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BRASFIELD, BILL

INTERVIEW

#13531.

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

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**BRASFIELD, HILL.**

**INTERVIEW.**

**13531**

Field Worker's name ~~Melvin Stites~~

This report made on (date) ~~March 30~~ 193~~8~~

1. Name ~~Bill Brasfield~~

2. Post Office Address ~~Barra, Oklahoma~~

3. Residence address (or location) \_\_\_\_\_

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month ~~May~~ Day ~~11~~ Year ~~1880~~

5. Place of birth ~~Harrison County, Arkansas~~

6. Name of Father ~~Perry Brasfield~~ Place of birth ~~Kentucky~~

Other information about father \_\_\_\_\_

7. Name of Mother ~~Hilda Gee~~ Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

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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Melvin Stites  
Investigator  
March 31, 1938

Interview with Mr. Bill Brasfield  
Hanna, Oklahoma

It is necessary that the first paragraph of this story have for a setting a point about a day's wagon drive southeast of Harrison, in Marion County, Arkansas, for it was there in 1886 that my brother, Abner Brasfield, at the age of twenty-two, shot and killed a man of the name of Bill Hamm, Justice of the Peace. My brother, Abner, was farming our father's land and Hamm was also, and it was after an argument over the land that my brother killed Bill Hamm. Abner was placed in the Harrison jail where he remained for two years before he was brought to trial. He was sentenced to twenty-one years in the Arkansas penitentiary at Little Rock. However my father appealed for a new trial. It was granted; Abner was taken back to the Harrison jail pending this new trial. He escaped and started in scouting. He, no doubt, realized that the best place to do this was in the Indian Territory. He came to the Territory and for the next two years we received infrequent letters from him postmarked "Tulula".

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It got to where we wanted to see him pretty badly, this was the main reason for our moving to a place within three miles of Eufaula, Indian Territory, which we did on March 4, 1890. I was but nine years old at the time, I was not ten until the 11th day of the following May, but it is easy to make impressions on the mind of a youngster of this age. I remember our journey from Arkansas and our first home in the Indian Territory. We came in wagons with our stock strung out behind.

My father had leased one hundred and sixty acres of very fertile bottom land. This farm nestled in the fork of the South and North Canadian Rivers where they meet three miles east of Eufaula. On this farm stood a double log house with a long hall-way separating its two wings. This house was typical of pre-statehood Indian architecture, especially that of the well-to-do Indian. As a general rule, the ends of the hall way were left open. We got water from a well.

Much of our furniture we made ; we made chairs out of hickory using cowhides to cover the bottoms. We made our plow stocks. The implements we most used in farming

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were Georgia stocks, double shovels and one horse turning plows. We had four mules, all four of working age. We had one team of oxen and these oxen were good workers. We used them to plow and to drag up logs for the building of houses.

Our farm had many kinds of trees on it. However, most plentiful were the cottonwood and hickory trees. In these woods roamed wild game including deer and hogs; these wild hogs were vicious, it wouldn't do to let them catch you out in the open. There were plenty of wild turkeys and at night we could hear the beavers at work and loud swishes told us of trees being felled by the beavers. Oftentimes they could be seen in the moonlight both in the forest and on the rivers. Coons could be heard battling with each other in the still of the night.

We hadn't been in this primitive setting but a few days when early one morning three men on horses rode up to the house. My brother, Abner, sat on the middle horse, his hands handcuffed to the saddle horn, and his feet fastened by a chain that crossed under the horse's belly. On a horse on each side of him sat a negro United

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States Marshal, Grant Johnson and Bass Reeves. They would not let Abner dismount; just gave him time to say a few words. They had caught him at Broken which is twelve miles to the east of Eufaula; they were taking him to Little Rock. When Brother Abner broke jail at Harrison a \$1500.00 reward had been placed on his head.

We followed them into town and once in Eufaula, Johnson and Reeves turned my brother over to Andy Duren, as a guard while they went in search of breakfast. Duren was a deputy placed at Eufaula to keep watch over the inhabitants of its dozen or so residences, two stores, post office and depot. It was in front of the post office that Abner was permitted to dismount, his hands having been uncuffed and his feet unshackled. However, from my place on the sidewalk beside my father, I could catch glimpses of Abner through the crowd that milled about. Abner stood beside his horse, handcuffs dangling from one wrist, and the chain still attached to his ankle. Duren stood nearby.

