

GRIFFIN, J. L.

INTERVIEW

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Investigator, John F. Daugherty,
October 26, 1937.

Interview with J. L. Griffin,
Mill Creek, Oklahoma.

Born February 21, 1866,
Tippah County, Mississippi.

Parents David H. Griffin,
South Carolina.
Fannie H. Pickins, Alabama.

My father was David H. Griffin, born March 5, 1829, in South Carolina. He was a farmer. Mother was Fannie H. Pickins, born in 1838 in Shelby County, Alabama. There were eight children in our family. I was born February 21, 1866, in Mississippi.

I left Mississippi in 1889 and came to Daugherty on the train. It was in the Fall and I picked cotton until I got enough money to put in a gin on Scott Hawkin's place at Nebo, My wife's brother and I were partners.

I was married to Sarah Ann Phillips on Oil Creek in 1890.

I ran the gin at Nebo, south of Sulphur, for four years and then I put in a water mill on Pennington Creek

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where Reagan is now. I had a left turbine wheel and a half mile race which carried the water to the mill from the creek. After I got the race built I needed \$100 to finish paying for the water wheel.

There was an Indian preacher living near and he was often a spectator during the building of the mill. I decided that I would ask him to let me borrow the money from him. This I did. He said "Mebbe so, you come back tomorrow." When I went the next day he asked me to wait another day and I had to go the third day before he handed me the money. I found out that he had this money buried. I had to scrape red clay from the gold pieces.

He was afraid somebody would see him digging it, so he waited until dark and made sure there was nobody near.

I put in the wheel and in ninety days I returned the \$100 to the Indian with the interest. He would not accept the interest.

In a few days he came and said he wanted a yard built "so big this way, so big that way." I asked him how large a yard he wanted and he told me to come and see it. I

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went over and measured his yard and sawed the lumber for him, of walnut. I had a sawmill, grist mill, and cotton gin, all ran by the same wheel.

The mill was fifteen barrel capacity every twenty-four hours and the gin which had only one stand put out twenty bales in the same length of time.

In 1898 I ginned nine hundred forty-two square bales from August until March, 1899. The gin stand was fed with a basket.

Steely Sealy, a full-blood Chickasaw, lived west of the mill and he taught me to speak the Chickasaw language. I sold flour, meal and lumber to the Indians, and they were as honest as could be. I never lost a dime on them. When they said that they would pay they always appeared on that day. If they didn't have the money they told you when you could expect them to be back.

I took a contract from the Chickasaw Government for my mill site on Pennington, which was a mile square, for which I paid \$20.00 a year. I put a hundred fifty head of cattle on it and didn't have to pay the usual permit charges.

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The "Blue Coats" came in here during the time Overton was governor and put a number of families across Red River because they refused to pay the grazing and agricultural permits. Some of them returned that night.

If an Indian had white renters, they paid the permit to him and he paid it to the Chickasaw Government. I had written receipts for Scott Hawkins' renters and when the Blue Coats were here Scott hid on my place. He had not turned the permits to the Government and if they had caught him he would have had to face charges of embezzlement. I took food to his hiding place for several weeks.

After Scott Hawkins' Indian wife died he began courting a white woman in Texas. I wrote all his letters to her and she finally began to enquire about how much property he owned. I told Scott that she would marry him if he wanted to marry her. He wasn't sure about that, but finally decided he wanted to marry her. A few days after they were married he came to the mill. He always called me "Feet." He said, "Feet, come to my house. White woman just talk all time, can't make him stop."

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The Progressive and Non-Progressive political parties had some hot fights during their campaigns. If they could not settle their differences they killed the opposing members.

The Hawkins and Andersons started a feud and Scott was the only Hawkins left. He was afraid to make trips alone to Court at Tishomingo and he paid me \$3.00 a day to go with him as a protection. The Indians were afraid to shoot at another Indian if a white man were with him. They were afraid of white men's court and they did not want to kill a white man who did not bother them.

There was one peculiar thing about the Indians. They did not know the meaning of kinship. They called their first cousins brother and sister. One day an Indian woman spoke of her cousin as brother. I said "Sallie, he is your cousin. Your mother and his mother are sisters." She insisted that he was her brother, saying "Mama told me he is my brother. You white folks don't know."

They kept no records and never knew their ages. I had to tell many of them how old they were for the Dawes Commission rolls.

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The Chickasaws had no marriage nor divorce laws. When a boy decided he wanted a girl as his wife he built a log cabin. Then at the first opportunity he would throw a stick at the girl or give her a bright colored shawl. If she cared nothing for the young man she ran and hid, but if she liked him she went with him to his cabin and they lived together until they became tired of each other then one of them would go away and never return.

