

Facts About Oklahoma Indians

By CATO SELLS

U. S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs

(Continued from last issue)

Eastern Oklahoma is now quite generally well supplied with public schools to which, as a rule, Indian children are cordially admitted, and our efforts for some time have encouraged this attendance, for we have great faith in the public school system as an effective agency for shaping the right beginnings of our democratic life. There is good statesmanship in the law which permits the use of federal funds in payment of tuition for the attendance of children of non-taxed Indians in the public schools, and we employ this legal provision wherever practicable. I am glad to say that of the twenty thousand children of these tribes who attend school nearly seventeen thousand are now in the public schools.

Outside of the Five Civilized Tribes and principally in Western Oklahoma, schools are maintained under thorough organization on the Cheyenne and Arapaho, Kiowa, Osage, Pawnee, Seger, and Seneca reservations, several schools on other reservations having been recently closed because of adequate public school facilities in those localities. All schools in operation are well attended and their work is conducted under the complete and uniform course of study promulgated in December, 1915, which outlines and grades the academic work and prevocational and vocational courses from the first to the tenth grade for use in all government Indian schools.

The Chilocco Industrial School

In the northern part of the state just across the state line from Arkansas City, is situated at Chilocco, Oklahoma, one of the finest nonreservation schools in the service. This plant is ideally located in a magnificent farming country and has a large farm and pasture splendidly adapted to diversified agriculture. The plant is modern and properly equipped. Its climatic conditions and soil possibilities are similar to those where its students reside, who are principally from Oklahoma. Full vocational courses, including the tenth grade, are given in home economics for the girls, and for the boys in the mechanic arts and trades but with special stress upon agriculture and stock raising. Large classes of bright, progressive students are graduated each year, and the attendance is usually beyond the normal capacity.

I have been much interested in this school and am convinced that the conditions there offer a great opportunity for the Indians of Oklahoma to have an educational institution the equal in all modern essentials of state agricultural colleges, and I am taking all the steps to have it so constituted. Its capacity should be increased to at least 800, which would necessitate considerable additional building. The best obtainable stock and equipment are being procured, and I hope soon to see here an institution of learning that will furnish ambitious Indian boys and girls practical and scientific training in farming and stock raising and in all the requirements of sanitary and cultured homemaking. Such a school should draw many students from other states who are able to pay the cost of better education, and its value to the Indians at large, and

particularly to the state of Oklahoma, would be more than can now be estimated.

Here I am pleased to say that President Cantwell of the State Agricultural College at Stillwater, is giving to the Chilocco Indian School splendid co-operation by way of personal advice and now and then the brief detail of members of his faculty for like service.

All our work in Oklahoma, as elsewhere, is dealing increasingly with the individual interest of the Indians. To this extent it becomes more specialized and more laborious, but its compensations are greater because it brings us nearer the condition of personal self-support. Our modern civilization is in no sense clannish or tribal; it is individualistic; it is predicated upon equal rights and opportunities to all. It commits us to the principle of education for all at public expense, and it should be our highest public obligation to see that all classes of actual or prospective citizens are elevated to the level of intelligent self-maintenance, and meanwhile to protect the weak and incompetent from acts of imposition.

The work of the schools for a generation has moved the Indians everywhere farther from dependent conditions and we are daily extending recognition of their individual competency. In many matters of industrial and financial interest to the Indians, we are expediting and liberalizing administration by allowing superintendents in the various jurisdictions to decide as to the competency of the Indian and to take final administrative action without approval of the bureau. This pertains largely to grazing, farming, and some kinds of mineral leases, as well as to numerous other local transactions, and serves, within proper bounds, to encourage initiative on the part of the Indians as well as to facilitate and economize office procedure. It is an instance of what pervades our purpose as a whole, to hasten as rapidly as is justifiably possible the release of all Indians from federal supervision and turn them over to the various state governments as capable and trustworthy subjects.

Patriotism

No reference to the Indians of Oklahoma should fail to recognize their remarkable wartime service. It is estimated that from the Five Civilized Tribes alone more than 4,000 Indians entered the military and naval service and that 200 made the supreme sacrifice. I have heard of no more brilliant achievements in battle overseas than are recorded of some of these splendid young Americans and those who remained at home were active upholders of the flag in every way that they could give assistance. The purchase of more than ten million dollars worth of liberty bonds and over eight hundred thousand dollars worth of war saving stamps, besides large donations in money and service, through the Red Cross and other relief agencies, stands to the everlasting credit of these tribes, and to other Indians in Oklahoma likewise loyal and generous.

In my intimate work with the Indians for nearly eight years, I have continually gained firmer faith in their racial ability to meet the tests and rise to the requirements of our civilization, and the Indians of Oklahoma will, I am sure, never contribute less than a large measure of leadership to this progress.

Conclusion