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LIFE AND EXPERIENCES OF A MUSKOGEE
BUSINESS MAN- THOMAS P. SMITH
Story given by Mrs. Thomas P. Smith
To Miss Ella Robinson, Field Worker

Thomas P. Smith was born in Clinton County, New York, in 1861 and died in Muskogee, Oklahoma, October 4, 1917. His early education was obtained in a village school of Clinton, New York.

When he was twelve years of age his family moved to Pittsburg, New York, when he entered the high school, graduating from the high school there. He became associated in the mercantile business with his two brothers, M. A. and M. J. Smith. In 1884 he was made Deputy Postmaster at Plattsburg, which position he held until 1887. Mr. Smith was a friend and henchman of Senator Platt of New York. In conversation with Senator Platt one day, he remarked, "I certainly dislike the long cold winters of New York and having to bundle up every time I go out of doors." Senator Platt remarked, "How would you like the climate of Arizona?" "Fine," replied Mr. Smith. So in 1887 he was appointed Chief Clerk at the San Carlos Indian Agency in Arizona. In 1888 he came to the Indian Territory as Agent for the Osage and Kaw Indians with headquarters at Lawhuska.

Mr. Smith camped on the sod in Guthrie with the other

pioneers at the great opening in 1889. Removing to Muskogee he associated himself with the Turner Hardware Company and in 1893 he was appointed U. S. Indian Inspector and in 1894 was made assistant of Indian Affairs at Washington. While in Washington, November 27, 1895, he was married to Miss Bell Granger, of Zanesville, Ohio. Three children were born to this union. Lawrence Granger Smith, who graduated from West Point in 1920, now serving with the 14th U. S. Cavalry. Two daughters, Mrs. Thomas McDermott and Miss Annabell Smith of Muskogee. Mr. Smith remained in Washington through the second Cleveland administration and through six months of the McKinley administration. He was then sent to San Francisco, California, on business but soon resigned to become secretary of the Pacific Coast Hardware and Metal Association, a strong organization formed for the purpose of adjusting all differences between the dealers and transportation companies, including all the leading influential firms from Seattle to Los Angeles. Mr. Smith performed this difficult task with much skill. But the call to Oklahoma was always uppermost in his mind and heart. So he resigned to return to Muskogee where for many years he was prominently identified with the leading business and contributed largely to the building up

of the Queen City of the West.

He was a leading spirit in organizing the first Chamber of Commerce and was its first president for many years. He served two terms as Mayor of Muskogee and during that time founded the traffic department of the city. He was one of the charter members of the Town and Country Club. He was Secretary of State under Governor C. N. Haskell, Oklahoma's first Governor. The most laudible thing that could be said of Mr. Smith was that he was a devoted husband and father and his greatest pride and joy was his home and family life. He had always proven himself true and loyal to his friends. The glory of having served his city, state, and nation belonged to him. To him such a service was a duty and a pleasure for it was not in his temperament to shrink. The years spent in public service made him one of Muskogee's most valued citizens and he died with the knowledge that he had more than done his part to make Muskogee a real city.

In traveling from the states to the Osage Nation the impression given by the rail that led from the states to the agency at Pawhuska was that of silence and space covered by a dazzling blue sky meeting the grass covered prairie on all sides. Here and there a clump of black jack and post oak

trees were important landmarks and offered shelter for campers at night and rest from the glaring sun to travelers. Each day the small stage drawn by two black ponies met the train at Elgin, Kansas, to take passengers, mail and express over the seventeen mile trail to Pawhuska. The driver, a most important personage, always cautious and solicitous and attentive to the comforts of the passengers. He regaled strangers with what they were to meet at the end of the trail which was covered in from five to six hours.

On my first trip we drove into the town of Pawhuska at 4:30 P.M. in early November. A flat dusty place with four native stone buildings on our side of the town, namely: the Council House, the Doctor's office, the Agency offices and the Doctor's home. Across the dusty road that led to Bird Creek the Trader's stores, long rambling wooden buildings. Across the place from the store buildings, a road led up a steep hill to the sand stone residence where the Agent lived. Around were many other wooden buildings, occupied by clerks, grades people and half-breeds. Most unattractive in appearance would it have been without the group of red Chiefs of the wilderness, the aboriginal natives of the soil.

The chosen delegates of the Osages and Kaws in all the

glory of paint and feathers, gathered in a group before leaving the following morning for a trip to Washington to talk Tribal affairs over with the Great White Father. Such a fine looking group! Bright eyes, broad chested, athletic men with brave fearless faces, sinuous muscles good enough for Longfellow to weave into his scenic rhymes. This group gathered in front of the Agent's office, was of much interest to spectators going and coming on this dusty area which was the center of the reservation. Teams from the states, saddle horses hitched to the hitching racks in front of the stores. Traders in business-like manner going to and fro. Freighters from the states, Indians with blankets wrapped tightly about them, strode with proud dignity through the dust or snow, stopping to gaze at the sky, their eagle feathers shading their eyes from the sun, there up the hill to the Agent's house which was commodious and comfortable. Beyond it in the grove were the government school buildings, cement and stone structures, one for the girls and one for boys, well equipped with a fine staff of teachers and house keepers. Miss Bolock, whose parents brought the first kindergarten system to the United States, taught that branch in the school, a delight to the little red children, who quickly learned to use their

hands and were adepts of following a copy. Miss Pollock was an excellent teacher and gave many exhibitions of the children's work. The parents were greatly interested and would always come to view the exhibitions. They would waddle up and down the aisles emitting sighs and moans, sorrowing because they could not take their little ones home. If the children were not in school their annuity checks were denied the family. After school hours the parents could take their children down the hill to the stores where they would buy quantities of candy and canned fruit. You would see a family seated on the side walk eating pineapple, peaches, and pears, drinking the juice from the can. At sundown the children were required to be back to the school house. These government buildings inspired respect for the authority that governs the homeland. To the Indian they meant great power from Washington to serve them. The full-bloods were not awed by the government officials as were the mixed bloods and traders. In their blood flowed the same spirit of independence and chivalry as flowed in the veins of the medieval prince. They came to the agency to be served.