Perryman Family

Monetta and her son Robert Trepp share stories of the Creek Nation and the Perryman family.

Chapter 1 — 1:30
Introduction

Announcer: Tulsa, Oklahoma was originally part of Indian Territory and was first settled in 1836 by the Loachapoka people of the Creek tribe.[20] They established a home under the Creek Council Oak Tree at the present day intersection of Cheyenne Avenue and 18th Street, and named their new settlement Tallasi, meaning "old town" in the Creek language, which later became "Tulsa".

In 1846, Lewis Perryman built a log cabin trading post near what is now 33rd Street and South Rockford Avenue. In 1879 the first Tulsa post office opened on a ranch belonging to one of Lewis' sons, Josiah Chouteau Perryman. By this time the area was known as "Tulsey Town" and had grown to be a trading post and cattle town. The Frisco Railroad expanded its line to connect with the cattle market in 1882. George Perryman convinced surveyors that the Frisco line should end within the Creek nation, and so the stake marking the end of the line was placed where the Union Depot stands today.

George and Rachel Perryman's son Mose is the grandfather of Monetta Trepp. In this oral history Monetta and her son Robert Trepp share stories of the Creek Nation and the Perryman family.

The interview was conducted September 9, 2010 in the Perryman Ranch home at 115th and South Elwood on the Creek allotment of Mose S. Perryman. Monetta Delores Johnson Trepp was 89 when she died April 26, 2013

Listen to the story of the relationship between the Creek nation and Tulsa on the oral history website VoicesofOklahoma.com.

Chapter 2
Perryman Allotment – 2:38

John Erling: My name is John Erling. Today's date is September 9, 2010. Monetta, would you state your full name, please?

Monetta Trepp: Monetta Trepp

JE: Your date of birth?

MT: November the 5th, 1923.

JE: So your present age as of this recording is?

MT: Is eighty-six.

JE: Who do we have with us here on the other side of the table?

MT: This is my oldest son, Robert Trepp.

JE: Robert, welcome to the interview.

Robert Trepp: Thank you, John. Great to be here with you.

JE: And, if you don't mind, your birth date and year?

RT: July 17, 1951.

JE: Where are we recording this, Monetta?

MT: This is at the Perryman home, which this year is 100 years old.

JE: Who originally built this home?

MT: Walter Dunbar, my grandmother's father. Originally there was a one-story house here and it burned, not completely to the ground, 'cause they tell me underneath there's still boards and everything that were original. And then he built the barn and he also built this house.

JE: Robert, we're located where?

RT: About 115th and South Elwood, in between Jinx and Glenpool.

JE: A little bit about his land, then.

RT: Each enrolled member of the Muskogee nation at the time of allotment received a 160-acre allotment. Mose Perryman selected 120 acres here for himself, and that was Monetta's grandfather. Mose.

MT: This was his Indian allotment.

RT: This was his allotment, except that he also took another forty acres which is now at 15th and Peoria.

JE: So that has been handed down, there's always been a Perryman owning this acreage from the beginning?

RT: Right. Through heirship it's fractionated between the heirs and about twelve or fifteen years ago, my brother stepped in and helped Monetta buy out the other heirs. So now she's the sole owner of the eighty acres that remain here.

MT: This is eighty acres left.

JE: Is it being worked? Cattle on it now at the moment?

RT: We do run longhorn cattle here, just a small herd. We don't want to overgraze the grands. Now the reason some people think the ranch was larger was that Mose also selected allotments for his two minor daughters. Cosetta's was allotment was 160 acres and was immediately south of here. And then his daughter Rachel, who we also called Dot, her allotment was 160 acres over here on the corner. So the three of those fit together and the entire operation was farmed and ranched by the family.

Chapter 3
Monetta's early days - 3:20

John Erling: Monetta, where were you born?

Monetta Trepp: I was actually born in Chicago, Chicago, Illinois. That's where my mother lived at the time I was born.

JE: Your mother's name?

MT: Edith, Edith Monetta, Edith M. Johnson.

JE: Where did she grow up?

MT: She grew up here. She grew up here in this house. She went to school in Sapulpa. And then when she was old enough, they sent a lot of the Indian women into boarding school. She went to an Indian boarding school, and then she went to College for Women in Colorado. I think she even went to OU for a little while.

JE: Your mother grew up in this house we're sitting in. We're in what would be considered the dining room of the house.

MT: Yes.

JE: We have a big, round table. It's just a cozy, warm, older home that will celebrate 100 years of the farm November 5th of 2010.

MT: It's actually, this house will be 100 years old then.

JE: Your father's name?

MT: Emmett Robert Johnson.

JE: Where did he grow up?

MT: He grew up in Davenport, Iowa.

JE: And your mother and father, how did they meet?

MT: They met in Kansas City. She went there to visit some of her friends in school, when she

went to the Colorado College for Women, and she went to Kansas City and that's where she met my father.

JE: And then did they live here?

MT: No, they lived in Chicago, and that's why I was born in Chicago. And then he died when I was about four years old. And my mother moved back here. At that time, this was really in the country, and she was very young at that time, she was just twenty-two or twenty-three years old. Even though her mother lived here she didn't want to live out in the country so she moved to Oklahoma City and lived with one of her sisters, Cosetta. So I grew up in Oklahoma City.

JE: Do you remember your elementary school?

MT: I went to Hawthorne, and then I went to Taft Junior High School, and then I went to Classen and graduated from Classen High School in Oklahoma City. Pretty good class, about 600. Then I went to OSU, which at that time was Oklahoma A & M. When I graduated, I went to work for the Internal Revenue, worked there a while, and that's when I met my husband. I still worked for a while because he was still going to OU. After he graduated, then we moved to Tulsa. He asked me where I wanted to live and I said, "Either Tulsa, Dallas, or Denver." When I sent out job applications and everything I really mailed most of them to Tulsa, because most of my family was here.

JE: Of that marriage, how many children did you have?

MT: Three.

JE: And their names are?

MT: Three boys, Robert Wallace, John Wallace Trepp Junior, and Thomas Wallace.

JE: The Wallace name for all of them comes from where?

MT: Well, this is a funny story. My husband's name was John Wallace, John W. Trepp, so I thought, well, that must be something pretty special, you know, in the family, for him to be named that. So after I named all my boys and had Wallace in the middle I asked my mother-in-law where she got Wallace. If it was somebody in her family? She said, "No, I just like the name."

JE: That's a good enough reason, isn't it?

MT: Right.

Chapter 4
Tulsa - 6:00

John Erling: Maybe we can trace the family background, and we go back to the beginnings of Tulsa, you have Creek ancestry, right?

Monetta Trepp: Right.

JE: And that begins with whom?

MT: George and Rachel Perryman, who a lot of people call the beginning of Tulsa, the first people in Tulsa.

JE: Rob, tell us about the earliest settlers and the Creeks coming here to this area.

Robert Trepp: The Creeks came to the area in the late 1820s. There were really two different phases of the removal of the Muskogee and Creek and Euchee people from Alabama and Georgia. The group that migrated out here in the 1820s was called the "voluntary party." These were people who were not compelled to move out here, they were allowed to move out here. Lands were set aside for them by treaty between the Arkansas and the Canadian River. Most of them settled on the Verdigris. Later those boundaries would be adjusted. And one of the Perrymans, as a matter of fact, this would be Monetta's great, great grandfather, Benjamin Perryman, actually signed the 1833 treaty that established a new boundary between the Creeks and Cherokees and set the tribal boundaries that are found on the first page of everybody's abstract in South Tulsa County. When they read that title there is a letter patent from Leonard Fillmore, President of the United States, to the Muskogee Creek Nation. And it is a deed for six and a half million acres of land. The Perrymans were a part of the voluntary removal party in the 1820s and they settled out on the Verdigris River at a place now known as the area around Springtown Church. Very close to Adams Creek, on Kuwita Road just a few miles south of Highway 412. That was the people of Big Spring tribal town. They have a history of their own that takes the Perryman name back into the Florida Panhandle at the time of the war of 1812, and even earlier. The people would actually settle here at the site in Tulsa, the center of their town was what we now call the Council Oak. Those were the Lochboga people, they came from an area about fourteen miles west of Auburn, Alabama. When the forced removal came they were treated as hostiles. They were marched out here basically on foot. There was a significant loss of life, probably about two hundred of the ones that left Alabama did not make it to the Tulsa area.

