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BONDS, ROBERT F. , INTERVIEW

#8250

BONDS, ROBERT F. INTERVIEW.

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Interviewer, Ethel Mae Yates,  
August 17, 1937.

Interview with Robert F. Bonds  
Elk City, Oklahoma.

Born September 22, 1856  
Troup County, Georgia.

Parents Richard Bonds, Virginia  
Elsie Bonds, Georgia.

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I came to Montague County, Texas, in 1886 and settled there as a farmer. I moved from there to the Territory in 1900. We came in covered wagons and were on the road nine days.

When we got ready to start it began raining and when we got to Red River it was a half mile wide and we had to camp on the bank of Red River for a week while the river was going down, before we could cross.

There were about a hundred wagons on the other side leaving the Territory coming back to Texas and many of the people in these wagons warned us to turn back but I was coming for the sole purpose of getting a home and as I had never owned one I was not in the mood to be discouraged.

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I had loaded my wife, eleven children, three hens, two pigs and what little household goods we had in three wagons and we had three teams when we started out. One of my brothers begged us not to come. It was in the winter and he feared that all those small children would just freeze to death. I told him if it got too cold, I would heap up a bank of dirt and put them behind that. So on we came, crossed Red River at Dead Man's Crossing and just cut across the country as there were no roads to speak of. Some days we would drive all day and would not get out of one pasture and in some places we would get into wagon ruts that would come up to the hubs of our wagon and if you happened to meet anyone it was just too bad.

We came on to Roger Mills County and filed on a place four and a half miles east of Berlin. Here I was with my family, three hens and one pig, as a horse had kicked one pig and it had died on the way. We were in the Territory but we had no house to move into until a man who had just finished a sod house let us move into it.

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The children made a small dugout at the south end of the house for the chickens. They dug a hole in the ground and covered it with willows and dirt. This sod house had a window cut out in the side and it had a dirt floor. So we picked up cottonwood bark and made a fire on the floor under the window and let the smoke go out of the window, so this is where we warmed ourselves and where we cooked.

We went to work to make a home. I cut down a large cottonwood tree and sawed wheels off of it and bored holes in the middle of them and fixed poles for axles and on this I hauled logs to a sawmill down on Sandstone Ridge and got this lumber sawed to build a dugout. I then dug down about two feet in the ground for the foundation for a dugout. I walled it up with cottonwood lumber. I made it thirty-two feet long and at the back of it I made a rock wall. There were two doors in the front; one door was finished and one was not. My wife and a neighbor woman were sitting one day in the unfinished door and the neighbor woman was holding a small baby in her lap. All at once she began to scream and she grabbed her baby

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and ran. My wife did not know what it was all about as this woman had not said a word and then my wife looked to see what was wrong; and saw a large rattlesnake coming in at the door. She did not know what to do because it was so large that she was afraid to try to kill it and she knew it would not do to let it get into the rocks in the dugout. It crawled right on in the dugout and when it got even with the bed it coiled and began waving its head in the air. One of the women managed to hit it with something and killed it. This snake was over four feet long; and had nine rattles and a button.

When we came to the Territory there were very few settlers here. The prairies were covered with cattle. The cattle rangers were mad because the people were coming in and taking up the land. The rangers called the new people "Old Squatters" and tried to choke them out. When we first came there was hardly anyone here, but it was not long until the prairies were filled with covered wagons.

The rangers would not let the settlers milk their cows, so one of my boys went down by Cordell to see if we could get some cows to milk. He had been gone a week and

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we had not heard from him and were getting ready to go to hunt for him when we saw a herd of cattle coming across the prairie and my son was driving the herd. This man would not let my son have any cows to milk unless he would take a hundred head so he brought the whole bunch and when he got home and counted them he had a hundred and forty head.

The first year we were here, I broke out twenty-five acres of sod with a sod plow. I took a tin can and drove the bottom full of holes and every third furrow I would wire it on to my plow. This is the way I did my planting. After I got my crop in I went down in the Eastern Nation to harvest.

We had been carrying water from a spring that was a half mile away and one morning after I left for work my wife and two small boys started in to dig a well. They dug down about thirty feet; the boys did the digging and my wife drew all the dirt out and when they got down thirty feet they struck rock and had to stop until I got home and could blast it. After I got home I blasted it and we

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struck a stream of everlasting water as fine as anyone e ever saw. But when I got home the ranger's cattle had destroyed my crop.

When we came to this country there were lots of prairie chickens, quail and some deer. The chickens and quail would come up into our yard in droves and when we wanted game, all we had to do was to go out and kill a chicken or a quail. The fleas were everywhere and when we would kill a rabbit it would be full of fleas. At night we would fill a tub with water and set it on the floor. The children would take off their shoes and stockings and in a few minutes their feet and legs would be black with fleas. They would wash their feet in the water and try to get rid of the fleas that way and we would spray ourselves with oil and do everything we could think of but we did not have much success in getting rid of these fleas. All at once, however these fleas disappeared. If they had not gone away I believe we would have gotten discouraged and have gone back to Texas.

The coyotes were here by the hundreds. My boys have had as many as fourteen dead coyotes on the school yard at the same time.



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There were grapes, plums and currants everywhere. Sometimes we would go up on the north fork of Red river and gather grapes and plums.

Berlin was a good sized town when we came here. It had five saloons and I used to freight whiskey from Weatherford for them. There were only two or three houses between Berlin and Weatherford and there was no Elk City at all.

About the only thing people had for recreation in those days were picnics and barbecues and barbecuing meat was my hobby. I have barbecued as many as forty beeves at a time.

I was personally acquainted with "Herd Law Johnson" and I think he did a great deed when he got up the herd law.

We came here without money and we suffered from drouth, low prices and from many other things as the old settlers know, but through it all we were blessed with good health.

When we came to Texas the soldiers were guarding the Indians but we never came in contact with them but when we were moving to the Indian Territory we saw a bunch of Indians near the roadside, who had some meat hanging in a tree.

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We wanted to buy some beef to eat so we went to a house nearby and asked about the beef and the man told us that it was not beef but that one of his horses had gotten crippled and had died and the Indians had dressed the carcass. The Indians had the hide stretched out on the ground and were pulling off the meat that was sticking to it and eating it.