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INTERVIEW WITH W. I. WORLEY
-922 So. F. St. Muskogee, Okla

FIELD WORKER L. W. WILSON.
April 29, 1937

A BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH.

I am 96 years old. I was born near Jonesville, Lee County, Virginia in 1841. I was old enough at the outbreak of the Civil War but was never in that war or any war during my lifetime. During the Civil War I was very delicate and sickly, and as Virginia was about the same between the north and south, neither side insisted or made me get in the army. I would take the team and wagon, go to mill and to town and would haul food and supplies for the women and children who had their men folks in the army. Sometimes in my wagon I would have food for families both of the north and of the south.

After the war I worked as a brakeman on the Norfolk and Western Railroad and on the old South Atlantic and Ohio Railroad.

Before coming to the territory in 1887, I had married, and my son was in his teens.

My wife's folks were of Cherokee descent. She was from North Carolina and after we married her folks left North Carolina for Texas. They were apparently separated, never

hearing from each other until one day the postmaster contacted us through their efforts and a correspondence was started. Mail was not handled as swiftly then as now for it had to be carried by pony express, stage coaches and steamboats as well as railroads. Time went on and her folks finally moved into the Indian Territory at Ft. Gibson. Naturally she wanted to see her folks and after I had bought a ticket for her and the boy to come to her folks at Ft. Gibson, Indian Territory, I only had a few dollars left and proceeded on foot myself. My wife and son traveled by rail all the way as the St. Louis, Iron Mountain Southern Railroad had just completed its line from Van Buren, Arkansas to Ft. Gibson, Indian Territory which was the end of the line at that time.

It took me three months and twenty days to walk from Jonesville Virginia, to Ft. Gibson, Indian Territory. When I reached Alabama, I stopped and worked about three weeks to make me a little money other than this time out, I was continually on the hike. I followed the line of the railroads.

I remember staying my first night in the Indian Territory

at Braggs, Indian Territory. I was so tired I could go no farther, having left Van Buren, Arkansas about an hour before daybreak and reaching Braggs, Indian Territory just at dark.

The next day I left Braggs and came to Boudinot Creek, where a section gang was at work. I inquired the distance to Ft. Gibson and he told me, my journey was nearing its end and I was happy to know that I would soon see my wife and son, if my legs would only last a little longer. I was 46 years old then and most men at this time consider themselves too old to get a job with the railroads and corporations but you see I was comparatively a young man to my present age.

As I walked on into Ft. Gibson I could not believe my eyes for I saw my boy cross the railroad track ahead of me. I shouted at him and he came running to me. I suppose you can imagine that reunion, if you have a family and have been away from them long. He and I soon found his mother, (my wife) and all the kin. It was a happy reunion. I was so tired and hungry and of course a meal was soon prepared. That night I slept like a babe. It was the first nights sleep I had for months, when I could lie down in perfect contentment. I always worried about them and at the end of each day's journey, though

tired and weary, my last thoughts were of my wife and boy.

Before my career as a railroad man, I had farmed and I knew how to farm.

The next day a man named Judge Walker needed a farm hand and I went to work for him. He had to pay \$1⁰⁰ per month to the Cherokee collector for a permit allowing me to work for him. My next job was farming for his son, Jack Walker, and while working for him, a permit of 75 cents was paid. The rest of my active life was spent on the farms and ranches in the Cherokee and Creek Nation.

The Cherokees had their tribal laws and their officers were elected for a term of 4 years. ~~Voters were all male persons and had to be 18 years old or older.~~ Elections were held under shade trees, in August. Those who could not write just told the Clerk who they wanted to vote for and these names were written down by the Clerk on a slip of paper and dropped in the box.

I never did vote because I was not a citizen of the tribe. My wife's people never voted, even though they were Cherokees because they had not been accepted as citizens. They tried a number of times to prove their citizenship but something always happened.

The Indians had no jails, but a whipping post and punishment was meted out to their criminals by so many lashes or the offender was shot. White criminals were captured by U. S. Marshals and taken to Ft. Smith, Ark. and tried by the U. S. Court, Judge Parker, presiding. Punishment was jail at the Federal Prison or hanging.

