

HERNDON, CHARLIE M.

INTERVIEW

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368

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Hazel B. Greene,
Journalist,
Oct. 26, 1937.

An Interview With Charlie M. Herndon,
• Hugo, Oklahoma. Choctaw County.

Father: George W. Herndon, native of Tennessee.

Mother: Mary McClannahan Herndon, Native of
Tennessee.

Father and Mother both buried at Hope, Arkansas.

I was born at Dover, Stuart County, Tennessee, right at the old Fort Donelson battleground. In 1888, my parents and the family traveled by train to Hope, Arkansas, where we lived for ten years. My father died and was buried there. Then we moved to the Indian Territory in 1899, after father died and mother had remarried; she and her husband came with us boys to the Indian Territory. When they died, we carried them back to Hope, Arkansas, and buried them each by the side of their former spouses.

We leased a place about a half mile from the Clear Creek Post Office. It was just about a mile southwest of the present town of Valliant, out there on the prairie. Just a store, blacksmith shop and about three residences. Edmund Gardner was the Postmaster. We farmed our place, and the land was so new and fertile then that it produced good stuff. We didn't

HERNDON, CHARLIE M.

INTERVIEW.

7975.

-2-

get much price for our farm products, but we raised lots to eat, and could get everything we needed for very little money.

The nearest place for us to attend church was at Wheelock. The old church had been rebuilt after having been neglected for years. During the Civil War the school and church buildings at Wheelock were abandoned to the mercy of those who chose to use them, and were shamefully abused. Some of the buildings burned; the old stone walls of the stone church were overgrown with bushes and trees, and served as a hiding place for rabbits and squirrels and other "varmints". One big tree ran right up through the roof. About 1886 the old stone church was cleaned out and rebuilt.

Wheelock was about ten miles from our home, but we would go there to church sometimes. My wife went more often than I did. I usually wanted to go hunting on Sundays, because I'd work hard all week in the fields. There were lots of deer and turkey, and squirrels by the million. We'd make sausage of deer and turkey meat. It was fine mixed, better than one alone. There was a great deal of other game, too, and a world of wolves. Why, we could not raise

HEWNDON, CHARLIE M.

INTERVIEW.

7975.

-3-

watermelons to do any good because of the wolves eating them up. That sounds "fishy", but it is true.

The roads were so rough that we went nearly everywhere horseback. And I'll tell you there were some tough customers here in those days. Not only the outlaws who came over here to escape justice in Arkansas and Texas, but some who were raised here. I have seen some of the native sons race horses across the prairie, and shoot and whoop, and be so drunk they could hardly sit a horse. I've seen them set the prairie afire by shooting into the tall dry grass.

The grass would grow almost as high as a man's shoulders. We used to gather it to fill bed ticks with. It made good bedding. It was springy.

Schools for white children were few and far between. Wheelock was a school for Indian orphan girls. There was a negro Academy about a mile north of Clear Creek. It was run by white people from the North. Missionaries mostly; I guess they were all missionaries. The one I remember so well was a Mr. James McBride. He died in 1892. I met him the first time I came over into the Indian Territory, before

-4-

we moved over here. He was fine. He had a son named Howard McBride, who was educated there in the negro Academy. I guess he had to be educated, and inasmuch as his father was Superintendent and lived there Howard received his education there, just as the children of some white missionaries to Indian schools were educated in the schools for the Indians. Howard was a fine fellow, too. Later he made a good Superintendent, too; just about as good as his father.

Then old man Flikinger came there. But a law was passed that required negro instructors for the negro schools. (The present Superintendent is as fine principled a negro as ever lived). I think it was about 1911 that the negroes became the teachers there. It is called Elliot Academy now. Those are not the original buildings, which were of logs; and burned. There were several buildings but they did not all burn at once. Just from time to time.

I have done lots of carpenter work on those buildings. That old cemetery just south of Elliot Hall, or Academy, is a very interesting one. Many notables are buried there.

That negro school was first called Oak Hill Academy.

When the railroad was built through here I helped to cut out the right of way and did some carpenter work for the work gang. That was in 1901.