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BORNEMANN, KARL

INTERVIEW

4949

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

Field Worker's name Anna R. Barry

This report made on (date) July 19 1937

1. Name Karl Bornemann

2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 1011 South Macomb Street

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month April Day 12 Year 1865

5. Place of birth Groszelsback, Germany.

6. Name of Father Ernest Bornemann Place of birth Germany

Other information about father Remained in Germany

7. Name of Mother Susie Bornemann Place of birth Germany

Other information about mother Remained in Germany

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 \_\_\_\_\_.

Anna R. Barry  
Interviewer,  
July 19, 1937.

Interview with Karl Bornemann  
1011 South Macomb Street  
El Reno, Oklahoma.

I was born at Groswelsbach, Germany, on April 12, 1863. When a lad of ten years old I came to the United States to live with an uncle in the state of Michigan. Here I spent my early boyhood. At the age of twenty-one, I left the northern states and drifted into Montana as a cowpuncher. I came to the southwestern country in the spring of 1887, my first employment being for the O. K. Cattle Company in Hardemann County, Texas, on the Pecos River.

The first herd of cattle I drove over the Chisholm Trail was in the spring of 1887, and I can still point out many of the old landmarks along the route. It was a bright morning in early May, 1887, when we rounded up a herd of twenty-five hundred head of cattle from their bedding ground of the night before. This herd wore the brand of their native ranch, O. K., burned upon their hips when they were calves. We had journeyed east past Quanah, Texas, and crossed the Red River into the Indian Territory. We hit the Chisholm Trail at Monument Hill. The trip so far had been

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uneventful, the weather had been fair, there had been no stampedes, and the herd was now "trail broke". So far it had been an ideal trip. Our outfit consisted of a boss, or foreman, seven cowboys, a horse-wrangler, and a cook, whose duty it was to cook and to look after the chuck wagon. Each morning the cattle would spread out and graze slowly ahead. The chuck wagon was followed by the horse wrangler and horses and passed on ahead of the herd and the foreman rode on to survey the route ahead, always trying to locate water and the best places to cross the rivers. It is a well known fact among the cowboys of large herds of cattle that each animal in the herd settles near the same location in the herd while on the drive each day. Another thing is when you round them ready to start on the trip the leaders, that start on first, will still be at the head of the herd when you arrive at your destination.

As we slowly traveled along the Chisholm Trail, we came to the old Duncan store. The boss had told the driver of the chuck wagon to move out about seven miles from Duncan store and to have our supper ready when we arrived, and here we would camp for the night. The chuck wagon was an ordinary wagon, covered with wagon bows and wagon sheet, very

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similar to the wagons used by the pioneers. In the end of this wagon was what was known as the "chuck box". It had a door with hinges at the bottom, and, when let back, served as a sort of table on which the plates and food could be set. A cowboy usually ate by taking such food as he wanted on his plate in one hand, a tin cup filled with hot, black coffee in the other, then found a good location to sit and enjoy his meal. If the ground was wet, we stood while we ate. I don't remember ever seeing a stove on the range in those days; fires were built on the ground with either wood or cow chips.

As we traveled along each day, the cattle grazed slowly along, gradually moving closer together, and the string grew longer until our herd was about one-half mile in length, and each animal had settled into its own place. We came on near the present site of Marlow, then on up to Cook Brothers Store; we came on, crossed the Washita River near the old Rock Crossing. We then reached Tuttle. We were nearing the South Canadian River. This river was considered very treacherous in those days, on account of the quicksand. Not a cloud was seen in the sky, and the sun shone brightly in the east, telling us another beautiful spring day was in sight.

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The boss rode on ahead to the South Canadian River to pick a place to cross and in about two hours he came riding back, said the river was up, and rising fast and it was doubtful if we could cross. He knew if we didn't get across now, it would be a several days wait for the river to go down. At last after much argument and discussion, we decided to try it. Our foreman tried to assign us each a place along with the herd, yelled for us all to do our best, as we each took our place. We plunged into the flood of cold water as our turn came. Our horses lunged through the water, tossed by the waves of the raging river, where sticks, brush, logs and foam swept down crowding our herd from its course in crossing. The cattle became frightened, wild and unmanageable. After we had landed, we looked like a bunch of half drowned rats, all shivering, but our work wasn't completed. We yet had to return and help bring the wagon across; two of us went back to help get the chuck wagon across; the boy who had charge of the wagon was a timid, kid-like cowboy. He insisted that I drive the team and he would ride my horse. We made it over just fine. Of course almost everything in the wagon was wet, but we didn't mind, we had conquered the South Canadian once more.

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We then came by the way of Yukon and here we left the Chisholm Trail, drove our cattle over to where Britton now stands, then on to Edmond, then to Guthrie, on thirty or forty miles east of Guthrie to the Iowa Indian Reservation, our destination.

Again, in 1888, I helped to drive another herd of cattle over the Chisholm Trail, I won't go into detail so much as nothing eventful happened this time; we followed the Trail on to Dover, crossed the Cimarron River near Dover, on up to Hennessey then on to Skelton Creek near Enid, our destination.

