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L.W. Wilson,  
Field Worker,  
July 27, 1937.

An Interview with Mr. A.J. Kennedy,  
Vian, Oklahoma.

A. J. Kennedy is the son of H.K. Kennedy, who was a surgeon during the Civil War.

A. J. Kennedy was born in Shelbyville, Indiana, January 24, 1862; his mother died when he was a baby.

Soon after the Civil War A. J. Kennedy, with his father, journeyed west by train and settled in a small village in Kansas, near the present town of Oskaloosa.

While in Kansas A. J. Kennedy attended St. Mary's College at St. Marys, Kansas, and while attending St. Mary's he and his father made several visits to relatives in the Indian Territory. In 1875 he moved into the Osage country, moved again in 1880 to the Chickasaw Nation and while living here A. J. Kennedy attended college for two years at Bonham, Texas, and returning from college he began work for a Mr. C. H. Scales at Wetumka in a general merchandise store and in 1884 was employed by the government of the Creek Nation at \$40.00 a month to teach English to the full blood Creek children. His first school was located at

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Hillabee, and the next was located at Seminole.

In 1888 he engaged in the mercantile business at Sandy in the Chickasaw Nation about fifteen miles west of Sasakwa. There never was a post office at Sandy and this place soon passed out of existence. While in business at Sandy he sold some of his merchandise for cash but most of his merchandise was exchanged for hides and furs. These hides and furs were sold to a Mr. Haas who was a brother-in-law of Mr. Sondheimer at Muskogee. Mr. Haas had headquarters at Atoka and Mr. Sondheimer is still in the hide and fur business at Muskogee.

The store at Sandy was operated for nearly two years and then Mr. Kennedy moved onto the Pottawatomie and Seminole line near the old Sacred Heart Mission and opened a store which was burned in 1890.

Mr. Kennedy joined up with a surveying party which was surveying the right-of-way from Oklahoma City to Wister in Le Flore County in 1890, for the Choctaw, Oklahoma and Gulf Railroad, now the Chicago Rock Island and Pacific Railroad. The Engineer was a man named McWilley and the instrument man was a Mr. Hall; the rest of the party were rod and

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chainmen, cook and camp employes.

Mr. Kennedy came to the Creek Capital at Okmulgee in 1892 and found employment with F. B. Severs in one of the two stores located there; the other store was owned by a Mr. Parkinson.

At the Severs store Mr. Kennedy worked for about six years as salesman, buyer and bookkeeper, and many interesting things happened during this time.

Mr. F. B. Severs was always referred to in those days as Captain Severs because he had served as a Captain in the Confederate Army. Captain Severs was a native of Arkansas, born at Cincinnati, and was a white man as is also Mr. Kennedy.

Captain Severs was a poor man at the close of the Civil War and for a period of a few years thereafter lived in Texas.

He soon returned to the Indian Territory and by some means became secretary to the Principal Chief, Legus Perryman.

During this period payments were being made to the Creeks for lands sold to the Sac, Fox, and Cheyenne Indians, together with other payments, all of which passed through the hands of

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Principal Chief Perryman. Warrants were drawn by the secretary signed by the chief and sent to the banks at St. Louis, Missouri, where they were cashed.

Captain Severs conceived the idea that the Indians would rather have merchandise than money, for they could not even count the money and had no conception of the value of a dollar so he made negotiations with wholesale houses, in some manner, to accept these warrants and furnish him with merchandise and by so doing opened his business, you might say, on the money of the Indians.

The goods began to arrive and the Indians would take up their payments in goods at the Severs store, yielding Captain Severs about fifty or sixty per cent profit on all goods purchased from the St. Louis firms.

In this way Captain Severs started his financial career, and at one time he owned stores and business houses at both Okmulgee and Miskogee, as well as numerous dwelling houses, and he handled twenty-five or thirty thousand head of cattle each year on his ranch located near the present town of Bald Hill.

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When Mr. Kennedy began work at the Severs store the bookkeeper was Captain Trent.

The Severs store handled all kinds of blankets, hardware, clothing, harness, riding bridles, saddles wagons and buggies, beads, jewelry, tobacco, cigars, candy, gum and farm tools and seeds. No article sold for less than 25 cents. A cigar cost 25 cents, pack of pins 25 cents, etc.

