

INDEX CARDS

Sioux
Burial Customs--Siouan
Physicians--Choctaw Nation
Skullyville
Shake Rag
Bokoshe
Hogtown
Cartersville
Cashaw
Mercantile Establishments--Choctaw Nation
Openings--Pottawatomie
Spiro
Railroads--Kansas City Southern
Steamboats--Arkansas River
Ferries--Arkansas River
Ferries--Canadian River
Ferries--Illinois River
Law Enforcement--Federal
Outlaws
Schools--Choctaw Nation
Law Enforcement--Choctaw
Medicine--Choctaw
Burial Customs--Choctaw
Farming--Choctaw Nation
Coal--Choctaw Nation
Churches--Choctaw Nation

Wm C. Cook

From a personal interview with the subject.

Muskogee, Oklahoma, Route 5.

L. W. Wilson, Field Worker

Indian-Pioneer History- S-149

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There is no trace of Indian blood, of any kind,
in any of my people. We are all of English and Irish descent.

I was born May 25, 1876 at Waldrow, Arkansas near the Indian Territory Line.

MR. Ira Cook was born in Indiana in 1841. Died 1915 and is buried at Cowlington, Oklahoma.

MR. Elizabeth Wilkerson-Cook was born in Missouri in 1851. Died 1915 and is buried at Cowlington, Oklahoma.

My father was educated in Indiana and studied to become a practicing physician. He came to Missouri just at the outbreak of the Civil War for the purpose of practicing medicine and secured license as a practicing physician. After the war he received license also to practice in Arkansas and Texas.

CIVIL WAR

I have heard father tell many interesting stories of the war and his personal experiences, the battles in which he was engaged etc., but I do not recall any thing that has not been recorded in history, if one will follow the doings of the Confederate Army under General Price as father was with his contingent throughout the war.

LIFE OF A YOUNG MAN JUST OUT OF THE ARMY

Father, together with some three or four of his old comrades, returned to Missouri, bought themselves some new wagons, teams and harness with the intentions of doing some pioneering farther west into Colorado.

They were stopping at the old Blossom Hotel, at Kansas City, Missouri, when they conceived the idea and naturally their trip westward started from this point. The object of their going to Colorado was because news came in daily of a big gold finding at Leadville and they thought not only of gold particular father, for he intended to practice medicine.

He has told me how the wild Indians on some two or three occasions raided their party and in one instance one of the party was killed. The rest of them never did get farther than Cheyenne Wells, Colorado. He has told me that when they would go into camp at night that they would get all their wagons in a circle, put their horses inside this circle, as well as themselves, so if the Indians molested them they could use their wagons as a means of barracks and also to keep their horses from being stolen.

The only laws was the six-shooter carried on their hips and rifles in their wagons. If a man was caught stealing a horse, and that was their prized possessions, they thought shooting too good and they would give him a neck-tie party (hang him with a rope to a tree).

The Sioux Indians were the ones he encountered most, and from his observation and older men he contacted he learned much about them. These Indians lived in teepees, with no certain place for their home. They lived principally on Buffalo meat and other wild game. The women folk did all the work, cooking, caring for the ponies and children. The papooses and children stayed with their mothers entirely until thirteen or fourteen years old and then they were under the man and the man always hoped for him to be a brave (a warrior).

The men did the hunting, fishing and fighting. The braves' delight was to invade and terrify emigrants, kill them, scalp them and take their horses and belongings. The ones getting the most scalps was the greatest warrior of the tribe.

These Indians traveled in single file all mounted. The reason they did this was to keep the white man from telling how many of them were in the tribe. If they ran across their trail one could not tell if there was twenty-five, fifty or one hundred, or any amount would make one beaten path.

The men cared no more for their women, or not as much, as a slave in the South before the Civil War. They did, however, reverence their dead more than the living, both men and women. They liked to go back and visit the burial places of their dead. They would gather up the bones and take them back to their new domain. Sometimes they would take their dead and wrap them in a buffalo hide and put them high in the air on platforms made of poles or in a tree and usually wrapped with his rifle, skinning -knife, blankets, bowls etc., believing they would need them after they left this world to go to their Happy Hunting Ground.

