

LESKE, JAKE

INTERVIEW

8204

254

LESKE, JAKE.

INTERVIEW.

8204

255

- 8 -

Form A-(S-149)

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

Field Worker's name Mrs. Nora Lorrin, El Reno, Okla.

This report made on (date) August 14th, 1937.

-
1. Name Mr. Jake Leske
 2. Post Office Address El Reno, Oklahoma.
 3. Residence address (or location) 900 West Hayes.
 4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month August Day 27th Year 1868
 5. Place of birth Near Maquoketa, Iowa.

-
6. Name of Father Charles Leske Place of birth Dresden, Saxony, Germany.

Other information about father Died Nov. 30, 1907.

7. Name of Mother Anna (King) Leske Place of birth Luxemborg, Germany.

Other information about mother Died in 1880.

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.

An interview with
Jake Leske, El Reno, Okla.

Mr. Jake Leske left Iowa and went to Texas in 1891 and when he heard of the second opening of the Cheyenne and Arapaho country came up to Oklahoma. His sister, Mrs. Semonds, had a grocery store in El Reno and he clerked in it for a few years.

The Indians used to come into the store in groups, probably from four to a dozen and would buy a very small quantity of a lot of different things. They would make a dollar go as far as it would go.

Jake Leske obtained a relinquishment on a homestead about ten miles west of El Reno in 1896.

He used to trade with the Indians after he went to the farm, that is, if they had any tools, axes or anything that he needed he would trade with them. The Indians were always fair and honest in their dealings. Mr. Leske always considered the Indians good neighbors; if you lost any stock or anything they were always willing to help you locate it, and would help all they could.

The place he got was first taken by another man and Mr. Leske bought the relinquishment.

2

One day he was out in the yard and an Indian arrived and came into the yard, stood around and looked him over. He had a brace and bit in his hand, Mr. Leske understood that he was not the man the Indian had expected to see. It developed that he had borrowed the brace and bit from the man Mr. Leske had bought the place from, and had had the brace and bit for two or three years. The man he had borrowed it from had sold out and gone. The Indian thought it was about time to bring the brace and bit home. He thought awhile and then said "You see him?" Mr. Leske said "Maby"? The Indian said "I leave it" and he did. He would not take it back. The Indians in the early days had a certain way of knowing Mr. Jake Leske. He owned a mule that was in a barn when it burned down. The mule got its ears burned off. The Indians all over the country knew that mule. If he met an Indian and wanted to have some dealings with him and he did not know who Mr. Leske was he would say "I'm the man who owns the short eared mule" and they would know right away who he was and where he lived. There were lots of Indians riding the country, but no child, girls or women were ever molested by them; Mr. Leske never knew of the Indians bothering anybody.

3

The white settlers were allowed to get the dead wood across on the south side of the South Canadian River. They would get up at four o'clock in the morning and have to hustle to get back home before nine o'clock at night. They were always worried when they were across the river and never stopped to feed the horses or eat dinner on the south side of the river on account of the dangerous quick sand; they never knew when the river would take a notion to rise and there were no bridges. When the river started to rise the quick sand would look roily and soft and it was dangerous.

They fed their horses and ate their dinners on this side and nearly always in the same place. The wild turkeys would come up with their young ones, some nearly half grown and feed where they had fed the horses. There were lots of wild turkeys. They did not dare to kill these turkeys though because they did not dare to carry guns when they went after wood across the river. There were Indian deputies who watched that.

There were deer and antelope over on the south side of the Canadian River and there was a law against killing deer and antelope. If they had carried a

4

gun those Indian deputies might have arrested them and if they had been arrested they would have been taken to Anadarko so they carried no guns.

They would often be driving past a patch of brush and an antelope would jump out and run away.

All of the wood haulers were pretty closely watched and were not allowed to cut any green wood at all. The men who lived along the river sometimes would slip across and cut down the cedar trees, cut them into posts and bring them to El Reno and sell them. It made it hard on the farmers who wanted just the dead wood to burn for fuel.

In the early days, when thrashing time came, the neighbors always exchanged work and generally had to market all the wheat they cut to pay expenses as wheat was only bringing 60¢ a bushel and there was not enough money to put up a bin. A few years later they built granaries and could then hold their wheat for a better price.

They would get into the field early and make a slick clean job of it. A days work would be from early enough to see well until at least nine o'clock at night and if it looked like rain they would work until 11 or 12 o'clock at night trying to save each other's grain. These

LESKE, JAKE.

INTERVIEW.

8204

5

early settlers worked hard, were honest with each other and were happy.

The Leskes had a good orchard having fruit from June up till late in the fall. Peaches, cherries, plums, nectarines and pears and the place was covered with wild fruit; there were wild plums, wild gooseberries, grapes, currants and elderberries. Lots of the neighbors who had no fruit came to their orchard and got it. Mr. Leske would just let these neighbors drive in and get what they wanted. There was no market for fruit and the Leskes could not possibly use all the fruit they had. Mr. Leske kept his orchard clean of weeds and it always bore well.

Every fall Mr. and Mrs. Leske would butcher and put up enough meat to last them until butchering time came around again. They cured their meat in the old home way by smoking it.

They built their smoke house by digging down about four feet in a bank and then laid sod up about four feet and then roofed it over. It made a dandy smoke house. They always raised and kept their own potatoes, buying only their seed potatoes. Mr. Leske says that if potatoes

are dug at the right time, and taken care of properly, they will keep in this country as well as in any place.

All the old timers were good neighbors and as they had no phones it was nothing unusual to get up in the middle of the night and go for a doctor for some sick neighbor.

Mr. Leske has a violin that is a hundred and fifty years old and he played a couple of tunes on it for me. The violin has a very sweet tone. Mr. Leske made a crochet hook out of a deer bone for his wife and she has it still.

Rube Hickox was the postmaster in El Reno when Mr. Leske first came here.