Form A-(S-149)

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

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RUSH, A. F. INTERVIEW, 9277.

Field Worker's name Zaidee B. Bland.

This report made on (date) November 22,23, 1937. 193

1. Name A. F. Rush.
2. Post Office Address Altus, Oklahoma.
3. Residence address (or location) Northwest of Altus.
4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month November Day 3 Year 1872.
5. Place of birth Fannin County, Texas. Fifteen miles northeast of Bonham.
6. Name of Father J. S. Rush. Place of birth Kentucky.
   Other information about father
7. Name of Mother Louisa Davidson. Place of birth Springfield, Missouri.
   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 17.

RUSH, A. F. INTERVIEW. 9277.

Zaidee B. Bland,
Journalist,
November 22, 1937.

An Interview with A. F. Rush,
Altus, Oklahoma.

My parents brought me to Indian Territory in the late '70's. I think, about 1878 or 1879. Father settled near Savanna about eleven miles south of McAlester. He came up to haul timbers for a mining company. We lived in a log house in the edge of a woods, about two miles from the mining camp.

We were not here but about a year until Pa disappeared. I was too small to help with the living, so Mother moved first to Lehigh and later to Coalgate to keep some boarders. The men who worked in the mine boarded with her. They each paid her $18.00 per month for meals and a bed to sleep in. She gave them a lunch early in the morning and did not see them again until night. So they were only at the house for two meals a day and to sleep, except on Sunday. We had to buy everything at the company store.

The soil in a mining country is all alkali or soapstone and you cannot raise a garden so everything has to

be bought. We had to buy water. A water wagon came around every few days and we had to pay 20 cents for a barrel of water. An old man and woman came once a week and gathered up all the dirty clothes from the houses in our row and took them away to wash. They charged 50 cents for a family's wash. Mother always did her own ironing.

There were no schools and the boys around these mines just grew up. We went fishing and hunting whenever we wanted to. Mother was well-educated and we had a lot of books, and she always took a paper or two. She taught me to read and figure and some way, I just learned things. I learned to drive by going with the men when they needed a little company or help. Mother had a frame house of four rooms. It was all company-owned and was not built very well, for the company was always moving the houses around. We burned coal in stoves at Coalgate. The company owned a big store, everything was gotten at the store in the way of food and clothing. The company issued scrip and a lot of people never saw any money at all. Their wages would all be used up in scrip before

pay day. Nine people out of ever, ten all around there worked for the mining company in some capacity.

We were only eight miles off the main line and there was a little short train that made two trips a day out to the mines. The railroad had a turntable out there and they would just turn the engine around and start right back.

We brought fresh vegetables and meat; mostly beef every day. There were several large ranches nearby, from which buttermilk and butter were brought to the miners. The grass-fed stock was so that butter and also buttermil did not cost much--15 cents for butter and 1 cents per gallon for buttermilk. We used canned milk for the coffee. Mother baked her own lightbread and pies. Cattle grew up on grass and never cost anything but a little tending.

There was good fishing. We had lots of creeks. The Indians called them all Boggy. There were Caney Boggy, Clear Boggy, Muddy Boggy, and Little Boggy. I mostly fished on Caney Boggy. The wild cane that you make fish poles out of grew a lot in Caney Boggy. I usually carried

a little gun and hunted squirrel while the fish were biting. Sometimes I would go home with so much game and fish that I could hardly walk; other days I might come home pretty nearly as empty handed as I started out. But I could usually get a squirrel. I almost always had a trout line out at night, an sometimes I would catch a fish weighing six pounds. Every kind of fish has days that they bite and days that they don't. Some days I would catch goggle-eyed perch; sometimes catfish or buffalo or drum. We ate everything that I caught, but some kinds of fish were better than others.

