

Notice of Copyright

Published and unpublished materials may be protected by Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S. Code). Any copies of published and unpublished materials provided by the Western History Collections are for research, scholarship, and study purposes only.

Use of certain published materials and manuscripts is restricted by law, by reason of their origin, or by donor agreement. For the protection of its holdings, the Western History Collections also reserves the right to restrict the use of unprocessed materials, or books and documents of exceptional value and fragility. Use of any material is subject to the approval of the Curator.

Citing Resources from the Western History Collections

For citations in published or unpublished papers, this repository should be listed as the Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

An example of a proper citation:

Oklahoma Federation of Labor Collection, M452, Box 5, Folder 2. Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

BRUCE, NANNIE S. Davis

INTERVIEW

#8525

277

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

Field Worker's name Mrs. Nora Lorrin, El Reno, Oklahoma

This report made on (date) September 17, 1937. 193

1. Name Mrs. Nannie S. (Davis) Bruce.

2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 532 South Reno Avenue.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month February Day 18 Year 1878.

5. Place of birth Dade County, Missouri.

6. Name of Father Christopher C. Davis Place of birth Indiana Nov. 29, 1849.

Other information about father Died August 3, 1937.

7. Name of Mother Marcha (Bowels) Davis. Place of birth Dade County, Missouri.

Other information about mother Died July 1, 1885.
December 9, 1849

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 .

FIELD WORKER NORA LORRIN
Indian-Pioneer History S-149
September 15, 1937.

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. NANNIE S. (DAVIS) BRUCE
El Reno, Oklahoma.

Mrs. Nannie S. (Davis) Bruce was born in Dade County, Missouri, February 18, 1878. Her father, Christopher Columbus Davis, was born in Indiana, November 2, 1849. He came to Oklahoma from McPherson, Kansas, just 40 years ago. Mrs. Bruce's mother, Martha (Bowels, pronounced Boles) Davis, was born in Dade County, Missouri, December 9, 1849.

A peculiarity about the ages of this family, who was the oldest, was this-starting with the father/being born in November, 1849, his wife next in December 1849. The oldest child was born in January, the next one in February, the next one in March and the last one in April. There were just four children, three girls and one boy. The boy was born in March but died while an infant. They lived on a farm in Missouri until Mrs. Nannie Bruce was six years of age and then they moved to McPherson, Kansas. She grew up at McPherson and Emporia, Kansas, and married Mr. William Bruce

2

the 19th of December in 1890, at Emporia, Kansas.

Mrs. Bruce's oldest boy was born at Emporia a year later. They were farmers by trade, but her husband worked in a rock quarry at Cotton Wood Falls, Kansas, making flag stones of very hard rock for sidewalks, and he worked at the quarry until they moved to Oklahoma. Their third child was eighteen months old when they came to Oklahoma.

Their reason for coming to Oklahoma was that of most people; they wanted to obtain a home of their own and there was still some land to be had when they came here. They rented a farm eight miles northeast of El Reno, and they made sorghum molasses for a living.

At that time the Indian Agency raised a lot of cane and the Bruces made it into molasses on the shares. The vats they used belonged to the Indian Agency at Concho. They were made of heavy galvanized steel and were made in three sections; in one long pan or vat, but divided into three sections. They built a brick

BRUCE, NANNIE S. DAVIS.

INTERVIEW.

8525

3

foundation about nine feet long and a yard wide and about three feet high.

They used an ordinary stove pipe at one end to carry the smoke away. The foundation was built a little bit slanting away from the pipe. The vat was placed on the foundation over a wood fire, most of the fire being under the section nearest the pipe, which was section No 1; the middle section was No 2; and the section farthest from the pipe was No 3. They put from ten to fifteen gallons of cane juice in No. 1, and put some water in No 2 and No 3. There were two little trap doors about four inches square, located one between each section, pulled up to open them and shut down tight to close them.

They could be pulled up and let the juice or molasses from one section to another when needed. When the juice was briskly boiling someone would have to stand and skim the green scum that would form on the surface of the boiling juice. They would keep this skimming process going until no more scum would

BRUCE, NANNIE B. DAVIS.

INTERVIEW. 8525

4

appear. When they decided that it was about done they would let the water run from section No. 2 into No. 3, and then let the boiling juice from vat No. 1, into No. 2, and refill No. 1 with fresh cane juice. It was Mrs. Bruce's job to do the skimming and she says the success of making molasses depends on the fellow with the skimming ladle. The ladle is a long handled shovel-like affair with the edge, or shovel part, tipped up sharply. The vats were about a foot deep. When the boiling juice in No. 2 was done, the water was taken out of No. 3 and the molasses from No. 2 was turned into No. 3. By that time the juice in No. 1 was ready to turn into No. 2, the molasses in No. 3 was ready to drain off into their six gallon crockery jars and the gallon buckets; the latter were furnished by the government. So it was just a succession of re-filling with fresh juice and taking off the finished product.