At this time travel over the Chisholm Trail was at its height; this was back in the years before the opening of Oklahoma. The town of Silver City was a very important little city. It consisted of a store, blacksmith shop and a hotel. Mail was carried from Fort Reno and Darlington to the post office established there. The South Canadian River was crossed at two points, the main cattle crossing being a little to the northeast of Silver City; while in high water, the Bond Crossing, about a mile and a half upstream from the town, was used.

In the latter months of 1888 and up until the first of April, 1889, I worked on the Bull Foot Ranch, near Arkansas City. During this time, all the talk was the opening of the Indian Territory for settlement. New people were

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moving toward Oklahoma, coming from Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, in fact from almost every state in the Union.

A colony of people had for a time located near the Bull Foot Ranch, where I worked. I had made up my mind to give up the life of a cowboy and make the run for a claim at the Opening. At first we thought we would make the run from the north side, but weeks before the Opening, people just poured in. They came in wagons, buggies, on horseback, on burros and afoot. Ten of us thought we could do better if we could make the run from El Reno, we were afraid to come in our wagons for fear we would make "Sooners" of ourselves, so we chartered a train car, loaded wagons, teams, bedding, a few farm implements, well anything we could crowd into the car. We shipped this to Purcell. Here we unloaded, hitched our teams to our two wagons, and traveled up the South Canadian River to the Bob Curtis Ranch, which is located southwest of El Reno. We landed near Darlington, April 16, 1889, ready for the Opening.

People just poured in, camping near Fort Reno and Darlington. I can see them now as they came in the big covered wagons with a dozen different things tied on the outside. I can still see the tired, lame horses, and three or four limping dogs behind, but those people all seemed to be happy and

and willing to face the hardships we later met.

On the morning of April 22, 1889, every one in camp was up early, cooking breakfast, hitching up horses, putting saddles on some of the finest of race horses; everything was in a stir, getting ready for one of the biggest races in history. We decided we would make the run from the north side of the Canadian River. Hours before the signal people began to form in lines, and as the time neared twelve o'clock noon, what an excited bunch of people there were! The soldiers worked hard to keep the people under control, but at times they became almost unmanageable. At ten minutes of twelve o'clock the soldiers shouted, "Everyone on the lines". At twelve o'clock the cannon at Fort Reno roared, the soldiers shot off their guns, and the big race was on.

I had bought a horse and saddle at Silver City, on the way up from Purcell, to make the "Run" on, and I can truthfully say I was just a little nervous, too, but as the crowd ran along together the first few hundred yards, I realized I was going to <sup>have to</sup> get away from this crowd if I staked a claim, so I branched out more to the east, running over ravines, hills and gullies, not knowing where I would land. I came to several claims I could have staked, but thought I could get

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a better one, which I did. I staked my claim five miles east and one mile south of where the little town of Banner now stands, in Canadian County.

I at once started to work, built a log house twelve by twelve feet. I didn't have a stove, and no money to buy one, so I made a fireplace out of sticks and mud. I cut poles about three feet long, about six inches in diameter, mixed a stiff mud, cut grass very fine, mixed it good with this mud and rolled each pole in this mud, covering them good and put them in the sun to dry. In a day or two this mud was as hard as cement. I then went to work building my fireplace, which I built in pigpen fashion. The first year, I borrowed a sod plow from a neighbor, broke out a few patches and planted corn and turnips.

Life was beginning in a new country; nearly every quarter was being taken, new people were moving in. The school house was being constructed. Everyone donated his work. We cut the cottonwood poles, <sup>and</sup> finally got a sawmill to make the cottonwood slabs. This school was established in 1891, about two miles south of the little town of Cereal, now Banner. This school was called Banner. Miss Etta Dale was the first teacher, C. W. Barnes was president of the school board and C. A. Mundell secretary.

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They agreed to pay Miss Dale a monthly salary of thirty-five dollars. This was Miss Dale's first contract as a teacher. Each Friday night they packed into this little school house for the literary, filling the seats and benches and sometimes we had spelling matches from the old blue backed Webster's spelling book. We had lots of fun; people coming for miles to take part in those programs.

The second year I bought a team on credit from a friend of mine. That year I broke out more sod, planted some wheat, corn and a few oats. I cut prairie grass and hay and sold it in El Reno for four dollars per ton; it was loose hay.

In 1891, the first wheat crop was raised in our neighborhood by a man named William Townsley, who lived on school land. William (Bill) Darlington was at this time an Indian farmer among the Indians. He brought a little threshing machine over from Darlington and threshed this wheat.

We encountered many hardships in the early day, but we had true friends and neighbors; when disaster or death fell upon a home everyone for miles around laid his work aside and went to help his neighbor. If we needed medicine, coffee or flour, and if the weather was bad

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and we couldn't get to town, we gladly shared with each other.

In 1902, I married, reared our six children in this community. I sold my claim in 1925, became discouraged because I had sold it, I then purchased the farm joining my claim. Several years ago we moved to El Reno to educate our children and today we are very proud that we live in Canadian County as pioneers.