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James Carselowey,  
Journalist,  
February 25, 1938.

Life and History of  
Thomas Mitchell Buffington,  
Twice Chief of the Cherokees.

Taken from Interviews During  
His life and from the writer's  
Knowledge of him.

My name is Thomas Mitchell Buffington. I was born near Westville, Cherokee Nation, Indian Territory, on October 19, 1855.

My father's name was Ezekiel Buffington. He was born in Georgia in 1807, and came to the Indian Territory with the "Old Settlers" in 1835.

My mother's name was Louisa (Newman) Buffington. She was born in Tennessee, in 1817, and died at my home on Mustang Creek, Cherokee Nation, Indian Territory, on February 15, 1898. To this union four sons and four daughters were born, all deceased, except myself.

I received my education at the old Baptist Mission, four miles north of the present town of Westville, Oklahoma.

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On May 10, 1878, I was married to Susie Woodall, daughter of Isaac M. and Mary Jane Woodall, at the residence of her parents in Delaware District.

My wife had been teaching school in a little log school house on Big Cabin Creek, about two miles from of where we built our home, which we started to build immediately after our wedding. My wife had just closed her school for the term, and we lived in the little log school house, until we built our house.

I had just moved to Delaware District, from Going-snake, when I married. My wife Susie (Woodall) Buffington, was born July 30, 1857, and died November 11, 1891.

On December 28, 1895, I married Emma Gray, a teacher in the Cherokee schools. She was born in North Carolina, and came to the Indian Territory with her parents, when still a small child. To this union five daughters were born: Lucille, Sue Nell, Maxine, Marie and Margarete, all of whom are married. Marie, who married Ross Null, died on April 21, 1937, leaving a small son, whom they named James Buffington Null.

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## I ENTER POLITICS IN 1889.

In Cherokee politics we had two parties, a Downing and a National party. I had always been a Downing man, and worked faithfully for my party, but had never thought of asking for an office myself; finally some of my friends induced me to come to Tahlequah, and I was placed on a Senate Committee, called a Committee on Claims.

In 1889 I was elected as District Judge of Delaware District, but before my two year term expired, I was elected as Senator, from Delaware District and resigned the judgeship and had my old neighbor Dudley H. Tucker appointed in my place to fill out the unexpired term for judge. It was in 1891 that I was elected to serve as Senator, and I had defeated L. B. (Hocley) Bell, who up to that time had never been defeated. Hocley was pretty mad when I came out against him for Senate, and told the neighbors that he had put my "first white shirt" on me, and now he was "going to take it off", but I wore it a good many years after that, and was never defeated for any office for which I asked.

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When we organized the Senate, at the beginning of my term I was elected as president of the Senate, but before I was named as president of the Senate our Principal Chief, Joel B. Mayes, in his address to the Senate said, among other things, "Gentlemen of the Senate, it hasn't been long since our Principal Chief, Lewis Downing, and our Second Chief, Robert Daniel, died during the same term of office; therefore I advise you to elect a man as president of the Senate, who is also capable of acting as your Principal Chief."

It was a queer incident, but that very term Joel B. Mayes, Principal Chief, and Henry Chambers, Assistant Chief, both died, during the term, leaving me as the president of the Senate, to succeed them, as Principal Chief.

It was then the duty of the Senate and council to appoint a chief, as the President of the Senate only served until the council and Senate appointed one. They insisted on my keeping the place, but I had other things in view, and recommended Colonel Johnson Harris for the place, whom they named.

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Out of gratitude Chief Harris appointed Elias C. Boudinot and me as delegates to Washington to represent the Cherokee Nation before Congress. While there, I helped to get the Curtis Bill passed, which brought allotment of lands to the Cherokees.

In 1895 I was elected as Circuit Judge of the Northern District, comprising Delaware, Cooweescoowee and Saline Districts. Each district had its own court house, and I held court at all three places.

The Delaware court house was located on Honey Creek, on the east side of Grand River, between the present sites of Grove and Jay, and was right out in the timber. Aunt Susie Snell, an old full blood Cherokee woman, conducted a boarding house there, where we boarded and lodged while attending court.

The Cooweescoowee Court House was located in the town of Claremore, a new town that had not been established very long before I held court there. It was the home town of Henry Chambers, Second Chief, who had died a few years before.

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The Saline court house was located two miles east and about a half mile south of the present site of the town of Rose, now Mayes County, Oklahoma. Like Delaware it was located right out in the woods.

I held the office of Circuit Judge for four years, and then entered the race for Principal Chief.

#### ELECTED AS PRINCIPAL CHIEF.

In November, 1899, I was elected a Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, and served four years. At the time I was elected to this position, I was serving as Mayor of Vinita, and resigned that position to go to Tahlequah. Felix Gowan, one among the oldest settlers of Vinita, was serving as president of the city council, and served out my unexpired term.

#### NOMINATED BY CONVENTION.

Instead of nominating a candidate by a primary election, as is done in our present state and county elections, the candidates were nominated in conventions. The convention for nominating a chief was held at Bag Tacker's spring, north of Tahlequah, and there was always



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a lot of wire work done in Tahlequah a few days preceding the nominations.

At the close of my first four year term of office I again entered the race to be held before the nominating convention, and the night before the convention was held I had a majority of the delegates who had assembled from the nine districts, and went to bed feeling that I had that race won, as I had always done before.

William O. Rogers, the Merchant Prince of Skiatook, was a candidate against me, and when the delegates cast their votes Rogers had me beat in the last Downing convention ever held for a Principal Chief in the Cherokee Nation. I always thought he bought some of my delegates between suns. This was the only defeat I ever met in convention, or general election.

#### MAYOR OF VINITA FIVE TERMS.

I served as Mayor of Vinita three terms, before 1900, and two terms after 1900, serving the last time in 1917.

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## HELPED TO NOMINATE BRYAN.

I have always been a Democrat in National politics, and was a delegate to the National Convention in Denver the year Bryan was nominated for the Presidency.

## FRATERNAL SOCIETIES.

In my early life I took an active part in fraternal affairs. I am a thirty-second degree Mason, a member of the Vinita Lodge, No. 5, A.F. & A.M., Indian Consistory, McAlester, and Akdar Temple A.A.O.N.M.S., Tulsa, and a member of Vinita Lodge No. 1163, Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks.

## CRIPPLED SINCE 1917.

While serving my last term as Mayor of Vinita in 1917, and while attempting to alight from a passenger train, I fell and dislocated my hip and have been a cripple ever since. I managed to come down town and sit in an automobile, where I could meet my friends and talk with them for a number of years, but since 1936 I have been unable to leave the house.

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I spend my time reading, listening to the radio and visiting my friends. Many of my old friends call on me from all parts of the old Cherokee Nation, and talk over old times with me, and I enjoy that more than anything, since I have been confined to the house.

In January, 1937, a committee of business men of Pryor, Claremore and Vinita called on me and notified me that a movement was on foot to hold a big celebration in Vinita for me, and at the same time place my name in the Hall of Fame at Oklahoma City. This was very gratifying, but as one of my daughters was very ill at the time, I asked them to postpone the matter until her health was improved.

**Journalist Note:**

The daughter mentioned died on April 21, 1937, and the old chief was so badly torn up over her death and long illness that he was never right well, after her death. He had a stroke of paralysis a few days before his death, from which he never recovered, and died on Friday, February 11, 1938, as stated above.

His remains were laid to rest in the Fairview Cemetery, Vinita, Oklahoma.