

WATROUS, EUGENE.

INTERVIEW

1399

444

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

WATROUS, EUGENE.

INTERVIEW.

1399.

Field Worker's name Merrill A. Nelson.This report made on (date) September 21, 1937. 19371. Name Mr. Eugene Watrous, (known as Gene Watrous).2. Post Office Address Enid Ice and Fuel, 302 South Indiana.3. Residence address (or location) 303 West Pine.4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month March Day 31 Year 1861.5. Place of birth Rome, Illinois.6. Name of Father Wm. Washington Watrous. Place of birth New York.Other information about father Physician when he died.7. Name of Mother Harriet Rose. Place of birth Conn.

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 14.

WATROUS, EUGENE.

INTERVIEW.

1399.

Merrill Nelson,
Interviewer,
Sept. 21, 1937.

An Interview With Eugene Watrous,
One of the officials of the Enid
Ice & Fuel Company from a personal
Interview at 302 South Independence,
Enid, Oklahoma.

My mother had nine children. She was a good mother to us. However, I am the only child left. One of us died in infancy. Another brother was a stationery engineer; there were seven boys in the family. I am the only one who went to Oklahoma. My parents remained in Illinois and are buried in Rome, our old home town near Peoria, Illinois.

I was born in 1861. In 1892 I went on the road as a traveling salesman. Kansas City was my headquarters. I handed in my resignation about the time of the Openin Win- tending to make the run into the Cherokee Strip but they did not find anyone to take my place soon enough so I went on south and was in Armore when the race was made. As soon as I had gone back to Kansas City and was relieved I returned to Enid. I had been through the country as a salesman and decided to try this town.

-2-

When I came here Enid was a tent city. There was a bunch of men from Texas and Mississippi who had a load of drug stock, but there was no druggist among them. They had two wagon loads of the stock worth perhaps \$1500.00. With a small capital they were glad to take me in as I was a pharmacist. Harry Edwards, who had brought in the drugs, was my associate. There were four or five all told in the outfit. I was the first or about the first druggist in Enid. Evans may have come here as soon as I did but this is uncertain. He may have come even earlier.

There were only a few stores in buildings in Enid. I myself first opened my drug store in a tent. Later I put up a board shack into which I moved. Emmett and Harley were others of the boys from the south. Then there was a jeweler. They took me in as a full fledged partner, counting their stock against my experience.

Right next to our tent there was a little frame law office. George Coger was the occupant. This was on the north side. Colonel Havens, afterwards a member of the Territorial Legislature, was another neighbor. For a while

WATROUS, EUGENE.

INTERVIEW.

1399.

-3-

he was Commissioner of the Land Office at Woodward. The old land office was just a few feet north of the present post office on the south third of the square which is owned by the Government. The county owns the rest. I was boarding with Mrs. Hebron. By the way, she is Mr. Horace G. McKeever, the well known attorney's mother-in-law. She still lives a half block from me on West Pine.

As a salesman, I had also traveled on the L. K. & T. in Indian Territory. There was nothing between Hennessey and Caldwell but a water tank at North Enid and a water tank at Renfrow. I came through this country in 1891 and 1892; I went by Enid. It was just prairie.

Pond Creek was the railroad town. The Government established Jefferson as the county seat. Medford is now Jefferson. The railroad tried to make North Enid the main town. I had no definite determination to settle. Enid was almost the first place to land when one came down from the north.

Money was hard to get hold of in those days. O. J. Fleaing, H. H. Chaplin and George Graham and H. H. Watkins

WATROUS, EUGENE.

INTERVIEW.

1399.

-4-

were some of the early bankers. H. H. Watkins had a bank where the Elks building is now. I believe this was the Citizens Bank, which went broke. Fleming was the cashier of the "O" county bank. Later he was President of a bank.

With a pot metal safe, depending entirely on deposits to do business, with little or no capital, it is a wonder that there was not more financial disaster.

Thompson and Loew, prominent Rock Island officials interested financially in the North Enid townsite, expected to establish the county seat there. Hoke Smith (of the Interior Department) sent a man to locate the county seats. They did not "sugar" their way at North Enid and for some reason they decided to locate the county seat here at Enid, two and a half miles south of North Enid.

But the Rock Island as everybody knows gave orders to their men not to stop. Both towns could not survive and survival depended on depot facilities.

The first Mayor of Enid was a big man with a full beard named Moore. The people of Enid first offered to build a depot furnishing land, equipment and paying all expenses if the trains would stop at Enid. The railroad turned that offer down.

WATROUS, EUGENE.

