

GOTT, WATT.

INTERVIEW

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Indian Pioneer History S-149
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Interview with Mr. Watt Gott.
Route 1 Box 200.
Hulbert, Okla.

Watt Gott is the son of Mr. and Mrs. John Gott long deceased. He was born in the Goingsnake District of the old Cherokee Nation, March 22, 1859, and is of Cherokee and white descent. His father, John Gott, a white man, was born in Tennessee in 1822. His mother, Margaret Bean Gott, a Cherokee, was born in Georgia in 1823, and moved along with her parents, James and Ruth Bean, to Arkansas, then a part of Indian Territory and settled near the present town of Cane Hill, Arkansas.

Migration.

The grandparents of Mr. Gott were referred to in later years as "Old Settlers" and were sometimes mentioned as the "Western Cherokees".

Mr. Gott remembers well his grandmother Ruth Bean and states she told him why they moved to Arkansas from Georgia. This is what she told him: The old Cherokee Nation was in the state of Georgia. The Cherokees had good farms, well improved, livestock, lots of wild game and were contented

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and satisfied. Soon an influx of white people came into Georgia that caused the Cherokees great worry. These white people encroached on the lands of the Cherokees, killed the game, caught the fish and were a constant source of worry. The Cherokees were made to know also that they had to give up their Indian ways and customs and take up the ways of the white man and in order to keep from so doing they preferred to seek homes elsewhere and asked the Government to assist them. After many deliberations they were promised land, acre for acre, west of the Mississippi River in Arkansas, between the Arkansas and White Rivers, and were promised that the Government would move them free of cost and give them food on the trip to the new land and for the improvements on their land in Georgia, they would be given guns, powder, bullets, clothing, bedding and a few implements to start clearing and cultivating land.

This was before John Guest "Sequoyah" introduced his system of writing the Cherokee language, and Ruth Bean, Watt Gott's grandmother, spoke what was known as the "Over Hill" Cherokee language and never mastered the Sequoyah lingo.

The United States Government began moving the Cherokees to Arkansas by steamboats soon after the War of 1812.

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Mr. Gott's grandparents, James and Ruth Bean, and his mother Margaret, then a baby two years old, were moved by steamboat as far up the Arkansas River as Little Rock, along with other families. Many of the Cherokees who left the boat at Little Rock had quite a bit of money, as did Mr. Gott's grandparents, but the Government with teams and wagons moved them into the vicinity of Evansville, Cincinnati and Cane Hill, Arkansas. Left by the Government, Mr. Gott's grandparents started building log houses, splitting rails, and clearing land. They acquired slaves as time progressed, but soon after establishing themselves in Arkansas, the Cherokees back in Georgia, about 1837, were driven out and came west. These Cherokees were called the Eastern Cherokees. Mr. Gott's grandfather and grandmother Bean had to give up their Arkansas lands for what is sometimes called the Cherokee Strip and they moved out of Arkansas. They did not go on the land given for the Arkansas land but moved over across the line into the Flint District of the Indian Territory and at this time the Cherokees were all united in a foreign land to start life a second time in the west.

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Sequoyah was in Arkansas teaching his language to the Western Cherokees. Some two years before Mr. Gott's grandparents came, and when they were moved to the Indian Territory, Sequoyah came with them and lived with them for years. He did much to help the Cherokees as did the Missionaries who came along with them. Mr. Gott's mother and grandmother knew "John Guest" well.

With the Eastern Cherokees came Principal Chief John Ross, who had only been Chief in Georgia about two years before Mr. Gott's grandparents left. Being more of the Eastern than of the Western Cherokees Chief Ross continued to be the Principal Chief in the Indian Territory and he served as such until 1866 when he died and was buried at Park Hill. He died in Washington D. C. and his remains were brought back to Park Hill for interment.

The Cherokees between 1838 and 1861 accomplished wonders in the way of building homes, fences, barns and in cultivating the soil. The second generation of Cherokees forgot the hardships endured, but the first generation just could not forgive nor forget.

Mr. Gott's grandfather, a white man, was the son of a

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Government teamster who moved into Tennessee from Virginia soon after the Revolutionary War and then moved into Georgia where he was married, and Mr. Gott knows little of his father's people.

Civil War.

