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WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Name Elizabeth Kemp Mead.

A biographic Sketch.

From personal interviews with the subject,
524 N. 8th St., Durant, Oklahoma

Date of birth-----March 18, 1849

Place of birth-----Old Doaksville

Father -----Joel Kemp

Place of Birth -----Chickasaw

Mother-----Maria Colbert

Place of Birth-----Chickasaw

Mrs. Lula Austin, Field Worker,

Indian-Pioneer History, S-149

April 2, 1937.

My Father, Joel Kemp, when a young man came from Mississippi with his parents, who were Levi Kemp and Polly Frazier.

He married Maria Colbert, Chickasaw, whose father was Levi Colbert, Chief of Chickasaws. His wife was Minto-ho-yo, fullblood Chickasaw.

They were married at Old Dookville and were the parents of ten children, six growing to maturity.

We moved to Lanola County, about 1852, near Red River which was later known as Kemp Ferry place. Later built at same place a two-story, log house with two rooms and two side-rooms with a hall between, two rooms upstairs, front porch 40 feet long. The house still stands and the logs are as firm as when put there in 1857. The old family graveyard is 300 yards from the house. My mother and father, with two of my brothers and four sisters, are buried there.

Furniture was scarce, nearly all we had was home-made. Made by John H. Carr, a missionary who later was Principal of Bloomfield.

I remember two old trunks that seemed so mysterious to me, and when they were opened we children would all crowd around to see but all I remember seeing was old papers, letters, dishes, and relics that my mother said belonged to my grandparents.

My father operated a ferry across Red River before and after the Civil War. Toll was twice as high before the war. In 1888 my brother, Joel C. Kemp was granted a charter by the legislature of the Chickasaw Nation, giving him legal right to operate a ferry on Red River which he did for many years.

My father was National Treasurer of the Chickasaw Indians. He would receive the Indian money from the United States and pay out according to the orders of the Legislature. The Council ground was at Emmet, called "Post Oak Grove." Later they moved to Good Spring, now known as Tishomingo.

Father was a member of the Chickasaw Legislature, spoke good English and the Chickasaw and Choctaw languages. He was in Washington when the Civil War broke out, and was made Captain to raise an Army for the protection of the people who remained home. They were not allowed to cross the Arkansas line. One day while he was stationed at Colbert Springs with the soldiers a letter was sent to our home by Jim Reynolds from General Cooper, commander of Choctaw army. My mother said it was important that the letter reach my father who was stationed fifteen miles away. I told her I would take it, so with my brother, who was nine years old (and I was only twelve,) we started horseback on our journey. Mother pinned the letter to my underwear and said not to let anyone see me, but give it to my father. As we neared his camp, he recognized us and came to meet us. I told him about the letter and he took me into the tent and I gave it to him. After reading it he told me I would have to go four miles farther and deliver a letter to a Mr. Colbert. I did and then Mr. Colbert sent a letter back to my father. It was past midnight before we reached home. Everyone was asleep but my mother. I gave her a note my father sent her and then went to bed. My brother and I were dead tired. The next day my mother told me the Federals were trying to take Ft. Gibson and that after my father read the letter he, with a bunch of soldiers, rushed to the Fort but the Choctaw Army had driven the Rebels back.

The Refugees from the Cherokee Nation came in bunches and settled near us during the War. They were without food, and I have often seen them gathering the tender leaves from Mulberry trees and cooking them for greens. Father would kill beef and hogs and divide out among them; also, let them have corn to make bread. They would dig Briar Root, which was sweet and brittle like potatoes, and mix it with the meal when they didn't have enough meal for bread.

I have beaten mortar and made shuck bread to send to the men in camp. The Rebel soldiers would pass our house for days, fifteen and twenty together, and stop for food. Mother would cook a whole hog in the wash-pot; they would eat everything and move on. I remember one day I was sick in bed and my mother was feeding a bunch of rebel soldiers; the table was in the bed room. When each soldier left the table he came by the bed and gave me a present. I received my first China doll, with other nice presents. They had obtained them in a raid that they made in Arkansas and Missouri.

One night when it was very cold and the ground was covered with snow there was someone said "Hello." My father sent his waiting boy to the door. It was a young girl, nearly frozen, who said her mother and sister were out in the wagon. They were all brought in, fed, and put to bed. My father had his negro put the team up and feed them. The next morning she told us her story.

Her name was Jane George, and her husband was Bert George, who was serving in the Rebel Army. She had been accused by the Federals of feeding the Rebel soldiers. They took her to Ft. Smith and put her in jail for several weeks and then let her out and told her if she was inside the Arkansas line by sunrise, they would kill her.

