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INTERVIEW

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Ida B. Lankford,
Investigator,
March 24, 1933.

Interview With Charlie Theodore Burns,
El Cajon, California.

My father, R. A. Burns, was born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1855. My mother, Sarah J. Burns, was born in Searcy, Arkansas, in 1868.

I was born in Nebraska September 25, 1892, and we moved from that state to the Indian country when I was six months old, moving all the way by covered wagon.

My earliest recollections were of moving out of an old dugout into our first house, one built of lumber cut and saved from native trees, grown on the banks of Turkey Creek where the town of Yess now stands, crudely sawed at a lumber mill on the creek banks convenient for those who had ambition and pride enough to want to get out of living in the old primitive dugout fashion.

We lived on biscuits, butter, butter milk, roasting ears, wild prairie chickens, quails and rabbits. We slept in tents, wagon boxes covered with a wagon sheet or

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in Summer out under the stars. The big moon was so bright and so close it looked like one could reach up and get it. All was peaceful and quiet. Now and then a lonesome coyote would let out a wierd call to his mate, making little boys and girls draw closer to their mamen, or run for the dugout.

Once, I can remember, a tragic thing happened. My oldest sister was churning, using one of the old-fashioned churns, of five gallon capacity. The butter was all ready to take up, when by some hook or crook, or by neglect, over went the churn in the yard. Our mother was so worried by the loss of the butter milk, that she cried. She picked up the butter and washed and washed it, until we could eat it. We had to have it for hot bread, as it wasn't good without lots of good butter and molasses to go with it.

One time I overturned a tea kettle of hot boiling water and scalded my feet and legs. My mother tells that when they were about to be well enough so I could walk again, I walked out in the yard over a bed of hot coals, left by a wash day fire for heating water.

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My poor mother must have been a very brave and very courageous woman. There were no doctors for twenty-five miles and no way to get them except on horseback or to drive a team hitched to a wagon. Twenty-five miles would be a two-day trip and there was no time for that.

The men were away most of the time the first year or so, so there we were very much alone. Wild herds of Texas longhorned cattle would pass our claim very often and prairie fires were to be feared as much as Indians or outlaws. Many a night we have all fought a wild fire with buckets and wet tow-sacks to beat out the fire. The men took teams of horses and plows to plow a fire break. They tied wet sacks over the horses' heads and on their feet, otherwise the whole bunch of us would have been burned to death.

One time the Indians over on Turkey Creek went on the warpath, and there were some very exciting times for the few folks who lived out in the western part of the Oklahoma Territory in the 1893. Never could I or anyone put into words the way things really were. No writer of

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fiction could put into books the joys and sorrows, the utter loneliness, the hardships endured by the early families of 1889-1892.

One of the greatest thrills that could come into a boy's life was mine when I went to the Wichita Mountains and with my daddy and some neighbors rounded up a bunch of wild horses to tame for farm use and saddle ponies. I got a little brown Mustang mare with a young colt. She was a beauty, dapple grey, more brown than black. The colt was never so much trouble to tame but the little mare was broken hearted. She never was so high spirited under captivity, broken in spirit.

In 1919 I moved my family to California and we are now living in San Diego County, El Cajon, which is a suburbantown near San Diego, California. My father and mother have a comfortable mountain home forty miles up in the hills, out away from the city. My father is eighty-five years old, can recall when he rode over the old Chisholm Trail, parts of which are still to be seen out in the western part of Wichita, Greer and Beckham Counties.