I never was arrested in my life.

The farm houses, barns and cribs were built of logs and the fences were usually split rails, stake and rider fences.

There were not many fences. Just the ones around the barn lots and orchards. There were some barbwire fences around Ft. Gibson but not back in the hills.

The lands were all owned in common and the live stock was all on open range. An Indian could farm all the land he wanted, if he did not infringe on his neighbor.

On the farm, we raised cotton and corn for market and cash crops. We always raised good gardens with a variety of all common vegetables.

With bread stuff, gardens, wild game and fowls, we all lived pretty good but of course had little money.

There was some mixed bloods that had large farm houses, orchards, large fields, mules, horses, cattle and hogs. This class was the rich, made off the full-bloods.

The full-bloods as a whole were poor folks, lived in log cabins, and only raised a few acres of corn and gardens in little clearings. Their live stock consisted of a horse or two, a cow, and a few hogs that ran in the woods and lived on the mast.

The Cherokees had good schools and they had a law where the Cherokee children had to attend school, it was compulsory. They had no excuse for they furnished free school books. They had schools all over the Nation and the buildings were usually built of logs. The teacher's salary in these schools was not much. They taught English in all the schools.

They had a national school, called the Female Seminary at Tahlequah. This was a beautiful building and had many able and capable teachers. The Boys Seminary was also a good building, south of Tahlequah near Park Hill. There was a Cherokee Asylum at the present location of the Sequoyah Training School and an Orphan Asylum near the present town of Salina, Oklahoma.

The Indians paid no taxes as we do now. Their officials and schools were paid and supported by license fees and annuities.

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Many whites and Indians inter-married. If a white man wanted to marry a Cherokee woman, the man had to get ten citizens of the tribe to vouch for his good character before a license would be issued. Of course a lot of them never so married, but lived together and these Indian women were known as common law wives, but they lost their citizenship in the tribe.

White people continued to pour into the Territory and subscription schools were built but these were poor schools; but better stores, hotels, churches came into their own, due to more railroads and easier contact with the states.

Our roads were poor, bridges few, and lots of hold-ups by the outlaws, cattle stealing and robberies of all kinds. Some of the ferries on some of the main roads were the Nevins Ferry that crossed the Arkansas River at the mouth of Grand River. It was owned by Julia and Mose Nevins.

The Junior Smith Ferry crossed the Arkansas river and cared for the people on the east side of the river in getting to their trading point at Braggs, Indian Territory out of the Gocseneck Bend District. It was owned by Junior Smith, father of our present Muskogee County Commissioner, Bud Smith. This ferry was out about 2 miles south and 10 miles east of Muskogee Indian Territory.

The Roger Ferry crossed the Arkansas River south of the present highway bridge on Highway 64, Muskogee to Ft. Gibson.

Rabbit Ford was down stream across the Arkansas river from Rogers Ferry.

French Ferry was across Grand River northwest of the fort at Ft. Gibson and was owned by Tom French.

On the old road from Ft. Gibson to Tahlequah was a little village of Maynard on Maynard Bayou, which would be about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile north and 1 mile east of the present Perkins school. This Bayou together with all creeks were forded. At the village was a store run by a Mr. Hendricks. I remember Pete Sparks as being one of the old stage drivers. It was on the Walker Place near Maynard where I first worked when I came to the Territory. The town of Maynard no longer exists.

I arrived at Ft. Gibson before the troops were moved out of the barracks. They moved out late in 1868, then in the spring of 1869 seven or eight hundred soldiers came back at or near the old National Cemetery at Ft. Gibson in tents and stayed for 4 or 5 months and then they left, to never return.

I remember a Captain John J. Lee, who was one of the last troops to be there.

Steamboats used to travel the Arkansas river to Navins Ferry. I remember some of the boats as being the Border City, Lucy Walker, Myrtle B, Mary D, and others.