She had two bull calves that she used to drag up wood with, so she hitched them to a wagon and with her two girls, 16 and 12, and what few belongings they could pack in the wagon crossed the Arkansas river after sun-up. They remained with us until after the war. While with Mrs. George taught my sisters and me how to card, spin warp cloth and put on thread beam and then weave.

My father would drive five yoke of oxen to a big government wagon to Bonham, which was the nearest trading post, and have meal ground. There was no grist mills in the county and some of the people used a hand steel mill or beat on a mortar.

My father's brother, Jackson Kemp, later had a grist mill operated by one horse, which he ran night and day. That was the first mill in the county.

Sugar was brought in wagons to the trading post from Shreveport, La. My father would buy two bbls. every fall, one white and one brown. It was 10¢ per lb. before the Civil War, but after was 25¢ per lb.

Once a year, usually in October, father would go to "Giles Thompson Salt Works" at Boggy Depot and spend two months getting our winter's supply of salt. He had a large iron pot that held fifty gallons which he would load on the wagon and take to boil the water. My brother, a cook, and one or two Indians would go with him. Fifty gallons of water would boil out eight or ten pounds salt. People came there from all over the county to get their salt; I don't remember what he paid for it but there was a charge. There was also a salt spring at Carriage Point, but ^{there} wasn't very much salt in the water. We would use the water to make salt.

We made our own rope. We used a flat board and had a stick with a knot on it that held the whirl that twisted the rope. Many times I have straightened the horse hair out and helped my brothers make rope. We spun our thread for cotton rope; it would take a week to spin enough thread for thirty or forty feet, and a day to make the rope.

The stage coach passed our house each day from Ft. Washita to Bonham. They drove two horses and changed horses twice on the trip, once at our house and again at Bonham. We received our mail from Old Warren, which was also a trading post.

My parents would send a peddling-wagon each week loaded with country produce; dried beef, chickens, turkeys, eggs, butter and vegetables when in season. The wagon always came back empty. There was very little fruit here, a few people had a few peach, and apple trees. The only way we knew to keep our fruit was to dry it, either on platforms or on top of house. Our butter, we buried in stone jars, which kept it fresh all winter.

Wild game was plentiful, deer, turkey, buffalo, and quails. We could make traps in the shape of a pyramid out of small sticks, placing one on the top of another, tying them together with willow and then place a trigger with corn on it under the trap. That way we caught birds and small game. One day while sitting at my window I saw a big buck deer coming up the lane. He came on near the house and the dogs chased him into Red River and when he swam to the other side my brother shot him.

Our big camp meetings were held at Yarnaby camping grounds under a brush arbor. Later the Presbyterians built a log house, 18 feet long, with a big fireplace in one end of building.

The Methodists also had a big camp-ground. We attended each others meetings and worked together.

It was a fine of not less than \$25.00 or more than \$50.00 to cut down a pecan or hickory tree or even a limb for getting the nuts within the limit of the Chickasaw Nation.

Every winter there was an epidemic of smallpox and diphtheria among the fullbloods and negroes. Among the intermarried less disease prevailed on account of better sanitary conditions. At the first breaking out of the smallpox the local people tried to treat the sick with roots and herbs. Later they were vaccinated against smallpox by doctors who were called to the locality. There were no doctors at that time in the vicinity. The nearest one, Dr. Mackey, at Bonham. Our family was one of the first to be vaccinated. Many died from vaccination.

My parents owned eleven negroes. Just three months before they were freed, Mother paid \$1000.00 in gold for two boys, ten and thirteen years old. They had been put up to the judge for bail by the wife of my half-brother. Her husband had killed a man. I was thirteen years old when the Civil war broke out. At that time I was living with my parents on Red River, twelve miles north of Bonham. My mother wore and made all our clothes. I had the first homespun dress in the neighborhood. It was blue and white checked. If you had a change of clothes and extra suit you were considered well-off.

A Mr. McCarty, refugee from Missouri, peddled underwear which he would bring in a wagon from San Antonio. It would take him a month to make the trip there and back. Everyone that was able bought from him and our other clothes were made at home.

My parents tried to give us children an education. One of my sisters went to Bonham, one to Bloomfield, and Simon, my brother, was sent to Dangerfield, Texas. But his school days were over when he was seventeen years old as a very sad prank was played on him which saddened his life. While at Dangerfield, each boy had his chores and one of them was to build fires at which each boy took his turn. A story of a ghost appearing in the schoolroom each morning as the fires were being kindled was told; so when it came my brother's turn to light the fires, he told them he wasn't afraid. As he lit the match to light the fire, something all in white blew it out and said "You will have to fan the fire" and as he struck another match he could see the white form and in his excitement he hit the form over the head with the poker. To his sorrow he had killed Bob Hamilton, one of his companions.

