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THORNTON, VOCIE

BIOGRAPHY OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN STONE.

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

Field Worker's name Wylie Thornton

This report made on (date) July 13, 1937

1. Name Vooie Thornton

2. Post Office Address 303 Ward Street, Tahlequah, 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 \_\_\_\_\_

Wylie Thornton,  
Field Worker  
July 13, 1937.

The Life of a Pioneer.  
Benjamin Franklin Stone.

By Vocie Thornton, Tahlequah, Oklahoma

Benjamin Franklin Stone was born March 14, 1852, fourteen miles east of Fayetteville, Arkansas, in the Oxford Bend Community. He was raised by his grandparents on his mother's side, the Boyds. His mother died when he was seven days old.

Mr. Stone was later married at the age of twenty to Nancy Tramble, eighteen years old, in the year of 1872.

About 1894, a man, whose name is unknown at present, left Oxford Bend, Arkansas, and came into the unsettled community near what is now Braggs, Oklahoma. He explored for mineral on what is now known as Little Greenleaf Creek, located east of Braggs. When he returned to Oxford Bend he was in possession of a large lump of pure lead. He related to his wife that he had found a very rich deposit of lead in this Indian Country, located on a small creek east of Braggs Station. He said he found this large lump sticking on a tree root that had been blown up by a storm.

This man whose name has been forgotten today, returned to claim this mine and was killed by some unknown assailant, supposedly an outlaw.

His wife came to B. F. Stone and related the story to

him, and persuaded him to go into Indian Territory to find this mine.

B. F. Stone persuaded his friend, a man by the name of Fouse, to go with him into the Indian Territory to claim this deposit and they did find it as directed by this first claimant's wife.

This Mr. Stone then attempted to prove his right on the Indian enrollment records before the Dawes Commission. He was turned down with the information that it was impossible to accept his claim. Therefore, he abandoned his intention to file his children on the lands holding the hidden treasure.

In the fall of 1901, B. F. Stone left Arkansas for the Indian Territory, entering the Territory near Dutch Mills and coming into Stilwell. Then he went south on the road called the old Ridge Route, down the Kansas City Southern Railroad. The road was very dim and unworked and he had to use an axe many times to cut new roads around mud holes and deep ruts. He made his way up and down those hills and mountains in a covered wagon drawn by a pony team. The hills were so steep that the wagon holding his wife and children slid down the hills in spite of the team trying to hold it back and the wheels locked tight. The wagon very often came near turning over.

Mr. Stone and his family saw hundreds of wild game, squirrels, deer, turkey, fox, wolf and Indian ponies that appeared to be wild. This family camped along the road with wolves howling about their beds during the night. Mr. Stone kept the fires burning pretty well all night to help him keep the howling wolves away, as well as taking a shot at them with his gun now and then. The Stone family finally arrived on the bank of the Arkansas River near Webbers Falls. He paid a man a dollar to put his wagon, team, and family across the river on a ferry boat.

The Stone family arrived too late in that locality to be able to rent a farm for that winter. Instead, they rented a vacant house near the Widow Scales. The Scales were a well-known Indian family who were recognized as being thrifty and who showed many small favors to the new arrivals from Arkansas. Mrs. Scales had lots of land and money and stated that she had never known white people that she admired so much, as a family, as she did the Stone family. The white family was amazed at the special interest manifested by this wealthy Indian lady. The widow often prepared great feasts and called in the many friends which she had among her tribe. She always gave a special invitation to this white family.

On one occasion she requested the small Stone girl to dance again before her company as she had done on prior occasions. On this occasion this native called the child's parents to one side and begged them to accept one thousand dollars for this little girl whose name was Vocie and who was the youngest of the family. She also offered to have a will made giving this child everything she had at her death with but a dollar apiece to her relatives. She did not have any sons or daughters of her own.

Mr. Stone and his family had occasion to meet hundreds of Indians on these feasts, and parties, and found them very ready to assist him in every way possible.

Mr. Stone left Webbers Falls early the next spring because he had not been able to rent land to make a crop that year. He again loaded his family into this same wagon and started back over the same route he had followed down. They crossed the Arkansas River again on a wooden ferry. The sand bars on the banks of the river were so loose and so deep that he had a hard time pulling his load onto solid ground. The long wearisome trek back over those wolf infested mountains was very much dreaded by this white family, especially as the father was the only man in the family.

