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BRIGGS, GEORGE W.

INTERVIEW

#4550

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

Field Worker's name Eunice M. Mayer

This report made on (date) June 17, 1937

1. Name George W. Briggs

2. Post office Address Granite, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) Mountain Ave.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month May Day 14 Year 1852

5. Place of birth Meigs County, Tennessee.

6. Name of Father James Walker Briggs Place of birth North Carolina

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother X Foosee Place of birth Germany

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 13

BRIGGS, GEORGE W.

INTERVIEW

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Eunice M. Mayer
Field Worker
6-17-1937

An Interview with
George W. Briggs
Granite, Oklahoma.

George W. Briggs, of Granite, vice president of the Old Greer County Pioneers, had a big part in many events connected with the early history of old Greer County. Mr. Briggs first came to Greer County in 1880 and has been intimately identified with the county's history for the past fifty-four years.

Born in Meigs County, Tennessee, May 14, 1852, Mr. Briggs moved to Fannin County, Texas, when he was twenty years old. Seven years later, in 1879, he started on a buffalo hunt in West Texas.

Twenty-five miles south of the present site of Vernon his team bogged down in mud and he lost one of his horses. He then abandoned plans to continue on a buffalo hunt and secured a job with L. Waggoner and Son, famed cattlemen.

Mr. Briggs was sent to Doan's Crossing, the gateway to old Greer County, to cut trail herds in 1880. He slept on this side of Red River in old Greer County, taking his meals at Doan's Store. He spent seven years in the employ of the waggons as a trail herd cutter.

This work was done between the months of April and August when many thousands of head of cattle were driven up the trail from Texas to Kansas and elsewhere.

Mr. Briggs was sent to the Comanche Springs Crossing in North Fork in 1881, ahead of the trail herds.

He started a dugout on May 10, 1881, near Comanche Springs, five miles northwest of the present town of Granite. He filed on six sections of land under Texas law, filing his claim at Mobeetie and at Austin. He held his land until the Greer County decision on March 1, 1896, when he had to give up all except a half section. He then re-filed on a quarter section and bought a quarter section at \$1.25 an acre, as permitted under the special bill passed by Congress.

He still owns the half section of land, including the site of the dugout he built fifty-three years ago.

Before Mr. Briggs located at Comanche Springs, there had been a stage stand there on the line from Fort Bill to Fort Elliott at Mobeetie, Texas. The Fort Bill-Fort Elliott stage line was abandoned in 1879, when

the line was established from Gainesville, Texas, to Fort Elliott, via Doan's Crossing and Mangum.

Mr. Briggs knew many famous outlaws of the early days.

Among the outlaws with whom he became acquainted were Frank and Jesse James, who went to Texas and lived for a while with their brother-in-law and sister, Mr. and Mrs. Allen Parmer, who lived four miles east of the Waggoner ranch head-quarters, about the present site of Wichita Falls.

Mr. Briggs made several trips to Anadarko to report thefts of horses to the Indian agent. When these reports were made the Indian agent would call in the Indians and tell them to return the stolen horses. Within a few days the horses would be returned.

After working for the waggoners for six years, Mr. Briggs worked for the Francklyn Land and Cattle Company, an English syndicate. The Francklyn Company had purchased the herds and equipment of Herrold and Ikard, consisting of more than seventy

thousand head of cattle scattered all over Greer County, with line camps all around the county, and as many as four hundred cowboys employed.

Colonel E. B. Groom, a Kentuckian, was general manager of the Francklyn Company. The stockholders were residents of England.

Mr. Briggs recalls a visit to Greer County of about thirty-five men and women from England, stockholders in the Francklyn Company. The cowboys were branding cattle at the Spring Creek camp when the visitors arrived in chartered stage coaches.

When the women left the coaches and started to walk across a sandy strip to get closer to the branding work, they did not notice the sandburs- because they had never seen sandburs before. The hems of their dresses became covered with them. Soon they were screaming hysterically as they tried to remove the burs.

The Francklyn Land and Cattle Company mortgaged its cattle to a group of Fort Worth bankers.

