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BAKER, ANNIE MUTHART.

INTERVIEW

10601.

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

Field Worker's name Anna R. Barry

This report made on (date) April 11 1938

1. Name Mrs. Annie Muthart Baker

2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 1110 South Macomb Street

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month March Day 17 Year 1874

5. Place of birth Pennsylvania

6. Name of Father William Muthart Place of birth Pennsylvania

7. Name of Mother Jennie Clemens Muthart Place of birth Pennsylvania

Other information about mother _____

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 7.

Anna R. Barry
Journalist
April 11, 1938.

Interview with Mrs. Annie Muthart Baker
1110 South Macomb Street, El Reno, Oklahoma.

I was just a small girl of four years of age when my parents moved from Pennsylvania to the plains of Kansas, locating in Barton County about six miles southeast of Great Bend. I attended first a rural school located about one-half mile from my home. When I was a child eleven years of age one Sunday morning my parents were attending church at a distance of three miles from our home. They had left us three children at home to care for the stock while they were gone. My parents had been gone something like an hour when they noticed great clouds of smoke in the south and it was not long until they could smell the smoke and they knew that it was a terrible prairie fire coming toward their home. We children became frightened but very soon my brother told us his two sisters his plans. He told us Father had a small patch of sod broken, five acres, and we pulled the wagon into this field, tied the horses and cows around the wagon - drove the hogs to this field and by this time the fire was nearing and we children climbed into the wagon box, clinging to each other and saw our home and everything we possessed swept by the fire. Our parents upon seeing this cloud of smoke in the direction of our home

started at break neck speed toward the claim fearing for their childrens' lives. But when they arrived home sometime after this prairie fire had swept our homestead, they found us, their children, safe as well as the stock. When Father reached us he fell on his knees and wept with joy that we were safe.

I can never forget our first trip to Oklahoma if I live to be a hundred, Mr. Baker and I ^{had been} married only three years when we decided to make the pilgrimage into the new country of the west, back in 1893. This was indeed an adventure and, to some extent, really a dangerous trip. There were no well defined roads to guide one through uninhabited areas, only our own sense of the general direction we wished to go and only an occasional village or town at which to inquire whether we were on the correct road. We would drive as long as we could see, then pitch camp near the roadside for the night, arising before dawn to continue our trek into what we thought then and what has since proved to be a land of wonderful opportunity and adventure for us.

It was on June 1, 1893, that we took up a relinquished claim in the Cherokee Strip locating seven miles northeast of Fairview. We at once started a sod house, one room, sixteen by sixteen feet.

After we had crossed the Kansas line, we became weary of riding endlessly over rolling plains, seeing so few people, that at times one

had the impression of being all alone in the world. We had crossed the Kansas line and gone something like twenty-five miles when we sud only became conscious of shadows moving along with us to our right. We couldn't make out at first whether these shadows were just those of cattle, horses or riders. Then I noticed some shadows on our left as well, and just then, we came over a slight rise, which silhouetted the "shadows" against the sky and to our horror we discovered the shadows were made by Indians! We expected nothing less than death at their hands. My husband turned to me and said; "My dear, they may become ugly and again they may not but to be safer, you get in the back of the wagon and take my gun. Should they attack us and capture me and you see that you can not escape you will have the gun and can decide what you wish to do about your life.

"No, No!" I sobbed, "if we die, we will die together." We drove on, as fast as our horses could draw the heavy load, expecting momentarily to be scalped by the Redskins. I was almost hysterical with relief when these Indians disappeared and not once during that journey of some fifty miles did the Indians speak to us.

Sometimes they would come close enough to the wagon so that we could clearly see their painted faces and they would circle the wagon at times but they maintained complete silence all the time. Really, I doubt if there is anything more terrifying than certain kinds of silence. If the Indians had shouted or whooped it wouldn't have been so hard on our nerves as that ominous, foreboding silence. We never did find out why these Indians followed us, unless it was through a sort of sardonic form of humor. They couldn't help knowing we were terrified of them.

It was years before I overcame my fear of the Indians, although I saw many Indians those first years. I used to be terribly frightened on numerous occasions when the Indians came to "call". I would be working, and would turn around and there would be one or two Indians sitting on the floor, or on chairs. They were so quiet that I never would hear them come in. The first time that occurred I was almost paralyzed with fear, when I discovered them in fact, I was too frightened to make an outcry, or move, but just stood staring at them. They were an old couple and really seemed to enjoy my discomfiture, for they both laughed, then the woman said, in broken English, "we good Indians, come to see little white squaw. You maybe got tobacco?" I nodded my head for I could not possibly have spoken as my tongue seemed frozen to the roof of my

mouth. I went into the next room and got some of my husband's tobacco and when I came out into the kitchen, there the old squaw stood turning my very sharp bowie knife, over in her hands. She tested the blade, then grunted and turned to me. I said a little prayer, for I sincerely thought my time had come, but no, all she wanted was the knife. "You give Indian nice knife?" she asked. "Yes, yes. You may have it," I answered quickly and gladly. She could have had anything in the house, I was so relieved that it wasn't my scalp this squaw had in mind. After looking around a bit more and taking some beads, which were lying on the table, they left as they had come without ceremony or saying "thank you" or "good bye". I sank limply into a chair and cried from sheer nervousness and when my husband came home that evening, I told him of my experience and added that he simply had to put a screen on the door with a latch so that I would at least know when I had a visitor. This he did, and I had no further surprises.

The weather was lovely for quite sometime after we arrived in the Strip and we went happily about the task of building our home. We made a late garden, breaking a few acres of sod, it was early in the Fall of 1893 that we decided it would be best for us to go back to Kansas to spend the winter. When we returned to our

claim the next spring, Mr. Baker established a blacksmith shop. He was a mechanic who could make new machinery or could skillfully repair the most intricate machinery then in use. He could make a complete wagon or put spokes into a wheel that had been broken. Most of his work, however, consisted of shoeing horses and oxen and sharpening plows. For fuel he used oak-bark. It was at this blacksmith shop in bad weather that men gathered around the roaring red-hot stove and with high-heeled boots, chewed tobacco, talked religion, politics and whittled. The lonely prairie dwellers although ordinarily too busy to stop and idle away much time, were nevertheless glad to enjoy such pleasant association before beginning what were many times long tiresome journeys back to isolated cabins or huts.

The first winter we lived on our claim, our white flour began to run low, we had raised quite a quantity of Kaffir corn and my husband took this Kaffir corn to mill and had it ground into flour. Of course this made very dark bread but it was the best we could do until we raised a crop of wheat. White flour biscuits were considered the rarest treat and I usually saved these for Sunday morning breakfast. There was very little sugar in our home during the first two years we lived on our

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claim. My husband helped a neighbor cut cane and make this cane into sorghum molasses, Mr. Baker received twenty gallons as his share for his labor and this sorghum solved our sugar problem the first year. Everything from coffee to preserves was sweetened with molasses and puddings, custards, pies and even preserves were made with molasses.

We lived on our claim for five years, then moved to Fairview where we lived for thirty years.