

HADWIGER, GUS S.

INTERVIEW

#8338

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

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Field Worker's name Herbert Rogers.

This report made on (date) August 10-11, 1937.

1. Name Gus S. Hadwiger.

2. Post Office Address Alya, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 711 Locust.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month May Day 31 Year 1869.

5. Place of birth Brownsefien, Moravia, Austria.

6. Name of Father Augustine Hadwige Place of birth Brownsefien, Moravia, Austria.

Other information about father Served in army for 14 years.

7. Name of Mother Aloisa Hainz. Place of birth Moravia, Austria.

~~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 13.

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Herbert Rogers,  
interviewer.  
August 10, 11, 1937.

An interview With Gus Hadwiger,  
Alva, Oklahoma.

I am the son of Augustine Hadwiger and I was born in Brownsefen, Moravia, Austria. My father was born in the same place. My mother, Aloisa Heimz, was born in Moravia. Augustine Hadwiger, my father, served in the Austrian Army for fourteen years. Seven of these fourteen years were spent in the Austria-Hungary Army.

My parents came to the United States in 1878 in order to better the prospects for the education of their children. We located at Barton County, Kansas. We lived there for two years. The family remained at Barton County, Kansas, and I went to Pueblo, Colorado. Here I worked as a newsboy and bootblack from 1881 to 1882.

In 1883, the family moved from Barton County and located on the Harper Kiowa Territory at Camp Supply, which is two and one-half miles east of where Attica, Kansas, is now located.

In 1884, I carried the mail from the Attica postoffice to a place two miles south of Attica. Mrs. George Markham was the postmistress then. Then from here I went to Otego, Kansas,

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a distance of twenty miles. There was one post office between these two places at Oliver, Kansas. I carried mail on horseback in mail pouches but lost my job when the Post Office Department found out that I was under sixteen years old.

In 1885, I came to the Indian Territory to work at the Apple Brand Cattle Company. This camp was located twenty-four miles west of where Alva is now, at the mouth of the Red Horse Creek which is now in Woods County. I worked for this outfit that summer. I attended the first round-up ever held at the Wildcat Hills near Fairvalley. We rounded up cattle west of those hills and selected those fit for beef purposes. These animals were driven to Round Pond Creek at a point south of Caldwell, Kansas, where they were held for a time and then shipped.

In 1886, I rode to Mobeetie, Texas, which was at that time the metropolis of the Texas Panhandle. All cattle coming from the South passed the mob traveling North over the trail through "No man's Land" through what is now Beaver, Texas, and Cimarron Counties, following the west line of Kansas to the Arkansas River. This trail was a strip of land three miles wide, which was reserved along the boundary of Kansas and Colorado, for

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trail purposes, extending from the southwest corner of Kansas to the Arkansas River.

Western Kansas was just then being settled and I recall that we could see the little towns of Colorado glimmering in the sunlight. This trail connected with the Arkansas River at Trails City at a point one mile west of Coolidge, Kansas. Trails City consisted of two saloons and two other houses. From Trails City the cattle were watered from a spring known as Wild Horse Spring northwest from Trail City. There some pioneer had walled up some springs and the mud puddle surrounding it answered the purpose of watering the cattle.

The group of men driving this herd consisted of seven people, three Mexicans, a negro cook and three white men and we drove the cattle through Colorado and Kansas. The Mexicans in these days still used the flat horn saddle, Mexican style.

We lost about a hundred and sixty head of cattle in stampedes while we were on the way and most of these were lost in what is now Beaver County.

We made no great effort to find them because the owners gathered them up in later years in roundups. We butchered

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*We butchered*

cattle for beef, being particular not to kill our own because the local range cattle were much better. We cured meat as we went along, giving the ribs, legs, etc., to settlers along the way, who were glad to receive them. We cut the rest of the meat into strips one and one-half inches in diameter and about eighteen inches long. These were salted and hung on ropes extending from the end of the wagon tongue. At the southwest corner of the rope we kept a fire of cowchips burning in order to keep the flies away from the meat, the wind being usually from the southwest. At night the beef was taken in the wagon and hung out in the morning for three days in succession; by this time it was dried. To cook this meat we soaked it, stewed it some and fried it, which made it very palatable and nourishing.

