

INDEX CARDS

Shawnees
Tepees--Shawnee
Houses--Shawnee
Millwrights--Shawnee
Furniture--Shawnee
Buffalo--Quapaw Agency
Fords--Grand River
Food--Shawnee
Community life--Shawnee
Hunting--Shawnee
Clothes--Shawnee
Household manufactures--Shawnee
Pottawatomies
Cemeteries--Pottawatomie
Payments--Pottawatomie
Religion--Shawnee
Grass--Quapaw Agency
Legends--Shawnee
Trails
Chetopa, Kansas
Character traits--Shawnee

LEGEND & STORY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field worker's name Nannie Lee Burns

This report made on (date) May 14 1937

1. This legend was secured from (name) Edward J. McClain

Address 617 A SE, Miami, Okla

This person is (male ~~or female~~) ~~White~~ ~~Non-Indian~~, Indian,

If Indian, give tribe Shawnee

2. Origin and history of legend or story Memory

3. Write out the legend or story as completely as possible. Use blank sheets and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 13

INTERVIEW WITH EDWARD J. McCLAIN, SHAWNEE
AT 717 A. Street SE., Miami, Okla.

FIELD WORKER NANNIE LEE BURNS,
May 14, 1937

EARLY SHAWNEE DAYS.

My father, John McClain, was born in 1835 and my mother, Alice McClain, was born in 1844, both in Jackson County, Kansas. Father died in this county in 1875 at our home about 12 miles west of here. My mother died in 1897 also at the old home though after father's death she had married a Scotchman from Edinburg, Scotland, at Baxter Springs, Kansas.

My grandparents came from Dayton, Ohio, to Kansas.

My parents came to Northeast Indian Territory in 1870 from Jackson County and first stopped at the mouth of Warren's Branch, three miles north of Ottawa at the Pottawatomie Ford. In 1872 they moved to Big Timber Hill in Craig County where I was born, March 8, 1873.

I am a three-quarter Shawnee and have no brothers or sisters, though my parents raised seven other children and one of them was a white person.

EARLY LIFE.

Our first home was a round tepee and was still, till

2

after we moved to Big Timber Hill. At first the Shawnee Band, which we lived with, were a tepee village and sometimes there would be maybe thirty or forty and sometimes a hundred or more. In summer many went various places to hunt and there would not be so many. They lived by hunting and made little effort to raise anything, maybe little patch of Indian corn.

Big Timbered Hill, where the band settled permanently, is a large wooded hill several miles across and is located in a prairie country from whose sides and slopes you can see many miles in any direction. Here father, who was a millwright by trade, built our first home a dobe one containing two rooms 12 X 14 feet with a porch between, the cracks filled with mud. I saw my first plaster, using lime, when I was about ten years old. The roof was long poles laid longways the roof and the clapboards were fastened to these poles by a wooden round pin through the shingle and pole. You started at the lower edge of the roof and laid then in rows just as you do shingles now. They were from 18 inches to 24 inches long. We had wooden doors and it would take father a week to make a door as the logs had

-3

to be split with a heavy froe and axes and shaved with a broad ax. Board windows were made in the same way and were raised and fastened with a strap. In cool weather the inside was always dark and we used pig-tail lamps. These were strips of cloth braided and then twisted and placed in a pan of grease. We had no locks but the door had a strap with the latch inside and you could not open it till you learned just the right jerk to give it. Our floors were puncheon smoothed with the broad ax and with a part of the lower side cut away to make them lay flat. Our first barn had a roof made of hay.

They cut the long bluestem grass which was about six feet on an average and laid it straight and tied it in bundles and placed ^{these} on the roof, the heavy end down, in rows like shingles. It did not make a very good roof as it often leaked. The sides were of poles.

It took my father a year and a half to build our first house as it all had to be done by hand and in a slow way. The shingles or rather clapboards were 18 to 24 inches in length, about 8 inches wide laid with a 4 inch lap. For the comb, he used boards about four feet long and from a half to an inch thick. My father used white oak for the

4

comb though black jack was sometimes used. Later our home was enlarged to a four room house.

FURNITURE.

