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HISTORY OF PATTERSON MERCANTILE COMPANY
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4-15-37

James A. Patterson, founder of the first mercantile company of Muskogee, was born in Lincoln County, Tennessee, 1819. He was the son of William and Anna Newbury Patterson. At the age of 15 he moved with his parents to Cherokee County, Alabama. There his father died in 1848, leaving him the main support of his mother and the younger children. In 1854 he came west to the Creek Nation, Indian Territory in the employe of Colonel William H. Garrett, who at that time was the agent for the Creek Indians. He taught school for two years near the Agency, until he became an employe of Mr. G. W. Stidham, who owned and operated a mercantile business at that place. In 1860 he went into partnership business with Mr. Stidham and they opened a store at Shieldsville, near the original site of the town of Okmulgee, Oklahoma. They continued in business there until the beginning of the Civil War, when they were compelled to move their stock back to the Creek Agency. Soon after the beginning of the Civil War he was appointed Sutler for the refugee Creeks at Fort Washita, in the Chickasaw Nation. A position he retained during the entire period of the war. At the close of the war he went into business with Major J. Harlin, dealing in merchandise and cattle at Tishomingo, Chickasaw Nation. In 1867 he returned to the Creek Agency and again was connected with Mr. G. W. Stidham in the mercantile business. Their trade extended over a large part of the

Cherokee, Creek and Seminole Nations. In 1872 the M.K. & T. Railroad was built into the Indian Territory, running a straight line from Parsons, Kansas, to Dennison, Texas. Immediately thereafter, in 1873, Mr. Patterson opened the first dry goods store at the present site of Muskogee. Mr. Andrew W. Robb, who was living at that time at Fort Gibson, and had held the position of Quartermaster at the fort, moved to Muskogee and was employed by Mr. Patterson. They formed a partnership in 1876 and this relation lasted until the death of Mr. Patterson in 1897. In 1889 a stock company was formed. The stockholders were, A. W. Robb, President; Herbert J. Evans, known as Jack, Secretary; The store was divided into departments, being the first department store at that time in the Territory. Mr. Joseph S. Schmidt, an experienced dry goods man from Evansville, Indiana, was put in charge of the dry goods department. William H. Keys was manager of the clothing and Mr. William Reeves the shoe department, Mr. Keys and Mr. Reed came from Fort Smith, Arkansas. Chas. Seekings, an English Immigrant boy who had entered the service of the company years before as a errand and general handy man, and later trained in the grocery business was made manager of the grocery department. All heads of the departments were stockholders. Mr. Levi Ackley was credit man. The company also owned and operated a mill and gin in Muskogee and more than 60 people were employed and the payroll of \$30,000 per annum was maintained. They erected an improved round bale cotton gin and compress in 1897. In 1891 William N. Patterson, familiarly known as Major, a nephew of Mr. J. A. Patterson, came to Muskogee from his former home in Alabama, having just finished school. Mr. Patterson took him into

the firm at once and gave him an interest in the business.

The first store building was located on Main and Broadway, facing east, where the Turner Block now stands. When Muskogee had its first disastrous fire the entire business part of town was destroyed with the exception of Captain E. R. Sayers' store just south of Okmulgee on Main Street. At that time Mr. Patterson and Mr. W. W. Turner who had formerly occupied the site of the old Patterson building exchanged lots and substantial brick buildings were erected on each lot facing west and Main Street was moved west the distance of one block. It created quite a protest from the citizens as the larger part of the town was located on the east side of the late railroad. Cherokee Street being the principal residence street. The people didn't want to walk that extra distance, but as the railroad company wanted to lay their track it was thought advisable. The proprietors were quite proud of their new store and increased their stock to suit their own requirements, quarters and employed additional help.

Among the early employees before the stock company was formed were: Mr. Wm. N. Martin, a prominent citizen of Muskogee for many years was in the dry goods dept.

Taylor Chisso, a member of the Creek tribe, who afterward became prominent in Creek school affairs, was a member of the force. Mr. J. Bolander, a native of Sweden, was the first bookkeeper.

