

Facts About Oklahoma Indians

By CATO SELLS

U. S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs

(Continued from last issue)

Decided improvement has followed the new regulations promulgated on April 7, 1917, under which a number of leases covering valuable Indian lands have been entered into by or on behalf of the Indian allottees, or heirs, with the operating companies, the result of which will probably lead to greater mining operations, larger production of lead and zinc ore, and increased royalties to the Indian owners. This rapid development of mining interests has been reflected in the growth of great mining camps on the reservation. It is not difficult to believe that the mining and town-site properties in the Quapaw agency involve millions of dollars in invested capital and thousands of income to the Indians.

Under these circumstances, it was not strange that designing persons of the white race were ready to take advantage of conditions, with the result that we have several suits now being prosecuted in an effort to undo some of the gross wrongs that have been committed.

General Agricultural Conditions

The limits of this article will hardly permit extended reference to the tribes in the western part of the state numbering approximately 17,000, and embracing the Kiowa and Comanche, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Shawnee, Iowa, Kaw, Kickapoo, Otoe, Pawnee, Ponca, Pottawatomie, Sac and Fox and other small bands. They complete the large Indian population of a great state and I am proud to say, hold a forward place in the progress of our continental Indian life. In the agricultural industries that hold the roots of civilization they are among the active and prosperous of their race.

The area of land cultivated by the Indians in Oklahoma has doubled in the last six years. This significant fact is a striking approval of the policy which has been pursued for helping these Indians make the most of their lands and create an interest in their greater possibilities.

I have encouraged the sale rather than the leasing of inherited lands and have insisted, especially in the case of non-competent Indians, on the expenditure of the proceeds for improvements, and have refused to allow the Indians to lease such improved homesteads. As most of the Indians inherit other land, this plan is resulting in the upbuilding of Indian homes which compare favorably with white homes of the community. It results also in eliminating the lease income upon which the Indians are apt to rely for support and which removes the incentive for vigorous effort to promote their own welfare and materially better their

condition. Generally the Indians used the proceeds of the sales of their inherited lands for the betterment of their homes. This is a radical change from the old system which permitted the Indian to lease practically all of his land, living on the rentals as long as they lasted and then merely existing.

With few exceptions, due to varying conditions, the Indians of Oklahoma have had sufficient money of their own to equip them for farming. There were some, however, who were not fortunate in having inherited land sales to aid them or oil and gas royalties to provide revenues. These have been assisted from the reimbursable (repayment) funds which congress has wisely appropriated during the past six or seven years.

Educational Progress

I have thus far referred chiefly to the material interests of the Oklahoma Indians, which in no sense means that less importance is attached to their educational status. No civilization can long endure unless the work of the schools is built into its foundation, and no better example of achieving the self-sustaining development of the Indians by means of education is found than in Oklahoma where there have been evolved many years those government boarding and day schools for Indian children which have recently approached an ideal system with standards and practice comparable to those of the best schools elsewhere.

The educational facilities for the Five Civilized Tribes had their origin and for some years their management, under the tribal system of government, which was unfortunate because too often selfish and political considerations prevent efficient instruction, economical methods, and material upkeep. Although there was federal legislation as early as 1906 providing for taking over the control of these schools, it was not until 1910 that their entire management passed to the commissioner of Indian affairs. Since then they have come within the general plan of organization, superintendence, and course of study as applied to other government schools for the Indians, and today, under capable instructors and economical supervision, they rank with the best schools of like grade in our service. No greater wealth has come to the Five Civilized Tribes than these schools have brought to their children who are there taught the things most practical and valuable in real life.

(To be continued next issue)

At a recent meeting of the juniors the following officers were elected: President, Albert Spearson; vice-president, Elmer Therriault; secretary, Millie Bennet; treasurer, Alex Williams; sergeant-at-arms, Joseph Racine; cheer leader, Dewey Sampson; assistant cheer leader, Hattie Cayton.