

## SAVE THE HISTORICAL RECORDS

*By Charles Evans*

The Oklahoma Historical Society has from its very beginning, stressed the importance of preserving old letters, old documents and books telling of Oklahoma, past and present. Not any of these should be destroyed in any way or form, or by any individual, county, state, or the Nation, until the Historical Society could be given the opportunity to pass upon their worth. News that records relating to the Five Civilized Tribes were burned at Muskogee recently, brought the following comment by the *Daily Oklahoman* in an editorial in its issue of July 18, 1947:

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The Indian Bureau is privileged to do as it pleases with the old records that have been accumulating and piling up in Oklahoma for more than a century. When these records have outlived their usefulness and it is only a 100-to-one chance that they will ever be needed again, the Indian Bureau is justified in carting off and destroying the old files to make storage room for new business.

During the current modernization of the various Indian Agencies in Oklahoma, in which one principal purpose seems to be to center the accounting and record keeping in fewer main offices, it is likely that many letters, maps, and documents, grants, orders, surveys, and other records made from 1820 to 1889, may be lost in the shuffle. These records may not be worth a thin dime to the Indian bureau officially, and there is no likelihood that one page of the old records will ever require another official squint, yet many of these records are tremendously valuable to those interested in keeping early Oklahoma history straight.

Before the Indian Bureau hauls off and burns any of the old records, the Oklahoma Historical Society should be invited to inspect them. County, district, and tribal units of the society likewise should be alert to the project. Some of the records concerning the Five Civilized Tribes, dealing with their removal, resettlement, allotments, courts, missions, schools, graveyards, and individual or family status already have been disposed of in the cleaning up process in the Muskogee office. Much more of this work is going on, not only in Muskogee, but in Pawnee, Anadarko, Wewoka, and other Indian business centers. We feel certain that the Indian bureau authorities will be glad to cooperate with the historical groups in saving any records that may be valuable to the state's historical record. The society, however, at least will have to make requests for permission to examine the papers before they are junked for all time.

Such names as Skullyville, Tobucksy, Blue, Boktuklo, Eagle, Gaines, and Cedar may mean nothing to the Indian bureau now or in the future, but to the people of the old Choctaw Nation they mean a great deal. In the old Cherokee Nation such county names as Golangsnake, Saline, Coowees-coowe, Canadian and Flint likely never will have to be referred to again officially but the life and programs of the Cherokees more than a century ago centered around those names and their achievements, and made an important contribution to the present day Oklahoma and its history all along the line.