

MUSGROVE, CLYDE. INTERVIEW 4153

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

MUSGROVE, CLYDE.

INTERVIEW.

4153.

Field Worker's name Anna R. Barry.

This report made on (date) May 20, 1937. 1937

Name Clyde Musgrove.

Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma.

Residence address (or location) _____

DATE OF BIRTH: Month December Day 11 Year 1874.

Place of birth South Haven, Kansas.

Name of Father Jacob R. Musgrove. Place of birth Jackson County, Ohio.

Other information about father _____

Name of Mother Isabella Musgrove. 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 9.

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Anna R. Barry,
Field Worker,
May 20, 1937.

An Interview With Clyde Musgrove,
El Reno, Oklahoma.

My father in 1870. moved into the sparsely settled and undeveloped district of Southern Kansas. In 1872 he opened one of the first stores at Winfield, Kansas, and in 1873 he founded the town of South Haven on the border line between Sumner and Cowley Counties. For a number of years he was one of the leading merchants along the south Kansas border, erecting stores at Old Salt City and South Haven. His stores along the border of the Indian Territory were conducted largely as Indian trading posts and in the early days he organized and maintained an ox-wagon freighting train for the hauling of supplies to the Fort Reno and Darlington Agency.

In 1889, my father participated in the original Oklahoma Opening and located at old Reno City. I was fifteen years old then. The railroad avoided Reno City, and we moved to the present city of El Reno having acquired a homestead right near the town of El Reno.

When eighteen years of age I entered a printing office and learned the trade. In 1896 I established and for five years was editor of the "News" at El Reno.

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El Reno is entitled to credit for being the central point in the vast land movements which brought hundreds of thousands of citizens from all over the nation to secure free farms and lots.

Although not platted as a townsite during the opening of 1889 when six counties in central Oklahoma were thrown open to settlement, El Reno sprang up a few months after the opening and soon superseded ill-fated Reno City, located on the lowlands two miles north of here, which was the location selected for a city which would be nearest to Fort Reno.

So, despite her late start in the race for supremacy against those cities which came into being on April 22, 1889, El Reno was destined to play the leading role in the new rush for homes. The ninety-eighth meridian which bisects El Reno and Canadian County, was the starting line for the first two big races. It marked the western boundary of the area included in the original Opening, and since the military forces at Fort Reno had control over the policing of the territory in advance of the Opening,

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Canadian County played a most significant part in the historical event.

On the day of the run, thousands of the homeseekers lined up on the West side of the meridian and with the sounding of the signal guns by the soldiers, the dash was started which led thousands of citizens into the eastern half of Canadian County.

Making up for lost time after her delayed start, El Reno turned into a railroad center when the Rock Island came in from the North and the Choctaw from the East. When Congress authorized the opening of the Cheyenne and Arapaho country on April 19, 1892, El Reno was in a location to attract the prospective settlers into that new country. This time, the homeseekers lined up on the East side of the meridian line, and when the zero hour arrived, they swept westward to snap up the fertile farms in the large area to the west of El Reno and the west half of Canadian County, except East and West Walnut townships, was added.

The location of the county seat in El Reno after a bitter battle with Frisco City, gave El Reno an added

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force, and with the doubling of the size of the county by the Cheyenne and Arapaho opening, the business of the courthouse located here gained rapidly. The fertility of this section caused a heavy flowing of substantial citizens desiring to locate permanently on the farms, and by 1901 El Reno had reached a population of approximately five thousand.

This was the year of the big drawing, the greatest land lottery ever held in the United States and more than one hundred thousand people gathered at El Reno during the registration period, while twenty-five thousand were present at Irving school on the day of the drawing August 6, 1901.

El Reno had thus had a leading role in the three most dramatic mass settlement movements of history. The ninety-eighth meridian, which passes through the city North and South on a line just east of the Rock Island depot, has played a fateful part in the history of El Reno.

Fort Reno and Darlington also played leading roles in the play which converted the lonely prairies into settled communities almost overnight. The military department was

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most necessary in helping to maintain order, to keep out the Sooners and to police the areas while the settlers were gathering. The Indian agency at Darlington was required to look after the interests of the Indians after they were deprived of their reservations.

