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BONNER, FRANCIS A. INTERVIEW #8951

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BONNER, FRANCIS A.

INTERVIEW.

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

Field Worker's name Elsie A. Norris.

This report made on (date) October 12, 1937. 1937

1. Name Francis A. Bonner.

2. Post Office Address Crescent, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) Crescent, Oklahoma.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month June Day 14 Year 1857.

5. Place of birth Americus, Indiana.

6. Name of Father George W. Bonner. Place of birth German town, Ohio.

Other information about father Married mother at Dayton, Ohio.

7. Name of Mother Ellen Jackson. Place of birth Dayton, Ohio.

Other information about mother Passed out of this life January, 1870, at Americus, Indiana.

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 7.

Elsie A. Norris,
Interviewer.

October 12, 1937.

An Interview With Francis Bonner,
Crescent, Oklahoma.

My Pioneer Experiences in Oklahoma.

I came to Oklahoma on the third train out of Arkansas City on the 22nd day of April, 1889, arriving at Guthrie about 2:30 o'clock. Our train was crowded to the top of the cars, and every available space was full to its capacity, though when we got into Oklahoma fellows began to jump or fall off and any way to get off to make a run out into the country for a claim.

At Guthrie everyone wanted a farm adjoining Guthrie or a pair of corner lots. As to myself, I jumped off the train somewhere about what is now Noble Avenue, and made a run for a business lot. Yes, I got one in Block 99, just north of the Island Park, worth after a year or so a matter of \$25.00.

Well I built a part-frame and part-tent temporary abode, and sent a telegraph for my wife and daughter to come to Guthrie right away. They landed at Guthrie on April 29th, 1889; not able to buy a suitable location to build up a business, I decided to get a claim which

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I did, August 3rd, 1889. I found a vacant quarter Section the S-W-4-Sec. 23-17-3 West, Wild, rather rough, but plenty of water and some pretty good timber. More timber under the ground than on top. I had built a small place on the claim, and on the 3rd day of January 1890, I yoked up my two heifers to a wagon, loaded a few things on the wagon and headed for the claim. The heifers gave out when we had forded the river and were within a mile of the claim, but my friend Peter Plagg was on his way to his claim, and driving slowly along with me hitched his big team of mules to the end of my wagon tongue, and pulled me into my claim, for which I have always been thankful to Mr. Plagg. I had a splendid corral made for the heifers, dry and reasonably warm. I had intended to use the heifers for work, but I took the yoke off of them and never could get the heart to put it on again.

Then I got busy building myself a mansion. I cut black jacks and white oak trees of about the same size and length. I dug a place in the red soil about three and one-half feet deep and stood the logs on end,

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fastening them on top with a 2 x 6 and nailing securely, leaving place for a door and window. On this 12 x 14 foot stockade house, I put a good shingle roof, and a regular 4 inch board floor, laid on 2 x 4's. This was my first house on the claim that we called home. Then I built two wire fences around forty acres for the cattle.

I only had one horse and as he was so small, he could not do much. I traded him for a larger one, and when I got him fed up he proved to be a balky horse. Then I bought another, a little mare for \$32.00 that proved to be a good horse for her size in every way. She was a beautiful mare, but I had to hire my breaking done. Plowed out six acres and planted it in mostly garden and watermelons.

The next year, 1891, I had more breaking done and then I had nineteen acres in cultivation. I raised a good crop of corn and potatoes and other garden vegetables and made good money. I will say right here, that our claim was mostly timber and brush and there was more timber under the ground than on top of it. My wife worked perhaps harder than I in grubbing it all and getting out

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the grubs and roots below reach of the plow.

I added a few acres each year to our cultivated acres. One year I hired thirty-six acres broken with cattle, for which I paid \$5.00 per acre and furnished pasture for the cattle and board for the men.

In 1892 I bought fine horse and mare colts that were one year old. They were half Hambletonian stock and made me a splendid team when they were three years old. When they were four years old I bought a new wagon with a spring seat and a new harness. Then I had something to ride in that I felt more proud of than I ever did of the Hudson or the Chrysler cars that I afterwards bought. I could go anywhere and was in the swim with the best.

Our cattle and horses had increased until I had all my claim fenced and cross fenced. I raised hogs, too, and when the price was low I would butcher the hogs and make sausage and lard and sell directly to the consumer at a fair price.

After selling my first load of wheat for 32 cents per bushel, I quit selling wheat and would mix corn and wheat and feed that to my stock, hogs and all.

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We made some money every year and after awhile we planted a large orchard of all manner of fruit trees for our own use, also grapes and berries. We were living on the fat of the land, but in 1905 I decided to leave the farm and go into business.

I took up insurance and rented the farm. In 1906 I saw a chance to help the people of Crescent in getting homes. The town of Crescent had been sold by lottery and agents all over the states of Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Tennessee, Mississippi and other states sold lots. These were sold by lottery on the 4th day of August, 1904, at \$25.00 a ticket. A man who bought two or more would draw their lots in separate blocks, no two lots were sold to any one person side by side. The lots were twenty-five by one hundred and forty feet, not big enough for a residence. When anyone wanted lots to build on they could not get two lots together, without much writing and delay.

I made up a book of names of purchasers of lots and their residences, and began to buy lots, just as many as a party owned. They would sell in that way, but they would not sell one lot at a time, unless that

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was all they owned here. Hence, it was not long until I could sell a party a pair or more lots together and they could build a home. Then Crescent began to build.

Today I own about one hundred and fifty lots in Crescent and own my own brick office building and a matter of twelve residence properties, and owe not a dollar.

I saw the advantage of the town of Crescent having a park. Block 39 was all in native timber and a lovely place for a park. This block I bought and after getting it I deeded it to the town at actual cost to me. After that block was completed, I began to buy in an adjoining block, No. 48, for the town. This block is not all purchased, but I have turned over to the town fourteen lots and I have ready six lots more as soon as they care to take them over. This leaves only four more lots to secure in that block. This block is used by the town for a ball park.

In 1938 a committee of citizens called on me at my home and insisted that I run for town clerk. I had all the business I could take care of and refused to run for the place, but they would not take no for an answer

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At last I consented, thinking that my friend, A. B. Powell, would be elected any way, but in this I was fooled. I was elected by a majority of fifty-four votes and had to take the place. Well, I made good and after four years service I placed a notice in the paper that I would not be a candidate for re-election. Mr. O. E. Brewster was elected to the place and is serving the people of Crescent in a very satisfactory way.