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L.W. Wilson,
Journalist,
March 10, 1938.

An Interview with Mr. E. F. Vann,
Muskogee, Oklahoma.

I am the son of Turnip and Martha Vann and I was born in the Flint District of the Cherokee Nation of the Indian Territory, June 20, 1870. The present location of my birth-place would be in Adair County near the present town of Stilwell. I am a full blood Cherokee Indian and am now the day jailer at the Muskogee County Jail in Muskogee.

My father was born in North Carolina about 1825, and my mother's name was Martha Hood before her marriage and she was born in Georgia, September 14, 1833. My father is now dead and is buried some few miles south of Stilwell. My mother is also dead and is buried in McIntosh County, near Checotah.

In 1890 I married a white woman of the name of Alice Metheney who was born in Crawford County, Arkansas, June 8, 1876.

My father and grandfather moved to Georgia before the removal of the Cherokees to the Indian Territory from North Carolina and my mother's parents lived in Georgia. There has

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been much told to me by my parents and grandparents as to the way in which the Cherokees were treated and were driven from their homes in Georgia, all of which history has recorded; however I feel that I should say my parents were of two different clans or factions. My mother's parents were favorable to the Treaty or the Ridge Party and on account of a treaty made with the United States Government, my mother's people were moved west by the Government, by steamboat and wagons and settled in Western Arkansas, north of the present town of Fort Smith, in 1835. Mother was but a baby two years old at this time. These Cherokees were called Emigrants or the Western Cherokees.

My father's people would not abide by the treaty and were known as members of the Anti-treaty or Ross Party who refused to leave their homes back in Georgia, because the land was fertile and had many improvements and furthermore because their loved ones were buried there. In all, the members of the Ross or Anti-treaty party were satisfied and content in Georgia and did not care to take up new homes in a country of which they knew nothing. All the story of their sufferings in Georgia and along the Trail of Tears has already been written. My father

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while only thirteen years old came on the Trail of Tears with his parents and while on this trail, he lost one of his brothers. Father's people settled in the Flint District where I was born. It was in 1838 that this removal occurred and it was only a few years until my mother's people who had settled in Arkansas were again compelled to move into the confines of the Indian Territory. They settled in the Flint District where Father and Mother grew up and were married.

I have heard my grandparents and parents say, that after the troublesome times of enforced migration and settlement in their new lands in Indian Territory, there followed at last a period of peace and prosperity among the Cherokees. The younger Indians such as Father and Mother became reconciled to the change but my grandparents never did.

The country of the Cherokee Nation was thinly populated and wild game was abundant. The Cherokees had plenty of cattle, horses, oxen, swine and some sheep, most of which ran upon the open range of woodland and prairie. They tilled small fields of cotton and corn. In some instances the Indians were slave owners, having brought their negro slaves with them.

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White men had intermarried among the Cherokees and many families were of mixed Indian and white descent. Many of the families of mixed blood were well-to-do and their children were sent back East to be educated.

Most of the people lived in log cabins of one or two rooms, some of which had only dirt floors while some were puncheon floors. In almost all these cabins there was a large stone or stick and mud fireplace. The wealthier mixed blood and full blood families lived in larger houses of frame, log, brick, or stone which were equal to homes back in the states during this period.

The people lived a simple life and much of what they had to eat and wear was produced at home. They killed and cured their own beef, pork and venison. They dried their meat by placing it on scaffolds and under the scaffolds they would keep smouldering fires allowing the smoke to pass over and around the meat to keep away flies and insects while the sun did the drying. They ground their own corn in a mortar with a pestle or ram. They picked the seeds from cotton by hand. Cotton and wool were carded, spun and woven into cloth, and spinning wheels and hand looms were found in nearly every

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well-regulated home.

People were hospitable and delighted to entertain friends and neighbors. Their social affairs and popular sports consisted of picnics, fishing parties, horse racing ball plays, fox hunts and house raisings as well as Stomp dances and church going.

