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INTERVIEW WITH NICHOLAS BILLY
Choctaw Indian, Age 57
Coalgate, Oklahoma
Pete W. Cole, Field Worker
June 21, 1937

HISTORICAL SKETCH OF LIFE OF EDMUND BILLY
A FULLBLOOD INDIAN

I am the son of Reverend Edmund Billy and my mother was Susan Wilson. I was born in 1880 near Kulli Tukle, (Double Spring) Church in Atoka County. My father was born in 1855 in Mississippi. My father was a small lad when several of the members of other families were fleeing from the army of soldiers who were destroying property, robbing people, and kidnapping young women, killing them, and committing other deeds so that it was uncomfortable and unsafe for them to be in the country during the Civil War. To get away, they wandered westward, not knowing their destination. They suffered much during their trip on account of sickness, but as far as food was concerned they did not suffer so, as there was plenty of game in the country, berries of different kind were plentiful, and roots of certain kinds of wild plants were dug up, dried and beaten to meal or flour which substituted for bread. Very often in case of sickness of someone in the family, they would stop and

camp at some suitable place and remain there until the patient was able to continue on the journey. There was always someone in the tribe or community who was an herb doctor and who would wait on the patient and treat him until he would recover unless in extreme cases, of course, nothing would do any good but to die. They did not dare to stay any length of time at any place for fear of the soldiers finding them and doing them harm. It was not thought that the soldiers were authorized to hurt anyone but they exceeded the limit of their authority and it was necessary for them to stay hid from these men.

Most of the men (Choctaws) were serving in the war and the families consisted mostly of widowed wives and children of the soldiers. The aunt of my father carried him on her back as he was only a small lad when they came to the Indian Territory. It took them two years and three months from the time they left Mississippi until they arrived at Doakesville, near what is now Fort Towson, Oklahoma, then Indian Territory, Kiamichi County, now Choctaw County.

My uncle, whose wife carried my father on her back from Mississippi, was an officer in the army and was killed in

the war and nothing is known of him or his grave. After arriving and settling in the new home, they began building a house out of logs, and began to make preparation to farm. There was a man who owned and operated a store who handled most of the goods and groceries that was needed in the community. Deakesville was our trading place as there was no town near at this time. Paris, Texas, was the closest town and it was about fifty miles south across the Red River. It was usually a two days trip in a wagon to go there.

When my father was large enough to work he helped the folks clear land, chop wood, carry water, and did such odd-job work as he could handle. By this means he was a great help in taking care of the expenses in the family.

Eight and nine foot rails were made and sold for about fifty cents a hundred; twenty-five and thirty cents per thousand for two and two and one half foot oak board, or fifty cents a day for common labor wages. My father often worked for hogs, cows, clothes, and other necessities that he cared to earn and did not work for money alone. Money being scarce and unknown, wage workers for others were paid in trade that one might have.

When living in a settlement it was customary that any edible game killed was divided equally through all the neighborhood, or, if insufficient to accommodate all, each family would bring something and they would give a big dinner and have a big feast. This was to show their love, loyalty and respect for their fellow tribesmen.

Most of the men were serving in the war, or had died or were killed, so that the people who came to Doakesville with my father were mostly women and children, and the first church that was organized after their arrival in this country was started by a woman who used to hold services and have Sunday School under the arbor.

When he was about twelve years of age, father drifted away westward working his way until he came to Kali Tuklo. After working there for sometime, he married Susan Wilson, a daughter of Charles Wilson. Charles Wilson was the father of Marcus Wilson, who is now dead. Marcus was an herb doctor, rather an Indian Medicine Man. He was a great lover of dogs and when he went to big meetings or any place, the dogs would be right with him. He would not eat his meals unless he knew that his dogs would also be fed. It was noticed that while he would be in the church house during the service, one of the dogs would get on his lap and lie

there during the service. After his death these dogs were at a loss as to what had become of their master. They would march to his grave and lie around there for days at a time and would not eat when food was brought to them, and finally all starved out and died.

When my father married Susan Wilson, six children were born to them, three boys and three girls, all of whom have died but one sister and myself. When my mother died, in 1800 my father married again to Rebecca Hudson at Pleasant Cove in Pushmataha County and to this union were born one set of twin girls and another girl, but all have died.

During his days he attended a neighborhood school for a few months. This was the only schooling he had. After I was large enough to attend school I attended Trinity University at Tahacana, Texas, which was six miles from Mexia, a railroad town, when my father sent for me stating that my mother was sick. I came home in 1893, and my mother died in 1894 and was buried at the old home place where they lived. Now the land is owned by Will Cummings.

My father became a church member at Kalli Tuklo Indian Church in 1875 and was ordained minister a few

years later. I remember when he used to go to his appointment at Bok (Lusa) (Black River) Goodwater (Okla Achukma) which is in the extreme eastern part of McCurtain County, a distance of one hundred fifty miles. He used to attend other appointments near Redden, Daisy and Miller, Oklahoma. He lived and died in Duggan, Oklahoma, in the Chickasaw Nation in 1912.