

CHAPMAN, J. M.

INTERVIEW

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Billie Byrd,
Journalist,
April 13, 1938.

An Interview with Mr. J. M. Chapman,
White and of Choctaw descent,
Sixty-two years old,
Okemah, Oklahoma.

Yellow flags placed near a home or community were signs that the people most feared to approach during the Territorial days in the Choctaw country. Those yellow flags were put up at the homes or communities where there were cases of smallpox or of some other contagious disease. The flags were put up by Government orders and were placed either on tall poles or trees near the home of a quarantined family for a half mile in every direction and with these flags so scattered and placed, no one could approach a place without having seen the sign. The quarantined family would select the healthiest member of the home to approach the outer edge of the quarantine area on the days on which the Government people issued rations to the sick. This member of the quarantined family obtained what was given and returned with the provisions.

Garland is a town in Oklahoma in Haskell County north of Stigler, but before it had started as a town it was the place

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where the District Court for the Choctaw people was held. Another District Court was placed at Whitefield which was south of Garland. In these courts were held courts for the criminals; sentences were passed and punishment by whipping or death was carried out. They had Choctaw Lighthorsemen just as the same as the Creeks had. Judge Garland, after whom the name of the town was selected, was a noted man among the Choctaws. He promoted the beginning of the town of Garland. He first made a log cabin and began a blacksmith shop along with his work as judge. In this location, a good many of the neighboring farmers made trades with him.

Seeing that so many people were living in the neighborhood and that a good many came to trade and do business with him, Judge Garland determined to establish a mail route. He first operated the Pony Express with the mail being carried from Stigler which already had a railway at that point about 1892 or 1894. From Stigler to Whitefield then on to Garland and a further route to Tamaha was made. The Pony Express was maintained for several years until the change was made to the use of the two-wheeled cart. This cart was in use for some

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time until changes came, later. The blacksmith shop was the post office, with Cooper Serat, Choctaw, acting as the mail carrier. The activity around Garland still kept up well. Judge Garland saw good prospects for a good business and he established a general merchandise store combined with the post office, as he was the postmaster. After the store was established the people came more often to the store to do their trading and Garland's trade did not fall off.

There was another man who saw the possibilities of a good location and wanted to make an establishment there. He was A. L. Jones, the first doctor who ever came to that place. His office and business were conducted in the back of Garland's store. Later on, another doctor came, so the two built another building for their quarters.

United States marshals were looked to to keep order but the Indians were under their own tribal laws. It was during the election of their chiefs that the people disliked to meet one on the road or any place else. The feelings arose when the opposing parties were competing.

Among the Indians there were two organizations called the Buzzards and Eagles. In these two divisions, the opposing

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Members stood in opposition to the beliefs of the other party in the tribal affairs, elections, ball games, and the other opposing contests. In each case, they stood as very bitter opponents, and at times met in combat or skirmishes. Sometimes all male children who were old enough and were able to carry and use guns were armed and called together in a body to be ready for any uprising that an opponent might call. When they entered into skirmishes or other trouble, the United States marshals and light horsemen quieted them down.

After all the hostility was quieted down, any member of a Buzzard or Eagle party who met the other at any gathering and didn't exchange greetings, one would speak up and say, "Well, why don't you speak?" Those questions were to test the other's feeling and learn if the hostile manner was gone. Sometimes the whites asked that, too. For it was during those times that the feet of the white people would become very tender. The white people were living among Indians and they feared them because they had not completely forgotten the treatment accorded their fathers by the whites when the Indians were forced to leave the old homes. The Indians

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became very ugly towards the whites and the whites didn't want to be mixed in with them because nothing could seem to control the Indians when their feelings were touched. The Indians didn't want to have anything to do with the whites, then.

A United States Marshal

Jim Cole was one big and fat tall man. Criminals were supposed to fear all United States marshals but Cole was liked by all the people for his kindness and playfulness. Even though he carried his six-shooter, he never jumped quickly to conclusions or at anybody. He went slowly in his work but he always had his man. He may have reached for his gun at times to use in catching a criminal but he was never known to draw his gun on just any man. He would carry a warrant that should have been served long ago in his pocket until it was almost worn out. He would first approach his party, talk to him and look things over before serving the warrant. He wanted always to verify facts first and see if the subject was liable to be taken to court. If he found things so, he would serve the warrant by saying, "Well, I

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hate to but I'll have to serve it," and would hand the warrant to the party and arrest him. Other United States marshals are often reported to have chained and guarded their prisoner very strictly at night but Cole never did. He would take the prisoner to his home, offer him the best meal, the best bed he had. In case of too many prisoners, Cole provided them with the best beds and he would sleep on the floor.

Choctaw Cries

The Choctaws mourned for their dead thirty days or two or three months after the deceased had been buried. The mourning was conducted by the relatives but was joined and entered into by the friends of deceased and their relatives. All the mourners would gather near the burial place and camp while the morning would be spent in preparing meals or the feast to be held along with the mourning. Not only the relatives provided the food but the friends and neighbors helped in the preparations. Just before eating, a small group would go to the grave, bow before it and offer their mourning cries. This crying would be kept up by this certain group for fifteen or twenty minutes. They left and went to

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the loaded table prepared and took part in the feast of everything that the Indians like and were able to prepare. Another group would go to the grave and go through the same thing. This changing about went on until every mourner had taken part in the ceremonies as well as in the feast. After all had shown and given their respects to the dead, anything to eat that was left over was divided among the families and the mourning ceremonies were over. The Choctaws entered into this but it was such a mournful and sad occasion, it made me weep with them.