

CLARK, WINIFRED M.

BRAGGS.

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Braggs.

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Braggs came into being as a trading center for about twenty miles radius of allotments. People came from along the Illinois River on the southeast and the Arkansas River on the west. Nearly all the stores carried a general stock.

The town was named for Mr. Braggs, the first depot agent, who lived at the depot. When I went there the wooden shutters were still put up over the store windows every night. It had been the habit of drunken horsemen to come into town at night to shoot out the lights seen through windows. Several murders were committed by passing horsemen. One day at sunset the Craig family were sitting at the supper table in their log home not far from the road. The oldest son sat with his back to the open door. He was shot and killed by some one who mistook him for his father, a Texas white man who came there in early days and married a Cherokee woman.

This man Craig seemed to have many enemies among the Indians. Tom Madden, a Cherokee merchant, was so in fear of being killed that he carried a gun concealed in a paper

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bag, thinking it would not be noticed. He was killed and the deed laid to Craig but another, a Cherokee Indian, was made to serve a life term. I saw him when he was dismissed from the prison and arrived in Braggs. He had been sent home because of lung trouble. Craig avoided him and it was said that he was afraid this man would kill him. It was supposed that Craig bought the jury that sent this Indian to the pen.

Many people in and around Braggs were related and seemed to resent the presence of newcomers who tried to locate there.

When I first saw the town there was a small depot, on the Iron Mountain railroad, which ran in a southeasterly direction through the center. A two-story white house, east of the depot, belonged to Dr. Reece. A white cottage, at quite a distance northwest of the depot, belonged to old man Patrick, a white man who had married Indian women and acquired considerable real estate.

Under this house was a cellar built like a small fort, with very thick stone walls and small windows on each side. There was an inner room for a safe hiding place when his

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enemies came to town. When he became old he was a kindly white haired benevolent appearing person.

Mr. Patrick owned several of the store buildings on the main street which ran parallel with the railroad and about two hundred yards west. These stores were operated by Indians and white men who had been there several years before statehood.

Old man Patrick had a feed store and lumber yard back of it just south of his home. Will and Ike Herzog, with Beau Hawn as clerk, had the next store. Roscoe Williams and his partner, with Clyde Hunter as clerk, had the store on the corner of a cross street. West on this street was the gristmill and blacksmith shop operated by a man named Breedlove and his boys.

Across the corner from Roscoe Williams store was the post office and Dr. Reece's office in a small building. Near this was a long narrow two-story building called a hotel. This building stood on posts and stones, high enough off the ground to allow wandering pigs and geese to get under it. Several other small stores were south of the hotel and a small bank, on the corner of another cross

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street, which was managed by a Russian named Castanien.

Mr. Castanien induced my brother to locate in Braggs, telling him of the country's grand opportunities for trade. My brother, Albert C. Clark, brought a large stock of hardware, farming implements and carriages, and built a stone and brick store on the cross street opposite the bank and next to the grocery operated by Mr. Wicks, a Cherokee.

The only school was in an unpainted one-room old store building out on the road that led by the north cottongin. This building had two rows of rough handmade seats. A few had narrow boards attached to the backs for desks.

A short cloth blackboard extended across the front of the room behind the teacher's desk which stood on a low platform.

I taught in that building, having charge of ninety-five pupils classed in the first three grades. They were crowded into one row, five in a seat. One morning the middle one of a group, five year old Thelma Donoghy, got hot and sticking out her elbows to right and left toppled the other four off on the floor. Straightening up she looked around soberly and said: "There."

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I grew tired of the crowded condition and bought a dozen folding chairs and brought in a long board for the little boys. The school board would not provide any furniture for this school as they planned to build a new brick school on land that Mr. Patrick had been induced by his son-in-law, George Meeker, to give to the children for their playground. This eight acre piece of land was on the northeast corner of Braggs. The next year we moved into the new building. There were forty shiny new single seats in our room and it was a problem to find room for ninety-five young wigglers. I obtained a bench from the church house to place in one corner near the big desk to take care of those who would not sit quietly with others, as some pinched or bit their seat-mates.

There was only one church, Methodist, in Braggs at that time. It had been started by the Reece family who always took care of the itinerant preachers and their families when they came to town. One of the Reece girls told me that her mother always cooked chicken for these visiting preachers and all she ever got to eat was the boniet part of a wing. When this girl grew to be twenty years old,

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her father allowed her to work in the post office. She had beautiful hair and always wore a white silk ribbon on the side of her head. She was very attractive, with lively repartee for all. She said: "I feel like a bird out of a cage." Her father had always been afraid to let even his boys have much to do with the people of Braggs.

One of the greatest events of the year was Decoration Day when people from country and town went out to South Bethel Cemetery, about five miles southwest of Braggs, where their people were buried, and where many of them had attended school, in the old log school house at the northeast corner of the cemetery which had been named for the old school.

The people went prepared for a whole day, with stack cakes and pies, loads of good food of every description, enough to feed their own family and anyone else who needed a good dinner. There were many men and boys and even girls who came on horseback, who depended on the generosity of some one else. One of these good cooks was Aunt Millie Craig. I have seen her spread a big white cloth on the ground, unload her huge basket of food and in a few minutes the cloth was surrounded by those who ate until sat-

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isfied while Aunt Millie ate nothing. The last time that I saw her do this I wondered if she was not going beyond her strength. Apparently she was not one of the crowd. A lady out of a log cabin in the woods. Her lot had been cast in a difficult place, and she was trying to live up to the prevailing custom.

