

MORTON, WILLIAM P.

BIOGRAPHY

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Jerome M. Emmons
Interviewer
June 3, 1937.

Taken from the Okmulgee Daily Democrat
of February 4, 1923, in the files of
the Okmulgee Times Democrat.

The almost universal hope of the youth of a generation ago to rise to 'clerkship in a store' guided the course of life events for William P. Morton, of Okmulgee, who today is one of the oldest merchants in the city in point of business. He owns Morton Brother's Department Store.

A native of Okmulgee County, the old family home being Sharp, William attended the schools at Okmulgee and Wuyaka, which were mission schools. Between school terms he clerked in stores and his love for the mercantile business began.

When he started in Okmulgee twenty-eight years ago, in 1895, there were less than two hundred people in Okmulgee. His first experience was with Parkinson-Trent, their store being located where Beatty's Drug Store now stands. This was twenty-eight years ago. Fred Parkinson,

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Oklahoma State Examiner and Inspector, was his first boss. After working for Parkinson-Trent for some time, Mr. Morton went to the store of Captain F. E. Severs and C. J. Shields, a well known local justice, became his new boss.

After obtaining a business education at the Quincy Business College, Quincy, Illinois, Mr. Morton became a bookkeeper. He had filled other positions of responsibility, as he was head of the grocery department at one time. He took charge of the books after Mr. Shields retired from the store.

Mr. Morton said Captain Severs was the greatest man he ever came in contact with. He also speaks well of the memory of Christopher Belcher, a white man, who was adopted into the Creek Nation. He began work with Captain Severs when Severs was at the peak of his prosperity and Mr. Morton saw him lose his fortune and by the force of business genius and honesty win another, leaving an estate of great value at his death. He knew Captain Severs when his smallest checks were protested and through it all he moved as calmly as when he was sailing the sea of prosperity at its highest.

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Stores now are vastly different from what they were twenty-eight years ago, before there was even a railroad in Okmulgee. Goods were hauled from Muskogee, the nearest railroad point. The Meyers Store handled everything from tobacco to coffins, and most of the trading was on credit. People paid their bills yearly, this being the center of the Creek Nation and a large cattle industry. The cattlemen received their money in lump sums, as did the Indians, and paid their bills accordingly. Everybody paid their bills.

Bookkeeping was simplified. Each item such as coffee, shoes, etc., was not charged on the books. Instead, if the credit extended an individual was \$50.00, he was charged with this amount and a due bill issued to him. Four marks made a dollar, each representing a quarter, and as the holder traded, the due bill diminished. There were no working hours. From daylight until as late at night as there was a customer in sight the store was kept open. Sometimes the store was kept open until late Sunday mornings.

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At one time, Mr. Morton was at the head of Captain Severs' land department, looking after rentals and collections. Captain Severs, at different times in his career, had as much as thirty thousand acres under his supervision, and a vast amount of work was necessary in looking after the farms and tenants.

Mail was obtained once a day from Muskogee and the merchandise wagons were going and coming at all times. The stores purchased hides, pecans and the like, which were hauled to Muskogee from where they were shipped.

Robberies were almost unknown. Cook's gang and Cherokee Bill robbed stores here only once during Mr. Morton's recollection.

While whiskey was not sold here, being forbidden in the Creek Nation, rum runners were numerous. Many times a fleet footed horse with gallons of cheer and a rider on his back, escaped the officers who were on the watch for 'fire water.'

Seldom did a drummer make his appearance here.

Fred Larkinson was buyer for Parkinson-Trent and Robert W.

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Hamilton for Captain Severs over a long period of years.

Mr. Hamilton is now retired from business, having accum-

ulated a considerable fortune, according to Mr. Morton.