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BRYANT, WILLIAM

INTERVIEW.

7199

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

7199

Field Worker's name Hazel B. Greene

This report made on (date) August 17, 1937

1. Name William Bryant (white)

2. Post Office Address Fort Towson, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month April Day 9 Year 1886

5. Place of birth Oneonto, Blount County, Alabama

6. Name of Father William James Bryant Place of birth Lincoln County, Georgia.

Other information about father In the year of 1842.-died April 2, 1924

Fort Towson, Okla

7. Name of Mother Fannie Blankenship Place of birth Alabama

Other information about mother Is about seventy-seven years of age.

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 17.

When I was about four or five years old we left Alabama and went by train to Mount Pleasant, Texas. My father, mother, and family and my mother's parents and their children.

Mother's father and mother were Blankenships. We just stayed at Mount Pleasant a little while. Grandpa bought some meat hogs, then he decided to move over to the Indian Territory and did - a couple of months or more before we did. We stayed there in order to kill the hogs when they were ready, and they came on to prepare a home for us to come to. Then we hired J. Cook and a fellow by the name of Rashnick, with their wagons and teams to move us over here as they had moved Grandpa.

There were no roads to speak of. They were awful. It took us three weeks to come from Mount Pleasant, Texas, to Grandpa's place over here close to Doaksville, Indian Territory. We came by way of Clarksville, Texas, and crossed at Blake Hook's ferry on Red River. When one got on this side of the river he just started out in the direction he wanted to go. There were no roads over here, just trails, and they

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just spread in every direction, so Grandpa sent the boys to that ferry every day for a week to show us the way home. They would stay all day waiting for us, then they would go home, three miles from Red River. The day we got there it was bitter cold, raining and sleeting, so they were not there. That was in January.

Well, we got across and stopped, because it was nearly night and we were all wet and cold. Father used about three gallons of coal oil trying to start a fire with that mossy, scrubby elm timber so we could dry out, but we didn't get thoroughly dry, and went to bed damp.

Cook and Rashnick left us there to go on their horses and find Grandpa's place. They said they would return and bring fresh horses to pull the wagons. They got lost and wandered around all night.

For years after that it was no uncommon thing for hunters to be lost on the prairies and in the river bottoms. He would hear them whooping and go out and bring them in and warm and feed them. I remember once two grown girls were lost. They had come over from Texas with their families on a hunting trip, had

seen some flowers off a little ways, and had gone to get some of them. They kept getting farther and farther away and when they realized they were lost, they got panicky and wandered around a day and night before we found them. They had on low-quarter shoes, and their feet were blistered and their clothes were nearly torn off. They were scared so that they ran like deer when they saw us. They perhaps thought we were desperadoes or something. We had to run them down. We put them on our horses and we walked and hunted their camp. They couldn't tell us where it was. All they could tell was that it was beside a spring, so we went to Deerfoot Spring first. They were not there. That was about six miles north of Doaksville. Then we found their camp four miles northeast of Doaksville at the old camp, where the United States Surveyors had camped while surveying and appraising the Indian lands. Captain John Smith was at the head of them. I was twelve years old, but I rode and led horses for them, carried a chain for them, and just anything they wanted me to do. They were laying out sections and townships, preparatory to allotting the lands to the Indians.

I don't remember much about the allotment of land. I know when we came over here, white people would just select the place they wanted to live and build their house, after seeing Tom Sanguin or Willie Wilson. They and Jim Harkins more or less ran this part of the Choctaw Nation then. I know Dad just built his house where Tom Sanguine told him to and later Bill Sanguin allotted it for his own.

Now back to our camp at Hook's Ferry. We had killed Grandpa's hogs and had the meat in the two wagons. We kids had our bed on top of that meat and a lot of other things. We slept cross ways, I remember, the wagon sheet was drawn over the bows, drawn together and tied, but there was a small opening at the back and a large one in front. Well, the wolves smelled that meat and gathered there, it seemed to me, by the hundreds. We had a big old brindle bull dog and the wolves would chase him into the wagon I was in and he would jump in my face every time. Next morning my face was scratched all over. Dad kept the fire going and guarded camp with his gun.

Next morning when the drivers straggled in and it was daylight, we started out in the general direction of Doaksville, up by Pilot Knob, which is a mile or so south of the present town of Swink. After a mile or so, we met the boys going to the ferry again. The boys were my uncles, Marion and Mabry Blankenship.

We raised the first cotton that was ever raised in our immediate community and had to take our first six bales to Paris, Texas, to have it ginned.

Then about 1896, old man Fisher from Bonham, Texas, put in a gin at Doaksville, on Tan Yard Branch. It was a one-stand gin and fed by hand. It would take nearly all day to gin a bale. That gin was run about one year and then it burned. Just the other day that old boiler was loaded here at Fort Towson Railroad Station for scrap iron.

