

CLARK, WINIFRED M.

TECUMSEH.

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IMMIGRATION OF NEGROES.

Indian Pioneer History-S-149.
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Tecumseh

We came to Oklahoma City in the early '90s, but my father heard of a new settlement east of there at Shawnee so he made investigation and decided that it would be better for a location. He bought a claim from an old soldier for \$120.00. This claim was about two miles south of Tecumseh, Pottawattomie County.

He was offered a block of land in Shawnee, in the heart of the business district, if he would build a store and place his hardware and implements there, that he had shipped from Chicago, which had been our home and where he had been a merchant, but he preferred Tecumseh because it was the County Seat and "the railroad was bound to come" so he was told.

Father built a store in the little tent and shack town and began business there. Socially it seemed to be a tough place. There were sixteen saloons along the main street, with drunken brawls so frequent that it was not safe. My brother went to stay with my father but he would have nothing to do with the boys of the town. He spent his days out on the claim shooting snakes and hunt-

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ing. There were two large snake dens on the place and my father wanted to get them cleared out before he sent for us.

Father built a story and a half house on the claim, with lumber that he had hauled from Oklahoma City. He had the house painted bright yellow and the roof red, then put a native lumber leanto shed on the south side for a summer kitchen. This house was on the highest hill that he could find on the place so we could have a view of the country. He cut down all the tall trees that were close to the house because he was afraid of lightning. We missed those trees, as the house stood without shade.

As soon as the house was finished, my mother, sister and I came, with all our household goods. We came by stage and the goods came by freight wagons from Oklahoma City. We were not farmers but my father put us there to "grow up with the country". He bought us a buckskin pony and a tricky little mustang, also what he thought was a full blood Berkshire pig but which turned out to be a razor back. All of these animals became great pets. The first year was a flood year for months so we had a fine time

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roaming the woods and playing.

My mother bought two fine cows and calves from a man who went through the country selling to the settlers. Up to that time we had lived on tinned milk, and other strange food.

We had been there about two months when we heard there was to be a Fourth of July celebration. They advertised an Indian dance, so we were eager to see it.

The town people gathered up all of the goods boxes to make a huge bonfire. They invited the Indians to take part in the dance, but the Indians declined. The only one who consented to take part was a young fellow who liked whiskey well enough to discard his pride. The boys let him drink until he hardly knew what he was doing, then they clapped and shouted while he staggered around that hot fire until he was exhausted.

Decent law abiding citizens came into the community, organizations were perfected, nearly all the saloons were driven out, churches and schools were built and Tecumseh became a good town, but Shawnee put up the money to induce the railroads to come and Tecumseh has never become more than a fair sized town.

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Immigration of Negroes.

Our mother passed away within a few months after we came to this country, but it was while she was with us that this event occurred. One morning we were in the lean-to kitchen that had a door toward the south. I noticed a queer movement in the woods so far to the south that I could not tell what it was. We watched it grow and move toward us and were afraid because my brother had gone off on his horse. The dark object developed into a long line of negroes, about three or four hundred people, traveling close together and trailing along like Indians. They came within about fifty yards of the house and stopped. Some of them sat on the ground. A tall woman came to meet us bringing a basket of berries to sell to us. My mother bought them and asked her where they were going. The woman said: "We have come all the way from Memphis. The floods drove us out. Our homes were close to the river and were swept away. Memphis couldn't help us, so we heard of this country and have come to find new homes, but no one wants us. They turn us away from every place where we go. I don't know what is to become of us."

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Some of our old people have died and some of the little children, along the way." We felt so sorry for them.

My mother gave them all the food that we had in the house.

It was all we could do for them. As they passed on, going north, we tried to count them but after all did not know their exact number. Later we heard that a few had dropped out at Tecumseh and other places but the main body kept on and finally the Governor of the Territory appealed to the people to help them and they were located at Kingfisher.
