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BAKER, FRANK ALPHONSO. INTERVIEW 10607

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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 21 and 22 1938

1. Name Frank Alphonso Baker

2. Post Office Address Knowles, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month February Day 10 Year 1861

5. Place of birth Greene County Illinois

6. Name of Father Calvin Morris Baker Place of birth Virginia

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Rebecca (Dudley) Baker Place of birth Philadelphia 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 23

Anna R. Barry
Journalist
April 21, 1938

Interview with Frank Alphonso Baker,
Knowles, Oklahoma.

I was born in Greene County, Illinois, February 10, 1861. My father, Calvin Morris Baker, was born in Virginia; my mother, Rebecca Dudley Baker, was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. They met in Illinois where they were married and lived for about twelve years. Then we moved to Kansas, living in Topeka five years, then we moved to Osage County, where we remained two years. Father bought a partnership in a department store in Larned, Kansas, and we moved there. I clerked in his store for seven years. It was in Larned that I met and married my first wife, Georgia Woods. We had two children, a boy and a girl. When the boy was a young baby, my wife died and shortly afterward, I left Larned settling in Great Bend, Kansas. I worked in another store there, as manager for two years. I met Annie Muthart in Great Bend, and we became very good friends. Her parents left there, going to St. Joseph, Missouri, where they bought property and it was there that Annie and I were married forty-seven years ago. We lived in Great Bend for three years where our two older children, both girls, were born. When the youngest was ten months old, we decided to go down into Oklahoma and look things over, intending to locate a homestead. We sold most of our household goods and loaded the rest into a covered

wagon, known then as a "Prairie schooner" and started south for Oklahoma. My mother and Aunt Hannah made the trip with us, following in an equipage similar to ours. It would create a furor should such a sight appear in public today, but then it was no uncommon thing to see wagons such as ours, loaded to overflowing. We had trunks and boxes tied on the sides, coops of chickens fastened on the rear, while beneath swung our tubs, jugs of fresh water and some carpenter tools. On top of the wagon I tied a ladder. Within was a stove, rolls of bedding, some small pieces of furniture, a box of blacksmith tools and other odds and ends.

During the second day of our trip, we almost lost our baby. She was sleeping in the rear of the wagon on a feather bed and awoke without making any disturbance, so we thought she was still sleeping. She pulled herself up and, we supposed, must have crawled out onto the chicken coops and rolled to the ground. We didn't hear a thing and no telling when we would have missed her; fortunately Mother and Aunt Hannah, who were some little distance behind, saw her in the road and brought her on with them. My wife almost had hysterics when they drove up by the side of us and related what had occurred.

We arrived in Oklahoma the year following the opening of the Cherokee Strip. We scouted around to see what was available in the

way of good land; when it looked as if I wasn't going to be successful, a man of the name of Schwalk told me that the homestead just north of him had been abandoned and that if he were I, he would put a contest on it. To do this, I had to go to Alva; Schwalk very kindly offered the hospitality of his home for my family, as it was practically impossible for me to take them to Alva with me. I drove my wagon into his yard, putting up a tent for my wife and girls to live in during my absence. It was summer, so the arrangement was really very pleasant. I had no trouble about the contest, as the man to whom the claim formerly belonged didn't fight it. He was from Texas and after coming here, staking and filing on a claim his wife refused to live in Oklahoma, so he left his homestead. Just another case of, 'one man's loss is another's gain'. The land was in what was then old Woods County but is now Major County, just a few miles from Rusk. It was very good land.

My first house was a 'soddy', twelve feet square in which we lived until October, when I built a large sod house having three rooms, which I plastered, then whitewashed inside and out. Our house was the only house in the country which was plastered and whitewashed and besides, we put in glass windows and a split log floor which made our house something for the community to point

to with pride' when showing visitors over the countryside. Being a carpenter and blacksmith by trade, I made all the furniture we needed besides the few pieces we brought into Oklahoma with us. We had brought along a cook stove but I made a heating stove of sheet iron, which lasted us for many years.

