

It is also interesting to have revealed that Wah-ne-nau-hi was the daughter of Major George Lowrey, the last of the hereditary chiefs of the Cherokees. Major Lowrey figures prominently in the history of the Cherokees, and he also came to Indian Territory in the removal. He lived out his life in the Cherokee Nation (west) and is believed to have been buried in the Lowrey Cemetery southwest of Tahlequah, although it is said there is no marker at his grave.

When a little girl, Miss Balentine remembers that her father had a mercantile store in Vinita, located on the east side of the railroad at the corner of Second and Illinois Streets. In those days of early Vinita, the beginning of town was on the east side. In its nearly 100 years of existence, the town has moved to the west side of the Katy Railroad. Near her father's store, was the R. M. Swain Grocery, Provisions, and Feed Co. R. M. Swain was a full blood Cherokee woman and well educated and was a good business woman. However, the store was built and stocked by her husband, a white man, but carried on business under her name as white men could not own property in the Cherokee Nation in those days. Rebecca M. Swain done well.

The Houston Balentine home was just north of the Balentine Mercantile. He remembers that the yard was all fenced in, and a board sidewalk ran in front of their home up to the main street (Illinois Avenue). Most of the stores were built up above the ground with steps going up to the covered porch. This elevation provided for loading and unloading customers wagons, freight haulers, and drays. When she and her sisters walked along the streets they were instructed by their mother to go out into the street so as to not pass a saloon, and there were many saloons in town in those early days dispensing beer, homebrew, moonshine and assorted hard spirits. Houston Balentine was a remarkable man. Although blind, he operated his store in equal competition with the others and lived until he was 68 years old, passing away in 1901. The Balentine store carried a wide variety of merchandise including whole wheat flour by the barrel, harness, corn shucker mits, coal hods, baby cradles, plows, guns, and new rope for a hanging if need be.

The peace and quiet was broken frequently in old Vinita town. She recalls one night nine shots rang out in front of a saloon near their store on Illinois Avenue. The next morning a man lay dead in the street, shot from his horse by John Davis. The Balentine girls could see the man's body from their yard gate.

Had circumstances and conditions been different, Vinita, Oklahoma, might today be Downingville, State of Sequoyah. The original townsite, laid out and platted, was located some two or three miles south and west of the present city. Elias C. Boudinot, a part Cherokee, was an enterpriser, lawyer, and politician and had bought land around Downingville expecting to make a killing in the land business when the railroad came thru. But the railroad missed his lands and Downingville was moved up by the railroad. So moved Boudinot and still pursued his activities and was a man of some wealth and means. His desire for personal gain helped much to destroy the Cherokee Nation, and he was a strong advocate of the Indian Nation being joined with Oklahoma Territory to become one State. Otherwise there might have been the State of Sequoyah as many Indian leaders had hoped for. It was Boudinot who betrayed his Indian heritage by getting carried away with the charm and beauty of Vinnie Ream, a white woman from the East, and from her first name came Vinita.