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Field Worker, Nennie Lee Burns,
March 17, 1939.

Interview with Mrs. Margaret Caven
Cardin, Okla.

NINETY YEARS

My parents were John and Elizabeth Cushionberry, born and raised in Georgia. After their marriage they moved to the hill country of Kentucky where I was born February 10, 1946.

We had free schools there though we had to walk three miles to school and when the river was up and the backwater covered our road, we would sometimes have to travel three-quarters of a mile in a skiff or boat. Our schoolhouse was of native lumber with a clap-board roof and we had a heating stove for heat. There was a twelve paned glass window for light and this was all except a single pane above the boy's writing table. Sometimes we girls would knock out some of the chinking for extra light on our side.

We had no sewing machines in those days but I was a good seamstress and unless you would look on the reverse side of the garment, you could not tell my sewing from that of your machines. I was a good quilter. We raised our own sheep and I even helped to shear them and washed the wool, carded it, spun and wove it into cloth. I wove both the broken and the plain twill cloth. We also made our own thread from the cotton and the flax, as well as wove the cotton and linen cloth. I would weave the fancy patterns in the linens and use two colors in the weaving of the bedspreads. For our carpets, I made the regular three-ply warp.

The Methodists had church and Sunday School there and in the summer when the crowds were large we would make a brush arbor and the meeting would be held out of doors in the timber. We usually had a protracted meeting each summer which would sometimes last several weeks.

The principal crop with us was tobacco which was

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raised in large fields. This required lots of work and as my father did not own any negroes, we children, when help was short, would have to help in the fields. When the tobacco was ripe, it was cut and hung in a great shed to dry or cure. The whole stalk was hung up and dried and when cured it was stripped and packed and taken to the river and sent down the river in boats to market.

As hard as we worked we found time for enjoyment. Those were gay times for us as we had our dances, log-rollings, house-raisings, quiltings and the men had plenty to drink. Whiskey was kept by the barrel in the cellar.

Log-rolling was when they wanted to clear a piece of land for farming. The neighbors were invited in and the men cut the timber and burned the branches and brush and then rolled the logs together and set fire to them. This was hard work but enjoyed as it gave the men a chance to test their strength and many a contest was fought and won this way.

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Tobacco was the best paying crop and most of the time was devoted to raising it but the farmers also had lots of fat cattle and hogs, but they thought so little of that that they would not even take them to market and if the merchants wanted them they had to come to the homes and get them.

Civil War Days.

Before Lincoln was elected, a man came to my husband's father's home and he said if Lincoln was elected he would free the negroes, so after the election of Lincoln my father-in-law sold all of his and the sale included the one that had been given to my husband when he was a very small lad and who had grown up with him as his playmate. From the fact that we had sold our slaves and tried to stay out of the trouble, we fared better than most of those living around us. The soldiers would come to the house and search for some one that they thought might be found there but no serious trouble came

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of it until Grandfather Caven was keeping a sick man in his home and the soldiers learned of it so they came one night and took the sick man and grandfather with him. They took them some distance through the woods and a cornfield of shocked corn. Then they told grandfather that he could return home but as he had noticed two men drop out on the way, he was afraid to return and so spent the night in a shock of corn. It was raining and he died from the exposure of that night. Many of the people were afraid to stay in their homes at night.

I was married October 20, 1369, and my husband was just eleven days older than I was. I was thirty-five years old when our party left Kentucky by covered wagon for the West. It was a disagreeable trip as we had so much mud and water and almost no roads. Streams were often high and we would have to camp and wait for them to run down and I ruined so many of my pretty quilts on this trip. One prized possession I brought with me was my side-saddle.

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Traveling through Missouri, we went first to Kansas and then we returned to Barton County, Missouri, where we remained five years. Here we had poor houses and a new country to farm and quite a different life from what we had lived in Kentucky.

