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James R. Carselowey,
Interviewer,
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An interview with Bettie Perdue Woodall
Welch, Oklahoma.

Old Indian Days

My name is Elizabeth Perdue Woodall, but I have always been called "Bettie". I was born near Westville, Indian Territory, December, 6, 1851. My father's name was James Perdue, a half-breed Cherokee Indian. My mother, Dollie Thornton Perdue, was a white woman. Both were born in Georgia. They were married in 1838, and came immediately with the eastern emigrants over the Trail of Tears to their new home west of the Mississippi, settling in Going-snake District, in the new Cherokee Nation.

The Trail of Tears

Some histories say that on the Trail of Tears all the women and children were allowed to ride; but my mother told me that not a single woman rode unless she was sick and not able to walk. My mother walked every step of the way over here.

The Government furnished green coffee in the grain for the Indians along the route. Many of them had never seen coffee and did not know how to make it. Some of

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them put the coffee in a pot with meat and were trying to cook it like beans when my mother came along and some Indian woman said, "Ask her, She white woman". My mother said she just had to laugh the way they were trying to cook that coffee. She took some of the green coffee, roasted it in a pan over their fire, put the parched grains in a cloth and pounded it up, and made them a pot of coffee. They all liked it and said she was a smart white woman.

She also showed them how to cook their rice. It seems they all thought everything had to be cooked with meat, but in this way the young white woman became very popular and much loved by her newly made friends.

My mother told me about many of the hardships and privations she and the rest of the women suffered while on their way from Georgia. Some of them were almost unbelievable, yet I know they are true, for my mother would have had no motive in telling it if it had not been so.

On one occasion she told of an officer in charge of one of the wagons, who killed a little baby because it cried all the time. It was only four days old and the mother was forced to walk and carry it, and because it cried all of the time and the young mother could not quiet it, the officer took it away from her and dashed its little head against a tree and killed it.

After my mother's quarrel with the officer in charge of our wagon, my father made arrangements with some of the other officers in front to move to another wagon. He was afraid the officer might kill her to keep her from telling on him.

My parents settled near the present site of Westville and my father taught school and farmed. They were married quite a while before I was born, and I was their only child. There was a peculiarity about my father and mother. He was an Indian, but was blue eyed and had brown hair; while my mother, who was white, had piercing black eyes and black hair.

Father's Health Fails

Just before the War started my father's health began to fail. He had never been very strong and they soon knew he had tuberculosis, or consumption, as it was called then. My mother's brother, Tom Thornton, came to live with us and to take care of us. Father had never believed in slavery, but didn't want to take sides either way. He was not able to fight and thought he would be better off to remain neutral. This didn't help much. The Northern soldiers drove off all of our stock, and actually drove off the last milk cow my mother was milking. When two Northern

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soldiers came into the lot and told her they had come for that cow, she told them of her sick husband and that about all he could eat was a little milk, but they just laughed at her and drove the cow away. It made her so furious that she threw the milk stool at them and told them to take that too. She came into the house and sat down on the bed beside father and told him about it, but he told her there would be some other way of living; but she knew they were just about out of everything to eat, and that the loss of the cow was going to be a great loss.

The Pin Indians belonged to the Confederacy, but they were just a lot of outlaws doing all the mean things they could. Van-Buren, Arkansas, was our nearest trading post, and the Pin Indians had notified Uncle Tom Thornton that if any of them left home and went to Van Buren for anything they would be killed. But my uncle told mother that he was going to risk it any way as father was too sick to be moved and we had to have something to eat.

That night he and a neighbor by the name of Abe Woodall went to Van Buren and were gone several days; but got back with something to eat, and we had the first square meal we had had for two or three weeks.

Pins Kept Their Word

Early the next morning the Pins rode into the yard, took Uncle Tom out in the yard and cut his heart out, and him alive. It was a horrible thing for us to see, and our only support was gone. Father was very ill and ^{we} did not tell him what had happened. That same day the Pins stopped at the gate, called Abe Woodall to the door and shot and killed him without ever getting off their horses.