In the Flint District and in surrounding districts except in the clearings which were being tilled, the country was still in its original condition, a hill country of forest with small areas of prairie scattered through it. It seemed the entire country abounded in wild game, deer, bear, opossum, raccoon, wild hogs, wild cattle, wild horses, bob cats, squirrels, rabbits, wild turkeys, quail, prairie chickens and wild pigeons. Antelope and buffalo were on the great prairies to the west in what was called the Cherokee Strip and which could be reached from the Cherokee Nation a three or four days journey. Many hunting parties were formed to go hunt buffalo in what the hill Cherokees called the buffalo country.

All species of soft water fish were abundant in the creeks and rivers and particularly in the Barren Fork and Illinois River.

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Wild bees were common and the Indians could have plenty of honey by cutting down a "bee tree" and robbing the bees of their treasure.

Each Fall many nuts were gathered such as pecans, walnuts, hazel nuts, and chinquapins as well as hickory nuts. Hickory nuts were crushed in a mortar with a pestle and after they were well crushed were placed in a vessel of water and the grease was skimmed off and used for shortening. Sometimes the kernels were picked out and crushed into a butter similar to the present day peanut butter. The Cherokees called this "Camuchi".

Some orchards were planted but not many because there were plenty of wild fruits and berries such as plums, grapes, seedling peaches, dewberries, huckleberries and a number of others.

The Cherokees had a tribal form of government, with Chief John Ross as their Principal Chief, up to and including the days of the Civil War. There were three branches of the Cherokee government-Executive, Legislative and Judicial. People manifested great interest in political affairs and the campaigns before each election of tribal officials were hotly contested.

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Trade and travel between the Indian Territory and the states was done by steamboats which plied the Arkansas River between Fort Gibson, Webbers Falls, Tamaha, Pleasant Bluff, Fort Smith, Arkansas and other cities in the states. At the arrival of a steamboat at an Indian Territory landing nearly everyone in the trading settlement would go down to meet it for these boats carried passengers, mail and freight. From the boat landings the cargoes were hauled to inland points by freight wagons, trains and stages.

Missions and schools increased at the instance of missionaries who came to this country with the Indians. Many Indians received some education in the mission schools, completed their education at colleges back in the states and returned to the Indian Territory and took up teaching. Mother's father, my grandfather, David Hood told me that the Cherokees had a Bible Society and a Temperance Society as early as 1845 or '46, seven years after the trek over the Trail of Tears.

At the outbreak of the Civil War the Cherokees were in good condition and did not care to enter what they called a "white men's war", saying that they had had trouble enough

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with the white men in the years past.

Many white men as I have said had married into the Cherokee Tribe and many of these men were from Southern states and owned slaves and along with these Cherokees were the Cherokees of the Treaty Party or the Emigrants among whom were my mother's people. All of the Full Bloods of the Anti-treaty or Ross Party were in favor of the Federal Union and my father's people belonged to that faction, but as time passed the Cherokees were compelled to take part in the Civil War.

The Federal garrisons at Forts Smith, Washita, Arbuckle and Cobb were withdrawn from the territory and marched into Kansas under Colonel Wm. H. Emory.

The Confederate States sent Albert Pike into the Territory to enlist the Cherokees in the Southern Army. The Confederates forces had now seized Fort Smith, and Confederate troops from Texas occupied Forts Washita, Arbuckle and Cobb.

About this time annuities were due the Cherokees from the Government but these payments were withheld. The Civil War was now under way and troops were organized in both the Union and Confederate armies.

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My grandfather, Jim Vann, my father, Tumip Vann, and a fellow who was a close friend of Father's joined up with the Union and my grandfather on Mother's side, David Hood, and his brother, Henry Hood, joined up with the Confederates. Jim Vann and Father fought in the battles at Cane Hill, Arkansas, near Springfield, Missouri and at Honey Springs. They had been stationed at Fort Gibson under General Blunt before the battle on Elk Creek at Honey Springs.

