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BLANCHARD, BEN L.

INTERVIEW

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BIOGRAPHY WORKS
 WORKS PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION
 Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Hazel B. Greene

This report made on (date) October 13, 1937

1. Name Ben L. Blanchard

2. Post Office Address Hugo, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 502 East Duke Street

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month October Day 10 Year 1885

5. Place of birth Near Goodland railroad station, Indian Territory, Choctaw Nation

6. Name of Father L. F. Blanchard Place of birth North Carolina

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Mattie E. Graves Blanchard Place of birth Arkadelphia, Arkansas.

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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Hazel B. Greene
Journalist
October 13, 1937.

Interview with Ben L. Blanchard
602 East Duke Street, Hugo, Okla.

My father, L. N. Blanchard, was born in North Carolina; my mother, Mattie E. Graves Blanchard, was born in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, and I was born near Goodland in the Choctaw Nation. My parents were married at Prescott, Arkansas, and came to Goodland, Indian Territory, Choctaw Nation, in the usual covered wagon. They lived near Goodland one year, and made a crop. I was born there on a farm near Goodland, and was six months old when they moved to Doaksville, about eighteen miles east of Goodland. It was called Goodland then. Both syllables were accented. We lived in and around Doaksville until I was about seventeen years old. The first school I attended was at Doaksville, a Miss Talulah Collier, from somewhere in Texas, was one of my first teachers. The first school I attended was held in an old store building there and I don't remember the name of my teacher. Then the new school house was built up across the road south of the Doaksville cemetery. There were no graves south of the old military road that ran west from Doaksville, a couple of hundred yards and

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then past the cemetery, and then north on up toward old Spencer Academy and on to Fort Smith, Arkansas. That was the road from Fort Towson to Fort Smith. Goods were freighted over it from boat landings on Red River to Spencer Academy, before a railroad was brought down south from Springfield, Missouri, and on through to Paris, Texas. Then the freighting was done from Goodland for a while and then the Academy was moved over west of the river and the railroad to a place within a mile or so of Nelson.

The road branched at the Doaksville cemetery. The branch going west was the one to Goodland. When I was a boy, the Doaksville Trading Company composed of Will Bear-den and Joel Spring, and perhaps others, had the main store in Doaksville. Their goods were freighted from Goodland and when the freight wagon came in, about once a week, it was an event. Everybody was interested in seeing what new things were brought in, especially the girls and women, in the springtime when hats and new flowered muslins were brought in. Then the mail coming in was something to be looked forward to as this was just about the most important event of each week. Newspapers were sometimes several days

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old when received at Doaksville, but they were read from "kiver to kiver", and all the news duly discussed, by the men as they loafed on boxes and barrels on the store porch in summer and around the big old heater in the middle of the store in winter.

The most important affairs of the country and nation were settled right in Will Beardens old store, settled according to some of the old graybeards who gathered there. But when election time came around, none of the white men who didn't happen to be intermarried citizens could vote. At least the white men could not vote in tribal affairs. But election day was one exciting time. If a man said something about any of the candidates or their policies, which did not suit his listener, he was promptly knocked down, with a fist or a gun. One election day, a negro-Indian knocked a white man down with his pistol, just as fast as the white man could get up, until he got tired of it and walked off and nobody interfered, because everybody was afraid of the negro-Indian. That school house, where I learned to sing, "Three Cheers for the Red, white and Blue" has been torn down, to make room for more graves. It is in the main cemetery now.

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I never went hunting and fishing; to amount to anything. There were plenty of deer, turkey, prairie chickens, and other game, but I preferred to tramp around and look for old cannon balls, arrow heads and spear heads. I would tramp around the old Fort ruins and wonder all about the occupants of the Fort, what became of them and why. There are about a dozen tombstones still in the old Fort cemetery. There were many soldiers buried there, but these bodies were removed before I ever visited that cemetery but the open graves showed where they had been buried. An old plastered frame building was still standing out in the field a little way from the Fort proper. I imagined that it had been the officers' quarters, though some said it was a part of the hospital. The most of the stone walls were tumbled down, as far back as I can remember. In 1901, the right of way for the Arkansas and Choctaw railroad was surveyed through about a mile south of Doaksville and on east. My father and I helped to cut the timber off of that right of way, and with Father's several teams we helped to build the railroad dump from the hill east of Fort Towson (the present town) to Clear Creek.

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I entered the railroad service that way, and kept on climbing until now, after thirty-six years, I am a brakeman and a conductor on the road I helped to build. I have been in the service continuously all of those years. I have seen a lot of towns along the road from Ardmore to the state line east, grow and prosper and then fall into decay. Some of them are indeed "ghost towns". I consider myself a pioneer in railroading.