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INDEX CARDS

Civil War
Refugees-Texas
Ferries
Doan's Crossing
Blacksmith
Greer County
Fort Sill
Juanah Parker
Indian Captive
Teacher

BANKS, THOMAS ARTHUR. INTERVIEW.

Form A--(S-149)

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

4135.

Field Worker's name Zaidee B. Bland.

Report made on (date) May 21, 1937.

Name Thomas Arthur Banks, and Babby Banks.

Post Office Address Altus, Oklahoma.

Residence address (or location) 509 W. Walnut Street.

DATE OF BIRTH: Month September Day 16 Year 1852.

Place of birth Springdale, Arkansas.

Name of Father J. B. Banks - Place of birth Alabama.

Other information about father _____

Name of Mother Sarah Susan Sherrod Place of birth Tennessee.

Other information about mother _____

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. Write on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 14

Zaidee B. Bland,
Interviewer.

The Experiences of a Pioneer
of Oklahoma.

Thomas Arthur Banks and wife.
509 West Walnut, Altus, Okla.

My experience in the Indian Territory began in 1861 when we crossed the Cherokee Chickasaw Choctaw Creek Strips on our way to Texas from Arkansas.

I was born in Springdale, Arkansas. My life was not very eventful until I was past ten years of age, except for the fact that I lost my mother by death.

Father was a law-abiding citizen until the Civil War. All our sympathies were for the South but we lived in a county that was pretty much divided in their sentiments; some being with the Federals and many with the Rebels. My father early volunteered for service with the Rebels, but was turned down on account of his health. He came home, of course, discouraged.

One of the first and hardest battles of the entire Civil War was fought in north-rn Arkansas and southern Missouri. The Rebel soldiers were driven south clear into Mississippi. My father and a lot of the neighbors did not want to go so far away from their homes, wives, and children so hid in the brush and picked the soldiers off from ambush. All natives, and everybody hid; every-

body fought (men women and children) to rid our land of the Federals. I do not think half of the time we knew if we were in Arkansas, Indian Territory or Missouri. My father had fought the Indians before, but the Indians we met now were mostly for the South and gave us very little trouble. They really did not seem to care much about fighting a "white man's war. We don't care, we want to be let alone; we want to hunt". I think right in this vicinity was where the word "Bush Whackers" was first applied to the Rebel troops.

We fought every way we could think of. I remember the men got a lot of telegraph wire, twisted it, and would tie it from tree to tree, where they knew the Federals would pass and then hide and shoot them as the wire caught them under the neck and threw them from their horses.

One morning I was hiding in a hazel thicket. I heard horses approaching rapidly and I peeped out to see. I saw seven men running their horses as if the old Scratch was after them himself. When they had passed I stepped out to see how many of our men were after them and there was only one lone man shooting from behind a tree.

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The Federals took all our stock and ate all our provisions. So father called all our kin together one night to see what we ought to do. My mother's youngest sister had tried to help dad take care of us children after mother was gone. We loved her dearly. Down in the woods among the cane brakes, father said there were four young mules that had been overlooked by the Federals. These mules were about two years old and had never been roped. Father sent us boys with uncle (our beloved aunt's husband) to get them while he gathered up old pieces of wrecked wagons to piece together to see if he could not make two wagons that would haul the women and children of our two families to Texas, where it was rumored there was not so much fighting. Father had a brother in Ellis County that was known to have a large ranch with plenty of cattle, horses, and sheep. Pa rigged up two wagons; to the first one we hitched two of those young mules and out in front of them to the tongue of the wagon was hitched an old worn out army horse that we had found wandering around in the woods to guide those young mules and try and keep them pulling straight. There were no roads only trails to follow. To the other wagon was hitched the other young mules and placed as near the first wagon as was

thought safe and lariat^{ed} to the end of the first wagon by ropes to help guide them. A horse in front of two mules was called a S. lined team. We cross the Arkansas River on a ferry boat, all the other streams we forded. We did not run into anyone on the entire trip but Indians and they seemed very pleased to let us alone as we did not have anything they wanted. This was indeed a beautiful country; plenty of game of all kinds and the Indians did not seem too unfriendly.

At the close of the war we continued to make trips back and forth from Texas to Arkansas, often bringing our cattle or horses through and some times trading horses with the Indians. I had acquired quite a little skill in shoeing horses and liked to be on the big round-ups that this country had. The range was all free up here and many cattlemen kept regular herds up here with their chuck wagons and line riders.

