

## BUFFALO VALLEY: AN OSAGE HUNTING GROUND

By *Orel Busby\**

On a sweltering hot day in June, 1834, a weary column of General Henry Leavenworth's First U. S. Dragoons topped a rise of land in what is now northeastern Pontotoc County and looked down upon a welcome sight.

Ahead was an alluvial mountain valley, approximately nine miles long and three to five miles wide, drained by converging streams that flowed from the hills on the north and west. Courses of the creeks were timbered with pecan, cottonwood and many other varieties of trees, and rolling off on either hand were expanses of bottomland and semi-prairie carpeted with bluestem, buffalo and Indian switch grass.

The stretch of well-watered and sheltered land was known as Buffalo Valley by roving bands of Osage hunters. Close association with the area since the turn of the Century has convinced the writer that few regions in Oklahoma ever furnished such a fine natural habitat for northward-ranging buffalo herds.

Probably no area of comparative size in Oklahoma was ever surrounded with a more varied background of our State's earliest history.<sup>1</sup> This conclusion is drawn from careful research into movement of frontier armies, migrating Indian tribes, and the westward march of emigrants along the California Road which skirted the valley in 1849.

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\* Judge Orel Busby contributes this account of Buffalo Valley to *The Chronicles* from his first hand knowledge of the region and his deep interest in the records and other sources bearing on its history. He has lived all his life around the Valley, a beautiful part of the country lying near the Pontotoc-Hughes county line, south of the Canadian. Judge Busby is a former Justice of the State Supreme Court, and well known attorney of Ada, Oklahoma, where he has his family home. He is active as a leader in the affairs of the Oklahoma Historical Society, serving as a member of its Board of Directors.—Ed.

<sup>1</sup> (a) Shawnee Town was about six miles to the northeast and roughly bounded by the South Canadian river on the northwest and within lines drawn from the present towns of Allen to Gerty to Atwood, in Pontotoc and Hughes counties.

(b) Fort Holmes and Edwards' Store, at the mouth of Little River on the north side of the South Canadian river and about four miles northwest of Atwood.

(c) Marcy's Caravan and Whipple's Caravan and the California emigrants camped at the springs on the north edge of Buffalo Valley (Sec. 34, Twp. 5 N., Rge. 8 E.)

(d) One of the first settlements known as Red Springs Indian (Chickasaw) Church and School was in the middle of the valley (Secs.

Buffalo Valley, drained by Muddy Boggy, Sincere, Sandy, and Rhoda creeks, is visible for miles to the east and southeast from State Highway 12 which spans its northwestern rim. Today the valley is cattle country with alfalfa, bermuda and native bluestem greening under the warm spring sun. But one can stand on a high point of land on the northwest side and visualize the valley as it was on that June day in 1834 when the First Dragoons under General Leavenworth came out of the timber from the east and saw the virgin meadows alive with grazing buffalo.<sup>2</sup>

Research shows the area is steeped in history. The "Osage Village" historical marker, the first such marker erected in Pontotoc County by the Oklahoma Historical Society, stands beside State Highway 12 on the northwestern edge of the valley. About one-half mile northeast is a bubbling spring on the north edge of what is now a portion of the 4B Ranch, the First Dragoons made camp on June 26, 1834.

General Henry Leavenworth and the Dragoons, including officers Henry Dodge, S. W. Kearney, R. B. Mason, Jefferson Davis, Nathan Boone, and the noted artist, George Catlin, were

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16 & 21), Twp. 4 N, Rge. 8 E.,) just east of the old town of Steedman. The old Red Springs Indian graveyard is still there.

(e) The Dragoons' road or trail turned south from Allen toward Wapanucka, and traversed Buffalo Valley on the Texas Cattle Trail, while the emigrants and others traveled on southwest or due west on the south side of the South Canadian.

(f) The old Indian "stick ball" grounds on the Choctaw-Chickasaw Line was in the center of the north part of Buffalo Valley (Sec. 10, Twp. 4 N., Rge. 8 E.)

(g) Research also indicates that the French Post, old Fort Fabry (1741), may have been located at the mouth of Big Creek on the Canadian river about four miles northeast of the present town of Atwood.

