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BANKS, LENA R.

INTERVIEW.

10540

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

BANKS, LENA R.

INTERVIEW

#10540

Field Worker's name Bessie L. Thomas

This report made on (date) April 18 1938

1. Name Lena R. Banks

2. Post Office Address Cache, 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 4.

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Bessie L. Thomas  
Investigator  
April 18, 1938.

Interview with Lena R. Banks  
Cache, Oklahoma.

Among the first improvements that the Indians made on their land was to have it plowed and fenced, usually having no more plowed than ten acres, just a small patch for corn. The Indian always hired a white man to make the fence posts, being too lazy to make them himself. These men who cut fence posts were known as rail-splitters. The fences were always built in the old-fashioned manner of stake and rider rail fence.

In the Spring of 1891, a family by the name of Mayes came into southwest Oklahoma near Cache, and near the home of Quanah Parker hunting work; they were known as rail-splitters. In this family there were several grown boys who appealed to Quanah for work and were immediately hired. They had to use the running gears of their wagon to haul the posts from the forest after they were made. There was no house in which the family could live, so the wagon bed was set on the ground and used as sort of a store room and they improvised a little shack in which they slept and ate. They hewed out timber in

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a long thick piece which looked like a piece of lumber, walled up the sides to about five feet in height and about ten by fourteen, with the means of stakes and poles and a roof was shaped and over this wagon sheets were drawn taut. The beds were built up along the walls with stakes and posts and the slats were made out of slabs the same as used in the walls, only not so wide. The food was cooked out of doors over an open fire.

The boys and father went every day to the timber to make the rails and the mother, a grown daughter and a small baby were left at camp each day. There was much fear among the white people who lived in this part of Oklanoma, in the early days of wild animals; there were a great many panthers in the mountains, also great herds of cattle and horses in the country and in the evenings the panthers came down in the valley and would kill a great many calves and colts. On a balmy spring evening the mournful and constant lowing of the cattle interspersed with the screams of the panthers was enough to instill fear into the bravest heart.

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This family of Mayes had selected for their home a spot which unbeknown by them was frequented by panthers when in search of food. This family had two very fine pedigreed dogs, which were kept constantly at camp as they were wonderful watch dogs, they were never permitted to follow the men. On this particular evening it was very warm and the boys decided to sleep outside the door making them a pallet on the ground. Around the entrance to the camp a wall had been built and the dogs were permitted to sleep on the inside of this enclosure. The family retired and all were soon fast asleep, after a hard days work. The baby had been placed in the bed and next to the wall. All at once, away in the middle of the night the grown folk of the family were awakened by the vicious baying of the dogs. Just outside the wall and on the side where the baby was sleeping there was heard a clawing and scratching noise. The boys became frightened, jumped out of the bed, ran inside the camp and kept trying to force the dogs outside. The scratching and clawing outside the wall continued. The father and one of the boys grabbed their winchesters, but were afraid to venture outside as the night was pitch dark and they had no

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lantern. The dogs continued barking; after the baby had been moved away from the wall the scratching sound ceased and the animal rushed at the dogs, catching one of them. The family, huddled together in stark terror, heard the dog being strangled and as the last struggling sounds were made; they could hear the animal dragging the dog toward the creek. The other dog rushed into the camp and in terror huddled up to the family, whimpering and crying. There was no more sleep that night, for fear the animal might return to camp. As soon as daylight came the men searched outside the camp and found the tracks of a huge panther. They followed the tracks to the dry creek bed and saw how the panther had dragged the dog, then it had left the creek and disappeared into the hills.

The next day camp was immediately broken, the father went to Juanah and told him what had happened, asked for his and the boys wages and said he was leaving. Juanah had learned to like this family and their work was more satisfactory than anyone else's whom he had hired, so he begged them to stay, offering better wages, but the father said he was not going to live where there was so much danger from wild animals.