

PARRIS, JOHNSON

INTERVIEW

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Elizabeth Ross,  
Investigator,  
November 30, 1937.

An Interview With Johnson Parris  
Park Hill, Oklahoma.

OLDEST CHEROKEE BARBER.

Thomas Johnson Parris, now 85 years of age lives a short distance from the Park Hill postoffice, in a rural section. Born in 1852, Mr. Parris has spent the greater portion of his lifetime in the present Cherokee County, originally the Tahlequah district.

As a boy Mr. Parris lived in the Goingsnake district, and was in that section during the Civil War period. Concerning the war-time years he has varied recollections, though only 13 years of age at the termination of the conflict. At the conclusion of the war or soon after Mr. Parris was taken to Fort Gibson where he lived for a number of years, attending school in an old building which had been built in the early years of the military post. In this building the Presbyterian pastors preached to their congregation, and some years ago the erroneous statement was made that Henry M. Stanley, discoverer of David Livingstone in Africa, once taught school in the old church. However, as Henry M. Stanley never saw Fort Gibson the possibility is that some

other person of the same name may have once stayed briefly at that place. However, J. M. Stanley, portrait painter, spent a portion of 1843-44 at the military post, or near vicinity, but there is nothing to prove that he taught school while there.

After leaving Fort Gibson for Tahlequah, Mr. Parris thereafter lived in that town or in its near vicinity, near the center of the Tahlequah district. Early in the eighties he began working in a barber shop, first with Bluford Foreman, a half-brother, and later in his own shop. He spent many years as a barber and has shaved in long past years a number of notables of the Cherokee Nation, as well as others from distant states and cities in Tahlequah temporarily on matters of business, or on important missions for the United States Government. He has shaved or trimmed the hair of several principal chiefs of the Cherokee Nation in years long past.

In the periods in which Mr. Parris was employed in barbering, the cutting of hair and shaving at night was by the light from kerosene lamps principally, for it was not until a comparatively recent period that electric lights came into use in the barber shops in Tahlequah.

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