

CHAIR, LIZZIE WILSON.

INTERVIEW.

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Investigator, Wylie Thornton,
March 24, 1938.

Interview with George Wilson,
Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

George Wilson was born on Sugarloaf Mountain in the Cherokee Nation near what is now the town of Stilwell, on September 15, 1878, in a two room log hut, surrounded on every side by vine covered thorn thickets or under-brush; this log home was situated on a limestone mountain.

The father of this Indian family was Mr. Arch, a real full blood Cherokee, who never spoke a single word of English and lived entirely on natural resources with the exception of a small garden back of the house consisting of about one-fourth of an acre and farther back in the woods he had cleared up about ten acres for his Indian corn crop. The ten acres were cultivated twice with a bull tongue, single stock plow, drawn sometimes by an ox and some times by a small Indian pony.

George Wilson often spent whole days helping his

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father cut down a hickory tree and hew it out into a crude homemade plow, usually making this plow out of a tree with a limb running out in such a way as to make it easy to use this limb as the part of the plow that would go into the dirt. They also made the handles separate from the stock part of the plow and just fastened the handles on by wooden pins, and also made a cross piece that held the handles in place or separated them the right distance apart so the user could walk behind and hold the plow in place. His father taught him how to make the crude harness for the plow pony and also how to make the single tree, the thing you hitch your pony to in order to pull the plow. He used hickory wood almost altogether in making these plow tools.

For a long time the Indians thought the pony was not good for any purpose except to ride on hunting trips or on other travels. They would often hitch up a steer or a cow. The poorer Indian often milked the cows then worked them also. Of course, they did not expect much milk out of them that night but in such

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cases they usually gave them some feed at the noon hour, so after all these work-cows provided enough milk for a small family. Father knew how to make an ox yoke perfectly.

My father's name was George Wilson instead of Arch because he lived in a later period of time. A very few full blood Indians used surnames in my grandfather's time and since he had only one name which was Arch, this caused my father later on to be given an additional name in order to be able to distinguish his name from his father's name and that of his brother. When the Government enrolled my father's people, the Dawes Commission in writing his name and that of my uncle, Eli Wilson, got their names turned around and that is why they happen to be written as they are.

My grandmother, Peggy Griggs, before her marriage, was known to be very religious, and this, I suppose, was one of the causes why my father, George Wilson, was an ordained Baptist minister during the last twenty years of his life.

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Many of the things which my father told me in regard to his early life are almost unbelievable. Father told us once that he learned to shoot a gun when quite young, possibly nine years of age, and that he usually went as far away from the house as a mile to a pond on the mountain to kill deer, and always watched the herd of deer come to get water and he always picked out an opportunity to shoot the largest buck and not shoot a doe with the same shot. The hind quarters of a deer were all that Father ever took home for meat and the wolves always feasted on the rest of the carcass. The wild deer were not so wild then as they were in later years. Father said that he had often shot a buck down and the rest of the large herd would just seem to get very furious and would keep going around the wounded buck and would seem to indicate that they were ready to fight instead of running away. Father very often approached his meat after some trouble with the bucks, and he never shot an additional deer just because he could have. The wild turkeys were so plentiful that Father never killed the female turkey

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but only killed the male bird. This care for the wild life was taught the Indians by their fathers and to hunt otherwise was considered poor citizenship and poor marksmanship with the gun or poor marksmanship with the bow and arrow. My father in his later years was known for his master marksmanship and was very often ruled out of shooting matches, or was forced to use a strange gun or to shoot with the gun turned over, as with the bead on the end of the barrel on the underside.

The happiest days of Father's life were the last twenty years and these years were spent preaching the Bible to his own people. He had no school education but he studied the English alphabet and finally became an efficient reader of English and of course, he was a good scholar of the Cherokee alphabet and that meant that he could read the Cherokee alphabet perfectly.

After he had been preaching for a few years, he was made a traveling evangelist, covering the entire Cherokee Nation; however, he served as pastor at a good many churches before going into the evangelistic work. He

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served as pastor of the following places; Lees Creek, Cherry-Tree, Roundsprings, Echota, Standing-Rock, Long-Springs, New Foundation, Pine Tree, his home church, Fair-Field, Cedar Tree and Piney.

My father was well known for his ability and was known as a great peacemaker and all church disputes and disagreements were his to settle. When any Cherokee citizen made a banter to an enemy with these words, "I will tell you what I am willing to do, I will settle this matter on any terms that George Wilson says are right," this meant the other man knew that he was wrong or he would accept this challenge. This banter was heard among thousands of Cherokees for over a period of twenty years, and thousands of times serious trouble, even blood-shed, was avoided by the word of George Wilson, the greatest peacemaker among the Cherokee people since the death of Jess Bushyhead of the very early days.

Many times the Cherokees called "Hello" at the Wilson home along about midnight, to call the beloved and respected preacher out of his bed only to hear

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George Wilson say "Come on in boys, into the house" and after both had stated their case by Father's fireside, they listened very quietly to hear the solution for their troubles. After hearing what Father had to say, they very often left their guns with George Wilson in token that peace had been agreed upon. After Father would ask his callers to bow their heads with him while he prayed, invoking God's blessings on these two friends of his and asking God to help them to understand that He is their best friend, he would add, "And Oh God, help them to pursue peace with you first, then peace with all mankind" and very often men repented of their evil thoughts and went away with different intentions. My father, George Wilson, died July 31, 1929, at his home about eight miles east of Tahlequah.