

ROSS, ELIZABETH

Said he was JOSEPH'S SON

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Elizabeth Ross, Interviewer
Indian-Pioneer History
August 30, 1937

Said He was Sequoyah's Son

At the beginning of the eighties of the last century, a gray-headed Cherokee, whose name was William Guess, but who was usually called Billy Coon, lived in the hills several miles southeast of the present Park Hill Post Office. His home was in the Tablecough district some years before the beginning of the Civil War.

Although more often referred to as Billy Coon this individual asserted that Guess was his real surname and that he was a son of George Guess, or Sequoyah, originator of the Cherokee alphabet.

Some years ago a man traveling through the timberland, trying to find his way to the home of an acquaintance, came to a house near a fine spring and there made inquiry concerning the route to the home which he desired to reach. The desired information was furnished, the traveler afterward related, by a man who said that his surname was Guess--the same man who was known as Billy Coon.

Many Cherokees, full-bloods, or near full-

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bloods, have often been known by names other than their real name. In some instances as many as three surnames have been borne by the same individual. The custom has long prevailed. Just how or why William Guess came to be called Billy Coon is not known. The old time Cherokees who may have known are now dead.

William Guess, or Billy Coon, was a proficient maker of chairs. He used durable wood, and the chairs were well made and skillfully bottomed with hickory, elm bark, or rawhide. In a period when furniture stores were unknown, and chairs from manufacturers unavailable, the native Cherokee artisans supplied the demand to a large extent, and in various homes chairs were to be found which had been made by Billy Coon.

Some of the people of today recall that William Guess had two sons and a daughter. The sons were often referred to as George and Looney Coon, but they subscribed their names, and referred to themselves as George and Looney Guess.

George Coon, the eldest son, wore his hair long and twisted beneath his hat. When released the

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hair reached nearly to his waist. He was fully six feet in height, muscular and straight. Looney Coon, or Guess, was equally as tall and probably weighed 275 pounds, if not more. Both lived northeast of Tahlequah at no great distance from the Illinois River. Both died in middle life. Looney was able to perform satisfactory work as a blacksmith.

The sister, whose name was Laura, married a full-blood Cherokee who was generally known as Charley Stealer, but who was finally called Charley Pritchett. Their oldest son, Tony Pritchett, a member of the American Expeditionary Forces, was killed in France.

William Guess, or Coon, died early in the eighties, probably before the close of 1881. Presumably he was buried at Tahlequah, as he was visiting there when over-taken by a fatal illness. His exact age is not known, but mention was once made of him as being in the Park Hill locality in a rather early period.

Colonel William A. Phillips, Commander of the Union Indian Brigade in the Civil War, used

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to relate that a son of Sequoyah served in one of the Régiments of the Brigade. Possibly William Guess, or Coon, was the man.

Authority: The late Lewis A. Ross related that Bil'y Coon claimed to be a son of George Guess, or Sequoyah. The writer also remembers Bil'y Coon.