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INTERVIEW

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Jas S. Buchanan
Investigator,
January 12-13, 1938.

An Interview with Harry H. Adams
Muskogee, Oklahoma.

I was born October 1, 1879 at Nashville, Illinois.
My father was David Adams, Irish, his father migrating to
this country from Ireland. My mother was Henryetta Akins
Adams.

In 1889, when I was ten years of age my parents moved
to the Indian Territory, stopping at Muskogee. Soon after
coming to Muskogee my father was appointed Deputy United
States Marshal under T. B. Needles who was the first United
States Marshal appointed in this district of the Indian
Territory. Father served as deputy under Chief Needles,
then S. M. Rutherford during his term, then under Lee E.
Bennett until he resigned the service in 1907, serving a
total of eighteen years in the service of the United States
Deputy Marshal.

After coming to Muskogee, I attended school at the
Harrell Institute. Professor Brewer was the principal and
Mrs. G. L. Jackson, now of Muskogee was the music teacher.

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Later I attended the W. T. C. U. school for boys situated just east of what is now 'C' Street between Broadway and Okmulgee.

About 1893 I went to work in the Muskogee post office as clerk under F. C. Hubbard, postmaster; also under Frank Berry who succeeded Mr. Hubbard as postmaster. Leaving the postal service, I accepted a position in W.C. Jackson's jewelry store which was located on Main Street south of Broadway, a one story building. After about two years with W. C. Jackson, I went to work in M. L. Bragdon's Drug Store which was also situated on Main Street between Broadway and Okmulgee. I remained with Mr. Bragdon about a year, then returned to the post office as clerk under Frank Berry, postmaster, also under H. T. Estes who succeeded Frank Berry as postmaster.

Leaving the post office, I accepted a position as bailiff in the Federal Court under Leo E. Bennett in 1896, where I served in different capacities until Statehood in 1907.

"THE BRUSH COURT".

In 1896 when the Frisco Railroad was building between

Sapulpa and Oklahoma City there was a great deal of trouble through that part of the Territory, crimes ranging from misdemeanor to murder. Muskogee being the closest Federal Court, in most cases the aggrieved parties would go to the trouble of traveling to Muskogee to secure a warrant for the arrest of the offending parties, they would take the matter in their own hands, which in many cases resulted in killing. Conditions grew from bad to worse until United States Marshal Lee E. Bennett went to Washington and obtained permission from the Attorney General to establish a traveling court as it seemed impossible to bring the troubles into court.

All preparations were made and a caravan equipped for the expedition, consisting of wagons for baggage and equipment, chuck wagon, hacks and buggies for transportation and saddle horses for the posse of Deputy Marshals. When the caravan was completely equipped and all arrangements were made, we left Muskogee in August.

Included in the personnel of this "Brush" court, as it was named due to its transient and various locations, was the United States Commissioner, Dave Yancey presiding as Judge, as at that time in the Territory the United States

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Commissioner had authority to try criminal cases; Leo E. Bennett, United States Marshal with the following deputies; Bud Ledbetter, Lon Davis, Bill Barker, my father, Dave Adams, and myself; a negro cook by the name of Bill Wright, who incidentally was a former bugler of the old 10th Cavalry; and a negro teamster whose name I cannot remember.

Leaving Muskogee we took a westerly direction and after a hard days travel we camped the first night on Mountain Creek near the old "Spike S" ranch. The next day we proceeded to a place on Polecat Creek where we made camp near Sapulpa, from where we had been receiving many complaints of law violations. The officers made a raid in Sapulpa, breaking up and cleaning out several questionable places and gambling joints and making several arrests. No trials were held there as all parties made bond. Leaving there our next step was just west of Kellyville where we camped about three days while the officers were scouting the vicinity and at the same time waiting for a big stomp dance that was to take place at the old Tuskegee stomp ground on Little Deep Fork southeast of Bristow. Breaking camp near Kellyville, we made it to

Tiger Jack's place south of Kellyville that evening where we spent the night. Starting the next morning we made Jesse Allen's ranch southeast of Bristow for dinner. Leaving Jesse's place we proceeded to a place near the Tuskegee stomp ground, arriving there late in the afternoon and making camp about three quarters of a mile from the stomp ground and on the opposite bank of Little Deep Fork. Outposts were immediately established in the vicinity of the camp and during the evening each straggling Indian who approached the camp was taken into custody and detained in camp until that night so as to prevent them from informing others of our presence in the vicinity. That night at the proper time we made a raid on the stomp ground and due to a complete surprise, the raid was a success and resulted in the arrest of nine people for whom we had warrants. The next day we held court in the camp on the bank of Little Deep Fork and all prisoners who were found guilty were bound over, and due to the lack of facilities for confining the prisoners, we would shackle them and chain them to trees and tent posts. We were in that camp five days and the posse was busy scouring that part of the country for parties when we had warrants and occasionally bringing in other prisoners for trial.

