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BONHART, JOHN (MRS.) INTERVIEW

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INTERVIEW WITH MRS. JOHN BONHAM
Ida B. Lankford, Field Worker
July 22, 1937.

The year of 1896 was a very hard year for us in Texas as we had not made any crops. In the fall of 1896 we got a card from our brother, Henry Bonham, telling us to come to Oklahoma, that we could buy land real cheap there.

My husband, John, went to Oklahoma in a wagon to see how things were; he rented the Edgar Parker farm, now called the Vaughn place, south of Cordell. We came back home and then we moved to Oklahoma. We landed on the place De-center land, 1896, after nine days on the road coming from Montague County, Texas. It was very cold all the way; my oldest child was sixteen months old. We had five wagons and several head of cattle; some rode horseback and drove the cattle. My mother and I drove one wagon with a buggy trailed on behind; we had to ford all the creeks then as there were no bridges and we had to ferry across Red River as it was "up". We camped at nights and cooked our meals over an open fire; we had to haul our wood in some places and our meals consisted of bread, coffee, meat, and potatoes and everything tasted good as we were hungry and tired.

This country was new then and there was lots of vacant land around here and grass was waist high and there were lots

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of game, such as quail, rabbits, prairie chickens. There were lots of snakes and coyotes; they would come up and get my chickens and would kill young calves. One of my children was bitten by a rattlesnake but got well. There were so many snakes that several children were bitten and some died from the bites. The country from Red River to Washita County was still Indian territory as it had not come in for settlement. We saw plenty of Indians on the way here but they were all friendly.

There was nothing here Cordell is now, but there was a store, a post office, a hotel and a few other buildings one and one half miles east of where Cordell is located now. Cloud Chief was the county seat.

I had never lived in a dugout and when I saw where I had to live with my baby, I cried and begged John to go back to Texas. But ^{we} were not able as we only had fifty cents in money and owed over one hundred dollars in Texas.

We bought enough flour, meat and other supplies to run us a year; we had fourteen head of cattle, ten cows, five horses, household goods, a few farming tools, and things looked pretty hard for us. But we traded one horse for some feed for the other stock and later traded thirteen head of

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cattle for the place we are living on now, located south of Cordell. I know that cattle were not worth much then because the thirteen cows we traded were only valued at one hundred and sixty dollars. After the trade of cattle we had only one cow left.

We moved to this place in February, 1897, and have been living here ever since. There were two large dugouts here and about fifty acres already broken, with ten acres in wheat. We lived in the dugouts for three years, until it rained so much that one of them caved in and then we borrowed one hundred dollars from a neighbor and hauled lumber from El Reno, the closest railroad, and built two rooms fourteen by twenty-eight feet. They were just boxed without strips or weather-boarding but it looked like a palace to me. While living in the dugouts we killed several snakes and other poisonous animals.

We did most of our trading at Cloud Chief; it would take all day to go there and back in a covered wagon, but we would go there to picnics and barbecues and stay all night. We also made several trips back to Texas in the covered wagons and we had grand and glorious times.

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The first year we were here, we made two hundred bushels of wheat, had it threshed by a horse power thresher; I cooked for twenty-five or thirty men, three meals a day in our dugouts. We had to haul the wheat to Duncan to sell it; we got from ninety cents to one dollar a bushel. We forded all the creeks and rivers to get to Duncan or anywhere else. We made four bales of cotton, got it ginned at Cloud Chief. It would take from one to two days to get a bale ginned, then we would haul it to Duncan and sell it for four and one half cents a pound.

The men went to drive cattle from Texas to our place; the weather was real bad and the men got out of food because they couldn't get to town to get any and they almost starved. A few Indians came along, cooked them some biscuits and saved them from starvation.

After Cordell got the county seat from Cloud Chief the Frisco Railroad was built through in 1902 and times began to get better. We built more on to our house. The railroad men had camped all along from Cordell to Rocky and they came through our place; we were so thrilled when we saw the first train coming down the track. It was a work train.

