

MIKELS, J. W.

INTERVIEW

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

MIKELS J.W.

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Field Worker's name Alene D. McDowell

This report made on (date) July 20, 1937 1937

Name J. W. Mikels

Post Office Address 400 S. Seminole, Bartlesville, Oklahoma

Residence address (or location) _____

DATE OF BIRTH: Month August Day 2 Year 1857

Place of birth Schuylar County, Missouri

Name of Father John S. Mikels Place of birth Kentucky

Other information about father Died in Missouri at the age of 76

Name of Mother Mary Shull-Mikels Place of birth England

Other information about mother Died in Missouri at the age of 50

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and history 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 10.

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Alene D. McDowell,
Field Worker,
July 20, 1937.

An Interview with Mr. J. W. Mikels,
400 Seminole,
Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

I was born August 2, 1857, in Schuylar County, Missouri. My father, John S. Mikels, was born in Kentucky and died in Macon County, Missouri, at the age of 76 years. My mother, Mary Shull Mikels, was born in England and came to America with her parents when she was a child. She died at the age of 50 years and is also buried in Macon County, Missouri.

I came to the Indian Territory in 1879 from Missouri. My cousin, John Runnels, and I were young men looking for excitement and a good location. We rode 2,000 miles on horseback and finally located in the Indian Territory.

We were required to have a permit from the Indian agent in order to work in the Indian Territory. This permit cost 25 cents per month and we usually bought a six month's or a year's permit at a time. In 1880 eight of us went to Claremore for our permit. We went in a wagon and followed

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an Indian trail, for there were no roads in those days.

I went to work on Brown's Ranch where I learned my first lessons in ranch life. I was just out of school and this new life was very exciting. I well remember the stiff Cady hat and Prince Albert suit I wore. When I arrived at the ranch I was a "green horn" and the boys had lots of fun at my expense. They would put on my Cady hat and parade in front of the mirror, and I was so green I did not know they were making fun of me, and when they laughed so did I. I thought they were admiring my hat.

One day Frank and Charlie Labadie, my cousin, John Dennison, Dennis Hampton and I went to town, and I wore my Cady hat and Prince Albert suit. Believe me, I thought I was a dandy. Dennis and the Labadie boys asked me if I would get mad if they bought me some clothes. Of course, I was elated and readily gave my consent. They bought me a big white hat, khaki pants and shirt and a pair of high heel boots with half moons on the tops. I felt like an old cow puncher when I returned to the ranch. I have never lived down the razzing of the Cady hat and Prince Albert suit by the old timers; however, most of the boys I knew then have passed on.

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The cook on the Brown Ranch was named Mayfield, and had married just previous to my arrival at the ranch. His wife was much younger than her husband and an exceptionally pretty girl. She was about 25 years old.

There was to be a dance about a mile from the ranch and we were all invited. I was very disappointed when I learned each fellow was to take a girl, for I was a stranger and did not know any girls. The boys suggested that I take the young lady at the ranch, and I, not knowing she was married, asked her to go with me. She agreed and rode behind me on horseback to the dance. Of course I was dressed in my Prince Albert suit and was dancing with her, having the time of my young life, when the cook walked up to us, took me by the shoulder and shook me like I was a rag and asked me why I had run off with his wife. I received the greatest shock of my life, for her being his wife was the biggest surprise I had received since my arrival in the west. I was scared and did some serious thinking and explaining, for I thought he would sure kill me. The boys

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from our ranch were lined up where they could see the fun, for this was the best joke they had played on me. After they had their fun, Mayfield called me to one side and apologized and told me to dance with her all I wanted to, then bring her home after the dance. This was certainly a relief to me.

My cousin, John Runnels, and I worked for the Wright and Troxell Ranch, located four miles north of Bartlesville where Dewey now stands. The land was leased from Nelson Carr. Wright and Troxell shipped about 2,000 head of cattle a year, and the nearest shipping point was Caneyville, Kansas. This town is now known as Caney. I herded cattle on this ranch and boarded with one of the owners, Jim Wright. I remember how I used to wake up at night and cry from homesickness. I became acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Nelson Carr who were like a father and mother to me.

In October, 1882, my cousins, Dan and Bill Mikels, John Runnels and I decided to make a trip to Texas. I had a little money, so I bought a wagon and one horse. One of the other boys furnished the other horse and we started south. I was the proud owner of a white face, white stockinged

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horse and had been offered a good price for him before we left, which I refused.

The first night we camped east of Bartleville and someone tried to steal the horses, but we managed to scare him away. The second night we camped near Claremore, and the same fellow tried again to steal the team. He sneaked up to the wagon where we were asleep, and cut the halter rope, when I was suddenly awakened. I shook my cousin and told him someone was after the horses. The only weapon we had was a muzzle-loading shotgun, and one of the boys fired at the thief and he ran into a thicket of willows and begged us not to kill him. We cut him off from his horse, which we tied to our wagon and informed him if he wanted his horse he must apologize to us. After we were asleep he stole his horse and made his escape. We recognized him as one of the neighbors of the Brown Ranch. I will not mention his name, for his family are still living and are respectable people.

