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J. S. Clark, Director,
Indian Pioneer History.

Tomer Lower, Interviewer,
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Marion Monroe Irkley,
Moteau, Oklahoma.

Marion Monroe Irkley was born at Tuscaloosa, Alabama, on December 11th, 1882, and came to the Indian Territory with his parents in 1881. They settled on the C. C. Lathis place, near Monroe, a small village near the Arkansas State line.

C. C. Lathis was an intermarried white man, who, by reason of that fact, had extensive land holdings in that area and rented land to white tenants. Upon these rented lands, he paid "permit" fees to the tribal government.

Mr. Kirkley recalls that in 1891, Principal Chief Jackson McCurtain had a troop of militia stationed on what was known as the Adam Morris place. It was the duty of this troop of militia to see that permit fees were paid by all non-citizens. If these permit fees were not paid their right to remain in the Territory was forfeited and they were obliged to move over the State line into Arkansas. In compliance with this regulation, the father of Mr. Kirkley was required to pay a fee of \$15.00 for himself and the excess stock he owned and \$5.00 each for his two sons, who at that time were eighteen and twenty years of age. Very few

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removals were enforced as it was easier to meet the demands of the troops that payments be made than for a man to move his family and household goods. Mr. Kirkley spent the years between 1834 and 1837 near Paris, Arkansas, where he was married and he and his wife then returned to the Indian Territory, settling down in what is now a part of DeFlore County.

Upon completion of the Frisco railway through eastern Oklahoma in 1877, the lumber industry was quickly developed as the railway penetrated vast forests of splendid timber. Sawmills were soon heard upon all sides and the work of felling the great tree began; soon men began hauling the saw-logs to the mills to be sawed into lumber and then hauling the finished product to shipping points on the new railroad. These things gave employment to numbers of men who had prior to that time never known any other kind of work than farm work.

Mr. Kirkley was one of the numbers to become so employed. He continued to work in the lumber business for more than forty years.

The first saw-mill was installed at Fry's Switch, a station on the Frisco about six miles distant from the present site of Wister. Then in quick succession mills

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were installed at LeFlore, Genal, Malina, Muskahoma and Stanley, all on the Frisco railway. Then, upon completion of the Kansas City Southern railway, the saw-mill industry was extended into this area and expanded until, in point of production revenue to the local taxation, it ranked next to the coal industry. The same can be said with reference to the number of man employees.

Wages at these lumber camps ranged from 1.25 for common labor, to as much as from 3.00 to 4.00 per day for skilled labor.

For the accommodation of the employees, and incidentally for the profit of the mill operators, what were known as company stores or commissaries were provided, where employees were sold groceries, clothing, tobacco and in fact all goods procurable at the ordinary corner store. Of course the goods were taken by the mill and store owners to see that the credit account at the store did not exceed the amount of the earnings of the employees who had been so accommodated.

The lumber mill industry continued to time as the adjacent timber areas became depleted. The houses of the employees were of the most primitive and permanent construction.

Children in such surroundings were denied the benefits of any sort of decent scholastic privileges. This condition contributed to a very large extent in

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swelling the ranks of the illiterates in Oklahoma.

The medical care of the employees was provided for by the company doctor system. This company doctor system was one by which the employing companies would provide a doctor for all the employees and would collect a sum, usually one dollar per month from each employee for such services. This service included all prescribed medicines. There was a great deal of sickness among the employees of the company, and because of the great number of mosquitoes in this vicinity, and this charge for medical services was indeed reasonable. Some children who succeeded in living through the malarial conditions in these lumber camps must have been unusually strong.

The lumber industry in LeFlore County is still of considerable importance; however, the plants now operated are of the smaller types with one exception. The plant at Pine Valley is larger and there some two hundred men are constantly employed. A spur line of the railroad extends from Page, a station on the Kansas City Southern, for a distance of fifteen miles, to Pine Valley at the foot of the Kiamichi mountains. This spur is operated for the accommodation of the Pine Valley lumber industry only.

It is worthy of note here that no major labor difficulties have been encountered in this area and that the majority of the employees are negroes.