

HESSLER, CARL WILLIAM

INTERVIEW

4134

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HESSLER, CARL WILLIAM

Form A-(S-149)

BIOGRAPHY FORM

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

4134

Field Worker's name Zeideo B. Bland

This report made on (date) May 24 1937

1. Name Carl William Hessler

2. Post Office Address Duke, Oklaho. a

3. Residence address (or location) North and east of Duke about 3 miles

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month July Day 18 Year 1862

5. Place of birth Germany

6. Name of Father _____ Place of birth _____

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother _____ 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 _____.

The Experience of a Pioneer of Oklahoma,
Carl William Hessler, Duke, Oklahoma

I was born in Germany, in 1862. My father was in the army and my mother was a regular practicing physician registered in Germany.

Since I can first remember I loved the soil and both my mother and father encouraged me to love to see things grow from the soil. Naturally, we often discussed the land across the water, where land might be lived on and made into a home just for the love of the land and the work of making a home of it.

When just a lad, you might say at least a very young man, my mother saw to it that I had money that she thought I needed and helped me obtain a job as deck sweeper on a vessel sailing from Germany to England.

On reaching England I went directly to Liverpool and took passage to America. I obtained passage on the White Star Line Royal Mail steamer, "GERMANE". I left Liverpool Sunday night at seven o'clock and arrived in New York on the following Saturday night. I paid \$85.00 for board and passage. I ate the first meal on the ship just after boarding it and

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the only other one after landing in New York just before leaving the boat. They surely made my beard on that trip. This was the second trip this boat had made across, the fastest time any boat had made up to that time. I only had one thought in my head, I wanted land and to establish a home. I left New York after three weeks, going down the coast. I stopped a short time in Virginia, then went on to San Antonio, Texas. In Texas I lingered about five years, working on farms and ranches; learning the ways of the country of my adoption. I took out naturalization papers, and accumulated a little capital and some stock.

In October of 1888 I joined a group of homesteaders who were headed for Greer County in the extreme northern part of the greatest state in the Union. There were several covered wagons, all driving horses beside my mount that I brought along. We were three weeks making the trip to Quanah. We never traveled on Sunday but always stopped and rested our teams and baked enough bread to last all the following week. We stayed in Quanah three weeks, getting our supplies and learning all we could about the land that had not been

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homesteaded.

We headed due north out of Juanah, crossed five creeks and one river and came to camp on Turkey Creek. The next morning the country looked so beautiful I just went out a little ways from camp and started digging a hole for my dugout and set about establishing a home. There was no one around to say no. The prairie was full of quail, two colors of them. They were surely good to eat for they fed on the hackberries. Prairie chickens were good but the turkeys we could not eat in the fall for their flesh was bitter from eating china berries. Antelope were plentiful.

The country was so full of wild cattle that it was dangerous to ~~try to~~ go anywhere on foot. They seemed to sense you were an enemy for they would charge every time they saw a man.

I dug my hole, cut the poles from that little creek out front there, lined the sides and put on a roof. I put dry grass on top of the poles, then dirt. It made a snug roof that did not leak a bit. You see these flat flint rock lying all about? I gathered them and went a mile or two further over, got some of that gyp, mixed it with

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water, and built myself a rock fireplace and chimney in the north end of my hole in the ground. Next I gathered rocks, set them in this gyp cement and made a wind break for my horses. You can still see it standing out there. It was about one hundred feet long and five feet tall, or about that.

This was November, 1887. I had brought my dog with me, a black shepherd called "JACK". He was a lot of help to me as well as company. He could scare the wild cattle away better than I could for they seemed more afraid of him. Also the coyotes would not come too near where he was. He was fearless and had a good many fights with the coyotes. I had an old iron skillet and a dutch oven to cook with on my fireplace.

I batched seven years. In those seven years, lots of people had come to homestead. Some wanted their children to have the privilege of going to school. Teachers began to come and teach private classes. Over in a community called Prairie Hill came a Miss McCaully to teach school. She boarded at Mrs. Hills and taught quite a class of youngsters. She charged \$3.00 per month tuition. She could have had many more than she did if she had only had the room. There was a big picnic at Turkey Creek. The minute I saw the new

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school teacher I knew I liked her. I watched her every time I could. I could not find anyone to make us acquainted. I did not forget how good she looked to me and every time there was a public gathering I went, hoping to meet her. After several months I went to a singing in a dugout and there were not so many there but what we all could get acquainted. I met her at last.

