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GLENSMAN, FRED C.

INTERVIEW

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BIOGRAPHY FORM  
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

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Field Worker's name Merrill A. NelsonThis report made on (date) August 21, 1937 193 7

By Margaret Gensman, Carl Legge, Employee, Mildred Legge

1. Name Fredrick C. Gensman. Member of a prominent bus firm2. Post Office Address Corner of Main and Grand (SE).3. Residence address (or location) 615 West. Main, Enid, Oklahoma4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month \_\_\_\_\_ Day \_\_\_\_\_ Year 18745. Place of birth Schlessingerville, Wisconsin.6. Name of Father Conrad Gensman Place of birth GermanyOther information about father A farmer in Sedgwick County, Kansas.7. Name of Mother Margarita Kellerman Place of birth Germany

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 6.

M. A. Nelson  
Interviewer  
August 21, 1937

Interview with  
Frederick C. Gensman  
615 W. Main, town?

Mr. Fred C. Gensman was of German descent. He spoke, read, and wrote this language. He was born in 1864 in Schlessingerville, Wisconsin. Later the parents moved to a place near Garden Plain, about twelve or fifteen miles west of Wichita, Kansas.

In 1893 (according to a picture), or perhaps a little later, he had a dugout on a farm near Garber. He did not make the run into the Strip, but settled on a farm soon after.

Later, he had several farms in that vicinity. Mr. Legge says it was in 1894-5 they bought their first farm near Garber. The picture of the dugout in which they lived when they first came to this country shows a crude structure with one half the building above, and the other half below the ground.

Two years after the run he bought store property in Enid. The old home place here in Enid belongs-

ing to his parents was given to a lady known as Aunt Bertha Hackett in appreciation of her care for Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Gensman in the later years of their life. Later, she traded the place for a farm near Billings, on which they scarcely bothered to pay taxes. Shortly after they paid the taxes in arrears, the Hackett oil field was opened. The best well in that field was found on their place.

The store in Enid was operated for some time by Fred and George and an elderly man named H. E. Deal. Later they bought Mr. Deal's interest in the business and then Will Gensman became a partner. The business, though starting small, became extensive. The hardware business was especially large. In the corner store they sold smaller articles. Next to this on the east, they sold stoves and larger household pieces. They sold buggies having a stock of twenty or more on hand at one time; also harness. They still have the wooden horse they used in connection with that business. Their building on the corner was built in 1898 when Mr. Deal was sole owner. An implement department was added which grew until it had to have a building by itself east of the corner store on Maine.

In 1903, a fire started in the old frame shack

which they had moved south of the present building.

It reached east to the frame implement building on the site of the present implement building, then it jumped to the corner and the other side of the street, wiping the entire old south side out of existence.

After the fire, Fred immediately rebuilt the store on the corner, next to the implement store to the east. Then George built another brick building on the south in 1913, and later they filled in the gap with still another building. So Fred and George's heirs now have six buildings.

They began to build branches in cities around Enid, but in 1923, the branch stores closed out and the business was liquidated.

Margaret and Mildred, daughters of Fred Gensman, were the first twins born in Enid. Margaret is now Mrs E. J. Myers.

Over the store on the corner was the office of Moore and Moore. Mr John C. Moore is said to have been the first mayor of Enid, elected November 16, 1893. Although there had been provisional officers

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elected previously. Art Stephenson was also mayor for a while.

The Gensman's success was due to their organization. They spoke both English and German. This was a new and growing country and demanded supplies. Any business that offered the proper service would grow. There were several competitors who furnished keen competition in those days, but the Gensmans are still doing business after forty years.

Fred was a lodge man. At the time of his death he was state treasurer of the Odd Fellows. He had also been a trustee. He was interested in local politics but did not run for office. Will was a good mixer, who could officiate at religious or social gatherings. He was a sportsman and sold many guns and other similar equipment. They also sold many wagons.

Among the first auto owners in Niid were Dr. McKenzie, Mr. Goltry and Will Gensman. The Gensmans fixed up an old wagon with a stationary engine, using a cultivator wheel for a steering wheel about

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this time. This was about 1902.

One morning a fire from an overheated automobile belonging to Roger Peard, set a barn and the home of an old couple on fire. The fire department was out all night. In the morning they were returning a little too fast and at the Kress corner they caught Will. He was driving his brother Fred to the train to inspect one of the branch stores as was his custom. Fred died about two years ago. George died earlier.

There are four girls in the family: Ethel, the eldest, taught one of the first kindergarten's in Enid. Margaret, who lives at 512 South Polk, has a girl and a boy. Her name is now Meyers.

Although the business has decreased, they have seen it pass through many epochs from the flail to the combine.

Mr. Fred Gensman was an active member of the Rotarians.

Notes on George Gensman (By Mr. Webber)

George Gensman was born March 1, 1864. He has

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lived in Enid at 108 West Maple, first 892 East Broadway and lastly, 401 West Oak. He lived first in a small three room house, but his last home was more elegant. He went to school at Valparaiso, Indiana, and taught school at Andale, and Mount Hope, Kansas. He associated with Mr. Deal in business in 1893, had his brother Fred join a partnership with Deal and later about 1901, they bought Mr. Deal out and added Will to the firm. Mr. Deal went into the contract plumbing business. George became head of the Genaman firm until it dissolved.

His parents were dairy people in Wisconsin but had a wheat farm in Kansas. They settled on a place four miles west and two miles south of Enid. It was in 1911 that the brothers incorporated their business. They put in stores at Nash, Salt Fork, Hunter, Billings, Marshall, Milldale, Jet and Jefferson.

The farmer is always skeptical. When combines came in, the younger men would buy them. The older men were afraid that the crop would spoil before they got it cut. As I said, George was president. Fred handled the implements. Will handled the buying and was outside contact man.

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It has been said that from flails and cradles to combines was the history of harvesting here. In another line it was from walking plows to rubber tired tractors drawing three and four bottoms.

The Gensmans at one time had a grocery store, too. The firm has now divided. George Gensman has four of the buildings. He sells hardware implements and appliances. Fred also sells hardware and appliances two doors away.

The Gensmans have kept out of politics, though Fred was sometimes on the election board and was a prominent Democrat. It has been by industry, economy and honesty that they have been able to build up their business and the up to the minute stock they now have promises that they will hold their trade indefinitely.

The Gensmans are buried together in a lot about three hundred feet north of the main gate of the Enid cemetery North on Grand 1 mile and a half north of town. Fred, however, is buried in the Mausoleum in the same cemetery.