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Life and Experiences of a Muskogee Pioneer

Joseph Dresback.

Interview given by his son Ralph

to

Miss Ella Robinson

Historical Research Field Worker

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My father was born in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, February 5, 1831. He lived there until he reached early manhood when he moved to Alabama. There he married my mother. Mother was born October 4, 1847. From there they went to Illinois where they lived until 1871 when they came to the Indian Territory.

The MK&T Railroad was being constructed through the Indian Territory at that time and he saw the possibilities of a new country rapidly developing. As he owned and operated a small saw-mill, he conceived the idea of bringing his mill and pursuing that line of work in his new home. As the railroad did not extend into the Territory, the only way he could transport his mill to a new location was to bring it overland which he did, hauling it in an ox wagon. It was a long and tiresome journey, many times over uncharted trails. But his young wife was brave and made the trip with him. He located the mill on the south bank of the Arkansas River just where the Katy Bridge crosses. He got the machinery in readiness and found a small place in which to live and was ready for business. His first work was sawing the timbers for the Katy Bridge. That required several months to complete. The railroad was completed to Denison, Texas in 1872. He then saw a better location and moved the mill to the Verdigris River and sawed black walnut timber which was being used for the floors and finishings in the homes of the Indians. They hewed the large logs with broad axes where they were felled, then they were "snaked" through the woods with oxen to the mill where they were sawed into planks. In 1875 he moved his family to the present site of Muskogee. As there was no town here at that time, only a trading post and an eating place run by Mr. and Mrs. James Mitchell. A house in which to live was not available.

Mr. James A. Patterson had moved his little stock of merchandise from the Creek Agency where he had been in business to Muskogee Station. Mr. Patterson allowed Mr. Dresback to partition off the back end of his little store-room which was being used as a little warehouse and they moved into it. The store was located near the west end of the viaduct near the railroad. That was where I was born in October, 1875. Mr. Patterson's store was the only Dry Goods Store here. J. S. Atkinson had the only Hardware Store. Dr. Cummings had the first Drugstore. It joined the Patterson Store on the south. All the business houses were located on Main Street facing east. After living there for some time we moved to a small house where the Federal Jail now stands, and later, to a better house at the location of the First National Bank. Mr. Robert L. Owen and his mother lived next door.

My father operated his mill on the river, driving from home each day. I attended school when I became of school age in the old Rock Church at the corner of Cherokee and Okmulgee Avenue. The school was under the auspices of the Southern Methodist Church and Rev. T. F. Brewer was in charge. Mrs. M. E. Locke was my first teacher. I attended there until I was about 12 years old when I was enrolled in a private school taught by Mrs. Edwin Burke, near where we lived.

In 1886 my father sold his mill to a man named Schoonover. He then took charge of a Grist Mill owned by Mr. J. E. Turner which he operated for several years. In 1887 Muskogee had its first disastrous fire and all the business houses on Main Street with the exception of F. B. Severs Dry Good Store located south of Okmulgee Avenue was destroyed. As the buildings were all of wood, they were soon consumed. They were replaced immediately with substantial brick buildings. The Patterson Mercantile Store building is now standing at the corner of Broadway and Main with the date of 1887 on the front.

My mother opened a millinery store which she managed for several years.

When Henry Kendall College, a school under the auspices of the ⁴¹Presbyterian Church was established and admitted boys. I entered this school and graduated there. Previous to that I had got my first job from Mr. John Cobb who owned and operated a Drug Store for a number of years. I think I was about 10 years old when I began working. After I graduated from Kendall College, I was employed by the Choski Trading Company who owned and operated a General Merchandising business in Choski in the Creek Nation. Messrs. John F. and Will Chandler owned the business. They dealt largely in cotton which was bringing a high price and we did a fine business for a number of years. I held that position for 10 years. My parents had then moved to a farm near Haskell, Oklahoma where my father died March 16, 1906.

On returning to Muskogee 20 years ago, my wife and I moved to Lake View Farm where we now operate a chicken ranch and dairy farm. This farm was the original allotment of Jenetta McIntosh. My mother died on December 20, 1928.

Among our old friends of early days, I recall, were the two Zufall families: George and Otto. Mr. Joseph Sondheimer and his two sons, Alex and Sam. The Tufts family, including 10 children. Colonel and Mrs. D. M. Wisdom, the Indian Agent and their family. Mr. Sam Severs and his family, who lived on north Cherokee Street. Dr. M. F. Williams was our neighbor and good friend. Many of our friends of those days have passed on but the memories of them still remain.