

by C. Guy Cutler

WEWOKA--BARKING WATERS

During the war between the states the Seminole Indians were divided in their loyalty, many of the more influential citizens and officers of the tribe going with the southern cause under General Gaines of Texas and the others remaining loyal to the union as a matter of principal on the theory that if they rebelled all the treaties they had made with the Government that guaranteed the reservations and lands would be voided. Those who remained loyal to the north and during the war sojourned at LeRoy Kansas as refugees. After the war had been concluded and peace declared those indians of the Seminole Nation who were located at LeRoy Kansas made no move to get back to the Indian Territory, and finally the government designated one E.J. Brown to take such steps as were necessary in getting the Seminoles back to their reservation in the Indian Territory. Brown was a white man and former resident of New York State but had come west in the confidence of his early manhood to pioneer a new civilization for that section of the United States. It was he who conducted the Seminoles back to their lands in the Indian Territory and it was he who founded the city of Wewoka in 1866, he established a small trading post on the south bank of Wewoka Creek and built him a home in what is now almost the center of the city, being at the corner of Sycamore street and Mekusukey Avenue, the same being more familiarly known as the Judge H.M. Tate residence property. The fine old black walnut trees about the place now were planted by Brown in 1867 and the old home well may still be seen in the alley back of the Tate residence..

The town was named Wewoka which means Barking waters in the seminole language because of some little falls that playes over the rocks just north of where Mr. Brown had established his store, and in the early days the bridge that spanned Wewoka creek was a toll bridge and was kept by Caesal Bowlegs a freedman soon after Mr. Brown had established his trading post and after the treaty of 1866 made by the five

civilized tribes with the National Government the Seminoles established and formed a government. This government was composed of members from each of the fourteen bands and was called the National Council. The Nation also elected a Principal Chief, a second Chief and the Council itself elected a Secretary who was not necessarily a member of the Council, as well as a National Treasurer. At the time of the commencement of the civil war John Jumper was Principal Chief but owing to the fact that he had joined the Confederacy the Seminoles after the formation of their government subsequent to the war elected John Chupco Principal Chief, he having been loyal to the Federal Union during the war and being really one of the great indians of the tribe. After the Government had been formed the Council of the tribe designated Wewoka as the Capitol City of the Seminole Nation and it remained such capitol of the Seminole Nation until the dissolution of the Seminole Government March 4th, 1906.

Wewoka was recognised as an important trading place by the Federal Government in the early days of 1867, and a Federal Post Office was established and a Post Master appointed in May of that year, the original and first Postmaster's commission issued by the United States Government hangs in my office at Wewoka at this time, and it recites that on "May 13th, 1867, E.J. Brown was appointed Postmaster for We-wo-ka "Seminole Nation, State of Arkansas". The Seminole Nation was attached to the State of Arkansas at that time for political purposes. E.J. Brown was not only the first Postmaster of Wewoka but he was also the first white man ever adopted into the Seminole Nation of tribe of Indians and as such a dopted citizen he received an allotment from the Tribal lands when the same were subsequently divided into allotments and distributed among the members of the tribe.

H.R. Brown, a resident of Wewoka at this time and E.J. Brown a resident of Seminole County, children of E.J. Brown were born in Wewoka. E.J. Brown died in 1914 on his allotment that he had received from the

Seminole Nation in this county. Some time in the late sixties E.J. Brown sold his trading post to Helm & Robb and they maintained the store for a few years and then Mr. Robb sold out to Courtland L. Long who was later to become a real patrioe of Wewoka and through those efforts together with that of Governor John F. Brown, Principal Chief of the Seminoles and A.J. Brown the National Treasurer, the townsite was platted and eventually opened to white settlers.

Mr. Long sold out his interest in the trading post and removed to Mound City Kansas where he went into the banking business and during the depression of 1893 retired from the banking business and returned to the Seminole Nation and intered into a partnership of the trading post with John F. Brown and A.J. Brown forming the Wewoka Trading Company.

This trading company was subsequently incorporated and ultimately became one of the outstanding commercial establishments of the Indian Territory, being at one time rated by Bradstreet & Dunn as worthy of credit to the extent of a Million Dollars. For many years the trading company maintained its place of business on the south banks of Wewoka Creek at a point almost identical with the present location of the Choctaw Cotton Gin, just south of the bridge which now spans the creek on State Highway 56 running out of Wewoka to the north. The trading company carried everything necessary in those early days for the then civilization and in fact from a Cambrick needle to a Threshing machine. In 1897 the Wewoka Trading Company erected a large stone business block on the Southeast portion of Block 20 of the original townsite of wewoka and to this they added in 1902 a modern brick business building. This stone and brick business house was located on the corner where the Cutlip building now stands and ran as far north as the Key Theatre.