I had one sister just younger than I and Mother, Sister, and I lived at Coalgate until the Opening of the Oklahoma County to settlement when Mother got a wagon, put bows and a sheet in it, and bought a span of little mules. At the store she got a sack of flour, a side of bacon, a sack of meal that had to be sifted, some green coffee that had to be roasted and ground, and a camping outfit that she thought would do. Then, she, Sister, and I went over to be in the race for land to make us a

home. I was quite a lad and had picked up considerable information about driving and handling teams. When we got to the Canadian River, there were thousands of wagons awaiting their turns to cross. There was only one place that you could cross, but every one helped everyone else who needed any help and soon all were over, forming a line down the whole length of the country which was to be Opened.

Promptly at noon on the 22 of April, 1889, a man in army uniform came riding out where everyone could see him and fired a pistol into the air. The race was on. Mother had a red flag in her hand and she ran not fifty feet from where she was standing and stuck her flag into the ground. Everyone rushed by us and we were left far behind the mob. We camped there for two or three days when the placing party came by to survey our land and to give us an official slip showing the quarter we had laid claim to. Mother found that she was almost in the center of a quarter that bordered on the river. We filed properly and set up camp, plowed and planted a little feed stuff. It was too late in the year to plant much.

I was a lad of a boy but I cannot tell you the thrill that I had when I trod the land that I felt some day we would have title to and to know that I was my mother's protector. I felt that there would never be anything that I would be afraid of. We made permanent camp by a little stream. The grass was waist high everywhere. The mules did not need any feed, except what they could "rustle" for themselves. For one year we were very happy and contented, improving the camp and planning our home. Across the river in the Chicksaw Nation there was a big cattleman, who had a lot of land leased, and he came over and contested our claim won and set us out; he "lawed us plumb off the map". I don't know how they did it, but, of course, I know it was done because of money.

The town of Norman was being laid out and building was going on. I could get a little work there, digging ditches and helping run lines; so we moved camp over there. There were only a few little shacks in Norman. I stayed there a year or more, then went back into the

Chickasaw Nation and hired out to a big ranchman, "Red" Alexander. His land lay back on the Washita River. There was not a house around, but the big old ranch-house. It contained two monstrous rooms with a hall between and a bunch of lots and cribs around. I got $20.00 per month and all expenses, including washing and ironing. I was general handy man. I did whatever I was told to do, but here I really learned to ride the horses. I disremember, but I think that I stayed with "Red" for four years. I broke a lot of horses for him. He had a strain of buckskin horses that were never gentled. These horses had black stripes down their backs and black stripes on their lower limbs. A horse was ridden once a week for a real hard day and then allowed to rest a week. He was not ridden again until his day came around and every time the horse's day came, he would have to be roped and snubbed down to a post and saddled and broken out. Any one riding a horse would have to ride high for a few times and watch out for tricks, for the horse was sure to pitch if the weather was a little cool or rainy.

After he was broken out he would be gentle for the whole day and you could rope yearlings from his back all day.

I went to work for a man after I left "Red" who had a strain of big sorrel horses, bald-faced with glass eyes. They looked so much alike that you could scarcely tell them apart. They were the biggest rascals you ever saw. He had three of these sorrels that were over fifteen years old and they had to be broken out every time their day came just as though they were wild. The only difference was that, through the years they had learned every trick under the sun about how to throw a rider. You surely had to know how to ride them. After they were broken out they were as gentle as kittens and would eat out of your hand. It was a lot easier to break a wild horse, it usually pitched a few times and then began to run, and, if it did not fall with you, you were pretty safe, but if it did run or try to lie down and rub you off its back, you had to know how to jump free from the saddle and you could never have time to pick the place to light, so you would have to learn how to bunch yourself to save your bones. At that I have had my legs caught and broken several times and my

shoulders knocked down more times than I could count. I have seen a few wild horses turned back to the range, because they could never be broken to ride. They acted like they had no sense. They would never get bridle-wise, and I have seen a few horses shot. These would act so vicious just as though they were possessed of the devil and a lot of boys and men got killed.

