

MARSHALLTOWN, CREEK NATION

By Carolyn Thomas Foreman

Marshalltown was located in the Coweta District of the Creek Nation in the point between the Arkansas and Verdigris rivers: "It was a thoroughly vicious community, and horse and cattle thieves plied their vocation unmolested, protected by the close-knit racial consciousness of the Creek negroes."¹

Marshalltown was named for Benjamin Marshall a wealthy and prominent mixed-blood Creek who brought nineteen slaves with him when he removed west from Alabama in 1835 and settled on the Verdigris.² The Marshall plantation was one of the best known in the Creek Nation and it was celebrated for its fine fields and great orchards; the owner is said to have been active in establishing the first boarding school among his people and he was a member of the convention that adopted the alphabet used by the Creeks.³

The Marshall family was well known in the East before the removal of the Creek tribe to the West. In *Woodward's Reminiscences*⁴ he wrote:

Old man Marshall was an Englishman. He settled where Columbus, Ga., now is. He had three sons, Joe, Jim and Ben. Joe was a true friend of the whites, and so were his brothers. He was a good fighter, and lost one of his eyes defending the Tuckabatchys, when they were forced in, in time of war. He was killed by a drunken Indian after the whites settled the country in Chambers county. Jim, I think, died in Russell county, Ala.; and Ben, a very intelligent man, is yet living in Arkansas.

Woodward realized that the Creeks were soured and disinclined to go into council in 1832. He notified Colonel John Crowell, the Creek agent, who used every effort to prevent liquor being taken into the camp:

"But by some means, some negroes belonging to a half breed, Joe Marshall, got some whiskey into camp. There was an order for it to be destroyed, and the whiskey was poured out on the ground, which seemed not to suit the tastes of some whites as well as Indians.

"It appeared that a white man had hired negroes to carry the whiskey to camp, and it was proposed to flog the negroes; but Marshall objected, stating that the white men were to blame. A general fight commenced with the Indians themselves, and a great many whites left the camp, not knowing but that a general massacre was to take place.

¹ Angie Debo, *The Road to Disappearance* (Norman, 1941), p. 253.

² Grant Foreman, *Indian Removal* (Norman, 1932), p. 142; Office Indian Affairs, Creek Emigration, muster roll October 15, 1835. This party of Creeks was conducted by Lieutenant Edward Deas.

³ *Muskogee Phoenix*, June 15, 1893, p. 5, col. 2.

⁴ *Birmingham, Alabama*, 1939, pp. 114, 115, 124, 125. This book was first issued at Montgomery, Alabama in 1859.

"Marshall's party was the weakest, and seemed to be giving way. I remarked to (Charles) McLemore, who was standing by me, that Marshall was a good man, and had been a great friend to the whites in the Creek war, and that I disliked to see him backed out; that was enough—Charley walked into the thickest of it, among knives, clubs, and everything else. Wherever he went, he opened their ranks, and Marshall soon quit winner. . . ."

Marshall urged removal because the Indians were being furnished with whiskey by the whites, and all they possessed was carried to grog shops. He was eager to take his family of eight to the West and it was largely through his influence that an emigrating party of 511 was organized on the Tallapoosa River near Wetumka, December 6, 1835.⁵

After the Reverend R. M. Loughridge visited the Creek country he sent an account of his trip to the Board of Foreign Missions in 1841. Major William Armstrong had given him a letter to Colonel James Logan, Creek agent, but he was absent from his post so the missionary decided to visit the chiefs and "Mr. Benjamin Marshall, an Indian of considerable information, and of great influence in national affairs."

Benjamin Marshall held the position of national treasurer for forty years, without bond. He had been entrusted with treaty making with the United States concerning the removal of his people from Alabama to the West. It was stated that "He was a man of unblemished character and one of the most farseeing statesmen the Creek people ever had, and one of the chief councilors of the nation."⁶

At the grand international council held in 1843 near the present site of Eufaula 730 Creeks were in attendance, Ben Marshall as interpreter having a part in the proceedings.⁷

Agent Logan wrote to Commissioner of Indian Affairs Medill on November 9, 1847 that one of the principal subjects taken up at the general council in 1846 was the appointment of a second chief of the Lower Towns to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Ufaula Harjo: "The office has developed upon Mr. Benjamin Marshall, formerly national interpreter, an educated half-breed of wealth and standing. He is of course favorably inclined to religion and education, and much good may be anticipated to arise from his appointment. . . ."⁸

⁵ Grant Foreman, *Indian Removal* (Norman, 1932), 125-26, 142.

⁶ Carolyn Thomas Foreman, *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, "Report of the Reverend R. M. Loughridge to the Board of Foreign Missions regarding the Creek Mission," Vol. XXVI, No. 3 (Autumn, 1948), p. 278 and note 1; D. C. Gideon, *History of Indian Territory* (New York and Chicago, 1901), pp. 352-53.

