

DENISON, CHARLES A. (Dr.)

INTERVIEW

#12200

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Hazel B. Greene,
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An Interview with Dr. Charles A. Denison,
Idabel, Oklahoma.

My father owned a big plantation in Tennessee, and on it he had a commissary, gin, blacksmith shop and lots of negroes and their cabins of course. After the Civil War Father lost everything he had but about \$3,000.00. He salvaged that out of the wreck and came to Clarksville, Texas, and bought a few acres just across the river from old Shawneetown, Indian Territory, and built us a home.

That was sixty years ago, when I was just sixteen years old. I began coming over into the Indian Territory, and have been over here nearly all of the time ever since. I would be away for a few months at the time, attending school, but I always came back. And since I established an office at Shawneetown in 1883 I have lived within fifteen miles of what is now the town of Idabel. In fact I have lived within fifteen miles of Idabel for sixty years. I was on this side

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of the river about as much as I was on the other side. I have practiced my profession over an area of about forty miles. Many a time have I driven forty miles in my buggy to see a sick person. It was easier to drive over the country then, than it got to be later when the country was being fenced, because before the fencing was begun, if you came to a bad place in the road you could drive around it.

It was a wonder that I did not marry an Indian, because there were just a few white people here when I first came over, and for many years afterward. They were nearly all full-blood Choctaws and their negro slaves and not one in fifty of the Choctaws could speak English and a lot of the slaves could speak only Choctaw.

My father lived until November, 1903. He died over here in the Indian Territory, but we took him back to the home place over in Texas for burial. My first wife was an English girl, Maude Monkhouse. My present wife is Bonnie McCarley. We have no children. My first wife

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and I had two children; neither of them are living.

When I first knew Shawneetown, Captain Joe Bryarly and Mr. Steven Teel owned the store and the post office was in the store.

The post office was established in 1881 and called Kulli-inle, which means different springs, because there are several different springs around the locality.

Kulli-tuk-lo, the county seat of Bokhoma County, means "Two Springs". The post office at Kulli-inle was changed to Shawneetown a good many years before it was abolished in about 1927.

However, the store and place had always been called Shawneetown. Back, a hundred years or more before the Choctaws were brought here, a band of Shawnee Indians had their tents and tepees there and formed an Indian town there. Then when the United States Government was ready to bring the Choctaws here, United States troops were sent to move the Shawnees and white people out and they did just that. The Shawnees scattered, and I believe, were absorbed by other tribes of Indians. That was about 1832.

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The Captain Bryarly whom I mentioned owned and operated a ferry across Red River about three miles south of Shawneetown, before he bought the store at Shawneetown and moved to it. There was a McCullough ferry a couple or three miles above Bryarly's. I saw Red River once when they did not need a ferry for about three days. It was frozen over and wagons and teams were driven over on the ice. That was "that cold Friday, Saturday and Sunday in February", 1899, when the thermometer stood at 13 degrees below zero. I will never forget it. Mr. Bernard Teel died that night, February 12th, and we nearly froze going to his funeral at the Waterhole Cemetery. The Waterhole Church was organized several years before the Civil War, by one Lowlin Shoate, who was the first pastor. It is located about three miles south of the present town of Garvin and is one of the oldest churches in the country. It is a Methodist church, also a Choctaw church.

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We have our home in Idabel, a nice home and well-furnished; also, our place at Shawneetown to go to when we take a notion. We rented out our house in town a few years ago, and went out to Shawneetown to stay awhile and are still here. We like it. My wife likes to raise turkeys, chickens and geese and I like to raise our meat hogs. We have seven big hogs ready to kill now, and we have hams left over from last year. My fifty-year-old goose got killed recently. There is nothing at Shawneetown now except our house, our servant house and outbuildings.

I am a member of the Goodwater Masonic Lodge which was the first one authorized in Red River County, Indian Territory. I am also a Scottish Rite Mason and a Shriner.

I opened up the first General Merchandise and Drug store in the town of Idabel which was then named Mitchell, November 11, 1902. Mrs. Elizabeth Yencer was my first customer. She bought two yards of calico at 5 cents a yard and just recently threw away the rags

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of it. That was the first piece of dry goods sold over a counter in the town of Idabel.

The Old Military trail, from Eagletown and other points east, dipped down south a little to take in Shawneetown on its route to Fort Towson and Fort Smith. The mail route was from Wheelock via Shawneetown to Clarksville, Texas. That was the route for many years. The routes have changed many times since then.

For many years the country was swarming with game of all kinds. Indians would kill deer and keep the most undesirable parts for themselves and would bring a ham or the saddle to the store to trade for tobacco or ammunition. He would usually get two bits for a ham, and sometimes as much as 75 cents for a saddle. That was when the two hams were still connected with all the tenderloin. And sometimes a saddle would weigh as much as seventeen or eighteen pounds.