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STORY OF OO-WA-LAH

By William R. Harper, Cherokee
Claremore, Oklahoma.

Mr. Harper says:

"I think this story is true, I heard it told around my grandmother's fire-side when I was a mere lad."

About 8 miles north from the City of Claremore is to be found a little county (district) school-- a two room frame building on a broad prairie but not far from the Verdigris River, but a few (four or five) miles northeast from the famous Claremore Mound, where a decisive battle between the Cherokees and Osages was fought in 1818; and a short distance south from the famous "Long Mound" that parallels the Verdigris for three or four miles.

This district school is successor to a Cherokee public school which was originally located about a mile away and near the home of the late DeWitt Clinton Lipe-- now deceased, who served the Cherokee Nation as Senator, National Treasurer and in various minor capacities and was elected County Clerk of Rogers County in 1907, serving one term. He did not seek re-election, but died a year after his term expired. One of

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his daughters, Miss Hattie Lipe, has for several years, been employed in the office of County Superintendent of Schools of Rogers County; his other living daughter, Miss Lola Lipe, has been employed as teacher in the Claremore public schools for several years. This school district No. 8, as well as the municipal, township and voting precinct are also called "Oowala"-- in honor of Mr. Lipe, whose Cherokee name was Oowala, an Indian word (Cherokee) meaning light, or more properly lights--derived from the lights or lungs of an animal-- a hog for instance. Those Indians used, so the story runs, to prepare a dish of food from portions of the livers, lights, etc. of the hog, flavored with red hot peppers, that were grown on Indian farms. It was very palatable; my informant says his grandmother used to prepare it soon after "hog-killing time" in autumn and it was relished by various members of the family.

"Oowala" is the family name of the Lipes, well known citizens of the old Cherokee Nation and hence how it came about: About a hundred years ago, in 1839, to^{be} exact, a white man named Oliver Lipe arrived in the "Old Cherokee Nation" on the Tennessee river, before all the Cherokees

had moved to their new home in the west. He was a native of the State of New York, descendent of John Caspar Lipe, who emigrated to America from Wales in 1710.

The young man wooed and won the heart and hand of a blushing Cherokee maiden of ~~the~~ half-blood whose name was Katharine Gunter, and it became necessary, or at least expedient, that they be married according to the laws and customs of the Cherokees; at which time the white man marrying an Indian girl was adopted into the tribe and given an Indian name. When arrangement had been made and the ceremonies about to begin, an aged member of the tribe, probably "master of ceremonies" for the occasion, who did not speak English, or at least addressed one of his tribesmen in the Cherokee language after this manner; "What is the white man's name?" The answer was: "His name is Lipe." The old Indian, to whom an arbitrary name meant nothing, thought his informant had said: "His name is Light"--and laconically replied---"Oo-wa-lah!" This was construed as a suggestion for the white man's new (Cherokee) name and it "stuck;" in fact he was called by that name until the day of his death-- many years later, and it was

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applied, as a family name, for his descendants--children of his union by the Indian wife being called "John Owala", "Jake Owala" or "Mary Owala" as the case happened to be. Of course English speaking people used the English name "Lipe", thus: John Lipe, Jake Lipe or Mary Lipe, as the case might be. Major DeWitt Clinton Lipe, in whose honor this school, township and precinct were named, settled in that community soon after the Civil War, coming from his ancestral home at Fort Gibson during the early 70's. His brother, Jake Lipe, settled on the west side of the Verdigris, a few miles away, and lived there for many years.

Oliver Lipe, the original "Owala," with his Indian wife came west with the Cherokee people about 1840 and settled at Fort Gibson, where he conducted a successful mercantile establishment and occupied a commodious brick home in the "old town" of Fort Gibson. This home was located but a short distance from the southern approach to the bridge across the Grand river on the road to Wagner. In the mean time he served as clerk of the Cherokee Courts and Supervisor of Schools. His son, Jake, served for a time as District clerk of Cooweescoowee District, Cherokee Nation, while DeWitt Lipe filled various offices, as stated above.