Before the unsuspecting bankers knew what was happening,

the cattle had been driven out and sold and the bankers lost heavily on their investment.

Mr. Briggs, who later was to serve ten years as County Commissioner and was to be Greer County's representative in the first Legislature of the State of Oklahoma, called the first Democratic County Convention ever held in Greer County. in 1888.

Precinct meetings were held and delegates were elected to the County Convention.

Mr. Briggs attended both the Precinct and County Conventions and since that time he has never been absent from a Democratic Convention in his precinct nor from a Democratic County Convention in Greer County. He served as Precinct Committeemen in his precinct for twenty-four consecutive years and has been County Chairman upon several occasions.

Mr. Briggs was married in November, 1890, to Miss Belle Broadie, pioneer resident in the "cove" just northwest of the present town of Granite.

Mr. Briggs had the distinction of naming two towns in Greer County, one of which is now long extinct but the other still is a thriving town.

The first of these towns was quartz, located four and a half miles southeast of the present town of Granite. Mr. Briggs was instrumental in securing a post office there and named it quartz.

Later, a school was built at the south base of Mt. Ash and the post office moved there from quartz. Mr. Briggs named the new town "Granite", the name under which it grew and prospered and which it still bears.

Mr. Briggs was in Mangum in October, 1887, when Capt. A. M. Dawson began publication of the "Mangum Star". In fact, Mr. Briggs was in the "Star" office when the first copy came off the press and picked it up to read. He then immediately subscribed for the paper and carried the first copy away with him.

During the reign of the Populists in Greer County, Mr. Briggs was the only Democratic member of the Board of County Commissioners, an office which he held for ten years.

The Populist members of the Commission were not any too well educated and Mr. Briggs had to resort to "politics" to gain his points numerous times.

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At one meeting of the Commissioner's Court, Mr Briggs had a heated argument with his fellow Commissioners. To carry his point, he picked up a copy of the statutes and read provisions of the law exactly in line with his contentions, threatening the penitentiary for any Commissioner who acted to the contrary.

"Well, that's the law. We'll have to give up", said the other Commissioners.

Mr. Briggs had improvised everything he read.

In those days the County Commissioners were required to audit the funds and money held by the County Treasurer in a literal way.

The County Treasurer would bring all the funds in his charge to the Commissioners' Court and lay the cold cash on the table for the Commissioners to count.

An accident in a hotel room at Fort Worth, Texas, caused the death of Chief Yellow Bear of the Comanches and came very near ending the career of Quanah Parker.

Mr. Briggs of Granite was with the two Indians in Fort Worth, Texas and knows the intimate details of the tragedy that ended the life of Yellow Bear and resulted in

the selection of Quanah Parker as Chief of the Comanches.


Mr. Briggs was employed by Waggoner brothers, cattlemen who had thousands of acres of Indian land under lease. He was designated by his employers to stay with Chief Yellow Bear and Quanah Parker, to provide them with entertainment and to keep them in a good humor.

Mr. Briggs accompanied the two leaders to Fort Worth in 1885.

The Comanche leaders were sleeping in the same room; Quanah Parker retired early, while Yellow Bear was out seeing the sights. When Yellow Bear went to the hotel, he undressed and prepared to retire. He turned out the gas lights, then turned the gas on again immediately and was asphyxiated.

Mr. Briggs was sleeping in a near by room but did not learn of the tragedy until the next day; he arose early the next morning and went to visit an artesian well, returning to the hotel about eleven A. M.

When he returned to the hotel some of the hotel officials asked if he had seen Chief Yellow Bear and Quanah Parker. Learning that they had not appeared that morning Mr. Briggs went to their room and broke down the door.



Chief Yellow Bear was dead. Quannah Parker had rolled off the bed and had fallen in such a way that his nose was immediately in front of the crack under the door only six inches away. He had breathed enough pure air to escape death.