<sup>2</sup> George H. Shirk, "Peace on the Plains," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 1 (Spring, 1950) pp. 11, 12. One first becomes conscious of the valley in driving northeast on State Highway 12, from Ada to Allen when crossing Sincere Creek near the Cash Ranch. One of the finest views of the north portion of the valley may be seen from the Kemmerer home from a hill on the north side of Muddy Boggy Creek bridge (Sec. 9, Twp. 4 N., Rge. 8 E.) on State Highway 12.

Buffalo Valley was the hunting ground on the "Big Osage War and Hunting Trail" traveled by the Osages from their villages near Claremore Mound, in present Rogers County after their settlement in this region about 1802. This "Big Osage Trail" was marked as a military road by Capt. J. L. Dawson, of the Seventh Infantry, in 1834, from the first Camp (or Fort) Arbuckle on the Arkansas (about 8 miles west of Sand Springs) to Camp (or Fort) Holmes near the mouth of Little River on the Canadian, in present Hughes County.—James H. Gardner, "One Hundred Years Ago in the Region of Tulsa," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XI, No. 1 (June, 1933), pp. 765-85.—Ed.

on an expedition westward that year to secure peace with Plains Indian tribes.<sup>3</sup>

The Dragoons on this expedition found a roving band of Osage hunters camped in Buffalo Valley. There were about six hundred Indians (counting the women and children who according to custom went along on the annual hunt), many of whom were occupied in dressing out buffalo killed in the hunt. This particular band was led by Black Dog, second in leadership of the Osage Nation. Near the spring where the Dragoons camped was a village of poles and saplings covered by deer or buffalo hides. In Black Dog's camp the excitement of the hunt prevailed. Black Dog is reported to have been a man of tremendous proportions, seven feet tall and weighing two hundred and fifty pounds.

In Buffalo Valley, when the writer was a small boy going on hunting and fishing trips with friends in the region around Allen, were seen many buffalo wallows. These were usually about one foot deep, generally round, and anywhere from ten to thirty feet in diameter. Also in the valley were occasional alkali spots which show up today when turned with plow or disc. In our present pasture on the 4B Ranch, which constitutes a part of the valley, the cattle still seek out these alkali spots and prefer to lie there. Undoubtedly the alkali dust had some chemical which aided the buffalo in eliminating lice or ticks.<sup>4</sup> Fifty years ago buffalo skulls were to be found in the valley. Mixed among them were of course skulls of cattle, but the buffalo skulls could be determined by the short horns and wider heads.

A century ago there were four general herds of buffalo that ranged across the Great Plains and along the eastern fringe of the Rockies, their ranges overlapping as the herds moved with the seasons. From north to south they formed the so-called Northern, Republican, Arkansas, and Texas herds. Some of these herds ranged the Great Plains region of Oklahoma. Apparently Buffalo Valley in the old days was merely a choice piece of graze where the great migrating herds from Texas struck about May and remained for awhile on their way northward; some even remaining in the valley that was a "natural" wintering place.

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<sup>3</sup> The young group of officers leading the Dragoons afterwards became some of the most noted in American history. Thumbnaill biography of each is found in Shirk, *op. cit.*, pp. 39, 40, 41.

<sup>4</sup> Scientists have now determined that fine "road dust" or chemical powders fill up the breathing apparatus of insects, including lice and fleas with which buffalo were infested, and kill these insects. The buffalo were apparently ahead of the scientists in this discovery that the powdery fine alkali dust helped rid them of fleas and lice.

High hills circle the valley practically on three sides, protecting it from the worst blasts of wintry cold. Running out from the valley into the hills are many sheltered canyon-draws where the herds must have wintered. This shows up a contributing factor to the worth of the valley as a hunting ground.

Since 1900, the writer has been interested in knowing why the Osage traveled so far south and east to hunt buffalo as they did when Black Dog's band was found by the Dragoons. During the writer's investigations he talked with many old-time Indians who were familiar with the traditions and folklore of their tribes. It was tradition among them that the "wild Indians" as they called the Osage came into the valley region annually until the near extinction of the buffalo. The Choctaws and Chickasaws gave these "wild Indians" or "big Indians" a wide berth saying they were "afraid of them."<sup>5</sup> Tradition also was to the effect that these nomads would drive away their ponies if they found them in the vicinity of their camps.

