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LEGEND & STORY FORM  
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION  
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

1. 374

Field worker's name Nannie Lee Burns

This report made on (date) July 2, 1937

1. This legend was secured from (name) S. W. Abrams

Address 232 H. N W. Miami, Oklahoma

This person is (male or ~~female~~) ~~white~~, ~~negro~~, Indian,

If Indian, give tribe Quapaw

2. Origin and history of legend or story From memory and remembered conversations from his parents.

3. Write out the legend or story as completely as possible. Use blank sheets and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached \_\_\_\_\_

INTERVIEW WITH S. W. ABRAMS  
232 H. N. W., Miami, Oklahoma  
Nannie Lee Burns, Field worker  
July 2, 1937

My father's parents were Josiah and Mary Abrams from New York. My grandmother Douthitt, a part Cherokee, made a widow by the Civil War and all means of a livelihood destroyed, was given transportation for herself and her children, William A. and Melissa J., to Illinois and here she became a demonstrator for the Singer Sewing Machine Company and with the trend westward came with her children from that state in 1880 and settled near Fulton, Kansas.

My parents were Abner Walter Abrams and Melissa J. Abrams, nee Douthitt. Father was born February 14, 1847, at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and mother at Loudon, Tennessee, October 8, 1800. They were married at Fulton about 1853.

#### Father's early life

Grandmother Abrams died when father was four years old and his mother when he was fourteen. His uncle, Benjamin F. Toussey, became his guardian. Till the death of his mother, he attended the local schools which were no doubt rude log buildings, and was taught reading, writing, and arithmetic; but he was a reader

and at his death he possessed a very valuable library. After his mother's death, father joined the army but because of his youth, his uncle secured his release. He ran away, however, and succeeded in enlisting again, this time at Fort Scott, and served through the war in western Kansas, Missouri, and Arkansas in the Second Kansas Battery. During his service he made a friend that was to be of much help to him in later years namely, Samuel J. Crawford, future governor of Kansas, and later an attorney in Washington, D. C.

After the war closed, father proved up on a claim in Wilson County and worked some time at a sawmill near Saint Joseph, Missouri, but soon drifted back to Fulton. Here he went into the general merchandise business and later also became interested in a sawmill in Colorado.

#### Uncle Ben Tinsley

Uncle Ben was a Baptist missionary to the Indians. He knew several Indian languages. He came first to the Quapaw country to preach and soon the Quapaws began telling him their troubles. Their land was coveted by the cattle barons and they had no way of earning a living for themselves, and most of their people had already gone to the Osage country.

Uncle listened to them and suggested that they talk to my father, as he was a much younger man than he; so they began coming to Fulton to see my father, sometimes on foot and sometimes riding their ponies. But father was established in business and did not like the idea of leaving there and bringing his wife and small children to this new country; and so it continued this way till one day father was at the sawmill in Colorado when he saw in an old paper that congress was considering the Dawes Bill, which would give each Indian eighty acres and throw the rest of their land open to settlement. He began to think of the Quapaws and soon he wired mother and told her if she was willing they would sell their holdings and move to the Indian Territory. She agreed and by the time he disposed of his mill and reached here she had already sold part of their property in Fulton. Knowing that he would have to depend on farming here he traded what property he could not sell for young stock, among which was sixteen shorthorn cows, good horses, new wagons, and a buggy, and farming implements. This, I think, was in 1887. There was not a suitable house for them and they were allowed to live on the government farm about

one and a half miles northeast of the present Sunnydale School. He made a living for his family by selling butter and cordwood at Baxter Springs.

#### Quapaw Affairs

After his arrival, father visited the Indian Agent and tried to secure his cooperation but there seemed nothing to do. Most of the Quapaws were gone and a clause in their treaty provided that when they had vacated their reservation so many years, their land reverted to the government. So in the company of Frank Valliere and another Quapaw, he went to the same country and visited the Quapaws there to show them the necessity of their return if they wanted to save their land. Immediately after they came here my father was adopted into the tribe and this was to be his pay for the help that he hoped to be to them. They had no money and this was all they could offer. Mother became secretary and during father's absence kept in touch with things. Father selected as his residence the present family home located on what was then known as the Ponca Hill, and now known as the Abrams Hill; and here shortly after he came, with the help of the tribesmen, he erected a two-

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story log house 20 x 40 feet. Although the house has been added to and modernized, this part still stands as a part of the building.

