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KING, GEORGE (JR.)

INTERVIEW.

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L. W. Wilson, Interviewer.
August 18, 1937.

Interview with George King, Jr.
Route 2, Vian, Oklahoma.
Father-George King, Sr.
Mother-Ofielder King.

Mr. King is sixty-seven years of age. He was born in 1870 at Jackson, Tennessee.

He is the son of George King, Sr., who was of Spanish and negro descent. His mother, Ofielder King, was of white and Cherokee Indian descent.

His father was born in Alabama and his mother in Tennessee.

They were living at Jackson, Tennessee, the place of George's birth, when his parents planned to move to the Indian Territory to better their condition,

as they had been told it was the land of opportunity.

They were told that they could come here and grow up with the country and the time would come when unassigned lands would be opened and they could file on some of this land. These lands were opened but none of Mr. King's folks ever filed for claims because when they arrived in the Cherokee Nation his mother asserted her

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rights as a Cherokee and started farming.

Removal to Indian Territory.

Mr. King and his parents moved by train in 1882 to Memphis, Tennessee. They crossed the Mississippi River on a steamboat, or steam ferry. The cars were loaded on the boat without removing the passengers from the cars and once across the river, the train pulled off the boat and down the railroad track. They traveled across the state of Arkansas by train and landed at Fort Smith, Arkansas. They remained at Fort Smith for nearly two years before continuing to the Indian Territory. Soldiers were still garrisoned at Fort Smith in those days. Mr. King says he was only twelve years old but remembers seeing them.

From Fort Smith to their present home traveling was done by stage coach. The Arkansas River at Fort Smith was crossed by ferry (the Cobb Ferry) and the road taken was the old Military Road. About nine miles from Fort Smith, Arkansas, in the Indian Territory, was a

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tavern where they stopped to eat. It was called the "Nine Mile tavern". Continuing on the old Military Road they came to Sallisaw Creek and on to the head of Big Vian Creek. There were no bridges and all creeks were forded. The ford on Sallisaw Creek is one mile from where they now live.

Life and Customs

Mr. King settled between Sallisaw and Vian Creek. Their closest neighbor was two miles one way and one mile the other way. They were approximately thirty-five miles from Ft. Smith, Arkansas, with no towns between. There were no bridges, no schools, and no churches at that time for miles and miles. Some twenty miles farther west on the Military Road and a little off the road were the old Mackey Salt Works, where they secured their salt.

There were all kinds of wild game, such as wild turkey, deer, prairie chicken, squirrel, fox, wolf, wild hogs and cattle.

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There were no particular ones who trapped, every one trapped and hunted. Every family owned from five to twenty hounds.

All Indians could make a home any place, but they must not get closer than one-fourth mile to any other person's place. All farms were small, ranging from two to five acres.

The crops consisted of corn, beans, potatoes, pumpkins and tobacco. They did not know of a crop failure, because there were no drouths and anything they planted would make a crop. There was always plenty of rainfall.

The fruit was all wild and consisted of grapes, plums, strawberries, mulberries, huckleberries and here and there were scattered some old apple and peach trees that were planted before the Civil War. Due to lack of cultivation these apple and peach trees bore very small fruit. People did not have fruit jars

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and did not know at that time how to can fruit and meats. All fruits and meats for winter use were dried.

There was always plenty of water, good cold spring water. The springs never went dry, nor did the creeks in those days. The creeks and rivers furnished an abundance of fish of all kinds for those who cared for fish.

There was no means of communication with the outside world, not even a newspaper, daily or weekly, but occasionally someone would go to Webber Falls and get a paper when the steamboat landed. Many

times the boat did not have a paper. If a paper was a month old when one person got it, it was read and reread with pleasure and delight, then given to someone else.

Their mode of cultivating the soil was with a big eyed hoe, a homemade deer tongue, something like

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the present Georgia Stock, and a herrow, made from the fork of ^atree, or brush dragged over the ground to level it down. No small grain of any kind or cotton was raised at this time in this part of the Indian Territory.

The houses and barns were of log construction, with large fireplaces.

The fields were fenced with rails split out of trees, with no gates to their enclosures, they had draw bars. There were no gates to their yards and all would climb over the rail fence.

The women folks all wore long dresses and wore long hair. The women rode horseback as well as the men.

There were no roads, just trails through the country from neighbor to neighbor and ^{riding} horseback was about the only means of travel.

The women had side saddles, which were placed on the horse as any other saddle. They had long split

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riding skirts and rode side ways on the horse instead of astride as the men did.

During the winter time the people cooked on the fireplaces but during the summer months they cooked out in the yard on open fires. There were no cook stoves.

Corn, bread, potatoes, meats, etc., were raised at home. Mr. King says that each Sunday morning they had hot biscuits. It was a treat and every one in the family looked forward to Sunday morning. The wheat flour was bought at Webbers Falls. It was brought up the river on steamboats from Ft. Smith, Arkansas.

There was not a doctor nearer than Ft. Smith, Arkansas, thirty-five miles away, and people were compelled to doctor themselves with whatever they had to do with.

Their medicine were made from bark, roots and herbs. Even until this day here in the hill country, mid-wives are much in evidence and all minor ills and

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ailments are doctored with concoctions of barks, herbs and roots, the formulas for which have been handed down from generation to generations. Some of these barks, etc., are sassafras, snake root, butterfly root, mullen; and others. Some of the full-bloods in the hills today plant in their gardens many plants to make their medicine, just as they do their garden products.

