

BARRY, ANNA R.

HENRY PATTERSON DEC'D. 10604

40

BARRY, ANNA R.

HENRY PATTERSON DEC'D.

10604.

Anna R. Barry,
Journalist,
April 15, 1938.

This article was written by
Henry Patterson about a year before
He passed away and was never published
In any newspaper.

"IT DID HAPPEN HERE".

I came to Oklahoma for the "run", just as many
thousands of other hopeful persons from countless states
did, and was successful in obtaining a good claim.

Unlike hundreds of others, I didn't get into the Terri-
tory, until the night before the opening, so missed a
lot of the attendant excitement. But with the dawn of
the great day that was to go down in history as the
greatest of all deals in real-estate, there was sufficient
excitement for everyone. If I live to a hundred, I'll
never forget the feeling that coursed through me when I
awakened before daylight on that momentous day of days.
Little cold chills ran up and down my back, leaving
goose pimples in their wake. What a grand and wonderful
opportunity is mine, was my first thought, and as I
watched the rosy hues of the rising sun I knew I should

BARRY, ANNA R.

HENRY PATTERSON DEC'D.

10604.

-2-

find in this new land, not only a home, but my life's work, the fulfillment of my dreams. I have not been disappointed. The piece of land I was fortunate in obtaining, was a very good bit of property and yielded a fine living, although I didn't live on it myself a great length of time. We remained out there until the drawing of 1901, when I was again fortunate, in that I was able to purchase, at a bargain, some town lots. The man who drew this property received word from his home that he must come there at once, and had not the money for the trip, so offered me his lots cheap, if I would pay cash. This I was only too glad to do, and so became the possessor of some of the most valuable lots in El Reno. My drug store stands on part of that land today. It wasn't long after this little business transaction, that I conceived the idea of building a store on the location, and since my people in the north had been in the drug business, I naturally turned to that branch of industry myself, having had quite a bit of experience along that line in my father's store.

BARRY, ANNA R.

HENRY PATTERSON DEC'D.

10604.

-3-

But to return to the day of the "run". I was in the fourth or fifth line from the front when the signal rang out on the air and lost no time in getting under way. The surge and roar of the moving hordes was like the noise of a great hurricane at sea. It gave me the feeling that I was being carried along without will or volition and that I might at any time be hurled to my death on some rocky shore. There were as many behind me as in front, and I doubt very much my ability to have stopped my mad flight, had I wished and tried; neither would it have been possible for one to have turned back, once he was on his way. There was but one course open--to go steadily onward. Some of the old '89ers had a pretty tough time of it that first year, but we progressed as well as we could have expected and far better than most. We did not come out here broke, as so many others did. Well, if not broke, a lot of people had barely enough capital to get them here and keep them a few months or weeks. They were forced to depend almost entirely on what they were able to raise those first few months of summer. The opening years was an unusually

BARRY, ANNA R.

HENRY PATTERSON DEC'D.

10604.

-4-

good year, weather conditions were favorable for crops, and everyone was thus enabled to realize wonderful results from the gardens. Most all were able to raise all he needed for immediate consumption, and in nearly every case, had an abundant surplus to can.) I believe every settler had countless sacks of dried corn, peas and beans stored away for winter. By peas, I mean the old fashioned cow pea and they made good eating too, very nourishing and cheap. I think they are known now, as black-eyed peas. We managed to raise enough corn so as to have meal for the following winter, and I ate more corn bread at that time than ever before or since. White flour was scarce and expensive, as no one was able to raise any wheat that first summer, but we all put in plenty the first fall we were here, so that the next winter, we had ^{an} abundance of white flour, too. We had turnips, carrots, potatoes and cabbage all winter. Owning two good milk cows, we were able to have milk and butter the year around. The following spring, we purchased another cow, besides old Betsy gave birth to twin heifer calves, making us feel that was an omen of good fortune. We had a nice flock of chickens, too, so had

BARRY, ANNA R.

HENRY PATTERSON DEC'D.

10604.

-5-

all the eggs we could use, and even quite a lot of fryers during the first summer. However, there were those who did not fare so well, those who brought no stock with them, and had no money that first year with which to purchase anything. They are the ones who needed courage and great fortitude to remain here and they buckled on their armour and fought the battle through. It was a very small percentage who gave up, sold or abandoned their claims and returned to the states from which they originally came. It took a tremendous lot of courage and character, to remain here fighting what looked at times like a losing fight, to create a home from a wilderness and to maintain that home when once created. Especially is this true of those who were practically destitute, who had to undergo suffering from hunger themselves and worst of all, watch their families suffer from lack of food and the bare necessities of life. The diet of some of these hardy pioneers consisted of nothing but molasses and a bread made from coarse meal which they had obtained by grating the corn on a nutmeg grater, or maybe grinding it in coffee pots. For their coffee, they would

BARRY, ANNA R. HENRY PATTERSON DEC'D. 10604.

-6-

brown bread crumbs until they were burned, or used some parched wheat and rye, when they could get it. Some did not even have molasses for their bread. Others had better fare, they set a pretty good table, so they thought, if they could have beans and side meat; and the family who could afford real coffee, milk, eggs, a few vegetables and bread made from real meal of flour, were the aristocrats in the neighborhood.

The greatest thing that stands out on every hand during those first difficult years is there wasn't a man, woman or child, but was ready and willing to share anything he owned with his neighbors. In time of sickness, the neighbors were at hand to offer sympathy and assistance.

One more fortunate in this world's goods, shared his store with his less fortunate brother.

One such instance of neighborly kindness comes to mind. Some distance from our home, but in our neighborhood, lived a Polish family. There were the parents, five children and an old grandmother. We weren't very well acquainted with them, as they lived several miles from us, and sort of kept to themselves. The man and his oldest

BARRY, ANNA R.

