

INTERVIEWER GOMER GOWER
Indian-Pioneer History S-149
August 19, 1937.

INTERVIEW WITH MILTON W. MONROE
Route 2, Wister, Oklahoma
Born February, 1872
Fullblood Choctaw.

Father's name, William Monroe
Born, Mississippi.
Mother's name, Lily Monroe
Born, Mississippi.

The subject of this sketch was born in what was then Sugar Loaf County, in February, 1872, of fullblood Choctaw parentage and has lived in the vicinity of his birth-place all his life.

On attaining scholastic age he attended a tribal-supported school at a point about two miles west of the present town of Wister, where his parents had moved shortly after his birth on the Fourche Maline river some eight miles south of Wister. He later attended a Choctaw Tribal School at Talihina for a period of three terms.

While still in his teens and soon after the construction of the Frisco Railway through Wister, his parents moved back to his birthplace on the Fourche Maline river. This move was occasioned through their loss of both cows and horses, which

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were run over and killed by the trains. The elder Mr. Monroe did not know at that time that the railway companies were responsible for such acts. Mr. Monroe owned a considerable number of Indian ponies; some of these ponies returned to their accustomed range on the prairie near the railroad and several of them were killed by trains. It was some time before these ponies became thoroughly located on their new range.

Mr. Monroe's parents were highly religious people and attended church at Yellow Spring Prairie, where a Reverend Willis Folsom conducted services in the Choctaw language. At this church, in common with the practice of the Methodist people, protracted meetings would be held in the late summer months. For the greater comfort of the congregation brush arbors were used in which to conduct the services. On one of these occasions in the very early period when pine knots furnished the illumination a very ludicrous situation arose through the ignition of the dry leaves

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on the brush from which the arbor was built. For the better illumination of the surroundings, a platform about four feet high was built, on which a quantity of dirt was placed to prevent the platform itself catching fire from the blazing pine knots. Upon this dirt the pine knots were placed and on account of their comparative elevation a fairly good light was provided for the conduct of the services. The Reverend Folsom, and his devout congregation were all on their bended knees engaged in prayer and were oblivious to their surroundings when, to their consternation, fire began to fall, as though coming down from Heaven. Needless to say, they all jumped up and with one accord hastily made their exit from the burning arbor. It is said that the Reverend Folsom on seeing the true source of the fire and being assured that it did not come down from Heaven said, in a most fervent way "A-a-a-a-meem." It was later discovered that the blaze from the pine knots had reached up to the leaves, which being quite dry, flashed like gunpowder and brought

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to an end a half-finished prayer.

In 1894, the church was moved from Yellow Spring Prairie to a point near the home of the elder Mr. Monroe, on the Fourche Maline River where it is still maintained under the pastoral care of the subject of this sketch. However, owing to the removal by death and other causes of those who speak the Choctaw language, the membership has dwindled from upwards of one hundred to fifteen communicants, the present enrollment. It is one of the very few churches at this time in which services are conducted entirely in the Choctaw language.

Mr. Monroe recalls being told by his father that in the old Choctaw Nation in Mississippi, the poorer classes lived principally by hunting; that not more than two or three acres of ground would be tilled by the women folks, while the men would be engaged in the chase. However, in some instances, and especially in those in which whites were intermarried with the Choctaws, larger bodies of land would be cultivated and in other instances large plantations on which slaves would be used were not uncommon.

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On the small home patches of ground occupied by the fullbloods, corn and sweet potatoes would be the major crop and these were augmented by the growing of beans, peas, melons and other garden produce. With this background and because both his grandfather and father were of the poorer classes and skilled more in the art of the hunter than in the tilling of the soil, it is easily understood why after disembarking at Fort Coffee with other groups of Indians, they immediately set out in quest of good hunting ground rather than in quest of surroundings in which agriculture predominated. The object of their search was bountifully supplied in the wooded hills and ridges which abound on the south side of Fourche Maline River at a point about six miles east of the village of Summerfield. It was here they set about the erection of their cabins, choosing protected spots on the south side of a ridge where the frigid North wind would be tempered. This area of good hunting ground was finally sought out by some of those who had been brought by steamboat

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up the Red River and it was regarded as the hunters as well as the anglers' paradise.

It has already been noted that Mr. Monroe attended school at Talihina. He recalls that on that occasion he was told of an instance in which an old Indian woman was killed by another Indian on the charge of being a witch. The perpetrator of the crime, an Indian, had a sick daughter who was being treated by a native doctor, whose custom and practice was to brew a concoction of herbs in a kettle, which after being boiled and still very hot, would be placed in a hole of sufficient size to snugly contain the kettle. The patient, if stricken with pneumonia, would be placed directly over the steaming kettle and kettle patient and all, would be covered with quilts, rawhides or other material, with the object of retaining the heat and thereby effecting a cure. In this case a cure was not effected and the wily medicine man told the grieving father that a certain old Indian woman was a witch

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and had exercised her powers as a witch in bringing about the death of his daughter. In a spirit of reprisal he killed the woman who was accused as a witch. For this murder this man, whose name was Solomon Hatema, was convicted and sentenced to a life term in the penitentiary where he finally died, according to this legend.