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Facts About Oklahoma Indians

By CATO SELLS

U. S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs

(Continued from last issue)

The Act of March 3, 1901, made all Indians of the Five Tribes citizens of the United States, and the Act of February 8, 1887, known as the Dawes Act or the General Allotment Act, provided a way for conferring citizenship upon Indians of other tribes within the boundaries of what is now the State of Oklahoma.

The tribal or communal interests of the Indians in their lands were being gradually broken up into allotments of land in severalty by transferring tribal title into individual holdings with restrictions imposed on the allottee's right to sell or otherwise dispose of his land unless with the approval of the government. In some cases the allottees received fee patents with restrictions against alienation for twenty-five years and in others patents with a period of trust for that time.

Here we had in a sovereign state thousands of Indians who had received full United States citizenship, but whose lands and other property were still held under the protecting arm of the government. We had American citizenship and restrictions against the full personal control of lands. This impressed me as a condition that should not continue indefinitely, and a more liberal practice was begun with reference to Indians who were qualified to look after their business affairs.

This tentative plan brought encouraging results and largely decided me in announcing the "Declaration of Policy" of April 17, 1917, which provides that a broad, liberal policy shall henceforth prevail to the end that every Indian of twenty-one years or over, as soon as ascertained to be as competent to transact his own business as the average white man, shall be given full control of his lands and funds and thus cease to be a ward of the government. This policy was further greatly enlarged by the subsequent declaration to give a fee patent to, or release from United States control in other ways, every allottee who had at least one-half white blood.

Under these broader policies, the total number of

Indians released from government supervision has reached nearly 21,000, Oklahoma sharing a large percentage.

In the years prior to 1913 somewhat over 6000 fee patents had been issued, and from that year to the date of the new policy about 3,542 fee patents were issued, approximately 9,500. It will be seen that under this liberal procedure many more Indians have been released from government control since 1917 than in all prior years.

Under various acts of congress the restrictions on the control of lands of many of the Five Tribes allottees were absolutely removed and the Indians and intermarried whites given full responsibility of citizenship. As rapidly as conditions will properly permit, we hope to place in the hands of every Indian who is competent the full control of all his trust property; and I venture to suggest that it would be in the interest of all the good citizens of Oklahoma, not only as a business proposition but for other high considerations, to give encouragement to every Indian released from government control, to the end that his property may be kept intact and that he may be shielded from those who might seek to involve him in transactions that would result in the loss of his land or money.

I have held to the principal of protecting the Indian in his property rights until he shows a responsible capacity for taking care of himself in competition with the white man, believing that this is scarcely a greater service to the one than to the other. No state can thrive on the pauperism of any considerable element of its population. There is something wrong with the social, civic and economic standards of any state where there is a large improvident class of citizens.

The Wealthy Osages

In the northeast corner of Oklahoma is the Osage Indian reservation, belonging to about 2,100 Indians who have been called the richest people, per capita, in the world. This section of the great state of Oklahoma is one of the wonderful oil-producing fields of the country, and its wells daily pour great wealth upon these Indians. From their oil and gas royalties

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