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Story submitted by
John Dill

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I was born in Georgia in 1863, grew up there. While just a small boy I began working on a railroad construction gang as water boy. I will never forget the water boy song these old southern negroes would sing. I followed the construction gangs from place to place working and making my own way. I never had an opportunity to go to school. Later on I decided that I wanted to go West. In 1885 I came to the Indian Territory stopping at what is now McAlester, Oklahoma. The Choctaw, Oklahoma & Gulf railroad was in course of construction and I got a job with the gang building the bridges and culberts. At that time there was not a house where McAlester now stands. J. J. McAlister had his home and a store over where North McAlester now stands.

I was very much impressed with this country. I thought it was the most beautiful country I had ever seen with the free and wild life here. This was before the cattle came here. I worked on this railroad for about six or eight months, than came up into the Cherokee Nation near Wagoner. I settled on Blue Creek which is between the Verdigris and the Arkansas rivers. I got a job selling Singer Sewing Machines. They were very different in those days to the modern ones of today. They only two drawers and sold for \$55.00 each. That was a very interesting experience for me, driving all over the country selling to the Indians. I acquainted myself with the Indian customs and soon learned to make friends with them. They called a sewing machine a si-loa-boe-liska. I tried to learn as much of their language as possible. I traded them sewing machines for anything they had that was of any value. I covered all the territory from Westville in the Cherokee Nation to Okmulgee in the Creek Nation, driving a team of ponies to a light hack. I could only haul two machines so

when I had made two sales I then had to drive back to Muskogee and get two more. But in driving over the country and dealing with the Indians I become acquainted with and on the friendship of some very interesting characters. Isparacher (Spi-E-Chee) a Creek chief was one of them. I stayed at Isparacher's house right after the Green Peach rebellion. I didn't know enough of the Creek language to talk to him very well, but we could understand each other and become very good friends. Isparacher had gone to Washington and married a white wife. While I was staying there his wife ran away with a blacksmith. Another very good friend was Jim Gregory, a fullblood Creek, who lived on the Verdigris river. I sold him a new sewing machine and he paid me \$20.00 in gold. David Hodge was another very high class man, well educated Creek and Chitto Harjo (Crazy Snake) I remember as a very fine looking Indian and an upright honest fellow. These Indians always welcomed me to their homes and were always willing and anxious to help me. If they knew of a prospect where I could sell a machine they would go with me and help me to make the sale. Whenever I happened to be when night come I stayed alnight. When a meal was ready the Indians would call Hum-chuck which meant, come and eat. Being a white man I had to pay so much each month to the Creek Government for a permit to live and work here. The Creek Council was composed of the House of Kings and the House of Warriors, which was the same as our Senators and Congressmen of today.

The Indians were allowed to settle anywhere they want to so long as they did not get within 1/4 mile of another Indians claim. Upon my coming to Muskogee it was my early good fortune to fall in with the family of Miss Alice Robertson. Miss Alice was born at Tullahasse. She had one uncle by the name of F. M. Williams who was a doctor, both of the physical body and of the soul. He practiced

medicine among the Indians during the week and preached the gospel to them on Sundays. He was a very noble character. Miss Alice's mother was one of the first women to graduate from the Wooster College (up North). I stayed at her boarding house for a long time. Mrs. Robertson was connected with the Presbyterian school here. We also had a Methodist school here, the Brewers were at the head of the Methodist school. Father Ketchum was head of the Catholic school when I came here. He had been raised a protestant but had gone to the Catholic Church. He was a noble man and I learned to almost worship him. He later moved to Washington, several years later, my wife and I went to Washington and one of the first fellows we went to see was Father Ketchum. I was also fortunate in getting acquainted with Judge J. W. Shackelford. Judge of the first court ever to come to Muskogee. I will never forget Judge Shackelford. He organized and built a Sunday school for the men and every Saturday afternoon regardless of other duties he devoted to calling upon other men of the town at their homes, places of business or anywhere he might find them and invite them to his Sunday school. He always had good attendance and the best citizens of the town. To Judge Shackelford a great deal of credit is due for the building and upholding of the moral and religious standards in the early days in Muskogee. Muskogee's first merchants were J. A. Patterson and A. W. Robb. Our first telephone service came to Muskogee about 1896 or 1897. A man by the name of Ed Hicks built the first telephone line from Tahlequah. There was a phone installed in the Stepler mercantile store at Tahlequah one in the Turner Hardware at Muskogee.