JE: This was along the Trail of Tears then?

RT: That's what the Cherokees call it. The Creeks, especially the traditional Creeks, see a significant difference. The Cherokees were betrayed by their own tribal leaders and that was one reason for their grief and sorrow. The Creeks were marched here by force in

violation of a treaty that said they had every right to stay in Alabama.

JE: There—

MT: Who forced them to move?

RT: The United States Army.

MT: Hmm.

JE: All the tribes, the Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Creeks, and Seminoles came because there was that force.

RT: Right, and there's a large portion of the Seminoles that escaped removal and are still on their reservation in Florida, along with the Miccosukees. Miccosukees are more closely related to the Hijee towns and to the Creeks and to the Perrymans.

JE: So then can we say the Creeks journey ended under the branches of the Council Oak Tree?

RT: Exactly, that's where they took the cinders of the fire that they had put out in Alabama, which they carried and kept a living fire all the way along. And they used those cinders to build their new ceremonial fire at the Council Oak, which was both the center of their religion and the center of their government. That was their town square.

JE: And we know it now as 18th and Cheyenne.

RT: Exactly.

JE: And they brought the name of a town with them.

RT: Right. Because of the way the Muskogee towns are related to each other, even though we call it Lochboga, their more formal name, they're known as Lochboga Tulsa, because they are related to towns such as New Tulsa or Tulsa Cedar River, which is located down near Holdenville. There was also a town called Old Tulsa or Big Tulsa. They relocated down near Eufaula. Those towns are very closely related and then they are also almost as closely related to tribal towns such as Hickory Ground, Oakfuskee, and Nuyaka, Tulmachasee, which are scattered from the middle from Henryetta down toward Tultonville.

JE: Was a name of a town Tulsee?

RT: There are strict Muskogee people who say that it should always be pronounced Tulsee because that means "town." That's where the word comes from. And they like to put out that when you say "Tulsa" it means "embarrassed."

JE: But somehow, through pronunciation or whatever, it came to be known—

RT: This is the South. Lochboga does not trip off the American tongue.

JE: Is that a form which Tallahassee, Florida, takes its name?

RT: Exactly, it's the same, in Muskogee we have a phenomenon in the language they call "progressive contraction." Which means that the more often words are used together the more likely that syllables will become dropped along the way. So if the full word

for an old town is "adulwa ahasee," then that gets contracted down to Tallahassee, and that later gets contracted to Tallasee, which is still the name of a city in Alabama, and of course, the modern usage is Talsee.

Chapter 5
University of Tulsa - 3:00

John Erling: The Creeks, we hear them called the Muskogee Creeks.

Robert Trepp: Muskogee is our word for ourselves, and as the people from Europe discovered us each of those nations gave us a different name of their own. The Spanish called us Appalaches, the Appalachian Mountains get their name from that. The French called us Tallapoosas, and the English called us Creeks because all of our towns were settled next to a moving water.

JE: So they came out of Alabama and Georgia borders?

RT: Their original area was actually much broader than that and extended to the Florida Panhandle, the Georgia coast, some parts of South Carolina, and on up into the Tennessee River Valley.

JE: And did we have the Lower Creeks and the Upper Creeks, the Lower Creeks of Macintosh?

RT: Again, that's an outsider's designation. The Creeks don't think of themselves that way, but to the British, they found Creeks living in the plains and they called them Lower Creeks. They found Creeks living in the mountains and they called them Upper Creeks.

JE: Out of the Creek Mission education came the University of Tulsa.

RT: Absolutely.

JE: Rob, tell us the beginning, how did that work?

RT: They received lands in Muskogee and then they had to come back to the Creek council for permission to sell those lands to buy lands in Tulsa and form what then was Kendall College and later became the University of Tulsa. Up until the time of the Civil War, missionaries were actually prohibited from coming into the Creek nation. But after the Civil War, more and more missionaries were let in. Robert Lockridge was a very significant leader among the Presbyterian missionaries. And most of the work of the Presbyterians was done up and down the Arkansas River. There were also significant work by the Baptists and the Methodists, mostly down on the different branches of the Canadian Rivers. And to this day, the traditional churches among the Muskogee people

down South are either identified with the Indian Baptist Conference or the Indian Methodist Conference.

JE: We just touched on the Civil War, we don't need to talk much about it, but the Civil War was really devastating to the Muskogee nation.

RT: Oh absolutely. The same forces that tore the United States apart tore the Muskogee people apart. You had people that allied with the North and people that allied with the South and you had people that switched sides for different reasons in between. The most significant thing about that is of the ten thousand loyal Creeks that tried to make it into Kansas for federal protection only five thousand lived to come home. And it was a very devastating time for the Muskogee people. With all these events, with removal, with the Red Stick War, with the Civil War, it's always the traditional people that sustained the most significant loss of life. And that has cost us a lot of cultural knowledge that died with people who were not able to pass it along.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

Chapter 6
Perryman Trading Post - 4:25

John Erling: Let's go to Benjamin Perryman then.

Robert Trepp: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Came from Alabama to Indian territory in 1828?

RT: Right.

JE: He had six sons and two daughters.

RT: Right.

JE: What do we know about Benjamin and who was he married to?

RT: He had several different wives and he was an extremely important leader of the nation. He helped negotiate the terms of the boundary in the Treaty of 1833, and his signature is on that federal treaty. His son Louis had the most impact on the Tulsa area because Louis established a trading post at Tulsa at the location, which is now known as Zinc Park.

JE: When you said wives, that's interesting because that wasn't in succession, that was at the same time.

RT: That was not uncommon with Creeks. You can't say it was standard practice or anything like that, but especially because of the wars they'd been through where so many men had lost their lives it was not uncommon for Creek man to have more than one wife. And

almost every situation where that was true those two women were sisters.

JE: Okay, interesting.

Monetta Trepp: Well, Louis had four wives.

RT: But not all at the same time.

JE: Right.

MT: Okay. 'Cause one was a daughter of another—

RT: Two of them were daughters of a previous wife.

JE: Let me just introduce him then. So that's Benjamin Perryman. And then Benjamin had a son Louis. He had sixteen children?

RT: Yes. And four different wives.

JE: And four different wives?

RT: Right.

JE: And then we have three of his sons, George, Leggus, and Josiah.

RT: Exactly, and they all lived here in the Tulsa area and Joe Creek is actually named for Josiah because that was the trail you would have to take if you were going to Josiah's house.

JE: I often wondered about that.

MT: And Louis was named after Louis.

RT: It's my understanding that the street Louis was named after Louis, that's correct.

JE: And so this then, the Perrymans, is the beginning of Tulsa?

MT: Um-hmm (affirmative).

RT: The Perrymans actually settled over on the Verdigris River but there was an epidemic. Rivers back in those days were the major routes of transportation and commerce. So when diseases spread through the country they spread by the river ways. The Perrymans and some other of the Big Spring people picked up and moved into the Tulsa area, Louis especially, because he already had a trading post over here. From those years onward, they began to intermarry with the Lochboga people.

JE: And about 1882, or maybe before, there were brothers known as the Hall Brothers?

RT: Yes, the Halls were important traders who moved into the Tulsa area. They were part of the increasing immigration as a result of the railroad being built from Joplin down into Central Oklahoma.

JE: And is it true that they chose the point where the Frisco Railroad should stop?

RT: There was a time when the Frisco Railroad stopped at the Cherokee Creek boundary because there was a dispute with the Creeks over exactly where it would be located. There was another time that it stopped at the river because they had to wait for the bridge over the river to be completed.

