

WELCH, W. A.

INTERVIEW

#7289

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BIOGRAPHY FORM

WELCH, W. A. WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION INTERVIEW. 7289.
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

Field Worker's name Gomer Gower

This report made on (date) August 26 1937

1. Name W. A. Welch

2. Post Office Address Shady Point, Oklahoma

3. Residence address (or location) Same

4. DATE OF BIRTH: Month August Day 11th Year 1866

5. Place of birth Van Zandt County, Texas

6. Name of Father David R. Welch Place of birth Ireland

Other information about father reared in Alabama

7. Name of Mother Sarah E. Welch Place of birth Texas

Other information about mother

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story of the person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects and questions. Continue on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached Eight.

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Gomer Gower, Interviewer.

August 26th, 1937.

Interview with W. A. Welch,
Shady Point, Oklahoma.

Born August 11, 1866.

Van Zandt County, Texas.

Father-David R. Welch

Mother-Sarah E. Welch

W. A. Welch was born in Van Zandt County, Texas,
and
on August 11, 1866, came to the Indian Territory with
his parents when he was two years of age. The family
settled at the old Brazil Stage Station, in what is
now Le Flore County, where his father engaged in a
general merchandising business.

He attended school only eight months in all his
life.

As a youth he assisted his father in his store.
This gave him an excellent opportunity to study the
Indian character, as the principal part of their trade
was with the Indians.

Like all others who had occasion to have business
dealings with the Indians, Mr. Welch says of them that
when once their word is given they feel honor bound to

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carry out the terms of any trust bestowed upon them; the spoken word being as binding as the most expertly drawn legal document.

He recalls that on one occasion, an Indian whose name was Douge Le Flore had an unpaid account at the store of something over eight hundred dollars which he finally paid to the last penny.

In that period embracing the late seventies and the eighteen eighties, Mr. Welch relates that the Stage Station (Brazil) was on the Fort Smith and String Town Road and that during the terms of the Federal Court at Fort Smith vast numbers of people from the interior of the Choctaw Nation would travel this route, and that it was a favorite camping ground for travelers as well as being a point where provisions could be bought. He has seen as many as two hundred people assembled there, some going and some coming.

There being no railroad accommodation available all Federal prisoners from the interior would be

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brought overland through this point by the Federal officers and, as may well be imagined, many notorious characters who were on their way to Fort Smith would be chained together and securely locked to a tree under which blankets would be spread for beds, where under the watchful eyes of the officers, they would spend the night. Hacks were used for the conveyance of prisoners and when the conveyances were found to be inadequate to accommodate all the prisoners which had been captured, the surplus number would be chained to the rear of the hack and forced to walk, sometimes there being long strings of such surplus prisoners.

All feared the sort of justice meted out by the famous Judge Parker. Sometimes, however, the dignified court of Judge Parker would be outwitted, as is illustrated in the outcome of a charge of murder which had been lodged against one Captain Reynolds, a very close friend of Green McCurtain and of Mr. Welch's

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father. Captain Reynolds had been incarcerated at Fort Smith awaiting trial for the crime. Green McCurtain and the elder Mr. Welch secured his release from prison through habeas corpus proceedings, after which a trial before the Choctaw District, presided over by Judge Noel Holson, at the old District Court House near the present village of Summerfield, was speedily arranged, which ended in the acquittal of Captain Reynolds, and having once been placed in jeopardy he could not again be tried for the same offense. All of which tends to show that law was more a matter of expediency than the administration of justice.

An old council house had once been established at a point about two miles southwest of the Stage Station, but accounts of the activities into which it entered are not remembered beyond the fact that it served as a council house at some remote period and later was converted into a dwelling house.

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It is related that about 1875, a white man whose name was Runnell, came with his family from the state of Iowa and occupied the old building. In the family were two daughters who were noted in the community for their beauty. Several negro families lived in the community then, as they do today. There being but few young white men, the daughters took up with the negroes, one of them living with a negro, the other committed suicide at the home of Mobile Boyd because his mother, a negro woman, objected to her son, Mobile, keeping her as his wife.

The Welches, both father and son, had ever been close friends of Green McCurtain and had supported him in all his undertakings and it was with great consternation that the younger Mr. Welch received an eight-page letter from McCurtain in which he complained in no uncertain terms that it had come to

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his ears that he, W. A. Welch, while avowing true friendship, had at the same time acted traitorously.

A like letter was sent to Captain E. J. Reynolds.

This occurred soon after Mr. Welch had moved from the Brazil Stage Station to the city of Poteau and after the Jones-Locke-Jackson campaign, probably in 1893.

Two brothers, Adam and Noel James, Choctaws, were particular friends of both McCurtain and Welch. They had done all their trading at the Welch store at the Stage Station and upon its removal to Poteau continued to trade at the store. The two brothers went to Poteau with their wagon to get a bill of goods from the store. It was their custom to spend the night at the store on these occasions as the distance was too great to make the round trip from their homes in one day. Mr. Welch apprised the

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brothers of the receipt and the contents of the letter from McCurtain. On the following morning when Mr. Welch supposed the brothers would be getting ready to return to their homes with the goods which they had purchased, neither of them could be found. Mr. Welch could not imagine where they had gone without the goods. To his delight they drove in late at night after making a trip of more than fifty miles to Sans Bois, where McCurtain lived at that time, where they had gone for the sole purpose of defending their friend, Mr. Welch, against all false accusations which had been the cause of the charge of unfaithfulness by Green McCurtain. The assurance of these two faithful friends that the rumor which had inspired the writing of the letters was groundless and had been circulated with the hope of causing disaffection in the ranks of the

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progressive element of which McCurtain was the leader was sufficient to fully restore the close friendship which had been so nearly destroyed through the circulation of a false rumor. Mr. Welch kept this letter for a number of years but it was destroyed in a fire which at the same time consumed his home. The particular complaint made was that an organization was being formed at that time for the purpose of bringing about the death of McCurtain because of his activity in the contest for the office of Principal Chief, which had just closed, and that Mr. Welch and Captain E. J. Reynolds were members of that organization.

After spending several years in the mercantile business at Poteau, he moved his business to Shady Point, where he still conducts it.