HENRY PATTERSON DEC'D.

10604.

-7-

son had helped me during the summer several times, and he always requested that he be given his pay in milk, eggs and butter or vegetables. This suited me all right, and I really never thought much about the condition of the family finances. He and the boy always ate their meals with us when they were working for me, and I noticed that at times they looked a trifle peaked. I didn't give it any serious thought. About Christmas time, we were awakened one night by the oldest Kenezeh boy who asked that my wife and myself come to his home immediately, his grandmother had taken suddenly quite ill. We of course wasted no time in questions, but went at once. When we arrived and discovered the conditions existing in that home, we were shocked and horrified. There was no food in the house, and they had been managing to exist for days on nothing but bread made from coarse meal and water. This Mrs. Kenezeh made into cakes and baked in the wood ashes of the stove. The poor old grandmother had been literally starved to death. Fearing there wasn't enough of this poor fare for the rest of the household, she would refuse to eat, saying she wasn't hungry, or didn't feel

BARRY, ANNA R.

HENRY PATTERSON DEC'D.

10604.

-8-

like eating, and, not really obtaining any strength, when she did occasionally eat, she starved to death. They had made known their sad plight to no one; nor had anyone the least inkling of their straitened circumstances. We soon spread the news of their needs and the neighbors rallied immediately with food and clothing. The men folk went to work to construct a coffin for the dear old lady's burial, my wife and some other women insisted on padding it and lining it with some pretty material so that her last resting place wouldn't be bare and devoid of all comfort. To me, somehow, it seemed a poor gesture considering the cause of her death, but the womenfolk felt better to make the little old lady's last bed a comfortable one. Perhaps they were right, who knows? Every neighbor was anxious and willing to do his part; a grave was dug, the old lady reverently laid out and placed in the home-made casket. Then we were ready for the funeral, but didn't know who we could get to conduct the services. My wife found out that the Kenezeh family were Catholics. Since no priest was close, we again faced another problem. - Mr. Gilbert, a friend of

~~BARRY, ANNA R.~~

HENRY PATTERSON DEC'D.

10604.

-9-

ours, said he believed had heard there was a priest in Kingfisher, or had been there a day or two before. He was sure if told the circumstances, he would gladly come down and say the burial services. Mr. Gilbert left immediately for Kingfisher, and was lucky to catch the priest who was making ready to leave. He kindly postponed his departure to come back with Gilbert and conduct the funeral much to the gratification of the Kenezeh family. After the funeral all the neighbors got together and each contributed food, etc., from their stores and all agreed to see that the Kenezeh family got along all right until the crops came in the summer.

One other event of those far-off days comes to mind, one that was full of excitement and apparent danger, but proved to be only a false alarm. I was out at the barn doing the milking early one evening, when a neighbor rode into the yard, dismounted on the run and shouted excitedly. "Hey, Patterson, you'd better get your family together as fast as you can, and take them over to the fort, the Indians are on the war-path". "That so," I wanted to know, "How do you know they are?" "Why, Riley

BARRY, ANNA R.

HENRY PATTERSON DEC'D.

10604.

-10-

from up on the hill saw a bunch congregating about noon in that gulch just back of the reservation; they had on their full regalia and there was quite a crowd of them. About an hour ago, Wilkins, who lives near the gulch, came riding as hard as he could to tell us that there were more Indians gathering. In all, he estimated there were over a hundred around their camp fire. He thinks they mean business. He and Riley have already taken their families to the fort, and I'm joining them as soon as I ride on down and tell the Kenezehs. And with that, he mounted his pony and was soon lost to sight. I decided the best thing for me to do would be to do as they did and go on to the fort without further delay. I hated to leave the stock, but realized we could not take any of it, and our lives were certainly more valuable than theirs. I hurried to the house and broke the news to my wife, who took it calmly, as she did everything else. She began preparations for our departure, at once. When we reached Fort Reno, we found most all our neighbors already there and excitement was rampant. A body of soldiers were making ready to go out to round up

BARRY, ANNA R.

HENRY PATTERSON DEC'D.

10604.

-11-

the Indians. Some of us volunteered to join them, but they refused our help, telling us to remain with our families, that taking care of the Indians was their job. Well, the laugh proved to be on us, for when the soldiers located the Indians, they discovered they were on the war-path all right, but not against the white settlers, but that they were out after land terrapins. We were certainly one relieved bunch of people when the soldiers returned with the glad tidings. We joyously returned to our homes, and really, it seemed we had been gone ages. We felt as though we were being given our homes all over again, for in our minds we had lost them, 'twas like finding something we'd lost. I tell you that old home-

stead never looked so good before; how grateful we were to have that home!

I'd like to tell a little something about how the Indians hunt and dispose of land terrapins, or how they did in those days. I don't know if they ever hunt them now. They would map out the territory they intended covering then would circle it, and, armed with a stick something like a hockey club, would beat the bushes, thus scaring

BARRY, ANNA R.

HENRY PATTERSON DEC'D.

10604.

-12-

out the terrapins and herding them into the center of a vast ring. There the squaws and children would be waiting with a great bonfire going and into this roaring fire, they would drive the terrapins. They would keep pushing them back into the blaze until the terrapins were overcome with the flames, then when they were roasted in the shell, they would eat them. I never tasted any, but Indians have told me the meat is delicious. It has always seemed a very cruel mode of preparing the terrapin and I never had any desire to sample any of it. I asked one Indian why they didn't first kill the terrapin, but he said if they did, the meat was no good. Possibly he was right, but I'll stick to beef steak.

We finally moved into El Reno, reared our family here and have owned and operated our drug store for more years than I care to remember. I guess we are one of the oldest industries in town.