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James R. Carselowey
Research Field Worker

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A. L. CHURCHILL, DECEASED
Vinita, Oklahoma

Here is a man who has died, while living at Vinita, and all of his relatives have left the state. He was one of Vinita's pioneer business men and has done much for the up-building of the city and county and I deem it my duty to tell you the few facts I have found out about him, from friends, yet living in Vinita.

A. Lud Churchill was born at Windsor, Missouri on December 20, 1868 and died at the Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota in 1928, at the age of 60 years. He attended the public schools of Windsor and was a student at William Jewell College, Liberty, Missouri. He went to St. Louis at the age of 17 years and was employed by a wholesale dry goods company and later was employed by the Margadine-McMittrick Dry Goods Company and became general salesman for the Indian Territory. He had a wide acquaintance in the Territory and he selected Vinita as the place to enter business and make his home.

On December 23, 1890, Mr. Churchill and Miss Mamie S. Squires were united in marriage at Windsor, Mo. To this union a daughter and a son were born. The daughter, Mrs. Helen Slock, of Silkeston, Mo. survives. The son died in infancy. Mrs. Churchill died January 2, 1924.

In 1898 Mr. Churchill moved with his family to Vinita and entered the mercantile business with W. T. Wade who at that time was operating the "Jumbo Store", carrying a line of dry goods.

In 1903 he went to the First National Bank of Vinita as its cashier and in 1908 became active vice-president, which position he held until 1924

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when he retired because of failing health, but remained with the bank as vice-president and chairman of the Board of Directors. He was also president and a director in the Vinita Building and Loan Association and a director and vice-president of the American Jersey Cattle Club. He established a Jersey cattle ranch joining the city of Vinita on the southwest and named it "Windsor Place". He had become nationally known as a raiser of prize cattle and "Windsor Place" has long been noted for its Jersey cattle and has been a show place of the southwest, even before statehood.

Mr. Churchill was well known in financial circles of the state and in 1900 served as president of the Oklahoma Bankers' Association. In 1919 he was instrumental in the organization of a Rotary Club in Vinita and was its first president and even after his health failed he took considerable pride in keeping up his attendance at the weekly luncheons. He was a member and an officer in the Presbyterian Church of Vinita and a Shriner of the Muskogee Commandry.

While his body was taken back to Windsor, his former home, for burial, it was his request that it be brought back to Vinita for the funeral services. The services were held at "Windsor Place", his Vinita home, under direction of Dr. Talrade Witt, a former pastor, now of St. Louis, assisted by the present pastor, Dr. F. E. Barrier.

and thus another of our pioneer city builders passes from the field of action.

Chauncey C. Moore, supervisor
Indian-Pioneer History, S-149

March 25, 1937

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James R. Carselowey
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Interview: Felix G. Cowan
Vinita, Oklahoma

My name is Felix G. Cowan. I was born in Woodford County, Illinois, on July 27, 1866 and moved to Missouri in 1873. In 1874 I came to the Indian Territory with my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Cowan, and settled on Cowskin Prairie, then Delaware District, Cherokee Nation, Indian Territory.

In the spring of 1876 we moved to Vinita, at that time the town was going under the name of Downingsville. The town plat, on record at the County Clerk's office shows that Downingsville was platted in 1871. The plat shows both M. & T. and Frisco Railroads as having entered the city when the plat was made. The town was then at its present location but had been moved a few years previous from a point down the Katy track called Mulwe Switch, at this time, but the town was established there under the name of Downingsville and was moved two miles north at the junction of the two railroad crossings, after the railroads were built.

The Frisco made their original survey down on Cabin Creek near the town of Downingsville but abandoned the survey on account of the rough condition of the land, and made another survey where the Frisco now crosses the M. & T.

The United States Government had made an offer of every other alternate section of land through the Indian Territory to the first railroad to enter the Territory and the two roads were racing to see which would reach the state first. The Katy won, by a narrow margin, and was already here and established before the Frisco reached the town. When the Frisco reached Downingsville, the Katy placed box cars on their tracks and would not let the Frisco cross their track. They squabbled for some time before they got the matter set-

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tled. Finally the Frisco built their track right up to the Katy track and when dark came they took a Frisco engine and dumped the box car off the track and proceeded to build their track during the night. Nothing was ever done about it and the Frisco built on out as far as Cabin Creek and that was the end of their line for several years. They built a round table and turned their engines around and went back to St. Louis. At that time only a few scattered buildings distinguished the town from the remainder of an endless expanse of green prairie. Practically all of the business houses were east of the I. M. & N. track. There were a few scattered business houses in the one block west of the I. M. & N. track.

Enters Business.

In 1864 I entered a partnership with George Merson and we opened a billiard parlor. Our new business proved to be a great success, and we operated it until 1866, when our place of business was destroyed by fire.

Gets Married

In 1866 I married Lula Murray, a step-daughter of Robert A. Tittle of Anita, Indian Territory, and lived with her some twenty odd years when we separated and I married the second time to Mrs. Rebekah Blair of Indian Territory, Iowa. We spent our honeymoon visiting my second wife's estate in the state of Washington where she owned some valuable timber land covered with cedar and fir trees. One large cedar tree on the place made enough lumber to build a five room house on the place, in addition to a smokehouse, a hen house, wood shed, cellar and enough lumber to fence the yard and garden. The tree was 16 feet in diameter and 100 feet high. The fir trees on the place grew as high as 100 feet. The place was located between the towns of Seattle and Portland and we sold it to a timber company for saw-mill purposes.

Enters New Business

Up to 1866 I had made considerable money and there was no bank here to

keep it in. The custom those days was to deposit the money with some merchant for which he would give you a receipt and he would lock the money up in a safe.

I was always uneasy for fear some one would blow the safe and one day Bob Blakeny, a live wire grocery clerk, approached and wanted to sell me some lots on what is now Wilson Street, and today is Vinita's main business section. Blakeny said he had just received a telegram from his father, George Blakeny, who was post master at Leosho, Missouri, saying that he thought he was short in his account with the government and to sell his three lots on South Wilson Street and lend him \$500.00 as soon as he could. I paid him the amount but he wrote his son a few days later that he had only made a mistake in his figures and that he was not short but I had the lots and today I have three brick buildings on them, in the heart of the best business section of Vinita. The deed he sent me was a quit claim deed and was as much out of date here in the Territory as a new automobile would have been those days. All you got here when you transferred a town lot was a bill of sale.

When our billiard parlor burned I dissolved partnership with another and built me a frame store building on my new lots. There was no market here for poultry, eggs and chickens those days, so I decided to open a feed store and buy the farmers' produce. They were so glad to get a market that I did a land office business from the very start. I began buying hides and furs and before very long I added a stock of groceries. I continued in the grocery business in Vinita for 32 years.

Enters Politics

Shortly after statehood I was elected as County Commissioner from the third district and while in office, we let the contract for the building of the present new court houses which is one of the best in the state.

In 1918, I retired from the grocery business and the following year I was appointed as steward of the Eastern Oklahoma Hospital at Vinita, a new establishment which had just been started in 1915. It was my duties to handle

the commissary and I held the place until April 1, 1931 under the Murray regime.

When the hospital was first established they were very scarce of room for both patients and employees. I drove from town for some time but this got so burdensome that I took a one room apartment in the Violent Ward in the basement. It was about as noisy as trying to sleep on a railroad right-of-way but we soon got used to it.

I have served as a member of the City Council, all told for a period of 19 years and was a member when the present city water works was build to Grand River. I have seen Vinita grow from a village of only a few hundred to a city of the first class with a population of 5,000.