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

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Field Worker's name Hazel D. GreeneThis report made on (date) July 14 19371. Name Susan Bonner-Noel Williams2. Post Office Address Greggton, Texas

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month May Day 26 Year 18865. Place of birth Scottsville Kentucky6. Name of Father Dr. R. S. Bonner Place of birth Calloway County, Ky.Other information about father Buried at Doakville cemetery.7. Name of Mother Nancy Frances Chandler Bonner Place of birth 55 miles south of Scottsville, Ky.Other information about mother Mother living at Ft. Towson, Okla.

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 _____.

RANCH LIFE AS TOLD BY MRS. SUSAN WILLIAMS
Greggton, Texas
Hazel B. Greene, Field Worker

Susan Bonner was born in or near Scottsville, Allan County, Kentucky, May 26, 1886. She went to South Texas when nine years old, in order for her tubercular father to get well. He did, after living out of doors for about two years in that warm dry climate. He got well and lived to be nearly seventy years old, and the family came to Indian Territory in August 1899. They came to the Creek Nation, and went to Wagoner. Mrs. Bonner said: "I was stunted out of a years growth; the first night we spent in the Indian Territory. I just knew that we would all be scalped before morning, but the only thing that happened that night of importance was my father scaring horse thieves away from our

camp. They were trying to get close enough to steal our horses, but he was sitting up with his trusty shot gun, because we were all afraid.

We arrived at Doaksville, in January 1900, We had started to move back to Shreveport, where we had lived for a couple of years, but when we reached Doaksville, it looked like a good place to live, and we stopped there. My father, R. S. Bonner took up the

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practice of medicine, for which he had studied for a long time. Then he passed the Indian Territory examinations, and kept up his practice in and around Doaksville and Fort Towson until his death twenty-eight years later at the age of sixty-nine years. He died May 12, 1928, and is buried at Doaksville Cemetery. Mother is still living, and she was seventy-seven last January.

I was nearly sixteen when I married Lee Noel, and he was nearly seventeen. We married May 4, 1902, at old Parson Giles. It was about four miles northwest of Doaksville, then we went immediately to my husband's father's ranch home up in Cedar County. This was twenty miles the way we had to wind around those sandy hills then, but I believe they call it sixteen by the section lines now. He had his ranch-home and store where the post office of Corinne was afterward. In fact the post office was in the same old location, but in a new building, as the store was only a log structure. After we married and Lee bought the store, a group of the men succeeded in getting a post office established there. Lee was postmaster, and he built a new store. He was

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postmaster for about nine years, but it was so confin-
ing that he didn't like it, and neither did I. We would
stay there awhile and take care of it, and then we'd
hike off to some one of our cabins on our ranches. Some
members of the Noel family would take care of the store
and post office but Lee would always go in and make out
the reports for the post office. Then he sold out to
W. P. Cochran at Antlers, who sent Henry Halley out there
to run the store. Lee resigned the postmaster job in
favor of Halley.

My father-in-law was a Missourian. I don't know
just when he came to the Indian Territory, but I know
that my husband, Lee, was born in the old abandoned
hospital building at the old Fort Towson, July 1, 1885.

His father was Garnett Lee Noel. His mother, who still
lives at Antlers, was Sally Noel. Mr. Noel was commonly
called Barney, and was one of the most prominent pioneers
of the Indian Territory days. He died about 1911 and is
buried at Antlers. He was a faithful friend of the Chooc-
taw Indians, and they thought that whatever Barney, Lee,
Ben or Al Noel told them was bound to be just that way, as
Lee, Ben and Al were the older boys. Mrs. Noel said that

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they lived in that old hospital building and made a big crop on the old fort field. Some one was in the old log residence when they moved there that winter, so they just had to live in that old hospital. Other families had lived in it, but she didn't like it a bit, as she was young and easily frightened, and all sorts of ghost stories were told about it. One was that in the dissecting room, after midnight headless men walked about. Mr. and Mrs. Osborne Leflore, full-blood Choctaw Indians lived there the year before and moved away because a little orphan boy they were raising thought he could see headless men, skeletons, and men without arms and legs all around the house and grounds. He was born with a caul over his face and was supposed to see things that were supernatural, and they believed that he did.

