

"THE WEDDING OF OKLAHOMA AND MISS INDIAN TERRITORY"

By Muriel H. Wright

One of the highlights at the inauguration of the first Governor of the State of Oklahoma at Guthrie, on November 16, 1907, was the pageantry showing the marriage of Mr. Oklahoma and Miss Indian Territory. Guthrie and Oklahoma City newspapers gave wide space to this part of the inauguration ceremonies, *The Oklahoma City Times-Journal* for November 17, reporting under the headline, "Oklahoma Gem of the Prairies, the 46th State in the Union."

The part of Miss Indian Territory, the bride in the memorable wedding ceremony, was taken by Mrs. Leo Bennett of Muskogee, a beautiful young woman of Cherokee descent, with dark hair and eyes. She wore for this occasion a lavender satin dress made in the latest fashion of the time, floor length princess style with long sleeves and high collar;¹ and a large picture hat and gloves, carrying one large, mauve colored chrysanthemum.

The part of Mr. Oklahoma, the bridegroom, was taken by Mr. C. G. Jones of Oklahoma City, a well known leader and business man in the history of the city. He was tall, fair haired, and—noted for his punctilious appearance—wore for

¹ The description of Mrs. Leo Bennett's dress and her accessories worn by her when she played the part of Miss Indian Territory in the memorable wedding scene shown during the State's first inauguration ceremonies on November 16, 1907, was given the writer in a personal interview by the late William A. Durant who "gave the bride away." Mr. Durant also gave details and descriptions of costumes worn by others on this memorable occasion. One of the repeated requests that has come to the writer in the field of Oklahoma history has been from schools and other organizations for data on costumes worn in the pageantry of the "Wedding of Mr. Oklahoma and Miss Indian Territory" given on November 16, 1907, during the inauguration ceremonies at Guthrie. The data gathered in research on this subject have provided notes for the writing of this article in *The Chronicles*. Most pageants and scenes given by schools and organizations, presenting the marriage of Miss Indian Territory in recent years have not given the costuming worn in that memorable event in 1907. Directors and writers of present day pageantry generally have Miss Indian Territory shown as an Indian girl wearing her hair in two braids, a feather headdress and a buckskin, beaded dress and moccasins; Mr. Oklahoma always in a cowboy outfit, not in keeping with fact.

the wedding ceremony the best in striped trousers and black coat suitable for such an occasion.

The bride was given in marriage by the Honorable William A. Durant, who had served as Sergeant-at-Arms during the Oklahoma Constitutional Convention, 1906-1907, at Guthrie, the Capital of Oklahoma Territory. Mr. Durant was a prominent young Choctaw Indian who afterward became well known as a member of State Legislature and Speaker of the House of Representatives. In his last years, he served as Principal Chief of the Choctaw Nation, appointed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The wedding ceremony of Miss Indian Territory and Mr. Oklahoma was performed by the Reverend W. H. Dodson, of the First Baptist Church at Guthrie. The scene was opened with the introduction of Mr. C. G. Jones, by Judge Frank Dale, former Chief Justice of the Oklahoma Territorial Supreme Court and, in 1907, well known practicing attorney at Guthrie, in partnership with Judge A.G.C. Bierer, former Associate Justice of the Territorial Supreme Court.

The leading Territorial newspaper, *The Oklahoma State Capital*, for November 17, 1907, pointed up the wedding pageantry, reporting the order of the inauguration ceremonies that had taken place in front of the Carnegie Library at Guthrie. First had come a big parade down the street: sixteen carriages with officials of Oklahoma Territory and others, one open carriage with the chiefs of the Five Civilized Tribes, these Indian Territory leaders fine looking in white collar, dark tie and citizen clothes; there was a marching band resplendant in their band regalia, and a large crowd of white people and Indians walking—some of the Indians in feathered headress and blanket, with the women carrying baby cradle boards bright with decoration and bead work; there was a company of mounted police and another of Muskogee lighthorse troops. The parade ended at the steps of the Library where an immense crowd had gathered.

At ten o'clock on Saturday morning, November 16th, Honorable Charles N. Haskell, a citizen of Muskogee, Indian Territory, and the Governor-elect for the new State, was escorted to the platform on the steps of the Library Build-

ing, the bright sunlight dazzling his eyes as he bowed right and left to the cheering crowd. Charles Filson, Secretary of the Territory of Oklahoma, stepped to the front of the platform and read the Presidential Proclamation declaring Oklahoma a State.