We did not have any more trouble until we arrived at the Red River about ten days later. We were camped near a little stream one evening and were cooking supper when six Cheyenne

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Indians rode across the stream to our camp. We then discovered a band of about fifty Indians camped on the south side of the stream.

Our visitors rode their horses through our camp, and campfire, tore down our tent and completely wrecked our camp. They tried to talk us into allowing them to take two inches of our scalp, down the middle of the head, telling us it wouldn't hurt. One of the boys drew the old muzzle-loading gun for protection, and they stood back, for they were afraid of the "white man's firearms." I looked across the creek and saw two cowboys approaching, each riding a good horse. They rode straight to our camp and inquired what the trouble was; then drew their six shooters and made the Indians leave. They followed the Indians across to their camp and gave orders for them to pull camp and vacate within thirty minutes. Within the limited time there was not a man, woman or child in sight. The cowboys spent the night with us, which was a great relief for we were young and I'll admit, frightened. This happened 56 years ago, but it is as clear in my mind as when it happened.

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In 1885 I was united in marriage to Miss Barbara Iseli and settled on a rented farm south of Bartlesville. That was a successful year and I cleared \$1,000. We then moved to Jake Bartles' town on the north side of the Caney River, and operated the Old Bartles Hotel, located across the road from the Bartles Trading Post. This building was built of solid black walnut lumber and part of it still stands on the same location and is now occupied. We operated the hotel for one year and this was the birthplace of our first child.

One day two United States Deputy Marshals, I do not recall their names, came to the Bartles store, looking for someone they thought might have passed by. They were tough looking men, and when they flashed their guns and laid them on the counter they appeared even tougher. One of the guns was accidentally knocked off the counter to the floor and was discharged. Bartles told them he wished they would do their shooting outside. They passed the remark up as a joke and continued on their way.

I made the run into Old Oklahoma in 1889 and secured a

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good claim of 160 acres on the south side of the Cimarron River, ten miles east of the old Turkey Track Ranch, about four miles southeast of Guthrie, in Logan County. I plowed around the place and started to build a house. A homesteader was required to spend six months of the year on his claim, I had other interests so sold my claim to a doctor from Peru, Kansas, for \$25.00. I do not recall the doctor's name, but he got a good place for his money.

In 1893 I made the run into the Cherokee Strip. I drove a horse and buggy to Black Bear Creek west of Pawnee and rode horseback the balance of the trip. I rode one and one-half days, a distance of 75 miles, and gave up. At that time I was a prosperous farmer in Washington County and decided to return home.

In 1892 I carried mail from Coffeyville, Kansas, to Pawhuska, Indian Territory, for a man named Moore. My team was a span of wiry little mules that were wild. I was about ten miles east of Pawhuska, one day, when a drove of deer ran across the road. This frightened the mules, and they spread apart breaking the neck yoke and keeping me busy

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for a few minutes. I had a gun, but by the time the team was quieted, the deer were out of shooting range and I did not shoot.

The law would not allow a Government employee to drive into water over 4 feet deep and when I was making the return trip to Coffeyville one day and arrived at the west side of Sand Creek, the creek was up so I decided to camp and spend the night there.

Bob Dalton and Bob Gilstrap came by and tried to cross, but the creek was so high they turned back and spent the night with me. They remarked that it would be a good time to rip open the mail bag. I told them if I was going the other direction they might get something, but I never carried much to Coffeyville. I thought nothing of the remark and we all slept together and the next morning we parted good friends. This was a short time before the Dalton raid in Coffeyville.

In 1895 I removed to the Sam Beck farm, northeast of Bartlesville. My chief crop was corn. I raised hundreds of hogs. Caney, Kansas, was the end of the

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Missouri-Pacific Railroad and the nearest shipping point for our grain and stock.

The Santa Fe Railroad was built through Bartlesville in the late '90's and I operated a restaurant at what is now 312 Keeler Avenue, and the train crew boarded with me. They were a fine bunch of fellows.

In 1900 I built a frame building on the corner of Third Street and Keeler Avenue where I operated the Plaza Hotel. This building has been replaced with a brick building and the Palace Hotel is located on the second floor. Lander's Grocery store is on the ground floor.

In 1901 I sold the Plaza Hotel and removed to Cleveland, and invested in eight oil wells, cleared \$100,000 and decided to see the country. I made five trips to California but was dissatisfied. In 1907 the finance company tried to foreclose on the oil wells and I returned to Oklahoma to protect my interests. I returned to Bartlesville to make my home and have lived here since.