

History of the State of Oklahoma

by

Luther Hill, published 1908



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Isaac Jasper Nelson, a prominent farmer now residing in Mangum, Greer County, a sturdy pioneer, of the locality, and who holds the record of being on the the most efficient Sheriff's who ever herded in old Oklahoma, has reached a position where he can commence to thoroughly enjoy the fruits of a manly and industrious life, He is a native of Grayson county, Virginia, born on the 11th of September, 1854, and was reared on a typical plantation of the Old Dominion. He is a son of **William and Celia (Anderson) Nelson**, both of Virginia, as was the paternal grandfather, **M. L. Nelson**. Father and grandfather were slave owners, and in the boyhood days of **Jasper** (covered by the Civil war and its attendant periods of disorganization) educational advantages were especially imperfect; but while his book learning was neglected he was early thrown among working members of society, so that even

in early youth his practical knowledge was a fair worldly capital.

William H. Nelson, the father, reached manhood in Virginia, married in the state and at the opening of the Civil war was a successful farmer. When the rebellion of the south broke into open warfare he enlisted in the first Confederate regiment that went to the front to defend the soil of Virginia under the gallant Lee, and participated for the four long years in his brilliant and bloody campaigns, passing through the ordeal with only one slight wound. At the close of the war he returned to his Virginia plantation, and cultivated it as best he could until 1869, when he removed to northwest Missouri. After spending a year in that locality he decided that his prospects would be improved by a change to the newer country of the southwest, and in 1870 he therefore migrated to Johnson county, Texas, where he bought land, cultivated and improved it, raised live stock in a modest way, and spent there the remainder of his life as an honest, industrious farmer. He was a worthy member both of the Baptist church and the **Masonic fraternity, and his wife yet remains on the old Johnson county homestead.** **Mrs. William H. Nelson** is a daughter of a well-to-do Virginia farmer, and also comes pf a sturdy family of Baptists. The children born to Mr. and Mrs. **W. H. Nelson** were as follows: **Jasper**, of this sketch; **Maggie**, now Mrs. **E. Ferguson**; **Lewis M.**, a farmer; **Frankie**, Mrs. **R. Ferguson**; **Mart M.**, also an agriculturist; **Elisha E.**, a farmer of Greer county; and **Elmer** and **Perry**, both engaged in farming in Texas.

Jasper Nelson removed with his parents to Missouri and Texas when a youth of sixteen, and developed into a strong man in Johnson county. There he continued to engage in farming, married and in 1893 removed to Greer county, then a portion of Texas. In that section of the state he located

a section of land, and at once commenced to mold it into an attractive and valuable farm and homestead. His first attempts at cultivation were decidedly discouraging, made as they were during the famous (or infamous) drought of that year. Although not a complete failure, his crops for this season were so short as to deprive him of anything but a bare sustenance, but since that time his agricultural operations have been remarkably successful. At first he raised wheat, oats and corn, and he was among the pioneer cultivators of cotton in Greer county. As there were no gins in that locality at the time, the raw product was taken to Guano, Texas, which was also the nearest good grain market and the headquarters for the settlers' supplies. Mangum was then but a small settlement, without railroad facilities and of little consequence in any particular. When the United States supreme court settled the title to Greer county it in favor of Oklahoma, one half of Mr. Nelson's section was taken for school purposes. This tract he has leased, retaining his homestead of 160 acres, to which he has added 160 acres by purchase.

Mr. Nelson continued his successful agricultural operation at the locality named until 1902, when the Democracy of the county elected him to the shrievalty. His service in that important office covered two terms, or nearly five years, and his straightforward, brave and yet conciliatory conduct in the performance of its duties, is still considered a fine model for any incumbent of the position. While fearless in the discharge of his duties, which were by no means unattended by great danger, his disposition was peaceable, and he had no desire to use unnecessary force in the handling of prisoners, however desperate or aggravating they might be. So though more than 1,500 prisoners (some of them the worst kind of criminals) passed through his hands, such was his skill, determination and self-control that he has the high credit of having never injured anyone committed to his care; and it may be added, as an encouragement to such a policy, that he himself escaped bodily harm. Mr. Nelson also proved to be a skillful detective, and accomplished good work in ferreting out gamblers and other law breakers, irrespective of person. With this honorable record to his credit, he returned to his

farm, which he had left in the care of tenants, and has since been engaged chiefly in bringing it to its former condition. His standard crops are wheat, oats, corn, cotton and alfalfa, which he raises in rotation, and he is also a stockman, to a limited extent. On his homestead are a comfortable residence and one of the best barns in the county, as well as a fine orchard. His family home is a modern house in Mangum, in whose development he takes a hearty and useful interest, being a promoter of its oil mill and other growing industries. Thus situated, Mr. Nelson has all the conveniences and enjoyments of both city and country life, and can consider the situation, with some pride, since he is indebted only to his own industry, skill and ability for abundant means of enjoyment and broad usefulness. Notwithstanding this abundant success he is unassuming and charitable, is hospitable to his friends and associates and generous to those who merit assistance. Fraternally he is a Royal Arch Mason and a member of the I. O. O. F.

