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BENNETT, Wm. F.

INTERVIEW

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6656

INDEX CARDS

Chickasaw Nation  
Land Grafters  
Physicians

Field Worker Lula Austin  
April 14, 1937.  
Interview with Wm. F. Bennett  
Durant, Oklahoma.

Born November 29, 1869,  
Tennessee.

Parents William Bennett, Tenn.  
Sarah Bennett, Tenn.

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Fifty-eight years ago, I came through the Indian Territory on my way to Texas. We had three wagons and were driving mules. We stopped back in the timber belt and camped. There was an Indian hut near where we camped. It was built of logs with only one opening near the eave about three feet square and a little ladder to reach the opening. The roof was of raw-hide. There were two Indian women there, and a little papoose was in the yard asleep on a board that was between the logs in the corner of the rail fence. They had about fifteen chickens in the yard, and we went over to barter for a chicken. My father took fifteen cents from his pocket and showed it to them. They grinned and one Indian reached between the logs and brought out a little pan with crumbs in it and

called the chickens. They began to eat and she reached down and caught one, giving it to my father. He decided he needed two, so he pointed to one a little larger and offered fifteen cents. The Indian shook her head. He reached in his pocket and got another nickle, making twenty cents. She grinned, took the little pan of crumbs, fed them and caught the one father had asked for. We noticed an Indian man walk up with a gun. He placed it by the tree and stood quite a distance from the house. We tried to tell the Indians to tell him to come on up we were his friends, but they shook their heads no.

We moved on to another camping place. There was one negro and one white officer, who had a white prisoner also camped near. The white man was groaning, and I asked him what was the matter. He answered that he wanted water. Said it had been three days since he had had a drink. I brought the bucket of water to him and he drank. The negro looked at me and said, "We don't care how much water he drinks, as we are going to string him to a tree tomorrow."

We moved on to Hill County, Texas, where my father located and planted a crop. Not a seed sprouted. There

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was no rain for fourteen months. The land that now sells for two hundred dollars an acre could have been bought during that drought for \$1.50 an acre. The cracks in the earth were so large we had to use blinds to keep stock from falling in the cracks crippling themselves. One night while we were attending prayer-meeting our house and everything we possessed burned. Father had \$1600 in gold buried in some cotton that was stored in a little out-house which also burned. He salvaged some of the gold; I don't remember just what he received for it, but nothing like full value.

Cattle were dying for water and people were skinning them, selling the hides. If a steer was down and still breathing they would knock him in the head and skin him.

After our home burned we moved back to Central Arkansas. On our way across Texas we were nearly famished for water. There were little mud puddles in the bed of creeks and dead cattle near by. I got on my knees and drank from one of these mud puddles. We had gone a night and day without water when we came to a house with a well. Father approached the house and called but received no

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answer so began to draw the water. I will never forget how the poor mules turned their heads and nickered but as the pulley squeaked a man came running up the hill, telling us we could not have water from his well. Father said my wife and children are famished and if you don't give it to us willingly I will take it over your dead body. He called to a young man who was making the trip with us to bring his gun and after quite an argument he consented to let us have the water but said the mules would have to go without. Father said I will let the mules drop in their tracks before I would kill you for water for them, but I would kill you for water for my family. When we reached the Indian Territory, a white man who had several thousand acres leased offered my father five hundred acres if he would remain and be his neighbor, white people were so scarce in the Indian Territory at that time, but father went back to Arkansas.

I came back to the Indian Territory February 2, 1901, from Lane Oak County, Arkansas. Thirty-two was my age when I came to this County. I improved 800 acres near Old Allison, building seven houses on the land. When the land office opened to allot the Indians, the country was full of crooks. They would try and file

some of the best land as surplus and then lease and buy from the Indian for a small sum. That is the way some of the white men made their profits.

Whitehead and Redwine, lawyers, were two big land grafters. They came down and tried to buy my improvements on the eight hundred acres near Old Alison. We came within about \$750.00 of making the trade. They went back and filed Indians on it all. I filed a contest against Whitehead and Redwine in the land office at Atoka and during that period I filed and fought sixteen contests and never lost one. Etherage and Cook, lawyers, of Atoka, represented me. I was getting up men who lacked a little having their filing and I asked Judge Armby who was holding court in Caddo to go with me. He dismissed court and went to Atoka with me and filed contests on some of this land and two years after his death the suit was won. I leased the land for five years and after the lease expired, turned the land back to Judge Armby's heir.

In the early days in Durant the first doctors were men who bought themselves pill-bags and put their signs up. One doctor by the name of Parks was attending W. T. Clark,

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who was sick with yellow jaundice. The doctor recommended a steam bath for fourteen days. He was my neighbor so I gave the baths. There was no improvement. I said to the doctor, "There should be some reaction, or he is going to die." He looked up and said, "But how you going to get reaction. We all have to die," and he died.

Dr. Park was the partner of Doctor De Lashmut. Their sign read, "Medical and Eye Doctors." Doctor De Lashmut treated the eyes. He would put the patient in the chair and pull his eye open, pouring medicine in the eye, putting out more eyes than he cured. There were four leading doctors here then, Dr. Early, Dr. Park, Dr. De Lashmut and Dr. Horton. All are now dead.

Mr. Bennett gave me this true story to illustrate the physician thirty-six to forty years ago in the Choctaw Nation. I will repeat a statement made to me by a leading doctor of this town, Durant. I knew him intimately for fifteen years in Indian Territory. This statement was made to me thirty-five years ago. I



have repeated it many times since. He said the practice of medicine was a fraud. He said a farmer rushed to his door here in Durant, told the doctor his wife was dying and alone ten miles in the country; to come at once, and directed the doctor as to where he lived. He hurried back home to be with his wife until the doctor could get there. The doctor harnessed his mare and hitched her to the buggy and hurried along the way. The road was very bad and traveling was slow. When about three miles from his destination he remembered he had forgotten to put his pill-bag in the buggy. He stopped his horse and sat there in the darkness thinking. A thought came to him. He thought of the dry clay on the spokes of the buggy wheels, so getting out of the buggy he took his knife and knocked dry pieces of the clay off rubbing the clay in his hand until it was pulverized. He then took an envelope from his pocket and filled it half full of the fine clay, put it back in his pocket and continued on his way. When he arrived at the little house he entered and before him saw nine little children on pallets, and the sick woman on a bed, her husband sitting by the

the bed crying. He went to the bed and felt the woman's pulse and told her to stick her tongue out for him to see, then said "You are a very sick woman." He told her husband to bring water and a spoon. He emptied some of the powdered clay and mixed it with the water by stirring ~~the~~ the contents with his pencil. He gave it to the sick woman and prepared twelve more powders for her to take every two hours, telling her husband to let him know next day how she felt. Well, a month went by before he heard from the man and he met him on the street and asked how much he owed him. The doctor looked at him and not recalling who he was said, "Well I will have to look on my books," and the man said "you only made one trip to see my wife" telling him when. "Oh, yes," he said, "That will be ten dollars." The man paid him the \$10.00 and said his wife improved after the first powder, was up in two days doing her work and felt fine.

Dr. Early told Mr. Bennett that he felt a man could not be saved that would deceive his fellow man like that and he was going to stop practicing medicine. Dr. Early is now dead.