Mr. and Mrs. Noel worked lots of negroes in the fields and when they were right busy they had the field hands to eat the noon meal there instead of going to their various homes. If the least unusual noise was noticed by those negroes, they would leave that dining room in the middle of a meal, every man, hungry or not. Mrs. Noel said she was afraid to go into that dissect-

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ing room after dark, alone or with someone. Any time that Mr. Noel would be out till after dark, she would take Lee, who was a little baby and lead her little girl, and go to a neighbor's house, the old log house that was only a few hundred yards away. She said that regularly, every night, they would hear something in the loft. It would start from one corner of the building and go across to the opposite corner. It seemed to drag a chain, and when it would reach the opposite corner, it would seem to descend the wall, and land at the bottom with a thump, though they could never see a thing. They just knew it was some prisoner who had been chained in that loft until he had died, or rather the ghost of a prisoner, as the story was generally told.

Mr. Noel grew tired of his family being for everlastingly scared to death, so he kept listening and investigating and found the cause. After that noise had gone on for years, a part of the time the house being vacant because of it. He discovered it was caused by a raccoon, with a piece of chain on its neck. Evidently some one had had it in captivity, and it had broken its chain and escaped. It would lay up in that

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loft in daytime and go out foraging at night. It would descend the wall between the outside stone wall and the plastered part, and that accounted for the thump that always followed the sound of the descent, because it would drop a little way.

The family got possession of the old double log house at the Fort and lived there awhile. Then went to Doaksville, and established the mercantile business of Noel and Babb which was a general merchandise business. They freighted their goods from Goodland railroad station after the railroad came through going north and south, though prior to that they hauled by ox team from Paris, Texas, or from the river. Goods had been brought up by boat from points below. From Jefferson Texas, and across the river at the most convenient ferry, which I believe was Hooks' ferry.

Before they left that old hospital building they heard that there was a dungeon under it, and searched all of the old ruins, but found only what had been used for a morgue. It was an immense basement, and was so cool and nice they were tempted to use it, but were afraid of ghosts.

They moved over to Doaksville and lived there till

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about 1900, when they closed out the store at Doaksville for some reason, and I don't know what became of Mr. Babb after that.

Mr. Noel established his ranch up in the mountains, in about 1899. His family remained in Doaksville for several months until he got the house built. John Huskey was the carpenter who built that house and they were several months getting it completed. It was a nice house with about five rooms, and ceiling and everything. It even had matting and carpets on the floors. When it was finished, Mrs. Noel and the children moved up there, and Mr. Noel paid Miss Mattie Huskey fifty dollars and board to teach his three older boys for six months of each year.

That was in the fall, about 1900. In May, 1902 Lee and

I married and by that time another family had moved up there and they needed a school. Rufus Brannan, with a house full of children; later his daughter and family Mrs. Mans Fowler, with another houseful, and Sam Smith with two, moved in the neighborhood. Time passed till about 1906 when Mr. Noel and Lee furnished the lumber and the neighbors got together and built a schoolhouse.

Miss Della Kidd, of Antlers, now Mrs. Della Bedford, Court

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Clerk of Pontotoc County Oklahoma, taught the first two terms and we boarded her. Mr. Noel and Lee paid her for teaching. I don't remember anyone else paying a part of it, but perhaps they did. By that time we had bought the store, had a post office established with Lee as post master. Lee could speak the Choctaw language fluently, so became quite an interpreter, both at home and for the courts. He was also a notary public. He died in 1930, and is buried at Antlers.

We had church and Sunday School in that little school house and once in a while we could get a preacher to come and preach. Everybody went to church and Sunday school when they had a chance, as that was a good place to visit one another.

