



# Muskogee County Genealogical Society Quarterly

Volume 29 Issue 3

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## In This Issue...

<i>Muskogee County Genealogical Society 2013 Leader Information</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Forest and Lumber Industry</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Joseph and Ralph Dresback</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>District Medical Society, 1913</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>President Grant Visits Muskogee,</i>	<i>10</i>



### Muskogee County Genealogical Society 2013 Officers

Back Row (l-r): Sue Tolbert, Publications and Liaison for Three Rivers Museum; Mary Downing, Treasurer; Linda Stout, Secretary; Alissa Hill, President; Stacy Blundell, Vice President; Barbara Downs, Society Newsletter Editor.

Front Row (l-r): Nancy Lasater, Quarterly Editor and Jere Harris, Past President.

Not pictured: Nancy Calhoun, Liaison for the Muskogee Public Library.

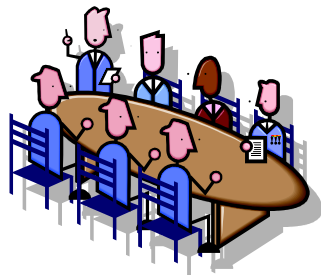
Please visit these Muskogee County Websites:

[Muskogee County-USGenWeb](#); [Muskogee County History and Genealogy](#); [Three Rivers Museum](#); [Five Civilized Tribes Museum](#); [USS Batfish](#); [Boynton Historical Society](#); Webmaster: Sue Tolbert

# Muskogee County Genealogical & Historical Society

## OUR PURPOSE:

The MCGS was formed in 1983 for the purpose of promoting the general study of genealogy through workshops, seminars, and monthly programs; and to discover and preserve any material that may establish or illustrate the history of Indian Territory and Muskogee County and its families.



## BOARD MEMBERS 2013

President, Alissa Hill  
Vice President, Stacy Blundell  
Secretary, Linda Stout  
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Newsletter Editor: Barbara Downs  
Quarterly Editor, Nancy Lasater  
Webmaster: Sue Tolbert

## APPOINTED POSITIONS 2013

Research, Barbara Downs  
Library Liaison, Nancy Calhoun  
Three Rivers Museum Liaison, Sue Tolbert

## MEETINGS

MCGS meetings are held at 6:00 PM on the fourth Thursday of each month (except July and August) in the Grant Foreman room at the Muskogee Public Library, 801 West Okmulgee, Muskogee, OK.

The Board of Directors meetings are held the third Tuesday at 5:30 PM in the library's Genealogy and Local History department. All members are invited to attend the Board meetings.

## MEMBERSHIP

Membership in MCGS is open to anyone promoting the purpose of the Society. Individual or family membership is \$20 per year due each January 1.

## OUR RESEARCH POLICY:

Outlined on our website or you may write to us for a Research Request Form at:

Muskogee County Genealogical Society  
c/o Muskogee Public Library  
801 West Okmulgee,  
Muskogee, OK 74401

## BOOKS

MCGS publishes books of genealogical interest focused on Muskogee County and Muskogee Indian Territory. A current price list of our publications is provided on our website at <http://www.rootsweb.com/~okmuscg/index.htm> or write or email us for a list.

## QUARTERLY

The MCGS Quarterly is published online four times a year: March, June, September, and December. Back issues of the Quarterly are available. Check our website for current issue prices and postage.



## INDIAN PIONEER PAPERS

Vol. 50 page 226

### FOREST AND LUMBER INDUSTRY

FROM INTERVIEWS WITH SEVERAL PIONEERS NAMED HEREIN

L. W. WILSON, Field Worker Indian Pioneer History -S149

June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1937

When the Indians, along with white men, settled and pioneered in the Indian Territory, they must have felt glad to see the great forest that grew in the mountain regions and along its streams, as well as the bountiful grass for stock-raising in that part of the plains portion.

They had logs with which to build their log huts, to shelter them from the winter storms and logs to build their schools and churches.

The trees of these forests were both of hard and soft wood. There were oak, maple and hickory, bois-de-arc, black walnut and elm that were tough and hard.

There were pine, cedar and others that were soft and easy to work.

When the Indians wanted a sled, ox cart, ox yoke, single or double tree, and other farm tools, or even rustic furniture for their homes, the wood was at hand. Fuel for their fireplaces or open fires was plentiful.

When canoes were needed for fishing and hunting, or bow and arrows needed for weapons, the forest furnished all of this for their making

As the population grew, they needed bridges and ferry boats to enable them to cross the streams on their military roads, stage lines and trails, and the forest provided the logs for the lumber to make the unknown number of these bridges and boats.

