

# What life was like for Julia Ann Turnbull

Jim Flinchum's death at the peak of his success as a cattleman left the family a handsome estate. He had a herd of 2170 cattle, many horses and a large amount of land near what would become Gerty. He also was a respected in the community as an excellent blacksmith. He had been a U. S. Marshall, but resigned this position in 1893 because of his burgeoning cattle business.

Bill was not mature enough to step into his father's shoes to take over the Flinchum enterprise and Julia Ann still had a house full of children. Although she was better educated than most women of her time she was ill prepared for the tremendous responsibility that befell her at this time. The three older children successfully pressured her for their inheritances. She soon married James David Christian, a white man. Through mismanagement and bad investments, and possibly the times, the Flinchum cattle empire disappeared in a few years.

## EARLY DAYS IN THE CHOCTAW NATION OF THE INDIAN TERRITORY

(By James S. W. F LINCHUM)

In February of 1890 the Jim FLINCHUM family moved from the Mount Pleasant Community, nine miles east of Caddo, Blue County, Choctaw Nation, Indian Territory, to Tobucksey County, Choctaw Nation, which is approximately 80 miles northwest. They settled on a claim previously obtained from a part Indian named Ed LEADER. This was a very remote area, sparsely settled where wild game, deer, wild turkey and even wild hogs were fairly plentiful. Occasionally, a panther was seen or heard and small gray timber wolves were a nuisance. The nearest town of any size was McAlester, Indian Territory, 35 miles east on the Missouri, Kansas and Texas railroad. The claim consisted of a one room hewed log cabin, a dug well for household water, and ten to twelve acres of orchard and truck patch. The main artery of transportation was the Fort Smith, McAlester and Stonewall wagon road, which to this area, at that time, was comparable to the Oregon or Santa Fe Trails. The FLINCHUM claim was approximately 1/4-mile north from this wagon road which crossed the headwaters of a small stream locally called Salt Creek at the Flat Rock Crossing. A less known and less travelled road running north into The Creek Nation ten miles away and south to Coalgate, Lelhigh and Atoka crossed the McAlester Stonewall road at The Flat Rock Crossing. This crossing was known as a good place to camp overnight as wood and water was convenient and easily available. From our house east for a distance of one and one half miles was open prairie and travellers along this northeast to southwest road could be seen.

One incident that I will always remember was the passing of a troop of U. S. Cavalry moving from Fort Gibson to Fort Sill. They were observed in ample time for us kids to rush down to the crossing on the nearby stream to watch them pass. The entire unit stopped and watered their horses as we sat on the stream bank in complete awe and curiosity. The cavalry men nearest spoke to us while watering their mounts assuring us that we wouldn't be harmed. For some time thereafter the passing of the cavalry troop was the principal topic of conversation around our house. Also this McAlester road as we called it, was our means of reaching our grocery 35 miles away at McAlester, which at that time was the nearest general store, where anything from barbed wire to baking soda could be purchased.

Dad would drive a wagon to McAlester twice annually, Spring and Fall, to buy groceries, etc. We would drive there in one day with an empty wagon, stay overnight in the wagon yard and load up early next morning at W. J. WADE'S general store. Our load home would generally consist of 400 to 500 pounds of flour, 100 pounds of sugar, 15 to 20 pounds of green coffee (which would be roasted later in the stove oven at home ), and other small food items. There would also be nails, staples, barbed wire, stock salt, smoking and chewing tobacco for the hired hands.

Horse stealing was the major crime in those days and rather common. One specific incident occurred in 1891. My Aunt Mary, Mother's sister, sent along a few head of cows and a gelding saddle horse when we moved from Blue County, and had also given me a small brown mare. The saddle horse was dark yellow with white mane and tail. He was a very pretty animal but otherwise not much of a cow horse or a smooth riding saddle horse. During the latter part of 1891 he was stolen one night along with my dad's saddle which had long hair coated saddle pockets attached to and part of the rear of the saddle. Neither was ever recovered. A prelude to the stealing of this horse and saddle, however, was a gun fight between three horse thieves and U.S. Marshals. The U.S. Marshals had been tipped off that horse thieves operating in the area had gotten together a small herd of stolen horses and were preparing to move out, so the marshals moved in. The thieves were overtaken at Lone Elm Spring, a water hole about 20 miles southwest of our ranch. A woman was driving the Chuck wagon and three men were driving the horses. When the marshals ordered the men to surrender a gun fight ensued. The woman and two men were captured but the third man got away. During the gun fight, however, he was shot through the calf of the leg and the same shot killed his horse, a beautiful roan mare. He escaped to a man's place that we called a neighbor who lived 14

miles away from our ranch. The neighbor kept him hid out for a day or two then the two of them rode one horse to our ranch, there the neighbor let him off in a fence corner where he hid until night fall, he then stole our horse and saddle. Dad heard later by the grapevine what had happened and started checking and so on found a place in a rail fence corner where the grass had been mashed down and also found a letter that had evidently fallen from the pocket of the horse thief addressed to Jack SPRADLIN. He was a known horse thief and robber nicknamed Dynamite Jack.

