

ROSS, ELIZABETH

FORT GIBSON BOTTOM

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Elizabeth Ross,
Interviewer,
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An extensive section of cultivated land, outlying from Fort Gibson, Cherokee Nation, was some years ago covered largely with timber, wild cane and underbrush. In some places comparatively small portions of land had been cleared of timber and placed in cultivation, but by far the greater portion of land now cultivated was in its original condition.

Those who recalled the appearance of the "Fort Gibson bottom" in periods preceding the Civil War, and for some years following, described it in an interesting manner. Many of the trees were of more than ordinarily large size, many of them black walnut trees. Many of these walnut trees were felled, made into logs and sawed into lumber at a saw mill operated by the United States government for the benefit of the military post, the lumber being used in construction of buildings and for other purposes. In the large barns which were built several years before the outbreak of the Civil War conflict much fine walnut plank was used in building stalls for the horses and mules, and in flooring portions of the barns,

in the upper parts particularly.

The lakes and sloughs in the bottom lands were filled with fish and were frequented by fishermen during many years. In the late fall and winter seasons wild ducks were to be found upon and about the water in great numbers, and there were numbers of the fur-bearing animals in the extensive wooded tracts, raccoons, opossums, mink and skunks. Wild turkeys were found in roosts in the tall timber. The wild cane has been described as being dense and tall, towering high above the lesser growth, and covering the land extensively.

In years long past parakeets in large numbers frequented the bottom. These birds of bright colored plumage were in large flocks and their food was found in the insects and seeds of various wild plants. Among other things eaten by the parakeets were the green cocklebur of the farms in the bottoms and elsewhere in outlying sections. With increasing population in and about Fort Gibson and vicinity, and the clearing away of the timber in the bottom and cultivation of the land, the parakeets disappeared and none have been seen in many years.

Small and crudely built cabins were to be found here and there in the most isolated sections of the bottoms. Some of those occupying these small houses were reputed to be persons of bad character, fugitives from justice in the old States of the Union. Acts of violence were reported from time to time as having occurred at some one of the cabins in the depths of the bottom, and lawless persons sometimes fled into the bottom, seeking to escape from the officers of the law.

There were times when there was a hurried exodus from the bottom, when after copious and continued rainfall the Grand, Verdigris and Arkansas Rivers rose to more than ordinary high water stage. Considerable sections of the bottom overflowed and numbers of persons who lived in the lowland fled to more elevated sections. Among recollections of some of the old people of past years were those relating to fleeing from the high waters.

Authorities: John M. Adair, Menard, Oklahoma.

The late Henry C. Meigs, Fort Gibson, Okla.