

LEOSER, WALTER.

INTERVIEW

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Elizabeth Ross,
Investigator,
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An Interview with Mr. Walter Leoser,
Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

Old Tahlequah House.

Houses built in the earlier years of Tahlequah have largely disappeared. Many fell into disrepair and were removed. Others which, if repaired would yet stand in good condition, were removed so that more modern and convenient buildings might be erected. So at this period people who seek houses which were standing before the Civil War meet with disappointment. It has been said that a small and tumble-down hut which has stood until fairly recent days was one of the oldest, if not the oldest, of such houses in Tahlequah, but no definite proof has been made. There is, however, a house which is yet occupied, which has stood for at least eighty-five years, and is today (in 1938) in a state of excellent preservation. This is the home which is known as the "old Leoser House".

In 1848 or '49 there arrived in the small town of Fort

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Smith, Arkansas, Dr. S.D. Leoser. He came from the state of New York and was on his way to Mexico; the war between the United States and Mexico was in progress when he left his home in New York. He had been employed by the government as an army surgeon, but after reaching Fort Smith, word was received of the close of the Mexican War. Consequently the services of Dr. Leoser were not required in the army, and he remained at Fort Smith for awhile, where he heard considerable mention made of Tahlequah, the capital of the Cherokee Nation, and decided to make a trip to Tahlequah which was then a small town. Upon reaching Tahlequah and meeting a number of the people there Dr. Leoser decided that he would engage in the practice of medicine at Tahlequah, the Cherokee Indian capital, and in adjoining sections. Some time after arriving in Tahlequah he was married to an Indian girl who was a Cherokee citizen, and the remainder of his life was spent at Tahlequah.

The well-built and substantial log house, which became the Leoser home in 1853, had perhaps been completed during

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the 1840's but as to that Dr. Leoser never knew. The house is situated not far from the large spring in the northern part of the town. For many years there were few houses in this section, and the houses which were there were surrounded by many large forest trees and extensive wooded tracts stretched away north and east, and people living among the outlying hills and valleys traveled over narrow wagon roads and trails to Tahlequah.

There were intervals when Dr. S. D. Leoser was the only physician to be found at Tahlequah; when making his calls upon sick persons in the country districts he usually rode horseback, and in the course of a year he traveled many miles. Large numbers of the older people of the present Cherokee County, in years long past were acquainted with this physician who had arrived in the early years of Tahlequah. Dr. Leoser died in 1876.

A large and modern residence was built some years ago close to the comparatively small log house which was left standing and has always been used as a place of residence by

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a member of the Leoser family and whoever the original builder and owner of the log house may have been he built a very substantial home which is no doubt the oldest wooden building at Tahlequah.