

KEYS, WILLIAM HENRY.

INTERVIEW.

7283.

Interviewer, James S. Buchanan.
August 25, 1937.

Interview with William Henry Keys.
510 North Cherokee,
Muskogee, Oklahoma.

I was born February 7, 1853, in Oxford, Mississippi, son of Matthew Henry Keys and Mary Ellen Lipscomb Keys.

I was reared in the immediate vicinity of my birthplace and my first employment after leaving school was as salesman in the general mercantile business of W.S. Nelson and Son Dry Goods Company of Oxford, Mississippi. I was with them about two years after which I accepted a position with the Harris Walton Hardware Company of Oxford, and remained with them about one year.

From that position I went into the cafe business for myself in Oxford and continued in that about two years, then selling out my cafe, I went into the business of drugs and manufacture of patent medicines in the same town. This business I carried on about four years, when I sold out my cafe in 1884 and moved from Mississippi to Fort

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Smith, Arkansas, where I lived about eight years, being employed by different mercantile companies.

When I came to Fort Smith, it was a typical border or frontier town and was a tough place. The town had a population of about five hundred and most of the houses were log, the Old Confederate post buildings being the only stone buildings in the town at that time. Fort Smith was a trading center for Western Arkansas and the Indian Territory and I have seen wagon trains drive into the town from a distance of two hundred miles or more on trading trips.

All our freight at that time was brought into Fort Smith by steamboats, and practically all the town was along the river front.

The Federal Court for Arkansas and the Indian Territory was in Fort Smith at that time, and all the outlaws brought from the Territory were tried there before Judge Parker. He always considered them guilty before they were tried, and he was, in most cases, about right.

In 1892, I left Fort Smith and came to Muskogee and accepted a position with the J.A. Patterson Mercantile

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Company being in charge of the Tents furnishing Department. I was with the Patterson Mercantile Company only a short time, when Mr. Patterson asked me to become a member of the firm. I enquired of him as to what was required of me and he told me my note was for \$3, 000.

The deal was made and my note paid in due time. I became a member of the firm in 1892 and continued with them until 1912, when I sold out my interest to W.N. Patterson for \$5,000, for which I accepted his note due one year after date, and Mr. Patterson died before the note was paid and his heirs refused payment; therefore it was never paid.

The Patterson Mercantile Company conducted a large business throughout this part of the Territory and besides their mercantile business, the firm owned a cotton gin, compress, and elevator at Muskogee and a grain elevator at Wagoner and one at Claremore. He issued what was called scrip money, printed in denominations of 25¢, 50¢ and \$1.00 and \$5.00 signed by the President of the firm. It became the medium of exchange in the territory as the firm would

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redeem it at face value on demand and everyone recognized and accepted it the same as they would United States currency.

On October 13, 1881, I was married to Annie G. Jones, daughter of Daniel Weldon Jones and one Sheegog Jones in Oxford, Mississippi. Two children were born to us; Robert Daniel Keys, March 5, 1883, and Jenny Jones Keys, September 10, 1889. Both children were born in Oxford, Mississippi, but Jenny died in 1890 in Fort Smith, Arkansas.

After severing my relations with the Patterson Mercantile Company, I engaged in farming on a place I bought five miles southeast of Muskogee, known as the Joe Harris place. I later sold that place and retired from active life and have lived in Muskogee since.