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BEARDIN, BESSIE OAKES

INTERVIEW

#6633

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

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Field Worker's name Hazel B. GreeneThis report made on (date) July 14, 19371. Name Bessie Oakes Bearden2. Post Office Address Hugo, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month Nov. Day 2 Year 18805. Place of birth Goodwater, Oklahoma.6. Name of Father Lem W. Oakes Place of birth Old GoodwaterOther information about father one eighth Choctaw Indian --living7. Name of Mother Lucy Smith Place of birth ArkansasOther information about mother White woman, buried at Hugo cemetery

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 _____.

Interview with Bessie Oakes Bearden
Hugo, Oklahoma

Bessie Oakes is the oldest daughter of Lem W. Oakes, of Hugo, Choctaw County, Oklahoma. She is one sixteenth Choctaw Indian, and was born at the old Thomas W. Oakes home place at old Goodwater, in the Choctaw Nation, about fourteen miles southeast of Hugo, Oklahoma. Her mother was Lucy Smith, born in Arkansas and raised in the Indian Territory. Lucy's mother died when she was young, then her step-mother died while she was still a young girl. Her father lived southeast of where Hugo is now, at or near the old Morris Fisher place. When he married the third time, Lucy went to live with friends over in Texas. Lem went over and brought her back a bride to his father's home there at Goodwater, and they lived in the house with his parents until their second child, who is now Mrs. Louis Spring, was born. She was perhaps a year old, when Lem and Lucy settled a place that is about two miles east of the present town of Hugo, Oklahoma.

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Bessie says she can remember the old home place at Goodwater quite distinctly and can remember leading her blind grandfather along the lariat ropes and wires that they had strung from tree to tree. She being the oldest grandchild at home he seemed to want her out there with him every evening when he went out to take his exercise. Though she was only about three when they moved away to settle the new place up on the prairie, having been born November 2, 1880, she said it seemed to her that they were leaving all the world. So it was to that child, all the world that she knew. They did not go back often, and not ^{at} all for a long time, as they had no way to go except in an ox wagon, or log wagon.

It was about fourteen miles from the new home to Goodwater, and it was several years after they moved until they got horses, teams or buggies. Then this young couple were very busy making their new home and taking care of their growing family, but they always managed to go back down there for funerals, and the Oakes were always buried there in the family cemetery. All seven of Lem and Lucy's children are living.

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The house was of the usual log variety. Two big front rooms, a hall and two side rooms, then later a parlor was added onto the front. The porch made a hall between it and the other part of the house. They had a paling fence and the palings were split out of timber like the boards that covered the house. Also there were palings for the garden and a stake and rider fence of rails around the farm.

We had an ash hopper and dripped our own lye and made soap, and that was the best soap to wash with, too. We used good old rain water and home made lye soap and a battling stick and we didn't miss the rub-boards that we knew nothing about ^{and} which came later. A battling stick was a smooth paddle about four feet long with the handle smoothed down and rounded to fit the hands: of course the paddle was wider. We'd soak those clothes, sometimes over night, then lay them across a puncheon bench which was made from a log for that purpose, and paddle away on them until they would come out clean.

Though we were nearly white, we had our Tom Fuller block, because we liked a mess of Tom fuller or hominy occasionally. Sometimes we would just skin the corn with the lye and cook it that way; but it had a different taste when pounded with a pestle in that old tom fuller block, and so did the meal.

After a few years Papa got some ponies for us to ride, and some to work. We rode three miles to Spring Chapel to school, which was my first schooling. Then I attended Rock Hill school and when I was about twelve I started to New Hope, which was up close to Fort Smith. I got very little schooling as we could not go all of the time to Spring Chapel. The terms were short, and some times the weather would not permit us to go, and again the ponies would get out. We seldom ever walked as it was too dangerous. There were wild horses, that would run over little children, wild hogs, and wild cattle, and we were afraid of wolves. I believe they would howl around our back door every night, and the front one, too,

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as for that matter, but more often in the back because the stock was there. We had to put our hogs and calves and any young stock in sheds at night to keep the wolves from carrying them off. The hawks or eagles were always after our chickens, and we had to protect them.

Once I was on the front porch looking across the prairie, and saw a big old bald eagle circling around. He lit on a little mound, and as I watched, a flock of wild turkeys passed between him and me. Something frightened the eagle and it flew away, but it might have been after young turkeys, or old ones either. Eagles would catch big turkeys, too, as well as young pigs and chickens.

Deer were plentiful. Daddy usually killed one every Sunday morning, as he was not busy with things around the farm, and that would be enough meat for the whole week. If any neighbors came along we divided with them, or sent meat to them. Daddy never had to go away from the house to kill one, as they would come up and lie down with the cattle.

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The first church I remember after we left Goodwater, was Shoat Springs. I don't know just how old Shoat Springs church is, but Mother united with Methodist Protestant church there. Later Papa joined the Methodist Church here and she changed to that.

I went to New Hope school for girls fifteen miles from Fort Smith. By the time I went there we could catch the midnight train at Goodland and be there the next morning for late breakfast, at Fort Smith. Then we would have to hire a rig and drive out to the Academy. It was over in the Indian Territory and for Indian girls only. I went two terms and a half. I had typhoid fever one fall and came home at Christmas and never went back. I was married the next year when I was sixteen to Charles Edward Bearden, a white man. He was a son of John J. Bearden, a pioneer here. They were from Arkansas, but had been here many years, then.

When I got up some size, we had more neighbors and would have socials, candy pullings, singings, play parties, and occasionally a dance. The rail-

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road coming through in about 1885 brought lots of people, but Goodland was a town before there was a railroad there. Why there was a town called Goodland and a mission school named that also, is more than I can understand, but they both had that name. It was the only place we had to trade. Joel Springs owned a store there and A. J. Walker was postmaster. John Hastings ran the hotel. It was about six miles from us, and we would go over there for everything, some times we could sell eggs and butter there.

After Mr. Bearden and I married we settled on a place three and a half miles south east of Hugo. There was already a house there, but I don't know who built it. It was not much of a house, so we built a good one. There was a fine spring there on that place which was my filing, and so it became our permanent home. Later Bearden Springs and a school house built there were named Bearden.

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Mr. Bearden died in Oklahoma City, at the age of sixty-two, March 5, 1934. He is buried at Mount Olivet Cemetery at the southeast edge of Hugo Oklahoma. That cemetery used to be the old Burgoyne Cemetery, because old Captain Burgoyne first began burying people there.

Mr. Bearden was a white man, born in Arkansas. His mother was a Conditt, Rhoda Conditt. She died at Booneville, Arkansas, January 14, 1872, leaving three children.

Mr. Bearden traces his ancestry back to John Conditt, a native of Great Britain who settled in Newark, New Jersey, in 1678. Mrs. Bearden has the history of the Conditt family from that date, and the first family member spelled it Cunditt.