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~~JAMES ANDREW BRANSTETTER~~, INFORMANT  
Pryor, Oklahoma. April 12, 1937.

-Jas. S. Buchanan

I was born December 14, 1873, near Vandalia, Pike County, Missouri. My parents, Valney Augusta and Mary Elizabeth Branstetter, with two sisters and myself moved to the Indian Territory in the Spring of 1884, arriving at the little town of Cooyak, which is now the town of Pryor, March 15 shortly after I had arrived at the age of ten years. My father leased a tract of land near this place from an inter-married Cherokee by the name of John Elliott, where he remained for nine years and engaged in farming and stock raising.

This country was very sparsely settled at that time. Almost the whole section of this country was an open prairie covered with blue stem prairie grass, and in many places, especially along in draws it would grow taller than a man's head, and proved very dangerous for the settlers in the fall of the year from prairie fires, which proved very destructive to live stock as well as farm improvements, also to wild game which abounded in this country in those days. When a prairie fire is driven by a high wind it is most impossible to imagine the speed it travels and it is almost impossible for anything that happens to be in its path to escape. After one of these fires I have seen in its black path countless numbers of carcasses of animals, such as calves, wolves, skunk and rabbit that were caught in its path and burned to death.

I remember an incident just after one of those prairie fires, I was at a water hole on Salt branch, from which we hauled our drinking

water, and I saw a herd of deer on the slope a short distance north of the creek that had been driven to the hills by the fire and they were traveling towards Grand river. I counted fifty-three deer in that one herd. There were lots of turkey in the hills and the prairie chicken were so numerous you could hear them drumming or cooing of a morning in every direction until they would become annoying. In the fall of the year the ducks and geese would come in so thick that they would destroy any grain that was in the fields not yet harvested. We would harvest any grain just as soon as we could, or as soon as it was ready to harvest so as to get our grain in the bins before the ducks and geese came in.

Our closest neighbor east of us was S. H. (Sam) Mayes' home which was eleven miles away. He also owned a ranch in the hills west of Cooyah. I remember his cattle brand was "SA". In 1895 Mr. Mayes was elected chief of the Cherokee Nation and served a term of four years. This county (Mayes) was named in his honor.

The original name Coo-Y-yah, meaning "Huckleberry" in the Cherokee language, and was the only post office near us in those days, proved too difficult for English speaking people, and after a few years Coo-y-yah was changed to Pryor Creek. Then later, as there was a post office in the western part of the state by the name of Pond Creek, and the similarity of the names caused confusion in the mails, the word "Creek" was dropped from Pryor Creek, hence the name Pryor.

About eight miles north of Cooyah there was another ranch that belonged to John Warren, whose wife was a Cherokee. There was but very

~~little of the country under fence, only the land that was in cultivation, the balance free and open range which made cattle raising very profitable.~~

Wolves and coyotes were so numerous in those days that they were very destructive, killing live stock and catching our chickens. In winter time they would run in droves, and during severe winter weather when the ground would be covered with snow and ice for many days and they became hungry and desperate for food they would attack anything they came across. I remember in the winter of 1888, my uncle, Charlie Osborn, was compelled to take refuge on top of the M.K.&T. railroad bridge across Wolf Creek in Squaw Hollow, north of Cooyah, to escape from a bunch of wolves.

This territory, which is now Mayes county, was a hunter's and fisherman's paradise, as several creeks traverse the district, generally in a southeasterly direction and flow into Grand River, the principal stream being Pryor Creek. The streams have rather high timber-covered banks and the fish that abounded in those streams is unbelievable today.

#### THE KILLING OF DICK AND ZEAK CRITTENDEN.

I knew the Crittenden brothers for years, and Zeak and I were good friends. There were no ill feelings between Dick and I, but Zeak and I, through circumstances, just became better friends and were closer together. I never did know just exactly the beginning of the trouble, or the cause that led to the killing of the Crittendens by Ed Reed, who was a deputy United States marshal stationed at Wagoner, but there was bad blood between them for a long time. On the day of the killing the Crittendens were in Wagoner and Reed claimed the Crittenden brothers had made threats to kill him, or at least that was the evidence at the trial when he was exonerated

of the killing. When the killing occurred, Zeak and Dick were riding down the street at Wagoner on their horses when Ed Reed stepped out of a store door and begin shooting, killing Zeak first and then Dick.

There was quite a bit of ill feeling against Reed about the affair.

About two weeks later, after the killing of the Crittendens, Ed Reed was in Claremore and got into a difficulty with a man that run a pool hall at that place, I can't recall the fellow's name, but Reed did not have his gun on him and he asked the fellow to wait there until he returned, and the supposition was he was going after his gun, and in just a few minutes he returned and as he walked into the door the fellow shot him, killing him instantly and was later acquitted for the killing.

In 1898 I was married to Mollie Beard of near Vinita. Two sons were born to us as follows;

Wilford Wallace, born December 10, 1900. Now living in Tulsa and employed by the Public Service company as electrical engineer.

Walter Beard, born March 12, 1903. Now living in Hominy, Oklahoma, employed as electrical lineman.

I lost my wife March 13, 1903. Married to my second wife, who was Josephine Brown of Pryor, March 6, 1904 and five children were born to this union, three of whom are now living as follows;

Ethel May, born September 6, 1906.

Hettie Irene, born July 9, 1908.

Louis Derett, born July 14, 1910.