

NELSON FRANKLIN CARR

By Harold R. Farrar *

Nelson Franklin Carr, "Pioneer of the Big Caney," was the first white man to become a permanent resident of this area, Washington County, Oklahoma. He was born September 2, 1844 at Wilton, Saratoga County, New York and died November 4, 1925 at his home in Bartlesville. His father was William Henry Carr who was born in 1818 in New York state and died there on September 14, 1848. His mother was Sarah Mabel Clancy who was born in Vermont in 1819 and died in 1908 in California at the home of her daughter. William Henry and Sarah Mabel Clancy Carr were the parents of three children who lived to maturity, two daughters and a son, the son being the subject of this sketch.

Nelson could remember very little concerning his father as he died when Nelson was but four years old. At the tender age of nine, young Nelson was beginning to take on the responsibilities of "the man of the family," which consisted of his mother, two sisters Anna and Jennie, and himself. At the age of fifteen he was the main support of the family—something a boy that age would find almost impossible today.

The fatherless family decided to seek their fortune farther west and in April of 1859 started on the long journey which ended near Fort Scott, Kansas, after four months of travel. They came by rail as far as Pleasant Hill, Missouri, which was then the terminus of the Missouri Pacific Railroad, traveled by stage to Westport, Missouri, and here purchased a wagon and ox team in order to continue their journey. They proceeded in a southwest direction until arriving at a location three miles north and two miles east of Fort Scott, Kansas, on August 7, 1859, and here they decided to settle. ¹ They were on land which was open for homestead and Nelson and his mother each filed claim on one hundred and sixty acres. The patents were filed on these properties on January 15, 1863 ² This made a fine three hundred and twenty acre farm on which to start life anew

* Harold R. Farrar, a native of Kansas has been a resident of Oklahoma since 1943. He lives in Bartlesville where he is employed by the Phillips Petroleum Company. Mr. Farrar is an active member of the Washington County Historical Society.—Ed.

¹ *Bartlesville Examiner* (Bartlesville, Oklahoma), March 18, 1947. See biography of Nelson F. Carr in *History of Oklahoma* by Luther E. Hill (1909), Vol. II, p. 292.

² Olshwick Abstract Company, Fort Scott, Kansas, to writer. Letter dated January 29, 1965.

in what was the "wild west" to this eastern family. It was on this farm that Nelson was reared and attended what little schooling was available in the area.

Nelson enlisted for Civil War service at Fort Scott, Kansas, on July 27, 1861, and was assigned to Company "B", 6th Regiment, Kansas Infantry, Volunteers. This unit, in March of 1862, became the 6th Kansas Cavalry under the command of Colonel W. B. Judson and Nelson served, as a private, his commanders in an honorable fashion until his discharge on March 6, 1862 at Drywood, Missouri. A description of him at the time of his enlistment is as follows; five feet ten and one half inches tall, light complexion, gray eyes, brown hair and his occupation was listed as a farmer. He served only a short period of time because he contracted "intermittent fever," this we know as malaria. He was treated for this ailment on two occasions during his enlistment, one period of illness lasting for eight days, the other lasting for fourteen days. He continued to suffer from this ailment after his discharge and on May 29, 1911 he was admitted to the Battle Mountain Sanitarium at Hot Springs, South Dakota, for further treatment.¹

Upon his return home from war service Nelson could see that in order to become a successful man he would have to further his education and with this thought in mind returned to his former home in New York and attended school for a period of six months. Returning to Fort Scott he accepted employment as a book-keeper in a mercantile store and served in this capacity for four years. During this time he envisioned the profits which would be his if only he had his own store. He saved his money and he and his brother-in-law, Henry C. Bridgeman, went to what is now Oswego, Kansas, in March of 1866 and purchased the only trading post at that location.² The building which housed their small store was a crude log affair with a dirt floor and no windows. Nelson thought their customers deserved something better so he decided to install a wooden floor in the building. He journeyed to Humboldt, Kansas, where the materials were available, and purchased the necessary boards and nails with which to put in the floor. He constructed a crude raft, loaded his flooring upon it and set sail down the Neosho River one mid-afternoon. After drifting all night he awoke the next morning, glanced around him and could still see the small town he had left the day before. "That was a mighty crooked river," he later commented.

¹ General Services Administration, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C., Civil War Pension Record of Nelson F. Carr.

² Wayne A. O'Connell, Oswego Democrat, Oswego, Kansas, March 21, 1858.