Father made two beds. One had high posts and had a cover fastened over the top and had curtains that you could draw around the sides and end, and was built high, so high that a low bed could be pushed under it. Besides this the women could put or store lots of things under the bed. The other was a low frame. We used the buffalo skins for covers and floor covering. The last buffalo I saw was when I was about seventeen. It was killed in this part of the state one mile southeast of the Stepp Ford on this side of the Neosho River near the Pottawatomie camp and the robe was given to my mother. Father made our chairs and we used the fireplace for cooking. Had a rat tail biscuit maker of iron and set on three 3 inch legs, and iron lid, also long handled iron skillets and iron pots.

FOOD.

Our meat was jerked buffalo meat and venison, no hogs in those days. The bones were boiled for soup, the skins were used to make moccasins. Sugar we had from the Maple tree.

5.

Beans, pumpkins and corn were dried for winter use. We pressed the blackberry, boiled the juice and sealed it in stone jars, the plum the same way, though we had little success with the wild strawberry. Huckleberries were pitted and cooked into a butter.

We had cows till I was about 15 years old but we used the goats for milk. They belonged in common and if you wanted milk, the woman went out and milked any one of them.

PREPARATION OF THE FOOD.

The men hunted in the daytime and would sometimes bring in four or five deer and a buffalo or two, though sometimes but not often these would be cut up on the prairie. They skinned the kill and cut the meat in strips or jerked it and this was put on the roofs to dry or cure even in the warmer weather. Our only pest was the green headed fly later.

One man watched the corn and when he decided that it was right, it was gathered, shucked and placed over the coals in an upright position. A long iron rod, running over the fire, held these ears in place and they were cooked ten or fifteen minutes according to the fire, being frequently turned. When done they were removed from the fire and then

6

a knife was run lengthwise of the cob between the rows of kernels and they were worked off the cob, the grains then were placed in the sun to dry. The men made and tended the fires but did nothing else. Later this was cooked with plenty of grease or boiled with meat, sometimes you boiled black-eyed peas with it and a little salt and sugar.

Flour was made from the corn. You had a log possibly 20 inches across with a trough in it and then you pounded the corn kernel with the end of a long stick or pole. In making sotella, you used the flour corn after it was roasted and dried. It was never washed but cooked with plenty of lard or meat. Conahana, was made from white man's corn, known as hominy.

CLOTHING.

Hides were tanned by placing skins in a vat filled with a strong lye solution till the hairs were killed, then they were taken out scraped and cleaned with soap and salt and then spread out to dry and cure. Cowhides were placed in a vat of burr oak bark liquid and left for four days. This gave the hide a dark color and made it stiff. We made our own moccasins and for thread, we used strippings made from

7

skin, or more often it was made from flax and hemp and another weed, I can't recall the name just now. The outer bark or covering was stripped off, the balance was pounded and broke. Next we had a board with wooden pegs on which this was carded and then twisted into thread lengths. The men had a boot higher than the moccasin that they wore when in the timber and rough places. Only our Sunday moccasins were beaded. My mother wore a dress made of what looked like tow to me. It was of a coarse weave and made in two pieces and over this she wore a blanket. Most of the men wore shirts and trousers, often red flannel shirts, and broad brim hats. My father's hat was black and he always wore a feather or a bell in his hat. Mother wore a handkerchief on her head. Some of the men wore fringed trousers.

TRAVEL.

The men rode bareback. The women had a kind of saddle with a horn. The saddle was made of buckskin. The men would ride as far as they could then would jump off and run alongside the horse to rest him. They also used the drag. This is fastened to the horse by two shafts and usually only one person in it. If the wife is riding, ^{in the drag} the man leads the horse or the woman may put her children in it.

AN EARLY VISIT.

When I was about five years old, a storm destroyed our home and we went to the Pottawatomie Village for a short time. It was then located southeast of the Stepp Ford near the present Charley Demo farm on this side of the Neosho about nine miles northwest of Miami. Their old burying ground is on this farm and some of the Shawnees are buried there too. They lived either in hide tents or makeshift houses and when we went, they were making sugar. They had it piled on the ground in a long heap. Here I saw my first drunk man, money and sugar. While we were there, a government wagon drawn by four mules brought them a large sum of money and the men with the wagons threw it out on the ground with scoops.

At night there was what you would now call gambling, then it was a game. A man would have a ball and some shells and he would put the ball under one of the shells.

Each player would select a shell and put on the log a piece of money and the man who guessed the right shell, got the money. They left when I was about ten years old.

RELIGION.