My brothers and sisters all married and raised families. I have only one brother, Joel Kemp, living today. I spent four years in Bloomfield Seminary that were happy years. Bloomfield was in charge of the Methodist missionaries and run by the Chickasaw Government. The first principal of the school was John H. Carr, a white man who married Catherine Nail, a Choctaw. There were about thirty girls the first year I was there, but the attendance was more the next three years. You had to be between the ages of nine to eighteen to attend the school and be able to read well in McCuffey's Fifth Reader; spell well, and read in the New Testament, and be of good moral character.

The Chickasaw Government furnished everything. We made our own clothes which were made by hand. There was one machine in the school, owned by one of the teachers. We would do her work to get her to hem our dresses on the machine.

The building burnt but was rebuilt, moving location 3-4 mile NW from the old building. The building was heated by wood stoves and we used oil lamps for lights. Our bed rooms had no fire, but we never suffered from the cold. We had plenty to eat, nice ham, sausage, and bacon, and milk once a day.

The girls were numbered and answered roll-call by number. We were never allowed to leave the school ground without a teacher. Each morning and evening we had prayers, and every Thursday at 3 o'clock prayer-meeting. The only kind of musical instrument we had at school was a melodeon. At home, my brother had a fiddle and my sister had an accordion, which they played.

After the Civil War broke out, parents came for their children and we had no school except what they called the neighborhood school, which I attended about three months. Then when the war was over my mother took me to Bonham to place me in school and because I was going to have to work in a hotel for my board, I refused to stay, and to this day I have never forgiven myself for not getting an education.

The next year I married Benjamin Franklin Roark, Chickasha Indian. My father let us move a two-room house, near him and my husband was to work land with my brother on the halves. An old slave we called "Aunt Tena" lived with us. She was, in slave time, my grandmother's waiting girl. We raised one boy, A. B. Roark, who was county clerk of Panola County in Chickasaw Nation when J. S. Mosely was governor. Mr. Roark died very suddenly one day while we were visiting my parents. He had been in fine health before. Several years later I married Albert Henderson Moberly (White man) who was a merchant. He only lived three years.

While on a trip to Texas for merchandise, in company with my son, who was ten, on his way home he spent the night with my brother and took sick in the night. My brother sent a runner for a doctor, but he died before the doctor came. They buried him and then my brother came on home to tell me. They didn't know where I lived and my little boy said he could show them the way but couldn't tell them.

I later married Sanford Minor Mead (white man) who was a farmer. We lived in and near Sterrett, I. T. now Calera. We raised six children to maturity, all still living, but Mr. Mead passed away twelve years ago.

Sanford Mead - Arizona and works for Government.

Landers Mead - Calera - farmer

Walter Mead, Calera-farmer.

Daughters:

Abigail Whisenhunt - Parent

Laura Perkins - Lives on farm.

Pettie Edeman - Hugo.

INDIAN DYES

Yellow was made by boiling Bois'd'arc chips.

Purple was made with sumac berries, white sumac berries preferred.

Red was made with a weed they called "Queens Delight" grew on bottom land

Brown was made by boiling walnut bark, put rusty iron in to set it.

INDIAN MEDICINES

Wahoo, a bush that has red berries; when ripe the berries will open. The root is boiled, making a tea which is very bitter. This was used for all ills.

In old time the Choctaw children took the mothers housename instead of taking the father's name.

Bob Tappens was a U. S. Marshal with offices in Ft. Smith; he said his posse would ride horseback through the country. They would have a wagon with provisions and pack-horses with them. Tandy Folsom, a Choctaw, was also a U. S. Marshal, tho at one time he was classed as a desperado, he wasn't really mean. What he did was more in mischief; he didn't like the white man and tried to keep them afraid of him.

I remember one day while living in Sterrett, I. T. he came galloping in town, giving his war whoop; the people quickly closed their doors and hid. He rode in the store buildings and scattered people, chickens, and dogs. I was on my porch watching him. He rode up and said "Where is Uncle Minor?" "Out to the farm," I said, "Who is here?" He said, "Just me-get down," he did and came in. I said "Tandy, what were you doing up there in town?" "Oh, just wanted to have some fun," he said. I fed him and he lay on the cot and had a nap, woke up and rode away. He was good at heart and it was only when he had a little "fire water" that he gave trouble. He committed suicide.