

KELLEY, JAMES P.

INTERVIEW.

12780

Grace Kelley
Investigator
January 24, 1938.

Interview with James P. Kelley,
Henryetta, Oklahoma.

My grandfather was about eighty years old when I can remember him best. He had come to the Choctaw Nation before there were any railroads in the Territory at all. He was a Campbellite and had come to the Territory to preach-- that and hunting were the only things he wanted to do. When plowing time came he would put a sack of groceries on his horse and start out. His only wages were the meals that he received at the meetings so he would come home poorer than he had left. He always lived with his sons--they did the farming and making the living for the family.

Lots of times people would come and wake him up in the middle of the night, some of them would have a bad tooth that needed to be pulled out. He would take the person into another room, get the pliers and pull the tooth without any medicine whatever; some of them did quite a bit of hollering. Others would need a doctor-- he had herbs hanging all around the house-- and he would do what he could for them. I guess he must have been a pretty

2

good doctor for we didn't have much sickness and he lived to be ninety-eight years old. Other young people didn't need either a dentist or a doctor but wanted to be married, so they were married.

My grandfather had a big fireplace in the living room and every night he'd have prayer there by the fireplace before going to bed. (This was before I was seven years old.) I know there never were any prayers longer and more uninteresting to young ears than those were. I'd see that was to be the next thing so instead of getting a chair and suffering through ~~it~~, I'd slip off and go to bed. After they were through grandmother would come and see that I was in bed right.

The church that we attended was away out in the woods and we'd get up at daylight to go to it; they preached all morning. The women had all brought good food and at noon they would have a picnic, then there would be preaching all afternoon and we'd get home after dark.

Grandfather had a big farm that was leased for seven years; it was a bare place ten miles east of Coalgate when they moved on it but they built a good four-room box house, made a cellar and

3

built a barn and smoke house of logs and a spring house that was over the best spring that I ever saw. For some reason they didn't want me to go into the smoke house. I don't know why, but that made me want to get in but as the door was locked all the time I had to find another way of entrance. It was built upon four rocks and had a good floor--but one board was loose so I'd crawl under and come up through where the loose board was. After the seven years were up they had to move and leave the improvements as payment of the rent.

They had a big meadow and the grass was a way over my head. I'd wander off down there and get lost. I couldn't see which way to go so I'd just stand in the one place and bawl until some of them came and got me.

I've seen them feed good sweet potatoes to the hogs by the baskets full. Everyone else had all that they could use and there was no sale for them so they used what they could and fed the rest to the hogs in the place of feed that was worth more.

Hunting

When the farm work was done the young men went hunting and all game, including squirrels, were skinned and hung in the

KELLEY, JAMES. P.

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12780

4

smoke house. There wasn't a time that there wasn't wild meat in the smoke house.

Coalgate about 1897

I guess there were about fifteen hundred people at Coalgate in 1897 as there were little towns all around it. There were two railroads but the Choctaw was there years before the Katy came through. At first the town was a mile and a half away from the depot. I believe the coal mines were opened before 1885---but I do know that they were there then. All my folk went there when the mines opened and they were there a long time before my mother brought me there when I was a baby.

Peddlers

Peddlers used to go through the Territory with everything you could think of to sell; medicine of all kinds, horse liniment, dry goods, stockings. They were a lot like the Assyrian peddlers of later days, they would stay all night with us and in the morning they either paid for their lodging and for the feed for the horse with some of the things that they had to sell or if we didn't want anything they paid the cash.

KELLEY, JAMES. P.

INTERVIEW.

12780

5

Early Schooling

After grandmother got her housework done she would sit down, sometimes I'd sit on her lap and sometimes I'd sit beside her, and ^{she'd} teach me. She started with the A B C's then used some books that the older children had used. I didn't go to school until I was about nine years old and was put into the third grade. There were no schools close enough for me to attend before that. The first school was a subscription school at Coalgate and the fees were two dollars a month and everyone from the first to the eighth were in the same room.

Newspapers Scarce

During the Spanish-American War there were no newspapers out our way but whenever anyone went to town they would get a paper--maybe it was a week or two old-- and they would bring it back and take it to all the neighbors to read about the War. I'd sit and wonder what it was all about.

First Shows in 1901 or 1903.

I was never to a show until after I was ten or twelve years old; it was at Coalgate, too. A mean Indian, Buster Burroughs, shot the lights out and broke the show up; he delighted in breaking up all dances, shows and all kinds of

6

gatherings and when he came to town the marshal would hide out until after he had left for home.

Richest Indian around Coalgate.

Bill Wooley was a full-blood Choctaw who had a white wife; he had lots of land and people would lease it, improve it and move off. He sent his daughters away to other states to college.

Old Fashioned Picnic

Every woman took a good lunch for her family but they, didn't go off by themselves to eat but all of the lunches were put on one table and everybody ate at that table together. There was a dance platform that was about thirty feet square. The most interesting thing was the merry-go-round, which was more like the modern merry-mix-up but was called a merry-go-round. The top part was round like a wheel with swings hanging down from it that were large enough for two persons to sit in. In the center there was a pole with a mule hitched to it and a man would hit the mule to start it to going round, thus turning the wheel and swings. It didn't go fast enough to make the swings go up in the air but went round and round.

KELLEY, JAMES. P.

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12780

7

After starting this mule the man would play a fiddle as fast as he could.