In building our second house, I made the roof of red clay. We didn't move in until after the first rain, as a roof made of clay leaks like a sieve during the first rain, but after it has become dry, it is as hard and impervious to weather as cement.

We got along better than most of the settlers, because I had my blacksmith shop (a half dugout, half blackjack log structure) and did work for all the neighbors, who practically all paid me back in work. I always said, that I could break more sod with a hammer than I could with a team of horses. I guess every horse for miles around was shod by me, wagons and other farm implements were also kept in repair and in return I had very little farm work to do myself. I believe my farm was the best cared for piece of land in the country. Lots and lots of people had to steal cedar from Government land and sell it to have money for food. It would take them over a week to get and dispose of the cedar as they had to do it with as much secrecy as possible. There were United

States Marshals in there to keep people from taking the cedar, but they knew how desperately hard up the settlers were and that they were either forced to steal or starve so they closed their eyes to most of the thieving.

I was more or less in the Indian country when first settling here and I came to know many of the Indian customs as well as the Indian himself. The Indian Reservation at Cantonment isn't very far from my old homestead. I found the Indians very friendly, if treated right. The three main chiefs at Cantonment were Good Bear, American Horse and Mr. Moore, the latter a full blood rapaho. Why he was named Moore, no one knew, but the agent at Cantonment told us that he had been informed when he first came there that Moore had adopted the name of a trapper who came into the Territory long before settlement and made himself very popular with the Indians by some feats of bravery, saving Chief Moore's life when he was attacked by a mountain lion. At that time Moore was just a young lad with an Indian name in common with the youth of the day. After Mr. Moore had saved his life at the risk of his own, the Indian youth adopted Moore's name as a mark of respect and gratitude.

I once asked Good Bear what Chief Moore's original name was, but the old chief only grinned and said; "Ugh! That's all forgotten long ago, it much better so. Chief Moore now great Chief; wouldn't like

his Indian name to be known." Then he grinned from ear to ear and looked as though he'd like to share a good joke with me, but changed his mind much to my disappointment. "Better so you not know Chief Moore's Indian name, he wasn't proud of it, you see he got first name when very little boy. Moore is his second and last name."

Perhaps you know that an Indian is first given some descriptive name, which he may change when he becomes a warrior. Often times the first name is given in ridicule, as Johnny Fall-in-the-River. An Indian earned that sobriquet as a result of having fallen in the river when he attended his first big dance. He was all dressed up in full regalia with paint, etc., trying to get into the dance with the warriors when someone elbowed him out of the way, causing him to trip and fall in the river so spoiling his appearance. The little Indian girls laughed at him and called him Johnny Fall-in-the-River, which name stuck to him until his first successful hunt.

There was a Government scout of the name of Amos Chapman who lost a leg down in the Territory before it was settled and when I knew him, he was drawing a pension from the Government. He had the biggest cattle ranch in that country and was married to a Cheyenne woman. He kept a Chinese cook because he didn't like Indian cooking. In fact his house as well as the ranch was well staffed with

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'helpers'. One didn't exactly call the help servants in that country.

When you went to the ranch to call on Chapman, a man would come out, take your horse, put him up and when you were ready to leave, some one brought your horse or team around already for the trip. That was something unusual in those days and never failed to make a big impression on anyone coming there.

My father's half brother got into trouble up in Illinois and skipped out of there going into Kansas. He was quite a drinking man and one time when very drunk, got into a fight with another man and knocked his eye out. That was a penitentiary offense in that state, so Uncle Nate had to get out in a hurry. He was always the black sheep of the family and Father was always having to get him out of one scrape after another. However, that was one scrape which Father could do nothing about, so Uncle Nate skipped. At the time he landed in Kansas, the country was not very well settled and the Wyandotte Indians were on the war path. They captured Uncle Nate and were going to kill him but a daughter of the chief took a fancy to him and begged her father to let her have him. The Indians made Uncle Nate understand that if he would marry the Indian girl they would let him live as long as he lived with her. He consented, thinking that he would be able to escape later, but it was so long before an opportunity presented itself, that when it did come he

no longer cared to get away.

