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

Field Worker's name Zaidee B. Bland

This report made on (date) September 9 1937

1. Name C. W. Boedecker

2. Post Office Address Altus, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 614 West Broadway Street

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month September Day 29 Year 1871

5. Place of birth Wisconsin

6. Name of Father G. A. W. Boedecker Place of birth Germany

Other information about father Merchant

7. Name of Mother Alena Gaylor Place of birth Germany

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 9.

Zaidee B. Bland
Interviewer
September 9, 1937

Interview with C. W. Boedecker
614 West Broadway St. Altus, Oklahoma.

I was with the surveying party who cut into sections the Choctaw, Cherokee and Creek Nations. Our real headquarters were at Denison, Texas but we came into Oklahoma from the north out of Kansas.

Our company consisted of enough men and equipment to establish four camps. These camps were to be about seven miles apart. Each camp had eight or nine men and four covered wagons drawn by large mules. The wagons were Studebakers. We drove only two mules to each wagon but they were the regulation Government mules about sixteen hands high. We each had a tent and a cot besides the mess tent and officers' tent. Our regulations and equipment were like the army has at all times.

Wages

We each received \$30.00 per month and board. We thought that good wages and I would not have given 5 cents for the entire state at that time.

2

RATIONS.

We were fed just like the army on a march. We were allowed to buy very little fresh fruit, meat or vegetables from the people. However, there was a lot of fruit and melons and these were always given us in abundance by the natives.

PEOPLE WE ENCOUNTERED.

There were no people living in the country we were surveying except Indians and squaw men. We could always tell when we came to farms that were owned by squaw men for there were different improvements on them, large houses, spacious barns and hospitality. These large plantations were indeed good to look at as they looked so well kept and prosperous.

The crops were mostly corn, cane and cotton which all grew luxuriantly. Corn was taller than the head of a man on horseback. Every plantation had acres of orchards. All fruit was free for the asking and sometimes we did not wait for them to ask us.

I remember once we camped near a place where they had been crushing the apples for cider and we thought it

3

would be fine to crush apples and drink the juice just as it came from the press. We crushed and drank our fill but alas! there was the sickest bunch of men you ever saw in a few hours. I guess we must have drank more than we thought we did.

CAMPS.

We always tried to camp as near good water as possible but avoided trees. There were so many windstorms that would blow down limbs and some times whole trees that we learned to avoid shady places. Once when we were away from camp we could see a very large black cloud and knew there would be rain and wind but were not prepared for such a total wreck of our tents as we found on arriving at camp. Everything was blown down and there were so many holes in our tents that the Government had to send us new ones. That was a night of horror as the wind blew, the lightning crashed and the thunder roared and we had only such shelter as the wagons afforded and our camp was a total wreck. All the larger streams were ferried across but the smaller ones were forded. Sometimes we would be surprised to have our wagons go suddenly down to the hub and then all eight mules would have to be hitched to it to get out. We never seemed to be able to guess where trouble lurked from the looks of

the surface. All roads had to be cut and always a path cleared for the flagman to be seen. The instruments we used were very accurate and seldom did they give the signal for the flag to be dropped that it was not directly over the line stone.

It beat any country I ever saw to try to get information as no one would tell a thing. Everyone acted suspicious of any stranger.

We all had to wear wading boots and had to push through swamps amid the snakes and obstructions. The dew was as bad as a rain and we were usually wet to our waists until after eleven o'clock every morning. We did not have hours but worked towards an end of a line all the time.

Tarantulas, snakes and centipedes gave us the most scares but no one in our party was ever harmed by them, but hornets and mosquitoes gave us real concern. One day our chain man went up a little rise and tumbled forward on his face and we thought him dead from heart trouble. We ran to him for examination but we could not find anything wrong so lifted him up to take him to the wagon when someone noticed a large lump forming on his temple then we knew he had been stung by a hornet.