On many days sales amounted to over a \$1000.00 and you could not find enough money in all the cash tills to buy a postage stamp at closing time.

It was all credit business. If an Indian established credit, he would make arrangements with the store for a certain amount of credit and this amount would be charged to him in one lump sum. There were no itemized accounts. If the customer wanted a \$100.00 credit, as an example, he was charged \$100.00 and due bills were given him for the amount in bills of \$5.00 or \$10.00 denominations to cover. These due bills for example read as follows:

Okmulgee, Indian Territory, September 1, 1892.

Due in merchandise to bearer John Wildcat at my store

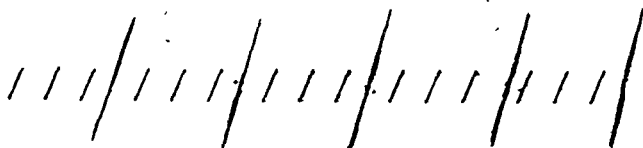
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\$5.00



F. B. Severs.

Each short mark as shown represented 25 cents and each long mark represented \$1.00. When a 25 cents purchase was made the clerk would take his scissors and clip off one of these short marks and throw it away, etc.

No Indian seemed to count money but you could not "beat" him on a due bill. Many Indians would make you clip for each purchase, that is, if an Indian bought a cigar for 25 cents then clip a short mark, if another article for \$1.00, clip a long mark which represented \$1.00 and so on. In other words they would not do all their trading at one time and clip the total amount off the due bill at one time.

The Indians were very honest in all their dealings and met their obligations promptly or else they would come to Captain Severs' store <sup>and</sup> explain fully why they could not pay him.

Many of the cowpunchers sent to Texas and some to Wyoming for their saddles and paid enormous prices for

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them, more than even Captain Sever charged for saddles sent from St. Louis, Missouri. The St. Louis saddles were as good as could be bought any place, but these cowhands had peculiar ideas about saddles. Some had ridden the range in Texas and thought a Texas saddle was the best and the same was true of those from Wyoming. The price was no object to this class of trade if you had what they wanted.

At one time there was due Captain Severs, from the Creek Indians for merchandise he had let them have at the store, pending a payment due them, more than \$400,000.00 and naturally he began to get worried although it could have been twice that amount and he would not have been hurt from a financial stand point because his wholesale people would furnish him an unlimited amount of goods on credit basis.

He went to the Principal Chief and Treasurer of the Creek Nation to ascertain why payments were withheld but they did not know.

So the Treasurer, N.B. Moore and wife, together with



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others, made a trip to Washington to see the President of the United States, who was Benjamin Harrison. On their arrival at the White House they were refused admittance to confer with the President. The second day admittance was granted and they inquired as to why payment was being withheld from the Creeks.

President Harrison's reply was "The money will be paid as soon as I can find someone whom I can trust with the money".

Mrs. Moore said, "Why, here is my husband, the treasurer for the Creeks".

The President replied, "I would not trust a cent with any Indian I ever saw or heard of".

The party returned to the Creek Nation with the understanding that at an early date the matter would be disposed of by President Benjamin Harrison.

Soon a United States Commissioner of Indian affairs appeared in Okmulgee and came to the Severs store. All the people about the town tried to see that he received the best lodging and entertainment possible.

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The Commissioner remained for two weeks in Okmulgee and made arrangements as to the manner of payment at the old Creek Council House, so that as he paid the Creeks their money, they would have to pass out by Captain Severs whom they could pay as they went out. The United States Commissioner had it thoroughly understood that he had no interest in the matter other than to see the Creeks were paid.

The Creek Nation was divided into "towns" and the Principal Chief notified the men of each town when to be present and every Creek to whom a dollar was due came for the payment.

The payment to the Creeks amounted to something like \$500,000.00. The first of <sup>the</sup> money shipment came to Muskogee by express and was transported to Okmulgee by stage, protected by the Lighthorsemen. This money was placed in the safe at the Severs' store.

The payment got under way and was made to the head of each family. As each Indian passed through the Severs' room in the Council House, to get out of the building,

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he would lay down all his money and say "Take Um out all owe you".

The Creeks paid all that \$400,000.00 and Severs never lost a cent.