JE: Then in 1846, Louis Perryman built the Long Cabin Trading Post.

RT: Right.

JE: Which is now 33rd and South Rockford Avenue.

RT: Yes sir.

JE: Louis built that trading post there and that's kind of establishing his business foothold in the area.

RT: And that would have been the first business in Tulsa.

JE: The Perryman Trading Post?

RT: Exactly.

JE: That was the foothold in the area until the Civil War?

RT: Exactly.

MT: Was that on the river?

RT: No, it was over at Zinc Park.

MT: Oh.

RT: Just up Crow Creek from the river.

JE: And then the war forced many of the residents to leave the area.

RT: Absolutely. The area was lawless, it was unprotected, there were bands of militia out of Arkansas and Texas that patrolled through here. This was the breadbasket of America before the Civil War. They exported corn and they exported beef into the rest of the country. Because the loyal Creeks were unable to secure their property as they left there was a lot of stray cattle running around. And the Confederates came up here, herded them up, took them home to feed the Southern cause.

Chapter 7
George and Rachel Perryman - 4:25

John Erling: Then we come to the sons of Louis and we have George Perryman.

Robert Trepp: George was the youngest of the three. He was very involved in tribal government, especially in local affairs here around Tulsa. He married a woman named Rachel Alexander. Her family has a history of their own, and it's from Rachel, who was a full-blood Lochboga that we get our identity as members of Lochboga and as members of the Beaver Clan. Because Muskogee tradition is that you follow the maternal line.

George remained very active, like I said, he was the younger of the three. His brothers had been soldiers during the Civil War. He wound up being one of the major cattle forces in the area. His herds would run as far east as Shoto and as far south as Mounds. There was a time in the period after the Civil War where the Muskogee nation was having trouble with the Texans who were driving cattle from Texas to the railroads in Kansas. And the trouble was that the nation had a grazing tax that they applied to these herds as they came through and the Texans were refusing to pay. So the nation entered into an agreement with several families, and the Perrymans were just one of them, to actually lease the land from Tulsa to Shoto in wide strips and fence it off so the Texans could not cross those fences without paying their permit tax to the tribe. So the Perrymans and several other families, as a result of that, were effectively collecting taxes off of Texans to turn into the tribal government.

JE: But George and Aunt Rachel, as she became affectionately known, they had children?

RT: They had not only children of their own but they adopted quite a few children, some from family members, and some just the orphans that were common at that time in our history.

JE: Even to the numbers of in the twenties, I believe.

RT: Yes sir.

JE: So this was a very fun and loving home, obviously.

RT: Yes.

JE: He had a ranch house known as the White House?

RT: Right.

JE: And I believe that was located at 38th and Trenton Avenue?

RT: Right.

JE: Then it was used as the area's first post office?

RT: There was a shed on one side that was used as the post office and Josiah was designated as the postmaster.

JE: And Josiah lived on his farm, ten miles south of Tulsa as the postmaster?

RT: Right.

JE: This is like 1879, '80, '81, in there. Do you have any idea then the population of Tulsa?

RT: Probably in the range, I'm guessing, somewhere around five to seven hundred people. You've got to understand that especially with the advent of the railroad this was becoming a commercial center. It was a center of trade, not only for the local tribal towns of the Muskogee such as the Euchee that lived west across the river, the smaller towns that lived out on the Verdigris, Concharty and some of the other towns that lived down in the Bixby area. This really became a center of commerce for them. Intermittently, now not always dependably, but intermittently depending on the season there were even

steamboats that were able to get up the Arkansas, not only to Tulsa but even beyond.

JE: And then Legust was the chief of the Creek nation.

RT: He was elected chief of the Creek nation.

JE: The brother of JC and George.

RT: Right.

JE: So these were three very strong leaders.

RT: Legust continued to practice law in Tulsa even after statehood. George died on a trip into Kansas to sell cattle in either late 1898 or 1899, but not before he was one of the signatures on the original city charter for the town of Tulsa.

JE: So then, Monetta, your heritage, where does that go back to?

RT: To George and Rachel.

JE: To George and Rachel?

RT: Right.

JE: Who would that be then from George and Rachel?

RT: Their son was Mose, Mose's daughter was Edith, and Edith's daughter was Monetta.

Monetta Trepp: That's not too far back.

JE: No it isn't, that's a close connection.

MT: And most died in [time 4:13—it skipped] My mother was born in 1901.

RT: She was born in January of 1901, and he died in early February 1901—

MT: Yeah he died right after that.

RT: When she was just a week or two old.

MT: But then Rachel lived until 1933.

RT: Yeah.

MT: I remember when they buried her.

JE: Do you have remembrances of George and Rachel?

MT: Just Rachel.

JE: What do you remember of her?

MT: I remember going to the house there on Rockford or Trenton, whichever it was. My mother would go and my aunt would go in and visit with her and we would all play in that little creek. And I still can't find that creek there, but they told us there was quicksand in it so we were very careful. I think they told us that to keep us out of the water. But we played in it anyway. I drive up in there sometimes and try to find the creek. It was situated different, there's no creek there now.

JE: But you were awfully young then?

MT: Yes.

JE: When Rachel was around, four, five, six years?

MT: Well, I guess I was about ten when she died, so—

JE: So do you remember being around her?

MT: Yes, and not too much, because when we'd go visit her my mother and aunts would all go in the house and we'd play outside. But I remember on her back porch there was a great big jug of sofkey, which is pretty potent, pretty strong after it sits there a while. When the men came in from work or whatever they were doing they would always drink some sofkey. It fermented and it was so strong it was like coming in and having a drink.

JE: What is that?

RT: Sofkey is flint corn or hominy that has been cracked. It's been soaked in a mixture of water and lye and boiled and it's allowed to sit and soak. Because it's cracked it soaks up the mixture very quickly. It's eaten almost like a soup.

MT: They always had a dipper in that big jug on the back porch.

RT: It becomes real thick because of all the cornstarch.

Chapter 8
Aunt Rachel - 3:25

John Erling: I want to come back to Aunt Rachel, the wife of George Perryman.

Monetta Trepp: She was a character.

Robert Trepp: While we're getting started on her we were just talking about sofkey. Sofkey, like I said, has to be cracked before it can be cooked. The tool that the Muskogee use for this is kind of like a mortar and pestle except that it's very large. The bottom unit is cut out of tree trunk and the top unit is a tree limb, and the women pound that until they crack the corn, scoop it out, put more in, crack some more. It's called acatchobadoggy. We have Aunt Rachel's acatchobadoggy right behind that door over there.

JE: How about that?

MT: In the kitchen.

JE: How about that?

MT: I saw it when I came in.

JE: Well, everybody loved her, she fed everyone, even I'm told, the famous Dalton Gang, which stopped by. What do you know about that, Rob?

RT: Not much about that, but I've been told that nobody ever appeared at her door and went away hungry. It just did not happen. The Muskogee tradition of hospitality runs deep and it's probably one of the elements that created the southern hospitality we all think of today.

JE: And again, Aunt Rachel would be?

RT: Her great grandmother.

JE: Great grandmother?

MT: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: And when she sold her downtown house and land for sixty thousand dollars there's a story that goes with that.

MT: Right. She didn't want a check or anything, she wanted cash and she took the cash and she put it in her pocket and away she went.

JE: Obviously nobody robbed her, she didn't have a problem with it, she just took the money home with her.

MT: She was quite respected in town. I've heard people tell it that even when she had a car and had a chauffeur, she would still get in her horse and buggy and ride around town. Herself, by herself, very independent lady.

RT: I wouldn't worry about how safe she was in her own house. She had a very large German shepherd named Pal. But she also had, as you went up the steps to her home, in the photographs you can see that nailed under the top step is a sign that says "Welcome.

JE: And then she had a residence at 6th and Boulder?

RT: Yes, where the Tulsa County Courthouse would later be built, where Bank of America building stands today. There is a marker in the sidewalk.

MT: In the concrete.