There were a lot of men here who had just drifted out of the Eastern states with nonames that were real. There was no celebration about burying a man in those days. When a man got killed we just dug a hole in the ground and put him in it. Some times a coffin was made for him but not often. Usually, he was just wrapped in his blanket and rolled into the hole and covered up.

That was about all we could do. We had two graves on a hill under a blackjack tree that formed little mounds for a long time. One boy was killed by a horse and a few days later two men picked a quarrel in the yard by the bunk houses and drew guns. One man was killed; the other drifted away. There was no one to arrest him and investigate the affair. Gun law was the only law. At Paris, Texas

on the south and at Fort Smith, Arkansas, on the east were the nearest United States Marshals and, perhaps, if you started there to report a crime the man would be gone when you got back with an officer or perhaps you could not find an officer--he would be busy somewhere else. Those days were busy days for the "laws". They were mostly out on the trail somewhere.

I had now gathered quite a string of horses and I had my mother to think of and I had saved my money, never gambling and drinking it up like so many of the boys did. I got a lease of my own from an old Indian woman named Mollie Raglin. She was a real old woman and had married a white man and he had run off and left her and I promised to stay with her for eight years. She agreed that I could have everything I made on the land I cleared so I put up a log house, fenced quite a corral for my cows and built cribs and raised corn and cane, sweet potatoes and other vegetables. I dug a well and built a good ground-tank for stock water; built a levee across a draw, and had all the stock water I wanted. I first built a sixteen feet square logroom and went for mother. After she came and I had

more time, I split logs and stood them on their ends against the one room and built another room sixteen feet wide and twenty feet long. On the inside, the room looked as pretty and smooth as you please, but the outside had the bark on it. I put on a clapboard roof and a rawhide floor. There was a little sawmill in the community where they sawed logs on the halves, but there was no way of dressing them down to make them look smooth on both sides. All doorfacing and windowfacing had to be cut by hand. I had two window-sashes in this room, two and one-half feet square, for light. The sash was stationary and could not be opened; it was for light only. I went to the blacksmith and had him make hinges for my doors. We used wooden pegs for a latch except when we were to be gone for several days as was the case every time we went to town; there was a hole bored in the door and one in the jamb and before we went to town we drew a trace-chain through those holes and put a padlock on the chain. A door had two wrought-iron hinges put on with six screws each. Town was thirty miles away; we had to go either to Pauls Valley or to

Wynnewood. We never went to town except in a covered wagon and we would camp in the wagon yard. We did not go to town often.

We raised everything we wanted at home; we had potatoes, cabbage, turnips, and things like that the year round, for we would gather them in the fall and make a great mound of them, cover this mound with corn stalks and then dirt, which would keep these vegetables good to eat till there were new ones next season. We raised our own meat, made our lard and molasses. We could have fresh meat any day by going to the woods for it or we could have fish for the catching. We had plenty of deer, turkey, squirrels, quail all the year round and in the fall and winter, we had bear, coon, possum. I kept a pack of long-eared hounds, black and tan and red-bone. Nothing could beat those two breeds. They could hunt all night and then call for more. It would tickle them to death for me to put on my hunting cap and call them. I had a cap, with a loop in the front of it so that I could see how to aim at night. The cap was made of fur, with a reflector about as big as a door knob and

the lamp was incased so that the light would not blow out and I could see to aim fifty feet in front of me, especially if I could shine the light into the "varmint's" eyes. The dogs did not always wait for me to go with them, but would go alone and when they would tree any thing I would go and see what it was if I wanted to. I usually could tell by their bark what they had treed. I hunted 'coon, 'possum, wildcat, bobcats, and skunks in the winter for their hides. A good 'coon would bring about 50 cents, 'possum about 20 cents, and a skunk would be priced according to the size and stripe.

