

MEAD, ANNIE BELLE.

INTERVIEW

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

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Field Worker's name Zaidee B. Bland,
This report made on (date) March 11, 1938. 193

- 1. Name Mrs. Annie Belle Mead.
- 2. Post Office Address Altus, Oklahoma.
- 3. Residence address (or location) 501 North Willard Street.
- 4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month October Day 8 Year 1889.
- 5. Place of birth Waco, Texas.

6. Name of Father Phoenix P. Steele. Place of birth Texas.

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Bailey K. Polston. Place of birth Kentucky.

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 _____.

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Zaidee Bland,
Journalist,
Mar. 11, 1938.

Interview With Annie Belle Mead,
Altus, Oklahoma.

My father had a brother living in Old Greer County, Texas, and when I was too small to remember much about the trip we came up prospecting and to visit this uncle. There was a lot of contesting going on so Father thought it better to lease a claim and move up and look around before trying to buy anyone's claim. Claims were all there were for no one had proved up. In fact, no one seemed to know whether he was living in Texas or Oklahoma Territory. I can remember that we crossed the Red River that first trip on the sand which had been strawed. We had to pay a dime for the right to drive across the straw spread over the sand. Father rented the old Chisum home claim and we went back home to Henrietta, Texas, with the intention of selling our crop and moving to the new country.

In November of that year Father sent two loads of furniture and farm tools across, intending to follow with the family in a few days but Mother was taken sick with

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typhoid fever and we were not able to start with her for several weeks. But at last she was able to travel and we started with two covered wagons, the rest of the household furniture and all of the family. One of our uncles drove one wagon, to which he had hitched a span of white mules. It took us five days to make the trip and one night while we were camped at Wagoner, which is now called Burkburnett, Uncle was sleeping on a cot by the side of the wagon. The mules were tied to the back of the wagon and would eat out of the trough on the hind-end of the wagon. Some time in the night a train came through and those mules got scared and jerked the wagon over on Uncle and he thought the earth had come to an end. I do not think he was hurt much, just frightened but I can remember how everyone geyed him the rest of the trip.

During the night the biggest snow I had ever seen came and when the morning of December 5, 1895, had dawned everyone was blue, for no one thought we could go on in such a snow storm and we were all anxious to get to our new home. December 5th was Father's birthday and as everyone was glumly standing around in the wagon yard, one of my brothers thought about it

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being Father's birthday and went out and got a strap and came in to give him a whipping. By the time the scuffle was over everyone was laughing and it was decided to hitch up and proceed across the river. Father had friends living just across the Red River and he thought we would not get too cold or get lost just going that little way.

We made it to our friends' dugout that night only to find that another friend had thought of the same thing that we had so our friend and his friend and our family made three families who had to stay in that one dugout that night. The men folks slept out in the wagons.

The next morning our host made a fire for all that crowd and put the poker on top of the stove where it got very hot. Later, he came back into the dugout and, picking up the poker and finding it very hot, jumped from one foot to the other, swapping the poker from one hand to the other and hollering to the top of his voice. Finally, one of his sons said, "Pa, drop the poker", which the old man did amid much laughter and teasing and Mother wrote back to her mother and said that people out here did not know enough to drop a hot poker until some one told them to.

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The next morning, the 6th of December, the sun came out bright and shining so we went on to my uncles. Uncle lived in a dugout and there were five in his family and five in ours. But we stayed several days with him until we moved to our own leased place which was a dugout, also. We had brought with us a nice carriage which we had had down in Texas and Father now traded this carriage to Mr. Jim Little for four cows and took his white mules and traded them to someone for a sow and six pigs and twenty chickens. In a little while Father bought out a claim, giving \$25.00 and a shotgun for it. We still own this land.

COPY OF HOMESTEAD CERTIFICATE.

PHOENIX P. STEELE. Homestead certificate No. 2570.

Application 3708. SW $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 35 Twp. 2 North R. 21 west Ind. 160 acres. THEODORE ROOSEVELT PRES. Recorded Okla. Vol. 139, page 267. Oct. 27, 1904. This certificate was given to Father when he had proved up. I think he was about seven years proving up.

On this claim there was an old caved in dugout and we continued to live on the Old Chisum claim and farm, both places, for several years. It was here that we were introduced

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to our first real sand storm in Oklahoma. Father and Uncle were over at our place not more than a mile and a half across the prairie where they always went and when the dust began to blow they decided they had better quit work and come home for the day. They started and got lost on the prairie. It was some time in the forenoon when they started home and they got home at ten o'clock that night. They said they never would have gotten home but at last they gave up and let the horses have their heads.

Father now built us a dugout on our place twenty by sixty and it was a nice one, too. Mother went with Father to Vernon and got a new stove and some new things for it and we did not move all our old things. We got the new stove up and were bringing over the other things when Thanks giving came. We had some neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Hudson, who came over to help and brought with them an immense wild turkey, so Mrs. Hudson cooked the first meal on the new stove. The turkey was enough for us all. I remember all the cakes and pies were sweetened with sorghum molasses for there was no sugar in either our home or Mrs.

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Hudson's. Father said that he knew we were going to have a nice time in our new home for we were making such a nice start. Here Father built the first cistern in the country for people thought that it did not rain enough in this country for a cistern but we proved that it did. I tell you we were surely tired of hauling water and going to Vernon for all our supplies. I have known Father to be waterbound between Pease River and Red River for a week at the time with us scared to death. That first year Father raised a hundred bales of cotton.

The first Sunday we spent in our new dugout we had four preachers to dinner. It happened this way, Brother and Father went to Old Frazier to church and invited the preachers home to dinner, Brother Buchanan and Brother Reagen who belonged to the Church of Christ. Mother and I went to Prairie Home school house to preaching and invited the preachers home with us. The preachers whom Mother and I invited were Brother Morgan and Brother Bailey who were Baptist ministers. They (the preachers) had a great time joking each other; they all agreed about the water but the Church of Christ preachers said they did not know how the Baptist preachers were going to eat without contamination.

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We lived in this dugout five years and saved enough money to build a home but Mother wanted to go back down in Texas to see her mother and Father's mother and they could hardly decide what to do, build a new house or go visiting. It was decided that we could build after we had no mothers to visit so all was gotten ready to go visiting. We got to papa's mother's house and the next morning Grandmother died. Papa was always so very glad that we went to see her. Papa had saved a lot of his cotton and did not sell it until spring so we had enough money to build a house anyway.

After our house was built and a nice orchard was planted there was some talk of a railroad coming through. Father said, "I will give \$500.00 for a railroad to be built through our county if it does not come through my farm and destroy its value and if it does come through my farm I will give the railroad the right-of-way". When the railroad was surveyed it came right through our orchard and cut off a part of our house. One of the neighbors said, "Now, Steel, what are you going to do?" The train is liable to take off some of your shingles

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when it begins to run". Papa said, "I am a man of my word. I'll give the right-of-way as I said". So our house was moved to town. I was ready for the Eighth Grade anyway and Father wanted to come to town to put me in school as the Seventh Grade was as high as I could go in the country school which I had attended. The two rooms Father moved to town are still standing on East Walnut Street, There have been a good many more rooms added and it is a modern home now. We were really glad to get to move into town for we had to walk three miles to school due north and we had a lot of blue northers in those days . But the school house in town burned to the ground the night before the school was to open on Monday morning so we all had to go to school up in the loft of the livery stable that fall, at least the Eighth Graders did. The different grades were scattered about all over town any place that was found large enough to hold the children in the grade.