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Jas. S. Buchanan
Investigator.
December 9-10, 1937.

Interview with Thomas J. Welch, Jr.,
108 McKibbon Building,
Muskogee, Oklahoma.

I was born March 12, 1877, in Conway County, Arkansas. My parents were Thomas J. and Sis Keith Welch. Father was part Cherokee and Mother was of Irish descent.

My parents moved from Arkansas to the Indian Territory in 1877 when I was only an infant, stopping on Grand River near where the town of Hulbert now stands. My mother died there immediately after their arrival leaving Father with my sister four years old and me, about three months old.

About one year thereafter Father married a Cherokee widow by the name of Mary Collins, a native of Georgia, who came to the Indian Territory with the immigration of the Cherokees. Three children were born to that marriage.

In 1882 Father moved to a place near what is known as Eagle Bluff, located on ^{the} Illinois River about sixteen miles north of Tahlequah, where he established

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a claim, improved it, building a small log cabin which sufficed as a home until he later built a large double log house.

In 1887 Father moved to a place about three miles southwest of where the town of Braggs now stands, which belonged to Dedimar Sanders, a Cherokee, who was Captain of the Lighthouse of that district and locally prominent in those days. We lived there about four years, during which time the Missouri Pacific Railroad was built through the Indian Territory and Father had a contract with the company to furnish the construction camps with meat. He had cattle of his own and would buy cattle in the vicinity, butcher them and deliver the meat to the camps.

I believe while we were living in that vicinity were the most eventful days of my boyhood. I recall the great sport I enjoyed fishing in Big Greenleaf Creek, and if I should attempt to describe the abundance of fine fish that were in the streams at that time my story would seem incredible. I remember on one occasion while enjoying one of my fishing periods,

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sitting alone on the bank of Big Greenleaf, I counted a herd of fifteen deer pass leisurely along on the opposite side of the creek from me. Another incident I recall, I was sitting on the bank fishing near this same place where I saw the deer and quietly watched a large flock of wild turkey come down to the creek for water. There being so many in the flock and partly obscured by brush I was unable to count their number.

There was but very little money in circulation in this country at that time, but as to the actual necessities of life there were more then than there is at the present time, as we never knew what it was to want for anything to eat. There was plenty of game, such as wild turkey, deer, wild hogs and prairie chickens, also an abundance of small game such as coon, opossum, squirrel and quail and it was no trouble to obtain food for a family under any circumstances.

During the time we lived at the Sanders place the Dalton brothers, who were later outlaws, were in the service of the Government as United States Marshals, and when they, with other marshals, would be in that vicinity, they had a regular place they would camp on Big Greenleaf

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near our place, and I remember on one occasion when my father sent me to the old water mill with corn to be ground, I saw the Dalton brothers and some other marshals camped at that place with some prisoners on their way to Ft. Smith.

Before the railroad was built through that country, the closest store to our place was one owned by a man by the name of Tom Madden, located about two miles north of where Braggs now stands. John Patrick also owned a store on the east side of the Arkansas River about five miles northwest of Braggs. There was a ferry on the Arkansas at Patrick's store but I don't remember who owned the ferry, though I believe it was Patrick. After the town of Braggs was started Patrick moved his store to that place, and conducted a prosperous business for several years.

I knew old Captain Braggs, part Cherokee, on whose claim the town of Braggs was established and in honor of whom the town was named.

For several years Harsha and Spaulding's cotton gin at Muskogee was the only cotton gin in this part of

the Territory, and it would take us two days to bring a load of cotton to the gin and make the return trip to the farm, crossing the Arkansas River on the Junior Smith Ferry about five miles west of Braggs. The roads through this country in those days were only ungraded trails and travel was very slow, and besides the most of our hauling was done with ox teams.

The first term of school I attended was when I was nine years of age, at what was known as the South Bethel Church and school. It was a Cherokee rural school, located about four miles west of Braggs. It was a log structure about 20 X 40 feet with split logs, flat side up, peg legs driven in holes on the round side for benches or seats, and the teacher's desk was a crude board table. The teacher was a white man, past middle age, by the name of McAfee. The old South Bethel Cemetery is situated just west of the site of the old Church. It was an old burial ground at my earliest recollection and it is the resting place of several of the old pioneers of the early days.

A very impressive incident of my boyhood days was

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the steamboats on the Arkansas landing at the mouth of Big Greenleaf Creek where there was a log yard, the logs being hauled there by ox teams, then loaded on the steamboats and shipped down the river to the mills.

