

COOK, DON.

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Nettie Cain
Interviewer
August 9, 1937

Interview with Don Cook,
Holdenville, Oklahoma,
Route 1.

I was born in Wewoka District, Creek Nation, now Okfuskee County, near Okemah, August 31, 1876. My father, Jack Cook, was born sixteen miles east of Okmulgee near Council Hill and my mother, Sallie Harjo, was born in the Wewoka District, Creek Nation.

My grandparents came from Alabama, up the Mississippi River, first settling at New Orleans, Louisiana, then came to Fort Smith, Arkansas, and stayed for several years. From this place they came to Fort Gibson, then to the Wewoka District in 1832 or 1835, settling near Okemah. Five years after the establishing of Fort Gibson, about 1824, the Creeks, Cherokees and Choctaws settled the region farther west and south.

About 1845, after the Seminole Indians had moved to the Creek country, a jealousy arose between the two tribes about the laws. The Creeks had already established the laws as they wanted according to the treaty made between the Creeks and the Government back in 1832. About August 7, 1856, an agreement was reached between the two nations for the Seminoles to establish a government of their own. After this the Creeks and Seminoles lived in peace.

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A few of the Creeks owned negro slaves, by whom most of the labor was performed. They lived at ease and their wants were easily supplied.

When the Civil War broke out the Creeks and Seminoles hesitated about taking sides, but May 14, 1861, Albert Pike was commissioned to attach them to the Confederate cause but the Creeks were divided on that question. Albert Pike met the representatives of the Choctaws, Chickasaws, Creeks and Seminoles at North Fork Town (Eufaula). On August 21, 1861, headed by John Ross, the Cherokees decided to go South.

The Five Civilized Tribes were placed in an attitude of hostility toward the Government with which most of them had lived in peace for a century. Some took part in the war but not all of the Indians were willing to engage in the conflict. Many Creek and Cherokee Indians remained loyal to the Union, even though the Federal Government seemed to have abandoned them at the time.

Late in the year 1861, about 2,500 Indians gathered under the command of Opothle Yahola, their leader, who was my great-great-uncle. They were poorly equipped and had

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never been in military training. About November, 1861, 1,500 other Indian forces, under the command of Colonel Douglas Cooper, in search of Ophole Yahola, marched up Deep Fork Valley, then turned northward. ^{Opothle} Yahola and his people were overtaken at the point of the Cimarron River on the evening ^{of} November 19 and a battle ensued. On December 9, 1861, a harder fight took place on Bird Creek after which Opothle Yahola made his way to the Kansas line. The suffering among the Indians during the Winter of 1861 - 1862 was almost indescribable. They had abandoned their farms, homes and stock, and few of them had tents or shelter of any kind. Most of them were scantily clothed and many were without shoes. Food was scarce and many died from exposure in Kansas.

A meeting was called at Fort Smith to grant a new treaty September 1, 1865, by Armstrong, a Choctaw, to renew the treaty with the Indians that had been broken. Twelve tribes were there, including Creeks and Seminoles. The information was ^{sent} out that all Indians who took part with the South had forfeited their right of consideration or protection and that their property was subject to confiscation. They were also told that they had to free

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the negro slaves and give them full rights. After thirteen days, the meeting was adjourned September 21, to meet in Washington the next year.

The following year, 1866, the Five Civilized Tribes prepared to send their delegates to Washington for the purpose of resuming negotiations. Creek and Seminole delegates were to arrive first, owing to factional differences existing in several tribes. The Seminole Treaty was signed first March 21, 1866, and the Creek Treaty on June 14, 1866.

Under the Creek Treaty the Creeks ceded to the United States the west half of the entire domain of Creek lands, being 250,560 acres for which the United States agreed to pay \$30.00 per acre, amounting to \$7,516,800. Of this amount \$200,000.00 was to be paid in a per capita payment and the remainder was to remain in the United States Treasury and draw interest at 5 per cent.

About 1867 National Executive offices were established and necessary laws were enacted and adopted for the benefit of the Creek Nation. Samuel Checote was elected Principal Chief to take office on December 5th.

