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ERICOS, DELLA E,

INTERVIEW

10267

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BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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BRIGGS, DELLA E. INTERVIEW.

10267

Field Worker's name Mrs. Nora Lorrin.

This report made on (date) March 17, 1938. 1938

1. Name Mrs. Della E. (Sherman) Briggs.

2. Post Office Address Bethany, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month August Day 9, Year 1864

5. Place of birth Indiana

6. Name of Father Joel Sherman Place of birth Toledo, Ohio
November 26, 1832.

Other information about father Died February 10, 1919.

7. Name of Mother Alice (Wentworth) Sherman Place of birth Near Buffalo,
New York, January 1, 1841.

Other information about mother Died June 16, 1914.

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 _____.

Investigator, Mrs. Nora Lorrin,
March 17, 1938.

Interview with Mrs. Della E Briggs,
Bethany, Oklahoma.

I was born August 9, 1864, in Indiana. My father, Joel Sherman, was born near Toledo, Ohio, November 26, 1832, and died February 10, 1919. My mother, Alice (Sawentworth) Sherman, was born near Buffalo, New York, on January 1, 1841.

I traveled with my parents in a covered wagon, driving a team of horses to Illinois when I was a small child and when I was sixteen years of age I traveled the same way with them to Eaglesville, Missouri, where I met and married C. M. Briggs. The marriage took place February 25, 1883. My parents had planned to go to Kansas, so we got a team and wagon and fixed it up in the same style, put our bed and clothes in it and came to Kansas with them. We all took claims close to Medicine Lodge. We lived there in a little frame shanty. We had twin sons and a third son born to us. They are

all in their fifties now. Then we came to Oklahoma. In the race (1889) when the children were small boys, we got claims on Uncle Johns Creek, about twelve miles northeast of El Reno. My father and husband and two brothers got claims all together. He built a small sod shanty and my father built a dug-out in the bank of the creek.

My father, mother, family and husband went back to Kansas to get our few household goods. I stayed with my little boys and lived in my father's dug-out and took care of what we brought the first time. I cooked meals for two young men who lived in a tent close by, who had taken claims. They furnished the food and I got mine and the little boy's food for doing the cooking for these two young men. When my father's family got back with their goods there was not room for me to stay with them so I took my camp outfit, a few dishes and a feather bed and some quilts and moved into our sod shanty without any doors or windows in it. My husband stayed in Kansas to work a while. He did not come back with my father's folks. My brother stayed with me the first night. I

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gave him and the little boys the feather bed and a quilt to cover themselves with. That just left me one quilt so I put it on the dirt floor and laid on one-half of it and covered up with the other half. I did not sleep much. It had rained and the roof leaked, the ground was damp and cold so I sat up most of the night, wrapped in the quilt. After the first night the little boys and I stayed alone until my husband came back. He got my father's team of mules and went back after our few household goods. He had no team, no stock of any kind, so in a few days my husband got back with our household goods and we got the sod shanty fixed up some so we could exist anyway. Then we all got to having the chills. We were all "down" at the same time. My folks were "down" too, so we could not help each other and there was no money and no medicine. There was a man who lived on a claim joining us; he was a widower; he heard about us and came over and brought us some medicine. It was called "Golden Seal" a powder. He said that it would break the chills so we took it. It did break the chills for a short time but they came back again. So my husband sold the improvements on the claim

to get medicine and something to eat and we moved into my brother's dug-out, which he had made to hold his claim. It was about 9 by 10 feet in size and we lived there until the next summer. There is where our fourth boy, George, was born, on March 7, 1890. He still lives in El Reno.

As soon as I was well enough to be on my feet, my husband left to get work. So I had to carry my wood and water up a steep hill out of the bottom. My shoes were worn out. I had an old rubber rain coat and I took pieces of it and wrapped my feet in them so I could get out. I was not well and the children had the whooping cough. The baby was born with it. I thought he would choke to death after he was born and before I was up and around. I coughed just as hard as the children did. Everybody that saw me said that I was going to die if I did not get out of Oklahoma. So I sent my husband a letter; he was at Rush Springs, working on a farm. He had to walk almost all the way back and he looked like a dead man when he got home. Then a man whom we knew when we lived in Kansas, put up a saw mill on the North Canadian River. He borrowed

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a little tent to sleep in and cooked outside. This man gave my husband a job at 50¢ a day. He could not get around very fast, he was so crippled up. When they shut the mill down we went to Missouri and stayed as long as my husband had work at his trade, but the man who had promised him steady work, "went broke" and then my husband had to work at odd jobs whatever he could get. I got a letter from my sister; she said that she would send us money to come so we could get a claim when the Cheyenne and Arapaho Strip came in. We came and we got a claim four miles north of Darlington, where they issued the Indians their beef and groceries. The old Indian trail was about a hundred yards from the dug-out we lived in. The Indians would go by in strings with their ponies and buckboard wagons, about forty or fifty at a time, with their squaws and papooses, war paint and feathers. When I would stay alone with my children in the dug-out, with just a door and no windows, I would bring the ax in at night. It was all the weapon that I had, we had no gun. When the wind was right, I could lie in bed and hear the Indians beating their drums, when they were dancing at or

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near Fort Reno. We only had about ten acres of plowed land on our whole hundred and sixty acres of land, the rest was gyp cement, and prickly pears so thick you couldn't walk through them. We could not use the water it was so "gyppy." We hauled water for two miles from a spring on the Reservation. It was bad to drink in hot weather. We could not get ice for it. Another thing that bothered us was the coyotes, we could hear them howling at night in all directions. I finally got a nice bunch of chickens and turkeys. I had forty half-grown turkeys with one hen. One day it was cloudy and they got about a quarter of a mile from the house where the weeds had grown up. The turkeys were white and light gray. I looked out and saw a coyote jump up and grab at them as they tried to fly. I told my husband and he ran but before he got to them, the coyotes had killed three of them. I dressed them and cooked them and we ate turkey for a while. My chickens didn't go as far away as the turkeys did but the coyotes would run them right up into the yard trying to catch them. One day we were hauling water from the spring, which was in a draw with heavy brush and a few trees. I guess the coyotes heard us and as we went out

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on the road there were eight coyotes which passed ahead of the team and went into the next draw. One day one of the boys took the dog and started through a small patch of corn and when he got about a quarter of a mile from the house, I saw the coyotes running in and out of the field. I could not see the boy. I thought they were killing him. I picked up a club and started to help him. I was just scared to death but I didn't get far. The boy came in sight and I hollered and told him to come back, so he did. He said that there were four or five coyotes. The dog jumped on them but there were too many for him and they killed him.

we finally got our cottonwood lumber and dobe house fixed up pretty well and there is where our fifth baby was born, a girl, and we were sure proud of her as we had four boys. That was in 1895, and when the baby was two years old we moved to El Reno and our last child, a boy, was born in El Reno. He was born in 1907 and our children are all living, and married. I thank God for them. I have had hardships all my life. I have had people ask me how I could stand to stay alone at night with my

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children with the country so wild and so many Indians close by. I would always tell them I would go to sleep praying for God to take care of us. I still work awful hard as we are still poor and have a hard time making a living. My husband can't get work any more and our children are poor too and have a pretty hard time of it. We have twenty one grand-children, of whom seventeen are living, and we have nine great grand-children living and one dead. We live in Bethany now but our pioneering was done in Canadian County and we lived in El Reno many years.