To avoid bringing money from the St. Louis banks after the first few days, the Commissioner would draw warrants on the United States Treasurer and Captain Sever would cash them and the money was used over and over again in making this payment. This was where the bookkeeper, Trent, got action for the salary paid him. This was a tremendous task, so Mr. Kennedy was <sup>made</sup> assistant bookkeeper. The Indians, during this payment, milled around a great deal but they were very peaceable and caused no disturbance.

One time an emigrant from Arkansas stopped to do some trading at Captain Severs' store. He made some purchases and gave Mr. Kennedy a \$10.00 bill from which change was due. Back to the bookkeeper, Captain Trent, Mr. Kennedy went for change, knowing well there was none in the cash

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tills.

Captain Trent said, "Where did you get that \$10.00?"

Mr. Kennedy replied, "From a customer from Arkansas, an emigrant," Trent said, "We have no money for change, take back the goods and give the man his money."

Mr. Kennedy went to Captain Belcher who was then the postmaster at Okmulgee and by scraping around they dug up enough money to change the \$10.00 bill.

That night at closing time Captain Trent, the bookkeeper, found the cash for the merchandise purchased by the emigrant and he called Mr. Kennedy in to ask where this money had come from. Mr. Kennedy explained and all was satisfactory.

#### Robbery of Stores in Okmulgee.

\*As before stated there were two stores in Okmulgee. the Severs store and the Parkinson store.

One morning, early, the Buck Gang rode into town.

Mr. Kennedy had just opened the Severs' store and was about to have everything in readiness for the days business. When a negro came to the side door entrance and said, "The Buck Gang is raiding Parkinson's store."

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At this time there was something like \$20,000.00 at the Severs store, as a payment had been made to the Indians and their accounts had been paid two or three days before. Besides Mr. Kennedy there was one other man in the store, the bookkeeper. Like a flash they got the money and tried to hide it. They worked hurriedly and with the money went to the second floor, (the store was a two story building) where there were many suits of men's clothing and the money was hidden in the pockets of these suits of clothing. Then, the two men rushed back down stairs. As they entered the ground floor of the store, there stood a man and they were frightened, but they asked the man what was wanted and he replied, "The Buck Gang has just robbed Parkinson's store and has ridden out of town", so they knew they were at least safe for the time being.

A check up of the Parkinson store revealed they had secured between \$15,000.00 and \$16,000.00.

The members of the Buck Gang were soon caught, tried before Judge Parker, of Fort Smith, Arkansas, and hanged.

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## Happenings at the Creek Capital

During the time Mr. Kennedy spent at Okmulgee in the employe of the Sevens' store, many men and women were tried under the Creek laws and punished. There were no jails and if a Creek was found guilty of certain crimes, punishment was administered at the whipping post. Many were whipped and some were shot. For the first offence the culprit was given fifty lashes, for the second offence a hundred lashes, and at the third offence the prisoner was shot. In case of murder it was death by gun shot.

Mr. Kennedy tells the story of an Indian who was tried before Judge Anderson of the Creek Court for murder and found guilty. A man called Captain Harry was Captain of the Lighthorsemen or Indian Police.

The scene was at the old whipping post at <sup>the</sup> Council House in Okmulgee. The day of execution came. The coffin had been made and the burial clothes were donated by the Sevens' store as was Captain Sevens' practice.

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The prisoner was escorted by the Lighthorsemen and made to stand up inside his coffin, Captain Harry felt in his pockets for a handkerchief with which to blindfold the prisoner but had none; the prisoner felt in his pocket and produced a large red handkerchief, lifted one foot on the side of his own coffin and calmly folded the handkerchief himself for a blindfold and asked Captain Harry to tie <sup>it</sup> ~~about~~ his eyes. When this had been done Captain Harry pinned a piece of white paper over the prisoner's heart and he stood erect now in his coffin, and the firing squad of Lighthorsemen, at the signal of "fire" from the captain, fired three bullets into the Indian's body, near his heart, killing him instantly.

~~His body was~~ carried in his coffin to a place on Okmulgee Creek for interment. A negro man redressed the body, in the suit provided by Severs, there on the banks of Okmulgee Creek, the crowd dispersed and the negro found that there were shackles on the dead Indian's leg.

The negro shouted to Captain Harry, "If you want

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these shackles you had better get 'em or I'll bury 'em with him.