The first two trips to Washington were unsuccessful. On the third trip, my father was talking to his old friend, Ex-Governor Crawford of Kansas, and he told father to go home and take possession of the country and to put the people on a self-supporting basis. Father accordingly returned and employed J. G. Hogden of Galena, Kansas, to survey the country and to run the lines. The party would leave in the morning with a load of sandstones picked up from our hill and these they used as corner stones to mark the locations. Maps were made and then father would get them around the map spread most likely on the floor and get the Indian's consent to locate at such a place. Of course, most of them wanted to locate in the timber but he reasoned with them that this would not be good farming land and that they must have land to make a living, saying "You take forty acres here to live on, and then you take the rest out on the prairie and I will get you a man to farm it and make you a living."



So this was done and then father went to Fulton and went among the renters there and persuaded a number of families to move here. Among them were the Bingham's, the Beths, the Harbers, and others who have since become prominent families. As a part of his contract, each tenant was to erect a small house and buildings.

The prairie being covered with an excellent growth of bluestem grass, father reasoned that this should be a great hay market. He began, therefore, to work towards securing a railroad.

But all was not going smoothly during this time; every outside influence possible was being used against father's plan, for if he succeeded the cattlemen would lose out.

The early chiefs not realizing the seriousness of what was being done were easily persuaded or paid to sign something they did not understand, and this would mean a trip to Washington to undo what had been done. Often mother and father would get an uneasy feeling at night and would get in their buggy and drive to the home of some one of the tribe, and possibly have to talk to him a long time to find out what was being done or said, for it was not always easy to get the Indians to talk even to them.

Mother besides acting as secretary for the tribe, spent much time among them, stressing the need of schools and later persuading them to send the children to Haskell or Carlisle, persuading them to build houses for themselves, and suggesting methods of improving the home and its surroundings.

The Chief was elective. I think the first Chief after father came was Jim Medicine, followed by Charlie Quapaw Blackhawk, but I have often heard him say that Peter Clabber, who remained chief till his death, was the most helpful to him and seemed to understand most fully the importance of what they were trying to do. Father's Indian name was "White Eagle".

By 1895 father, with the help of the tribesmen and by following Governor Crawford's advice, had things going pretty much as he wanted; so with Frank Valliere and possibly others, they took their maps to Washington and with the influence of Crawford and others whom father had met during his many trips there succeeded in getting the maps they had made accepted by the government as the official allotment maps for the tribe. Looking forward, father thought that the allotments should be protected against alienation, and was

instrumental in getting a twenty-five year restriction clause in the allotment act. He thought in this time that the Indians should be competent to take care of themselves against the grafter.

In March, 1896, the quapaws were delivered their patents at Wyandotte, all signed by Grover Cleveland. As soon as all the allotments were approved, General Blair, a Frisco official with whom father had been in touch, came to our home and with the help of father and those who had worked so faithfully with him, secured a right-of-way across the quapaw country. Father, in appreciation for his services, received from the Frisco a life annual pass, but after many years it was revoked by them. One of the conditions of his helping the railroad secure the right-of-way was an agreement to establish a station in the territory, which was called Quapaw. In the contract, this stipulation was overlooked and no provision was made for an agent at Quapaw, but the matter was adjusted later. With the establishment of Quapaw and the sidetrack called a, a shipping point was provided for the soundst hay grown here.

Land had been set aside for the Quapaw Mission School and the government had been conducting a school here for some years. This was a mile east of Quapaw. The Catholics had also requested land for school purposes, so forty acres in the section south and east were assigned to them. However, they did not establish a school there till after the closing of the Quapaw Mission.

One incident that I might mention before I leave this subject. One day as father was ready to return home from Washington, he met at the station W. E. Lykins, who said, "Abrams, I'm licked." Father asked him what he meant and he said that he could not get the approval for the sale of the townsite of Miami from the Ottawas. Father replied that they needed the town and asked him to give him his papers; then calling a cab he returned to the capitol and with the aid of Crawford and others that he had met there through his frequent trips, in a couple of hours had the necessary signatures. He returned the signed papers to Lykins, who had been unable to get results because he was not acquainted there.