I also made the acquaintance of some men who become very

Notorious outlaws. At one time I was rooming in an old building at the corner of Main and Court streets where the YMCA building now stands and I had as my roommate Jim French, who was an outlaw and was killed at Catoosa while robbing a train. That was an eye opener to me. I had never suspected that he was an outlaw and I recall an instance while I was selling sewing machines. I went up into the Suchee country and I could not understand their language and had to have an interpreter so I employed Rufus Buck, a young and well educated Indian, to go with me he was with me for a long time. He had four brothers and I trusted all of them. I thought they were all fine boys, but it developed later that they were the outlaw bunch known as the Buck gang that were operating in that country. They were later captured and taken to Ft. Smith, tried under the Arkansas law and all were hung. I remember Henry Starr as a pretty good boy and had good folks. The first thing Henry did was to catch a pony belonging to some one in the community, saddle it and ride it around for awhile. The man who owned the pony reported it to the officers and demanded that Henry be arrested and when the officer went to arrest him he killed the officer and was taken to Ft. Smith. Was sentenced to 25 years in the penitentiary. While he was in the Ft. Smith jail they also had a bad Indian in the jail, they called Wild Bill. Some friend slipped a gun to Wild Bill and he killed one of the guards and was creating much excitement in the jail. No one could get to him to get the gun. Henry volunteered and went unarmed and took the gun away from Wild Bill and turned it over to the officers. After they had taken Henry to the penitentiary, his mother Fannie Starr who lived near Porum, and an Indian woman who I always thought lots of, decided she wanted to get Henry out, so she (being a woman

who never did a thing just half way) boarded a train and went to Washin ton to see the President, who was at that time Theodore Roosevelt. She got a hearing before the president, presented her case and the President pardoned Henry. She told me all about it when she came home. She said that when the President told her that he would pardon Henry that she began to cry just like a baby. The President asked her what she was crying for, haven't I given you everything you asked for, Fannie said yes you have given me every thing, but I don't deserve all this good treatment. Back home I am not considered anything much, I have a boy that is bad and here I come before the President of the U. S. A. and he treats me like I am an ambassador or something and I just don't deserve it. Henry Starr was a fellow who if he had been let alone might have made a wonderful man. After Henry was pardoned, Fannie needed to borrow a little money for something and they had just established a bank at Forum and had a big sign on the window saying Capital \$30,000. so Fannie went to the bank and asked to borrow the money to take care of her little debts and they told her that they had just loaned out all the money. I met her on the street she told me about it, and she pointed to the sign on the window and she read it \$300,000 instead of \$30,000. She said to me, "I just wonder if I hadn't ought to go home and get Henry to come and investigate a little."

About 1889 or 1890 the fair was established here with the fair grounds where Spaulding Park is now located. The fair was a wonderful success from the start. The leaders of the fair were such men as C. W. Turner, J. A. Patterson, A. W. Cobb, Captain Hester, and Sam Houston Benge. All very aggressive builders and the Indians from all over the country took great interest in the fair and took pride in displaying their products.

They had a good race track and some of the best horses in the U. S. were entered here. Dan Patch the world's champion trotting horse was brought here.

About 1894 Professor Bacone started the Bacone College. One of my very good friends, Alex ~~May~~ (Fus Fixico) the poet was graduated at the Bacone College; also, the Indian politician Pat Hurley was a product of Bacone College. So with a poet and a politician as products of their college, the Indians decided it was time for them to produce a preacher. So one of the Tiger boys, a brother of Chief Moty Tiger, became a preacher. He got a church out here in the country. One evening he and some more men were talking about his church, he told them how much his salary was one of the men said that was a dam poor salary. He said dam poor salary and a dam poor preach.

