Form A-(S-149)

BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

ld Worker's name Hazel B. Greene

s report made on (date) September 3, 1937

Name Mrs. Edna Hunt Osborne

Post Office Address Fort Towson, Oklahoma

Residence address (or location)

DATE OF BIRTH: Month August 31, Day Year 1881

Place of birth Atlanta, Georgia

Name of Father Dr. H. C. Hunt Place of birth Atlanta, Georgia

Other information about father Father buried at Milton.

Name of Mother Sara Hanna Place of birth Macon, Georgia

Other information about mother Mother living at Durant.

s or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story
he person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects and questions.
inue on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this Form. Number of
ts attached 25.

Interview with Mrs. Edna Hunt Osborne
Fort Towson, Oklahoma
Field Worker, Hazel B. Greene,
Hugo, Oklahoma
September 3, 1937.

HOW A LITTLE WHITE GIRL GREW UP AMONG THE CHOCTAW INDIANS.

I was born in Atlanta, Georgia, August 31, 1881. When I was a baby, my father, who was a physician and surgeon, moved to Cameron, Indian Territory, Choctaw Nation, about forty-two miles southwest of Fort Smith, Arkansas. He practiced medicine there for years and then moved to Milton, Indian Territory, in Leflore County, when I was about ten years old.

We lived there until I was grown and married, but I grew up with fullblood and half-breed Choctaw Indians. There were very few white people there. There were a few Choctaws there who were nearly white. The family of J. T. Leard, is one family that I remember so well. My first schooling was in the neighborhood school with the fullblood Choctaw Indian children and the mixed breeds. The first school that I attended at Milton was so lousy, that the better class of patrons took wash pots to the school ground, set them up, filled them with lye water, heated this lye water to the boiling point and scalded the benches, floors, and everything inside of the building, in order to kill the lice.

Later, they tore down that old building and built a big new one, with a big auditorium and everything that it takes to make an adequate building for the comfort and convenience of the pupils. The old building was supplied with bench-desks of rough lumber, constructed so that the table-like back of each bench formed a desk for the pupil in the seat back of it. There were two rows of those benches, with an aisle down the center and an aisle down each side next to the wall.

The most forward pupils were permitted to help the teachers with the smaller and more backward ones. I happened to be one who was permitted to help. Of course, the Choctaw Indian children went free to the school, and white ones had to pay tuition. There were sometimes young Choctaw men in that school who were up to twenty-four and twenty-five years old, who could not read nor write.

Just any kind of a book that was brought to school, was used, whether it was a Blue Back Speller, Reed and Kelloggs Graded Lessons in English, a McGuffey's speller, or just anything that a child could learn something out of.

When I was twelve years old they sent me to LaVaca, Arkansas. I went to school there two terms, then I was sent to Fort Smith, Arkansas. I attended there, at Saint Anna's two years where I studied everything that they thought it took to make an accomplished young lady, a smattering of this and that, music included. After that I had one year in nurse's training at Atlanta, Georgia.

At the little old school at Milton there was a fullblood Choctaw Indian boy named Simeon Thompson. He and my brother Adolph were very good friends. Four years ago that brother of mine was killed in an automobile accident, between Seymour and Wichita Falls, Texas. I had been away from Milton for thirty three years, when I went up there to bury my brother, Major Adolph A. Hunt. He was a captain in the World War, and at its close, he was raised to the rank of Major. However, he never served in the army in the rank of Major. He was given a military funeral, in the big auditorium of the new school building, so all of his friends could see him at the last. When I went out to the cemetery to select the spot for his burial, a fullblood Choctaw Indian man opened the cemetery gate for me to pass through, and I was attracted by the way he kept looking at me. Finally I recognized him and asked, "Well, Sim, Is it really you?" He answered, "Yes, Edna." and the tears rolled out of his eyes. Not much stoicism there. He said he had come to see his friend laid away. It was heartbreaking to see that Indian man cry for his friend of childhood and school d ays.

Inasmuch as my father was the community doctor, I, as his daughter had to preserve and affect a dignity that I was far from feeling sometimes. I was not permitted to go to very many dances or parties. I attended a good many Indian weddings and cries. I recall one wedding. There were two ministers in attendance. One white man, for the benefit of the white guests and a fullblood Indian minister, who would read the lines and the white man who would interpret them. After the wedding, four men held a blanket over the heads of the newlyweds, and any little gifts you wanted to give them, were thrown into that blanket. Then the bride and groom proceeded to open the gifts. We usually tried to give them something bright and pretty, handkerchiefs, scarfs, ribbons, and small useful presents. Of course there were the usual wags, even among the Indians, who threw in their share of safety pins etc., and the crowd would have a lot of fun. Weddings were usually followed by dances the following night, and feasts especially if the wedding was not held at the church.