Then we moved up on Caney Creek about ten miles from Corinne, to what was known as the Pritchard Ranch, because George Pritchard had built some cabins there and had stayed up there one season, attempting to establish a ranch there, but he gave it up. We lived there and a little further down the creek for about ten years. We had about fourteen hundred acres surrounding this place, on Caney Creek, and we had worlds of cattle, hogs and

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horses on the range. We would live just wherever it was most convenient for us, sometimes at the Pritchard Ranch, as it was ours, and sometimes in the old Isaac Houston cabin.

We were still at the Pritchard ranch when the Pine Belt Lumber Company extended their railroad there, and established a "box car town" of about five hundred people and called it the Pine Belt Front. Lee and Al furnished lumber and they and the neighbors built another school and church house. That ranch house of ours and the Pine Belt Front were right on the banks of Caney Creek. The Pine Belt Lumber Company dammed the creek to make a reservoir, and dug a well too. That well furnished water for all the people in camp, nine engines that were pulling log trains on that road, and I guess a couple of hundred mules that were used in logging. A gasoline pump ran day and night. Great troughs were built in the corral and a tank was built for the engines to fill from. The rest of the water was run into the creek in the reservoir. That is really a "ghost" town now, just our old cabin left. The track has all been taken up.

We lived in the log cabin there till we could get

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a house built, then the Pine Belt Lumber Company ran a spur to the mouth of Caney Creek, where the creek runs into Little River, eight miles from the "Front", as they called the Pritchard Ranch Cam. They established a small camp there which they called the corral. We owned a place there, about three hundred acres, so we moved there, and lived in the old Isaac Houston cabin until we could build a house. That cabin was just about three miles from Pritchard Ranch place. It consisted of two big log rooms, no hall, and a porch. And was put together with wooden pegs, and an occasional old square nail. These nails were few and far between, it had puncheon floors, both in the house and porch, a clapboard roof, and the cracks between those pine logs were sealed with pine boards. These had been planed out by hand, some of them a foot wide or more, and some six or eight feet in length. Just as pretty and smooth as hand made boards could be. The doors were homemade with wooden hinges, and wooden latches, and windows of hand riven boards of the sliding variety. There were the usual little old potato houses, which were mere pens roofed over, and made to house the potatoes

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or anything else people wanted to put in them. They were usually so low, that one would have to crawl to get in them. Even then they would have a loft to them to put things in, but even then they were not ever very high. Sometimes they would put corn in them; but not infrequently they stripped the shucks back off of the corn and hung it in bunches in their living rooms. Those full-bloods that lived back there in the hills never raised much corn anyway, just a little for Tom Fuller, hominy and other corn dishes. Never raised it for feed till in later years, around in 1900 as their ponies lived on the range.

Sometimes they had a little smoke house, and at this old Isaac Houston place were the usual number of small houses and graves of Indians. These were penned and covered over by a kind of little house, or shed over the graves. They were some of Isaac's family, I presume. He had abandoned that place and had settled another place across the river, but the crossing on the Little River at that place was called the Isaac Houston Crossing. He built a nice little boxed house of two rooms and had put two big old feather beds in that house

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just for his white company. When we would go over there on round ups, gathering cattle, Lee and I always slept in the choicest bed. I went with them many times, even after our son was born in 1905. We would put him up in front of us on a pillow and take him right along. Then when he was about three years old, we gave him his first saddle. He was so little that we had to take the stirrup fenders off and used hame strings for stirrup leathers. The fenders were too long, but he rode the same pony that his Daddy rode when he learned to ride at about three or four years of age. All the other children, Lee's brothers younger than he, learned to ride on that little pony. Of course Frank was too young to ride when he died. Then we moved to Fort Towson about 1920, and that pony was so old and feeble that we gave it to a full-blood Indian, Josian Thomas, a Choctaw Snake Indian, for his kids to ride. We gave him five dollars to buy corn for him through that winter, corn was only twenty cents per bushel and we didn't like to think of the poor pony trying to live on the range all winter. That was the last I heard of that pony, but I know he has been dead a long time.

