

GRAY, WALTER.

FIFTH INTERVIEW

13743

348

GRAY, WALTER

FIFTH INTERVIEW

13743

James Russell Gray,  
Investigator,  
April 21, 1938.

Interview with Walter Gray,  
Hartshorne, Oklahoma.

In the Fall of 1889, when I was twelve, our family settled in the Creek Nation where we rented land from a white man named John Foster who had married a Creek woman; that made him what was called an intermarried citizen and he had rights to land and property under the Creek laws. Our cabin was close to the site of the present town of Okemah; the cabin was right on the bank of the North Canadian River, near what was called "Rock Crossing".

The Creek Indians around us lived in little communities called "towns", though they weren't towns in the sense that they had post offices and stores; they were merely groups of cabins. Some of the cabins would be from a quarter of a mile to a mile apart and the community might be scattered over six or eight miles of territory. Some of the Indians lived off to themselves, maybe five miles from their nearest neighbor, but as a

GRAY, WALTER

FIFTH INTERVIEW

13743

-2-

rule the Creeks lived in the little communities, or "towns". A town might have anywhere from fifty to nearly a thousand inhabitants.

Our cabin was about six miles down the river, south and east of where Okemah is now. North and west of us, just how far I'm not sure as I was never there, was a community of Creeks called the "Fishponds", and they were the champion ball players in that whole section.

Down south of us, near Weleetka, south and east, was a community called "Alabama Town", that was about ten miles from our place. Jim Sullivan, Peter Coachman, Charlie Coachman, and one of the Yahola boys lived there. These were all Creeks.

North of us about eight miles was "New Yorker Town". That was a large community and had a big population.

Our cabin was in a community of Creeks called "Cobaslocko", or Overcoat Town. It was relatively a small community; it centered around Rock Crossing and all the people in the community lived within a radius of five miles of us.

GRAY, WALTER

FIFTH INTERVIEW

13743

-3-

In 1889, from Okmulgee to Wewoka, there were only three all-white families, so far as I know. Our family was one and John Williams and his family was another. He lived on the south bank of the North Canadian about three-fourths of a mile up from Rock Crossing, on Zack Cook's place. Williams' wife was named Mollie and he had a boy named John, another named Judge and there was a little girl named Daisy. He had a hired hand named George Robinson and another named Ivy Sears.

There was another all-white family named Crawford that lived between us and Wewoka; I'm not sure how far they lived from us, but it was farther than to Alabama Town. Mrs. Crawford's name was Mollie. They had one boy named Martie, another named Willie and there was a baby girl, though I don't know her name. An Indian of the name of Wattie Parmer owned the place where the Crawford family lived.

John Foster and his family lived on the north bank of the river, north of the Williams cabin. He was a white man who had married a Creek wife. Her maiden name

GRAY, WALTER

FIFTH INTERVIEW

13743

-4-

had been Liza Bruner; she was a sister of Perry Bruner who lived at Holdenville. The Foster family was a large one; he was raising four of his dead brother's children. One of them was Guy, whose mother had been a white woman. Then there were Ira and Ed, half Creek, and their sister, Lula. John Foster also had six children of his own; Willie, Ida, Oscar, Claude, Walter, and Robert. Ida and Oscar died sometime before 1900.

Zack Cook was another white man who had married a Creek wife. Her maiden name had been Agusa Yefkee. They had a daughter named Leah who married one of Colonel Robinson's boys. They had two sons; Daniel and Wallace. In 1926 Wallace was living in Okemah, and I heard he was a well-to-do oil man. Then there were three smaller children, Joseph and Reuben and a little girl named Sissie.

About four miles from us, up Rock Creek, was the Bedeau family; I'm not certain how to spell the name, but we pronounced it as though it were "Bu-dew", with the "u" short and the accent on the last syllable. The old man was named Lonzo; he was white. His Indian wife was dead.

-5-

He had four children; a son named Hampton, two girls named Virona and Hettie and a small boy named Jesse.

✓ L. H. McDermott was another white man who married into the Creek tribe. His wife was a Creek woman named Lou. His store and ranch house were about two miles east and one-half mile south of what is now Okemah. He had no children, but besides "Mac" and his wife, there was a young fellow named "Blink" McDermott, Mac's nephew. There was an Indian boy called Jesse McDermott, though he was an adopted child.

Three miles or so west of us was a negro settlement. We called the place the "Bruner Settlement". Twelve or fifteen families lived there, scattered out over about five miles of territory. There were Nick Bruner, August Bruner, Munch Bruner and a lot more. While we were living in Overcoat Town, a negro named L. C. Murphy, a state man, came into the Creek Nation, married a native negro girl named Mary Smith and put in one hundred and fifty acres of land near the Bruner Settlement.

GRAY, WALTER

FIFTH INTERVIEW

13743

-6-

Just east of us, down the river, lived an Indian family named Josselyn. The old man was one-eyed.

The Indian houses were from a quarter to three-quarters of a mile apart and on east of Josselyn's was Joe McKellup and his family, then Ben and Jim Deer and their sister, Liza Wolf. Ben was married; his wife's maiden name had been Susie Brimer.

Then next was Mosey Sawyer and his family; Creeks. His wife was dead. He had four boys; Solomon, Wesley, Andrew, and Joe. The next Indian family was John Bushyhead and his son, Jimmy Lonnie. East of Bushyheads lived Kasheetka Yahola and his son, Louis. Next was Jim Scott; he was an educated Creek, an officer, or judge, like our own justice of the peace. Next was Daniel Webster, an Indian, and his son, Jeff.

The next Indian family was the Canards; the old man was named Thomas Canard and there were three children; Jeff, Felix and Lucy. The children went to the mission near Wetumka and they could read and write, too. But the mother was a typical Creek; she never tried to talk around white people, just grunted.

GRAY, WALTER

FIFTH INTERVIEW

13743

-7-

The next Creek family was George Walker and his folks. Blink McDermott married one of the Walker girls. Next were Joe Berryhill and his wife; she had been Sallie Daniels. They were both Creeks. Then Henry Martin and his daughter, Sissie. Next was Joe Robinson and his family. These were both Creek families.

All the other families I mention will be Creeks unless otherwise designated. William Jimboy and his family lived next on our trip through Overcoat Town. Jimboy was a Methodist preacher. He couldn't talk much English, but he had a deep, melodious voice. I have heard him preach and pray and sing. Then we come to George Brimer and his family. Then to Hollock Hodjoe, his wife, Hocktee Lonnie, and his son, Tumpsey Lonnie. Then Mr. Yefkee and his son, Dave. Then Big Little Mose, "Slocko Gee". Then Jacob Knight and his red-headed, white wife, Melinda, and a family named Hodulgee, Judge Fixigo and his family, John Berryhill and family, and Sam Berryhill and family. Next was a crippled fellow; I have forgotten his name, if I ever knew it, but he was called "Limpy".

GRAY, WALTER

FIFTH INTERVIEW

13743

-8-

There was one family of white people I forgot to mention. They lived on L. C. Murphy's place up close to the Bruner Settlement. They weren't there when my family first moved to Overcoat Town, they came a few years later. Their name was Harrell and there were three men, brothers, and their mother. The boys' names were Dan, Henry, and Kid. Kid Harrell had once been a deputy United States Marshal under Lon Stanfield.

This brief account practically covers everything about Overcoat Town, though I may have forgotten a few people.