

~~LEWIS, DAVID B.~~

TOLL BRIDGES

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TOLL BRIDGES

An interview of David B. Lewis, age 38,
Eufaula town (tulwa), Eufaula, Oklahoma

Billie Byrd, Field Worker
Indian-Pioneer History
8-12-37

In the earlier days when there were no bridges across some of the larger rivers and streams of water it was often necessary that people go in a long out of the way route to reach a shallow place of water to cross the streams, in order to travel to the trading posts, which made long and difficult trips for some of the Indians.

By and by it became necessary for some method to be found where these long tedious trips could be done away with, so that nearer routes could be established to the trading places. It was then that the tribal toll bridges were constructed upon the consent of the tribal officials and the government officials who looked after the welfare of the Indians.

These tribal toll bridges were for the use of the Muskogee-Creek tribes only and were to be maintained and kept up in good repairs and in good condition for a period of fifteen years. This toll was turned

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over to the tribal treasury to be used for the repair of the bridge and other expenses. No other road or toll bridge could be opened or maintained within a distance of a half a mile from the toll bridge already in operation. White traders, settlers or of other trade and Indians of other tribes were the ones who were required to pay to cross the bridges, but there were instances when some of the people did not want to pay after crossing so that this kind of people were turned over to the proper government officials who took the proper steps to obtain payment.

These following amounts were charged:

Wagon, driver and more than two teams	75¢
Wagon, driver and two teams	50¢
Wagon, driver and one team	25¢
Any livestock, such as cattle, horses, mules, goats, sheep, hogs, per head	10¢

About 1871, it is said that Lile Drew was given the right to construct a toll bridge across the Little Elk River in the northern part of McIntosh County, while William McIntosh built another toll bridge which was across the Big Elk River in the southern

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part of Muskogee county now. It was in 1863 that the Texas road, a cattle and traders trail, was in operation. At the point of the little trading place of the present Spear, north of Checotah, this Texas road went in an easterly direction crossing the Big Elk river. It is said that it was during the Civil War that the biggest battle during that great war was fought in the Indian Territory. It was while some negroes were being brought from Texas and an encampment had been made at this point on the Big Elk river that a massacre of the negroes was made. A great number were killed and the Union troops at that time were under the command of a General Blunt. There are still traces of the old Texas road to be seen at the spot of the crossing on the Big Elk river.

There were instances when even toll gates were in operation and one was on the Eufaula road to the South Canadian river about 1892. Almost the same rules regarding the toll bridges as to the upkeep and maintenance was kept in the toll gates and the charges

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for the toll gate were as follows:

Wagon, driver, more than two teams	25¢
wagon, driver more than one team	15¢
Man on horseback	10¢
Any livestock, per head	10¢

The manuscripts of Billie Byrd, Indian, are presented as he writes them. Any editing to secure continuity or better English would destroy their typical Indian manner of expression. There may even be inaccuracies in the statements found in the foregoing interview but they are allowed in the narration as they give the opinions of the one interviewed, in this case his opinion from tales of his forebears. Ed.