JE: And Tulsa County wanted to buy it for use as a courthouse.

RT: Exactly.

JE: What I was told, and maybe this will prompt your mind, she wanted to be paid in gold because she did not trust US currency?

RT: I have heard that story about her before on other things, yes.

MT: Well—

JE: So there's possibility there's truth to that?

MT: You have to understand that the Indian people, they didn't trust the government at all because of what they had done to them. And this is one reason there's a lot of Indian people that are not considered Indian because when the Dallas Commission signed them up they wouldn't go and sign up, because they were afraid they'd take more away from them.

RT: One other story I've heard about Aunt Rachel, probably twenty-five, thirty years ago, I was talking to a man in Coweta who when he was young actually knew her. And I asked George Marshall, I said, "One of our family stories is that she didn't speak English, that she only spoke Creek." And he said, "Oh no." I said, "Well, the family admits that she'd use an English word if there just wasn't a Creek word for something." He said, "Nope,

she'd speak English if she was doing business with a white man."

MT: She was very cagey about what she did. She really saved this land here.

Chapter 9
Tulsa's First Post Office - 1:25

Monetta Trepp: When that house was torn down—

Robert Trepp: Before the house was torn down, when it was sold out of Rachel's estate—

MT: Oh, when it was sold?

John Erling: Which house now are you talking about?

RT: Rachel's house.

MT: We're talking about the original, the one they call the White House.

JE: The White House?

RT: The new owners did not want the shed at the side and told the man to tear it down.

MT: Um-hmm (affirmative), and someone took it and took it up—there's an Albertson's up at 15th and Lewis. They had some storage units, something back there. When they got into that and tore it down someone found that old post office and they called Wes, the man that's the caretaker here, 'cause that's the only one they knew at that time to find a Perryman. And he went up and got it or we bought it, I don't remember what all happened. But we know it was authentic because when you see it there's a space in the middle there that had some papers and they were all Perryman papers. You have those, don't you?

RT: Yes.

JE: So that post office is here on this Perryman ranch where we are?

MT: In this house.

RT: Tulsa's first post office.

JE: You say "in this house," it's attached to this house?

RT: No, it's the shelves, the glass windows where you would see whether you had mail or not.

JE: Oh, so the innards of the post office?

MT: Um-hmm (affirmative).

RT: The window that looks like a teller's window, that's all here.

JE: Wow, what a find that was.

MT: That was really a find.

JE: Yeah.

MT: It was just remarkable 'cause it could have just as easily been torn up. But I guess someone looked in there and found those papers.

Chapter 10
Perryman Cemetery - 4:45

John Erling: Then we have the Perryman cemetery at 32nd and Eudica, Tulsa's oldest private cemetery. Let's talk about that, how that came about.

Robert Trepp: That is the remaining fragment of a much larger cemetery that served all the people of Lochboga tribal town. Family stories tell us where different families like the Yaholas and the Beavers were buried. There is an interview in some of the state historical society records with a member of the Partridge family, which lived up a little bit further north down on Crow Creek. And he starts talking about all the small grave houses that were in his backyard going up the hill towards the cemetery.

JE: I have visited the Perryman cemetery. And you just said grave houses. I saw on the property there these little wooden structures, four feet wide, six feet long, and knee-high. So why were they built?

Monetta Trepp: Robert actually had those built and put there.

RT: That's a Muskogee tradition. If you get down around Highway 9, on a rural road you drive past the Creek cemetery, those are very common. They're called sickpoffkan, which means a pocket house. And the pocket refers to the pocket of earth that you have dug away to put your loved one in. It replaces an earlier tradition going back thousands of years where people would actually be buried underneath the house that they lived in.

JE: Okay.

RT: So this was a reaction to—

MT: You mean their actual home.

RT: —probably missionaries saying, "You can't do that anymore."

JE: So then they'd build a house—

RT: Right.

JE: And get buried underneath it.

RT: Right.

JE: Is there any marking? I didn't notice any markings.

RT: One of the reasons that I put those there was that I was mad that the gravestones had been stolen from my great, great grandmother and my great uncle.

JE: Okay.

RT: And those were the two that I put there.

JE: But as I recall, at the cemetery a George Perryman's stone is standing—

MT: It's that heart-shape.

JE: —tall and proud.

MT: Um-hmm (affirmative). I always thought Rachel was next to it, part of it too, like a double. But she isn't, she's right north of it.

RT: Buried next to her mother.

JE: Jo—

MT: And her mother came on the Trail of Tears. It's kind of a pyramid shape.

RT: Obelisk.

MT: Okay. It's the oldest stone in there, she was the oldest.

JE: And Josiah would be buried there?

RT: Josiah and Legust are both buried there. Their markers are not there, they're back somewhere on the west side towards the north corner of the cemetery. Every Memorial Day I make sure that they get little American flags because both of them served in what was called the "Indian Home Guard." The federal groups that were mustered in Kansas during the Civil War.

JE: And your grandfather Mose is buried in that cemetery?

MT: Um-hmm (affirmative). His looks like a bed, part of it's gone, part of the sides, and part of them are out here somewhere.

RT: But the headstone and footstone and it's covered completely with a marble slab. I'm not sure what kind of stone it is, I assume it's marble.

MT: That was another tradition if you were up around the lakes some of those have a concrete thing across it, where the body's underneath it.

JE: Now that cemetery has been greatly reduced.

MT: They say that when they widened Utica they took out a lot of graves. And also they say there's graves underneath those houses to the west. It was quite a large cemetery. And at one time there was a fence around it, some sort of a fence, and they said that during one of the wars they buried some of the unknown soldiers outside that fence. That they didn't know where to send their bodies to.

JE: So we just built and widened Utica. Was there some disrespect to these graves?

RT: There were some members of the family that were more interested in the money they could make off selling lots than they were in preserving the cemetery. And if it hadn't been for Penosky Perryman, his English name is Newman Perryman, and his family, the cemetery may not have been preserved at all.

MT: Newman took care of it.

RT: He was the son of George Junior.

MT: He took care of it himself for a while and then, you know, they've had Boy Scouts that used to go over and cut the grass. Then Texaco took it over, there's a man from Texaco that lived close and he had his employees take care of it for a while. Then Penosky called me and said that he couldn't take care of it anymore. I used to try to help him with some money to pay someone to do it after he got older. And he said, "The city wants to buy it." And he said, "I don't trust them after they widened Utica or the Historical Society wants to buy it." So I said, "Newman, I would trust the Historical Society." So they are now the owners.

Chapter 11
Perryman Ranch - 8:15

John Erling: Let's put in perspective the land of the Perryman Ranch at one time. One of the biggest in the Creek nation, it extended from 21st to 71st Streets and from the Arkansas River to Lynn Lane in Broken Arrow. Would that be accurate?

Robert Trepp: This was not a matter of ownership, this was a matter of usage, because this was still when this was under tribal title. All the tribal members had an equal membership in the six and a half million acres before the Civil War, which was reduced to three and a quarter million acres after the Civil War. But you were entitled to use what you could use that no one else was using. So if you had a home nobody could take it away from you. If you fenced off a garden nobody could take that away from you. It was a matter of not only usage but prior usage. The Perrymans and the families they were related to and the families they were friends with, they would run these huge herds of cattle. And I like I said, they'd run them all the way out to Shoto where the tribal boundary ended. They'd run them all the way down to Mounds on Duck Creek and the only way to tell them apart was by whose brand was on which cow. But the Perrymans had dozens of men who worked for them as ranch hands and helped manage those herds. George Perryman was an important man in selling cattle, and as a matter of fact, was on a business trip into Kansas regarding sale of cattle when he died in 1898 or 1899.

JE: Because there were so many Perrymans that all settled together they all got an allotment and that's what made them appear then to be fairly wealthy. And you had a great leader in George to manage all this. Is that the way this worked?