I arrived home in Harper County in due course, glad to get back. I was the oldest of the family of eight children and had to keep busy at something to help keep the family on the claim.

I returned the following year to Pueblo, Colorado, and hired out to Mr. Parker to learn the carpenter's trade, at which I worked until 1891. There was a prospect of the

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Cherokee Strip opening, but the matter was delayed. I had very little money but was willing to work and I had a set of carpenter's tools.

The opening of the strip seemed a certainty the following year, so I began to prepare for this event. I had an excellent six year old mustang pony which I trained for the race by riding eighteen miles to Attica, Kansas, everything along the road being very interesting. I rode back every evening.

During these rides I became acquainted with Tom Schaeffer, whose widow still resides in Alva. Tom and I were both single at the time and we endeavored to get claims side by side; he was to do the farming and I was to earn money to keep him on the premises. By reason of my acquaintance with the Cherokee Strip I knew where the best land was located, which proved to be an advantage to us.

Finally in the following year, 1893, the opening of the strip became a certainty. An office was established on the boundary in the southwestern part of Kansas, where people who intended to make the race had to register two weeks before the race and show their qualifications as homesteaders under

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the law. We did this and waited till the day of the race.

Finally on Friday, September 16, at noon the country was opened for settlement and people seeking the claims used any means to get first place. We lined up on the line the evening of September 15th. It was a very dry fall. There was no water in the creeks or in the Salt Fork River. The nights were cool and clear and people extended west and east from Kiowa as far as I could see.

It didn't appear possible that there was land enough in Oklahoma for all the people who were there. They came in all kinds of conveyances, on horseback predominating although there were thousands of wagons, buggies and spring wagons. Some had the hind part of the wagon fixed as a rumbling conveyance which was more substantial than a buggy and of light weight.

About ten o'clock in the morning of the September 16th we looked in the southwesterly direction and could see a cloud of dust created by the troop of cavalry coming from Fort Supply to Kiowa, Kansas, to guard the line until the proper moment. These soldiers were stationed at intervals of one-fourth mile and about two hundred and fifty yards south



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of the Kansas line. I entered the race at a point about a mile south of Campbells barn which is still situated one mile east of Kiowa, Kansas. There were a great many people, including women, on foot. We watched our time pieces closely and about five minutes until twelve o'clock, I heard a pistol shot which was evidently shot by someone in the crowd. People assumed it to be the signal and the race was on! Stopping them was impossible so the soldiers fired their guns and away we went.

My partner and I remained still until the crowd was well on its way and was about a half mile ahead and then we started. We knew where we were going so we rode in a straight direction on the Salt Fork of the Arkansas river, eventually locating about one mile west of where Ingersoll is now.

By the time we had ridden twelve miles, we were ahead of the crowd, except for six men who were ahead of us. Many people in the race followed the Kiowa-Hennessey road, which ran in a southeasterly direction from Kiowa to Dunn's Ranch, thence southeasterly to Timber Lake Springs and then to Hennessey. Due to the fact that the wagons took the road, the mounted men had the advantage. Driftwood Creek then had rather steep

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banks. We made the run of sixteen miles in one hour and ten minutes. Thinking back - believe now that we could have made better time, but it wasn't necessary then since we were in the lead.

We located claims and I searched the prairie with field glasses for my brother who was following us in with a wagon of supplies. We finally located him at the mouth of the Medicine Lodge River. There was very little timber along the Salt Fork at that time, just a few cottonwoods. My brother was quite a distance away and one member of the party went for him.

Many people had nothing to eat and no water to drink but we had plenty, so all the people met at our tent. We arranged a place for the night and fifteen people came who had staked claims in the vicinity. In our party were Thomas Schaeffer, <sup>now</sup> deceased and L. E. Benson, now residing in Alva. He is reputed to be the oldest man in Alva.

Our claims were located one mile west and one-half mile north of Ingersoll. My partner, Tom Schaeffer, took the corner immediately south of mine, the east half of the south nineteen-twenty-seven-eleven-section. I still own this tract of land under patent of the United States with nothing against it.