Mr. Joe Herrin, now living in Muskogee, was employed in the grocery department resigned to join the Rough Riders, in 1898.

Miss Nettie Graves was the first woman employed in a store in Muskogee. As it was an unheard of thing for a woman to work in a public place, it created quite a lot of interest and comment when she began working.

As she was also a stenographer she did not stay long as she secured a position in a lawyers' office. Miss Stella Comby was the next young woman to be employed by the firm in 1894. She had moved with her mother and sister from Missouri. All white people employed in the Indian Territory were required to secure a permit from the Indian Government. Mr. Chas. Barnett, a Creek official, at once called upon her and informed her that she would be required to pay \$2 per year for a permit. As he looked very much in earnest she handed over the \$2. She was the first woman to pay for a permit in the town. Miss Comby was one of the most popular saleswomen ever employed in the town. Her bright smile and her willingness to be of service to her customers endeared her to the entire patronage. Miss Belle Lyons and Miss Della Curtis, a young woman from Kansas, were also employed there. Mr. Charles Hart, a popular chap from Missouri, was assistant manager of the dry goods department. In 1891 I went to work there. I began just as an experiment on my part and perhaps a greater one on theirs. They were to have their midsummer sale the next two weeks in July, and I asked Mr. Robb who was my mother's good friend, if I might work during the sale and he gave his consent. I think he thought rightly of my ability, however, it was my first experience of standing on my feet all day. In the mad rush for bargains the store was filled with customers all day, standing and almost fighting for bargains. Sometimes the goods was badly damaged in the fray. I remember one dozen fine napkins that were badly damaged that they were charged to the woman who fought for them and would not take them. They were delivered to her the next day. When I got home in the evening of the first day I announced to my mother that I was through with business it was too strenuous for me, but after a good

meal, a hot bath and a night's rest, I was ready for the fray the next morning. The next morning after the sale was over Mr. Robb asked me if I would like to continue working as he had noticed how well I got along with the negro customers as they had an enormous negro patronage. I had received a dollar per day during the sale and was to get \$10 a week on a permanent job. No one could afford to turn that down so I became a member of the regular force. We had semi-annual sales in July and January to reduce stock and make room for the next seasons goods. They were real sales. High class merchandise at little above cost prices. Long before the doors were opened in the morning the sidewalks would be crowded with people and the grand rush began when the doors were open. The people would look forward with much interest to the sales realizing that they could secure fine merchandise at little cost. As the store drew patronage from a radius of 75 miles it was necessary for people to spend the night in town. Those who could afford it stayed at a rooming house or a hotel, went to a show at night, shopped early the next morning and left for home. Others who could not afford such luxuries came prepared to camp in the wagon yard, located at the corner of Cherokee Street and East Broadway. It was enclosed with a high board fence and the gates were locked at night insuring safety. As the firm dealt heavily in cotton, farmers coming from a distance, always stayed in the wagon yard. They came in late in the afternoon, sold their cotton, went to the gin and got weighed in. They received their weight checks and unloaded very early in the morning and were paid at the store and proceeded to spend the money.

As that perhaps was their only shopping trip for the season, the buying was heavy. I always tried to be on hand as early as possible in order to get in a big day. Many days I sold as much as \$250 worth of merchandise in an hour and often the cash sales in our department alone would run as high as \$1,000 or \$1,500 a day. We carried the highest grade merchandise obtainable from St. Louis, Chicago and New York markets. Heavy silks for dresses were in demand and ranged in price from \$2 to \$4 per yard. As the styles were not designed with any idea of economy it required from 8 to 10 yards of material for a dress. The findings and trimmings would cost several dollars more. Bringing the entire cost of one dress to \$30 or \$40. We also carried the finest grade of table linens. Mr. Schmitt took great pride in his assortment of fine damask. A dinner arrayed in the best linens from Pattersons, french china and cut glass from the Turner art department and sterling silver from a leading jewelry house, presented a setting at a dinner party fit for a King, and as dinner parties was one of the most popular social occasions, the demand for our linens never slackened. In order to save time and for convenience the firm conceived the idea of opening and maintaining a kitchen and dining room for the employees. It was located on the third floor with a good trustworthy negro man, Charley Hunter, installed as cook, and he was a good one. We were served dinner every day and supper on nights when we worked extra and Saturday nights. The dinners consisted of meat well cooked, at least two vegetables, a plain salad and a dessert. Men who came on business with the office force and visitors were always invited to dinner if it was near meal time. They always seemed to enjoy it. During the summer when business was not so brisk, the firm provided us with meal tickets from a nearby

