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CALDWELL, JOHN J.

INTERVIEW

10201

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BIOGRAPHY FORM
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
Indian-Pioneer History Project for Oklahoma

CALDWELL, JOHN J.

INTERVIEW

10201

Field Worker's name Ruby Wolfenbarger

This report made on (date) March 14 1938

1. Name John J. Caldwell

2. Post Office Address Sentinel

3. Residence address (or location) Sentinel, Oklahoma

4.- DATE OF BIRTH: Month June Day 26 Year 1865

5. Place of birth Georgia

6. Name of Father John Caldwell Place of birth Alabama

Other information about father Farmer

7. Name of Mother Rebecca Hines Place of birth Georgia

Other information about mother Housewife

Notes or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story of the person interviewed. Refer to Manual for suggested subjects and questions. Continue on blank sheets if necessary and attach firmly to this form. Number of sheets attached 5

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Ruby Wolfenbarger,
Investigator,
March 14, 1938.

An Interview with Mr. John J. Caldwell,
Sentinel, Oklahoma.

I was born in Georgia, June 26, 1865. I moved to Texas with my parents when I was fifteen years old. My father was a farmer. In Texas we didn't have very much land and it was not very good soil. When the Indian country was being settled, I thought that I would like to come up here and get a homestead. We had heard that this was a wonderful cattle and farming country. We didn't have anything or any home in Texas and we wanted a free home. At this time I was married and had several children. I had planned to come up here in 1889, but I couldn't get enough money together. It was in 1898 before I came to the Territory.

My family and I came on the train to Oklahoma City, there I hired a man to drive us out to this part of the country. This cost me about 5.00; we brought our trunks and a few bed clothes.

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The weather was very cold and bad; it was in November. My wife and children slept in the wagon while the driver and I slept out on the ground. We camped at Weatherford one night; there was nothing there then except two little stores and a blacksmith shop. We located one mile east of Mountain View and two miles east of Sentinel. There was nothing here at that time but one little store which was called Hittney's Rock Store; the building was all rock. This rock house is still standing in very good condition. I went to Cloud Chief and filed on one hundred and sixty acres. It cost me about \$15.00 to file on the land.

We lived in a small tent until I could dig a dugout. I covered this with small poles and brush. We had lots of trouble trying to keep the snakes and centipedes out of the brush. My wife and children dug a small dugout for our chickens, while I broke the land and planted the crop. We had about six hens and one rooster. Our furniture was very crude in that day; most of our stuff was home-made and our chairs were boxes; we just had one wooden bed and for a

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broom I used broom weeds and sage weeds.

Fuel was our biggest problem in the early day around here. There wasn't any timber, just a few small trees along the creek. We had to go to the Kiowa and bargain with the Indians for our wood.

Times were very hard with us the first few years; we didn't have any money and there wasn't any work to do to make an extra dollar. We lived for days and days on corn bread and milk. We borrowed three cows from our neighbor, Charlie Allen, who had more than he could feed. We made our coffee out of kaffir corn. We hardly knew what flour was. However, we could go out and get all the fish that we wanted, the streams and creeks were full of big Channel Catfish. The third year that I lived out there I built a two-room frame house. I went to Granite for my lumber. The Rock Island Railroad was put through from Chickasha to Granite in 1891.

At the time we came out here there were not over seven other settlers around here; most of them are still living and some still own their farms. We could start out across

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the country with a load of cotton and we would soon be at the gin; we didn't have any section lines in those days. The second year that we were out here a man came out taking the census, he said that they wanted to see how much the country had improved in the last few years. We had a three months school on Big Elk Creek near our place. We also used this place to hold our church services when we could go to church as we worked so hard that we didn't get to go every Sunday. In the summer we had brush arbors covered with feed stalks and weeds. We got our mail once a week from a little post office at Salem, about five miles from our place. This post office was in a half-dugout.

We didn't have any entertainments the first few years. Later we celebrated the 4th of July. We made extra good crops for about seven years. Most everything that we put into the ground grew. We had wonderful crops of cabbage and tomatoes. We had lots of rainfall and at the time when it was most needed. I got my deed to the place after five years; then I rented it out and bought another good place near there. I am still farming but not on my own farm; I have eighty

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acres of rented land and I have not raised enough feed for my stock in the past few years. We depend upon our chickens, eggs and cream for a living.