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

Field Worker's name Mrs. Nora Lorrin

This report made on (date) June 7, 1937

1. Name Miss Iona A. DeBaum

2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 802 South Roberts

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month March Day 10 Year 1867

5. Place of birth Near Shelbyville, Illinois

Her father was a farmer and she was born on a farm.

6. Name of Father William S. DeBaum Place of birth Near Fairbanks, Indiana.
Born Dec. 13, 1841.

Other information about father French, English, Dutch. Died April 21, 1915

7. Name of Mother Angeline Pogue DeBaum Place of birth Near Fairbanks, Indiana.
Born Jan. 15, 1844.

Other information about mother Died June 17, 1898.

Scotch-Irish.

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 _____.

Interview with Miss Iona DeBaum
El Reno, Oklahoma

Miss Iona DeBaum was born to Mr. and Mrs. William S. DeBaum, on a farm near Shelbyville, Indiana, on March 10, 1867. There were two children born to this family, both girls. They left Shelbyville, Indiana, in 1880, going to Prescott, Arkansas. Miss DeBaum graduated from the Prescott high school in 1889, and she taught three years in Nevada County, Arkansas, before she received her diploma.

She came to Oklahoma in October, 1889, but had to return to Arkansas to finish her school, as she was under contract to do. Miss DeBaum obtained a claim by buying a relinquishment on an eighty acre farm located one and a half miles east on Foreman street in El Reno.

Her first school was a subscription school, held in her own home, which was a dug-out. One of those half and half affairs, with a dirt floor. They used her table for a desk, and the kitchen chairs for seats. She states that they kept the regular hours, with usual recess periods, and an old fashioned school bell to call them in from play. She had five pupils, Mable Jackson, Guy Riley, Grace Cross and Luther and Willie Reeder, and she taught this school

for three or four months.

She was a charter member of the First Christian Church in El Reno and taught the 'teen aged boys in Sunday school, from 1892 until 1911. She missed only two years, on account of the illness of her mother. She states that the first normal school was held at Old Frisco in 1892.

Miss DeBaum says that she has often been credited with being the first teacher in the El Reno school but that the honor should go to Miss Ella Farnham who taught a subscription school in 1889 and 1890 for \$25.00 a month. Because of the hard circumstances of her patrons, she had to wait quite awhile for her pay.

There was a story-current at the time that the bachelors of the community were taxed \$5.00 each to help pay the teacher. She says that some of the bachelors said they paid and some of them said that they did not, so she does not know whether it was the truth or not.

Miss DeBaum taught her first regular school, not subscription, at Rich Valley.

I will digress here long enough to tell of an incident that happened at this school. - The Rich Valley school

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was built of cottonwood logs, and the neighbors got together and built it. It had six windows, two of them had glass and the other four had to be boarded up because they could not afford glass windows for all openings. When it began to get too warm some of the boys would kick off some of the boards from the windows, finally getting them all open. The older boys were taken out of school to help with the crops. There was a bench in one corner that the water bucket was kept on, and from time to time one of the pupils would be allowed to pass the water, everybody drinking from the same cup.

One day there came a terrific rain storm (a water spout) there were thirty-three boys there and in order to keep dry they climbed up on the rafters under the roof, as there was no ceiling. Miss DeBaum put some of the girls, eleven of them, under the water bench and put an overcoat over them. She took the rest of the girls to another corner that was partially sheltered and covered them as best she could with a couple of parasols, that were luckily on hand. The creek was up so high that she and three of the girls could not get home that night and had to stay with a neighbor. They sent word by a boy to

a family that was close enough to the opposite side of the water to call across and let the parents of the marooned bunch know that they were safe.

She taught at Riverside in the winter of 1891 and another winter term at the same school in 1892. Riverside is located just six miles straight east of the Irving school. While she was teaching at Riverside an interesting incident occurred. It seemed that she was going to be late to work one day. She was boarding at the time with Mrs. Kinsley, so Mrs. Kinsley told her husband to hitch up the ponies and take them. After he left the room to do her bidding, she told the girls she was afraid he would not have time to catch the ponies, but they looked out toward the barn and Mr. Kinsley was hitching up a yoke of oxen. The woman that was with Miss DeBaum said she wasn't going to ride behind those things but Miss DeBaum said, "Well, I am." The other woman changed her mind and they rode to school that way. Miss DeBaum said that the oxen would go almost as fast as the ponies would and it saved them from being late for work.

