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May 11, 1937

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Field Worker Zaidee B. Bland
Indian-Pioneer History Project S-149.

Interview with J. G. Brawley
Duke, Oklahoma.
Born 1866, Parker Co. Texas.

Father's name J. W. Brawley
N. Carolina.
Mother's name Sarbra Ann Brawley
N. Carolina.

THE EXPERIENCE OF A
PIONEER OF OKLAHOMA
J. G. BRAWLEY
DUKE, OKLA.

For several years I had been going and coming from Texas to Oklahoma. In 1899 I sold all my property in Texas, determined to make my home in Oklahoma forever and here I am.

I made the last trip in a covered wagon, drawn by two black mares. One was named Moll and I kept her until she finished her life here and I know when that host comes riding through the clouds on that last great day, if I am permitted to be one of them I will be riding old Moll instead of a white one unless maybe she will be white over there. I crossed at Doan's crossing but the river had been up and we had to put a lot of straw into the river before it was safe to try with the wagon, for quicksand was always bad after a rain or big rise. I

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leased land from Mr. Haney with a dugout and corrals already constructed.

The very first thing that I remember to have done after we were unloaded was to haul up to the house four wagon loads of Buffalo chips for our winter fuel. Then we cut blue stem grass for hay during the winter. We never had anything to feed our horses except this hay. We just turned them loose on the prairie to eat curly mesquite grass. This wild grass was as good for the stock dry as it was green in the spring. It never grows tall enough to be harvested but all stock like it and it is a very excellent grass for horses. We made our entire crop with only the grass for the horses to eat. (I never carried a gun (pistol) in my life, I didn't need to, I always carried my fiddle. I never saw a crowd so mad or drunk in my life that a few tunes on the old fiddle would not quiet and start them to thinking about something pleasant or maybe dancing. It was a heap safer than a gun, I never did like to see people shooting at each other, and no man is going to shoot another one while he is playing a fiddle. I have been among the Indians a lot in my life and found that they liked my playing the fiddle as well as any other kind of people.

Once I was at an Indian fair and the Indians were having a lot of fun shooting a bow and arrow at a mark 100 yards away; I pulled out a silver dollar and said, "this is yours if you can knock it out of the crotch of this tree." I placed the dollar in the crotch of a little tree. The arrow sped true, the dollar went spinning. Some of his friends took the dollar to him. It was worth the dollar to see such good shooting.

I had heard a lot about these Gyp sinks in the western country and was always a little scared of them. One day I was plowing along and all at once my horses sank, they went down about five feet. Well, scared ain't no name for me or the horses either, I got my horses out but I can show you the hole to this day, about two miles from here, right there in the middle of the field.

Rattlesnakes! "Say, sister, did you know them things were good to eat?" "Well, they air--just roast them in the ashes or skin them and fry them brown and I tell you they are good eating. I had rather eat a rattlesnake than a prairie dog any time. I have et prairie dogs; they ain't so bad. Prairie dogs, snakes and owls live in the same town but not in the same holes. Mr. Owl and Mr. Prairie

dog visit. I have seen them sitting on the same bank around a hole and Mr. Dog would be chatting just as though he were talking to Mr. Owl who would nod as though he understood. When Mr. Snake comes around the Owl and dog both vamoose pronto.

"We used to get a dollar for every wolf's ears and brush we would carry to town and believe me, I have had lots of fun killing them sneaks. I used to always sleep with my rifle for my pillow, I wasn't skeared you understand but never knew when one of those yellow varmints would come prowling around camp and if I got him, why there was a dollar and we never had too many of those cert wheels in those days. Didn't need them then like we do now cause we didn't have to go hungry then like we do now if we haven't a dollar. I have sat up many nights till ten o'clock, helping mother card and spin the thread so she could make me a shirt or a pair of jean pants. The only light we had was a grease streak. Know what that is? Well, its a twisted rag stuck into a snuff bottle full of any kind of grease. I think mother used mostly hog grease.

We had a cousin named Joe who lived with us. He and I nearly always went hunting together. One morning mother

said, "Boys I am about out of meat, you had better go out get me an antelope." Some way Joe didn't want to go, so I took my old rifle and trotted over the hills a little way. Found a bunch of them critters in no time, just grazing along. I came over the hill sorter sudden like and they threw up their heads and away they went - but I knew they would not go far maybe just over a little rise. So I waited a little till they would quiet and go to grazing again. The wind was from them to me and I walked nearly to the top of a little rise of sand and then got down on my belly and crawled the rest of the way to the top for I sure didn't want to miss this time. I had my gun in my hand just as I raised up to look over that hill Mr. Wildcat on the other side undertook to take a peek from his side of the hill. Say I believe we really touched noses. We were both skeared. I pulled off my hat and hit that critter in the face and fell right over backwards rolling clean down that sand hill before I got my breath. That cougar let out as big a hollow as I did. I skinned for home and I guess he did too. When I got home with no meat, I had to tell why. How they all laughed. Joe said, "you dumb ox you, why didn't you use your gun?"

