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INDEX CARDS

Civil War  
Mountain Station  
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Cotton Gin  
Trading Post  
Railroad - Choctaw, Oklahoma and Gulf

~~WILSON~~ INTERVIEW

6789

BAIRD, JAMES WILSON BIOGRAPHY FORM

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WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Bradley Bolinger

This report made on (date) July 21 1937

1. Name James Wilson Baird

2. Post Office Address Wilburton, Oklahoma, N. D.

3. Residence address (or location) 6 miles southwest on a farm

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month May Day 16 Year 1870

5. Place of birth Hartford Arkansas

6. Name of Father William Graham Baird Place of birth <sup>1851</sup> Fort Smith, Ark.

Other information about father My father was a trader and merchant

7. Name of Mother Mary DeLart Baird Place of birth Arkansas

Other information about mother My mother lived to be 89 years of age.

Buried in the Wilburton cemetery.

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story of the person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects and questions. Continue on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 6.

BAIRD, JAMES WILSON. INTERVIEW. 6789.

Bradley Bolinger,  
Interviewer,  
July 21, 1937.

An Interview with Mr. James Wilson Baird  
Wilburton, Oklahoma K. F. D.

White Man Early Day Settler.

My father's name was William Graham Baird, he was 83 years of age when he died and was buried in the Wilburton Cemetery. He was born near Fort Smith, Arkansas.

My father was a captain in the Confederate Army during the Civil War. His commanding officer was Stand Watie. Father was discharged after the war was over along in 1864 and moved to the Choctaw Nation. They stopped at Mountain Station <sup>on</sup> / top of a large mountain about eleven miles southw st of where Wilburton is now located. This Mountain Station was one of the principal stage coach stops in this whole county. There was lots of good water in a large spring there and my father operated the trading post there for three years. My father told me that at that time there was only one family of white people living anywhere in that neighboring country.

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His name was R. D. Edmonds and he was what was known as an Intermarried Choctaw Indian Citizen.

My father later went into the cattle business with a full-blood Indian, named Jack McCurtain. There were three of the McCurtain Brothers, each of whom was a governor of the Choctaw Tribe at some time.

When my birth was forthcoming my mother went back to Fort Smith for me to be born and I was brought back to my father's place while I was still an infant.

As I grew up as a boy to notice things the Choctaws all through this county-then named Gaines County-were very peaceable. They very seldom stole anything from the white settlers or other Indians.

They had what they called Indian court houses. There was an Indian court house one and one-half miles south of where Wilburton is now located. There were no jails or prisons in this county then. When another Choctaw did any stealing and killing he was immediately arrested by the Choctaw sheriff. The Choctaws conducted their c r i m i n a l

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courts and trials about like the whites did in the South before the Choctaws were moved here. There were no jails or prisons here then and when a Choctaw was found guilty, he was immediately tried and punished.

There were no doctors in this country in those days and when an Indian got sick there were some older Indians who would come in and go out in the woods and dig some roots and herbs and bring them in and cook them down and bathe the body of the sick Indian and give him some of the medicine to drink. They would perform a few ceremonies over the sick body. Many of the Indian families in those days just had a small place near the cabin of their home and any of the family who died was buried there. In some cases I have known them to bury the dead right in the yard of their cabin. In later years they decided to have a regular burying place where all the Choctaws could use it.

Most of the Choctaw Tribe in those days belonged to and believed in the Baptist Church. I remember that in

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many cases when a Choctaw was seriously sick and thought he or she was going to die, he or she would ask for the Indian preacher to come and if the sick person did not already belong to the church, this Indian preacher would take him or her, regardless of sickness or weather, out to the creek and baptize the sick person into the church.

All the Indians in those days could be trusted on their word and when an Indian was arrested and found guilty, in many cases he was immediately carried out to the whipping tree that always stood in the court house yard and held up to this tree for the whipping. I knew one who was tried for murder and found guilty and the Indian Judge was not ready to execute him and the day he was tried, he was told that he would be notified what day for him to report to be shot. These Choctaws would not leave the country after they had been tried and were going to be shot. They would say there was no other place for them to live, as their policy was that it

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was impossible for one citizen to join another tribe and they would not stand for him to live in their country so the Choctaws when they committed a crime always came back on the day the Indian judge had told them to report, even though they were to be shot when they got there. The Indian sheriff most always killed the prisoner.

One of the first cotton gins to be placed in this county was put in as best I remember in the year of 1886. This gin was put in by a man by the name of George W. Riddle. This gin was powered by four horses traveling in a circle out by the side of the gin. Three or four bales was a large days' ginning for a gin of this kind. However, there was not much cotton raised in the Nation in those days.

For the trading posts in this county then they had to haul their supplies to a trading post from Fort Smith. There were no roads hardly and creeks had to be forded and if the weather got bad before you returned it would

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take you sometimes a full week to make the round trip.

The Choctaw, Oklahoma & Gulf built a railroad through this county along about 1890, I believe and coal was found around Wilburton. However, there was no town here then. This new finding of coal and the railroad and all caused lot more white people to come in here and settle down. Many of them came her to work in the coal mines and the town of Wilburton began to grow fast.