Mr. Gott was only two or three years old at the beginning of the Civil War but was a big "shirt tail" boy when it ended, and he remembers some things that happened in his young life. His father and two older brothers, George and Bill, entered the war with the Southern Army, and were among the first in the field, under General Earl Van Dorn. Albert Pike had established a fort west of Fort Gibson called Fort Davis and had many Indians under his command and joined Van Dorn at Pea Ridge, Arkansas. Many of the Indians had only bows and arrows with which to fight and they were defeated. Pike withdrew to the Indian Territory and built Fort McCulloch on the Red River. Stand Watie with his cavalry and Colonel John Drew with others remained in the northern part of Indian Territory and Mr. Gott's father and brothers were then with Stand Watie. The North again invaded the Indian Territory and the Southern soldiers fell slowly back and Tahlequah was captured, Park Hill where John Ross lived was

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taken and Chief Ross was made prisoner. The commander of the Northern army went crazy and his officers went back to Kansas and again the South was in possession of the Indian Territory. Two years passed during which time dickering went on with the Cherokees on both sides but Stand Watie and Southerners such as Mr. Gott's father and brothers paid no attention to this dickering. This condition made two Cherokee Nations, North and South. The Chief of the Northern Nation was John Ross, a prisoner who was exiled to Philadelphia and Stand Watie Chief of the Southern Cherokees was in the field fighting. This was about 1863. Mr. Gott's mother and he were then at Webbers Falls and refugeed to Doaksville down on Red River after scouting parties had burned the home in which some two or three families were living. They were hungry, ill clad and there was disease, principally dysentery among them. While they were in the refugee camp, a man, friendly to the South, came by one day on a mule and had honey in a meal sack and he gave the refugees half of the sack of honey. Some three or four days later this man came back on a fine horse with a filly following. He talked to the refugees for a while and left but soon returned with two wild hogs which he had shot.

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He dragged the hogs into the Cherokee Camp, with one tied to the tail of the horse and the other to the tail of the filly. They were small hogs of course but they really made a feast while they lasted.

It was in 1863 that the battle of Honey Springs was fought south of Fort Gibson about fifteen miles. The South lost that battle. George Gott was captured by the North and taken to Fort Gibson where he died. He had been injured in battle. Fort Gibson was occupied by the South before the war, but the North got Fort Gibson and captured Fort Smith about the same time that they won the Battle of Honey Springs.

The North would send parties raiding through the Cherokee Nation, burning all homes then standing and killing and driving away the cattle. The Indians could see no hope; they were ready to give up and did give up. They never wanted to fight to begin with but Stand Watie and his men never gave up but stuck to it and did not know peace had been declared for weeks after the war ended.

The only food and clothing Stand Watie had was what he captured from a wagon train taking supplies to the soldiers from Kansas to Fort Gibson.

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General Stand Watie's son was a Captain under him and Cornelius Boudinot, later a lawyer was his first Major and Colonel J. M. Bell was one of his most trusted officers. His wife and children were refugees in Texas during the war, like many of the other poor Cherokees.

After the Civil War.

When the Civil War was over Stand Watie's men marched into Fort Towson, hungry, ragged, tattered and torn. Mr. Gott and Bill were with them, but George Gott was missing. Mrs. Gott and Watt wept with joy ^{on seeing Mr. Gott and Bill} /as well as with sorrow for the loss of George. No one can imagine that reunion of the Gott family and others. Almost five years had passed without members of families hearing from each other.

Men had gone without food for days and were so hungry that when food was prepared many died on account of over-eating, some got very sick and recovered, while others ate sparingly, realizing the result of over-eating. Watt Gott, a small boy, had in his hand a sweet potato baked in the ashes and was on the porch eating it when a soldier took it from him and ate it. Watt cried, and the soldier spoke up and said to Watt's father "Gott, I was so hungry and at any other time I would not have done that for \$1,000.00."

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George Starr's family and the Gott family moved by wagon back to the Cherokee Nation. The road took them to Fort Smith, and they crossed on a ferry to the Indian Territory and then they went up Lee's Creek and settled in the Goingsnake District .

The Cherokee Nation was one vast scene of desolation. Old chimneys in some instances marked the sites of what had once been happy homes. The Cherokee Nation had been the No Man's Land between the North and the South. Homes and barns had been burned, all movable property carried away or destroyed, cattle killed and eaten, orchards had died out and fields had grown up in weeds and bushes. The population had been decreased by the hundreds who had been killed in the war or who had died from hunger, cold and disease. The Cherokees were left with nothing except their land and they paid dearly for having taken sides in the white man's fight. They even had to give up some of their lands for the homes of the wild Indians, for the railroads, and to the white settlers. These wild Indians were lazy, dirty, shiftless, who would not plant crops or raise stock or do any work, but who stole what they lived on from the Cherokees and Creeks, lived in tepees, roamed the prairies and woods, visiting, feasting

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and dancing among themselves. The wild Indians were finally confined to reservations and kept there by the United States soldiers. The Cherokees had to build for themselves new homes of logs, clear fields, catch wild cattle, horses and hogs and tame them, as the livestock that had not been killed had gone wild in the cane brakes.