The only major battle in which my folks fought in the Confederate Army was with Stand Watie at Honey Springs. It is terrible to think and realize how my folks fought each other at Honey Springs but I am glad to say that none of them were killed and all returned home after the War, and settled down again with relatives in the Flint District to start life anew.

Reconstruction

The end of the War found the Cherokees in a pitiable condition with their homes burned, fields grown up with weeds, live stock eaten or driven off and hogs and cattle wild in the cane brakes.

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It was only the next year after the war that the Principal Chief of the Cherokees, John Ross, died in Washington and his body was returned to Park Hill for burial.

Slaves were freed, and made citizens with full tribal rights because the North had won the War. Railroads were permitted to build through the territory and Congress was empowered to establish a Territorial government with an Inter-tribal Legislative Council. The Cherokees bitterly opposed all of this and the fact that there were two factions of Cherokees tended to defeat the purpose of the Peace Council.

It took about ten or twelve years after the end of the Civil War for the Cherokees to re-establish themselves and to recover from the effects and losses of the Civil War. Their lives and customs were about the same at this point, as they had been some ten years before the Civil War.

The MK & T Railroad was built across Indian Territory from Kansas to Texas in 1871-72-73, and what is now the Frisco Railroad built from Missouri to Vinita to the MK & T junction at about the same time. The Iron Mountain Railroad

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was built from Van Buren, Arkansas, to Coffeyville through the Territory in 1886 and 1887. The Kansas City and Southern was built in 1894 as was the Choctaw, Oklahoma and Gulf, now the Rock Island.

Soon lands were taken from the Cherokees on which wild Indians were placed on reservations. From the close of the Civil War the Cherokees continued to lose their lands in first one way and then another until allotments were made by the Dawes Commission.

In my boyhood days people plowed with oxen, used crude deer tongues made of wood and then finally got little plows called twisters. My folks continued using oxen when I was about sixteen years old. The first turning plow I ever saw was when I was thirteen years old. It was what one would call today a pony plow.

Mother went to Fort Smith one time and came back with the plow. I shall never forget this plow nor the first cook stove Mother got at Fort Smith. I was then twelve years old. The Indians came for miles to see the stove. We always cooked in the fireplace or on an open fire before the stove came into our home. When I was just a boy my job before each meal was to

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grind the coffee in a little old box hand coffee mill.

Coffee was parched or roasted by Mother as green coffee was all one could buy. Many times we parched corn and used that for coffee and sometimes Mother made a drink which she called wheat coffee. I used to have to peel pumpkins, cut the pulp up into cubes and lay these cubes out on our roof to dry. I liked pumpkin bread and Mother had no trouble getting me to do this work.

I used to help pick out the cotton seeds as there were no gins and I helped to run the spinning wheel and the old hand loom in making cloth. I loved to hunt and fish. I would gig fish or shoot them with a bow and arrows and I killed birds with a blowgun made from cane and I killed large game with a cap and ball rifle. I bought gun caps and powder at the store, some bar lead and moulded my own rifle balls.

My clothes were home spun and gloves were knitted by Mother as were my socks. I wore moccasins some and finally got shoes. We used to buy shoe peg wood at the store; this was box elder wood cut just right for shoe pegs and I had to whittle out shoe pegs from this wood to repair our shoes.

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Our shoe last was made of wood and later we got the iron lasts.

I also helped to make soap; we had an ash hopper, saved the ashes and let water run through the ashes so as to make a lye water and by adding greases and boiling same, Mother and I made fair soap.

Every three or four months we would take our big iron kettle and go to the salt springs over near Little Lees Creek north of the present town of Long, and make salt. We would place the salt water in the kettle, build a fire under the kettle and boil the water out leaving the salt.

