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

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Field Worker's name Hera Lorrin

This report made on (date) February 25 1938

1. Name Mrs. Barbara Elizabeth Gannon Baker

2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 420 West Hayes

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month September Day 22 Year 1862

5. Place of birth Holt County, Missouri

6. Name of Father James E. Gannon Place of birth New York

Other information about father Died or disappeared during Civil War
was Union soldier.

7. Name of Mother Amenda J. Wridge Gannon Place of birth Kentucky.

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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Nora Lorrin
Investigator
February 25, 1938

Interview with Mrs. Barbara Elizabeth Gannon Baker,
420 West Hayes, El Reno, Oklahoma.

I was born in Holt County, Missouri, September 22, 1862. My father, James E. Gannon, was born in New York. I do not remember the date of his birth, but he was a Union soldier; about forty years of age when he was killed or disappeared during the Civil War. My mother, Amanda Jane Wridge Gannon, was born in Kentucky, October 2, 1830, and died in 1908. My people moved from Missouri to Brown County, Kansas, and I grew up there. There were just two of us children.

I was married to John W. Baker in Hiawatha, Kansas, December 29, 1881, and before we came to Oklahoma I was the mother of six children. While we were living in Kansas we farmed, but always had to rent a farm from someone else, as we did not own any land. We were desirous of obtaining a home of our own and when the Cheyenne and Arapaho country was opened, in 1892, we thought that was our opportunity. My husband and step-brother came overland to Oklahoma, in a covered wagon, bringing four horses,

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bedding, dishes and household belongings. The children and I came down on the train after my husband had bought a claim from Boone Johnson, paying \$440.00 for it. We landed at Okarche, December 29, 1892. Our claim was located seven miles west and one mile south of Okarche. Before the children and I came to Oklahoma, my husband had built a little one-room shanty, about 12 X 16 ft., so we put up two beds and "piled in". There were eight persons in the family and it was pretty crowded in that little home but the children were small and didn't take up much room.

We got our water from the slough, hauling it in a barrel that was placed on runners with shafts, and it was hauled by one horse. We used this slough water until we got our well dug. We got gyp water, but had to use it. We went to the Cheyenne country to get wood to burn and we called it "squaw wood". It was good wood and made good fires but the sticks were only about as big around as your wrist.

We built a sod chicken house and a straw barn. We took six poles with forks at the top and set them

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in the ground, putting poles around the top and then putting poles across the top and around the sides. We then covered the top and sides with straw and it made a good windbreak and shut out the cold from our stock, but when it rained our old straw barn leaked like a sieve, so it was not so good in wet weather. After we got started, about the second year, we raised lots of hogs and chickens. We had some cattle and two good milch cows, so had all the butter and eggs we wanted and we also raised lots of vegetables.

Okarche was our trading point and for the most part we did our trading with Heinen and How, who ran a general merchandise store, selling groceries, clothing, dry goods, etc. I have sold lots of eggs at 10 cents a dozen and many a pound of butter at seven cents a pound. We killed our own meat and salted it down in barrels and until we got our cave dug we would set our barrel of meat outside the house. The children would gather wild plums along the river and that was all the fruit we had until our orchard came into bearing. We had apples, peaches and grapes; not so many apples but

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lots of peaches and grapes. We also raised a lot of pie melons and used them in place of fruit, seasoning the sauce with sugar and stick cinnamon.

We raised some wheat, kaffir corn and maize, cutting the heads off the kaffir and maize and then cutting the stalks and stacking them into shocks to be used later for fodder for the stock. We also raised millet for the chickens, cut and stacked it as we did the wild hay. We also used the kaffir corn flour to make biscuits; it makes splendid biscuits, making a much darker bread but very palatable. We made hominy out of the kaffir corn also, and it is very good if you get a good "do" on it. I would clean it thoroughly, then take the skins off with a strong hot soda-water solution. Then it was handled just as other hominy, with lots of washings to get rid of the soda. I used to parch wheat and grind it in an old fashioned coffee mill and use it as a substitute for coffee, when we were out of coffee; it tasted like postum.

We used to herd our cattle, before everybody got their crops fenced. For awhile they had seven cows

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and I often took my knitting or some other hand work along with me when I went to herd the cattle. I usually had a dog along to help me and I had to do the herding on foot. When I was a girl in Kansas I used to ride herd on our cattle and often had to cut my own cattle out of herds on the prairie.

