

PRESSNELL, ALVA.

INTERVIEW

10092

28

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

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Field Worker's name Linnaeus B. Ranck.

This report made on (date) February 17, 1933. 1933

1. Name Alva Pressnell.

2. Post Office Address Gage, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) _____

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month August Day 8 Year 1861.

5. Place of birth Iowa.

6. Name of Father _____ Place of birth _____

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother _____ Place of birth _____

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 _____.

PRESSNELL, ALVA.

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10092

Linnaeus B. Ranck,
Investigator,
February 17, 1938.

Interview with Alva Pressnell,
Gage, Oklahoma.

I was born in Iowa, August 8, 1861. During the late '90's I came to Kansas where I taught two terms of school in Sheridan County in a sod schoolhouse. The late Winter of 1901 I struck out for Oklahoma Territory with a view to homesteading. I landed at Kingfisher broke and while I was lounging in a Kingfisher hotel lobby one night I happened to pick up a newspaper in which I observed a brief account of progress in Day County. Of particular interest to me was the representation that the census of Day County at the turn of the century showed a population exceeding 2,000 people, and that in the county there still remained much unpre-empted public land. Thereupon, the next morning I started for Grand, the county seat of Day County, on foot, carrying my suitcase which contained all of my earthly possessions.

My route took me through Watonga which at that time had no railroad. The grade through the town was about complete,

PRESSNELL, ALVA.

INTERVIEW.

10092.

-2-

however. On to Anadarko I plodded, catching a ride now and then for a few miles, but walking most of the way. I finally reached the little post office of Lenore in Dewey County. At Lenore the settlers told me that Dewey County westward was the jumping off place, and that those who ventured further west never returned. I walked most of the way, over trails and the open prairies, spending my nights enroute at the homes of settlers and ranchmen and finally arrived at Grand the latter part of March 1901. Grand was a "blustery" place; Day County being naturally a cowman's country, the ranchmen and the multiplying settlers were at grips one with the other over the herd law and the free-range questions.

During April of 1901 I filed on a claim several miles northwest of Grand and within the ranch of M. F. Word. The winter of 1901 and 1902 I taught the one-room school of Grand. Before the school term expired I deemed it necessary to sharply discipline a certain stalwart youth of the school. The afternoon of the following day a couple of cowboys, sympathizers of the recalcitrant boy, got gloriously drunk in Grand and proceeded to the schoolhouse on saddlehorses

PRESSNELL, ALVA.

INTERVIEW,

10092.

-3-

with a view of "roping" me, dragging me out of the old schoolhouse, and threshing me soundly. In dead earnest, one of the daring cowpunchers advanced so far in attempting to carry out the intent of the pair, that he had his horse started over the threshold of my classroom, but I repulsed him, for I had fortified myself with a heavy steel stove-poker.

Came 1902 and another biennial election for Day County. The cowmen were still in control of Day County and its local Government, and making a determined and last stand in Day County against the settlers. The one and only issue in the politics of Day County during the campaign of 1902 was the herd-law question. Necessity and agitation had forced a distinct line of cleavage between the two opposing elements of Day County's citizenry which, by 1902, brought the final test of the two factions' relative strength. In the main the settlers of Day County were herd law men. The summer of 1902 they were active in organizing for the coming fall election. It seems that one "Sol" Grim, who resided on a homestead south of the Canadian River, was one of the principal leaders of

PRESSNELL, ALVA.

INTERVIEW.

10092.

~~4~~

the herd law section of Day County's citizenship. A preliminary meeting of herd law men was held at the homestead residence of Sol Grim. I attended and, as I was active in behalf of the herd law element, I took an active part in the meeting. At this conclave it was decided to hold a county convention for nominating a herd law ticket for Day County to go before the voters in the coming election. But where should this convention meet? That was a question. In the courthouse at Grand, the county seat, appeared the logical place from one point of view; but that was the stronghold and the place, as it were, of the free range men, so Grand, therefore, would not do. At the suggestion of Alva Pressnell it was decided the convention should be held in the Packsaddle schoolhouse, situated on the north side of the river several miles east of Grand. Many settlers with their families foregathered at the Packsaddle schoolhouse the day before the convention. In fact, most of those who attended the meeting arrived the day before and all camped over night about the vicinity adjacent to the schoolhouse. The next day in convention assembled the herd law men nominated a

PRESSNELL, ALVA.

INTERVIEW.

10092.

-5-

complete county ticket and in the general election that followed every candidate on their ticket except for the county sheriff was elected. This defeat of the free range element in old Day County ~~was~~ the final and complete liquidation of the power and influence of the county's cowmen.