

Hill, Mary April 19, 1937

Billie Byrd Research Field Worker S-149 Interview with Mary Hill, Age 47,

Muskogee Tribe Okfuskee Town (tulwa), Okemah, Oklahoma

The Migration to the West of the Muskogee

Many years ago, my grandmother, Sallie Farney, who was among those, that made the trip to the West from Alabama, often told of the trip as follows:

"In every way we were abundantly blessed in our every day life in the old country. We had our hunting grounds and all the things that are dear to the heart or interest of an Indian.

A council meeting was mostly composed of men, but there were times when every member of a town (tulwa) was requested to attend the meetings.

Many of the leaders, when unrest was felt in the homes, visited the different homes and gave encouragement to believe that Alabama was to be the permanent home of the Muskogee tribe. But many different rumors of a removal to the far west was often heard.

The command for a removal came unexpectedly upon most of us. There was the time that we noticed that several overloaded wagons were passing our home, yet we did not grasp the meaning. However, it was not long until we found out the reason. Wagons stopped at our home and the men in charge commanded us to gather what few belongings could be crowded into the wagons. We were to be taken away and leave our homes never to return. This was just the beginning of much weeping and heartaches.

We were taken to a crudely built stockade and joined others of our tribe. We were kept penned up until everything was ready before we started on the march. Even here, there was the awful silence that showed the heartaches and sorrow at being taken from the homes and even separation from loved ones.

Most of us had not foreseen such a move in this fashion or at this time. We were not prepared, but times became more horrible after the real journey was begun.

Many fell by the wayside, too faint with hunger or too weak to keep up with the rest. The aged, feeble, and sick were left to perish by the wayside. A crude bed was quickly prepared for these sick and weary people. Only a bowl of water was left within reach, thus they were left to suffer and die alone.

The little children piteously cried day after day from weariness, hunger, and illness. Many of the men, women, and even the children were forced to walk. They were once happy children - left without mother and father - crying could not bring consolation to those children.

The sick and the births required attention, yet there was no time or no one was prepared. Death stalked at all hours, but there was no time for proper burying of ceremonies. My grandfather died on this trip. A hastily cut piece of cotton wood contained his body. The open ends were closed up and this was placed along a creek. This was not the only time this manner of burying was held nor the only way. Some of the dead were placed between two logs and quickly covered with

shrubs, some were shoved under the thickets, and some were not even buried but left by the wayside.

There were several men carrying reeds with eagle feathers attached to the end. These men continually circled around the wagon trains or during the night around the camps. These men said the reeds with feathers had been treated by the medicine men. Their purpose was to encourage the Indians not to be heavy hearted nor to think of the homes that had been left.

Some of the older women sang songs that meant, "We are going to our homes and land; there is One who is above and ever watches over us; He will care for us." This song was to encourage the ever downhearted Muskogees.

Many a family was forced to abandon their few possessions and necessities when their horses died or were too weary to pull the heavy wagons any furth.

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Dowson, Lucy Removal

Melissa Bird, an old woman of the Eufaula tomi (tulwa) has often talked of the life and incidents occurring in the Muskogee-Creek Indian removal from the old country of Alabama to the Indian Territory.

Prior to the beginning of the move, the Indians had already begun the holding of religious services at night. They were told of old Jerusalem.

When the move was finally begun a group of the Muskogee-Creek Indians arrived at the Mississippi River. There was a log building on the banks of the river wherein some Indians were holding religious meetings. The inside of the log house was covered with red clay and the Indians of the vicinity wore kerchiefs around their heads, long shirts and leggings.

It was in the Mississippi River, known as the Wewogufkee Thakko (Big Muddy Water) in the Muskogee Creek language, that one of the ships with a load of the Muskogee-Creek Indians was wrecked. Although many perished, a few were saved or swam to shore. Many of the dead bodies were taken from the river and given burial on the west banks of the great river. Search was carried on for several days for other lost bodies yet a number were never found or recovered.

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Cook, Wallace March 17, 1937

Cook, Wallace

Grace Kelley, Field Worker

When my grandfather, Emeithle Harjo, was twenty-five or thirty years old, he was removed to the Indian Territory, from Alabama. The boat that he was to cross the Mississippi in was a dilapidated affair and sank in the Mississippi River. He swam pretty near all night saving the women and children. They were all brought here and turned loose like something wild. He had to walk from here to the Fort Gibson to get the axe and gun that the Government promised and gave to him. He built his home across the highway from here. There are some house there but they are not the ones he built, they burned, and rotted down.

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Chambers, Jennie McCoy

Mary D. Dorward, Field Worker

Jennie McCoy Chambers A Biographical Sketch From a personal Interview with the Subject.

(1530 East 14th Street; Tulsa, Okla.)

(The subject of this sketch was very difficult to interview, for, while she was very willing to talk, she is very deaf, is eighty-three years old, and her mind seems to wander.)

Jennie McCoy Chambers was born April 24, 1854, in the Koo-wee-skoo-wee (her spelling) district of the Cherokee Nation, near the town of now Claremore. The house, a log cabin, still stands. It is at the north end of Claremore Lake on Dog Creek, has two large rooms and a small room downstairs and a room upstairs. Has clapboard doors.

Mrs. McCoy is about half Cherokee (which she calls Cher o 'kee, just as she says Tahl ee 'quah), her mother, Mary Hicks, coming over the Trail of Tears from Alabama when a child. Her father, Joseph McCoy, was a rancher and the family lived on the place near Claremore until the Civil War when they went over near Saline, and "refugeed" in the Cherokee Nation until the close of the War. Evidently they did not remain at Saline because she said that she and her sister many times walked from Tahlequah to Fort Smith and back for supplies from the Government, and many times they almost starved. Her people sympathized with the Union.

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Wynn, Lizzie November 29, 1937

Grace Kelley, Investigator An Interview with Lizzie Wynn; Dustin, Oklahoma

Immigration from Alabama

Uncle Willie Benson used to tell me about how they came to this country. When they started out they were afoot and were driven like cattle. At first they had something to eat but that gave out and they were starving. If they had had guns or string they could have gotten game or fish but were not allowed to have them. They came to a slippery elm tree and ate the bark of that until they could get something else. When they would give out they would camp for two or three days to rest up a very little bit, then come on again. Lots took sick and died, so there were not so many when they got here. Big boats were used to haul them across the streams and lakes. When they got to Arkansas they were unable to walk farther so wagons were provided for the rest of the trip. I don't know just where they located first but they were Muskogee Indians under Opuithli Yahola.

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