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Name Mrs. Nancy Frances Bonner.

A biographic Sketch.

From personal interviews with the subject.

Fort Towson, Oklahoma.

Hazel B. Greene, Research Worker.
Indian History Project.
Indian-Pioneer History S-149
April 10, 1937

Date of birth-----January 22, 1860

Place of birth,----Scottsville, Kentucky.

Husband-----Dr. R. S. Bonner.

Place of birth---Calloway County, Kentucky.

Date of his birth, November 24th. 1858

Husband died-----May 12, 1928, Ft. Towson, Okla.

Buried at Doaksville Cemetery.

NOTE BY FIELD WORKER.

I have just spent several hours with Mrs. Bonner,
and will try to repeat the stories as she told them to
me.

INDIAN PIONEER HISTORY PROJECT S- 149

Some experiences of a country doctor, in
the Indian Territory long ago.

My Husband,

Robert Sanford Bonner and I were born and raised in Kentucky. When I was sixteen and he was seventeen, we ran away into Tennessee and got married. We were near the County line so we just rode horse-back to Lafayette, Tenn. to be married. We had mighty little of this worlds goods for a long time, but he was intelligent and a good manager, and was a good provider all of our lives together.

In 1895 doctors told him that he had consumption, and that he could not live in Kentucky, and advised him to go to South Texas. Right then, January, 1895, we sold out and went by train to San Antonio, Texas. When we got there more doctors advised him to live out of doors, if he wanted to live at all, and so we did for a couple of years.

In 1899 we came to the Indian Territory. I never will forget the first night we spent in the Indian Territory. We had come by wagon and had two good teams. That night horse thieves kept skulking around our camp, but my husband had staked them close to the wagons, and sat guard all night with his gun.

He had always been interested in the study of medicine, and had read lots. In those days, one could go before a board in Indian Territory of medical examiners, and if they made the grades, were given a certificate and licensed to practice medicine. So when we got to Old Boakville, and found that the doctor who was there wanted to return to Arkansas, we de-

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cided to locate there for a while. (The while lengthened to twenty-eight years.) My husband successfully passed the examinations every time he was required to do so, also went to Dallas, Texas, and Texarkana to short terms of medical school, and received diplomas from them.

Once, when an election was being held for the electing of a Principal Chief of the Choctaw Nation, a blacksmith and another man got into a fight over it, the blacksmith stabbed the other man. He mounted his horse, rode a mile, got his gun and returned to town and literally shot up the town looking for this blacksmith. Shot into his home, shop and every other house where he suspected he might be hiding, until he fell exhausted from the loss of blood at our door. My husband dressed his wound and took him home in a buggy. He soon recovered and he said the blacksmith were apparently friends after that. It was just "A friendly argument" over an election. It was right exciting on election day. There would always be lots of fights. On that day, mentioned above, I saw a negro man just slap a white man down as fast as he would get up. Slapped him with the side of his pistol on the side of the head. Doctors were kept busy on election days.

Nobody was arrested or punished for these "Free for all" fights and some times they killed a few of the crowd.

Once each month a preacher would come to preach to us, and everybody would go to church. The better ones to worship, some out of curiosity, and some would get drunk and try to break up the services. Once a drunken Indian rode his horse into the church. He was not a full blood either. Just enough white blood to make him mean. Sometimes we would

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have Sunday school and singings. Now this was at Doaksville. Out in the country at the Choctaw churches, where they were most all full-bloods, every thing was more orderly. The full bloods are so serious about their religion. So sincere.

Some times we would have parties and dances, then sometimes some drunken ones would break them up. Once, the host got tired of the dance at his house, so he just got his gun and ran every body off. I was there and saw that. I was one who ran. He was drunk.

