

BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

MAYES, GEORGE W. SECOND INTERVIEW.

8165

Field Worker's name Amelia F. Harris

This report made on (date) August 10 1937

1. Name George W. Mayes. quarter-blood Cherokee Indian.

2. Post Office Address Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 306 N E 13

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month November Day 21 Year 1848

5. Place of birth Old Baptist Mission, Going Snake District

Mission established in 1839 by Reverend Isaac Bushyhead

6. Name of Father G. W. Mayes Place of birth Georgia

Other information about father Confederate soldier

7. Name of Mother Charlotte Bushyhead Mayes Place of birth Tennessee

Other information about mother Came to Indian Territory in 1838.

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 .

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Amelia F. Harris,
Journalist,
August 10, 1937.

Interview with George W. Mayes
Cherokee Indian, 89 years old,
306 E. 13th Street,
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

In previous interviews I gave history relative to Father, Mother and some of my boyhood days. I will now proceed with things that happened before I got married.

In 1859 an uncle who ran a general merchandise store near where the town of Sapulpa is today wanted me to assist him in his store. Father consented.

At that time there weren't any roads, just "pig" trails as we called them. We traveled more by direction and nearly always horseback. We were traveling horseback to my uncle's store this time, and we made very slow progress. The first night we stopped at an old Union Mission built by a Frenchman, Mr. Choteau, in 1821. This was near Pryor Creek and was the oldest mission in the Indian Territory and I am the oldest man living to-day who spent a night in the mission.

This mission is one mile west of Grand River and four miles southeast of Choteau. The first newspaper published in the Indian Territory was published at this mission

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and edited by a Mr. Chapman who died in this mission and was buried there.

I believe this old burial ground is the oldest in the state, all of the buildings were made of hickory logs. Some of the buildings were quite large. There has been a fine monument erected giving a short synopsis of the origin of the mission and concerning Mr. Chapman as editor of the first newspaper and about his death.

In the year of 1836 the newspaper men held their convention at this mission in commemoration of this first newspaper.

At the mission they were kind enough to give us breakfast and with an early start we traveled all day, arriving at the store about dark. The store was located in an Indian settlement with more full-blood Creeks than any other kind. One of our best customers was old man Sapulpa, a full-blood Creek Indian, a very worthy citizen and a leader in political affairs.

The town of Sapulpa derives its name from this family. We never lost a dollar in our dealings with these Indians. They were good pay. I worked one year in the

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store and decided I would go back home and go to school again.

This school I attended was built in 1858 on the old Military Road from Kansas to Texas. It was a log school house and there was a fine spring of water there. This was a subscription school with a man teacher. I went here one year; then the War.

I have traveled over the Military Trail many times. We used to freight merchandise from Girard , Kansas, through Baxter Springs which was a great camping place where everybody made a special effort (either going or coming) to reach for one night's camping. From there we went on to Pilot Point, Texas. We freighted from April until October, and in the meantime we bought cattle. By October it was cold and the cattle were fat and we drove them over the Military Trail into Kansas. I am the only man living today who used to freight and drive cattle over this trail.

Very few people lived on this trail. I knew them all as we tried to reach these farmers in time to stay all night.

We crossed Red River at Colbert's ferry where we would swim the cattle and take the chuck wagon over by

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ferry boat paying 50-cents for the wagon and team. About the third night we would reach Jim McAlester's. Jim was a Chickasaw Indian. He had a general merchandise store on this trail about four miles from where the town of McAlester is today. About fifty miles farther on the trail was Bill Pursley, full-blood Choctaw, who had lots of cattle, too, and there was another Indian family living near the Arkansas line. Their place was the last stop in the Territory.

We did a great deal of hunting on this trail, killing buffalo, deer, turkey, geese, prairie chicken, quail and almost everything you could wish for. Game was so plentiful I thought we would always have plenty of game.

We fled into Texas during the Civil War. After the War, we returned to Indian Territory and eventually back to Mayes County. In the Spring of 1871, I made a crop with Father. That summer I went into the woods and split a lot of rails and started improving a small place for myself and that Fall I hewed the logs and hauled them to my farm with ox teams and built a good log house. I made clapboard shingles, puncheon floors, wooden doors with wooden hinges, a sandstone chimney. This house was near a fine spring of water.

