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CHECOTE, SAMUEL. INTERVIEW.

Jefferson Berryhill
Field Worker
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Muskokee or Creek Tradition
Interview with Rev. Samuel
Checote.

Rev. Samuel Jefferson Checote was born five miles north of Okmulgee, Oklahoma in Okmulgee County, October 18, 1866. He is of Big Spring clan of Creek Indian and now lives three miles southwest of Okmulgee, Oklahoma. He is half Creek Indian and half white.

His father, Jefferson Checote, who was a fullblood Creek of Cussetah clan, died in 1884. His mother was part white, Cherokee and Creek. Her name was Eliza Jane Jones of Big Spring clan, and she died in 1872. His grandfather was Samuel Checote, also of Big Spring clan, dates of birth and death unknown.

This tradition of the Creeks was told to Mr. Checote when he was a youngster by some of the old Indians. He recalls the names of two who told these traditions, Yarkkin Micco and Jim Beaver of Coweta Town and clan. They were Creeks who had figured in the Red Stick War in 1812. Mr. Checote heard them telling this tradition around the camp fire. I will

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write as he tells.

The Creeks (we were told by the older folks) immigrated from the west. The Chiefs of the tribes and the members wondered very much where the sun come or started from. They thought it had a place of abode somewhere. Finally they or the chiefs agreed or decided to go east to find where the sun started so they all got together. The Chief of each tribe called all his subjects and after every chief had his subjects together, they all became as one group, yet there were many clans. They were on the west slope of North America and the immigration started by forming a line stretching across the whole country by the different tribes. They camped in a breast like formation, every tribe's camp near each other but to themselves. Each tribe had a pony rider or a foot runner. They would ride or run to the nearest camp in warning the other tribe. The signal warning of danger was a war whoop or whatever happened. Then the next rider or runner of

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the tribe would go and signal the warning to the other tribes, so on, etc., till all the tribes knew what was going on. They had spies to go in front of the emigrants to scout around. They traveled or moved camp all at the same time and in that way all the Indians moved from the west or from the Rocky Mountains, the backbone of the world. For many moons they traveled till they came to another body of great water (Atlantic Ocean). Still the sun was beyond the big water and they could not go any further, so each Chief of the different tribes took all their tribe and went their way, very much disappointed, and from here they scattered every direction, looking for a place or location to settle and begin a new life in a new country.

This is the story or tradition told by old timers which was handed down from generation to generation.

Thus the tale ends.

Land Allotment

When the Dawes Commission became in effect, Mr. Checote was appointed as one of the party to help enroll the Creek Indians. Mr. Checote said there was a field outfit at Okmulgee, Oklahoma, to enroll the Creeks and he helped them enroll in Okmulgee for a while; then moved from Okmulgee to Tuskegee Town and there enrolled the Indians for several days. From there (Tuskegee) they moved to Sand Creek, south of Bristow.

Mr. Checote says it was no easy job to enroll the Creeks for some were bitterly against it. He said they would walk up to some Indian home, and they would find the Indians had slipped away. They had to ask the children to find out where the parents had gone. Some children would tell, some were instructed by the parents not to tell where they had gone. Some of these Creeks refused flatly to enroll; they did not want the white man's government. He said he had to go back to the same place twice to try to catch the Indians home. Some

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of these who refused to enroll and take an allotment of land was a group of Creeks headed by Chitto Harjo or (Crazy Snake). After almost all of the rich land was given away, the rest was given to those who had refused allotment. Of course, they had the poor and worthless land; in fact, that's what they thought--remember "Jackson Barnett."

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New Life & Homes in Indian Territory

Rev. Checote has a keen memory of days long gone by. These facts he heard from the older folks around the camp fires.

There was a great suffering among the Creeks after their removal from their old country. They were very homesick, discouraged and weary, but with all this trouble, they took courage again as the Government had promised them that this would be their home and country forever or "as long as the grass grew and the river runs." Although they could never forget the past, they began the new life. Many farms and ranches were begun and improved; they built log houses; many churches were erected; law and order prevailed. Some became prosperous and wealthy; some had slaves to work for them; they had plenty to eat as there was plenty of game and fish; they had livestock; they even had fences around their lands. They had good crops. Schools were provided for them; some were anxious to learn and were pretty well

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educated. They were becoming accustomed to their new country for they were no more subjected to the white man's law. They had their own laws and own Chiefs or leaders. In this condition, these brave people became a strong and a prosperous race. Yet their long struggle for peace and happiness was to end suddenly for a terrible war was about to commence, a Civil War.

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Muskokee or Creek Costumes

These costumes were worn by the Creeks some forty or fifty years ago. Mr. Checote saw these costumes as he himself wore some.

The turban, or head dress, was used, if of beaver skin, it was a flat circle around the head. A polished silver band holding it or securing it in place. Some used shawls or a handkerchief wrapped around the head. Some wore feathers in their turban most all the time.