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There was a gang known as the Hughes gang led by three brothers by the name of Hughes who had been giving trouble in that vicinity for some time. About three o'clock one morning Bud Ledbetter, Lon Lewis, Jesse Allen and Tiger Jack left camp on the trail of the Hughes gang. Between daylight and sunup the officers contacted the gang, supposedly coming in from one of their raids, the officers commanded their arrest which immediately resulted in a gun battle and the death of one of the Hughes brothers, another brother was brought in by Jesse Allen and later in the day Bud Ledbetter and Lon Lewis came in together with another member of the gang. Later while we were at Bristow, the other and only one of the Hughes brothers who was at liberty made his appearance there in an effort to contact his brother who was in jail there, which resulted in his arrest.

After the general cleanup of the vicinity on Little Deep Fork we broke camp and proceeded to the little town of Bristow which was only a shack and tent town at that time. The Frisco was building through there and the track was not yet completed into Bristow. As our caravan approached Bristow from the south

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there was a general exodus of gamblers, bootleggers and general riff-raff from the side on the north of the shack-town. We made camp on the most desirable location on the east side of the right-of-way.

The posse raided the place immediately upon our arrival, not missing a tent or shack, making three arrests and capturing many gambling devices of various descriptions, of which we built several bonfires at different places in the one street of the tent town. The next day we held court, and at the same time the posse made a raid on a construction gang that was building the Frisco track into Bristow. When the posse approached the camp about half of the gang fled to the brush, however they made two or three arrests. The next day the posse adopted greater strategy and surrounded the construction camp before they learned of our presence.

After surrounding the camp they closed in from all sides not permitting a chance of escape in any direction. In this raid there were three more arrests made, including one negro that was wanted for murder, who was later tried and sentenced to Fort Leavenworth prison for life. By the time we left

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Bristow we had about thirty prisoners, all chained to trees about the camp.

During the time we were in camp at Bristow the only one of the Hughes brothers of the Hughes gang that escaped in the gun battle near Tuskegee stamp ground came to Bristow in an effort to see his brother who was there as a prisoner. He was immediately arrested and placed with the other prisoners.

Before leaving Bristow we were compelled to hire another team and wagon for transportation of the large number of prisoners we had collected.

Leaving Bristow we proceeded in the direction of old Mounds, camping that night on Polecat Creek between Bristow and Mounds. Incidentally that night was the first and only rain we experienced during the expedition, and the only inconvenience it caused was that we had to chain the prisoners in the tents that night.

Breaking camp at Polecat Creek early the next morning we experienced a slow and tedious trip over rough and muddy road or trail until late in the afternoon when we reached

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old Mounds, which at that time was located several miles north of the present site of Mounds at the north entrance of the pass where the old road passed between what was called Twin Mountains. We camped there that night and after another days journey we arrived at Buford Miller's ranch which was located on Duck Creek about fifteen miles west and a little south of where the town of Haskell now stands. We were in camp there three days, during which the two wagons with the necessary guards brought the prisoners to Muskogee. As soon as the wagons and guards returned we broke camp and moved to Okmulgee where we spent about five days. We established our camp on the little creek which was then north of the little town of Okmulgee, though now the town has grown past it. At that time there was a negro postmaster at Okmulgee against whom there was an indictment for selling whiskey. Dr. Bennett, Chief United States Marshal, came to my father while at Okmulgee and asked father if there was anyone in the outfit that could relieve the postmaster in case the warrant was served and the negro could not make bond. Father referred Dr. Bennett to me, due to my experience in

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the post office at Muskogee, so Dr. Bennett instructed Father to execute the warrant. Father then called me in to his tent and told me to get ready to go to town as he had a mission for me to perform. I cleaned up and reported to him. He handed me the warrant and told me to serve it on the postmaster and if he could not make bond I would relieve him as postmaster at that place until another could be appointed. That did not please me as I did not want to stay at the place. I proceeded to the post office and served the warrant and had quite a talk with him, as I was going to perfect some plan if possible to avoid being kept at Okmulgee. After a lengthy conference the postmaster and I went to the Parkinson Mercantile Company where we contacted Mr. Parkinson and prevailed upon him to make the postmaster's bond.

Mr. Parkinson was rather reluctant about making the postmaster's bond, but I put up a very impressive plea for the negro on the grounds that I thought it was all a political frame-up against the postmaster because he was a negro. Finally Mr. Parkinson consented and I appeared before the "Brush" court with the prisoner and a satisfactory bond. I didn't stay at Okmulgee as postmaster.

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After cleaning out Okmulgee by raiding several places, closing up places of vice, whiskey and gambling joints and making several arrests we broke camp and started for Muskogee with the mission of "Brush" Court completed.

After returning to Muskogee with the Brush Court expedition I went to work in the Muskogee post office where I remained one month, then went to work in the United States Marshal's office under Dr. Bennett where I remained until Statehood in 1907. In December, 1907, I went to Seattle, Washington, where I lived until January, 1921, at which time I returned to Muskogee where I have since made my home. July 22, 1922, I again entered the service of the United States Marshal's office as deputy marshal in which capacity I served until September 16, 1923. Since that time I have been employed in the civil service as guard in the Federal Building at Muskogee.

My father served as a United States Deputy Marshal continually from April 20, 1889, until 1907, being in the service eighteen years.