The man usually found another girl and brought her to his cabin as he did the first one. They never lived together if there were no children. The man expected the woman he lived with to bear children and if she didn't he hunted another woman for his mate.

The women cut all the wood, got the water, moved or built the houses or wigwams, tanded the garden and reared the children. The man sat around, smoking, or hunted and fished. A child took his mother's name instead of his father's.

One day an Indian came to my house to borrow a plow and a horse. I hitched a team to the plow. He stood and looked at them for some time, then he said "What I do

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when I come to a tree. One go one way, one go other."

Jocelyn Brown was a very wealthy Indian. He had three ranches, one on Oil Creek, west of Mill Creek, one east of Mill Creek, and one on Blue Spring, southwest of Troy. He had a wife on each ranch. He divided his time between the three. When an Indian woman had a child and it had no father, she named it Brown so she could get money from Jocelyn to support her child.

Susan Brown lived on the Brown Ranch, east of Mill Creek. I helped round up a bunch of cattle for her one year. She sold them to Dick Sacrey, a big cow-man in the early day. He started to write her a check for the amount paid for the cattle which came to \$13,565.00. She refused the check and demanded that she be paid in money. Dick had to ride to Gainesville to get the money and we had to hold the cattle until he returned. Indians did not want checks. Their annuity payments were sometimes sent in checks but there was someone near to cash them. The largest payment they received which I remember was \$127.00 per capita in 1893. The payments usually ranged from

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\$30.00 to \$100.00. These payments were made at Pishomingo and the Indians went there to receive them.

In November, 1894, I went to a Pashofa Dance on Pennington Creek. They had a sick Indian in a log hut and the Indian doctor was in there administering herb medicines. I was standing there like an orphan calf at a roundup watching them dance around their pot of pashofa when an Indian girl grabbed me and pulled me into the circle. I could not get out, so I had to dance with them.

We danced until daylight but the Indian was no better. About three o'clock in the morning a screech owl flew into a tree over the dancers. The guards shot him as he screeched and rushed to the creek and dived into the water to wash away the stains of the screech owl's blood.

They took the owl to be an evil spirit who had come to kill their sick tribesman. These guards were stationed on the outside of the circle where they danced and they allowed nothing to come near the dancers or the hut. A dog, cat or any bird or animal was quickly killed if it

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ventured near. To them these animals were evil spirits.

I went to Antlers on a fishing trip during the political fight in the Choctaw Nation between Dick Locke and Wilson Jones. Several Indians had been killed and I decided I'd better get back to a safer place to live so I rushed home without catching any fish.

When wife and I were first married we thought it would be fun to take a trip through the Cheyenne and Arapaho Reservation. We hitched a team of horses to a wagon and away we went. There were no white people there at that time. The Reservations were covered with cattle. Wife was afraid of the Indians and I was afraid of the steers. The first night we camped in the Comanche Reservation I put my gun near in case I needed it. It was July and we were sleeping on pallets on the ground. During the night my wife said softly "I saw an Indian come up there and squat down." I said "I don't see anything." She pointed toward an object and I got up and went over and kicked it. "Is that what you saw?" She said "I think it was right there." I picked up a huge tumbling weed and showed her. We both laughed about her Indian.

The Indians were gathering for their annual Sun Dance at Anadarko as we passed through there. As we drove out of town we noticed something in the distance which we thought was a cloud. As we drove on it seemed to be moving toward us and we finally discovered it was about two hundred Indians coming to the Sun Dance. They almost ran over our team before the line divided, just going on each side of the wagon as they passed us. My wife was certainly frightened at seeing so many Indians on each side of us.

Governor Harris of the Chickasaws was reared in Pontotoc County in Mississippi, about sixteen miles from where I lived. He named one of the counties of the Chickasaw Nation after his home county. Mill Creek was so called because he had a mill on the banks of this creek.

The Chickasaws called the United States Court at Ardmore, which was moved from Paris in 1890, "The Sandy Land Court," because it was moved from a black land locality to a sandy land.

I helped Felix Penner drive the first herd of cattle he shipped to Dougherty and we had a stampede.

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It happened like this. As we drove the cattle into town a small dog ran out of a yard and barked. The cattle were not used to small dogs and they started running and bellowing. They ran through a picket fence and took the fence with them. The pickets were found all over Strawberry Flat when the cattle were stopped.

Tip Harris rode in front, shooting. This did not start them to milling. They ran on and on with us after them. There were about a hundred and eighty-five head of cattle in the herd. We finally stopped them without the loss of any of them.

I have lived in Murray and Johnson Counties since 1889. I am the father of eight children.