Quannah Parker was unconscious for two days and little hope was held for his recovery, but he did recover to become the great leader of his tribe and the friend of President Theodore Roosevelt. Mr. Briggs remained constantly at Quannah Parker's bedside until he began to show marked improvement. He then asked Buck Inglelow, Greer County cowboy, who was visiting in Fort Worth to stay with the Indian while he slept a few hours.

Quannah Parker had asked Mr. Briggs numerous times: "Where is Yellow Bear"? Each time Mr. Briggs would reply that Yellow Bear was in another room, adding "he is sick like you, Quannah".

When Inglelow arrived at the room, the Indian asked:

"Buck, where is Yellow Bear"?

"Yellow Bear is dead 'rn hell", replied the cowboy.

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"Uh", grunted Quannah Parker, turning to Mr. Briggs.

"George, you lie".

Quannah Parker was a man of remarkable intelligence.

As soon as he was able to be up, he called a lawyer and secured as many affidavits as possible, giving the exact details of the death of Yellow Bear. He wanted to be elected Chief of the Comanches and wanted to show the Indians just how Yellow Bear died so that they would not suspect him of having caused the death of the Chief.

When the Indian was able to travel and had secured the affidavits he and Mr. Briggs started back to the Comanche Reservation. They were met at Harrold, Texas, by a band of approximately five thousand Comanches.

Quannah Parker was elected Chief of his tribesmen.

Mr. Briggs was associated constantly with Quannah Parker for two years. The Waggoner brothers wanted to keep on good terms with the Comanches so that they could use their land at a very low rental.

They gave many presents to Quannah Parker, including a carriage costing \$1,000.00; a suit of fine clothes and many other expensive presents.

On one trip to Fort Worth, Chief Yellow Bear and Quannah Parker were dressed in tuxedos given them by the Waggoner brothers.

When Mr. Briggs first began associating with Quannah Parker, the Indian could speak only a few words of English. Mr. Briggs taught him to speak excellent English. He told him much about the ways of the white man.

Quannah Parker liked beer, but always refused to drink whiskey.

During one visit to Fort Worth, Mr. Briggs and Quannah Parker went into the White Elephant saloon to drink beer. It was a large and beautiful saloon with several plaster elephants twenty feet in height placed in the corners.

As the two stepped up to the bar, Mr. Briggs noticed a friend, Colonel John Simpson of Dallas, sitting in a far corner.

Speaking rather loudly and waving his hand, Mr. Briggs said: "Colonel, come up and drink with me".

Mr. Briggs introduced Quannah Parker to Mr. Simpson and they talked pleasantly for awhile.

Later in the day, while Mr. Briggs was reading in the hotel lobby, Quannah Parker returned to the saloon. That

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night he told Mr. Briggs what happened.

"I went back to drink beer, " Quannah Parker said. "When I walked up to the bar I looked and saw Colonel Simpson and waved at him and said, 'Colonel, I'm going to take another drink, come up and drink with me.' Forty men got up and came. Too damn many colonels in White Elephant."

Quannah Parker told Mr. Briggs that he was not in the famous Adobe Walls battle. Historians have credited him with leading a band of Comanches and Kiowas in an attack upon a group of buffalo hunters at Adobe Walls on the north plains of Texas, but Mr. Briggs said Quannah Parker told him that not only did he not lead the charge, but denied that he had any part in the fight. He said he was on his horse on a hill half a mile from the Adobe Walls barricade and that he watched the attack and was wounded.

Quannah Parker also told Mr. Briggs that a "Medicine man" had told the Indians that the forty-five sharp rifles or buffalo guns used by the whites in the Adobe Walls battle had been woodcocked and that the bullets would fall to the ground as they left the barrels.

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Mr. Briggs and "Did" Sanders were employed for seven or eight months by G. F. Doan to operate his store at Doan's Crossing after Mr. Doan had established a business at Vernon, which he did when that town was founded. Most of their dealings were with Indians.

Neither Mr. Briggs nor "Did" Sanders could learn the Kiowa language, but Mr. Briggs learned the more important words of the Comanche language, while Mr. Sanders became proficient in the Comanche language and, after leaving Doan's store, he secured a position as interpreter and was stationed at Lawton until his death a few years ago.