

Interview with Mrs. Mexia Ford (Mrs. Phil)
Muskogee, Oklahoma
March 23, 1938

Mrs. Mexia Ford was born in the historic old town of New Harmony, Indiana. She came to the Indian Territory a bride, and, like many others, fell at once under its spell.

Her mother, Charlotte M. Boren, nee Sampson, was also born in New Harmony which had been the home of her family for some generations. She was a charter member of "The Minerva" - the first woman's club in the United States. She was quite a beauty in her day. She was educated at "St. Mary's of the Wood." She grew up in the cultured atmosphere of New Harmony for many distinguished people made it their home.

Her father, who was much interested in rare fossils and shells, and possessed a fine collection of his own, numbered among his acquaintances such men of repute as Thomas Say, Isaac Lee, Leseur, Louis Agassiz, and the canny and brilliant Scotchman, William McClure - a devoted friend of whose estate he was executor. Her mother was an exceptional character greatly beloved, the best commentary of her life being a line from an editorial on her death, "the world is poorer since she went away." Her sister married a grandson of Robert Owen, the

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famous philanthropist and reformer, who had bought New Harmony from the Rappites, making it the background of many of his widely known experiments. Mrs. Boren made her home at intervals with her daughter in Muskogee and participated in the social events of the day. She passed away in New Harmony, but lies sleeping in Maple Hill.

SOCIETY IN THE 'NINETIES

Society, in the early nineties, developed along rather quiet lines. There was always a nucleus of culture in Muskogee to which the new-comer, and those of Indian descent, were glad to rally - the teas, receptions, and luncheons of those times were just as elsewhere, only very few and far between - one had plenty of leisure to wonder about the "next." The church did "its bit" by offering an occasional musical program, and, at intervals, some speaker of note - it was a happy rift in those placid days, for one was not only entertained but was provided with another place to go. With the influx of new-comers, responding to the lure of the Territory, social life became broader and more diversified. Dancing, for instance, took its place in social activities, and the dining-room of

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the old Adams Hotel echoed to the rhythm of dancing feet. Later the first dancing club of Muskogee was formed, the old court house, changing its judicial nature for the nonce, looked on with approval as the gay dancers of the "Cloverleaf Club" spun over its floor.

Card clubs, too, came into existence and waxed fast and furious. Euchre was the game of the day, flourishing at high speed for some years, only to die a lingering death on the "bridge" table.

The "Tourist Club," with a limited membership, was the first of its kind in Muskogee, and quite a feature of its social life. It was not only a "feast of reason", but a "flow" of tea as well, every meeting ending with simple refreshments, and a flourish of tea cups. Intellects which, in the topic of the program, had traveled over land and sea, scaled the pinnacle of heaven and the depths, now, fell like Lucifer, from the shining heights to the mundane tragedy of a stray cow in the yard caught chewing up the "last rose of summer," recipes for "pickled peaches," etc., could be heard amidst the clatter. These were such happy afternoons, where the "sublime and ridiculous" mingled with much laughter, each member leaving with a feeling

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of good will in her heart. It wasn't much, of course, but still a happy part of the life of the times - will they ever come again - quoth the raven "never more."

An outstanding event was the Dickens Party, the first and last ever given in Muskogee. Here Sally Brass, the little Marchioness, gay and debonair Dick Swiveler, David Copperfield, Dora, Dolly Varden, and many other dream people from the fascinating pages, held high revelry for a night.

The "Turner Opera House," our first, contributed quite a great deal to the social times. The drama not only entertained us but many lecturers of renown held forth - Robert Burdette, the Taylor brothers of Tennessee, the brilliant Senator Ingalls of Kansas who spoke of "Paradise Lost" as "the wonderful book which everyone talked about - and nobody read," - and many other outstanding speakers.

Then Muskogee rose to its zenith - it purchased the officers' quarters at Fort Gibson, as the fort was abandoned, and formed the "Country Club," which became the setting for hilarious times, dances, dinners, cards - social and otherwise. It was quite in the order of the day to drive over plowed fields, open gates, and then embark on the ferry. Sometimes the woods on the other

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side would be abloom with the wild grape - the fragrance of which still lingers down the years.

The Court and Government officials, the Dawes Commission, politicians, and lawyers of note all added an additional tone of brilliancy and Society expanded more and more. Charming afternoon and evening affairs were given, and the notables who dropped down in our midst were "banqueted" and "receptioned" just as was done "in the states."

As the average house in those days was small, the undaunted house-wife thought nothing of taking down the beds and pushing cumbrous furniture out for an airing on the porch, if more commodious quarters were desired. There were no special caterers in these days and again the resourceful house-wife, with or without the help of a dusky maid, as the case might be, pounded the ice which packed the can which froze the cream; whereof they all did eat.

So the grey days and the gay days of the town were drawing to a close - these were fascinating times, as distinctive as Muskogee herself was distinctive - possessing a subtle charm, quite undefinable, which seemed to blow in on the winds from its beautiful prairies laden with blooms in the springtime and

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echoing to the call of the quail in the autumn. Society, now advanced to the "similitude of the states," seems to pause on the threshold, watching with regretful eyes, the mocassined feet of the old Indian Territory passing down the trail of "days that are no more."