

SMALL, ROBERT W.

BIOGRAPHY OF JAMES SMALL

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FIELD WORKER ROBERT W. SMALL
Indian-Pioneer History S-149.
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James Small, M.D. Deceased.
Born October 28, 1841, McMinn
County, Tennessee,

James Small was born October 28, 1841, in McMinn County Tennessee, being the seventh son of Reverend Mr. James and Mary A. Wallace Small/^{natives} of Wayne County, Kentucky.

In 1861 he volunteered his services in the cause of the Union in the Civil War enlisting in the Second Kansas Infantry and later joining the Sixteenth Missouri Cavalry in which he served until he was honorably discharged at the close of the war.

In 1864 he married Miss Mary Noe, of Lee County, Virginia; after the close of war he settled at Ash Grove, Missouri, and began the study of medicine under Dr. E.H. Moore. In 1871, he moved to Isabella, Mo., and began the practice of medicine and in 1879 he attended the American Medical College, St. Louis, Missouri where he graduated in 1880.

In 1891, Dr. Small was appointed resident physician at the Nuyaka Mission, of the Creek Nation, Indian Territory.

The Nuyaka Mission was a school maintained at the expense of the Government for the benefit of citizens of the Creek Nation. At the time Dr. Small was resident physician at this institution the enrollment of pupils was about one hundred, all of whom were of Indian blood and were citizens of different sections of the Creek Nation. The male students frequently ran away from school and returned to their homes but were usually brought back again. The strong desire for freedom from school curriculum and strict discipline was manifested in most of the young pupils. The boys spent their recreation periods in contests with bows and arrows.

Educational institutions were looked upon by the young pupils in that early period as encroachments upon their rights and freedom; they had not been given the instruction in childhood to equip their minds with a desire for literary attainments. It seemed to many of these young Indians only a punishment to be sent away to a school where all were strangers and where the instructors had ways and manners foreign to their tribal

customs. The behavior of these young Indians betrayed the strong impulse of their natures to live unmolested and free to exercise every ordinary tribal privilege. This feeling against the distasteful "custom of the white man" was gradually broken down more and more in each succeeding school year and after this feeling became an exception rather than the rule among the students of the various institutions of learning, many of the young Indians attained distinction in various lines of study.

In addition to administering medical treatment to all the pupils and employees of the institution, Dr. Small also practiced his profession in the surrounding country and after one year at the Nuyaka Mission he resigned his position and took up the practice of medicine at Red Fork, Indian Territory, and later at Coweta, Broken Arrow and in other places in Oklahoma.

In his early practice among the inhabitants of the Creek Nation, Dr. Small has related that he maintained the custom of answering every call regardless

of the conditions of roads, of the weather or of the financial condition of the sick and afflicted. He usually kept two good saddle horses and made all calls on horseback until the last few years of his life when he used a buggy and team.

In his early experiences in the Creek Nation he has mentioned that social conditions were at a low ebb in many parts of the Nation.

The inhabitants of the Creek Nation as a rule were of certain cliques or clans.

A lawless element and their sympathizers formed no inconsiderable part of the population of some communities while in others a more respectable and law-abiding citizenship dominated to a large degree. The United States Government maintained marshals and they in turn appointed a number of deputies to help preserve peace and order in the different communities. Vigilante clans were also in evidence in certain parts of the Nation. Many badmen from the states who came to hide from the law found this Indian Territory a favorite place of refuge. This lawless element that drifted

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in from the states together with some native born bad men often formed an element which was difficult to conquer or to scatter. An enmity between the law enforcement officers and this tough element grew with such intensity that each member of both groups lived in fear that their lives would be snuffed out at any moment.

Dr. Small has related that on many occasions when riding through the country after night little bands of men could be seen a short distance from the roadway standing in groups; each man holding his horse with bridle reins. Dr. Small knew that these men were undoubtedly waiting for an officer of the law to come into view and that their plan was to level their Winchesters and fire at the officer before he had time to note their presence. Coming in late one night when the moon and stars were shining brightly Dr. Small suddenly heard the clicking sound of Winchesters in a clump of bushes near the roadside and thinking that he would be mistaken for an officer

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of the law was nonplussed as to what to do to immediately identify himself without inviting a volley of fire from the ambushade; he instantly tried to whistle a tune and to appear ignorant of the presence of these gunmen while at the same time he thought that the saddle horse which he was riding would identify him as his horses were noted for their size and gaited qualities. No doubt his whistling and the fact that the gunmen recognized his horse prevented several Winchesters from being pulled on that occasion.

Peddlers and traders of various ~~lands~~ were numerous in the Indian Territory in the early periods and frequently they met with highwaymen who relieved them of their surplus cash and often they lost their horses at night by thieves who seemed to be well organized in various parts of the Indian Territory .

Dr. Small kept a lock on his barn door every night to prevent the loss of his saddle horses.

At the time Dr. Small went to the Nuyaka Mission and for several years afterward the Creek citizens would

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allow white men to break up and farm the fertile lands where such land was found unfenced and was not claimed by other citizens. These white men could control all the land they would put into a state of cultivation and the rents from such lands would bring a considerable sum in revenue to many of the citizens. In addition to the farm land many men would fence great open prairie lands to pasture their cattle and horses or they would lease the grass lands to cattle men. Often Creek citizens would have as many as a thousand head of cattle of their own.

Okmulgee was a town of about two hundred and fifty inhabitants when Dr. Small was employed at the Nuyaka Mission which is a few miles distant from Okmulgee, then the capital of the Creek Nation.

Sapulpa and Tulsa were towns of a few hundred population then.

The Creek Indians as a rule lived in houses of some sort, mostly in small houses built of native lumber; very few lived in teepees.

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During the Civil War the Creeks owned a number of slaves; after the close of the war, the descendants of the negro slaves intermarried with the Creeks, producing citizens of mixed blood. These Creek citizens were, however, entitled to every right which was accorded to the full-bloods.

The descendants of the negro slaves who had no Indian blood were allowed forty acres of land at the time of the allotment of tribal lands; also the few remaining ex-slaves who were then living were allowed an allotment of forty acres each. All such allottees were known as freedmen.

When Dr. Small was living at Coweta, Indian territory, in the late 90's a citizen of more than half negro blood was postmaster and also owned the largest mercantile establishment in the town, employing white, negro and Indian clerks; he also owned a cotton gin and had extensive land holdings and large herds of cattle; he was a shrewd, progressive business man accumulating a comfortable fortune in a short time from his various kinds of business.

The lands on the Arkansas River a few miles from Coweta grew cotton to a height of seven and eight feet and some seasons produced two bales per acre. Corn on similar lands made yields from seventy to a hundred bushels per acre. The soil was very rich and there was enough moisture to insure abundant crops almost every year.

For the reason that citizens of the Creek Nation had not been allotted their lands, there were very few good houses built in the country and very few orchards or other improvements of a permanent nature. Often white men leasing the lands of citizens would build small houses on the leased land with the privilege of removing these houses at the termination of their contracts.

Public improvements, such as roads, bridges, schools, and churches were matters of least importance in the rural communities, as the population shifted from one section to another so frequently that little interest was centered in any part. The fact that renters and leaseholders would sell out and rent again in

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another locality and that the lands had not been allotted to the individual citizens was largely responsible for this lack of public improvements in almost all parts of the Indian territory.

At the first opening of lands to homestead in Oklahoma, Dr. Small secured a fine claim but abandoned it in a short time to return to the practice of his profession; again in later years he entered another quarter section of level prairie land in Beaver county, but later abandoned it also.