The family talked it all over and the father said, "Well, git-dap ponies." The mountains again were in sight with but scarcely any road through them. They moved along on this return trip very slowly, resting their horses after each steep hill climbed. The family always walked up the steep hills but they were about three days and a half getting to within five miles of Bunch, to what was known as the Kerby Smith Farm. Mr. Stone rented this for that year.

He made a very fine crop that year of 1902. Every neighbor he had was an Indian, as there was not a white family within five miles of him. An old Cherokee Indian was his closest neighbor, and the best neighbor the family ever had. Her name was Missouri Bunch. This good neighbor was unable to speak a word of English but always made signs with her hands to express her wants. Mr. Stone always made it a point to never refuse to grant every request made whenever it was at all possible to grant it, thereby making fast friends out of his only neighbors. One other very close neighbor and friend was Dick Hawkins, a full-blood Cherokee, who always helped him hoe out his cotton and corn. Mr. Stone stated that his Indian hired help always gave him a real day's work when employed by him.

The notable thing about Mr. Stone's stay on this farm was how his Indian landlord had moved out of his old

homestead to give him room for his family. This old Indian homestead was one of the first houses in that country to be built of lumber. It had two large rooms and two smaller side rooms with a large sandstone chimney on the east end of the building. The front faced the south; and the building still stands today.

One thing Mr. Stone remembered very distinctly was about the wife of his Indian landlord. Mrs. Kerby Smith was totally deaf and dumb. The old Indian lady told the Stone family that early in life she had used a lead pencil to pick her ear and caused her to go deaf and later brought on dumbness and loss of eyesight.

The Kerby Smith Indian family were considered about the only thrifty Indians in that community. They had sold a great number of cattle off of the open range every season, and had kept the money hidden on the premises, but had made it a rule to move this money to a different place for safety's sake from time to time; on down to a certain date. Along about the year Mr. Stone came into that community this money saving Indian family lost its savings. Only God knows the worry and heartaches that caused the Smith family. The normal portion of that family always motioned each other off around into different rooms away from this feeble mother. She had become very feeble by this time, and the family was

almost sure if she found out about the great loss she would likely fall dead. Anyhow, the family had whispered about this matter cautiously for months, and they knew that mother would soon inquire about this family savings. Then someone would have to shake her hand to tell her the awful news, and probably see her collapse. The family had invented a very secret dumb code of language by taking her by the hand and indicating the words by the shake of the hand.

The family decided that they would give her the much dreaded news, and had called in all the relatives for this awful ordeal. The lot fell on some of the family to take her by the hand while friends and relatives stood in a ring to witness this awful thing.

The hand was grasped and the news was transmitted. Instead of death to the feeble mother, she began to smile. The people also began to smile instead of having that pale scared look. That happened, when her hand was dropped, was that she hobbled to a secret, personal, age-old trunk, and dug up one of her old worn out pieces of clothing, and unwrapped this large roll of bills and gold. The family cried, "Hurrah! Hurrah!", grabbed each other and began to dance round and round.

Then she grasped one of them by the hand and told them

she had decided the money should be moved again and moved it while they were in the field. The family told the Stone family that their purpose for this special code was to guard against robbers coming onto their feeble mother in their absence and talking to her.

The children of B. F. Stone stated that they remember that within a short distance of this old Indian homestead there are a lot of very ancient petrified animals, and other curious stones. These were visited by travellers and many Indians; they are sure these are still there.

Late the next fall, Kerby Smith came up from his Sallisaw home to try to persuade his renter to stay on his farm the next year. Mr. Stone, however, decided to go back to Arkansas on a visit with his family and while there his entire family got sick with measles. One daughter, Mamie, died and this long sickness in his family forced him to have to farm in Arkansas that year, 1903. He moved on the Ingram farm, within one mile of Sonora, Arkansas. He stayed there only this year (1903) and the next year he again found himself located one mile south of Webbers Falls, Indian Territory. He came over the same rough road he traveled from Arkansas to Indian Territory two years before this date. This place belonged to Doctor Burns, who now lives at Warner, Oklahoma. This pioneer

was known for his ability to raise fine watermelons in those early days; so much so that he became known as the watermelon king of Webbers Falls. He had the same name in Arkansas.

