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INTERVIEW WITH MR. W. R. MULKEY

By L. W. Wilson,
Field Worker.

Mr. Mulkey has answered the questions and volunteered other information as follows:

I was born near the Kansas and Indian Territory line in the Indian Territory December 23, 1869, and I am of Cherokee descent. This makes me 67 years old.

Father--James D. Mulkey was born in 1830, in Georgia and died July 26, 1893. He was buried in the old Bennett graveyard about three miles southwest of the present town of Warner, Oklahoma. He went to California in 1849, altho he was but 19 years old, along with others going to the gold rush. He returned to Texas and married my mother in 1867. During the Civil War, he was employed by the government as a frontiersman. His duties as Frontiersman was to serve as a guide and trail Indians. (A Scout) He was never at no time in the army. He was stationed all along the Red river or the Border as he termed it between the Territory and Texas. Soon after he married he moved from Texas to Indian Territory and I was born in 1869 as I stated.

MOTHER- Elizabeth Joy-Mulkey was born in Arkansas in 1846 and died in 1918. She was buried alongside my father in the old Bennett graveyard southwest of Warner, Oklahoma.

REMOVAL

I was only a child when my father and mother moved to Texas (about six years old). This was in 1875 and we returned to Indian Territory in 1887 by wagon. The motive for our return was on the account of our Cherokee Rights. We crossed Red river north of Gainsville, Texas, on the Brown ferry (a pole ferry) and father having scouted in that section did not take any particular road or trail by name, but with his instinct and knowledge we blazed our own trail in a northeast direction and came to the M.K. & T. railroad at what is now Atoka, Oklahoma, and continued north along the railroad and hit the Texas road north of the present town of Savannah, Oklahoma, and followed it through Krebs, Oklahoma, forded the South Canadian river to Eufaula, Indian Territory, and continued north crossing the North Canadian river at Rock Ford and on to the northeast from the Texas road to one-and-one half miles of now Warner, Oklahoma, where we settled and lived until my parents died. This was in the Rattlesnake Mountains, now called Nebo Mountain. Father died before allotments were made but the rest of us received allotments. The place on which we lived was known as the Fred Kerr place.

LIFE AND CUSTOMS

Houses and school houses were built of logs with rock fireplaces. There was some few houses in the country built of native lumber. We did our farming with oxen at first and then with only one horse and our farming tools consisted of a bull-tongue (home made except for the tongue and brace rod) big-eyed hoe and a home made "A" harrow. (This harrow was made by cutting a fork out of a tree with holes bored at proper intervals and teeth inserted, made from seasoned hickory).

We raised corn, cotton, some wheat and oats. The corn and cotton was planted by hand in rows and the wheat and oats were broadcast.

We would grind our meal with an old hand grider and our wheat was ground by a horse power mill and likewise the cotton was ginned by horse power. Pryor to the grinding of our wheat of course it had to be threshed and to do so we would pile the wheat on the ground and then my father would put me on the back of one of the horses and I would simply drive the horse around and around tramping the grain out of the straw. The straw was gathered up and shaken well and cast aside and then the wheat was gathered up. In order to clean the wheat we would wait until a windy day and then by pouring the grain from vessel to vessel or from a pile on the ground to other piles the wind would blow the dirt and chaf out of the grain. We did not raise much cotton at first, just enough to make our thread and clothing. We would pile the cotton around the fireplace at night and when it was thoroughly dry we would pick the seed out of the cotton by hand. Our cotton gin and grist mill was finally located at what is now Checotah, Oklahoma, and was run by two Jews who also operated a general merchandise store. Their names were Mose and Ben LaFayette. Our clothes were practically all home spun, that is, thread and clothing was made with the spinning wheel, reel and loom. We had cotton cloth and mohair, no wool for we raised no sheep. When father moved in from Texas he brought with him some two or three angora goats, they continued to multiply and it was from this goat hair that we made our mohair or goathair clothes. We colored our clothes from liquids made of different barks such as sycamore bark, red oak bark, shumac with a little copperas added and indigo. There was a store at Texanna, Indian Territory, where we first did our trading and they hand-

A man by the name of John Pierce ran the store at Texanna, Indian Territory. We made belts and hat bands and pocket books from rattlesnake skins and there was plenty of rattlesnakes here as they were back in Texas and we were used to them.

There was all kinds of fruit, wild nuts, and wild berries in abundance, namely, blackberries, dewberries, strawberries, huckleberries, plums, grapes, few seedling peach trees, hickory nuts, pecans, walnuts and chinapins. We had plenty of wild honey for we would locate a bee gum in a tree, cut the tree and rob the bees.