A bobcat is a gray cat with a short, flat tail. A wildcat is spotted more like a leopard, and is very mean. He can rip a hound's ear open with one swipe. If a dog has treed a dangerous animal, the dog will hop about and yap and yap, never giving the "varmint" a chance to jump on him, but if it is a 'possum or something like that, the dog will sit down with the other dogs in a circle around the tree and bark until some one comes. In the spring and summer I had to keep my hounds in a pen. I usually built the pen under the shade of a tree. I had

to feed them on cornbread and milk, and when I did not have time to go kill something for them I would feed them with scraps from the table. In the winter I always skinned all the "varmints" I killed and put all of them into a kettle except the skunk and would boil them until they were about half done and then feed them to the dogs, as I never liked to give my hounds raw meat. I did not want them to think they could kill their own meat, for fear they might get to killing pigs, calves or deer. I have heard my hounds bay many times at two or three o'cloc in the morning, and I would crawl out of bed and go to see what they had. We lived on this place until Mother died and was buried on the place. I can't tell much about Mother's religion but she was a good woman and I know she is safe and happy somewhere.

I began to freight for a company, when Mother went away. The company owned all equipment and drove cattle to their wagons. The tongue was cut off of one wagon and fastened behind the other with a trace-chain and five or six yokes of oxens were hitched to the front wagon. This is a slow, but sure, way of moving hundreds of pounds of

freight. I had gotten so used to saving my money for Mother that I just went on saving up my money. I have worked hard and lived honestly. I have done nothing in my life that I am ashamed of. I prowled around at first one thing and then another. I got to buying up cattle from the Indians for some big shipper. I would get two or three horses and an Indian boy for guide and interpreter and work one settlement of Indians at a time. I have had a lot of dealings with the Indians, first and last, and I want to tell you there was never a squarer race of people in the world. They always keep their word and expect you to keep yours and I have met my first time to have an Indian misrepresent his stock to me for a little more money. If the Indians promised you they would have a bunch of cattle for you at a certain place on such and such a day, you could depend on the cattle's being there. The Indians never forgive a wrong nor forget a kindness and they deal fairly with you if you deal fairly with them. I have been to their tribal trials and have known them to condemn a man to die, and he would be

turned loose to do as he pleased until the appointed hour. Then he would be at the place ready to be shot. They believe every Indian goes to the Happy Hunting Grounds regardless of how he was or lived and that in the Happy Hunting Grounds there will be no opportunity to be bad, there an Indian, his horse and dog and all that he has ever loved, will enjoy eternal bliss together.

I have been on lots of interesting hunts, but I would rather go bear hunting than do any kind of hunting. Bears are so innocent of guile and put up such a fair fight with the dogs and always go down like gentlemen, facing their foes. Bear meat is the healthiest meat of all wild meat. It is sweet and clean-tasting, for a bear eats nothing except good, clean nuts and grain, with fish and honey. Sometimes the black bear might get a very little pig, but not often. You can take a bowl of pure bear-grease and crumble your bread into it, eat it like soup and like it and you never feel like you have had too much grease and you would be hungry again in an hour or two. Bear meat and fat digest very readily that you feel like it does not stay with you.

Once twelve men, including myself, went over into Devil's Mountain to hunt bear; we came near to freezing to death and would have if we had not had so much nice pinewood to burn. There came such a big snow that Mr. Bear hid in his cave and we did not get one.

I would rather have a robe, coat, or rug made from a bear's skin than from the skin of any animal that lives. A bear will get so fat that he can hardly walk and will weigh between eight hundred and a thousand pounds. I have killed a lot of timber wolves, their hides make nice rugs, too. You may think tepees are cold, but they were always lined with the pelts of animals, and the floor is usually two or three pelts around the fireplace. I tell you the way the Indians used to live was wholesome and clean and their religion could not be beaten and the same thing is true of their morals. I always found Indians true blue. I married a true woman and we have raised five children: One boy and four girls, and educated them all and they are all good citizens and have been able to care for themselves through all these bad times. Oklahoma for me always.