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DOWNING, WILLIAM B.

INTERVIEW

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Field Worker: Gus Hummingbird,
July 14, 1937.

Interview with William P. Downing.
Baron, Oklahoma.

William P. Downing, a fullblood Cherokee, was born about seven miles east of the present town of Westville, Oklahoma. He was the son of Hyder Downing and Susan Catherine Foreman, Cherokees who came from Georgia with the emigrants in 1838.

Hyder Downing was fifteen years old at the time of the Removal. He was born about 1823, according to the old records that have been kept in the family for a long time.

Early Life.

Bill Downing, as Mr. Downing is better known, spent some of his early life near the present town of Proctor, Oklahoma. The family moved to this place when Bill was about two years old. Hyder Downing, the father of Bill Downing, laid claim to a tract of land that was located on what is now known as Tyners Creek, about two miles north of the Proctor Post Office.

They lived at this place until Bill was twelve years old then the family moved to the Peavine community. Here Bill has spent most of his life, but he now lives at Baron.

The Downing family operated about a ten acre farm while they lived at Tyners Creek. When they moved to Peavine, they operated about thirty acres. Hyder Downing was a man who tried to raise his living at home. He usually raised all of the food that his family could use.

Education.

William received a fair education in the common schools of the Cherokee Nation. The first school he attended was the Tyner school near where the town of Prector is. The school was of log construction and there were no windows in the building. A few books were to be found at this school, but there were no school boards at that time so all the teachers were appointed by the Cherokee Board of Education. This board consisted of three members appointed by the Chief of the Cherokee Nation. The Chief was usually a member himself.

The old teacher at this place was Dick Wolfe. Mr. Wolfe became a Senator from the Goingsnake District. Later he was a member of the legislature when the great railroad fight or the railroad question was up for consideration. Bill completed the third grade at the tyner

school and then the family moved to Peavine.¹ He went to make his home with a Mr. Shirley, a permitted white man who had married a Cherokee woman. This family lived a little west of Proctor. While he was staying with the Shirley's, the Shirley School was established near the home of Mr. Shirley.

William attended this school until he finished the sixth grade. This school had longer terms of school than did the Tyner school, and there were more books to be had at this place. Brown Hitchcock from Tahlequah taught this school about three years, and he was the only teacher that Bill went to at this place.

William's father came and took him away from the Shirleys when he was about fourteen years old and took him home. He then attended school at Peavine for three terms.

The earliest church that Mr. Downing knows anything about was the church that was sometimes held in the school building at the Tyner school. There was no church in the community in which he lived at Tyners Creek.

This was just a branch of the old Big Shed which was the mother church of all Cherokee Churches. This was located on Peavine Creek about five miles north of the Dannenberg Store, as Stilwell was called then. After the family moved from Tyners Creek they moved within three miles of this famous church and the family became active church workers.

Finally this old church was torn down, and the lumber that was taken was used in building the present Baptist church at this place though the name has been changed from Big Shed to Antioch. There are some benches at this church that were made before the Civil War. The church record book at this place is the book that Captain Smith Christie used as a record book of the expenditures of the army he commanded during the Civil War.

Trading and Milling Posts.

Cincinnati, Evansville and Dutchtown, Arkansas, were the early day trading places for the majority of the Cherokees that lived in this part of the Cherokee Nation. While the family lived at Proctor their trading point was Tablequah, Indian Territory. Cincinnati and Dutchtown were both milling points for wheat at that time. There was

a Brist Mill on Caney Creek about three miles west of Stilwell, which was operated by a white man named Stephens. He was permitted in the Cherokee Nation on account of the mill which the Cherokees thought would be a great help to their country. People they considered helpful were people that were permitted in the Indian Territory.

Eli Wright also operated a water-mill on Baron Creek about four miles east of the present village of Baron, Oklahoma. This was the mill where the Downing family did their corn grinding.

Stock and Stockmen.

Many Cherokees raised stock at that time. Among the early day stock men are Jim Walkingstick, Johnson Whitmire, John Clynes and Ed Clynes. John Clynes was a permitted white man, as he married a Cherokee woman. These men handled about two hundred head of stock, and marketed most of their stock at home to buyers that came through the Cherokee country.

Zeke Proctor was the early day stock dealer among the Cherokees. Mr. Proctor lived on the Illinois River just about two miles north of the present town of

Watts, Oklahoma. He was usually hired to buy cattle from the Cherokees by some northern cattle man. Nelson Foreman was another Cherokee that was usually hired to buy cattle from the Cherokees. Vol English, an Arkansas white man, bought cattle in the Cherokee Nation, and he also operated a store at Dutchtown.

Elections.

The first time Bill voted was in 1888; and the issue of the election was the railroad question. His voting precinct was the Goingsnake Court House. This Court House at that time was located on what is now called Peacheater Creek about five miles west of the town of Westville.

Richard Wolfe, his old teacher, was elected to the Senate from the Goingsnake District. He was again re-elected in 1894, and it was during his second term when the Kansas City Southern Railroad extended its lines through the Cherokee Nation. Nelson Terrapin, Bill's step-father, was also elected as Councilman from Goingsnake District in 1894. The reason that that Bill would not support him was that Terrapin was in favor of the railroads. Among other old timers who opposed the railroads was Aaron Goingswolfe,

Jehathan Whitmore, and Jefferson Ketcher.

Missions.

This part of the interview with Bill Downing was told to him by his father Hyder Downing, and his Aunt Susie Walkingstick, who came with the emigrants in 1836. They settled on what now is the Walkingstick's farm, just one mile north of this old mission.

Ed Walkingstick, the oldest son of Susie who died just a few years ago, attended this mission. This mission was located about fifty yards south of the Kansas City Southern Railroad Bridge across the Baron Fork River about a mile south of the present Baron, Oklahoma, Post Office.

The building was constructed by the Cherokees themselves. It was a large log building with about four rooms, and a large fireplace in the center with one smokestack. This mission remained here for about fifteen years after the Cherokees came and there were only five white people who ever operated this mission. The cemetery that was established with the mission was located in what is now on the farm of Fred Wilsey. The railroad covers most of the old cemetery but there are four or five old graves that are still visible.

The missionaries that came along with this mission lived on the hill which is the same spot of ground where the residence of Mr. Howell is located. The Ta-Ka-Nee-skee family of Cherokees lived on the farm that is now owned by Fred Wilsey. The government blacksmith shop was established on what is now known as Ed Clynes farm and a commissary was established on the mountain east of this mission about three miles. The commissary remained for three years and was then moved. The blacksmith was also taken away with the commissary. The mission remained several years after the removal of the blacksmith shop and the commissary.