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KORN, WILLIAM.

INTERVIEW BIOGRAPHY FORM

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WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Linnaeus B. Ranck

This report made on (date) January 21 1938

1. Name William Korn

2. Post Office Address Gage, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year 1868

5. Place of birth Kimble County, Texas.

6. Name of Father _____ Place of birth Germany

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother _____ Place of birth _____

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 12.

Linnaeus B. Ranck
Investigator
January 21, 1938.

Interview with William Korn,
Gage, Oklahoma.

I was born in Kimble County, Texas, in 1866.

Hostile Comanche and Apache Indians had been carrying their forays into Kimble County, so our family decided to move to Mason County, Texas. When we left a neighbor, who owned a bunch of sheep, persuaded my parents to leave Adolph, my older brother, then a boy of eight or ten, to herd sheep for a short time, after which he was to join our family in Mason County, so we moved on to Mason County and young Adolph stayed to herd sheep for the neighbor. That was either the year of 1866 or '67, according to my best recollection.

Adolph was out with the sheep herd one Sunday morning. The settlers then had community church services every Sunday at first one settler's home and then another. Those days many of them went to church on horseback- even the women and children. Adolph observed three persons approaching astride horses. He thought at first it was people of the community going to church, then he noticed that they appeared to have blankets about their bodies and became suspicious, but did

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not run for the shelter of dense timber not far distant till it was too late. He was within fifty yards of a thicket when one in the group of three Indians rode close upon him, with gun drawn. Adolph gave up and unharmed, was captured and carried away by the Indians. North, north his captors seemed to travel. By night many other Indians had joined them; the band had quite a number of stolen horses and mules they were driving out of the country.

The first night in captivity the Indians bound the boy's hands and feet with rawhide thongs and placed him between two of them on the ground to sleep. Sometime during the night when it appeared certain to the boy that his captors were soundly sleeping, he attempted to work out of his shambles and escape. His attempt was foiled, however, and one buck thumped him soundly, bound him the tighter and put him down again between two of the party. The Indians and the captive boy were not so far from settlers where they camped in dense woods the first night, for during the night the boy heard roosters crowing and again in the morning. With their captive white boy, the Indians struck out again by the break of day and continued to travel in a northerly direction. During the second day it seemed

the raiding bands and their spoils had all gotten together again. In later years, after his rescue, Adolph declared that the Indians were about a week or longer in reaching their home camp or rendezvous, and ^{he} believed that it was in western Oklahoma that they finally stopped, or at some locality in the Texas plains country not far west of the western boundary of Oklahoma. Thereafter while held in captivity the boy was never away from the Indian's main camps again. He was left with the squaws, children and old men when the warriors were away on hunting trips or raiding and warring expeditions.

In the course of time, since he was regarded as the chattel of the warrior who captured him, Adolph was traded to a prominent Comanche Chief and became ^a member of the chief's family. He became a playmate and special caretaker of a weakling boy of the Chief's. During the Chief's absence on a hunting trip the puny boy died. In accordance with a Comanche custom it was ordained that Adolph should be killed by the deceased child's father, upon his return, in order that Adolph's spirit would join that of the dead

Indian boy in "the happy hunting ground". Evidently the Chief's wife had become much attached to the captive boy and wished to save his life if possible. At any rate, just a day or two before the expected return of the Chief his wife hustled Adolph away to a secluded place of hiding in a thicket of timber close by a stream of water. Here he was to remain in hiding. At night the squaw took food to him and he drank from the waters of the nearby stream. Here the boy remained for a number of days and until, it seems, the Comanche Chief suppressed his superstition and consequent desire to kill the white boy. Later on, before his rescue from the Comanches, Adolph Korn again narrowly escaped being murdered. The Indians were teaching him to ride, it seems. They placed him on the back of a wild mule and tied him to the animal so securely he could not be thrown off. The mule ran and bucked and in the course of its antics it fell and broke Adolph's leg. The Indians then decided to kill him, for it was thought that if he recovered he would always be crippled to some extent and his captor did not want to be burdened with the boy during his convalescence. An old squaw interceded in his behalf, sparing Adolph's life and finally he was turned over to her to be cared for. She set his

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broken leg, bound it up with splints, and cared for him tenderly and faithfully and the boy recovered, with his leg as strong again as ever.

Adolph's parents, brothers and sisters ^{for a time.} did not know what fate he came to when the Indians carried him off. A posse of the neighborhood settlers undertook trailing the Indians who captured him but learned of his fate too late to ever overtake or locate his captors. Adolph's family knew only that beyond a doubt he had been captured by hostile Indians and taken away from the locality of his capture, to what fate they knew not for four or five years.

After a lapse of four or five years following the boy's capture, his parents then residing in Mason, Texas, heard from the Military authorities at Fort Sill that Adolph's release from Indian captivity had been effected and that soon he would be returned to his parents in Texas under Military escort. Two young white men who had been held in Indian captivity for many years were returned to Mason, Texas, at the time the soldiers brought this brother to Mason. Three soldiers made up the escort that came to Mason with the rescued captives and in the

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group of three was an officer whose name I remember as McKenzie. Quite likely this officer was Col. R. S. McKenzie who was prominent in the campaigns against the hostile Plains Indians in Western Oklahoma and other parts of the Southwest during the late 60's and the early 70's. One of the white men who was returned to Mason with my brother was named Fisher and the other one was a man of the name of Layman. Fisher had been in captivity since a small child, had grown to manhood among the Indians and had married a squaw. Layman, too, had been held captive by the Comanches for many, many years. When released, he was about grown. Fisher had a couple of children by his Indian wife at the time he was recovered by the soldiers. He pined for the people of his adoption, his Indian wife and children, and soon left Texas and went back to the Comanche Indians and Oklahoma. Before he returned, however, while visiting friends and relatives in Mason and Mason County, told of having been into Texas and the community of his white relatives and family on raiding expeditions with bands of the Comanches after he became grown. On these occasions, said Fisher, he would restrain the Indians from committing any depredations against his white relatives or stealing anything, said he used to steal up to the house

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of his parents at night and view his father, mother, etc., through the windows, then slip stealthily away to join the Indians again.

