

LEWIS, SUSAN.

INTERVIEW

12757

522

LEWIS, SUSAN

INTERVIEW.

12757

James Russell Gray
Investigator
January 19, 1938

Interview with Susan Lewis
McAlester, Oklahoma, Route 4

The Old days, the days before Statehood, were best. Everytime I get to thinking about it I wish I was back again at the little settlement called "Dog Creek" just southwest of Skullyville, where I was born and raised. We lived close to home and had simple pleasures but we were happy and there was always plenty to eat and wear.

I was born at Dog Creek in the Choctaw Nation, March 12, 1870. Mother's maiden name was Patience Brown; Father was named Jess Lewis. His real name was Stanton but he took the name Lewis from his old master after the Civil War. I am about half negro and half Indian; a fourth Choctaw and a fourth Chickasaw--my grandmother on Father's side, Rosa Lott, had much Chickasaw blood. I talked nothing but Choctaw until I started to school. I went to school at a little log house on Dog Creek. I didn't go far in school but I learned to talk English.

Dog Creek was a good sized little settlement of thirty families or more. Our home there was a three-

LEWIS, SUSAN

INTERVIEW.

12757

2

room. log house; there was a fireplace where we did our cooking. Our furniture was homemade; we had plank tables, a plank safe for dishes and wooden bedsteads. We were farmers; we raised cotton, corn, peas, potatoes and molasses cane. And we raised feed for our stock. We had cattle, geese, hogs, horses, mules, turkeys and chickens.

We made all our own clothes, nearly. We did our sewing by hand. We bought gingham or calico and made dresses and shirts. We had a spinning wheel and did a lot of spinning; we would spin wool, sometimes mixing our own dyes to color it out of roots and berries. For instance, walnut juice makes a good brown. We would spin cotton into yarn and knit the yarn into socks, gloves and scarfs, using steel needles.

We beat corn in a mortar and made bread with the meal; the meal was called something like this: "Pulaska hiwasha." Cornbread cooked in shucks was called "Shuck bread", or "Banaha". Corn grits boiled until done were called "Tom Fuller". Tom Fuller cooked with hog meat was called "Pashofa."

LEWIS, SUSAN

INTERVIEW.

12757

3

There was a country store at Dog Creek run by an Indian named Jim Darnell. He kept oil, tobacco, flour, lard and coffee. Sometimes, especially in the fall of the year when we had cotton or other farm produce to sell, we went to Fort Smith for supplies. The trip took at least two days; we sometimes went in a hack drawn by two horses and that way was faster than traveling in a wagon.

There was plenty of game around Dog Creek; all kinds of varmints, like skunks and possums and coons, wolves, panthers, turkeys, deer, and wild hogs.

I went to church at Dog Creek with the Choctaws. We met most of the time under a brush arbor. That church was Baptist but sometimes a Methodist preacher would come and preach to us. A Choctaw named Sim Colbert was a Baptist preacher. We would meet at Dog Creek one Sunday, then next Sunday we would meet somewhere else with some other congregation; at Skullyville, say, or Sans Bois, or Brazil. Sometimes there would be as many as two hundred present at these meetings.

Once, a few years later when I lived at Kinta,

LEWIS, SUSAN

INTERVIEW

12757

4

I attended a meeting at Sans Bois; there were about a hundred people present under the arbor there. They were from Stigler, Blocker, Jack Fork, Skullyville, ^{and} Dog Creek-- Choctaws and negroes. Some of the Choctaws present were Austin Moore, Sim Colbert, Earl Polk, Fulsom Carney, Wallace Carney, and Green McCurtain.

But to get back to Dog Creek; Father died when I was eleven. We buried him there and Mother and I moved to Spiro where we stayed about a year. Then we moved again, this time to Brazil, close to the site of the present town of Calhoun. That was near Dog Creek, the settlement where I was born. I lived at Brazil until I moved to Kinta in 1895. Our customs and manner of living at Brazil were about the same as at Dog Creek.

When I went to Kinta there were only two houses there and one store. Farming was the main industry, but an Indian named Silas Jackson had a small mine where he took out coal. This mine was just a small one, working five men altogether. Later on it caved in; a woman went down in the mine to examine it and the next day it caved in. Miners are superstitious about women going down into a mine.

LEWIS, SUSAN.

INTERVIEW.

12757

5

While I lived there at Kinta I would go over to Sans Bois and wash for Green McCurtain, the Choctaw governor, or chief. He had a big, two-story house on the northwest edge of town. It was made of plank, not logs, and if I remember rightly was whitewashed. There were five rooms downstairs and five upstairs, with a big balcony upstairs on the outside.

A negro woman named Sharlott Thurman cooked for the McCurtains and a negro man named Dick Brown drove the two-horse hack that Green McCurtain did his traveling in. Green McCurtain was well-to-do; he had big barns, and owned plenty of cattle, hogs, and sheep. He had land and placed tenants on it to farm for him. He had big patches of cotton, corn and feedstuff and there were all kinds of turkeys, geese, ducks and chickens around his place. Green McCurtain was a big man, about two hundred pounds, and he always went well dressed. He wore a big white hat, good shirt, store trousers tucked into expensive boots with a star design worked into the sides.

McCurtain wanted Statehood; I have heard him say so. One day I heard him say, "If I can I'm going to

LEWIS, SUSAN.

INTERVIEW.

12757

6

help bring Statehood to Oklahoma; I would like to see some of these no account niggers and Indians pay a few dollars taxes." He was highly criticized for this attitude, but he seemed to always win in the elections. I guess he was right; Statehood was bound to come, anyway, but I was happier and had more under the Choctaw law. I knew an Indian sheriff near Kinta named Burney Spring. And there was a deputy sheriff named Russ Vance.

I don't remember but one ferry; it was in the Canadian River between Quinton and Eufaula. Once when I was at Kinta I went to Eufaula with Wallace Carney's wife, an Indian woman. She wanted to go to see some of her people who were sick. We went on horseback. The ferry was a big flat wooden boat that could carry, if necessary, a wagon and team. When we got across I jumped my horse off too soon and almost stuck in quicksand.

When I was a little girl back on Dog Creek we nearly always treated our own sick folks. We got herbs and made teas. We had to do the best we could for our sick, because there were not many doctors. We gathered

LEWIS, SUSAN.

INTERVIEW.

12757

7

mullein, slippery elm, elder berries, dogwood bark, oak bark, peach tree bark, wild cherry, willow, sassafras, and such like and kept them ready for emergencies. We always had a tow sack or two full of dried herbs in the smokehouse or sideroom.

One treatment was to sweat a sick person; I remember we used to gather a weed called "ice weed" and make a pot full of tea out of it. Then the older folks would take the steaming pot of tea into the sick room and use it to make the patient sweat. They had some sort of ceremony that they went through, too; something they had learned from the Choctaws, but I never was allowed to be present, being just a child, and so I don't know what the ceremony was.