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The Life of Otto Albert Zwirtz

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Otto Albert Zwirtz

Otto Albert Zwirtz was born August 16, 1896 in Cloud Chief, Washita County.

In the 1900 Census, Otto is living with his parents, and brothers and sister in Union, Oklahoma in Washita County. Otto's father, William, was born in Germany in February 1851, and his mother, Anna, was born in Austria in August of 1862. Otto had an older sister, Eda, born in Illinois in August of 1877, and two older brothers both born in Kansas. William was born April of 1886, and Herman was born in June 1892. Otto's younger brother, Leo, was also born in Oklahoma in August 1898.

According to the census, William immigrated to the United States in 1870 and was a naturalized citizen, and his mother, Anna, immigrated in 1883.

Additional information found on the 1910 Census, shows the family moved to Cedar, Oklahoma in Custer County. The Zwirtz's were blessed with another daughter, Anna, born in about 1901. The 1910 Census asks individuals about their ability to read and write as well as if they attended school. Otto's father, William, could not read or write, and did not attend school. His mother, Anna, could read and write, but it does not show she attended school either.

Otto registered for the World War I draft on June 5, 1918. His lists farming for his self as his occupation, he was 21. The next year he would be killed in a cyclone that struck Weatherford.

In an article printed in the Weatherford Booster on March 20, 1919, Otto Zwirtz lost his life in a cyclone. The storm destroyed much valuable property near Weatherford. Otto was the only person to lose his life in the cyclone, but many were injured, and a trail of wreckage were the result of the storm. Otto and his family were entirely unaware of the approaching danger. The storm hit Otto's residence, three miles east and north of town, completely leveling it and the barns and sheds. Other members of the household escaped.

Many people took precaution when the threatening clouds approached by going to the storm caves. Some were caught in the storm on the way to the caves and were injured. The veterinary, Dr. Sells, was trying to rescue a cow and calf on the south side of town, but was caught in the cyclone, lost consciousness, and when he later awoke he found himself quite a distance away, gripping a fence.

The amount of property loss was a considerable sum. Insurance at the time only covered small amount of the losses. The storm damaged two silos at Abraham Leppke's,

Otto Albert Zwirtz

south of Corn; moved both the house and barn causing considerable damage at F. Engles. John Schroeder's barn was completely destroyed. The storm then moved north east damaging the following, as listed in the Weatherford Booster: Abraham Duerksen, small building destroyed; Jacob Nikkel, shed carried away; John Duerksen, garage completely demolished; Will Byers, house, barns and sheds totally destroyed; Will Kearns, house moved off foundation and damaged considerably; new barn and small buildings, belonging to two Indians, destroyed; Dr. Sells, barn gone; Robert Banner, barn destroyed; Missouri school house, completely demolished; A. C. Welsh, on J. H. Kendall's farm, house, barn, fences destroyed; Harry Ayres, house destroyed, roof taken off barn; John Lowry, vacant house completely destroyed; Charles Pigg, total loss on house and barns; George Eads, total loss on house, barns and fences; Henry Umbach, house completely destroyed; Carl Umbach, roof of barn blown away; F. V. Farris, house and barn completely lost; Otto Zwirtz, house and barn destroyed; Frank Lohrengel, house moved off foundation, damaged considerably; Albert Barr, barn partially damaged.

In addition, windmills and fences were carried away, trees were uprooted, telephone wires and poles were torn down and other minor damage was done.

The storm attracted many onlookers. Hundreds of cars were filled with people eager to see the damage caused by the storm. Neighbors and friends of the storm victims gave what assistance they could to those in effected by the cyclone.

According to his obituary, Otto moved to Custer County in January 1902. On December 22, 1917 he married Sarah Butler. He died on March 16, 1919 in Custer County. His funeral services were held at the Federated Church conducted by Reverend L. L. Shaw