

INDEX CARDS:

Tribe-Cherokēe
Indian Trader
Arkansas River
Osage Indians
Fort Gibson
Civil War
Grand River Ferry

371

FIELD WORKER JAS. S. BUCHANAN
Indian-Pioneer History S-149
July 21, 1937.

INTERVIEW WITH FRED AUGUSTUS KERR JR.
Route 1, Warner, Oklahoma

I, Fred A. Kerr, Jr., was born September 9,
1853, eight miles east of Ft. Gibson.

My father was Fred Augustus Kerr, Sr., (white)
born and reared in the vicinity of Pittsburgh,
Pennsylvania.

My mother was Louisa (Coodey) Kerr, the daugh-
ter of Joe Coodey and Jane (Ross) Coodey. Jane
Ross Coodey was the sister of Chief John Ross of the
Cherokees.

About 1837, my father with a number of other
men formed a trading company, equipped and stocked
a wagon train and came west to trade with the Indians,
then beyond the frontier of civilization. Their
intention was to exchange their goods for and buy furs
from the Indians in the west until their wagons were
loaded, then take the furs back to the eastern markets.

After many weeks of travel and hardships they pass-
ed the frontier of civilization into the Indian country

2

which is now northern Oklahoma or Kansas, when they were attacked by a band of hostile Indians, which resulted in a long and serious fight and the total destruction of their equipment and stock, though they were successful in holding off the Indians. Eventually the Indians gave up the siege and departed. The surviving members of the trading party, leaving the ruins of their wagons and stock of goods, also several members of their party buried there on the plains, started back towards civilization seeking assistance and protection. Several of the survivors died from wounds and exposure on the return trip to the frontier, and eventually my father and another man were all that were left of the entire party.

From continuous riding through the rough unbroken trail, their horses became exhausted and they deserted them and proceeded on foot. My father's companion eventually became exhausted and told father that it was impossible for him to go any further and he said to father, "you go on and try to save yourself."

Father said he thought the situation over, finally making the most difficult decision he ever made in his life, but realizing the circumstances demanded drastic action he told his companion, "I have seen several of our men left behind, and as there are only two of us left, before I leave you here alone sick to perish by a slow death from exposure, I have decided it would be more merciful for me to kill you than it would be to leave you here to die." When father made known his decision, his companion thought seriously for a moment and then decided he could make it a little further, and with the feeble assistance of father, they started staggering on, they knew not where. They had traveled but a short distance when they came to a river, which they learned later was the Arkansas river. As darkness had come, they decided to rest there for the night.

At dawn the next morning they were awakened by the crow of a rooster on the opposite side of

4

the river. They jumped to their feet with surprise and joy, because the crow of the rooster meant they were near a settlement and what was more than anything else just then, food.

Father said his companion was so jubilant over the fact that they had reached a settlement that he could hardly be restrained from attempting to swim the river, when it would have been an impossible feat for him to perform, due to his weakened condition. Father persuaded him to remain on that side of the river while father swam across, where he found a settlement of Osage Indians, borrowed from them a canoe, returned and rowed his companion across the river to the Osage village where they were given food and care by the Indians.

When father managed to make the Indians understand that they were very hungry and wanted food, the squaws started to prepare a meal of wild meat. He said his companion was so crazed with hunger, that he would snatch the meat from the fire before it ^{would} hardly begin to cook.

After they had been well fed, rested and partly recovered from the trying ordeal they had experienced, father made a deal with the Indians, giving them one hundred dollars in gold to take them to Ft. Gibson on horseback.

That was my father's introduction to the west and his arrival at Ft. Gibson as I heard him relate it many times.

His first permanent employment at Ft. Gibson was with the government in the commissary department, which position he held for a long period of time, during which time he and my mother were married.

At the beginning of the Civil War my father gave up the position with the government which he had held so long and joined the Confederate Army, where he also served in the commissary department, assigned to a division at a confederate post which was situated near Tahlequah, until the entire post, which consisted entirely of Cherokees, deserted the Southern cause and went to the Union side. He then took leave and came

6

home to Ft. Gibson and remained at home with us about three weeks, when a Captain Butler of the Confederate post at Webbers Falls, whom father had partly reared and educated, assumed a grudge at father and openly made the assertion that he, Captain Butler, was going to take a detachment of men and go to Ft. Gibson and hang Fred Kerr.

An Indian Confederate private, who was a friend of my father, overheard Captain Butler's remark, deserted the Confederate post, and came to Ft. Gibson and informed my father of Captain Butler's intention. Father, fearing for his own safety, left Ft. Gibson and none too soon, as immediately after he departed. Captain Butler and his men were there looking for him. Father went to Fayetteville, Arkansas, where he found the Cherokee regiment which had deserted the Confederacy near Tahlequah and joined the Union side, all of whom were his friends. He was made welcome and there joined the Federal forces and was immediately reassigned to the

commissary department where he served the remainder of the War.

After the War Fred Kerr followed a civilian life at Ft. Gibson. He bought a farm one mile from Grand River, north of Ft. Gibson, known as the old Shaw Place, situated southeast of Col. Sam Houston's home place. He lived on this place for several years and operated the old ferry on Grand River that he purchased from the Cherokee government shortly after the close of the War. He owned the ferry about fifteen years and operated it with hired help.

Father died at the home of one of his daughters, my sister, Mrs. George Elliott, at Muskogee in 1887.