The Osage Indians were located in the southeastern part of Kansas at this time and much trading was carried on with them as well as Indians of other tribes and the few white settlers of the area. Later the Carr and Bridgeman partnership constructed a larger building for their store and it was finished on July 3, 1866. As the next day was an important one a big celebration was held which included a picnic, open house and a dance for the area residents. It was in this store, on July 16, 1866, a name was drawn from a box naming the town Oswego, it previously having been called Little Town.³ A postoffice was established at this location and on October 4, 1866, Mr. Carr was appointed the first postmaster by Postmaster General Alexander W. Randall.⁴ As the salary of this office was determined by the receipts it was not a well paying job, usually amounting to about one dollar per month. Nelson served in this capacity for almost a year.

The Oswego trading post and post office was the gathering place of the community and Nelson became acquainted with most of the residents of the area as they all traded at this store. One of their customers was Hilliard Rogers and Nelson had great admiration for this man as he was a prominent man in the tribal affairs of the Cherokee and had served as interpreter in the Seminole Wars, in Florida, under Generals Scott and Taylor. Mr. Rogers was one fourth Cherokee and lived in the Timber Hill area south of Oswego in Indian Territory. Nelson had heard many glowing reports concerning the beautiful and talented daughter of the Rogers family, Sarah Ann. He decided he should look into this matter and on his twenty-second birthday, September 2, 1866, he saddled his favorite pony and rode down to Timber Hill for a visit with his friend Mr. Rogers. He discovered Miss Rogers to be even more beautiful and charming than he had hoped for and if the young man had ever entertained thoughts of being a bachelor these thoughts were soon forgotten. After a courtship of nearly a year they were married on August 25, 1867 in the Timber Hill area by the Reverend David Standfield, minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church at Chetopa, Kansas.⁵

The Delaware Indians purchased, in 1867, land in the Cherokee Nation and were preparing to move to their new homeland from Kansas. This land now comprises the greater part of Washington County, Oklahoma. Plans were also being discussed concerning the removal of the Osage Tribe to what is now Osage County, Oklahoma from southeastern Kansas. Nelson could see

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, Mrs. George T. Hawley, Assistant Librarian to writer, letter dated December 23, 1904.

⁵ General Services Administration, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C., Civil War Pension Record of Nelson F. Carr.

that there was a need for a trading post in this newly inhabited area. He discussed his plan for this new location with his bride. It was decided they should establish this new store and they came to the Delaware District. On September 5, 1867, they made camp at a location one and one half miles north and one mile west of the present site of Bartlesville.⁴ This was near the ford where the Black Dog Trail crossed the Big Caney and here a crude log building was constructed which served as store and living quarters for them. This was the first trading post in this region. Nelson sold his one half interest in the Oswego store on September 20, 1867, which enabled him to devote full time to his new business location. As it was crowded in the one room log cabin with the store and living quarters located in the small area and sleeping facilities in the attic, it was not long until a larger log building was constructed for their home. This Nelson did with the help of his father-in-law, Hilliard Rogers, who with Mrs. Rogers and their young son William Grant Rogers had moved to this locality from Timber Hill. This new home was much nicer than the first. It was larger, it had a wooden floor and the walls contained windows of glass. When this home was outgrown, a five room frame house was built northeast of the first log houses. In 1881, a fine eight room home was built which still stands, and is owned and occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Russell King west of Dewey.

Business was good at the new trading post and many hides and furs were traded for which meant having to freight goods to and from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. These trips sometimes took as long as eight days and many times were made under very trying circumstances. On one occasion Nelson was caught out in twenty degrees below zero weather while returning from Kansas. After the deaths of both Mr. and Mrs. Rogers, in 1870, Mrs. Carr was left alone many times with her young son, Edward, and her baby brother, William. Leaving Mrs. Carr in charge of the trading post was not the ideal situation so Mr. Austin T. Dickerman was hired, and came down from Oswego to run the store in the absence of the owner.

During the absence of Mr. Carr, in May of 1868, on one of his freighting trips to Kansas, a band of "wild" Indians invaded the land of the Delawares. They discovered the small son of Jim Snake, a friend and neighbor of the Carrs, herding ponies on Butler Creek and murdered him. As the invaders were leaving the scene of the crime they were discovered by a band of Osages and were chased out of the country. The Osages returned, all fired up from their recent victory, and stopped by Carr's store. They proceeded to loot and destroy the small establishment over the protests of Mr. Dickerman. When a claims court was

⁴ *Bartlesville Examiner*, March 16, 1947.

established, thirty three years later, Mr. Carr filed suit against the Osages and recovered his losses.⁹ This looting incident caused him not to re-open his store. He turned to other activities which included cutting and marketing timber.

