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BENHAM, FLORA HOGAN

INTERVIEW

#13569

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BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

BENHAM, FLORA HOGAN. INTERVIEW.

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Field Worker's name Grace KelleyThis report made on (date) April 12, 1938 1938

1. Name Flora Benham
2. Post Office Address Henryetta, Oklahoma
3. Residence address (or location) 711 N. 1st Steet
4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month December Day 20 Year 1859
5. Place of birth Arkansas

6. Name of Father Thomas Leach Place of birth Missouri

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Delilah Taylor Place of birth Missouri

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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Field Worker, Grace Kelley,
April 12, 1939.

Interview with Flora Benham,
Henryetta, Oklahoma.

We were considered prosperous farmers in Texas but we were renters. My first husband, Mr. Hogan, wanted a farm of his own so on the first day of February, 1891, we started from Texas. We had two covered wagons with a little furniture, food and meat, clothing and bedding, and the necessary farming implements. We had seven children, twenty-five cows, some good horses and mules, a few chickens and the dogs. My husband drove one wagon and I drove the other. I can't say that I was thrilled at the idea of the move but husbands in those days went where they thought they could do the best toward making a living and the wives went along.

We stopped in Custer County in the Cheyenne-Arapahoe country about thirty or forty miles from El Reno. Mr. Hogan bought a fellow's claim. That is, he paid this fellow \$100.00 to relinquish his claim so

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that he, my husband, could file on it. Mr. Hogan made a dugout in the bank of a hill and covered it with dirt. When it rained it leaked on us and was very uncomfortable. The dugout was a large room for we had to have beds for nine persons. The night we moved into the dugout one of the boys had to sleep on the table but we got a bed fixed for him before the next night. I could have made him a pallet but we had a dirt floor and I didn't like the idea of the children sleeping on it. I suppose our fireplace was the only one in that part of the country and I really think it was foolish for us to have had one for fuel was so hard to get. My husband had always had a fireplace and couldn't imagine a home without one. As soon as the dugout was finished Mr. Hogan dug a well, for there were no springs and our water had to be hauled from Deer Creek. The dugout, well, and a little patch of ground plowed for the crop were the only improvements my husband made before he died, a month after moving from Texas.

Forty Miles After Groceries.

We had to go to El Reno for our groceries and meat

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for we didn't have any hogs. I went with Mr. Hogan, but many of the other men went to town without their families going along. I remember that I bought \$5.00 worth of rolled oats because the children liked them so well and I didn't know when I would be able to get any more.

Railroads.

El Reno was the end of the railroad in 1891, but they were talking about extending it on to Weatherford. My husband was very enthused about it for it was over a hundred miles to any other railroad and about forty miles to El Reno. That was the Rock Island Railroad. All the crops would have to be hauled to El Reno until the railroad came closer. As Mr. Hogan expected, Weatherford grew by leaps and bounds after the railroad came there and Custer City was a new town that was built after it came. About twelve years later another railroad was built through there but I don't remember the name of it.

Hauling Wood.

About the only money to be made was from the cedar

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posts. A bunch of the neighbor men would go together to haul firewood from the cedar brakes. I don't remember the number of miles but it was quite a way from home for it took two days and a night to make the trip. When they were cutting the wood up they decided to try to sell posts to people in Arapaho and it took them all day and into the night to haul them there. The logs were hauled home so that the waste part could be used for firewood.

Epidemic of Pneumonia.

About twelve of the men who were going to the canyon from our neighborhood after those cedar posts died from exposure. That was during February and March and the weather was bad but the men needed the money and each of them wanted to sell as many posts as possible while the people needed them. Everybody was improving his land at the same time and we supposed as soon as my husband got it improved that he would need no more posts. These men stayed out in all kinds of rain and cold and came home with colds. Some of the colds developed into pneumonia fever but some of

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the men had the pneumonia when they were put to bed.
There were over twenty-five children left without fathers.

Pioneer Children.