Dr. Burns of Warner, the landlord, spent many Sundays with the Stone family, viewing the watermelons growing so large. He requested that he be notified when a certain large melon was ripe as he wanted it for a certain occasion. This occasion later proved to be a church picnic, and was held on the sandy banks of the Arkansas River. When he was notified about this watermelon, Dr. Burns came to the farm after it in his latest means of transportation at that time. It was a fine two-horse buggy. Only the end of the melon would go into the buggy. It was reported the mountainous appearing melon amply fed these cheerful church picnickers on the banks of old Arkansas. The fertility/that land was almost unbelievable at that time, but Mr. Stone was unable to stay in those mosquito infested bottoms any longer. This was in the year of 1904. The informant observed here how different it was in those days than in the present time. She states how her parents stood in their yard on dark nights and counted sometimes as many as twelve to fifteen lamp lights burning in other homes where there was reported serious illness.

Many were dying with the swamp fever and she further states that on certain days the doctors were unable to visit all the sick, so, some died without proper medical attention. All this was on account of the undrained lakes and ponds. The informant also stated in that year of 1904 her father was the only person in the home of George Ledbetter, who was not a member of the family, when Ledbetter's brother-in-law started dying with swamp fever. There was no one else able to be present at the Ledbetter home at this time because every home for miles around also had sickness. Mr. Stone stated that Bobby Shaw got up out of his bed and attempted to leave the house, but he caught him and held him down until he died. Then he laid him out on a board, and placed nickels on his eyes, all by himself. All this occurred because of the bad health conditions around Webbers Falls in 1904. Since 1904 there is a great improvement in drainage, of the fertile lowlands of the Arkansas.

Late in the fall of 1904 the Stone family cashed in on a bountiful cotton and corn crop and left again the old well-remembered, sickly, fertile lowlands, in quest of better water and better health. This was to be found only in the hilly highlands of Oklahoma. The covered wagon was loaded and a fine well-fed team of horses started north-

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west, intent on going by the way of Muskogee. They camped once between Webbers Falls and Muskogee. At noon of the second day's journey the family came within gunshot of Muskogee, but were until night finding a wagon road that would lead them into town. This was because of the wire fences. He would think he had found a road into town, then he would again come against another pasture fence; he did this most of the second day, as there seemed to be no main road that near town. All roads looked dim through a prairie. The family reached this small town at dark and rented a camp house at a wagon yard. The next morning they started again by way of Fort Gibson, crossed the Arkansas River about where the bridge is located now, and came through Fort Gibson.

Fort Gibson had three stores in it then. They camped just east of this little place, then next day reached Tahlequah. The following day they left for Moody where they camped with some people they had known years before in Arkansas. The people's name was Buddy Williams and they had a small store in Moody. Here they visited for about a week.

After this week the Stone family moved onto Siloam Springs and again stopped and camped to let their team

rest. The family wanted to drink at the great fountains of water flowing from the twin springs. The local doctor there advised them that they should stay there as long as they could because the pure water would go a great ways toward ridding them of the malaria. They had contracted this disease in the bottoms. Next, they moved onto Westville, Indian Territory. There some very kind Indians by the name of Smallwood, rented a farm to Mr. Stone. Mary Smallwood was a full-blood Cherokee and a sister of Dove Smallwood, one of the very earliest Cherokee Presbyterian Ministers that ever held religious services in this part of the Indian Territory. Here Mr. Stone found himself in the middle of a full-blood settlement. There was not a single white family within three or four miles. The nearest Indian school, and only school, was the Green School which was located about a mile and a half northeast of this old Smallwood homestead. It was about four and a half miles west of Westville. This informant states that while living there the Smallwoods reserved one upstairs room at this home for old keepsakes of their forefathers, and of the family. In this collection she remembers some very old pictures of old Indian notables, and early leaders, ministers, etc. One collection she remembers was a set of

silver-looking Communion Service cups and wine pitcher for religious services. She remembers that they looked very ancient, and she is sure that they can be found there yet at the old homestead or at least in that community.

B. F. Stone was forced to get a special permit from the Indian authorities before his baby daughter, Vacie, was allowed to attend school at the Green school house.

The Stone Family had no other church near enough for them to attend other than this full-blood Indian church at the Green school house. They attended these services, though they were not able to understand one word spoken by the Indian ministers. Some of the Indian ministers whom she remembers were Joe Bell, Alexander, and Nick Snip. She is sure that those men were of the Baptist faith. David Smallwood, the brother of their landlady, was of Presbyterian faith.

The society of that old Indian settlement consisted of these religious services every Sunday and an annual picnic held every September of each year, on the first Saturday and Sunday of the month. Mr. Stone always supplied this picnic with his watermelons which had become very

famous for their sweet taste and immense size. Mr. Stone boasted of the fact that he never charged his neighbors for all the melons they could eat if they came to his home for a watermelon to eat there. They were charged only for melons which they carried away.