Railroads were built through the Territory and many cross-ties were needed to lay under the track. The best tie in the early day was an oak tie. There was wood enough for all.

In the Coweta District of the Creek Nation, L. C. Perryman, in 1872, felt the dire need of a saw mill, that could saw and convert these trees into lumber, so that that the people could build themselves better houses, barns and out buildings.

Joseph Dresback, who was born in Pennsylvania, pioneered first into Kansas and engaged in the saw mill business before the Civil War. After the war he learned of the great forest trees in the Indian Territory and dealt with Judge Perryman of the Creek Nation to the end that he started a mill. The Creek Nation issued him a permit and gave him 2 acres of ground on which to place the mill. The permit is still in the hands of his son, Ralph Dresback, who was born in the vicinity of the old Creek Agency trading post on the south side of Fern Mountain about 4 miles Northwest of the present town of Muskogee, Oklahoma, in 1875. Ralph Dresback still resides in this neighborhood, about ¼ mile north and ¼ mile west of the U. S. Veterans Hospital at Muskogee, Oklahoma.

The mill was a portable steam driven mill. The first site was on the south banks of the Arkansas river near the present M. K. & T. Rail road bridge or possibly better described as being 1 mile east and 3 miles north of the post office in the city of Muskogee, Oklahoma.

Operation started in the early part of 18723, and the first lumber cut was for the M. K. & T. R. R to be used as cribbing to be nailed together and placed in the river in a way that waters of the river could be held back and men could go down and lay the piers for the bridge. The M. K. & T. Railroad had built to Gibson Station in 1871, but Mr. Dresback moved all his belongings into the territory with oxen and ox carts.

The lumber from the Dresback Mill, which was oak, was used, as explained on the M. K. & T. bridge across the Arkansas river.

The firm of Barr and Garwood operated a mill on the Verdigris river and were putting out lumber at the same time and for the same purpose, for the building of the M. K. & T. Railroad across the Verdigris river.

The Barr and Garwood Company ceased operation in 1873 or '74 due to a dispute over settlement of funds of the mill when Barr shot and killed Garwood.

After Mr. Dresback finished work for them. K. & T. bridge, he moved his mill to a location on the north side of the Arkansas river, near what was the Leacher's Ferry, or located at the present time as being about five miles north on Mill street, Muskogee, Oklahoma.

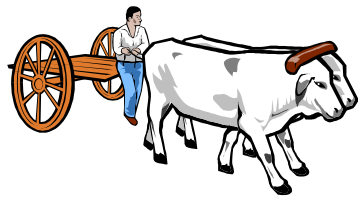
The mill operated at his location for years and many times under difficulties, not due to insufficient timber, but to dissatisfied people who would go to the principal Chief of the Creeks and complain. Just an example of the nature of these complaints. Mr. Dresback was hauling a very heavy load of green lumber by ox teams and had to cross the Arkansas river on the Leacher's Ferry. The oxen with the load was driven on the boat and the result was that the heavy load caused the boat to collapse. Leacher, a full blood Creek Indian, became very angry and complained to the Creek Government that Mr. Dresback, a white man operating the saw mill, purposely and willfully demolished his boat. The Chief investigated and found Leacher was wrong, but a hatred always thereafter lingered in Leacher's heart. He, Leacher, rebuilt his boat and continued operation of the ferry.

The Dresback Mill sawed all kinds of dimension lumber as well as one inch lumber from 4 inches to 16 and 18 inches in width and various lengths. The logs sawed were principally white and red oak.

After the timber grew thin surrounding the mill, logs were gotten out along the river bank, up stream from the mill and then rafted and floated to the mill.

The logs were transported to the mill and river's edge by oxen, and were usually rolled, or in the terms of an early log camp, "snaked" along.

Oxen always proved more satisfactory than horses or mules due to their hoof being different preventing miring down in boggy ground.



Mr. Ralph Dresback states that thousands of logs in later years, that is, in the 80's, were drafted down stream as far as Fort Smith, Arkansas, and coming from up stream as far as the Cimarron river in the Cedar Belt. Thousands of cedar logs were rafted down the Cimarron river to the Arkansas and then on down the Arkansas river to the saw mills. He recalled a man catching enough cedar logs in the river, that lost their moorings, to build a large log cedar home near the present town of Haskell, Oklahoma.

Large black walnut logs were never sawed into lumber except for someone's home.

Freight rates were exceedingly high on lumber but much less for logs. So the Dresback Mill would hew the walnut logs down to desired dimensions for sawing at the mill, and of course, at the same time reducing the weight, load them on freight cars on the M. K. & T. and ship them back to the eastern states and in lots of instances the shipment was billed for export to Germany and other foreign nations.