Years later in 1871, my father came down here and located Uncle Nate, but found that he was perfectly satisfied with his Indian life and family for there were eleven children. He was always a great fighter and seldom lost a battle, so that the Indians respected his ability in that line. Uncle Nate became quite wealthy and very popular among the Indian braves. They have no use for a failure of any kind. When he was drinking though, he would get into too many fights with the other Indians, who would sometimes 'gang up' on him and when this happened and there were too many against him, his wife would be afraid he might be killed and would come out, get him and make him go home to bed until he sobered up. He would never argue with her, but would go right along very peaceably which always seemed so surprising in one of his belligerent nature. I talked with a Seneca Indian from New York who was visiting at Cantonment and who told me he knew Uncle Nate, Father's half brother very well. He said he had seen him fight two or three Indians when he was drinking and he would whip them all.

The Indians at that time were very honest. My brother had a job one winter with a Kansas Commission house which shipped a lot of cattle into Oklahoma to pasture them. It was a hard winter and

there was very little feed raised that year. When the snow was on the ground, all we had to feed the cattle was grass hay. Many cattle died and Brother would give the dead cattle to the Indians if they would skin them. He would have to have the hides to account for the number of dead cattle. When the Indians skinned the cattle, they would place the hides on the bank of the creek for Brother Harry to pick up later. Sometimes it would be days before he got around to gather them up, but the Indians never took one of them, although they could have used them for clothing or moccasins.

When the agent of the Commission House came out in the spring they gave Harry all of the hides. The Indians wouldn't always take the dead animal, but we didn't know why. Before using any, they tested each by stepping on its neck.

When we first came to Oklahoma, we worked for the Government, that is, we farmed Indian land living across the river from the Government camp. One time when we were ready to go home, we discovered that we could not cross it. We tried to get the Indians to tell us whether we could cross safely for they always knew about those things. None of the Indians would speak a word, pretending they knew nothing. I played a cornet a lot in those days and seldom went anywhere without it. While we were waiting for the gang boss to get some information out of the Indian bucks, I noticed a little sick boy lying in a

hammock near us and thought I would play for him just to see what he would do. In no time at all, there was a circle of squaws around me, they in turn being circled by Indian men. At the close of my 'one man' concert, Chief Good Bear came to me, led me over to my horse and put his hand on it near the top of his back, indicating thereby, how high the water was. I asked him what crossing to take, as there were two. He held up two fingers to show we should cross at the two cottonwood trees. Harry's horse was a good swimmer, but mine almost drowned both himself and me, before he got the right feel of the water. I was as bad off, or worse for I couldn't swim a lick and when Harry first went in, ^{my horse followed and} ~~he went clear~~ under and began floundering, drifting with the stream. Brother pulled his gray horse over to us which gave my horse the moral support he needed and he finally got his bearings much to the satisfaction of us both.

The Indians down there at that time were mostly Cheyenne and Sioux; there were some few Arapahoes, but not many. The chiefs, who ran the camp, were Gorse, Good Bear and American Horse and there were a lot of lesser chiefs, Yellow Eyes, Powder Face, Night Killer, Beaver Tail, White Eagle and many more.

Once when the river was "up" there were three days when the Indians wouldn't try to swim across even to get their ponies which

were on the white man's side. Finally on the third day, Chief Moore decided he'd better swim across to get the horses, as he was afraid the white men would charge them for pasturing. He swam over and drove the horses into the stream, although they didn't want to enter the water for the river was way out of its banks and the current was very swift and strong. The horses went in without any hesitancy, but the mare with colts hung back until Moore drove them into the stream. It was interesting to watch how they protected their babies crossing that river. The mares would get the colts on the 'up side', so the current would wash them down against the rafters who could then help the babies swim across. "Ugh, Mamma horse heap wise", grunted Yellow Eyes who was watching with us.

