

WESSEL, R. H.

SECOND INTERVIEW

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Ruth Lee Gamblin, Interviewer,
May 25, 1937.

An Interview with Mr. R. H. Wessel,
North 11th Street, Frederick, Okla.

I came to Frederick in 1902 and bought a paper that had just been started, the paper that is now the Frederick Press. I had searched through most all the towns of Southwest Oklahoma but after I came here and had looked around a bit, I acquired faith in the future of the town and surrounding country. I knew this was where I wanted to locate.

One day when I was about fourteen years old, and living near Wallace, Nebraska, my father asked me to go into town and get a copy of the latest paper published. While the editor of the publication was hunting out the latest issue from an overcrowded shelf he asked me if I would like to work in a printing office to which I replied "You bet I would".

That was my first newspaper connection and happened over forty-five years. Since that time I have been directly or indirectly connected with the newspaper and printing business. There was some time out for service in the Spanish American War and while attending the Nebraska University of which I am a graduate and I was also editor of the college paper.

My salary for the first newspaper job at Wallace, Nebraska was exactly two dollars a week and I was so small that I had to use boxes to stand on to reach the type cases.

I worked for this man during the campaign of William Jennings Bryan. At that time Coxeys Army came into existence. The editor favored the Populist party and always wore a Coxeys army button on his coat lapel, so when the Populist party was defeated the editor was forced out of town by boycott. When he left my father leased the paper for me, paying \$2.00 a month for the lease. I was the editor of this paper, and the youngest editor of any paper.

A drouth made times hard in Nebraska, in those days and I finally had to close the shop.

Shortly afterwards I had a chance to enter the Nebraska University. While attending the university I sold books and did many odd jobs to pay my way, finally becoming editor of the University paper.

While I was in the University, the Spanish-American War broke out. I enlisted in the Nebraska regiment which was the first regiment to go to the Philippines.

When I came back from the Philippines I went to work in the publishing plant of my former lieutenant colonel, who published several papers at Lincoln, Nebraska. One of them was William Jennings Bryan's "Commoner".

When my employer made a trip down to Oklahoma Territory for the purpose of drawing a number to get land in the Territory, I asked him to draw a number for me. The number I got was a lucky one, while the one he drew was not. I arrived in Marlow, Oklahoma, August 5, 1901, and began looking for a place to file some land. The next day I continued my journey to Lawton where I filed my number and finally chose a tract of land near Sterling on Beaver Creek. I was the second to file and was the first to build, putting up a half-dugout and making other necessary improvements called for by law. I kept this land until I was offered \$8,000 for it and then sold out.

During the time I was proving up on my land I continued to work on papers at Lawton. I can remember Lawton very well when it was only a tent town and I was working for papers there when this county opened.

I began looking for a place to establish a paper of my own. I looked over the town of Walters, Waurika, Cache and Snyder. At Cache I started a paper with another man as partner, but it wasn't much of a success.

Then I came on down to Snyder arriving there the day of the official opening of that town. But I found two papers already established there, so on a cold Sunday in November, 1902, I arrived in Frederick.

Here I found a small four page paper printed on a 10 x 15 job press and called The Hazel Enterprise, already established, but when the owner heard of me, he came to me and offered to sell. We made a deal whereby I became owner of all the equipment, the paper, and the good will of the people.

When I bought the Enterprise, I was still part owner of the Cache paper and with the help of an inexperienced aid I gathered all the news, set all the type and got my issue out here in Frederick on time and then went back to Cache and did the same thing, getting both papers out on time practically by myself in one week. Another thing the equipment of the Enterprise did not include a paper cutter, so I had to use a butcher knife as a paper cutter for several issues until I could get one.