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Journalist, James R. Carselowey,
March 16, 1938.

Interview with William Brown,
Vinita.

My name is William Brown. I now live on R.F.D. 3, 10 miles southeast of Vinita. I was born near Lincreek, Cameron County, Missouri, April 7, 1868. The Bagnall dam was built near my birthplace. I came with my parents to the Indian Territory when a small boy and we rented land from the Cherokee Indians and farmed for a good many years.

There were scarcely any renter houses to be had when my father first came to the Territory, but the crop seasons were good, the land new and we raised good crops.

In 1912, when the White River dam was built I went back to Missouri and worked on the dam while it was being constructed. That doesn't seem very far back, but I can see a wonderful difference in what

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man has learned in the construction of water dams since that day. I speak from my working experience on dams, when I say this, for I came back to Oklahoma to help build the Spavinaw dam in 1923-24. Back on the White River dam, they didn't know anything about 8 hour shifts for men. The men those days worked ten hour shifts and two shifts took up the entire day, except four hours, which was used for eating and going and coming. The foreman did not know that cement could be mixed in cold weather those days, and when cold weather set in we rested. The cement was poured from the sacks and mixed by hand. Four men were detailed at a time to pour the cement, and they worked twenty minutes and another bunch went on. It was so dusty, that they could not go longer than twenty minutes at a time.

White River Lake 26 Miles Long.

The White River lake was twenty-six miles long. The material to build the dam was unloaded at Branson, Missouri, and hauled twelve miles by wagon teams, over the rough mountain roads. All of the material was thus

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hauled until the dam was completed, then the dynamos for the machinery, which was very heavy, were loaded on barges and floated down the river, and landed at the places they were to be erected to make electricity. I am mentioning this briefly so that the reader can see what a wonderful progress the country has made in the space of a few years.

The Old Sorghum Mill.

Before I leave Missouri again I want to tell you of a few of the early day things they were using back there while I was there. One was an old sorghum mill, strictly hand made. The rollers were cut from round logs with three of them bolted together, much in the same manner of a modern sorghum mill. This was used to squeeze the juice from the cane and then it was placed into common old wash kettles and boiled down until it was thick enough for sorghum. A gallon of sorghum could be bought for twenty-five or thirty cents.

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The Old Threshing Method.

The White River country was a rough mountainous country, and they hadn't yet heard of a threshing machine. When a wheat crop was raised the neighbors all got together, much in the same manner as the modern farmer but each man brought his own threshing machine in the form of a horse. The wheat was piled in a clean spot on the ground and eight or ten horsemen would ride round and round on the wheat, tramping it until all the grains were beaten out. A man with a pitchfork would stand in the center and keep the wheat turned over until it was all threshed out. It was then put in sacks and taken to an old water mill, about forty miles away and ground into flour. Before being placed in sacks the wheat was placed on a wagon-sheet and fanned in the wind until all the straw and dirt blew out of it.

Red Cedar at Branson, Missouri.

There was so much Red Cedar growing around Branson, Missouri, that the American Pencil Company

established a pencil factory there and manufactured pencils by the thousands. The trees grew from two to four feet through and buyers from Batesville, Arkansas, bought the logs and rafted them down the river to be made into furniture and posts. One raft of logs brought as high as \$700.

How a Raft was Made.

A raft was made from the longest cedar logs that could be found. They were tied together, then cedar posts were piled on top of them and bales of cotton piled on top of that and sometimes a wagon and team would ride on top of the cotton, and would be driven back.

A Fish Ladder in Dam.

The White River dam was made with a fish ladder, built in the dam, so that fish can go through the dam. All old time fishermen know that fish go up stream when the weather begins to get warm, seeking shallow and cooler water, while in the fall they go down stream, seeking deeper and warmer water. The fish

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ladder was built in the White River dam for that purpose and is built in a winding way through the dam, which lets a small stream of water run through the dam at all times but is so winding that it is not swift and fish go through it at regular intervals. Many of the larger fish are picked up for food as they pass through the ladder. A walk-way is provided in the center of this dam.

I left the White River district in 1919, and returned to the Indian Territory. I had saved up quite a little money and on reaching the Territory I learned that the oil business was on a boom, and decided to buy up some heavy draft teams and take them into the oil field and sell them. All of the pipes and equipment for oil field work in those days were being hauled by wagon and teams, and heavy draft teams were in demand. I found a ready market for my horses and when I had about supplied the demand, where I was, I heard of a good market in another oil field at Santa Fe, New Mexico. I

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I bought up eighteen of the finest draft horses I could find, loaded my family in a covered wagon and started out there.

When we had traveled three days in the state of New Mexico the water supply began to play out. The creeks were all dry, and the farther we went the drier it got. We finally had to buy water for our stock. Most of the water wells were run by windmills, and the high winds had put them out of commission. There were a few cisterns where we could get drinking water, but none for the stock. We finally got to where we were paying 20 cents a bucket for water for our stock, and I decided to turn back when my water, feed and food bill reached \$20 per day.

When I had traveled back one day, a man told me if I would turn north I would strike water sooner but it was two more days before we found water in a creek. I headed back to the Oklahoma oil field, sold my horses and settled down to farming, near Strang, where I farmed until 1922.

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In 1922 Eastern capitalists came into the neighborhood and leased up thousands of acres of timbered land in the vicinity of Kenwood, about eight miles east of Salina. They incorporated under the name of the Kenwood Lumber Company and built a railroad spur from the Kansas, Oklahoma and Gulf line at Salina to Kenwood, and on eight miles to the east of Kenwood. This railroad was used in shipping logs to the mill and at the same time gave the Company an outlet for the lumber they sawed. It was a big thing for the farmers and laborers around there as all who wished could get work. I took a job of hauling flour and feed for Pin Powell, who owned a flour and feed mill at Strang to Kenwood. The company did a land office business at first, and it looked like they were going to set the woods on fire, but in a few years they went broke and left the field.

