

KEELER, FRED

INTERVIEW

#12016

IDENTIFICATION FORM
 W. S. L. COURSE ADMINISTRATION
 Indian-Persons History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Alene D. McDowell

This report made on (date) October 11, 1937

1. Name Fred Keeler

2. Post Office Address Kansas City, Kansas

3. Residence address (or location) 549 Oakland

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month July Day 15 Year 1882

5. Place of birth Bartlesville, Oklahoma

6. Name of Father George B. Keeler Place of birth Illinois

Other information about father Helped to build Bartlesville

7. Name of Mother Josie Gilstrap Place of birth Missouri

Other information about mother Cherokee extraction

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story of the person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects and questions. Continue on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 15.

Interview with Fred Keeler
Kansas City, Kansas

Field Worker - Alene D. McDowell
Indian-Pioneer History, S-149
October 11, 1937

I was born July 15, 1882, on Keeler Creek, ten miles south of Bartlesville. My father, George B. Keeler, was born February 7, 1850, at Hennepin, Putnam County, Illinois. He died in 1929, and his remains placed in the mausoleum in the White Rose Cemetery at Bartlesville. My mother, Josie Gilstrap Keeler, Cherokee, was born in Neosho County, Missouri. She died in 1893, at the age of thirty-six years and is buried in Washington County.

When my father was six years old he removed with his parents from Illinois to Vernon County, Wisconsin, where they resided for about ten years, later returned to Illinois and settled at Belvidere. In 1868, they removed to Iowa and as my grandfather had followed merchandising in Illinois, he established a store in Boone, where they lived until 1870. They then removed to Glenwood, Iowa, where they engaged in farming for fifteen years. My father was a farmer, cattleman and merchant, as he had been reared.

In 1871, my father came to the Indian Territory and

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became a trader in the Osage Nation. He was employed by Louis Choteau, an Indian fur trader, who was of French descent.

In the latter part of 1871, Mr. Choteau was killed in his home by a drunk outlaw whom he had requested to leave his house.

My father worked for Mr. Choteau in the commissary located on the banks of Silver Lake, the first location of the Osage Agency. When the Osages first came here from Kansas, they thought they were to have all the land in the river bottom and they established their agency on the banks of Silver Lake, south of what is now Bartlesville. They were to have the land north of the 96th meridian, so they moved their agency to a location about the center of the Osage Reservation, east of Pawhuska, where they received their rations and payments.

While making the trip from Kansas, the Osages camped at a spring near what is now the Woolaroc Ranch, owned by Frank Phillips of Bartlesville, about fourteen miles southwest of Bartlesville. This spring was named for Mrs. Choteau, mother of Louis, and is known as the Choteau Spring.

After Mr. Choteau's death, my father closed out the fur trading business for Mr. Choteau's mother.

He later became connected with Dunlap and Rankins, licensed traders, and after one year Mr. Rankins sold out his interest and my father and John Flora bought buffalo hides from the various Indian tribes for Dunlap. In this way he became familiar with the sign languages of all tribes. He spoke the Osage language fluently.

In August, 1872, my father married Miss Josie Gilstrap, Cherokee, and two years later was adopted into the Cherokee Tribe. He then removed to Pawhuska where he was employed by Dunlap & Flora until 1874, when he accepted a position as clerk in the J. H. Bartles Store, on the north side of Caney River from the present town of Bartlesville.

In 1875, he engaged in the cattle business and agriculture on Keeler Creek, ten miles south of Bartlesville, and followed this occupation until 1884, then joined William Johnstone in the mercantile business on the south side of the river, in what is now the city of Bartlesville. They erected the first store building on the present site of the city and handled all kinds of merchandise and also

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carried on an extensive business in handling cattle.

My father was active in the building of Bartlesville and felt a great pride in the city.

In 1897, he made a deal with the Cudahy Oil Company to drill the first commercial oil well in the state of Oklahoma, which is now in the Johnstone Park at Bartlesville.

He was one of the organizers of the Union Machine Company of Bartlesville, was a director of the Water Company, and was vice president and one of the directors of the First National Bank. He owned and sold five additions to the town and the Sutton-Keeler building was erected by A. D. Morton, Dr. G. W. Sutton of Cleveland, Dr. F. R. Sutton of Bartlesville and Mr. Keeler. Keeler Avenue of Bartlesville was named in his honor, as was Keeler Creek, where I was born.