In 1888 I found a man north of old Logan's Crossing who would relinquish to me for \$100.00. So I bought his dug-out and right to prove up for a homestead. I went back to Ellis County, to get my family to come but my wife did not want to come. I leased out my dugout to a man and continued to go back and forth. I did not persuade my

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wife to come with the children until 1897.

I had made a good many trips up here and there were a good many homesteaders here now, but only one house built above the ground between Mangum and Vernon. The man who built it had already gone and Mr. McKibbins at Vernon had a lien on the house for supplies he had let the owner have. He sold me this house for \$75.00. All the neighbors helped and we took the floor out, jacked it up, put it on wagons, hauled it around the head of Hackberry Creek and placed it in front of the dugout on my claim. We had a time getting it moved across the prairie and had to take the tongues out of the wagons to make a turn. My neighbors (to be) said I was some engineer or I could not have accomplished it.

We had an old well sweep to draw water from the well and this remained the only house with a well we for years and had all the community gatherings here preaching, singing, dancing, and funerals. We brought three wagons up from Texas with us and lot of loose stock. My wife still contends that had she not been in the first wagon that crossed Red River she would not ever have crossed. I mean the first of our train.

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The children had heard so much about Red River that they all wanted to wade across just to say they had waded in Red River. When we were about half way across the nine year old son stepped into a hole of quicksand and went instantly to his shoulders. He was on my side of the wagon but my wife happened to see him and screamed. I jumped over the side of the wagon and pulled him out and all was safe.

We had wonderful neighbors then as now and shortly after we came they gave us a house warming and the neighbors brought us chickens, little pigs, any number of things they had accumulated after several years of living here.

I brought my blacksmith forge with me and set it up under a cottonwood tree. The three wagons I brought with me were all painted red. I now found that all the wood posts and poles that we needed for fencing, burning, or building were swiped from across the river in the Nation as it was called.

The marshals would not let us cut green wood without arresting us if they caught us but did not care for us getting the dead wood. If the Indians caught us however

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we had to pay them fifty cents a load. I made many trips for wood and the boys and I usually took all three wagons every time we went, for the creeks were so dangerous to cross we needed to help each other across. I was never caught but always took my fifty cents to pay the Indians should I get caught.

My wife never liked for us to make these trips and usually cried and because of fear never slept while we were gone. It always took us two or three days to make the trip with no high water to hinder and longer if we had high water. Once when we had made a trip over into the Nation my oldest son hurried home ahead of me and told his mother the marshal had gotten me. He never tried it again for it frightened her so. They would keep some of our neighbors in jail six weeks some times when they caught them but they were usually set free without a fine.

We had drouths those first years even as we do now and the neighbors had to go on each other's notes and tie up everything we had to get supplies from Vernon. I remember once my wife got along on one gallon of lard a whole year once.

We did not like to have to make more than one or two trips to Vernon a year and always as many of the neighbors

as could would go at the same time to help each other across the creeks and rivers. We tried to take our wives at least once a year. Once coming home when we got to the Red River we saw it was up, so some of us decided we had better take the horses loose from the wagons and ride them across first and feel out a path safe for the wagons. My horse did not want to swim and laid down in the water. I took my clothes off and plunged in to try to save my horse. I lost all my clothes and all the money I had. I got my horse safely landed on a sand bar and started on swimming down stream to rescue my clothes when my wife and one of the neighbor women from the bank observed that my horse was safe but that I was going on down the stream and thought surely one of the men were drowned. My wife grabbed an ax and the neighbor a bottle of whiskey and away they came down the stream on the bank as close to the water as they dared get. We began to scream at them to go back for we were all naked, but they could not seem to understand. I never did get my clothes. When we came from Texas we had left one son down there. I could wear his clothes nicely. Amid this confusion this son drove up to pay us a visit and I ~~was~~ dressed in his clothes. By putting eight horses

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to each wagon we got across with the loss of one horse who stumbled and fell while crossing and the other seven just pulled the load on out, dragging him along. He was not dead when we got him out but died a few minutes after.

On one of my rambling trips I had my family with me and we had passed Quannah Parker earlier in the morning going to Fort Sill. He had three of his wives with him. He stopped and visited with us and showed the wife and children a coon that he had shot that had only three legs. He thought it strange and so did we.

