

Notice of Copyright

Published and unpublished materials may be protected by Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S. Code). Any copies of published and unpublished materials provided by the Western History Collections are for research, scholarship, and study purposes only.

Use of certain published materials and manuscripts is restricted by law, by reason of their origin, or by donor agreement. For the protection of its holdings, the Western History Collections also reserves the right to restrict the use of unprocessed materials, or books and documents of exceptional value and fragility. Use of any material is subject to the approval of the Curator.

Citing Resources from the Western History Collections

For citations in published or unpublished papers, this repository should be listed as the Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

An example of a proper citation:

Oklahoma Federation of Labor Collection, M452, Box 5, Folder 2. Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

BENSON, LIZZIE.

INTERVIEW

12783

279

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

230

BENSON, LIZZIE.

INTERVIEW.

12783.

Field Worker's name Hazel B. GreeneThis report made on (date) January 25, 19381. Name Mrs. Lizzie Benson.2. Post Office Address Antlers, Oklahoma.3. Residence address (or location) Pushmataha County4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month October Day 8 Year 18785. Place of birth Arkansas6. Name of Father James Marion Wright Place of birth Arkansas7. Name of Mother Susan Brown Wright Place of birth ArkansasOther information about mother Buried in Arkansas.

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 6.

BENSON, LIZZIE.

INTERVIEW.

12783.

Hazel B. Greene,
Journalist.
January 25, 1938.

Interview with Mrs. Lizzie Benson,
Antlers, Oklahoma.

I was four years old when my mother died, then Father married Louiza Jane Blackwood. She was a beautiful girl, and as good as she knew how to be; but she was unschooled, hence when we moved to Eagletown, in the Indian Territory, she did not realize the importance of taking advantage of even the limited opportunities of sending us to school. Short terms of subscription schools were held in the little log courthouse at West Eagletown, and I guess that three weeks would cover the entire time that I attended that little school. And here I say that it was the only school that I ever attended. I was eager to learn, and wanted to attend school, but the grown folks would sit around and tell tales of men who had been convicted of crimes in that courthouse and executed out there beside it and of those who had been whipped there. Tales of how the ghosts of the executed would return at night and sit before the bar

- 2 -

and ghosts of dead and gone Judges sat on the bench and would re-condemn them and they would say that executions took place nightly beside that courthouse.

Then we children would have to go to school there next day, and by the time I would be there an hour or two I would have a nervous chill and the highest fever, from pure fright and nervousness. Then maybe I'd be out of school several days. Then when I would be able to return, the same thing would be repeated, until I was a nervous wreck and they quit trying to send me there. Then we moved a mile or so across the river to East Eagletown. I was a good sized girl and my father thought me too big to go to school with beginners. I would have gone, but they were ashamed for me to go with beginners.

So I stayed at home and took care of the baby and helped with the work, indoors and out. There was always a baby to attend to. My stepmother had so many. As soon as I was big enough I did the cooking. We cooked on the fireplace, and that was a big task. It took me years to outgrow the damage that those

- 3 -

horrible tales did to my nervous system. I would get off to myself at every opportunity with a blue back speller and compose myself and study. I had gotten as far as the word "baker" in the blue back speller, when I was in school. So I laboriously plodded on trying to learn.

I would slip out my sister's books and study them. Nearly everybody then was more ignorant than they are now, and the most of the people thought education was foolishness. I recall one evidence of mass ignorance. One morning there appeared to be FIVE suns rising up in the East. The people gathered in groups and just knew that the "end of the world" was at hand. They would watch awhile and then pray awhile. I know now that it was some sort of a mirage, though what caused it I do not know, but some of those old people still believe that there were FIVE suns in the sky that day.

I married when I was about 19 years old. Then I could study all I wanted to. We bought a great big Bible and my husband and I read in it at every

BENSON, LIZZIE.

INTERVIEW.

12783.

- 4 -

opportunity. I really learned to read in it. Then we bought a small Bible, so that we could handle it easily and we would take turn about reading in it after we would go to bed every night, reading until too sleepy to read more. I never missed a church service if I could help it. They were schooling for me. I absorbed everything the preacher said. I was that greedy to learn. I helped my children with their lessons all along and loved every lesson and wish I had started to school with the first one and gone on to the finish. Today I read everything that is good. I keep my dictionary worn out. I have to buy a new one every once in a while. Why I was so densely ignorant that Hot Springs, Arkansas, seemed to me as far away as Germany. One day I looked it up on a big map that we had bought and was surprised to find it so close. Only about four hours drive from my home.

I used to wonder that my father didn't try harder to have me educated, because he used to be a school teacher, but now I know he was always tired

- 5 -

of the battle of life. Sometimes he would have a poor crop and get the blues over his condition, and somebody would tell him about a place somewhere else that was a more "healthy" place and maybe he'd sell out his crop for a shotgun or just anything, and start out roving around, hunting health.

We lived at so many places, it seemed to me that we were forever on the move. I don't know how many places we lived near Eagletown. The old Brannan place was a fine one. A big double log house with a stack chimney, with fireplaces below and I imagine above too. I never knew, because we lived downstairs and never dared to go above stairs, because of the tabs of ghosts that were told to us, Tales of men who had been killed in that house, and were supposed to walk the upstairs nightly, and we thought might come through our room too, but we covered up, head and ears, so frightened we were.

That house was made of hewn logs, notched to fit nicely, and ceiled overhead and the sides with planed lumber that was said to have been hauled from Paris, Texas. The long porches of planed lumber and the glass

BENSON, LIZZIE.

INTERVIEW.

12783.

- 6 -

windows were things of beauty to us. We lived there fifty years ago, and they said it was an old house then and the cemetery near was an old one then. I don't know if the house is still standing.