

CRABTREE, MAY.

INTERVIEW

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

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Field Worker's name Zaidee B. Bland,

This report made on (date) August 16, 1937, 1937

1. Name May Crabtree.

2. Post Office Address Altus, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) West Pecan.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month August Day 21 Year 1880.

5. Place of birth Mississippi.

6. Name of Father Frank Dodson. Place of birth Mississippi.

Other information about father Farmer.

7. Name of Mother Thursey Bishop. Place of birth Mississippi.

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 9.

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Zaidee B. Bland,
Journalist,
August 16, 1937.

An Interview With Mrs. May Crabtree,
Altus, Oklahoma.

Father died two and one-half months before I was born and Mother stayed in Mississippi only long enough to get strong after my birth and then we moved into Arkansas, where we attached a step-father, Jim Thomas, and went on into Indian Territory. About the first thing that I can really remember was the trip to Oklahoma. There were no roads to speak of and Pappy was expecting to go just over the line a little way and rent land and work in the sawmills during the slack time of the crops. We wandered around in the woods and got waterbound and could not really tell where we were.

I remember once we were traveling along through some shallow water and we got too close to the bank of a stream of water and two of the wheels went down into the water so far that the water poured into the wagon and almost washed everything away and scared us almost to death but Pappy had good control of the horses and they pulled us out.

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Pappy rented land near Compton in Latimer County. We had a log house. Mother cooked on an open fireplace. We got our water from a spring creek and the water came boiling out from under a great big flat rock as cold as this I am offering you out of the Frigidaire. How we did love that water! We washed in it, waded in it, fished in the deeper holes in the creek. It was surely living water all right.

Mother only lived two years and then I went to live with my uncle in the Choctaw Nation. He owned his land there and he and Auntie were both very old and Uncle did nothing but hunt or fish. I lived with them until I was grown. They lived in a big four-room log house and had everything one could wish for in those days for we did not know so many things to wish for as we do now. My playmates were Indians and I was about grown before I could sing a song except in the Indian language. I surely knew a lot of Indian songs, though, and I thought they were pretty and have taken part in their dances but cannot say I ever understood the beauty and enjoyment the Indians seems to get out of the dance.

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Many times, Uncle would take us children with him hunting for he was old and his sight was poor. I have toted many an old gobbler home by taking him by the feet and throwing them across my shoulder and when I would get home with him all his feathers would be off the back and head where I had dragged them on the ground. We hunted deer and bear. Uncle cured the meat of the deer by jerking it or drying it as some call it but the bear was so fat they always salted him away and cured him more like you do hog meat. Bear meat was so fat that you would have to trim a lot of the meat off. We rendered some of it, for bear grease was good for a lot of things and especially for the hair and to grease your chest if you had a cold or to grease bottoms of a child's feet if he was croupy and we also made soap of bear grease. We dripped our lye from an ash-hopper and made all the soap we used. 'Possums were put in water rolled in ashes and then all the hair scraped off then they were cut open and all cleaned out and then thrown on top of the house or somewhere and allowed to freeze before they were cooked. Then were roasted on a spit before the open fire

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with frequent basting with a sauce which Auntie always fixed up. I think it was made of vinegar, syrup, red pepper and I am not sure that was all but I am sure that those three things were in the sauce and sometimes after the 'possums were parboiled they were stuffed like a turkey and then roasted.

Once, we were all out helping Uncle lay some fence and a little Indian and I were so small that it took us both to lift and carry a rail. We were a little way from the others and saw what we thought was a big dog run out of the bushes and grab one of the grown dogs in his mouth and make off into the woods. We screamed and ran back to the others but were so scared that we could not tell for a long time what we had seen. Uncle kept saying, "What scared you"? At last I said, "A great big dog caught one of our dogs about the back and ran off into the woods with it". It was a cougar lion. Another time we were out hunting with Uncle when I saw a great big "varmint" in the hollow of an old tree and I said, "Look, Uncle, there is a dog in that tree". Uncle shot and such a scream that varmint did let out, it nearly scared us all to death and

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everyone of us "skinned up" a tree and left Uncle on the ground alone. Uncle finally got the "varmint" killed and it was a catamount. We would go wading in the creek and I would take my apron and hold it out from me and get it full of "crawdads" and we would take them to the house and Uncle would go fishing with us and use the crawdads for bait.