The Sondheimers, Sam and his two sons, Sam Jr. is still here, had a great deal to do with the building of Muskogee. They were engaged in the hide business here and were always right in the forefront when any movement for the upbuilding of the city was proposed. Captain Levers was also a pioneer merchant of Muskogee, and also had a great deal to do with building the cattle business in the territory. He was one of the first to build a pasture and bring in vast herds of cattle from Texas and I would like to mention right here that Capt. Levers was the only white man ever to be adopted by the Creek Tribe. He had married a Creek wife and the tribe adopted him as a Creek citizen. Placed him on the rolls and later when the payments were made he received his annuity just like any other Creek Indian. Ed Hart an Indian who is now a very wealthy cattleman and banker at Okmulgee worked as a cowhand on Captain Levers ranch. Soon there

were big pastures fenced all over the country and thousands upon thousands of cattle were shipped here from Texas and pastured here on the fine prairie grass which grew so abundantly. They would, of course have to get a permit from the Tribal Government, to build those pastures which would take in miles and miles of country. To those living inside these pastures they would have to pay a certain amount each year as annuity. This was a great success and the cattle business soon became a great industry in the Territory. About 1890 we established the Commercial bank here, it was the first bank in Muskogee. Yardeka Harjo was another very bright Indian and a great philosopher. The Creek Council sent him to Washington to look after their tribal affairs there.

The first show we had in Muskogee was built by C. . Turner. The whites would sit down stairs and the negroes in the balcony. Billyasco, a Creek who had married a negro wife come in one night and he and his wife sat down right next to Mrs. Rutherford, wife of Marshal Rutherford and Mrs. Dew M. Wisdom both typical Southerners. I was usher and of course I saw that was going to create a disturbance so I went and asked asco to move and he refused, so I went and got Bud Keel, U. . . Marshal. He came and told him to move and he tried to argue with him but Kell made him move. Bud Kell was a fine man and a good officer. Always tried to give everyone justice but wasn't afraid of any thing.

About 1898 the City of Muskogee was incorporated. we elected for our first Mayor Major Pat Burns. Major Pat was a real builder. He secured the first fire engine the city ever had and then made the City a present of a fine team of horses to pull the engine. Frank Swift was Muskogee's first fire Chief. we had no waterworks at that

time and had to get water from cisterns to do the fire fighting with. But soon, we put in the waterworks and than is when the town really began to grow. Of course, when the city was incorporated and officers elected and we began to make improvements, than there had to be a tax collector to do these things. I remember I had the Commercial National Bank, the only bank here, and Major Pat came to me and told me that if I would help him to collect this tax that he would give the bank the account, and right than he paid me two hundred and two dollars. One-half of his year's taxes. When the Indian payments came I worked with Col. Dewey M. Wisdom, who was Indian Agent, helped him to make the payments. We made payments at Ft. Gibson, Claremore and Vinita. The Indians would come from everywhere for those payments and camp until the payment was over. The Indians were practically all honest and when the payments were about to be made, they could go to any of the stores and buy anything that that they wanted and pay for it when he got his money. Many of them when they got their money would go to the merchant that they owed, hand him their sack and tell him to get his money. Than go on to the next one and do the same thing and keep going until all his debts were paid or until all his money was gone. One day I was walking down the street and Dr. Blakemore called me and asked me if I was busy. He said I want you to go and hold a man for me. So I went along and the man was Al Jennings, the outlaw. The officers had shot him in the leg and captured him and had called the doctor to remove the bullet. This was the first time I ever saw an x-ray. When the Dr. was preparing to give him the anesthetic Al said there is just one thing I want understood and that is that any talking I may do while under the medicine don't go. The Dr. agreed and proceeded with the operation. He was later tried and sent to the penitentiary at Leavenworth.

served his time out and after statehood ran for Governor of Oklahoma.

Back in the early days we had no roads no bridges or anything of the kind, I remember one time I was way up west of Tulsa in the Osage Nation, I came to the river and couldn't get a ferry to put me across. I tied my ponies up, took off my clothes, and waded in and picked out a route across the river that was not too deep for me to drive across than went back got my team and drove them across. After I told Major Pat Burns about this and he explained to me that, that was the reason why we must have statehood and pay taxes, to build roads, bridges and schools. He said some day you will be able to drive around over the country on fine roads, cross the rivers on bridges, and will see good schools built all over the country. That impressed me very much I had never gone to school and the thought of building good schools and roads and so on almost became a nightmare to me and I always got a pleasure out of paying taxes. After the city was incorporated we had to pay a license to conduct a business within the city limits. Bob Fry was the first license collector.

In describing the development of this country, it would be unfair if we neglected to mention the colored people. We had some fine people among the negroes. I could mention an old darkey we called Sugar George, he was a wealthy old negro owned several houses here and had lots of money. Another important factor in the early development of the Creek Nation was known as the light horse they were officers elected or chosen by the Creeks to enforce the tribal laws and protect the people's property and property rights.