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INTERVIEW

#12707

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Hazel B. Greene,
Journalist,
January 10, 1938.

An Interview with Mrs. Inez Bennett,
Antlers, Oklahoma.

I was born in Texas about forty-nine years ago. My parents, J. M. Edwards and Julia Ringold Edwards, were both native Texans.

My mother's father was a German. He came from Germany and settled at Doaksville. He was a tinner by trade, and operated a tin shop there in Texas. Grandfather used to talk of a special friend of his named Byrd, at Doaksville and I got the impression that he was Governor of the Choctaws.

We lived not very far from Clarksville, Texas, when doctors announced that my sister and brother had spots on their lungs and should live in a higher altitude. So Daddy started out to look for, and located what he thought a very desirable place. He went to Finley, in what is now Pushmataha County, and there he found an acquaintance of his with a little "Peckerwood" sawmill. It was shut down then for lack of money to operate on, so Daddy bought

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a half interest in it and returned to Texas to bring his family over.

We started early one morning, before daylight.

There were five covered wagons in the caravan. We had two wagons and my two married brothers with their families had three wagons. A neighbor drove one of our wagons. There was quite a party of us. We had about a hundred head of cattle along with us. We camped out and enjoyed it. We crossed Red River at Meigs' ferry, and came up through Fort Towson and camped there the first night. It was summer time; we would start early and drive late, so it took us only four days to drive from our home near Clarksville, Texas, to Finley.

That was a pretty good record, because that was about 1902 and the roads were not so very good then. There were no bridges across the streams either. We ferried the larger ones if we had to and forded all that we possibly could. While we were on the road there was a big rain which got the creeks "up". I remember we attempted to swim those cattle across a stream and we had a terrible time. They began going down stream and the men in the wagons

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jumped out into the water to help the boys on horseback. It was summer time and going into the water did not hurt them.

I will never forget how those cattle looked out in the middle of the creek and the boys on horseback and the boys swimming urging them back to the bank. The cattle always wanted to face the drivers to see what they were doing or else they wanted to go on across. I remember some of them were backed to the bank that they started from and I recall seeing Mother on the bank, reach and get hold of the tails of some of the calves and help pull as the boys pushed them out of the water. But in a few hours, the stream was low enough to ford and we proceeded on our way.

The second night we camped at Hugo, and up close to Antlers the next night. We crossed the Kiamichi River at the Mack Hill ferry, but we forded it. The water was so clear and pretty that it did not look deep, but it was deeper than we thought, and I remember one wagon got hung on a rock out in the middle of the stream and the boys had to get out of the wagons and wade in and lift the wheel over that big rock. The water was axle deep

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nearly all the way across.

We arrived at Finley just after a big Fourth of July picnic. That is what makes me remember so well what time of the year we made the trip. I was only about fourteen years old at the time. Father was a machinist and loved to work at mills. He had run a gin in Texas until Mother protested so much about its being dangerous that he sold out, and then he bought part of this sawmill in the Indian Territory.

Finley consisted of a store with the post office in it, the sawmill and a few shacks. The people whom Father "bought in with" permitted us to occupy one room of their house. We cooked out in a smoke-house, ate under the shade of a tree, and slept in the house.

By the time cold weather came we had our house built, spered and carpeted. We were putting on some style for that day and time and place. The house was lined with building paper, but that was "great" then. The houses of our neighbors were, some of them, not even stripped. Our carpets were of rags woven into carpets.

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From the time I could remember we children cut strings for carpets at night, until we would fall asleep over our work. First, we covered the floor with newspaper, then put hay up n top of that and then spread and tacked down the carpet. The hay and newspapers made the floor softer and the dirt sifted through the carpet into the hay, consequently the carpet lasted longer. Our house was boxed and had windows. So many of the neighbors had little log houses and no windows. We built on the bank of the creek and used water out of the creek for all purposes. It was as clear as a crystal, and not unhealthy to drink. All of those mountain streams were clear then. The only reason I can think of for their being muddy now is possibly soil erosion. The land was not cleared up so much then and the soil could not wash away so much. The only time that the water would be muddy was after a big rain. Even with drinking creek water, my sister and brother got well. Daddy contributed the lumber and the neighbors built a school house; I think they gathered in and had a big working and a big dinner.

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My sister taught school in that house later. We built a platform right out over the creek and drew our water up with a rope and bucket, just like out of a well. Our house was right on the bank of the creek.

My sister taught a subscription school in the little school house that Daddy helped to build. We had Union Sunday School in it, too, and preaching occasionally, though not very often. The first fall that we were there a young doctor came there and located, Dr. J. O Hartgraves. He was later married to my sister. He was from Belk, Texas.

There was an old Choctaw church close to Finley where the Choctaws held camp meetings. They would come for miles and miles around and begin on Wednesday or Thursday and have preaching and eating at all hours of the day. One could go there most any hour and find eating or preaching and they would have the best things to eat- barbecued beef, pork or venison and pies and cakes.

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Years later, Father got the contract to carry the mail, and when he lost a hand in some machinery, Mother began carrying it to Antlers from Finley. Sometimes when it was very cold she would put a coke oven in the hack to keep warm by and sometimes she would light a lantern and put it under the robes at her feet.

Mother was quite an outdoor woman. She would ride anything that the boys would saddle for her. She was thrown from a horse when she was sixty-eight years old and had some ribs broken, and her children dared her to mount a horse again. That was the first time in her life that she was thrown and the last time that she rode. She is seventy-one years old now.

Horseback riding and swimming were two of our greatest diversions.

Mother was the hunter in our family. She would take a gun and go out and bring in as much game as a man.

S. W. Finley, for whom the post office was named, was postmaster, and owned the general merchandise store when

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we moved there.

L. U. Bennett was the young brother-in-law who came to Finley to work for Mr. Finley. He would work at anything, in the store or out, and when Mr. Finley had nothing for him to do, he would dig snake root. That was the most valuable medium of exchange then. It was as staple then as cotton is now. Later, Mr. Bennett and I were married. He is the head of the Bennett Lumber Company of Antlers. We live in Antlers.

I have done lots of hard work, too, however, I just never did happen to dig snake root. All pioneers had to work hard to live.