There was game of all kinds, black bear, deer, squirrel, rabbits, opossum, raccoon, fox, coyotes, wolves, bobcats, mink and muskrats.

Fish were very plentiful and could be easily caught in any creek or river.

Wild hogs were plentiful and people arranged to keep them that way for a long while. A person who turned out a few gilts together with a boar that he had purchased and had marked was entitled to kill his meat each fall from those that were wild in the woods. They killed their meat in the late fall because the hogs would be fat on the mass (acorns, nuts, grass, roots and herbs). These people who went about turning their gilts loose had what they called a hog title or claim. I don't suppose that you would term these as the real wild hogs like I heard my father talk about that used to be really wild and vicious in the cane-breaks.

There was some cattle raising and a few small ranches in the country and I worked on some of these ranches. Cattle raising seemed to be more profitable in the early days than was farming. About all the farming done in my locality was to have something to eat and wear at home.

Of course meat was no object account of so much wild

game and fish.

Our social affairs were dances, barbecues, camp meetings, horse races, roping, riding, church and visiting friends and neighbors. While most of the children were Indians the English language was taught in the schools.

The churches all preached the Protestant faith and the most of them in my locality were Methodists. Camp meetings were usually held for a week under an arbor built of brush and logs rolled up in position for seats. People would go camp at the meeting grounds until the meeting ended.

I went to the Bennett school. It was of frame construction with a large stone fire-place. This school has passed out of existence. It was located one mile south, one mile west and one quarter of a mile south of the present town of Warner, Oklahoma. I also attended the Shin school, later called the Martha Russell Memorial. This school was located three miles north of the present town of Warner, Oklahoma.

BURIAL GROUNDS

In my travels around over eastern Oklahoma I know of many old family burial grounds. It would indeed be hard for me to tell you the route to travel to reach some of these burial grounds. The Bennett burial grounds where my father and mother is buried is about three miles southwest of Warner, Oklahoma.

FORDS AND FERRIES

The Brown's Ferry was across Red river between Gainsville, Texas and Ardmore, Indian Territory, at about the present location of the highway bridge.

The Foreman's Ferry was across Illinois river near its mouth and was run by Bullett Foreman.

The Lynch Ferry was across the Arkansas River near the present highway bridge at Webbers Falls, and was owned by Joe Lynch and Doc Campbell.

The Vann's Ferry was located east of Webbers Falls and about seven miles down stream from the mouth, now called the North Canadian and on the old road to Ft. Smith, Arkansas. This was owned by Bob Vann.

The Nevin's Ferry was across the Arkansas, River the east landing being at the mouth of the Grand River and the west landing near the present Muskogee Pump Station and was owned by Mose and Julia Nevins.

The Rogers Ferry crossed the Arkansas river at about the present Frisco railroad bridge east of Muskogee and was owned by the Rogers Brothers.

The McMakin Ferry was just south of the Roger's Ferry and was owned by the McMakin Brothers.

The Mud Ford was on Dierdy Creek seven miles east of Warner, Indian Territory.

The Alberty Ford was on Dierdy Creek about four miles northeast of Warner, Indian Territory.

The Rock Ford was on the North Canadian river and about four miles south of Texanna, Indian Territory.

STEAMBOATS AND STEAM FERRIES

The Lynch and Campbell Ferry, above mentioned, was first a pole ferry then a cable ferry, and finally a steam ferry.

Some of the steamboats that I remember that used to come up the river as far as Webbers, Falls, Indian Territory, and Ft. Gibson, Indian Territory, the landing being at Nevins Ferry for Fort Gibson, were as follows: Steamer Mary D-^{Captain}~~Deputy~~ Blakely; Steamer Border City-Captain

Blakely: Steamer Jennie Maie- Captain Walter Huff; Steamer Drew- Captain W. H. Wybarke.

I remember one year in the month of May I had occasion to go to Ft. Smith, Arkansas, and I purchased a ticket for the boat Border City at Webbers Falls. The fare was \$1.50. I stayed in Ft. Smith for a month and returned to Webbers Falls by boat. The river was up and they could not land the boat on the Webbers Falls side of the river and had to land at what would now be on the Gore, Oklahoma, side of the river and they had to put the passengers across the river in a skiff and we had to pay an additional twenty cents to our regular fare.

RAILROADS

The A.C.S. railroad built through LeFlore County in 1894.

The Midland Valley railroad, F.S. & W. Railroad built into Ft. Smith in 1903 and 1904.