In the locality of the Dresback Mill, the trees were all hard wood and as oak was all the mill sawed cottonwood, and other hardwood logs were rafted down stream to the states to be sawed and used at mills making wagon spokes and fellies, tool handles, hoops, barrels, etc.

"If the Creek Nation ever got a royalty on their timber I don't know it," said Mr. Dresback, and continued by saying their mill at least never did pay any royalty. He also stated occasions arose when one would have to give the Chief a few dollars and that is all that was ever paid.

Mr. Jas. T. Spencer of Haskell, Oklahoma, has stated that a mill similar to the Dresback Mill was operated by Jake Bartlett at the then trading post which is now Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

The Bartlett Mill, however, sawed a great deal of black walnut lumber which was carted to Kansas by oxen.

The soft wood trees of pine grew in the mountain country of the Flint District and along the streams of the Canadian District of the Cherokee Nation near the present Arkansas state line as well as hardwood trees of all specie throughout the entire Cherokee Nation. The Cherokee Nation was a much more wooded country, as a whole, than any other nation of the Five Civilized Tribes.

Before the Civil War most of the pine logs were sawed into lumber along the Cherokee Nation line at Cincinnati, Evansville, and at Fort Smith, Arkansas. No one is able to state if this was due to the Cherokee Nation not issuing a permit for the operation of a mill but it is so presumed.

Ellen Shanon Magee, born in slavery, and moving to Fort Gibson, Indian Territory, in the early '50's, states the first mill she saw in the Cherokee Nation was after the Civil War. Ellen is 117 years old and resides at the present time at Fort Gibson, Oklahoma.

Many of the old full blood Cherokees and pioneer speak of saw mills being located along the Grand, Illinois and Baron Fork rivers and other creeks and bayous of the Cherokee Nation.

The method of sawing lumber in nearly every instance was with portable steam driven mills. A mill would move into a location and saw all the desirable timber into lumber of all sizes and dimensions within a radius of some 2 or 3 miles each way, and move to another location. These mills operated in many instances as did grist mills. Money was scarce and if a man wanted lumber he would haul or snake so may logs to the mill and get back lumber. In this case the



mill took one third of the finished product for toll.

Lots of logs of both hard and soft wood were rafted and floated down the Grand and Illinois rivers into the Arkansas river to meet other coming from points as mentioned up stream from the Creek Nation and the Osage country.

Fort Smith, Arkansas, operated not only saw mills but planing mills and the log industry proved profitable, for the cost of the logs in the nation was only the labor of cutting the trees and getting them to market or mill at Little Rock, or Fort Smith, Arkansas.

With the coming of the railroads through the Cherokee Nation, the marketing of cross-ties to put under the rails became a big business and the farmers took advantage of same.

Each railroad operated a time and timber department to buy and grade cross-ties for their road. All cross-ties were white oak and hewn with broad axes to required size. The railroads – Iron Mountain, Frisco, and K. C. S. R.R. came through the right of ways, surveyed for their road, arranged with the people along the right of way to furnish cross-ties for them. The amount paid was 10 to 15 cents each, delivered on their right of way. No one interviewed can state if the Cherokee Nation received a royalty for any lumber or cross –ties timber.

Even until the present day many cross-ties hewed and sawed are sold to the railroad through the old Cherokee Nation.

Judge W. M. McLain of the Tribal Court at Webbers Falls, Indian Territory, in the early 90's operated a hardwood saw mill about ½ mile south of the present town of McLain, Oklahoma, as told by Zeb Dugan of McLain, Oklahoma, and other old settlers at McLain. This mill sawed oak, sycamore, and cottonwood lumber. All lumber was rough, not being planed.

A similar mill was operated in the Saline District of the Cherokee Nation on Flint Creek near the present town of Kansas, Oklahoma. The owner of this mill was a Mr. Hilderbrandt. It operated in the late 80's. This mill, so advised by Cook McCracken of Muskogee, Oklahoma, did custom sawing. Lumber not used by the people in the vicinity for building purposes was carted to Siloam Springs, Arkansas, and Baxter Springs, Kansas. All lumber sawed was white and red oak. Mr. Hilderbrandt also operated a water mill for grinding corn. The saw mill was operated by steam.

After the Dawes Commission made allotments to the citizens of the Cherokee tribe and the forests and timbered lands were not more held as common property of the tribe, little saw mills dotted the country every place. These mills served two purposes. They gave the owner of the land lumber to build his home and out building and they helped to clear up the land for cultivation purposes. It proved very remunerative for the operator and owner of the mills. Little mills are still operating at various points, but to no degree of success.

