

LEWIS, D. B.

INTERVIEW

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INDEX CARDS:

## THOMAS AND LEWIS STORIES

An interview of D. B. Lewis, age 36, of Eufaula town (tulwa), Henryetta, Okla.

Billie Byrd, interviewer  
Indian-Pioneer History  
9-20-37

The story of a singing river was told by an old man by the name of Holly Thomas who use to live three or four miles southeast of Eufaula but he has been dead for some years. His father and mother had come over to the new country from the eastern home during the removal and so the story had been told to Holly of the sorrows at the time of the removal and what the conditions were at that time. He was a small child during that time but he was told all stories about the times when he had become a young man. Those old folks never could cease from talking about and telling of the hardships they experienced along on their trip often known as the *Trail of Tears*.

This story of the singing river was told to Holly by his father. It is not exactly known whether the incident connected with this story happened in

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the Mississippi River or the Tennessee River but

it was the Creek Indians that it was told about.

This was told as it actually happened but it was a

very strange incident. As some of the Indians had

been brought to the river to be put aboard the ships

that were to carry them part of the way by a water

route, some began to form ideas that they did not

want to be put aboard the ships because they did not

~~fully want to leave their old homes, and further, some~~

~~resolved never to set foot on the ships so that they~~

wouldn't be forced to suffer any more hardships.

They thought it would be best to end all rela-

~~tions with their superior officers so that they began~~

~~to fight them. In the attempts to check the rebellion~~

the officers had to use weapons and some of the Indians

were killed as they tried to run off into the woods.

Seeing the rebellious attitude of the Indians the white

officers grabbed any Indian and pushed or forced them

into the ships. The officers readily killed any Indian

on board the ships that seemed to be in a rebellious

attitude, but there were some Indians who did not take

part in the uprising but they were the eye witnesses

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to those Indians who were killed on board the ships and thrown overboard into the waters of the river. Some of them that were left unharmed said, "even we will die here but not by guns." With this, they took hold of one another's hands and stepped off into a large suck hole that was in the river and went to their deaths singing a song. It is told that many years later, the words of the song which had been sung by these Indians could be heard at certain times so that many people from foreign countries and people from different places in this country have made trips to this vicinity in attempts to record the tune and words of the song, but no one has ever been successful.

Jackson Lewis, another Indian, was the name of another man who had come over during the migration of the Creeks. He was a very active, playful and inquisitive small child so he did not realize all that was happening.

Several years after the sorrowing, disheartened Indians had landed in the new country and had reunited in their tribal affairs and had begun making improvements

and home's in the new country, Jackson Lewis had grown to manhood. He had cast aside his playthings and his childhood interests but had acquired the mind and actions of a grown man. With this passage of time he had become a medicine man, with calls quite frequent among the Indians for he was noted for his doctoring and his ability to cure serious burns and poisonous insect bites. He never knew that he came from the old country (tulofa chule) until he was told by his father many years after he had grown.

His first venture was the establishment of a store which was called Tulofa Chule (Old Town). It was located right east of the present site of Eufaula and before Eufaula was ever begun. There was everything to sell at that store, mostly the things that were in demand and in use of those days. Many whites and Indians came to trade at Tulofa chule by way of oxen or horse team and wagons, horseback and walking. He had quite a bit of active business there because Jackson Lewis was a genial and friendly man to everyone. He was wont to extend too much credit to the Indians and his friends so that this custom eventually led to his downfall in the business causing his bankruptcy.

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When his first venture as a merchant failed, Lewis could not be called a failure, so he established a blacksmith shop. Each of the tools necessary in a blacksmith shop, such as the forge, bellows or anvil, were all made by Lewis so that it is said that he never went into the expense of buying any of the tools that he would need in his business. He made a complete wagon in his shop from the spokes of the wheel, hub, tongue to a finished product. He fashioned axes or chisels. Jackson Lewis was, also, quite a jewelry man as he could make ear rings or finger rings--the rings being made from copper pennies which were beaten to fashion into any shape, size or design, often making the rings out of celluloid combs so his jewelry ware was in great demand by people from the Seminole country just as well as his other wares such as the picks and shovels.

Billy Coker, a Seminole of Seminole country, was a frequent visitor with Jackson-Lewis and in fact, they were brothers-in-law as Billy Coker had married a sister of his (Lewis'). She was a member of the Gufaula tribal town. In what is now Seminole county, there is a Baptist church called Achena-Hu-chee

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-Eufaula and a busk ground called Eufaula-Seminole or Seminole-Eufaula. It is believed that through the descendants of the sister of Jackson Lewis and those of her Seminole husband, Billy Coker, that these settlements were begun.

Jackson Lewis served south during the Civil War. There was a strange incident that occurred relative to Lewis and another man named Ben Johnson. Lewis was stationed as a military guard at Ft. Gibson when the Southern forces occupied it. There were reinforcements stationed in the vicinity of Eufaula also. The main battles and heavy fighting were being staged in a southeasterly direction from Ft. Gibson and a northeasterly direction from Eufaula. Ben Johnson was in the midst of this heavy fighting when he was ordered to notify the reinforcements stationed at Eufaula to report for duty, but his horse was shot before he could reach his destination so that he started on foot. Jackson Lewis was also ordered to notify the reinforcements at Eufaula and was going in a roundabout way that he overtook Ben Johnson and they proceeded on towards their destination, Eufaula, with

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the horse carrying double riders. They were shot at from the rear by pursuing enemies as they were continuing on their way. Later, Peter Ewing, the father of the later Peter Ewing, discovered that the bullet had passed through the rear part of the saddle and had lodged in the saddle horn but neither one of the men had been a target to be fatally injured. It was unbelievable that the men had escaped injury or death from the bullet.

At a place called South Muskogee which was in a westerly direction from the present Muskogee and along the large hill in that vicinity, the Southern forces were fleeing from the Northern forces that those of that group are reported to have told of seeing bright and high flames coming out a cave or side of a hill.

The favorite plaything that was prized by Jackson Lewis in his young days was a tin box. During one time of the removal he saw the box lying in some yard and he cried for it so much that his mother managed to obtain it for him. As a child he put all his small possessions in it as well as using it as a



container for sand, dirt and other loose articles.

After he had become a brown man, he still used it and took better care of it but used it to place pins, buttons or other useful small articles in. The box came into use as a bank when Jackson Lewis had put ~~up his store but he was forced to close his bank~~ at his bankrupt cy. Still, the box continued to be ~~of~~ some use in his blacksmith as he converted it into a tool box for his small tools and as a holder for his small jewelry ware such as ear rings, rings and pins. He always kept this box on his work shelf.

This box has been handed down from one descendant of Jackson Lewis to another, after his death, and through this course of being handed down, this box is now in the possession of my sister.

NOTE--Billie Byrd's manuscripts written in Indian dialect are not edited to put them into better English, as a part of their value seems to lie in the Indian manner of telling the tale. Ed.