We built a pretty good boxed house at the Isaac

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Houston place, with four rooms and a porch, and a great big barn. We were living there when our barn burned, in 1911. In the fall of the year, one cold frosty morning, we had had breakfast and the field hands, and cow hands had all gone off to work. I was making beds, and it was before daylight when I looked out the window and saw the barn burning. I grabbed my twelve gauge double barreled shot gun and fired it three times. That was our signal to call for help from the field hands, cow hands, or neighbors, when we needed it. In just a few minutes a crowd was there trying to save things. It was late in the fall, and we had gotten our feed for the winter in the barn and had about ten or twelve yearlings "on hospital", (poor ones being stall fed.) Five or six of those burned, and all the chickens and pigeons that were roosting there, and about six hundred bushels of corn. No telling how many tons of hay were burned as the upper story of that big barn was full. Probably three hundred bushels of cotton seed burned together with my saddle and little son's saddle, and a lot of the harness. We got our Studebaker buggy out as it was in the hallway and we could get hold of the tongue and pull it out, and the harness was in it. One old hired hand had a pretty good saddle and he ran into that burning build-

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ing to save it. He lost his eyebrows and a lot of his hair, but got the saddle. Lee had loaned his own saddle the day before to a neighbor to do an errand for us, to go to mill, I believe, so it was not there. But our son's first saddle that was burned, had been outgrown so we had ordered him another, with his name on the fender. It was to have some leather chaps and some bell spurs, and we were intending to surprise him with them. But when he cried over that one burning up we had to tell him that he had another coming.

We still freighted a lot of things by wagon from Ft. Towson and Goodland, to the store at Corinne. His saddle and things happened to be there when we went to Corinne that day to telephone the Pine Belt Lumber Company (telephone around by Antlers) to send us out a carload of feed. The Pine Belt telephone line was out of order that day and it was fifteen miles to Corinne. That was a long way to go to telephone, but we had it to do. And not one dime of insurance did we have. We were forced to sell six or eight hundred head of yearlings that we wanted to winter and sell for a better price, but we had bought up the most of the surplus feed in the country, and could not replace it.

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That is not enough to carry over hundreds of heads of yearlings.

The neighbors gathered in and threw up a log crib for us, a double one with a hall. We already had some boards on hand so they had only a few of those to make. The hall was to shelter the buggy, and the cribs for feed and harness and saddles. For dinner that day, I boiled three hams in a wash pot, and beans in another. There was just Coleman, Lee and I in our family, but I kept two big dining tables set all of the time as I never knew just how many I was cooking for. I kept a negro man to cook, when I could get one to stay, because I preferred to ride the range.

My home was "The Rangers Hotel" up there, that is, one of them. Barney Noel's house was another. Everybody who rode the range knew that they could eat and sleep at those places, and at the homes of any other ranchers. It was the custom for any of the ranchers to leave their houses unlocked for the convenience of any others who might be riding the range, and who had to spend the night. Even though the owners were not at home, and they did just that as anyone was welcome.

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Range riders simply rode up, penned their cattle, if they had any, unsaddled their horses and came to the house. If anybody was at home, all the nicer, if not they made themselves at home. They cooked, ate, and slept in the beds. It was an unwritten law that they must clean up the dishes, and never leave the beds unmade. If they did, they had to pay a fine to the lady of the house. Twenty-five cents for the dirty dishes and the same for the unmade bed. We always knew long before we got home, if we had had guests while we were gone, even if we had been gone several days. We studied all tracks and could tell if they were friends or strangers. We knew the horse tracks of all the range riders. That sounds like an exaggeration, but just ask any old time ranchman, or range rider.

Many a time have I come home and as we would approach the house maybe the yard would be filled with men and children and the women would emerge from the house with my cook aprons on, and have supper all ready. Just neighbors from over the mountain or somewhere who had come over to visit, and waited for us to come home. Lee was a fiddler, so we would have supper, dance till midnight, have another supper, with maybe two or three cakes that the women had stirred up.

