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BEARD, WILLIAM FRANCIS. INTERVIEW

#9372

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BEARD, WILLIAM FRANCIS INTERVIEW

BIOGRAPHY FORM

9372

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Anna H. Barry

This report made on (date) November 24, 1937

1. Name William Francis Beard

2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 415 South Jensen Street

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month March Day 19 Year 1865

5. Place of birth Rob County, Indiana

6. Name of Father Alexander Beard Place of birth Virginia

Other information about father _____

Beard

7. Name of Mother Catherine (Burkhalter) 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 _____

Anna R. Barry
Investigator
November 24, 1937

Interview with
William Francis Beard
El Reno, Oklahoma.

A BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH

William Francis Beard was born in Indiana, on March 19, 1865, the son of Alexander Beard and Catherine (Buckhalter) Beard. It was in this state that Mr. Beard spent his early life.

It was on April 19, 1892, that he made the Run at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Opening. He located on a claim four miles west and eight south of the El Reno mills. The settlers of the prairies found at hand material for shelter and fuel; the dug-out and the sod house provided shelter and cow chips and wood served as fuel; where timber was available along the creeks and rivers it was natural for people to make log houses.

When Mr. Beard's wagon halted at the place desired for a house they quickly set up a tent. He then took a spade from the wagon and began to construct a half dug-out; the dug-out was more easily made than the sod house

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and he was very anxious to get settled and to start planting a crop. In a few days he had a ten by twelve foot hole dug; his family continued to live in the covered wagon box while he used the running gears to haul the logs, poles, brush and grass needed for the roof and front of the dug-out. The roof sloping back onto the hill was made of poles and logs covered over with brush, a layer of prairie hay thick enough to hold dirt, and finally a layer of dirt was put over the grass.

This house was by no means ideal; many times after a heavy rain it was necessary to dig a trench from the house to the level to carry water off the floor. Most of the water in this part of the country was hard and there was nothing to soften it; this water was called "gyp" water, it hardened and roughened the skin and left the clothes in bad condition. Every time Mr.

Beard's wife thought it was going to rain she set about to supply herself with wash water by strewing tubs, dish-pans and other vessels around the house; the wind usually scattered them in every direction. A little later the

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rain-barrel appeared at the corner of the house to catch the raindrops which dripped from the eaves, and were carried to the barrel by means of a trough. In time cisterns were dug.

Mr. Beard owned a sod plow and the first year he planted little patches of melons, pumpkins, squashes, corn and other food stuffs and raised a good crop considering that it was late in the Spring when he planted. It was an experiment in many ways to find the best type of agriculture for the country. The scarcity of timber made fencing a difficult problem for their family.

Mr. Beard's family felt proud if, on looking out the window some Sunday morning, they saw a neighbor coming across the prairie in his big wagon and soon the whole family would be unloaded and would come in to spend the day. Often times the neighbor woman would bring a cake or a chicken. These things were welcomed and all had a good time and after a day's visit this family returned home to remember the pleasant occasion for days.

If by misfortune a man in the neighborhood had sickness, was disabled or behind with his work because of the

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loss of a horse, someone went around and asked the neighbors to help with the worthy cause. Sometimes it was husking corn, sometimes plowing, hauling wood or planting crops. No one thought of pay.

At a "corn husking" the neighbors went to a home, sat in the barn, husked the corn and shelled it by rubbing cobs on the ears of corn. After two or three hours of this work everyone went to the house for a good supper. Men, women, and young people then played all sorts of games and told riddles.

The first school house and church built in their neighborhood, called the Heaston school, was built by a group of neighbors. It was at this school that literary programs were held, there were "pieces" by little tots, songs, readings, violin selections by the older ones. When finally the group broke up, the songs of people could be heard a mile away as they made their way home over the prairie.

After black boards became available ciphering matches became the popular amusement. Each neighborhood had its

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champions whom it was ready to match against newcomers; schoolmasters were tried out in this way and as more and more skill was shown in addition and simple problems they gave way to problems in square and cube root.

The Singing School was a place where all the young people got together. A lot of these young folks had little interest in singing and could not carry a tune but attended Singing School to have some place to go. Reading matter was very scarce and everything readable was exchanged from one neighbor to the other. Almanacs and patent medicine pamphlets, each with a loop of string fastened in one corner, were issued at the stores.

In the prairie days, court days played a large part on the calendar at the county-seat at El Reno. People came in from miles around to see the show and hear the lawyers plead their cases. It was indeed a great treat for all except those who had to pay the fiddler. After a case had been settled in court it was talked over around the stoves of the country stores, hotels and rural school-houses.

Court days brought trade to the merchants and news

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to the local paper. There were many quarrels over boundary lines and disputes over the ownership of land or chattels.

People looked forward to the coming of a man who would travel through the country repairing clocks and watches. Since there was not business enough in the small towns to support a jeweler, these men traveled through the country picking up the business. Often a clock would be out of running order for weeks because there was no one to repair it. The lightning rod agents were the most detested of all. People had only mere shacks for homes and they thought it a disgrace to even think of putting lightning rods on them.

The fruit tree peddler gave the homesteader a great deal of trouble; these agents carried beautiful pictures of apples, plums, cherries and other fruits. The settlers, longing for trees and fruit like that in their old home states, were tempted to buy more than they could afford. The agent's commission was high and the trees frequently were a long time on the road and in poor condition when

the farmer received them. Washing machine, sewing machine and windmill agents were among the other callers in the rural districts.

People were always friendly and neighborly; a man could ride across the prairies for days hunting stray cattle or horses and never be asked to pay for his board and lodging or his horse's feed. When the man offered to pay, the reply was "That's all right, Stranger, just you do the same for me when I'm in your part of the country."

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