After the best timber was absorbed for building purposes, and cross-ties, many trees were cut and split into staves. Oak timbers were used for this purpose. At the stave mills they were rabbited and bucked and freighted to coopers to make lard and whiskey barrels as well as beer kegs. Most of the timber went to the stave mills at Fort Smith, Arkansas. No one seems to know of a stave factory in the Cherokee Nation.

The pine logs used in 1936 and 1937 in rehabilitating the stockade and log houses of the old fort at Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, were taken from the timbered lands on Baron Fork river and around the present towns of Eldon and Stillwell, Oklahoma. To see these logs is worth while because one can visualize what pine trees existed seventy-five or more years ago in the part of the Cherokee Nation. Judge Boydston who has supervision of the rehabilitation feels justly proud to know that the logs used in this work are home products.

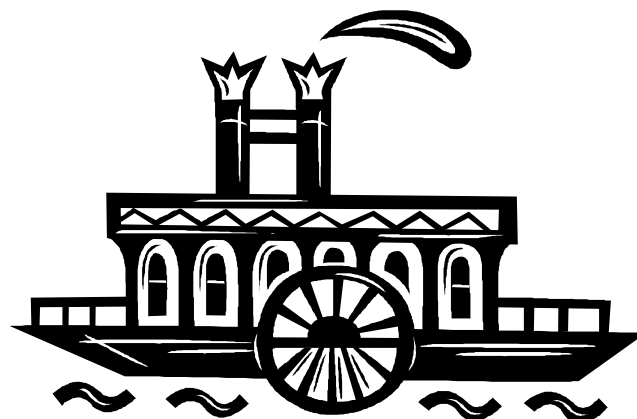
Along the Arkansas river in the Choctaw Nation grew softwood timber and some hardwood timber, a scrub hardwood compared with the hard wood of the Cherokee and Creek Nations.

Bill Cook of Hyde Park, Muskogee, Oklahoma, who was born some 65 years ago in the Choctaw Nation near Skullyville, now Spiro, Oklahoma, and in the Cashe and Paw Paw bottoms along the Arkansas river in now LeFlore County, can recall no early saw mills near this vicinity but says that he has cut and rafted many rafts of pine logs down the Arkansas and Poteau river to the mill at Fort Smith, Arkansas, and some times the rafts of logs were torn apart and loaded into barges and then barged by steam boats on down the Arkansas, to points unknown to him.

Mr. Barney Palmer, now living in Muskogee, Oklahoma, made ties and sold them to the K. C. S. R.R. in 1894 for 15 cents each. They were white oak cross-ties and hewn with a broad ax. He also states he rafted logs to Fort Smith, both pine and oak logs, down the Poteau river and the Arkansas. When the logs were sawed into lumber and planed at Fort Smith, Captain Blakely who operated several steam boats, brought the lumber back by boat and with the lumber they built the steamer "Maumelle" in the mouth of the Poteau river. The Maumelle had two side wheels and a stern wheel and ran regularly for a number of years between Fort Smith, Arkansas and Webbers Falls, Indian Territory.

The growth of the Creek and Cherokee Nation has called for so much lumber that the forest areas have given up their best trees, but there still remains sufficient timber for fence posts and even some of the cotton-wood for box factories now operating in Muskogee, Oklahoma. Fuel is yet plentiful in some parts where gas is not available.

Transcribed and submitted by Barbara Downs



# INDIAN PIONEER PAPERS

VOL. III page 268

**Life and Experiences of a Muskogee Pioneer Joseph Dresback**

**Interview given by his son Ralph Dresback**

To

**Miss Ella Robinson**

**Historical research Field Worker**

**3-19-37**

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 Indiana 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 the 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 floor and finishings in the home 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. Mitchell. A house in which to live was no 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 storeroom 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 Hardwar 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. 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 (sic) store which she managed for several years.

When Henry Kendall College, a school under the auspices of the Presbyterian 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.

