

INDEX CARDS

Muskogee
Mercantile establishments--Creek Nation
Railroads--Missouri, Kansas and Texas
Payments--Choctaw
Atoka
Coal--Choctaw Nation
Masonic Lodges--Atoka
Outlaws--Cherokee Nation
Ranching--Creek Nation
Blackstone, Mip
Hotels--Creek Nation
Haskell, Charles N.
Railroads--Ozark and Cherokee Central
Railroads--Kansas, Oklahoma and Gulf.
Kelsey, Danna H.

I came to Indian Territory in January 1886, from Grand Rapids Michigan, where I was born and reared, attaining a high school education. My father passed on when I was a young man and I began then to make my own way. I landed at Atoka in the Choctaw Nation, where I learned RR work under the tutelage of my father-in-law, Mr. J. R. Brown, who was then the RR Agent at that point and who, himself, came to the Territory with the MKT in the 70's.

I came to Muskogee in May 1886, taking a job in the freight office, under Mr. W. W. Miller, the agent, staying at that point a matter of two years. At that time Muskogee was a small town, but a very important trading point. There were several quite large mercantile establishments here. The outstanding ones being the Patterson Mercantile Co., Turner and Byrne, dealers in hardware and lumber; J. E. Turner Mercantile Company; T. B. Severs General Store; the drug store was owned and operated by Dr. F. M. Williams succeeded by E. R. Rulison.

The Government maintained an Indian Agency here, and such agency was in charge of some very able and brilliant men.

The professions were also very ably represented by the brainiest men in the country.

What is now the MKT RR was at that time leased and operated by the Mo. Pac RR Co. and the line was permitted to run down, the main business of the company being diverted to the St L & S, the latter paralleling the Katy into Texas through Little Rock.

I had the good fortune to attract ^{the} notice of Mr. J. W. Maxwell, then the division superintendent of the line at Muskogee,

who was, by the way, a very brilliant RR official and a man who excited the loyalty and love of his subordinates. Mr. Maxwell¹⁸⁴ offered me the first Agency coming to his attention having day and night telegraph operators (I was not a telegraph operator myself) the result being my appointment to the agency at Atoka where I was well known. That town being my first stop in the Territory when I came West.

My wife was also well acquainted there having made it her home for some years; as I tell my friends, I spent eight of the happiest years of my life at Atoka and intertained for it and its older citizens a lasting affection.

Almost immediately after taking up my duties at Atoka the line went into the hands of Receivers (Messers. Eddy & Cross), thus separating the Katy from the Mc. Pac. At once great preparations were instituted to place the Katy on a plane with other great Southwestern carriers. Immense sums were expended to improve the road bed; heavier steel was laid and plenty of rolling stock provided to care for business which immediately began rolling through this fertile country and on through Texas and the Gulf.

Atoka boasted of some very high classed citizens, I recall Father J. S. Murrow, as he was affectionately called by his many friends, he was a missionary to the Indians - - Captain G. B. Hester of Boggy Depot, whose daughter became the wife of Senator Robert L. Owen, the prominent family of Choctaws the Wrights. Frank Wright being a Presbyterian Evangelist, Dr. E. N. Wright a prominent physician and Allen Wright an Attorney and former member of the law firm of Stuart and Wright. Mr. Wright now living in McAlester and practicing

law there.

185

During my stay in Atoka the U. S. Government made a huge payment to the Choctaws, Atoka being the headquarters. This payment, amounting to a sum of \$3,000,000, certainly accomplished a great deal of good throughout the Choctaw Nation and circulated a lot of money in that area.

Indians came there who had never been on a RR train, and the "Iron Horse" was a great curiosity to them. Atoka was the Junction of ^a ~~the~~ branch line of the Katy, operating to Lehigh & Coalgate, a distance of 7 & 14 miles respectively, from Atoka. The majority of the Company coal for the Katy was mined at Coalgate and hundreds of cars were handled monthly through Atoka; also large quantities of commercial coal originated at both Lehigh and Coalgate, requiring many trains daily to handle same, this made Atoka an important station, quite a large force of employees were required to properly handle the business.

The social life at Atoka was very pleasant, lovely people made it so.

