

HERBERT HOOVER AND THE OSAGES

By Louise Morse Whitham

In the same week when Herbert Hoover, thirty-second President of the United States, accepted appointment by President Truman to survey the food situation in the U.S.-British occupation zones in Europe, he found time to write a second letter about the days when he lived among the Osage Indians at Pawhuska.

The 1946 *World Almanac* correctly states that Herbert Clark Hoover was born August 10, 1874 in West Branch, Iowa, that after his father's death, when he was six, Herbert went to live with his uncle Allan on a farm in Iowa, later with an uncle, Laban Miles, Osage Indian Agent in Indian Territory, and from there he went to his uncle, John Milhorn, in Salem, Oregon.¹

There are several other accounts, however, which either ignore the Osage episode, or place it anywhere from Hoover's sixth to his tenth year. One story is that "he spent several summers" at Pawhuska where people still remember "the interest Herbert Hoover found in the rocks of the surrounding Osage hills—an interest which later blossomed into a mining and engineering career." This sounds suspiciously like a post-mortem idea.²

The following account seemed very plausible and decidedly interesting.³ Found in the files of the late W. E. McGuire, "White Brother of the Osages," was a manuscript of memoirs covering his association with the Osage tribe over a period of fifty-five years. Mr. McGuire came to the Osage Agency in 1881, a year before Major Miles brought his nephew, Herbert Hoover, to live with his family. Mr. McGuire comments:

"The city of Pawhuska did not exist then. There was only a straggling little community known as the Osage Agency where white men were few and little welcomed.

"I learned to speak the Osage language and won the confidence of a people slow to friendship. There were no hotels then, no place for a stranger to stay. I solved the difficulty by bringing a complete camping outfit with me—a big mountain hack, two good horses, bedding and food. In 1884 I was appointed teacher in the government school there.

"During this time Herbert Hoover, later President of the United States, but then a lad of about ten years, spent a year at the Osage Agency with his uncle and aunt, Major and Mrs. Laban J. Miles. Mr. Miles was government Agent at the time. I recall Hoover as a fat little boy,

¹ *World Almanac*, 1946, p. 447.

² *Oklahoma*, American Guide Series (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941), p. 291.

³ Unpublished manuscript, owned by Mrs. W. E. Frederick, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

always reading. He liked to stretch out on the Agency lawn under the trees and read for hours. I didn't know then that Herbert Hoover would ever be President or I might have paid more attention to him."

There was one quick way to find truth in this maze of contradictions—write to Mr. Hoover and thus establish the facts for Oklahoma history. Mr. McGuire's remarks were added to the request for information. Mr. Hoover's reply follows:

The Waldorf-Astoria Towers,
New York, 22, New York
December 12, 1946

Dear Mrs. Whitham:

I have your letter of November thirtieth. I am afraid there is some embroidery on that story.

For about a year I lived with my uncle, Major Laban Miles, while he was Osage Indian Agent. This was about 1882 and I was seven or eight years old. I did attend a school at the Agency, but have no recollection of all that reading. In fact, outside school hours I was greatly engaged with my cousin Walter in absorbing Indian lore adapted to small boys, mostly learning the making and using of bows and arrows. I have no recollection of the names of the Indian boys who participated in those operations, but I believe I could still hew a bow out of Osage orange wood.

My recollections of the kindness and tender care of the Miles family are still vivid.

Yours faithfully,

(Signed) Herbert Hoover

To another inquiry about the school which Mr. Hoover attended, he wrote on January 16: "I attended school with the Indians appropriate to my size. They were of course being taught English. I and my cousins were mostly interested in learning Osage."

Thus it appears that young Herbert Hoover who was eight years old, August 10, 1882, probably had very little "interest in the rocks of the Osage hills" since he could not have been reading very extensively at the time.

Those who have read John Joseph Matthews' *Wah' Kon-Tah* will recall that he centers the story of the development of the Osage people about their beloved Agent, Major Laban J. Miles, one of the Quaker Agents appointed by President Grant to work among the Indians of Indian Territory. The Osage were most unhappy at the time. Like the Plains tribes, they had to live within a reservation. Rations replaced buffalo meat. They had been "pacified" by the U. S. Army. They were in need of human friendship and of guidance that did not profit from their distress.