Some of Mr. King's neighbors still living are George Usrey, H. W. Moore, Will Rogers, John Smith and Mr. Kennedy. Most all the old timers have passed away.

Fords, Ferries and Steamboat Landings.

The Bullet Foreman Ferry crossed the Illinois River a few miles upstream from its mouth.

The Webbers Falls ferry was owned by Dr. Campbell and Joe Lynch and crossed the Arkansas River above the falls, a short way upstream from the present Highway bridge between Webber Falls and Gove, Oklahoma. The

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old ferry road is still traceable from the highway on the Gore side of the bridge from the present highway. This ferry was originally a pole ferry, then a cable ferry and later a steam ferry.

The steamboat landing was near the present highway bridge on the Webbers Falls side of the Arkansas River.

The steamboats also landed at Tamaha, Indian Territory.

A ferry in later years (early nineties) crossed the Arkansas River at Tamaha but Mr. King cannot recall the owner's name.

All fords known to Mr. King had no particular names. The people just crossed the streams at any advantageous points.

The Cobb Ferry crossed the Arkansas River near the highway bridge between Ft. Smith, Arkansas, and the present town of Moffett, Oklahoma.

There were many ferries across the Arkansas

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River between Ft. Smith, Arkansas, and Ft. Gibson, Oklahoma, which Mr. King had knowledge of but the names have passed from his memory with the years.

Roads and Trails.

The old Military Road ran from Ft. Smith, Arkansas, to Ft. Gibson, Indian Territory, and was the road Mr. King traveled in coming to the Indian Territory. This road ran in a northwestern direction from Ft. Smith to near the present town of Muldrow, Oklahoma. It continued missing the hills by passing as much as possible through the valleys and along the creeks. It crossed Sallisaw Creek about six miles upstream from the present town of Sallisaw, Oklahoma, and crossed Big Vian Creek about nine miles northeast of the present town of Vian, Oklahoma, which is on the north side of the present Circle "A" Ranch. At this point was a two room log tavern run by an Indian by the name of John Bark. The Road continued in a northwestern direction, coming to a road leading off the Military Road that led down to

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the old Mackey Salt Works, near the east banks of the Illinois River. There was no bridge or ferry on this river. The river was forded. After crossing the river some ten miles and crossing some two or three creeks, fording them, the road had to cross over the mountains, later known as the Braggs Mountains, and on into Ft. Gibson, Indian Territory.

The soldiers used this road as late as 1884 to 1886 in traveling between the two forts, Ft. Gibson and Ft. Smith, Arkansas.

There was a stage line that ran from Webbers Falls, Indian Territory, to Ft. Smith, Arkansas. This stage road crossed the Canadian River by the Vann Ferry, followed the course of the Arkansas River on the south side to Spiro or old Skullyville, crossed the Poteau River and the Arkansas River to Ft. Smith, Arkansas.

There was a stage line that crossed the Arkansas River at Webbers Falls, Indian Territory, on the Lynch Ferry and followed the course of the Arkansas River

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downstream. It passed within two or three miles of the ~~Drake~~ Store on Drake Prairie to the Childers Stage Stand, which is now the town of Sallisaw, Oklahoma, and to Ft. Smith, Arkansas, and crossed the Cobb Ferry at Ft. Smith, Arkansas.

Railroads.

and
The St. Louis Iron Mountain/Southern Railroad built through from Ft. Smith, Arkansas, to Coffeyville, Kansas, in 1887, '88, and '89. Along this railroad towns sprang up. Some of them were Sallisaw, Vian, Gore, Ft. Gibson, and others. Trains ran through as far as Ft. Gibson in 1888.

The railroad was a great thing to the development of this section of the country for we then had a faster means of transportation to our metropolitan center, Ft. Smith, Arkansas. With the railroad newspapers came regularly and also we soon had telegraphic communication with the outside world. Many little stores and trading posts, as well as post offices, were abolished and the people moved to the railroad towns.

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The railroads bought lots of cross ties for their road and the people along the road began to make cross ties for them which meant money in their pockets that they could not have received otherwise.

Little sawmills began to operate in the timber sections and many homes were built of native lumber instead of logs.

Allotments.

The Dawes Commission went about enrolling all the Indians and was to give them lands to call their own individual farms, taxes exempt; instead of having the land belong to all of them in common.

The Cherokees bitterly opposed this but like everything else they opposed, it did them no good.

Surveying parties went all over the Nation laying out townsites, sections, townships and etc.

Now that they were all enrolled they began to make allotments based on the appraised value of the land which ran from \$2.00 to \$6.00 per acre.

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Most all of those enrolled filed for the places on which they lived, which was no more than natural, as my folks did. Mr. King has lived and reared his family on the same location that his father and mother settled in 1884.

Schools and Churches.

Schoolhouses and churches were first built of logs and were usually of one room. English was taught in all the schools and preached in all the churches.

Many meetings were conducted under brush arbors during the summer months, usually in July when the crops were laid by. The people would come to the meetings and camp for a week, have their meetings and talk and visit with old friends, relatives and neighbors.

The Cherokee's had two good schools at Talequah, the Male and Female Seminaries.