

ROBERTS, L. A.

INTERVIEW

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Charline M. Bulbertson,
Investigator.
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An interview with L. A. Roberts,
20 East Jackson, McAlester, Oklahoma.

I was born in Richmond, Virginia, in the year 1868.

My parents were Richard R. and Amanda Roberts. Both are buried in Oak Hill cemetery at McAlester. My father was in the Civil War under General Lee in Pickett's Division. He was in all the heavy battles in Virginia and was captured by the Yankees and held prisoner for eighteen months. I am in possession of his discharge which was signed on the battle field by General Lee.

I came to Savanna, Indian Territory, from Texas in the year 1885. My trip was made by horse team in a covered wagon. I came with my parents and another family by the name of Calhoun who traveled along with us. There were very few white people here at that time; most of the people were full blood Indians and mixed breeds.

As we came into the Territory we bought feed from the Indians; we paid about \$1.00 a bushel for corn. The Indians were making raids into Texas when we left there. When we came into the Territory we forded Red River.

Savanna was a leading mining town at this date and that was the reason for my parents stopping here. Our first home was located about three hundred yards from number two mine shaft. It was an ordinary box house as were most of the houses. Savanna was considered then the best town between Kansas and Texas. Father was in the timber business here for about one year. It was on April 6, 1887, that the terrible explosion occurred at the mine and ruined Savanna as a mining town.

Our next move in the Choctaw Nation was to the J. J. McAlester farm near McAlester some twenty two miles from Savanna. We stayed at this place three years before moving to the Fulson farm which was near McAlester also. Then in the year of 1896 we moved to McAlester where I have lived up to the present time. My first home here was on West Grand Avenue and part of the original house stands to-day however it is known as the Humphrey home. There was only one two story building at this date and it was located where the Enloe hotel is to-day. The first floor was built of stone while the upper story was wood. This building was used as a court house.

The Baptist Church was built where the Public Service Company is on West Grand Avenue. The first church which was the Christian Church is located on the same lot where it is to-day. The jail was located on East Choctaw street where the Settle service station is.

Mr. W. E. Croom had the first livery stable which was on Main and Washington streets. There was ten or twelve stores scattered about the town where we were able to get all our needed supplies. A lady, Mrs. Mize owned the first hotel which was located near the city tool house.

My father made the run in 1889 and staked a claim in Tecumseh in the center of the town site. Father said that it was a scramble to hold his stakes and he sold his claim later as he did not want a town site.

This was a rough country at this date. It was not unusual to have as many as seventy or eighty men in jail at one time and oftentimes all of them would be in one fight. There were no "laws". United States Marshals came through once every six months. Crockett Lee and Ledbetter and J. J. McAlester were friends of mine.

The installation of the first telephone exchange in McAlester was in 1897 or '98. I was a lineman and helped

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put up poles and did line work and also installed instruments and put in the switch board. I served as wire chief until 1907.

The switch board was installed in the Fogarty building which was located between the freight and express office on East Choctaw. It was necessary to get a contract from the Indian agency to get permission to put up the exchange. Mr. L. H. Roberts was manager and Dr. D. M. Hailey, McAlester, and C. W. Foley of Eufaula were stock holders.

The first toll line went to Krebs, three miles east of McAlester. The contract there was for forty or forty five telephones. The first instrument installed there was at the Osage Trading Company. The charge to call from Krebs to McAlester was 10 cents. Service charge here in McAlester was \$3.00 a month. The second toll line was put up to Hartshorne and the next time it was extended to Eufaula. The first switch board was a hundred drop board and two operators were employed and one worked in the daytime and the other at night. They were Phoebe and Dollie Asbil. I am in possession of a picture of this switch board. Elmer Doran and myself were the first linemen.