My mother filed ~~on~~ one hundred sixty acres joining ours

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on the east; we bought one hundred and sixty acres more from Mr. Benton.

We have raised seven children, four boys and three girls. One boy is a doctor. He was bitten by a rattlesnake when a small boy but recovered; one boy is a druggist; one girl is a nurse and all are married except one boy and he is still at home with my husband and me.

We have been living here for forty years on this place. We came here with fifty cents and now have four hundred and eighty acres of land and plenty of everything. It isn't so bad after all here in Oklahoma.

People think they are having a hard time now but to look back the way we had to live then it is almost heaven now, and it does not seem possible. The water in the old days was so hard that I could hardly wash and I would cook beans all day and they would still rattle.

Mrs. Bonham's post office is Cordell, Oklahoma.

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

Field Worker's name Alene D. McDowell

This report made on (date) May 10, _____ 1937

1. Name Lanville H. Bonham.

2. Post Office Address Copan, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) Copan, Oklahoma

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month August Day 20 Year 1872

5. Place of birth Neosho, Missouri.

6. Name of Father George Bonham Place of birth Unknown
 Died in Oklahoma
 Other information about father Civil War Veteran. Buried at Caney, Kansas

7. Name of Mother Christina Moyer-Bonham Place of birth Unknown
 Other information about mother Died in Oklahoma, Buried Caney, Kansas.

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 _____.

Alene D. McDowell,
Research Field Worker,
May 10, 1937.

PIONEER DAYS

by

Lanville H. Bonham
Copan, Oklahoma.

Lanville H. Bonham was born August 26, 1872, at Neosho, Missouri. His father, George Bonham, was a Civil War Veteran from Iowa. He died at the age of 58 years and is buried at Caney, Kansas. His Mother, Christina Doyer-Bonham, is buried at Caney, Kansas.

"I moved to the Indian Territory with my parents from Kansas in 1886 when I was 14 years old. We settled on a farm on Cotton Creek, northeast of what is now Copan, where my parents lived for many years. Our first home was leased land with a one room log house with a large fireplace in one end of the house. This house had a shingle roof and the sparks from the fire set fire to it and it burned while we were away. Only a few things were saved from this fire. My father then bought a small farm and built a two story log house, where they spent their remaining years. Our furniture was homemade, and I have a table that was brought to the Indian Territory in 1886 and is still in use in my home. Our fuel was wood and kerosene and our water supply was a large well.

We attended church in a log house with homemade benches and our school was a subscription school, also held

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in this house. Our school usually lasted about three or four months a year. I attended school for seven terms in Kansas before we moved to Indian Territory. We bought our supplies at Caney, Kansas, located about one mile north of the Kansas line and about ten miles from our home.

In 1891 there were several reservations opened for settlement, among them the Sac and Fox Indian land. These homesteads were granted free under the 'Free Home Bill' presented by Dennis Flynn, who later served as Congressman for two terms. My father and I made this run on horseback and we rode bareback to save the weight of a saddle, but after we had ridden about nine miles and our location was not clear, we became disgusted and returned home.

The Delaware and Osage Indians in our community were friendly and would celebrate with smokes. One tribe would invite the other tribe and would exchange presents, these presents were smoked away. If one Indian wanted to give a friend a blanket or a pony, they all sat in a circle around the fire and the 'tomahawk' shaped pipe was passed around the circle, each one taking a puff or two until the present was smoked away.

Another interesting custom was the Doll Dance frequently celebrated by the Delawares. A Delaware woman, Mrs. Lee, who

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lived near our home, gave these dances and often invited our family. She wore a hat about two and one-half feet tall and she furnished the music by beating a drum made by stretching a rawhide over the top of a keg. I do not know the reason for these dances.

The Indian foot ball games were played much different from the present game. The field was similar to the present field but the ball was not touched, only kicked. It was a rough game and sometimes they were painfully injured from a kick.

In 1900 I married my own cousin, Miss Mattie Bonham, and we spent all of our married life in and near Copan, Oklahoma. We are the parents of eight children, three of whom are deceased. My wife passed away last summer and I now live with my daughter in Copan.