When my brother got back to Texas he was a strapping big fellow and had forgotten practically all of his mother tongue. He could, however, speak the Comanche language well and had become quite adapted to the Comanche life and ways and had long since ceased pining for his father, mother, brothers and sisters when the soldiers rescued him from the Indians. Adolph accounted for his rescue by the soldiers from the fact that the troops kept on the trail and in such persistent pursuit of the band of the Comanche tribe holding him captive that finally the Indians surrendered because of impending starvation. I believe that it was somewhere in Western Oklahoma that my brother's rescue was effected.

I do not remember exactly when I first came to Oklahoma. It was during the middle 80's, however. I came up from Mason County, Texas, with a train load of cattle to the old Indian Territory. It was then that I saw my first Indian. A number of them were about the stockyards where the other

cowboys and I were unloading the Texas cattle. Quite a number of cattle had either been killed or had died in railroad transit. As these were removed from the cars, the Indians were ready to drag them aside. The Indians then dismembered the carcasses of the dead cattle, ate of them and took the residue of the edible portions away for future use.

Practically all of my early days in Oklahoma were connected with cattle ranching in one section of the state and then another. I was back and forth from Texas to the Indian Territory with cattle. Most of the movements to the Territory, however, were by train. The fall of 1893, and after the Cherokee Strip had opened for white settlement, I came through with a herd from the Osage country to this section. The old H Steeple Ranch was then being established in this end of the Strip and the herd I helped drive through from the Osage was turned loose on the H Steeple range.

The grass in the Strip was wonderful since it hadn't been pastured for a few years. By the spring of '94 the H Steeple range had no less than ten thousand cattle, all of them having come in from Texas directly or indirectly. Settlers in this end of the Strip then were mighty few and far between. The Santa Fe right-of-way was not yet fenced. That spring, however, the railroad company fenced the north side of their right-of-way.

The H Steeple range had no fence lines to begin with; they began fencing ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ a ring of 1894. The H Steeple foreman, Billy Daniels, and a few men were out here the fall of 1893 ahead of most of the cattle and the outfit otherwise, and had been establishing a headquarters for the new ranch project and a number of line-camps on the range the outfit contemplated using. The first headquarters was established upon Eight Mile Creek in dugouts--a dugout barn for horses, dugout bunkhouse, dugout for cooking and eating. The next spring, however, a new and more elaborate headquarters was established away to the south and in the north bottoms of Wolf Creek, a few miles northwest of the site of the present town of Fargo.

When I reached the H Steeple range from the Osage country I became one of the outfit's lineriders. Every-day I rode west from headquarters, the first headquarters on Eight Mile Creek till I met the linerider who daily rode east from a line camp near the west boundary of the H Steeple range. I rode this beat till the summer of '94.

In the meantime, I filed on a "water-claim" for the ranch up on Twenty-Five Mile Creek, some seven miles northwest of the present town of Gage. Every H Steeple cowboy did likewise for the outfit. A good part of the summer of 1894 I spent at the H Steeple headquarters breaking saddle horses, for I was an expert bronc-buster. The wolves were menacing the range cattle so I stayed in camp on my claim a part of that summer with another H Steeple cowboy named J. . White, hunting and trapping for wolves. There was an agreement between the ranch owners and their cow-punchers, whereby every cowboy filed on a water claim for the outfit; the ranch paid the filing fees, put up a shack dwelling for each man and made such other improvements on their claims for them as were required; they also paid the

Government the cash amount per acre (then \$1.25) necessary to get the title to the land. The cowboys, in the meantime, worked for the outfit and drew their regular monthly wage for ranch service, then about 30.00 per month. The agreement with their cowboys, with respect to proving up their claims, the H Steeple never fulfilled, since the outfit began suspension of the ranch operations in 1895 and by '96 the ranch had been sold out and abandoned and the remnants returned to Texas.

I spent the winter of '94 and '95 in Texas. In the spring of '95 I returned to this country and the H Steeple Ranch. I rejoined the outfit in this section not so long after the disastrous April storm in this country that spring. The outfit's cattle drifted into the lowlands along Wolf Creek during that storm and against the railroad right-of-way fence and perished by the hundreds. A lot of them broke through the railroad fence and drifted south as far as the South Canadian River country. The course of the cattle southward was easily trailed on account of so many dead ones along the way. The ranch cowboys were still working the country rounding up the surviving cattle when I

returned to the ranch from Texas. I was with the H Steeple till the last of the outfit left this section.

Soon afterward I married into the Feuss family who had settled along Wolf Creek in 1895 within the H Steeple range, and with my wife established residence on the claim she had homesteaded. I now live on a farm east of Gage where used to be the old Buzzard Post Stage Station.