White men were curious to know of these things and when they would find a body they oftentimes took the things wrapped up in the hide. When the Indians found this out they would go on the war path, and this one thing alone made them furiously mad at the pale-faces, as they called them.

When father and the party turned around at Cheyenne Wells, Colorado and started back they were escorted through by United States troops and experienced no trouble on their return trip. With the loss of one of their own and the persuasion of others on the trail coming back East was why they came. After I grew up and talked to Dad, I told him he was a tenderfoot and couldn't take it.

After he returned to Missouri he became anxious to go to Arkansas and cover some of the ground he had gone over while in the Army, under General Price and finally settled at Waldron, Arkansas near the now present LaFlore County Line and started practicing medicine, "A saddle-bag doctor" of course. It was while here he met my mother and married her. I was born in Waldron, Arkansas in 1876 as I have told you.

When I was six or seven years old, we moved to what was then known as Skulleville in the Indian Territory and he practiced there. He would get his medicines from Ft. Smith, Arkansas, sometimes by steamboat, sometimes he would ride over there after it himself. He had certain days he would go to certain places, for example; he would go to Shake Rag, now Bokoske, Oklahoma next day to Hogtown, now Carterville, Oklahoma and another day to Cashaw, (now no more). A drug store finally opened-up at Cashaw run by a man named Newman, also one at Hogtown by a Mr. Foley. also one at Skulleville which father owned himself. If one at Skulleville wanted medicine and mother did not know about it, they would have to come back after it, the day father would be back, or do without it.

OPENING OF THE SAC & FOX, Iowa & Potawatomi County.

Father learned of the opening of the Potawatomi County and he moved to Johnsonville the closest he could get according to the law before the opening. I was about fourteen years old then. He started doctoring there and waiting for the opening so he could stake his claim. Johnsonville was on the South Canadian River and he was doctoring in the Potawatomi County even before the opening. He made the opening all right and got claim.

After all he did he gave it up. He had my uncle to stay on it for awhile and when he left it that was the end of the claim for my father.

He moved back there from Johnsonville, I. T. to Skulleville, I. T. and father continued as a doctor until he died, at Spiro, Oklahoma. Skulleville passed out when the K.C.S. R.R. built through the Choctaw Nation in 1894 and Spiro was the name of the new town placing it back from the Arkansas River a short ways. I married a girl over at Cowlington, I. T. and by father financing me together with hat I had earned I started farming and am still pursuing this occupation but with the loss of my parents. Sickness and bad crops and other causes I am far from being in the shape I used to be financially for now I own nothing.

GHOST TOWNS

Railroads caused the passing out of many little villages. I remember, as I said before, Shake Rag, Hogtown, Cushaw and others all in LeFlore Co/

RAILROADS

The K.C.S. built through the Choctaw Nation in 1894 and likewise the C.O. & G. now the Rock Island. The Ft. S & W R.R. and the Midland Valley R.R. in 1907 or 1908.

The Iron Mountain R. R. built out of Ft. Smith, Arkansas through the territory in 1886.

STEAMBOATS ON THE ARKANSAS RIVER

I remember the Wm. Drew, Border City, Lucy Walker, ^{Maumelle} Mournelle, Myrtle B. and there was others that came to Skulleville but I can't recall them now.

FERRIES

First, I will explain that between Webber Falls, I. T. and Ft. Smith, Arkansas along the Arkansas River was what we called bottoms, each bottom had a name, going down the Arkansas River from Webber Falls, I. T. was the Tamoha Bottom. There was a steam ferry across the river at Tamoha next Sallior Bottom, with no ferry, Blaine Bottom, with a ferry by a man named Foreman, Cushaw Bottom, with a ferry by a man named Sharver and later acquired by my father. This ferry was $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles above Redland and I worked on it some and last the Paw Paw Bottom near the present town of Braden, Oklahoma with a ferry but have forgotten the name. Bob Vanh had a ferry across the Canadian River about seven miles up stream from its mouth. The ferry at Webbers was first a pole ferry, then a cable and then a steam ferry. Joe Lynch and Dr. Campbell owned this ferry. Bullet Foreman had a ferry on the Illinois River about eight miles up stream from its mouth on the old stage road from Ft. Gibson, I. T. to Ft. Smith, Arkansas.