BRUCE, NANNIE S. DAVIS.

INTERVIEW. 8525

5

They had a molasses mill that they ground the green cane with, and the juice would run from a spout into a fifty gallon barrel which they kept covered with a cloth to strain the juice.

You could tell by the way the molasses was boiling when the molasses was done but they had a man by the name of Tommy Sharpe helping them and he was an old hand at the business and he was their molasses tester.

Their mill was run by horse power and only one horse was required to turn their mill. The molasses was made for the Government and the Government used it for the Indians. Most of the cane was raised by the Indian farmers. One variety was called "Blue Ribbon" cane.

The Indians always stripped the cane and brought great big wagon loads of the cane stocks to the Bruces mill. They did this work for three Falls. They would start about the first of September and keep it up until

6

cold weather or until the cane was all gone. When the cane was green and juicy was when the Indians stripped it. Mrs. Bruce says that it takes a lot of cane to make a gallon of juice.

They kept their sorghum in kegs and barrels and they made lots of ginger bread and cookies and ginger snaps as well as using it on their hot cakes. They lived in the same locality until Mr. Bruce died in 1922.

Mr. Bruce was at the drawing in 1901 when the Kiowa and Comanche lands were opened. He drew some land which, when they went and looked at it, seemed so bare and raw they backed out of buying it and came back and rented in the same neighborhood in which they had been living, northeast of El Reno. They used to come to town by the road that comes into El Reno northeast of town. They call it Foreman now and in 1901 when the drawing was in progress, she says that locality was literally covered with campers. Wells were dug

BRUCE, NANNIE S. DAVIS

INTERVIEW. 8525

7

along that road about a half mile or less apart for the use of the campers and their stock. They camped outside the city limits as well as all over town. She said that she saw men sitting on the court house lawn until you could not see the ground.

Mrs. Bruce and her husband came to Oklahoma with her father. Who, she says, brought them here. The first place they lived was a little one room box house, 14 by 16 feet. There was a hen house and a barn, a rough place. They farmed row crops and later wheat. They had a good well and burned wood. Sometimes they hauled the wood from the river and sometimes they had old trees on the place that could be chopped down and used for fuel.

At first they had the use of three or four borrowed cows and just two horses, a walking plow and lister. It was not very long though before they were in better circumstances.

BRUCE, NANNIE S. DAVIS

INTERVIEW. 8525.

8

When they first came to Oklahoma she was more afraid of the Indians than she was of a rattlesnake. One time when they were living about half a mile from the Darlington Mission where they spent a Spring and Summer taking care of a crop, she took the children and went to the Mission to get away from an Indian squaw who was bent on visiting her. She was scared to death of that Indian squaw.

The Darling Mission was just one large building at that time and she is not positive, but thinks that it was the Mennonites who controlled it.

She has been at the issue pens at Darlington a number of times. Certain days the Government would butcher and give each Indian family a certain number of pounds of beef. The Indian squaws would take the entrails to the river and wash them and then take them to their camp and string them around on their meat poles or rack until they were ready to use. They ate them raw and also dumped them in their cooking pots and made soup out of them. The Government finally put a stop to that practice in an effort to civilize the savages.

BRUCE, NANNIE S, DAVIS

. INTERVIEW.

8525

9

After Mrs. Bruce's husband died she did private nursing in El Reno for a while and in 1924 worked as a second nurse at the Concho Hospital under a Miss Johnston, who was an English Hospital graduate from London, England. Mrs. Bruce nursed there for several months, but she had to keep her youngest boy with her as the Indians have a very contagious form of T. B. and she left on that account. She then nursed in Oklahoma City for six years.

She is the mother of seven children, all in pretty good circumstances. The oldest son, Alfred, is in the real estate business here. Otis is a prosperous farmer. One of her daughters is a farmer's wife. One, Mrs. C. L. Everetts, is the wife of an Auctioneer and second hand store proprietor. Another, Mrs. Grace Everetts, is also in the second hand furniture business. Chester works at a Wholesale House. Melvin, the youngest, is through High School and helps his farmer brother.

Her family is reared and she owns the neat little home where she lives at 532 South Reno Avenue.

BRUCE, NANNIE S. DAVIS

INTERVIEW : 8525

10

She has a bed room suite, that is unique, although it is not an heirloom of her family. There is a beautiful massive dresser and bedstead to match. It formerly belonged to the grandfather of the elder Dr. Muzzy who is pretty old himself. It is bound to be well over a hundred years. It is in the best state of preservation.