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Life and Experiences of a  
Creek Indian Woman

Mrs. Mary Lewis Herrod

By Mrs. F.H.A. Ahrens, Wagoner, Oklahoma.

One of the most prominent, and best known citizen of the Creek Nation during Indian Territory days, was Mrs. Mary Lewis Herrod, daughter of John and Louisa Kernels Lewis. She was born in the early 40's (exact date unknown) at a little Indian village on the Verdigris River near the present site of Okay in the Cherokee Nation.

There was a compact between the Cherokees and Creeks that allowed them to live and own property in either Nation. The little settlement was composed largely of Creeks. Mrs. Herrod's parents belonged to the "Wind Clan" and the "Thlekathka or Broken Arrow Town." The English interpretation of the Creek word Thlekathka is Broken Arrow.

At school age, Mrs. Herrod was placed in Tulahassee Mission, at Tulahassee. Reverend Robertson was in charge of the school, assisted by Mr. Lockridge. Miss Thompson was matron. Pleasant Porter, afterward Chief of the Creeks, was a student in the school at that time. After completing the prescribed course of study she began teaching near Tulahassee. She also taught at Newogufkee Town. The people of that town, as the little communities were designated, were of the highest type of citizenship; none ever having been

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brought to court for any offense. Mrs. Herrod was the first woman to teach in the Creek National Schools and the first to teach English to the pupils.

It was a difficult problem and she was at a loss as to just how to begin. She solved the question by using the object lessons, connecting a word with a picture. In that way, the children learned to read. She then taught among the Euchees. That, too, was a difficult problem as she did not understand or speak the Euchee language.

In the late 50's, she taught at North Fork Town near Eufaula, where she was married to Goliath Herrod, a full blood Creek. He had attended school in Kentucky and was a graduate from a Baptist College in Danville, Kentucky.

On returning to his home in the Territory, he served as interpreter for Doctor Buckner, a prominent Baptist Missionary in the Territory at that time. At the beginning of the Civil War, he enlisted in the Confederate Army and served through the duration of the war. His company was engaged in many battles throughout the Territory including the noted battle at Honey Springs on Honey Creek near the town of Checotah. At the close of the war, Mr. Herrod settled at North Fork, near Eufaula, where he died shortly after.

Being left to her own resources, Mrs. Herrod again turned her attention to school work and was appointed matron at Asbury Mission, a Methodist School, near Eufaula. Reverend Young Ewing, a Methodist Missionary, was in charge at the time. She also served as matron at Wealaka Mission where the present town of Wealaka is now located.

On retiring from active school service, she located at Eufaula, where she owned and operated the Herrod Hotel, which was well known for many years among the Indians for its hospitality and good food.

Mrs. Herrod's highest ambition was to be of service to her own people. Always ready to advise and guide them through their difficulties. Their spiritual as well as their material welfare, was a matter of deep concern to her. On one occasion when a company of Creeks' became reckless and dissatisfied and thought of leaving the Indian Territory and colonizing in Old Mexico, she met with them and admonished them to remain in their own country, a united people. She attended the meetings of the Creek Councils at Okmulgee and kept informed on all affairs of their government. Mrs. Herrod was a true southerner, having lived in Indian Territory during Civil War days

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when the country was ravished and property destroyed by the invading army from the North. She never forgot the awful injustice perpetrated upon the Indians who had tried to remain neutral and agreed among themselves to abide by the outcome of the conflict, either side being victorious.

Mrs. Herrod's parents, with all other Indians who tried to remain in the Territory during the struggle, lost all they possessed. She was also a true Indian and believed that they were thoroughly capable of handling their<sup>own</sup> affairs without the interference of the United States Government or any of its agencies. Mrs. Herrod was bitterly opposed to statehood in any form, particularly did she not want to be joined to Oklahoma Territory, which at that time was supposed to be populated with an undesirable class of people. So strong was she in her opposition she said that "if the Indian Territory was admitted as a state with Oklahoma Territory and the name Oklahoma adopted, I will never write another letter if I can't write Indian Territory on my letters." And she never did.

Mrs. Herrod communicated with all the Indians she could reach and asked them to meet at the various churches and

school houses on the fifteenth day of November, 1907, the last day of the existence of the Indian Territory as a Territory, and spend the day in fasting and prayer.

Mrs. Herrod was a member of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and attended every meeting, both state and national, when it was possible. She was also an active member of the Eastern Star and a regular attendant. She was a consistent member of the Presbyterian Church, having received her early religious training at Tulsassee Mission under the Robertson family who were staunch Presbyterians.

She had no children of her own but regarded her sister's daughter, Kate Shaw, as her child and helped in her rearing and education. As long as her health permitted, Mrs. Herrod was engaged in work that tended toward the upbuilding and betterment of her own people. With an intellect far above average and a consecrated heart, she was able to do much for the Indians. When her health failed and she needed care, her niece, Mrs. Kate Shaw Ahrens, took her to her own home in Wagoner where she died in 1917, and was buried with the Eastern Star service. No citizen of the Creek Nation ever exerted a finer influence or was more greatly missed than was Mrs. Mary Herrod.