A full blood Indian man had blood poisoning in one leg. It was so far advanced that my husband decided that he could amputate it and save his life. He took another doctor up there they lived several miles away, up in the pine woods to assist in the amputation. When they arrived there, quite a large crowd of full blood Indians had come in to see the sick man. The doctors examined him and decided it was too late to amputate and save his life. The infection had spread so far, it was useless. Well, the indians wanted to know so my husband told them that there was no use, he was going to die anyway. He told them that out in the yard, where they were congregated. In a few moments some one came out and said that Solomon was dead. Upon close questioning some of them admitted that they went in and told him that the doctor said he would die, and he promptly turned his face to the wall and died. When my husband rebuked them for telling the patient that he would die. They said, "Well you SAY he die, and he DID die."

He practiced medicine over a radius of many miles, as far West as

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Kiamichi river, South to Red river, North to and past Old Spencer Academy. Often it was so far that he would have to stay all night. A lot of the roads were too rough to go over in a buggy, so he would go horseback. It was pretty hard to ride 25 miles horseback so he would fold a cotton blanket and put in his saddle to make it easier. Sometimes he didn't find such comfortable beds to sleep upon ' way out in the hills, and some times it was a pallet on the floor, sometimes he just put down his blanket with his saddle for a pillow and slept after attending his patient. Frequently they had only one bed. He found the most of the homes of the full blood Indians scrumpulusly clean. Often they would have corn bread and coffee alone for breakfast, and once they has only sweet potatoes, baked, and coffee for breakfast. They had been sick and unable to dig snakeroot to trade for flour and had been unable to go to mill to get corn ground. Occasionally they would have a surplus of some sort of produce and lacking money with which to pay him they would load him down with good things to eat. Their tables would groan with well cooked foods.

One of their favorite foods was Tom Fuller. It was made by making a sort of a mortar by cutting down a tree and hollowing out the stump, then they would make a pestle of wood and pound corn to the consistency of what we know as grits, almost as fine as meal. This was cooked various ways, but I believe the most common was as we cook grits.

He rode many many miles, and many many days and nights in order to alleviate pain. And I believe he was as well beloved as any man who ever lived in this country.

In his later years he traveled by automobile. He brought the first one to the town of Fort Towson. It was a small, buggy-like vehicle, and chain driven. Well, it had a gasoline engine, but the wheels were turned by chains. Then he would sometimes make trips away out in the sand hills in that. His many Choctaw friends never failed to send for him as long as he lived and was able to travel.

Among my recollections, I recall a Choctaw wedding. The Indians would hold camp meetings, and sometimes camp at a meeting for several days. Just lots of the full blood men were preachers, and they would take their whole families to these meetings and just stay till they were over. Well, an Indian youth who lived away up North of Spencer Academy, had met a girl at one of these meetings up about Alikchi, and the way they had to go it must have been fifty miles from his home to hers. That was too far to go courting ver often, so they decided to get married at the next meeting time. Indians in wagons, Indians in buggies, and Indians on horseback, big, little, old and young filed through our little town all day long Saturday before the Sunday when the wedding was to take place. I was told that the ceremony was quite impressive, also very long and wonderful dinner was served, several beeves were barbecued. Then the trek back home begun the blushing bride with them.

I must tell you of the Indian girl who really went back to the primitive. She lived out in the hills north of Doaksville, her name was Louisa Nonnemontubbee. She attended Tusahoma Female Institute. She spoke splendid English, wrote a lovely hand, dressed up to date, and when

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she would come home for vacations, half the white girls in the county envied her up-to-the minute clothes. I did not see her for about two years after she came home to stay. And when I did see her, she had a red bandana handkerchief on her head, a bright colored blouse, made very old fashioned, an extremely long, full skirt with ruffles of another color, and bindings of still another color at the head of the ruffles. She was barefoot, and had a sack of snake root that she had dug, and would not talk for a long time just grunt. I finally got her to talk a little. I had been told that that was a frequent occurrence but it was my first observance of it.

One peculiarity of the full blood Indian was that they would come to my house, and just stand outside until discovered. They would never knock at the door or call to us, and there was no use to ask their business, because they would never tell you till they got good and ready.

~~We had a splendid school at Doaksville for our children to attend, and they got good and ready.~~

We had a splendid school at Doaksville for our children to attend, and they all got fair educations.

I am 77 years old and still live in Fort Towson. One mile south of Old Doaksville.