When I was about four years old I went with my mother

2

to some place to worship. They sat around on logs but I did not understand it. We believe in a Supreme God or Great Spirit, the unusual is worshipped. An old Sun Religion. Some worshipped the dog in the sun. Another belief- that whatever you have been most cruel to in this life, you afterwards become and suffer the punishment you inflicted on them. One day, I struck a horse and mother said to me, "Don't do that" and told me why. There are three heavens - one on the bottom of the sea, one on the earth's surface and one in the air.

An old story of how the red bird became red, one day, he was so badly scared that he turned red and said "Wet Year".

EARLY LANDMARKS.

I was I think about three or four years old when Baxter was started. My father helped build the Richard Williams home in 1869 and for some time there were no homes in this part of the country except theirs and the Frank Connor Home at the Connor Bridge over the Neosho northwest of Fairland, and a shack on this side of the river at Poolers Ford, the Military Crossing on the Neosho.

10

The bluestem grass was higher than a man's head when on horseback and in the rich valleys even higher. The green headed flies and the mosquitoes pestered the horses in the summer and they would get as far in the timber as they could and as they ran through the pea vines and hops, this would knock the fly and mosquitoes off. Then too we had wild grapes as large as your tame ones.

At first what supplies that came to us were brought by some of the tribe who would make an occasional trip to Fort Scott. I remember when a trail or road was established from Chetopa, Kansas, running southeast by our hill and connecting with the old Military road at Poolers Ford. They made a round trip each day, leaving Chetopa in the morning and returning that evening. At first they carried passengers, later as other roads were opened a man carried the mail on horseback. This road was the same as the Chetopa-Mayesville Road till it reached the Williams place.

(CHETOPA MAYESVILLE ROAD)

It ran from Chetopa two miles southeast and crossed ~~Russell Creek~~ at the old Bluejacket farm and graveyard; south two miles; then southeast two miles, crossing Mud Creek; then

11

south two miles across the south end of Big Timbered Hill, two and a half miles to Cow Creek; southeast to Potato Mound, south one and a half miles across Nigger Creek; Southeast three and a half miles, crossing Coal Creek just north of the present bridge and grave yard. Here the roads divide and you follow the valley almost due east to the Pooler Ford while the Mayesville Road continues due south to the Hudson Creek crossing near the present Hudson Creek School house and on southeast to Fairland.

SOLDIERS.

The appearance of the soldiers was always of interest to me. They wore blue coats, blue caps that ran up to a point and a sharp bill, blue trousers with red, white or black strips down the legs. They drove and rode mostly horses. They had nothing to do with us but we sometimes saw them.

LATER LIFE AND MARRIAGE.

I left the Hill when I was 18 or 19 years old and for a time lived near Seneca and afterwards worked various places till October, 20, 1904, I married Nellie Ayers, a white girl born at Gainville, Texas, raised partly in Georgia and Springfield, Missouri, and living in Bluejacket when I met her. She was an orphan. She was born May 25, 1883.

12

I farmed for Joe Howe for three years, then moved to Vinita where we had a cafe for a year and then we came to Miami when the peaches were in bloom. Here at first I followed carpentering, then for years worked as a paper-hanger, and my last work was painting.

We have no children and my wife passed away Jan. 6, 1933.

CONCLUSION.

The writer has known Mr. McClain ever since they came to Miami and this is one man that has been a commendable citizen, he and his wife were sweethearts always. The last several years he has been unable to work, suffering from diabetes ^{and} having lost a part of one foot and one eye, and is now spending his days alone at his little home here.

Mr. McClain never attended school but has managed to educate himself to the extent that he reads and writes and can do his own figuring and he has the reputation and is often referred to as "that honest Indian."

May I relate something that I heard yesterday.

Some years ago when he first became unable to work a merchant trusted him for a few dollars of groceries and later told him not to try to pay it. A short time ago, he

-13

received a little money and he went directly to this merchant and insisted that the bill be hunted up he insisted till this was done and he paid it.

INDEX CASES

Sac and Fox Indians

--Sokuk

Removal--Sac and Fox

Buffalo hunt--Sac and Fox

Food--Sac and Fox

Farming--Sac and Fox

Community life--Sac and Fox

Religion--Sac and Fox reservation

Law enforcement--Indian agent

Social institutions--Sac and Fox