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In the Spring of 1872 I married and took my bride to this home. The next year I went to the sawmill and bought lumber and improved this house. All my children were born here. I kept improving and taking in more land until I had 1500 acres.

I raised fine blooded horses and cattle. I matched these horses and sold them for \$300.00 a span. As my cattle grew and fattened I shipped them to market. My brand on my stock was M bar- M.

When it came time to file on an allotment, I could only file 160 acres of good land; the Government took the balance of my land away from me. I allotted where I built my first log house and I own it today, clear of any indebtedness.

The Cherokee people had one of the most noted out-laws ever known in Territorial days. He was a half-blood Cherokee known as Tom Starr. He held no fear for the law and he did more depredation and killed more people than any other Indian but he seemed to lead a charmed life. He was never arrested - the law could never get him, he caused them so much worry that Chief Ross called the Cherokee Council together to try to work out some plan

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to stop his meanness. They offered to compromise with him offering, if he would quit his meanness and settle down to a law-abiding life, they would wipe out all charges against him and the law would never molest him. To this he agreed.

He married and settled down, raised a big family and he made a good citizen. He had one son, Sam Starr, to go wrong.

Sam married Belle Shirley of Missouri. They both served prison terms and were later killed.

In 1874 before Belle married Starr, she came to my house riding the best looking horse I ever saw and asked to stay all night. I told her my wife was sick and there was no one to cook for her. She smiled and said, "I'm a good cook", I said "all right, hop down"; she assisted me in getting supper. My wife felt well enough to get breakfast and immediately after that meal, Belle left; she never did tell her name; she was well armed and later I learned who she was.

Belle took up with the James boys, Scott Reed and and Cole Younger during the war. She had one daughter by

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Cole Younger, and a son by Scott Reed. Her son was killed in Claremore; the daughter married and moved to Ft. Smith.

I was down to Grandma's one time when there was a picnic near her farm, and the James boys had a fine race horse that they were going to run at this picnic. There was a lot of betting and they told me if I would ride their horse they would pay me \$10.00. I did and won the race for them.

There weren't many amusements those days, picnics and Indian dances for the most part. We went to an Indian war dance which was very spectacular. It was held on Spring Creek and the Indians pitched their tents around in a circle and cut and hauled big logs which they formed into a square, all the ground being scraped clean; in the middle of this square they put bark and fine chopped wood, then big wood, all ready to be lit for the feast at night; during the day they would have an Indian ball game and plenty of barbecue and Indian dishes to eat, but the war dance didn't start until sundown; then the old men would go to their tents and put on war paint and head gears - full regalia - and the young men would deck themselves in

paint and costume, and then the women would put on their beaded costumes and moccasins with their long black hair hanging down their backs. When it was dark enough for the dance to start, the Medicine Men would light the fire; the young braves would hop on their ponies and ride off a about two hundred yards; they would stop suddenly, wheel their ponies around and start in a run towards the fire, shooting off their pistols in the air and yelling out war whoops; then the old men would throw back the flaps on their tents and start marching toward the fire, beating music out of the tom-tom, an instrument made by stretching rawhide over strong hoops until it dries, they drummed on this with small sticks.

The women were all lined and had small terrapin shells and small gourds filled with pebbles tied just above their ankles, and the young braves, old men and the women would meet and form a circle around the fire. Then the dance "was on". They would sway backward and forward low and chant in Cherokee and as they swayed and shuffled their feet the rocks in the gourds and terrapin hulls would rattle. The tom-toms beating was kind of weird music but pretty, too, and I had a mania for watching them.

These were nearly all full blood Cherokees. Sometimes there would be three or four Choctaws and Chickasaws in the dance but not often as each tribe was a little clan-nish.

Each of the Five Civilized Tribes had its own central location, on which they erected a council house. These places they called their capital; the Cherokee capital was at Tahlequah. We had our own written Constitution similar to the Constitution of the state where the tribe came from. We elected a chief and a sheriff and a company of men known as the Lighthorsemen to enforce the law. The Indians were very quick in their punishment for crime. If a person was guilty, he was either fined, whipped, or put to death by hanging or shooting. We didn't have any jails to keep them in. I was sheriff of Mayes County for three years but never had to shoot a man and I never failed to get every criminal I went after.