

Family matriarch supervi

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The Tribune Staff

SALINA — SITTING IN the chair on the front porch of her home, Nancy Pigeon looks at peace with everything and everyone around her.

A full-length apron covers her dress; her hair is wrapped in a bandana. She wears no shoes.

This is how she will spend her afternoon, and others to come — content to sit on the porch. She has tonight's dinner cooking on the stove. When the garden is ready to be picked, there will be more activity for Mrs. Pigeon, but that is a few weeks off.

Her peaceful countenance betrays her past years. She will be 72 in August.

During those years, Mrs. Pigeon has reared eight children, and helped to raise some of her 32 grandchildren and 23 great-grandchildren — "with two more on the way," she adds.

"I got 'em wrote down in my book. I can't keep track of them by heart. There's too many." Leafing through "her book," there is a page devoted to the children, with birthdates listed; several pages for the grandchildren, and for the great-grandchildren.

Mrs. Pigeon and her husband, Willie, have raised the children on their 60-acre homestead in the country, east of this town. They have given two of the older boys 15 acres each.

Nine families in the Pigeon clan live on the 60 acres. The eldest son lives down the road.

"I don't know why they stay around here. I guess they don't have to pay rent," with a hearty laugh. "I wish they all be around here."

Nancy Raincrow Pigeon reared in a traditional Cherokee family; she is a full-blood Cherokee. The land on which she lives is deeded to her mother-in-law, when land was made to the Cherokee.

"The Cherokees used to try to keep the family together," Mrs. Pigeon says. "If someone would get sick, all get together to help. build a big fire in the front of the house, and everyone would gather around. Now, when someone is sick, they know how he is getting along."

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still can do that, but not many others
can."

Mrs. Pigeon attended school,
through the fifth grade, at Wyand-
otte. "It was hard times. My par-
ents didn't have no money," she
recalls. "Everyone asks where I
graduated. I tell them Wyandotte —
fifth grade." She also attended the
Sequoyah Training School (then
called Parkhill) at Tahlequah.

"ALL MY BOYS ARE BIG and
husky," Mrs. Pigeon continues.
"People ask me how I raised my
boys. I tell them I worked my butt
off climbing up the hills to cut post
timber. I would sell cook wood for 75
cents a rick. We sold eggs and fryers
too."

About 1924, Mrs. Pigeon worked
up the road from her home, at a town
called Kenwood, when the sawmill
and railroad were in full production.

"I worked in the hotel, keeping the
upstairs clean. There were a lot of
boarders. I stayed with a woman
there — a Miss Vann. I worked for
the railroad people, doing the wash-
ing on a board next to the creek.

"It was a lot of hard work. We had
to walk to town, or to church," Mrs.
Pigeon says.

"Now, I can't walk anywhere be-
cause of my arthritis. I don't have a
car and never learned to drive.

"I haven't worked a day to get
Social Security. I have been a house-
wife and raised my kids."

She has helped neighbors in the
area. "There were some folks
named Jones. They had men work-
ing in the fields baling hay, and I
would cook for the workers. Then,
after Mrs. Jones died, I did the laun-
dry and cooking for him, until he
moved."

Mrs. Pigeon also has cared for the
sick on a number of occasions.
"When they get bad, they call me.
"Miss Pigeon will do it," they say."
She has been to most of the hospitals
in the area caring for family and
friends.

She relates one incident which
happened several years ago. A
woman had gone hunting for wild
onions, when it began to rain and
snow. She had been gone all day,
and when she didn't return that
night, a search was organized. She
was found the next morning, in an
abandoned old Ford Model T, where
she had taken cover. She was all
right, but Mrs. Pigeon had been
called in. She waited up all night
while they searched, in case the
woman needed attention.

Mrs. Pigeon often works as an in-
terpreter. Everyone knows her at
the Claremore Indian Hospital, she
says. She grew up speaking Chero-
kee, and although she can read and
write English, she "can't write En-
glish well. But I can Cherokee."

MRS. PIGEON LIKES LIVING in



NANCY PIGEON, to be 72 in August

also constructed the churchhouse at
Kenwood.

Who's the boss around the house?

"Well, I guess I am," Mrs. Pigeon
says. "I do all the talking. Some
things we talk over — he doesn't
boss me and I don't boss him. Once
the children got married, they began
to boss themselves."

As she reminisces, chickens, dogs
and a cat ramble through the yard
and across the porch. Under a tree
at the side of the house sets a
wringer washing machine. Mrs.
Pigeon says she would rather use it
than go to the laundromat, which she
is forced to do in winter. She is look-
ing for a wood cook stove to put in
the yard, where they eat during the
summer.

MRS. PIGEON WAS BORN in a
house by the Jordan Church, on the
road into town. She was delivered by
a midwife, but doesn't know if the
midwife was licensed or not. "I want
to have a birth certificate, but I don't
know how to get one. My first seven
children were born at home and they
don't have birth certificates."

MRS. PIGEON PLANS TO CAN a
lot from her garden. She already
has put up seven quarts of huckle-
berries. She has a large garden —
beans, lettuce, mustard greens,