From 1889-1903 the early sod houses, dugouts, and log cabins had been replaced in most cases by comfortable farm houses, and agriculture and stock-raising were in a thriving condition. Many of the tiny villages of earlier days had grown to be flourishing towns. And today are fair sized cities. By this time the standard and scale of living of the people had advanced greatly; and the territory as a whole had grown quite prosperous.

I will offer a few reminders of early day journalism in Oklahoma. When Dave Payne and his original colony of Boomers drove into the Cherokee Strip and settled at Rock Falls, near the present site of Braman in Kay County he brought with him a Washington hand press and a few fonts of type and founded the first newspaper actually printed in old Oklahoma. This colony was soon broken up and moved out by the Federal authorities, but Payne's Boomers

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came back again and again until Congress finally opened the country to settlement.

Payne's paper was called the "War Chief" and during the intervals in which Payne was held in Fort Smith, the printing plant of the "War Chief" was stored in the ware room back of my father's store in South Haven, Kansas just north of the border. I remember the electrotype heading with its war-bonneted Indian and the date line which indicated Vol. 1, No. 3, which I think was about as many issues as the soldiers allowed them to get out.

At the time, Oklahoma was opened, April 22, 1889, the Greers of Winfield, Kansas, were the most prominent newspaper folk in southern Kansas, except the Murdocks of Wichita and as the proposed town of Guthrie was organized largely by Winfield and Arkansas City men and it was agreed that the Greers should have the town paper. They accordingly laid down the forms for the first edition of the "Oklahoma State Capitol" in the Winfield Courier office and on the afternoon of April 22, the first paper of the new territory appeared, printed in red ink, among the tented streets of Guthrie the edition having been printed in

Winfield and brought in on the first train with the townsite officers.

A shack was quickly thrown together and in a few days the "State Capitol" appeared from its own plant with Frank Greer in charge.

Running a newspaper in Oklahoma during the early days was what the insurance underwriters now would term "extra hazardous". It was not a vocation exactly suited to one with nerves; rather, it was one that required nerve--and plenty of it. Charley Barrett said he used to spend all day Friday getting out the paper and all day Saturday fighting as a result of what the paper contained.

Those were the good old days before the freedom of the press had been violated by the unholy libel laws and when it was legally proper to call an offending citizen as many varieties of unpedigreed hound as the sorts in a font would allow. Those good old days were also gun-toting days when the open season for shooting editors lasted twelve months in a year. One remarkable fact in nearly every case was that after one of these six-shooter arguments the editor would come back and wield a vitriolic pen that was more deadly than the bad man's gun.

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T. F. Hensley who could use language that would melt the rollers on his Cotteral press, incurred the displeasure of the Jennings family by some of his criticisms of their official shortcomings. The elder Jennings was a County Judge and a son, Al, was County Attorney. Hensley was warned to look out for the Jennings crowd, but went on about his business, part of which business was to publish further facts not entirely complimentary to Judge Jennings and his son, the prosecuting attorney. Hensley was coming out of the post office one day when the Jennings family got him. Hensley didn't have time to draw; besides they had ambushed him and there were three of them; when the surgeon finished sewing him up Hensley called for his stenographer and began dictating copy for an extra; the edition was circulated on the streets and broadcast; it is doubtful whether an unexpurgated edition could have gone through the mails. One edition followed another, each disclosing more official rotteness until public sentiment was aroused. Hensley's office when editor of the "El Reno Democrat" looked like an armory at times and his usual paperweight was a blue barreled six-shooter.

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Before Hensley "let up" the Jennings crowd had been run out of the country, defeated and discredited as outcasts and outlaws. Outlaws they were, in fact too, flourishing for a time in the Indian Territory as the Jennings gang of train robbers.

The old days are past and column rules have been turned for many of the friends of those older days. Those old times were such as tried men's souls; we would not want to go through them again, but looking back, we know we wouldn't have missed them for worlds.

I am now senior clerk at the El Reno post office, and editor and owner of the "El Reno News".

The "El Reno News" was the forerunner of the "El Reno American" which was founded in 1896 and the name of the newspaper was changed from the "El Reno American" to the "El Reno Daily American" in 1901.