

MAYES, GEORGE W.

INTERVIEW

#4900

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BIOGRAPHY FORM
 WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
 Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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Field Worker's name Amelis F. HarrisThis report made on (date) July 21, 19371. Name George W. Mayes - one quarter Cherokee Indian2. Post Office Address Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.3. Residence address (or location) 603 N.E. 13th4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month November Day 21 Year 18485. Place of birth Old Baptist Mission - Going Snake District es-
tablished in 1839 - By Bushyhead.6. Name of Father G. W. Mayes Place of birth Georgia, 1824Other information about father Confederate Soldier7. Name of Mother Charlotte Bushyhead Place of birth TennesseeOther information about mother Three quarter Cherokee - Came to Indian
Territory in 1838.

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story of the person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects and questions. Continue on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached _____.

An Interview with Mr. George W. Mayes, Cherokee Indian.

By - Amelia F. Harris, Field Worker.

July 21, 1937.

I was born in the Old Baptist Mission in Going-Snake District, Cherokee Nation.

Reverend Jesse Bushyhead established this mission in 1839. He was mother's father, and she returned to the home of her parents for the birth of her child, as hospitals were unheard of before the Civil War. I was born November 21, and mother stayed at the Mission until January, then returned to her home in Flint District.

Indian Territory was not laid off in counties when the Indians first came, but was known as districts.

We lived in Flint District until 1857 when I was nine years old. We then moved to Goo Wees Coo Wee District, (which means high or great). We took up a farm here and also grazing land on Pryor Creek about fifty miles from the Kansas Line. This creek was named for Nathan Pryor, a Government Agent for the Osages. He was a great uncle to Colonel Sneed. Pryor died before we came there, in 1831, and was buried on the place where we moved. It was the custom in those days to bury the dead on the place

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where they had lived as there were no public burial grounds then.

Father was more of a cattleman than a farmer, and he raised fine horses and cattle. We had open range and there was plenty of fine grass so it cost very little to raise stock. We never put hogs in a pen to fatten them. They would be fat at "Hog Killing" time just from eating persimmons, nuts, acorns, and roots of all kinds.

We rented our farming land out to white tenants for crop rent.

People from Missouri and Kansas would come and buy our fine blooded stock.

In 1868, during the second year of the War, the Kansas Jayhawkers came to our farm and stole our fine horses. They butchered some of the cattle and drove the rest away. They pushed my mother out of the house and then set fire to it, and burned the furniture, clothes, and everything. Mother stood like the Rock of Gibraltar and looked on, with not a sign of emotion on her face. Her heart was broken to watch the accumulation of sixteen years of married life vanish with the smoke. After they

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left we found we had one yoke of oxen and a wagon. This we hitched up and started to my grandmothers'. We went by Van Buren, Arkansas to Fort Smith, then crossed the Arkansas River here, and drove back into Indian Territory, then to Scullyville.

We traded our oxen for a team of horses here and we were able to travel faster. We went over the old "Texas Trail" which ran from Fort Smith to Boggy Depot over the California Trail to Boggy Depot, then to my grandparents. Here we rested for a week or two, and traveled on the Texas Trail, crossing Red River at Colbert's Ferry. We stayed here until March 1st, 1863, and traveled on into Rusk County, Texas. We lived here until 1865. We longed for the Territory, and finally we migrated back into the Choctaw Nation. We were flat broke so we stopped at the mouth of the Allen Bayou, which was the dividing line between the Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations. We rented a big farm from Watson Daney, a full blood Choctaw for crop rent. Our entire family worked hard. We also ran a ferry boat here at Allen Bayou. We

charged fifty cents for a buggy and team or a wagon and team, and twenty five cents for those on horseback. We saved up quite a bit of money and soon we put in a small stock of groceries in one of our front rooms.

We raised good crops, especially fine corn for which we got from a dollar to a dollar and a half per bushel; this was at the close of the War in 1866.

We lived here two crop seasons, then the proceeds from our ferry and good crops enabled us to buy over one hundred head of cattle, some good teams of mules and horses. We sold our ferry boat and permit for one hundred dollars. We had money enough to finance us for a year or two, so in 1867 we moved up into the Cherokee Nation and settled on the banks of Grand River, ten miles from Fort Gibson. Every morning we could hear the bugle call at day-break to awaken the soldiers, just as plainly as if we were there. The Grand River carried the sound to us. The United States soldiers were stationed at Fort Gibson to keep peace between the whites and the Indians,

but they didn't keep the Creek Indians from stealing. The Creeks were so bad and we lost such a great amount of things that we decided to move back to Pryor, our old home. Here we started farming and raising fine blooded stock. There was a ready market in Missouri and Arkansas, and a good price too.

I was elected to the Cherokee Council and served two years from 1887 to 1889. I was a member at the time the Cherokee Strip was sold to the United States, and I voted against the sale because I didn't think they were paying enough for the land. I felt they were robbing us, as on previous deals, and I never regretted voting as I did. I was elected to the Cherokee Senate and served from 1901 to 1903. I also was County Sheriff after Statehood. During my time of service, which was two years, I never had any serious trouble, but I got every criminal. I ever went after without shedding blood, or killing any one. If I had a warrant for an Indian I just sent him word to come in; but if I had a warrant for a white man, I had to get him. He wouldn't come in, unless I brought him.

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Under our Cherokee laws, before Statehood, for stealing, the penalty for first offense was thirty-nine lashes on the offender's bare back. The second offense was one hundred lashes. These whippings were horrible as a black-snake whip was used, and nearly every lash would bring the blood. The third offense for stealing and murder was death by hanging. I witnessed the punishment for the first, second, and third offense for stealing by a Cherokee Indian named Lookback. It seemed as if he couldn't keep from stealing. Another time, Tom Smith, a half-blood Cherokee, and William Billy, a full-blood Choctaw, killed another Choctaw whose name I don't remember. These two men went to a dance near us where the other Choctaw was. They got drunk and got into a fight which ended in the killing of the unnamed Choctaw. They were tried, convicted, and sentenced to be hanged. They were told to go home and straighten up their affairs and to come back on a certain date to be hanged. William Billy, the Choctaw, was there on time and was hanged, but Tom Smith, the

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Cherokee, fled as soon as he was turned loose to go home and straighten up his affairs. He left for the Cherokee Nation, crossed the Grand River and went on into the hills. He was never heard of until after Statehood, but I have talked to him several times since and he always laughed and said what a fool the Choctaw was.

While father was high sheriff of the Cherokee Nation I saw him hang seven men. He was sheriff when one of his nephews was sentenced to be hanged for murder. Dad ordered his under-sheriff to hang him, and he locked himself in his office and wouldn't permit anyone to see him that day. This was a sad day for father, but there was nothing he could do to save the man.