Ex-Governor Crawford took a great interest in the affairs of the Quapaws, and often visited my father at our home. The Quapaws, in appreciation for what he had done, said that when they could they would

remember him for his assistance. This opportunity did not present itself till after the discontinuance of the Quapaw Mission School, when the tribe by agreement deeded him eighty acres of the mission site. Father, feeling that his work was now done, began to give much of his time to leasing hay land and extensive farming operations.

#### Our Early Home Life

There were four of us children; I had two brothers, Harry and Earl B., and one sister, and Elizabeth.

At first as there were no public schools, father built a small building in one corner of our yard and hired a teacher for us and any other children that wanted to come. Here we attended school till 1900. There were never less than eight or ten pupils in this school. Mrs. Nell Wells, nee Stewart, was our last teacher.

My parents were interested in education and gave each of us the opportunity for a good education. I was sent to Dexter Springs, next to the military school at Columbia, then to William Jewell, and later to Saint Marys.

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My father was guardian for several of the Quapaw children, and was always sure that they were in school while under his care. One girl I remember, Mary Lane. When she graduated rather than let her come home father told them at the Loretta Academy to teach her music, and kept her there as long as he could.

We had three tenant houses on the farm, which consisted of our six allotments of twelve hundred acres on the prairie. One of them needed a well, so father hired Ollie M. Youse of Baxter Springs, to drill it. One evening Youse called my father up and told him that he had a "Jack mine" for him. They drilled two more holes and both showed ore.

#### Mining

From Galena, he hired men who knew mining and sunk a shaft. Then, he organized the Iowa and Oklahoma Mining Company, to develop our land, and leased other land east of section 30. Most of the ore was found on my sister's land, where the White Eagle, the Sunnyside, the Dark Horse, the Strong Bow, and the Last Chance mines were afterwards opened. Other mines that father helped develop were: Sunburst, Omaha, Hobo, Good Luck, Landcaster, and others.

Sunnyside

A town called Sunnyside sprang up three-quarters of a mile south of the present school of that name and continued till 1910. It even had a hotel.

Earlier Mining

This successful mining had not been father's first venture, for he had an interest in mining and was often around the Galena fields, knew ore, and was always watching for it. In 1891 having to haul water for home use a mile and a half he hired Robinson and Steelman to drill him a well at the home where the windmill now stands. This was drilled to the depths of sixty feet, but later it was deepened.

With Governor Kenfrow father formed the Tar Creek Oil and Gas Company, which leased a large part of the Quapaw acreage. They were interested in oil then, because of the fact that Tar Creek gets its name from an oily tar found near it. They drilled a few shallow holes and became discouraged; so they turned their acreage as a wildcat proposition to the Pennsylvania Company of that state who needed some acreage to fill in.

The Baxter Springs Home

Mother decided that she wanted pea fowls and so went with father to the home of Mr. Cooper in the north part of Baxter Springs to get them and he offered to sell them his house. The purchase was made that day and the family was moved to Baxter Springs; but the farming operations were still carried on at the farm and father came down each day.

We moved to Baxter Springs in 1900. While there father helped reorganize the Baxter National Bank. Mr. Brewster and the father of the late Charles Fibley of this city were his associates in this work.

In 1905 he bought his first automobile, a Great Smith, made in Topeka, Kansas. In 1915 he became active in the mining field here in the Tri-State District, but he sold out in 1917 and retired. From this time till his death on January 13, 1927 he spent his time as he chose, but much of it with his books. Mother passed on at the farm home December 21, 1934.

My Activities

After finishing school I secured a position on the road in connection with bank advertising and followed this till I decided that I wanted to be a



rancher; so in Kansas City I purchased a load of cattle and shipped them home and followed them and remained here till I was selected as one of the persons allowed to go to Oklahoma University from this county for a short course in radio and engineering. From the University we were sent to Camp Donophon and sailed for France September 5, 1918; but were switched around and so did not see any active service. I left France for home on December 24th. June 24, 1919 I married Ruby Nell McCall of Carnegie, Oklahoma, whom I had met at the University. We have since made our home in Miami, where I have been engaged in the mining business. We have two children, Jack and Gloria.

#### Conclusion

This brings to a close an interview with one who though not himself active in the affairs of the Quapaws knows from the oft repeated conversations in the home the difficulties that were met and overcome to give the Quapaws the broad acres and the rich mining lands that have been theirs.