There were a number of ranches and on some of them I worked. On the McDaniel ranch I worked one year as a farm hand and 2 years as a cow puncher. I never cared much for cow punching. The McDaniel ranch was in the Brushy Mountain District about 10 miles southeast of Muskogee. This ranch handled from 10,000 to 15000 head of cattle yearly. Their brand was the triangle.

I knew of the Severs Ranch. It was located near the present town of Bald Hill, Okla. It was owned by F. S. Severs. Handled 20,000 or 25,000 head and branded F. S.

The Spaulding Ranch was over on Cloud Creek near the present town of Boynton, Okla. It was owned by H. B. Spaulding. They handled 25,000 head yearly. Their brand was the "Lazy S".

I knew of many ranches but it has been so long it's just a remembrance. Will Chote Ranch was on Georgia Fork Creek, Frank Smith on Dierdy Creek etc.

I traded mostly at Muskogee and Ft. Gibson. Before banks operated and money was scarce, merchants printed script, we used for money. I heard F. H. Nash at Ft. Gibson put out script, the people called Dog Head money but I never handled any of this but I have handled the Spaulding Script. This was a green piece of paper, the size of our present paper money. It had Spaulding's picture on one end and the amount on the other. The first bank opened in Muskogee in 1839. Some of the early Merchants were the Turners, Spauldings and Robbs in Muskogee and Johnny Scott, Will and F. H. Nash in Ft. Gibson with Drs. Fuller and McBride in Ft. Gibson.

The doctors had to pull teeth, operate and doctor all diseases. They did not have specialists as they do now.

The Indians doctored with barks, roots and herbs of all kinds. The negroes doctored a great deal as the Indians and I suppose they learned it from the Indians.

There was much lawlessness and some of the outstanding ones were Jim French, Milo Creekmore, Cherokee Bill, Bill Nails, Bill Cook, Verdigris Kid, Al Jennings and the Buck Gang.

Some of the U. S. Marshals were Bud Ledbetter, Ike Rogers, Bazz Reeves; and Tuxie Miller, a Cherokee, that lives here in town now was an Indian Police.

Along in 1894 the Dawes Commission was set up in the Territory to give the Indians certain lands to be theirs and do away with it belonging to all in general. Again my wife's people tried to prove citizenship but never did. Indians were enrolled so the land could be divided. It took time to make the rolls and appraise the land. This appraisal was necessary because the land varied so much in quality. Finally each one enrolled, was given a certain number of acres according to the class of land. Negroes were also included in these allotments. They were called Freedmen.

Besides the Indians getting allotments, they also got paid some Strip money about the same time, on account of the opening of the Cherokee Strip to white settlers. I never tried to get any land on this account.

There was finally talk of making the Indian Territory a State and of course the Territory came into Statehood in 1907. The Indians protested against Statehood but it did no good.

Schools were better all the time but Statehood did away with much lawlessness and caused us to have the good schools and churches that we have today.

In the early days people enjoyed themselves as much or more than now.

I was comparatively an old man then about 50, but I liked horse racing and watched the younger ones at ball games. Shooting contests and the like. We would go to church and camp meetings and on Sundays visit a lot with our friends and neighbors.

I didn't care for dances but the young folks had dances, old square dances. They didn't know what a Jazz band was, just some body played the fiddle and picked the guitar.

The Indians had stomp dances over on Walkers place at Maynard but I never attended any of them.

COMMENTS.

Mr. Worley impresses the interviewer as a man who gained his education from practical experience. That he has lived a life of toil and sacrifice for his family. You cant imagine how active he is at the age of 96. Of course he is bent with age, but he goes about working in his garden and among his chickens. The interviewer found him upon his arrival at his home, helping his grown grandchildren unload dirt to fill in their backyard.

The daily newspaper "Muskogee Phoenix" places in the hands of the oldest white man a gold cane to be his until death. Mr.

Worley's picture once was displayed in this paper as the oldest man, but he refused to take the cane, saying "I have no use for a cane and why do I want to be responsible for it".

Men like Mr. Worley builded not nly our beloved state but that of our great nation of which we are justly proud.