A few minutes later a well known horse and rider appeared and the crowd parted to let them through. The

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horse was black, weighing about eleven hundred and eighty-five pounds and went by the name of Niger. He had never been out run in several years <sup>of</sup> competitive territorial horse races. His rider was his owner and my cousin, Abner Brasfield and it was after Cousin Abner that my brother was named. Cousin Abner, then nearly sixty years of age, dismounted within a few feet of Brother Abner, but Niger walked up by Brother Abner's side. Into my mind leaped the thought that Brother Abner would try to make his get away on Niger. I later learned that almost everyone else thought the same thing but that's where we all were fooled, including Andy Duren.

Into Niger's saddle bag went Brother Abner's hand and when it came out it brought with it a 45 Colt which we had aforetime name "Old Martha". Cousin Abner lived at Brooken and hearing of Brother Abner's arrest had hurried by our house after "Old Martha". This 45 Colt had been named "Old Martha" after Cousin Abner's wife who had given it to us.

The handcuffs still hanging from one wrist and the chain dragging, Brother Abner backed away from the deputy



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sheriff. The crowd, by the way, had suddenly diminished. Duren told Brother Abner to stop. Whereupon Brother Abner retorted, "Go to h--l." The deputy jerked his gun and fired without taking careful aim. Even as he fired I saw my brother take a careful aim. Duren's shot went wild and Brother Abner's shot knocked the gun from Duren's hand severing the thumb from his hand. The deputy dived through the post office door. (This building still stands just across the street west of Belt's store in the present town of Saffaula.) Brother Abner took two parting shots at the door through which the deputy had disappeared. His bullets embedded themselves in the woodwork of the door.

When Johnson and Reeves arrived on the scene a minute later, Father and Cousin Abner were placed under arrest and taken to Fort Smith, they were accused of plotting Brother Abner's escape. When the others of us reached home we found Brother Abner seated in a chair on the porch with a Winchester between his knees. He had forced a neighbor to cut his chain and handcuffs off.

Dad and Cousin Abner made bond and came back home; they made three or four trips to Fort Smith for trial but

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it was never held and the charges against them were finally dismissed. Brother Abner stayed around for a few days and then went to Texas. Two years went by before we saw him again. At that time he returned and gave himself up to Grant Johnson. A detective in Texas had broken Brother Abner's arm with a shot. Brother Abner served four years in the Arkansas prison at Little Rock and the Governor pardoned him.

For several years before Statehood Brother Abner served on the law force at Eufaula. I recall hearing of a gun battle between Jake Stanley, outlaw, and Grant Johnson, United States Marshal. Stanley had stolen quite a bit in and around Eufaula. One day he was seen leaving town in a wagon. Johnson followed on horseback and a little way out of town caught up with the Indian-negro outlaw. Stanley halted his team and using his wagon to hide behind returned the United States Marshal's fire. Johnson fired from his saddle. Sitting on his horse he made a good target. Stanley knowing that Johnson wore a breast plate, aimed at his head. Johnson had to head back to town, doing so after two of the bullets sent his way by the outlaw had found their way through his hat.

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A pre-statehood incident surrounding outlaws of more ill repute is the following:

Marion Horn and his family, wife and three children, lived on the east side of Eufaula in a double log house with a hall-way between the two wings. Mr. Horn had better than \$1500.00 about the house in the '90's. This was 'come on' enough for Belle Starr and Pony Starr, infamous outlaws. These two rode up one night and held up the Horns. From the sewing machine drawer in Mr. Horn's house they took \$90.00. They asked Mr. Horn of the whereabouts of the \$1500.00 which he had on his place. Naturally, Mr. Horn refused to tell them and the outlaws proceeded to make him tell. They threw a rope over a rafter in Horn's barn and strung him up by the neck. However, before he became insensible they lowered him to the floor of the barn and offered him a chance to talk. Horn, even under this punishment, refused to give information, and the outlaws went a step further, they burned their victim's feet while he dangled in the air but to no avail and the outlaws had to give up. Horn later said the money the outlaws

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were after was buried directly beneath the spot over which he was tortured. Mr. Horn's toe nails came off and he was unable to walk for better than three months. Neither did he ever regain his natural color but dark ugly spots appeared on his face and neck.