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Journalist, E. W. Wilson,
January 10, 1938.

Interview with Charles Shipley,
Route 2, Box 268,
Muskogee, Oklahoma.

I was born in Bates County, Missouri, September 12, 1866, and if I live until next September 12, I will be 72 years old. I have lived in the Indian Territory and the State of Oklahoma for all these years, save sixteen. I was sixteen years old when I left with my parents for the Choctaw country in the Indian Territory.

We traveled by horses and wagons from Missouri and finally arrived at Fort Smith, Arkansas, after some three weeks on the road. At Fort Smith we rested for a few days. I interested myself about the city of Fort Smith watching the little mules pulling street cars through the streets. On the mules were fastened bells that would jingle as they traveled along. Many hours I spent down at the ferry that crossed the Arkansas River, watching the ferry boats putting teams and wagons across the river. I had never been around any rivers prior to this and it

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amused me. The ferry was an old time cable ferry. The steamboats were also steaming up and down the river, docked in some instances loading and unloading freight and passengers. Most of the hands unloading freight were negroes. Father and Mother enjoyed the traffic on the river seemingly as much as did myself.

After we had rested we left Fort Smith, traveling along on the east and south side of the Arkansas River and came within a few miles of the Poteau River where we settled down to live.

Pioneers' Life and Customs.

I don't know how my father secured his permit for the use of the land he finally cultivated, but I do know that we slept in our covered wagon and cooked on open fires until we could cut logs and build us a cabin. The cabin built had only a dirt floor, the shuttle window and door was made from the side-boards of our wagon. The fireplace was made of sticks and the cracks were filled with clay as was also the logs. The roof was made of shake shingles, split out of logs with a froe.

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In the surrounding country the people were living fairly good and their homes were about like ours. Some better-to-do people had box houses made from boards hauled from Fort Smith, Arkansas.

Only small fields of corn were cultivated. Ten acres of corn was a large field of corn. Cotton was raised more than corn. All people had a garden, a horse or two, a cow, and a few farm tools, like a wooden beam plow, an "A" harrow and large hoes. Our cotton and corn were hauled to Fort Smith and disposed of for food stuff and clothing that could not be raised at home.

All kinds of wild game, fruits and berries were in abundance. We had lots of honey from robbing wild bees that had made their hives in hollow trees.

We made many dollars from hides and furs of wild animals. We marketed these hides and furs at Fort Smith.

Marriage.

During the years while living with my parents in the Choctaw Nation, I made many trips to and from Fort Smith and along the road lived a girl I admired and adored. She was a white girl and was prettier than

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any Indian girl I ever saw. I wooed and won this girl and married her in 1887 at Fort Smith, Arkansas. We were married according to the United States and Arkansas laws and were married by a Methodist preacher.

Two miles from Fort Smith in the Choctaw Nation, we built us a little cabin and started life all our own. That old woman you see standing there in the door was that pretty little girl I am talking about. She is as sweet and pretty to me today as she was fifty years ago.

Life after Marriage.

The mail carrier who carried the mail from Fort Smith to Skullyville, Indian Territory, passed our home. It was only a few days after our marriage until he stopped and said, "I am not well and want to lay-off and if you want a job, saddle your horse and go to town with me (Fort Smith). I will vouch for you and as you have a pretty good horse you can have my job for a month." Of course, I hated to leave my young wife for a day and a night, as it required one day to ride from Fort Smith to Skullyville, stay all night and return the next day. I hurriedly talked it over with my wife, saddled my horse and went to town, got

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the job and returned home. That night we went after her brother and his wife to stay with her while I was working.

I started my work the next day. After one month the regular man came back for his job and I was then given the job of carrying the mail to Redland, Indian Territory, from Skullyville, and this necessitated our moving to Skullyville. I continued carrying the mail on this route by horseback for six months and quit to go to work on the railroad that was being built out of Fort Smith to Coffeyville, Kansas. It was the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad.

We moved back to our little cabin two miles from Fort Smith, that we first lived in only a month or so.

Engineers had surveyed out the right-of-way through the Cherokee Nation and excavating for the dump was started. I had hired out as team boss on a sub-contractor's gang that was to build the first nine miles west of the Arkansas River. The gang lived in tents and camped out. I bought a little tent in Fort Smith and my wife and I lived in that tent for nearly nine months while I worked building the railroad dump. All excavating was let to a general contractor for so many miles of road and then sub-let to smaller contractors

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for only a few miles. There were no steam-shovels and clam shells then. We did not even have wheelers or self-dumping wagons or trucks. The nine miles built while I was team boss was done with plows and slips. The cuts were plowed and slipped into the low places for fills. It was necessary, if the haul was too great, to load the wagons with dirt and rock by hand and haul to the place to be filled. Of course, today with modern machinery it could be done more quickly and much better. Behind the grade gang came the bridge men and behind them ties were distributed as well as rails, bolts, angle bars, frogs, switches, switch stands and all necessary material. Many of the ties were cut and delivered from the timber adjoining the roadway. They were hewn ties, hewed out with an adz or broad-ax. After we completed the nine miles, the contractor moved his outfit to Fort Gibson, Indian Territory, I did not go along, but went back to my first little home after I was married. My wife and I saved our money and bought us some new household goods, and among them was our first cook stove. We had cooked on open fires while building the railroad and previously

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in the fireplace of our cabin. I bought a team, farm tools, a cow and few chickens and started farming.

