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INTERVIEW

#12639

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Hazel B. Greene,
Journalist,
Jan. 10, 1938.

An Interview With Fannie Bryant,
Fort Towson, Oklahoma.

My mother, Minerva Ann Napper, was born at Echo, Alabama, and Father was born at Clopton, Alabama. Mother is buried at Doaksville Cemetery, Choctaw Nation, Indian Territory, and Father in Alabama. Father's name was D. H. Blankenship.

Father was about seventy years old when Mother died and he returned to Alabama and married a woman young enough to be his daughter. Then he died in a few years and was buried in Alabama. I was born in 1862 in Clopton, Alabama.

My father was born on a big plantation which belonged to his father, in Henry County, Alabama, near the town of Clopton. Then when he married my mother, Minerva Ann Napper, from Echo, about thirty miles away, but in the same county, he brought her to the plantation of his father and they resided in one of the tenant houses about thirty yards from where he was born, and we older children were all born and reared there.

After we were all grown and married the family decided to move to Texas, so to Texas we went, and stayed there a

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Few years and decided to move to the Indian Territory. My father came over here a year before we did and made a crop. Then we moved over here. We leased a place from an Indian and they hauled the lumber about twenty miles with which to build us a house. It was on the prairie and no logs were near, but there was a little sawmill about twenty miles away and my men folks would get up early and go after a load of lumber and it would be away after dark when they would return. They just hauled enough for a little 14 x 14 foot room and for a side room. We camped until they finished it and we felt rich when we moved in it. That was about three miles southeast of the present town of Fort Towson. As I said it was prairie and no clearing to be done, so the men did what they called "sodding" the land. They "sodded" about seventy-five or eighty acres. We had boys growing up all the time who could work a lot of land. We raised cotton, corn, sweet potatoes, peas, cornfield beans, and lots of good things to eat. I remember our cornfield beans sometimes grew so long that we gathered them in our arms like we did ears of green corn. We hadn't much market for anything we raised so we just tried to use everything ourselves. We raised so

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much corn on that land that we would fill our cribs and leave the balance piled in the fields. We could sit on our porch and see runs of deer and turkeys in our fields eating corn and peas. The turkeys were awfully bad to steal peas. I remember one year they were so bad that we had only a few "messes" of green peas and then barely saved seed for the next year. But we would kill the turkeys so I guess we were about as well off as if we had gotten the peas.

We also raised lots of sweet potatoes. I remember in 1908 we sold seven hundred bushels of sweet potatoes to the Pine Belt Lumber Company at Fort Towson. We got about 40 cents per bushel. They never paid me a cent in cash. They just gave me orders to the commissary, and I could take it up in merchandise.

Away back in 1887 and later, we were four miles from Doaksville where the nearest school was. Our children would leave home between daylight and sun-up to walk that four miles to school, and when the days were short it would be "slap" dark when they'd get home in the evening.

We didn't have much preaching nor Sunday School in winter, but in summer would have meetings often, once a

month of so. However, it was years after we came here before they organized a Sunday School near enough for me to attend. But when we were going to have preaching on a Sunday, all of the women would bake pies, cakes and sweet potatoes, and fry chickens on Saturday; then Sunday morning we would put some grass in the bottom of the wagon, spread an old quilt over it and load the kids in the wagon and go to preaching, and stay all day and have dinner on the ground. There would be a sermon in the morning and sometimes one after dinner unless the preacher lived so far that he would have to leave right after dinner. In that case we would just have singing. But nearly everybody lived too far away to have preaching at night.

Another diversion was going fishing. A lot of families would arrange to go camping-fishing together. The women would cook up pies and cakes, and fix up the camping outfit and they would all get together and go down on a pretty creek and camp out a night or two or three and the men would fish. Sometimes, as we drove the wagons to the camping place, some of the men would walk through the woods and kill deer or turkey or find a bee tree so that we could have some wild honey to go with our wild meat and fish.

Sometimes we would carry along a pot so big that we would throw squirrel, turkey, and maybe duck or goose or deer all in one pot and cook them. We would mix them up that way just to have something different.

We really had fun. After supper, we would sit around the camp fire and talk or sing, and if some one could get hold of a fiddle we would have music and really enjoy it. In summers we had picnics, and would have platforms built upon which the younger ones danced and not altogether just the young ones. I have seen a mother, her husband and three daughters and a son in one set, dancing an old fashioned square dance. After some of those dances the boys would get drunk and race their horses and fire their pistols, just to make a lot of noise. Then sometimes some of them would get drunk and break up the dance.

Deer hides were pretty good. Pa tanned some of them for shoe strings and harness strings and sometimes for moccasins. He would bury the hides in ashes until the hair would slip, then he would lay them in a vat with red oak bark which had been soaking in water, and would keep them covered with water too. He kept the ashes wet while

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the hides were buried in them. That would tan them. He would have a layer of hides and a layer of red oak bark and cover them with water. Then he would lay a hide on a smooth board and use a dull knife like a drawing knife and scrape the hide, and remove all fat or hair or whatever he didn't want on there.

In the spring of the year our men folks would cut logs of red oak and begin skinning them and the children would carry those slabs of bark and stack them to dry. The bark was skinned off the logs while the sap was in it.

There were other ways of tanning skins too, but that was our way.

I raised turkeys; the tame ones were larger than the wild ones of the same age. Once the boys found some wild turkey eggs and I set them with some tame eggs and they all hatched off at the same time. The young ones soon strayed off with the wild turkeys and would not come home to roost with the ones hatched from tame turkeys eggs, but the boys kept watch on them and killed them. I raised geese and ducks too and with their feathers and the ones I picked from wild ones I made feather beds for all of my children.

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I raised enough fowls to have feathers to make pillows aplenty too, but none of my children would sleep on a feather pillow, so I just sold the feathers to neighbors who did not raise any geese or ducks themselves. Some of my feathers brought 50 cents a pound.

My men folks killed many a wild goose and duck. The geese would come to the corn piles in the field in the fall and winter and then we would kill them. They were fine eating too. Quail were plentiful also.

Indians were novelties to us when we first came out here. A sister of mine lived at Doaksville and I'd go to see her, and sit on the porch to watch for an Indian woman to come along riding on her little pony with a bundle of snake-root and a child or two on the pony with her, coming to the stores to sell the snake-root. The Indian women would sometimes stop a little way off from the store, hitch the ponies, leave the children and dogs there and carry the snake-root on to the store. They would sometimes hang the smallest child on a limb, tied up in a shawl or blanket, with its head sticking out. Perhaps the baby was safer there than on the ground. Frequently they would come so far that they would camp near Doaksville before returning home.