

[Sidney L. Prager]

Interview

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SIDNEY L. PRAGER

Pioneer Merchant of Roswell

Member of [Firm Jaffa Prager?] Company 1887

And of Price and Company Forty Years

From 1898 Up to Present Time.

Sidney L. Prager, who at the present time is one of the leading merchants of Roswell, first came to New Mexico in [1881?].

He was influenced by his brother William S. Prager in coming for the purpose of attending the Jesuit College at Albuquerque, which he attended for one year, returning to his home at Pittsburg, Pennsylvania in 1882.

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He came west again in 1886, and was engaged as a clerk for a year, in the Price Brothers Mercantile establishment at San Antonio, New Mexico - eleven miles south of Socorro. Cl8 - 6/5/41 - N. Mex.

In June 1887 he removed to Roswell where he became one of the members of the firm of the Jaffa Prager Company Mercantile business organized in 1886. He was associated in the organization with his brother, William S. Prager - who was president of the firm - and the Jaffa brothers - Nathan, Harry and Joe. The business was conducted successfully by these progressive businessmen for ten years. During all the time of their operation together in the struggling little village they assisted in all civic movements for the development and upbuilding of Roswell, and of the Pecos Valley, mainly by extending credit where it was needed for establishment of business enterprises. They also assisted in the financing of ranch interests and of stock and agricultural industries for the Pecos valley.

In 1896 Jaffa Prager Company sold out their mercantile business to Joyce Pruit Company who, after coming to Roswell in 1895 had 2 conducted a general merchandising business consolidated with the firm of Pierce and Walker that had previously operated at [?], now Carlsbad, New Mexico. After buying out Jaffa Prager and Company the newly organized firm, operated with a capital stock valued at two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, engaged Sidney Prager as clerk. Familiar as Mr. Prager was with business methods employed for successfully conducting business, he efficiently assisted in building up a firmly established mercantile business that was extended in branch houses opened, at Artesia in August 1904, and at [Hagerman?], in July 1906.

After remaining with the Joyce Pruit Company two years Mr Prager, in 1898, entered into the mercantile business with Morris Price, as a member of the firm operating under the name of Price and Company, at what is now [??] and Cigar Store, 212 North Main Street.

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Later he bought out all interests of the business continuing operations under the name of Price and Company.

At the time of the coming of Mr. Prager and the establishment of the Jaffa Prager Company Roswell had made very little progress in business advancement.

By 1898, when he became a member of the firm of Price and company, Chavez County had been created from a part of Lincoln County Roswell had been made County Seat, a court house and jail and a new three room brick school house with a cupolo and bell had been built, and the pioneer grocery store of M. Whiteman (still in operation) had been established.

All of these achievements for the advancement of Roswell accomplished during the one year, 1889 and had been [?] by a weekly newspaper - the Pecos Valley Register - which had been established in November 1888 by James A. Erwin and Louis O. Pullen.

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In 1890 the first bank had been organized by [??] Cahoon which was established in the Pamily Hotel at that time operated by J. P. Church.

In 1891 the existence of the Artesian Basin had been discovered by chance when water gushed from the top of a surface well when it was drilled on the Nathan Jaffa place at what is now 119 [??] Avenue.

Very soon other artesian wells were drilled at South Main and First Streets and at North Main and Fourth, with Mr. Prager and other business men of Roswell contributing of the expense of putting them down.

tho'usands of acres in the farming districts were put into cultivation that were watered by the underground water source, and Roswell soon became the trading center of a rich agricultural district as well as of ranch and cattle interests of southeastern New Mexico.

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In 1891 by advice and influence of Judge Cranville A. Richardson Roswell was incorporated as a village.

During the summer, 1891 the Goss Military Institute was established by Robert S. Goss, a graduate of the Kentucky Military Institute, who was brought to Roswell by Captain Joseph C. [?].

The year of 1894 (tho'ugh remembered as the "Hard Time" year) brought the first railroad to Roswell, which was the extension of the Northeastern Railroad from Eddy now Carlsbad, and the [?] Block, office and club rooms, building was completed, and Roswell Club for social purposes was organized.

During the same year of 1898 that Mr. Prager bought out Morris Price, and as owner assumed the management of the mercantile business of Price and Company the buildings of the New Mexico Military Institute were completed and the school was opened in the fall for 4 students.

After fifty successful years under the capable management of Mr. Prager the business now conducted by him at 306 North Main Street has become one of the foremost general merchandising establishments in Roswell and as counted by the years of continuous operation Price and Company is the oldest operating at the present time in Southeast New Mexico. He has guided the business thro'ugh many years of prosperity as well as thro'ugh the hard ones of depression and has extended credit and help where in his judgement it was needed most, and has contributed generously to every worthy cause. He has truly been a friend to the Roswell people. Their welfare and the upbuilding of the city and of Southeast New Mexico has become one of the main interests in his life.

Mr. Prager, the son of Samuel and Sophie Prager of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania was born in Pittsburg June 5, 1869, and was educated in the public schools of Pittsburg with the

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exception of the year of 1881 that he attended the Jesuit College at Albuquerque New Mexico.

He was married at Dallas Texas in 1896 to Miss Anna [?] (daughter of Louis and Henrieta Goslin of Dallas) who came to Roswell in 1893 to fill the place as instructor of music in the Goss Military Institute. Four sons (all of whom were married) were born to Mr. and Mrs Prager: William Louis, (deceased who died May 17, 1933) Samuel Henry, (deceased, died January 24, 1909) Louis Morris (with the United Fruit Company, Central American and [??], who is Government Internal Revenue agent at Denver, Colorado. There were three grandchildren, the sons of Louis M. Prager; Bruce and Glen, who were born in Central America, and Richard the oldest son, who died in 1936.

Mr and Mrs Prager have lived continuously in the home built by them in 1903 at 102 South Richardson Avenue, which has ever been 5 open to the Roswell people for social gatherings for musicales - and for the enjoyment and study of literature. Their "Open House" on New Years day has become an annual event of the Roswell social season that has been looked forward to by all the "Old Timers" of Roswell for over thirty years. Strangers are always cordially welcomed at these receptions and are graciously received at all times by both Mr and Mrs Prager.

Fraternaternally Mr Prager is a Mason and an Elk. He is a member of the Roswell Country Club, of the chamber of Commerce, of the Merchants Credit Association

Mrs Prager is a member of the Roswell Order of Eastern Star, of the Roswell Woman's Club, the American Legion Auxilary, Golf Club Pioneer Book Club, and Chavez County Archaeological and Historical Society.

Both Mr and Mrs Prager are popular leaders in all social and business affairs of Roswell. They have a large circle of friends who appreciate their efforts in promoting all educational

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and cultural developments that are instituted for the pleasure and benefit of the Roswell people.

Source of Information

Mr and Mrs Sidney L. Prager and Personal knowledge of writer