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An Interview with
James S. Latimer
Wilburton, Oklahoma
P.F.D. #1

My father's name was Dr. G. W. Latimer and he was 62 years of age when he died. He was born at Caldonia, Missouri, and was buried in the Springdale Cemetery at Springdale, Arkansas.

My mother's name was Nancy B. Cowan Latimer. She was born in Tennessee, was 86 years of age when she died, and she was buried in the Springdale Cemetery next to my father.

My father and mother moved to the Kansas Territory where I was born December 10, 1855, near Fort Scott. Then they moved to Missouri, near Mansfield in Webster County. When I was about ten years of age, my father and mother moved to Benton County Arkansas, and I went to school in Boonville. When I had finished about all the education there was to be had there, I was given the appointment as telegraph operator and station agent for the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad at what is now Claremore, Oklahoma. This was in the year of 1884. I was sent to the old town of McAlester from there

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at once, and soon was sent to the now town of Red Oak, Oklahoma, this county.

In Red Oak I met my wife, Allie Beshears, and after a while we were married. My wife's father's name was Turner Beshears, and he was a half-blood Choctaw who had come from the South. He was one of the Choctaw signers of the Treaty of Dancing Creek, before they left the South.

While in the early day around Red Oak, the Choctaw tribe moved part of the Choctaw tribal government from Tuskahoma to the place that is now Red Oak, Oklahoma. They made this place a District Court for this part of the Choctaw Nation and all the Indian affairs were handled at Red Oak. Of course, there was no town there then.

In 1893, there was only one store or trading Post where Red Oak is now located. I was then agent for what is now the Rock Island Railroad which was named in those days the Choctaw road, and I stayed at this place a number of years and was then transferred to what is now Wilburton. There was only one store and trading post at this place now Wilburton when I came here, and small Postoffice. A man by the name of Lewis Rocket operated the store and trading post. I have been living in this county ever since.

Coal was found around Wilburton in, I think about

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the year of 1896; then this town began to grow and lots white settlers heard of the finding of coal here and came to this little place to work in the mines.

In the days before this town sprang up, the Choctaw Tribe had quite a lot of politics in the selection of their government officials. There were two different Parties in existence then: One was the Eagle Party and the other was named the Buzzard Party. This Eagle clan of the Choctaws in this county were of the Progressive type. This clan was in favor of the Choctaw Nation coming into statehood. The other party was against this part of the country becoming a state. They put the information abroad in the Nation that the white men intended to take the country away from the Indian. Along about this time is when Green McCurtain and a man by the name of Dukes were running for the office of Governor. Dukes was a half-breed Choctaw and Green McCurtain, a fullblood. In the early day the Choctaws in this country elected their officers by public vote, in many ways like they do in the state and county now. Only their vote was written in the Choctaw language and written in longhand and was not a secret. This was the last election held by the Choctaw Indian Tribe before this territory was taken over into

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statehood. There was trouble between these two clans of Indians. Many fights and killings took place and there would be large bunches of the two different clans meet some times and there would be lots of killing. The Federal Government finally had to take a hand and send some soldiers to this country around here, now Latimer County, to stop the fighting and killing. However, Green McCurtain was put in as governor of the Choctaw Tribe.

In the year of 1906, the year before statehood, I was elected as a delegate to go to Guthrie to a meeting to help determine the new county boundary lines and new names for the counties as we felt sure that statehood would be accepted the following year. This county was changed from what the Choctaws called Gaines County at this meeting at Guthrie and it was named Latimer County.

I live eight miles west of Wilburton now near an old place called Boiling Springs. These Springs are one mile north of where I live now. There is an old Indian burying ground just a little ways up on top of a large hill, close to this Boiling Springs.

(Field Worker's note: We visited this place today. There was to the best of our knowledge about a hundred Indian graves in this burying ground and possibly more.

There were some of these graves with rock markings that dated back as far as 1860 that we could make out. From all the information I was able to gather from Mr. Latimer he tells me that there has been an Indian church at this Boiling Springs that was put there just after the Choctaws were moved from the South. There is still an Indian Church at this place today but a better one had had to be built.)

The Choctaw Indians tell me that these springs were found when their fathers came to this country from the South and they are running today. The Choctaws in this county in the early day when I was a young man used to gather at this Boiling springs and have their big meetings and Indian Crys that would last for a week at a time. They would sleep, eat and all in the yard of this old Indian church.

Not many of these graves were ever marked by a stone of any kind but many of them had small log cabins built over them. However, these have rotten until you can barely tell just what they have been intended for.