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BARNES, JAMES R.

INTERVIEW

#13317

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BIOGRAPHY FORM
 WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
 Indian Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

BARNES, JAMES R.

INTERVIEW.

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Field Worker's name Gomer GowerThis report made on (date) March 21, 19381. Name James R. Barnes2. Post Office Address Poteau, Oklahoma.3. Residence address (or location) Same4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month May Day 14 Year 18495. Place of birth Sebastian County, Arkansas.6. Name of Father Joseph Barnes Place of birth TennesseeOther information about father Buried at Kully Chaha7. Name of Mother Nancy Goforth Place of birth ArkansasOther information about mother Died in 1852.

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 5.

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Gomer Gower,
Investigator.
March 21, 1938.

Interview with James R. Barnes
Poteau, Oklahoma
Born May 14, 1849.
Father--Joseph Barnes
Mother--Nancy (Goforth)

James R. Barnes, the subject of this sketch, was born in Sebastian County, Arkansas, on May 14, 1849 and came with his parents to what was then Indian Territory about 1875 and settled near Kully Chaha, in what was then Sugar Loaf County now LeFlore County. Aged though he is at this time, he recalls with remarkable clarity many of the men and outstanding events of that early period. Being a man of deep religious convictions, his mind dwells more upon the struggles of the Circuit riders and Missionaries who sacrificed time and comfort in the interest of their Father's business. In common with all the other pioneers into this part of what was then Indian Territory, he pays particular tribute to the Methodist Missionary, Joseph Snedley, who had been sent out as a missionary to the Choctaws from far-off England while he was still a young man, and through his tireless efforts had established churches in the new Choctaw

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Nation. He states that the esteem in which "Parson Smedley" was held by both white and Indian bordered closely upon worship. It was "The Parson" who first conceived the idea of fencing in the pasture adjacent to each of the mission churches so that those who came to worship might have a place to pasture their horses or oxen for the duration of the meeting, be it for a week or a month, as was oftentimes the case.

Mr. Barnes, being one of them, gives a graphic account of the pioneers who first settled in what is now the north-eastern part of LeFlore County and embraces that part lying east of the Poteau River. For some reason, the Choctaws, with the exception of the McCarty, Folsom, Riddles, Wall and Nail families, had sought out homes lying to the West of the river, leaving a vast and fertile area next to the Arkansas state line approximating two hundred and sixteen sections for the use and benefit of these five families. Lands, owned by whites, just across the boundary line, commanded high prices because of the limitless grazing privileges the owners enjoyed by reason of the free grass available to their herds in the area embraced in the Indian Territory, as

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above noted. That condition resulted in steps being taken by the Choctaw citizens residing in the area to turn the benefits, which the whites enjoyed, to their own profit. With that end in view, they leased land adjacent to their own homes to non-citizens for farming purposes and, although the terms of such leases, often as low as \$10.00 per year, were liberal in the extreme, it was felt by the Choctaw families that it was better that than nothing. In that manner, that part of Scullyville and Sugar Loaf Counties soon came to have more white than Indian inhabitants, and owing to that condition the social customs of the whites dominated the area.

Mr. Barnes enjoyed an intimate acquaintance with Mack Ricks and Adam Morris, both of whom had assisted in conducting groups of Choctaws from Mississippi to the Indian Territory. Both were white men who had qualified to act as interpreters, having learned the language through association with the Choctaws. Both had intended to return to their native state as soon as their services as interpreters were no longer needed. However, upon reaching the end of their journey, they discovered that they would have to wait upon the convenience of Washington to forward funds with which to pay them off before

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they could start on their return trip. Three years elapsed before final settlement was made by the Government. In the meantime, Adam Morris, the younger of the two men, being footloose and fancy-free, took unto himself an Indian wife and became a full-fledged Choctaw citizen, but Mack, upon receiving his long awaited pay, hurriedly left for Mississippi and in due time returned with his wife to the Indian Territory or rather to the western boundary of Arkansas and established a store and saloon and soon was one of those who reaped a rich harvest from the free grass in the nearby Indian Territory, upon which his vast herd of cattle roamed at will.

When Mr. Barnes was asked if either of the two men had told him by which route their groups had been brought to the Indian Territory, he replied they had not, but both had recited instances in which members of the groups had become mutinous and insisted on loitering along the way, retarding the progress of the journey at every opportunity. This fact indicates that a part of the journey, at least, had been overland.

Mr. Barnes, now in his eighty-ninth year, has spent practically all his life within a radius of twenty-five miles

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of the place of his birth in Sebastian County, Arkansas, and over the years has been a consistent member and communicant of the Baptist Church. He assisted in organizing the first Baptist Association in this part of the Indian Territory. Both he and his father were members of Moshulotubbe Lodge No. 13, A.F. and A.M., now non-existent at Kully Chaha. His account of the early history of that lodge, though denied to the profane, is such as to make one feel proud of the institution.

Mr. Barnes is one of the pioneer squatters, one of the pioneer members of a pioneer lodge of the Masonic Fraternity, and one of the pioneer Baptists, in what is now Oklahoma.