I received my early education in the schools in Bartlesville and later attended the mission near Skiatook. John Watson was the principal of the mission and his daughter, Eva Watson, was our teacher. I understand she is now living at Long Beach, California. Ed Sunday, who

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is now a prosperous real estate man of Claremore, was my room-mate at the old mission.

Dr. Stewart was the first mayor in Bartlesville and I remember the first man who received a fine in the new town. He was George Dickey, who was arrested and fined for firing a pistol as he left town. Dr. Stewart pounded the table with his fist as he fined him to emphasize he meant business. The mayor's court was held in the home of Dr. Stewart.

The first marriage I can remember was Dave Stewart, son of the mayor, who married one of the Parks girls. Sam Bopst had been married here but I cannot remember about that. I believe Sam's was the first wedding in the town.

The first United States Commissioners court was held in my father's building at Second and Johnstone. The first Federal Court was held on the second floor of the only three-story building at that time. This building is located at 317 Johnstone. William Higgins was deputy clerk and I was custodian of the court offices.

I remember a civil case that was being tried against C. B. Gray, a Baptist preacher, and father of Jim, John

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and Cella Gray. O. B. Clevenger, the attorney for the plaintiff, made some abusive remarks about the defendant and ridiculed him as a minister. Mr. Gray's son, Cella, who was just a kid, was in the rear of the room. He sat there and the tears began to stream down his face and suddenly he jumped up and in about two leaps he was at the front of the room and had hit Clevenger. Mr. Gray was a fine man and was highly respected by all who knew him. Cella Gray is now one of the leading citizens and merchants of Bartlesville.

I was United States Deputy Marshal for three years and went out with statehood, in 1907. I was then city marshal for a while. Bill Turner and a fellow named Brown were also city marshals at that time.

One of the first doctors on the north side of the river was Dr. Pyles. He and his family were murdered by a negro, about two miles northwest of the old Bartles Store. They were killed with an ax.

Dr. Tan, a negro, had a little office located on the side of the Bartles Store. Dr. Woodring was one of the first doctors on the north side of the river and was

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the first doctor on the south side. He settled on the north side in 1889, and when Mr. Bartles moved his town four miles north and started the town of Dewey, Dr. Woodring moved to the south side. This was in about 1899 or 1900.

Dr. Bruce owned the first automobile in the city. I remember very clearly, it was a bright red car and everybody gave him the road for he was a wild, reckless driver. Everybody spoke of his car as Dr. Bruce's "little red devil." He always wore a linen duster and goggles.

My father's first home was about 200 feet east of the southeast corner of the children's park. His second home was on the bank of Caney River, 150 feet east of the river bridge. His third and last home is now located on the corner of Second and Delaware and is used for the Nurses Home at the Washington County Memorial Hospital.

I drove a team for Mr. Gates, who was looking for a right-of-way to build the first pipeline out of the state. I believe this was in 1904. I think Mr. Gates since was President of the Prairie Oil and Gas Company and located at Independence, Kansas. We tried to follow

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close to the 96th meridian, which is now the Osage-Washington County line, to the Kansas state line.

At one time I purchased large turkeys for resale at Coffeyville, Kansas, for thirty-five cents each.

Smith and Allen Lounsbury owned part of the teams that hauled the oil field equipment from Red Fork to Bartlesville for the first oil well. They scattered hay on the ice across the Arkansas River to keep the horses from falling when they crossed the river. This was in the Spring of 1897.

My father bought hogs and shipped them to St. Louis, Missouri, to market. He bought and fattened them, then drove them on foot to Caney, Kansas, the nearest shipping point, then he shipped them to market. While making the drive, if a fat hog became tired he was put in the wagon, which followed behind. He usually shipped from 350 to 400 head.

The cattle from this vicinity were driven from Possum Creek to Talala and shipped over the Missouri Pacific Railroad to market. Coffeyville, Elgin and Caney, Kansas, were also shipping points for cattle.

The Nowata Road ran north from the Bartles Store for about one-half mile, then across country southeast, where it crossed Coon Creek near the present crossing on the Tuxedo Road.

The Tulsa Road was west of Bartlesville, along the Osage County line. It crossed Sand Creek at the old ford, about 200 yards west of the crossing now used, near the Phillips Ranch and out through the hills along Nigger Gap.

