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FIELD WORKER MERVILL A. NELSON
Indian-Pioneer History Project S-149
April 21, 1937

INTERVIEW WITH J.J. (JOHN) ALLEN
Mayor of Enid
Convention Hall, Enid, Oklahoma
814 N. Randolph.
Born February 13, 1879, Hodgenville, Ky.

Father's name Jacob J. Allen,
Born near Abraham Lincoln's birthplace.
Mother's name Josephine Deever,
Born Illinois, near Vincennes, Ind.

The La Rues, one branch of our family, were French people. They came first to Virginia, later migrating to Kentucky. This was in the early days when Kentucky was considered part of Virginia.

William La Rue, one of my ancestors, owned large amounts of land on Logan Creek in Kentucky, and he settled there about 1800. I know this is correct as he was buried twelve years ago at the age of ninety-nine.

On the Allen side, I understand that my great grandfather was from Virginia also, and he too settled in Kentucky at an early day. The Allens lived most of the time here until their moving to Oklahoma. I had a great uncle in this line. Horace Allen, who is said to be the man who shot Quantrell, the famous

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guerilla fighter. Quantrell was taken to a hospital in Louisville, after he was shot, but died shortly afterwards.

In 1884 my parents moved to Wellington, Kansas. From there they moved to Wichita, Kansas. My father made the run from there to Old Oklahoma, but did not take any land. The part he saw along Skeleton Creek looked so poor to him that he did not see how he could make a living on it.

Again he made the run in September 1893 into the Cherokee Strip, in a spring wagon. From the Tennessee line, he came north as far as Drummond. It was unusual for those from the southern line to go so far, but he was looking for something special. Finally he saw a nice piece of woods - over seven hundred acres of timber, one of the largest groves between eastern Oklahoma, and the blackjack belt. He was used to timber in Kentucky and liked the looks of things. There were some other persons from Sedgwick county making the run, who were located near him, and

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I think he stayed with them the first night. They lived about one mile west of his claim, which was one and one half miles northeast of where Drummond is now.

He had to buy off another party who was contesting the claim. In this way we settled the dispute by compromise, and kept out of court. My father returned to Wichita which was no larger than Enid is now, but left an uncle, G. Allen, to care for the place in his absence.

In October when I was fourteen, all our family, that is my six brothers and sisters, and father and mother, and one or two helpers, started for our new home. We had a covered wagon, a cow, some chickens and a buckboard with an extra horse following the team. One or two other families helped us along the road, but the trip was rather uneventful, as we had no difficulty crossing streams. However, one night we stayed at Medford. We slept in a hayrack that night and it was one of the best 'sleeps' I ever had.

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The country impressed me at first as somewhat barren. Grass grew to a great height, on some places it had been as high as a man's head and even higher in other places. The season that year as usual was very dry, and the grass had been burned, so it looked like starvation to me. Mother also thought it was very poor country but she never complained.

When we reached our place, we found the same blue stem grass, and the trees, tall and varied. In addition to the black jack we had elm and other woods. There were the buffalo wallows, in the glens, and in the woods all about. A well was soon made and a dug-out, or home half in the ground was built. Part of us lived in the dug-out and some of us lived in a tent. We soon made a shed of blackjack posts and covered it with blue stem grass. There was no town near, as Drummond had not yet come into existence. There was no railroad along there. Small game such as quails and prairie chickens were abundant, and occasionally we would get some deer meat, though I never shot a deer myself.

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Our wood was our salvation, for we could take it to Enid and exchange it for groceries, or sell it for one dollar a load. The next year we did not raise much; only a few vegetables and watermelons. The soil of our farm was somewhat sandy, but we soon learned to raise truck and melons from it, which gave us a good business in Enid. Radishes and onions were among our specialties.

It might be well to give an idea of how Enid looked at this time. The square was not all filled up, but there were shacks around the larger part of it, and people were still living in tents. The land office was located in the park in the center of the square. On the southwest corner, where the Dress Store is now stood the old Bank of Enid. The largest building, the Rex Hotel, was to the north of this on Independence Street. I am not sure whether or not this was a brick structure, it may have been frame.

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Next came Godschalk's clothing store, then Frantz Hardware. Across Broadway was a big saloon, then other stores, Truitt's Hotel and a real estate office. On the east side of the square, was Murphy's grocery which became the firm of Murphy, Carroll and Brough, then Kennedy's Mercantile, where Newman's now stands. Somewhere along here Lockadays had a hardware store.

