

KESSENGER, WILLIAM HENRY. INTERVIEW 9878

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BIOGRAPHY FORM
 WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
 Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma
KESSINGER, WILLIAM HENRY. INTERVIEW. #9878.

Field Worker's name Ethel B. Tackitt,

This report made on (date) January 18, , 1938

Lone Wolf, Kiowa County, Oklahoma.

1. Name William Henry(Harry) Kessinger.

2. Post Office Address Hobart, Kiowa County, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 825 S. Washington Street.

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month January Day 14 Year 1864

5. Place of birth Illinois.

6. Name of Father Wm. Franklin Kessinger Place of birth Illinois.

7. Name of Mother Mary Ann Estes Place of birth Illinois.

. Other information about mother Typical pioneer.

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 Eight

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Ethel B. Tackitt,
Investigator.

January 18, 1938.

Interview with William Henry Kessenger,
825 S. Washington Street, Hobart, Oklahoma.

I was born in Illinois January 14, 1864. My parents, William Franklin Kessenger and Mary Ann Estes Kessenger, were also natives of Illinois. Our family moved to Texas when I was a boy and settled in what is now Wichita County before that county was organized. We lived at Wichita Falls and I remember quite clearly that every cowboy who rode through the settlement was met by somebody working for the organization of the county and was forced to put his name on the petition to organize it. There were only four families living in Wichita Falls at that time; they were Tom Williams, Jim Raleser, F. M. Davis and my father, W. F. Kessenger.

Freighting and bone hauling were the only occupations to be followed at that time if one was not a cowman or a cowboy working for some of the big outfits such as Dan Waggoner's and Burnett's or the Day Land and Cattle Company over in the Indian Territory.

In the spring of 1881 I made my first long freighting trip and that took me from Gainesville in Cooke County,

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Texas, to the location of the present town of Clarendon in Donley County, a distance of more than three hundred miles. Matt Ricker was my partner and we had a team of five yoke of oxen. We were loaded with shelled corn going out and coming back we picked up a load of buffalo bones, so paid for the trip both ways. We had three wagons trailed one behind the other. It took nearly the whole summer to make the trip and there were great trains of haulers doing the same as we, hauling loads of provisions and other articles to the ranches and settlements in the West and returning with loads of bones and buffalo hides for the buyers who shipped them to the Eastern market. A well dressed buffalo hide could be bought for a dollar or two. The Indians dressed many buffaloes and sold them ^{but} the raw hides were shipped in bulk.

The Tonkawa Indians dressed and sold hides among the white people quite frequently for they lived in Texas in the early '80's. A hide dressed by the Tonkawas was pliable and soft on the inside, while the hair on the outer side

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side was unharmed and thick. They usually painted pictures of persons, birds, and animals on the skin side with their Indian paints and dyes of red, yellow, and indigo.

I hauled supplies to the ranches and line camps of the cowmen over into the Territory and in March, 1885, I with two other fellows hauled barbed wire on spools from Wichita Falls, Texas, to the Cheyenne and Arapaho territory to build a cattle drift fence for the J. D. cow outfit. These fellows were George W. Swinney and Warrick; they each had a team of six yoke of oxen and I had a team of five, that means that they each had twelve oxen and I had ten. Each man had his three wagons coupled one behind the other and after crossing Red River at Doan's Crossing we struck out across the sand hills, winding along as best we could for there were no such things as roads in Greer County across which we were to travel. The speed was slow at best for the oxen had to pick their own food from the grass when we camped at noon

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and at night we had also to find water for them but as we traveled through the valley in which the town of Altus is located at present and headed on north crossing the Elm Fork of Red River south of the present town of Granite and continued north past Headquarter Mountain and crossed the North Fork of Red River into the Cheyenne country.

We had our orders to take the wire to a line camp of the J. D.'s and the foreman came to us and pointed out the place where he wished us to unload the great heap of spooled barbed wire. It was then wound on wooden spools, one hundred pounds on a spool. This barbed wire was to be used in building a drift fence which stretched for miles in a general direction east and west to keep the thousands of head of cattle which roamed at will over all of the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, Comanche and Greer County country from drifting out and down into Texas when a norther struck them. These drift fences would stop them and the cattle would follow it to

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some creek, river or gyp break where they would be sheltered from the wind and cold. The grass was so plentiful in those days that stock never suffered for food. The great need was water as the water holes would freeze over and the stock could not break the ice and would often fall upon the ice, so would freeze to death. The duty of the cowboy line rider was to look after his miles of fence and see to it that the water holes were cut free of ice every day in winter and that no cattle bogged down in these water holes in summer.

After unloading our wire we started on the return trip; the going was not so hard but we were in a hurry and did not take time to pick up bones on the way as there were not so many bones in this district as were to be found farther west. We made it across Red River on April 22, 1885, and camped on the Texas side that night and it was most lucky for us that we made it across as the most terrific rain I have ever seen fell that night and Red River came down in a flood that would have

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kept us on the other side for weeks.

It required two months for us to make the trip with those twenty-two oxen and heavy wooden wagons over a stretch of country of unbroken sand hills and rolling prairies covered with mesquite grass growing thick and matted, crossing as best we could Bitter Creek, Lake Creek and many small streams that flow into North Fork; the valleys of which were then thickly set with willow bushes, small trees and tall coarse lowland grasses.

In the summer of 1889 I with four other fellows secured the contract to string the barbed wire on the drift fence for the Burnett and Waggoner cow outfit. This fence started about seven miles south of Emmett Cox's ranch and ran west with a three or four mile jog to the north to take in the turtle holes watering place and continued west seventy-two miles to the Greer County line which was indicated by the North Fork of Red River.

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Another bunch of fellows had gone ahead and dug the post holes and set the posts. Our outfit followed with a home-made wood and iron roller fixed on the hind end of a wagon on which the spools of wire were placed so that it would roll. The wagon with a team of mules pulling it, strung the wire by the side of the posts about one hundred yards at a time. Then we would stretch it tight with this home-made stretcher that my father had made in 1882 and in this way we built the seventy-two miles of three-wire fence that was for years the Burnett-Waggoner line fence, a land mark known to all cowmen in Indian Territory and Texas.

My friend, George W. Swinney, a well known freighter and cowpuncher of Greer County and Texas, developed what is now called tuberculosis and was forced to quit ranch work. He had no kin but was staying with a friend near Mangum when he became despondent and took his own life by shooting himself. He was buried in the Mangum Cemetery in the last of the 1880's.

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When the Kiowa country opened in 1901, I drew a claim and tried to farm it but the land was so sandy that I could do nothing with it.

I now live in Hobart and so far as I know am the last one of my people living.