Hearing so much of the Indian country and the great possibilities and the cheap rents, we decided to come here. We located four miles south of the present city of Fairland and rented between two and three hundred acres of land from Uncle Jimmie Lamar giving him a third of the crop raised. Here we had a three-room house, two of native lumber and one, a log room with a fireplace. The house had only one window. I had brought my loom with me from Kentucky and had hauled it around with me but sold it when we left Missouri. After we came here I got another one but my weaving here was limited to rug and carpet weaving. I wove no cloth.

My quilts were badly worn and here I pieced and quilted many quilts and as I and the older girls quilted, Mary, my daughter here, kept us a pot of coals

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from the fireplace sitting in the center under the quilt to keep us warm.

It was while living here that my younger girls started to school. Their first teacher was Mrs. Nettie May, now living in Fairland. She was a young lady then and she started out and solicited pupils from the families and, with a few pupils in a small building furnished by the neighborhood, started her little school. The children had to walk and most of them had to go over the prairie covered with tall grass and many of the roads were mere paths through the prairie and of course there was danger from the snakes and wild animals.

An event of those days was the first neighborhood Sunday School picnic that was attempted and held on the McCollough place on Horse Creek. Mrs. May was requested to take the school children and arrange a program for the day. The men hauled lumber to the place and built a platform and arranged some seats for the crowd in the grove. These seats were only

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rough boards placed on supports about twelve or fifteen inches from the ground's end had no backs. The children taking part in the program wore tall red caps and red sashes. The parents prepared and took with us our dinner and at noon we had a basket dinner and spent the whole day there. In appreciation of her efforts in training the children, the folks gave Mrs. May an album.

Many of my opinions changed after I came here. While we were in Kansas I had seen a party of Indians eating raw meat without any salt but here I found my friends and neighbors, who were mostly Indians, living as I had been taught to live and as friendly and neighborly as I was.

We had eight children and the older ones took care of the smaller ones while I helped my husband in the field during the busy season. We raised much wheat and kept enough for our own flour and seed for the coming year. The surplus was hauled to the Frisco and sold. We could get some things that we

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needed at old Prairie City and Fairland after it was established but each spring and fall my husband and I would make a trip either to Baxter Springs, Kansas, or Southwest City, Missouri, and bring home the groceries and clothing and the things that we would need through that season.

Later we moved near Bluejacket where we lived six years and here we began to raise more corn, which we sold for twenty-five cents per bushel, and delivered it at the railroad at Bluejacket, and as they did not have grain elevators in those days, it was usually unloaded along the right-of-way on the ground but sometimes they would build great open pens for it. I have seen great mounds of corn piled up this way. It was all right if it did not rain and spoil the corn. I had never been back to my old Kentucky home and while we were living at Bluejacket I decided to go back on a visit taking the younger children with me. I went by train and while waiting in Saint Louis for my train, which would not leave until the next day,

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they told me that I could go to a hotel and get a room to stay over night and when I asked them what the hotel would charge me, they told me that it would be two dollars. So I sat up all night in the waiting room and made beds for the children on the seats. The thing that seemed best to me at the old home when I reached there was the spring near the house and which was connected with the house by a cable. Standing at the house you could bring a bucket of that spring water cold as ice to you and it reminded me of the difference between it and the water we had had so many years in the Indian Territory.

While we were living near Bluejacket, our barn burned and we lost so much stock and grain and machinery that it made it hard to farm so we decided to move to Miami. We came here and stayed until the second spring when we returned to farming. In the fire on the farm I lost my side-saddle.

We were living at Miami when the Frisco was built from Miami south to Afton and my children were

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in the crowd of school children that marched that day to the railroad to see the driving of the "Golden Spike" which celebrated the connection of the Frisco at Miami with the main line at Afton.

After our return to a farm which we rented south of Fairland, we continued to live in that neighborhood until our children all married, eight of them. When my husband died in 1920, we were alone except for a grandson who was living with us and so he and I continued to live there until a few years ago when I broke up housekeeping and came here to Cardin to live with my daughter.

Mrs. Caven suffered a fall some time past which has confined her to her chair since and her hearing is failing but she has her second eyesight and was doing some plain sewing when the writer visited her, and insisted that her daughter show me a quilt that she has pieced the past winter which is pieced of very small pieces. - Investigator.