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Gomer Gower,
Interviewer,
September 14, 1937.

An interview with Mr. Joe Ward,
Spiro, Oklahoma.

Joe Ward was born some three miles east of old Scullyville on September 15, 1855, and has lived his entire life near the place where he was born.

His father, Jerry Ward, a full-blood Choctaw, served as Sheriff in the new Choctaw Nation before County and District sub-divisions were made.

His mother, Eliza Ward, also a full-blood Choctaw, was brought from Mississippi with her family in 1833, landing at Fort Coffee on the Arkansas River.

Unscrupulous white men from the states would congregate at Scullyville for the purpose of taking the money of the Indians away from them after a payment had been made to the Indians by the Federal Government. On one of these occasions, two white men had been found fleecing the Indians outright and were placed under arrest by Sheriff Ward who proposed taking them to Fort Smith and turning them over to the Federal authorities. Just before starting for Fort Smith, he left the two men seated in the buggy for a moment while he stepped into

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a close-by store for a plug of chewing tobacco, taking his Winchester with him. On coming out of the store he saw that both men were running away and had succeeded in reaching a point some two hundred yards from him. A short distance further they would have reached brushy swamp land where they could have possibly evaded re-capture.

The sheriff commanded them to stop and upon their continued running, he quickly took aim and in turn killed both these men. This episode served to convince everyone that Sheriff Ward was a man whose office must be respected and the practice of stealing from the Indians was reduced to a minimum as a result.

The soil in the vicinity of Scullyville, a loose sandy loam, was particularly adapted to the raising of sweet potatoes and these, together with a patch of corn, composed the principal crops.

Their cattle provided them with beef and milk and butter in abundance. Shooting matches would be held at intervals in which a beef animal would be the prize. The entrance fee for the match would be based upon the value for beef of the particular animal and the number of contestants

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entering the match. Thus; if ten men entered the contest and the animal was worth twenty dollars, the fee for each contestant would be two dollars. The winner would be given his choice of both quantity and whichever part of the beef he chose; however, none of the contestants would be permitted to go home empty-handed, regardless of their inferior marksmanship. This sport, together with Indian Ball games, pony racing and hunting were the usual diversions, all of which were enjoyed in the true Indian fashion. The Indians scoffed at the carefully prepared race track of the white man and preferred a level place on the prairie on which to match the speed of their ponies.

The stakes would often be a calf, or saddle or mayhap the ponies themselves. There were no periods of training of the ponies such as was the custom of the Whites. When a race was arranged the Indians would merely agree upon the terms, select a suitable stretch of ground and the race would be run wholly upon the merits of the ponies.

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Many of the Choctaw Indians still feel resentful of the proceedings which took the Indian laws away from them and substituted the laws of the white men. They feel keenly the loss of their tribal existence which they enjoyed so freely before the division of their lands and regret the absorption of the Choctaws, once a proud and happy tribe, into the white race.