A.J. Brown the National Treasurer of the Seminole Nation had his Treasury in the Wewoka Trading Company, and the headright payments were made to the citizenship from this point.

In 1895 the Choctaw Oklahoma and Gulf Railroad extended its line from McAlester Oklahoma to Shawnee through Wewoka, being the first line of railway to touch the Seminole Nation at any point, this railroad was later purchased by the Rock Island Lines.

The townsite was platted into lots and blocks in 1897 but for many years thereafter only the members of the Seminole Tribe of Indians could purchase and own town lots in the townsite. However, in the meantime I.A. Smith of Tecumseh, Oklahoma, established a store in Wewoka and built a brick building that still stand and is now occupied by the Hassen Brothers store and for many years Steve Douglas managed that store and operated the same for the Smith interests, the lots however on which the same was located was leased and not owned until the townsite itself was later opened up for that purpose.

During the days when the Wewoka Trading Company was at its best it was allowed to issue its own paper money, which the Seminoles called "Choko Sodka". This paper money was made and printed in Canada and had the same hair lined protective measures in it that the ordinary paper money of the United States has and was signed by either John F. Brown President or A.J. Brown Vice-President and C.L. Long Secretary of the Wewoka Trading Company. It was issued to the citizenship on their headright payments but was only redeemable in goods from the big store. For many years this paper money, was the principal medium of exchange in and about Wewoka and the Seminole Nation. None of it now remains in existance except possible two pieces in the hands of Ambrose Montgomery a resident of the north part of Seminole County, but at the time the old Wewoka Trading Company burned down in November, 1895 there were two or three kegs of this old paper money in the basement. It was a rather imposing sight when shipments of gold and silver were made by the National Government to the Seminole Nation to be paid out by the Wewoka Trading Company to the individuals, the shipments were made in steel cars to the Rock Island Depot and there

it was met by a light wagon drawn by the swiftest team to be found in the nation and guarded by Light Horsemen (Seminole Police) with ready carbons in their hands, it would dash up Wewoka Avenue to the waiting vaults of the Wewoka Trading Company, there to be distributed to those of the tribe who had not seen fit to take up all of their payment in Choko Sodka. The Light Horsemen remained on guard about the building until such time as the payment was completed. And during all such times, although the region was infected with some of the most desperate outlaws of the Indian Territory, no attempt was ever made to hold up the shipment or the Wewoka Trading Company.

In the meantime the Seminole Nation had builded a capitol building and Council House and was carrying on its function of government. The old Capitol Building stood just where the Seminole County Court House now stands and in fact the old building itself was removed at the time of the erection of the present Court House across the street southeast adjoining the present site of the Wewoka Times Democrat and is to-day known as the "Court Rooms". It was in this old capitol building that the Council of the tribe made and enacted their laws and it was here also that the Council tried the offenders against the laws and visited such punishment as in their judgment was adequate and just.

The Government of the Seminole was less expensive in its operations than is found in the present day governments. And punishment calculated not to incur any expenses on the citizenship, for instance if a member of the tribe was convicted of a minor offence he was sentenced to an appropriate number of lashes on the back as punishment and immediately afterwards was taken out and his hands tied together at the wrist with his feet shackled at the ankles and with a long pole placed between his feet and his hands tied up over one of the lower limbs of the now giant pecan tree at the southwest corner of the Seminole County Court House, he was whipped;

6

or if he as convicted of a major offence he was given a certain time within which to arrange his earthly affairs then seated at the old execution tree which stood just across south from the Security State Bank, and there with a marker pinned over his heart he was shot to death by Light Horsemen. At least it can be realized that the minimum of expense was required for the punishment of violators of Seminole laws. There were no jails or prisons maintained with a tremendous expense, nor were there any intricate fabric or judicial systems with its appeals and delays and excessive expenses. Their laws also provided that the third whipping of any individual would be the death punishment, and in all of my experiences of more than thirty years I have never known personally of any member of the tribe who was ever whipped more than one time, neither have I ever heard of one that was sentenced to whipping more than two times. The old execution tree itsself stands in the Historical Rooms of the Historical Building at Oklahoma City, and there the visitors may see the bullet holes in the bark of the old tree and stains upon it, perhaps the blood stains of those members of the tribe who had died to vindicate the law.