U. S. MARSHALS

I knew Tine Hughes, Bazz Reeves, Ike Rogers, Bud Ledbetter, Chas. Barnhill, a fellow named Stanfield, I have forgotten his first name, but he was a dear friend of my fathers, also Heck Thomas, and I guess Bill Tilghman is about all.

RANCHES

There was a few small ranches around the country. I recall the Will Choate Ranch, Nip Blackstone, Sr. Ranch, Joe Lynch Ranch, but I never cared for ranch-life and only gave them a passing notice.

OUTLAWS

I knew Cherokee Bill, Bill Nails, Bill Cook, Buck gang- three of them. I say I knew them but it was only at sight. I did go to Ft. Smith to see Cherokee Bill hung, and I saw others in jail at Ft. Smith but I was only a spectator each time and have forgotten them. Al Jennings and Frank Jennings I remember them. If I ever saw the Dalton boys, I can't recall it but has ^{father} told me Frank Dalton was killed in 1884 by some horse thieves and that Grat and Bob Dalton use to be U. S. Marshalls before they started their lawlessness.

The Daltons were all raised up around Coffeyville, Kansas and were respectable people and that Louis Dalton, father of the boys was loved by everyone. Louis died in 1889, the year they opened the Oklahoma County for settlers.

INDIANS

The only Indians I knew were the Choctaws. I have seen wild Indians but somebody tamed them before I saw them. Choctaws, of course, had their peculiar way of living, but did, I guess, the best they could, under the circumstances. They got their bread money from the Government, along with other little payments. They could buy what they wanted, as far as their money went, from the stores at Skulleville or St. Smith, Arkansas. I use to think there was more Indians in Ft. Smith than any place to be found in the Territory. Of course, they lived in log cabins, lived on wild game, wild fruit and wild berries, a great deal. Had their peculiar dishes to eat, and prepared their food some different from we whites, and at that we whites would try to cook and eat the things Choctaws ate and they tried the things we liked.

We all went to school together, in log school houses, some times a ^{frame} ~~pane~~ house, studied out of the same books and all in all we got along pretty good. What hurt the Indians in this country, I think was when they did away with the tribal laws. They felt that the white people thought they could not govern themselves and why govern them, for they knew it was the whites that were bandits and outlaws and criminals going to jail at Ft. Smith. If an Indian was told under the old law to show up for a crime and the result was so many lashes at the post, Mr. Indian would be there. Do you reckon a white man would, certainly not, and even today white, Indians, all have to make a bona fide bond to save being kept in jail until the day of trial.

The Indians today will tell you that the white man want live up to his laws why should an Indian, and they mean from Washington, D. C. down to the J. P. Court. Every Indian in the Five Tribes feel they have been unjustly treated more for this one thing than all the rest.

INDIAN MEDICINES

The Cheotaws doctored themselves with roots and herbs to a great extent. They used bone set, butter-fly root, sasafra bark, and many others I can't recall. A fullblood would die before he would have a white doctor unless some white man or half breed would persuade him. An Indian would take any kind of medicine that was made into a liquid, but when it came to taking a pill or capsule now that was something different. But as time went on and lives were saved by white doctors, they began to get more confidence in them. You see doctors, in those days, had to be a dentist, eye, ear and nose specialist and in fact handle all cases from pulling a tooth to obstetric cases as well as being a surgeon.

The Indians had among them mid-wives and few times was father ever went for when a new fullblood baby was born. There was usually in every neighborhood a midwife for even the whites, and the doctor was raced for, only when the mother and babe or either was not expected to live. Many a mother died in the early days as well as the babes for the want of medical attention. Sanitary conditions in many instances were the results of deaths together with exposure account of housing conditions to these mothers.

