

THE GREAT SEAL OF THE MUSCOGEE NATION

The official seal of the Creek Nation appearing in colors on the front cover of this issue of *The Chronicles* is a replica of an original painting in the Museum of the Historical Society, the painting being a reproduction of the actual impress of the old Creek seal preserved in the Agency of the Five Civilized Tribes at Muskogee. This seal shows a sheaf of wheat and a plow in the center of device surrounded by the words "Great Seal of the Muscogee Nation, I. T." The initials here are for "Indian Territory," and the name "Muscogee" is that applied to the nation of the Indian people commonly known as Creeks.

This official seal of the Muscogee or Creek Nation was adopted by the National Council some time after the War between the States, its symbolism indicating the industry of the Creeks as agriculturists, for which they were well known in Indian history. After coming west from the Alabama-Georgia border to the Indian Territory (1828-1836), the successful growing of small grain, wheat, oats and rice, besides the production of large crops of corn in the rich lands bordering the Canadian and Arkansas rivers and their tributaries, brought prosperity to many of the Creek people. They continued to observe their ancient tribal customs in the "Green Corn Dance" celebrated in summer as a thanksgiving and a rejoicing in the new crops that began the new year in the Nation.

The sheaf of wheat and the plow in the center of this Great Seal had a broader significance of Christian influence among the Creek chiefs and leaders after the War. From the adoption of the written constitution of the Muscogee Nation in 1867, the Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist churches counted some of the outstanding leaders of the Nation as members in one or another of these three organizations. Among them were such prominent chiefs as Samuel Checote, Joseph M. Perryman, Legus C. Perryman and Pleasant Porter.

A Biblical interpretation of the sheaf of wheat in this Great Seal may be found in Joseph's dream (Genesis 37:7): "For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright"

An interpretation of the plow may be found in the prophecy (Amos 9:13): "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper"

Apparently the first document of the Muscogee Nation among some of the original papers preserved in the Oklahoma Historical

Society's collections, bearing the imprint of the Great Seal, is a permit of election issued to Arkansas Town, dated August 18, 1885, and signed by Principal Chief Joseph M. Perryman. In the October session of the National Council in this same year, Chief Perryman approved an act providing for the issuance of certificates of citizenship in the Muscogee Nation," under seal of his office," and the preservation in his office of a list of the names of such persons. The spelling of the name "Muscogee" or "Muskogee" is the English form but it is rendered in the native language as *Muskoke* or *Maskoke*.

The name *Muskoke* or *Maskoke* was accepted by the Creek people sometime after 1700 though neither the origin nor an explanation of this name has yet been found in the Creek language. The name "Creek" itself is from "Ochese Creek Indians," the title given the first group of the tribe about 1720, by the British agents for the Indian tribes in the Carolina region. "Ochese Creek" was an old name for the Ocmulgee River, Georgia, near the sources of which the eastern portion of the tribe lived when English trade began here. As time passed, the name was shortened to "Creek Indians" or "Creeks," and finally "Creek" became the popular designation for the whole tribe or "Creek Nation."

About 1700, many tribes in what is now Southeastern United States who spoke a related language were living as a Creek confederacy, in which the *Maskoke*-speaking people were the dominant group, the tribes having leagued together for mutual protection against the Spaniards in Florida. Agents in the colonial government service referred to the Creek tribe, whose country included nearly all of what is now Alabama and Georgia, in two divisions according to their geographical locations: the Upper Creek living up on the Coosa and Tallapoosa, and the main branches of the Alabama River; and the Lower Creek, down on the Chattahoochee and Flint rivers near the present Alabama-Georgia border. When the Creek people moved west to the Indian Territory, the geographical locations of these two divisions were reversed: the Lower Creeks lived up on the Arkansas River, west from Fort Gibson; the Upper Creeks lived down on the Canadian River, from the mouth of the North Fork west.

A treaty signed in February, 1825, at Indian Springs, Georgia, the home of the Upper Creek chief, William McIntosh, provided the cession of Creek lands in Georgia to the United States, in exchange for land, acre for acre on the Arkansas River, "commencing at the mouth of the Canadian Fork thereof, and running westward between said rivers Arkansas and Canadian Fork for quantity." The treaty further provided the payment by the Government of \$400,000 for the expenses of the removal of the Creek tribe to this new country in what is now Oklahoma. Within a year, Chief McIntosh met death at the hands of a party of Creek light-horsemen led by Menawa, a chief of the Upper Creeks, for having signed away the tribal domain.

The Treaty of Indian Springs was declared null and void and most of the Georgia lands were ceded to the United States in January, 1826, as provided in a treaty signed at Washington by the Upper Creek leaders including Menawa and Opothleyahola who was later noted in the history of the Indian Territory. The followers of Chief William McIntosh, led by his son, Chilly McIntosh arrived by steamboat at Fort Gibson in 1828, and built their homes along the Arkansas west of the Verdigris. Other groups of the Lower Creeks also came west, and there were soon many settlements of the "Western Creeks" as they were called in this region, with Roley McIntosh as the leading chief, half brother of the late William McIntosh. Several of these families were wealthy, including some of the McIntoshes besides Benjamin Perryman, living in well furnished, comfortable homes on their fine farms operated by their Negro slaves.

