

HUNTER, THOMAS W.

THIRD INTERVIEW.

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Hazel B. Greene  
Journalist  
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Interview with Thomas W. Hunter,  
Hugo, Oklahoma.

I am about one-half Choctaw Indian, sixty-six years old and County Judge of Choctaw County.

Back in Mississippi the Choctaw Indians had their castes just the same as other races do. For instance, there was an aristocratic group who were stately and proud. They were called Okla Falaya or long people. They had married and intermarried until they all seemed to be taller than the average Choctaw Indian. It seems that the Okla Falayas stopped over in the eastern part of the Choctaw Nation, around Eagletown, and all along the line. From them came many celebrities. Some of the Pitchlyns, Folsoms, Garlands, Wilsons, LeFlores and others.

It is my opinion that if a man thinks himself superior to some others he is so for the reason that he will deport himself better. Among the Okla Falaya were several chiefs of the Choctaws. I just recall to mind Jeff Gardner who was National Treasurer of the

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Choctaw Nation and afterward Principal Chief of the Choctaws. Back in 1850 those old Trustees of Choctaw Academy recognized the unusual ability of Basil L. LeFlore when, as a youth he so applied himself to his studies and so deported himself that they caused to be printed in the Choctaw Intelligencer, under date of October 15, 1851, the following article.

#### CHOCTAW ACADEMY

"This is to Certify, To all whom it may concern, that Basil L. LeFlore, a Choctaw youth, has been a  
and  
regular scholar three years/nine months, at this Institution; during which time his good conduct, regular habits, and gentlemanly deportment, together with a strict obedience and conformity to the rules of the Institution, have procured for him the entire confidence of all his acquaintance, and an exalted seat in the affection of the Teachers and Trustees.

The President of the Institution takes a peculiar pleasure in recommending to the particular attention and patronage of the Nation, this honorable and worthy youth.

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Done by order of the Trustees of the Choctaw Academy, this Eleventh day of June, one thousand eight hundred and fifty."

"The Denderson"

BASIL LEFLORE

Basil L. LeFlore became one of the governors of the Choctaw Nation. His home was about a quarter of a mile northwest of the Mission School of Goodland at the time of his death. A part of that log home has been removed to the school grounds and stands there today as the Annie Crossett-Schooler Memorial, in honor of the wife of W. E. Schooler, owner and publisher of The Hugo Daily News, and who has for many years been a sort of a "Patron Saint" to the orphans at Goodland. Each year he sees that every child at Goodland gets to see at least one circus.

Basil LeFlore died about 1886. I was one of the ten boys who were sent from Spencer Academy to act as pall bearers, active and honorary. I remember James Culberson and Louis Battiest were two of them. I do not recall the names of the others now. Basil LeFlore was a grand character.

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I believe that the Choctaw Academy which he attended was a co-educational Methodist Mission School, and was established in the early 1840's just about where the village of Rufe is now.

I don't know when Choctaw Academy was abolished as an academy of learning, or whether it just fell into disuse. I rather think that the buildings just fell apart from disuse. I have been told that the boha falaya, or long building, was built of hewn logs. About 1900 a subscription school was started there and it was patronized by both whites and Choctaws and it was called Choctaw Academy School in honor of the one of by-gone days.

When I was a youngster, old people told me that Paris, Texas, used to freight goods from Doaksville and I wondered why it would have been easier for goods to be procured by people at Doaksville, than at Paris, Texas. Years afterward, when I learned that Doaksville was located on the north bank of Red River, I understood. The goods were brought up the river by steamer.

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In regard to the different "castes" of the Choctaw Indians, I have been told that back in Mississippi there were distinct clans or bands of the Choctaws and I suppose of other tribes, too. They <sup>were</sup> distinguished by names or numbers of the villages or communities in which they lived and were classed accordingly. Some clans or bands were more cultured or educated than others. For instance there were the "Six Town" Indians who mostly came up into what is now Choctaw County, when they emigrated to this Territory. Apparently they were not quite as advanced in civilization as some others as a class. Of course there were exceptions. But the majority of "Six Town" Indians were known by the tattoo marks on their faces, also by the numerous ear-rings, necklaces and armlets they wore. Those ornaments were made of shells or silver and gold looking metals.

(The "Six Town" Indians were sometimes called "bridle" Indians because of the tattoo marks from the corner of the mouth to the ears.) But I never heard of any unusually small tribe or clan of Indians who might have been called Skitini, or little men.

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The first trip I made to Wheelock Academy was about 1885. Superintendent Skimmerhorn of Spencer Academy sent another boy and me to the home of Jefferson Gardner at Eagletown after a big warrant, with which to take care of expenses at Spencer Academy. He gave us a note to Superintendent W. B. Robe to take care of us the two nights that we would be on the trip, and he did, royally. It took us three days to make the trip. One to reach Wheelock, where we spent the night, and another to go to Eagletown and back to Wheelock, where we spent another night, thence to Spencer Academy up about two miles from Nelson, in what is now Choctaw County. Nelson, I believe, is about the third oldest post office in the Choctaw Nation. But that is a matter of record. When we got to Spencer Academy with our warrant then someone had to be sent to Paris, Texas, to deposit it in the bank. There were no banks in this country then.

Jeff Gardner was Choctaw National Treasurer then.