WOODALL, WILLIAM C. INTERVIEW. 13432.

James R. Carselowey,
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An Interview with William C. Woodall,
Route 3,
Vinita, Oklahoma

OLD INDIAN DAYS.

My name is William C. Woodall. I was born on the old Stand Watie homestead, on Honey Creek, in Delaware District, Cherokee Nation, Indian Territory, about six or seven miles south of the present town of Grove. As stated in my former interview of April 2, 1937, my grandfather, George Caruth Woodall, together with his family and other near relatives left the Cherokee Nation in 1858 to go to California, when the Gold Rush was on. Talk of allotment of Cherokee lands brought them back in 1868, but while they were away the Civil War had been fought, and the Cherokee Nation was badly torn. When they returned three children had been born to my parents while they were in California and the oldest, Johnnie, had died and was buried there. When they got here my grandfather returned to his old home, but my father,

William Coffey Woodall started out to find a place for himself. There were any number of houses all through the nation, that had been vacated when the War broke out, and my father found a good double log house, made of pine logs, standing idle, on Honey Creek and just moved into it. I was born there, and we lived there several years before any one laid claim to the house.

House was General Watie's.

A few years after the War the old Indian courts were re-established over the nation and there was a courthouse in Delaware District near the place we were living. General Stand Watie was a practicing attorney in the Cherokee courts and brought suit against my father for the place in which we were living, but my father beat the case and kept the place. It seems that General Watie had several places in Delaware District, and after the War he lived at Webbers Falls a short time, then moved to one of his places across Grand River, south of the present town of Bernice. He was living there at the time of his death,

which occurred on the east side of Grand River, at one of his former places, where he had gone to transact some business. The river was past fording and stayed up so long, that it became necessary to bury him on the old place he had formerly lived before the War, a few miles west of Southwest City, Missouri, in the Cherokee Nation. Stand Watie's wife was buried in the old Watie cemetery, on the west side of Grand River, and had Stand Watie's inscription put on her tombstone, which leads many to believe that he is buried beside her but his body has never been moved.

A Civil War Story.

I have heard my father relate a Civil War story about a full blood Cherokee Indian as follows: Stand Watie had a First Lieutenant of the name of Buzzard and a Second Lieutenant of the name of Wilson Suagee. Suagee was a Full Blood and could not talk much English, and one day he met a bunch of Federals in the road, dressed in uniform. The Captain of the Federal Soldiers approached Suagee and

asked him if he had ever seen any men like these before, pointing to the men in uniform. The Indian said, "Yes, I kill it six, already." "Who are you?" the Captain said. "Stand Watie, he first, Buzzard, he second, me, I'm third," the Indian said. "Let him go," said the Captain, "he is crazy."

William Coffey Woodall, Sr.

My father's name was William Coffey Woodall, Sr., and my mother was Margurite (Reece) Woodall. They were the parents of eight children as follows: Johnnie, James Bonaparte, Lucy Jane, Charles, Lizzie, William Coffee, Stand Watie, and Susie Ellen. When I was eight years old, in 1878, my father moved to Hickory Grove, across the river, north of where we were living on Honey Creek, having sold the old Stand Watie place. My father had been teaching school at Hickory Grove for sometime and wanted to be near his work, but he had hardly gotten moved before the National Board of Education sent him back on the same side of the river he had moved from, to teach the Jeff Parks school. He boarded with Parks, and did not try moving any more. Jeff Parks

was an old timer, having come here from Tennessee in 1868. In 1890 my father sold his Hickory Grove farm and moved to a place about eleven miles southeast of Vihita, where he took his allotment, and where my mother died. My mother was buried at Hickory Grove, and when my father died in 1915, we took him to Hickory Grove and buried him beside my mother.

Indian Has License to Practice.

This same Indian, Wilson Suagee, mentioned above as having met the United States soldiers in the road, and gotten by them by being pronounced "crazy", was a resident of Delaware District, and after the Civil War procured a license to practice law. He was prosecuting a case in the Delaware court one day, in which a man had stolen a hog, while General Stand Watie was defending the man. When Suagee got up to make his speech he said, "Defendant can't make it nothin' but guilt. Stand Watie she talk it all, two language." At this, Ben Landrum, who was sitting nearby laughed. Then the Indian said, "Ben Landrum, she dam fool." Wilson Suagee lost his case to

Stand Watie, and was so mad because Ben Landrum had laughed at him, that he ran to the door, gave a big whoop, jumped out the door and tore up his license to practice law, and quit the business.

Brother was last District Judge.

My brother, James Bonaparte Woodall, was the last District Judge of Delaware District; he was elected in 1897 and served until the Curtis Act put him out of business, June 28, 1898. When my brother was elected he was living in Afton, and as there was no writing paper in the town, he sent word over to Sam Parks, an attorney in Vinita, to have him some envelopes and letter-heads printed and sent over to him. Parks called the printer and sat down to the typewriter and wrote out the following copy; for the envelopes; "No find 'em in 5 days, come back, that Jim Woodall, he's District Judge, Afton." "Surely, you don't want me to print it in that form, do you, Mr. Parks?" The printer said, "Certainly," said Parks, "he told me to fix it up, and said that was

the way he wanted it." My brother thought it was a good joke and used every one of them. When my brother adjourned the district court, of Delaware District, on June 28, 1898, he announced that, "This court now stands adjourned for a thousand years." He was so opposed to Statehood, that he sold his and his children's allotments as soon as he could, and went to New Mexico and settled in the mountains about sixty miles north of Albuquerque, where he and his family homesteaded a hundred and sixty acres per head. He said, when he first went there that the mountains were full of wild horses and that he and his boys captured a lot of them and broke them to work and ride and sold some few to the nearby towns. My brother lived there on a ranch until his children were all grown and married and his wife died, then he sold his stock ranch and went to Riverside, California, where he married again and where he is still living. He is now seventy-eight years old. My father was elected District Judge of Delaware District in 1871 and twenty-six years

later his son, James Bonaparte, was elected to serve the last term.

