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Life of Joshua Ross  
Indian Pioneer  
Given by  
Susie Ross Martin

In the true sense of the word, my father, Joshua Ross, was an Indian Pioneer. He was born at Wills Valley, Cherokee Nation, Alabama, February 7, 1833. He was brought by his parents to the Indian Territory in 1834, age one year, when the Cherokees, known as the "old settlers", emigrated west. His father was Andrew Ross, a brother of Chief John Ross. His mother was Susan Lowrey, daughter of Chief George Lowrey, also a noted Cherokee.

Joshua Ross grew to young manhood in his father's home on Grand River in the Cherokee Nation. He was one of twelve children, having ten brothers and one sister, Jane, the youngest of the family. She married Major John Murrell, a sugar planter in Louisiana.

My father attended the public schools of Cherokee Nation when a small child and later was sent to the Male Seminary at Tahlequah. He then attended the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. Later, went to Emery and Henry College where he graduated with high

honors. On returning home, he was employed in the Sutler's store at Fort Gibson, a position he held during the entire duration of the Civil War.

He was married May 7, 1864, to my mother, Muskogee Yarger, a daughter of a noted Creek Indian.

My parents made their home in Fort Gibson where their first child, Joseph, was born and died. In 1868 they moved to Grand Saline and lived on the farm of Dr. John Ross, a cousin. My oldest sister, Rosalee, and I were born there. In 1872, when the Katy Railroad was builded through the Territory and a railway station was established on the present site of the town of Muskogee, my parents came to the little village. My mother, being a member of the Creek Tribe, was entitled to all the land she could make use of. She selected a strip of land lying east of the Katy Railroad between the streets of Callahan and Okmulgee Avenue and extending to where the Frisco Railroad tracks now are. They enclosed this with a stake and rider rail fence. On this land they built their first home, a box house, consisting of two large rooms and a side room. As the family increased, the house was enlarged to meet the needs of the growing

family. There were only two other houses on the east side of the Katy Railroad. Father erected a store building at the corner of what is now Cherokee and East Broadway and opened a grocery store known as the Red Front. It was at first an only store on the east side of the Katy tracks. He had a fine patronage as he was well known by all the Indians, both Creek and Cherokee, in this part of the country.

There were no streets in the little town - only country roads and the prairie grass was as tall as a man on horseback. After the town was started and became a trading post, the old "Texas Road" that had formerly run two or three miles east of the town, came through the village; the wagons coming in on what afterward became Cherokee Street. As that ran in front of father's store, he saw all the travelers and sold supplies to them. The same families would go to Texas in the fall and back to Missouri or Kansas in the spring, sometimes for several years in succession. They were known to the people in the Territory as "movers."

Father planted the first orchard in Muskogee, choosing the finest varieties of apples, peaches and plums. As

there were no pests in this country to destroy fruit trees, we children had the privilege of enjoying the fruit for many years.

After a number of years, father sold his business and took a position in the store of Mr. Frank Cass, who operated a general mercantile business.

At the request of his Cherokee friends, father took a position in the Cherokee Male Seminary at Tahlequah where he taught for some time. He took his two little boys with him, but as he loved his home so much, that arrangement did not suit him and he resigned and turned his attention to his interests at home; dealing in real estate and assisting Civil War veterans in securing pensions. As he had in his possession the complete rolls of the Indians serving in the war, he was able to give them valuable assistance for which service he received very little pay.

Father spoke both the Cherokee and Creek languages fluently, which was greatly to his advantage in his contact with the Indians. Father gave liberally of his time and means to all public enterprises that tended to the up-building of the town and country.

Father was the first secretary of the Indian International Fair Association. Mr. John A. Foreman, also one of Muskogee's first citizens, was President of the Association. In the later part of September or the first of October each year, a Fair was held in Muskogee of a week duration; to which many of the western Indian Tribes, known as the wild tribes or plains Indians, came and camped for the entire time. The first Fair was held under tents located at what is now Cherokee and Cincinnati Streets; then a site was secured further east, where the Muskogee Hospital now stands, with a mile race-track adjoining on the east on the land where Spaulding Park is now located. As the Fair Grounds was considered such a long distance from town, everyone rode; the livery stables running a regular hack line. Much interest was shown by the people and the exhibits were a credit to the country. Horse races was one of the chief attractions and horses were brought from all adjoining states. Father felt a deep interest in the success of the Fair and did all he could to welcome strangers and see that everyone had comfortable entertainment.

Father was deeply religious and when the first Methodist Church was organized in Muskogee, he and my mother were the second and third members to join. Mrs. Ella F. Robinson, now living in Muskogee, being the first. When the building of the rock church on the corner of Cherokee and Okmulgee was started, father furnished teams to haul the rock from the quarry northwest of town, known now as Stand Pipe Hill, and from Agency Hill. He was a constant attendant at church and saw to it that we children were always in Sunday School. When Reverend T. F. Brewer, pastor of the Methodist Church, opened a school in the little church, we children, who were of school age, attended. Father was a great reader and had a library of valuable books which he treasured. He kept in touch with all current events and had a fund of information of a historical and literary nature. It was always so much easier to ask him for information we desired than to hunt it up for ourselves.

Father and mother were the parents of nine children, five of whom are now living. Four little boys died at

an early age.

While he was a highly educated man, he retained all the characteristics of an Indian and remained true to all their traditions. His Indian name was Kon-Kne-Cloiter. He gave all his children and grand-children Indian names. He gave my son, Joe Ross Martin, the name of Caneta, meaning Red Bird, and my little girl, Neva, the name of Che-ga, meaning love. All the children, with the exception of ~~us~~ three older ones, were born in Muskogee.

In addition to their own large family, my parents reared a niece and nephew of my mother's, giving them the same care that they bestowed upon their own children. The boy, Watson Deer, died of tuberculosis in early manhood. He had studied for the ministry in the Methodist Church and was a young man of great promise.

During the latter part of father's life, he spent much time in writing. At the time of his death, he was working on a history of the Cherokees in Oklahoma.

Jackson Barnett, the noted "rich Indian", was a friend of my father's. He was working at that time at

Leaches Ferry on the Arkansas River just above the mouth of the Grand River. He always wore a shawl around his head. Little did father think that Jackson would become known as the "richest Indian" and attain such notoriety.

My parents lived a life of quiet, peaceful happiness, both appreciating the fine qualities of the other. I never heard father raise his voice in correcting one of his children, no matter what disobedience of which they may have been guilty. His quiet rebuke was more effective than a scolding. He was of such a retiring nature, only those who were closely associated with him, could know and fully appreciate his splendid quality of heart and mind. He was unselfish to a fault, always giving first place to others. As he was honest, he expected to find that trait in those with whom he had business dealings and more often than not, he was disappointed. He was small in stature with a broad forehead of a statesman and a kindly manner that portrayed his real character. After an illness of several weeks, he died at the home of his daughter, Mrs. Rosalee Miles, in Muskogee, February 15, 1922.