1-476

June 19, 1969

Index side B, recording time 15 min.; interview time 1 hour.

Informant: Ausley Welch, 79-year-old Cherokee, Mayes County, Pryor, Oklahoma

Subject: Ausley Welch came from the Cowskin Prairie country of the Cherokee Nation. He attended Peters Prairie School and the Cherokee Male Seminary. For the current year he is President of the Cherokee Seminary Association. Mr. Welch has spent all of his life in northeast Oklahoma and knows much of the country and the Cherokee people.

There are many decendents of the Welch family who were among the original Cherokees to come to the Indian Territory from North Carolina. At one time many of them lived in the Cowskin and the Peters Prairie country in the northeast corner of the Cherokee Nation. Now most of the decendents are widely scattered.

Between Pryor and Strang, in Mayes County, is the old abandoned Welch School. This old school was named for one Bart Welch, a Cherokee who lived back in the early days of this country.

Mr. Welch has relatives still living on the Indian Reservation in North Carolina. He tells of the existence of a large white rock back there shaped in the form of an eagle with spread wings and tail. Its history and details are vague, but it is very old and supposedly used in some ceremonial rite. Ausley remembers long ago that his father had obtained some of this same white rock of chalk like substance, from Georgia and used it to make white lead pencils.

Ausley recalls days when he was a student at the Cherokee Male Seminary. The school football team frequently played teams from other schools. Students from their sister school, the Female Seminary, were not allowed to come to the games. Many of the students had brothers at C.M.S., and naturally the girls were interested in the outcome of the games. A set of signals were devised by use of flag waving to keep the girls informed of progress and scored. Whenever the boys made a score, the signal was given and the girls had a hearty cheer, although they could not see the game.

He tells of an Indian baptising in the Lucha country. On a see Sunday the Cherokees gather at their church and begin the baptismal ritual. After the indoor ritual, the minister leads those to be baptized in single file down a long narrow trail to the cold clear waters of the creek. The converted are clothed in clean white sheets. All during the baptismal rites the Indians sing hymns. He says this was one of the most impressive ceremonies he has ever seen.

He tells that in his young days he used to go with other Indians to gather huckleberries in Courthouse Hollow and on the hillsides bordering Peters Prairie. Long ago this berry was plentiful in that country and the Indians used to look for to berry season.