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They were big ones baked in twenty-four square inch pans, and coffee. Then we would dance the rest of the night, have breakfast and all would go home. Many a time have I sliced a whole ham for breakfast. Maybe that would happen three or four times a year at our house, and as many times at each of the other neighbors. It was our only diversion, when we had no church regularly. We would have a dance like that about every two or three weeks.

Long years before it was a law in this state to dip ^{also} cattle for tick eradication, we decided that it was a good thing to do. We obtained a Government plan for a vat and built it there on our place that we bought from old Isaac Houston. That vat is still in use.

I had my laundry done twenty-five miles from home, and carried it on horseback a part of the time, in a big basket set upon my saddle horn. Most of the time we carried it in the buggy however.

We raised lots of hogs, and we always killed twenty-five or thirty for our own use. We usually shipped one or two carloads each year. They were just wild range hogs, but they were ours, and we marked them and looked after them. We had trained hog dogs; and a trained hog dog would not

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work for anyone but his master. They worked in pairs. One would catch the hog by the jaw, and the other by a hind leg, and hold on until the master could get it tied or roped. The dogs knew very well that if they didn't catch a hog by the jaw that those old long tusked things could slash them wide open.

When Noel and Babb ran that store at Doakville, they had metal trade checks, as a medium of exchange instead of money. They were of five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, ^{and cents} fifty, and one dollar checks. We used those same old checks all the years that we had the store at Corinne. Then when we sold out to W. P. Cochran at Antlers, we took them all up. Mr. Cochran didn't move the store to Antlers, but put Henry Halley over there, and Mr. Halley was made post master when Lee resigned in his favor.

Indians would not take a check on a bank. They preferred gold, and they considered those old trade checks the same as gold. They knew that Barney Noel or any of his boys would honor them and they were traded around among themselves too. It was a long way to a bank but we did our banking business at Paris Texas. If men started out to buy cattle they carried the gold in belts which were com-

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bination cartridge and money belts. I have seen my husband with hundreds of dollars in gold in his belt at once.

Snake root too was almost legal tender, just the same as furs and hides. Indians who lived away back in the mountains, so far that it would take them two or three days to get there on their ponies, would bring a pony loaded with snake root, another with their bedding and frying pans and entire camping outfit. Maybe two or three children were on another one, the mother carrying one in her lap and another up behind her, and following the "Lord and master" of the household. A trail of dogs would be following, and all would come trailing to the store. That was no unusual sight to us. They would stop outside, after tying their ponies off a ways from the store, and wait till the man got good and ready to come in, and bring the snake root and make his or his squaw's purchases. When they would finally come in there was no use to ask them what they wanted. They would take their own good time and tell you when they got good and ready, and it might take them all morning long to sell their snake root and make their purchases, one at a time. There were intervals of just sitting and looking around and grunting, between the purchases. The full-

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bloods traded that way, one purchase at a time and then receive the change, if any was due them.

When we ran the store at Corinne we had to freight our goods from the railroad station at Goodland, by the way of Doakville. The road was too bad to use the present route from where Hugo is now,

We would have one hundred and fifty to two hundred head of horses on the range bearing our brand nearly all the time. Our brand was Bar L Bar L. Our mark was crop, and over crop of the right ear and under slope and over slope of the left. Mr. Neels brand was '7 L^(L) and the woods were full of seven L cattle from Doakville to seventy-five or more miles north, east and west. We all branded for each other. Wherever we found calves, we saw what brand the dammy wore, and we'd brand the calf that way and the colts the same. So it was with hogs in the woods, mark the pigs like the sow was marked. Every range rider carried two branding rings tied to his or her saddle, and when we'd find a calf or colt, we'd rope it and tie it, build a small fire and heat the rings. We'd cut a couple of sticks to cross in them and hold them with and run any brand that was the proper one for the cattle. We were always careful to put the brand of the proper owner on stock too. We never

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used the long handled branding irons like the moving pictures show, only when we branded at the corral at home. They were too bulky to carry on the saddle.