Mr. Carr had seen the bountiful crops of corn which the local Indians were able to raise although they sometimes did not devote much time to the proper methods of raising such a crop. He believed that with plenty of care and hard work that he could improve on their production. In 1869, he purchased a bushel of the finest seed corn he could find, paying \$2.50 for it and became the first man to raise corn on a large scale in this area. He now had control of a large amount of land but was in the need for more so purchased the rights to the farm of his neighbor, Jim Snake. This gave him one thousand two hundred acres with eight hundred of it in cultivation. The enormous yield from his one bushel of seed corn soon had him thinking of a new venture, a grist mill which would enable him to convert his crop into a more useful product—corn meal. He located a long sweeping bend in the Big Caney and in 1870 by digging only a short distance, he had a mill race with a drop of eight feet in the water level which furnished plenty of power to turn the stone burrs he had shipped in from New York. The site of this mill is north of the present Cherokee Avenue bridge, Bartlesville. One of these burrs is now embedded in the sidewalk at the home of Mrs. John Bilinis who lives near the old mill site. Thus, the waters of the Big Caney were harnessed for the first time and the first industry in this area was established. Some of the products of this mill were hauled to Oswego and sold for \$9.00 per hundred pounds. The mill was sold, on March 26, 1875, to Jacob Bartles for the sum of \$1,000 and has been known as Bartles Mill since that time.¹⁰

Mr. Carr then devoted all his time to farming and cattle raising, and one year harvested three thousand two hundred bushels of corn with a yield average of forty bushels to the acre. He had, at one time, three thousand bushels of wheat in storage at Coffeyville waiting for a higher price. In one transaction he agreed to sell to one P. Montgomery, on September 23, 1888, ten thousand bushels of corn for fifteen cents a bushel.¹¹ At the height of his farming career he had five thousand acres under fence and one thousand acres in cultivation. He also had several thousand head of cattle and one thousand head of horses, many of them Morgans and Steeldust. He controlled grazing land from the Big Caney to the Verdigris River.

⁹ Manly B. Updike of Muskogee, Oklahoma, in *Wide West Magazine*, April 1, 1914.

¹⁰ Bartlesville, Examiner, March 16, 1947.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Mr. Carr, seeing the need for educational facilities in the growing community, recalled the difficult time he had getting an education. He constructed and outfitted at his own expense, a small building south of his home to be used as a school in 1874. He employed Miss Betty Smith to come down from Kansas to teach this school. The first term saw eighteen pupils attending classes here, the first school in the region.¹²

A resident of the country west of what is now Dewey, Dr. James T. Pyle, was attacked on the night of May 28, 1886, and severely injured by an assailant using an axe for a weapon.¹³ After six days the victim died from the injuries. A Negro, John Stephens, was suspected as being the person who had committed this crime. Mr. Carr tracked down this man, captured him and turned him over to the proper authorities in order that he be brought to trial. The trial was held in Judge Isaac Parker's Court, Fort Smith, Arkansas, he was convicted and hanged for murdering Dr. Pyle. Tracking down the suspect was accomplished in this manner: The suspect was without shoes at the time and had wrapped his feet in strips of green blanket material and had lost one of these strips at the scene of the crime. When captured he still had some of these strips in one of his pockets and from this evidence Mr. Carr knew he had captured the right man. Mr. Carr had been appointed a member of the United States Secret Service in 1879, and none of his family knew of this appointment until after his death in 1925 when they discovered the document while going through his personal papers.¹⁴

After the discovery of oil at Bartlesville, Mr. Carr sold his vast farming and cattle raising empire in 1905, and devoted his time to the development of his oil holdings. He leased nineteen tracts of eighty acres each to the Caney Valley Oil and Gas Company. Over one hundred producing wells were drilled on his land.

Having spent forty years at, or near, the site of the trading post where their eight children were born and seven reared to adulthood, the Carrs purchased from their son-in-law, William Keeler, on October 26, 1907, a comfortable home at 311 South Creek Avenue in Bartlesville and removed from the farm.¹⁵ They purchased from Mr. M. T. Kirk, on December 8, 1913, a finer home at 301 South Creek Avenue and there spent their re-

¹² *Bartlesville Examiner*, March 16, 1947.

¹³ Glenn Shirley, *Law West of Fort Smith*, Appendix pp. 221, 222.