Persuading her that I wanted her to be my wife proved to be a bigger job than meeting her, but I never gave up until I had won her and married her and she is my dear, beloved wife to this day.

Prairie chickens became so tame that they would come right into the door of our dugout for the grain we would scatter. I raised enough corn the first year to sell, and buy a wagon sheet and bows complete.

I got ten bushel of wheat seed from Vernon, Texas, paying \$1.00 a bushel. It was the first wheat raised in this neighborhood. Farther south there was a good deal raised. The farmers got together and ordered a binder and an old horse-power thrashing machine.

I used to go hunting in the mountains and sometimes trade horses with Lone Wolf, a Kiowa Indian.

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I remember one time I drove a small bunch of ponies over to Lone Wolf's place and stayed all night. They let me sleep in a tepee right next to his house and invited me to eat with them. But I did not eat for they ate their meat raw and that did not please me. His wives were good bread makers, though. I sold his bucks all my ponies at \$7.00 per head and felt very rich coming home.

We would have to haul all our corn or wheat to Vernon or Qhanah to sell. We did not get so much for it but then the things that we needed did not cost so much either. I could get a pair of shoes that would last two or three years for fifty cents.

My wife could spin thread and knit all our socks, stockings, and gloves.

I built her a house.

We have two daughters, Susie, who was born October 3, 1894, in Texas, and Kate, who was born September 7, 1900, in Oklahoma.

I have lived in two states and two counties and never moved. I homesteaded the west half of Section 5, Twp. 2 North, Range 22 west of the Indian Base and Meridian.

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My wife made a mustard plaster once, sprinkled it with red pepper and saved the life of a man who was passing by and took acute indigestion at our gate. She made all our soap and yeast cakes. She would take peach tree leaves boil them and make a tea thickened with corn meal rolled out thin and dried.

Once, when I had driven a bunch of horses over to the eastern part of the state to sell and had sold only two horses at \$27.00 apiece, I heard a rumor that there had been a killing at home. I did not know who or how close to my wife and babies it was but I left my horses and hurried home to find that my nearest neighbor's brother had shot and killed his son-in-law and then killed himself. They had brought the body to his brother's and my wife had helped lay him out and was sitting up with the body.

I do not know why there was so much killing like that in those days. Mr. Guffin's wife was dead and he told his daughter if she married a certain young man he would kill him. She married him despite her father's threat. The next Sunday at church Mr. Guffin hid behind a post and when his daughter and her husband came in, he shot him dead and then killed himself.

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We did not bury him in our little cemetery but took him over to Frazee.

This place was in a little valley beyond Salt Fork where the grass was so good that all of the homesteaders milked cows, and the cowboys dubbed it Butter Milk Station because they always could get butter milk when they passed that way. It was on the river and a man named Holt asked for a postoffice and then had to give it a name, so it was first called Frazee. Afterwards it was changed to Lezer and when moved to higher ground after it was washed away in a big flood, the name was changed to Altus.

I have never moved, never owned any other land, never wanted to; Never had a mortgage on my land, never had delinquent taxes, and I have never been sick. I lost my eye as you see. I had a horse that was down and the ground was wet, cold, and slick. I was trying to help him up and in the struggle he accidentally struck me in the eye. There was a doctor not very far away and I went to him. I do not remember what he did for it but know for about nine or ten days I never slept.

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At last one night my wife put a peach tree poultice on it and in the night the eyeball bursted and I went to sleep and I have no eye there now.

Mr. Hessler has his complete birth record, passage papers, and his mother's and father's name, a very old Bible and an old hand painted pipe he brought from Germany.

These records and Bible are in German, He has forgotten how to read or talk German; he was so in earnest about being an American and he truly is a good citizen, much beloved and honored by friends and neighbors. His wife, a native Georgian, has made him a worthy help mate and taught him to read and write English.