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## THE CREEK INDIANS IN EAST TEXAS

by Gilbert M. Culbertson

Putting flesh on the barebones of historical documents is one of the great rewards of the historian. Vanished personalities spring from hidden places in a dance which is no longer macabre because it is real. Such is the task of reconstructing the Texas past from the Hagerty-Dohoney papers which deal with the migration of the Creek Indians, Texas slaveholdings, and the settlement of Harrison and Red River counties.<sup>1</sup>

Among the Indian tribes settled in Texas the Creeks were among the most civilized. Their correspondence is highly literate and their business transactions astute. There were indeed hazy legends of Madoc and St. Brendan and tales of Welsh and Irish blood among the Cherokees and Creeks. In spite of their superior culture and leadership the removal from the ancestral lands of Georgia was a "trail of tears."<sup>2</sup>

The first mention that the Creeks had arrived in Texas is contained in a letter from Dr. John Sibley to General Henry Dearborn, September 7, 1808, mentioning that Siache, a Creek who had murdered O'Neal, was a few miles from Conchetta village on the Sabine in June 1807.<sup>3</sup> There were many renegades gathering in the "Neutral Ground," outlaws, land sharks, and assorted swindlers, fresh off the Natches Trace and heading toward the Murrell Conspiracy.

The next twenty years marked the removal of the Creeks from their lands in Georgia and Alabama. Indeed Mirabeau Lamar was secretary to Governor Troup of Georgia and a believer in a firm Indian policy which he developed later as Governor of Texas. Lamar wrote to J. H. Eaton, Creek Nation:

— we came to bury the Tomahawk and to restore tranquility . . . to make this overture of peace and friendship, and to invite them to a participation of the blessings that are enjoyed in the West.<sup>4</sup>

He warns that: "You will be an easy prey to the rapacity of bad men and soon fall victims to a system of Government which you are incapable of comprehending."<sup>5</sup>

During the 1820s the Creeks were ably led although fatally divided. In fact division into "war towns" and "peace towns" was institutionally part of the Creek governmental structure. But the Creeks throughout their modern history have been beset by factionalism. They were divided in the 1820s between the pro-emigration party, headed by General William McIntosh and his opponents, the "red-sticks."

General McIntosh deserves to rank with the greatest American Indian leaders. He was a brigadier general in the United States Army having served under General Andrew Jackson in the Seminole Campaign of 1817-18. His father was a British captain, and by an ironic historical twist his aunt was Governor Troup's mother.<sup>6</sup>

Although there were many bones of contention between the Creeks and the Georgians, slavery was not one of them. In fact, maintenance of the South's

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"peculiar institution" was a point of common interest. The Creeks were among a number of American slave-holding tribes. Among the Dohoney documents are numerous slave transactions. The earliest is an executed contract from General William McIntosh to Louisa McIntosh for nine slaves for \$4000.00. After they were removed to the Indian Territory and Texas, many of the slave-holding Creeks became eloquent adherents of the Confederate cause.<sup>7</sup>

Pushed on all sides by the Georgians, General McIntosh signed the "Treaty" of Broken Arrow in 1824 which exchanged Creek lands for new holdings in Oklahoma. Although this act was conciliatory, it was bitterly resented by the Upper Creeks, or "red sticks," who passed a sentence of death on the McIntosh family. They surrounded the General's house on the Chattahoochee River, fired it, and killed the General. Samuel Hawkins, married to one of the McIntosh daughters, was hanged. His brother, Ben Hawkins, escaped to Texas as did Chilly McIntosh, a son, who had also signed the treaty. Chilly McIntosh went to Washington to demand the punishment of the murderers.<sup>8</sup>

The second document in the Dohoney series is the settlement with John Crowell, Indian agent, of the claim of the family for damages at the killing. The family received \$7000.00, signed at the Creek Agency, and received by Chilly, John, Peggy, and Susannah McIntosh. Of course, the government would eventually deduct this claim from payments made to the Upper Creeks for their lands.

The McIntosh faction of the Creeks then set out with their slaves on the long Westward trek. They located initially at the three forks of the Arkansas, the Verdigris, and the Grand River, arriving aboard the steamboat *Fidelity*. Accompanying this group was Benjamin Marshall, said to have had a hundred slaves, and Roly McIntosh, a half-brother of the General's, who headed the Western settlement at Fort Gibson.<sup>9</sup> Rebecca Hagerty, another daughter, was presumably in this party.

An important document in the Dohoney series is an official inventory from Colonel Brearly, agent for the emigrating Creeks, to Chilly McIntosh. Included are lists of supplies and the hiring of wagons from Ft. Mitchell in the Old Creek Nation to St. Francis in Arkansas Territory, signed at the Western Creek Agency, December 21, 1829. Of course, a mere listing of goods concealed the tremendous hardship of being uprooted. The McIntosh party was more fortunate and provident than the later Creek emigrants who embarked on their "trail of tears" with few hopes and fewer supplies. By that time the earlier settlers were already suitably located in Oklahoma and Texas.

Apprehension, however, was being felt already in Texas. General Mier y Terán wrote to the Minister of Relations as early as July 7, 1828, regarding the need for the appointment of a *jefe político* to deal with and observe the tribes:

It is now feared on the frontier, I know not on what grounds, that next winter the numerous Creek tribe will come. They have for some time carried on a war with the northern states . . . Finally being defeated by the campaign directed by General Jackson.<sup>10</sup>

The last significant Mexican report is that of Juan N. Alamonte, who visited Texas in 1835, and noted the existence of a Creek settlement near Nacogdoches. The Creek who settled with their slaves in Texas did so primarily as individuals. The majority of the tribe headed northward.