Church was an event. A circuit rider would come to our church, once each month, then later twice each month, and they finally got to having conference there and everybody went to preaching and to Sunday School. Another very healthful diversion was horseback riding. We did a lot of that. I was a perfect tomboy when I got out with just my brothers. Father wanted me to retain my dignity, but I would be tomboyish, and he would lecture me about being a young lady, long before I really was grown, when he would catch me riding the goats or calves.

I never knew but one Indian who wore a breech clout and blanket. His name was Billy Hunt, and because of the name he would claim kin with us. He would come to see us, and remove his blanket when he got in the house, and be nude, except for his breech clout, and he would hardly talk. He wore a necklace of bear claws.

In olden times the Indians of many tribes buried the belongings of the dead with them, sometimes they would even kill a man's favorite pony and bury it with the dead brave. Where I was reared, up around

Milton, the Choctaw Indians would frequently bury the treasures of the deceased with them. One Mrs. LeFlore died. Several hundred dollars worth of jewelry (no diamonds), were buried with her in the cemetery at Milton. Her grave was dug into and robbed and when they found that it had been dug into, her husband had the grave opened more fully and found that it had indeed been robbed. Other graves all over the neighborhood, in gardens, yards, private cemeteries were robbed. Lots of these graves were robbed by ghouls.

I knew one old Indian lady. She was a Choctaw. We called her Aunt Sophia Thomas. She thought my father was almost a saint, and that we children were little angels. She kept a wonderfully clean house and had a lot of Indian pottery, Indian blankets, and quite a collection of Indian handiwork, but she had not done this handiwork herself. We loved to go to her house and see this beautiful work, and we liked her, too. She would always feed us when we went there. Her husband died, and she had him buried in the yard close up beside the house, then she built her kitchen over his grave. The floor was of twelve inch boxing plank and she had one board left loose, so that she could raise it and place a plate of food on his grave every night. She never failed. She believed that her husband's spirit came and ate it. Of course something did eat this food for it was always gone when she was ready to replace it. She never re-married. She was loyal to her husband.

In early days in the Indian Territory, if some member of the family died, sometimes we would bury the body and have the funeral when the circuit rider came along next time. We would just announce the date when the circuit rider would be there, and everybody else would be there too.

The Indians were so nice and pious about their churches and religion.

If an Indian of note died, the cry usually lasted longer than for one of not quite so much prominence. Sometimes a cry would last three days.

Pine Log was the name of one of the churches that belonged entirely to the Choctaw Indians. Out of courtesy to the white people who cared to attend the cry, two preachers would be there. One to speak Choctaw and the other to interpret in English. The Indians would have services, and would feast at the regular meal hours, for a couple of days, then on the third day, they would adjourn between services to the grave of the recently departed, and everybody would cry. They considered white people as guests of honor, and especially the members of the doctor's family. I distinctly recall once, as a guest of honor, I was placed about midway down the side of the table, in front of a beautiful new white china chamber, filled with hominy. And we all ate from it.

They cooked meat by the wash pot full, and beans too. They baked a shuck bread in ashes. Sometimes one or two of the boldest of the fifty or seventy-five hounds which came with the crowd, would slip up and grab a piece of meat out of a pot, and sometimes a squaw would get it away from him and throw it back in the pot. Then sometimes the hound would get away with it. Sometimes the meat would be barbecued and in that case, several squaws would stand guard with sticks to keep the dogs away from it. Bunaha was nearly always served and great stacks of fried pies. Sometimes they made plate pies, but not so often as fried ones.

I would go sometimes with my father to see his patients, and it was no uncommon thing to see a fullblood Indian on a pallet close to the fire, with his head toward the fire. Why they preferred the pallet to the bed was more than I could understand.

Once Father had a call. When he got there, he found the patient dying. Her husband was saddling his horse to leave. Father told him that he should not leave, that his wife was dying. The Indian replied, "Go to Fort Smith, get coffin." Father told him that his wife was not dead yet, and that he should not go away. He again replied, "Go to Fort Smith, get coffin, new dishes, and marry again." And he went right on, before his wife died and returned with her coffin full of new dishes, and other new things for the new wife whom he married gaily within another week. They had a big dance too, the night that he re-married. They had a big feast at the funeral of the first wife and the bride-to-be was there. Among the lot of new dishes, were what they considered, some beautiful covered bowls with a handle on each one and there were several white porcelain chambers with flowers on the sides and tops.

I remember that one particular delicacy, that some of the Choctaw Indian children enjoyed, and perhaps the older ones did too, were terrapins. I have seen Choctaw Indian children bring live terrapins to school, and roast them in the shell and eat them for their lunch.