The best Indian friend Mr. Stone found after coming into the Indian Territory in 1901 was his nearest neighbor. While living on the Smallwood homestead he became acquainted with Ben Knight and he always found a great delight and pleasure in helping Mr. Stone's family in every way. He was a real neighbor who could help in time of need.

Mr. Stone always thought of his three years stay at this place as the sweetest memories of his life for several reasons. The truest friendship a man could have on earth was his among those Indian neighbors who seemingly had never learned the art of falsehood or dishonesty from any white man. He loaned money and borrowed money and made every other transaction and with it all found perfect peace among the Indian people. He also stated during his life he made the easiest living he ever made while located at this place. He had outside stock range for hogs and cattle, and his hogs, and stock cost him nothing to raise for they lived the year around on acorns and hickory nuts, and wild

vegetation. This grew in great abundance, and he further stated that he understands why the original Indians objected to allotments forced on them by the Government.

The Stone family found wild strawberries in abundance on this place, and canned and ate all they wanted. Wild plums were plentiful and were of good quality, as well as were the strawberries. The informant wished to state that a community graveyard is located on this place. Here are buried some very old notables. The parents and probably the grandparents of the Smallwoods are buried here. Some of these graves are marked by stones and inscriptions.

The Stone family were told that the Smallwood family had produced a minister in each generation.

The Stone family moved on this old Indian homestead and found all the improvements decayed, and in a very poor condition. Here was a six room house with three halls and two porches and a small barn and no fences. The fences had fallen entirely down, not even a gate that would swing was left. Mr. Stone started to improve this old home that had belonged to Mary Smallwood by proclaiming an old time rail mauling. A rail mauling meant that he called together on a given date all the male population within three to five miles around. These men were required to bring with them

every kind of tool at their command suitable to be used in splitting timber for rails, and hauling it to build a rail fence. On this rail mauling day every Indian brought his wife and children. The wives helped cook the noonday meal and the children that were old enough carried water and cook stove wood, and helped pick chickens for this great gathering of the community. The men and the larger boys cut down the trees suitable for making rails, and split them up into rails and hauled them to the field. There they built them into a complete field fence. All the food was furnished by Mr. Stone, and the food consumed by this great throng was worth pretty near as much as the rail fence. The object, however, was that he got the job done in one day. By this means the Stone family completed fencing this place early enough to make a crop the first year they moved onto the place.

After three crop seasons, the family left this place and moved to Bill Wright's farm, which is near Baron Fork Station. This farm was a creek bottom farm and he also had good luck farming on this place. The community life was quite different here. There were more white people and closer neighbors, and he lived here for three years, then moved again to a point near Lyon Switch. This is

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about seven miles south of Stilwell. He moved on another full-blood Indian's place. This Indian's name was ~~Hawk-~~ Wolf. Here, he remained for five years, improving the fences and other buildings, as he had agreed to do with his Indian landlord. While living on this place he lost one of his daughters in death. This death caused the Stone family to be a bit dissatisfied and another of his children left the family, by marriage, at this place. This was Vocie, who married an Indian Missionary, by the name of Wylie Thornton. This daughter married February 12, 1913, and in the fall of 1915 the remainder of the family moved to Bidding Springs, Oklahoma.

This place is now known as the Thornton farm. It formerly belonged to Ned Christie, but the Thorntons had bought the farm from Ned Christie's widow after the death of the famous outlaw. He was slain by the agents of United States Government.

Mr. Stone lost the mother of the family while they were living on the Wylie Thornton farm, and this death broke up the home. After that Mr. Stone, the old pioneer, now getting old, and slightly feeble, took his last living daughter with him to his people back in Washington County, Arkansas, where he had left them in 1901. Here he lost this last

daughter in death. After this, Mr. Stone, without a single member of his once large family left alive at home, started traveling around writing life insurance for a company out of Muskogee, Oklahoma. He fell dead near Henryetta, Oklahoma, the 27th day of October, 1930, while sitting on a client's porch collecting some past-due premiums on a life insurance policy. Mr. Stone was buried by the side of his wife in the Clear Springs Cemetery, near Lyon Switch, Oklahoma. This was close to his former home, where he had lived for five years on the old Hawk-Wolf homestead.

The above information about Benjamin Franklin Stone, deceased, was given by Vocie Thornton, his youngest daughter, who lives at 303 Ward Street, Tahlequah.