When my husband built our home, the first one, he dug about three feet into the ground and set the house down in it. He thought it would be warmer, and less likely to be blown down. The windows were just above the ground and there was just one door. One day my husband was gone, leaving me and the children at home. My oldest boy was sharpening an ax preparatory to cutting some wood, when three Indians in their war paint rode up on their ponies and stopped right in front of our door. The Indians sat on their ponies, jabbering with each other and peering down into our house, until it had us about scared out of our wits. We couldn't get away, as there was only the one door. The Indians did not try to come in but just sat there and looked

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at us. Then I remembered something that my mother had told me to do when I was a child, that if ever I was bothered with Indians, to say "You-Tucket-Chee" to them and they would go away and leave me alone. So I went to the door and said, "You-Tucket-Chee", and they wheeled their ponies and rode away. I do not know just what the words mean but suppose that they mean to go away, but whatever they mean, it worked.

The Indians used to camp down on the North Canadian River and we could hear the drums and their voices sometimes when they were particularly hilarious. I have gone to their camps lots of times, just to watch them. It was interesting to see their painted faces, their mode of living; squaws carrying their papooses on their backs, their tepee tents, ponies and numerous dogs. They wore lovely beaded moccasins, kept their babies in beaded baskets that were made on a back board, and they could stand the baskets up against something. There was an opening for the baby's head, or face rather, and that was all. Why the little things didn't suffer from the heat in summer is a mystery.

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There were usually two or three fires going in the camps and sometimes more, the burning wood making a rather pleasant odor.

The Indians used to come by our claim when the money and supplies were being distributed at Fort Reno; this usually took about two weeks, during which time they went streaming by daily. The longest train of Indians that I remember to have seen was about a mile long. They would be in wagons, spring wagons, on ponies and on foot. They would have their tents, tent poles, and the poles for their tepees in the backs of their wagons, and everything all set to camp when they got to Fort Reno. Wherever there were Indians, there were also numerous dogs. Most of the Indians would have their faces painted with red, blue and yellow, sometimes black paint. They also wore the flashiest colored shawls and blankets, red, blue, black in fact, all colors and combinations of colors were represented. Though the patterns or designs were typically Indian, once in a while you would see an Indian wearing a white sheet in lieu of a blanket, that

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is perhaps it was once white. They wore the shawls and blankets, summer or winter and often they were made of wool.

The homesteaders did not have a variety of amusements, much of their good times consisted in visiting each other in their own neighborhood. We went to church when there was any and the services were usually held in the schoolh^ouses. My children attended the Star School awhile and later went to the Mound Valley School in district No. 50. This school was taught by Miss Pearl Cruzan, daughter of Mr. Clarence Cruzan, a tall dark hair-^ed and dark-eyed man who used to run a sorghum mill. He made about twenty gallons of sorghum for us one time.

About all the game there was around our place were rabbits, ducks and quail; farther west there were some prairie chickens, but not to amount to anything around where we lived. The coyotes howled so much at night that we could not sleep. I've waked up many a night by their howling close up around the house. The children used to have a lot of fun mocking them. They would get out in the yard of an evening and give a c yote call and in

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a few moments the coyotes out on the prairie would be answering them. The coyote has such a choppy bark or howl at times that two of them can, and often do, sound like a dozen or more, and my children became very proficient at mocking them, sometimes I would hear them and wouldn't know whether it was the kids or the coyotes.

An old maid of the name of Annie Barker lived across the road from us and there was a colony of prairie dogs on her land that occupied about fifty or sixty acres. These prairie dogs would sometimes move over on our side of the road and when they did my husband or some of the boys would go and kill them. They used that prairie dog colony as a sort of weather barometer. They could tell what the weather was going to be by watching the activities of the prairie dogs. You could always depend on them, if they became very active all over the colony, pushing fresh dirt up around their holes, you could depend on it that a storm was on the way. The prairie dog town was full of rattlesnakes and owls. The owls were about the size of screech owls. I do not know whether the snakes and owls lived with the

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prairie dogs in their holes or not, but I do know that wherever there is a prairie dog town there will also be rattlesnakes and owls and they seem to be on good terms with each other.

One of our neighbors lost an infant in the early days before there were any cemeteries and they buried the little child in their pasture.

We used to have hail storms, but we were never completely hailed out at any time. We lived on this claim for thirty years and then sold it and bought another farm southwest of Calumet and lived on that one for three years. Before we left the first farm however, we had it pretty well improved, with a good house, though small, a barn, granaries and other improvements. My husband died May 16, 1922. We still own the farm southwest of Calumet, but my boys prefer to live in El Reno.