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BROWN, MARY HABBITT.

INTERVIEW

#9308

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INTERVIEW.

9308.

Form A-(S-149)

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

Field Worker's name Elizabeth L. Dungan.

This report made on (date) November 17, 1937.

1. Name Mrs. Mary Babbitt Brown

2. Post Office Address Salt Fork, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year _____

5. Place of birth _____

6. Name of Father _____ Place of birth _____

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother _____ Place of birth _____

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 8.

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Elizabeth L. Duncan,
Journalist.
November 17, 1937.

Interview with Mary Babbitt Brown.
Salt Fork, Oklahoma.

In the early Spring of 1893 everybody adjacent to the Cherokee Strip was very much interested in homes. Times were hard, crops were poor and a good many people were in a financial depression—then as well as thirty-five years later, but somehow it had not been named a "depression" then but was just a general hard times.

My father had come from West Virginia in 1883 where he had an eighty-acre farm and a mortgage. So he decided he would try to better himself by seeking a home in the Strip.

He and a neighbor, a very fine man, decided to pool interests and make the adventure together. They drove to Hunnewell, Kansas, to register for land and came back home to rig up the kind of an outfit they could travel in and take along some necessities for themselves and their team. They had a wagon with a

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box on it, a lot of feed for the team, also a "grub box" and a big water keg, ten gallon, bedding, etc. How well I remember Mother and myself cooking and filling that grub box, just like they were going to a picnic dinner.

By the time they were to return to Tunnewell, Father had decided to take my youngest brother, Howard, along. He thought Howard would be such a help to "stay by the stuff", wagon, etc., and of course as any twelve year old boy would, Howard wanted to go along, so away they went, not having the least idea of what they would encounter.

They lined up with the thousands of other homeseekers and when the signal was given they started south as fast as they could go. Here was where Howard found out how useless he was. He and the water keg played hide and seek all over the wagon, fore and aft. Howard always said he never knew how he came to the Strip, as most people came in wagons, buggies, carts and on horseback but not many rode a water keg.

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Finally they came in north of Blackwell and found the ones who had made the race from the South had set out a fire, so they could not get through that way. When they got away from the fire all the land was taken and they looked around a few days and came back home. Neither man got a home. Later, in November, I think it was, Father bought the land which he proved up.

We moved down the next Spring, selling the home close by Winfield and coming with the determination to establish a home. Many had made filings on their claims and had made claim houses, dugouts, or "soddies", then had gone away to work through harvest in Kansas, or elsewhere, and the vast areas of prairie looked lonesome. If we would happen to sight some human being, riding on horseback, or in a covered wagon, we would watch and wonder about him and wish that by some chance he would come by. Soon people began to come back to their claims, we would be excited when daylight came some morning and we would find that

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sometime during the night some of our neighbors had arrived home again.

There had been no social life of any kind in our immediate neighborhood and one day an elderly gentleman drove up to our shack and ate dinner with us and invited us to come to Mr. George Meece's house that night as he would endeavor to organize a Sunday school. We had met some of our neighbors by that time and my brother hitched a mule team to a lumber wagon and around sun down we set out. As we went along, Lee Harney and his sister, Mrs. Foust, got in with us and went along with us. So by the time the place was reached there were quite a number gathered.

At this time there were the Prather, Starr, Utterback, Cowen, Snider, Tyree, Burcham, Foust, Harney, Babbitt, and a number of other families represented. Mrs. J. N. Starr was elected superintendent, Miss Anna Prather secretary, and for some time we held Sunday school at Mr. Meece's.

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Later on when the school district was organized and a new sod house built, we moved there and by this time Dayton School house was widely known. Sunday School was held on the Sabbath all the time and through the winter a very lively literary society was organized and carried on. We enjoyed the good programs and especially if we had heard that Willie Prather would be there to sing, but weather conditions had to be just right before Willie would venture across the gumbo flats and consequently we were very frequently disappointed but we always had the Porter brothers, Lee and Jessie Burcham, Mrs. Baird and Mrs. Emma Utterback and Mr. Bud Utterback. The most wonderful Children's Day and Christmas programs were given.

We used to enjoy wonderful sermons. There were Reverend John Snavelly, Reverend Bills, and Reverend Crumley. Reverend Snavelly was a Friend's pastor, Reverend Bills, a United Brethren pastor, and Reverend Crumley was a Methodist preacher. We all remember Mrs. Gilbert, Mrs. Burcham, Mr. Heusel and Mr. Meece as Sunday School teachers.

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I remember Mr. Bills, the United Brethren preacher coming to preach one morning and feeling so badly because he had run into a bunch of boys, around a post office named Owens east of us, who had gathered there to play ball. He had asked these boys if they had any objections to his praying and they didn't, so he read and prayed and came on to preach to us. In those days almost everyone went to church and Sunday school and seemed to enjoy it. I very vividly remember two young men coming to Sunday school driving a cow to a cart. It was no uncommon sight to see people ride in horseback everywhere but a cow was out of the ordinary somewhat.

The Methodist people built a new church close by our cemetery which was located on the George Foust farm when his mother was brought back and buried.

The Reverend Mr. J. M. Via; a Baptist preacher and an old friend of the Dunn and Babbitt families while living in Kansas, came and organized the first Baptist Church at the Excelsior School house and this

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was later transferred to Dayton. The Reverend Mr. Grimalley, Mr. Griffin and Mr. Simmins were some of the pastors.

Miss Lee Burcham was the first Dayton school teacher. She and her father and some of the family lived on the claim till finally all the family came.

Those were glorious days. We visited each other and when sickness came or that grim reaper, Death, called at our homes, the true pioneer spirit came forth. There were few doctors and such a thing as a hospital was unheard of. The neighbors took turn about sitting up, helping with laundry work, possibly food, or in any way to manifest a loving kindness to each other.

My. Burcham had a son-in-law who was the owner of a fine bunch of greyhounds and he was visiting home-folks one day and had several dogs along. After dinner Mrs. Burcham decided she would walk up to our house and spend a few hours and the dogs followed. But they followed Mrs. Burcham only for a little way then they soon started out over the prairie looking

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for a chase and in a little while they jumped a big jack rabbit and when it came to the wagon road headed that way and Mother Burcham saw them coming. She thought she would catch Mr. Jack and stooped down directly in the path and held up her apron. When the rabbit saw an obstacle in his way, he made one of his famous jumps, struck Mrs. Burcham full in the forehead and over she went and on the rabbit went. The dogs could not stop so suddenly and the consequences were that the dogs all jumped on her as they went on. When she came to our door, she looked like the tail end of a cyclone had struck her. Her face was scratched and clothing torn, but as usual she could see the funny side of her experience. We all laughed to hear her recount her experience.

That was one thing most of the pioneers could do - see the funny side. I often wonder if that was not the secret of our being able to undergo the many hardships to which we were all inured.