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BILLY, JOSIAH

SECOND INTERVIEW #12198

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Gomer Gower.
May 20th, 1937.
Interviewer.

Interview with Josiah Billy.
Whitesboro, Oklahoma.
Born April 16, 1873.
Father-James Billy
Mother-Maggie Billy (Nee)

Josiah Billy was born on April 16th, 1873, in what then was Wade County, Choctaw Nation.

His father, James Billy, a Choctaw Indian, was born in Mississippi and emigrated from that state to the Indian Territory at the time of the General Removal. While the date of his birth is not definitely known, it is inferred that he was in his teens at that period. He died in 1886 and was spared the humility of witnessing the passing of his beloved Choctaw Nation.

His mother, before her marriage, was Maggie Vaughn. She was born in what then was Eagle County, in the Choctaw Nation, of Choctaw parentage. She passed away in 1910.

After his attendance as a pupil at the local Tribal schools, he became a pupil at Spencer Academy

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for three consecutive terms; 1885-1886 and 1887. He then taught in the community schools which were provided by the Choctaw Council for the education of the Indian children.

In 1889 he was united in marriage to Winnie Anderson, a daughter of Captain John Anderson and continued teaching school until 1903 near what is now Whitesboro in LeFlore County.

In 1902 he served as interpreter in the Choctaw National Senate and was a witness of the very tense situation which was created through the bitterly fought contest between Tom Hunter and Green McCurtain for the governorship. In that instance, the out-going governor, G. W. Dukes, who favored the election of Hunter, allied himself with the Hunter forces and vacated his office; turned it over to Tom Hunter, during the week that the votes were to be cast. Hunter took over the office and organized the Council without counting the votes. This caused great confusion and violent disputes in the building and on the grounds.

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The United States Marshal, who was in full sympathy with the Hunter faction, took over the Capital and caused a troop of negro soldiers to be brought in to assist him in maintaining peace.

Indian Agent Shoenfelt, however, gave his support to the McCurtain faction and sent to Washington asking that a company of soldiers be sent to the Choctaw Capital at Tuskahoma, to take charge of affairs. The authorities at Washington immediately responded to the request of Agent Shoenfelt and troops were rushed to the scene of the conflict to preserve peace. Upon the arrival of these troops a conference between representatives of the contending forces was held at the Gilbert Thompson Hotel. That conference resulted in an agreement that the Council House be turned over to the Councilors, it having been closed to all save the supporters of Hunter in the interim. Upon the announcement of the agreement made at the conference, a mad rush was made for the Council House by both factions; however, physical combat was averted and the election for the office of governor was entered upon in an orderly manner,

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the result being that McCurtain was found to be elected Governor.

Josiah Billy recalls the great oratorical ability to Jacob Jackson, a well educated Choctaw Indian, who served as the Choctaw National Secretary for a period of three, two year terms and was often heard in the Choctaw legislative halls with profound attention and respect. In 1892 he had been an opponent of Wilson Jones in a race for the governorship and, doubtless, would have won that race had Wilson not had the irresistible force and assistance of Green McCurtain. Jackson was a member of the Nationalist party, a party which fought at every step to maintain tribal existence.

He now lies in an unmarked grave in the cemetery at Shady Point, in LeFlore County.

In 1886, James Billy, Josiah's father, died when Josiah was thirteen years old. His mother, however, rose to the demands of her added responsibilities and gave Josiah a splendid education.

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Josiah Billy recalls that it was the custom of his mother to gather her children around her at nightfall and sing to them the old Choctaw songs and relate to them her experiences during the Civil War. One of these experiences was that of witnessing the return of some of the Choctaw braves, when granted leaves of absences from service to return to their homes in the fastness of the Tiamichi Mountains, here to celebrate with a war dance such conquests as they had made in battle. Shocking as it seems, the scalps of some of the fallen enemies would often grace the belts of the returned warriors.

On such occasions a community war dance would soon get under way and their war songs provided the rhythm and tempo of their dance movements. The women, as well as the men, participated in the festivities, sometimes continuing throughout the night. The "stomp" or dance grounds on such occasions were illuminated by heaps of burning pine knots placed at convenient points. When all the participants were

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congregated a circle would be formed composed of both men and women and the dance was on. At first the songs were low and moaning and the steps deliberate and measured. But as they warmed up, the songs became louder and the steps quickened, finally reaching a stage of abandon and wierdness that was captivating. Every movement had its own particular significance and visualized to the mind of the performers some deed of heroism attributed to valiant members of their tribe. From the effect of the continuous repetition of the words of the songs and the exclusion of all other thoughts from their minds, the warriors sought to reenact the motions significant to the heroic acts which they were engaged in commemorating at the moment. Their fervor knew no bounds.

The "Stomp Ground" which was invariably used by members of the tribe in the vicinity of the Billy home, was upon a circular rise of ground which had a diameter of about one hundred feet, a ground formation which was

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ideal for the purpose for which it was used. It is at a point about two and one-half miles northeast of Whitesboro and close by the Talihina-Whitesboro highway.

It is now a part of the National Forest and still affords excellent hunting and fishing, thanks to the efforts of the Fish and Game Commission.

For a number of years now, Josiah Billy has served his community as Justice of the Peace and Notary Public.