Jasper Nelson was married in Texas, January 7, 1879, to Miss **Sarah E. Nall**, who is a native of the Lone State state, born September 4, 1861, and a daughter of **John and Nancy (Young) Nall**, both of Texas. The father has always been engaged in some form of agriculture, and during the Civil war handled beef cattle for the Confederacy. He remained in Texas until 1876, when he removed to Indian Territory, where he continued farming, and in 1904 located in Greer county. There he still resides engaged in his life-long vocation. **John Nall** has been married three times. By his first wife, who died in Texas in 1867, were born the following four children: **Sallie E., Mrs. Jasper Nelson; Jane, Mrs. Hicks; Frank**, a Greer county farmer, and **Nannie**, who died at the age of ten years. The children of the second marriage were: **Seber**, a farmer; **Buck**, deceased; **Lizzie**, now **Mrs. Sprinagle**, and **Bube**, also an agriculturist. Of the third marriage are the following: **Jasper**, living at home; **Mary**, who became **Mrs. J. Wards** and is deceased; **Nora** and **Dall**, also living with their

parents; and **James**, deceased. Fourteen children have been born into the happy household of **Mr. and Mrs. Jasper Nelson**, and thirteen of this large family are living. In the order of their birth they are as follows: **William W.**, a farmer, married and the father of four children; then **Joseph** and **Mart**, also following agricultural pursuits; **Pearl**, who married **John Tanner** of Mangum, a well known business man of the place; **Ida M. Mrs. E. Brown**; **Mollie, Mrs. McKibbon**; **Elisha E., Lena** and **John**, living at home; **Sallie B.** and **Versa Lee** (twins), born March 30, 1897; **Nora**, who died at the age of fourteen months; **Fannie J.**, at home; and **Fowler Border**, the baby of the family, born February 15, 1906. Both Mr. and Mrs. Nelson are worthy members of the Christian church, are kind neighbors and, in every respect, useful and honored members of the community.

Newspaper Article:

Isaac Jasper Nelson: "He Kept Peace Without A Gun,"
MANGUM (Okla) STAR-NEWS, June 29, 1995, Thursday

Isaac Jasper Nelson was the sheriff of Old Greer county in the day of furious activity by the cattle and horse thief, the gambler, gunslinger and assorted other badmen, and he had the reputation of always being able to get his man.

the young TV fan of today is the himself rarely used a gun to that time. To him, a gun was merely something to leave behind on the seat of his buggy or in the sheriff's office.



But what may come as a shock to fan of today is the fact that Nelson arrest the worst of the badmen of behind on the seat of his buggy or in

Old settlers still living in Greer County remember Nelson as a man of daring and considerable persuasiveness. How else could he arrest a wanted man just by crooking his finger?



There were arrests involving hours of planning and the utmost in imagination, as the area the sheriff served was greater in square miles than the states of Rhode Island or Delaware and the horse was his only transportation.

In a political campaign, of which Nelson had several, it sometimes would take him several weeks to cover the county by horse, and horse and buggy.

In this area now are Jackson, Harmon and Greer counties and the southern half of Beckham county.

Nelson's wife performed hostess duties that would send many a modern woman scampering for frozen dinners and kitchen help. "It was not unusual" said John Nelson, a son, "For my father, without advance notice to my mother, to bring home for lunch as many as 40 persons." And if all were at home at the same time, the Nelsons had 14 of their own to feed. There were seven sons and seven daughters.

Nelson, a dapper figure in his white vest, would walk down the street inviting friends on both sides "to join him for dinner."

It was these friends and others like them who kept him in office for roughly 15 years, although the terms he served were not continuous. Alternating with him in terms was Sam Houston Tittle, a ranch foreman, who turned law enforcement, and was first elected sheriff in 1887.

In several of the races between Tittle and Nelson only a handful of votes separated the winner from the loser. But the record shows that there was never a contest over the outcome of any of them.

