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INTERVIEW

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An Interview with John E. Wells, Old Time Editor,  
1322 East Admiral Blvd, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

By - W. T. Holland, Investigator.

October 26, 1937.

I was born in Caldwell County, Missouri, on September 22nd, 1856. At an early date in my life we moved to Kansas. In 1890 I became interested in the newspaper business and worked on various papers in Kansas.

As the time for the Opening of the Cherokee Strip approached I became interested in Enid and in the proposition of publishing a paper there, but upon further investigation I found that no less than three other papers were making ready to locate in Enid so the day before the opening I bought the Caldwell Journal, having decided to stay there. I, however, went down to the state line to watch the scramble on the day of the Opening. It was a sight never to be forgotten. Caldwell was only two miles north of the state line.

Later on, about 1898, I came into the Territory locating at Hennessey where I bought the Press Democrat, a weekly newspaper.

I stood in line for two days and nights to register

for the run into the Kiowa-Comanche Strip. I made the run and filed on a claim but it required residence on the tract to hold it, so I eventually turned it back to the Government as I could not very well farm that tract of land and edit and publish a newspaper.

I later on decided that Miami was a better town, or destined to be, as they were about to develop the lead and zinc business in that territory. In 1902 I went to Miami and bought the "Herald". Mr. Paukenberry was the owner of the "Miami Record". We decided to combine the two into the "Record-Herald". I remained with the paper until 1905 when I sold out.

I was requested by some friends to come to Broken Arrow and publish a paper there. There was one paper at Broken Arrow, the "Ledger", edited and published by Mike McKeenan. His paper was Republican in politics, so I, being a Democrat, and some of the people wanting a Democratic paper, put out the first issue of the "Democrat" the first week in September, 1905.

Mr. McKeenan sold the "Ledger" to Mr. Parkenson

in 1909 and not long after that I purchased the "Ledger" and combined the two newspapers into the "Ledger Democrat".

When I went to Broken Arrow there were three banks, although the town was only three years old, having been founded in 1902. The banks were as follows; The First National Bank, F. S. Herd, President; The First State Bank, W. B. Fraker, President; The Arkansas Valley Bank, K. M. Rowe, President. The Arkansas valley bank had not yet completed the banking house and was doing business in the rear of Mr. McKeehan's drug store.

Later on the State Bank was merged with one of the others, so now there are the First National Bank and the Arkansas Valley Bank in Broken Arrow.

The Law brothers, James, Wash and Len, were very active in the business life of the community, helping to finance the banks and to build permanent business houses.

John S. Bilby was the largest land owner in that part of the country and he also handled large numbers

of cattle. He was accidentally killed at Catoosa, where he had gone to ship some cattle. He drove and shipped all his cattle from Catoosa because from Catoosa there were better freight rates to St. Louis and it was a direct route, too. A train backed over Mr. Bilby at Catoosa and killed him.

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In 1908 at Broken Arrow, a college was established by the state, known as The Haskell Agriculture and Mechanical College. It did not remain there long but was removed and the building was turned over to the city and became the High School Building.

One of the best known men as well as the one best liked was Mr. Guest, owner and manager of the Kentucky Colonel Hotel. It was favorably known to many travelers. Mr. Guest was from Kentucky.