

TUCKER, AUGUSTA INTERVIEW

7466

193

TUCKER, MISS, AUGUSTA

INTERVIEW

7466

Interview with Miss Augusta Tucker
Fort Towson, Oklahoma

Teaching School in the 1880's
Indian Territory

Field Worker-----Hazel B. Greene
September 11, 1937.

I was born and educated in Indiana, near Indianapolis. We came to the Indian Territory, Choctaw Nation, in the winter of 1884-5, from Paris, Texas, where we had lived for a couple of years. I began teaching school here when there was practically no law except the gun. There were some good people, who were trying to be good citizens, although they were handicapped by undesirable ones, who desired nothing but outlawry.

My father was Dr. C. N. Tucker. Our family lived close to Doaksville, and spent part of the time there, but I taught school all over the country.

My first school was in the fourth ward of the city of Hugo, on what has been known by the various names

TUCKER, MISS AUGUSTA

INTERVIEW

7466

2

of Scott Hill and Terry Hill, and in recent years as Laurel Heights. It was called the Scott school then, because it was organized by a Dr. Scott who lived near it. He was a white man who had come here in the early territorial days, and married an Indian woman, perhaps a full-blood Choctaw, I am not sure what percent Indian she was, but they had children who needed to be in school, so he got it started. The school house was built of logs, and I honestly believe it was 20 X 30 feet. It was immense. The fire place was the biggest one I ever saw; big enough to put a tree in, and was made of native sand stone. When it was filled with huge logs, it really heated up that room.

The floors were of puncheon. and the doors were made of timber hewn out of logs, as were also the windows which were made to slide. The benches were of split logs, with holes bored in the under side and the legs trimmed to fit the holes. "Piggy benches" they were called. The door hinges were home-made. A strip of

TUCKER, MISS AUGUSTA

INTERVIEW

7466

3

iron with a peg on the end was nailed to the door and fitted into the ring on another strip of iron that was nailed to the door facing, or frame. That constituted the hinge. They were so squeaky, we were forever putting lard on them, and we always had to lift that door some to get it open or closed; the front one especially was heavier.

I taught there one year. Dr. Scott, his wife, and some children are buried there, near the House on the hill. There were tombstones to the graves. I understand that George Scott, a son of the Doctor, lives at Stigler, Oklahoma.

The noted Frank (Uncle Bud) Ledbetter, who was a peace officer in Oklahoma, lived upon that hill, too, and I boarded with his family. I don't believe any of his family were of Indian blood. I think they were all white. The late Frank Ledbetter was a peace officer from the time I knew him in 1885-6, and I understand, a good one.

TUCKER, MISS AUGUSTA

INTERVIEW

7466

4

The next year I taught what was called the Wilson Jones school on Long Creek, about four miles northeast of the present town of Hugo. The Wilson Jones for whom this school was named was not Governor Wilson Jones but was, perhaps, a cousin. He married Miss Frances Willard, who was a sister to Miss Harriet, or Hattie Willard. Their father was a quarter-master clerk at Fort Towson, when soldiers were kept stationed there. He was a first cousin of the famous Frances Elizabeth Willard, American educator and reformer of Illinois.

Frances and Harriet Willard were well educated, refined young white ladies, who were brought to the Indian Territory from the east by their father, when he was ordered to Fort Towson. They both married full-blood Choctaw Indians.

Wilson Jones was a progressive Indian, far above the average in intelligence, and no doubt his white wife spurred him on to attain the better things of life.

TUCKER, MISS AUGUSTA

INTERVIEW

7466

5

Back in the early days, there was a tribal law in the Choctaw nation requiring the attendance of twenty or more Indian children in order to organize a school. So Wilson Jones and his wife built camp houses for some Indians to live in while their children attended school. They boarded some, in order to have the proper quota. Some of the parents could not come there and live, so the Wilsons took these ^{children} in their home with their own children. The white children who attended paid tuition.

One of the stipulations on my certificate was that I not allow the Choctaw Indian children to speak the Choctaw language. I enforced that in the school room, but did not try ^{on} the play ground. Some of those little fellows were away from home for the first time in their life, and were so homesick that it would have been rank cruelty to have kept them from talking to each other in their native tongue. So I just didn't hear them.

TUCKER, MISS AUGUSTA

INTERVIEW

7466

6

The Long Creek school house was of logs, but not so good a building as the Scott school building. It was kept warm by a big old heating stove. We got drinking water from a fine spring, down the red sand rock hill. Steps were cut out of that sand rock, so many that by the time I went down and got a bucket of water and returned, I would be exhausted. The spring was a thing of beauty. It bubbled up through a crevice in the solid rock. The water was splendid.

