

TOOMS, ROY. INTERVIEW.

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Reminiscences about Fort Gibson
By an
Indian Territory Pioneer
Roy Tooms.

I was born in Nashville, Tennessee, 1879, and moved with my parents to Fort Gibson at the age of five.

My father was G. J. Tooms and my mother, Margaret Smith Tooms, both of Tennessee.

The town of Fort Gibson at that time was located down on the river near the bridge across the Grand river. United States Troops were stationed at the fort and the post kept up to the regulation strength. The old stockade was located where the new one has recently been built.

The Government owned and operated a ferry just above the Iron Mountain Railroad Bridge. There was also a ferry at that point owned and operated by a private citizen. The United States Troops freighted all their supplies from Gibson Station across Grand River on the Katy Railroad. One day the ferry boat was overloaded and it capsized. One man was drowned.

While Fort Gibson was only a village, it supported four good general mercantile stores. They were owned by Mr. John Scott, William Percival, Florine and Will Nash.

Houston Benge, a Cherokee, lived in the Jeff Davis house and Sam Benge, his son, was born there.

Mr. John Scott lived in the Zachry Taylor house, supposed to be the oldest house in Fort Gibson.

The cemetery was located where the negro school now stands. Some years after we moved there and the cemetery had been removed, my brother found a grave of a soldier which seemed to have been outside of the cemetery. It was not identified but the cross-guns found in the grave proved that it was the grave of a soldier. Our men folks of the family reported the discovery to the proper authorities.

Deer and wild turkey were killed just outside the corral and the turkeys would come up and eat in the barnyard with the chickens.

Captain John Hammer had charge of the sutler's store. They were prohibited from selling liquor to Indians and minors, but they disregarded that and sold it to both. When the young Indian boys drank a little and got noisy and they tried to put them out, trouble began and shooting scrapes were sometime the result.

There were dense cane-brakes along Grand River and we boys made tours into them to cut fishing poles. When we penetrated into the interior it was quite dark and getting lost would have been an easy matter. We always went in the middle of the day when the sun was directly overhead and never on a dark day.

As the range in the Indian Territory at that time was open and cattle allowed to run out, they would winter in the cane-brake and come out in the spring in fine condition.

Mrs. Georgie Brown ran the only hotel in town and it was noted all over the country for the good food served there.

Dr. Trent, a fine young physician from the east, married Mrs. Brown's only daughter, Mollie.

Mr. Lafayette Buchanan, an expert cabinet maker, made all the coffins used by the United States Troops and the citizens as well. Using only the finest of Walnut lumber. He also made furniture, some that is in use in Fort Gibson today.

William Percival owned and operated the only cotton gin in Fort Gibson.

Mr. Jack Gott and Tim Walker, both prosperous Cherokee farmers, lived some four miles east of town.

Mr. Hubbard Ross, who is the present custodian of the new stockade, was a young boy clerking for Mr. Florine Nash.

Mr. Will Nash had his stock of goods in the old commissary building.

My father was a contractor but bought and sold cattle as a side line.

There were no ^{poor} people either in town or country. Everyone owned their own homes and farms with plenty of cattle to sell each year; and no one worked very hard.

Many of the old slaves lived there and were looked after by their former owners or their families. They could be hired for a small sum and were always willing to work.

They also owned their own little cabin homes surrounded by gay flowers and vegetable gardens.

We lived next door to the parents of Mr. William Gulager, and Clu and I grew up together.

I bought the allotment of Clarence Goldsby, a brother of the noted "Cherokee Bill," and have the last deed signed by his father.

I was at the Iron Mountain Station when Clarence Goldsby killed Ike Rogers, a United States Marshal. The passenger train had just pulled in. After Goldsby shot Rogers, he walked through the train to the opposite side and locking the door behind him, went over to Mr. Nash's pasture. Ran Lee, Town Marshal, went over to arrest him and he took Lee's horse away from ^{him} and left.

With the coming of the railroads and the influx of white people to the Territory, the happy peaceful days of old Fort Gibson began to pass.