

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

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FRYBERGER, WILLIAM E. INTERVIEW 5369

Field Worker's name Anna R. Barry

This report made on (date) October 13, 1937

1. Name William E. Fryberger

2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) 601 South Hoff Street

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month November Day 30 Year 1854

5. Place of birth Webash County, Indiana

6. Name of Father John Fryberger Place of birth Pennsylvania

Other information about father _____

7. Name of Mother Margaret (Bonewitz) Fryberger Place of birth Ohio

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 _____.

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Anna R. Barry,
Journalist,
October 13, 1937.

An Interview with Mr. William E. Fryberger,
601 South Hoff Street, El Reno, Oklahoma.

William E. Fryberger is a pioneer merchant of El Reno; he has been identified with this pioneer town since April 22, 1889. At the opening of the original Oklahoma Territory, for more than forty years he has been in business in El Reno until two years ago when he was made head of a wholesale and retail department store at El Reno and he also has a large establishment at Minco. He was a young business man of about thirty-five when he came to Oklahoma, his earlier business experience having been acquired in Iowa and in Kansas.

William E. Fryberger was born in Wabash County, Indiana, on November 30, 1854, and when eight years of age removed with his parents to Fairfield, Iowa. His father John Fryberger, a native of Pennsylvania and of German stock, married Margaret Bonewitz, who was born in Ohio in 1830. They were married in 1845 and she died at Fairfield,

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Iowa, in 1875. His father, John Fryberger died in 1910 at Soldier, Kansas. There were nine children in the Fryberger family, eight sons and one daughter.

When William E. Fryberger was eighteen years of age and had acquired a fair education in the public schools, he entered the printing office of "The Commonwealth" at Bloomfield, Iowa, and learned and followed the printers trade for five years. He then gave that up not being satisfied with its opportunities, and for the next five years was in the hardware business.

In 1885, he moved out to Soldier, Kansas, and followed the livestock industry in that locality until 1889, when he participated in the first great rush of white settlers into Oklahoma Territory. Soon after coming to El Reno he opened a wholesale grocery located on South Bickford Street in a frame building 18x24 feet; he afterwards added a retail department store, and a natural outgrowth of the business was the establishment of another store at Minco.

Among the people who flocked into Oklahoma for the opening were every class of people and men of every trade;

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there were merchants, doctors, carpenters, lawyers and ministers of the gospel; the ministers busied themselves in selecting and securing building sites for houses of worship. The opening day April 22, 1889, was on Monday. When the seventh day came it was recognized as a day of rest, every business house and every place of amusement closed, while practically the entire population attended church services, either in the open air or in a tabernacle tent.

When this country was first settled it was a great pleasure for Mr. Fryberger to get in his buggy and drive for miles, stopping at practically every homesteader's place he came to; in a very short time after the opening the homesteaders began breaking small patches of sod and the planting of corn, cane and vegetables on the sod; not many settlers expected to raise much of a crop the first year as it was so late in the spring when the opening occurred, but in most instances the task of building improvements was left until the first plowing and planting could be done families living in camps while this was being done.

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The homesteaders' houses at first were mostly built of sod or were very small frame houses and usually little log huts served as homes where logs were available along the rivers and creeks. When lumber yards were opened up for business and building material became more easily secured, better frame houses began to make their appearance upon the homesteaders' claims.

Mr. Fryberger's store was among the leading stores in El Reno. He sold goods to Indians in the early days. The Indian women usually carried the money of the family and sometimes they carried as much as two hundred silver dollars in a flour sack. Oftentimes if their money was in bills they would put it into pockets made on their dresses. Another strange thing about Indians buying in a store, they just bought one thing at a time and paid for it before they would look at anything else.

During this time the Indians bought expensive blankets: in winter they bought the bright colored wool blankets and in summer silk blankets edged in deep fringe. These blankets range in price from twenty to sixty dollars each.

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These Indians selected the blankets with the brightest colors regardless of quality. During these early years Mr. Fryberger's store sold a lot of beads and buckskin to the Indians. His store was also a stopping place for the early day settlers as well as for the Indians.

People in those days did not come to town as often as they do today; a family usually bought enough food to last at least a month and if they lived a long distance they came to town once in about every six months because of the slow way of traveling with a team and wagon.

The first automobile was brought to El Reno in 1900 by T.F. Hensley, 920 West Wade Street, an early day newspaper publisher here. The car was of the topless type, seated four passengers and groped its way around after dark with oil lights. This horseless carriage was called a "Darling", and resembled a horseless buggy as it chugged its way down El Reno's unpaved streets. This automobile traveled at the rate of ten miles an hour. These pioneer horseless carriages were the forerunners of extensive

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highway development in Oklahoma; without them winding dirt lanes would still make up the states highway system.

El Reno's first big parade occurred in 1890, when Governor Steele made his first official inspection trip here. The Fifth Cavalry from Fort Reno and the Indians joined in the celebration.

El Reno has grown from a prairie village into a town of real importance in the state, with the building of the Anstine Hotel, the Kerfoot Hotel and the moving of the famous Caddo Hotel, which was built in Reno City and moved across the North Canadian River in 1890. It was located where the Magnolia Gas Station now stands at the corner of Rock Island and Wade Streets.

But as time passed the Indians changed and also the white men who filled this county.

The Indians saw the very first iron horse which came into this country in June 1890, they noticed that it or rather the "wagons behind" were loaded with lumber, with food in cans and with clothes to wear. These Indians saw

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the white man send his grain to the mills and get it back, beautifully ground in clean sacks, instead of having his squaws spend days of back-breaking labor grinding it between two stones, the Indians decided that they too would raise corn, pigs and chickens on this fertile land instead of roaming the prairies.

Mr. Fryberger has served as a member of the City Council and the School Board and has taken part in every important movement in El Reno during the last forty-eight years.

On February 25, 1879, he married Miss Cora Belle Fortune. Her parents were Jesse and Lucy (Martin) Fortune, who were born in Indiana and spent most of their lives in Davis County, Iowa. Mr. Fryberger and wife (now deceased) have one daughter, Blanche, born June 11, 1881, who is the wife of Harry Lee Fogg, a prominent lawyer of El Reno and they have two children, William Lee and Rupert.

Today Mr. Fryberger is located in business at 202 South Beckford Street, making hand-made furniture. He has observed many changes in Canadian County in the forty-eight years he has been in business in El Reno.