RT: The Creeks were wealthy for their time, each and every one of them, even the ones that

would live in simple cabins or simple households. They knew no hunger. They could farm or orchard or ranch as much land as they could. They were an extremely prosperous people before their lands were divided up into individual allotments. And that's what really broke the tribal economy.

JE: Not all tribes were as successful apparently with their land. I mean, to manage all of this together, I don't think the other tribes had came here were doing that, were they?

RT: Because the Muskogee had a tradition of communal life. Each town was like a great big commune. And yes, individual families would have their own gardens where they would raise whatever they wanted to, but the town itself would also have large communal fields, where everyone in the town was obligated to help, at time of planting, during the weeding during the summer, and at time of harvest. Angie Debo describes some of these communal farms on the Canadian River, which would stretch for miles because the soil was so rich.

JE: Weren't the Creeks one of the earliest to attach themselves to a town? Where some of the other tribes didn't do that.

RT: The tradition of Muskogee towns is so ancient. One of the authors of a report for the United States Interior Department back in the 1930s calls the Muskogee tribal town the oldest "polity" in North America. The oldest civic political institution in North America.

Monetta Trepp: Robert, I want to ask you something. Down by Sallisaw, I think, spiral mounds, I heard that man that runs that talk. And I guess at one time that was a huge, huge area of people.

RT: They were obviously part of the overall Southeastern culture.

MT: Um-hmm (affirmative).

RT: A lot of the cultural artifacts there are not only nearly identical to some of the ones that would be found at Etowah, Georgia, or Moundville, Alabama, or some of the large prehistoric centers like that. Some of the artwork on those objects is so identical that they think some of the objects found in those three places were actually made by a single person. There's also an old Muskogee tradition that I have never been able to find out a lot about, but it talks about a town called Arbeka in the west. Exactly how far west that might have been no one really knows. But Arbeka is one of our most significant towns among the Muskogee. It's one of the original migration towns of the Muskogee and they still keep a ceremonial ground today down south of Henrietta.

JE: Didn't people from around the world visit the ranch with all the activities that went on? This was a hubbub or activity?

RT: When the National Governor's Conference came to Tulsa they had an event out here. We've had all kinds of events for some of Tulsa's major businesses like Williams Company and Hilti and many, many, many others. During the Depression this was an important

place for the local people. During the Dust Bowl days this was one of the few wells that never went dry. And local people from the neighborhood would come here and pull water from the well.

MT: Yeah, I can remember them coming up here to this well. Well, there wasn't any water anywhere else and bringing these big barrels and filling them up with water.

JE: And that well stands there to this day.

MT: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: It's right outside this house.

MT: Right.

RT: There was a rail line that served the Glenpool Oil Field that ran across the back of the property for a while. There was a schoolhouse up here on the corner not very far from here. This was always a very important part of the center of the community out here in South Tulsa.

JE: The discovery of oil, the Glenpool in 1905, that really energized the area and boom, sent Tulsa into the major growth.

RT: Absolutely.

MT: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Since the Glenpool was not that far away you would think that on all this acreage of the Perrymans there would be oil as well. Did they attempt that?

RT: Oh yeah, there's still—

MT: Yeah, this—

RT: —a functioning oil well right out here right outside the front door. There's another one not too very far over the fence where the cattle are.

MT: Across the creek over here there's three wells, I think right now.

RT: When I was growing up and we'd stay out here you would hear the clatter and clunk as that oil well right out here right outside the door would just constantly run. And that's one of the few strange feelings I have when I come out here now is it's too quiet. I don't hear that clatter and clunk that was here when I was a kid.

MT: Well, it kind of went deet-deet and then it made a ding, and then deet-deet, ding.

RT: Yeah.

MT: It's now dry, I don't know if they haven't tried to do anything to it.

RT: I think they cycle it.

JE: So did the Perryman sell leases or where the Perrymans benefactors of these wells that you just talked about?

MT: Well—

RT: Yes they were the mineral owners. It was more that the oil companies would come in and offer to lease the land.

MT: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Okay, so the money—

RT: You had to go out and peddle the land. If they thought there was a prospect of finding oil on your land they would come to you.

JE: And you would sell the lease?

RT: Right.

MT: So there's still a lease on this land. Sunoco, I think, is the one that has this. And I don't remember who has the other two. Different people, it's changed hands.

JE: Well, at its peak, this ranch, I'm told, had like fifteen thousand cattle, a couple thousand horses, twelve hundred wranglers?

RT: Yeah, George Perryman's operation did. Absolutely, it was huge. Add to that the fact that Josiah and Legust, his brothers, his cousins, people like the Porters and some of the other families that were closely related to the Perryman. All of them would have cattle in that herd. And like I said, when it was time to separate them you knew them apart by the brand that they had on their hind end.

JE: And in 1880, they shipped more than ten thousand bushels each of corn and wheats. I mean, this was prosperous land.

RT: This was prosperous land and, like I said, before the Civil War this was the America's breadbasket. What we think of as Kansas and Nebraska today were still occupied by tribes that owned all that land attached.

Chapter 12
Creeks and Slaves - 18:55

John Erling: So as we look back we have Benjamin Perryman coming from Alabama. Then we have Benjamin's son Louis. And then we have from Louis the three sons, George, Legust, and Josiah. Would George then be the one that you would say is really the father of Tulsa?

Robert Trepp: George and Rachel are referred to as the first family of Tulsa. Now when they called them ninety years ago, they weren't meaning that they were the very first family of Tulsa. They've referred to the first family as we would to the family that occupies the White House. That was their meaning. These were the community leaders, they were the shakers. George's involvement in helping develop the city, first on paper, you know, there would not have been a town site if George had not said, "We need to set aside forty

acres for a town site right here on the railroad tracks where it crosses the Cherokee-Muskogee line. That kind of groundwork that was done by George led to the growth of one of the most beautiful cities in the United States.

Monetta Trepp: And because it comes from the railroad tracks, isn't that why the streets go this way—

RT: Yep.

MT: And then they change and go—

RT: Yep, the original streets were all laid out parallel or vertical—

MT: To the railroad tracks.

RT: —to the railroad tracks.

JE: And could you give him credit because the Creeks had this legacy of attaching to towns where maybe other tribes didn't, but the Creeks did?

RT: It was in his blood. It was part of the culture he was raised in.

JE: Right. And not to disparage other tribes, but they could have been here and not had that same kind of background.

RT: The author I was talking about earlier who said that the Creeks formed the earliest polities in North America—

JE: Right.

RT: He said the significance of it was that their structure of a tribal town and the way they put it together was the first institution that was able to overcome the power of the clans. Clan justice and clan power in so many other tribes may have kept them from developing the stable and sedentary farmer lifestyle that the Muskogees had at the time of Columbus and at the time of De Soto invaded the United States with the Spanish army.

JE: What markings do we have to remember George and Rachel as the first couple, shall we say? Is there a statue or anything of them, do you remember?

RT: No.

MT: Uh-uh (negative).

JE: Neither? There really should be.

MT: I think there should be.

JE: Because the concept of Tulsa goes back to that couple.

MT: Um-hmm (affirmative).

RT: More things need to be done by the city to recognize its heritage. And the Muskogee heritage is a big part of that in terms of the amount of time that the Lochboga people, and later the Perryman family, were here before non Indians were even allowed into Indian territory. I make this point all the time, the ratio in population that we see of the number of Indians and the number of mixed-bloods and the number of relatives that they have is roughly equivalent to what you find in Hawaii. But over there, the sports

announcers are always these great, big Hawaiian guys wearing Hawaiian shirts. And the weatherman is always talking about this kind of shower in Hawaiian and that kind of rain in Hawaiian and they really do promote their own culture over there. I know the word Lochboga does not trip easily off tongue but everybody in New Orleans knows how to pronounce the word chopatulus. You know, this is something that has to be learned, it has to be promoted, and part of the community as it grows and develops.

JE: But it's so much easier to say Creeks.

RT: Yep.

JE: That came out of the fact that the Lochbogas, Muskogees, lived along the creeks—

RT: Exactly. You had to have a source of fresh water. You had to have a place to go take a bath every morning.

