

SWAIN, REBECCA McNAIR POLSTON. INTERVIEW.

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Field Worker: James R. Carselovey  
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Interview with Rebecca McNair Swain  
West Canadian, Vinita.

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My name is Rebecca McNair Swain. I was born on a farm, we called "Frozen Rock," near Fort Gibson, Cherokee Nation, Indian Territory, on August 19, 1864.

My father's name was Joseph Polston. He was born in Alabama, February 11, 1834, and married November 16, 1863, at Bayou Menard to Susan Rebecca Wilson. She was born July 19, 1846, near Fort Gibson, Indian Territory.

My father was killed by Pin Indians on our farm near Fort Gibson, shortly after his marriage to my mother, and before I was born.

My grand-father's name was Alexander Drungoole Wilson, half Scotch and half Cherokee Indian. He married a fullblood Cherokee woman, named Lucy.

My mother later married Thomas Washington Lindsey, and they were the parents of one son, named William Alexander Lindsey.

#### A FAMILY CEMETERY

We had a burial ground on the Old Wilson homestead near Fort Gibson, but I have been away from there so long I cannot give the exact location of the cemetery. My father and grand-father and about all of our relation are buried there and have monuments that are in good shape, and visible. I understand that one of Connell Rogers' sons owns the place at the present time. The cemetery was started as a family plot, but I cannot say whether it has been turned into a public burying ground, or not.

#### EDUCATION AT FEMALE SEMINARY

I received my education at the Female Seminary in Tahlequah. Some of my school mates who attended school there when I did are, Janette Billingslea, Lula Kelley, Fannie (Marks) Elythe, Sallie Keys, all of Vinita. Sallie (Rogers) McSpadden, Chelsea; Nan Fite, Tahlequah and Cora and Dot Archer of Pryor.

#### DAYS FOLLOWING CIVIL WAR

I was born during the closing days of the Civil War, and my mother told me of the strenuous days she went through following the war. My father had been killed by the

the Pin Indians before I was born, and there were no younger men left at home. All that were left were the women and old men, and even the old men were killed at various odd times.

One old man, by the name of John Starnes, a near relative of my mother, went to the spring one day to get a bucket of water, and while gone he was killed and both his arms and legs were cut off.

Mrs. John Starnes' first husband was an army man, and they had one daughter, which he took with him when he left her because she would not leave her people and go with him during the war. His wife's maiden name was Margurite Merrell, and she was a Cherokee Indian. In years to come the daughter married an architect by the name of Greenleaf of Kansas City, Mo. The girl's aunt had told her all about her mother, but she had been unable to locate her until the Dawes Commission made up the Cherokee rolls, and it was there she found her mother's name and found that she was living at Vinita, Indian Territory, and she came to see her after she was a grey headed woman. It was the first time she had seen her mother since her father had left Fort Gibson with her during the war.

My mother knew the Indians who had killed her husband in 1864, and in the early 80's she took me and went to a fair at Muskogee and it was there she saw the men who had killed my father and pointed them out to me on the fair ground.

Another atrocious murder the Pin Indians committed was that of Mrs. Sixkiller, mother of Mrs. Tom Knight, (Rachel Knight) of Vinita, Indian Territory. They had come to the house after night to kill some of the men folks, and could see the figure of a person through the window blind. They shot Mrs. Sixkiller dead, thinking she was one of the men.

On the Frozen Rock farm where I was raised there were more big snakes than any place I have ever seen before or since. We killed a rattlesnake 6 feet long.

#### RAN AWAY AND MARRIED

On December 27, 1879 I ran away from the Female Seminary and married John Swain. We were married at the old National Hotel in Tahlequah by Rev. Joe F. Thompson, a Methodist minister. Mr. Swain was conducting a saddle shop in Muskogee at the time and we went there to live.

In 1830 Mr. Swain moved his shop to Vinita and located in the Old Johnson Thompson building, where Mr. Thompson was in the grocery business, on the east side of the M.K. & T. track. The building was a two story stone structure and was was the first stone or brick building built in Vinita. We couldn't buy any furniture in Vinita those days so we hired a man to make us some chairs and a table, but we had to send to Seneca, Missouri, for a stove.

I first came to Vinita with my mother and step-father in 1872. The town was just starting that year. Both Katy and Frisco railroads had arrived in the town the year before and a new town was beginning to spring up. The town was then going under the name of Downingsville and had been started before the railroad reached the Territory, three miles below where, the present site now stands.

#### FIRST VINITA FAIR

The first Vinita Fair Association was organized in the early 80's and I was named as the first secretary of the Art Department, which position I held during the life of the fair. The first fair ground was located across the highway, north of the present fair ground, just south of the old Cobb ranch.

#### VINITA'S OLDEST CHURCH

The Congregational Church is the oldest church in Vinita, and was organized on November 24, 1879, by J. W. Scroggs, a Congregational minister, now retired and living at the State University at Norman, Oklahoma. Charter members were, J. W. Scroggs, Mrs. J. W. Scroggs, A. W. Timberlake, Kate Wolf, Mrs. Margurite Cox, Margurite Ironsides, Mrs. A. W. Timberlake.

#### OLDEST MISSIONARY SOCIETY

The Congregational Missionary Society was the oldest Missionary society to be established in Vinita, being organized in February, 1880, and has never missed a meeting and has never taken a vacation. I joined this church in 1880 and have been an active member in the church constantly since that time.

The first Congregational church was built on South Scrapper Street, just south of the present site of the Crowder Hotel. The new church building on South Smith Street was built in 1909.

#### WORCESTER ACADEMY ESTABLISHED

Somewhere in the early 60's the Congregational church, through its pastor, J. W. Scroggs, established the Worcester Academy, on the north side of the block now

\$100,000 for buildings and teachers, before any High School was established in Vinita. After statehood the city schools took over the building and grounds, and promised to pay for them, but so far nothing has been paid. The building was condemned, and re-modeled into a ward school building.

#### EARLY DAY GROCER

After my marriage to Mr. Swain he sold his saddle business out and established a grocery store at the corner of Illinois and South Second Street, where we remained in business until 1920.

Mr. Swain built us a nice 6 room brick residence on North Wilson Street in 1895, which we later sold to Morris Knight, who built on to it and made a nice apartment house out of it, which he named in honor of me, calling it "Rebecca Rooms."

Back in Territorial Days a white man could not own a store, or any other kind of business in his own name, so our grocery business was all done in the name of R. M. Swain, which were my initials.

My step-father had a store where Burchhalter's Funeral Home now stands, and they lived in the old Frisco rooming house, which was located next door, west.



SOME OLD RELICS

I have an old Grand Piano which was hauled overland in an ox wagon from Lynchburg, Virginia by the Breedlove girls. I also have three beautiful old oil paintings of enlarged pictures, given me by Mrs. Narcissa Owens, painted by her own hand. She is the mother of ex-senator, Robert L. Owens.