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The Nation was divided into six districts as follows: Okmulgee, Deep Fork, Wewoka, Eufaula, Muskogee and Coweta. Each district was to have a judge, prosecuting attorney and a company of Lighthorsemen, composed of a captain and four members.

The National Executive officers were Principal Chief, Second Chief, Treasurer, Auditor, Superintendent of Schools and Interpreter. There was also the Council which included the House of Kings and House of Warriors, each house to have speakers at all meetings in order to take care of business.

A disagreement arose among the Creek people; Oktarharsars Harjo with Isparhechar as commander on one side and Samuel Checote with Pleasant Porter as commander on the other side. This war started December 24, 1882, when a bunch of men out scouting came upon Isparhechar's camp. The two groups fired at each other and the Scouts lost seven men. Porter with 600 men pursued Isparhechar and his regiment, and when the confusion was over Chief Checote resigned on August 19, 1883, and called a meeting and put two men on the ticket for Principal Chief.

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My grandfather, Ruben Cook, a white man, owned a trading post at Council Hill (now Oklahoma City) at the outbreak of the Civil War. He was very wealthy and was afraid to take his money so he buried two nail kegs of money, loaded three wagons with food and supplies from the store and put the family in one wagon and started south to Texas, leaving the remainder of his goods in the store.

Grandfather died while they were in Texas before the Civil War was over and none of the family knew just where the money was buried.

After the close of the War the family returned to the Nowaka District in the Creek Nation where Father served for many years as Town King.

One cow town was Red Fork, five miles south of Tulsa. Cattlemen from different states came to the Indian Territory and bought cattle which would be driven to Red Fork to cross the river.

The old Texas and Kansas Trail was across the 160 acres of my wife's allotment. I have ridden the range and at one time I helped to drive 30,000 head of cattle to the Osage country. The herd was about three

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miles long and twelve men drove them, ten white men and two Indians.

Wash Proctor and I used to lariat Indian ponies. One of the great sports in the early days was for the cowboys to lariat and tie the yearlings and see who could be the quickest; this is how the rodeo started.

One of the oldest Indian ceremonial grounds is Tukabatchi, located near Holdenville. This has been one of the Indian dance grounds for more than sixty years. The celebrations usually lasted about seven days. The first dance is called the Old Dance when everyone takes part. The second dance is the Ribbon Dance in which the young ladies and girls have all colors of ribbon streamers; this is the prettiest dance of all.

In the spring the Indians have their Medicine Dance at which time the Indian Doctor gives them medicine for the liver which makes them very sick. Next day they rest, sleep some, play ball, and on the second day in the early part of the day they go out into the forest and kill a deer (now they have to kill squirrels

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instead). On the day when the men take their medicine the women dance and then the women take their medicine. The Doctor tells the men to sit very still and straight and not to talk or go to sleep. Everyone is so still you could hear even a pin drop. The months of the stomp dances are March, April, May and June. In July they have their Green Corn Dance and Medicine Dance. Their forefathers claimed they descended from Heaven. They have a silver set of dishes; no one seems to know just how old they are and very few people see them, just the leaders. A guard is kept at the building day and night so no prowler can ever go near. Tukabatchi was the mother of the whole Nation and this is a central meeting place.

Another ceremonial ground is Arbeka, close to Tulsa. When the Indians have matched ball games the best players are picked from the Tukabatchi and Arbekas.

I was a member of the Council of the full blood Creek Nation and spokesman for the allotment of the Indian Territory. I made trips to Washington in the interest of the Creeks and visited with President

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Coolidge February 21, 1928, at twelve o'clock at the White House.

Following is a list of the delegates sent to Washington: Sam Beal (in English) Watka Yahola (in Indian) spokesman; Joe Deer, delegate; Don Cook, interpreter; John Burkes, chairman. We spent one month in Washington trying to get Eastern Oklahoma given back to the Indians but failed to accomplish what we were sent to do. I am planning to go to Mexico in September to file for my allotment.