The Webbers Falls, Santa Fe and Warner railroad was built from Warner to Webbers Falls in 1910. We used to call this the Shawnee Road and I understand it was built by Muskogee capital including Oklahoma's first Governor. Governor C. N. Haskell.

RANCHES

The Half Circle C ranch was owned by J. R. Davis and usually handled three or four thousand of cattle yearly. This ranch was located in the vicinity northeast of the present town of Mexanna, Oklahoma. The cattle was all on open range.

The George Zufall Ranch was southeast of Muskogee and west of Keefton, Oklahoma and operated as late as 1895.

The Blackmore Ranch was located in the vicinity of the Rattlesnake Mountain and was owned by Mr. Blackmore. They branded their cattle with an OK on the neck.

The Half Circle L Ranch was located in the vicinity of Georgia Fork Creek south of Warner and was owned by Joe Lynch of Webbers Falls, Indian Territory, and was the same man that operated the Lynch Ferry.

The cow punchers were seldom educated but were law abiding, honest and a jolly good bunch of young fellows. They were continually playing pranks on each other. When night-time came they were usually ready to fall in the bunk house and go to sleep for they would arise at the break of the morning sun. I know from experience that riding and roping and branding each day was a day of much labor spent in the saddle. There used to be more people come to the Joe Lynch Ranch on a Sunday to see the boys riding, roping and bronco busting than ever attended any church on that day, at least in this particular community.

OPENING OF LANDS TO WHITE SETTLERS

There was a strip of land of about three million acres which included the present Oklahoma County and other land in old Oklahoma Territory in 1889. I cannot recall the exact day but I know that it was at noon that the cannon was fired, the trumpet sounded and people in wagons, buckboards, carriages, horse back and a foot made a grand rush to stake their claim and it seemed that by sun-down that there was someone camped on every 160 acre tract in that section of territory.

The Cherokee Strip was opened for settlement in 1893. This land was not opened in the same way as was that of 1889 in as much as the race for the claim had caused so much confusion before and in this case it was on the principle of lottery. They drew their lottery ticket and then it was up to

them to find where their claim was located and in many instances when the party got to what he thought was his claim he found some one else had squatted there and it was up to him to move the squatter or the lawful one with the ticket or move on to find the land that he really drew. This caused no little trouble and I don't know which was the worst, that of 1889 or that of 1893.

ALLOTMENTS, PAYMENTS AND ANNUITIES

It was at the beginning of the Dawes Commission that the Cherokees had to become enrolled and this was no little task for the Indians at least many of them, could not understand or at least did not care a great deal about it. Enrollment, however, went forward and I filed for my allotment as a Cherokee in 1897 at Warner, Indian Territory.

The allotment was determined on the value of \$320.00. I mean by that that they would not allot to anyone more than \$320.00 worth of land and the land was appraised at from \$2 to \$6.50 per acre, thus some received 50 acres while others received 160 acres. I got 80 acres located about three miles southwest of Warner, Indian Territory.

They used to issue what they called Bread Money to the Indians and I remember specifically that in 1891 that I went to Webbers Falls, Indian Territory, to get my bread money and they gave me \$1370. I don't know how they determined the amount to be paid as Bread Money.

In 1910 I was notified to come to Tahlequah, Oklahoma to receive my Eastern Cherokee money and when I arrived there the town was full of Indians half crazy and half drunk pushing, clamoring and striving to get their money and I experienced no difficulty as I waited until the second day of the payment when I drew \$133.19. The paymaster making this payment was named

Guin Miller.

UNITED STATES MARSHALS

I knew quite a few of the United States Marshals and I recall Uncle John West, Bass Reeves (colored), Grant Johnson (colored) Bill Tilghman and Bud Ledbetter. In the early days the United States Marshals used every method possible to arrest emigrants for the possession of liquor but in the latter days the ones I have mentioned above never used such tactics.

CITIES AND TOWNS

In 1892 the town of Checotah consisted of the following business people; Bill Gentry- General Merchandise, Cook and Thompson-Hardward, Lose and Ben LaFayette- General Merchandise, gin and grist mill and there was a little eating-joint that I do not remember who owned it.

We used to trade some at Texanna, Indian Territory, in the early days with the only merchant, John Pierce.

We also traded at one time with Sam Severs in Muskogee and also with the firm of Robb and Patterson.

TOLL BRIDGES

There was a toll bridge on the old Texas road south of the present town of Muskogee, Oklahoma on North Elk Creek run by a Mrs. Drew and the toll bridge on South Elk Creek was run by Jim McIntosh.

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