

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

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MESSENBAUGH, J.F. (MRS.) *- INTERVIEW.

10454

Field Worker's name Amelia F. Harris

This report made on (date) April 13, 1938 1938

1714 N. May Ave.

1. Name Mrs. J. F. Messenbaugh

2. Post Office Address Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

3. Residence address (or location) 815 NE 16th

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month _____ Day _____ Year _____

5. Place of birth Near Cumberland, Iowa.

6. Name of Father W. L. Whistler Place of birth New Lisbon, Ohio.

Other information about father Made one run.

7. Name of Mother Marian S. Mercer Place of birth Morgantown, Va.

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 22.

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Harris, Amelia F., Journalist.
Indian-Pioneer History Project. S-149.
April 13th, 1938.

Father came from Cumberland, Iowa, to Arkansas City April 20, 1889, and waited in Arkansas City until April 22, the day of the Opening. He boarded the much crowded Santa Fe train and got off at Waterloo Station ten miles north of Edmond, and stood in line until the gun was fired, and then started afoot with the mass of people who almost ran over him several times, but he kept walking, running and dodging. All the claims he came to were taken but he kept plodding along for eighteen miles. He always avoided the bottom land, feeling that it would be taken first, and looked for reasonably good upland, going southwest of Waterloo until he found a claim that no one else seemed to be near. He had with him in a tow sack a part of a ham, some bread, an ax and a stake with his name on it; he drove his stake up near the rock that the surveyors had put there with section numbers on it; then Father took his ax and chopped up a line of dirt in the shape of a room which would hold as a sign of improvements started.

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In walking over the land he noticed a man on the adjoining section, walked over and introduced himself. The man was Mark A. Leedman and in the course of conversation, Mr. Leedman and Father agreed that one would watch both homesteads while the other went to Kingfisher to file. Mr. Leedman had a horse which Father rode to Kingfisher to file, then Father watched when Mr. Leedman went to file. Father spent a day making a few improvements to hold the homestead and started a well by chopping the ground with his ax and throwing out the dirt with his hands. The next day he walked back to Waterloo and took the train back to Cumberland, our home, leaving his homestead in Mr. Leedman's care; after arriving home Dad and my oldest brother loaded up a wagon with some farm implements, seed to plant, also a camping outfit and they drove through in this covered wagon from Cumberland, Iowa, to Father's claim in Oklahoma, and they were on the road about thirty days as some of the roads were bad and traveling in a wagon was very slow. Wild game was plentiful and furnished all the meat they had on the trip. They reached Oklahoma

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about the last of May. The first improvement which they made was a well which they dug and walled up with rock; it afforded plenty of water. They broke out and planted in feed stuff, twelve acres of upland, then they cut posts to build fences around the plowed ground, also to fence lots for our stock. It was then July and Father commenced a sod house; he plowed the furrows around his claim as a fire guard and used the sod from these furrows to build a sixteen by twenty sod house; he built a fire place in one end of sticks and mud which answered the purpose of a stove for heat and for cooking, and after these necessary improvements were made Father and Brother continued to break land. They planted a big turnip patch, and hilled the turnips up for winter use with straw and dirt.

There were eight of us children; my oldest brother went with Dad and the seven younger children remained with Mother to harvest the crops made in Iowa, and to help in getting everything ready to move out to Oklahoma, which we did the 3rd day of March, 1890. We shipped our bedding and some household goods by freight, although

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we had sold most of our things, and we came on the Santa Fe to Edmond. I remember distinctly that when we left Iowa it was very cold and the ground was frozen, but when we arrived in Oklahoma we were agreeably surprised to see the beautiful prairie all green and with a profusion of wild blue and white anemones. Father met us in Edmond with the wagon team; we children wanted him to stop and let us gather flowers but he did not stop for he said our farm was covered with wild flowers, and everything was so different from Iowa. On the way to our new home we had to ford Deep Fork and Deer Creek, finally arriving at our claim about sundown. We had never been in a sod house before and ours was a novelty to us and we children were carried away with the crudeness of everything. When our things came Mother hung carpets and quilts over the walls and put a rug on the floor and our home was very cozy and warm.

Mother had brought every kind of garden and flower seed from our home in Iowa and we raised the best garden and fine watermelons and the old fashioned musk melons oblong in shape, and some were quite large, and we had

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plenty of corn and feed. We lived in our sod house a year and a half before Father found time to build a four room frame house and we were so anxious to move into it that we couldn't wait for it to be finished inside and the lathing and plastering were done after we moved in. After our new house was completed, the older people met at our new home and organized a Sunday School and church and they held these meetings each Sunday in our home until the community became financially able to build a church house.

Our first pastor was Reverend Dyke Rainey of Mound Mission, and every Sunday morning Father and Brother would prepare the parlor by placing long planks on boxes for benches for Sunday School and Church, and a small table was used for a pulpit. Then the men in our neighborhood went down to the sawmill on Deer Creek and bought sufficient cottonwood lumber for a school house, which they built one mile east of our home. This was a subscription school and Father paid \$1.00 apiece for each one of us to go to school.

Our farm did not produce very much and we did not

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I have any fear of the Indians. In 1904 I taught school in Oklahoma City and I was then elected as County Superintendent of Oklahoma County on the Democratic ticket.

In 1907 I married Dr. Messenbaugh who was the Mayor of Oklahoma City, also an Eye, Ear and Nose Specialist, and last but not least a farmer, and he enjoyed farming very much. He died June 19, 1928. In March, 1930, I became Curator of the newspaper department in the Historical Building and I am still in that department today.

My father only made one run for a homestead but my oldest brother made a run in 1893 and obtained a homestead near Enid. Our family still owns the farm that Father filed on in 1889 and the old sod house is used for a barn. I have two children, a girl, Mrs. J. C. Elliott and a son, Joseph F. Messenbaugh, a physician and surgeon of Oklahoma City.