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BARNES, JOHN H.

INTERVIEW

#6610

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An interview with John H. Barnes,
Box 171, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Mr. Barnes told of Captain W. L. Couch's last attempt to settle near Stillwater. This was in 1885, after Payne's death.

The Couch Colony made camp on the southeast side of the present Stillwater, where Boomer Creek empties into Stillwater Creek.

Here, on the north side of Stillwater Creek and the west side of Boomer Creek, they built an underground fort, a series of dugouts.

The neabby cattlemen, of course, complained and got the government to send troops to remove the colonists. A group of colored troops, under white leadership, camped near and leaders on both sides conferred probably two or three^{days}. The leader of the troops being very lenient and not wanting any unnecessary bloodshed, finally gave Couch the ultimatum, to move out peaceably or to be shelled out.

The troops, in the meantime, had sent a courier back to Wichita, Kansas, the army headquarters, to find out what to do about Couch.

Couch surrendered peaceably and the colonists were returning with the soldiers when the courier

was met coming from army headquarters. This meeting was just north of Stillwater, near Black Bear Creek, and the courier brought word that about thirty-four of its colonists were to be arrested and brought to Wichita, the rest to be freed.

When the troops first arrived near the Couch Camp, a bunch of cattlemen and cowboys had a cattle herd nearby. The cowboys drew numbers or gambled some way to see who would have to hold the herd while the others went to see the battle, which of course did not happen.

Couch finally met his death where Oklahoma City now stands.

The occasion was a dispute over some property. Couch was on the property and had hauled a load of fence posts and had them in a pile. There was a ditch nearby, having been dug for drainage or some such purpose. The other man (Couch's enemy) got in the ditch and Couch behind the fence posts, and they shot at each other with rifles from these positions. Couch was shot in the knee and later died from gangrene.

Mr. John H. Barnes and the Stillwater lawyer, Frank Lowry, now deceased, were at Arkansas City,

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Kansas, just before the Opening of '89. They came to Stillwater on horseback with a wagon train of many families bringing their livestock, and everything. They were accompanied by some soldiers and scouts who would ride ahead and get camping spots where water and wood were available.

People were traveling horseback, mule back, buggies, carts, wagons, and on foot; any way to get to their destination. They first thought they would have to start from the Kansas line but someone, probably a politician, arranged through the Secretary of the Interior, for their passage through the Cherokee Strip to the north side of Old Oklahoma, thus giving them an equal chance with the ones coming in from the south.

The trip from Arkansas City took about four days.

Mr. Lowry and Mr. Barnes both successfully obtained places at Stillwater.