

LEGEND & STORY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

281

Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

FERRIS, RANSOME.

INTERVIEW.

13472.

Field worker's name Nannie Lee Burns

This report made on (date) March 28, 1938

1. This legend was secured from (name) Ransome Ferris

Address Quapaw, Oklahoma.

This person is (male or female) White, Negro, Indian,

If Indian, give tribe _____

2. Origin and history of legend or story From past experiences.

3. Write out the legend or story as completely as possible. Use blank sheets and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 12.

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Nannie Lee Burns,
Investigator.
March 28, 1938.

Interview with Ransome Ferris.
Quapaw, Oklahoma.

"PAST MEMORIES."

My father was Edmund R. Ferris, born in New York, and my mother, Ellen A. Crumb Ferris, was born in New York, December 9, 1849. After their marriage they settled in Michigan on a farm and here I was born November 18, 1871, one of a family of four boys and four girls.

While we lived there we lived on a farm and gave careful attention to the rotation of crops and planned it so carefully that any certain acreage was put in the same crop only every five years so by careful planning we kept our land built up and it even grew stronger as the years went by. We raised corn, wheat, barley, flax, clover and the silage crops. We had comfortable homes and good schools and my parents did not suffer any hardships during the Civil War. But one of the family, an uncle was in the Army.

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My grandparents, the Crumbs, came to Kansas in 1868 and homesteaded one and three-quarters west and one mile north of Baxter Springs, Kansas. Here they built a small frame house which later when a better house was built they turned into a part of a barn. Here on this place they started a family cemetery which is still used and today contains the graves of six generations of the Crumb Family. Being impressed by the letters from her people about the many opportunities in the new country, mother, when I was seventeen, decided that she would bring the boys here so she came to Baxter Springs in 1888 with the four boys and, because of the better living conditions there, left the four girls with my father in Michigan.

We came by train to Baxter Springs and for some time we lived in Baxter Springs. The older boys helped on the farm but I remained for several months in Baxter Springs with my mother.

Trading with the Modoc Indians was our greatest thrill. Some of us boys got a quantity of new knives, bright beads, etc., and took them to the Modocs and traded for blankets,

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shawls, etc. Some of these blankets had cost eight and ten dollars. We would then take our blankets to Baxter and trade them for other things and we soon had established quite a little business for ourselves. The officers watched very carefully to see that no whiskey was taken to the Modoc Reserve as the whiskey made them quarrelsome. I remember Scar-Face Charlie better than any of the others as he had a sabre cut across the face.

We slept under buffalo robes that my grandfather had purchased for a dollar a hide. In Baxter Springs, the W. W. Scott Livery Barn was across the street from us and he would purchase Indian Ponies for a few dollars and would ship them to Texas and sell them. A law in this town forbade them allowing any dead stock to be disposed of in the town and so, to get rid of his dead stock, he would have it hauled at night across the line into the Indian Territory. Sometimes in the darkness we would get lost and many a time I have got down on my hands and knees to feel which way the grass was bent to find our way back and have crawled ahead feeling of the bent grass. However, there have been

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times when this could not be done and we would have to wait until the first morning light but we would hurry to get across the line back into Kansas by daylight.

Hack and J. C. Nailor had a butcher shop in Baxter Springs and the Nailor Pasture, as it was called, was one of the largest leased acreages in the Quapaw and Peoria Nations. They leased this vast acreage for a few cents per acre per year from the Indians and here they grazed their cattle during the summer months and late into the fall and early winter on the tall blue-stem and then they would ship from Baxter to the northern and eastern markets. Also they had a contract to supply the soldiers with fresh meat for the Modocs, the Poncas and the Nez Perces.

After the building of the railroad to Baxter Springs, another industry began to spring up at the expense of the Indian, that of shipping hay.

The hay-men living at Baxter Springs and even farther away would come into this country and lease a block of hay-land and then they would run a furrow with a plough around it. They would then guess at the acreage, and in the

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guessing at the amount of land enclosed, the Indian always suffered. After the number of acres was agreed upon they would in the later years pay the Indians Twenty-five cents per acre for the grass. Then this was cut and baled and before the extension of the Frisco to Miami in 1896 was hauled to the state line south of Baxter and shipped. This hurt the Indian Country more than the grazing, for the mower took the whole years growth of grass and left it not so sturdy for the coming year, while the grazing had not been so destructive. At this time I worked for Bob Miller of Baxter.

In 1889, I hired Lou Harner of Baxter Springs to come into the Quapaw and Peoria Nation and dig holes trying to locate the tripoli deposits and we dug holes over a large part of the Peoria Nation but we had to be careful not to let it be known what we were doing. Chet Shannon worked with me. This was before McNaughton started his mining boom in Peoria the next year. The existence of the "Old Spanish Mines" caused others besides McNaughton to want to know what this country contained. As you know

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there were various stories about the old diggings which even then were so badly caved in that it was impossible to know what had been mined but the men who studied it most carefully had decided that it was either Tripoli or surface lead. These old mines are one mile north and two miles east of Peoria and nothing is left of them today but timber covered mounds and caved in holes and the surface is covered with sharp flint rocks.

