

WILLIAMS, JENNIE BRYAN

INTERVIEW

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James R. Carselowey,  
Interviewer  
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INTERVIEW WITH JENNIE BRYAN WILLIAMS  
414 North Second St., Vinita, Okla.

My name is Jennie Bryan Williams. I live at 414 North Second Street, Vinita, Oklahoma. I was born in Saline District, Cherokee Nation, Indian Territory, on October 22, 1849, and I am now eighty-six years old.

My father's name was Colonel Joel Mayes Bryan. He was born in Georgia in 1809, and came to the Indian Territory with the old settler Cherokees, and was a Cherokee by blood, of the Cherokee Nation.

I was reared by my father and did not know my mother, but he told me my mother was a great granddaughter of Major Curry, a Scotchman.

When the Civil War broke out my father was pretty well fixed as a farmer and a merchant and he kept, and fed a large drove of horses for General McCullough, a Southern General, free of charge. Soon after the war started he raised a company of five or six hundred men for Gen. McCullough, and was made Captain of a Company and later was promoted to a Colonel.

## II

He took his wife and my half brother, Joel Mayes Bryan, Jr., and myself with him and went to the Choctaw Nation, where the Southern soldiers were stationed, and fought in several battles during the four years of the war, but none of them were in the Cherokee Nation.

His family went everywhere he went and camped, and ate hard tack crackers, beans and fat meat, until I thought we would starve.

I remember his hiring a new cook at one time, a man cook, who filled a pot full of beans, poured water on them, and when they started boiling they began to swell up. He got a tub and dipped them out, and by the time they were cooked he had as many in the tub as he had in the pot. I do not think he had ever cooked beans before.

HORSE SHOT FROM UNDER HIM

~~During one of the battles my father was in, he had his~~  
horse shot from under him, but was not hit himself. My father reared an orphan boy, by the name of Reuben Finley, and he was killed in battle, while fighting with the Southern soldiers.

HIS CHEROKEE TREASURY

John Ross was chief of the Cherokee Nation when the War broke out, and advised his people to remain neutral, but he could not get them to stay neutral. Some went North and some South, and

## III

there was a lot of strife, and some blood-shed between the two factions of Indians.

I have always heard that John Ross appointed a committee of men to hide the Cherokee Treasury, and that they buried it somewhere near Park Hill, south of Tahlequah, and that all of the men who hid the money were killed, but the money was never found.

I have been told that the enemy who killed one of the Committee was crowding him so closely that he chewed up the map showing where the money was buried, and swallowed it.

AN OLD LEGEND

An old legend has it that men have gone to hunt the hidden treasury near Park Hill and when they got to the place where they thought the money was hidden, and went to dig, that something like a strong arm would prevent the men from digging. This happened to several groups of men it was told, and finally they decided that if any man could dig up the money it would be Stick Ross, an old darkey living at Tahlequah. They went and got Stick and asked him if he was afraid of ghosts and he said he wasn't and was sure he could dig up the hidden treasury. However, the same thing happened to him that had happened to all the others. A strong arm seemed to hold both his arms down and he could not dig. It is said that the Cherokee Treasury has never been found.

AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

After the Civil War my father was so sure he could not live under the rule of the Northern side that he emigrated to Old Mexico. He remained there until John Ross, Chief of the Cherokees, died on August 1, 1866. William P. Ross succeeded him for a short time, until May 5, 1867, when Reverend Louis Downing, a southern man, was elected as Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation. He issued a proclamation that all Cherokees who were out of the country could return and take up their citizenship where they left off before the war. My father returned then and settled at Fort Gibson, a broke, but much wiser man.

OWED \$40,000 TO EASTERN MERCHANTS

My father had been in the mercantile business before the war, and owed eastern wholesale merchants a total of \$40,000 when he returned. They came to him wanting him to take the bankruptcy law, but he would not agree to do so, but made them a proposition. He said if they would furnish him more merchandise worth \$40,000, that he would pay them every cent he owed them. They agreed to it, and started him up in business at Fort Gibson, and he paid them every cent of the debt.

MADE ANOTHER \$50,000

Several years later he was employed as attorney for the Old Settler Cherokees, and spent eighteen years in Washington,

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D. C., attempting to collect an old war debt from the government, and finally succeeded. It was paid out per capita to the old settlers, and was the first big payment they had received from the Government, since their removal from Georgia in 1835.

My father received \$50,000 as his fee in this case, but had to give a bunch of senators \$20,000 to help win the case. My father died about three years after he won this suit, at the age of ninety-seven years.

JOEL MAYES BRYAN, JR.

My brother, Joel Mayes Bryan, Jr., who bore the same name as my father went back to Saline District, where we were born and reared, and spent the rest of his life there. He conducted a store a few miles north of the present town of Locust Grove for many years before there was any town at Locust Grove.