

INDEX CARDS:

Choctaw Nation  
Tribe-Choctaw  
Choctaw Land Laws  
Tribal Government  
Choctaw Permits  
Boggy Depot  
Laws and Customs  
Living Conditions

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Interviewer  
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An Interview with Charles Stewart Lewis

LIFE IN THE INDIAN TERRITORY FIFTY YEARS AGO.

Lewis was born at North Manchester, Connecticut,  
June 22, 1866.

His father was Charles Henry Lewis, born in Connecticut and his mother was Lavinia Stewart, born at Doaksville. Both his father and mother were Choctaws.

The elder Lewis was in the Union Army.

I had heard my father tell stories about the Indian country in the west and the opportunities it held for young men, so when I was twenty-one I decided to make my home there. When I arrived in the Indian Territory I found great possibilities. The land was held in common with equal rights to all. We were allowed all the land we needed for our use but no two families could live nearer each other than one quarter mile. We were allowed

-2-

one square mile for pasture, and there was no limit to stock on public domain. Our stock was branded and marked with our own personal mark and brand.

We had our own government also and our Principal Chief was elected by the tribe. All our Government expenses were paid by the Tribal Government. We derived our revenues from natural resources and from permits paid by renters. Each renter paid five dollars which entitled him to ten head of milch cows and as many hogs and horses as he needed for farming. The Capitol of the Choctaw Nation was at Tuskahoma.

Green McCurtain was Treasurer of the Choctaw Nation and handled the money paid the Indians for the land sold to the Government. Under the Indian laws if a man was found guilty he was given six months probation. At the end of the six months he returned to the court to be shot. Very few failed to return, but if one failed to return and stayed away ten years

-3-

he could return and be free. If a man stole anything he was given fifty lashes for the first offense. If he committed theft the second time he was given one hundred lashes. If he stole the third time he was hanged. There were all kinds of religious beliefs in the tribes. We had camp meetings at Blackjack, a place a few miles west of the present village of Tushka. No one was charged for food at the meetings. It was prepared on the grounds and was free to all. All demoninations united and preached and prayed and sang together. Much good was accomplished at these meetings

Our trading points were Boggy Depot, Atoka, Caddo, Mahay and Doaksville. The rivers were crossed by fords or ferries. Our schools were divided into districts and our teachers were white men or women who were not citizens of our tribe. The teachers were paid two dollars per child per month. Money came from the Indian treasury. We had boarding schools at different points in the Indian Territory, and we also sent students to schools in the States. We tried to select our most intelligent boys and girls for we wanted to be always

-4-

on the upward trend. Prohibition was strictly enforced among the Choctaws. The law makers of the tribe cooperated with the United States Government officials, and when an Indian was caught with whisky he was promptly turned over to Government officials. Our roads were worked with free labor, the age limit being eighteen to forty years. Our houses and fences were built by community gatherings. We did our banking at Denison and Paris Texas. We crossed the Red River by ferry. Our crops were corn, cotton, grain and vegetables.

Tin cans were used for canning fruits; and vegetables were dried. There was a steam gristmill at Armstrong Academy and a gin was located at Gado, and one at Bonham, Texas. Cotton brought from twenty-five to forty dollars per bale. Cotton cloth was three and a half to six cents per yard. Shoes were from sixty cents to a dollar and a quarter per pair. Cotton trousers were sixty cents per pair. Men's woolen suits were seven dollars. Each family dried as much as one beef during the fall. The meat was cut into strips, laid in the sun till cured, then hung in the smoke house

-5-

and smoked with hickory smoke. Cured pork was smoked also. We had all the wild honey we could use and we always tried to take the bee hives with us when we cut down a bee tree. In time we had honey at home. All these happy times were passed near Mahey in the Choctaw Nation, and though I am an old man the memory of the past is very dear to me. I like to visit Mahey, Doaksville and Hoggy Depot where so much of my best years have been spent. My Grandmother, Tryphena All Stewart, is buried at Doaksville, Indian Territory, and her grave has this simple inscription: Tryphena's Grave.