

ROSS, ELIZABETH

STRIP PAYMENT

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Elizabeth Ross,
Interviewer,
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"Strip Payment"

The largest disbursement of money ever made in the Cherokee Nation in Indian Territory occurred during the summer of 1894. The occasion was the distribution per capita of the proceeds of the sale of the Cherokee Strip, a large tract of land in western Indian Territory, which had been acquired by the United States Government for a sum in excess of six million dollars.

The disbursement of the money was in charge of the Treasurer of the Cherokee Nation, who at that period was E. E. Starr. The National Council in providing for the manner of payment to the Cherokee citizens, provided for the employment of a rather large number of men as guards. Jess Cochran, a former sheriff of the Cooweescoowee District, was chosen as captain of the guard, and the disbursement began at Tahlequah, in which place all citizens of the Tahlequah District received their shares, which amounted to \$265.70 each. The payment began in June, the weather being fine and sunshiny, and the largest crowd seen in Tahlequah in many years assembled. Besides the numerous citizens entitled to participate in the

disbursement, there were others who expected to receive some of the money through sale of articles of nearly every description imaginable, including live stock and vehicles, firearms and farm implements. Present, also, were peddlers and fakirs, traveling musicians, whiskey peddlers, gamblers, men operating steam-powered merry-go-rounds, and others in charge of tent shows, lunch and refreshment stands. There were present also men who were agents for the right of way to build fences. This right of way had been sold for the sum of \$25.00 by these agents who had extended credit to many of the citizens and were present to collect the sums due them. To the end that the collectors might more successfully meet those indebted to them, a temporary covered shed was built at the east entrance of the old brick Capitol building. Those who received their shares of money from the treasurer at the west end of the long corridor were required to make exit at the east end and consequently had to pass through the chute, as it was designated. Thus, the collectors stationed beneath the shed came face to face with those who had agreed to pay when the "Strip Money" became available.

Payments were made in each of the nine districts composing the Cherokee Nation. Crowds similar to that seen in Tahlequah were to be found at each place of disbursement.

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After completing the disbursement for a district, the treasurer, his helpers and the heavily armed guards moved to another district in horse-drawn vehicles principally, and continued through the sultry days of summer until the payments were completed.

No attempts at robbery were made during the progress of the payment, though there were occasional rumors that some attempts might be made by some of the reckless characters of the period.

It was while the disbursement of the "Strip Money" was being made at Tahlequah that the "Cook band of outlaws" came into existence. One William Cook and his brother, Jim Cook, were Cherokee citizens. They had been charged with some infraction of the Cherokee law, and fearing arrest in case they visited Tahlequah, stopped at what was called the "Half-way House," near Fourteen Mile Creek. With the Cooks was the mulatto Crawford Goldsby, later to be called "Cherokee Bill." The Cook brothers gave Mrs. Effie Crittenden, proprietress of the Half-Way House, an order to the Cherokee Treasurer for their shares of the money being disbursed, intending, so they said, to leave the Indian Territory immediately.

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upon receiving their money. But the sheriff of the Tahlequah District, Leonard Williams, by name, received information in some manner that the Cooks were at the Half-Way House and instructed a deputy to summon several men and go out in quest of the wanted men. Accordingly, a half-dozen armed men, mounted on horses, rode to the vicinity of the house near Fourteen Mile Creek and met with resistance. Crawford Goldsby, the mulatto, seemed to have insisted upon contesting with the officers. Several shots were fired. Sequoyah Houston, one of the sheriff's force, was killed, and Jim Cook was wounded. The officers retired from the scene of trouble and the Cooks and Goldsby fled. Jim Cook was later captured, sent to prison, escaped and returned to Fourteen Mile Creek, and was eventually slain. Bill Cook and Goldsby, being joined by other lawless characters, remained at large for some time, but eventually all were captured or killed. Goldsby was executed at Fort Smith, Arkansas, and Bill Cook died in the Albany New York penitentiary.

Forty-three years after the "Strip Payment" (1937) few of the men who constituted the "Strip guard" are alive, and nearly all the older citizens of the period

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who participated in the distribution of the money have
disappeared from life.

Authorities: References to "Strip Payment" in Tahlequah
newspapers of the period. Personal recollections.