

ROSS, ELIZABETH.

FOUR MILE BRANCH.

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Elizabeth Ross  
Investigator  
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The Four-Mile Branch.

Four miles east of Fort Gibson is the Four-Mile Branch locality, once inhabited largely by Freedmen, former slaves of Cherokee citizens. The land along the branch and in localities adjoining is fertile, and fine crops have been produced.

The settlement had its origin as the result of an epidemic of cholera at Fort Gibson in 1867. Large numbers of people were living in and about the town and in the vicinity of the military post. The Civil War had ended two years previously but as yet many of the people had not again engaged in their customary pursuits.

During the summer season of 1867 a number of soldiers arrived from a southern post to succeed the soldiers who had been occupying the military post. About two hours after the arrival of the new members of the garrison, one of the soldiers fell suddenly ill and soon died. Soon a number of soldiers were critically ill and some of them died. The fact was quickly found that cholera prevailed. Civilians were also stricken and many died, as also did numbers of negroes.

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Panic-stricken, many of the people hastened to localities at considerable distance away. Some went to Tahlequah, some to Park Hill, and to other places. But the Freedmen in most instances halted upon reaching the branch, where there was smooth and grassy land interspersed with trees. Water was easily procurable, and there were no more instances of illness from the cholera. In fact, none of those who removed to other sections of the country experienced illness.

After the passage of several weeks the malady decreased and its ravages ceased. During the period of its prevalence several well-known persons died from the effects of the disease besides many others, whites, Indians and negroes. Many years later there were old men and women in Fort Gibson and vicinity, as well as elsewhere, who recalled the period when cholera prevailed.

When the epidemic had ceased many of the Freedmen decided not to return to Fort Gibson. They had been given equal rights with the Cherokees, consequently, they built their cabins, and enclosed tracts of land along the stream which became called the Four-Mile branch. For a number of years in the days of the Cherokee government, there was maintained by

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the Cherokee Nation a public school (for colored children) which was designated as the Four-Mile Branch school and was usually taught by white teachers.

Years ago the cultivated tracts of land in the Four Mile Branch locality were enclosed with rails split from oak or other timber, which in later years gave way to barbed wire fencing. The old road leading from Fort Gibson to Tahlequah passed through the locality in years long past.

The cholera epidemic of 1867 was the last experienced at Fort Gibson. It is recalled that Miss E. Jane Ross of the Park Hill locality related incidents of the cholera epidemic at Fort Gibson and of the Four-Mile branch school.

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**Note:**

Miss E. Jane Ross died at Elm Springs, Indian Territory, April 2, 1894, aged 67 years. She often related to her niece, Miss Elizabeth, stories of the people and events of pioneer days. From these tales told by a person who knew personally the people and who passed through the incidents noted, Miss Elizabeth Ross has given many manuscripts to this project, including the above.

Editor.