We lived in a big two story frame house, with a barn-like hall through the house. Years ago, Father had a well dug as close to the house as it could be. Later, he had a room built over that well, for a milk house. We kept milk, butter and anything we wished to keep cool in the troughs in that room. We just drew the water up by hand, but there were lead troughs that extended to the hog pen and horse and calf lot. Our home was as public as a hotel for it was the stopping place for everybody, from governors of the Nation up or down.

Some very prominent people, socially, politically and otherwise, have stopped at our home. Sometimes, they would come to spend the night, sometimes it was necessary to spend days there. Many of our guests were preachers. I hated preachers for

I felt that they imposed upon us. I resolved to never, never, entertain any preachers if and when I had a home of my own.

We made two trips each year to Fort Smith, Arkansas, for supplies for the family. We brought back sugar, coffee, flour and some fancy groceries. In the spring of the year, we brought back supplies to last us until fall, and sometimes it would be so late in the fall when we made our trip to Fort Smith that it would be so cold that we would have to stop along the way and build up fires and warm ourselves. It was about forty-two miles to Fort Smith, the way we had to go then, I think they say it is little more than thirty miles by rail.

We passed over Buck Creek prairie, and when it would be cold, the wolves would come out curiously, in packs of fifty or seventy-five, at the edge of the prairie, and stick up their noses and howl at us, as we would pass along. The grass was so high out on that prairie, that when one had a side view of a horseman going over the road, only the tips of the horse's ears could be seen.

Buck Creek Council House was on that prairie, and that was where Indians and negroes were tried, executed, and whipped. They stood them against the wall to shoot them. If they were condemned to death, they were freed until the day of the execution, when the condemned man always returned on the designated day to be shot. I saw one negro whipped. He was stripped to the waist, and his arms held around a tree, or post, by two men. One man, held a watch and tally card in his hand, while another applied the leather strap, and still another, a Mr. Bazil, counted the licks. Mr. Bazil was a prominent merchant there, a white man who had married an Indian widow, by the name of Welch, who was very wealthy. All of the members of her family were buried in the back yard of their home, and those monuments looked to me to be eight or ten feet high.

It was on one of these bi-annual trips that I saw the negro whipped.

I was nearly always permitted to ride in the buggy with my father, as he accompanied the wagon which was sent to Fort Smith, for supplies. Sometimes he sent more than one wagon and sometimes we would stay up there for two or three days. I would go to a hotel, and clean up and dress up, whether we stayed one day or three, and Father and I would attend the theatre or a show. Then I would assist in the buying. We would pack the wagons with groceries, shoes, hose, quilt linings, dress goods etc. We bought dress goods by the bolt sometimes, but not often. But we nearly always bought quilt linings by the bolt. We bought dark goods for every day use, and pretty light linings for fancier quilts. We would get so tired of looking at the same patterns in those linings, from one fall until the next. But we used lots of quilts, and wore lots of them out.

We had so much company, especially when meetings were going on. We had preachers stop at our house it seemed to me, by the dozen, and our barn was filled with horses, just like a livery stable.

I know, if I have made one quilt in my life, I have made a hundred. When I had done some wrong, I was punished by being put in the closet and a rag bag put in there with me, and I had to piece up quilt scraps. Sometimes the scraps were new and sometimes old but every scrap was saved and used. I hated that quilt piecing. We bought big packages of needles, bought spools of thread by the case, that is sewing thread, and we bought Boss ball thread to quilt with -- lots of it.

We bought black cotton hose by the dozen pairs: ribbed ones for the children, and nice mercerized ones for our dress-up ones, and plain cotton ones for every day wear. The nicer ones never cost over twenty-five cents per pair. Shoes cost around a dollar and a half per pair. We wore high-topped shoes for winter, and slippers for summer. Each child put his foot on a piece of paper and his foot was outlined with a pencil in order to get the correct size.

Sometimes, when a man had a large family of children, he would send by us for a whole bolt of calico, with which to make dresses for the entire family. We didn't do that. We bought distinct patterns for each member of the family. When bought by the bolt, calico was only two and a half cents per yard, and domestic cost two and one half cents per yard. Childrens' ribbed black hose, a good grade, cost five cents per pair.

One could get all the corn around Milton one wanted at fifteen cents per bushel. Hay sold at fifteen cents per bale: meat was dear at five cents per pound.

On those Fort Smith trips I frequently selected hats, shoes, and dress materials for the neighbors and they, in turn, would do likewise for us. The prettiest hat I ever owned and the one I liked best was brought out from Fort Smith by Mrs. J. T. Leard. She looked at my eyes, hair, the shape of my face, and then selected the hat from remembering my general appearance. Then sometimes when I went I would select hats for the whole family and for half of the neighborhood. Always, when we would get to the toll bridge, as we went out of town, Papa would stop and tell me that this was my last chance to remember any article which I might have forgotten, and should have bought, and I usually remembered something I had intended to buy at the store there, at the bridge.

