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Interview: Ruth K. (Parks) Hawkins

My name is Ruth K. Hawkins. I live at the corner of Canadian and Brewer Sts., Vinita, Oklahoma. I was born March 23, 1866, the year my parents came to the Indian Territory from Tennessee.

I was married to Madison G. Hawkins, a white man, on November 23, 1887, at the home of my parents on Cabin Creek. To this union five children were born as follows: Louisa, who married Joe C. Skirvin of Labelle, Mo.; Drake, who married LaDonne Paula of Chicago; Madison, who married Mary Chandler of Vinita; Joyce, who married Bruce Rice of Miami, Oklahoma and Tom, who at this time is still single.

My husband, Madison G. Hawkins, died on September 4, 1925.

My father's name was George Washington Parks.

My mother's name was Louisa Spriggs.

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

I am the youngest of my parents' children and the only one that was born in the Indian Territory. There were eight children in all. The rest of my brothers and sisters who came from Tennessee with my parents in 1866 are as follows: Susan C. Cherokee; Samuel, Lucy, George, Margan and Donnie.

#### Father In Government Service

My father, George W. Parks, was born in Munroe County, Tennessee, March 20, 1820 and emigrated with his father and family to the Indian Territory in 1838. He had received a common school education and at eighteen years of age

was appointed Wagon master by General Wingfield Scott, who conducted the ~~232~~ Cherokeees to their new home in the Indian Territory. My father remained in the Indian Territory for two years, after which he returned to his home in Cleveland, Tennessee. After his father's death in 1840 he embarked in the dry goods business with a capital of \$4000.00.

In 1841 George Washington Parks was elected as mayor of Cleveland, Tenn. which position he held for six years. In 1852 he joined the Masonic Fraternity at Cleveland and there took the Royal Arch degree, filling almost all of the stations of the Blue Lodge and Chapter, but never affiliated with the order, after going to the Indian Territory.

#### Returns to Cherokee Nation

In 1866 my father sold out his dry goods business in Tennessee and returned to the I. T. but the war had shattered his fortune and he arrived in the new country with only two good wagons and teams and \$9.00 in money.

We settled on Cabin Creek three miles south of the present site of Vinita but there was no town there and no settlement along the creek. My father thought it an ideal place to build although the place looked like a wilderness. Our first problem was to find a house to live in until we could build. My father and brothers set out looking for a house and finally found one about fifteen miles away, that had been abandoned during the war, which had just closed. It was a big old brick building located on the south bank of the Grand river, with all of the doors and windows out. We moved in and hung quilts over the doors to keep out the cold and wolves and the men folks went back to our building place and started building a log cabin which we moved into and lived in for several years before we were able to build another house. It was thirty miles to Neosho and about the same to Chetopa, Kansas and my father had to make those long drives to secure windows and doors. We bought our groceries from Johnson Thompson's store, which was located on the old Military trail, on Mustang Creek. It was he that my father rented the old brick building from on Grand river.

## Surveyors Come

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We had not been in our new location long, before a bunch of railroad surveyors camped on the creek and we were told that a railroad was going to be built through the Cherokee Nation and on into Texas. This was great news to my father if for no other reason than that we might get a trading point. In a little while another bunch of surveyors came surveying a road east and west. The first bunch was for the M.K. & T. and the second bunch was for the Atlantic and Pacific, which later became the Frisco System. We learned later that the government had offered the first railroad to enter the Territory every other alternate section of land along the right-of-way and the two roads were racing to reach the Territory first. The Katy beat by a narrow margin and a town was started within a mile of my father's place and they called the place, Downingsville. Some man rushed in and built a fine hotel, two stories high and had it all painted up white but that was three miles south of where the town was finally built. The Frisco crossed the Katy three miles north of the first town that was laid off and that was known as the Junction. In 1871, the town of Downingsville was platted and the first town lot was sold by the Cherokee Nation and the man who had built the new hotel had the building left on his hands. He later sold the building and ground to Cyrus C. Cornatzer, a race horse man, who with his family took his allotment there. The farm was sold after statehood to C. B. Hughes of Vinita and after standing for 66 years it burned to the ground on April 1, 1937.

## Was Supreme Judge

In 1880 George Washington Parks was elected as Associate Supreme Judge of the Cherokee Nation with offices at Tahlequah, the national capitol, which office he held until death, which occurred in November 1883.

## Still Owns Old Home

I took my allotment for myself and family on the old homestead which my father settled in 1866 and we are all still in possession of them. My son, Madison Hawkins lives on the old place while I live in a home my husband built before his death, at the corner of Canadian and Brewer Sts. Vinita, Okla.