

MASON, OLLIE F.

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Hannie Lee Burns,
Investigator.
November 23, 1937.

Interview with Ollie F. Mason,
Miami, Oklahoma.

My parents came to Arkansas many years ago and settled not far from Bentonville in what is still called Mason Valley. Here I was born about sixty years ago.

I grew up in these hills and here I went to school during my earlier years with a few years away at other schools. My life was that of the average boy with plenty of work, some hunting and fishing and a little play..

Before I came as a young man to the Indian Country I was around Silcam Springs a good deal and there I met several people who have been my friends and neighbors since I have come to live in Miami. Among them are: John W. Coons who was the first City School Superintendent in Miami; Van Stewart, whose wife still lives here, came from near Bentonville to this place. He was one of the first of the officials of the Territorial Court to live in Miami; G. W. Grant, now living here, was a

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resident of Siloam Springs when the town was incorporated and put up a fight for saloons.

John Hargrove was one of the first merchants in that part of the country. He did business under the name of Zeke Proctor and ran in addition to his store a sawmill and a planing mill.

L. Matthews who came here from Siloam Springs was one of the organizers of the State Board of Pharmacy. I did not know he was here until one day I drove from Seneca, Missouri, to look at a drug store and the store was his. This was in the year of 1901.

Calvin McDonald, the father of Mrs. Fannie Chandler of this city, was a Baptist minister and made several trips back and forth from Georgia with different parties of the Cherokees. They would not travel on Sundays. They insisted on stopping for the day and spending the day in worship, a custom that has not been entirely dropped by them yet.

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Only this Summer just past a friend of mine here wanted to buy some huckleberries from the Cherokees living farther down in the hills and drove down one Sunday thinking that he would purchase some and he found that it being Sunday they were not picking that day and if he got any berries he would have to return during the week.

In the year of 1896 I became interested in the town of Grove and I moved to Grove in October, 1897.

D. K. Wetzel and I traded for some mill equipment and in the Spring of 1898 we built the first flour mill in that little city and named it the Grove Milling Company.

During this time I was beginning the practice of law and I am one of the few living men who appeared in the old Cherokee Tribal Court in the years of 1897 and 1898 at the old court house located at that time between Grove and Jay and called the Delaware Court House of the Delaware District.

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Pete Hastings was clerk then and I appeared in the matter of the estate of Charles Wetzel, representing his son, D. K. Wetzel, who was also my partner.

On the first Monday in September, 1898, I was the clerk acting under W. E. Jones who made the final sale of the Mathias Splitlog estate on that date. They had been for some two or three years selling and settling this estate. He was the man who started to build a railroad from Kansas City to the Gulf of Mexico and did succeed in getting it built to Neosho, Missouri, and today the old grade of a mile or more of unbuilt road can be traced southward from the little town of McElhaney, Missouri.

Afton.

In the month of March in the year of 1900 I moved from Grove to Afton, continuing the practice of law.

In some respects the town of Afton was a little different from some of the other newly laid out towns.

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At the time the town was laid out, it was in a square and, there not being many houses, the townsite contained some of the farm homes and the property and switchyards of the railroad company.

I was elected as a member of the City Council of Afton and we wanted to vote some bonds for improvements in 1908 and we had to show a specified valuation. Then the first city map of Afton was made. It was drawn on a square of white oilcloth with a lead pencil. It was made by the wife of Doctor Pruitt. By including the farm property and that of the railroad within the square we were able to show the necessary valuation and we were successful in getting our bond issue.

Mrs. Thompson who died in Afton recently was the first teacher there.

Rufus Gill who came there from Fort Gibson to take charge of the first store when Afton had only a box-car for a station is still living there and is in the Fire Insurance business.

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Wig Dawson, afterwards connected with the Dawson Drug Store there, was in the cattle business then.

It was while I was living in Afton that I was married to Etta Burnett, a daughter of John Burnett of Seneca, Missouri.

I was living in Afton when the Frisco Railroad was completed from Miami to Afton in the Fall of 1901. The celebration for the completion of the road was held at Miami October 18th, 1901. I was in Seneca that day and drove from there to Miami a distance of twenty miles in a buggy to attend the celebration. I still have one of the small silver spikes that they gave away that day. It was a great day for Miami. All the business houses were closed and the school children, several hundred, marched in a body and at the bridge which spans the Neosho River on this side of the bridge they drove the golden spike that completed the construction and opened officially the railroad from Kansas City to Afton.

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With the establishment of through railroad service at Miami, this town began to grow and with the establishment of the court house at Miami, I moved my family to Miami and have continued to live here.

Ogeechee on the Frisco between Fairland and Wyandotte since the establishment of Fairland in the early '90's had begun to dwindle. Before then it had been a thriving little country town of two stores, a marble factory, a post office, a blacksmith shop, and several residences. Today only the railroad switch marks the spot.

The history of Needmore is similar. It was started four miles west of Carey's Ferry and continued to be a country trading post until the K. O. & G. Railroad was built through and the town of Bernice was established which ruined old Needmore which was two miles south and east of there. The post office at Needmore had been called Echo.

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Ferries.

Uncle Bill (William H.) Curtis lived in Bentonville. He had a little store, just small box buildings, at Carey's Ferry in the latter part of the '80's located about a mile this side of the ferry. This was on the road from Pineville and Bentonville; they also crossed here on their way to Caney and Coffeyville, Kansas. Later Uncle Duke Kelly put in a stock of goods here and traded it to Fate Courtney.

Harlan's Ferry was on Grand River near the mouth of Elk River. Pooler's Ferry was east and just a little south of Miami across the Neosho River.

Ranches.

Two of the ranches that I knew best in this part of the state were the two owned by John Burnett of Seneca, Missouri. One was northeast of Miami near the Bigknife Ford on Spring River and the other was about four miles north and two miles east of Miami near the Ensworth farm.

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In conclusion I might mention that some ten years ago, I made a trip to Klamath Falls, Oregon, to see one of the older Modocs who were brought to the Indian Territory in 1873. His name was Charlie Hood and he lived some three or four miles back in the timber camps.