The first school buildings in El Reno were long frame buildings. They were located where the Central

School building now stands, and she gives December 2, 1892, as the date of the first school, other than subscription schools. Mr. F. N. Hopkins was the superintendent. She had the position next to him. When I asked her what grade she taught she said, "From long division to algebra." Other teachers were Miss Etta Dale, Miss Bessie Tuston, Miss Alma Russell and Miss Margaret Crammer.

Miscellaneous

At one rural school where she taught, she boarded with a Mrs. Shields who was one-quarter Indian, and Mrs. Shields's two children went to school to her.

In speaking of Mrs. Shields she said, "She was the cleanest housekeeper that I ever saw, she kept her house spotless."

Henry Mehr, part Indian, went to school to her as did Ed Keith, brother of Mrs. Shields.

She knew a man by the name of Broken Dish, a full blood Indian, who lived north of her father's place. She remembers him mostly on account of his death. When he died, there happened not to be any men on the place, just his squaws and they came over and wanted her father to help them take

him to their burial ground. She doesn't know just where the burial ground was located, but from her directions I suspect it was the old Darlington burial ground; anyway he obliged them. They had sewed the remains up in a canvas, together with a variety of other things. Mr. DeBaum tried, in handling the corpse, to find out, unobtrusively, what they had put in with the corpse, but he was unsuccessful. When they got to the burial ground the squaws got out of the wagon, took the corpse by the feet and pulled him onto the ground. Then told Mr. DeBaum that, "We don't need you any more, you go," so he left them.

When Miss DeBaum came here in 1889, in October, there were just fourteen houses in El Reno. The original Anstine (center square of present structure) was here when she came, and there were three little houses belonging to a Mrs. Sullivan located across from the Baptist Church, and they are still standing. A house on Choctaw Avenue across the street from the court house, that was the old Grant property, is still here. Those five of the original fourteen, as she recalls, are all that are left. A number of these houses were shipped in already built and all you

had to do was to hook them together. The Grant house was considered way out on the prairie as it stood off by itself. There were no roads, just trails, and in order to find their way back and forth from Oklahoma City at night, flag poles were put up. Instead of flags being put on the flag poles they put lanterns. These poles were used for a sort of lost and found department. If anything was lost those coming along behind would pick it up, but instead of keeping it, they would hang it on a flag pole. The owner could then get it on his next trip or have a friend get it for him. She says that Oklahoma was settled with a more honest class of people than are here today, as nothing of value would remain on a pole very long today.

Choctaw Avenue used to be called McDonald street and was named after a man by that name. This man said that the way the townsite was formed was not legal and that the land it was built on would always be in litigation. He suggested that the Government take it over and let the people run for the lots. It made the citizens so angry that they threatened to run him out of town so he left. Then they changed the name of McDonald Avenue to Choctaw Avenue. In the end, the Government did take it over and let them run for it, so McDonald's opinion was

justified. They never re-named the street for him, however. Reno City was so determined to kill El Reno, that they went to work and platted a forty acre tract on their side of the river and named it El Reno. When Governor Steele came here in 1890 he was met at the train by two delegations, both claiming to be from El Reno. He told them to take the Government post office El Reno for the County Seat and his decision was what killed Reno City.

More About Schools and her more Personal History

In 1892, teaching in El Reno, she had sixty-two pupils and said that sometimes she had some pupils from the superintendent's division making seventy-seven as their work overlapped and sometimes he taught some of her pupils.

In the winter of 1893 she taught at Pleasant Hill school south of Piedmont. From 1893 on to 1911 she taught in the El Reno schools, twenty-four years in all, counting the three taught in Arkansas.

In 1892 there was a colored school in the block south of the El Reno school. Miss De Baum has forgotten the name of the teacher of that school. She taught her third regular school in the old Oresham building that was located across

the street west of the present city hall. This school was taught in the winter of 1893. It was a frame building, sixteen by thirty-two feet, and so dilapidated the plastering would fall off and would weave back and forth when the wind blew. She taught twelve years in the Irving school. She taught the second and fourth grades.

In 1903 she was back teaching in one of the long buildings at Central school. She was Principal in the Webster school in 1909 and 1910 and taught the fifth and seventh grades.

She moved to Apache, Oklahoma, in 1911, and stayed there until 1920, then they moved back to El Reno to their present address, and have been here since then.

To induce the Rock Island Railroad to come to El Reno, the Railroad Company was given lots on both sides of Rock Island avenue from Foreman to Elm streets. The valuation was forty thousand dollars and land from the dividing line to the old freight depot. People who owned those lots were given substitute lots elsewhere in El Reno. The Choctaw Railroad got Choctaw Avenue in the same way with about the same valuation. When the Fort Smith and Western Railroad came, there was no land for them, but they were paid a sum of money instead.