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On Monday morning September 19th, 1893, I came to Alva, which was then a small city of tents with one small frame building which was the United States Land Office. There we were required to number and as the numbers were called we were permitted to file on the land. I had found a surveyor on Sunday and had run a line five miles away and he gave us the numbers of the land we had claimed so we came and filed on Monday. My number was 445. I then had to await time to file, which was Wednesday, September 21, 1893. As soon as I filed on the land I found a place to erect the tent which is now replaced by a modern home. I then came to Alva to look for a job. I placed my tent in the alley behind what is now the Rialto Theatre. I secured a contract to erect a store for Mr. John Roberts, grocery man of Kiowa, Kansas. This was the first building I built in Alva. It was twenty-five by sixty-five feet. I built this building for \$65.00. After this I built several buildings in and around Alva.

I formed another partnership with Harry Bowman and we built Alva's first school building, a four room brick veneer structure located where the west side school is at now. Three days before the building was completed somebody set it afire

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and it burned to the ground. It was not insured. Everything in it was lost. The school board gave us the second contract to build another one just like the first one. This one was used until the present west side school took its place. After this fire I resolved to quit carpenter work.

During the fall of 1893, after the opening, I worked with the bridge gang on the Santa Fe Railroad from Alva west. I built the first stockyards at White Deer, Texas. There was nothing there then but the small section house. It was necessary that the posts used for stock-yards be six feet in the ground. There was an old man helping me. It was impossible to dig six feet in the gumbo soil even with a spud bar. By persistent effort we could dig two feet and six inches, so we cut the posts off.

My partner, in the meantime, planted kaffir corn. We purchased the first flying Dutchman gang plow from Alva. We also purchased the first header from Alva. We then headed our Kaffir corn. There was no market for kaffir corn in those days so we staked it for the cattle and the horses ran on it most of the time. We also had a few chickens but the bird dogs kept them reasonably killed off. There was an abundance of wild game such as prairie chickens. We killed forty-five one afternoon.

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In the following fall of 1894 we planted eighty acres of wheat but it was a poor year and we made only four bushels to the acre. The next year we made thirty-one bushels to the acre. We continually increased our yield. The year we made thirty-one bushels to the acre we had one hundred and sixty acres planted. We marketed it and sold it in Alva. There were no elevators and we had to scoop it into box cars. This gave us sufficient funds to pay our debts and buy some cattle.

I was appointed undersheriff under H. C. Graff, who was the first man to be elected sheriff of Woods County. I was also appointed United States Deputy Marshal under G. D. Nix in the western part of Oklahoma.

During the period of 1895, 1896, 1897 we had many unusual experiences. The country was new and over-run with thugs and we had many encounters and sometimes it was necessary to kill people. By 1897 the tough characters were more or less weeded out and the country settled down and became more civilized.

I was married in 1897. Mr. Schaeffer was also married in 1897. We dissolved our partnership. I lived on the farm

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in 1898 and remained there until 1899. I then enlisted in the United States Army for service in the Phillipines. I was away two years and my wife remained on the claim. I had good luck in the army and was one of three men who served in all grades. I was made a second-lieutenant by President McKinley and Elihu Root/<sup>who</sup> was Secretary of War.

I returned in 1901 and remained on the farm until 1904 when I was elected sheriff of Woods County and served until statehood, in 1907.

I attended the first Republican Convention as a delegate at Tulsa. During this period I was commissioned by Governor Tom Ferguson as an officer in the Oklahoma Militia and I served in various capacities until 1914. I commanded the company at Alva and in 1914 was made border Quartermaster of the Oklahoma National Guards.

In 1907, I began the publication of a newspaper known as the Alva Daily News with Kent Ewbanks as my partner. He is now associated with the Wichita Eagle. I gave my interest in the paper to Ewbanks and entered law school at Valparaiso, Indiana, which I graduated from in 1910. I was admitted to

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the bar in Oklahoma the same year. I located in practice in Alva.

In 1914, I was elected County Judge of Woods County and was re-elected to the same office while with the troops on the border in 1916. I served until 1918. Since then I have been engaged in the private practice of law and in farming.