

D. MRS. W. M.

BUSINESS LIFE IN EARLY MUSKOGEE.

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(Story given by Mrs. W. M. Hammond, daughter of John J. Corbut,
to Miss Robinson, January 25, 1937)

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BUSINESS LIFE IN EARLY MUSKOGEE

John J. Corbut was born in Kensington London, June 20, 1820. Son of John and Elizabeth Carpenter Corbut. In his youth, he was an apprentice to a shoemaker to learn the trade. He called the man "Master" which was required of all those serving an apprenticeship. He was married to Miss Elizabeth Bryant in 1842. Their first child was born on Christmas day, 1843. After hearing of the wonderful opportunities of the new country across the sea, they decided to cast their lot among their people who had come to the new country, that invited all who wished to come. They landed at New York and after a six weeks voyage in a sailing vessel when they reached New York harbor, they felt almost as if they had reached "Heaven." They went immediately to Brooklyn where they lived for ten years.

Again the West made its appeal and they moved to Illinois and lived for five years. Again, things looked better farther on and they came to Missouri, locating in Sedalia. They were living there during the Civil War when the Union troops shelled the town, they would put the children under the bed and all lie flat on the floor. Hearing of the wonderful opportunities of the undeveloped Indian Territory, they came to Muskogee in 1880.

It was a little village of about 500. Small wooden houses built of boxing plank scattered up and down the only two streets in the town. Cherokee on the East side of the Katy Railroad, and Main Street on the West side. He built his little cottage home on

South Main Street near where the City Market is now located. He erected a building on North Main, where the present Muskogee Seed Company is located and immediately opened a shoe shop; as only a medium grade of boots and shoes were carried by the local merchants he had a splendid patronage from young Indians and cowboys wanting fine boots. They were made of the highest grade leather and kid with red tops stitched in a contrasting color. Twenty five and thirty dollars a pair was a common price. The boys thought they were really dressed up when they had a pair of his handmade boots. His work was not confined to making boots alone. He did expert mending and many a youngster went away proudly showing a brand new patch on their shoes. He also ordered fine shoes for ladies that wore unusual sizes. While his hands were busy with his work, he entertained his customers with stories of his interesting life in London. As Muskogee was the largest town in the Indian Territory, he drew his customers from a radius of 60 and 100 miles. He made a special kind of boot for the cowboys that stood extra hard wear. Having inherited his father's love for flowers and perhaps had learned the culture of them, he carried out his hobby in his new town. His father had been a gardener for Queen Victoria and Lord Holland. His yard was a thing of beauty and his humble little workshop was gay with beautiful roses that would make most experienced horticulturists green with envy. His chief delight was to take flowers to the sick and he never failed to find them. So pleasant and homelike was the little shop that it became a sort of waiting room for country people, who were detained in town while their men folks attended to business.

You probably sat on a hard bench with no back to it but time passed rapidly as you listened to the little man with his silver hair and bright snipe, while his deft fingers plied the needle and awl.

During the big fire in 1887, both his shop and residence were burned, however, he was not disturbed. Procuring the funds from a good friend, he rebuilt his place of business erecting a brick building, which is now occupied by the Muskogee Seed Company.

A good friend remarked the morning after the fire--"That Mr. Corbut was the only cheerful man in town." He had faith in God and his friends and they did not fail him. He carried on his work until two years before his death which occurred in 1904.

He and his wife were the parents of twelve children. His daughter has the Bible presented to him by the Sunday School Class of the Primitive Methodist Church in Brooklyn in 1855 as a token of their appreciation for his faithful service. It is inscribed with the signature of Thomas P. Wilson, Superintendent and George Golden, Secretary.