INTERVIEW.

1359.

-5-

They exhausted civil means and the trains were going through Enid at forty miles an hour. They decided to stop the trains so they turned the track up and upset a cattle train. Then soldiers were sent to guard the track. We put out fifty (or more) soldier citizens. I was one of them. We patrolled the streets and allowed no one to come or to go out of Enid after sundown unless identified.

Finally an enabling act was passed providing that the county seats be chosen by election.

This did not suit the people of Enid for this town had already been chosen by the Government as a county seat town. Finally they had a bill to establish county seat towns and the manner by election was stricken out and an amendment that the railroads be instructed to establish depot facilities put in. As soon as this became a law the news spread here and a great crowd come together to celebrate. It was like armistice day when some one got that telegram. They piled boxes together on East Broadway and there was a jubilee. George Orlan read the telegram standing on a box.

WATROUS, EUGENE.

INTERVIEW.

1359.

-6-

The people of Enid were not intending to do any damage. They merely wanted to ratify the proposition.

The men who had been deputized turned their warrants over and with this money a depot was built. But the railroad died hard and the depot was put just as far away as the law allowed, at or near its present site.

The depot was very small at first, about one third of its present size; Godschalk is the only one left of those who did business on the opening day. Goulding and Cannon were poor when they came, but they became wealthy and loaned out a lot of money to others.

J. B. Ferguson was another who had nothing when he came who became wealthy and at one time owned the Garfield County Bank. When he sold out, he owned the First National Bank and the corner where the Green Store is now at Randolph and Independence, the southeast corner.

Our first store was where the Mecca Theatre is now.

Then we moved to this Green corner till 1915. A lawyer from Wellington occupied the land of the Central National Bank in early days. This building has been moved to South Grand and Market Streets. I failed to mention that someone

WAINWRIGHT, EUGENE.

INTERVIEWS.

1397.

built a two story building on the North side and I moved there in '94 before occupying the Green corner.

The Rex Hotel put up in the spring of 1901 was a three story building. On the top floor was a billiard hall. There were rooms for twenty to thirty thus in the building. The doors were sometimes merely cloth screens.

John C. Moore, the first regular mayor of Tulsa was a good sized man with a distinguished white beard. His offices were located in the center of a block.

I saw Dickensheets, the realtor, the first day I came. There was a crowd of people waiting at the land office which went clear around the square. He was serving coffee and peddling sandwiches along the line. Lillie McGee was one of the first electric light men. When I met Edmond Frantz first he had a hardware store near where Corry's drug store is now. Frank Frantz worked in the hardware store owned by Ed and Will. He is now in the real estate business in Tulsa. He went to Arizona, got in with the Rough Riders, became acquainted with Teddy Roosevelt, and was appointed postmaster here. Next he was appointed Indian agent at Pawhuska and finally Territorial Governor, January, 1906. He now lives in Tulsa.

FERGUSON, EUGENE.

INTERVIEW.

1909.

-5-

One of the first Territorial Governors of Oklahoma was Mr. Ferguson. I had held office as city treasurer at Lincoln, Illinois, where I secured useful experience. My hobby was the preservation of wild life. Oklahoma at that time was a game paradise. Game was slaughtered mercilessly under the old Kansas and Indian Territory laws. Ferguson had been appointed by Roosevelt. Ferguson in turn appointed me game warden. I served under him four years, then was re-appointed by Muntz and served until the coming of St. John. My scalp was one of the first that Governor Haskell hung to his belt when he was elected in 1907. However, I was elected to the legislature and served in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th sessions of the Oklahoma Legislature, the latter four sessions in the Senate. I sponsored the enactment into law of a great deal of the legislation pertaining to the preservation and propagation of game and fish in the state. Askes, who was appointed game warden, did a great deal along these lines but left much to me.

One thing we had difficulty with was pheasants. They were sent for and released in the state but the climate

WATROUS, EUGENE.

INTERVIEW.

1329.

-9-

did not suit them. They came from China and Japan and do well in Washington and Oregon where they seem to enjoy the dampness. We hatched them out but they disappeared. They need more cover than they get here and the climate is too hot so none of the varieties seem to do well here.

Battrey was another merchant who started small and built up to a business of \$100,000.00 a year. They say he was robbed or else through a too generous extension of credit, his business reduced.

Calloway had a feed and livery yard and thrived during the horse and buggy days. Godschalk and Weiberger started a little clothing store just north of the old Cafeteria Grocery. Godschalk was always the soul of honor. Weiberger was unfortunate. He came on the freight and broke a leg trying to get off. He was partly Jewish. He was best known as one of the commissioners to the World Fair, appointed by the Governor to erect an Oklahoma building at St. Louis and arrange the exhibits. This building was moved back into the state and is now the Ellis building in El Reno.

