

EDWARDS, JOHN WAR.

INTERVIEW

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LEGEND & STORY FORM  
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION  
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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Field worker's name Gomer Gower

This report made on (date) April 29 1938

1. This legend was secured from (name) John War Edwards

Address Shady Point, Oklahoma

x x

This person is (male or female) White, Negro, Indian,

If Indian, give tribe \_\_\_\_\_

2. Origin and history of legend or story Early life in the Choctaw

Nation - 1882-1890

viewed) punishment of a whipping post

3. Write out the legend or story as completely as possible. Use blank sheets and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached, 5

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Gomer Gower  
Investigator  
April 29, 1938.

Interview with John War Edwards  
Shady Point Oklahoma.

John War Edwards, who relates these reminiscences, was born on June 14, 1861, in Cherokee County, Georgia.

In August, 1882, he came to the Choctaw Nation, Indian Territory and rented land upon which to farm from Norris Jacobs, a Choctaw Indian, whose home was on the present site of the village of Shady Point. A school house, near by, was called Double Springs. He has lived continuously within calling distance of the site of that old school house, for the past fifty-six years.

Mr. Edwards, having a mechanical bent, opened and operated a blacksmith shop at his home and did such horse-shoeing, plow-point sharpening and wagon-repairing work as was required to be done in the community. He continued in that line of work until his advanced age forced him to abandon all work except that which is entailed in cultivating his home garden, and of this he has a justified pride.

Of those first years of his residency in the Choctaw Nation, he relates, that through his friendship with Norris

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Jacobs, the Choctaw <sup>from</sup> whom he had land rented, he was permitted to own cattle in excess of the number - ten - upon which non-citizens were required to pay a head tax. The tribal regulations required non-citizens to pay a head tax of twenty-five cents upon all cattle and horses in excess of ten head, and to pay a permit fee of \$5.00 per annum for the privilege of residing within the jurisdiction of the Choctaw Nation. Due to this immunity from the payment of the head tax on his cattle, Mr. Edwards states, that he dealt in cattle to quite an extent. On occasions he had several hundred head of cattle in his possession at one time. At other times his herd was reduced to a very low number through the channels of sale and trade. Cattle and horses thrived the year round without the necessity of being fed. Grass was plentiful in that area in the Spring, Summer and Fall months, and the Poteau River bottoms, which were nearby, not only provided excellent feed in the form of wild cane, but also the best of shelter during the intermittent cold spells.

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The city of Fort Smith, about twenty-five miles distant from the area, afforded a ready market for the products of the range, as well as for such farm products as were found to be in excess of home requirements. Under such altogether favorable conditions, both Indians and whites, who dwelt in the area, were blessed with contentment and prosperity.

The old school house, near which a large brush arbor was built and renewed each year, was the mecca of religious gatherings which sometimes continued for weeks upon weeks.

Willis Folsom, a Methodist preacher and missionary, himself a Choctaw Indian, often held services at these gatherings. He was capable of conducting services in both the Choctaw and English languages. The nearby Double Springs provided a plentiful supply of cool water to quench the thirst of the large crowds congregated to attend the services, large, outspreading oak trees provided shade under which groups sat and ate their meals. The people, both white and Indian, looked forward to, and

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prepared for, these meetings for months before their occurrence, with the keenest delight. The spiritual atmosphere, which resulted and was created through the influence of these gatherings, kept lawlessness down to a minimum in the area and they proved to be a most beneficent factor in the lives of the people.

He, Mr. Edwards, once attended Choctaw Court at what is now Red Oak, at a point near the former home of Chief Jackson McCurtain, at which he witnessed a most brutal whipping of a culprit citizen who had been found guilty of a minor violation of the Choctaw law. The unfortunate Choctaw was caused to stand close to and facing a large tree which grew in the yard of the house in which his trial had been held. The services of three men were employed in administering the whipping; two of whom stood on the opposite side of the tree from the victim and by means of the victim's arms, pulled and held him firmly against the tree while the third man applied the cruel lash. Unfortunately for the victim, the Choctaw officer who was assigned to use the whip, or lash, held

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a secret grudge against his helpless charge and for that reason he applied the lash with all the severity in his power. He wielded it with such force that the bark of the tree against which the poor man was held was peeled off. Such was the inhuman beating given this violator of Choctaw law that upon being released by the two men who had held him close to the tree, he fell unconscious to the ground. The only sign of life left in the poor man was a jerky movement of his eyes. He remained unconscious until his death which occurred within a week. The occurrence aroused general indignation against the practice of whipping offenders of the law and more especially against the Choctaw officer who had thus taken advantage of his position as an officer to avenge a wrong, whether real or fancied of a helpless charge, by beating him to death.

Following that occurrence, great care was exercised to prevent the possibility of a repetition of the scandalous outrage.