

PARKS, J. T.

INTERVIEW

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Wylie Thornton
Field Worker.
September 6, 1937.

Interview with J. T. Parks,
Tahlequah, Oklahoma.
Father-Thomas Jefferson Parks.
Mother-Ann Thompson.

J. T. Parks was born January 13, 1862, in the Delaware District, Cherokee Nation, now Delaware County. He was named for Jeff Thompson, the first President of the Mississippi University. Jeff Thompson organized a Brigade or Regiment for service in the Confederate Army, made a dash around up in Missouri and was killed the early part of the war.

My father, T. J. Parks, served as a Captain for four years in the Southern Army. After all our property was taken by the Federal Soldiers and our house burned, my mother and the children refuged down on Red River to some place which is now in Bryan County.

We got back to our old home on Cowskin Prairie in about 1867, sometime in the fall. It was cold and snow was on the ground. Our home, as all southern Cherokee homes had been, was sold under a confiscation act of the


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Cherokee Council, dominated by northern Cherokees, but afterwards, under direction of the United States, was restored to us. We lived on rabbits, prairie chickens, and quail our first year at home.

Our farm had grown up in blackberry and sassafras bushes, so we moved further out on the prairie and made a new farm. The line between our house and Missouri was about two hundred yards east and there was a constant stream of covered wagons going up and down the old line road, mostly drawn by oxen. I attended school over in Missouri, at Greenwood School House and in the Scott house at Elk Mills, Missouri, about one mile from home. My father settled the old farm homestead sometime in 1840. Our only book was the old Blue Back Spelling book and when we learned the alphabet from A to Z we had to turn our book upside down and learn the letters from Z to A. I attended Cave Spring School across the prairie three miles, for two terms, went to the Cherokee Male Seminary two years, and then taught  School, in a full-blood Indian community

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located on the mountain south of Spavinaw. I made corn bread for five sisters and a younger brother.

Father was nearly blind from service in the war.

I graduated from the Cherokee Male Seminary in 1884 and taught there six years; was admitted to practice law in the Cherokee Courts in 1890 and in the United States Courts in 1896; served as city clerk of Tahlequah and district clerk of Tahlequah District; was President of the Cherokee Board of Education; was Executive Secretary of the Cherokee Nation; was private Secretary to Chief T. M. Buffington; served as superintendent of the Cherokee Orphan Asylum during tribal government; served as Mayor of Tahlequah; was County Judge of Cherokee County and District Judge of the First Judicial District since statehood.

I married Etta Duncan in 1889 and have four children, all married. Two children deceased.

I am a member of the Methodist church and a thirty-second degree mason.

I lived on deer and turkey all the year when teaching

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the New Town School. Also taught the Honey Creek School and Olympus school near Grove.

I have always been engaged in farming and stock raising.

I am a Cherokee Indian by blood.

I have seen flocks of pigeons so thick that as they would fly over, would darken the sun. They roosted and raised their young for one or two years on Barren Fork Creek, near Westville.

I visited the Cherokee Orphan Asylum in 1872 when it was in the old Male Seminary building. Reverend W. A. Duncan was Superintendent. I was at the Female Seminary, also, when Aunt Jane Thompson was Superintendent. It was near the present Park Hill. This was in 1872. My sister, Mary, was attending school there at that time.

I now live in Tahlequah and have retired for life and all I will do the rest of my life will be to help

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my friends in any matter I can, and earnestly desire to see the Cherokee people properly protected. Education is the salvation of these Indians.