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An Interview with Thomas Johnson Parris.  
Park Hill, Oklahoma.

By - Elizabeth Ross, Investigator.  
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I was born August 10, 1852, in the Goingsnake district near the present town of Westville, in Adair County. The greater portion of my lifetime has been spent in what is now Cherokee County, but which was for many years "The Tahlequah District" of the Cherokee Nation.

As a boy I was living in the Goingsnake district when the Civil War began and remember well the hardships which afflicted the people of my home locality. Many of the people of the district fled to distant sections in hope of escaping the perils of the unsettled period, but there were others who remained in their homes in spite of the danger and uncertainty. We were one of those families who stayed in the neighborhood until after the close of the war.

When the war came to a close the wants of the people were relieved, so far as food was concerned, by the distribution of rations by the United States Government. Military depots were established and to these places the people went on specified dates to receive the food products

allotted to them. One of the depots was in the Cherokee National Female Seminary building in the Park Hill locality. I made a number of trips to this place in a two horse wagon, driving a distance of about thirty miles. Flour, salt, beans, pork, beef and meal were given to those surviving, after which those who had been given aid drove or rode away to their homes.

After receiving our supplies from the government, for awhile our family removed from the Goingsnake district to the town of Fort Gibson in the Illinois District in the vicinity of the military post. Here several years were spent and here I attended school awhile in an old building which was once used as a church and which stood in the portion of Fort Gibson which has long been called "old town".

I hunted with the other boys of the town in the forests outlying from the town and fished along the Grand River.

As a young man, I engaged in manual labor in making a living. Having grown up with boys, some of whom were inclined to be wild and reckless, I sometimes experienced trouble, though not of a serious nature. On one occasion I escaped what would very likely have been a grave matter for

me, through the help of friends. Some friends and I were one day strolling about the town, when several soldiers from the Fort arrived and joined the young civilians. All went well for awhile, but at length there was a disagreement, and in a rather reckless mood, I drew a pistol and fired at one of the soldiers. The bullet passed through the blue jacket or blouse worn by the soldier, who with his comrades returned at once to the Fort. None of the soldiers were armed. My companions and I should have realized that trouble might result, but we failed to do so until a squad of soldiers led by an officer came into view. The soldiers were armed with Springfield rifles and I realized that I was being sought. There was not time in which to run to the woodland some distance away, so my friends hurried me into a vacant building in which was a large pile of corn shucks or husks. They made me lie down and piled the shucks over me and scattered others about the room and then re-entered the "living house". Soon the non-commissioned officer and his squad arrived. The officer demanded to know where the young man was who had fired upon a soldier. No one knew so my friends replied. The soldiers

carefully searched the premises. They went to the vacant building, saw nothing more than a pile of shucks and having failed in their quest, marched back to the Fort. I do not believe that the soldiers would have made me a prisoner, but rather would have shot me down. As it was, I remained silent beneath the pile of shucks until sunset. A friend then cautiously approached the vicinity of the house. No soldiers were now visible and I hurried outside, mounted the horse, behind its rider and was carried into the depths of a canebrake in the river bottom. There I stayed until nightfall, when my friend took me away by a circuitous route and we did not halt until we reached Tahlequah, twenty miles distant. There I remained for months before again visiting Fort Gibson.

Finally, I removed to the Tahlequah district permanently. I lived in the town much of the time. Tahlequah was rather a small place during the late seventies. Many of the fullblood Cherokees wore colored hunting shirts and in the winter season a number of the men wore blue army overcoats. The streets were not paved and wagons rumbled over the places where stones protruded from the surface of the ground. Live-

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stock, horses and cattle wandered about the streets and there was not a single street lamp in the entire town. Many great changes have occurred in town and country since I established my home in the old Tanlequah district.