

POWERS, PERCY

INTERVIEW

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Interviewer, Ruth Kerbo,
August 30, 1937.

Interview with Percy Powers,
Mangum, Oklahoma.

Born September 13, 1885,
Decatur, Texas.

Parents J. A. Powers,
Alabama.

Matilda Powers, Alabama.

Judge Percy Powers, of Mangum, received his first impression of Greer County as a child in 1889. His father, the late J. A. Powers, was a pioneer attorney, and his mother, Mrs. J. A. Powers, of Mangum, is still a resident of the community.

Judge Powers states; I landed in Mangum on April 14, 1889. At that time I was three and a half years old. My father had previously come to Mangum and for \$400.00 had purchased a squatter's right to the one hundred and sixty acres north of the school building from a man named Sprouse.

At Vernon, Texas, the services of a man with a wagon and team were secured and he took us to Mangum in three days. Mother and my two sisters and I arrived here one

night and took lodging at the Pierson Hotel, near where the Richards Drug Store stands. Both my sisters were younger than I and I remember that some child in the hotel had the measles. That night the cowboys got drunk and shot out the lights in the hotel.

The drayman who had brought us to Mangum had agreed to take the Sprouse family and their belongings back to Texas, but he had to let his team rest a few days.

The next morning my mother went to her new home, a two-room, box house, which my father had proudly proclaimed the finest home in Greer County. This box house of two rooms was the home of the Sprouse family. Mother had informed the Sprouse family of her difficulties at the hotel and they had generously agreed to share one room of the new home with us until they could leave for Texas.

Mother returned to the hotel, took one small sister under each arm and asked me to walk along with her.

When I was four years old I well remember calling at the plant of the Mangum Star. The publisher, editor, and devil were all combined in the person of Major Dawson, a native of Illinois, who had been a major in the Civil War.

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At that time the Mangum Star was located on what is now South Court Street about where Joe Hall's store is.

I well remember the litter and tobacco juice on the papers of Major Dawson's desk.

In the spring of 1890 my mother received some dishes packed in cotton seed. I was urged to plant these seeds and did so in what is now my mother's back yard. That fall the cotton was picked, put into a gunny sack and taken to Quanah, Texas. I claim to be the first cotton producer and the first cotton picker in Greer County.

My parents had some dairy cattle, and for a long time these cattle were permitted to graze on the commons, which includes what is now the court house square. It was my duty shortly before sundown in the summer to drive the cows home, but as soon as Mangum was incorporated an ordinance was passed prohibiting live-stock from running at large.

In the fall of 1891 I was sent to the public schools in a one-room, box building where the Edison building now stands.

The public free schools only lasted about three months because of lack of finances and in the summer of 1892, Miss Mollie Dodson, now Mrs. T. P. Clay, taught a subscription

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school . . . where the Edison building now stands.

I well remember attending my first court trial. It was held in the justice court of Judge John Rose. The Judge was barefooted and held court in a dugout about where the Wright building now stands.

When I was about ten years of age, I remember meeting Temple Houston, son of Sam Houston, in Mangum. He was an eloquent lawyer and generally attended district court in Mangum. He said to me, "Some day Oklahoma will have statehood and I hope to be able to go to the Constitutional Convention for the proposed new state. I want to go as a delegate for one purpose and one purpose only; that is, to abolish the office of Justice of the Peace." Temple Houston was the son of General Sam Houston.

March 17, 1896, was the day that W. R. Baumgardner brought a telegram from Quanah, Texas, that the Supreme Court of the United States determined the day before that Greer County was a part of the Territory of Oklahoma, rather than of the state of Texas. I was working in a feed lot about where Dr. J. T. Lowe's residence now stands. The late G. A. Brown, then of Vernon, Texas, was holding court in

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Mangum. Immediately upon receipt of the news, he realized that as a Texas judge he had no jurisdiction and dismissed court.

When Mr. Baumgardner reached Mangum about five o'clock p. m. the news spread like wild fire all over town and I remember attending a mass meeting that night in the old court house and jail where the new armory building now stands. Judge Brown was selected as a delegate to Washington to ask for legislation assisting the settlers of Greer County.

Judge Brown reported that he was able to get a conference with Congressman Joe Cannon of Illinois; that Mr. Cannon either called or sent a messenger to Senator Reed of Missouri, asking for a committee meeting to consider the matter that night but that Senator Reed answered: "This is not my night to get drunk."

I remember that legislation was secured, allowing all settlers to homestead land and later to make final proof. If final proof was made after the filing then all residence and cultivation of the land while under Texas jurisdiction would be credited in making final proof. He also secured legislation which permitted each occupant of land on March 16, 1896, to purchase an additional quarter section of land at \$1.25 an acre and giving the purchaser five years to pay.

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I also remember the first iron safe I ever saw. It was in the post office operated by Henry Clay Sweet and was situated at about the location of the present post office.

The horse races of the "gay nineties" were held on a straight track about where the brick plant stands. There was no stand and all of the spectators had to stand up.

In those days our only communication with the outside world was the stage to Luanah. It not only carried the mail but passengers and express as well. The arrival of the mail late each afternoon was quite an event.

. R. Baunagardner was the last driver of the mail hack.

At that time there were practically no trees anywhere, just a bleak prairie and from where the high school now stands it was easy to see wagons coming in to town from where the air port is now located.