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BELL, THOMAS. D.

INTERVIEW

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Charline M. Culbertson,
Interviewer
September 16, 1937

An interview with Thomas D. Bell

Kiowa, Oklahoma.

I was born in Cole County, Missouri, ten miles east of Jefferson City, in 1858.

I came to the Choctaw Nation, Indian Territory, in 1873 with my parents, Gordon P. and Martha Ann Bell. We located three miles north of Durant.

We came from Texas to the Territory in covered wagon. We didn't travel with other groups but only traveled with our immediate family. We brought all our household goods but have none of these possessions today.

Our first home in the Territory was a double log house with a hall between the rooms and a porch on the north. It was known as the old Judge Loren Fulson place; Judge Fulson was a fullblood Choctaw Indian.

Father farmed about sixty acres which was more than the average farm.

Father did most of our trading at Caddo, in Bryan County, paying \$1.00 for ten pounds of sugar and \$3.00 for coffee.

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During my early twenties I freighted to Fort Sill when it was a fort.

In Caddo at this time there were four stores, one of them was operated by Glem Hancock and one by Hugh Cox. There were also two churches, the Methodist and Christian. These old buildings do not stand today.

At Durant there was one log store operated by Dixon Durant. There was no church or school. There was a subscription school at Caddo, where the parents paid \$1.50 for each scholar. Whites and Indians both attended this school.

We had no home-made furniture. Father was a blacksmith. I am in possession of my father's vise and anvil which he used when he was blacksmith at Caddo. He had brought it when he came from Missouri to Texas and then into the Territory.

We did a great deal of fire hunting. When they first began to fire hunt they used fire pans and then during my time of fire hunting we used fire caps. We killed only one deer on a trip but sometimes for sport we would kill more. It was very dangerous to hunt this way as you might kill a horse or colt. However, you could always tell the wolves' eyes as one at a time would shine. You could never shine

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the light on the eye of a human being.

When I was a young man I witnessed some of the Choctaw Indians Stomp Dances. It was quite a colorful sight. All danced about in circles with shells on their legs that made lots of noise and by hitting against hides stretched over buckets. I also attended several of the Indian ball games which were very rough games and in which a player would often be killed or hit with the ball sticks which caused bad injuries.

The Pashofa dances were for the sick to drive away the evil spirit. After the dances everyone would eat Pashofa from a horn spoon. This was very good as it was made from all kinds of meat and beans cooked together making a stew.

I never attended any of the Indian weddings but have been to their three day cries. These cries some times were held two or five months or some times a year after death.

I have cut two hundred rails for 50 cents.

Father traded some with the Indians. You could buy a cow and calf for \$15.00. A pony that wasn't "broken" would sell for \$10.00 or \$15.00, while one that had been "broken" would sell for \$25.00.

We use to go on fishing trips on Blue River and Boggy Creek and stay for two or three days. We often seined for the fish, some times, however, using hooks.

I remember a toll bridge across Big Blue and was operated by Dave Fulsom, a Choctaw Indian.

I remember several cattle ranches such as Sic Deleny, Judge Ward & Robbins, Tom Ball and Cob Barnett. These ranches handled from fifteen hundred to two thousand head of cattle.

I recall a few United States Marshals, Jess Brown, Bob Toppin, George Pounds, Ike Ules and "Negro" Smith.

I was the last sheriff of Atoka County before the Territory went into statehood. I will be able to tell only one or two instances that happened during my term of office.

The sheriff from Grayson County, Texas, came to Atoka County after Luther Chew who was known to be a bad outlaw. I located him at Ti Valley at a saw mill camp, so the other sheriff and I set out for this camp. Upon our arrival at the camp we pretended to stop only for a drink of water until we had located the outlaw in a tent where some supplies were and

where we were to get our drinking water. When we asked for the drink and Luther Chew handed us the dipper of water we drew our guns and he surrendered without any trouble. Officers during this time had many narrow escapes and many thrilling experiences.

Some of the Indian police were Tucker and John Sulser and Lester was a collector.

I came to Kiowa in the year of 1876 and located at what is known today as the Dave Gray place just west of the city limits.

At this time neither Savanna nor Pittsburg had been built yet. The place where Pittsburg is was all in a hay meadow, where I cut hay and hauled ^{it} to Stuart where I sold it to the contractors who were building what is known today as the Rock Island railroad. It was known then as the Choctaw Railway Company. I sold the hay for \$20.00 a ton.

South McAlester had not been built yet; there was only one little shack where the old pine tree stood in front of the Pittsburg County Court House. In North McAlester there were three or four stores one of which

was operated by J. J. McAlester. There was a church and school at North McAlester.

Pittsburg was built overnight after the mines opened there. People moved from Caladonia, tearing their houses down there and moving them and rebuilding at Pittsburg.

Jess Nelson and I run the first mine at Lehigh.