For the use of the land I farmed, I had to pay an old Choctaw Indian one dollar per month. It was a permit, they called it, and I was supposed to be working for him. The improvements all belonged to me.

Along in 1894 or 1895 the Dawes Commission came into existence and the Indians and white people were much worried because they were to take the land from the Choctaws which they owned as a whole, and divide it up into allotments, which they did. I was rather worried myself but had little to say and figured I would just load up my things and move over into the Creek Nation. With my wife and then three children, we moved by team and wagon to Muskogee, Indian Territory, (Arkansas Town) and located on what was then known as Gaylord Johnson's place northwest of Muskogee near the present Spaulding Bridge and again started farming. At times, when not engaged on the farm, I worked on the ferryboat, a cable ferry that crossed the Arkansas River at the present location of the Spaulding Bridge.

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After a number of years at this location, I moved to where I am now at Brushy Mountain. It was about 1900, at any rate it was before my youngest son was born by about ten years and he is 28 years old. I farmed and worked on the Sam Watkins Ferry that crossed the Arkansas River about one-half mile east of my house here.

Ferries.

The Bolen Ferry crossed the Poteau River about nine miles up stream from its mouth and was the ferry I crossed when carrying the mail to Skullyville, from Fort Smith, Arkansas, in 1887. The Joe Vann Ferry crossed the Canadian River about six miles up stream from its mouth. The Smith Ferry crossed the Arkansas River about eight miles down stream from Fort Gibson, and the Sam Watkins Ferry was some three miles down stream from the Smith Ferry.

Other Ferries were, namely: the Nevins ferry, Roger, Ferry, Leacher Ferry, The Sam Brown and so on.

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Steamboats.

The W. M. Drew, Fort Gibson, Fort Smith, Memphis Packet, Mary D. and other steamers plied the Arkansas River with passengers, freight and mail.

Merchandising.

When I lived northwest of Muskogee on the Gaylord Johnson place, I traded with the H. B. Spaulding and the Turner Mercantile Companies. I would go to Mr. Spaulding and borrow three hundred dollars by giving security. I never got the actual money but was issued "Scrip" for the amount. The scrip was in size about that of our present "One Dollar" bill, but of course was of different denominations. Its color was a green back ground, black letters, and figures and on it was the picture of Mr. Spaulding. Every place in the vicinity of Muskogee used the scrip as a medium of exchange. It was good at the ferries, doctors, lawyers, stage lines and elsewhere as well as at his store for merchandise. This scrip was always redeemable for cash by Mr. Spaulding once each year.

Many times people needing actual United States money would sell this scrip at a big discount. I remember the

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last I ever borrowed from Mr. Spaulding, I borrowed it in March and the amount was three hundred dollars plus interest amounting to a total of principal and interest of three hundred and forty-five dollars, payable December the first. I had raised a few yearlings that were not mortgaged; really they were my wife's. Along in October I realized I could not have the money when it came due unless I deviated just a little from the farm. I induced the good wife to let me sell her yearlings for real money and then take the money and buy Spaulding Scrip and by so doing I could pay off. She consented and finding a buyer here and there I received \$100.00 in money and with the actual cash I bought enough scrip to pay the mortgage, so I figured, at least.

Along in November before the mortgage came due, I went into the store and told Mr. Spaulding I wanted to settle up. He looked astonished and said, "Your mortgage won't be due until next month." and I said, "Well, I want to pay it now." He looked thru his books, told me the amount and I laid down all of it in scrip

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and he did not want to accept it and said the papers read so many dollars and not scrip. Quite an argument ensued. A number stood around the store and I knew they were good witnesses and finally I put the scrip in my pocket and left for home.

When I got home the wife and I talked and we were both very much worried, but I knew he had to redeem it not later than January 1st and I knew he would not close the mortgage for I had offered him his own money and knew no law would uphold him.

In about a week I was back to town and stopped my team on Main Street near his store and started down to the Turner store. Mr. Spaulding shouted at me and I waited for him to get to me. He said, "Charlie, do you want to pay me that scrip today and take up your papers." I said "No, I don't have it with me now." He said, "Well, get it and come in and settle up. The other week I needed real money badly and thought if I demanded real cash you would get it for me."

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In a few days I came in with the scrip , settled up and from then until his dying day. I never did any more business with Spaulding but traded and did all my business with the Turner Boys and Captain Fred Severs.