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INTERVIEW

12185

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Benjamin Hawley Bailey.

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Ella Robinson,
Investigator,
Nov. 22, 1937.

Life and Experiences of an Indian
Territory man, Benjamin Hawley
Bailey, given by son, Rowland S.
Bailey of Muskogee.

Benjamin Hawley Bailey was born at Enterprise, Arkansas, a little town near the Indian Territory line a few miles from Fort Smith, in 1839. He was the son of Dr. Ward Howard Bailey of New York City and Laura Hawley Bailey.

After completing his medical education his father, through the influence of Dr. Joseph Bailey, brother of Dr. Ward Howard Bailey, who at that time was stationed at Fort Gibson as army surgeon, my grandfather and his young bride came to the Territory, but located at the little town of Enterprise, Arkansas, where he began his medical practice. He erected a house of hewn white oak logs in which to live and there was where my father was born June 5, 1839.

The home is still standing and is in a very good state of preservation. I, with other members of the family, visited it on Decoration Day, May 30, 1937.

In 1850, my grandfather moved to North Fork, Creek Nation, near where the town of Eufaula now is. There he engaged in

the practice of medicine until the beginning of the Civil War, in 1861. My grandfather received numerous threatening letters at the beginning of the war due to the fact that he was a Northern man in a Southern country and was looked upon as an enemy. For personal safety, he was advised by his friends to return to the North which he did, going to the home of his boyhood in New York where he remained for the entire duration of the war. My grandmother, with the younger children, moved to Fort Smith where she kept boarders to support herself and family.

My father "Ben" having reached the age where he could enlist in the army returned to the Creek Nation and enlisted in Company A, Second Creek Regiment, where he served throughout the war. He was often in the vicinity of the present site of Muskogee. He was stationed on Agency Hill (then known as negro hill) as a spy. He not only had to keep a watch on the Federal troops stationed at Fort Gibson and check on their maneuvers but on their herds of stock as well with the view of replenishing the supply of beef and work animals for the Confederate forces. Father was engaged in all the skirmishes

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in the vicinity of Muskogee and Grand River. At the highest point on Agency Hill he had a commanding view of the entire country.

While stationed on the hill he often saw the tracks made on the rocks there. In later years he revisited the spot and found many of them missing and expressed a feeling that some steps should be taken for the preservation of those that remained. The tracks represented a footprint in an Indian moccasin. The supposition is that the tracks carved in the rock were made by a band of Indians long before there was a known immigration of Indians westward.

The moccasin tracks were in sizes that fitted men, women and children. They were a peaceful tribe and not on the war-path as they were taking the women and children with them, something that was not done in times of wars.

They came from the East and were traveling in a south-westerly direction and the tracks were supposedly made to show those following the course which they had taken. At the time my father saw them in the early sixties, there were a number of these tracks of all sizes; at the present time there is only on rock with the imprint of two moccasin feet.

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During the latter part of the war, Father served as Steward in the Confederate hospital at Fort Washita. At the close of the war, July, 1865, he surrendered at Fort Smith and was employed in a general mercantile store there by a former Federal officer, Captain Stone. Although they had been enemies during the late strife, they were friends afterwards. Later he engaged in business for himself at Enterprise and served as postmaster at the same time.

In 1870, he was married to Miss Jessie Bishop of Fort Smith who died in 1877, leaving two little girls. Both are now living, Mrs. Laura Terry of Shamrock and Mrs. Kate Phillips of McAlester.

Father, during his association with the Indians, formed a great attachment for them and they for him.

In 1879, he, with his two little girls and his widowed mother, moved from Enterprise, Arkansas, to Okmulgee, where he engaged in the mercantile business with his brother-in-law, Mr. S. S. Sanger. They made the journey with one horse-drawn wagon, one ox-drawn wagon and one carriage in which the family rode. At one point on the trip, the oxen ran

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down a steep bank into a stream of water over-turning the wagon in which among many things was a large straw packed barrel of dishes. They were greatly dismayed expecting that every dish would be broken but to their surprise and pleasure not a dish was cracked. The youngest little girl, Kate, was greatly frightened when they approached a stream and her grandmother would pull a pillow slip over her head when they were crossing. In 1879, Father returned to Enterprise and was married to Miss Rebecca Hawley who died in 1888 at McAlester. As an evidence of the friendship the Creek Indians had for my father they wanted to grant him full citizenship in their tribe as they recognized in him a loyal friend; however, he declined to accept the offer on the grounds that he felt that he did not deserve it and that he had done very little for them.

Among his many friends in the Creek tribe were Chief Pleasant Porter and Judge G. W. Stidham. His youngest brother, Br. Ward Howard Bailey, Jr., married Ella, the daughter of the late Judge Stidham.

In the early eighties they moved from Okmulgee to Muskogee where he was first employed by J. S. Atkinson who

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owned and operated Muskogee's first hardware store. Later he was connected with the Patterson Mercantile Company. While thus employed he owned and operated an overland freight line from Muskogee to Okmulgee, which he hired a man to operate.

Part of the house in which they lived is still standing at 202 South Main Street. The houses all face the railroad track and what is now Main Street was his back yard and horse and cow lot.

In 1885, on account of ill health, he moved to a farm where the town of Stidham is now located. My father was a pioneer in many respects. He was the first clerk of the Southern Methodist Church in Muskogee. Later a charter member of the first church of that denomination at McAlester. Operated the first stock of lumber in Muskogee. Was a member of the first City Council at McAlester. Owned the first dairy and brought the first soda fountain to McAlester.

Father was a strict observer of the Sabbath. While he was engaged in the confectionery business he never allowed his store to open on the Sabbath although that would have been his best day for business.

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His third marriage was to Mrs. May Rose, a granddaughter of Reverend Ruble, a pioneer Methodist minister who for some years was in charge of Asbury Mission, a Methodist school for Indian children near Eufaula. Mrs. Helen Sittle, a teacher, in the Oklahoma City schools is their only child now living.

Father joined the Masonic Lodge soon after the Civil War and soon after his death which occurred at Oklahoma City, April 21, 1930, at the age of 91, was said to be the oldest Mason in Oklahoma. While living at North Fork in the early days the nearest Masonic Lodge was at Fort Gibson. He, in company with Judge Stidham and other Masons in that vicinity, attended lodge there. They would come to the Arkansas River the first day and stay over-night at the Nevins Ferry Inn, go on to Fort Gibson the second day, attend a lodge meeting, spend the second at the Inn, returning home the next day, taking three entire days for the trip. Father was of a kind, friendly disposition and in early days had endeared himself to the Indians and other friends in the Territory and retained their friendship throughout his entire life. He was buried at McAlester with Masonic honors.