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INTERVIEW.

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James Russell Gray,
Investigator.
April 18, 1938.

Interview with Mary Willie Bowers,
Route 1. Box 188.
Hartshorne, Oklahoma.

I have always lived in this section in what is now Eastern Oklahoma. When I was born on July 22, 1868, this was called the Choctaw Nation and was part of the Indian Territory. I was born close to the Arkansas line, at the foot of Sugar Leaf Mountain; Poteau was north and west of us and Cameron was almost due north.

Father was James Davis O'Kelley, known to his friends as "Doc." He was from Hall County, Georgia, and he must have been born about 1862, because he was seventy-three when he died three years ago. He was born during the Civil War, for I have heard him say so. He is buried at Vivian, a little school district thirty miles or so southwest of Hartshorne, in Pittsburg County. Father was named after one of the Southern leaders during the Civil War.

My mother is still living; she will be seventy-one this coming August. Her maiden name was Idella McDonald

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and she was born somewhere in Alabama.

The first home I can remember was when I was four years old. It was near the Frisco, I think it was the Frisco railroad tracks, three miles from Poteau on the road to Wister. It was a two-story house, two big rooms downstairs and two up. It was made of lumber, had porches at the front and back and there was an outside staircase going to the second floor. The porches were high off of the ground and we children were always falling off. At that time I had two brothers and one sister.

My father was farming then. He raised sweet potatoes, collards, corn and cotton. There was a gin at Poteau where we took our cotton. We traded at Poteau, too, got all our supplies there. I remember that the railroad went right down main street.

We moved to that two-story house when I was about six months old and we moved away when I was four. There were seven cases of slow fever, some of them in our own family, in that neighborhood when we left. We moved a short distance to a house in a field and stayed there a year and then moved

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to a place on a hill above Turtle Lake; the hill was covered with pines. We had a big log smoke house there and we kept it full of meat all the time; beef and pork, but mostly pork, smoked and salted.

My father owned some cattle and lots of hogs, I remember his going out and marking the ears of the hogs.

There was a drought one year when we were living on the hill above Turtle Lake, I'm not sure just what year that was but I know it was before 1894. The crops practically burned up and the gardens, too. We ate so many navy beans that year that my mother never liked them anymore. There was work then, though; a man could get 50¢ a day for splitting rails and 50¢ went a lot farther then. I remember that mother sent a dollar to town by one of our neighbors for some groceries. She got a fifty-pound sack of flour, a bucket of sorghum, a gallon of coal oil, a box of matches, and some change back.

While we were living there Father drove some cattle from Arkansas to Checotah, in the Territory; he was working for a man named Coon Batteree. The cattle forded the Potomac River close enough to our house on the hill above Turtle Lake

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for us to hear the cattle lowing. There was a storm the night before they crossed the river, and Jean Ratteree, son of the boss, got down on his knees and prayed; Father told us about it. Next morning Jean was cursing the cattle and someone reminded him of his prayers the night before. The boy grinned and said, "No danger now, the storm's over." I think that Coon Ratteree was at one time a deputy United States marshal.

Father studied medicine under some man near where I was born, some doctor whose name I ^{have} forgotten, then Father went to Louisville, Kentucky, and studied medicine a short time, after which time he practiced in the Territory. He would ride off on his horse, with his medicines in a saddle-bag, and be gone two or three days at a time.

In 1894 we moved to Enterprise. We got there in November and moved into a two-story house. The town was a nice little place with lots of neat, small houses and pretty chimneys.

The school house was a two-room building; there were about fifty pupils and two teachers. Professor Stroud was the principal and he had an assistant named Miss Lee Yowell.

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There was a post office at Enterprise and some general stores, a blacksmith shop and a gin. The people around there were mostly farmers, with a few scattered cattlemen here and there. Donahue owned a store and so did a family named Robinson.

There were churches in Enterprise; Methodist, Baptist and Church of Christ.

We moved west of Enterprise after about a year, over into what is now Pittsburg County and settled at a little place called Bower; a post office, three stores and a blacksmith shop. John McGill and a man named Ballard ran stores and a fellow named Barton ran the blacksmith shop. I remember he lived in a tent that had wooden sides and a chimney.

A man named Charley Howard shot Barton over a debt of five dollars; I saw the gun fire. Howard was sent to Leavenworth for ten years; our next blacksmith was named Levi Bruner.

We had school at Bower for three months in the summer time, and sometimes for three months more during the winter. We called it a National School, I think. White teachers were paid by the United States Government to teach the In-

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dian children and white people could send their children, too, if they paid a dollar a month tuition. The first teacher I remember was named Sam Ross, the next a fellow named Bass.

Father made a living practicing medicine, riding about over the country. The people who lived in that vicinity were mostly farmers; Eufaula and McAlester were the nearest large towns.

We lived in a one-room cottonwood log house, which had two sheds built onto it and we used the front one for a porch and the back one for a kitchen. We had a cookstove, though many people then cooked on a fireplace.

Indians were scattered about all around us, in the town and in the country, too. A well-to-do Choctaw named Krebs had a large white house on a hill near Bower. It was a sort of show place and we called it the "White House"; the Choctaws held church there. There was a graveyard near it, ^{and} I remember that one of the gravestones was dated 1865. There were lots of Indian graveyards on Longtown Creek; for instance, an Indian family named Jennings had a graveyard at their house.

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There was a Choctaw family named Stanley who lived in a two-story house near the Canadian River. One year there was a flood and the water got so high that cows were deposited on top of the house and the Stanleys had a time getting them off after the water went down.

The Indian boys from around Bower went to school at Jones Academy near Hartsborne when they got big enough to be sent away from home, and there was an Indian academy at Tuskahoma, I think, for Choctaw girls. I know that Joe and Lige Beck, white men and brothers, married Indian women who were sisters and their boys were sent to Jones Academy. Lige had three sons; Milo, Grover and Green. Joe had six boys, though I don't remember their names. If you remember, there was a sheriff in Logan County just a few years ago who got a lot of unpleasant publicity for whipping a prisoner. This sheriff was named Beck. Well, that was Milo Beck, Lige's boy.

When we lived there at Bower we were on the road from Eufaula to McAlester; one branch of the road also went east toward Quinton, Enterprise and Fort Smith. In those days

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there were no bridges in the Territory, you crossed the creeks and rivers at a ford or on a ferry. The Canadian River got up fast in those days. I remember once when we went to Eufaula that the river was low enough to ford, then before we came back it was so high that we couldn't cross on a ferry. There was a ferry where the North and South Canadian Rivers ran together; it was called Brassfield's Ferry. There were other ferries at places all over the Indian Territory where traffic was thick enough ^{to} make them necessary and where the water was too deep to be forded easily.

In 1905 we moved to Newberg, close to where Atwood is now; the Missouri Oklahoma & Gulf Railroad was just coming through there. We lived in that community until after statehood. I remember that an Indian named Ben Harrison who lived near us was elected to ^{the} Constitutional Convention; later he was state secretary or something at Oklahoma City. We were there at Newberg when Lee Cruce was Governor. I remember reading about Cruce's daughter christening a battleship. Cruce's wife was an Indian.