Again, the Cherokees re-established themselves and were doing well except for some little internal strife between the old Treaty and Anti-treaty parties at election times.

Then came the Dawes Commission, surveying townsites, section lines, creeks and school sites; enrolling the citizens of the Cherokee tribe and appraising the land from 50 cents to \$6.00 per acre. The Dawes Commission gave to each enrollee an allotment of so many acres of land not to exceed \$300.00 in value, instead of their owning the land jointly. They sold the Cherokee Strip in 1893 for half what they could have gotten for it from the cattlemen.

A speech was made by Joab Scales, a confirmed Confederate, and what he said about the Dawes Commission was: "There is not a baker's dozen of you in this crowd who do not know that the Dawes Commission are going to give to your old slaves as much land as you will get". Well it just about so happened,

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and the Cherokees did not approve of the Freedman Act at all, but knew they were whipped.

The Indian Territory became divided and was called Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory before Statehood. The Five Tribes of the Indian Territory were governed by themselves but the relation between them and the United States Government was handled by an Indian Agency located at Muskogee, which was called the Union Agency. Oklahoma Territory consisted of wild, rude, barbarous Indians on reservations and each reservation was controlled by an Indian Agent of the United States.

Farming after Civil War.

Farm equipment consisted of a bull tongue, a twister and scythe with cradle attached. The ground was plowed with a bull tongue and corn was dropped by hand in the row or furrow and covered up with a hoe, cultivated with a twister drawn by one horse. When the corn was laid by, the ground between the corn rows was stirred up and wheat was broadcast between the rows for pasture. Sometimes the wheat would be allowed to grow and mature. It was cut with the scythe and cradle and shocked, and was then thrashed with what was called a ground-hog thrasher, or was flailed out

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with poles. The chaff and "cheat" was blown out with a concern pulled by a horse, or was poured from pile to pile on a windy day.

Some of the Cherokees ground their corn in mortars but the Gott family always hauled their corn and wheat to an old water-mill between Cane Hill and Dutch Town, Arkansas. They paid no money for the grinding but gave a toll. For every three bushels of wheat ^{they} got back one hundred pounds of flour. The first turning plow ^{Watt} ever saw with an iron or steel mould board was at Evansville, Arkansas, in 1879.

Schools and Churches.

Bill Gott attended the old Female Seminary at Park Hill and graduated. Watt Gott worked at the Seminary, when a boy, as a stable boy. He cared for one team and buggy and had to drive members of the faculty, when they so desired, from Park Hill to Tahlequah, and he received 25 cents a day and his keep for his work. The only school Watt ever attended was the Oak Grove School in the Going Snake District, a frame school-house and only a few miles from Evansville, Arkansas, just inside the territory line. Watt's mother's brother, Mark Bean, Watt's brother, Bill Gott and a white man named Bates from Cane Hill, Arkansas were Watt's teachers.

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Church was held in the school-house, and the Methodist faith was preached. Mack Morris preached in English. Bill Ghormley preached in Cherokee and then would interpret his sermon in English. Arbor and camp meetings were held all through the country and would last for two weeks at a time.

Oddities of Early Days.

The Whitacre family bought a four eyed cook stove, the first in the neighborhood. The Gott family lived eight miles away but heard of this stove by the grape vine route. Mr. Whitacre was going to put up the stove on a certain day and Watt and his brother begged their parents to let them go and see it. So they went. When they arrived the stove was up; fifty people had come for miles to see it, and all were debating as to how and where to put the fire in it. They finally figured it out and got the fire under way. It was a wood stove and it puffed and blew and smoked but they started cooking on it and as the wind changed it ceased smoking; the smoking had been caused by a poor draft. Mrs. Whitacre fussed and fumed and threatened to take the "blamed thing" back or throw it out doors and use the fire place, but the food was finally cooked, after all the directions as to fixing it up

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and baking in it and the like were followed out. The people complained that the food didn't taste right because of being cooked on the "blamed thing".

The first thrasher and separator for thrashing wheat that came into the country was owned by Mr. McClatchey, and was operated by eight large mules. They got the outfit to operating one evening and it made so much racket you could hear it for miles and by nightfall the Indians were riding like Paul Revere to ascertain what it was all about. The thrasher had moved in on a ten acre field of wheat that had been cut and bundled or shocked. That next morning at daylight a hundred Indians and their families gathered to see the thing perform. The thrashers started to haul the shocks up to the thrasher but the Indians protested and stopped it and said "Put mules away, we kill hog and beef, make jubilee eat, have big time." They did that very thing and besides they carried the shocks to the thrasher by passing the shocks from one to the other until the entire ten acres passed through the separator.