

Lula Austin, Field Worker
Indian-Pioneer History
June 15, 1937

Interview with Elizabeth Kemp
Mead as given to Lula Austin.

George James, national school superintendent, came to my home one day and said, "Fannie, I am hunting a school teacher. I know you are able to teach and you won't have to teach only to the 4th grade." There was an Arithmetic lying on the table. He picked it up and said, "Solve this problem." I did. Then he took a speech out of his pocket from Gen. Cooper and he said, "See if you can read this." I did. He wanted to employ me, but I told him I would let him know so I went home to talk it over with papa; who told me he knew I was capable of managing it. I said, "Yes father, I can write, read and cipher, so I am going to accept the school." I taught there two years and I still have the old register I used to keep the names of the pupils and where they lived.

I had thirty pupils and among them were three children of John Pitchlynn, three of my own sisters, two of Joe Harris, and the balance were fullblood, speaking only the Chickasaw language, but I could understand the language enough to teach them the meaning in English. This school was 10 miles northwest of Durant where Emet

2

is now, and it was called Post Oak Grove, or the Old Council Ground.

The school boys dug a spring for our drinking water out of the side of a rock and it was the grandest water.

Joe Harris, trustee, came the first morning and helped me to register the children. School opened on the first Monday in October and closed the last Friday in June. It was a free school. I was paid once a year when the Legislature met. I was required to make a report of attendance, deaths and quits. I would give my report to the janitor at the Council House; he in turn gave it to the clerk who read it before the Legislature and they gave me a check and I took it to the Auditor and he gave it to the Cashier, from whom I received my money.

During the year I was allowed to run an account with the following merchants:

Ebe Reney, Tishomingo
G. B. Hester, Boggy Depot
Davis, Ft. Washita

These merchants would be there when the Legislature met and when the cashier received my check what I owed to the merchants was paid. When I went to get my money

3

though Joe Brown was clerk and he would say, "Here is one you will pay in full, nothing against it."

The meanest thing I remember doing.

One Sunday I was asked to stay home from meeting so my sister's company could ride my horse. I didn't like it very much and was crying. My father said, "Hate, the old mule is in the lot, you can ride her." So I told the negro boy to put a bridle on her and lead her out so my cousin and I got on bareback and my father put a spur on my foot and in a little while we caught up with my sister and her company, who were not very glad to see us. After meeting was over, sister said, "Now you go back the short way. We are going the prairie route." But I thought it would be more fun to go and tease them, so we rode close and spurred their horses, causing them to pitch. Sister said, "Never mind, I will tell mamma on you." Well when we arrived home she did and mamma laughed and I noticed one of the little negroes laughing. I kicked her in the mouth and knocked two teeth out then I thought I would get a whipping, but I didn't.

The day father died, he called my sister to his bed and told her his trunk contained national papers and for her to deliver it to the legislature. Sunday after he was buried on Saturday my sister put the trunk in a wagon and drove all night, delivering the trunk Monday morning at the Council House where it was opened.

Father was the best interpreter in the Chickasaw Nation and would spend much of his time in Washington to hear the speeches made there concerning the Indians so he could bring back the messages to his people.

When and how I began to use tobacco.

While attending school at Bloomfield, when I was eleven years old, Sarah Collins, one of the older girls, took me with her to gather the eggs and feed the chickens. On the way to the barn she asked me if I used tobacco. I said, "No," so she gave me a little piece and told me to chew it, taking a piece herself. When we reached the barn, she told me to get in the loft and get the eggs, when I reached the loft I slumped down on the fodder. She called me and I said, "Oh! I am so sick." "Oh," said Sarah, "Don't pay any attention to that, it is just the tobacco, get up and you will be all right." She bathed

my head and had me drink some water, I felt better.

The next day she told me to try it again. I did and have been using it ever since. Nearly all the girls in school used snuff or chewed tobacco. The younger girls would hide it in their playhouses and the older girls had a secret shelf on the campus in an old post oak tree.

When my sister Charity died, my sister Mary took some of her hair to Bloomfield Academy and Mrs. Angeline H. Carr made a picture of a tombstone with it.

