

OKMULGEE REPUBLICAN

Okmulgee, Oklahoma
Thursday, April 27, 1911
Vol. 3, No. 31
By Okmulgee Herald Co.,

HISTORY OF CREEK INDIANS

The following history of the Creek nation, which is now losing its identity as a race, was written by Mrs. W. M. Bryson, formerly the wife of a Creek Indian, A. P. McKillop, a member of the House of Kings of the Creek Council from 1880 till his death in 1903. Mrs. Bryson is one of the best authorities on Indian history in the territory, and this brief history of the Creeks should be preserved by everyone. It was read at the meeting of the Federation yesterday.

To write a history of the Creek people which would be interesting and teeming with facts to be read in the time allotted is one of some difficulty -- but with the short notice given me, and difficulty in finding data, I have formulated a short but I hope interesting sketch of these wonderful people. Years could be devoted to it and I would only find them too short in which to study this question.

Away back in the Sixteenth Century when the Spaniards were "discovering" America the Muskogee (or Creeks, as their name implies "many rivered" country) were a powerful people and when Montezuma

was defending his country against the avarice of Cortez the Muskogee's helped him, but Cortez was victorious and the Creeks rather than live subservient to the cruel conquerors moved eastward and in 1520 after a journey of six months came to Red River, where they settled for a time. The Alabama's here met them and a war followed resulting in victory for the Creeks. After travelling several years hunting and fishing and fighting they finally settled in the country now known as Alabama or Georgia.

In 1541 DeSota in his march of discovery across the continent, killing all he met and making every tribe his enemy was advised to make allies of the Creeks -- but the chief Acuera refused the proffered hand of friendship or to promise any allegiance to a people of such cruel and treacherous nations as the Spaniards had shown themselves to be and declared war upon the invaders. Even at that time they were an agricultural people for their corn was sold and given to and stolen by the Spaniards.

At this time the Muskogee people had incorporated the Asbeka, Cusseth, Coweta and Okfuskee tribes.

The Euchu, a powerful tribe living on the Savannah river was conquered and made a part of the

Creeks in 1620 and in 1703 the Tuckabotchess and Alabamas, by treaty became a part of the Confederacy which was thus formed. Later came the Hitchite, Quasarte, Taskeke, Yamase, Natchez and others.

Because of their strength and reputation for wisdom, many others came asking for alliance with the Confederacy until in 1798 it numbered 77 tribes or towns as they are now called.

Forty-nine were classed as Upper towns and twenty-eight as Lower towns.

The Tuckabatchie which had located on the Tallipoosa river was the leading town and was the seat of their capitol. Others prominent were Tulsa, Taskegi, Okfuskee, Hillabe, Antosse and Eufaula -- and among the lower was Coweta, Cussetah, Hetché Wetunka and Okmulgee were the most prominent.

Apart and without any direct connection with the other towns were the eight original clans of the Muskogees, viz: The Wind, Bear, Tiger, Deer, Bird, Raccoon, Snake and Fox. The first, second and third were most aristocratic according to precedence.

The ties of clan were even stronger than those of blood and a son in the clan relation owed and gave more strict obedience and deference than that

of tribe or family. Advice given by the Tiger clan to the Deer clan was strictly followed and no joke was permitted to be played by the Raccoon upon one of the Wind. Even to the present day among the full-blood the clan tie is strictly obeyed. Once upon a time I had occasion to know from personal experience how much it meant.

My husband belonged to the Tiger clan and a friend, a full blood was in need of advice and I gave it. He took it with great humility and obeyed it to the letter, saying that as I was of his clan mother, he must.

My husband explained this matter to me at that time at length and since it has appeared to me the most fascinating thing about the Indians. But it would take too long to unravel at this time. I also knew a friend who belonged to the Turtle clan and therefore would not kill a turtle. The clans could not marry in their own clan.

The Tuckabatches brought with them to Lallipoose in 1759 some curious brass plates, the origin and object of which has puzzled all scientific men who have examined them. There were seven of them,

two of brass, 18 inches in diameter about the thickness of a dollar and stamped with a dim "A-E" connected -- the other five are of copper.

The tradition is that these were given them by their ancestors and they were kept sacredly by the Muicco or King and only used annually on the occasion of the Green Corn Dance or Busk, at which time the prophet used them in the ceremony.

This Busk or Green Corn Dance is a ceremony still observed by the conservative Indians, and is the only one of great importance of national origin of which we have knowledge. It is a religious ceremony and one of Thanksgiving for the corn crop. It is observed when the corn becomes eatable and no one is allowed to touch it until after the "Busk" when they purify themselves with the black drink which is an emetic. There is always a "square" in town and the Town King is in charge of the square which has seats on four sides. The men sit and drink the medicine until they have performed their part. After this the fire is lighted and the men and women dance around it and feast for several days. It has been my great pleasure to attend several Busks of the Coweta Town and the ceremony impressed me

with its meaning -- although it is greatly abused at this present age and has lost much of its seriousness and former meaning to many.

The Creek Confederacy was ruled by one Great Chief chosen from the original tribe (the Muskogee) in early days, but after the beginning of the Nineteenth century the chiefs were chosen from Tuckabatches and Cowetas, the Towns of Chiefs.

Each town had its own chief or Micco who was called by town name as "Coweta Micco."

Subordinate to the Great Chief were two chiefs -- one of the Upper and one of the Lower towns chosen from Tuckabatche and Coweta respectively. These were the War Chiefs or Tustenugger (Warrior) Chief. When war was to be declared the Tustenugger sent to the town chief a stick painted red. The Town Chief would call his warriors together by drum beating and after the required number of warriors were secured the war party would purify themselves by taking medicine before departing on the journey to war.