There was a very old Masonic Lodge there and I entered the Blue Lodge early in my life, going on into the Royal Arch Chapter there, I recall my chapter team of three consisted of Morton Rutherford, Mike Conlan and myself. Morton Rutherford is now deceased, a fine man. Mike Conlan lives in Oklahoma City.

Morton Rutherford was U. S. Commissioner at Atoka, we lived close neighbors. I loved the family.

In 1895 I was appointed agent at Muskogee which was a distinct promotion and was no doubt largely due to the influence of Mr. J. W.

Maxwell, who at that time was Assistant General Manager of the Katy, having gone on up the line himself.

Muskogee was then a city of 4,000 and business was brisk both for the RR and the people engaged in business here.

Much had taken place here in the eight years of my absence. A bank had been established, the courts were in operation and I went to say the latter was a big step forward, enabling the handling, at first hand, of the criminal element which had been thriving in a large way, the people in this area having previously depended upon the Court at Fr. Smith, a distance of one hundred miles across the country by stage or horse back.

The Katy RR was being harassed by train robbers who plied the traffic up and down the Cherokee division between Muskogee and Vinita. For quite a long period of time I had arrangements with the U. S. Marshal here to send armed guards in the express car North on train #2, leaving Muskogee at 9:45 P. M., such force would travel to Vinita and return on train #1, arriving here at 6:30 A. M. This arrangement putting a stop to the practice of holding up our trains. These guards were intrepid officers and had been engaged in many conflicts with the Daltons and other bands of train robbers.

In the days before statehood and while the affairs of Indian Territory were being governed by the several Tribes, large numbers of stock cattle were brought to this country from South Texas that were unloaded ~~at~~ between Okataha and Blackstone. The latter point being located by the rivers South of Gibson Station. Immense pastures were under fence, these cattle fattened off the grass from time of unloading in April of each year, then in September were loaded and

and shipped to the National stock yards at E. St. Louis and Union Stock Yards Chicago.

187

This resulted in very heavy traffic for the rail carriers and produced profitable business bringing plenty of cash and commerce to this country.

Men like P. N. Blackstone, or Nip as he was known by his friends. Clarence Turner, H. B. Spaulding, I. N. Nicholson and many others were extensively engaged in the cattle business.

The Indian Nations charged a dollar per head for grazing. Many thousands of head of cattle were handled.

I recall a particular instance involving Mr. Nip Blackstone to show that this man's word was as good as money in the bank. He shipped in three train loads of cattle, the freight charges covering which were approximately \$2500 per train. He wired me from Texas to release the cattle upon arrival at Oktaha that he would pay me the charge upon his arrival three days latter. At the appointed time the full amount ~~of~~ was turned over to me, a matter of about \$7500.00. That is the kind of a chap he was. As far as that is concerned though I will say I never lost a penny doing business on a very large scale with the merchants and others with whom the RR came into contact.

Upon my arrival here in '95, there was no superintendent located here ~~and~~ there was one at Parsons and one at Denison, so that the agent who was also responsible for the Yard had many involved duties. In February 1899, Muskogee was the victim of a disastrous fire which practically wiped out the town. We had absolutely no fire fighting apparatus nor water except a few cisterns, and the fire was of such magnitude that the supply was not a drop in the bucket. All that part of Muskogee North of

Broadway, including the Turner Hardware Company, the English Block Corner Broadway & Main was complete razed, a very strong wind carried burning embers as far away as Brushy Mountain. The MKT passenger and freight offices including the Freight House, were destroyed. The Katy passenger was located as now in the building corner of Broadway and Katy Tracks. This building was frame and was used as a hotel, formerly the old Adams hotel and burned down very quickly, the occupants failed to save anything, however, we of the Katy saved the contents of the ticket office, also of the freight house, because I took steps immediately to have cars switched to the House and utilized the help of 100 or so RR men employees of the Company to stow everything moveable into the cars and move them to a point of safety, All the office furniture, desks etc., the telegraph instruments, battery jers, and even the clock was saved. The saving of the freight alone amounted to many thousands of dollars.

