

KURSH, CHARLOTTE

INTERVIEW

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FIELD WORKER GOMER GOWER
Indian-Pioneer History S-159
May 25, 1937.

INTERVIEW WITH CHARLOTTE KURSH
Rt. 1, Spiro, Oklahoma.
Day of birth unknown, year 1850,
born in what is now McCurtain
County on Red River.

Father's name unknown.
Mother's name unknown.

Charlotte Kursh was born about 1850 on a plantation on Red River in the Choctaw Nation, in what is now McCurtain County, and was large enough to sweep the yards and do housework when the Civil War began.

She recalls that it was a very large plantation there were and that/approximately eighty slaves and the owner, Sim Nunley, a half-breed Choctaw, was kind to the slaves. However, due to his absence during the war, the plantation was managed by his brother, who treated the slaves very cruelly. Sim Nunley, on being apprised of this, obtained a leave of absence from the army, returned to the plantation and immediately ordered his brother off the plantation and placed it in charge of another person by whom the slaves were properly treated.

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She relates that she was told by her mother that both before and after the removal of the Indians from Mississippi, the slaves were prohibited from meeting and holding religious services. Her mother said that the slaves would sometime slip off at night and with tubs or other things placed over their heads, would hold prayer meetings and sing in low voices, and then, very quietly would return to their quarters at the plantation. The tubs or other things which they placed over their heads prevented their voices from being heard at any great distance.

Each Saturday, rations for the following week would be issued to the slaves. Wooden trays would be used for plates and forked sticks would serve as forks. Spoons were often made of cow horn. Corn, cotton, wheat, yams, cane, peas of all kinds, pumpkins and melons, were raised in abundance on the plantation, and the slaves therefore, with the added advantage of having plenty of game and fish, were enabled to live well.

At the close of the War the owner of the plantation and of the slaves returned to his home and family;

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called all the slaves together and informed them that they were no longer his slaves; that they had been freed; that in slavery they were required to work for him for their keep, but that now they would be permitted to work for anyone they pleased. He proposed to them that they could remain on the plantation and that he would provide each of them with what land he could cultivate, stock to work, feed, equipment and the necessary household supplies and that thereafter they could pay him with a share of what they raised. The result of this proposition was that nearly all the slaves formerly owned by Sim Nunley remained on the plantation as renters, to the complete satisfaction of both parties to the arrangement. The parents of Charlotte Kursh were among those who remained on the plantation. After this arrangement was entered into and had become fully launched, Mr. Nunley moved his family off the plantation to either Atoka or Stringtown, Charlotte does not remember which.

After moving Mr. Nunley would visit the plantation quite often to see that the arrangements which he had

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made concerning it were being carried out. As nearly as Charlotte can remember, she was married to William Kursh when she was seventeen years of age, about two years after the close of the war. Her husband, William Kursh, was also an ex-slave, though Charlotte says he was only quarter negro and was part white and part Indian. The grandfather of William Kursh, who was a fullblood Choctaw Indian, stole a negro girl while she was a slave in Mississippi, and married her. She was later returned to her former owner. From this union the mother of William Kursh was born. She met a white man who came from Georgia, who became the father of William Kursh. It appears that due to the Choctaw customs, the child of a woman who was a slave was considered as having no standing as a Choctaw citizen and, therefore, was a slave as his mother had been.

Soon after Charlotte's marriage to William Kursh they moved to Skullyville and were given land to clear and place in cultivation, by Garrett and Tom Ainsworth, who were prominent Indians in that vicinity. This was at a point between Spiro and

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thirteen dollars per month as Old Age Assistance and is quite contented and happy.

From this narrative it will be seen that the lowly and humble ex-slaves contributed their part to the development of the state to which they were brought when they were chattel slaves, and are entitled to recognition as real pioneers of the Indian Territory.