

FRY, POLK SR.

INTERVIEW

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Indian-Pioneer History
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INTERVIEW WITH POLK FRY, SR.
North 11th. Street, Frederick

On the 19th day of January, 1903, I rode the famous Boss Line train into Oklahoma from Texas to cast my lot with the Pioneers who had drawn this land in the government lottery and had come here to make their future homes.

Being a young man who had just reached his majority and feeling that the whole world was before me to be explored I naturally was very enthusiastic and anxious to arrive at a place where the antelope roamed and the coyote howled, where the mirage fooled the tenderfoot and made him wonder what it was all about. I was one of the tenderfeet who had never seen a mirage but had heard a lot about them and had also heard this part of Oklahoma was noted for them. The joke was on me, for it was raining when we crossed the old Red River into this country but it did not keep me from beginning my search for the mirage. You can imagine my chagrin when I learned that you only saw them on bright, sunny days.

Another experience that I had the morning after arriving here will long be remembered by me. The morning dawned bright and clear and I looked at the mountains some twenty miles north of Frederick and they looked so close that I told my brother I thought I would run over to them before breakfast. They looked no more than a mile away. You can imagine how I felt when he told me they were just twenty miles.

He also told me a story about a tenderfoot that had arrived in this country a few weeks before that and had tried the same stunt of walking to them before breakfast but did not make his intentions known to anyone. Sometime after noon one of the freighters traveling across the prairie between here and the mountains found this man disrobing by the side of a small stream about six feet across. He asked him what he was doing and why he did not step across the stream. The fellow said, "You are not fooling me any more in this country. I started to walk to those mountains this morning before breakfast and I know from the way that looks that it must be at least three hundred yards across this river."

When I arrived in Frederick there were seven saloons, four or five grocery stores, about the same number of dry goods stores and two drug stores. The population was about three hundred.

I want to state here that the churches had arrived also and believe me they were doing some very fine work. The schools, too, were doing good work and people were starting to build one of the best lands known to the human race. They had arrived from Maine to Mexico, and this was truly the melting pot of the American people who were looking for homes. You never asked a man his name the second time and you accepted him for the life he was living at present. You never thought of class or creed but accepted everyone as your equal until they proved otherwise. It was a grand life, even though we did not all have the conveniences of modern times.

One of the greatest sports of the early day was chasing wolves with greyhounds. This is the part of Oklahoma where the famous Jack Abernathy staged his famous wolf hunt for President Theodore Roosevelt. Their camp was at Panther Springs,

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about ten miles from Frederick on Deep Red Creek or River. This beautiful ~~camping~~ place still stands, almost exactly as it was at that time.

Practically all our streams were full of fish, speaking in the fisherman's language.

There was one thing that made you really watch your step in the early days of this country and that was the rattlesnake. I don't believe there was ever a place where more of the reptiles existed, but strange to say, there were very few people bitten by them. The stock suffered more than the people from snakes.

I will state here that I came from the town in Texas named after the famous Chief Nocona, and naturally, being so close to where his son, Chief Quanah Parker, lived I was very much interested in the Indians of this part of Oklahoma more than any others and I was very much disappointed to find no Indians in the immediate vicinity of Frederick and I was here for possibly six months before we had any Indian visitors.

About a year after arriving here we had a picnic and promised the Indians a number of fat steers

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if they would make us a visit. Chief Quaneh Parker brought down a hundred or more and spent four or five days with us in Tillman County, but at that time it was Comanche County. I was delighted to have the opportunity to see the famous Chief Quaneh Parker and his family. One of his wives, I believe they called her "TOO NICEY"; was there with him at that time and possibly others also. I believe that he had one girl that was possibly four or five years old that looked very much like him and she had light brown hair and was very pretty. It was so long ago that I might be incorrect with regard to the names of some of the Indians who visited us at that time.

The farmers of this county prospered almost from the first day although the county was so infested with prairie dogs that they almost destroyed everything you planted unless you stood by with a gun. I have often said that had the prairie dog been named Prairie Squirrel, there would never have been hungry persons in this part of Oklahoma in the early days, especially for meat. I have it on good

authority that they are as good eating as any squirrel ever cooked.

In the early days of this county we raised an abundance of corn. I have seen it stacked for blocks and as many as seven corn shellers running at one time within the city limits. But as the county grew the cotton acreage grew also. This county has stood third in the production of cotton in Oklahoma for many years; 1936 was one of the poorest years in more than thirty years and we produced less than fifteen thousand acres in 1936.

Calling to mind one of the early occurrences, reminds me of the first year after the settling of this country by the homesteaders. There was what was called the Big Pasture or land that had not been thrown open for settlement. It was about five miles east of Frederick and I think there was something like 150,000 acres. The cattle barons that had this country leased before settlement had this land stocked with cattle and naturally when they started moving these cattle from the land it took an army of cowboys to do this

work. The pioneers will never forget when they started moving their saddle horses and their camps into that land for they chased their horses through the streets of our little town and believe me, we stayed inside our places of business to get out of the way of that some three or four hundred head of horses and cowboys. The cow punchers made us a number of visits and on one occasion they put on quite a show and like to have caused some serious trouble. I have never seen as many guns at one time drawn for action as at that time but through the cool headedness of our grand old city marshal and a few of the leading citizens a tragedy was averted. It finally ended up with four or five in the old wooden calaboose and a compromise; the boss taking his men and riding out of town and everybody happy.

When the Big ~~Prairie~~, east of town, was opened in 1907 for settlement, I was one of the lucky bidders on the land. While I have spent most of my time in the drug business I am proud that I spent the time on this land as a homesteader. I shall never forget the coyotes

serenading me nightly and how very lonesome those days and nights were when out there alone.

In the early days this part of Oklahoma abounded in game for the hunter. Besides the sport of shooting dogs with the small fife, there was the wild duck, wild geese, squirrels, quail, curlew, badgers, wolves, bobcats and many other wild animals and fowls. There is today some quail hunting and few other fowls, although we are so regulated in our hunting seasons that it is hardly worth the owning of a gun or hunting dog. Of course, it is through these drastic hunting laws that we have any game left for there are always those who would destroy all game for the love of killing.

Oklahoma to me is the greatest place on earth. I do not understand why, but it gets in your blood after thirty-four years here, and I like it and the people better everyday. I am glad that my children are educated in Oklahoma for I feel that we have one of the greatest educational systems and some of the greatest institutions of learning in this state that exist. I am proud of Oklahoma, I am proud of the people that inhabit it.