I utilized a small company building which was saved from the conflagration and had it set up for use as a telegraph office, ticket office and an office for myself, and although the fire was burning briskly at 9:30 A. M. , we had the telegraph office in operation by 10:30 A. M., and were getting trains through the Yards as usual, the company lost no property aside from the Katy oil and freight house, no rolling stock damaged or derailed.

The Superintendent was well pleased with the set-up when he arrived at noon and requested me to give him the names of each RR man who aided me in saving company property. I recall that each received merit marks on his record as a result; I made it quite plain to the superintendent that any of these men could have just stepped

up street a ways and had all the free liquor he could drink ¹⁸⁹ (the drug stores in town just placed their supply at the disposal of the populace) and everyone up town was gloriously drunk.

The Company put up a temporary freight house on the same site in four days time. In the meantime we utilized box cars for storage and delivery of freight.

The company also furnished a coach which was located about where the present news stand is situated, for use as a waiting room for passengers.

Immediate steps were put in operation to rebuild the Katy Hotel and it was of brick construction. It took almost a year to finish it.

At this time all trains were made up in the South Yard, South of Fondulac Street so that required much switching and handling of cars across Broadway and Okmulgee, that were known as death crossings and they were very dangerous. Many accidents occurred; the round house and coal chutes, also the stock yards were down town about opposite the Atlas Supply house; the Katy pond upon which the company depended for their water supply was in the area now being used for Freight House and tracks. This pond occupied quite a large area and was capable of holding a large supply of water, but we used to have a drought in those days as we do now, when our supply of water was diminished, we had to resort to water trains to haul water from the Arkansas river three miles North. This water was dumped into the pond then pumped into the tank for our engines.

Much rejoicing was had by all concerned when Muskogee obtained a water system and enjoyed the benefits of sewage disposal.

Talking about water reminds me of the early days here ¹⁹⁰ when travelers arrived and wanted room with bath at some of the early hostleries, the bath was what is known as a "hummingbird bath", that is, a wash bowl, no turkish towels, and the user had to bring the water in from the pump and subsequently dump it out the window.

After the ruins of the fire were cleaned up, the city emerged like a Phoenix and promptly began to rebuild in a large way, business was very good, the Katy of course was the only carrier serving this city and surrounding country. But Muskogee was making such rapid strides that it attracted outside capital and men who saw an opportunity to spread out, such men as C. A. Haskell (our first Governor) the Kenefics RR builders, they showed up here. Mr. Haskell raised \$70,000.00 in two hours time standing on a wagon drawn up on a prominent corner, the purpose of which was to build some railroads.

The Kenefics people built the line from Fayetteville through Muskogee and into Okmulgee, tapping the Frisco at both points. This line was finished and operations begun in February 1903. Of course the purpose of building this line was to sell it to the Frisco which would give that carrier an entrance ⁱⁿ to Muskogee. This line was known as the Ozark and Cherokee Central. The sale was consummated in about two years.

The Kenefics also built the KO&G and Midland Valley.

I opened the first station for the O & CC having resigned the Katy agency at Muskogee November 15, 1902.

Subsequently I reentered the service of the Katy in Texas, becoming a travelling auditor, headquarters Houston, then transferred to Muskogee in 1905 as Chief Clerk. I resigned this position and accepted a pension, at least I call it such, for I entered the service of Uncle

Sam here in Muskogee under Dana H. Kelsey. It was real work but nothing compared to railroad work and besides one was given better hours, no Sunday work, vacation with pay etc. Mr. Kelsey was a wonderful Executive and made a record for himself. He placed me in charge of the Restrictions Division in December 1908, which I held until my resignation in 1912, when I went into the Laundry business for myself.

In bringing this little history to a close I desire to dilate a moment upon a circumstance happening when I was agent for the Katy at Muskogee. One day Denny Sullivan, Division Superintendent of the Katy at Denison, whose jurisdiction included Muskogee Yards introduced a young man to me and informed me this man would enter the service as foreman of an engine, meaning he would have charge of a switch engine and two men in making up trains, a very minor job, but evidently a big step, for the man was no other than Frank Grace, who is now the Vice President ~~of~~ and General Manager of the Katy lines in Texas. If he has not had a meteor like experience it just shows what a man with brains may do.