Among other old time Chickasaw Indian "medicine men," was a well known character around Allen in the writer's boyhood days called "Old Jonah" Alexander. He claimed to be one hundred years of age just before his death and he still had all of his mental faculties. He loved to talk about the folklore and traditions of the "old days."

All his life "Old Jonah" lived near the spot of the present Osage Village marker. He said the valley just south of the marker was called Buffalo Valley by all the old time Indians. By "old time" he meant Choctaws and Chickasaws as well as the Osages who were referred to by the same tribes as the "wild Indians." Jonah explained that the valley was a great place to hunt because it had plenty of buffalo grass in the tight flatlands near the streams and the remainder of the area had a good growth of blue-stem and Indian switch grass. Another old time Indian called "Chief" Blackhawk (who died about 1907 at the age of 100 years) had migrated to the region around Allen from Ohio about 1878, and he agreed with "Old Jonah's" traditional stories. There is still buffalo grass, or "mesquite" as the natives call it, growing in the tight bottom lands alongside roads which cross the valley.

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<sup>5</sup> In 1835, a year after the Dragoon Expedition, the Camp Holmes treaty (Arbuckle-Stokes, U. S. Commission) established "Peace and Friendship" with the Comanche and Wichita and associated bands, delegations signing including chiefs and leaders from the Choctaw, Creek, Cherokee, Osage, Seneca, and Quapaw tribes. Articles 6 and 7 expressly stipulated action of the U. S. military with other signatory tribes against any one of the signatory tribes that might give cause for such action by murder and stealing of horses and cattle within the limits of the country assigned by the United States to another of these same tribes.—Charles Kappler, *Indian Treaties*, Vol. II, pp. 322-3 (Washington 1903).

Another reason the valley was a good hunting place is because the Indians could mount their ponies on the hill-tops overlooking the lowlands, locate grazing buffalo, check the wind, and then, using the trees rimming the streams as cover, get close to their game with bows and arrows. Without the advantage of the surrounding hills, the Indians might well have raced their ponies to death trying to bring down choice meat.

At this point it should be noted that the timber growth in this country has changed considerably during even the past fifty years. There is much more timber and brush on the ridges and even along the streams than there was when the writer was a boy. In the early days the ridges were almost devoid of timber. The valley looked like a large savanna or old English park. There were only large trees growing along the streams, mostly pecan, and very little "brush" country. The brush came in after white men overgrazed the regions and eliminated the waist-high grass which grew each year.

Among features of historical interest found today in Buffalo Valley are included the springs where the Dragoons, and later Captain Randolph B. Marcy and emigrants along the California Road, camped on the grueling trip west in 1849.<sup>6</sup>

Eroded scars of the old military road made by General Leavenworth and his men from Allen to the present Belton Crossing on Blue River are to be seen near the springs. Years after the tragic expedition of the Dragoons, this same road was known as the "Texas Cattle Trail," emigrants from Kansas and Missouri following this route across what is now Oklahoma on into Texas where they took up lands.<sup>7</sup>

Looking at the indentations of the old military road<sup>8</sup> and thinking of the features of the country, it seems strange that the expedition of the First Dragoons should have come to such a tragic end. Some of the finest officers in the nation's history were in command of the colorful regiment. Among those were Lieutenant Jefferson Davis, who later became president of the Confederacy, and a young junior officer, Philip St. George Cooke, a West Point graduate who later rose to prominence in the frontier west as a genius at raising defense against Indians and building pioneer roads. Other officers in the regiment later made impressive records as officers in the Mexican and Civil wars, and one was a member of the U. S. Senate.<sup>9</sup> There seems

<sup>6</sup> Grant Foreman, *Marcy & the Gold Seekers* (Norman, 1939) p. 51.

