

TIMMONS, CLAUDE

INTERVIEW.

#6576

181

BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

182

Field Worker's name Alene D. McDowellThis report made on (date) June 28, 19371. Name Claude Timmons2. Post Office Address 125 N. Comanche, Bartlesville, Oklahoma3. Residence address, (or location) 125 N. Comanche4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month November Day 7 Year 18735. Place of birth Mineral Springs, Arkansas6. Name of Father Silas Timmons Place of birth KentuckyOther information about father Buried in Pawhuska, Oklahoma7. Name of Mother Betty Stewart-Timmons Place of birth ArkansasOther information about mother She is 81 years old. Lives at
Pawhuska, Oklahoma

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story of the person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects and questions. Continue on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 13.

one D. McDowell
Search Field Worker
Indian-Pioneer History, S-149
June 28, 1937

Interview with
Claude Timmons
125 N. Comanche
Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

Claude Timmons was born November 7, 1873, at
Mineral Springs, Arkansas.

Father - Silas Timmons was born at Louisville,
Kentucky, and died at the age of 69 years, buried at
Pawhuska, Oklahoma.

Mother - Betty Stewart-Timmons was born at
Beartown, Arkansas. She is now 81 years old and lives
at Pawhuska, Oklahoma.

I am one-sixteenth Cherokee Indian and acted as
an interpreter in the early days.

I removed to the Indian Territory from Arkansas,
with my parents in 1881, when I was eight years old. We
settled on the Jesse Sixkiller place located on Peggs
prairie, about eighteen miles northwest of Tahlequah.

My parents came to the Indian Territory to prove
up their Indian rights, but were too late and did not
receive land. After we settled here, eleven families of
our relatives followed us and settled near Peggs.

My paternal grandfather came to the Indian Territ-
ory with us and soon afterward married Susie Smith,
a full blood Cherokee. and settled on her place near

- 2 -

Peggs. He died in 1910 at the age of 89 years and is buried near Peggs in the New Home Cemetery.

My grandfather shod horses for the cavalry during the Civil War . He was in the Confederate Army. The only shot he fired throughout the war was one night when he caught a fellow stealing his horse that was tied to a log of the house. The rope was drawn through a place in the loose chinking, and tied around a log of the house. My grandfather discovered the thief as he led the horse away, and shot over his head with a flint rock rifle. The fellow dropped the rope and ran.

We moved to the Indian Territory in two covered wagons, which my father had built, and drove oxen. At the time we settled at Peggs, there was only one house between our home and Tahlequah, a distance of eighteen miles.

The ground was broken with wood beam plows. my father had made. There were two styles of these plows, the single and double shovel. I plowed with one ox to a single plow while my father plowed with the double shovel. We did not have lines to guide the oxen, they stopped and started when we spoke to them. We had a one horse Avery turning plow for light work. My father

- 3 -

and grandfather were blacksmiths and made all their farming implements. The Indians were curious about our work and would watch us for hours.

Our first home was a four room log house, ceiled and weatherboarded, with two stone chimneys and fireplaces.. This place is now known as the Wilkerson farm. The old house is still occupied. Our fuel was wood and our lights were brass lamps, similar to the present oil can, with a spout for the wick, and there were no globes.

Our principal crops were corn and cotton. My father planted the first cotton north of Tahlequah. We hauled it to Fort Gibson which was the nearest cotton gin. Later gins were built at Tahlequah and Wagoner. We bought our supplies at Tahlequah.

I used to haul a load of cotton to gin with a team of oxen and on the return trip I would haul freight, consisting of hardware, groceries and whiskey. I was small but my father drove one team and I followed with the other.

We later removed to the Bob Johnson farm, one and one-half miles south of Peggs, where my father and I cleared forty acres of land. We built a log house

- 4 -

on this place. While we lived there my little sister died and the Indians would not allow her to be buried in the Arch Downing Cemetery, because we were not enough Indian. My parents decided to start a burial ground for the White people on their place, which is now known as the New Home Cemetery. My sister's was the first grave, then George Maynard's baby, Jim Wilkerson's baby and Dr. Estes' ten year old son were buried there.

My father and several other men hauled logs to mill to build a log school house on Blackberry creek, ten miles north of Tahlequah. This was the Shiloh school and was located eight miles from my home.

Gideon Morgan, Senator of the Cherokees, lived between my home and the school house, and one morning I was passing their house on a little sorrel mule I rode to school, and Mrs. Morgan ask if her two daughters, Sally and Amanda, could ride with me. I agreed and Sally rode in front and Amanda rode behind. I stopped for them each morning the remainder of the school term. I was about eighteen years old, and was small so Sally and I rode in the saddle, but Amanda was large and rode behind the saddle. Amanda was County Superintendent

- 5 -

of Schools in Bartlesville, Washington County, later.