There was a cemetery at that school, and I believe Wilson Jones was buried there. One daughter, Belle, died when she was about twenty years old and was very likely buried at Goodland.

Belle Jones was married to Joe Granthum, who lived near Goodland Academy. Margaret Jones married a Mr. Lingo. I don't know where she is. John lives at Hugo. I don't know where Mrs. Frances Willard Jones is buried.

Harriet Willard married John Turnbull, a full-blood Choctaw Indian, and they lived close to the Jones. I

TUCKER, MISS AUGUSTA

INTERVIEW

7466

7

will quote Peter Hudson, a prominent Choctaw Indian of Tuskahoma, regarding John Turnbull:

"John Turnbull was one of the leading exponents of education among the Choctaw people. I do not know where or when he attended school, but it must have been in the states before the Civil War. He was well educated.

Mr. Turnbull, whose descendants have become prominent in the affairs of the state, was a Presbyterian minister. After several years of teaching and preaching, he served the nation as superintendent of Public Schools. I know that he served in this capacity, because he wrote me while I was a student at Hartford, Connecticut, informing me that I had used up my time in the colleges of the state. This was in 1889. I was then nine years in state colleges; six years at Drury College, Springfield, Missouri, and three years at Hartford, Connecticut. However, I stayed on until I finished my course in 1890. Hence I know that John

TUCKER, MISS AUGUSTA

INTERVIEW

7466

8

Turnbull held the office of Superintendent of Public Schools that year. He may have acted in that capacity for several years."

John Turnbull was a widower when he married Harriet Willard. She mothered his children, some orphan grandchildren of his, and several other orphans. Her own five died in infancy. Among the orphans whom she raised was Belle, who became the wife of John Davis Wilson, one of The Wilson boys of the Choctaw Nation. John Wilson was employed in the first enumeration of the census of white people and Indians ever taken in the Indian Territory. He worked Towson County. He was a member of the Choctaw Council at different times; also a member of the Supreme Court of the Choctaw Nation. And it is probable that he held different political positions, from time to time, in the Choctaw Nation.

I taught two terms on Long Creek at the Wilson Jones school. My next term was taught at Doaksville, in an

TUCKER, MISS AUGUSTA

INTERVIEW

7466

9

old store building. There was no school building there then.

Next, I taught a couple of terms in a log school house out north of Doaksville, close to the Captain Nonnemontubbee place. The place was called Sweet Gum Grove, because there were lots of sweet gum trees there. Most of my pupils were Choctaw Indians. In looking back, I believe my school at Sweet Gum Grove was the most interesting and pleasant one I ever taught.

I especially remember one little Indian girl, who was very interesting and sweet. She always dressed in white, and her father brought her wrapped in a blanket, on horseback to school. When it was cold, she wore little white wool home-knit stockings. Her name was Emaline Christy. She was always neat and clean. Then I had some pupils who were not so well cared for. Some of them were so lousy that I would put mercurial ointment on their heads and then shampoo them with Grandpa's Tar Soap.

TUCKER, MISS AUGUSTA

INTERVIEW

7466

10

One little girl cut her hair short in an effort to get rid of the lice, then the patches of irritated scalp showed up, where the lice had bitten. They looked like ring worm. She was an orphan, living with her blind grandmother, who could not care for her properly. The grandmother had lice, too, and sent word to me to please send her some of the medicine that killed the lice and nits. I sent her some. My father, being a doctor, thoroughly deloused me every time I went home.

I had some English speaking pupils, besides the white ones. The children of Basil and Susan-Spring LeFlore spoke nothing but English.

I whipped one boy for vulgarity. He told me recently, that he thought himself justified in holding that against me, until he had children of his own.

Another one I punished is now a minister, Mr. Jimmie Machia, and lives over about Fufe, Oklahoma. He was just mischievous.. He had made a mustache, side-burns

TUCKER, MISS AUGUSTA

INTERVIEW

7466

11

and hair of black oilcloth. He got a pair of spectacle rims somewhere also. He would don these, when I was not looking and have the whole school in an uproar of laughter. I thought I'd never be able to catch him, he was so quick, but finally did, by placing a small mirror over the blackboard. He said he wondered until he was grown how I managed to catch him.

I could understand the Choctaw language, but could not speak it. I understood Choctaws so well that I knew they sometimes feigned ignorance of the English language, even though they could speak it fluently. For instance: a couple of Choctaw Indians walked into my sister's cafe in Fort Towson, and ordered breakfast in Choctaw. She could not understand them and called me to the front. I recognized them as a couple of my old pupils and graduates from some academies. Then they ordered their breakfasts in better English than I could command.

TUCKER, MISS AUGUSTA

INTERVIEW

7466

12

My education was pretty limited, but still one could teach in the Indian Territory then with a good deal less education than now. They were trying to get all white teachers here in the Indian Territory, when I came over and I passed the required examinations and was awarded a certificate to teach.

