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BARKER, E. O. (Dr.)

~~INTERVIEW~~

#8554

.214

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

Field Worker's name Ruth E. MoonThis report made on (date) September 17, 1937.1. Name Dr. E. O. Barker2. Post Office Address Guthrie, Oklahoma3. Residence address (or location) 623 E. Springer4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month July Day 18 Year 18545. Place of birth Southeast Indiana6. Name of Father John James Barker Place of birth IndianaOther information about father Ran Saw mills, could do anything with tools.7. Name of Mother Mary Sybil Mott Place of birth Indiana

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 13.

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Ruth E. Moon,
Interviewer.
September 17, 1937.

Interview with Dr. E. O. Barker.
Guthrie, Oklahoma.
Born July 18, 1854.
Father-John James Barker
Mother-Mary Sybil Mott

Dr. Barker came to Guthrie in June, 1889, thinking that the new city would be a good place for a young doctor to locate. He was \$300.00/ⁱⁿ debt, due to a long spell of sickness he had just recovered from, and he found that there were already seventy-five physicians here. He wrote his mother in Nebraska that if anyone in a crowd should call "Doctor", one third of the audience would answer. So the new field did not look very promising, but he found plenty to do from the very start, and now he is the only one of those original doctors left.

Until two years ago he was actively engaged in his profession. At that time he tried to retire, but patients come to his home to consult him, and they still do.

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F. B. Lillie and A. B. Wright had a drug store on West Noble when Dr. Barker arrived, and his first office was next door to it.

About a year later this partnership between Lillie and Wright was dissolved. Mr. Wright has a store at Chandler now, and Lillie moved his store to the east side of town. Dr. Barker moved with Lillie, and had his office in the same building with this drug store at several locations for a number of years. At one time he owned a half interest in it. Mr. Lillie died in 1926, and the store has since been run by his son.

There were still four towns here when Dr. Barker came. Each had its own city officers, but they had agreed on a common school board in order to have uniform schools.

Soon after Dr. Barker's arrival, a vacancy occurred on this board, and he was appointed to fill it. He served as member and clerk. That board had a real job. There were no buildings. There was no equipment;

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no money, and no legal way to raise any, until the legislature could meet and provide ways of doing such things. But the people of Guthrie wanted good public schools, and the board was determined that they should have them.

Vacant store buildings were rented in various parts of town. The location was determined by where they could be found.

Ten teachers were hired, and furniture ordered. The board issued warrants that were accepted for a while, but when the furniture arrived, the railroad company demanded cash for the freight. Joe McNeal, the banker, was a member of the board, and he agreed to advance the several hundred dollars needed if the other members of the board would sign a note for the amount. They did, and the furniture was installed in time to start school that fall. This was the first free public school in the Territory. The other towns had subscription schools the first year.

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After awhile the warrants ~~warrants~~ were not accepted so readily, so an assessment was made on all the lots in the city, with a levy of \$1.00 for each \$100.00 valuation. There was no way of making people pay this. Those who planned on making Guthrie their home paid it. The drifters ignored it, but the Registrar of Deeds agreed to refuse to transfer the title of any lot on which this tax was not paid, and in that way they collected a large share of it. The full record of the meetings of this first board are on file with the present clerk of the board of education in Guthrie.

After a year the statutes of Nebraska were applied to this territory by an Act of Congress. Then a legal election was held and a member was elected from each ward with the president of the board elected at large. Dr. Barker was the president. Before time for the next such election the laws were changed so he was the only president of a school board chosen in such a way.

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The people of Guthrie did not want their city government to be political, so at a mass meeting one hundred representative men were chosen to nominate a ticket, and the people promised to elect the ticket. This committee of one hundred met in a building on the present site of the Bath House. They first offered the mayoralty to Dr. Barker, but he refused it because of lack of time. They then offered it to U. S. Spencer, F. B. Lillie, and A. J. Spengel, in order named. Mr. Spengel accepted, and became the first legal mayor of the city of Guthrie. Neal Higgins told how Mr. Spengel, who owned a furniture store, bought a tall silk hat as soon as he was made mayor, and always wore it as long as he was in office.

Dr. Barker served as surgeon for the company of soldiers who were stationed here to keep order before the government was established, and when Lieutenant Capron was recruiting the troop of Rough Riders that went from the western half of the territory, Dr. Barker was the medical examiner appointed by Governor Barnes

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to decide their fitness. Eight-five went from Guthrie.

Dr. Barker also acted as physician for the inmates of the Federal jail, during the time that Bill Grimes was Marshal. He went to Orlando and stayed all one day with an outlaw who had killed an officer, and had been fatally wounded himself. The man died in the night, but the Doctor has forgotten his name.

Dr. H. L. Smith was the most prominent doctor during the first few years. One day his son, Dr. Ralph Smith, sent for Dr. Barker. The son had just found his father in the hay loft of the barn, where he had suffered a heart attack after going up to throw down hay. He died in a few minutes after Dr. Barker reached him. That was in 1898 or 99, and he is frequently referred to by his former patients to this day. There was a Dr. Charlie Smith who was no relation to H. L. or Ralph, and also a Dr. Hilia Smith, no relation to either, who was the first woman doctor Dr. Barker had ever known.

At first anyone could practice medicine in the Territory, for there was no way to make them have a license. But after the legislature had met and made

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laws governing such things, a board of examiners was formed, with Dr. J. A. Overstreet of Kingfisher, who had been appointed Superintendent of the Board of Health, as chairman. Dr. Barker was the Secretary, and this board issued the first licenses to practice medicine in the Territory.