Most of my schooling was at the Brown Springs School in the Flint District which would be located today near the town of Bunch, on old highway No. 17. My teachers were Frank Sanders, Amanda Sanders, Maggie Hanks and Ludi Starr. After I was grown I attended the Boys Seminary at Tablequah for some time and remember one of my teachers, a Mrs. Sevier.

Mother took me to church with her when I was a little chap and even on up to my late teens. Church was held at the homes of neighbors or at the schoolhouse. Some of the preachers were John Sevier a Methodist, John Smallwood,

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Presbyterian, John Ross also a Presbyterian and an Indian named Gettindown, a Baptist.

The first gin and sawmill I ever saw was one mile east of Joe Bowers Nine Mile road house on the old Military Road near Fort Smith. It was owned by a man named Alexander. It was a one stand gin operated by water. The cotton was fed into the stand by hand and tramped down into the press and finally a little buckskin mule turned down the press screw until it was the desired size when it was bagged and tied. The capacity of this gin was about three bales per day with good luck and no break downs. The sawmill was also a water mill. I might say the gin and mill were on Camp Creek.

I had to work a great deal when only a mere boy for Father died when I was quite young and Mother depended a great deal on me. I can't say I was like the rest of the little Indians because my mother had adopted many of the characteristics of the white people and she ruled over me.

Fords and Ferries

The Morgan Ferry crossed the Arkansas River near the present highway bridge between Fort Smith and Oklahoma. It

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was first a pole ferry, then a cable ferry. It was first owned by Gid and Frank Morgan and later by the Payne brothers. A cable ferry crossed the Arkansas at the present town of Tamaha and a pole and later a cable ferry crossed the Canadian River near the present town of Briartown.

Stage Lines

I used to go to Fort Smith and from there I would go to visit friends at Fishertown and at Eufaula. The stage coach left Fort Smith by way of the old military road and left the mail at Joe Bowers on Camp Creek about eight miles out of Fort Smith and continued on to the John and Nancy Childers Stand a short distance south of the present town of Sallisaw.

At the Childer's Stand, the horses were fed, watered and rested for their return trip to Fort Smith. The mail left for Childer's Station and the luggage was unloaded onto another stage after the passengers had eaten and the trip continued across Drake Prairie about four miles south of the present town of McKey and on to the ferry crossing the Arkansas River where the next stop and change was at Webbers Falls.

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The Vann Stand made the transfer and a new stage carried us to the next stop which was Fishertown, mail and passengers cared for, the trip was continued to Texanna for a brief stop for passengers and mail. The stage forded the South Canadian River into Eufaula, Fishertown was on the old Texas Road and no longer exists.

Ghost Towns

The town of Mayes located some four or five miles south of the present town of Stilwell was a thriving, active little village in the '80's and I remember some of the merchants as being William Littlejohn, John Sharp, Bill Taylor, George Taylor and Ben Fletcher. The town of Dannenburg was some few miles north of the present town of Stilwell and I remember Henry Dannenburg as the leading merchant there. These two towns Mayes and Dannenburg became ghost towns after the Kansas City Southern Railroad built through the Indian Territory and the town of Stilwell sprang up. Fishertown was located east of the present town of Eufaula on the old Texas Road and I remember that one of the Fishers operated a store and the other ran a blacksmith shop. This little village eventually passed out, the population going to Eufaula.

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The town of Manard was located on the old Fort Gibson and Tahlequah Road on Manard Bayou. This town no longer exists.

It might be said that stores in these ghost towns at one time handled complete lines of merchandise including hardware, shoes, clothing, and they traded merchandise for hides and furs. Some articles were handled then that would be difficult to purchase today such as side saddles, big eyed hoes, shoe peg wood, hoops, bustles, rats, brass toed boots, hat pins, buggy and ox whips, gun caps, gun powder and bullet moulds.