¹⁴ Ida Jane "Jennie" Carr Johnson in *Bartlesville Examiner*, March 20, 1947.

¹⁵ Miss Ruth Rahm, County Clerk and Register of Deeds Office, Washington County Court House, Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

maining years surrounded by their children and grandchildren, to Mr. Carr was a member of the Baptist Church, the Grand Army of the Republic and of the Masonic Lodge.¹⁷

Mr. Carr was a very retiring man who accomplished things in a quiet way. Mrs. Nelson J. Carr, wife of the namesake-grandson of Mr. Carr, has this to say about him, "Grandpa Carr was a quiet unassuming Englishman who wanted no publicity and received none. This is the way he wanted it." Although he had little formal education, he was far visioned and a very wise man. He had a wonderful disposition and was well liked by all who knew him. He lived by the Ten Commandments, and honesty was a quality he tried to instill in all the members of his family. He was a man of deep faith and because of this he was able to understand weaknesses in other people, he was never critical.

Mr. Carr was placed on the Cherokee rolls and allotted land through his marriage to a Cherokee. Here is his explanation, "I was married to the same woman the second time in February (17th) 1868 by the District Judge of Delaware District, Cherokee Nation.¹⁸ This was to make me a Cherokee citizen and is on record in the Chief's office Talequah [sic] Okla. or in Dawes Commission office Muskogee, Okla. My wife was of 1/8 Cherokee blood and by marrying before 1875 gave me the same Cherokee rights as any Cherokee Indian. Dated March 11, 1915. (Signed) Nelson F. Carr."¹⁹

The name of Mr. Carr is almost forgotten now. It can be found only in old records, on his crypt in White Rose Mausoleum, or on the lips of the relatives and the few old timers left who remember him.

Appendix

Cherokee Final Roll, ages calculated to January 1, 1902:

Barsh A. Carr, 53 years, 1-8 Cherokee. Roll #10144, Census Card #4206.

Cherokee Roll-by intermarriage:

14 /044.

¹⁷ Charles E. McGinnis, Grand Secretary, The Grand Lodge of A.F. and A.M., Topeka, Kansas, letter to the writer dated December 11, 1966.

¹⁸ Page 9, Book 8, Marriage Record of Delaware District, Cherokee Nation, Indian Territory. Certified copy furnished to author by Bureau of Indian Affairs, Muskogee, Oklahoma. Certifying Officer, LeRoy Martin.

¹⁹ General Services Administration, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C., Civil War Pension Record of Nelson F. Carr. See Appendix for the Cherokee records of Barsh A. Carr and Nelson F. Carr, U.S. Indian Office, Muskogee Area.

Nelson F. Carr, 58 years, Roll #90, Census Card #4206.

The Nelson F. Carr family can trace its descent from the brothers, Robert and Caleb Carr, who came to America in 1635 on the Elizabeth and Ann and settled in Rhode Island.¹⁰

William and Sarah Louisa "Lulu" Carr Keeler were the parents of William Wayne, or W. W. Keeler, who was born after the rolls closed and is a resident of Bartlesville, Oklahoma. Mr. Keeler is the present Principal Chief of the Cherokees. He is also Chairman of the Executive Committee of Phillips Petroleum Company, Bartlesville.

Nelson F. and Sarah A. Rogers Carr were the parents of eight children:

- | | | |
|--|------------------|---|
| 1. Edward Rogers | b. Aug. 30, 1856 | d. April 15, 1877 |
| 2. Ida Jane, "Jennie"
Roll #10127 | b. Dec. 21, 1869 | m. John H. Johnson |
| 3. Grace Maud | b. Nov. 16, 1871 | m. Matthew Elam |
| 4. William Arthur
Roll #10428 | b. Dec. 4, 1873 | m. 1st Julia Aranda
Tayrien
m. 2nd Louise Briggs |
| 5. Frank Marvin
Roll #10233 | b. May 20, 1878 | m. 1st Gertrude
Hampton
m. 2nd Ethel Flora
Hicks |
| 6. Sarah Louisa, "Lulu"
Roll #10335 | b. Nov. 22, 1880 | m. William Keeler. |
| 7. Josie May
Roll #10145 | b. Dec. 22, 1884 | m. Lorenzo J. Brower |
| 8. Beulah Mabel
Roll #10148 | b. July 11, 1892 | m. Sanford Cleve
Brady |

¹⁰ Arthur A. Carr, *The Carr Family* (Tonawanda, New York, 1947).