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BELLOWS, DOC.

INTERVIEW

10891

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

Field Worker's name Zaiden B. Bland

This report made on (date) March 21, 1938

1. Name Doc Bellows

2. Post Office Address Altus, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 806 East Commerce Street

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month August Day 16 Year 1866

5. Place of birth Louisiana

6. Name of Father Daniel C. Bellows Place of birth Ohio

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Anna Liza Morris Place of birth Ohio

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 _____.

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Zaidee B. Bland
March 21, 1938
Journalist

Interview with Doc Bellows
806 East Commerce Street
Altus, Oklahoma.

I had a brother-in-law up here whom I had visited sometime before. I had in mind always to go into the stock business and I needed more room for my stock but I never thought that this land would be very valuable or that people would stick and make a farming country of it. I did not bother to file because you could not prove up anyway and I contented myself with the thought that people who had filed would be moving out and there would be plenty of room when the dispute was settled. I thought I would buy up a little herd and stick around but I lost my wife the first year and went back to be nearer civilization, leaving my three children up here with their grandparents.

After I was down there several months I decided I wanted to come back and began to look around to see about a job. I hired out as cook to the boss of a trail herd that was fixing to trail north for the winter and be ready for the northern market in the early spring. There was a good deal of quarreling among the riders from the start

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and at last one of the straw bosses was shot. We thought him killed at first but found that something in his pocket had spent the bullet and it had entered his body just above the heart. We prepared to take him to the nearest settlement for medical treatment and examination but it was several days before we could get him to a doctor and in the meantime he was on a cot near my chuck wagon when we were not traveling and I had several talks with him. We were all fearful that he would die on our hands for he groaned and complained a good deal. I asked him one day if he thought he had a chance to get well and he replied, "I am afraid not Doc. You see I feel like I am bleeding internally." We got a doctor and awaited anxiously for his verdict. To our surprise we learned that the bullet had just entered the skin above the heart and it had not bled for the wound was not deep enough. When the skin was opened the doctor just flipped the bullet out like you would a pea out of a pod. The man was well and ready to go back to work after the place was washed and bound up.

Cooking on the Trail

I drove four horses to my chuck wagon. When we started the four were cow ponies, not one of them pulling

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at the same time and my first and hardest task was to break these ponies to pull together and to like it. My wagon had a coffee mill on the side, a chuck box built in the hind end with the lid swung on hinges so when it was opened it would make a shelf to work on; it had a leg fastened on it to hold it up. I cut up all my meat, made my bread, pies, etc., on this just as any lady would use her pantry shelf.

I had several iron pots and skillets for cooking, a large coffee-pot of tin and plenty of tin plates and cups. I had some iron spoons but do not remember any knives or forks of any kind. I cooked three ~~hot~~ meals a day and kept the coffee-pot on the fire all the time we were in camp so the boys could have a cup of coffee anytime one of them happened to come by and want one. We drank our coffee black; there was sugar for those who wanted it, but few did.

Our fare was meat and bread and beans with a cobbler pie thrown in every time I could get hold of any dried fruit. We started out from Mason County, Texas with two kegs of syrup, two or three hundred pounds of sugar and flour and plenty of lard and bacon, expecting to have fresh meat on the trail.

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I was usually allowed to pick my place for the mid-day meal but the boss went ahead and selected the place for a camp every night; for water was a very great factor for the night camp and had to be hunted often for hours before a proper place could be found. We had creek water which was usually soft so if I got my beans on by ten o'clock they were done for dinner. I soaked my beans over night in cold water and put them to boil in cold water and let them get tender before I put any seasoning in them. I made sour dough biscuit and cooked them in a skillet with a lid; sour dough bread never has anything in it but flour, salt, soda and lard mixed with sour dough and water, a cup of sour dough and a cup of water. I kept a keg of sour dough in the wagon all of the time and it was kept going all of the time by adding the scraps of dough left over each time and water, letting it sour as it would if you kept it in a warm place.

All cooking was done over an open fire; I swung my pots on a pole between two forked sticks driven into the ground. The best thing we had was our fresh meat. Sometimes I would have to put it into the pot before it was

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cold after the killing of the beef. I would have a deep pot full of grease boiling hot and into this boiling grease, without a bit of water, I would plunge the piece of meat I wanted cooked. There was never any gravy, only salt added and did the men love it that way! I had a can into which I would pour up my grease everytime after the meat was done to save for the next time and then into this meat pot I would pour water and hang back over the fire for the tin cups and plates to be boiled out in for cleaning. That was all the washing they ever got.

The boys did not like the syrup much; I think it must have been black Strap Syrup, a brand of cheap syrup on the market at that time made of glucose, cane juice and enough sorghum molasses to give it flavor.

We knew no days but work days; if there were Sundays we took no notice of them. We seldom traveled over ten miles a day and it was a long trip. I never made it but once for the other times I have come from Mason County I have made the trip other ways besides trying to cook for a gang of men following a trail herd.

I was very much surprised about people staying and making this a farming country. In the ten years, from 1890

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to 1900, people had begun to raise cotton as they did in Texas. A man named Weir brought in a gasoline engine and set up a gin stand at Mangum to gin the cotton, then he moved it to Altus and tried it but it was not much of a success for not many people were raising cotton and all the gasoline had to be freighted in from the nearest railroad which proved laborious and expensive. Water and fuel were always a problem in the early day and naturally it was thought that gasoline would be easier to get into the country than coal and Mr. Weir had the nerve to try it out but without success, partly, perhaps, because the gasoline engine had not been perfected enough at that time.

Farming has taken the place of stock raising almost entirely and I guess it is just as well for from the land all things come anyway as well as all things return eventually.