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BENBROOK, G. B.

INTERVIEW

13120

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LEGEND & STORY FORM  
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION  
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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**BENEROOK, G. B.**

**INTERVIEW.**

**13180.**

Field worker's name Nannie Lee Burns.

This report made on (date) March 2, 1938. 1938

1. This legend was secured from (name) G. B. Benbrook.

Address RFD #3, Miami, Oklahoma.

This person is (male or female) White, Negro, Indian,

If Indian, give tribe \_\_\_\_\_

2. Origin and history of legend or story Memory.

3. Write out the legend or story as completely as possible. Use blank sheets and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 10

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Nannie L. Burns,  
Investigator,  
March 2, 1938.

An Interview With George B. Benbrook,  
Rt. #3, Miami, Oklahoma.

My father, George Washington Benbrook, was born in Pennsylvania in 1807 and was taken by his parents to Kentucky when three weeks old. My mother, Rebecca Benbrook nee Dixon, was born in Kentucky in 1814. I am one of seven children and I was born in Washington County, Arkansas, nine miles east of Fayetteville on White River, April 26, 1859.

CIVIL WAR DAYS.

During this time one of the clearest memories that I have is of the battle of Pea Ridge. Mother, father and I had started to Springfield, Missouri, by wagon over the "Old Wyer Road" which passed through Springdale, Cross Hollows, over the Pea Ridge and entered the state of Missouri just south of Cassville. When we reached the vicinity of Pea Ridge, they were expecting the battle and we of course were stopped and we spent two days and nights at a large white farm house which, as I remember it, was

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about three-quarters of a mile from the ridge. My mother, being in a hurry, the third morning insisted on starting, so the mules were hitched up but we had gone but a very short distance when we were stopped by two soldiers to whom Mother handed a pass that she had from and signed by Abraham Lincoln. When the soldiers read it they called another man and after he read it and said a few words two men led our team through the section where the battle had been fought. They were still busy gathering up and burying the men who had been killed. There were great holes through the trees and the effects of the fierce firing was to be seen all around us. My father and Abraham Lincoln had lived as neighbors when they were boys in Kentucky and the two boys had hunted squirrels together using rocks instead of guns. I have heard Father say that Lincoln could kill a squirrel at every throw. When the War began my mother wrote to Lincoln and asked him for a pass and the mails and communication were so slow in those days that it was sixteen months after she wrote before they received the pass. We did not hear of the assassination of Lincoln for some time after it happened. When we heard

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it we were ploughing corn when a neighbor came by and told us that he had just heard that Lincoln had been shot and killed.

At one time Mother had thirty yards of woolen cloth woven and it was in a walnut chest when the men found it. They took it and measured it, doubled <sup>it</sup> three times, and then with their pocket knives they cut it in yard lengths and then they went to their horses and taking out their old saddle blankets replaced them with my mother's cloth and rode away leaving their old saddle blankets lying where they had thrown them. It was nothing unusual for soldiers to eat the meals that were prepared for the family. After the War looked like it would last longer than was first expected, and the bushwhacking became so bad in this part of the country, Father took his family to Iowa for one summer and one winter but returned with his family to Arkansas in time to get many experiences before the War's close. I also heard the guns from the Battle of Prairie Grove. I do not know whether it is still standing or not but in those early days there was a building, a wooden one, at the foot of the Pea Ridge on the old road called

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the Elk Horn Tavern. It had a large pair of elk horns fastened up over the front of the building.

I received little schooling for then the schools, while free, were in the settlements along the river and we lived on the forks four miles from the nearest ones and often would have to cross swollen streams on foot-logs, sometimes as many as three or four going one way. We left Arkansas in 1872 and moved to Lawrence County, Missouri, as some of the older ones of the family had gone there. I obtained work here feeding a thresher for a German. That season we threshed both for the Germans and the English. The Germans gave us five good meals a day and good beds but the English charged us 25 cents a meal when we were threshing for them.

The state of Missouri had given to the railroad, when it came through there, ten sections on either side of the road and this was rapidly being settled by emigrants being brought in by the English Agent and many of the settlers were of German parentage. I saw the first passenger train that ran from Saint Louis to Springfield; the railroad passed close to our house. The train consisted of three

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passenger coaches and the engine which was still burning wood for fuel. As the railroad was being built they bought much wood which was delivered to the railroad track and ricked two cords high on either side of the track. The wood was delivered in four foot lengths but then the railroad men hired men to cut this wood into lengths of two feet. The wood was ricked on either side of the track for a distance of three miles from our house. In the fall when everything was dry, fire broke out two miles east of Monett on the edge of King's Prairie and burned everything, it came as fast as a horse could travel. So fierce was the fire that it even burned the ties from under the rails on the railroad track. Before this the wild game had been so plentiful in that part of the country that I could go out any day and kill a deer or a turkey but after the fire, what did not perish in it, left the country. At one time I had two pet deer.