One morning, a few days after we were settled in our new home, about forty Indians, all on horseback, made us an early morning visit. They were all armed with pistols and Winchesters and were drunk. We were still in bed when we heard shooting about 200 yards from the house. My father dressed and went to the door to investigate. They were staging a pitch battle among themselves. When their ammunition was gone, they used their guns as clubs and continued the fight. There were no casualties, but some of them were badly bruised. Skelly Vann jumped his horse over the yard fence and would have ridden into the house if my father had not caught the bridle reins. Vann wanted some whiskey and when told we did not have any he said, "I will give you \$100 if you will take my horse and go to Bob Flatt's still at Siloam Springs, Arkansas, and buy a gallon of whiskey."

Skelly and Cull Vann, full blood Cherokees, were our first acquaintances. One morning they rode over to sell some hogs. My father bought three hogs, about 100 pounds each, for \$15.00. They returned that afternoon with the hogs, dressed, thrown over their horses. Skelly

- 6 -

would not speak English unless he was drunk.

WILD GAME

Wild game was plentiful where we lived. A drove of 50 or 75 deer would often graze within fifty yards of our house. One morning I was going to the pasture to bring in the horses; when I was about a quarter of a mile west of the house, a yearling deer loped along the path; when it came near me, I stepped behind some brush with a club and knocked it over, it was only scared and tried to escape. I was following close enough to touch it, when it suddenly ran into a bunch of wild turkeys and made good its escape. I rushed back to the house for my rifle and returned to where the turkeys were feeding. I sat still and whistled like a young turkey, they came close and I killed eleven. I have killed plenty of wild game with a bow and arrow.

The Indians used blow guns to kill small game, turkeys, quail and prairie chicken. These guns were made by burning the pith from cane poles. The darts used for bullets were made by splitting one end of a small stick, inserting a wad of cotton in the split end and tied with hemp string. These darts were blown through the gun with the mouth.

Bob and Grat Dalton, Dick Broadwell and Tim Evans

- 7 -

spent the night at our house on Peggs prairie a few nights before they were killed in the Coffeyville raid. The next morning when Bob Dalton ask my mother what they owed for the nights lodging and breakfast and she told him she never charged for an accomodation he gave her a \$20 gold piece. She told him she did not have any change, he said, "Keep the change, it didn't cost me anything." When they were ready to leave they told my father who they were. I have a picture of the Dalton boys.

Everybody carried a pistol and a Winchester in those days, not only for protection, but from habit. I always wore two pistols, and would have felt lost without them.

FERRY BOAT LANDINGS.

The Rogers Ferry boat was located east of Wagoner over Grand river. I have crossed on this boat many times when I hauled cotton to Wagoner.

Morgan's Ferry was over Grand river at Salina and was operated by Sam Mayes, who was later Chief of the Cherokees. Mayes bought the boat from Mr. Morgan and operated it when the steel bridge was erected across Grand river at Salina. It was then known as the Mayes Ferry.

- 8 -

Gid Morgan owned and operated a steam ferry across the Arkansas river at Fort Smith, Arkansas, and charged \$1.50 for a team and wagon to cross. We crossed on this ferry when we moved from Arkansas to the Indian Territory.

One day a man was on Morgan's ferry, Gid's brother Wash was standing on the river bank. Gid was on the opposite side of the boat when he saw the man pull his gun and take aim at Wash. He shot the man just below the ear, with a load of squirrel shot, killing him instantly.

INDIAN AGENCIES

The Saleen Court House, located about six miles east of Locust Grave, was a Cherokee agency. Flint Court House, east of Tahlequah and Greenleaf Court House, south of Tahlequah were also Cherokee agencies.

I well remember taking a bunch of horses and mules to Saleen Court House, to a Cherokee convention, to sell. Oscar Caba and Joel Downing, both Cherokees, were drunk and quarrelsome, and staged a fight. Downing knocked Caba down and was beating him in the face. Caba took his knife from his pocket, cut Downing across the middle of the back, leaving a deep wound and ruining a \$45. suit of clothes.

- 9 -

I was in Muskogee when there were only three stores there. A Hardware and Implement store, a Grocery and Dry Goods store and a feed store. When my parents settled at Peggs, there were three stores at Tahlequah. John Staples owned a hardware store, John Price and Tom Adair owned general merchandise stores and handled groceries, dry goods, hardware and implements.

CORN STALK SHOOTING.

