

WITCHER, ELIZABETH.

INTERVIEW

13636

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LEGEND & STORY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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WITCHER, ELIZABETH.

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Field worker's name Theodore R. Hamilton.

This report made on (date) April 18, 1958

1. This legend was secured from (name) Mrs. Elizabeth Witcher

Address McAlester, Oklahoma.

This person is (male or female) White, Negro, Indian,

If Indian, give tribe _____

2. Origin and history of legend or story _____

3. Write out the legend or story as completely as possible. Use blank sheets and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 4

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Theodore R. Hamilton,
Investigator.
April 18, 1938.

Interview with Elizabeth Witcher
McAlester, Oklahoma.

I was born on the site of the present town of Kansas City, Missouri, in November, 1848, and was the daughter of a freight wagon builder. I secured my schooling at the Lewis Academy in Independence, Missouri.

At the outbreak of the Civil War Father was one of the first to join up with the Union Army and was killed in action not long afterward by Jayhawkers, but a brother served during the entire war.

My name before marriage was Sage and I am of English descent. Not long after Father's death I moved to Topeka, Kansas, and it was here that I met and married John A.

Witcher, moving a few years later to a point in the Chickasaw Nation, known as the Sorghum Flats.

Sorghum Flats was only a single store building. There were no railroads through the country at the time except the MK&T and all of our goods had to be freighted out of Atoka, which was on the MK&T line. There was a pony express that delivered mail from Atoka.

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We raised a good bit of cotton which we sold or rather traded to the stores for other supplies and they in turn traded it to freighters who brought in other goods. Cornmeal was made by beating the dried grain between two flat boards. Wheat was sometimes ground this way, also.

It was not all work during those days. The Indians had their ball games and we also attended the meetings held by missionaries. They also hunted and fished much of the time. Sometimes the Indians would make the fish sick or drunk by throwing a lot of weeds known as Devil's Shoestring into the water. When the fish came to the top of the water they would catch them with their hands.

The Indians were always superstitious and if sick went to a herb doctor and whatever the doctor advised they would do. If an Indian was suspected of being a witch or a devil he was killed by the other Indians.

Outlaws and bandits were not so numerous in the Chickasaw Nation. Cattle buyers used to come up from Texas with their saddle bags filled with gold and silver and few of these buyers, as I remember, were ever robbed.

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We later moved from Sorghum Flats to Stonewall and I remember once two young outlaws tried to rob a store there. The owner's son saw them coming out of the building and ran to tell his father who fired on the bandits, killing one, but the other escaped.

A white man had to pay \$5.00 per year for a permit to live in the Chickasaw Nation. He was not allowed to own over ten head of cattle nor could he own any land but he was allowed to farm land. Many of the whites got around this difficulty by marrying an Indian and when this occurred they were known as squawmen. I remember one incident of this sort; a white man who was named Talkington came up from Texas and married an Indian woman. His first task was the building of a large corral of poles on his land, then while the Indian neighbors were off at camp meeting or somewhere else, Talkington would run their cattle into the corral and blot the brands, selling them later on as his own cattle. He got his reward though for one morning a rider happened to be passing near Talkington's home when his horse shied at something on a stump. The

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rider dismounted and found the object was Talkington's head which had been severed cleanly from his body. This was an Indian's way of warning others to take heed and do no rustling in their country.

Cattle drives were large and numerous in those days. I remember that I once saw a herd headed north that took half a day to pass our place. Sometimes a stampede would occur and the owners would have a hard time rounding the cattle up again.