<sup>7</sup> See Map of Indian Territory and Oklahoma, 1890, in Extra Census Bulletin, *The Five Civilized Tribes of the Indian Territory* (Washington, 1894).

<sup>8</sup> Sec. 2, Twp. 4 N., Rge. 8 E.

<sup>9</sup> See biographical data in Appendix Shirk, *op cit.*, *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXVIII No. 1, pp. 34, 40, 41.

no doubt that the regiment was well-equipped to carry out an important mission. Yet, except for important treaties made later with the Indians, the expedition of the First Dragoons was a disastrous one which resulted in the death from typhus fever and dysentery of 150 men out of a possible 600 involved.

The United States Dragoons were organized in the summer of 1833, and left Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, for Fort Gibson in the Indian country in the autumn of that year. Every man in each different company was given the same color horse: blacks for one company, bays for another, sorrels for another, and others were mounted on sleek grays. It is doubtful that the U.S. Army has ever decked out a more impressive regiment, but possibly a year in bad quarters at Fort Gibson took much of the stamina out of the men. They did not get their mission fully underway until the next year when the Army determined their first assignment—the expedition two hundred miles south and west to the North Fork of Red River.

What seems strange about the toll of disease in the regiment during that summer is that the country must have had plenty of water and game. In addition to vast numbers of buffalo which Black Dog and his band of Osages were killing and dressing on the edge of Buffalo Valley, it seems logical to suppose that numerous deer and smaller animals thrived in the neighborhood. Deer and small game are still found in the region near present Allen and all along the courses of Sandy and Muddy Boggy creeks; and in the buffalo hunting days wild turkeys prairie chickens, pigeons and other wild fowl were plentiful. Yet, in spite of the fact that the regiment had access to plenty of fresh meat and good water, it straggled back into Fort Gibson that fall sick and emaciated and showing a tragic contrast to the proud ranks upon which Black Dog and his hunters looked in late June.

Another interesting feature of Buffalo Valley in northeastern Pontotoc County, is that the present paved highway between Allen and Ada follows almost exactly the same course as the old California Road. In an article published in the summer of 1960<sup>10</sup> Robert H. Dott,<sup>11</sup> formerly of the State Geological Survey, traces the route of the California Road across Oklahoma and attached a map<sup>12</sup> which he worked out, plotted on a modern base. The map based on one made in 1849, by Lieutenant James H. Simpson shows the route followed the general course of the

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<sup>10</sup> Robert H. Dott, *Lieutenant Simpson's California Road Across Oklahoma, The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 2 (Summer, 1960), pp. 154-179.

<sup>11</sup> Robert H. Dott is Director, American Association of Geological Engineers, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

present State Highway 12. Mr. Dott spent several days in the area in preparation of the article and the map, and he was instrumental in locating sites for new historical markers, including the one by nearby Shawnee Town and two others inside the limits of Pontotoc County, which mark the sites of Natural Mound and Delaware Mountain.

The Shawnee Town marker set up on the west side of State Highway 12 in Hughes County between Allen and Atwood marks the approximate center of what was once a thriving but scattered village of Shawnee Indians. Research shows that the center of the Shawnee settlement was on the higher land a few miles north and east of Buffalo Valley, but it is probable that the southwestern edge of the extensive community of log cabin homes extended right up to the valley rim, near where is now the town of Allen.

Lieutenant Simpson who drew a map of the route in 1849 was a member of Captain R. B. Marcy's command which accompanied an emigrant train of California gold-seekers from Fort Smith, Arkansas to Santa Fe, New Mexico. Captain R. B. Marcy of the Fifth Infantry, U. S. Army, was assigned that year to open up a road from Fort Smith to the west. Marcy and his command left Fort Smith on April 5, 1849 and passed through Shawnee Town about May 15, 1849. The Shawnee Village lying roughly in a triangle beginning at Allen, then to present Gerty, then north through Atwood to the Canadian River and up its south shore to near Allen was mentioned in reports of Captain Marcy.

