

ESTUS, JAMES J.

INTERVIEW

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

ESTUS, JAMES J.

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Field Worker's name Don Moon, Jr.,

This report made on (date) April 26, 27, 1938

1. Name James J. Estus,
2. Post Office Address Guthrie, Oklahoma.
3. Residence address (or location) 620 East Cleveland,
4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month October Day 21 Year 1851
5. Place of birth Trimble County, Kentucky.

6. Name of Father Ambrose Estus. Place of birth Kentucky.
Other information about father _____
7. Name of Mother Mahala Conner. Place of birth Kentucky.
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 5.

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Don Moon, Jr.,
Investigator,
April 26, 27, 1938.

Interview with James J. Estus,
620 East Cleveland,
Guthrie, Oklahoma.

When Mr. Estus was about seventeen, his family moved from Illinois to Texas. Dallas was the nearest city and it had only about 2,000 population.

A family named Younger lived in the neighborhood and there were several young men in the family. They went well dressed and seemed to be nice people. One of their cousins whom they said was named Porter was visiting them. One day "Jim" Estus rode into the nearest little town to get the mail. The post office was also a store, and "bitters" were sold there.

He noticed the Younger boys there drinking. John Younger called for another bottle and offered it to Estus. He said, "No, thank you, John. I don't drink".

The bottle was passed around the crowd and was soon gone. John called for another bottle, and again offered it first to Estus. He made the same reply as

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before. John Younger was drunker by that time. He pulled out his gun and said, "I've killed plenty of damn Yankees in my time".

Estus said that at first he thought nothing of it, but after awhile the thought struck him that maybe Younger was talking about him. He was wearing one of the blue coats, with a big cape, that the Union soldiers had worn in the Army, so he decided to get on his horse and ride away. As he walked toward his mount, Younger shot four times at him. One of them went through the folds of the cape on his shoulder. Another Younger boy ran out of a nearby store when he heard the shots and said, "Why John, what are you shooting at Estus for? He's all right". John said, "He insulted me. He wouldn't drink with me".

The same day John tried to shoot another man, so the two of them went into Dallas, and swore out a warrant against him. When the sheriff came out to make the arrest Younger shot him and another man. In the excitement that followed the Younger boys and their cousin, who was really

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Jesse James, escaped over the line into Indian Territory.

Soon after this Estus went back to Illinois and attended Wesleyan University at Bloomington, Illinois.

The family moved from Texas to Cowley County, Kansas, in 1872, and the father took up land there. Arkansas City was their trading center and the family accumulated a good deal of farm land. There were five boys and one girl in the family. Besides operating their farms in Kansas, four of the brothers were associated in running a ranch in the Cherokee Strip. They were William, Alonzo, Robert and James Estus. James is the only survivor of this partnership of brothers. Of his neighboring ranchers, Druary Miller, William Bradley, Tom Snow, and H. L. Libby are living unless it is Tom Snow. Estus has never heard of his death.

The Estus brand was the Diamond Tail and it looked like this  . The brothers shipped most of their cattle to Kansas City. They had no trouble with the Indians. Their range was west of Ponca City, just above the Ponca Reservation.

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When Estus first married he brought his bride to a dugout in the bank of Red Rock Creek, now in the Otoe Reservation. The dugout was 16 x 18 ft. and had a fireplace. When asked what his wife thought of such a home so far, by neighbors, he said, "She enjoyed it. She often said that was the happiest time of our lives when we lived up there on the ranch in that dugout. We could shoot wild turkeys from the door. Antelope and deer were plentiful. We drank our coffee black and ate lots of game."

Mrs. Estus's father and three brothers came to Oklahoma in 1889 and took land at the Opening. She had never been so far from them, and persuaded Mr. Estus to sell his land in Kansas and come to Oklahoma.

He came down July 30, found a claim close to Mulhall, which he filed on, and moved his family down to it that Fall. He farmed it for thirty years and still owns his homestead and another one hundred and sixty acres adjoining it. He says, "I have been a farmer all my life, although I served one term as county commissioner, (1900)."

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"I think it was the second year down here that we did not raise anything all Summer. But in the Fall it rained and everyone planted turnips. We still call it the "Turnip Year", for that is all anyone had."

He did not join the Cattlemen's Association until a few years ago, and was delighted when he attended the first meeting to find old cowboy friends that he had not seen in forty years there. Now he attends regularly when they meet the first of September.

Mr. Estus is a good example of the high type of manhood that made up a large part of the ~~pioneers~~ of this section of the state. Although almost eighty-seven, and very deaf, he is full of life and interested in all that goes on locally and nationally. He lives alone, next door to his son, and except for the noon meal which he takes at his son's, he does his own cooking, and comes and goes as he pleases. I made several attempts to interview him before finding him at home.

His son, R. A. Ambrose, and called "Brose", is mayor of the city of Guthrie.