The Indians held annual Corn Stalk Shootings, and large bets were placed on their ability with the bow and arrow. The corn stalks were cut about five feet long and piled three feet high. Each took turns shooting the arrow through the pile of corn stalks. This celebration lasted a week at each of the following places: Moody Springs, located south-east of Peggs, Saleen Court House and Flint Court House. I attended these celebrations and took part in the shooting and gambling. Dan Backbone, a full blood Cherokee, was the best shot.

A FREE FOR ALL FIGHT

During the last Cherokee election, when the last Cherokee Chief, William C. Rogers was elected, I was attending a meeting near Hulbert, west of Tahlequah, on Bald Hill prairie and saw fight. Tom Cox, Don

- 10 -

Wenton, Mac Downing and myself were talking of horse trading when the fight attracted our attention, across the branch from where we were sitting. Bill Walford and Boone Catcher, both Indians, were having some trouble, Bill hit Boone and knocked him down. Jack Walford, brother of Bill's, shot Boone as he tried to get up, the bullet entered the left shoulder and came out the right side just below the shoulder blade. Boone was bent over when shot.

Dick Catcher, Boone's brother, struck at Jack with a knife and missed him. He then tried to borrow a gun from Tom Potts, a spectator, to shoot Jack. In the meantime Jack had mounted his horse and rode away, waving his gun above his head.

Clue Gooligar, a small man standing near watching the fight, was wearing a big pearl handled pistol. His gun was not loaded. Dick Catcher lifted Gooligar from the ground, stood him on his head and took his gun. He then drew the gun in Mac Downing's face and threatened to kill him. Mac saw the gun was not loaded, so pulled the neck of his shirt open and dared him to shoot. Mac grabbed the gun and lowered it, told Dick it was not loaded. Dick said, "Mac, I didn't intend to shoot you, for I'm not mad at you." The fight was ended between Dick and Mac.

- 11 -

Mac Downing and Dick Catcher had been enemies for a number of years. There had been a wedding dinner in the Joel Downing home several years before and five of the Catcher family were killed.

Tom Trippet and Tom Bevert then started a fight but they were too drunk to knock each other down. They clenched and fell, both rolled into the creek and were almost drowned before they were rescued.

A cold drink stand operated by some Negroes was located nearby. There were four barrels of hard cider, at the stand and someone cut them open with an ax, and everybody proceeded to get drunk. The Negro women then started a fight and did some fancy slashing with razors. They finished the biggest fight I ever witnessed.

ROBBERY AND MURDER

A Jewish peddler came by our house one night on horseback and ask to stay all night. The next morning he went from our house to Spring Creek, then to Locust Grove. About two miles east of Locust Grove, he was robbed and murdered by Jack Chewey, who was a dangerous character.

There was a \$500 reward offered for Chewey, dead or alive. Chewey was a fiddler and carried his fiddle with him. He stopped at Jim Smith's home to stay all night. Jim was a cousin of my wife. Jim ask him to

- 12 -

play and while he was playing Cooy Bolden, Jim's uncle, shot him with a Winchester. As he raised to his feet he drew two pistols from the holster, fired both of them as he fell backwards. The shots went through the ceiling. Bolden then shot him twice in the chest. He collected the reward. Bolden was my wife's uncle.

BILL PIGEON

Bill Pigeon, an early day criminal, was our neighbor. His first crime was shooting a Negro who was stealing a hog from him. He was then arrested by two United States Deputy marshals and taken to Fort Smith, Arkansas, for trial. On the trip to Fort Smith, he was handcuffed to a Negro and made to sleep with him. He told the marshals if he ever had a chance he intended to kill them. He came clear of the crime in Judge Parker's court at Fort Smith. He later killed the two marshals and was sentenced to serve a term in the penitentiary and was paroled. In 1910 he was living near Tahlequah and made a good citizen.

I have a powder horn, cap horn, and powder gourd that belonged to my great-great grandfather. I also have a cork screw made by him in the blacksmith shop at Murphysboro, Kentucky.

I worked for "Shorty" McGuire on the first paving job in Tulsa. I do not remember the year. After I came to Bartlesville I worked for him a number of years.

- 13 -

I came to Bartlesville in 1925 and camped under a wagon sheet, three miles west of town, for three weeks. I built a pond for Dave Ware and was camped in his pasture. I moved to Bartlesville and lived at 1101 Choctaw.

COMMENTS

Mr. Timmons is a real veteran of early day excitement. He has lived in the Indian Territory and Oklahoma for over a half century and can tell some exciting stories of the Territory days. Mr. Timmons gives this story from his heart and wishes to help the younger generation to understand what their forefathers experienced to make Oklahoma the great state it is now.