Some of the neighborhood women told my mother that the Pins were going to burn our house that night and she carried my poor dying father in her arms, while I carried his feather bed and pillow to a cave near our place. Some of the neighbors brought our groceries, and sure enough that night our house and all we had burned to the ground.

Father died about three days later and mother wanted to bury him in Van Buren. One of the neighbors with a team and wagon took us all to Van Buren where we buried my father. Several of the neighbors had gone with us, and as there was nothing to go back to some of the neighbors said, "Let's go to Texas".

Emigrates to Texas

Our whole party headed for Texas to remain until the war was over. The Pin Indians were getting so bad that it

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was almost impossible to remain in the neighborhood, and many of our neighbors had already gone. The move just suited my mother as the only sister she had lived there, and we landed right at her house. Her husband was a large slave owner and she was one of the best women I ever saw. We felt just like our troubles were at an end when we got there; but we were badly mistaken, they had just started.

My uncle in Texas was one of the meanest men I ever encountered. He had a lot of slaves and was just as mean to them as he could be. He would whip them at the least excuse, and they were ^{as} afraid of him as death. I remember one of his slaves had done some little thing to vex him and he was whipping him with a long black snake whip. The poor negro was screaming with all his might, when an Indian rode up, un-noticed by either my uncle or the negro. He gave a loud war whoop, lunged his horse at my uncle, hit him across the eyes with his quirt momentarily blinding him, snatched the poor bleeding negro up behind him and rode off. This made my uncle so mad at the whole Indian race that he said they were no better than the negro.

The war was over about that time, all of my uncle's slaves were freed and he was almost like a mad man. Mother ~~knew~~ it was no longer any place for us, so she told her

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sister that we were going back to the Territory. My aunt, poor soul, thought it best too. She gave us five dollars, all the money she had, and we started out on foot. Rides were not so easy to get in those days as there was little travel, and we often walked long distances; but mother was a good cook, and I liked to take care of little children, so we were always made welcome and treated nice whenever we stopped. We often stayed several days in one place.

Back Home Once More.

At last we got back home, but what a homecoming. Everything was so changed. The old chimney was standing as good as ever, but there was no house. Mother cooked our supper on the old fireplace, standing all alone, where we had left it. There was one of the sheds left standing so we made our beds there, and my how we did sleep. It was so good to be home again.

Our orchard was still there; the apple trees were bending to the ground with fruit, and there were some late peaches. Mother and I went right to work to dry all we could for winter, as there were no cans to be had. We had only been home a few days when some of the men of the neighborhood came in and built us a new log house. Since the fireplace was already standing, the house was ready to live in that night, and how proud we were of it.

The men built us a bedstead of poles, also a crude wood table and two chairs of slabs. Some of the men's wives came with them and brought great baskets of food. They gave us most of the cooking utensils they had brought along and part of their dishes. They had also brought us a few quilts and a straw tick filled with hay.

Bread and Meat Hard to Get

Bread stuff was the hardest thing to get when we returned. Since there had been no farming done since the War begun there was scarcely any wheat or corn raised. The Indians had learned to make meal from acorns. They were hulled, then pounded in a mortar until they were very fine like meal. This was mixed with the fat of a hog, and cooked as a pone cake in the fireplace, but had to be cooked very slowly to keep it from burning. This composed our bread stuff the first winter we were back in the Cherokee Nation.

The meat question was not so hard to solve for men folks, but was plenty hard for us. The woods were full of hogs that had been running wild ever since the War broke out, and they were anyone's hogs who would go out in the woods and shoot one down; but neither one of us could shoot a gun, and did not even have an axe on the place.

