

NAIL, WILLIAM

THIRD INTERVIEW

13713

63

LEGEND & STORY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

64

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Field worker's name Gomer Gower

Report made on (date) April 21 1938

This legend was secured from (name) William Nail

Address Poteau, Oklahoma

This person is (male or female) White, Negro, Indian,

If Indian, give tribe _____

Origin and history of legend or story Ownership of his father

~~and mother as slaves and sold as such after close of Civil~~

~~War. Question of freedman's rights determined by place of birth.~~

Write out the legend or story as completely as possible. Use blank sheets and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached _____

NAIL , WILLIAM. THIRD INTERVIEW.

13713

Gomer Gower
Investigator
April 21, 1938

Interview with William Nail (Ex-slave)
Poteau, Oklahoma

William Nail was born near the old Rock (Wapanucka) Academy, in the Choctaw Nation, about 1860, where he lived with his mother until some time in 1867, at which time he moved with his mother and father to Scullyville County, in the Choctaw Nation.

His mother, Chaney Colbert, a colored woman, was brought to the Indian Territory, as a slave, from Mississippi, by the Colbert family at the time of the general removal of the Chickasaws. His father, Joe Nail, a colored man and a slave, was also brought from Mississippi by the Nail family at the same time.

Both the Nail and the Colbert families were prominent members of the Chickasaw tribe, who settled in the same general locality. However, the husband of Susan Colbert, the owner of the mother of William Nail, having no definite boundary lines by which to be governed when selecting a home site in the then new Indian Territory, had settled in what later developed was domain owned by the Choctaws, hence the seeming discrepancy in the

NAIL, WILLIAM THIRD INTERVIEW. 13713

2

the statement that the Colbert family was of the Chickasaw tribe.

The fact that the Wapanucka Academy, a Chickasaw institution, near which, as stated, Nail was born was located so near the boundary line which separated the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations, made it necessary that a special provision be incorporated in the treaty of 1855 to insure its location to be embraced within the Chickasaw domain. That provision follows:

"Provided, however, if the line running due north from the eastern source of Island Bayou to the main Canadian shall not include Allen's or Wapanucka Academy within the Chickasaw District, then, an offset shall be made from said line, so as to leave said Academy two miles within the Chickasaw District, north, west and south from the lines of boundary."

At any rate, the Colbert family considered itself to be a part of the Chickasaw tribe regardless of the fact that the homesite, upon later and more definite boundary lines being fixed, was found to occupy a part of the Choctaw District.

NAIL , WILLIAM

THIRD INTERVIEW

13713

3

Upon the creation of the Dawes Commission and the establishment of an enrolling office at Colbert Station for the enrollment of the Chickasaws and Freedmen for land allotment, Nail , like many others who supposed that they were born in the Chickasaw Nation, proceeded to that point for enrollment and was informed that since the place of his birth was in the Choctaw Nation, he must report at some point within the Choctaw District for enrollment. This he did and was duly accorded the rights of a Freedman.

Records from various sources indicate that the Chickasaw people were reluctant in recognizing the emancipation of the slaves and continued to hold them in slavery for some time after the close of the War when the aid of the Federal authorities was invoked to put an end to the practice. The mother of William Nail was sold by her mistress, Susan Colbert, to a neighbor who bought her at an auction at a very low price because of the risk he took in making the purchase in the face of the recent national liberation of the slaves. His father, also, was sold by his owner and was held in slavery until liberated by the Federal armed forces.

NAIL, WILLIAM - THIRD INTERVIEW

13713

4

Fearing violence at the hands of the Chickasaws should they remain among them after their liberation, most of the ex-slaves made their way to other parts where they felt their presence was borne with more toleration than that for which they could hope if they remained among the Chickasaws.

It was under these circumstances that the family of ex-slaves made their way from near Wapenucka to what is now Leflore County, where they found a less hostile attitude among the Choctaws toward the ex-slaves than that exhibited by their former owners, the Chickasaws.

He relates that his father and mother, Joe Nail and Chaney Colbert, respectively, reared several children while they were in slavery, and owned by two families who lived at some three miles from each other. His father was permitted to visit his mother and stay overnight each Saturday and Sunday. These were the only occasions when the children saw their father.