

The full story regarding Big Jim's plan to move to Mexico with his followers and sell their land in Oklahoma is still not known, and the full details may never come out. Only the highlights are given here. It can only be stated here that this plan was probably conceived in desperation, and may have represented the last-ditch measures of Big Jim and his conservative followers, who, more than anything, wanted only to be allowed to live their lives the way they thought best. To them the carrying on the traditional Shawnee way of life and the preserving of the Shawnee language and customs were the most important things in life. They felt themselves threatened by a government that was enforcing unwanted change on the Indian people. They probably regarded the men on the Business Committee as "selling out" to the white men because they were dealing with the government officials. On the other hand the members of the Business Committee probably thought they were doing the best for their people by going along with the government policy when they had no choice, and working the agents and other officials to get the best measures enacted. This kind of conflict among the Absentee Shawnees as to how to deal with government policy--escape from it or go along with it--is not unusual. Almost every Indian tribe has experienced this kind of conflict, including hard feeling between the members of different sides. The recent histories of most Indian tribes to a great extent are histories of the disagreements of various groups as to how to go along with government Indian policy.

In 1899 Chief White Turkey died and left no descendant. He was reported to be the last of the pure blooded Hathewilla Shawnees. John King was the next in line for the chieftanship, but he refused to accept the position. He was already a member of the Business Committee and felt that he could exercise more real authority in that capacity.

The summer of 1900 Big Jim and a few followers went to Mexico to find a place to move. Thomas Wildcat Alford's son, David, was one of the men who accompanied him. The Mexican Kickapoos were living at Nacimenco in the Mexican state of Coahuila. An epidemic of smallpox was raging there and the Shawnees were all exposed to the disease. They decided to return to Oklahoma. David left secretly on horseback and managed to get home before he came down with the sickness. However he died on September 29. The rest of the Shawnees were quarantined and detained at the town of Sabinas, for the Mexican officials found out they had been exposed to smallpox. There Big Jim died of smallpox on September 30. He was buried on the bank of the river without ceremony. Only two members of the party escaped death and returned eventually to Oklahoma. A few years later Big Jim's son, Little Jim, became chief.

The recent history of the Absentee Shawnees is not considered here in detail. Oklahoma became a state on November 16, 1907. The plan to move to Mexico never worked out, though apparently many of Big Jim's followers dreamed about it for many years. The Shawnee Boarding School was closed in 1907 and from then on Shawnee children attended the public schools. The Absentee Shawnees have been affected by government Indian policy and non-Indian international events affecting the United States.

The Wheeler-Howard Act, passed by Congress June 1, 1934, was the beginning of a "New Deal" or greatly changed government policy and affected Indians all over the country. This act did not affect the Absentee Shawnees well so Congress soon passed the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act (sometimes referred to as the Thomas-Rogers Bill) on June 26, 1936. This act provides that any ten or more members of any Oklahoma Indian tribe can organize for their common welfare and adopt a constitution and by-laws under certain rules and regulations, and secure