About the time that gin burned, Thomas Fennell put in a gin and grist mill run by water power, down the creek about three miles from Doaksville, on Gates Creek. He could give five or six bales of cotton each day. There were four stands of it. Prior to that our nearest grist mill was at the water mill about three miles southwest of Valliant on Clear Creek, operated by one of the Wilson boys, Rafe, I think. The little old

grinders were of stone and no larger than a dinner plate. Just a dust of meal would come out at a time. Sometimes it would take all day to get two or three bushels of corn ground into meal and it always took at least two bushels to do us awhile.

I'll never forget, once a cat fish got in the water wheel at the Fennell Mill and stopped it. We took it out. It would have weighed fifty pounds, but was so badly bruised it was unfit to eat. It just took one man to run that gin. They'd raise the water gate and it would run steadily. Once Grandpa was there when Mr. Fennel got his hand caught in the gin and mangled it so that two of his fingers had to be amputated and the fore finger sewed up the whole length of it. Doctor Bonner did that without putting him to sleep. I guess he would have been drawn into that machinery and perhaps killed had not Grandpa been there to close the water gate.

The winter of 1898 Red River froze over so hard that teams and wagons were driven over on the ice. The mill pond froze over and Mr. Fennell and John Schauner cut twenty-four inch square blocks out of that pond. They stored it and sold it the next summer. People came from over in Texas and bought that ice. I don't remember the price but I do recall that they hauled

lumber and sawdust from Cravens' Saw Mill, four miles north of Doakville and built that ice-house.

I think it was in February when it was so cold. Cattle died by the hundreds. Already poor, if they slipped and fell on the ice, it was just too bad, they could never get up---they would just lie there and die, frequently kick around to a tree and then it was impossible to get up. Just lie there and kick. That was the worst spell I ever saw.

About 1900, Will Bearden built a gin at Doakville. The boiler was shipped to Goodland by train and loaded onto a wagon. When ^{the boiler} got to Rock Chimney Crossing on ^{the} Kiamichi River, they knew that it was too heavy for the ferry boat to support, so they hitched four yoke of cattle to a block and line on the opposite side of the river with the other end to the wagon upon which the boiler was chained and pulled the whole thing into the river. It went clear out of sight, I never will forget how the bubbles arose. They pulled it on out, then two yoke of cattle pulled it on to Doakville. It took about a week to make that trip.

Once before we had any gins, seven or eight wagons loaded with cotton were being taken to Paris to be

ginned. Doctor Bonner was along in his buggy. It took us a day and a half to go each way. On our return trip we camped at a negro schoolhouse and next morning one of grandpa's mules was gone. So he loaded his supplies over into another wagon and left his one mule there with some one and started home. We had gone about eight miles to the river and there was our mule tied to a tree and a negro man writhing in agony on a quilt on the ground with his clothes burned off of him.

Doctor Bonner had gone over to Paris after medicine and had it with him. He had a gallon of vaseline, so he smeared that all over the negro and left him. But I'm sure he could not have lived long. The negro gave the Doctor a shot gun to pay him for his services.

The negro had stolen the mule and started to the Indian Territory with him; had come to the river and had lain down on a bed of leaves to await the day, so the ferryman would put him across. He had built up a fire to keep warm and his leaf bed had caught fire. That was at Rock Shoals about a mile south of Frogville.

Another time, long before this, at this same, ferry the river was low and the boat could not get to the edge of the water. There was a space of water between the apron of the boat and the land. The mules jumped that space and threw grandpa out and broke his ribs and bruised him up. Doctor Sweigler at Manchester, Texas, was the nearest doctor then, so to him we went.

Once, my Uncle Marion was sick and we thought he would die. Sent for Doctor Sweigler, he looked in his mouth and pronounced it measles. We couldn't believe that because there was no measles in the country and we had not been anywhere. He gave him some medicine and the next morning he was broken out with measles as pretty as you please, and we all had them -- the first in the whole country.

We had been here a long time when the Spanish-American War broke out. We had subscribed for a Galveston Weekly paper, and sometimes Dad would send me to the Doaksville post office every day for a week, before the mail would finally get in. It was supposed to arrive there once each week but if nobody

happened to be running the ferry at Rock Chimney Crossing, as it sometimes happened, and the river would get up, it was sometimes two or three weeks before mail would get to Doaksville on that route to Fowlerville, Clear Creek, Alikchi, Eagletown, and Hocha Town. Then the return trip had to be made, so the war news was pretty stale sometimes when Dad would get it.

The mail carriers usually rode one pony and sometimes had one or more loaded with mail. Old Judge E. W. Tims was postmaster until he resigned and Thomas Fennell took it over.

When I was fourteen years old I would not have known my name if I had seen it in box car letters. Then I went to school a part of a term. I learned to read and write and figure a little and I just kept right on. Now, I write a legible hand and can figure fractions.

I buy timber and posts for the J. J. Kilpatrick Company of Oklahoma City.