This of itself showed that they were governed by a deep religious fervor and deference to a Higher Power on whom they depended for help in all of their affairs.

Many ceremonies common to the Creeks and especially the Uchees, tend to show Asiatic origin -- The purification of women who at regular periods retire into solitude and at child birth the retirement is strictly observed.

At these times the plates, spoons, etc., are only used at that time and by her alone. This seems to be identical with the written law of the Bible Lev. XII -- 2-5.

It is the people of a country who make history and one of the early men of prominence was Tecumseh, who was born of a Creek father and a Shawnee mother. In 1789 he was active in the war against the whites and in 1792 defeated the celebrated Union Kentow with nearly four times the number of whites.

He was a noted fighter, a wonderful orator and a man of very strong character.

Menawa, War Chief from the Okfuskee Town was another chief of undoubted valor and leadership -- We have his decendants among us today in this district.

Weatherford was another who caused the white people much hard fighting and loss of life and was brave enough to surrender himself voluntarily and alone -- when Jackson told the Creeks he

would make peace when Weatherford was surrendered.

Opothleyoholo was a great speaker and councillor while Menewa was chief of the Upper towns.

McIntosh, chief of the Lower towns was in favor of a treaty to sell their lands and Opothleyoholo was not. At a meeting at Broken Arrow he told McIntosh to be aware of signing the treaty -- but McIntosh signed it and was immediately executed according to the law at that time.

During the Revolution the Creeks took sides with the English -- Many of our Creek names may be traced to the English soldiers and the Highlanders of Scotland and numerous progeny of titled families are found in our Creek families of today. I know one family who trace their ancestry back to the Austrian Emperor. Another who has in their archives heirlooms of George Washington -- others who claim decent from Sir John Marshall -- Among the McGilroy, the McIntosh and Barnetts we find representatives of the Scotch Clans. Yohola Micco and Paddy Carr were two other warriors of note at the close of the Eighteenth century. The latter was of Irish father and Creek mother and a very shrewd man -- a smart and intelligent trader and interpreter. At the age of

thirty he owned 80 slaves, lands, horses and cattle. Many race horses as they were his great favorites, frequently riding his own races. His decendants are citizens of the Creek Nation today.

The treaty to sell the lands was signed by McIntosh at Indian Springs February 12, 1825. In 1827 the first immigration took place under the leadership of Chilley McIntosh, and finally by 1832 the majority of the Confederacy had been forced to move to the Western country and settle in a new land.

Much hardship was experienced and many died enroute.

Chilly McIntosh became leader of the Southern Creeks in the Civil War and Chief of the Lower town and was succeeded by Roley McIntosh. Opothleyoholo kept his chieftaincy of the Upper town and was succeeded by Temarchee Micco. Then Tuchabatche Micco followed by Deere, the last of the Upper town chief during the old Constitution. Roley McIntosh was succeeded by Motey Canard and afterward by Checote during whose term of office the New Constitution was made.

The present form of government that is consti-

tution and by-laws (which is now only a form) was modeled upon the U. S. Constitution and old Creek Code combined.

The framers of this constitution were D. N. McIntosh, David Jodge, S. W. Perryman, Coneto Micco and James McHenry. Only David Hodges remains alive today of the committee who in 1866 modeled the Constitution under which the Creek Nation lived and thrived until the U. S. Congress passed the Dawes Bill which took from the Indians their authority and sounded their death knell as a Nation, and separate people. Since the adoption of the New Constitution the Creek government had consisted of 47 towns. These were represented by one King or Micco each and representatives according to population and at the last session of the Council there were 102 warriors in the Lower House.

The chief was elected every four years as were the Kings and Warriors. The Treasurer and Supreme Judges, District Judges, Prosecuting Attorney, Light Horsemen and Police. It was my good fortune to attend with my husband many sessions of the Creek Council, regular and special, for 18 years, to assist in the clerical work of the Warriors and act as clerk for

the Educational, Finance and Census Committees as well as serve as private secretary for the Principal chief Hence my acquaintance with the people who operated the government was most intimate. Assisting in campaigns and elections and law making etc., has given me an insight which few have been privileged and it is my sincere opinion that the Indians are the most perfect politicians the world has ever known.

Of the many treaties made with the Creeks -- 1790-1803-18-21-25 the burden was cession by the Creeks of their lands and boundary of a gradually lessening territory until at the last treaty of 1825 the last of the land was finally sold by McIntosh for which his death could not atone and in 1827 the Creeks began their immigration to the New Land and west of the Mississippi. Many hardships were suffered in the long journey and many died on the trail. The old and the sick being unable to survive it. Then came the struggle for a livelihood which would have been impossible but for the numerous kinds of game abounding -- Of their final end we know -- Of the allotting of land and gradually one by one their prerogatives of holding the various offices

have dwindled to the Principal Chief and Secretary. The schools have been taken out of their hands by the U. S. to be better (?) managed.

However the Creek treasury still does duty by paying many of the expenses of education, allaying epidemics, etc.

Few of the relics of the people survive. Now and then a basket and bead work are found but are very rare. The last pattern worker known died recently. Perhaps a half dozen of the hatchet pipes are in existence. The Buffalohorn spoon is a great rarity. Moccasins are unknown and we do not know the peculiar style of the Creek moccasin as we do those of the Cheyenne, Kiowa and others.

With the passing of this nation goes a great people, of which little history is written but such as we know is of great interest.

The impress of their personality will long be felt and will I hope be remembered with a sigh for a people that are a vanished race.