In 1889 we moved from near Braggs to a place between Muskogee and Frozen Rock, near what was known as the Cobb place. Cobb, the owner of that place, ran a drug store in Muskogee at that time. We lived at that place two years, farming, and during the hay season my father had a contract cutting hay near Summit and hauling it with ox teams to Muskogee for Captain Seyers. During the time we lived at this place my sister and I attended school at the Frozen Rock School, which was a frame building. The old iron post that divided the ~~Creek and Cherokee Nations stood about one quarter of a~~ mile southeast of the place where we lived and the old line post is yet standing, or was a short time ago when I visited the vicinity.

In 1891 we moved from near Muskogee to the old home place, the claim that Father established in 1882 near Eagle Bluff north of Tahlequah. It was in midwinter

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when we moved and we pulled the wagons by hand across the Arkansas River on the ice and led the teams across after we got the wagons over. I have never seen such cold weather in this country since that time.

After we moved back to the old home place, I recall a trip Father and I took after a wagon load of corn he bought from Cornelious Boudinot. We drove from our place to Mr. Boudinot's farm which was located five miles east of Tahlequah, loaded the corn, and drove to Tahlequah, arriving there late in the afternoon. There we spent the night with Mr. Boudinot, as he was living in Tahlequah and practicing law at the time.

Mr. Boudinot had just bought a new repeating rifle, of which he was very proud, and he was showing it to Father and asked Father to toss several rocks into the air in succession while Mr. Boudinot shot at them, and to my amazement he never missed hitting a rock.

I lived at the old home place with my father until 1895 when I was married to Hester Moten, a Cherokee girl, of near the little town of Lowery. We were married under the regulations of the Cherokee laws which required

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a petition signed by twelve citizens of the Cherokee Nation and \$10 for the marriage license. A Cherokee by the name of Tom Triplet, who was clerk of the Cherokee Court at Tahlequah for several years, issued the license.

Soon after our marriage we moved to a place that I leased near the Illinois River, three miles north of the Whitmire post office at the old Oil Springs. When I leased the place that section of the country was sparsely settled and the roads were only trails through the hills and timber, made by travel of the settlers and the Indians, and that vicinity was the best hunting grounds in the Cherokee Nation at that time.

There were only about five acres in cultivation when I moved to the place and my wife and I both being very young at the time, my wife sixteen and I eighteen years of age, Father assisted us and we cleared nearly one hundred acres of additional land within the following three years and put it into cultivation. When we moved to the place there was only a one-room log cabin with an adobe fireplace, and the only thing we had to

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cook with was a Dutch oven and a cast iron kettle. We had no stove; therefore, we did our cooking in the Dutch oven and iron kettle on the hearth of the adobe fireplace, but we had better things to eat than can be had today. Our bed was a mattress made from corn shucks and a crude board table, chairs to match and a board cupboard nailed to the wall made up our household effects. Therefore, we had no fear of the installment man taking our furniture on account of a delinquent payment.

When we took corn to mill to have our meal ground, it meant a thirty mile ride which would take us a long day to make, as the closest grist mill was fifteen miles from my place. That was the Bill Thompson water mill on Tyner's Creek near the little town of Chance. There was also another water mill on Flint Creek at the Flint post office that belonged to Head Beck, which was about the same distance from my place, and to which we would sometimes take our corn. The Beck mill is yet being operated by Toney Beck, a son of Head Beck. Richard Beck, a brother of Toney Beck, is postmaster at Flint at the present time. When we would go to mill, the

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neighbors would alternate in making the drive and take corn for the neighborhood to save the other neighbors all making the drive. Tahlequah was a distance of twenty-five miles from my place and it required two days to make the trip.

I lived on that same place for about twelve years; when the Cherokee allotments were made I filed on an allotment in the Water Falls Hollow in that same vicinity. Six children were born to us and four were old enough to file when the Cherokee allotments were made.

My allotment was, of course, unimproved land and we had the task of improving it. I built a small house which sufficed as a home until I later built a two story, five-room frame house. We continued to improve the place until we had a nice farm home and we lived there until 1912 when we sold that place and moved to Kansas, Oklahoma, an inland town, where we bought a home. I engaged in the livery stable and wagon yard business which I conducted until 1922 when that business became unprofitable, due to the advent of motor transportation, and I discontinued it. During that same year I lost my wife.

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I engaged in the real-estate business at that place thereafter until 1927. In the meantime my children had all married and I was left alone, so I broke up housekeeping and went to Tucumcari, New Mexico, where I spent about one year with one of my daughters who had married and was residing at that place. Leaving New Mexico, I came back to Oklahoma, stopping at West-
and
ville, /leased a farm near that place where I engaged in farming two years. Since then, with the exception of four years I spent in Texas, I have been in Muskogee and vicinity.