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Facts About Oklahoma Indians

By CATO SELLS

U. S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs

Harlow's Weekly of the date of August 13, 1920, contains a most interesting and exhaustive article from the pen of Hon. Cato Sells, Commissioner of Indian Affairs. We are pleased to publish it, but are prefacing it as follows with an editorial review by the Fort Worth Record of the article in question:

A very readable and highly instructive article written by Commissioner Cato Sells on the administration of Indian Affairs in Oklahoma and published in Harlow's Weekly of Oklahoma City is reproduced in this issue of the Record.

Few people realize the extent or comprehensiveness of the financial and business affairs of the Indians of America handled by the United States government. This article on Oklahoma Indian affairs covers only a very small part, but is representative of this, the greatest estate in the world. Cato Sells has shown remarkable ability and wonderful business capacity and has earned the everlasting gratitude of America's Indian wards.

The Choctaw word "Oklahoma" is destined to hold a prominent, permanent and honored place among the many Indian terms that are written into the annals of every state in the union. Its meaning is at once suggestive of the large Indian population within the prosperous commonwealth of that name, now considerably more than double that of any other state, and of which the Five Civilized Tribes are an important local factor, since they embrace more than five-sixths of their race in Oklahoma.

Prior to 1830, these tribes, composed of the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Creek and Seminole Indians, occupied different sections of the Southern states east of the Mississippi river. They are of the old Iroquoian and Muskogean families who in earlier times produced many valiant leaders in war, besides others of notable inventive and literary genius, and today they fill with credit various important places of trust and furnish men of distinction in the highest councils of the nation.

These Indians had made considerable progress in communal activities before accepting, under treaties, lands west of the Mississippi and, after removal, re-established their tribal governments, held and owned

in common the land within their respective nations, and controlled their own affairs largely independent of the federal government. But their productive acres were attractive, and their practice of leasing them admitted large numbers of whites, many of whom were desirable settlers, but among them were adventurers and fortune-hunters who introduced conditions beyond the control of tribal governments and made it necessary for congress to take steps for the correction of lawless tendencies. In 1893, therefore, the Dawes commission was appointed, having in view a gradual transition from tribal government and communal estates to the allotment of land in severalty, the development of individual competency as a basis for citizenship, and the establishment of law and order as an essential to statehood. To this end the securing of agreements with the Five Tribes, the preparation of a complete roll of their members, the survey and allotment of their extensive real property, and the adjustment of some 10,000 contests between claimants, became an immense task covering practically one-third of all the Indians in the United States.

The passage of over two hundred laws by congress relating to these Indians is suggestive of the scope of their large interests and the difficulty of administering them.

On the final rolls of these tribes were 101,506 persons, of whom 26,774 were classified as full-bloods. They had a little less than 20,000,000 acres of land, of which nearly 16,000,000 acres were allotted to enrolled members, and about 150,000 acres reserved for townsites, schools, churches and other purposes. Sales of town lots have been made from more than 300 townsites for approximately \$5,000,000.00. The sales of unallotted tribal land have occurred entirely within the last decade and largely within my administration.

These have been held each year and are now practically completed covering over three and a-half million acres for considerably more than \$20,000,000.00. In addition, the sale of Choctaw and Chickasaw lands containing coal and asphalt deposits has brought nearly two millions, and leases and royalties for the mining of these deposits about five million more.

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