

RUSSELL, WILEY

INTERVIEW

#8917

217

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INTERVIEW. BIOGRAPHY FORM

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

8917

Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Virgil Coursey

This report made on (date) October 12, 193 7

1. Name Mr. Wiley Russell

2. Post Office Address Altus, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 1219 North Hudson.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month November Day 17 Year 1894

5. Place of Birth Oklahoma.

6. Name of Father E. C. Russell Place of birth Arkansas

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Ellen Baucum Place of birth Tennessee

Other information about mother _____

Notes or comments on report. Write the story of the life and story of the subject as suggested. Refer to notes or suggested subjects only. Attach photographs and other material if possible and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached _____

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An Interview with Mr. Wiley Russell, Altus, Okla.
By - Virgil Coursey - Field Worker.
October 12, 1937

My father, E. C. Russell, came to this country in 1889, and helped found the little town of Frazier. This was Greer County, Texas, then and was very sparsely settled. Frazier was really a place which served as a stop-over for cowboys to drink buttermilk at the home of Uncle Joe McClaren. In fact the cowboys named the place Buttermilk Station and it was so called until the Government gave it the name of Frazier when a postoffice was established there.

Uncle Joe McClaren carried the mail from Vernon to Frazier for some time and his daughter, Mrs. Holt, was the first postmistress there.

In 1890, my father opened a jewelry store at Frazier and it is still open today in Altus. The cost of this first enterprise would probably have a value of ten dollars and all his equipment for repairing watches could have been placed in a cigar box.

After the flood of 1891, the town was moved east

to the present site of Altus. The jewelry business was for some time conducted in the front of J. D. Pendleton's Drug Store.

Father hauled freight from Vernon at times and also sold water-cooled refrigerators. The records of his business indicate that fifteen dollars was a big month's business for watch repairing in the early days.

My father was the first tax assessor for old Greer County and when he took office taxes were low, never exceeding \$1.12 on the \$100.00 and people were so scattered that it took nine months to complete the assessing and the making of the tax rolls. Father received a letter from the state Comptroller, congratulating him on the neatness of his rolls, which were, the letter stated, the neatest from any county in Texas. When my father ran for tax assessor a second term he won the office by one vote.

While out campaigning near Mangum, Father spent the night with an old bachelor who had "never voted

and never intended to". But as Father was leaving the next morning, the old man said that he believed he would "just go vote for you". A check revealed that the vote of this old bachelor won the office for my father.

In 1890, my father undertook many different lines of business. He was editor of the Altus Plain Dealer, a two page newspaper. The front page was all advertising, mostly land notices. Father did everything about the paper; he gathered news and advertising, set the type and ran the paper off, using an old George Washington press.

He and W. C. Jarboe built a telephone line from Mangum, the county seat of Greer County, on into Altus. They used the services of an old man named Mathews, who was a fiddler and who would fiddle at nights as they camped along the new telephone line.

Father owned the first automobile in Altus; it was a second hand one, a "Tux Toledo", costing \$400.00, and it only ran about one quarter of a mile when it broke down.