Caves and Mounds

I remember a cave well, that I used to visit many times when a boy. It could be located today as being about one mile north and east of Lyons' Switch on the Kansas City Southern Railroad which is between Bunch and Stilwell. I have been in this cave many times and once inside of it I found that it has many rooms. The rock walls of this cave bear many inscriptions in the Cherokee language and other inscriptions that I always presumed to be, and was told, were written in Spanish. The drawings in this cave make

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one believe that years before the coming of the Cherokees Spaniards once haunted this cave. I particularly remember that a spring which crossed the floor of one of the rooms, sank down into the solid rocks and at a place about a quarter of a mile from the cave the water from this spring came to the surface of the earth.

Murderers and Outlaws

About nine miles north and west of Sallisaw in Sequoyah County on Dry Creek which could be located today as being about three miles east of Marble City was what was known to the country side as a Robbers' Roost. Two men known as "Spade Sunshine" and "Bear Grinnett" used this place as their hang out. I remember that in a drunken fracas among the gangs of these men Bear Grinnett killed Sam Hawks at Robbers' Roost.

In after years Ned Christie killed Bear over the killing of Hawks and later killed his best man Joe Eagle. Ned Christie was accused of killing a man named Maples at the Spring in Tahlequah. The law tried to capture Ned Christie by burning his cabin and home on two occasions but failed; although it was claimed that the Indian Police and the United States Marshal killed little Arch Christie as he fled from one

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of the fires but that is not true regardless of what some still living may say for I myself saw Arch after Ned Christie was killed by Ben Knight and other officers. Ned Christie was buried near the village of Wauhatchie.

Other murderers and outlaws whom I knew were Bill Pigeon, "Old" Tom Starr, Zeke Proctor, Cherokee Bill, Henry Starr and the Cook Gang. I could tell of others but will refrain for some of their children are living today and are honorable citizens.

Turkey Roost and
Wild Animal Haunts.

A short way from the Brown Spring School, the school which I attended was a turkey roost and it seemed that turkeys came to roost here faster than they could be killed out by the Indians and others.

Many deer and wild hogs roamed along Dry Creek which could be located today as being between Bunch and Bolivar.

United States Marshals

The marshals in the Indian Territory whom I recall as operating in the Flint and Sequoyah Districts who reported to Federal Judge Parker were Jim Cole, Jim Rogers, Ed Fryer, Jim Williams and Charlie Rhodes.

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Indian Police

The Indian Police in the Cherokee Nation as I first remember them wore uniforms and were easily distinguished at a distance. These uniforms were dark blue blouses and trousers trimmed with brass buttons. The trousers had black stripes down the legs. They wore brown hats which were similar to the present army campaign hats. They carried six shooters and rifles. I believe their salaries were \$50.00 per month plus their uniforms and their transportation was paid for in some instances. They reported directly to the Cherokee Indian Agent and were paid by the Cherokee Government. Some of the police whom I knew were Dick Taylor, Henry Houseburg, John West, John Brown, Jim Thompson and Zere Proctor.

Indians Weapons

The proverbial bow and arrow was the most used weapon in the early days but many owned cap and ball rifles which were used for killing large game like deer, bobcats and bear. Almost every little Indian boy had a blowgun with which he killed birds. The blowgun was a piece of cane five or six feet long in which was placed a small arrow and the arrow was

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shot by blowing into the cane.

Indian Paints

The Indians painted their faces with a weed known to them as the paint weed, leaving the color red. They also painted their bows and arrows with this weed when red was desired. In some instances the face was marked with soft stones making it brown or slate colored.

Indian Dyes

We dyed our thread the desired color after spinning it and before it was woven into cloth. Walnut hulls made a dark brown or tan, indigo made all shades of blue and paint weeds made all colors of red and pink.

Indian Medicine

In every community there were one or more Medicine Men and Mid-wives. Many remedies prepared by the Medicine Men were held as profound secrets by them but nearly every Indian knew that boneset would purge him and that snake root would also. To break chills and fever the Indians used butterfly root. Mullein was used to make cough medicine. Catnip was made into a tea for babies and sassafras bark was used as a blood purifier.

