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

Field Worker's name Bradley Bolinger

Report made on (date) June 25, 1937

Name Columbus Franklin Keff.

Post Office Address Wilburton, Oklahoma. General Delivery

Residence address (or location) Near Pleasant Hill.

DATE OF BIRTH: Month October, Day 8 Year 1872

Place of birth Whiteside, Tennessee.

Name of Father Henry Keff Place of birth Tennessee

Other information about father Died at the age of 60 years.

Name of Mother Mary Jane Morgan Keff Place of birth Dalton, Georgia.

Other information about mother She was 75 years of age when she died.

She is buried in the old North McAlester Cemetery.

es or complete narrative by the field worker dealing with the life and story
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 ~~four~~ SIX.

Bradley Bolinger,
Field Worker
June 25, 1937.

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Interview with Columbus Franklin Keef
Wilburton, Oklahoma.
Born October 8, 1872.
Father-Henry Keef.
Mother- Mary Jane Morgan Keef.

My family moved from the South to the Indian Territory when I was a very small boy. We settled about three or four miles east of what is now Krebs, Oklahoma, in what was then called Gaines County by the Choctaw tribe. The nearest trading place was old North McAlester. It cost you only a small amount to settle in this country in the early days; five dollars paid for your permit to the Indian Department.

My father's name was Henry Keef. He was sixty years of age when he died. He was buried in the old North McAlester cemetery. I was a small boy when he died. He served in the Confederate army during the Civil War.

My mother's name was Mary Jane Morgan Keef. She was born near Dalton, Georgia. She was seventy^{five}/years of age when she died. She was buried in the old North McAlester cemetery.

When I was a boy the only school that was in this country was near old North McAlester. It was built of part logs and part rough sawed lumber. The heating was

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done by a large "stick and mud" chimney. However, they had school only in the summer.

I remember when I was a boy and the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad came through this country. The locomotives pulling these trains burned wood to make their steam. All along the railroad in those days there were wood stations and the train would always stop to take on wood for fuel. All the white settlers who lived anywhere close to the railroad put in all their spare time cutting wood and piling it at one of these wood stations. When the train stopped for fuel the engineer and fireman and all employed on this train got off and helped load the wood. It was cut four feet in length, and a cut off a large tree was split in quarters. They would load on enough wood to last them until they made the next wood station.

When I was growing up I remember seeing a log cabin and one big lone pine tree standing in the yard about a mile south of what is now called North McAlester. Along in the year of 1882 there came a heavy storm and blew everything away, but did not molest this cabin and pine tree. This lone pine tree is standing today with

a large iron fence around it in the middle of the street right in front of the county court house.

Along in those days about all the farming that was done was to raise corn for bread. There was plenty of wild game of all descriptions and it was not much trouble to go out and find plenty of deer and other animals for meat and lard.

The Choctaw tribe of Indians in this country then governed themselves and had their Indian court houses over the county. They had the Indian judge and the Indian sheriff and all his helpers. These were all voted on and elected as the white people do now. The Indian law did not affect the white man who had come to this country. The only authority that had any effect on the white settlers was the Federal law from Fort Smith.

The last Governor of the Choctaw tribe before statehood was Green McCurtain. There got to be a lot of political disagreement among the Choctaws when Green McCurtain was running for the office. These two factions were called by the Choctaws the Eagles and the Buzzards. They would ride through the county, and there would be a lot of fighting and many killings took place. When the

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Choctaws went to count the votes on the day the election was over, the commander of the Fort at Fort Smith (*) sent a bunch of soldiers in this country to try to keep down the fighting and killing, as most of the Indians were gathering around the Indian court houses to see how the vote was going to go. The Eagles clan, under the leadership of Green McCurtain, were for statehood, and the other party was against statehood because they said that the white man just wanted to come into their land and take it away from them, and that they did not like it because the white settlers were coming into the country. However, Green McCurtain was elected as the last governor of the Choctaw tribe and statehood was accepted in 1907.

The first coal mine to be opened up in this country as nearly as I remember was during the year 1873. I worked around the mine in the early days. There were no towns in the country in those days but after the railroad came through, and coal was found to be plentiful, many white people moved in and towns began to spring up. Red Oak and Wilburton and what they now call South McAlester

(*) (The troops, of course, came from Fort Reno instead of Fort Smith. A. B.)

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began to grow into towns. What is now North McAlester had only two country stores and a postoffice in those days.

When I was a young man there were several bands of white outlaws who came to the Nation to hide, and as the country was sparsely settled they were able to get away without much trouble. I have seen some of the James, Younger, and Starr gangs. Many of these men would come to a place about eight miles north of where Wilburton is now located. There is a great mountain along there of almost solid rock with great caves and places that afforded protection, and many of the outlaws would come to this place and stay for some time. They later named it the Robbers' Cave.

A great spring has been running out of this mountain right near the caves as long as any one I have ever seen could remember. There is a great Boy Scout Camp with several stone buildings built in a park place around these caves, and it has been changed to a very nice looking place. Hundreds of young boys go there in the summer where they have plenty of outdoor exercise, swimming in a pool and fishing in a good clear mountain creek that runs through this camp.

The state now has a great game range around these
caves, and one can find many deer and wild turkeys here.
These mountains are covered with fine pine timber, and
the state will not allow it to be cut for lumber.