⁷ Grant Foreman, *Advancing the Frontier* (Norman, 1933), pp. 224-25, 229.

⁸ Grant Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes* (Norman, 1934), p. 190.

Robert Love, long a well known Negro citizen of Muskogee, was born April 15, 1854, south of the Arkansas River near the old Creek Agency. After the Civil War when the slaves were freed, Love, then thirteen years old, with his mother, brother and sister, left the plantation near Red River where they had refuged, and moved to the Creek Nation and settled at Marshalltown. Love recalled that the Fountain Baptist Church was the only house of worship in the vicinity and it was situated about three miles northwest of Wybark.⁹ The log building was about thirty-five feet long by eighteen feet wide; the benches were hewed logs and the pulpit was also made from a log.

Ketch Banard, an old Negro was pastor of the Fountain Baptist Church for many years and Love remembered hearing John Bemo, the noted Seminole preacher and teacher, conduct service there. During the summer camp meetings were held and people came from many miles and camped around the church. These gatherings which usually commenced on Wednesday lasted over the week end, and on Sunday afternoon all of the converts were baptized in the Verdigris River at the Slanting Ford which was about three miles up the river from where the town of Okay was later located. Plenty of food, such as roasted or barbecued deer, wild hogs, wild turkeys, was provided by the people and spread together so that all attending the meeting could partake of it.

Negroes and Creek Indians attended the services and a majority of the Indians were unable to understand the sermons so that an interpreter was necessary to translate from the English. Love recalled that Sampson Stidham and Dock Barnett frequently acted as interpreters.

Love stated that Marshalltown was a tough place as the village and neighborhood were infested with outlaws; the officers of the law never ventured into the district singly when it was necessary to go there in search of a wanted person.¹⁰ Love's mother was shot and killed by a mob trying to capture a fugitive; at her funeral Sampson Stidham took young Love and gave him a home on his farm near Gibson Station, and he remained there until grown.

B. Marshall wrote to Henry & Williams on June 1, 1858 from the Creek Nation:¹¹

"You will pleas send me by the first Boat you see coming up hear. Ship to the Verdigris Landing, one Barral of good Sugar, and one Sack of Coffee. If you have collected that Money for the hire of Isaac for last year, you will pay yourself that amount,

⁹ Wybark was later known as Verdark, and North Muskogee.

¹⁰ Oklahoma Historical Society, *Indian-Pioneer History*, Foreman Collection, Vol. 6, pp. 324, 329-30.

¹¹ Grant Foreman Collection.

and the balance I pay at the Annuity payment with out fail, the other Articles you sent me was put out at the Mouth of Grand River and put me to good deal of Extra Expence to git it home. If you git a chance to send those articles Bond them to deliver them where they promise to do without the River is so low they cant git up, how is Isaac gitting along his health &c."

From Van Buren, April 19, 1859, John Henry, Williams & Co. shipped aboard the *Violette* to George W. Stidham, Creek Agency port, six kegs of Dupont Powder, thirty-six bedsteads and five bundles of mattresses. The same boat brought freight to Port of Verdigris from Van Buren, June 9, 1859 to Benjamin Marshall. On July 9, 1859, the steamer *Muscogee* brought freight to the Creek Agency Landing for Stidham; this consisted of five cases of merchandise which had been received from the *Medora* on June 23. John Henry, Williams and Co. shipped aboard the *Muscogee*, December 10, 1859 to Benjamin Marshall at the Port of Verdigris Landing three boxes of merchandise. Marshall was still receiving freight shipped by the same steamer from the same Van Buren firm in 1860. On January 24 he received 1 box wool cards, 1 box cotton cards, a case of books, a case of shoes, two boxes of tobacco among other merchandise. Another bill of lading on that date consisted of a bale of domestic, five cases boots and shoes and three boxes merchandise. The *Muscogee* also brought a barrel of sugar, a bag of coffee, 12 cane bottom chairs, two rocking chairs "high top," one sewing rocking chair and one plain bottom rocking chair.

The water was evidently too low for a steamer in May, 1860 as a bill of goods was sent to George W. Stidham from Van Buren "on board the Good Keel Boat whereof [John J.] Garrett is Master" to be delivered at the Port of Creek Agency. The bill consisted of six bags coffee, two boxes smoking tobacco, nine tar buckets, a keg of soda and other merchandise.