BURIAL GROUNDS

I know of several old family cemeteries in LeFlore County. On nearly all old home places was a family cemetery, usually located on high ground so that it naturally drained itself of water. In some places grave markers and tombs are placed, made of natural stone and later marble or lime stone tombs bought from agents that would come through the country taking orders for them. They carried with them a sample book and from this book you would select the kind you wanted and one that would fit the purse. These ^{Stores} ~~stores~~ usually came from Ft. Smith, Arkansas and Little Rock, Arkansas.

The Choctaws had peculiar burials. If one should die in the household, they wrapped him in blankets, bedecked them with beads and jewelry, and would lay them in a comfortable position upon the log rafters of the cabin in which they died and would leave them there and they would go about to build another cabin for the ones living to use for their lives. The reason they placed them upon the rafters was to keep the coyotes, wolves and varments from getting to the bodies. This practice of burying their dead ceased in 1889 or 1890 when the Government officials

made them build coffins and place the corpse in them and bury their dead as we do now.

DEVELOPMENTS OF AGRICULTURE AND COAL INDUSTRY IN THE CHOCTAW NATION.

The Choctaw Indians were farmers. They did not farm extensively and a fullblood's farm was just a clearing in the forest and they would build a rail fence around the clearing. Their farm buildings were small usually of log construction, and their homes were log houses of one and two rooms.

They raised a few acres of corn, had a garden of the common garden vegetables. The stock, cattle and hogs all ran on open range. Some times hogs were penned to be fattened and these were the only ones that ever got grain to eat.

Their living was plain and simple and lived on nearly everything produced at home.

After the railroads built through LeFlore, Haskell and other counties, it brought about great changes in the life of not only the Indians but all the people. Commercial centers were more accessible. Mail more regular, and deposits of coal long known to the people were brought within reach, in fact the Rock Island R. R., K. C. S. R. R., Ft. S. & W. R. R. and the M.V. R. R. built their roads so they would traverse through the country on which these deposits were located. Mines opened up and this became one of the greatest industries in the Choctaw Nation and has remained so even until today.

Farming progressed steadily in the fertile valleys of Sugar Loaf, Winding Stair, & Kiamichi Mountains and along the bottoms of the Arkansas, Canadian,

Poteau Rivers and other streams and instead of raising only enough of agricultural products for home consumption they began raising cotton, corn, wheat, oats as well as live stock for the markets.

SCHOOLS & CHURCHES

The school which I attended at Skulleville was about the average as to housing facilities. It was built of native pine lumber with large fire place. The floor was built of native pine boards and not surfaced and it kept us kids busy who was large enough to pull our own splinters out of our feet for we all went barefoot. The teacher would have to quit teaching lots of times to pull splinters out of the little kids feet.

I studied the old Blue Back speller and the Rays Arithmetic as long as I went to school. We didn't change book every moon like mine do now. Indians and whites all attended school together, also church. Church throughout the territory was usually held in the school houses but in the summer church was held under arbours "Camp Meetings" last a week or ^{ed} two at a time. The preacher had a circuit, he would come and usually lived with some of the members as long as he held meetings in that community as well as care for his horse. His living was all gratis as he paid nothing for his keep, and the last meeting he held in the community, what we called protected meeting, the people would all chip in and give him some money, a new suit, or maybe a new saddle and bridle.

There were different denominations of preachers, but they were mostly Methodist, Presbyterians and Baptist. There were Indian Missions but I never lived near or went to any of them.

COMMENTS

During the boyhood of Mr. Cook, education was at a premium but with the inadequate school and the help of his educated father he secured a relative fair education. Besides going to school he had to do the chores, worked as stable-boy for his father's horses and when old enough helped in the drug store. Unlike his father, he did not care for medicine or doctoring but loved nature and the soil, remembering as he had been taught that civilization started at the plow and would end at the plow, and when he married he started farming and has farmed ever since.

We pay tribute to Mr. Cook and his father for the good they have done to make our state the grand state that it is today.