We came here because my father, Dr. C. N. Tucker, had heard that the Choctaw Council wanted white doctors. We lived over near Paris, Texas, then, and had made a couple of crops there, but when he heard that, he came over to see about it and met with the Choctaw Council. They decided to accept him, so he selected a place to move to and returned home. Mother refused to move, until she was sure some more white families would come also. She said her daughters were about all grown and she knew that if they came here among the Indians and there were no white boys, they would likely marry Indians. So when she finally came, five other white families came too; the families of John Ward, the Prater's, Charlie Smith,

TUCKER, MISS AUGUSTA

INTERVIEW

7466

13

John Roberts and the Snelgroves.

In spite of all precautions, my oldest sister, Alice, married a full-blood Choctaw Indian, a widower with a child. His name was Isham Williams. He died last Spring. She died in 1902. Both are buried in Spring Chapel Cemetery. My sister Alice and Isham Williams were married under the Choctaw law, which gave her every right as a Choctaw citizen. Old Parson Keith, presiding Elder of the Methodists, who lived at Bon Ton, performed the ceremony. One did not have to have a license to get married in those days. They simply went before a minister or County Judge and were married. He gave them a certificate of marriage, recorded it in his book, and that was all.

Old Judge Tims at Doaksville kept such a book, and I am sure it would be valuable, if found. I witnessed weddings more than fifty years ago in Doaksville, and I am sure that Judge E. W. Tims' record was the only one of them. He also kept records of his court proceedings.

TUCKER, MISS AUGUSTA .

INTERVIEW

7466

14

In later years one could go to Paris, Texas, and secure a United States license to wed, and come over in the Territory to use it. My sister Kate and Bill Snelgrove did that.

Turner Farris was an orphaned grandson of John Turnbull, who raised him as his own but never thought of being appointed guardian of him. So when Turner wanted to get married, before he was of age, there was no one to give consent. He had to get permission from the Secretary of the Interior.

My sister, Ollie, was already married to Al Roberts when we came over here. She is buried at Albany, close to Durant. Al is buried at Doaksville. Minnie, who never married, is buried at Doaksville. Minnie was my sister.

I have never married, because I quarreled with the only man I ever wanted to marry, and he is long since dead. Now I am past seventy years old.

My father, O. N. Tucker, practiced medicine in and around Doaksville nine years, before losing a

case, excepting those from gun shots and stabbings, which were plentiful.

My grandmother Apple died in Indiana and left an estate of about \$60,000.00, so we all returned there to settle this estate. We were gone from the Indian Territory several years before we returned in about 1900.

We lived in a big old two-story log house, that some of the Colberts had built, when we lived in Doaksville. Two big rooms were separated by a big hall, where the stairway led the way to three rooms above. The kitchen, too, was two story, but it was frame. The dining room and kitchen were below, the bedrooms above, both connected to the main house only by a runway of planks.

Before we moved there, some one had pulled all of ~~the dropsiding off the back of the frame part of the~~ house. So we used what had been the kitchen for a back porch, the old dining room for a kitchen, dining room. Then the rooms above were the boy's bed rooms.

People told us that the weather boarding had been pulled off and used to make coffins. All coffins in this country were home made then, and lumber was scarce.

One Sunday, along about 1888, a bunch of us youngsters were in the kitchen dawdling over dinner, as young folks will do, after the old folks had gone on up in the main house. Tom Sanguin had a bowie knife, which he kept pretending to stick us with. I had told him about three times that if he didn't quit, I would put it where he would never see it again. He kept right on. I took it and dropped it down between the two walls. He could not get it, and it was not found until about forty years later; when that old house was being torn down, the knife was found and a big to-do was made over it.

There were lots of conjectures as to how and why that bowie knife came to be between the walls of the old house. I laughed up my sleeve, when I read the

romance that was woven into the history of the old knife. I knew its history, and that old Bowie knife had never stabbed anyone, because it was new when I dropped it between the walls. No romance was ever connected with it.

One of the oldest graves in Doaksville cemetery is that of a Gilbert. The date was 1846, and was discernible when I lived there, but the roof-like concrete tomb was beginning to crumble even then. And years afterward, when I was attending a funeral at Doaksville cemetery, I noticed that the grave itself had been disturbed, and the top of the concrete cover broken until the inscription could not be read.

Another tombstone that I used to see is gone. It read, simply, "Mother and babe sleep here."

A young woman drove a wagon and team to the home of Dr. Folsom; who lived at what later became the Willie Wilson home, on the old road that led west from Doaksville to Rock Chimney crossing on Kiamichi river. She

TUCKER, MISS AUGUSTA

INTERVIEW

7466

18

was too ill to talk, and collapsed immediately after reaching his home. She never recovered enough to tell who she was. Next day, she and her still born babe were buried in one grave in Doaksville cemetery. There was no clue to her identification among her effects.

