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AGENTS IN INDIAN TERRITORY.

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Agents of Early Indian Territory Days

In the early days in the Indian Territory when shipping facilities were poor and rates extremely high, agents of various commodities reaped a rich harvest.

When the Five Civilized Tribes emigrated to this, their western home, they found dense unbroken forests. The only trees found that were not indigenous to this country were the "Trees of Heaven", better known as the "Paradise Trees", named so it is thought on account of their thick beautiful foliage that was a safe haven for birds seeking shelter and protection. It was generally known that those trees were introduced to this country by the early French traders. These men brought them from St. Louis where they had previously been brought from Louisiana by boat up the Mississippi River. They were the first ornamental trees known here. It is also thought that the bois d'arc trees found here came in the same way. The wood from these trees was used by the Indians for making bows and arrows because of the durable quality and flexibility.

FIRST FRUIT TREES

The first fruit trees grown in the Territory came from

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seeds brought by the Indians from their former homes.

Apples, peaches, and pears were the principal variety.

They planted the seeds as soon as they found a location and built their homes. When the first crop was ripened, the seeds were saved and divided among those who had none.

The fruit was of the choicest varieties and in that way many fine orchards were started. However, as the country became settled, agents representing nurseries in nearby states came. As transportation was poor and the farm homes were far apart, they traveled overland in strong heavy hacks drawn by two horses. The roads were poor and in many places almost impassable. However, those men braved the hazards of bitter cold weather and swollen streams to reach each farm home throughout the country.

They made their first trip in the fall when they came with their catalogues containing bright colored illustrations of all kinds of fruit which looked as though it could be picked from the pages. They often left these catalogues at a home and went on their journey, returning later for their orders. Looking over these catalogues furnished entertainment for the family around the fireside in the evenings.

As all their travel was through the country, the agents were compelled to ask accommodation in the homes of the people. They were welcome visitors as it was not a daily thing in isolated districts to entertain company.

They were rather a pleasant and entertaining group of men and brought a touch of the outside world to many families who had little contact with affairs not their own. An agent often stayed several days at one farm home. He looked over the orchard, pruned up the trees and gave valuable advice as to the care of the orchard. One man, familiarly known as "Apple Tree Smith", will be long remembered as one of the principal agents throughout the Territory, who came here in the early '80's. The first large orchard he planted in the eastern part of the Territory was that of Honorable Harry Brewer, father of Judge O.H.P. Brewer, on the Arkansas river near Webbers Falls.

As insects and pests on fruit trees were unknown in this country at that time, an orchard well taken care of would often last until the third generation.

New varieties were had by the process of grafting. This, too, was the work of the agents. After having placed

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their orders for spring delivery, in the fall and early winter, the agents went away to return again in the spring when they came to deliver the trees. They stayed to superintend the planting and in that way made acquaintances and friends throughout the country. Without the agents the general introduction of fruit trees into this country would have been delayed many years. Around each cabin home fruit trees were planted. Some were planted in the yards where they served as shade trees. When anyone changed his place of residence after having planted a small orchard, the place was often left untenanted but the fruit was there to be had by anyone who chose to take it. As the place was enclosed by a fence and as no one ever destroyed anything, apples, peaches, and pears could be gathered from an abandoned orchard for many years.

TOMB STONES.

The tombstone agents were another group of men who traveled over the Territory in early days. They, too, had to go overland to the various rural communities. They sold from catalogues as did the fruit tree agents. There was a difference, however, in the reception of the two classes

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of agents. No one looked forward with pleasant anticipation to the visit of the tomb stone agent. Buying a monument was a duty and not a pleasure. An agent always managed to hear of any death that had occurred since his last trip and took himself there without delay. Miniature stones were carried as samples to be shown to prospective buyers.

The styles in monuments then were quite different from the monuments of today. The stones for children ranged in size from 6 x 12 inches to 24 inches in height. A shaft some 6 feet tall and set in a heavy base was the general style for grown people. The larger stones ranging in price from \$200 to \$500. All over this country today in old cemeteries can be found many of these monuments bearing a silent message from those who lived and died in days past. Bits of valuable history can be gleaned from the old monuments. A person's life summed up in a few short sentences. Not how little but how much could be put on a stone was the prevailing thought. An angel with wings spread or a lamb lying down was the popular style for little children.

