

KEITH, F. W.

INTERVIEW

#7371

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Given by  
F. W. Keith,  
Muskogee, Okla.  
July 31, 1937.

Interviewed By, 7371  
Florence L. Phillips,  
Forum, Okla.

Settlement: John-Kettle, two miles east of Briartown.

Settlers: Tom Sunday, John Wickett, Indian Catch a Coon,  
Buzzard Flopper, Freeman Keith, Chas. McClure, Henry McClure,  
Bob McClure, Bill McClure, Bill Phillips, Ellis Borwn,  
Frost Skinner, Tom Starr. These families moved into the  
Kettle Settlement about 1880.

They hunted and fished, killed game of different kinds—  
deer, turkey, prairie chicken and squirrels. Wolves were  
plentiful, too, they came around the cabins at night.

The McClures were from Georgia "Southern Gentleman,"  
about one-eighth Cherokee.

Freeman Keith's mother was a McClure.

Bill Phillips was English, Cherokee and Spanish. He  
married Jossie McClure, sister of the above mentioned  
McClure brothers.

There was a little log school-house there in 1880 and  
the log house is still standing on Ruth Starr's allotment.  
It was there, Indian pastors held services. The Indian pastors  
had no interpreter and those that attended did so with  
devotion.

The Indians came to church in different dress. Some came with Indian costumes, especially the men. The women wore large shawls and no head dress.

Just before time for services to begin you could see the Indians coming from all directions. The men with bows and arrows, some with single barrel rifles, some with knives in their belts, some with blow guns made from large canes through which arrows were blown by the mouth.

Their songs in the Indian language were beautiful, the Indians singing all parts in perfect harmony. After church services were over they went quietly home.

The Indian baptismal rites were always held at the slough—a beautiful pool. Some of the Indians came on foot, some in wagons, some drifted quietly down in canoes to the place where the rites were being held. During the first baptizing Keith attended it gave him a thrill. John Kettle, old and gray, came paddling silently around a bend in his dark brown canoe in Indian dress and gay feathers. He stopped about fifty feet from where they were, resting his chin on his clasped hands. After the rites were over, he paddled on his way as silently as he came.

Their amusements were corn-stalk shooting and dances, stomp dances and the old puncheon-floor dancing. The puncheon floor dance was called such because the floors of the cabins were made of split logs flat or split side planed down and turned upermost. Two would step out facing each other, standing on one puncheon. Then the music started, which more often was minus a violin but composed of tin pans which they beat with a stick and everybody kept time to the dance by hand-clapping.

The steps were something like the steps to the old break down music and some of the Indian stomp dance. And they had to dance up and down, back and forth, never passing each other on one puncheon.

The South Canadian River was the boundary line between our settlement and the Choctaw Nation.

Their drinking water was hauled or carried from a large spring near the settlement, which was later named the McClure Springs.

Kettle was an Indian prophet, prophesying many things that came true.

Isaac Honey was our first postmaster living at what is now Briartown, Oklahoma, and about two and one-half

miles west of the Kettle Settlement..

Uncle John West, father of Ellis and Dick West of Muskogee, was the first United States marshal at Briartown near the Kettle Settlement and Bill West, his brother, was deputy.

During those times the law breakers of Canadian District were tried at Webber Falls.

Shoemake, near Webber Falls was the first District Judge. Herman Vann was also Judge at one time of that District. John Sevier was then prosecuting attorney.

When the white people broke the laws they were taken to Fort Smith, tried and punished or released.

When an Indian of the Cherokee Nation was found guilty by trial, he was sentenced and sent to Tahlequah to be imprisoned. When put to work, they were put in the chain gang.

The Old Buffalo trail runs near our settlement, through what is known as Uncle Tom Starr's place. The trail is still visible, coming from the west on down across the Canadian River.

There was a salt ground known as Deer Lick, and a salt spring northwest of our settlement. There the Indians boiled the water down, getting salt for home consumption and the deer

lick furnished plenty of salt for the cattle.

The Kettle Ferry was the only ferry known then where you crossed to the Choctaw Nation. This ferry was owned by John Kettle, near the settlement.

The Ford, known as the Rocky Ford was at the Kettle Ferry where the water was low.

There was another ferry about a mile from the Kettle Ferry known as the Hoyt Ferry, owned by Babe Hoyt, a Choctaw. Many people were drowned at these ferries and Rocky Ford.

The ceremonial grounds were on top of Briartown Mountain. There is a large cleared place on top. In the center stands a lone tree. There the Indians met from miles around to hold their secret business and for ceremonial affairs. The Ke-too-wah Society was led by Tom Starr.

The most valuable timber near our settlement was walnut.

The trading post for Briartown was Fort Smith and Webber Falls.

Oxen were used in those days to plow the fields and for travel.

The McClures had some horses, mules and oxen.

Wolves were a menace during that time, killing hogs, calves and young colts. They ran in packs and were dangerous to man. Doors and windows had to be securely barred at night to protect human life.

The Indians received payments from the Government during that time known as bread-money. The payments were not to exceed \$10.00 per head.

The politics were the National and Downing Party.

The mail was brought to the settlement by carriers on horseback.