In 1923 another big project opened up, when the city of Tulsa started building a dam across the Spavinaw valley to secure an adequate water supply for that city.

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This was by far the biggest project that had ever been attempted in Oklahoma at that time, the first cost being estimated at \$7,000,000.00 but before completed it cost another two or three million.

The preliminary work consisted of clearing away the timber and removing the Spavinaw Cemetery, which was located in the valley now filled with water.

I first took a job of helping move the dead for the Burckhalter Funeral Home and Klangle & Rogers, both of Vinita, who had the contract of removing them. It was a shaky job, and not many men would work at it. Some of the bodies had been there so long that there was nothing but bones to remove. Others consisted of coffins partly decayed and many of the bodies had to be rolled up in a robe and removed. Those who removed the bodies had to work far into the night to catch up with the grave diggers and those who had been digging them up. No bodies were left over night.

One remarkable feature about this removal was the vast number of unmarked graves. We buried all of

these in the northeast corner of the new graveyard, which was secured one mile north of the town of Spavinaw. This old cemetery is said to date back before the Civil War.

In 1923-24 I worked on the building of the Spavinaw dam. It was a huge affair reaching from bluff to bluff across the valley, once occupied by Spavinaw creek, which stream was fed by living springs up and down the valley. The machinery used in building this dam was much superior to that used on the White River dam. Large steam shovels, drag lines, winches and five wheeled wagons were used.

The valley where the Spavinaw Lake was built was between two high bluffs, with plenty of rock all round. These rocks were gathered up, placed in a pile across the valley and cement run between the crevices. Huge rocks were blasted from the side of the mountain and hauled into the dump by the huge machinery, and when high enough dirt was piled on top and before the dam, until to the outsider the dam would look to be constructed mainly of dirt.

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A railroad spur was built from Verdigris near Tulsa, where the tiling was manufactured, to the Dam site at Spavinaw. It was built parallel with the water ditch, and the tiling was unloaded from the cars into the ditch and moved into place by large machinery. The tiling was 6 feet in diameter, made of concrete and each joint fit into each other so closely that water would not leak through.

The tiling across Grand River was the last to be placed, connecting and finishing the line that had been laid from either end. A low water bridge was built across Grand River and the tiling dumped from the cars right into the water. The ditch across the river had been dug down to a rock bottom. The ground on the east side of the river was higher than the west side, which gave the water enough force to carry it up out of the river bed on its way to Tulsa. This water runs by natural gravitation almost to Tulsa, where a pump carries it on to a high hill outside of Tulsa where a water tower is located and where the

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water has a natural drop to all parts of the city. It is considered by far one of the finest water systems in the state, most of its water coming from natural springs.

The city of Tulsa paid \$65 an acre for all the land covered by the lake, and if a farmer had as much as one acre in the lake region they bought his entire allotment and in this way the city owns much of the rugged land surrounding the lake, which is used for a park and recreation ground.

The city of Tulsa did not have much trouble in securing a right-of-way for the lake. About one of the hardest problems they had to deal with was Tom Wickliff, a full blood Cherokee, whose wife had inherited the old homestead of her parents. They lived right in the valley where the lake was to be located and Tom just couldn't see how he was to give up this valuable old homestead, even for \$65 an acre. Tom had just been into trouble with the county, state, and United States officers, causing the authorities to make a treaty of


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peace with the Wickliff boys, after killing two United States Marshals, Ike Gilstrap and Henry Vier, and the city had to use strategy in securing his consent to vacate his land. They sent many of his friends to talk to him and used all the strategy they knew on him before he finally gave in and moved out. He received \$11,000 for his wife's place.

Wickliff went up on Lynch's prairie about three miles out of Spavinaw and bought the Cyrus Bell farm, which was a much better farm than the one he gave up and went into the Hereford cattle business. He remodelled the house and built a fine new modern barn, had a good orchard, and is living easy yet at his new home. I worked for him a while shortly after he moved, and can say that he has a model little farm, that any white man would be proud of. He had a chute built to his barn loft and would run his show cattle up in his barn loft during fly time and always took the best of care of them. He called them his show cattle and would take them to the county fairs.



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The city of Tulsa had trouble with the first superintendent they hired to build the Spavinaw Dam. They placed \$5,000 to his credit to make the first pay-day payment, but when pay-day came he was gone and so was the \$5,000. After that a new superintendent was hired but the pay checks were sent direct to the workers through the mail from Tulsa. Strang had the nearest bank, and the city deposited money there to pay the checks.

Arthur Carnes was the cashier of the Strang bank, which was eight miles from Spavinaw, and to save the hands time and delay, he and his wife would get in their car every two weeks, bring a sack of money and take up the checks at Spavinaw. They had been doing this for about two years and had reached the last pay-day without being hi-jacked. Most of the workers had been let go and only enough men to lay the tile across Grand River were due a pay-day. To be exact Carnes had \$1,800 in his sack and was on the road to Spavinaw to make the last payment when two men held him up at

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the mouth of Spavinaw Creek and made him and his wife crawl through a wire fence; then took his money sack and car and drove away and left them and have never been heard of since then. Two weeks later a man out hunting in the hills found the car, a new Studebaker, hanging over the side of a cliff where the hi-jackers had jumped it off the cliff and left it. The car was found about two miles from the scene of the robbery and they found where the robbers had hitched a two-wheel cart and one horse there until they returned to get them. When this was discovered residents of Strang called to memory seeing two strangers pass through Strang the morning of the robbery, but no one has ever seen them since.