

HENSLEY, MARY E.

INTERVIEW

#4203

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Mrs. Nora Eorrin

May 26, 1937

Interviewer

Interview with Mary E. Hensley.
920 W. Wade, El Reno, Oklahoma.
Mother-Pamelia Ann Mullen
Father- James Mullen.

Mary E. Hensley was born to James and Pamelia Ann Mullen, near Crawfordville, Indiana, on March 10, 1859. Her father was a farmer.

She was married to Mr. T. F. Hensley, December 25, 1873. From the beginning of their marriage they had a pretty hard struggle, on account of the fact that her husband was determined to have a better education.

In 1876 they moved to Edinburgh, Missouri, where he attended the Grand River College and completed a three year course in two years. He then taught three terms of school.

Mr. and Mrs. Hensley sold their home in Edinburgh and moved to Princeton, Missouri, where they purchased "The Princeton Advance". The name of the paper was changed by Mr. Hensley to "The Peoples Press", the same name applied to an El Reno paper later. Mr. Hensley published this paper until 1889 and then sold it to

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Bolster and Steckman. To quote Mrs. Hensley,
"It was bought on a suggestion made by Rev. Joseph
H. Burrows, a politically inclined Baptist Minister,
who was a candidate for congress from the old tenth
Missouri district, and to whom Mr. Hensley rendered
valuable service."

Burrows not only urged the purchase of a paper
but even pointed out an office he thought could be
bought and went further by offering to loan the down
payment on the purchase price, which he did, and did
not want anything as security for that loan except a
promise to pay at any time it suited her husband's
convenience. The offer was accepted and that confi-
dence was an asset, the significance of which we may
not have sensed as keenly then as we do now after
more than fifty-five years since the transaction.

It was Congressman Burrows who appointed General
Pershing to West Point and it was claimed by many
that Hensley was indirectly responsible for that ap-
pointment by reason of the service rendered in the

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election of Burrows. [△]

In their printing office, their equipment consisted of a Washington hand press, a medium size Gordon job press, a paper cutter and a few fonts of type, including some job type. The plant was purchased partially on credit. They, of course, were anxious to meet current expenses as well as to pay out on the office and Mrs. Hensley said, "In order to contribute my mite toward that end I went into the office, learned to set type and soon was considered a full hand, turning out the necessary number of columns to qualify as a fairly rapid compositor. This saved the pay of one printer and together with Bill Walker, foreman, we managed to come out on time every week and always breathed a breath of relief when that feat was accomplished."

Persons who never saw such a primitive press as the Washington hand press can hardly form an idea as to how they are operated, but one of my duties in addition to type setting was to ink the

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forms on press day, in order to save another small sum. I also folded the papers, addressed and made up the mailing list and played the "devil" to the full limit. It may be well right here, to explain that the devil in a print shop is the newest recruit and the one knowing the least about the business.

The Hensleys have been married for sixty-three years and have been the kind of married folks that are truly ideal "helpmates". Old fashioned, perhaps, but the kind and about the only kind that makes for lasting happiness.

Going back to their printing shop, they later purchased a cylinder press, a Prouty, and moved into the lower part of the Masonic building. Later they were almost completely wiped out by a fire, which destroyed a large part of the block in which their plant was located.

Mrs. Hensley says, "Our cylinder press was a self inker and could be run by hand or by engine but before we could afford an engine I took my turn

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at the wheel and when not doing this I fed the press, standing on a low platform, and it required some skill and accuracy to have a paper ready every time the cylinder revolved to nab it. To let the cylinder go back over the form without a paper meant inking the cylinder and spoiling one or two papers. We finally managed to acquire an engine and the shop was a show place on press day from that time on.

The Hensleys won a gold medal given by the State Press Association who held a meeting in Springfield, Missouri, in May, 1884, for best press work done on a Prouty. The pin part of the medal represents a printer's "stick". The lower part is a shield at the top of which is engraved in Hebrew "Let there be light". Below that the engraved picture of the press and the words, "Awarded to T. F. Hensley for best press work done on a Prouty press" and the date, '1884."

In 1885 at the beginning of Cleveland's first administration Mr. Hensley decided to file application

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for the position of special pension examiner, took the civil service examination and was appointed. That meant going to Washington where he spent some time in the pension office, then was sent out to do field work. In the meantime the management of the printing office was turned over to Mrs. Hensley to manage as best she could and she said, "In some way it managed to function under my management for three years, when it was sold".

Mr. Hensley held his position until the end of Cleveland's administration and then decided to open an office in Washington to handle pension claims, and Mrs. Hensley and her two boys, Claude and Frank, joined him there in 1890. They resided there until 1892, when the newly opened Oklahoma beckoned them and they came here. Since coming to Oklahoma they have been in both the Newspaper and Mercantile business.

During Mr. Hensley's political and other activities he served four years in the lower house of the

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Oklahoma Legislature and four in the Senate. He also served six years in the Oklahoma State Auditor's office. He was in government service during the war, served two terms as mayor of El Reno. During this time the Kiowa and Comanche country was opened to settlement in 1901. Headquarters for that event were in El Reno, which grew almost overnight from normal to at least 100,000 people, all clamoring for claims. Mrs. Hensley remarked that it was during Mr. Hensley's first term as Mayor of El Reno that their only daughter, Gladys, was born, February 18, 1898, an event that occasioned more than passing notice because of the fact that she was more than twenty years younger than their youngest son, Frank. Gladys is now Mrs. Frank Engle of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Her husband is manager for the Phoenix Life Insurance Company.

Mrs. Hensley seems to have taken her homemaking and the birth and rearing of her children in her stride

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as it were, for she says, "As to what became of our business during the years Mr. Hensley was engaged in matters that took him away from home, I will state that it was dumped in my lap and I continued to carry on until after the close of the war, when we disposed of our holdings".

Mrs. Hensley also says, "Even though our newspaper venture in Princeton, Missouri, was launched on a small scale, with all its disadvantages, hardships and privations, it proved to be the stepping-stone to greater achievements which landed us in comfortable circumstances, a far cry from our condition when we started, for at that time we were financially nil. To that meagre start we owe all that we have ever accomplished in the way of financial independence"

Mrs. Hensley says there wasn't any social life, that they had their noses to the grind stone and were too busy for society. However, they took in the usual picnics and told of some Fourth of July celebrations

that took place at Gilbert's Lake, northeast of town. This property is now occupied by the Rod and Gun club. Their method of conveyance to these celebrations was a horse and buggy. She said there were lovely trees there and it was a good place for their picnics.

The Hensleys have a lovely home at 920 West Wade. They raise flowers and have a nice little vegetable garden kept as neatly as a pin.

They came to Oklahoma in February, 1892, and were successful a short time later in acquiring a homestead.

In her long career, Mrs. Hensley has been a successful wife and mother, home maker, printer's "devil", typesetter, compositor, editor, and journalist. She is also a very good business woman, since it was her hand that held the reins over both the paper and other business while Mr. Hensley was gone from home on his varied duties.