The coats were made of deer skin, "Micco Hutke," To use the buckskin for a coat, cut thongs of buckskin hanging around the flap of his coat collar and sleeves. The trousers or breeches were made of the same, the deer skin. They were made close fitting, leggings around their legs from waist down to their moccasins in a tight fit. The belt was made of buckskin and around the waist some wore beaded belts. In this or attached to this belt, a hunting knife was carried, also made of buckskin. It was the custom to have a bag and a powder horn,

where they carry their ammunition, which was also made of buckskin with a strap of buckskin about the width of a belt goes over the one shoulder and around the neck, it hangs on the side and a little horn to measure the powder with, on a buckskin string hanging on to the ammunition, powder horn or bags were beaded and out thongs hanging all around. This made it look very pretty.

The moccasins were made of buckskin, they were soft but lasted long time.

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Buffalo, Deer and Turkey Hunting.

Mr. Checote states that the Creeks went up around Foreman, Oklahoma, to hunt buffalo that there were millions of them in Oklahoma. Said there were plenty of deer and turkeys in Okmulgee County and most everywhere in Oklahoma. He killed lots of deer and turkeys. Mr. Checote said it was no hard matter to go out and bag a deer and some turkeys and give a big feast. It was good sport to hunt while there was plenty game, but now it is all gone. The white man came and killed the game in a greedy fashion. The days of good game hunting in Oklahoma are gone forever.

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Indian Mission or Camp Meeting

Many years ago these meetings were held by Creek Indians. They were called big Camp meetings then, but now as time has passed and the Indians have become more civilized, they have changed the name big camp meeting to Indian Mission. When the old-time Indians had this camp meeting, it was a very important meeting. There were people or Indians of every tribe from every direction, town and place who came to the meeting, but they were different from the missions of today. Of course, we know that the meeting was for the purpose of worship. The old Indians did not have any programs or Sunday schools like the mission of today. The meeting lasted for a week then; it was a christian meeting then; and they were christians for a week. Everyday the preaching and singing and the praying went on, at nights it was the same, for there were many preachers gathered there. They

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had worshipping all through the night.

As for the eating there was plenty of all kinds of meats. It was an easy matter to acquire the things to eat, for there was plenty of game then. They had a very strict rule then--no one was allowed to drink or swear around the meeting. Drunkards were not wanted around. It was a very good meeting for christians.

But now let us turn and switch our attention to Indian missions of today. The old days have passed and now the next generation has sprung up. They have forgotten the forefathers for now they are educated. They have learned the white man's ways. They think it's a place to have a good time. It is, but they do it the wrong way for they drink and do as they please. They seem to think it is a place to go wild forgetting the laws of their forefathers.

I will now describe the preparation

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for the camp or Indian Mission. First, the Bishop has the authority to let the Indians know where the meeting is to be held. After they are notified. Then about three months before the time, they start having what they call box suppers and pie suppers to raise funds for the church. These suppers are held in different churches, but the money gained goes to the church that's responsible for the meeting. While that is going on, the church members or neighbors are having Sunday schools, and the Sunday school collection is also used for the purpose or the benefit of the church. Then the members hold a meeting some night and set an appointed time to work or clean the camps and the premises and at the appointed time they gather early in the morning. They start the work, some cut weeds, some clean out wells for there are many wells, the houses are painted if necessary; the church house is fixed up and painted.

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All this goes on till all the things are cleaned and fixed up for the coming meeting. About a week early, or before the meeting, the campers move in and camp. Then the following week starting Tuesday and Wednesday, the beeves are killed. They pick a man of experience to be the head of the crew of men given to him. The beeves are butchered and distributed about the camp in equal share. About seven or eight cows or yearlings are required according to the number of camps. Hogs are butchered also but more than beeves. If there are twelve camps, then each camp gets one hog. All these are bought with the money that was made from the church's doings. Then the camps are ready for the gathering, they have wood for cooking (some hire cooks); the beddings such as quilts, mattresses, pillows and sheets, also beds are put in place for the people for sleeping; the church house is cleared of chairs and benches to make room for beds, some

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sleep outside on the ground or in cars; there are many tents set up for the visitors to camp in. After the campers have moved in, then the work to prepare for the event goes on in day then in night. They hold church prayers, this goes on till Thursday, then the gathering begins, for they come from many different churches and there are many different tribes of Indians from everywhere. The main event has started then. There are programs and contests for singing for they come prepared. This goes on till Saturday night. Of course there are many speakings. Then on Sunday they are ready for the persons who are to be ordained for preaching or be made elders. This goes on all day with preaching scheduled. The meeting is almost over then. Some go home Sunday afternoon; those who came from a long distance stay till Monday. They have church all through the night on the last night (Sunday night).

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The camps have numbers on each camp. Visitors are sent to camps to eat according to the number for which the table is set. Sometimes the table is set for twenty, more or less. Each camp counts how many rounds or sets they have fed.

On Monday all the visitors go home, knowing where the next Indian Mission will be held for they vote on the place where they wish it to be held. The meeting is over, the campers are tired and weary but happy. They pack and move to their homes to take much needed rest, thinking and wondering if they'll ever see and participate in another Indian Mission or Camp Meeting.