

HAM, JAMES R.

INTERVIEW.

#9079

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BIOGRAPHY FORM
 WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
 Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma
HAM, JAMES R. **INTERVIEW.**

9072.

Field Worker's name Zaidee B. Bland.

This report made on (date) October 28, 1937, 1937

1. Name Mr. James R. Ham.

2. Post Office Address Altus, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 421 North Spurgeon Street.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month February Day 15 Year 1854.

5. Place of birth Alabama.

6. Name of Father Bright R. Ham. Place of birth North Carolina.

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Polly Ann Jones. Place of birth Alabama.

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 10.

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Zaides B. Bland,
Interviewer.
Oct. 28, 1937.

An Interview With J. R. Ham,
A Pioneer of Oklahoma. 1888.

I had a nephew who was up here near Martha, then Greer County, Texas. The lure of free land was great in Freestone County, Texas, where I lived. I came by train to Vernon and rode out to Martha on the Mail Hack. The hack was driven by a red faced Irishman and as he handled the two little ponies he told a fresh tale of the wonder and advantages of this country with every breath until you almost felt like you would be living in heaven, at least in paradise, if only you could get a claim to this wonderful prairie land between the Red Rivers.

The next morning after my arrival at Martha my nephew and family went to an all day picnic at Navajo. I went along, of course. It was the first time I had even seen any Indians and I was a little shy of them.

There was a big platform built and the Indians danced around and around it. The platform was built up high so the white people could get a good view of the Indians.

There was dinner on the ground and you would certainly have thought that this was a "Land flowing with

milk and honey", judging by the good things that were spread out for us to help ourselves to. Everything was free, red lemonade thrown in. There was no ice but plenty of lemonade, at least that was what it was called. It was pink in color with round slices of lemon floating around on top, and was plenty sweet. It was made up in barrels and there were tin cups to drink from. The cups were nice and shiny and were tied to the barrels so they could not be taken away.

While mixing with the crowd and getting acquainted I found a man who had plowed around one section of land six miles south from Navajo; had a good two room house built on the land and sixteen acres already broke out that he would relinquish to me for \$600.00 cash. I was not long in making a deal with him. It took about ten days for the deal to go through satisfactorily then I hurried back to Fairfield, Texas, to make arrangements to move my family and stock.

I made arrangements with the nearest neighbor to my house to come to Vernon for my household goods and farm implements and have them on the place when we arrived. I planned to ship such things and only drive through with a camping outfit, and bring the livestock.

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We started from Grosebeck with three wagons and about fifteen head of loose stock, a jack, a jenny, two colts, a yearling and a small colt.

My wife had a nursing baby but she took charge of one of the wagons. She carried the baby in her lap or lay her on the seat beside her. Father drove one wagon and I had a hired man drive the other wagon while I looked after the loose stock. The days were not long and the weather very unsettled. One night after twelve o'clock the worst rain and wind storm I was ever out in came up. The clouds looked black and there was considerable lightning when we went to bed. Just after twelve o'clock sometime the tent blew down and there was such a deluge of rain that we all saved ourselves only by getting into the wagons. We did not have time to gather our bedding so everything was either blown away or was soaking wet. The lightning and thunder frightened the stock and caused them to scatter and run. The jack was staked out for we never let him loose at all. He pulled up his stake and came screaming and pawing toward the wagons wanting human company. The hired hand jumped out of the wagon first and called to me to come and help subdue him. He was crazed with fright but we got him tied

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up to one of the wagons where he could still hear us talk to him in a soothing voice.

The jenny had a bell on her neck and we never thought of tying her up and had it not been for that bell we probably would not have found some of the stock again.

The next morning was sunshiny and while my wife and the others gathered the scattered things and dried out the bedding the hired hand and I went to gather the scattered stock. About three miles from camp we drew rein and listened. I could hear the faint tinkle of a bell. We rode over into a dense thicket and there found the stock with the jenny and her two colts. The evening was spent in straightening camp and getting ready to move on the next day. It was a rough night and the worst one we had on the trip, although we were ten days coming through and camped out every night.

When we got to Vernon we found that our household goods had already arrived and the men had come and gotten them several days before. It took two wagons to haul the household goods and bedding although it had all been packed securely in boxes. The only furniture we brought was our organ and a sewing machine. We thought we could either

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buy beds, tables and chairs or do without. There were five feather beds in the boxes with the dishes, cooking utensils, wash pot, tubs, quilts and wearing clothes.

We were only thirty-five miles from home so we decided to camp and take an early start and make the last thirty-five miles in one day's drive. We heard some rumors of the river having been up but the general opinion was that it had run down enough for safe crossing.