On our farm we soon began the raising of good horses. Though we produced no racers, we did have eight or ten fine horses and mules, and about the same number of cows on the place. It was all blooded stock.

Though we were poor, we never would accept any relief or charity. Money was 'tight' and scarce but we got along. We did sometimes live on plain food however. Sow-belly, beans and cornbread were our usual fare, but occasionally we ate kaffir corn bread. Our dug-out was ten by twelve feet, with a little room built on top.

About 1896 or 1897, Ringling Brothers had a circus in Enid, There was such a crowd that they had to

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turn people away, and women fainted in the crush. The crowd could not be kept out of the hippodrome and part of the show had to be given up. Mr. Ringling said he never wanted to see that kind of a crowd again. The crowd camped along the road and swelled the highways for three days.

I have an uncle Sam Allen who runs a store in Drummond. Previously, he had a store in Kansas, but having credited everything to everybody until he was about to the end of his rope, he heard that there was a good crop back in Kansas where his store had been located. He returned and collected nearly every cent due him for people would pay in those days if they had the money.

We had a subscription school on our place, and I attended the eighth grade there. It was first a dugout school, and was not a wonderful school nor were the teachers extraordinary.

A railroad came through Drummond in 1902. It cut a corner off father's place, but he received

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fifty or seventy five dollars. As whole quarter sections sometimes brought two hundred and fifty dollars, you can estimate how large an amount of land father sold to the railroad.

I have always taken an active interest in civic affairs but have never mixed much in state or national politics. In the early days they would have political rallies in our groves. Among the speakers were Dennis T. Flynn, Geo. Orner, receiver of the land office at Woodward, Kirkpatrick, Woodinghill, Judge Beaucamp, who still sometimes is seen in Enid, and others. Beaucamp was both a County and District Judge, and he may still hold court here.

I am a member of the Central Christian Church and have been an active Mason for twenty years. In 1934 I was state Grand Master, I also belong to the Scottish rite consistory at Guthrie and the York Rite locally. I have served as secretary and recorder of the latter lodge.

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While not always a resident of Enid I have watched closely its growth for the last twenty-five or twenty-six years. I have always taken a great deal of interest in it, as it has always been a progressive town and has a fine large trade territory. There have been some changes in local government and county government, since the early days. I have spoken of the poll tax and relief. Another change^{is} that there used to be a registrar of deeds as well as a county clerk. Now these positions are merged in one.

I am glad to add my part to the upbuilding of Enid. Many have done great things, both before and during my mayorship. Judge L. C. Garber, constructed this Convention hall in which we now are. I have pushed the installation of a traffic system, the paving of Twenty-Sixth St., and Market St., the opening of Broadway St., and the resurfacing of Main Street and other improvements, with the help of county, state, city,

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and federal aid. Bud Gentry has always helped us while he was on the highway board.

Garfield has profited from our oil and other industrial taxes, but the state should realize our budget is too small and Enid can't be run on a six mill levy. Taxes used to be lighter in older times, but civic duties are greater now.

I have three sons, all grown; Jerome L., an undertaker in Enid; Hugh H., in the Industrial loan business in Sherman, Texas; and Forest W. of Long Beach, California.

One of the early day sheriffs was a man named Porter who shot Dick Yeager, near Skeleton, north of Enid. Yeager was an outlaw, and he died and was buried in the old cemetery near Enid where our finest Kisner Addition now stands.

In the early days there were two newspapers here - the Daily Wave, edited by Eisenburg, and the Coming Events, edited by Bray. The motto of the wave was: -waves, surges, roars and rebounds only to come back with greater force

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for Enid, "O" County" (as Garfield County used to be known) "Oklahoma, and Democracy." These two couldn't get along. Eisenburg called Gray's paper-
"A coming uncertainty." City Marshal Williams favored Eisenburg, and there seemed also to be a difference between Patterson, the receiver, and Massler, the registrar of the land office. I think, Eisenburg was friendly to Massler. Eisenburg said something about Patterson, Patterson was so angry he shot Williams, an old friend, who was trying to part them. Williams shot Patterson through the head, as he ran out through the back of a store. Williams returned, sat down and died.