The Collins Brothers of the Brazos River Cattle Company of Texas shipped 500 head of longhorn cattle into the Indian Territory in the autumn of 1875 and unloaded them between the Arkansas and Verdigris rivers about four miles north of Muskogee, where the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad had built an unloading chute. The shipment was in charge of Sam Bass, Joel Colloin, Brady Collins and Bill Elliott. The four men took turns in building feeding pens and herding the cattle, in the neighborhood of Marshalltown, which was principally occupied by Creek Freedmen; they paid the Negroes \$1.00 a bushel for corn in the shuck, and five dollars per ton for wild prairie hay, measured in the rick. They fed the cattle there for three and a half months before they were loaded on cars and shipped north.¹²

¹² *Indian-Pioneer History*, Vol. 2, pp. 377-78; interview with William Anthony Cummings, later an officer.

The *Eufaula Journal* of Thursday, July 5, 1877, contains an account of the annual examination held at the Marshalltown school on June 25. The exercises, held under a brush arbor adjoining the school house, were witnessed by a large audience made up of parents, friends of the children, as well as visitors from a distance. The program consisted of an original speech delivered by Patsy Hartridge, after which the classes were examined in reading, spelling and defining, recitations in arithmetic, geography, English grammar and natural philosophy. "The class in the latter study earned a well merited praise, having stood a thorough examination most admirably. This, it is said, is the first and only class of colored boys and girls that have received instructions in this so much heretofore neglected branch of education." The primary class, instructed by Paul Weaver, passed a creditable examination and an essay on Abraham Lincoln was delivered in excellent style. Among the students were: Susan Brewer, Mary Jones, Bicken Barnett, Joseph Stephens who deserved all of the praise bestowed upon them.

The exercises were closed with singing and an address by R. M. Stephens, "who did not forget to pay proper respect to the Indian Journal, stating that a newspaper was the cheapest of all existing literature, and to be without one was simply showing to the visitor at home an absence of education. . . ." A delicious dinner was served after which the audience dispersed and the teacher looked "for his 'Pegasus' to take him to Okmulgee to attend the Institute."

Trouble arose with the prosperous Cherokees when their cattle wandered across the line into the Creek Nation and were converted into beef by the Negroes at Marshalltown. The Cherokees became incensed at the delay in the Creek courts, and took matters into their own hands. The Cherokees scorned Negroes, and their young men did not hesitate to take shots at the Creek Lighthorsemen. Several raids were made on Marshalltown by Cherokees; they shot into houses and killed several black men. On the night of July 26, 1880, a mob seized two Negroes, supposed to be horse thieves, from their homes, carried them into the Cherokee Nation and hanged them. The next day two parties of blacks rode into the Cherokee country to search for the bodies of their friends.

A fight resulted with mixed-blood Cherokees in which Alex Norman was wounded and young William Cobb killed in the first volley. The Cherokees were aroused when news of the murder reached them and a party of more than a hundred armed men left Fort Gibson, where a payment was in progress, to wipe out the settlement, which harbored such desperate characters as Dick Glass and Bob Marshall. The road to the ferry was crowded with men rushing to the aid of the ranchmen and the ferry boat was kept busy all afternoon, and until late in the evening carrying men across Grand River. By morning several hundred men had gathered and

the ranchmen furnished them with food and ammunition. When they were organized and equipped they advanced upon the settlement and were amazed to find the place practically deserted. The invaders burned a few shacks and pinned notices to the doors of others warning the citizens not to cross into the Cherokee Nation or steal their cattle under pain of another raid. The warning proved sufficient to prevent further trouble in that part of the territory.¹³

Chief Samuel Checote called an election in the Creek Nation for the first Monday in September, 1883. No disturbance marred the occasion except in Marshalltown where a fight broke out after only fifteen votes had been cast. Snow Sells, chief of Arkansas Town, ordered the election stopped. Fights were frequent in that wild community, but it was probably a ruse of Sells and a Negro Light-horseman to prevent the vote of one of Isparhecher's towns from being recorded.¹⁴

The Marshall name was handed down to the Creek Nation and a prominent citizen of Muskogee was Benjamin Marshall, the grandson of the man for whom Marshalltown was named. Mr. Marshall was born February 13, 1866 at the forks of the Verdigris and Arkansas rivers. He was the son of Robert Marshall, and he attended school at Tullahassee Mission before he went to Carlisle School in Pennsylvania. His interest was in farm life, and he owned one of the finest farms in the Indian Territory on which he raised hundreds of acres of corn and cotton, cattle and hogs in addition to a fine orchard. Mr. Marshall was secretary of the Muskogee Townsite Commission and he acted as interpreter in many celebrated law suits in the old Indian Territory.¹⁵

¹³ *Indian-Pioneer History*, Vol. 19, pp. 181-183. Interview with H. W. Hicks, Vinita, Oklahoma.

¹⁴ Debo, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

¹⁵ *Muskogee Phoenix*, End of the Century Edition, November 2, 1899, 31. Gideon, *op. cit.*, pp. 352-53.