

KIZZAR, W. H.

INTERVIEW. #8919

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Interviewer, Virgil Coursey,
October 12, 1937.

Interview with W. H. Kizzar
703 East Broadway,
Altus, Oklahoma.

I was born in Parker County, Texas, October 30, 1879. I was educated at Branbury College, Texas, and Polytechnic College, Fort Worth.

In 1890, my parents decided to move to Oklahoma. We came to Quanah by train and there continued the trip in wagons. We crossed Red River at the old Yelldell Crossing and many a trip was afterward made over that crossing for all supplies had to be hauled from Quanah. These supplies, coal, sugar, beans, coffee, etc. were bought in large quantities sufficient to last for several months. We settled ten miles west and two miles north of Altus on a quarter section of land. There was a large family of us, eight children, and it kept us digging to make a living.

My father was a Methodist minister and preached all over this section of the country. He usually had four churches, visiting each church once a month. The trips were

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made in a little two wheeled cart. Father received very little money for his services. The churches were called missions and were supported mainly by the Conference, a small sum being set aside for this purpose.

Since my father was away most of the time, we children had the responsibility of making and gathering the crops.

In 1891 or 1892 we experienced one of the worst dust storms I have ever seen. For three days and nights the wind blew from the north with almost hurricane velocity. The top soil blew out of fields as deep as it had been plowed. Practically every one in the country had planted feed. That seed blew out and later maize and kaffir corn sprang up all over the prairies where the dust and seed had settled.

Dirt drifted along fences to a depth of five feet and cattle walked out over fences as though there were no fences there.

At one time during the early days, people became so destitute in our neighborhood that it was necessary to provide some relief. A meeting was called and a committee selected to work out a plan. My father was one of the

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committee. It was decided that he should make a trip to Dallas, D. C., Fort Worth and the other larger cities in Texas and ask for food. He was successful in quickly getting three or four car loads of food shipped into the stricken area. He met with the Chamber of Commerce of the different Texas towns and presented his plan and explained the gravity of the situation. During one of these meetings a telegram was received by the Chamber of Commerce saying that my father was a "fake" and that people were not in the distressed condition described by him.

Of course, my father was greatly embarrassed and shocked. He explained to the chairman that there must be some mistake and that he intended remaining in the city until he was vindicated. It developed that a banker, running a sort of private bank, sent the telegram in an effort to thwart the plan. It was the banker's intention to force the farmers to borrow money from him and to give him mortgages on their farms. Then it would have been a simple matter for him to foreclose and take over many farms.

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When the people in the community learned what this banker had done, they almost mobbed him. He closed his little bank, packed his suitcase and hurried to Vernon to catch a train to some other place.

Before this time he had persuaded a widow to deposit with him three thousand dollars which she had realized from a life insurance policy.

A posse of men overtook the banker at Vernon. The seventeen year-old son of the widow who had been defrauded stuck a gun in the banker's ribs and demanded his mother's three thousand dollars. The banker opened his suit case and handed the three thousand dollars to the young man. The banker was allowed to go and was never seen again by his former neighbors.

Those car loads of food from Texas kept many a person from going hungry. As I have stated, our family was poor but we never asked for any of the food. We had plenty of milk and butter and an occasional bacon rind, which tasted better than a big, thick steak. That was more than many people had. Bread was made from kaffir corn ground in

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a coffee mill and muffins made from ground kaffir corn were delicious.

I helped survey the right-of-way for the Orient Railway through this country.

It took about six months to make this survey and it ran from Red River north nearly to the Kansas line. I remember that our survey ran through the present town of Altus.

When the railroad was built the road was built west of our survey in order to avoid the brakes found ⁱⁿ the north part of the town.

People gave us no end of trouble trying to bribe us to disclosing where the road would be built. We could not have told even had we wanted to because our information on the subject was meagre.