The hornets would make our teams run away and once stung by a hornet aside from the pain you would be very sick all over for several hours. The mosquitoes (we called them gallinippers they were so large) would bite all the time and at nights we had to have a smudge in the tent to keep the pests out and that would make the tent so hot that a man could scarcely sleep. The bite of a hornet caused us to have boils all over our bodies. I was laid up once twenty one days and I think I must have had a hundred boils on me. There were five under each arm and the boys cut sticks to rest my arms in to hold them out from my body. It was hard to get a doctor to lance the boils for we were seldom close enough to a settlement to have one so we just had to let nature take her course and her course was long and painful. Malaria caused chills and fever. There was never a day some of the men was not laid up with a chill. Everytime we came near a town some of us boys would go in and buy the town out of Groves Tasteless Chill Tonic. Our supplies all came marked U. S. A. so we could have all the whiskey we wanted and lemons. We got most all our wearing clothes

from Montgomery Ward's out of Chicago. Our boots were Thompson Quinbys and they cost us \$12.00 a pair. Everyone did his own laundry at odd times and on Sunday.

There was one peculiar thing about these camps; there was not a musical instrument in the entire camp, not a harp, fiddle or accordion. I never could account for that for usually every camp had a fiddle or harp. Sundays were spent in playing ball by teams of the different camps and in playing poker for pecans. There were lots of pecans and we used them in various ways for exchange instead of money. Once we were camping near an old gin and we all turned in pretty early and I was lying there being lonesome when I heard the notes a fiddle very distinctly. I got up to listen and decided that it was coming from that old gin shed. I thinks to myself, "Now, we are having a neighborhood dance and it will be fun to attend." So I waked up the boys and over we went. It was a stag dance the boys were putting on to fool us and were we fooled and mad! I wished that I had never heard a fiddle for they came pretty near beating upon me for my buddies thought I was in with the natives in planning the joke.

I can't remember wild animals of any size except razor back hogs. These were long, thin with sharp backbones and

7

we were really afraid of them. Those "boogers" were dangerous if they caught you alone without a weapon.

People along the way would have hog killing times. It looked to me like everyone for miles around would gather and make a big fire, then the hunters would go into the woods and kill hogs and hogs while the men left at camp would clean or scrape the hogs and cut them up until everyone had all the meat he wanted. We were always offered some but that was one kind of meat I would never eat- a razor back hog.

I remember we passed through a town called Hog Town once. They had for the name the picture of a big hog and after the picture of the hog the word Town. Whichever way our lines went we had to cut a road and sometimes it would go right through a man's corn or cotton. It looked like a shame to cut down so much of a fellow's crop but Government orders must be obeyed. Sometimes the Indians would get mad and try to stop us. The Creeks banded together and refused to let us cross their strip and we had to send for the boss to make peace. He threatened them with the soldiers and we were allowed to go on but we kept a sharp look-out for fear of an ambush. We were

8

told to keep our mouths shut and not to have trouble but to get the job done the quickest we could.

My brother was mound man and he also carried the lunch with him in the wagon. Sometimes we would get lost from him and would not have a bite to eat until we got to camp again in the evening. The thickets and river bottoms were bad to get through. Whenever we came to a meandering river we would pull off our clothes and wade down the stream until we found the direction. We camped near Belle Starr's grave. Over the sides of her grave are two large slabs of marble with a roof. The front is marked by a horse, a bell and a star, which are engraved on the stone.

We were all a more or less superstitious bunch. One night we were late pitching camp so when we came to a little clearing near running water we made camp. The next morning we found we were in a graveyard. The boss's cot was right over a grave. We were not long in moving that camp. We surveyed and sectionized but I never dreamed then that I would make the state my home for practically the rest of my life. We were real near the Arkansas line once when a big long old hillbilly came over and tried to pick a fuss with us claim-

BOEDECKER, C. W.

INTERVIEW.

8466

9

ing we had killed one of his hogs. He had to search our camp but of course he found nothing. He left grumbling and threatening and said if he ever did find evidence we might just as well get ready for Gabriel's horn.

I wonder if anyone remembers a little yellowish root called an Indian turnip. I did not know what it was but one of the boys did and persuaded me and some of the others to taste it. It drew up my mouth and made me spit foam until I thought I was going to die. The more water I drank the worse off I was. My tongue got thick and I think my mouth burned for a week.

I remember some of the towns we camped near were Eufaula, Checotah, Webbers Falls, McKay, and Muskogee. I do not remember all of them I am sure but then there were mostly just a post office, a store or two and sometimes a cotton gin in any of the towns. We had to go to stations on the Katy for all our supplies that we did not bring in with us. That was the only railroad through the country. at that time.