The seven years preceeding 1884, I worked for a farmer and stockman named Davis. The first month I received \$16.00 and the balance of the time I received about \$22.50 per month and during the entire time we did not have

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a settlement but when I left Mr. Davis' employ, in company with my chum George Estes, we decided that we wanted to go places and started out. We were in Memphis when we saw a bill stating that we could get a ticket to Saint Louis on a certain steamer for 50 cents and thinking we had a bargain we purchased tickets but this proved an expensive trip as some days the steamer would not make over a mile a day and we were three weeks on the boat. There was plenty of liquor on board but I did not drink, but I did like to dance and each set that you danced cost you 50 cents, and there was lots of gambling. We learned too late that they expected to make the difference in the fares from the money spent by the passengers. By the time I reached home from this trip, my savings were gone and I went back to work for Mr. Davis, and later, when I had saved another stake, I purchased a wagon and started for Kansas. We went to Barber County, Kansas, and from there I drifted to Arkansas City, the old border town. Here I met my wife who was Carpy Adair, born January 10, 1873, at Spencer Indiana, who had come with her parents to this county when she was fourteen. After a sample of life in Arkansas City

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in which we learned by experience the destructiveness of the dust storms, etc, we went to the Kay Reservation for two years. There were times in Arkansas City when you could not see across the street for the dense dust and the street cars which were then drawn by horses along their tracks could only be kept on the tracks by placing four heavy iron bars in the cars. At a distance, when traveling, the dust and mirage would look like a big hill to which you never came any closer. Once when driving here we encountered a dust storm and the air was so hot that we had to cover our faces to protect them from the heat, and the dust was mixed with smoke. Later we learned that it was the heat and smoke from a barn that had burned, mixed with the dust. Many cattle were unloaded here to be grazed on the prairies of the Indian Territory and there would be many dead cattle when they arrived and the Indians made extra dollars by skinning the dead cattle. There were lots of cowboys there and lots of local color but now I was looking at the serious business of making a living so we went to the reservation in Kay County to work for my wife's brother who farmed there on a big scale. We

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lived near Kaw City two years. The first year we farmed thirteen hundred acres and our corn that year averaged seventy-two bushel per acre. The second year there was a drouth and we had a complete crop failure and lost everything. I also suffered a great loss on my cattle and this together with a flood later completely broke me. We had a substantial well built house but the word was brought us that the water was high and covered so much of the country side that we decided that we would take refuge on a high knoll near the house, which we did one night and took much of the better stock with us. Waiting there, with the waters coming higher, my brother decided that the folks had better take to some large walnut trees that stood nearby, so some one swam from the knoll and fastened a rope to the trees by which means the people were transferred to the trees where they waited for the crest of the water. When the water had swept past where the knoll stood there was left only a deep hole; the knoll was gone and with it all the stock.

Deciding that the climate of Missouri was more reliable, I moved my family to Missouri and located near

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Purdy. In 1896 I decided that we would again try the Indian country so I brought my family to Miami in the spring of that year and lived with them in a tent that summer and obtained work on the Frisco Railroad that was at that time completing its extension from Baxter Springs, Kansas, to Miami. I worked on the Tar Creek cut north of town and from there south to the Neosho River which was as far as the road extended. The turn-table was built at Third Avenue southeast about where the Nicely Mill and Elevator was built later but the track was built on to the river and a large water tank was erected on the bank on this side of the river so that the engine might run there and fill its boilers. The cars were stopped up-town and only the engine made its daily trip to the river for water each morning, before it left on its daily run to Baxter Springs, Kansas. The engine headed north in the early morning, pulled a string of freight cars, and the last car was a passenger coach attached to the rear for the accommodation of passengers. At Baxter Springs the engine was again turned around and late that evening the train made its return trip to Miami. This was the extent

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of the train service in Miami until in 1901 when in October the completed railroad to Afton connected us with the main line of the Frisco at Afton. The day that the first train came into Miami from Baxter Springs it brought a great number of people who came to help Miami celebrate that day. The celebration that night closed with a big dance in which the entire population of the little town was present in addition to the many visitors.

## LATER YEARS.

After the completion of the railroad there was a demand for homes and other buildings, so for some years I worked as a carpenter and in those days helped to build many of the older buildings of the present city. Later, I began a small dairy and I am still continuing this and though all of our seven children are now grown and in homes of their own, my wife and I have lived for many years here on the north bank of the Neosho. We have had some unpleasant experiences with the transients who have camped for a short time along the river. Among my patrons are some who have purchased milk from us for about 20 years.