Before Marcy escorted the wagon train of emigrants through Shawnee Town and on southwest along the upper reaches of Buffalo Valley, the widely-scattered settlement of Shawnee Indians was mentioned in the Report (1849) of Captain Frederick T. Dent. Captain Dent, attached to General Matthew Arbuckle's command at Fort Smith, was assigned to make a preliminary examination of the California Road before Captain Marcy and his command started escorting the emigrants west.

It is safe to assume that the emigrants who stopped in the Shawnee village to trade for corn and other supplies later hunted game along the route within the limits of Buffalo Valley. The valley in addition to being a favorite haunt for roving Osage hunters was possibly a hunting ground for men of the Shawnee village, especially in the winter when game on the higher and more exposed country was scarce. The map as prepared by Mr. Dott shows that the California gold-seekers camped at the springs on what is now the northeastern portion of the 4B Ranch which lies along Sandy and Muddy Boggy creeks.

Four years after Captain Dent made his report on Shawnee Town, Lieutenant A. W. Whipple, commanding the 35th Parallel

Survey, followed closely the route of the California Road across Buffalo Valley. Whipple's first camp inside the limits of what is now Pontotoc County was possibly made at the same springs where the First Dragoons sighted the Osage hunters under Black Dog.<sup>13</sup> This assumption is drawn from the fact that Lieutenant Whipple's last camp before entering present Pontotoc County was near the town of Gerty, and that distance of a day's travel for a survey party would be about right.

Lieutenant Whipple, a brilliant young officer of the Army Engineers, was ordered west from Fort Smith with his survey party in 1853. It was the desire of "top army brass" and merchants of growing towns in the Indian border country to find a natural route for a railroad running from Fort Smith to the west coast. Whipple was under orders to move westward along the 35th Parallel, following in general the route already established by Captain Marcy.

Lieutenant Whipple, besides being an accomplished engineer, had a vivid style of writing, shown in the following concerning Shawnee Town:<sup>14</sup>

A few miles from camp we left on our right the road leading from Little River, and soon afterwards were in a labyrinth of trails. We inquired of an Indian for the right road, but gained little satisfaction. Upon inquiring of our host the direction to Shawnee Town, he seemed nonplussed.

After a while, however, he made us understand that we might consider ourselves already within its precincts. The numerous paths are, as it were, streets uniting various houses of this extensive if not populous place.

There seems no doubt that early-day travelers and soldiers were impressed by the sight of Shawnee Town. Captain Dent in his report had this to say:<sup>15</sup>

In this prairie the road forks, the right hand leading to Edwards' Trading Post near Little River. . . . Opposite to the point of entrance to the last mentioned prairie is Shawnee Town, 125 miles from Fort Smith. . . . The inhabitants, like those of the same tribe lower down on the Canadian, show proofs of rapid advancement in civilization. Here, again, we found an abundance of provisions, corn, etc. . . .

Indians occupying Shawnee Town were part of a band of Absentee Shawnees who left Ohio and first settled on the north side of Red River. Later the band moved to the area along the South Canadian where the new historical marker is now set up.

One wonders why the Shawnees did not establish their village in nearby Buffalo Valley. The land was extremely fertile,

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<sup>13</sup> This springs locality is in Sec. 34, Twp. 5 N. Rge. 8 E.

<sup>14</sup> Dott, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

<sup>15</sup> Foreman (1939), *op. cit.*, p. 135.

had many fine springs dotting the country, and was in a more sheltered place. It is possible that the Shawnees did not settle in the valley for two reasons: Either they did not want to disturb the natural habitat of buffalo, or they avoided the roving bands of Osage hunters. Either reason seems a substantial one.

Points of historical interest within a few minutes' drive of Buffalo Valley includes sites of Old Fort Holmes and Edwards' Trading Post. The military installation and the trading post were located near the confluence of Little River and the Canadian and both were often mentioned in writings of early travelers.

Fort Holmes was established by Lieutenant T. H. Holmes the U. S. Army, who later became Lieutenant General in command of the Trans-Mississippi Department of the Confederate Army during the Civil War. Holmes, a West Point classmate of Jefferson Davis, started construction of the fort near the mouth (on the east side) of Little River early in 1834. This was during the time that the ill-fated Dragoons continued on their expedition to the south and west.

