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Tribe-Shawnee
Indian Removal-1871
Chief-Charles Bluejacket
Preacher
Delegate to Washington
School-Willie Halsell College
Will Rogers
Stomp Dances

Interviewer W. T. Holland
Indian-Pioneer History

I was born near Vinita, Oklahoma, July 15, 1898, the son of Stephen Bluejacket. The Shawnee Indians were divided into several classes or sets, or clans, and we were known as the Loyal Shawnees. This name was acquired from our attitude toward the United States Government, in that we always were willing to cooperate with them in carrying out any plan they thought best for us. We were willing to acquire the habits and to conform to the customs of the white man. Our people never caused the Government any trouble.

My people came west to Kansas about 1832. They sold their land in Ohio and were given land in Kansas, not so far west of Kansas City. They remained in Kansas for thirty-five or forty years, but when the game became scarce they decided to move on. An agreement was reached whereby all the Shawnees sold their land at the same time, and bought headrights in the Cherokee Nation, coming into the Territory in 1871. All of our people, about eight hundred in all, settled in the northern part of the Cherokee Nation, my family settling near Vinita. My uncle, Reverend Charles Bluejacket was Chief of the Shawnees when they left Kansas and moved to the Territory, and for quite a while thereafter. He was Chief in fact, and not just in form, as he had to sign all treaties and all papers involved

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ved in the transfer of title to land and leases.

The railroad ran through his land, and the station, and town of Bluejacket were named for my uncle. He, too, was a preacher. Physically, he was a fine specimen, well educated for his time, carried himself erect, was six feet tall and weighed two hundred pounds. He had six sons, all six feet or over, and who averaged two hundred pounds in weight. He was active in the religions, political and fraternal life of the people. He was a Thirty-Second Degree Mason. His interest in his people, as their Chief and leader, caused him to make numerous trips to Washington. In all, he made nine trips. Some were made as a delegate on some commission and others merely to ask or demand something for his people, from the Great White Father. He made one trip by water. He, and several other Shawnees traveling as his companions, dressed themselves as "Ducks" and got canoes, and went via the Arkansas and Mississippi Rivers to New Orleans, where they took an ocean vessel to Washington. They, of course, caused a sensation in Washington, in their native Indian garb. Uncle Charley was buried at the cemetery at Bluejacket. The plot of ground for that purpose was given by him

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from his land. He was eighty-six when he died. The cemetery is well kept, and the Chief's grave properly marked. He was Chief until Statehood.

My early life was such as all Shawnee boys of that time. We lived in log houses, as all others did. Hunted and fished in season, raised some corn to make bread with and enjoyed life.

Some of my early schooling was at the Willio Hallsell College at Vinita. I went there in 1893. Will Rogers was a student there that year, and at that time and age was full of fun and mischief. I know he was always talking out loud in school, chewing gum, and throwing paper wads. He was good with a rope then, and a splendid rider. We had to watch him closely when we went in swimming, as he would often slip out and tie knots in our clothes.

There at night, we would play "Run Sheep Run", and run and hide games. Will was the best runner in the bunch, so good, in fact, that we named him "Rabbit" Rogers, and he was known as "Rabbit" from then on to his intimate friends.

In 1894 I went to Carlisle, where I stayed three years. I went to school there three years, completing the twelfth grade. I took up baseball, and after leaving Carlisle I played professional baseball for eight years.

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I knew Jim Thorpe, personally, and Pop Warner was the football coach at Carlisle when I was there. Chief Bender was there at the time I attended. I knew a lot of Indian athletes of that time. My hobby now is making Indian hunting bows and arrows.

My mother was part French.

I will tell you how our people acquired the name of Bluejacket. It was during ~~the~~, or prior to, the Revolution. When the French and British were fighting over the Territory, of course each side got as many Indians on their side as possible. Our people were allies of the French, so, during this war there was a Frenchman named Van Sweringer, the ancestors of the noted railroad brothers, who came to our village, the village of my people. He came as a friend and was ^{so} friendly that our people took him in, and made him a member of our tribe after he had married a Shawnee maiden. He was a French soldier and wore a blue coat, or jacket. This was something new to our people, and they called him Bluejacket. After that, our family took the name of Bluejacket, from the coat of the French soldier, who was an ancestor of my mother's.

Our meeting grounds are at White Oak Hills, west of Vinita. I used to attend stomp dances there years

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ago, and this place even now is occasionally used. My father was present at Lawrence, Kansas, and saw the Quantrell Gang set fire to the town.

In my early days the owner of the largest herd of cattle around Vinita was Will Halsell. He had as many as thirty thousand head. All was open range there and I don't know how many acres he did graze. The cattle would get mixed up with other rancher's cattle, but at the roundup, their brand would show their ownership and each rancher's cowhands would cut out his cattle.

Vinita, of course, in the early days was the terminal of the railroad and our trading place. There were no other towns of any size around. People would come in on the train to Vinita and scatter out over the Territory.