For about 40 years, one or the other wore the badge of Sheriff.

On a train trip to Oregon to pick up a prisoner, Sheriff Nelson suffered a light stroke which partially paralyzed one side of his face. The Johnson county, Texas, native never ran for office after his 1914 term expired.

Once when he was disarming a prisoner, the prisoner became unruly and almost ripped off the white vest, the sheriff usually wore.

"Why didn't you use your gun?" a friend asked. "And cripple him," Nelson replied. "Why should I do that when I can handle the situation without it?"

Handling situations without violence turned out to be the trademark of Nelson. This prompted the present Greer county judge, Percy Powers to say, "Nelson was a high class and honorable man, and he wasn't afraid of the devil."

Powers had been a resident of Greer County since 1889, and was in his 27th year as county judge.

Nelson once kicked in a window of a commercial building in Mangum, and raided a gambling party he found in progress. One of the party fired a gun at him but missed. Nelson then entered the building through the broken window and, without a gun, rounded up more than a dozen gamblers and marched them off to jail.

On another when he was trying to trap a well known gambler he effected a disguise quite successfully.

This was in the day before modern makeup technique and the success of it doubtless was a tribute to his flair for showmanship. Even close friends failed to recognize him as he ambled down a Mangum street and into a wagon yard where the gambler had taken quarters temporarily.

Nelson died in 1927, at the age of 72.

There were numerous arrests for drunkenness in the days before statehood, but it was the policy of Sheriff Nelson to release them to go home if they'd go. Otherwise, he'd lock them up in jail.

It was Nelson who enforced the closing of saloons in Mangum and Greer County after

Oklahoma became a state in accordance with the newly adopted prohibition.

Fifty-two years later the first liquor permit issued in Greer County after the repeal of prohibition was obtained by businessman Border Nelson, youngest son of the old sheriff.

A grandson of the former sheriff Jack Nelson, is police chief at Willow.

Additional Information: Below is from the book A history of Greer County and its Pioneers 1980, published by the

Mangum Museum, Mangum, Oklahoma (the engraving is a copy of the likeness of him on his monument.

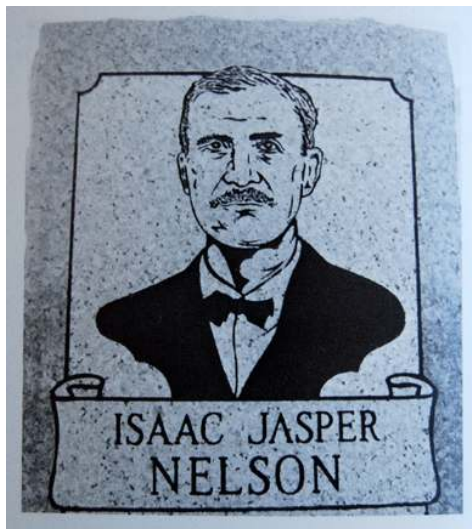
Isaac Jasper Nelson Pioneer Hall of Fame

Mangum Museum, Mangum Oklahoma

Isaac Jasper Nelson born in September 11, 1854 in Grayson County, Virginia. He was brought up on a typical plantation of the "Old Dominion." He died December 27, 1928 at the age of 74.

He moved with his family to Missouri and, after a year there he decided his prospects would be improved by moving to the newer Southwest. In 1870, he moved to Johnson County Texas, where he bought land. On January 7, 1879, he married Sarah E. Nall, and from this union fourteen children were born.

The children were: William W., Joseph, Mart L., Pearl, Ida M., Mollie, Elisha E., Lena, John C, twins: Sallie B and Cressie Lee, Nora, Fannie J, and Fowler Border. Mrs Nelson died in 1917.



Jasper Nelson came to Greer County in 1889 and continued his agricultural operations until he was elected sheriff in 1902. He was straight-forward, brave, and fearless in the discharge of his duties, but always peaceable. He was a member of the Church of Christ for 29 years, was affiliated with the Masonic Lodge and I.O.O.F. His career as sheriff spanned 18 years. In political campaigns, of which there were many it sometimes took him three months to cover Jackson, Harmon, Greer and the southern part of Beckham counties in a buggy. He was never known to carry a gun except in a case of absolute necessity and was known for "always getting his man

Isaac Jasper Nelson
1854-1928
Riverside Cemetery
Mangum, Oklahoma

Photos and information submitted by okiegal03@yahoo.com
(gr-gr-granddaughter of Isaac Jasper Nelson)