These agents, too, made an average of two trips yearly through the Territory. They took their orders and then

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returned later to deliver the stones and assist in placing them. One of the best known agents who came here in the late '70's was Mr. R. A. Hosey. He was a native of Missouri and came into the Cherokee Nation and married a Cherokee girl. He traveled over the country selling monuments until he had established a business that enabled him to open the first marble works in the Territory at Tahlequah in 1883. Later, he opened a marble yard at Muskogee and one at Wagoner. He was known throughout the country as a man of high honor and integrity. After retiring from the marble business, he organized the first Woodmen of the World Lodge in Muskogee and was the first State Deputy of the Order. Other agents came and went but R. A. Hosey was the most outstanding. He lived his life out in the Territory and died at the home of his daughter in 1923.

SEWING MACHINE AGENTS

Sewing machine agents were another group that reaped a rich harvest in early Territory days. As a sewing machine was a much needed article in any household, it was not hard to interest the women in them. These men, too, traveled over the country in specially constructed conveyances that enabled

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them to carry several machines in the back of the wagon, which was drawn by a team of stout horses. The supreme question always arose, did the man of the house, who perhaps did not do all the buying, but always the paying, think a sewing machine in the home as necessary as a piece of farm machinery, which was also sold through agents? However, many sewing machines were sold throughout the country. The Wheeler and Wilson and Remington were the first models introduced into the Territory. Later, the White and Singer were the most popular. Any neighbor in reach who could not buy a machine was invited to bring her sewing and spend the day in a home where there was a machine. Many pleasant visits were made and the sewing done at the same time.

Later, the general mercantile stores began handling sewing machines as well as all kinds of farm machines and the genial agents were compelled to seek other employment.

LIGHTNING RODS

The lightning rod agents were another group of men that flashed across the country during the '70's and '80's with the era of better homes. Houses were constructed altogether of lumber and built on a style known as frame houses.

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From these homes agents reaped their richest harvest. They were gifted with an unlimited sales talk that was almost irresistible. They made the people believe that no house was safe from lightning even for one day. They, too, traveled overland through the country visiting each home. The lightning rods, after they were placed on the houses, were rather attractive and as some thought, gave the home a more valuable and prosperous appearance. They were adorned with silver balls that flashed in the sunlight and attracted attention to all passers-by. They passed out and nothing came to take their place, but the agents will be long remembered.

PATENT MEDICINE VENDORS

The most successful and perhaps the most unscrupulous agents of early Indian Territory days were the patent medicine vendors. The nostrums which they sold from house to house throughout the country found a ready market. Since time began, people have been looking for a cure-all for their various ailments. In these so-called medicines, the agent made them believe they would find it. Concoctions guaranteed to cure all the ills of both man and beast, were carried by these men who traveled over the country imposing upon a class of ignorant

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and credulous people. Tonics with the basis 75% alcohol and a few bitter herbs; liniment for man and beast; salves of all kinds; cough remedies of various kinds, were the principal ones sold. Often, only the changing of a label converted one kind of medicine into another. Fortunately all of the mixtures were harmless. The alcohol in the tonics did wonderful things to the tired housewife and over-worked farmer. Some of the medicines, however, contained a small amount of narcotic that perhaps resulted in some becoming addicts, but the benefit of the remedies only lasted as long as the medicine. As the country was settled up, reliable doctors were in reach and these men, too, vanished from the stage of action in the Territory.

PACK PEDDLERS

Another group of men who were more numerous perhaps than other salesmen, who traveled through the Territory in early days, often on foot, were those who carried a pack containing dry-goods and useful household articles. The majority of those men were foreigners, Greeks, Jews, and Armenians. So successful was their business that many of them later were able to open stores of their own and some

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became leading merchants in various towns when the Territory became a state. The visits of those men, or peddlers as they were designated, was anticipated with pleasure by the women of the country as they were able to purchase much needed household articles at their homes without making a trip to town over bad roads. It was always interesting to watch them open the pack, particularly were the children interested. They were experts at packing and each article had a particular place of its own. The pack was always wrapped in heavy water-proof oilcloth to secure it from damage of weather. More often a trade was made than a cash sale. The goods being paid for with chickens and eggs which in turn were sold at the nearest market for a good profit. Hence, the peddler not only made an enormous profit on his goods, but made a second one on the commodities which he received in payment.

As the country developed and small towns sprang up, those men, likewise, passed from the scene of action.