When we got to the banks of the river there was quite a bunch of people ready to cross and some were already crossing. I do not remember just how it happened but my wife's wagon got to be the last in the line. Some one tied the jack behind her wagon and we never knew how that happened either for he had not been behind her wagon before.

I was already across with all the loose stock. I was sitting on my horse waiting for my wife's turn to come across. She had gotten entirely through the river except a little stream of water right near the north bank of the river coming right along fine when all at once her horses stopped and I wondered what was wrong so I rode out to meet her at once. I could see the wagon settling into the quicksand. When I got to her there that jack was behind her wagon settling down with his feet set. He had balked right

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in the middle of that quicksand and the horses could not budge the wagon with him set back on his leadrops like that. I rode up to my wife and stepped down onto the wheel of the wagon and let her take the baby in her arms and get on my horse and ride to safety. I got the jack, and by beating and coaxing I rode him out bareback then we had to rescue the horses and wagon. Before we got that wagon out we had six horses hitched to the wagon and thirteen men lifting the wagon out of the quicksand. After the delay we pushed on as fast as possible, without stopping to eat.

It was after nine o'clock when we got home. The neighbor, who had been looking for us all day heard our wagons and got on his horse bareback and came down the road to meet us, whooping and holloing and beating his horse with his hat until the horse was quite frightened and you would certainly have thought there was a prairie fire or something. He tried to get us to go to his dugout for the night but we were too tired, so simply went into the house, spread out our bedding and all lay down, too tired to even eat.

I brought wheat seed with me, determined to plant wheat. I made three straight failures and completely starved

out, losing my seed. I leased out to a man for six years, sold off the stock, took my wife and children and went back to Fairfield and went into the implement business.

I sold on a credit so that at the end of that six years I found myself broke again. I had this land and it was time for me to come back to it again anyway so back we came and here we are.

When Greer County was declared to be part of Oklahoma I could only hold one quarter and purchase one other quarter so had to find some one to prove up on the other half of my section and sell to me, which I did, and we lived there very happily many years.

My section joined the section that the town of Headrick is built on. I never did live in a dugout but had to steal wood from the Indians.

I always had a great faith in Providence and by heeding my hunches, as some people call them, I was saved from trouble more than once.

One day seven or eight of us neighbors decided to go over for wood. We liked to gang up that way for company and to help each other, too.

We all got across Otter Creek safely and were going around Long Mountain when they all got ahead of me some way. I guess I had to stop to fix the harness or something. Anyway, as I went to crawl back onto my wagon I thought, "Well they are so far ahead of me I'll just stop here and load on this old dry short-length stuff, and go on back home". I did just that thing.

Every man in that crowd was pinched and had to pay a fine besides laying out some days in jail. I was only saved by playing that hunch.

We had to ford all streams. I made it a practice to tie my hind wheels of the wagon whenever I started down a steep place. Once when I was over alone for wood I was driving four horses for I wanted a big load. I did not try to drive the team from the wagon but put my saddle on one of the wheel mares and drove from her back. The bank down into Otter Creek was steep where I started to cross. I got off and tied my wheels as usual. I got back into my saddle and started down. The first thing I knew I felt a stick of wood strike me in the back. I did not wait to look but jumped at once from the back of my nag. I landed safely but the load came on knocking both my wheel horses down and they in turn dragged the

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front horses to a stop. The singletree struck the nag I was riding and rubbed every bit of the hide off her hip and side clear to the saddle. I thought now I have one dead horse if not more. I spoke to them and they quieted at once and I began to unloose them as fast as I could. The front horses walked out of the water and stood quietly when they were loosened. As soon as I could I got the wheel horses loose so they could get up. There was not a sound until I loosened that nag with the saddle on. When she found that she was free so she could get to her feet she bounded to her feet and let out such a neigh of joy that all the mountains echoed the sound. The four horses were all pretty badly skinned but all got well.

We had to go to Navajo for a doctor so we did not have one except when we thought some one was going to die.

I had slow fever twenty-one days once and the doctor came every day. There were two young doctors there but they

liked to go to rooster fights so most people had Dr. Redding and I did, too. Once when my wife lay three days unconscious the doctor stayed the whole three days and nights and I decided he needed some help so I said

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to him, "Don't you think that I had better get you some help?" "Yes," he said, "if you can get me some help but if you get either of those rooster fighters at Navajo I am giving up the case right now. If you will wait till morning I think you will find your wife better and all will be well".

The first protracted meeting we attended here was at Gates Crossing, on the river under the trees.

People got religion in those days in large doses and most of the time it was enough to last a lifetime. At one of these meetings one of my very dearest friends got religion and was baptised, Mr. Herring, a big stockman. I am a Methodist and always have been.