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Indian Arts

Some of the Cherokees were very artistic and in late years have become great painters. In the early days they made bowls from clay in which they ate their food. I, myself, have eaten many times from home-made bowls and cups and saucers made of clay. Nearly all the men made their own pipes from clay and used small cane for pipestems. Small statues of horses, cows, birds and other animals were made from clay. I know of homes completely furnished by home-made furniture such as chairs and beds.

Indian Marriages

There was a method for marriage prescribed by the Cherokee Government pertaining to securing a certificate of marriage and completed by any minister but up in my country few people were married in this way. A Cherokee would girl or boy pick his or her choice and the couple would start living together. The Cherokees made true and loyal husbands and wives, there simply were no such things as separation and divorces.

Indian Burial

The Cherokees as far back as I have been told about

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their customs always buried their dead in the ground as they do today. I have known of instances where they would bury with the body, if a man, things he had in his pockets when he was taken sick. Things like his knife, pipe, tobacco if he had any money, his eyes would be closed and pieces of money placed on them.

Indian Laws and Courts

The Cherokee Nation was divided into nine districts. In each district there was a court house and a whipping post. A judge, a prosecuting attorney and a sheriff and his force were the law enforcement agencies.

In my district, the Flint District there was two story frame court house which was located near the present town of Lyons, on the Kansas City Southern Railroad and about one hundred yards from the court house stood a large oak tree which was used for a whipping post. Judge Lon Lynch served as judge of this district for years and the Prosecuting Attorney was Ellis Starr. Some of the sheriffs elected from time to time were Tom Taylor, Charlie Smith and Dick Taylor.

If a person was found guilty of a crime he was sentenced to receive a certain number of lashes at the whipping post. I remember an Indian who was known by all as "Saddle Blanket"

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who stole a hog and was lashed. In the Cherokee Nation a murderer was hung and the sheriff had charge of the execution. A scaffold was built at the whipping post and the last man hung in this district was a man named Murphy who had committed a murder.

Dawes Commission

The Dawes Commission began to operate in the early '90's or about the date of sale when the Cherokee Strip was to be opened for settlement by white people in 1893. Engineering parties began to lay off the whole Cherokee Nation into sections, townships and townsites. A man of the name of John Lynch was pilot for one of these parties. W. H. Hastings at that time was one of the office employees.

After the surveys were made the Commission began to enroll all the citizens of the Cherokee tribe, with the intention of making allotments of land to each of them at the opportune time, doing away with the owning of the Cherokee lands by the tribe in common. The lands were appraised at from 50 cents to \$6.00 per acre, and the basis of the allotment provided that no one enrolled could own more than about \$300.00 worth of land. Everyone had his right to

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take the land on which he lived if he so chose; this was because he was entitled to the improvements which he had placed on his land.

In due time allotments were made and the Cherokee Tribal Laws began to slip out of existence.

Payments and Annuities

At the time of the Civil War and before, payments were due the Emigrants for their concessions in Georgia before moving West according to a treaty made with the United States Government but these annuities were not paid until after Statehood as I remember it now when my mother, an emigrant, received then a sum of money the exact amount of which I do not recall.

The Cherokee Strip was sold in 1893 and if I am correct each Cherokee received \$363.20 about the year 1897 or 1898. The Strip payment was made at advantageous points in the nine districts on different dates. I received mine at Webbers Falls.

As I understand it, the money came to the Nations Capital at Tahlequah and from there it was distributed to the other districts. The money was hauled in boxes loaded on wagons

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to Webbers Falls, guarded by Indian Agents, Indian Police and Indian Sheriffs.

Before the Strip payment was made I received small sums from \$10.00 to \$20.00 at different times. Some people called these payments "bread money" but they were better known as "headrights". The money received was for pasture license, permits and other little moneys collected by the Cherokee Government.