

PENNEBAKER, J. D.

INTERVIEW

#4530

331

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INTERVIEW.

4530

Nora Lorrin,  
Interviewer  
June 23, 1937

Interview with Mr. J. D. Pennebaker  
602 North Evans, El Reno, Oklahoma.

Mr. J. D. Pennebaker was born on a farm in Scotland County, Missouri, near a small town called Etna, on July 13, 1868. Henry Clay Pennebaker, J. D. Pennebaker's father, was born near Bardstown, Kentucky, in 1831. His mother, Mrs. Susan Leslie Pennebaker, was also born near Bardstown, on August 12, 1827. His parents were married in Kentucky in 1852; they were married one day and started for Missouri the next.

They were farmers and Mr. Pennebaker was in and out of Missouri until he came to Oklahoma. They came to Oklahoma in 1893 because there didn't seem to be any place else to go. He and his father made the trip through in a covered wagon; they had just one wagon and one team. They came across the country to Baxter Springs, Kansas, then to Miami.

There should have been roads but there were not any. They came wherever they saw a wagon track

PENNEBAKER, J. D.

INTERVIEW.

4530

2

and sometimes would follow an Indian trail. They crossed the Verdigris, Grand and Arkansas rivers by ferry.

Mr. Pennebaker had a sister living near Banner and they landed there. His father bought a relinquishment from a man who had a claim five miles this side of Geary and they settled on this farm. At the time his father bought the farm there was nothing on it but a shack and some posts. The posts had been set in the ground but no wire had been put on them yet. They built a four room house, barn, out-buildings and had three wells, one of them was a windmill and the other two were just dug wells.

They dug one well sixty feet deep on top of a hill and the water rose forty feet in just a few minutes but unfortunately was very gypsy. They hauled water for a year and a half before they dug a well of their own. Mr. Pennebaker did not have many contacts with the Indians. He had a fuss with one of them though, an Indian named Red Horse. The Indian kept letting his ponies get into Mr. Pennebaker's

PENNEBAKER, J. D.

INTERVIEW.

4530

3

crops and they were doing a lot of damage and the Indian went and borrowed a Winchester. Mr. Pennebaker had told this Indian to keep his ponies out of the field but the Indian would not pay any attention to him so Mr. Pennebaker finally took the ponies up and told the Indian that he could not have the ponies until he paid the damage and that is when the Indian got his Winchester. This did not cause any bloodshed however.

In 1894 Mr. Pennebaker and some friends went to Caddo Springs and along the South Canadian River fishing. It rained and a wall of water ten feet high came down the river. They were up about Bridgeport and a bridge was under construction at the time and they crossed the river. Had they not crossed when they did they would have been marooned for a week, as the river was bank full and stayed that way quite awhile. About four miles up west of this bridge there was a crossing called the Stage Crossing. The stage made three trips a week from El Reno to Arapaho.

A couple of outlaws, Vic and Bert Casey, killed

PENNEBAKER, J. D.

INTERVIEW.

4530

4

Sam Farris, a constable at Yukon. They were "from up around Arapaho" and after Vic killed the constable, they were chased and Vic got shot in the heel but they got away and got back to Arapaho, but were finally caught and Mr. Pennebaker has the six gun that Vic Casey was shot with.

Mr. Todd ran a stage line from Fort Reno to Caldwell, Kansas, and was running it when Pat Hennessy was killed by the Indians.

In 1898 Mr. Pennebaker went back to Missouri on a visit, and while there met a girl named Hannah Renfrew; she later came to Oklahoma and they were married on August 1, 1901, near Geary. Their oldest daughter is an adopted child and they have two children of their own, a boy and a girl.

Mr. Pennebaker knew an Indian by the name of Black Coyote, Arapaho, and chief of Indian Police. He knew a friendly Indian named "Red Wolf" and another named Charley Campbell, and another one called "Coyote" had a squaw who was a clean housekeeper and a good cook and Mr. Pennebaker often ate with them and they always seemed to be glad to have him come. The squaw

PENNEBAKER, J. D.

INTERVIEW.

4530

5

made bread by patting it like the Mexicans do.

"Coyote" would say "Good bread". The squaw did not like dirty Indians, and she'd say "No good!" and make a negative gesture with her hand and say "Dirty! No good!" A man named "Dutch Jake", a squaw man, had a ranch about four miles from Lr. Pennebaker's farm.

There used to be a ranch owned by Gill Frass, called the Frass Ranch. It was located this side of Calumet; Gill Frass was also a squaw man. He gathered up a bunch of cattle and pastured Indian land as well as his own and sold beef to the Government as well as to the Indians.

The Government used to issue beef to the Indians every two weeks; between beef issues would issue groceries every two weeks and it kept the Indians on the jump as they would no sooner get home with their beef when they would have to go back after their groceries.

El Reno was the greatest wholesale point in the western Territory, just about all the freight for western Oklahoma was obtained here and the

PENNEBAKER, J. D.

INTERVIEW.

4530

6

freighters used mule teams. It was nothing uncommon for a freighter to have twelve head of mules hitched to a freight wagon and sometimes he would have more than that. Mr. Pennebaker saw a freighter with a six mule team once who was hauling a little rocking chair and that was all he had.

There used to be an Indian burial ground south of Geary along the South Canadian River where there were a few Indians buried.

At one time there were some Indians buried in a tree about half way between El Reno and Geary, probably members of a different tribe than those Indians who were living here at the time; a habit the Indians had was hunting a place close to a creek or stream to bury their dead.

A very destructive hail storm struck the Pennebakers in 1901 and he had in 640 acres of the best wheat he had ever raised and the hail storm struck just a short time before the wheat was ready to be harvested. Mr. Pennebaker was harvesting what was left of the wheat with the aid of

PENNEBAKER, J. D.

INTERVIEW.

4530

7

twenty-five or thirty men when they got word that the land drawing date was set and his men all wanted to go and register. Mr. Pennebaker was afraid that if he let them go by themselves they would stay, so he hitched up and took them and all of them came back with him. They all registered but of all the men who registered, only three got claims and Mr. Pennebaker did not get one either.

Mr. Pennebaker owned only the hundred and sixty acre farm, but he leased a lot of Indian land. He went with his father to live on that farm in 1893 and left it in 1907. He was elected Clerk of the District Court in 1907 during "Statehood" and held the office for two terms which covered five years.

He has been justice of the peace for several years and was in the abstract business here for fifteen or sixteen years. His health began failing in 1916 and it has steadily grown worse until he has had to give up all work.