Once when we were doing some hay baling on land which we had leased from the Indians, we had to employ Indian labor. We had been told that we would have trouble with Chief Powder Face when we went in to lease the land but we found him very nice to deal with. We gave him a share of the crop for his lease, to others we paid a certain sum an acre for the grass. It was very hard to get young Indians who had been away to school to talk English or to get any of them who could speak it for that matter, because if they did the other Indians made fun of them. When we started

baling the hay Chief Powder Face said he would get us a crew of Indians, which he did. Yellow Eyes did the tying, Night Killer was on the stack to do the pitching. We knew that both could speak English but neither would say a word. In order to tie correctly, the one doing the tying would have to call out 'block' when so much hay had gone through, so we would know when to put in the block. I couldn't get Yellow Eyes to say a word, so began bragging on Night Killer saying, "I bet Night Killer can say 'block' better than Yellow Eyes can". Finally he grinned and called out 'block' at the proper time. Every time he'd yell out 'block'; they would both laugh. Along toward evening a crowd of Indians came down to watch us and everytime Night Killer would holler 'block' they would all laugh and say things to him in the Indian language; however, he went right on with his work. The next morning when we resumed baling we couldn't get a word out of him for love or money.

At Cantonment the Government would furnish the Indians with cattle to eat, allowing the Indians to kill them as they wished. This killing was done by the Indians mounting ponies, circling the cattle and riding around and around them in ever narrowing circles, meanwhile shooting arrows into the mass until the cattle dropped, some of them dead, others only wounded. The Indians

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would dismount and finish killing the cattle not yet dead, by stabbing them with their hunting knives. When a beef was dead, the first thing the Indians would do would be to rip it open, remove the intestines, cut them open, empty them and then eat them just as they were. To the Indians they were evidently a delicacy. The Indians always knew when there was any dead stock on the prairie long before the owner of the animal knew it. They would watch the buzzards and when they saw them circling over a spot, would investigate and if they found some animal dead or dying, would leave one of their number on guard to ward off any other Indians or wild beasts likely to devour the dead animal, while the other Indians went to tell the owner and ask for the carcass. Everyone gave such stock as this to the Indians in return for the hides when they had skinned the dead creatures. One time an Indian came telling me that a calf of mine was dying. I went with him to see it and there I found it had died of black leg and was so bad from that disease that it smelled terrible. The Indian wanted to trade for the calf so we told them we would take a bridle one of the horses on a pony. Without a word of argument the Indian stripped the bridle off and gave it to us.

Indians always like to appear just at meal time, but if you let them eat without paying, the first thing you know you will have the whole tribe to feed, for what you do for one, you were expected

to do for all in that tribe. That makes it necessary to charge the Indians something if only a very small amount, in fact they expected to pay and if one didn't charge, the Indian had no respect for that one's business ability, thinking he was an easy mark.

In the early days, the Indians were a pretty pagan bunch and had many barbaric ceremonies. One of the worst of these was the Snake Dance which no one outside of those believing in that particular cult, was allowed to witness. Any white man caught trying to watch the Snake Dance was put to death and in

very hideous fashion. Mr. Charman told us of one of his cowboys who hid in the woods and witnessed one of these dances. He became so sickened at what he saw that he inadvertently gave his presence away and was hauled down out of the tree in which he had been hiding. Early the next morning the other hands found his body at the corral gate and so terrible were the mutilations to which he had been subjected, that they couldn't have recognized him except for his boots and other clothing lying beside him. On his chest was the mark peculiar to a certain group of Indians, a fetish sign showing that he had met death due to desecrating the

Indian worship. They had evidently carried his body back to the ranch, leaving it there as warning to other cowboys who might have some idea of doing as he had done. There was nothing Chapman could do about it, as he could never have proven who the guilty parties were and besides the Agency had warned white men time and again not to interfere with the Indians or their religious ceremonies.