There was a ferry boat across Caney River and the landing was about where the first oil well now stands, in the Johnstone Park, in Bartlesville. This was operated by Al Oakson and owned by my father and William Johnstone. Carter's Ferry was located at Ringo, about five miles northwest of Ramona, in the south end of Washington County. It crossed Caney River, along the section line near the Osage-Washington County line.

Ringo was a pioneer town that was located in Washington County. There was a little lake of about two acres located about five miles northwest of Ramona. Chief Bill Rogers, who lived in Skiatook, established a

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little store at the north end of the lake. The store was located south of Ellen Miller's place and was operated by Mr. Carter, who also took care of the post-office and owned and operated the Carter's Ferry.

Jesse Morgan, brother of the late Arthur I. Morgan, had the first contract for the Star mail route from Coffeyville, Kansas, to the Bartles Store. A change of administration caused the post office to be moved to the south side of the river. Frank Crane was the first postmaster after it was moved to the new location. I believe it was during Cleveland's administration that the post-office was moved. It was in the Bartles Store during the Republican administration and the Democrats applied for the office in the new town.

Cyprian Tayrien had operated a little store on the south side of the river, in what is now Johnstone Park, prior to my father's and Mr. Johnstone's operation of a merchandise business here.

The first telephone operator in Bartlesville was the present Mrs. James Hickey, who now lives at 1111 Johnstone in Bartlesville.

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The white settlers were required to have a permit to live, farm, or work, in the Cherokee and Osage Nations. There were Indian Police to see that these people had permits and to keep all outsiders from remaining within the borders of the Nation. These police were Indians and they were very strict about their rules. John West was the Chief of the Indian Police and his son, Dick, was one of the police. Frank West now operates the Ford Agency at Sapulpa, Oklahoma. Franklin Re-ward of Pawhuska was an Indian Police on the Osage Reservation and was later a United States Deputy Marshal. I believe the Indian Police were paid by the Department of Justice.

The Claremore Mound is an old battle site of this vicinity. The Osage and Cherokee Indians fought a battle at this place, the Osages fought a losing battle. Chief Claremore was the Osage Chief, and the city of Claremore was named in his honor. This mound is located about one mile west of Claremore, in Rogers County.

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Our first ball diamond was located about one mile north of Caney River on the west side of United States Highway #75, where the National Refinery Company now have their plant. Base Ball was one of our favorite sports and we have played many interesting games on this diamond.

There used to be an Osage Indian grave on top of the mound at the west edge of Bartlesville. There is no trace of these graves now, but I remember them, and have seen them many times when I was a child.

When Bartlesville was first incorporated, 1897, the west field fence ran along one-half block west of where the railroad is now and north to the Caney River. The south fence ran down Third Street to Osage Avenue, then in a northeast direction to the west side of the old bridge across Caney River.

I have a picture of the Arthur Morgan home on North Delaware Avenue. The first time I ever acted as pall bearer was for their little son, Ollie.

Mr. Eppstine, a Jew, who came to Caney, Kansas, in the early days and established a trading post,

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learned something about furs and hides. All merchants handled furs and hides so he decided he had better do likewise. He was not familiar with the fur business and when he received his returns from his first shipment to St. Louis, he learned his first lesson. Coon hides sold for forty cents and opossum hides for five cents. He had bought opossum hides for coon hides and when he found that he had made the mistake he was very excited and told his employees not to buy any more of those "stick tail Coon hides," for the market had decreased. The boys got a big kick out of this.

The old band hall was used for everything in the early days. It was first located near the west line of the City Park, on North Cherokee Avenue, where the old bath house stood for many years, later. It was moved to the corner of Second and Osage where it was later torn down. Andy Wilkie, one of our citizens, died very suddenly and about a week after he was buried, the citizens decided to have his body taken up and an autopsy performed by Dr. Ayres and Dr. Woodring and the stomach sent away for an analysis. However, everything

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was all right. I was then just a lad but I was in the building, the old band hall, where the body lay in state and saw the body. Of course, I was afraid to pass there after dark. One night I was returning to my home and had to pass the old band hall. The back part of the building stood about three feet off the ground and a bunch of hogs stayed under the building. I was frightened so I threw a rock at the building and out came those hogs with a rush. I don't know what I thought it was, and I didn't wait to see. I was barefoot and the ground was covered with sandstone. I know the fire flew from those rocks, I ran so fast getting home.

I have one old gun, owned at one time by Henry Starr and a number of early day pictures, including the first calaboose in Bartlesville, and early day pictures of the Osages.