Pawhuska was then merely a remote Agency, with a Government building, two Indian Council Houses, two stores, several dwellings and camping places. The school-house was by far the largest building

in the hamlet for it cared for both the day pupils and the Osage boarding pupils.⁴

Major Laban J. Miles reached the Agency in the late summer of 1878. He wrote, in part, about his attitude toward all Indian people who were at that time both feared and mistreated by many white people:⁵

"One of the most interesting parts of the story of William Penn was where he went to talk with the King (of England) and the king asked him how he was going to get possession of the Indian lands. William replied that he was going to buy them of the Indians whereupon the king returned, 'Buy them of the Indians? You have already bought them of me!' Penn replied, 'Not because you had any right to their lands. . . . ' and so the discussion went on. Being a member of Penn's historic church I always took the Penn side of the argument. I recall an old adage that was given me when I was much older by an old gentleman who said, 'There are always two sides to a question—the mule's side and the driver's side.' On the same theory, I always believed there were two sides to the Indian question—the Indian's side and the white man's side".

It was in this atmosphere of tolerance and of sincere effort to aid a people struggling with the difficulties of white ways and regulations that a future President of the United States spent the year before he became eight years old. Of course he had no notion that his future Vice-President, Charles Curtis, would be related to the Osage.

Forty-six years later—forty-six years after the summer of 1882—, a succession of brilliant accomplishments had brought great wealth and world-wide acclaim to Herbert Hoover, then President of the United States. In the same time, a flood of oil had enriched the Osage people and transformed their little agency village into a thriving city. Together these circumstances made the wonder story of Oklahoma.

Many Osage visitors to the Nation's capitol had glimpses of the "Great White Father" who had lived among them in his bow and arrow days, but for the man who had fed millions of the world's destitute there was no going back. He wrote in 1947, between reports to another President on the food situation in Europe, "I regret that I have not had time to revisit Pawhuska."⁶

⁴ John Joseph Matthews, *Wah' Kon-Tah* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1932), end page sketch, and pp. 27-32, 40.

⁵ *Ibid.*, "Introduction," pp. 13-16.

⁶ Personal letter to Mrs. Louise Morse Whitham, March 3, 1947. The original letters from Herbert Hoover to Mrs. Whitham are now on file in the Oklahoma Historical Society.

HORACE SPEED

By Grant Foreman

Horace Speed, distinguished pioneer in the field of jurisprudence, who did so much to rescue Oklahoma from the obloquy in which widespread lawlessness in our state's early history had cast her, was born in Nelson County, Kentucky, January 25, 1852, the son of Thomas and Margaret (Hawkins) Speed. He was a member of the famous Speed family of Kentucky, which gave to President Lincoln a member of his cabinet—James Speed. He attended public schools in the county of his birth until he was fourteen years old, when he began to work on his father's farm. At the age of seventeen he obtained a position as clerk for General John Parker Hawkins, assistant to the commissary general in Washington, where he remained eight years. During this period he pursued the study of law, and in 1877, upon his admission to the bar, entered the office of Harrison, Haines and Miller, of which General Benjamin Harrison was senior member, at Indianapolis. After one year with this famous firm he set up a law office of his own.

He continued in active practice in Indiana until 1889, when he went to Winfield, Kansas. The same year, that of the famous "Run", he removed to Guthrie, when he was appointed secretary to the so-called Jerome or Cherokee Commission, that negotiated with the Cherokees for the opening up of the Cherokee Outlet, and later with the Sauk and Fox, Potawatomi, Shawnee and other western tribes for the opening up of their reservations to white settlement. While engaged in this important work, when the territorial government was established in 1890, Mr. Speed was appointed the first United States district attorney for Oklahoma Territory.

In this capacity he tried several hundred cases in which he broke up a vicious ring of grafters that by perjury had thwarted the proper administration of the land office service. In these cases he established himself as a fearless and incorruptible prosecutor and restored the administration of government agencies in the confidence of the public and thereby enabled it to function usefully in the interest of the people it was designed to serve.

During this part of his career, another engagement of much interest was what became known historically as the Cherokee Outlet cases. In these suits an injunction was sought by cattlemen to restrain the government from removing their herds of cattle from the Outlet. Speed, representing the government, successfully resisted this effort and secured a judgment establishing the right of the government to remove the cattle from the Indian lands.

But it was after he had served his term as United States Attorney that he was again called upon by the government to render a