Transcribed and submitted by Barbara Downs





## **THE DISTRICT MEDICAL SOCIETY**

### **ORGANIZED IN MUSKOGEE**

**Muskogee Daily Phoenix , Tuesday,  
January 28, 1913**



**Dr. W.A. Tolleson of Eufaula was elected president of the medical society of the Seventh Councilor District of Oklahoma at the first meeting of the society at the Commercial Club rooms last night. Dr. A.B. Montgomery of Muskogee was elected secretary-treasurer. Following the program consisting of papers on technical subjects, a luncheon and smoker was given by Dr. B. A. Ballentine, the retiring president of the Muskogee Medical Society to the newly organized society.**

**Okmulgee , Muskogee , Okfuskee, McIntosh, Wagoner, Cherokee and Creek counties are the counties represented in the society. Twenty-five or thirty medical men from the afore-mentioned districts were in attendance at the meeting. The presidents of the medical societies in the counties comprising the seventh district were made vice-presidents of the new society. About a hundred medical men were present.**

**It was decided that the permanent meeting place for the society would be in Muskogee . The meetings are to be held the fourth Monday in January, April and October.**

**The use of the pulmotor for supplying persons with oxygen and inducing artificial respiration was demonstrated by J.F. Owens of the Muskogee Gas & Electric Company before the society last night.**

**Dr. J. Hutchings White read a paper on surgical conditions of the kidneys and Dr. J.L. Reich of Wagoner in his demonstration, showed the value of the microscope to the practitioner for the existence of rabies. "It is unfortunate for Dr. Nesbitt who lost the dog, but fortunate for us that it was possible to show the slide tonight," Dr. Reich said.**

**Dr. Charles W. Heltzman showed the progress that had been made in the medical world in the last decade, especially in the treatment of such diseases as malaria, typhoid and yellow fever; and in the development of surgery. Dr. J. Hoy Sanford read a paper on "Gonorrhoeal Infection of the Posterior Urethra and Prostate Gland," and Dr. M.M. Roland made a display of radiographs of fractures and dislocations. General discussions followed the papers read.**

**Transcribed by: Glenn Smith, P.O. Box 1332. Muskogee , OK 74402,  
gsmith@emptychair.net**

## President Grant Visits Muskogee

Submitted from his Muskogee Daily Phoenix blog with permission by Wally Waits.

The year 1874 was an economically challenging time for many Americans. They were suffering from a prolonged depression that began the previous year. The Panic of 1873 was caused by over speculation in railroad construction and financing. The Panic also followed the government's ceasing use of the silver dollar for money. With the off-elections of 1874 looming, President Ulysses S. Grant was hearing pleas for help from Republican candidates. In addition to the financial uncertainty, the Republican Party was split between the radical wing and the liberal wing. The latter faction advocated easing restrictions on former Confederate states. The former believed in continuing with the harsh treatment. Fearing the upcoming elections would mean there would be diminished support for his programs in Congress, Pres. Grant decided to campaign across America. His aim was to drum up support for Republican candidates by traveling by train making stops at many towns along the way. On October 12, 1874, Grant's train stopped in the new town of Muskogee. This whistle stop did not last long. Normally, Muskogee was a meal stop, but there is no record that the president ate here. While the steam locomotive was taking on more water, and possibly coal, President Grant agreed to hear supporters' well wishes. Pleasant Porter greeted the president with the following message. "The Creek Council, now in session, instruct (sic) me to express to you their appreciation of the great honor you have conferred upon them in visiting the Indian Territory. The Indian race look upon you as the friend of their people; they feel confident you, while occupying the elevated station you now fill with so much honor to the whole country, will guard sacredly the rights of all, however weak and defenseless they may be. In behalf of all the people, and sentiments of high regard for you personally, we bid you welcome to our country." President Grant had earlier in the day stopped in Vinita. He not only heard a similar message from Elias C. Boudinot, Grant replied to Porter's greetings with a rephrased, canned speech similar to the one he gave in Vinita. Here is the President's message delivered at the Muskogee train station. "I shall remember with pleasure my visit to the Indian Territory. I see on every side evidence of prosperity. In this latitude you must possess a climate well adapted to the growth of cotton and other profitable crops. I have always tried to see you protected in every right guaranteed in your treaties, and while I hold my present position I shall endeavor to see that you are protected in the enjoyment of your personal and civil rights. With industry and a proper observance of the laws of the country and the rights of others, you cannot fail to become prosperous and useful citizens." President Ulysses S. Grant continued campaigning across the country by train. For example, he was in Springfield, Illinois three days later for the unveiling of the President Lincoln's new statue. However, Grant's efforts to support the Republican ticket proved to be inadequate. The election of November 3 switched control of the House of Representatives to the Democratic Party. Their gain of 94 seats gave the Democrats 62 % of the House. There was no political reason for President Grant to stop in Muskogee on October 12. This was because there were no national elections in Indian Territory in 1874. However, a refueling stop permitted him to receive a delegation headed by Pleasant Porter and other local residents that day. It was an exceptional opportunity for area residents to see and hear President Ulysses S. Grant.