As we went on south we saw several bands of Indians. When we camped and were eating, a band of Indians came up and wanted to trade horses. I went a little way off with them to look at their horses. The wife and children continued to eat. There was a sack of flour leaning against the hind wheel of the wagon. Some of the Indians came up to my wife and said; "Chuck away, Chuck away". My wife thought they said, "Sack away". She had one of the boys move it. That did not please them. My wife became frightened and told the children to all get into the wagon and said to the Indians, pointing to where she could see me talking to the other Indians, "You will have to wait until my man comes. I do not know what you want". When I came up I told her they wanted

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what was in the chuck box. We had a lot of biscuits cooked up. The Indians crossed their legs across their horses and I poured all the cooked food we had into their laps and away they rode as happy as they could be.

We often saw Quannah Parker and learned to know some of his seven wives. He had one he called "Too Nicie". Once when the President had sent for Parker to come to Washington he decided to take "Too Nicie" with him and took her to Vernon to a white dressmaker to make her a dress to wear. The dressmaker told "Too Nicie" that she would have to have a corset to make her dress look nice and when they got one fastened on her she ran out into the street to show it to her husband before she would let them put her dress over it. Once when Buck Smith and I were over making some farm tools for Quannah Parker, they kept up such a din of racket beating on old tin cans that we could not sleep for two days and night. We asked them what they meant. They said one of them was sick and they were trying to drive the evil Spirits away.

Once there came to our camp a white man who was dressed like an Indian. He made us understand that he was escaping from the Indians who had captured him when he was a very

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small boy. He had tried often to escape and every time they caught him they would burn a hole through his ear. He had twelve holes in one ear and six in the other. We judged him to be about thirty years old. He said he had escaped this time by cutting his squaws throat and sneaking out while the Buck was asleep who had been left to guard him. He drew in the sand the hills and stream of the country from which he had been stolen from and the brand of his father's cattle as he remembered it. I recognized the "H" as belonging to Mr. Hunt down near Fort Worth and sent him on down that way and that was right; he was united with his people after more than twenty-five years of captivity.

Wild cattle and getting drowned were the greatest dangers we really had.

Once one of our neighbor boys from Texas came up here to teach at old Dunbar. Four of the young men went over to Eldorado to a ball game. When they came to Salt Fork coming home there had been a rise. One of my nephews said to the other boys, "Let me cross first. I know the stream better and then I will direct you boys from the other side." He made it and called to the others. The next boy made it. The new boy (the teacher) who did not know the stream

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started, and his horse stumbled and threw him. The horse then turned back and made the shore he had started from. The boys gave the alarm and every one in the country turned out to look for the body.

I got on my horse and started to Mangum to telegraph his folks. I could not cross the river, but met a man who said I could get across at Granite. My horse gave out four miles from Granite. I left him with a man and continued on foot. Too late when I got there, so I had to wait till morning for a wire was down somewhere. I sent a telegram headed Granite. I walked back, and got my horse. When I got home again, I joined the hunters for the boy's body. All night again the search went on. A wagon load of people had attempted to cross the river at Doan's Crossing. A lot of their things had floated out of the wagon. They were walking down the bank looking for them when the lady said to her husband, "Look, there is a bundle of some one's clothing". On trying to fish it out it was found to be the body of the missing boy. He was brought to our house and we made a coffin. The body had been in the water since Saturday about noon until Monday afternoon, so we could not wait for his people to come. Just after we had him buried,

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up came his father. The telegram being head Granite he had gone to Granite. He wanted to take the body back home to Texas to his own people for a final resting place. We had to swim our horses over Red River to get to Vernon. There we had a man make us a box and line it with tin. We took it back opened the grave/^{and} set the coffin in the lined box. We soldered the top on and took the whole thing back to Vernon to put on the train to ship to Ellis County. When we attempted to put the body in the baggage coach the train men would not accept it, saying we had to have a doctor's certificate of death, or let them view the body. We talked and talked. The body was all to pieces from laying in the water so long. We could not open for the decayed odor if the box was unsealed. Nothing did any good. The Father of the boy pulled out his gun and said, "Stand aside; boys load that box in, and anyone wanting to dispute it this gun talks. I am going home with my boy's body." The train pulled out with the body. The neighbor women helping my wife had fed all these three hundred men while they had been hunting that body. We tried to count the chickens they had killed; biscuits made, and coffee served, but finally gave up. For nearly a week we had not been to

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bed to sleep nor had any rest; and we were tired. We had done the best we knew and helped a friend in a sad hour.