JE: And so I think you referred to the British and all, they just referred to them as Creeks.

RT: Right.

JE: The Creeks had slaves, is that true?

RT: That is true.

JE: And other tribes did too.

RT: Yes.

JE: Talk to us a little bit about that, how that came about.

RT: Even before contact with the Europeans there was slavery in North America. And usually that was through conquest. It was not a form of chattel slavery where you own someone and bought and sold someone. Two towns had a grievance, they had a battle, people were killed, and as a result of that, people would be captured by the victors and taken back to their hometown as a replacement to the community for whoever had died in battle. They were technically slaves in the fact that they couldn't leave. But they became ingrained in the community. They were able to marry into the community and have a family. And if they had children their children were born free, their children were born as members of the community. So it wasn't chattel slavery, it wasn't inherited slavery of the type that the Europeans brought here. But, Creeks live side by side with the Europeans in the Southeast for a couple hundred years and they picked up some bad habits. One of those was chattel slavery. You always have this distinction within the Muskogee nation of what's going on in the lives of the traditional people and what's going on in the lives of not so traditional people who think of themselves as progressives. Although some of us always question that. They did begin to imitate plantation slavery in the Southeast. And as a result of that, when they moved out west that was something that they brought with them. It would vary from family to family but for the most part that was still not the strict kind of chattel slavery that we think about in the Deep South. Yes it did happen. Yes some of my relatives were involved in it. Yes one of my relatives was probably the worst,

well, maybe not the very worst, but he's probably in the top three worst slave traders in the Muskogee part of the Indian territory.

JE: Who would that have been?

RT: His name was also Mose Perryman, I mean, it is not Monetta's grandfather. It was a great uncle that he was named for.

MT: That's one thing, these names go over and over.

RT: All the key names rolling through this family.

MT: Yeah, hearing the same names all the way back.

RT: Among the lives of the more traditional people there were also black families that would live with them as part of their household, usually in a separate cabin. But other than the sleeping arrangements everything else was just one big family and they worked together. The women would take care of the children and prepare the food together. The men would ranch or farm or whatever they were doing on that particular plot of land together. But they would be referred to legally as slaves and sometimes there were even forged bills of sale to guarantee title to that person under the adjacent state laws, to keep that person from being taken away. Because their only options were going south and being treated as a slave, or going north and literally having very few opportunities up there, even after the Civil War. Let's go back even further. When De Soto's army marched through the southern states in 1540, 1541 and '42, he had African slaves with him. Two of those escaped and lived with the Creeks until they died, and may even have had some children although that's not very clear. When the English arrived and settled the colonies in Virginia, although they did bring some African slaves with them, they also sent raiding parties into the interior where they took native people as slaves. Always finding the males the most recalcitrant. The Spanish were finding the same thing in Cuba and Haiti, and the French in Haiti with their African slaves, so the Spanish would trade their male slaves north and the Virginians would trade their male slaves south. And you find this mixed culture on the early plantations. It was almost necessary to have a native woman there because who better knew how to live in the southeastern United States than a native woman. So these bloodlines of Africa and America became mixed on the early plantations. You end up having sons and daughters, mostly sons, who are told by their mother, "This is the way home." And if they are able to escape the plantation and find their way home there are people there that accept them as relatives. They bring things into the nation, which other people don't provide, such as the knowledge of English and an ability to do specialized work with metal and repair guns. All these fluid things happen over hundreds and hundreds of years. There were Africans who would escape the plantations and find their way into the Creek nation or the Seminole nation. And like I said, would have papers forged to show bills of sale to keep them there because it

was better than life on the plantation. Some of these would become allied with Creek households so you have these two different kinds of slavery with the Creeks. You have the slavery that's really only on paper, which is a formality to protect the African family. And then you do have the evil, cruel, horrible chattel slavery where they would break up families and sell people down the river. I'm not going to say that didn't happen, it sure did. There's no way to say it didn't.

JE: Other tribes—

RT: At the time of the Civil War these things ended up splitting the nation. And there were families, mostly along the Verdigris and some along the Cherokee boundaries south toward Eufaula who firmly aligned with the South. There's even a treaty between some Creek leaders and the Confederate states. When war finally broke out, those families mostly moved down to the Red River, just north of Paris, Texas. As a matter of fact, there's a tiny little village along the highway there that still has a Creek name to it, to this day.

JE: Hmm.

RT: The loyal Creeks, led by a man who had been speaker and a leader since before removal named Abethley Yahola, they wanted to prove their loyalty to the United States because they did not want to lose their lands. They ended up writing to Washington, DC, and saying, "Our treaty with you requires you to protect us." And the answer from the United States was, "We will protect you but we can't do it where you are, you'll have to come to Kansas." So you wind up with this column of ten to fifteen thousand people along with their geese, guineas, wagons, whatever they could load in the wagons, whatever livestock they could get to come with them, trying to make it from Eufaula, Okemah, Holdenville, first to Okmulgee then up the deep fork then up the little deep fork toward the town called Big Pond, crossing the Arkansas River, having the skirmish with militia out of Texas and Arkansas, several skirmishes, one near Begs, one's called the Battle of Round Mountain that took place out at the last exit going west off Keystone Expressway before it turns into a turnpike. There would be another long skirmish called the Battle of Caving Banks, which took place up at Turley on a horseshoe bend in Verm Creek. And then finally, out west of Skiatook the Muskogees and their allies, who included Seminoles and Shawnees and Delawares and Kickapoos, and of course, the Euchees. They were out of ammunition and they were run over by the Confederate attack. The most lasting image in my mind of the stories that have been told to me about that battle is that the armies overran this camp of neutrals. They were armed but they were still technically neutrals. The women were picking up their cast-iron skillets by the handle and swinging them at the horses and the soldiers. Three thousand people died on that land out west of Skiatook. That is more people than died at Pearl Harbor. That is more people than died

at the World Trade Center. Another thousand died trying to make it to Kansas in a sleet storm. Another thousand died under so-called federal protection in Kansas because they had no blankets, they had no houses, they had no food. Abethley Yahola bankrupted himself, probably one of the richest men in Indian territory bankrupted himself trying to help feed his people up there. He died, himself, up there in an unmarked grave; one of the most courageous and noble leaders to ever walk this continent is buried somewhere unknown in Kansas. So of the ten thousand loyal Creeks that went north, along with them they were taking not only the paperwork slaves that lived with their families, they were taking chattel slaves who followed them off the plantations, knowing that they were taking those people to freedom. Fighting shoulder by shoulder with these people at Round Mountain, at Caving Banks, and at Tistanolla out west of Skiatook. Just an incredible chapter in American history that absolutely nobody knows about, including most of my fellow tribal members.

JE: Again, they were headed to Kansas for protection because that's what the government said—

RT: Exactly.

JE: "—We can't protect you there in Indian territory, we can protect you in Kansas."

RT: Right.

JE: And this was all during the Civil War?

RT: Yes. This was in the very late months of 1861, early 1862 that this all took place.

JE: Hmm. Wow, what a story.

MT: Don't you think it's ironic that they dumped all these Indians in Indian territory in Oklahoma, and this is where they struck oil. So they did get something back from it.

RT: Yeah. As a matter of fact, John, in the early 1820s the federal maps that the federal officers in the War Department and in the Congress would have been looking at when they were thinking about where they were going to move the five civilized tribes. This area here is marked on those maps as uninhabitable desert. And our removal treaties, well, the treaties that were used as an excuse for our removal, say that this land will belong to us forever unless we should become extinct.

JE: Another broken promise.

RT: Yes. Even after statehood it was not uncommon for these black families to stay with the Creek families that they had lived with for generations. Because they really had nowhere to go. You couldn't go further into the South because of the Jim Crow laws and all the clan activities and things that were going on. To be quite frank with you, the states to the

north were not much better. There are a few black communities that thrived in Kansas, but that is the exception. And there were a lot of states where blacks, right into the '30s and '40s were not able to vote, were not able to participate in their communities and were treated as second class citizens or worse. Even though their lives here were not perfect it was better than they could find a life anywhere else.

