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James R. Carselowey
Journalist
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Interview with Nancy Brown West,
Spavinaw, Oklahoma.

Old Indian Days.

My name is Nancy Brown West. I was born at Topeka, Kansas, June 18, 1858. My father's name was John Brown, a quarter blood Cherokee Indian who came to the Indian Territory from Georgia shortly after the Eastern Emigrants arrived here, and went to Topeka, Kansas, to find work. It was there he married my mother, and they came back to the Indian Territory in 1870, and settled near Coffeyville, Kansas, in the Cherokee Nation.

~~I received most of my education in the Cherokee National~~
Schools, after we came back to the Territory and my father died at the place we settled, south of Coffeyville, on the Territory side of the line.

After my father's death my mother moved to the home of her brother-in-law, Cy Brown, two miles west of the present town of Spavinaw to take care of his children, as his wife had died about the same time my father did. She remained with him until she had raised his children.

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In 1876 I was married to John D. West a Cherokee, who was born in 1852, two miles west of Spavinaw. His father's name was James West and he was the father of seven children; Mat, Bill, Sill, John D., James, Eliza A. and Laura. Eliza first married John Martin, who died, and she then married Vet Thompson. Laura was married to a man by the name of Gray.

We lived on the place settled by my father-in-law, James West fifty-three years. The elder West built the first two rooms of hewed pine logs, with a hall 10 feet wide between them. The first part of the house was built many years before the Civil War. There was an old time fireplace at each end of the building, and after the war we built two additional rooms of the same kind of hewed pine logs. The old house is still standing.

We are the parents of fifteen children, as follows: John, Lola, Edith, Dewitt, Pearl, Lillie, ElNora, Newt, Bert, Ruth, Cora, Callie, Ora and two that died in infancy.

When I first came to Spavinaw in 1876 there were no stores located here, although it was an old land mark, having become widely known by its water mill which was located here before

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the Civil War. There was no other mill located closer than within thirty miles of the Spavinaw Mill, and early day settlers rode horseback and carried their corn behind their saddles as far away as the Kansas line.

Bill West, brother of my husband, was the first storekeeper, having opened a store in 1886 at his residence about two blocks northeast of the old water mill. Prior to that time we had to drive to Vinita, about twenty-five miles, to do our trading, and there wasn't much to select from after we went. We could cross the Grand River at Island Ford, on a direct line to Vinita when the river was fordable, but when up we had to go to Brown's Ferry about eight or ten miles up the river to get across. The old Brown Ferry is among the few ferries on the river that are still in operation, and at the present time it is making money for its owners faster than it ever did since the Civil War.

Grand River Dam makes Business good.

The old Brown Ferry, founded and located at the same spot before the Civil War, by Tom Brown, is now owned and operated by P. D. DeFord. For the past several years DeFord

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has made a scant living from his little ferryboat, on account of bridges over Grand River, located on either side of the ferry some six or eight miles in each direction up and down the river, but fate played into his hand when the Grand River Dam Authority decided to build the dam over the Grand just one mile south of his ferry, and on a direct line between the two boom towns of Ketchum and Disney. As soon as the Supreme Court made it known that the act was a legal one according to law, business got so good that this veteran river man couldn't begin to handle the traffic that poured into Ketchum and Disney to view the site where the \$20,000,000.00 project was to be built. DeFord's Little ferry could only carry three cars across the river at one time, for which he received a fee of 25¢. The traffic became so great on the first few Sundays, that he raised the price to 50¢ per car, on Sunday only, but that didn't stop them. Each Sunday found cars waiting in line for over a half mile to cross the river on the little ferryboat, to get just one glimpse of the site where the dam was to be built. Tags on the cars showed the visitors to be from many of the far-away states of the Union.

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New Boat built and Launched.

DeFord has seen his business grow from 60 cars a month to approximately 300 cars per day, and as it grew larger everyday he set about to build a larger boat. Being a carpenter himself, he hired help and in a few weeks erected a ferryboat 26 by 65 feet, capable of transporting twelve cars across the river at one time. The new boat is equipped with a motor and will make the trip across the river in ten minutes. The cars have been lined up on each side going and coming, and he carries a load each way, just as fast as he can load and unload them. The loading and unloading is estimated to take 3 minutes more. It is just one mile from the ferry to the new town of Disney. The distance around to either of the bridges is so great, that no one attempts to make the long drive, and since the new boat has been put in operation, it is keeping the traffic pretty well on the move.

Boat Breaks Cable.

When the new ferryboat was launched from the foot of the large bluff, where it was built, it went into the river with

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such force that it broke the cable and upset, and it took fifteen men three days to right the boat.

First Post Office at Spavinaw.