A few months later some men came from Arkansas seeking their sister who had started from the Chickasaw Nation with her husband. They found where a young man who was traveling with his young wife, had died, and the young wife had started on alone, driving the team, and hoping to reach her folks in Arkansas before she should be confined. But the stone was already up, and was never changed.

Dr. Folsom always believed that the young woman who had died in his home was the sister the men from Arkansas were seeking.

Dr. Folsom and Sim N. Folsom were brothers. They were also cousins to Miss Frances Folsom, who became Mrs. Grover Cleveland, wife of the President of the United States. When Sim N. Folsom's son, Grover

19

Cleveland Folsom, was born, they wrote to President and Mrs. Cleveland of the event, who sent him a silver drinking cup, with his and their names upon it. Grover Folsom was killed in France in the World War, in 1918.

I want to tell of an experience that I had with cats. Mrs. Hannie Wilson, second wife of Willie Wilson, lay a corpse; there were several of us sitting up with it, and among them, besides myself, was Alfred Bryant, a Choctaw Indian boy. There were no screens, and the cats began coming in, just sneaking in, one and two at a time. Alfred began catching them, and kept on catching them, at intervals all night. The next morning when he turned them out of the chicken coop where he had put them, he counted twenty-three cats. Some of them had come from as far away as our home, a distance of seven miles. Our old cat was one of them. I had always heard that cats were bad about coming to the dead, but that night surprised me.

Old Grandma Pyron told me how she had to spread herself upon the corpse of a neighbor woman, while others fought off the cats that had come to prey upon it.

In those days when one died, they were simply laid out on what was called a cooling board, until a coffin could be made. We had never heard of embalming then. There were no screens either. Having no screens was perhaps one reason that so many people died then of malaria. It seems to me that more people had chills, fever, and pernicious malaria than they do now, due perhaps to the mosquitoes.

THE LEFLORE GHOST.

Back in the days when the soldiers were stationed in Fort Towson, Choctaw Nation, Indian Territory, one of the young soldiers fell in love with one of the Choctaw Indian girls of the LeFlore family. Her folks did not approve of her marrying a white man. And he did not want to marry under the Choctaw law alone. So, after the tribal ceremony, to which her

TUCKER, MISS AUGUSTA

INTERVIEW

7466

21

Family finally consented, although reluctantly, they went on horseback to Arkansas, where he wanted to be married by a white minister under the United States law. So they were married and started on the return journey. It had rained a lot and they found the streams swollen from the spring rains. When they reached Clear Creek, they were seen to ride into the water, and were seen carried on down the stream and drowned. Their bodies were never found. It is said, though, that just before a death in the LeFlore family, some near relative always sees that young couple on their horses, riding along. She, always with her face turned toward him, as if talking to him, and he, in a listening attitude. This was told to me by Basil LeFlore, about 1890.

One rainy evening I was teaching at Sweet Gum Grove; we were roasting peanuts. A member of the LeFlore

TUCKER, MISS AUGUST

INTERVIEW

7466

22

family (I was boarding with the LeFlores) announced that some one was coming, a couple on horseback, and that it looked like the girl's white blanket would lose some of its starch in all of that rain. We looked and saw nobody. Her father that member of the family see them again. That night Osborn LeFlores was killed, bearing out the ghost story.

Many a time I have taken off my cook apron, when some one would call me over to Judge Tim's house or office to witness a wedding, but I believe the oddest of all was the one in which the bridegroom could speak no Choctaw and the bride could speak no English, and how they ever fixed it up to get married was more than I could ever figure out. That was when a couple simply went before a minister or Judge and announced that they wished to get married, and he performed the ceremony, before witnesses, and made a record of the event. Later they had to have a license.

TUCKER, MISS AUGUSTA

INTERVIEW

7466

23

I remember one old timer thought he could still get his license in Paris, Texas, and have the ceremony performed in Indian Territory. That was in 1902, so when the preacher faced them, he told them that they would have to use the license in Texas. They all got in a hack and crossed Red River into Texas, and then had to hunt another preacher over there. The one over here could not marry people over there.

Another time, a young fellow who lived four miles west of Doakville, was going to marry a girl four miles east of Doakville, and he had invited me to attend the wedding. He led a horse for me to ride. When we got there, he found that he had forgotten his license and left it at home. The wedding party waited until some one rode the eight miles and back with the license. The bride rode my horse to her new home, and friends took me back home. It made the wedding about two hours late, so, while they were waiting for the license, we consumed the splendid wedding supper before, instead of after, the ceremony.