(Once, Mabry Blankenship, Tom Cook, and I were going to De Queen, Arkansas. Court was going on at the old Sulphur Springs, or Alikchi Court Ground, so, out of curiosity we stopped. They were preparing to

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execute William Goins, but I have forgotten what his crime was.

They blind-folded him and took him out in front of the court house, spread a blanket on the ground, and made him kneel upon it, just kind of hunkered and sitting upon his feet. They had pinned a black spot upon his white shirt over his heart. His arms were extended and a man held each arm. The sheriff, or whoever shot him, was only about twenty feet away. He rested his gun upon a split-log bench to shoot. He shot him too low. Goins fell over and asked for water. His sister handed a bucket of water over to him, and I saw his hands upon the bucket. Then the crowd was so close upon him that I didn't see any more, but they say he was strangled to death. I didn't see that. They told too, right there that rags were stuffed into the wound in his back so he would bleed inside and die. I didn't see that. I was sick from seeing the shooting. But I was there when United States officers came, in about thirty minutes with notice not to execute William Goins -- just about thirty minutes too late. I saw some ^{men} whipped that day. They tied them

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to a cedar post, gave them ten lashes on the bare back and let them rest, then administered ten more if the sentence called for that many. Those Indians would never grunt, even though the lashes drew blood.

We boys used to go over there when court was going on because there was always a big crowd there and there was usually dancing at night. I've seen Indian men dance all night after having been whipped that day.)

The way I remember it, there were split-log benches in that old courthouse.

Everything was pretty crude those days, in this country. The old post office was a frame building and I've often wondered where they got the lumber, because it was old, when I was a little boy. I believe part of it was log and a part of it was a story and a half high.

I remember where Doctor Craven's arm was shot and had to be amputated. Doctor Bonner gave him some sort of anaesthetic, but sawed the bone with a hand saw.

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There was lots of game in this country when we first came here. Dad used to take deer hams to Paris, Texas, and sell them for \$2.00 per pair. We dried lots of ham after using all we would want while it was fresh. Just kept it hanging in the smoke house.

We could hardly raise peas for the deer eating them up. We could hardly raise pigs on account of wolves. We had to keep the pigs shut up, just like we did the chickens, away from the wolves until they were some size. Then we would turn them out with some big barrows that would keep the wolves fought off.

There were plenty of deer and turkey, even after the Arkansas and Choctaw Railroad was built through here. Dad sold lots of deer/^{and turkey} to the railroad construction camps. Those were good old days - plenty of game in the woods and fish in the creeks, and/^{many} hogs. I recall seeing one Indian go out in the woods, shoot a hog and drag it up tied to his horse's tail. That was cruel to the horse, of course, but he did it.

We used to enjoy going to the Choctaw meetings, because for years and years we had no/^{meetings.} They had what, I guess, we call ushers now. Men stood at the door with sticks, one on each side of the door and

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pointed out seats for folks as they came in and always, if a man and woman came in together, an usher put the stick between them and separated them, guiding one to one side of the building and the other one to the other side. And incidentally they kept the dogs out of the church.

We had dances too, sometimes some tough fellows would get drunk and break a ^{dance} /up. Then sometimes, if they didn't break it up they would leave the dance racing their ponies, whooping and shooting pistols. One fellow ran his horse over a bunch of young folks and crippled Doctor Bonner's daughter, Clara.

Officers were always far away it seemed. Sometimes they would be on hand at big meetings and picnics. I never saw a white officer until I was grown. They were always negroes or Indians. It was no unusual thing to see toughs racing their horses through Doaksville and shooting pistols as they raced, especially at night, when they hadn't the nerve to do that in day time.

About one and one-half miles southeast of Fort Towson, upon a high hill is a hole probably a half

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acre wide, filled with water. It is called bottomless and a witch hole. To my mind it is an old Spanish mine shaft because it shows that tons of rock have been taken out of it and piled on either side. One can drop a pole in it and it always goes out of sight. We tried to drain it but could not. We found slugs of lead around that place that had been melted. Some of them would weigh fifty or seventy-five pounds. We used to go in the wagon and pick them up for fishing sinkers. We used to find stone axes and arrow heads around there, and old coins. I guess I have twenty-five dollars in old coins that we have picked up around here and out on the farm and at Doaksville. One old dime made in 1821 and one \$1.00 gold piece, several half dimes, and others. We used to fish in that hole. I've seen five pound bass caught in it and how it got stocked with fish upon that hill is a mystery to me.

Ever since an Indian was fishing there and said some big something jumped up out of the water at him, frightening him so that he dropped his gun in the hole. We told him it was a witch and have called it a witch

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hole. He never recovered the gun. The hole is so deep, everything goes out of sight in it.

Not far from there a salt spring spouts up in the edge of the creek, a vein two feet thick, and it spouts about three feet high. One can hear this spring roaring long before getting to it, and one-hundred yards above this salt spring is a fine water spring.