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Interview: Donnie (Parks) Couch
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My name is Donnie (Parks) Couch, a Cherokee by blood, of the Cherokee Nation. I was born in Tennessee on July 12, 1855. I came with my father and mother to the Indian Territory in 1866.

My father's name was George Washington Parks.

My mother's maiden name was Louise Spriggs.

George Washington Parks is the son of Samuel Parks and Susan Taylor. Susan Taylor is the daughter of Richard Taylor and Jennie Taylor. Jennie Taylor is the daughter of John Walker and Catherine, a full-blood Cherokee and Catherine is the daughter of Kingfish and Chi-ga-u. Chi-ga-u, after the death of Kingfish, married Bryant Ward and was afterward known as Nancy Ward.

My father's brothers and sisters who came here with him from Tennessee in 1866 are: Ruth Parks, who married Dick Price, Alaire Parks, married James Price and had no children, Jennie Parks, married John Langley, and Joseph Collier, and had no children, George was in the army, married Louise Spriggs and had eight children, Thomas Jefferson Parks, married Mary Ann Thompson, Richard Taylor Parks, married Sarah Elizabeth Day, and Sarah Elizabeth Crigson and had children, John Parks, married Alaire Wilson and Arie McDonald and had children, William Parks, never married, Mary Ann Parks, married William James Day, Robert Colburn Parks, married Clara Rider, John Ross Parks, never married, Samuel Parks, married Sarah G. Miller but had no children.

My brothers and sisters that came to the Indian Territory with my parents are, Susan C. Parks, who married Thomas Fox Thompson, Cherokee, died single, Sam Parks, married but had no children, Lucy Parks, married James W. Skinner

and had six children, George Parks and Morgan Parks, deceased, Donnie Parks, married L. C. (Wren) Couch in 1881 and had four children, George, deceased, Montie, deceased, Lucy married Tom Allen and Lee Couch, married and his children.

Here before Vinita

We settled on Cain Creek in Delaware District, Cherokee Nation, within a mile from where the town of Downingsville sprang up a few years later and was later changed to Vinita. I can't remember the exact date the first store was put in at Downingsville but it was between the time we came in 1830 and 1870.

When the first survey of the N. W. 1/4 was made, the surveyors said they were to put a town every thirty miles, or about thirty miles, according to the lay of the ground. Preparations were at once made for a town and a store went in. Another man built a fine two story hotel, which was later purchased by Cyrus S. Bernatzer, a Shawnee Indian, and the house was made over into a residence. He and his family took their allotments at the place.

Place was a wilderness

But I don't exactly need to say more. When we landed the country was a wilderness. There wasn't a house, and I don't think there were any other people and we had no place to live, except the camp at night. It wasn't very safe. My father began to be afraid for his people and he began to build a brick building. It was a big brick building, three stories high, and it was built on a hill. The river was on one side and the land was on the other. The Indians were afraid of the whites and they were afraid of the whites. They fled to the hills, leaving their horses and cattle behind, and they became wild horses and cattle. The house belonged to Johnson Thompson.

My father rented the old brick building which had no doors and windows in it and he hung quilts over the doors and windows as long as we stayed there. The wolves would come right up to the door and howl and we were always afraid they would come in the house, but they never did.

My father and brothers went right to work building a log cabin on our new found place but had to go to Oetopa, Kansas to buy their doors and windows as that was the nearest lumber yard. We bought our groceries from Johnson's store on the old Military trail. The best I can remember his store was located about three miles due west of where the town of Hetchum is now located on Mustang Creek. Cattle and dogs were so wild that they would chase you every time they caught sight of you and we had to be very careful.

While we were living in the brick house across the river, the girls used to like going down on the river bank, just a little ways from the house, to watch these wild cattle swim the river. It was the first one every day because one day a fine young heifer spied our hiding place and began to raise her head and come toward us. We knew it was time to go so we rode for the house. It was a race for life and death and we just barely got inside the gate in time to save ourselves.

We stayed in the brick house less than a year, when we moved to the log cabin built where the present site of the W. G. Hawkins place is now located, three miles south of Vinita. My sister, Ruth, was the youngest of the family and took the old home place for her allotment for herself and children. The grass was so high along Cabin Creek when we first came that you could just see the top of a man's hat riding through the grass on a horse. Wild dogs were so bad in the cree bottom that it was unsafe to go down in the bottoms. Wolves were also bad and made it hard to raise chickens. Prairie chickens, wild turkeys, deer and quail were plentiful, to say nothing of the wild dogs that there was no one to claim, that we always had plenty of meat.

Another settler came

In 1870, Jim Hall and his wife came to our place looking for a location. They had just married and settled just a few miles southwest of our place, on the east side of the M. K. & T. They lived there until he became one of the

largest cattle men in northeastern Oklahoma, when they moved to Vinita where they both died, after becoming very wealthy. The place where they first settled still belongs to their estate.

Downingsville is born

The town of Downingsville was born just a mile west of where we built our first log cabin about a mile south of Cabin Creek and about two miles south of the present town of Vinita. The first arisco survey showed their crossing of the N. N. & T. near the new town of Downingsville, south of Cabin Creek, but Corneliusoudinot, then the leading Cherokee attorney, Johnson Thompson, Colonel J. M. Bell and others got busy with the railroad officials and had the survey changed, about three miles north to where the present town of Vinita is now located. They then fenced off two miles square at the crossing and prepared for a townsite to be built wherever the road might cross. They were successful in getting the crossing moved and the town soon moved northward to the railroad crossing.

Cherokee Nation Steps In

There was so much friction come up over the wayoudinot and his bunch had handled the location of the town that the Cherokee nation stepped in and declared it unlawful, tore their fences down and proceeded to lay out a townsite at the place the railroads had crossed.

Town is platted in 1871

The town of Downingsville was platted by the Cherokee nation in 1871 and the first town lot was sold in February, 1872, to Marti Thompson. This was at the new location. The town went under the name of Downingsville for some time and through the efforts of Corneliusoudinot who had gone as a delegate to Washington, he had it changed to the name of Vinita. He had known the noted sculptress, Winnie Ream, in Washington, and had the town named after her.

Early Day Livery man

My husband and I lived on our farm near the old home place until the early 90's when we moved to Vinita, built the house at 25 South Vann St., where I am now living and went into the livery business. He started his barn on the east side of the N. K. & T. track, the first door north of the road two story building, built by Johnson Thompson. W. D. Kaines later went in with him and they made the place twice as large as it had been and operated there for several years before moving to South Wilson St. where they located across the alley, south of Felix Brown's grocery store. They were in a frame building and the place has been torn down and is now occupied by the Pittsburg furniture store. A fine two story brick building is on the lot.

John Gunter owned a big livery business just across the street from us where the highway store is now located. In those early days, these two livery stables were the only ones that no one ever dreamed of the business district overtaking them, but it has passed them and gone on south for another half mile.

My husband, D. C. (Dren) Couch died May 17, 1941 and was buried in the City (Interview) cemetery. My father, W. W. Parks, was elected Supreme Judge in 1881. He is buried at the old home place, a family plot.