

SHELTON, I. C.

INTERVIEW.

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An interview with I. C. Shelton, Tulsa, Okla.
June 9, 1937.

"AN OLD TIMER."

I was born in Jackson County, Alabama, on November 19, 1859. My ancestors came from Middle Tennessee, settling in Northern Alabama, where I, as well as the other children, were born. My recollection of our early life is not at all pleasant. I was old enough at the close of the Civil War to remember things, and these things were mostly sad memories. I was the youngest of several children and my parents died before my maturity. Coming up, or growing during and immediately after the Civil War was during a time very trying on my parents, whose death, early in life, or middle age, was no doubt due to the worry and hard times and want brought about by the Civil War which prostrated the South, but more especially by the "reconstruction" period through which we were forced to live. No wonder, then, that we were looking forward hoping to find a country where opportunities were more plentiful, and where the future held more promise. One of my sisters married a man by the name of Bynum. They heard glowing accounts of Texas, the acres to be had for the asking, decided to go to Texas. I went with them, as I had no ties back there,

and was as anxious as they to get away from our old home to one that promised more. So, in 1879 we moved to Texas, via Arkansas. Our stay in Texas was short, for soon after our arrival, we began to hear of Oklahoma Territory. You see the promised land was just ahead, all the time.

Well, we considered the move for some time, and in the Fall of 1880, loaded up our goods and lit out north to Oklahoma. We located about eighteen miles north of McAlester, in what is now Pittsburg County, on Indian land, of course. You see, I lived with my sister and brother-in-law but was head of the outfit, and made all the trades. He made a trade with the Indians for the lease of several hundred acres of land. This deal was duly approved by the Indians and we moved onto the land. There weren't any laws here then, except the Criminal Code, enforced by the U. S. Marshals, so all trades or leases were merely verbal agreements.

But very little trouble came between the settlers and Indians from these contracts. We cultivated quite a lot of this land. While not clearing land, still it was no small task to get the sod plowed and finally

ready to cultivate. Usually the first year the land was turned as much as possible, or as much as you needed, and this was allowed to lay for a year, to rot, before trying to cultivate it. After this, it was easy to make a crop, and we did make some good crops on this land. Of course, the first year we had, of necessity, to plant some of this sod land to make feed for stock; and some things for the family, but only just such land as we needed to grow necessary things. The improvements we put on the place reverted to the Indians upon the termination of the lease. This meant quite a lot to the Indians, the plowing of the land, for they did very little plowing.

The only land cultivated by the Indians except the sod turned by the white men, was the "Stomping" ground of the Indians. That is the ground around their huts where the stock had tramped out and killed the grass. They plowed up this lot and raised some vegetables, corn, and what few things they planted. So, the Indian fared very well in trades like this for they got their land plowed and

that was worth \$3.00 to \$4.00 per acre. The improvements put in the land weren't worth much. A shack, and of course some fencing, as we had to fence all cultivated land to keep out range cattle.

I worked with my brother-in-law for some time then got a job with Mr. McAlester, founder of the town by that name. He was the first settler in that section and controlled, or had prior claim on a great tract of land, on which McAlester, the town, was built. He fenced all the land he wanted, and under the rules of that time no other settler could come nearer than one-fourth mile of him. He was a rancher and operated on a very extensive scale. He also owned and operated several cotton gins and some "grist" mills.

I worked for Mr. McAlester until March, 1889, when I came to Tulsa. On my arrival here, I got a job with a merchant by the name of Bynum who owned a general store. I was a clerk and sold everything from green coffee to farm machinery. This store carried most everything wanted or needed. Not a department store, as now, but a "general" store.

Everything in the same room, dry goods, clothing, on one side of the room, and groceries and hardware on the other. A good part of the business was credit business and was based on character only, as there were no laws to force a man to pay his debts there, as now, but just his promise to pay.

Fortunately, it seemed most everyone was honest, so no great loss was suffered from bad debts. The merchant, in turn, received credit from the wholesale houses of St. Louis and Chicago, so could extend credit.

Sunday, there, was just another day, as everything went on about the same as week days, except we did close the store on Sundays. I recall that on Sunday, we young men would go down to the river and watch the people ford the stream, or ferry, as the case might be. There was wagon load after wagon load of people passing through to be on the border for the run in April. Some would try to ford the stream and would make the mistake of stopping to let their horses or mules drink and this was usually an expensive mistake, as the team would sink in the

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"quicksand", then it was up to them to get out, and the best. And about the only way was for the ferryman to help them. For this service he would charge \$5.00 in addition to the regular fee of \$2.00 for the ferryman, so the cost would be \$7.00, a good sum then. Of course, they made this mistake only once, but that was expensive. Some, knowing the ford better, would get over all right.

R. M. Bynum, the merchant, was a relative of my brother-in-law. This was one of the reasons for my coming to Tulsa and working in this store.
