

MONROE, JAMES R.

J. C. STARR PAPERS 712631
INDIAN COURT.

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James R. Carselowey, Journalist,
January 11, 1938.

CLERK OF INDIAN COURT HEADS GUILTY.

By J. C. Starr, in 1903.

Journalist note- The following article was found among the papers of J. C. Starr, now deceased, and was written for publication in the Globe-Democrat, St. Louis.

Tahlequah, I. T., Nov. 7.- "The defendant enters a plea of guilty," was heard in Judge Gill's court at this place during the present term when Thomas Triplett, chief of Cherokee hoodlums, was brought before the bar of justice to answer almost a dozen indictments found by United States Grand jury three years ago, charging him with forgery, and uttering forged papers, in connection with the Cherokee auditor's fraud, wherein the Cherokee Nation was robbed of \$194,365.44 on bogus national certificates. Judge Gill will pass sentence next week. Triplett was out on bond, but his bondsmen surrendered him to the jailer.

The crime Triplett is charged with arose over the ticket thefts in the Cherokee Nation, and investigations show that he was the chief of Cherokee hoodlums. He has held the office of district clerk of Tahlequah district

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for a number of years, and it was while in office that he conceived the idea of carrying on a wholesale business of robbing the government.

Under the Cherokee laws the district clerks issued national certificates, or what is known in the states as town script. They had an abundant supply of credit blanks on which to issue certificates. The law provided that jurors should receive \$2.00 per diem and mileage for attending the district and circuit courts. Witnesses received mileage and per diem, payable in national certificates. People who boarded jurors were in like manner paid, as were also guards.

When a prisoner was unable to give bond, the Cherokee sheriff appointed from two to a half dozen persons to guard him until the day of trial, and the clerk paid the guards in national certificates; thus, the clerk issued national certificates for nearly all of the items and expense of the Cherokee Nation. After the national certificates were issued, the clerk mailed a report of them, giving numbers, dates, amounts and names of persons in whose favor they were issued. This report was sent to the

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Cherokee auditor who recorded it, and speculators who bought the certificates, would send their certificates to the auditor to have them compared with the clerk's reports and if found to compare, the auditor entered the amount thereof to the credit of the person filing certificates with him and sent the party a receipt. This receipt was submitted to the National Council where the receipt was compared with the entry on the auditor's books, and if found correct the legislature ordered the principal chief to issue a national warrant for that party, drawing 6 per cent interest from date until advertised for payment. It was the fraudulent entry in these records that caused the charges of forgery against Triplett.

It will be remembered that the Cherokee National Council caught a number of prominent Cherokees, who held high official positions, red-handed in this steal of 1899, and at once ordered an investigation. The act calling for an investigation was approved by the President of the United States on January 13, 1900, and a commission was appointed to make the investigation.

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composed of Willis O. Bruton and Clem V. Rogers, on the part of the Cherokee Nation, and Zeverl inspector, on the part of the Interior Department of the United States Government.

This commission completed its labors on June 1, 1900, and made its report to the Cherokee National Council in the Fall of 1900, and soon thereafter, in December, 1900, took up the report, and after an investigation found eleven indictments against Thomas W. Triplett, the ex-district clerk of Tahlequah district on charges of forgery and uttering forged papers. These cases have been hanging in the United States court constantly since 1900 until now, a period of three years. A. A. Taylor, ex-Cherokee auditor, was also indicted in connection with the transaction on a charge of burglary

It might be added that a duplicate national certificate was frequently issued by dishonest clerks and sold and put in circulation. People who bought national certificates seldom required the seller to endorse them, and frequently the duplicate reached the auditor's office first, was

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audited, and when the genuine certificate came in, it was declared by the auditor to be a duplicate; the term duplicate national certificate in Cherokee parlance, is the same as counterfeit money.

The number of certificates issued for the six years immediately previous to the passage of the Curtis Act on June 28, 1898, abolishing the Cherokee courts, amounted to \$332,839.46; the commission found that genuine national certificates were issued during that period amounting \$65,946.43, and that the balance of this amount were fraudulent claims. The committee found that there was a balance of illegitimate claims for which warrants had been drawn of \$194,365.44.*

This item was a great loss to the Cherokee Nation, and accounts for a large per cent of the public debt. This crooked work of boodlers had been going on in the Cherokee Nation for a number of years and the leading boodlers escaped on account of the statute of limitation.

Ex-auditor, A. A. Taylor will be tried on a charge of burglary in entering the auditor's office.

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Thomas W. Triplett, who will in a few days be sentenced to a term in the penitentiary, is half blood Cherokee. He was for years clerk of Tallapoosa district, and for a time deputy clerk of the United States court at Tallapoosa. He is at this time afflicted with consumption, and for this reason it is expected that he will not be sent for more than 5 years, that being the district attorney's recommendation for leniency.

*Note: (The figures given here as to total of certificates issued, total of genuine claims and the amount illegally paid do not appear to be right. However, as this is a copy of the J. C. Starr paper as written no correction is attempted. Ed.)