Fortune smiled on us one day. While my mother was

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down on the branch cuttingsome wood she spied a big wild hog lying in the spring asleep. She slipped up behind, hit it between the eyes, killing it the first blow. She cut his throat with the sharp part of the axe, and came running back so badly excited that she almost scared me to death before she could tell me what had happened. We took a sled, hauled the hog to the house and dressed it, and we had meat to do us all winter.

Married A Scotch Indian

Among the men who came to build our house, was a tall blue-eyed Scotch Indian, by the name of James Tuck Woodall. He was about five feet eleven inches tall, and about 30 years old and single. He was teaching the school which had just begun there that Fall. He seemed to me to be about the nicest man I had ever seen. He had such a nice smile, and talked with a slow southern voice; I was really attracted to him, and soon found out that he liked me too; we were married on Christmas day, 1870, and were always very happy.

My husband farmed our little place the first summer we were married, but the next Fall he secured a school at Spavinaw, in Delaware District, and we moved up there.

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Mother sold her little home and went with us. She never married again. My husband taught the Spavinaw school about five terms. In the summer he worked in Ochalata's store.

Ochalata was a full-blood Cherokee Indian, who spoke little English, and he soon taught our oldest son, then a small child, to speak the Cherokee language.

Ochalata was also our neighborhood preacher, and was well respected by all. About this time, 1875, he was elected Chief of the Cherokee Nation, and since he had never worn anything but jeans clothes, he thought he ought to have a nice suit of clothes. Since I had the only sewing machine on Spavinaw and did most of the neighborhood sewing, he came and asked me if I would make him a suit of clothes to wear to Tahlequah. I told him I would, and he brought me some fine black goods to make it out of. I cut it out, basted it up and sent for him to come and try it on. He went in our bedroom to put it on, and I will never forget how he looked when he came out. He had a broad smile on his face for he was well pleased with the looks of it. He straightened up; turned all the way around, then looked down, two big bare feet were sticking out of those fine pants, and how he did laugh-

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then we all did. Ochalata had always gone barefooted, and came to try on his suit without his shoes.

Ochalata always went to church barefooted, but would carry his shoes and sit down under a tree and put them on before going into the church, then he would pull them off as soon as he left the church.

I finished the suit of clothes, pressed them, made him two nice light shirts, and those he wore to Tahlequah. My husband ran the store for him until he came back.

In 1879 my husband was elected to the Cherokee Council from Delaware district, but only served one term. He spoke both languages fluently and found while he was at Tahlequah that good money was paid for interpreters, so after that, while Council was in session, he always had a good job. I don't think he ever taught but one school after that, and that somewhere on Honey Creek.

We lived at Spavinaw until the Spring of 1883, when we moved up about nine miles southeast of Vinita, where we raised our family. We first built a small frame house, but when the Cherokee Strip was sold, I don't remember just how much money we got, but my husband got a neighbor, Jim Carselowe, who was a good carpenter, to help him, and they

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Our built us a nice two-story house. / place had a large orchard and we were living easy when Statehood came. With that all things changed.

It was hard to get used to little farms, wire fences, and the awful roads fenced on each side with wire. In the Winter and Spring it was almost impossible to get through them for the mud, and in the Summer they were so rough from the ruts made, that I don't know which was the worst. All of us, including my mother, received our allotments. My mother was called an adopted member of the tribe, though she was a white woman. Our first sorrow came when my mother died with pneumonia in the Spring of 1907. The next Spring, May 9, 1908, my husband died. I make my home now with my only daughter, Mrs. Lizzie Parker, who also is a widow. Her husband died the next day after my husband died. She was left with twelve little children the oldest only fourteen; but she was well provided for, as her husband had been a very successful farmer. These little grandchildren are all grown up now, most of them married, and my daughter is Grandma now to grown grandchildren.

I have twenty-seven living grandchildren and thirty-four great grandchildren. I am 86 years of age and still in

good health, although I have been totally paralyzed twice,
but have entirely recovered. I piece quilts for pastime,
but still like to putter around the house.

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