

INDEX CARDS:

Cherokee Nation
Tribe-Cherokee
Cherokee Politics
Secret Societies
Allotment

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INTERVIEW WITH BENJAMIN KNIGHT
On Politics, Sports, Secret
Societies, Railroads and Allotment).

Benjamin Knight is a fullblood Cherokee Indian,
born April 30, 1874, and reared in the Goingsnake
District, Cherokee Nation.

He was the son of Benjamin Knight, a noted
politician of that time. His mother was Rachel Soap,
a fullblood Cherokee. Ben, as he is better known
among his many friends, did not receive much of an
education in the schools of the Cherokee Nation, only
completing the second grade.

His father and mother separated when Ben was still
a small child and he remained with his mother until he
was about fifteen years of age. His father took him to
his home at that time and tried to educate him. He was
so nearly grown that he did not take much interest in
school. Therefore he did not learn much.

Politics at that time had become an interesting
thing to the Cherokees. His father was born politician.
The old man Knight did not have much of an education but

2

he was a good man with many friends among the big politicians of that time. He was elected sheriff for three straight terms.

Young Ben was taught politics at a very early age. He never was elected to any public office but he was always in the campaigns.

(POLITICS)

The names of the present major parties has two meanings in the Cherokee language. Before the Civil War the Cherokees did not take much interest in politics. Abraham Lincoln was elected president in 1860 by the Republican Party which was called the Northern Party and in Cherokee Co-Ne-Tha-Gla, meaning "Cold." The Democratic Party was called Southern Party or in Cherokee Co-Ne-Ga-Na-Wa, meaning "Warm."

(Ben Knight)

The story about the beginning of politics among the Cherokee was told to Ben by his father who was an old soldier in the Civil War. After the Civil War the Cherokees changed their names for these two parties.

3

That faction of Cherokees that favored the North in the War organized their own party in the Cherokee Nation. The new party was called the National Party. The meaning of the words National in Cherokee being "The supporters of the Union"

The Downing Party was also organized which consisted mostly of the people that went with the South. This party in Cherokee was called "The Vanishing Party."

The term did not mean that the party was going to vanish. But the acts of this party when in power was going to cause the Cherokee Nation to go down, which did happen sometime later. Ben Knight, Sr., was a strong supporter of the National Party.

This division among the Cherokees can be traced back to the old Nation in the East. As long as this world stands this division will never be unionized among the Cherokees as they were before the Removal.

(Secret Societies)

The oldest Secret Society known to the Cherokees was the Kee-Too-Wah. This organization, according to old Ben Knight, started back in the old country.

4

He has told young Ben that he and Arch Scraper belonged to this organization. There are so many different people who have tried to explain this and he is not able to explain this as his father did so, so he will not try.

The Pen Indians was a secret Society which was formed from the said Kee-Too-Wah. This was organized after the Immigrants came to their western home. According to the way the Cherokees explain this organization it should be called Pin Indians instead of Pen. The Cherokee name being Co-Nee-Squa-Tee which means a straight pin.

(Sports)

The most famous sport among the Cherokees when Ben was a young man was the Old Corn Stalk Shooting. This was a sport where there was plenty of betting. He has seen teams bet at these shootings. They did not bet because they just wanted to; they had lots of confidence in their supporters, the Medicine Men. This sport took place usually three or four times a year, the Indians who lived in the various districts of the Cherokee Nation participating.

The teams usually consisted of about twenty-five to fifty men. The territory was usually several communities. The early day shooting teams was the Sugar Mountain, Illinois, Ah-Moo, Flint, Goingsnake, Long Prairie and Delaware.

The Medicine Men mentioned above were what we would nowadays call fortune tellers. These men could use small beads and by floating them in the water they could tell whether the team they were helping was going to win or lose.

The night before the game all the men in the team and the medicine men stayed up all night. Just at break of day the captain of the team would select seven men from each of the seven "clans" to be the starters in the shooting. They usually shot two games out of three to be considered the winner. The said helper would tell in which game to bet heavy. He saw at one time a Cherokee lose a team of oxen at these games. The Starrs were heavy gamblers at that time. The Starrs owned race horses. They at one time won a livery barn from a white man at Siloam Springs, Arkansas.

(Railroads and Allotment)

The Cherokees never were in favor of the railroads or the Allotment of land. The railroad bill was passed by the

6

legislature without the consent of the majority of the common people. The Allotment Law was passed by the legislature also, but some of the leaders of the Cherokees protested this and it was left up to the common people to vote on the bill. A band called the "Night Hawks" among the Cherokees did not vote in this election and this lack of interest caused the bill to pass.

This organization called Night Hawks claims to be the Kee-Too-Wah, or a part of it. That is a mistake if they had been, they would have voted in the said election. The leaders of this organization caused the poorer class to receive the flint hillsides as their part of the land.

The organization still has two Ceremonial Grounds; one at Gore, and the other at Chewey, Oklahoma.