Two other early treaties were important in Creek history: The Treaty of 1832 signed by the Upper Creek leaders ceded all the tribal lands east of the Mississippi and provided for the removal of all the tribe from Alabama. Another treaty was necessary, signed by the Western Creek chiefs at Fort Gibson in 1833, defining the boundaries of the Creek Nation West, all the country lying between the Canadian River on the south and the Cherokee Outlet on the north, and extending west from the Arkansas River and the Cherokee Nation to the 100th Meridian. Further provision for the settlement of all the Creeks and the Seminoles in this area.

The whole tribe was united in the west in 1839, following the removal of those who had remained in the Alabama-Georgia boundary line region. Yet there was a cleavage between the Upper Creeks and the Lower Creeks that had grown out of the killing of William McIntosh and the sale of the tribal lands in the east. This continued for many years, even affecting the alignment of the people during the War between the States, in which most of the Upper Creeks under the leadership of Opothleyahola sided with the Union, and the Lower Creeks under the leadership of the McIntoshes, with the Confederacy. Before the War, the National Council composed of the chiefs and leaders of many "towns" (or *talwa*, in native language) over the nation met at stated times at "High Spring" near Council Hill in present Okmulgee County. After the War, Okmulgee was designated the capital when the people adopted the first written constitution and code of laws of the "Muskogee Nation," in 1907, which remained in force until the close of the Creek government at the time of statehood for Oklahoma.¹ There were three departments under this Creek constitution: the executive, one principal chief for the Nation, elected every four years; the legislative or National Council,

¹ *Constitution and Laws of the Muskogee Nation*, L. C. Perryman, compiler (Muskogee, 1890). This code of the Creek laws employs the English form of the name, *Muskogee*.

composed of the House of Kings (Senate) and the House of Warriors (House of Representatives), that met annually at Okmulgee where a commodious two-story, log council house was erected; and the judicial, consisting of a supreme court and district courts.

At the time that Okmulgee was named the capital, the western boundary of the Creek Nation approximated what is now the west line of Seminole County, the Creek lands west of this line having been ceded to the United States in 1866 as a result of the recent war. This diminished area was divided by law into six judicial districts, each having a judge, a prosecuting attorney and company of light-horsemen chosen to serve for designated terms in office. These six districts as finally named were Coweta, Muskogee, Eufaula, Wewoka, Deep Fork and Okmulgee. There were forty-four tribal "towns" (or *talwa*), besides three towns for Negro citizens in the Nation, all of which were represented in the National Council according to their population. One of the old tribal towns, "Tulsey Town," in Coweta District north of the Arkansas River, has grown into the City of Tulsa, Oklahoma. The old Creek Agency was south of the Arkansas in Muskogee District, near which the Union Agency for the Five Civilized Tribes was established after the building of the M. K. & T. Railway in 1872. This Agency and the station on the railroad were the beginnings of the City of Muskogee which was sometimes referred to as the "Capital of the Indian Territory," so important was the place in the development of the country. Okmulgee was not only the capital of the Creek Nation but was well known as the meeting place of delegates from many Indian nations and tribes who were members of the General Council of the Indian Territory, 1870-1872.

During the period that the Dawes Commission was at work closing out the tribal government, as well as that of each of the other Five Civilized Tribes (1894-1907), many Creek leaders were prominent and active in affairs that brought statehood for Oklahoma.² The device of the "Great Seal of the Muscogee Nation, I. T."

² Among the many publications on the history of the Creek people are:

Angie Debo, *The Road to Disappearance* (Norman, 1941); Grant Foreman, *Indian Removal* (Norman, 1932), and *The Five Civilized Tribes* (Norman, 1934); Edwin C. McReynolds, *A History of the Sooner State* (Norman, 1954); John R. Swanton, *Early History of the Creek Indians and their Neighbors* (Bur. Amer. Ethnol., *Bulletin* 73, Washington, 1922); Muriel H. Wright, *A Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma* (Norman, 1951).

Many articles relating to Creek Indian history have been published in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, among which are:

Roland Hinds, "Early Creek Missions" (Vol. XVII, No. 1, March, 1939; John Bartlett Meserve, "Chief Pleasant Porter," (Vol. IX, No. 3, September, 1931), "The MacIntoshes," (Vol. X, No. 3, September, 1932), "The Perrymans," (Vol. XV, No. 2, June, 1937); Ohland Morton, "Government of the Creek Indians," (Vol. VIII, No. 1, March, 1930, and No. 2, June, 1930); Virginia E. Lauderdale, "Tallahassee Mission," (Vol. XXIV, No. 3, Autumn, 1948); Muriel H. Wright, "Official Seals of the Five Civilized Tribes," (Vol. XVIII, No. 4, December, 1940).

—the sheaf of wheat and the plow,—is in the lower right hand ray of the five-pointed star that forms the central design of the Great Seal of the State of Oklahoma.

—*The Editor*