Edwards' Store or Trading Post was west and south across Little River from the Fort. A daughter of the Edwards who started the post married the Cherokee scout, Jesse Chisholm. For a time Chisholm was a partner in the store but later rose to fame as a trail blazer in Oklahoma. Soon after the relentless guns of white hide-hunters had exterminated the buffalo off the Plains, longhorn cattle on their way from Texas to Kansas followed the famous Chisholm Trail as well as the Texas Trail through what is now Allen.

Edwards' Trading Post and Fort Holmes were visited by General Leavenworth and the Dragoons in June of 1834. Apparently their first camp after leaving Fort Holmes and riding through Shawnee Town was made at the springs on the north-eastern edge of Buffalo Valley, for years known locally as "Motes Springs."<sup>16</sup> As mentioned before, the historical marker "Osage Village" is located on State Highway 12 near these springs.<sup>17</sup>

South of Buffalo Valley as the crow flies, in the rolling hills southwest of the present settlement of Jesse in Pontotoc County, Brigadier General Henry Leavenworth was injured in a horse fall while chasing a buffalo calf.<sup>18</sup> The fall resulted in the

<sup>16</sup> In Sec. 34, Twp. 5 N., Rge. 8 E.

<sup>17</sup> In Sec. 4, Twp. 4 N., Rge. 8 E.

<sup>18</sup> George Catlin, "Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians;" 4th Edition, (New York 1842,) Vol. II, pp. 46, 50, 51. (See, also, Shirk, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12, for description of the "Buffalo Hunt" and scene at the "Osage Village." The Dragoon "Camp Osage" was southwest of present Jesse, probably on present Goose Creek near the Johnston-Pontotoc county line.—Ed.)

General's death on July 21, 1834, in camp west of present Kingston in Marshall County.

Years after the vari-colored mounts of the First Dragoons left their hoofprints on the turf of Buffalo Valley, the land along Muddy Boggy, Sandy, Sincere and Rhoda creeks<sup>19</sup> became compelling lures for farmers striking west after the Civil War. The land was like a breathing delta, just waiting for the clearing and the plow.

And decades of farming and ranching have not entirely wiped out tangible evidence of pioneer times, nor of tangible proof that large Indian settlements were once in Buffalo Valley. Several old log homes of Indians remain, mute reminders of later years when the Choctaws and Chickasaws moved west.

One of these is the Old Scott Johnson house.<sup>20</sup> Scott was known as one of the leaders of the Snake faction among the Chickasaws. That is, Scott refused voluntarily to apply for his individual allotment, and the Dawes Commission in 1905 made arbitrary allotments to him and members of his family.

In the heart of the valley (near Steedman and the old Scott Johnson house), looking forlorn in a grass and brush-choked grove of trees alongside a country road, are graves of the old Red Springs Cemetery. This old Chickasaw burial ground was established more than a hundred years ago, and the strange little houses built by the Indians over graves of their loved ones are still standing. Many of the little houses, or coverings, have almost rotted into the earth, showing the ravages of decades of time and weather. Others of more recent date are still in good shape, with possessions of those departed resting under the shading roofs. Others, so old that nothing above-ground is visible except broken and tilted headstones, are scattered through the grove of trees.

Another spot of historic interest in Buffalo Valley is the site of the now vanished town of Steedman. Before and after the turn of the century this was a thriving frontier village, center of an active and widespread farming trade and extensively populated by Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians. The town, previously an Indian settlement, grew rapidly when the Kansas, Oklahoma,

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<sup>19</sup> Three historical markers seen as you approach and then after you have passed through the beautiful old Osage hunting ground add much to the interest of Buffalo Valley as a historic point. The Shawnee Town marker was erected by the Oklahoma Historical Society in the summer of 1960. Simultaneously two others along the Old California Road through Oklahoma—for Delaware Mount and Natural Mound—were erected along State Highway 12 inside Pontotoc County a few miles southwest of the spot in Buffalo Valley where scars of the Dragoon Road are to be seen today.