WATROUS, EUGENE.

INTERVIEW

1399.

-10-

Judge W. O. Cromwell was an Assistant Attorney General in the Territorial days when I was Game Warden. Some one had shipped some live wild quail to a man named Payne in Wichita; I held them and asked his opinion as to my right to do so as this was an interstate shipment. Cromwell held that the man had a right to ship the thousand wild birds out of the state.

The largest catch I ever made was almost an entire carload of quail; three thousand of them were shipped out of Okeene to a commission house in Chicago. There were spotters looking for the car as we expected its shipment. They came in a green car. My dog could scent the meat. They were shipped in a Texas-Pacific car. I took possession. There were six barrels of dressed turkey near the door. The quail were packed in egg cases in a refrigerator car.

The first few years in Enid everything was hurly-burly and there was plenty of excitement. There were four or five saloons with dance halls in the rear and gambling was wide open in some places. The toughest element came to the dances as well as the better class. The law was on a man's hip pocket.

WATROUS, EUGENE.

INTERVIEW.

1933.

-11-

My first wife died before I came west. I have one daughter by my first marriage. I married again, a Kingfisher girl, in 1900.

The following offices I held in the Masonic Lodge.

Past Master of End Lodge, #80.

Past Eminent Commander.

I am a member of the Chamber of Commerce, also of the Elks Lodge, and of the Consistory at Guthrie, (Scottish Rite) also of the India Temple or Shrine at Oklahoma City. One of the civic organizations I belong to is the local Chamber of Commerce.

When Dick Yeager was brought to the jail in a wounded condition I administered a drug which eased his pain till he died. The County claimed he was a State prisoner and would not pay the bill.

Times were really hard here at first. I could have had my choice of twelve farms that next summer. I could not visualize how I could profit by staying on a claim and proving up. Harley, one of my pals who had come with me into the drug business, did prove up on a claim out by Kremlin.

WATROUS, EUGENE.

INTERVIEW.

1939.

-12-

Champion, McKensie, Fields and Kelso from El Reno, had offices over my drug store. They were known as the "Big Four" and were from Texas.

There was a big rough fellow, a Dr. Reason, who had been a physician in the timbered country. He was unwilling to bother with small sums of money, saying that where he came from the smallest sum one would consider was 25 cents. He surprised some people who did not understand his background ^{and} why he despised little things. There was another doctor who would not affiliate. We discovered that his diploma was really his brother's. Nevertheless he had some practice and was not entirely unsuccessful.

During the territorial days many unskilled men came in and it is reported that they were allowed to practice medicine through the conniving of one of the men on the Territorial Board. It was said that by paying a little money some men whom it was a crime to allow to practice medicine were permitted to do so in the Territory.

The way the ^{capital} of Oklahoma was moved ^{was} as follows: The law said that Guthrie was to be the capital till 1913

SARNOUS, L. WINE.

MILWAUKEE.

1890.

-13-

but in spite of this in 1890 the man who was then
governor took the seat to Oklahoma City which would have
secured the place sooner or later anyway and made that
the capital ahead of time. This was about the time of
a special session of the Legislature.

J. Elmer Thomas was the only member of the State
Legislature who had served continuously as I had done
when I was in the State Senate. Being a Republican, I
was always in the minority. But he would help me just
as freely as if I were a Democrat.

It has been said that Callahan and Flynn passed the
Free Home Bill. Now I recollect, Callahan had little to

do with this, as he was in Congress only one term.

I looked after the interests of the retail druggists.

Long about the only druggist in that body. I sponsored

the law which made it obligatory for every druggist to be
a registered pharmacist. We also got a law through that

the dues to the Pharmaceutical Association should be \$5.00

per year; 2.00 of which was to go to the convention, or the

meeting we hold once a year. All the pharmacists were

supposed to join this.

WATROUS, EUGENE.

INTERVIEW.

1929.

-14-

Roy Sanford, a local druggist, served one year on the Board of Pharmacists appointed by the Governor. The year I was president we met at Sulphur. In territorial days, appointment to the Board of Pharmacy was political pie. I talked to Bob Williams, who was then governor, and tried to show him that the druggists were competent to choose these men, not the governor, and finally we passed a bill that the Pharmaceutical Association was to choose seven men from which the governor chose the Pharmacy Board. This raised the shadow.