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Patterson advised me to join the Union and avoid any trouble that might
possible arise. The firm paid an initial fee and we went into business
to place the firm principally and for the benefit of those employed by
other firms who were not getting along about business and were getting
checks. The office force believed in recreation as well as work and was
the first base ball team ever sponsored by a business concern in Wuxong
they had the material with which to form a fine team and the firm paid
the equipment free of charge. The suits were gray with Patterson in big
black letters across the front of the shirts. John Cobb, Dewitt Blacker
Charles Hart, Spencer Summerlin, Jim Hamer, Arthur Reid, Mark Minter,

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THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20530

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If you possessed a strong constitution, a keen sense of purpose and an understanding knowledge of human nature, you came out of a feeling of unity and friendliness characterized our people. It was from the fact that the management always made us feel that we were a part of the institution and not merely hired hands.

Major Patterson was married in 1946 to Miss Betty Baker, the charming young daughter of Herbert L. Baker of Muskogee, Oklahoma. We were a part of our family and the people who were interested in the work of the clothing store and the office of the store. We were a part of our family and the people who were interested in the work of the clothing store and the office of the store.

When we opened our bank to their new customers ranging from \$10 to \$25,000. They were entered on a charge account and the customer could trade them out as they desired. The amount was from five cents to one dollar. Our negro customers were extended the same of service as the whites received. They always had a favorite clerk and would indefinitely for them. You not only had to know what to offer them but you also had to know their mind as well. Each individual was a study in negro character. You also had to know their size and names for things. When they asked for a quarter of a yard of fabric, you gave them a twenty-five cent ball of cotton thread for sewing. Ten yards mackery meant ten yards of striped cotton fabric. Saturday was a gala day for the colored population. They came early, spent the day, and their shopping late in the afternoon after sitting with their friends and having a good time socially. It was a painful ordeal when the negro men, especially the old ones, were commissioned by the feminine members of their family to purchase women's

underwear. "Lady Unions" were the names they applied to several of the garments. One old gray-haired uncle asked me if we had lady unions. I replied that we did and to come right up stairs. He said "I don't want em now, I just ax ya, is ya". They always turned their backs while you wrapped them up. The amusements they furnished us offset the many annoyances that some of our enlightened white customers caused us. It took the patience that Job is credited with, to keep smiling and give your best service when in the middle of a busy day of city friends come in to get 2 yards of val lace at 72 cents per yard. After having spent an hour or so looking over the entire stock they made a selection. Perchance during that time several of their church and society friends had stopped to talk over the latest news and some times scandal, forgetful of the fact that the clerks were live and hear ears. Had the conversations in front of the dry goods counter been repeated there would have been war in high circles. We also knew all of the family troubles and physical ailments of our customers before we ever knew their names, sometimes. We designated them as the woman with the stingy or grouchy husband, and the one with the liver or stomach trouble. Our advice was asked on numerous subjects. For instance, "what color do you think would be most becoming to me," to "how to feed the baby." We were always glad to see our friends in the morning as they passed through the store to the store to the grocery department. Our gentle friend, Judge John R. Thomas, (father of Mrs. Grant Foreman, of Muskogee), always stopped to chat with us and admonished us to work harder and earn our salary.