We played many games in the woods, "Wolf Over the River", "Dare Base", "Stealing Chips" and "Black Man" but the game I think we loved most was to bend down a young tree and name the tree after a favorite horse and ride up and down, up and down. I bet you there are a hundred trees in the eastern part of the state growing crooked today from the bending and riding we gave them. I would eat anything the Indians would except terrapins. I could not "go" them. I have carried one many times in my apron until we would get to a place to make a fire so he could be roasted or I would take it home with me to give to my Indian friends. We never passed up a terrapin but always caught every one we ran across. I never knew an Indian to iron clothes. They would wash them and hang

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them on a bush to dry, shake them out and put them back on.

All the religious meetings I ever attended were with the Indians but they usually had a white preacher or a converted Indian to do the conducting of the services, so the meetings were very like the ones which the white people held. I remember once when we lived near Durant and the church was called Lone Elm that we had a converted Indian who was the pastor coming to preach for us once every month. He usually came on Saturday and sometimes we had preaching on Saturday, too, but times we did not have preaching. Once some of the men got the pastor off on the creek to gamble and drink and the next morning when we were all assembled at the church to hear him preach he came walking down the aisle, entered the pulpit and said, "Brethren, I am quite intoxicated this morning and am not going to talk to you". He picked up his Bible and walked out, got into his buggy and drove away, leaving us all wondering what in the world was the matter with him until some one explained.

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In 1888, 1892, 1896, I think we had the most peaches and the biggest peaches I ever saw. A half of a peach would not go into the mouth of a Mason jar. We had a neighbor, Carl Owens, who loved to experiment; he took the limb off of a June apple tree and grafted it onto a peach tree that would ripen in June and for years he had apples and peaches growing on the same tree. He also grafted a pecan limb onto a hickory nut tree and had pecans and hickory nuts from the same tree. We had an abundance of apples, peaches, plums, apricots and pears. We had five trees of what we called slick peaches, I think these must have been nectarines, which made the best butter and we could make jelly out of these peaches, too. They were more acid than the ordinary peach but not so acid as the plum. The fall of the year seemed to give me the greatest thrill, for that was when we gathered the sweet potatoes and the goobers; the night would be moonlight and there would be great piles of potatoes and peanuts, as they are called now. We always had a great party then for everyone helped his neighbors to gather these things and, then in the warm fall days a lot of us

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would go nutting. We surely had good times and it seemed to me we did almost everything together. There was no help to be hired so the neighbors just helped each other until all was gathered. There was no barter in food stuff. If one raised more than he needed for his own use he passed it on to some one who needed it. The men bartered horses, cows, pigs sometimes, dogs sometimes and wives sometimes but not in food stuff at all. They swapped in skins of the fur-bearing animals for that was same as cash to them. My entire youth was spent among the Choctaws and I loved them just as my children seem to love their playmates. I never saw inside of a school house until I was grown but did not miss it for none of us knew anything about books and what we didn't know did not bother us.

I was a great big girl when a neighbor child died whom we all had played with and some dozen or more of us about the same age went to sit up with the body after it had been laid out. They laid the body out on a cooling board and covered it with a sheet that went down to the

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floor. There were hogs under the floor and I did not know it so away in the middle of the night, a great big old hog decided to turn over and lifted the entire floor, upsetting the corpse. I thought the boy had come alive and was turning over and I screamed and screamed and one of the other girls fainted. I didn't faint but my knees get right weak every time I think of it after all these years.