Judge Frank Dale then came forward to introduce Mr. C. G. Jones, stating that Mr. Jones would propose marriage of Oklahoma to Miss Indian Territory. Mr. Jones stepped to the front of the platform, bowing right and left to the cheering crowd, to deliver his proposal, in which he said in part:

I have been asked to perform the agreeable duty of proposing marriage to Miss Indian Territory. Permit me to say that nothing gives me more pleasure, as the President advises us of his Proclamation and that the marriage will be strictly legal, without regard to age, condition, or previous servitude. The bridegroom is only 18 years old, but is capable of assuming all the matrimonial responsibilities of a stalwart youth. Though he was born in tribulation, in the City of Washington in 1889, his life of 18 years on the plains has been one of tremendous activity and he has grown to the size of a giant . . . On account of his youth and inexperience, he is possessed of an unconquerable modesty and has asked me to propose marriage to the Indian Territory . . . By authority in me by the high contracting parties and in obedience to their request, I now call upon Rev. W. H. Dodson, of the First Baptist Church of Guthrie to perform the ceremony.

Mr. William A. Durant, wearing a dark business suit, stepped from the midst of the officials present on the platform, and replied in part:

To you, Mr. Jones, as the representative of Mr. Oklahoma, I present the hand and fortune of Miss Indian Territory, convinced by his 18 years of wooing that his love is genuine, his suit sincere and his purposes honorable . . . Despite the unhappy circumstances of her youth, which have cast a shadow of sorrow over a face by nature only intended to give back only warm smiles of God's pure sunshine, this beauteous maiden comes to him as the last descendant of the proudest race that ever trod foot on American soil . . . Although an orphan, Miss Indian Territory brings her spouse a dower that, in fertile fields, productive mines and sterling and upright citizenship, equals the fortune of her wooer. Mr. Oklahoma into whose identity Indian Territory is about to be merged forever, must be entrusted to care for this princely estate. We resign it to you in confident hope that it will be cared for, developed and conserved to the unending glory of our new state and the untold benefit of her people.

The music of the traditional Wedding March was played as the bridal party came out on the platform, the identity of the bride having been kept secret until then. The crowd "gallantly shouted" as the lovely Indian bride² reached the

front of the platform where she smiled and bowed right and left occasionally shading her eyes from the sunlight with the chrysanthemum in her hand.³ The bridegroom took his place. Mr. Durant gave the bride away, the Reverend Dodson performing the marriage ceremony which was closed by his "fervent prayer."

Judge Frank Dale again came forward and raised his hand as Charles N. Haskell and Leslie Niblack stepped out from the crowd of officials on the platform. Mr. Niblack specially commissioned Notary Public administered the oath of office, one hand raised and the other holding the Bible. Governor Haskell signed the official papers. A group of Cherokee girls standing near the platform sang the "Star Spangled Banner, and were cheered lustily. The governor then followed with his inaugural address, followed by loud applause. Greetings from cities in the new state were presented him with a huge bouquet of chrysanthemums. Mr. C. H. Pittman, in behalf of the women of Enid, immediately presented another large cluster of these flowers in the name of Mrs. R. W. Johnson, saying "I give the 20th Century flower to the 20th Century Governor of a 20th Century State. "Yells of approval arose from the throng of onlookers as Mr. Pittman added an explanation that the chrysanthemum was to be the official flower of the new State.

² In 1907, the people of the Indian Territory were sensitive to the idea that they were uncultured, living in a backwoods region. They felt that they were to "the manor born," with a long background in civilized ways with educational advantages and good living. Therefore, the bride, Miss Indian Territory, was the modern, beautiful Indian princess wearing a lovely dress made in the height of fashion of the time. It may be added that Mrs. Leo Bennett very likely had her satin gown, worn at the Oklahoma inauguration in 1907, made in either Louisville, Kentucky, or some other city where the leading dressmakers were patronized by some of the beautifully dressed women of the Indian Territory.

The photograph of Mrs. Leo Bennett shown on another page of this article was loaned by her daughter, Mrs. Ann B. Medlock of Grand Prairie, Texas, through Miss Eula Fullerton, of the Oklahoma State Health Department, a member of the Oklahoma Historical Society, who is known for her interest and writing on Oklahoma history. Mrs. Bennett is shown in this photograph, in the dress that she wore when she took the part of Miss Indian Territory on November 16, 1907. This photograph was received in the Editorial Department recently, and has been a satisfaction to the writer, in that the dress shown fits the description given by Chief Durant over fifteen years ago.

³ *The Oklahoma State Capital*, Sunday, November 17, 1907, p. 2, cols. 3 and 4.