



HEFLEY, JESSE L.

INTERVIEW

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Grant Foreman  
Director S-149  
April 30, 1938

Interview with Jesse L. Hefley,  
215 W. Eufaula,  
Norman, Oklahoma.

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The following interview was se-  
cured from a questionnaire sub-  
mitted by Mr. Hefley.

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I was born in Montgomery County, Illinois, in the year, 1866, my parents being Jefferson L. and Margaret C. Hefley, white.

We came to Oklahoma Territory in June, 1888, though I had often been in the Territory from 1871 on. We came by covered wagon through Missouri, settling first in southern Kansas near the south boundary line of that state. From this proximity we had considerable acquaintance with Oklahoma.

I was in the race at the opening of the Potawatomie Country, of the Cherokee Strip and of the Comanche-Kiowa Reservation.

My father was quite a hunter and I often went with him. In that way I knew game and fish condi-

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tions quite well in several places in Oklahoma. I also knew the Hunnewell and Caldwell Trails out of Kansas to Cantonment and Fort Sill pretty well and I knew a great deal about freighting in the early days. I also knew a lot about the cattle industry in the '80s. I lived in rather close contact with the opening of all the Indian lands. I have been acquainted some with Indians all my life and know some of their manners and customs. As a pioneer and early settler and a continuous citizen I have had personal experiences rather characteristic of such a life. \*

Miss Clark in her personal note urges me to write up some of these. This I hesitate to do for I can see no sense in which they could be of historical value. I have seen the good years and the bad, the overflows and the droughts, the blizzards and the cyclones, the sand storms and the sunset but these are things that nearly all of us have seen. I could probably add nothing to what has been often told. If, however, you think there is any specific thing or things that I might help with, I will be glad to do my best.

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Miss Winifred Clark, working on Indian-Pioneer History Project S-149, has added the following information about Mr. Hefley's family:

While attending the University of Oklahoma I made my home with the Hefley family on the west of Norman. I was told many of their personal experiences.

Mr. Jefferson L. Hefley was the father of eight children: Jesse, Harold, Charley, John, Ranie, Nora, Bell and Nell. Mr. and Mrs. Hefley, with some of the older children, came into Oklahoma Territory in 1888, before the first opening. Mr. Hefley was employed by the Santa Fe Railroad as Section foreman, and the family lived in a two-story frame house, close to the track, built on land that they claimed.

Sometime after I first met them, in the early '90s, a lawyer brought a contest suit against them, as they were judged to be Sooners. Several of the children were down with typhoid fever. The people who won the case had no mercy, but, receiving right of possession from the Court, proceeded to remove those sick children from their home to tents.

The people of Norman, who knew the Hefleys

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well, were so incensed at this action that they organized to help them by bringing teams, wagons and implements to remove the orchard, by cutting the roots and limbs, and transplant it to five acres of land that had been given to the Hefley family by the town of Norman. They also removed all improvements, including the house. Mr. Hefley was so grateful to these people for their kindness. He used to show me the beautiful trees in bloom and say: "They are old, like me, now. I think their hard experience helped to make them stronger."

When the Hefleys were settled on their five acres west of Norman, Harold and his father farmed on rented land. I remember when Harold tried to plant cotton and the strong wind blew the seed out of the ground, he bought a sack of cheap flour, put it in the large dish pan, rolled the cotton seed in it and sprinkled it until each seed was covered with dough. It had to be planted by hand but it stayed in the ground.

Harold was the bread earner while Jesse and John went to school. He tried anything that would bring in the dollars. He made brick, between

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planting and harvest time. His brick kiln was near the house, close to a little creek; at one time when ready to close the kiln, he worked without sleep for four days. It was near commencement time at the University, and he was anxious to hear the cornet soloist. He said he would go that night and was sure that he could stay awake, but he slept through the performance, and when we came home he threw himself on the bed and slept three days and nights without food. Harold was a natural musician but had no opportunity to develop his ability beyond what he could teach himself on the cornet.

The University had a Normal Course for teachers. John was there six years, finishing the Normal and four years of college, and after getting his degree, made teaching his profession, becoming principal of several important schools including Central High in Muskogee.