Killing near Hickory Grove.

While we were living at Hickory Grove, about eight miles south of the present town of Afton, a killing took place almost in sight of our place. My sister, Lucy, and myself were out in the yard playing when we heard three shots ring out and right away a fine black saddle horse came dashing by our gate with a saddle on. It was only a few minutes before a man came by after the horse and told us that Henry Brown and Will Lamar, both well known Cherokees, had shot each other from their horses as they rode along the road, side by side. The shooting took place immediately in front of Ben Hurley's house, where several neighbors had gathered and they ran and picked the two men up, after they had fallen from their horses. The two men had had an old grudge at each other and had just accidentally met in the road. Brown had a wife and one child, Kim Brown, who is still living near Afton.

The Old Settler Payment.

In 1893 President Grover Cleveland appointed a committee of old settler Cherokees to make a roll of all the "Old Settlers" then living, together with their descendants, with a view of making an old settler payment. My father was appointed on this committee, which was as follows: William Hendricks, President; Darius Ward, Secretary; Thomas R. Knight, James M. Keys, and William Coffey Woodall.

When the roll was completed, D. M. Wisdom, Indian Agent at Muskogee, sent his son, Fent Wisdom, to all the leading towns of the Nation to make the payment, which was made in cash. A large force of guards, picked from the best marksmen in the Nation accompanied the payment, and no attempt was ever made to take the money which was carried with them from place to place. My father was selected as one of the interpreters to accompany the payment.

My father tells of one incident when a white man attempted to go in with his wife to draw her money, but

this was one thing that was forbidden. No white person was allowed to draw money for the Indian wife or husband. In this case the wife did not want her husband to get hold of her money, and he was at once ejected from the payment ground and my father says this old Indian woman had that $400.00 hidden in her bedding at her death several years afterward, with instructions to give it to her son, by an Indian husband, when she died.

Oochalata.

Oo-cha-la-ta, a full blood Cherokee Indian, was elected Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation in 1875 and again in 1879. During this time my father was a member of the Council, and a good friend of the old Chief. I was just a small boy and had accompanied my father and mother to the capitol and when the Council adjourned they came back with Oochalata as far as Spavinaw and stayed all night. My parents were in a wagon and had let me ride a pony. I remember riding my pony alongside of the old Chief all the way from Tahlequah, as he too was riding a horse. We didn't

talk much, as I could talk no Cherokee, and the old Chief could talk no English, but he kept jabbering in the Cherokee language all the way to his house, but I do not know what he said, from that day to this. The next morning when Ochalata's roosters began to crow I thought I had never heard so many roosters crow in my life. They were scattered all up and down Spavinaw Creek, roosting in trees, and I thought he must have at least a thousand roosters. At that time Ochalata wore his hair long, braided in two braids and wore a large black hat, while my father wore his hair long, but did not braid it. He just tucked it up under his hat, like Chief Thomas M. Buffington did before he cut it. My father and Ochalata both cut their hair in later years and wore their hair like the white man.

Ochalata Ran Boarding House.

When Ochalata's term expired as Chief of the Cherokees, he moved to Tahlequah and ran a boarding house. Many of the Cherokees boarded with him, including my father and myself,

when we were there to attend the Council meetings. I remember a gang of Full Bloods who stopped there singing a great deal at night. They were great singers and sang all the parts and I thought I had never before heard such singing. Occhalata was a Baptist preacher and loved good singing. The Full Bloods would often bring their choirs to the Commencement exercises at both the Seminaries and they would sing at the closing of school. If a singer made a mistake, he or she was not allowed to sing with the choir any more.

An Old Indian Hunter.

Another old time Cherokee Indian, who lived on Spavinaw Creek, was John Tagg. He had the name of being the greatest hunter in the Spavinaw hills, and had the name of having killed as high as seven deer in one morning, and said he could have killed more, only he did not want to "kill it all one day." John Tagg lived up in a little hollow, running out from the Spavinaw Lake, recently made by the city of Tulsa for their water supply, and it is now

known as the "Tagg Hollow" and is a famous fishing resort for Tulsa fishermen. This famous old hunter, for whom Tagg Hollow is named died in 1935, in August of that year, at the ripe old age of a hundred years. During his last years he always blamed the lake for his ill health. He said it gave him a "mis'ry in his legs," meaning rheumatism. Soon he couldn't hunt and was eventually confined to his bed. John never quite forgave the city folks for building that lake. John had a sister of the name of Sallie Tagg, who died in April, 1935, of double pneumonia. "Sal", as those Tulsans who visited Spavinaw knew her, was the most picturesque character in the hills. John was always proud of his sister, because she was the best fisherman ever seen in those hills, despite the fact that she never owned any high priced fishing paraphernalia like her white neighbors, who came with the lake. It is believed that grief over her passing, just four months before the aged hunter died, hastened his death.

Given Big Funeral.

John Tagg was given a big funeral by the full blood

Cherokees of Spavinaw, with a Cherokee preacher reading the last rites for him in the little Indian cemetery, two miles north of Spavinaw, where John was buried alongside of his sister, Sallie. A good many white people attended that service, men and women who had come to honor the crack shot of the Spavinaw hills, before rheumatism laid him low. At the side of John's grave stood his wife, Esther, and four grown children, some of whom have had college educations.