

MARKS, L. W. (MRS.)  
(MARKS, FANNIE Blythe)

INTERVIEW

#7475

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James R. Carselowey, Interviewer,  
September 14, 1937

Interview with Mrs. L. W. Marks,  
Vinita, Oklahoma.  
(Fannie Blythe Marks)

When emigration started toward Indian Territory in 1869 it marked a trail in northeastern Indian Territory, now Oklahoma, that was destined to be made permanent when the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas railroad linked the north with the south. Afterward came the Atlantic and Pacific railroad from the east and stopped in Vinita for years before continuing to the west. A different intersection was originally planned for these two trunk lines but when the Atlantic and Pacific railroad actually came the crossing with the Missouri, Kansas and Texas railroad was made at its present location and thus the town of Vinita was founded.

At first Vinita consisted of railroad property alone; there were the two depots and because the

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Atlantic and Pacific, now the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad Company stopped here and because Vinita was the end of a division that company built section houses for their workmen here and a round-house and turn table for their engines.

Before the coming of the railroads and the establishment of a town, this was a beautiful country with broad rolling prairies covered by tall waving grass, well watered by timber bordered streams and with but few scattered farm houses and ranches. It was a paradise for the cattle that followed in the wake of the buffalo that once roamed these plains. There was no trading point nearer than Chetopa, Kansas, and the settlers had to take their grist to a mill at Spavinaw, built by the Mormons on their migration in search of a permanent location which they ultimately found in

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Utah. Spavinaw was about twenty-five miles from Vinita.

Like all new countries, the law was lawlessness here at first. Cattle rustlers roamed at will; bandits from the states found a safe refuge here because there were no extradition laws then and the United States officers who dared to arrest them did so at their own risk and literally took their lives in their own hands, with no other protection than their own initiative, courage and quickness "on the draw".

The law was administered in a speedy and primitive manner and punishment was often administered by the aggrieved party.

For instance: two men quarreled over a gambling table and one man shot the other who did not die at once but lingered on until day break. The wounded man's brother took the would-be assassin, chained him to the dying man's bed and forced him to share

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in his death watch. In the grey dawn he released the man who had killed his brother and he was at once taken outside and executed for his crime on the streets of Vinita.

Johnson Thompson and sons built the first store in Vinita. It was a stone building on the east side of the Katy track, and it still stands though much modernized to fit present needs.

The second store was built by Arch Goddykoontz and George W. Green on the west side of the Katy track and opposite the two railroad stations. It was a two story frame building with a store-room below and living quarters above and was connected by a board walk with the first hotel, the Commercial House, once run by Charley Peach who now lives in Chelsea.

The Presbyterians were the first of the religious denominations to establish a mission school

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and a resident missionary at Pheasant Hill, seven miles northwest of Vinita.

The Reverend Mr. Hamilton Balentine, a Princeton man, supplied this pulpit until his death, then his brother-in-law, the Reverend Mr. Nelson Chamberlain was ordained and continued the work until he died. Both these ministers are buried in the old Pheasant Hill cemetery.

Pheasant Hill was the nucleus of the First Presbyterian church of Vinita. The four charter members were Mrs. Amanda Goodykoontz, Mrs. Ellen Miller, Miss Fannie Blythe and Arthur Chamberlain who made up the quota necessary to organize the First Presbyterian church of Vinita under the Reverend W. H. Haywood, who later organized the First Presbyterian Church at Tulsa and which with its increasing strength justified the erection of

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a building. In the earlier days all denominations worshipped together in a community church built by the community. In its long service many notables spoke in this church, among whom were Miss Frances E. Willard and Moody and Sankey. Eventually the Methodist congregation fell heir to this building which they used for several years but now they have an up-to-date church building on the adjoining lot.

We are indebted to Colonel E. C. Boudinot for the beautiful name of Vinita. He named the town in honor of the noted Washington sculptress, Vinnie Ream whom he knew in Washington and whom he very much admired. She it was who made the bust of the native inventor of the Cherokee alphabet, Sequoyah, which now stands in the Hall of Fame. Each state is permitted to place two of its most famous representatives there and it is worthy of note that the other representative is to be Will Rogers, another

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Cherokee. Although Colonel Boudinot was a Cherokee by blood, he never lived in the west until the close of his life but was reared and educated in the east and spent the most of his life in Washington, D. C.

Our town was originally named Downingville for Colonel Louis Downing, the Cherokee Chief, but Vinita was so much more musical and convenient that in time the name was legally changed.