<sup>20</sup> In Sec. 21, Twp. 4 N., Rge. 8 E.

and Gulf Railroad built through the valley. This was during the era when farming in the valley outstripped the growing of cattle. All along the courses of Boggy and Sandy creeks were substantial homes of white settlers who for a time—until the land was almost exhausted—made cotton “King.”

Better roads and faster means of transportation to the cities of Ada and Allen finally relegated Steedman to the past but several old homes are still standing. Southeast of the site of Steedman is the Kalihoma Indian School and settlement, a project instigated by the U. S. Government in the middle 1930's. The school building surrounded by log cabin homes of Indians is still standing in a sheltered cove just off the county road. Several Indian families who have not taken well to white man's ways still live in the neighborhood. The old days when an Indian could subsist upon what nature had to offer have about vanished but even today you can see descendants of the first Indian settlers hunting game or digging for wild onions and other plants and herbs along the creeks and fences which cross the 4B Ranch.

Topping the historical sites in the valley—at least from a local standpoint—is the old Choctaw-Chickasaw “ball ground.” Here, on a flat expanse of land which looks much as it did fifty-odd years ago, were played the inter-tribal ballgames among the Choctaw and Chickasaw athletes. There was a time, within my memory even, when these ball games drew contestants and spectators from the far corners of both Indian Nations.

Site of the Indian “ball ground” is on the old Choctaw-Chickasaw line,<sup>21</sup> which at this point ran north and south. Each spring and fall the Indians from both Nations met to hold their lengthy and sometimes violent contests at “stick ball.” This old ball ground and pony race track is bi-sected by a graveled county road.

Some of the writer's earliest memories of Indian life are tied up in several of those Choctaw-Chickasaw ball games which he attended on the grounds in Buffalo Valley. There was always a great deal of rivalry, with Indians stirring everywhere about the grounds and through the trees nearby.

And no more rivalry was ever stirred there to watch what occurred on a pleasant late spring day in 1903. The Indians were less restrained by rules and regulations than are any type of sport contestants in Oklahoma today. What happened on that day in 1903 turned into a bloody fight that had to be quelled by local U. S. Marshals and members of the Indian Lighthouse. Aftermath of the fight was that the semi-annual Indian ball

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<sup>21</sup> In Sec. 10, Twp. 4 N., Rge. 8 E.

games were abolished. Some violence on the part of the players would perhaps have been expected and tolerated, but not a pitched battle or wholesale riot with the spectators taking a hand in it.

In this matched game in 1903, the Indians were to play until one side or the other "hit the post" with the ball, or made 12 scores. The goal posts were about 100 yards apart, with 12-inch planks attached to the posts for goals. The players, stripped down to breech-clouts, had to hold the ball with their "sticks" and "hit the goal" from the front side. During the play the contestants dashed hither and yon over any part of the field where the ball happened to be tossed. Half the time the players and spectators were mixed as the play got under full steam.

There are several Indians living in the region of the valley today who were present at the game that year. The writer has located two old-timers who played in the game: Mose Burris who lives near Lula, and Impson Frazier, who lives near Citra. Both are in their eighties now.

According to Burris, the game in 1903 was more a contest between two counties in the Indian nations<sup>22</sup> than it was a contest between the two tribes. The play was rough and rowdy right from the start with about three hundred people on hand and all of them fired up over the ball game. Betting fever was running rampant, and it was not all confined to the menfolk. Women started betting shawls and aprons, and finally dresses, on their favorite contestants in the game.

It took twelve points racked up by one side to finish the game, and sometimes it took three days to end it. But this game was never completed. When a Chickasaw slammed a Choctaw with one of his sticks the entire crowd got riled and started fighting.

"There were so many people fighting," Mose Burris says, "you couldn't tell who hit who."

It was a bloody affair that has long been remembered by old timers. Talk concerning the game can even get heated today, but mostly in a humorous way, because a time, a period, has come and gone and old timers look back with nostalgia.

And it is not hard to stand on the old ball ground and visualize just how it was. Not if you are "strong" on history. And Buffalo Valley and vicinity in Pontotoc County is a place where history is right at hand.

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<sup>22</sup> Atoka County, Choctaw Nation, and Pontotoc County, Chickasaw Nation.