

KING, JAMES A.

INTERVIEW

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Interviewer, Elizabeth Ross,
November 15, 1937.

Interview with James A. King,
Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

Oldest Store Building.

All of the original store houses in Tahlequah disappeared many years ago. Today the oldest building, the lower portion of which has been utilized as quarters of mercantile firms ever since its completion, is that which was built by Johnson Thompson in 1883. The building is composed principally of brown sandstone, the front, which was remodeled some years ago, being of gray limestone. Otherwise the walls are as they were when completed fifty-four years ago. The name "Thompson" and the date "1883" are to be seen in large letters and figures above the windows in the upper story, which faces the east.

The Thompson building stands upon the site of a pioneer store, a brick building two stories high which was erected by George M. Murrell rather early in the forties of the last century. The brick building stood until demolished in 1883 so that the stone building might occupy the spot.

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Johnson Thompson, who established a mercantile business in Tahlequah about 1877, operated a store in another old brick store house until the sandstone building was completed, when he removed his stock to the new store. He and his family lived for some years in rooms on the second floor of the building. Eventually the upper story was largely utilized as headquarters of the telephone company long existent in Tahlequah.

The Thompson building held an extensive stock of merchandise in the months preceding, and during the disbursement of the proceeds of the sale of the Cherokee Strip in 1894. Many Cherokee citizens received credit at the store and traded heavily in many instances, procuring food stuffs, groceries, and dry goods. Upon receiving their shares of the "Strip Money" as it was usually designated, numbers paid off the amount of their undebtedness in full, some partially, and others paid nothing whatever.

Due bills, or script, were issued by the proprietor of the store to many of those who had signed notes and promised to pay upon receipt of their shares of money, and many who received the script sold it at low rates for cash to persons

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not entitled to participate in the disbursement of the trip Money.

After retiring from active business in the stone building, Johnson Thompson, advanced in years, lived for a rather brief period. Long a leading business man of the town, he had served as a member of the building committee having in charge the erection of the new Cherokee National Female Seminary in Tahlequah, completed in 1889.

Beneath the building is a large basement, a portion of which was utilized for the storing of various articles of merchandise to be used in replenishing stocks in the sales-room.