

SEALS OF THE FIVE CIVILIZED TRIBES

By Muriel H. Wright

Original paintings of the official seals of the Indian nations, or Five Civilized Tribes in the Indian Territory, on exhibit in the Museum of the Oklahoma Historical Society are reproduced on the opposite page in color.

The Indian seals have a part in the large five-pointed star that centers the Great Seal of the State of Oklahoma described in Article VI, Section 35 of the Oklahoma Constitution adopted at the time of statehood in 1907. Reading clockwise the Indian seals appear in the five rays of the large star in the Oklahoma Seal, as follows: upper ray, Chickasaw; upper, right hand, Choctaw; lower, right hand, Seminole; lower, left hand, Creek; upper left hand, Cherokee. At the center of the Great Seal is a replica of the Oklahoma Territorial Seal described in *Statutes of Oklahoma*, 1893 (p. 1129), providing the design for the "permanent Grand Seal of the Territory of Oklahoma." Also, outside and between the five rays of the large star of the Great Seal are forty-five small stars representing the forty-five states of the Union when Oklahoma was admitted as the 46th state, in 1907. The many details of the Oklahoma Seal, especially those of the six official seals appearing in the large star at its center, have presented problems in drafting the design accurately for official usage, and in making drawings for illustrative purposes. It has been found that practically every version of the Oklahoma Seal, if not all, from statehood to 1957 was inaccurate, even grotesque in many details. This has been especially true in depicting the five Indian seals.

The Oklahoma Historical Society through special research by the Editorial Department in 1957, provided the corrected reproduction of the Oklahoma Seal shown on the outside front cover of this number of *The Chronicles*. This reproduction gives the five Indian seals like those in the Museum paintings as well as that of the Territorial Seal in the center of the large, five pointed star, the design of the latter shown in *Statutes of Oklahoma, 1893*. It is interesting and gratifying to the Historical Society to note this reproduction of the Oklahoma State Seal a part of the interior decorations seen in the two new office buildings erected by the State north of the Capitol, dedicated

¹ For details on the history and the production of these five paintings, see "Official Seals of the Five Civilized Tribes" by Muriel H. Wright, *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XVIII, No. 4 (December, 1940), pp. 350-70. Reproductions of the five seals in black and white illustrate this article.

and opened this year (1962). The entrance doors, the panels over the elevators and other places in the Will Rogers Building on the west side, and even the specially designed chinaware of the new cafeteria show fine replicas of the Society's corrected reproduction of the State Seal. The Sequoyah Building on the east side also uses this reproduction.

The paintings of the Indian seals in the Museum are the work of Guy C. Reid, well known architect of Oklahoma City, that were made and contributed by him at the request of a special committee of the Historical Society to provide the device of each for reproductions in color. Each painting consists of a pen and ink sketch with lettering to scale, hand-painted in water color, the designs based on gold-leaf impressions of the old metal dies, on the old Indian laws providing use of official seals and other data from the records of the Five Civilized Tribes, supplied through special research on the subject in the Historical Society and the U.S. Indian Office at Muskogee.

Replicas of the five paintings have been popular and widely used since they were reproduced in 1940. At the invitation of the Alabama Department of Archives and History through its director, Mrs. Marie Bankhead Owen, white satin banners with the Indian seals embroidered in colors like those in the paintings were presented on Flag Day, June 14, 1940, to Alabama's Hall of Flags in the Historical Building at Montgomery. The banners in lieu of flags are still on exhibit there in memory of the five Indian nations that at one time or another in the past lived within the boundaries of Alabama.

These same paintings of the Indian seals made up the design used by the Post Office Department for the special U.S. postage stamp in 1948, commemorating the centennial of the development and settlement of the Five Civilized Tribes as nations in Oklahoma. During the centennial celebration held in Muskogee this same year, large reproductions of the five seals were painted in the same color scheme on the street, along which five, beautiful floats also depicting the Indian seals in color were a part of a two-hour parade.

The Indian seals from the Museum paintings have been reproduced in "Five Civilized Tribes Jewelry," particularly beautiful silver charm bracelets and necklaces and earrings, at the instance and with the approval of The Inter-tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes, which has its offices at Muskogee. The Council is made up of members of the Five Tribes, and was regularly organized some years ago to promote the welfare of all American Indians.

The Historical Society at one time reproduced the designs of the Indian seals on small silk flags in the predominating

colors of the Museum paintings, that were popular with school children and visitors to the Historical Building. *The Chronicles*, also, carried each of the Indian seals in colors on the front cover besides the Oklahoma Territorial Seal and the State Seal, beginning with the winter number of the magazine, 1955-1956, to autumn, 1957.

Briefly, the history and lore of the five Indian seals are given here:

Cherokee Seal. The seven pointed star in this seal has reference to the seven sacred clans, the legendary beginnings of the Cherokee people. The oak wreath surrounding the star is the symbol of strength, the oak having been used to keep the sacred fire burning in the "town house" located at the central part of the nation, in ancient times. The outside border of this central device bears the words "Cherokee Nation," followed by the Sequoyah characters for "Cherokee Nation," pronounced "Tsa-la-gi-hi A-ye-li"—and the date "Sept. 6, 1838," that on which the constitution of the Cherokee Nation, West, was adopted.

Chickasaw Seal. The Indian warrior is shown in ancient regalia, carrying two arrows in his right hand, a long bow in his left hand, and a shield on his left shoulder. The Chickasaws were noted as a nation of warriors, of which the war-chief Tishomingo is known as a great leader in history.

Choctaw Seal. The outside border of this seal has the words, "The Great Seal of the Choctaw Nation," and the central device shows an unstrung bow, crossed by three arrows and a pipe-hatchet. The Choctaws were known as a peace loving people yet strong in defensive warfare. In ancient times, they smoked the Indian calumet pipe in their councils, the calumet later being replaced by the steel pipe-hatchet in trade with the French.

Creek Seal. In this seal, the words "Great Seal of the Muscogee Nation, I.T." are in the border surrounding the central device that shows a sheaf of wheat and a plow. The people of this tribe referred to themselves as the "Muscogee," the early English colonists having given them the name of "Creek" because they lived along certain creeks in Georgia. The sheaf of wheat and the plow represent the "Muscogee" as an agricultural people, the device apparently having been chosen through the influence of Christian members of the Nation when an official seal was adopted after the period of the American Civil War.

Seminole Seal. The Seminole was smallest in population among the five Indian nations, great authority resting in the office of the Principal Chief. After settlement in the West, the Principal Chief was generally a member of a strong ruling clan or family, who was elected and re-elected for this office through a period of many years. In keeping with this central authority, the official

seal has the words "Executive Department Seminole Nation" in the border, and the device in the center shows a plumed tribesman rowing a canoe across a lake to a village and trading house. This scene is symbolic of the lakes of Florida, the homeland of the Seminoles before the main part of the tribe was removed west to the Indian Territory. Some of the Seminoles never moved west, and their descendants still live in the swamp country of Florida.

The official seals of the Five Civilized Tribes, seen in the Museum paintings based on their old government documents in the historical records, reveal some of the tribal characteristics and much of the lore of the Indian peoples. The paintings of these seals in color, each device done according to data from original sources, have themselves made history in the state, having created a deeper appreciation for the story of Oklahoma and all its people. Continued interest and requests for reproductions of the Indian seals have prompted the full page in color here in *The Chronicles* for autumn, 1962.

—The Editor