The captain returned, unlocked the shackles and took them with him. The body was soon prepared and laid out in the box ready to nail down the lid and drop in the hole that had been dug. Everyone had left, leaving the grave to be closed by this negro man.

#### Other Courts and Whipping Posts

Mr. Kennedy recalls that about three miles north of the present town of Boynton, on Cane Creek, at the Trading Post of Lee which was a stage stand, a ore room log courthouse, a post office, store and possibly another house near-by, as well as the whipping post.

Judge Dave Lee, besides being Judge of the Court, was a lawyer, postmaster, doctor, merchant, and his wife served meals to passengers on the stage coaches and to the stage drivers and saw that the teams were fed.

#### Indian Burials.

The Osages usually took a dead brave and placed him in <sup>a</sup> sitting position with the blankets which he wore placed around him and his gun and other little earthly possessions



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were put beside him, and over his body they piled many stones to prevent the body from being eaten by the prairie wolves and coyotes.

All over the Osage Nation these burials of the dead took place and wherever you found a pile of stone there was the body of a dead Indian underneath. One time a cowpuncher who had been riding herd all night and was very cold saw one of these piles of stone, threw his rope around the top of the pile, tied the other end of the rope to the saddle horn, drove his pony on and toppled the stones down exposing the corpse, pulled in his rope and then lassoed the corpse, pulled it out of the stones, took the ~~dead Indian's blankets~~ and rode away.

In the early days there were no coffins and boxes had to be made in which the Creeks and Seminoles buried their dead. They placed these boxes in the ground as they do at the present time.

Mr. Kennedy, while operating his store near the Sacred Heart Mission, was prevailed upon to assist in building a coffin for someone who had died in the neighborhood and

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whom he had known in his lifetime. Being no carpenter he could do but little but nevertheless went to help.

The box was finished and the corpse was placed therein. The Indian preacher presided, and as he preached Mr. Kennedy stood idly by whittling on a piece of a large splinter from the boards from which the box or coffin had been made.

The sermon was finished and some of the kinfolks of the dead Indian picked up all the sawdust, splinters and pieces left from the wood of which the coffin was made, including the shavings Mr. Kennedy had made while whittling, and placed them inside the box with the corpse.

The mother of the dead Indian had a cup and saucer which she placed between his feet, the cup filled with coffee, and in his hand she placed some tobacco. The lid was then nailed on the coffin and the body was laid to rest in the ground. The coffee and tobacco were to help him when he reached his happy hunting ground but the reason for placing the sawdust, splinters and shavings in the coffin, Mr. Kennedy never learned.

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As time passed this burial ceremonial discontinued and the Creeks and Seminoles buried their dead as we do at the present time.

Mr. Kennedy knows of many old burial grounds, but in the early days many bodies were buried along the creeks, on the prairies, and in family cemeteries.

Again in Mercantile Business for himself

The town of Okmulgee began to grow when the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad started construction through the town in 1898. The survey of the railroad right of way was made in 1897. Mr. Kennedy quit work for the Severs store and formed a partnership with a Mr. P.K. Morton and opened a mercantile business in 1897.

Together they worked and had a successful business for almost a year at which time Mr. Kennedy sold his interest in the store and moved to Vian, August 2, 1898, to take charge of the mercantile business operated by C.W. Turner and N. B. Blackstone.

Soon after this he bought the business and changed the name of the store to the Vian Trading Company. This store Mr. Kennedy operated successfully until his health

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became impaired when he retired to private life.

### Marriage

When only a young man Mr. Kennedy was married to a young lady who lived but a short time and for years he was unmarried, but while operating the Vian Trading Company he became engaged to a beautiful full blood Cherokee girl, Miss Maggie Walker, and was married under the Cherokee Laws in March, 1901.

Miss Walker was accomplished as well as beautiful having been educated at the Cherokee Orphanage at Salina. She was also a graduate of Bacone College at Muskogee. The preacher officiating at the marriage of Miss Walker and Mr. Kennedy was the Reverend William Wilson.

Mr. Kennedy was a delegate to a convention at Muskogee called for the purpose of giving the new state a name. Pleasant Porter, Principal Chief of the Creeks, presided over this convention which proposed the name "Sequo-

Mr. Kennedy is a member of the Masonic Order.