When each family had decorated graves they joined the group outside the fence under the trees where they heard preaching, singing from shape notes, and sometimes political speaking, if it happened to be campaign year.

Braggs has had several destructive fires. One of the first that I remember was the old depot. No one knew the exact cause but it was in winter with the wind blowing from the northeast carrying the burning brands to the roofs of the stores. There was no fire fighting apparatus. Men and boys climbed on the roofs and kicked off the embers as fast as they fell. They said that it was the sheet of ice over the roofs and store fronts that saved the town.

The north gin, at one time, was in charge of Lee Breedlove. He was young and reckless and had a habit of blowing the whistle at all times of day.. He was warned to

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stop blowing the whistle except at certain times as, in case of fire it was the only alarm.

One day at about ten in the morning he started to blow the whistle. People paid no attention for some time, until finally my brother noticed its prolonged howl and said: "Men, lets go, there's trouble at the gin."

They found Lee had tied down the whistle and was fighting a losing battle. One part of the gin was gone but they saved the other part by hanging wet cotton sacks around the edge of the roof.

The south gin got on fire at night when the yard was packed with bales. There was a pond close by so it was a great help in saving the gin and cotton.

When the old hotel burned it was occupied by a family who had the furniture insured. The men and boys of the town rushed in and tried to carry out the furniture while the proprietor fought them and retarded their efforts to help him. It dawned on some of them that he had set the fire for the insurance. They backed out and let the rest of it go. They had spoiled his game.

This fire destroyed the post office, Doctor Reece's

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office and the photographer's place. Mr. Todd, the photographer, lost a valuable large new camera and Doctor Reece had to work fast to save his beloved old bird dog that always slept in his office. They saved everything in the post office as it was farthest away.

While I was out of town one day the house next door burned to the ground. Our house had a ladder on the east side and from the eaves to the deck around the big chimney. My little barefoot pupils stood on that deck and poured water down the roof. This water was passed up to them by an old couple named Marlow and others who used up their rain barrel of water before they could break into my home to attach the hose to the kitchen faucet. Some of the boys kept on using the hose until after sunset wetting the area between my place and site of the burned house.

There were some peculiar characters around Braggs in the early days. William Penn Boudinot, a half blood Cherokee and descendant of Elias Boudinot, lived with his son Dick in a log cabin three miles northeast of Braggs. This old man would ride into town, hitch his pony to the rack in front of Patrick's store, do a little trading, then he

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would walk back home. Some one, going that way at night, would take the pony home to the Boudinot cabin. This happened many times. He finally disappeared very mysteriously.

William Penn Boudinot had two sons who were often at Braggs. Frank became a lawyer and located in Washington becoming useful to the Indians. Dick had about a dozen hounds. He hunted and fished and made regular trips to the Agency. Those hounds slept under the beds in the cabin during cold weather.

Dick cared nothing about the education of his children. I taught a subscription school at Boudinot Chapel. Three of the pupils were Elinor, Harriet and Willie Boudinot, aged fifteen, ten and six. That was their first opportunity to attend school. Grandmother Boudinot had taught them until they had a fair foundation and as they were very intelligent they learned rapidly. Mary had been to public school one month and at that time was too proud to enter with her sisters, as she was seventeen. In spite of her early handicaps she became fairly well educated and has held a position in the American Embassy for many years

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first in Cuba for eight years and then in European countries.

Two brothers, dark skinned Creeks, named Sonny and their mother who was copper colored came to Braggs occasionally. Sometimes the mother would bring nuts or fruit to sell. She always went bare footed and bare headed and would slip silently into my house and stand in the middle of the room before I knew of her presence. I would ask: "How much?" She used signs but never spoke. Somehow I seemed to know what she wanted and always bought.

One day I was in my brother's store early in the morning. Frank and Dick Boudinot came in and a small Indian. He was an interpreter. Big Sonny was sitting down near my brother's desk facing me. He was very still. Frank and Dick were near the front door talking in loud whispers, conferring with the interpreter who carried their request to Sonny in Creek. Sonny did not answer but looked at the floor. Once when I looked at him he was looking at me and I saw a queer little flicker pass over his face. I knew he understood everything that Dick and Frank said in English. The conference ended without obtaining the lease they sought. The next morning Sonny was sitting on a saw-

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horse sunning himself back of Wick's store, and as I went past him he said: "It is a lovely morning, isn't it." He thought I would be surprised and I certainly was.

Watt Sam is a Natchez Creek. He has an allotment east of Braggs and has been there many years. He has had a good education and has been able to interpret several Indian languages. He can speak English and understand very well. One day I said: "Watt Sam, where is your wife? I have a message for her from the wife of Robert Ross of Tahlequah." He looked straight ahead. I repeated. I soon saw that I had offended him by speaking to him in public so asked a Cherokee boy to speak to him in Cherokee. Zeke McCoy found that she was in the next store. Watt Sam had been in my home and said the whole Cherokee alphabet for me, so I could hear the right pronunciation of the syllables.

A young man was sent from the University of Chicago to interview Watt Sam, who was supposed to be the last one of his tribe, to get records of Natchez Creek, in folksongs and legends. John Tony, his interpreter, Watt Sam and his wife went to the Kroh Music store to make some of the records.