Dr. Joseph Pinquard performed the first major surgical operation here, about '92. It was the amputation of a breast, and the woman lives in Chandler now. Some of the doctors tried to start a hospital the second summer but they received so little support that the undertaking was dropped. There was a great deal of sickness, typhoid and malaria, with various combinations of the two.

In 1902, Drs. A. L. Blesh and Horace Reed opened a temporary hospital on the second floor of a building on Oklahoma Avenue, and the next year they built the front half of the hospital building on the west hill. (now used as a nurses' home). They ran it for about two years, but it was heavily in debt, so a Hospital Association was formed. About six other doctors took stock,

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and were to pay \$100. a year towards getting it out of debt. After the first year only Dr. J. L. Melvin and Dr. Barker continued in the Association. Dr. Barker was Secretary and Treasurer until the hospital was turned over to the Methodist Church, about 1907. He then became a member of the staff, and as long as there was a Nurses' training school there, he had the Chairs of Obstetrics and Anaesthesia.

He and Dr. M. P. Halsted and Dr. Joseph Pinquard established the Oklahoma Medical Journal in January 1893. After the first year the other two dropped out and Dr. Barker edited the Journal alone for a number of years. In January, 1899, Dr. A. L. Elesh became Associate Editor in charge of a department of surgery, and in January, 1901, Dr. John Ransom Hamill and Dr. R. V. Smith were also added as Associates. With the issue of December, 1901, (Volume 9, No. 12). Dr. Barker announced the sale of the Journal to Dr. J. R. Phelan of Oklahoma City, editor of the Oklahoma Medical News, the merged publications to be known as the Oklahoma Medical News--Journal.

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The Oklahoma Territorial Medical Association was formed at a meeting in Oklahoma City, May 9, 1893, with Dr. Barker as one of the organizers. There were twenty-eight Charter members and the first officers were: Dr. D. G. Walker, Oklahoma City, president; Dr. E. O. Barker, Guthrie, Vice-president; and Dr. C. D. Arnold, El Reno, Secretary.

When the associations of the twin territories merged in 1906, Dr. Barker served as secretary of the new Oklahoma Territorial Medical Society. After statehood he was secretary and treasurer of the Oklahoma State Medical Association for nine years.

In 1909, the state association established an organ of its own, called the Journal of the Oklahoma State Medical Association. Dr. Barker managed the organization of the new publication and ran it for the first year.

During the Renfro and Barnes Administrations Dr. Barker served as surgeon to the Oklahoma National Guard with the rank of Captain.

He is the only charter member of the Guthrie

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First Methodist Church, still here. During the first years he sang in the choir, and served several years as a trustee. He was a member of the board of trustees when the present building was constructed.

Dr. Barker served for a number of years on the board of U. S. pension examiners, until he retired because of age.

During the World War he was a member of the Auxiliary, board of medical examiners, which passed on cases on which the regular board disagreed.

He has filled both the posts of County health officer and city physician at some time during his long residence in Guthrie.

Last winter the Logan County Medical Association voted him an honorary membership in recognition of his distinguished service.

Dr. Barker was married to Miss Calla Dorland in Guthrie in 1896, and they bought their home on east Springer Avenue in 1898, where they have lived ever since.

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About the time they were married the young couple had been buggy riding one Sunday evening and then were attending a tent meeting, when suddenly a whistle blew loud and long. A deputy marshal who was in the audience made a sudden exit. They later learned that the famous outlaw, Bill Doolin had escaped from the federal jail. He stopped a buggy-riding couple and took their rig from them, and the Barkers felt glad that they had returned safely from their ride before the jail break.

During the first months in Guthrie each of the four townsites had its provisional government electing a mayor, city council, registrar of deeds, city clerk and treasurer. Police were appointed.

Controversies over ownership of lots were heard before boards of arbitration, the mayor of each townsite appointing a board of three men for his city. These boards had no real authority, but their decisions were usually respected and the certificates which they issued later accepted as proof of ownership.

The most interesting story Dr. Barker recalled in

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this connection was about an elderly couple who ran a restaurant down the hill about a block west of where the city hall is now located.

Their building had a tent top, and was cheaply constructed, but they were trying to make a living in it. On the back of the lot came a man who was contesting them. The Board of Arbitration decided in favor of this man, and after the couple had served supper one evening, the police came and set all their things out in the street, and ended by knocking the building apart and piling it with the goods. A crowd gathered, in fact, the street was full of people for a half block each way, but the blue uniforms of soldiers were much in evidence and everything was quiet. But as soon as it was dark, several wagons full of lumber rolled up, and unloaded, a bunch of carpenters arrived, and as it was a moonlight night they made good progress. When daylight came the building was finished, and the old people served breakfast in their new restaurant. It was a strong, well-built house with a shingle roof. These people then appealed their case, and waited until

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there were legal courts to try such cases in, and then they won out.

Dr. Barker did not say so, but he probably helped shingle that house by moonlight, for he had been a carpenter and cabinet-maker before he went to North-western Medical College at St. Joseph, Missouri. He had learned the trade in his grandfather's shop in Indiana, beginning when he was fifteen. Dr. Barker's father, who had taught school, ran a saw-mill, and farmed. He had also the ability to do anything with tools. He died when the boy was fourteen. The future doctor worked as a carpenter in Indiana and later in Nebraska until he decided to become a physician. In fact, he "read medicine" for several months in the evenings after working ten hours a day as carpenter, before entering the Medical College, in 1881.

Later wood-work became his hobby, and he still spends hours making beautiful and useful articles for his home or as gifts for friends.