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Mercantile establishments--Creek Nation

James S. Buchanan,  
Research Field Worker S-149,  
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Truman Harsha, Informant  
Subject: William S. Harsha  
Muskogee, Oklahoma.

My father, William S. Harsha, was born in Albia, Monroe County, Iowa, February 8, 1857. His father and mother were Samuel and Martha (Harrison) Harsha, who were natives of Pennsylvania and Virginia respectfully. Grandfather was a shoemaker by trade and in 1865 went to Iowa, settling at Keokuk where he remained about one year. He next removed to Albia, Iowa, where he worked at his trade until 1857, when he removed to the state of Kansas and later engaged in the general merchandise business at Greeley, Anderson county, and devoted the remainder of his active life to that business, death occurring in 1867, while grandmother had passed away in 1865.

William S. Harsha was reared and educated in Kansas and was only ten years of age when left an orphan. He worked on farms in the vicinity of his home in Kansas until he was about eighteen years of age and during the winter months attended rural school, thus acquiring his education. He first started out in the commercial world as a clerk in a store at Richmond, Kansas, where he was employed for two years, and in the month of November 1876

he came to Muskogee and shortly thereafter he secured a position in Okmulgee as a clerk for C. W. Turner, where he remained until 1880, when he came back to Muskogee and accepted a position with J. E. Turner (the father of C. W. Turner) general merchandise. A year later William S. Harsha purchased an interest in the business of J. E. Turner. During his first years connection with Mr. Turner at Muskogee he did not know what his salary was to be, but at the end of the year he was paid one thousand dollars for his services. He and J. E. Turner continued in business together for seventeen years under the firm name of J. E. Turner and Company. At the end of that time Mr. Turner's health failed and he retired, his interest in the business being acquired by H. B. Spaulding, after which the business was carried on under the firm name of Harsha and Spaulding for three years. In addition to a general mercantile business they built up an extensive business in live stock and cotton, and were owners of the Harsha and Spaulding cotton gin, the largest and most modern in this country at that time. The firm carried a stock valued at forty thousand dollars. The volume of their business is indicated by the fact that their freight bills for the year of 1899 amounted to more than ten thousand dollars, which

was quite a contrast to Mr. Harsha's situation in 1876 when he arrived in Muskogee and accepted as his first position, a job driving a mail coach between Muskogee and Okmulgee. In 1901 Mr. Harsha disposed of his interest in the business to his partner, Mr. Spaulding, and acquired an interest with C. W. Turner in a general mercantile business at Choska in 1902, and Hoy L. Harsha, the oldest son, became secretary and treasurer of the company, the business being carried on under the firm name of Choska Trading Company, with William S. Harsha as president and C. W. Turner as vice president. In 1903 they removed the business to Porter and there remained until 1907. During this business connection Mr. Harsha also engaged in the cattle business devoting his time to both interests.

After disposing of other business interests in later years, he confined his attention to the real estate business in Muskogee and at one time president of the Canadian Valley Trust Company of Muskogee which failed in the panic of 1907. He continued in the real estate business the remainder of his business career, retiring in later years. At the time of this writing Mr. and Mrs. Harsha are residing in Muskogee.

In September 1878 William S. Harsha was married to Miss Laura Newcomb, daughter of Luther and Elizabeth (Kelsey)

Newcomb of Pomona, Kansas. To this union were born nine children, six of which are now living as follows: Hoy L. now living in Haskell and connected with the state banking commission. Rex S., Francis W., William N., Annie, who married J. F. Brandon who is now a missionary to South America, and Truman, now engaged in the furniture business in Muskogee.