

Miss Ella Robinson,
Research Field Worker,
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William Herring ✓
Pioneer Indian Territory Officer

William Herring, familiarly known as Uncle Bill, was born in Sampson County, North Carolina, July 16; 1855. Information concerning his parents not obtainable except that his father fought in the Black Hawk War. In 1874, he was married to Miss Anne E. Bunch. In 1880, he moved with his family, consisting of his wife and two sons, to Arkansas and located near Fort Smith where he was successfully engaged for ten years in farming. Owing to the ill health of his wife, he moved to the Indian Territory hoping that she might be benefited. He selected Muskogee ~~as a location and engaged in the transfer business.~~ He also had the contract for feeding cattle for Mr. Fount Crabtree.

In 1893, under the administration of President ~~Cleveland, he was appointed jail guard at Muskogee.~~ Mr. J. J. McAlester, for whom the town of McAlester was named, was United States Marshal at that time. Judge Charles W. Stuart was United States Judge. Mr. William Heffner was Muskogee's City Marshal, and Gus Lubbes was United States Jailer.

Muskogee, at that time, had a population of approximately 2200.

The jail was a two story frame building with a fourteen foot wall around it, located where the Muskogee Daily Phoenix Building now stands. There was no water system in those days, consequently all the water used in the jail had to be brought in. The drinking water came from a cistern located at the corner of the court house across from the jail. Numerous attempts were made by the prisoners to burn the jail and on the 9th of November, 1893, they succeeded in doing so. We then moved to the court room where we held the prisoners until arrangements could be made to build a prison. Shortly after the fire, a contract was made with Mr. C. W. Turner to erect a two story jail building on a lot 40 x 60' near the colored Baptist Church where the Ritz Theater Building now stands. The account of this transaction can be found in the Muskogee Phoenix published at that time. A stockade with a fourteen foot wall was erected north of town where the Dorn-Cloney Laundry Building now stands. At first, tents were put up inside the wall until the Bull Pen house was built. Again, there was no water system nor sanitation. Water had to be hauled in and the garbage hauled out. From 100 to 250 prisoners were held in this place. Among them, some of the notorious outlaws including Al Jennings, Cherokee Bill, ^{Ed} Jim Reed

(son of the Belle Starr), the Buck gang. While the Buck gang was incarcerated there, an attempt was made to release them. Unsuccessful, however, due to the efficient management of Mr. Herring and his co-workers.

He retired from that position in 1895 and was employed by several cattle men to make collections. In 1898, he was appointed night marshal under William Heffner, City Marshal and continued in this position until 1901 when he was elected City Marshal and elected again in 1902. In 1903, he was elected Chief of Police, a position which he held until 1907 when he was elected Meat Inspector by Governor Haskell and continued in this position until 1910. He was then appointed Sanitary Officer and was also serving as Street Commissioner.

~~In 1913, under United States Marshal, E. A. Chloa, he was~~
appointed Deputy U. S. Marshal and continued in this position until 1921 when he was returned to the police force of Muskogee where he served until 1928; retiring from public life.

~~As an officer, Uncle Bill, was in a class all by himself.~~
He made no enemies even among the worst violators of the law, which he treated with respect and impartiality. He was a man of quiet, stern exterior but possessed a kind heart. Time and again he would go out after the most hardened criminals and bring them in without a gun. In some cases he called the defenders by telephone assuring them they would receive all consideration and they would respond by meeting him at the station.