JE: Benjamin Perryman, when he came from Alabama and then Benjamin's son Louis and down, did they have slaves? Did they have blacks?

RT: Yes, yes.

JE: Working for them?

RT: Yes.

MT: And I feel like Sarah and Henry came here as slaves with the Perrymans. They lived out there in that little house and I'd sit out there at night and listen to their stories. I loved to listen to them.

JE: So the Creeks were caretakers of them? Gave them protection, a place to work?

MT: Sarah—

JE: Was there intermarrying between blacks and the tribal members? Then we have the issue of freedmen.

RT: Right. Those who, the enrolled descendants of slaves, yes.

JE: Amongst the Creeks, the freedmen had right to land? Or were they denied it?

RT: No, they received 160 acre allotments. They were full participants in tribal government after 1866, basically because they were allied with the loyal Creeks that they had fought with in those battles with the Confederates. Again, this was tribal land, common land, but the Creeks took the possessary rights of the three worst slaveholders, including the other Mose Perryman. And they turned those into townships for the blacks. They built boarding schools, they built orphanages for the freedmen and their descendants. They participated in tribal politics, they elected tribal judges, they became tribal light horse members, they served in the national council, both in the House of Kings and the House of Warriors. And they were a big influence in tribal elections too. There were full participants up until the time of statehood. The thing that finally drove the wedge between the freedmen and the traditional people was allotment. And the traditional people did everything they could to hang on to their lands. And some of the freedmen may have too, but that message did not get across because it was not long until most of the freedmen lands had been sold and the freedmen families were gone. And the traditional people resented the abandonment more than anything.

MT: When they gave out the allotments and the people came out of the courthouses, or

wherever they came, they had no idea what that piece of paper meant. They didn't know it was for 160 acres or something. And people stood outside the door when they came out and bought it, you know, for practically nothing, would buy that piece of paper. And course then, that person that was supposed to get the land didn't. It was almost like those they just said, up there killing people to get the land.

RT: Yeah, and that's not the only place that happened. There's a lot of unexplained deaths among Muskogee leaders around the time of statehood too.

Chapter 13
Creeks Education - 4:45

John Erling: You brought up education, education and the Creeks.

Robert Trepp: The Creeks, first through the help of the missionaries, but also gradually with more and more native people actually being the instructors and superintendents. They had neighborhood schools that kids could walk to. For the older students they had boarding schools, they had orphanages, which ran full functions at schools. And for those kids that progressed and graduated, they had a scholarship fund to send students back east to colleges. Alice Robertson, Oklahoma's first congresswoman, before she got into politics to that degree, was an advocate for the tribes. And especially, she testified against the United States shutting down the tribal education systems, which it did in 1906. And in her testimony she says, "Almost 100 percent of the Creeks are literate." She says, "Not all of them can read and write English, but the rest of them can read and write Muskogee, all of them enough to take care of their own affairs." Now there is not another state in the country that you could point to in 1900 and claim that almost 100 percent of its people were literate.

JE: You know who actually drew up the language and created the alphabet and all?

RT: Lockridge was real involved in helping set up the usage of English letters in spelling Muskogee words.

Monetta Trepp: Muskogee language is a very hard language, I think.

JE: Is there something today in 2010 that's trying to keep that alive?

MT: Um- hmm (affirmative). Down to the Creek Indian Community Center down on South Union they have Creek language classes and Choctaw.

RT: Actually, you know, there's some resistance from our traditional people to having language classes.

JE: And why is that?

RT: Their version of it is, "Why can't those people learn the same way I did?" Well, of course, those people grew up in an environment where that was the predominant language. We still have families down around Hannah and some of the other smaller communities that are basically monolingual and it's not English. If they have to do business with a doctor or a lawyer or some times even a grocery store, they make sure that they have a niece or nephew go with them so that they can translate. But most of their social lives, at the church, at the community meetings, they can conduct all those conversations in Muskogee and have a wonderful day doing it. Because of some of those criticisms from traditional people I love so much were starting to think more among the tribal officers about setting up a radio station, setting up a TV station, and having things in the tribal language where people can actually become immersed in it and have a better opportunity to learn it on a real detailed conversational basis.

MT: There's something I didn't realize until, I guess, it was when Will Samson died—

JE: Let's identify him. Will Samson was?

RT: He was an actor, his—

MT: He was an actor, yes—

JE: He was an actor in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.

MT: Yeah.

RT: His most famous role is he was nominated for an Oscar for the role of Keith Broom in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.

MT: Actually, he was Creek.

RT: Yup.

MT: He was full-blood Creek. And at his funeral they went out to a—tell him about it. I used to wonder when I first started working within the Indian community, which I knew nothing about until I moved Tulsa. On Friday afternoon about noon, if you go to Colinson [time is 3:33] by just to see him, they were gone. I didn't know where they had gone to and I started investigating and I thought, "Gee, these people take off early." Anyway, they're going back to their community. They all go home, or used, go home Friday afternoon and they stay in these little communities until Monday morning and they go back too work. They don't stay in town in their houses. And they're all over the place down around Oakmolegee.

RT: And it's the same with both the people that go to the traditional ceremonial grounds and the people that go to the traditional churches. They have camp houses out at those places. They will go out there on a weekend whether it is a—for the churches they have what they call Fourth Sunday, which is the Sunday they actually have services in their church. Other times they're going to neighboring churches. With the ceremonial people

they will have dances four times during the summer. On other weekends they will go to other ceremonial grounds to dance. But they still camp at their own camp.

MT: And they still do this, right now.

Chapter 14
Keeping Traditions - 2:25

John Erling: You have concern that in the, let's say, fifty years or seventy-five years that the culture of the Creeks will still thrive. Is that a for certain thing or do you have a concern that it's going to weigh in with the interests of the younger generations coming along?

Monetta Trepp: With all the intermarriage, you know, the young Indian people in all the tribes going out and they marry someone that isn't Indian, I think gradually it will all be gone. I don't know.

Robert Trepp: I—

MT: Rob sees another side of it, I don't know.

RT: I visit the ceremonial grounds and it is younger people that populate those more and more. They are strict in their observance of it, they are strict in listening to the elders that administer those ceremonies and keep those traditions alive. While I admit some of that knowledge is inevitably going to be lost along the way, the effort to keep it alive is going to be fierce and ferocious.

MT: They still have their dances and the Green Corn Dance is one that they really don't allow people to go to. Still, do they?

RT: There are parts of it where they do want visitors to come in. Especially they invite visitors in for the Ribbon Dance, which is one night or sometimes one afternoon, depending on which town it is. But what's commonly called the Green Corn Dance and which the towns call their Basketa, or the Busk. Basketa means to fast because the men cannot have corn from early spring until these dances are complete. It's a series of ceremonies and certain things have all got to be done at the right time and in the proper way. After the Ribbon Dance is over then they let their fire go out. And that is the last night of their calendar year. The next morning, the maker of medicine, his assistants, and the officials of the town make sure that the proper preparations are made and a new fire is lit. And that is the start of their new year. Then there will be more dances after that. The most important is probably the Feather Dance. During that, the Speaker of the Town will get up and will recite the history of the town and remind everybody of its traditions and their duties as members of the town.

Chapter 15
Casinos - 3:05

John Erling: George Perryman and Rachel and, of course, before them, Benjamin and son Louis would never have imagined the thought of a casino, which is at 71st and Riverside. What is the thought amongst traditionals of the tribe and others of what that's done to the nation? Because it has brought an influx of money to the nation.

Robert Trepp: More recently it's brought an influx of debt into the nation, and servicing that debt is taking not only most of the revenue that comes out of the casinos, but sometimes that revenue isn't enough and it has strained the tribal budget in other areas too.

JE: So why is there debt as a result of the casino?

RT: Because of all of the construction.