I had enjoyed living in the new country until Mr. Hogan's death for all the neighbors were on an equality and trying to get ahead yet had time to help each other, but after his death I was lost. He left me \$100.00, the farm and good stock, but it seemed that I had nothing. One of my little boys brought me to myself. He came to me and told me that he would give me everything he had and started to emptying his pockets of marbles and tops, etc. It came to me that I had seven children who would do anything for me and my duty was to do anything for them. The two oldest boys put in the crop and people thought the amount of corn they raised was wonderful. The chinch bugs bothered other people's corn but not the boys' corn and they said that the rows were so crooked that the bugs couldn't find it. That corn was ground into cornmeal and kept for feed for the stock. Corn sold for 15 cents a bushel so we didn't sell any.

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The other children herded the cattle; all of them could ride horses. It was too hard for them to draw water from the well for the stock to drink and we didn't have a windmill so they drove the stock to the creek every day. Calves brought a good price and I sold enough to buy the necessities if not the luxuries of life.

Harry Bailey had the care of the timber. The timber was supposed to belong to the Indians and the Government had him hired to keep us white people from getting it. I never considered that we were stealing it for God put that timber there for some use. The Indians weren't using it nor needing it. I did need it; I couldn't get along without it for firewood and there was none anywhere else that I could get so I sent my two little boys after it. Mr. Bailey found the boys with a load of wood after they had started home. He had to act as if he were protecting the timber so he made them pile the load of wood off of the wagon. He left before they had finished and as soon as his back was

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turned they started reloading the wagon and brought it on home. The children and I lived on that farm for fifteen years or until the children were grown.

Mail.

We got our mail at Rogers. Rogers was a neighbor of ours who had a store and the post office was in it. He and Harry Bailey were partners in the cattle business. Their pasture was on Deer Creek and contained over a hundred acres. Harry Bailey lived in that pasture.

Good Watch Dogs.

We had some of the best dogs. They were watch dogs and were for protection instead of for hunting. One day Mr. Hogan went to town and stayed all night. One of the dogs followed him. When he put the team up the dog stayed with it and wouldn't let anyone come near it. He even kept the chickens from eating with the team. A man offered my husband \$10.00 for the dog and that was an enormous price for a dog in those days. My husband refused to sell the dog and the next night after he returned home the dog was killed.

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Horse Thieves.

I could give the names of some of the horse thieves for they lived all around me and were friendly. They are still living and it will do no one any good so I will not. I had good stock and it was helping me to rear my children. I worried about it getting stolen because it was always the best stock ^{that} disappeared. The horse thieves told me that I need never fear for they never had and didn't intend to steal from a widow, I never lost an animal either. There was a deep canyon close to our house. The stolen horses were exchanged there and taken to another state before being sold. The ones around our neighborhood that were stolen were never seen again. One horsethief named Casey was killed in El Reno when an officer tried to arrest him but he was the only horse-thief who was caught.

Cattle Trail.

There was an old cattle trail that went through our farm but it wasn't traveled after we came there. It looked like a wide road that had been traveled a lot. I did know the name but don't now. It was thirty or forty miles from El Reno and near Weatherford.

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Buffalo.

There were no buffalo in 1891 nor later but there were signs of where they had been. Lots of people used the buffalo chips for fuel. After they were dried they made a hot fire.

Wild Game.

There were many coyotes. The prairie chicken used to feed with my chickens. They and the quail were thick and ran in big bunches. My boys would go out and bring in lots of them. I usually fried them and there would be all we could eat, not just a taste around. They killed lots of rabbits, too. My boy, who did the most hunting, still lives in Weatherford. His name is Frank Hogan.

High Wind and Fires.

When I first moved to the Cheyenne-Arapaho country I thought the wind would drive me crazy. I had never lived where the wind blew like it did there. One of my neighbors moved there from Kansas and he didn't mind the wind at all. He said that it didn't blow hard but I only thought that I was glad that I didn't live in Kansas. We didn't have the sand storms in those days

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for the prairie was covered with grass except where we had little farms. The fires were awful for the grass was so tall. They would sweep over the country and scare us to death. We burned a fire-guard around our shack to keep the fires from getting to it and boys would drive the cattle to the creek for safety. My first husband, Mr. Hogan, died after we had been in Custer County a month and after my seven children were all grown, I was married to Mr. Benham.