

MITCHELL, JOHN W. W.

INTERVIEW.

#1235

453

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Maurice R. Anderson, Field Worker
Indian-Pioneer History
May 4, 1937

454

An interview with John W. W. Mitchell,
General Delivery, Wynnewood, Oklahoma.

Parents were J. S. Mitchell of Alabama--deceased;
Margaret Vaughn of Alabama--deceased.

John W. W. Mitchell was born June 8, 1852, in
Mississippi.

I came to the Indian Territory and settled at
Wynnewood, in the Chickasaw Nation in 1891. I
brought my family with me and we stayed at the only
hotel in Wynnewood at that time.

It was built out of cottonwood logs, and we
stayed there a few days until I could find a place.
I bought a house and lot from a man who didn't have
the house finished when I bought it. I finished
the house and we moved in and I still live in the
same house, although it has been re-shingled several
times. I came to this country to buy a farm but
after I got here I could have bought several farms
had I been able to get a clear title to any of them.

I went into business, first the grocery business
and later made it a general store. There were four
stores in Wynnewood at that time and most of the
things we sold were on credit. We would have to wait
until the fall to get paid for them, and sometimes

2

I never got paid, but the general run of the people were honest, however. I have sold gingham for five cents a yard, and flour for \$1.25 for a forty-eight-pound sack; sugar sold twenty pounds for \$1.00.

People were about the same then as now. You could hear them talk of what hard times they were having just as they do today. I know times were better then for there was more work. Of course, if there had been as many people here then as there are now there wouldn't have been very much work. It didn't take much money to start farming.

This land around Wynnewood would raise anything that was planted. There wasn't much cotton raised when I first came here, but in 1893 there were three thousand bales raised around Wynnewood.

A Mr. McGee owned the first gin at Wynnewood.

Noah Lael was the biggest cattle owner around Wynnewood, and his cattle ranged from here to Atoka. Mr. Lael wouldn't sell a milk cow at any price, after he had branded them, but he would let anybody take one or two to milk. I have bought good milk cows from farmers for fifteen to twenty dollars, cows that gave five to six gallons of milk a day,

and sometimes I would have to take a cow or some hogs on a grocery bill. I ordered my groceries from Fort Worth, Texas, and my merchandise would come from St. Louis, Missouri.

There were some good hogs raised around here. I bought some hogs from Governor Guy, one-time Governor of the Chickasaw Nation. They were called the mule hoof hogs, and this was my first time to ever see any of them. They had a hoof like a mule's hoof. You couldn't make those hogs fat regardless of how much corn you fed them. There was no cause for any family to go without hog meat in the winter, as hogs were cheap and corn was ten to fifteen cents a bushel. I would kill two or three fat hogs every winter, and in the summer men would bring fresh beef around selling it. You could buy enough steak for 25 cents for two meals.

In those days people tried to help one another. You could borrow money from your neighbor without a note, only your word, and if you wanted a fat hog to kill you just went to your neighbor and told him what you wanted and you got it, with plenty of time to pay for it. People trusted one another more than they

4

do now. I believe there are a hundred to one more crooks and thieves in this country now than there were when I came to the Indian Territory.

I remember the time John Walner killed Bill Lewis. I was running my store at Wynnewood, and that morning Bill Lewis was in my store and told me he had killed eight men in his day. He said, "Before the day is out I am going to kill another one." Then he went out of the store, and across the street. I happened to walk to the front door and was looking out when I saw John Walner coming up the street with his Winchester under his arm. Bill Lewis also carried a Winchester. John Walner turned and went across the street toward Bill Lewis and as soon as Walner got to the board sidewalk he stopped and said, "Bill, I heard you were going to kill me." Bill started to raise his gun but he never got it to his shoulder. John Walner carried his rifle under his arm and he never raised his gun at all. He shot from where he carried his rifle, and at the first shot Lewis fell dead.

Later, I believe it was in 1905, that

John Walner's nephew, Bob Walner, killed him over some property left to Bob Walner, by his father. John Walner was the guardian over this land and money and Bob Walner accused him of running through with it and killed him.