Whiskey was prohibited in the Indian Territory, but in Father's practice he needed it, and always got some. Sometimes he would pack this whiskey under bolts of cloth in the wagon, and sometimes he put it under the buggy seat, and when he did that, he was always uneasy until we would get home. Once, when he had gotten away over in the Indian Territory with his whiskey, he decided to open it up and wanted me to watch and see that nobody caught him with it and I scared him nearly to death by pretending that I saw someone coming. He scolded me a little.

Out back of our smoke house we kept two big ash hoppers, in which we put our winter ashes. We poured water through the ashes in those two ash-hoppers out back of our smoke house, and dripped the lye out of the ashes, and made our soap. We made one barrel of thick soap and one of jelly soap. I didn't like the jelly soap because it didn't readily dissolve in hot water, and never in cold water. I imagine it was the soap that was made of the lean meat, because it was always what was in the bottom of the pot. The firm soap was cut from the top. Women had beautiful hands then too. Perhaps it was the soap. Sometimes when we wanted extra fine soap, we made it of tallow.

Milton is one of the earliest settlements in the

Indian Territory. It is perhaps hundreds of years old. There were old withered Indians there when I was a girl. There were old Choctaws, who were there too, perhaps among the first to leave Mississippi. Milton was first called "Needmore" but when they were allowed a post office they named it Milton.

The railroad was surveyed through Milton when I was fifteen years old. We thought Milton would be the main town in the country, but it failed to be for some reason, and McCurtain about twelve miles away was the best town. I believe McCurtain is on what was called Wild Horse Prairie. My brother and I used to run cattle and brand them on that prairie, and we would eat mountain oysters like the veteran cowboys did. The grass was so fine, we would sometimes cut prairie hay off of it. Each spring we marked and branded cattle and had a regular roundup. We branded everything that ran with our cattle. Some people thought that unfair, but it was not, because it was the custom then. It was too much trouble to cut out strays and try to find out who they belonged to. So just everybody branded everything that ran with his cattle. A few, we had to feed through the fall, but usually we never saw them from one spring to the next, the grass was so fine.

There were lots of wild hogs on the range. They were so wild that when they heard a human being approaching, they would grunt and squeal and run off cracking their teeth together. Sometimes one old boar, braver than the rest, or more vicious, would turn and threaten to attack a horse. We would catch twenty or thirty of these wild hogs in the fall of the year and pen them up for our meat for the winter. We would feed them corn for a while, so the meat would be better, firmer, and so it would lose some of that wild taste. And we would kill all of them. It usually took twenty or thirty hogs to make enough meat and lard to do us. The hogs were smaller and we had worlds of company. Those wild hogs could not be kept in ordinary pens; we had to wall them up with boxing plank, the pens had to be high too, to keep these wild hogs from climbing out of these pens, and when we would go to throw corn to these hogs they would invariably run to the other side of the pen. They never got gentle. Now, we kill two good fat hogs for meat and lard for my family to do us until next hog killing time, or nearly that long.

We live on the old Pine Ridge Academy site, which was a Presbyterian Mission school and was probably established about 1840, and was discontinued, probably in time of the Civil War.

According to annual reports from various academies and schools, to the Commissioner of Indian affairs, made in 1854, the one from C. Byington, relative to Pine Ridge, reported forty-six girls, in good health and spirits, and the Academy, as being in a thriving condition. The report stated that the larger girls were being taught to make clothing for men and women and children.

I find no record of just what happened to the buildings, but I imagine that they just fell into decay. The well was pretty well filled with trash and logs when we moved here, about twenty years ago. We had it cleaned out and are using water out of it all of the time. My one regret is that I had the kitchen cellar, filled up instead of having it cleaned out.

My baby was only about a year old when we moved to this place and I was afraid she would drown in the water which stood in the old cellar all the time. I fully intend to have it excavated some day and use it for storage, and for a storm cellar.

There are rows of giant catalpa trees along the ridge back of the house and there are other giant catalpa trees in the yard and there is some shrubbery, which no doubt, was planted here when the Academy stood here.

Another thing I regret is, that we did not build our house of the pine trees which stood so thickly on this ridge. We cut these pine trees down and sold them, yet I hope some day to have a log house of pines grown on this particular ridge.

I am all white, as is also my husband, A. L. Osborne, whom I married on January 15, 1898.

My mother, Sara Hanna Hunt, lives at Durant,

The site of the former Pine Ridge Academy was one mile north of the Doaksville Cemetery in Choctaw County.