Another experience that I had in those early days, was driving an eye-doctor that came each week to treat the Indians who had sore eyes. At that time, many of them seemed afflicted with a peculiar eye trouble and he was making a good thing of it until one day a chance remark from one of the Indians scared him so that he did not return. One of the men cut cord-wood and sold it at Baxter Springs at fifty cents per cord to pay him for treating his wife. This man then so poor later, after the discovery of mines on his land, became one of the richest of the Quapaw tribe.

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Those were stage-coach days as the mail had to be carried south from Baxter Springs overland and followed the old Military road through the Indian Country. However, the stage-coach was discarded after the building of the Frisco in 1870 but in sections not covered by the railroads the mail still had to be carried overland. When a brother of mine decided to move to Western Oklahoma in 1889 he went in a covered wagon from Baxter Springs and because of almost no roads and no bridges, etc., it took them three weeks to make the trip.

In the spring you would see the covered wagons as well as carts and buggies moving westward and in the fall the tide seemed to change and the trend was mostly eastward. Most any night you would see camp-fires all along the old Chetopa and Military road.

The 25th of March, 1893, I married Sarah May Pelden and then moved to a farm just north of Columbus, Kansas. Farm life in those days was not an easy matter. Many persons were compelled to stick and take the hardships because they had come pioneering and could not get away. You just had to take things as they came and make the best of it.

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Why the year that the grass-hoppers came, they came in so great a mass that they blotted out the light of the sun. as they came over, It looked like a black cloud, they were so thick. They even began to eat the half grown peaches in the old family orchard and every one began to gather what they could before it was completely destroyed, in the meanwhile fighting the grass-hoppers.

After I began farming for myself things were much better but I had to work hard to make it. I would kill and dress a load of hogs and haul them to Galena, Kansas, and sell the meat at four, and if lucky at five, cents per pound. Corn sold at ten cents per bushel and by hauling it to Joplin, Missouri, I could get twelve and a half cents so I would get up and start before daylight with a load of thirty five bushels, drive there, sell my corn and not get home until eight or nine o'clock at night, realizing a dollar and a half for a long day's work for myself and my team. But the things that we had to buy were not so expensive as they are today for then you could buy a good stout pony for fifteen or twenty dollars

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and a good cow from twelve to fifteen dollars, good stout plough-shoes for one dollar and twenty-five cents and calico for three to five cents per yard. A neighbor was always ready to give another a jug of milk. But even with these prices, there were times when I have made a meal on mush covered with sorghum molasses. One summer since I have been in Quapaw, my bread bill for a single month for my family was twenty-three dollars; some difference isn't it?

From the farm near Columbus we moved to Baxter Springs and here I went into the huskster business. I had a little pair of mules and I would make trips as far west as Oswego, Chetopa and Columbus, Kansas, and then would buy up produce, eggs and everything that the farmer had to sell and would sell it and then would bring this to Galena, Kansas and Joplin, Missouri, where I would sell it and then return for another load. I earned more money at this than I had made farming.

In 1902 I came to Quapaw and went into the livery business which I continued for ten years but while in this

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business I engaged in other things, among which was the haying business which had grown to be one of the chief resources of this country. After the railroad was extended to Miami in 1896 through Quapaw, great hay-barns were built at Baxter Springs, Quapaw, Miami, Narcissa and as far south as Afton. The average barn would hold around six and eight hundred tons of baled hay though a few were built that held a thousand tons. These were large frame structures with great double doors in the sides through which a load of hay could be driven to store in the barn and also when the hay was sold or shipped in the winter and spring months it could be loaded directly on the wagon from inside the barn. The hauling of this hay from the field to the barn and the re-loading of the hay gave employment to many farmers and their teams during the summer months and also in the winter when they were not so busy on the farm, and it was a very common thing to see a stream of wagons loaded with baled hay containing generally from two and a half tons to more than three tons moving across the prairie toward either the box-car that

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was waiting at the convenient railroad siding or toward the barn to be stored for future sales.

We have never had any permanent negro residents in this county and it was about this time that the men from Baxter Springs began to hire negroes to work in the hay and it was not long until they began to think of moving in here, but one day there appeared over the door of the barn operated by John Large and myself the sign in large letters, "Darkies, Don't let the sun go down on you in this town." This had the desired effect and so none of them ever became residents.

I have continued to live in Quapaw ever since 1902 and have done several different things and have been connected with many of the different movements here. When the Old Quapaw Mission was sold, I purchased one of the frame buildings and first moved it here, later when Commerce or Hattonville as it was called was started, moved it there and it was used as a store building and later when Century was established it was moved there and it still is in use there next to the wrecking plant.

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In those years I made some money and when we thought Quapaw was to become an important mining town, I caught the building fever and erected at a cost of more than \$25,000 in the new town a two story brick building with a seventy-five foot frontage and three store rooms below. I paid it all except \$240.00, and after things just continued to go down, I let it go for that amount.

From 1825 to 1833, I was the mail messenger and received \$800.00 per year and then I cut my bid to \$500.00 for the three-hundred sixty-five day service and the man who underbid me took it for \$240.00, so since that time and since the death of my wife I have lived here on this little acreage tending a few acres, watching my orchard grow and raising a few calves.

My daughter and her husband live with me here.