My husband was a splendid wild horse breaker. He broke them to the saddle, and I herded for him when he was breaking them. Herding means to ride a gentle horse that is trained for that, and ride between the wild horse and all obstacles and to make him take the direction you desire him to go.

I guess I was the first woman in Cedar County to ride astride. Mrs. Jim Crook in Red River County, and Mrs. John D. Wilson in Towson County rode that way. We didn't ride "half human" saddles either. "Half human" saddles were the padded ones made especially for ladies. My first saddle was a side saddle, but I learned to ride bareback first. My saddle was a double cinch one.

We had what we called "Surcingle" wild horse breakers. Men who could ride with a surcingle, or bareback. When they broke them bareback, without a surcingle or rode, without holding to it, it was called "ridin' slick". Surcingle riders could not break a horse to the saddle, so a saddle rider always had to follow him up to have a horse properly broken.

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I rode that double cinch man's saddle and always carried a thirty-two Winchester rifle. I never knew when I might need it for mean cattle, or hogs; if they got to crowding us and fighting, as they sometimes would. We always tried to shoot them in the nose or horns to stop them, as that would not kill them. I saw one fighting steer that had to be shot eight times in the nose, as he hated so to be conquered.

One way to drive a wild steer, or any other kind for that matter, is when it sullen and refuses to go, rope and throw it, and prop its eyelids open with sticks. Make them the proper length to keep them open wide and so they will not slip. Then they would go right along, and if they can feel a trail or road beneath their feet, they stay in it and seem to feel their way along, but if they come to a tree they will run right into it. I guess the sticks make them see double or blinds them, and at any rate it confuses them.

Every rancher's home was open to all the others. If there were not enough beds for all who came at once, pallets were made on the porches, bed ticks were filled with hay, and they would even sleep in the cotton seed, if necessary.

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We moved to Cloudy in about 1925, and succeeded in getting the post office re-established there. Lee was post master there, but his health had begun to fail about that time, and he was really not able to carry on business. In 1927, I believe, we went to West Texas, New Mexico, and even as far as California seeking a healthy place for my husband and our son, who was tubercular. We spent everything we had traveling around, and Lee died absolutely broke, December 14, 1930. Coleman died May 4, 1932, and both are buried at Antlers. Lee died on Coleman's fifth wedding anniversary, and Coleman died on our thirtieth one. Coleman left two baby girls, now seven and ten years old.

When we owned the fourteen hundred acres of land surrounding the Fritchard Ranch place and several hundred at other places, we sold the timber off of it to the Pine Belt Lumber Company and spent it all on sickness and that will break anybody.

I am now married to A. T. Williams a merchant at Greggton, Texas.

Barney Noel and Wife were both white people, and Jim was the only one who married an Indian. He married Maggie Frazier at Spencerville. They had two sons and a daughter.

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I want to say something here about the punishment meted out to violaters of the law. It was usually y whipping, and it was the custom for the one who had been whipped to shake hands with the one who had to do the whipping, but old Alfred Holman never would. He would always ut on his shirt, whoop just as loud as he could and run off whooping, but he would never shake hands with the one who p nished him. He was whipped a number of times for not very serious violations of the Choctaw laws, but would get in bed again, like a mischievous puppy.

Old man Barney Noel said he nearly had to kill a full-blood Choctaw man once, because he insisted upon swapping wives with Mr. Noel, and Mr. and Mrs. Noel both were opposed to it. It seems that when the full-blood men took a notion to swap wives that the women really had no choice in the matter, but I think though that that custom died out long before I ever lived among them.

In fancy I frequently live over those days, when we would take our two old blue beagle hounds and go with Lee out in the woods and round up wild hogs to kill or ship. We used to have plenty of deer, venison, turkey, and squirrels too were plentiful. However I do not wish to live that way again, as I am just as well contented now as I was then.

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That was a hard life to live. My father was a doctor and I would have to go home to him lots of times and stay for weeks and recuperate from pernicious malaria or pneumonia or something of the kind sometimes a result of the strenuous life I lived.