The first post office was established in Spavinaw in 1886 shortly after Bill West put in his store, and a man by the name of Guy was the first postmaster. The mail was carried on horseback from Salina, the first town in the Indian Territory to be settled by white settlers.

The next public spirited move that was made to build a town at Spavinaw was to build a schoolhouse. Pine logs were plentiful all over the Spavinaw hills in those days and as there was a large settlement of Indians up and down Spavinaw Creek, they got together, hewed logs and built a good log schoolhouse, and then secured a National school here which has been run continuously ever since.

A few years later Love Bumgarner, another Cherokee Indian, opened a store in Spavinaw, and continued in business here for several years. He sold out sometime in the nineties and moved to Vinita, where he bought the first Masonic building to be built in Vinita and opened a hotel, which he called

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the Sequoyah Hotel, after the famous inventor of the Cherokee alphabet. He continued to run his hotel until his death, when his wife sold the place and moved to Muskogee.

William Penn Adair had Post Office

Before Spavinaw got a post office we got our mail across Grand River at Colonel William Penn Adair's place. The name of the post office was "Oo-tah-see-ta" and Sue Adair, wife of William Penn Adair, was the postmistress.

Colonel Adair spent much of his time in Washington, representing the Cherokee Nation, and his wife stayed on the farm and kept things moving, possibly better than Colonel Adair himself. Before the war they had owned slaves enough to conduct a large plantation, but when the negroes were set free they had to resort to hired hands.

Everybody called Mrs. Adair "Colonel Sue". She kept as high as twenty hired hands, after losing her slaves, and was said to be a hard master to work for, but she always paid well, and had no trouble in keeping hands. The last time I heard of Colonel Sue, only a few years ago, she was living in Eufaula, and was almost 90 years old. She was still able to walk up

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town five or six blocks and carry her own groceries home, and did her own cooking and house work. Colonel Sue never saw the time she was afraid of work, and when young and plenty able to hire all the help she wished, she very likely did as much as any of her servants.

The old William Penn Adair place was located on the west side of Grand River, near the present site of the Greenbriar schoolhouse, about eight miles southeast of the present town of Adair, which town was named in honor of the once famous lawyer.

Oo-Cha-La-Ta had store.

Oo-cha-la-ta, later known as Charles Thompson, had a store on Spavinaw Creek, about fourteen miles northwest of the present town of Spavinaw, and in the early days older ^{settlers} than myself say it was known as Spavinaw, but shortly before Statehood a post office was established there, and it was named Eucha, after the famous Indian Chief.

Oo-cha-la-ta was elected Chief in 1875 and served four years. In 1887 he was elected on the ticket with Colonel L. B. Bell and served in the senate two years.

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Old Water Mill had Saw Attachment

The old water mill, located on Spavinaw Creek had a saw attachment and my husband was the sawyer. They secured pine logs from the Spavinaw hills, which were all around the town and he sawed the lumber for the first house built in Vinita, after the railroad came through there. It was built by Oce Trott, an early day Cherokee settler and John Reed, now living at Strang, hauled the logs.

Made Wheel for old Water Mill.

My husband was a good carpenter, and made a new wheel for the old water mill after years of service had worn and rotted the old one out. It was a huge wheel made of sawed pine timber bolted together, and was the sole power for running the mill. Water from a natural water fall on Spavinaw Creek poured into cups on this huge wheel, causing it to turn, and as the wheel turned over the water was poured out and re-filled as it went around. There was never a lack of power on this spot and it was conducted until about 1923 when Spavinaw Creek was swallowed up by the huge Spavinaw Lake, which was built to supply the city of Tulsa with water. At that time a flour and grist mill

was being operated by the old water mill. It is now operated by machinery.

Another old house gives way to Lake

Bill West, Spavinaw's first storekeeper, was another old time Cherokee to give up his old homestead to make way for the New Spavinaw Lake built in 1923. He had a very fine old hewed log house, four rooms, with a fireplace in each room, that was torn down, and a boat landing is now located in his yard.

Bill West and all of the rest of my husband's brothers and sisters are dead now and buried in the West Cemetery on Lynch's Prairie, except James West, who is buried in the Spavinaw Cemetery. Jim was always a funny turned man, and moved up on Lynch's Prairie to be away from the rest of his brothers. The family cemetery was located on his place, and all of his brothers were placed there, but when he died, his request was to be buried at Spavinaw away from the rest of the boys.

Railroad comes in 1913.

No one knows, who has not been isolated from a railroad all their lives, what it means to hear a train whistling

within eight miles of their place. There was great rejoicing in 1913 when the first Kansas Oklahoma and Gulf train whistled into this community, and railroad officials came to Strang and drove a golden spike to commemorate the completion of the road eight miles west of Spavinaw. It was as though it was coming to our front door, and I took the second train by to go to Joplin to visit my relatives.