

ROSS, ELIZABETH - WELL CLEANERS.

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### Well Cleaners.

A number of years ago when bored wells were unknown; the old time rock-walled wells, some of them quite deep, required cleaning from time to time. (For some unknown reason such wells were not often furnished with covering.)

Not many cared to descend into the old wells, that is the owners of land upon which the wells were situated, and sought the services of men who had no hesitancy in descending into the depths.

One of the persons often employed to clean wells was a colored man of the name of Sam Webber. This man was so agile that he often dispensed with the use of a rope and climbed down the walls of a well, holding to protruding portions of the stone wall. At other times he steadied himself by holding to a rope attached to the windlass at the top. Arrived at the bottom of a well, Webber scooped up the accumulated mud or obstacles which had fallen into the water, placed the mud and rubbish in

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a large pail attached to the rope and signalled that the bucket be drawn upward. After an hour or so the well was thoroughly cleansed and Webber, returning to the top, stepped out upon the ground and received the compensation agreed upon.

Webber was not troubled with nerves as were some of the well cleaners. One of them finally declined to enter one of the old wells, declaring that whenever he reached the bottom a feeling came over him that the walls were about to cave in and cover him beneath the stones and dirt. Webber, however, had no hesitancy at all in entering and descending to the bottom of this well, which old Edmund Campbell regarded with misgiving. Webber, however, experienced a bad half hour in another well.

At the site of the old Park Hill Mission Home, long occupied by the family of the Reverend Samuel A. Worcester, missionary, there lived another family some years after the close of the Civil War. James E. Latta, it seems, was the

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man who engaged Webber to clean the well, which was ninety feet in depth and narrowed toward the bottom. Without hesitancy Webber descended and got along very well, but when in the most narrow place at the bottom, or near the bottom, <sup>he</sup> ~~made~~ a turn and quickly found himself wedged between the stone walls. Far upward gleamed the sunlight, but Webber could neither descend or ascend. Time after time he tried to disengage himself but to no effect, for he remained tightly fastened. Although Webber was not frightened he had no hesitancy in declaring that he didn't "feel good" at all. But he remained cool and finally succeeded in turning in such manner that his tightly wedged body became disengaged and soon he made his way out of the deep well and returned to his home.

Another old-timer by the name of Green Goff lost his nerve to some extent and finally ceased cleaning wells. In one of the big old-fashioned wells, so Goff

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asserted, there was to be found a huge snake which thrashed about in menacing manner in the water. Goff didn't care to work in close proximity to the alleged big serpent, and seems to have decided that he had better quit well cleaning all together.

Upon the advent of bored wells the old-fashioned dug wells were largely abandoned, but a few of them remain and are yet used, but well cleaners, such as Sam Webber and others of that period are seldom heard of in these times, in 1937.

Authorities: The men above referred to related their experiences. All were old-time colored men who lived in Tahlequah district.