My brother Harry and another fellow hid out and watched one of their Snake Dances one time, escaping capture only by the skin of their teeth. It was several days before they would talk about what they had seen and then to only a few whom they knew wouldn't betray their identity to the Indians. Had they discovered who the white boys were, they would have killed them, even if a year or two had elapsed before finding out who they were. Harry and the other boy left the Territory six months later as they were fearful the Indians would discover that they had watched the Snake Dance.

In the Snake Dance the Indian would dance until they worked themselves into a perfect frenzy keeping up the dance continuously for days and nights without food, drink or rest. All this time they would have in their hands, large snakes mostly rattlesnakes, as the more dangerous the reptile, the more glory to the participant.

These snakes were held aloft where they struggled to reach the dancer, who in turn laughed, sneered at, berated and ridiculed the reptile in his helplessness to harm the dancer. They were wrapped around the necks, waists and different parts of the bodies of the dancers who always kept tight hold of the snake just behind the head, for a slip there would probably have proved fatal. Finally when the dance reached its height, the Indian ate the snake raw and alive, taking bites out of it while going through intricate steps of his dance. The writhing of the reptile would become so terrible at this juncture, that sometimes it was able to loose its head and strike back at the Indian usually causing his death. In that event, the tribe considered that the young brave had offended the gods in some manner and so was destroyed by the spirits of the evil gods which dwelt in the snake. No attempt was made to save the life of such a one, or in any way to ease his suffering. One very old man's snake got its head loose and struck him many times before he could kill it. This old man was weakened from dancing so long without rest or food and simply couldn't hold the snake. They said his death was terrible to see and the way the other Indians shunned him, refusing any aid, was heartless indeed.

The educated Indians in the early days did not like to use their educations when they returned home, because of the ridicule

they were subjected to from the rest of the tribe. One Indian girl named Mary Preston (that was her school name but her Indian name was Bright Flower) married Chief Little Horse. They were both Cheyenne and she was a graduate of Carlisle, but he had only a mission school education. When she came home from college, she was never known to speak a word of English unless it was necessary to conduct some business transaction. She couldn't entirely hide her education however, for when one saw her, he couldn't fail to notice her refinement and culture. One time my brother, his wife and I were down at Cantonment and went to see Mary as we were farming her land and had to see her on some business pertaining to the lease. We went down on Sunday and when we went into her wigwam we found her busily engaged in beading some moccasins. She nodded smilingly to our greeting but said no word in return. I kidded her about working on Sunday but she gave no sign that she understood anything I said, going on placidly with her work. Brother's wife grew impatient with her actions, and decided Mary was dumb and couldn't understand English. Although I assured her that she could and Ida (Harry's wife) began poking around the wigwam, making fun of things in general and Mary in particular. I could see that wasn't going

to set very well with Mary, whose eyes were flashing somewhat dangerously and I finally said to Ida; "You'd better keep still, Mary can understand everything you're saying, she has a better education than you have." The only evidence Mary gave of knowing what had been said, was the look that came over her face, the corners of her mouth twitched as she tried to keep from laughing. When Harry came in, he, too, kidded Mary about working on Sunday with Mary still saying nothing quietly folded up her work and put it away.

Abe Morse, was another Carlisle graduate who wouldn't talk unless it was to transact business. He could make out any kind of legal papers and was a very shrewd business man which several white men found out to their sorrow, when they tried to cheat him out of lease money.

The Indians had no family names until the Government gave them names. Before that time, every child was named from some incident occurring to them, the girls keeping their baby names but the boys could win another title when they became braves. They usually tried to obtain some high sounding names. I always found if one treated the Indian all right, he in turn was a good friend but on the other hand the Indians never forgot or forgave

mistreatment. At first the only place the Indians could buy was at the agency store where the clerks charged them much more than they should have, because they knew they could take advantage of the ignorance of the Indians. Other men, who had store, were afraid to credit the Indian, because there was no way they could collect, if the Indian didn't want to pay. Finally a Mr. Fireball came to the blackjacks and put in a store and he would credit purchases to the Indians and soon had practically all their business as he charged them the same as he did anyone else. They soon found out that if they didn't pay up when they got their allotments, he would give them no more credit and they would have to buy at the Cantonment store, paying double. Some of them thought they must pay immediately upon receipt of their check, so would sometimes come in the middle of the night to settle their bills. Indians are great gamblers and will go on betting as long as they have anything to bet. White men took advantage of them on this score, whenever they could and many times Fireball would step in and prevent some white slicker from taking an Indian to a 'cleaning'. Things of that sort made the Indians strong friends of Fireball.