JE: But that is—

RT: That was not built on revenue, that was built on borrowed funds.

JE: But you have the source of reducing the debt—

RT: We did until the tourist industry crashed on us a year and a half ago, almost two years ago. When the economy in general suffered at the hands of Wall Street revenue at all tribal casinos dropped severely.

JE: So you have this debt that in time will be paid back?

RT: But in the meantime it's taking money away from other tribal programs.

JE: So then in the long run is it something you should have engaged in? Or something that was inevitable because everybody else was?

Monetta Trepp: Well, the first thing the Indian people want, the people as a whole, an average Indian person, is to get money from the government for their health and for roads and housing to fit their needs before they want money going out into the community.

RT: It wasn't until the great society programs in the office had become an opportunity that tribes even had any kind of income, or any significant income. The tribal income before that was off of a few oil wells and renting a few houses in Muskogee on some lots. And the sandbar revenue off of Mackey Sandbar down on Riverside. Once there were these great society programs opening up to allow tribes to serve the needs of their members and meet their needs for housing and health and education. That's when we saw the regrowth of tribal government. The fact that there are any Indian casinos at all is a victory for tribal sovereignty. It shows that we're still a self-governing institution. And if the state of Oklahoma can regulate gaming as it does, then under federal law and federal court decisions we can do the same thing on our land. And don't have to do it the same way that the state does it. So yes, it was inevitable, whether the expansion was timed properly or not nobody has a crystal ball and nobody knows exactly what the economy is

going to do when you complete your project and have all this debt that you need to take care of.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

RT: All I know is at the current time it is creating some resentment.

Chapter 16
White Buffalo - 7:48

John Erling: I can bring this to a close unless there's something else that you think would be of interest? It's been extremely interesting.

Robert Trepp: I just want to say that the real miracle going on in Indian country has been the new explosion in education. All of a sudden, instead of people educated enough to listen to a lawyer, we have Creek lawyers, and we have Creek doctors and Creek dentists and Creek architects and Creek professionals. And it is finally going to give us a structure where we can rebuild our society and rebuild our culture and maintain our identity as a people.

JE: Are there famous Creeks—

Monetta Trepp: Besides Yahola who was—

RT: Ernest Childers. Ernest Childers won the Congressional Medal of Honor. One of the schools in Coweta is named for him.

MT: Um-hmm (affirmative).

RT: Allie Reynolds, pitched for the Yankees.

JE: Great pitcher for the Yankees.

RT: Yeah.

JE: I had his baseball card.

RT: My dad did not really approve of all of my interest in tribal government. It wasn't that he objected to it, he just didn't encourage it. All that went away the year that I got a birthday card from Allie Reynolds. Daddy was impressed.

JE: How did that come about?

RT: Allie and I served on the very first board that ran the bingo that was built down here on the river. Long before it was a casino it was just a simple bingo operation and it was quite profitable. That place had a net revenue of fifteen thousand dollars a day.

JE: So Allie Reynolds maintained a presence in the Creek nation?

RT: Absolutely. All kinds of relatives down here. He never lost touch with them.

JE: Well, again, this is historic time that we've spent here because we're sitting here in this house—

RT: When you leave the property today, if you get a chance in traffic to slow down as you go north on Elwood and you pass the fence past our last gate you'll see a line of pear trees, some of them in very bad condition, that takes off running at an angle. Those are pear trees that were planted by Mose Perryman but they run off his property at an angle because he wasn't able to properly survey the lines. He saw where the government marked the corner, but he wasn't accurately able to survey where the property line would actually run.

JE: And what is the significance of the white buffalo at the Perryman Ranch?

MT: Well, a white buffalo is important to Indian people, and I'll let Rob tell that story in a little bit. Wes, the caretaker here, was up in Bartlesville or somewhere buying some cattle. He went out to this man's place and he said, "I want to show you something." And he showed him this white buffalo he had. So Wes bought him and brought him home and had him a couple of years. And then he called me one winter and he said, "I'm going to sell the white buffalo." I said, "No you're not." And he said, "I have to, I need the money." So Rob bought the white buffalo and he's alive and well.

JE: Is there a significance of the white buffalo to the Creeks?

RT: The Sioux and the Ojibwa are Chippewa people. All have stories about a woman named White Buffalo Woman, or White Buffalo Calf Woman, and how that she came to them leading a white buffalo with her and taught them ways of peace and ways of living a better life with each other. So she is a very, very respected person in those traditions. There is actually one author who based on their stories makes a line of argument that that woman was probably Muskogee, because of the things that she taught. But there is no specific white buffalo tradition among the Creeks. I did find something interesting though, and I keep trying to find it again, back when the Internet was young I found an aerial photograph of Black Mesa taken in the wintertime. And if you flip it upside down the pattern of the snow where it remains and where it's been melted away by the sun looks an awful lot like a white bison.

MT: When we first had the white buffalo here the word got around pretty well and there was two Indian girls that walked from Glenpool up here to see the white buffalo. And there's still people that come in and all they want is just to get some of the hair of the white buffalo. It's good luck.

RT: He likes apples, he likes pears, he will even eat oranges.

JE: Some people deposit that there and—

RT: Hill and all.

JE: They lay them there?

RT: Uh, you can toss something out to him but there's only two of us that he wants walking up to him.

MT: And not me.

RT: Nope.

JE: He's not white?

RT: Yes he is.

MT: Well, he's kind of grayish.

RT: He's kind of a cream-colored but, or a buff-colored—

MT: Well, I—

RT: But he is not a brown bison.

MT: Of course he gets down in these ponds and this dirty water and he comes out almost brown.

RT: He has to because of the flies.

MT: Yeah.

RT: He's beautiful in the wintertime.

MT: I read a story in the Indian Times or somewhere that white buffalo changes color during its lifetime, I think, four times. He goes from white to gray to more brown, and then before he dies he's usually white again.

RT: Well, all young buffalo are born a buff or a golden color. And gradually turn browner, and then as they age they will develop. This one just never changed, he has always been white.

JE: We do have the white buffalo statue that is on the approach.

RT: We have a statue on the corner and the buffalo is back in the back with the longhorns.

JE: Indeed, there is a live white buffalo on this ranch.

MT: There isn't a lot of pictures—

RT: His name is Yanessa Heckey, which in Muskogee means bison, white.

MT: Isn't he knowledgeable?

JE: He's very knowledgeable. Rob, ten, eleven, twelve years old I guess you were interested in all of this and you started reading.

RT: First book my grandmother gave me, the first adult kind of book my grandmother gave me was a book called The Creek Frontier from 1540 to 1783. And believe me, I read it at a young age. I've read it twice since and the third time I got a lot more out of it than I did when I was in junior high or high school.

JE: Yeah.

RT: Well, he tells me all kinds of things that I never did know or hear about. I'll say, "How do you know that and I don't?" He said, "Well, I learned it from your mother," meaning my mother.

RT: Or your aunt.

MT: Yeah. And I said, "Well, why didn't I learn it?" He said, "Because you didn't ask questions." And he does.

JE: He had a very natural interest in it. Right?

MT: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: Well, it's paid off for us here today, which should also encourage people to go to your website, which is perrymanranch.com.

RT: And nemi.us is the website for Mother's nonprofit group that's trying to build the cultural center at 71st and Oakland.

MT: And this isn't just Creek, it's for all people to come there, if we can get it built and learn about all the tribes in this area.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

MT: And it's national Indian monuments so they can learn about all the tribes all over the United States.

RT: There are people in Tulsa from over seventy-five different tribes, and we're interested in working with all of them and anyone else.

JE: How do we say good-bye or thank you in Creek?

RT: I'll say medo, which means thank you very much.

MT: Meadow.

JE: Medo and to you as well.

Chapter 17
Conclusion - 0:33

Announcer: This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers, and librarians are using this website for research and the general public is listening everyday to these great Oklahomans share their life experience. Thank you for your support as we preserve Oklahoma's legacy, one voice at a time on VoicesofOklahoma.com.