

GRANT, NIFFIE

INTERVIEW

#7260

209

INDEX CARDS:

Creek Nation
Tribe, Creek
Living Conditions

EARLY DAYS IN THE INDIAN TERRITORY

An interview of Niffie Grant, age 68,
Arbeka-Tulwa Thakko Town (tulwa)
Paden, Oklahoma

Billie Byrd, Field Worker
Indian-Pioneer History
8-23-37

We lived near the Helluby Creek where I was born near what is now Paden, Oklahoma. One of the men who opposed the enrollment and allotment of lands, Chitto Harjo, was my uncle. I think his sister known as Mollie, who must now be past her sixty years, still lives in the vicinity of Henryetta, Oklahoma.

There have lived men who have been known for their good and brave deeds or by their characters. They visioned the present generation and the coming generation and to the welfare of the country or tribe. Along with this forethought of the coming generation was that those who were leading would soon depart from the world. So they spoke in behalf of their people to bring them into civilization trained and educated to be leaders and good citizens. In these times there lived men who opposed these things.

This was the way with the Indians who have lived in this Indian Territory. We know that Indians have lived before treaties of any kind. We know they never bought, never sold or never worked.

The games and food were plentiful in the woods which were their homes. They lived in mud-slabbed houses, teepees, bark houses or whatever kind of dwellings were to their liking.

Bread was of different varieties made of corn. They lived in different settlements according to their tribal towns; namely, such as Tuckibutchee, Alabama, Okfuskee or Cusseta, and so on. How these tribal towns came into existence is not known. The Cusseta group is believed to have been the first band of Indians to entertain the white men in the old country. The old country is spoken ^{of} by the older Indians as "tulofa chule". These older people used the expression, "when we first came from the old country--"

There came a time when the Indians had to take a journey from the eastern home to the western country.

According to the agreement of 1825, the Indians were to live in Georgia or Alabama just as long as the sun set or the sun rose, or the waters flowed and the grass grew. But one of the tribesman sold some of the land without making the deal known to the other members of the tribe. He was shot by the Muskogee tribe members. This was the penalty in the tribal law.

When the first Indians were forced to leave, the first bunch of Indians came peacefully and without guards. Orders were given to the others to leave for the new country and they provided their own food and helped themselves so that in later years they received payments.

Some of the Indians remained in their old country until orders were given to be taken to the new country by force. When they were being rounded up, some ran away and went back to their homes. They were run down and if they would not leave they were often shot and the homes were burned and destroyed. They were finally brought to the new country under guard by the government people, as it has been told by the older ones.

Such men as Oputhli Yahola, a member of the Tuckibutchee town, was a spokesman and leader of his people, the Muskogee tribe, who bore the responsibility of leading the tribe to the new country. From 1832 up to the outbreak of the Civil War, he preferred to remain peaceful and in the war he preferred not to take part in the war but sought refuge by fleeing with faithful followers to the North to what was known as Le Roy (E-Loy), Kansas. It was then that there was loss of life from hunger and sickness. Some were killed by enemies. The leader and his followers finally reached their destination. At the close of the war, these Indians were permitted to return to their homes.

Isparhechar was the name of another influential Indian of the Alabama town ^{who} was strongly in favor of the treaty and opposed the tribal government movements. (The treaty of 1825 is the one in mind). This uprising ^{resulted} in some of the Indians being killed by Isparhechar's men. This uprising began sometime during the green peach season and was called the "Green Peach

#7260

P. 5.

war." In a fight with the Newoka District lighthorsemen south of the present Okemah, Oklahoma, some of the lighthorsemen were killed which caused Isparhechar to flee. He was overtaken at the Sac and Fox Agency, where he was placed under arrest and taken to Ft. Gibson with all his followers. I was a small boy then but my father and grandfather were followers of Isparhechar. When at Ft. Gibson, all the guns and ammunitions were taken away and the men were kept there one year. At the end of that time they were returned to the vicinity of the present Greenleaf settlement about $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles west of Okemah, where they were set free and could return to Ft. Gibson for their guns. Rations were given to the Indians while they were at Ft. Gibson by the government, which consisted of beef and flour which had been brought from Ft. Smith. Isparhechar and his men finally became law abiding men.

When Isparhechar was asked if he still favored tribal law, expressed his willingness to follow the orders of the day as he knew that some of his followers

were guilty of having killed men. There were only two words which he could say and that was "yes" or "no". If he said yes, he would be under the tribal law and he knew that if he said ~~shot~~, tribal punishment would be inflicted upon him which ^{would} either be a whipping or death by being shot.

He became a prominent citizen and held various offices in the Muskogee-Creek government serving on various committees, made several trips to Washington in behalf of his people and even became chief of the Muskogee-Creek nation.

Oktarcus Harjo was the man who introduced a resolution stating that there ought to be a tribal form of government about 1866. There were many in the tribe that favored the move and some opposed it. The resolution was passed by the Indians that there should be a tribal government. There were presidents, secretary, judge and prosecuting attorney and the several by-laws and constitution as adopted by the tribe.

In order to run the tribal government, six districts were formed and organized. The districts were

7250
P. 7.

Bufaula, Deep Fork, Wewoka, Okmulgee, Muskogee and Coweta. Officers were placed in each district called the lighthorsemen who were under the command of a captain and deputies. They arrested criminals and other wanted people. Isparhechar was against this form of government.

The tribal form of government was in action from 1866 until 1899 or until the Curtis Act was introduced.

The tribal towns were in settlements and had their own chiefs and other officers. When the Creek law came into existence it was then that the different chiefs began to lecture to their tribal towns forewarning each of their members to abide by the law and commit no wrong. There were strong penalties to be paid according to the decisions of the judge and the kind of crime committed.

The western part of the country was the open range which finally became Oklahoma.

When the Dawes Commission began to function in its work of enrolling the Indians for allotments, that Chitto Harjo or Crazy Snake began to take his stand in

opposing the move. He still favored the treaty of 1825 as made to Opwithili Yahola which stated that the Indian was a free man in a free country as long as the sun set in the west and rises in the east, and as long as the rivers flow and the grass grows. He wanted no other form of tribal government or laws. He was a member of the Arbeka Town (talwa).

There were men who were faithful in their stand with him in his beliefs. They had arms and there were several small skirmishes between the Harjo forces and government men. Although they did not favor the allotment system, Harjo and his men were forcibly allotted. Some of these men who had been allotted in this manner were recipients of land that produced vast wealth from oil and mineral products.

NOTE.- Billie Byrd is of Indian blood and expresses himself in word and writing in Indian manner. No change has been attempted in this manuscript. -Editor.