One time, some white men were building a schoolhouse and needed a ridge pole for their roof. They went over and took a

cedar tree from the Indians' land, and when the Indians found out what the white men had done they came to the workers, demanding that they give up the cedar tree or pay for it. This the white men refused to do until the Indians proved that it belonged to them. The Indians said all right, they would go bring the stump and show that it matched. While they were gone, the white men squared the end of the pole so that it wouldn't match. When the Indians returned, they took one look at the pole and knew what had been done. "Humph"! grunted Chief Powder Face "Indian one big fool, all go away when one should have stayed behind along with pole and watched" and with no further argument, they took the stump and returned to their camp. They all knew they had been out-smarted in the deal and cheated out of their cedar, they also knew the joke was on them and they wouldn't become more ridiculous by continuing the discussion.

Most all of the Indians had to haul their drinking water from a Government well which was operated by a force pump. Once when an Indian came to get his supply, he was given a new barrel in which to haul his water. He was too lazy to remove the top and, as the bung hole was near the top and open, he decided to fill it through the hole. Placing the pump hose in the opening, he lay back on the grass waiting for the barrel to be filled. The

force of the pump was so great, that it wasn't long until the barrel was full to capacity and the pump was still working away forcing water into it. Finally something had to give and the barrel burst at every seam, spraying water over everything within reach. That was one time an Indian got a good shower bath unexpectedly.

One time when the Indians were on the war path, Chief Moore moved his camp into the yard of Mr. Whitaker so as to protect the family and property. Whitaker had helped the young braves of Moore's camp one time when some white men were attempting to force them into signing a lease on their land, which would have resulted in a great loss to the Indians. Moore, like many of the other Indians, never failed to return a favor done to him or to his followers. The trouble at this time was caused by Powder Face who was a Sioux Indian. He and his band were usually at the bottom of any outbreak of discontent among the Indians. Another time he created a disturbance against the whites and the fight was aimed at my brother-in-law who was living on Indian land and teaching in the mission school. Moore was a great friend of Arthur's as were nearly all the Indians on the reservation. He came to Arthur in the middle of the night and told him to get his family together quickly that he was taking them to a little lake

quite some distance from there, where they were to remain until Moore came back for them, as their lives were in grave danger. Arthur did not question Moore, but did as he was told for he knew Moore wouldn't come to him with such commands without sufficient cause. Moore himself took Arthur and his family away leaving a band of young braves behind to guard Arthur's property; otherwise he would have lost everything for what Powder Face and his band couldn't have taken away with them they would have destroyed. Powder Face was very angry when he arrived to find Moore's young men on guard, and would no doubt have attacked them but Moore was too powerful on the reservation to be antagonized. Powder Face became so mean and caused so much trouble among the younger Indians in various camps that he was finally run off the reservation, and eventually was killed.

Shortly before Powder Face was killed some Indians came swooping down on a white settlement in the dead of night, yelling their blood curdling war whoops and set fire to all the buildings in their path. While the people were engaged in getting what they could out of the burning buildings and trying to save

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some of the outbuildings and homes, the Indians drove off all the horses and cattle they could round up. My mother's house was one that burned to the ground with most of the furnishings although we managed to save all the stock, chickens and a few pieces of furniture. The buildings all went as well as the hay we had in three large stacks between the barn and house. Practically all our clothes were lost in the fire. We felt that we were lucky to get off with our lives and with no loss of stock.