Mr. Joseph Sandhimer never passed by without a pleasant word. He and
 Mr. Schmitt could converse in German, usually to our discomfort, for
 we thought they were talking about us. There were four delivery boys,
 one on each side of town, as that was in the days before auto, horse
 cream wagons and tandems were used. In continued wet weather the streets
 became a mass of mud and loaded wagons would bog down on Main Street,
 and the delivery boys would take the whole day to get the goods to the
 stores. The Michigan and the Detroit boys in this section in later
 years, the facilities and the best later accommodations, the sales
 were under more favorable conditions. The boys in or Friday night
 boys were only Saturday morning and were free for the rest of
 the week. They would get behind the counters on their own and sell goods
 as they were employed there. They were a general lot of men, a
 few from Chicago, from Chicago, handled pieces coats and suits
 from Marshall Fields in Chicago, handled piece goods
 from Carson, Harris, Scott and Co., also of Chicago.
 Alvin and Ermit Skinner represented Ely Walker of St. Louis. They
 always called the men folks with fine cigars and we girls got a box of
 soap. In 1907 when the Territory became a state and the negroes
 were allowed to mortgage and sell their land, money flowed like water.
 The difficulty was getting good shipped fast enough. They were especially
 fond of petticoats. They liked the kind that rustled and of the
 very bright colors. Many boxes of skirts and shirts and lists were sold
 out before they were ever marked and put in stock. While the clerks
 were called upon for loads of advice and help in selling materials, our

These customs are very attractive and were full of good friends. The month of August was the biggest day of the year with them. They celebrated their emancipation. Although the month of August was closed until the 4th of August was the day set apart for the celebration. The people here made it a point to buy clothes and food for that occasion. They wore white dresses and blue and white gingham. Blue being the favorite color. They usually wore the pants and they were attached unless they were made with a projection of cotton from the top corners and the front pockets. They wore colored cloaks. The celebration consisted of a picnic and a barbecue, held at some of the private grounds a few miles from town. In the afternoon they extended to their white friends who were honored guests and received the most courteous attention. The white people that attended were always seen in the afternoon. The negroes also departed upon the evening train to advise them of all business matters and call their attention to the well taken care of.

Mr. W. H. Robb, who formed a partnership with Mr. Patterson in 1870, after the death of Mr. Patterson became the senior member of the firm. His personal endeared him to the entire force during all his years of service. He was compelled, through illness, to retire a few months before his death, which occurred in 1909. Among the outstanding citizens of Oklahoma today is Mr. Connie Coley of Muskogee. As a young lad he was employed in 1876 by Mr. Patterson. He began service as a general helper around the store and later as a salesman. Messrs. Patterson & Robb recognizing the

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true worth of the young man became especially interested in him. His keen business acumen, sterling traits of character, and his close attention to business, bespoke a bright future for him. They did not lose sight of his fine qualities. He remained in their employe until 1881 when he formed a partnership with them and opened a general mercantile store at Eufaula, known as the Foley Mercantile Company which for many years was the leading firm in that section of the country. He also owned and operated a cotton gin there. Mr. Foley has continuously made his home in Eufaula since that time. He is a mason of the highest rank and a citizen which Oklahoma is justly proud to honor.

At the end of 8 years I resigned from the employe of the firm to take a position with the Schmitt Dry Goods Company, a new store opened with Mr. Joe Schmitt, John Leiber and Charles Hart as proprietors. It was located on west Okmulgee just west of the Fite-Rowsey building.

Major Patterson had never particularly cared for indoor life. The oil business which was rapidly developing in the country at that time appealed to him and the store was closed in 1913. Mr. Patterson established his headquarters in Tulsa and entered the oil business. But was forced to retire on account of ill health and died April, 1920.

The Patterson Mercantile Company stood at the forefront through the years from 1873 to 1913 a place well deserved through the merits of those who managed its affairs. The building they occupied now stands at the corner of Broadway and Main Streets with the date, 1887, on the front, bearing a silent tribute to the pioneers of Indian Territory days.