Another horse was stolen the next year under slightly different circumstances. Dad had just traded for a red roan, bald faced and stocking legged saddle gelding which he looked upon as his personal saddle horse, but a few days after acquiring him, the horse wrangler reported "Old Baldy" was missing from the saddle herd that morning. It soon became apparent what had happened, the pasture fence had been laid down and "Old Baldy" had been led into the road and the thief's saddle placed on him he then left his own worn out "crowbait" of a horse that was too tired to move out of his tracks. When this was reported to Dad, he immediately caught and saddled one of our best horses, a big dark iron gray, with a smooth rolling gait, he was a high roller that had to be held in, but this morning after Dad had buckled on his gun belt and picked up his 38 Winchester, he took off in a cloud of dust. Late in the afternoon a short distance east of Stonewall, Indian Territory, where there was a U. S. Deputy Marshal's office and U. S. Commissioner's Court, he overtook a covered wagon followed by a young lady driving a two-wheeled cart. At the same time he observed the horse thief riding Baldy a short distance ahead of the covered wagon. In sizing up the situation he felt that his horse had been pushed hard and was becoming pretty weary, so he made a deal with the woman driving the cart to drive around her folks in the wagon and pass the horse thief whom he surmised she wouldn't spook, and carry a note to the U.S. Marshal 's office in Stonewall. Well, it worked out all right, she delivered the note and two U.S. Marshal's jumped into a buckboard, one carrying a double barrelled 12 gauge shotgun, the other his pistol. They soon met the horse thief and recognized him from the description in the note, they stepped out of their buckboard and ordered him to surrender. He started to go for his own gun but when the marshal with the shotgun pointed it at him with both barrels cocked he surrendered, meekly saying, I wasn't too afraid of that pistol, but looking down that shotgun barrel I couldn't see anything but a graveyard and a tombstone"

Living adjacent to a well-travelled road had its drawbacks. During the first eight years we had five horses and seven saddles stolen, the last two on March 25, 1898. The reason I remember this so well is because one of the two was my own personal saddle pony, a small black animal with a white spot in his forehead, a typical kid pony with a pacing or rocking gait, the other was a dun quarter horse with a black mane and tail. He was a real fast cow horse that we sometimes raced in the community and I'm sure he was the principal object of the thieves. Neither was ever recovered. We finally built a saddle house which was locked every night and the night horse which we kept up for the horse wrangler was kept in a small overnight pasture and we always picked one that was spooky and hard to catch.

On the other hand an advantage of living near a well-travelled public road in the early days was that it provided an opportunity of obtaining news as there were no newspapers available and it also provided an opportunity to meet and socialize with the travelers and to meet people looking for new farm land for lease or rent where they might stop and rest for a year or two or to settle down for good. We were fortunate in obtaining hired help and also in a period of two or three years Father talked to several men with families who appeared to be honest bonafide farmers with good experience who wished to settle on land under our control. All our land was virgin soil which had to be cleared and put into cultivation. The usual verbal agreement was that Father would assign them a tract of tillable land, boundaries of which would be indicated by a mark on a tree called a blaze or by stakes, build them a log cabin, a log crib and shed attached and dig a well for household water. They would agree to clear the land, breakout the virgin soil, plant and cultivate the crop but not pay any rent the first year. Any other virgin land to be handled under the same verbal agreement and that a specific crop rent was to be paid on all farmed land the second year. In this manner we accumulated a sizeable acreage of cultivated farm land. At that time all farm land had to be fenced with split rails as hogs fed on the open range and crops had to be protected by hog proof fences. In the next year or two we obtained two or three more tenants and each time a new tenant was obtained more farm ground was added and the field fences had to be extended. Soon there were around 500 acres in one big field. This, however, was not all farmed as there were three small streams running through the field.

In the meantime the entire Indian Territory was being surveyed and sectionized by U. S. Geological Surveyors who camped at our ranch for two full weeks while working in our area. Town sites were set aside for small rural towns and soon a

small town and community began to take shape three miles southwest from our place. It was called "Buzzard Flop" by a local jokester, later to be named Guertie, still later Raydon and now Gerty, Hughes County, Oklahoma.

One of the first businesses to be put into operation was a saw mill, then in rapid succession a post office, a one room school house, several small dwellings, two general stores, two drug stores, a blacksmith shop, a steam cotton gin with four gin stands and a manually operated cotton press, all built from native hardwood lumber. At that time plenty of post oak and red oak saw timber was available in the immediate community. One of the two general stores built by C. Y. SEMPLE in 1897 still stands and up until 1975, was used as a store and living quarters.

Several humorous incidents of small interest occurred during those early years. One in particular to one of our tenant's families named RICHERSON. There were two brothers from Alabama named Bill and Mark RICHERSON. Mark had two daughters of marriageable age, the oldest of which was named Molly. He also had a hired hand named Tom SEARS. Well, Tom and Molly fell in love and wanted to get married, but the only place a marriage license could be obtained was at McAlester, which was 35 miles away. Tom didn't own a horse and few if any of the tenants owned a riding horse, so Tom walked the 35 miles, obtained a marriage license, then walked back home. My brother next older than me rode along for company (and , I assumed let Tom ride some) reported that Tom whistled and sang all the way to McAlester and back. Many of the descendants of those early settlers and tenants still live in Oklahoma, pretty well scattered throughout the state and to other Midwestern States and some to California, others still living in Hughes County. All that I've heard of in the last few years is that they are good solid citizens and a credit to any community.

Toward the end of the century Gerty became a good small inland town where most community needs for groceries, etc., could be obtained from local stores. In 1895 the Choctaw Oklahoma and Gulf Railroad, now the Rock Island, built into Calvin twelve miles north and from then on merchandise of all kinds were hauled by freight wagons from Calvin to nearby inland stores. With the coming of the railroad, the sectionizing of the entire Indian Territory, more and more settlers were arriving looking for new homes and land to farm. Also, since the entire Indian Territory had been surveyed and sectionized preparatory to fulfilling the proposed law that provided for the opening of all land in The Indian Territory to allotment by individual allottees would signal the end of big cattle operations. The

approval of the Congress of the study and recommendation of The Dawes Commission and the signing of the Bill