I clean forgot my gun and panther cat hides were worth two dollars and one-half, too. "Well," I said, Joe, come on and lets go back, taint very fur and you know, where there is one panther cat there is usually two and maybe we can get them both, taint fur (far) nowadays."

Well, Joe got hisn (his) and I took a better holt on my gun and out we started again.

I followed my tracks right up that old sand hill, got my hat right whar (where) I had hit that cat in the face. The print of that cat showed he had fell right over backwards and then lit a shuck from them parts. As we backtracked that panther through that little valley, weren't long before we picked up another track smaller. Then we knew sure that we were stalking two cats. We tracked some three or four hours. It was mighty hot being in the middle of the day by now, and we knew panthers ways enough to know they was holed up long ago somewhere. We come to a little clump of bushes, not much, but one tree was big enough to climb up and take a look around. We was getting over in the Gyp hills now and we thought we might likely see a cave, maybe where the cats might have a den. We had been coming awful quiet-like always keeping the wind in our face so the

cats would not get our scent down wind. Joe motioned he would climb up that biggest tree and I nodded my head and reached for to hold his gun. He shook his head, no, he might want to take a shot at something when he got in that tree. It was kinder awkward for Joe to climb with his gun; he was going sorter slow-like, the leaves in the tree was awful thick and there was a wild grape vine too that made it harder to see anything in the tree. Anyway, we wusn't looking for anything in the tree. Joe had got a good ways up and I was standing with my gun in the hollow of my arm, watching when Joe reached up as high as his arm would go to get a hold of a bigger limb so as to pull himself up where he could get a better view of the country. In place of grabbing the limb his hand touched something soft. Such a screeching and a spitting, Joe tumbled out of that ree backwards and a panther put an ear right on top of him. The panther streaked across the sand and Joe picked hisself up out of the sand, not hurt, except a scratch from the limbs. When I seed Joe warn't hurt, I began to laugh: "Joe," says I, "why didn't you use your gun, panther hides is wurth (worth) two dollars and one-half?"

Well, Joe and I were even. We went over another little rise and got ma the antelope she wanted and went home. We didn't get those cats that day but we never gave up stalking them until we had those five dollars in our jeans for their hides. I didn't have anything to shoot with for a long time but a muzzle loading gun.

The Indians came one time and burned all our feather beds and took our clothes and quilts. Mother hid with the younger children. They did not burn the dugout so we set up house keeping again. We had to pick the seed out of the cotton for mother to card to make new clothes and quilts.

About the only place to go was camp meetings under the trees in the summer and dances any old time.

I think my mother was the best singer of old time hymns and was the prettiest and happiest woman in the world when she shouted at them meetings. We always went in ox wagons to the meetings, as well as to the dances, and never came home till morning from either place. I don't know much about my religion, I have always been a moral and honest man and I figure that ought to get me somewhere when the roll is called, and some way I reel like mother

will be waiting for me for she could dance and sing and shout too. I'll bet I have played for more dances in Oklahoma than any other man living and I played baseball till I was fifty-five years old, and I never cussed when ladies were present, if the other boys stole a base when I wasn't looking or I was put out by the wrong ruling of the umpire, even if I knew it was unfair. Sister, you will have to come back and let me tell you about my courting days, and all them dances I played fer.

Note--The typist has followed as closely as possible the speech of Mr. Brawley, J. G., as shown by the Field Worker's notes without attempting to correct.

SUPPLEMENTARY STATEMENT BY ZAIDEE B. BLAND:

All of this experience as related took place in western Oklahoma. The fuel was used in the western part of this county. The Indian fair occurred somewhere on or near Cache Creek and was called the Lawton fair but I understand it took place somewhere in the region of the Big Pasture or on the reservation. He said that he had completely forgotten the name of the tribes but remembered that at the time he could distinguish them by the form of their dance. Mr. Brawley is not an educated man--in fact, I don't believe he writes at all and can read very little if at all--but I never saw a more perfect physique at his age. His figure is tall and erect, his step is sure and quick, and his eyes clear.