Later in 1835, there were again rumors of a Creek migration to Texas.

General Sam Houston headed a "committee of vigilance and safety" from the citizens of Nacogdoches to protest the possible introduction of over 5000 Creeks onto a grant made by the Mexican government to General Filasola. Apparently such a deal was being arranged by an impressario, Archibald Hotchkiss and Benjamin Hawkins, with Apothleyahola and other Creek chiefs.

Petitioners allege that such "incursion" is contrary to the treaty with Mexico of April 5, 1831, and should be prevented to protect "a sparse and comparatively defenceless population unprotected from the evils which were so tragically manifested on the frontiers (sic) of Georgia and Alabama; evils which can only be remedied by the skill and generalship of a Jackson while he was controlling the chivalry of Tennessee and Georgia."<sup>11</sup>

It was not entirely clear what Benjamin Hawkins was doing negotiating with the Apothleyahola faction, but it is certain that Houston, for all his favorable Indian policy, was not anxious to have hostile or anti-McIntosh Creeks in support of the Mexicans, which, of course, would have been greatly advantageous to Santa Anna.

The Indian question arose again, this time before the Governor and Council in January 1836, when it was reported that a large body of Creeks were emigrating to Texas. On January 2 the Committee on the State and Judiciary resolved that this was "a course dangerous to the country and in the highest degree criminal and unpardonable."<sup>12</sup> There is no doubt, however, that many of the Creeks already settled in Texas were prepared to defend the Republic if the Mexicans crossed the Trinity. Koch maintains that the Creeks had better relations with Texas than any other Indian tribe.

General Houston may have been toying with recruiting Creek settlers to support Texas, or he may have simply been delaying. On February 9, 1837, he wrote to Lt. Peter Harper from Columbia showing interest in a settlement proposal. However, Houston cautions:

The subject will then be laid before congress . . . Until then I would advise my Red Brothers the Chiefs, with their people to raise Corn on the Canadian and to keep peace among themselves.<sup>13</sup>

The letter to the Creeks via Lt. Harper raised a strong protest from Acting Superintendent of the Western Territory, William Armstrong, Choctaw Agency, 10 May 1837:

The Creeks as well as the Cherokees have a great disposition to engage in the contest between the Texians and the Mexicans, and there are those among them, more especially the Cherokees, who are secretly encouraging such a design.<sup>14</sup>

Armstrong is less than anxious to see the Indians engage in Texas settlement or politics, an opinion vindicated by the fate of Chief Bowles and the Texas Cherokees.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile members of the McIntosh family were settling in Harrison County near Port Caddo, where they established Refuge Plantation. Port Caddo, during this period, was a town "with prospects."<sup>16</sup> The land was settled by slave-holders, who have been statistically studied by Randolph Campbell.<sup>17</sup>

It is interesting to note that on July 14, 1838, S. M. Hagerty, the husband of Rebecca McIntosh, and others directed a petition to the Congress of the Republic praying for relief: "Without leaving our farms uncultivated or our families at the mercy of ruthless and hostile savages who are continually

committing depredations on our frontier."<sup>18</sup> Of course, the problem was the Comanches and other "hostiles" who raided deep into Texas in such episodes as the kidnapping of Cynthia Ann Parker.

The workaday world of the Texas plantation was occasionally broken by the arrival of supplies from Jefferson or orders from New Orleans aboard the steamboat *Comet*. There is not a great deal of excitement to be garnered from the plantation accounts — during the Civil War there is evidence of the salt shortage, but on the whole the operation is very much self-contained.<sup>19</sup> In the late 1850s, one document mentions a slave theft by Conchat Harjo from the Soda Lake area. A detailed description is given. Conchat Harjo was a relation of Opothleyoho so the Creeks brought with them their old feuds and rivalries to Texas. The plantation seemed to prosper.

At the same time during the 1850s there was a growing restlessness among the Creeks and their Texas neighbors. Some of the Hawkins family felt a desire to be "moving on" toward California. In this case "California or Bust" was "Bust." N. B. Hawkins with his brothers Sam and Pink set out with slaves and wagons. On the Red River the wagons were attached (for old debts, rather than attacked). The party progressed as far as El Paso, where they contracted to haul lumber for the fort. The slaves were not interested in working and were too close to Mexico to do much about it. Hawkins was then swindled out of several thousand dollars worth of lumber and had to apply to Aunt Rebecca Hagerty for a loan to return.<sup>20</sup>

The restlessness on the other side was caused largely by Creek settlement along with the Alabama-Coushatta in Polk and Livingston Counties. In 1857, citizens of Polk County petitioned the Legislature for removal of the Creeks. There were proposals for resettlement in the Western part of the state or in Nueces County. Although \$5000.00 was appropriated for the project in 1858, it was never carried out. By 1860, the Creeks in Texas number only 403, most having relocated in the Indian Territory, where Chilly McIntosh was supporting the Confederacy.<sup>21</sup>

There is one brief letter in the Dohoney papers from the Confederate period. Written from Arkansas on April 15, 1862, to Mrs. Hagerty, it is from an otherwise unidentified cavalryman, T. L. Crary, now at Ozark on the White River and awaiting transport to Memphis, "whair thair is a big fight."<sup>22</sup> This letter was probably a prelude to the disaster at Arkansas Post.

Never numerous nor always influential, the Creeks made their mark on each major phase of the development of East Texas. So thoroughly assimilated in the cultural and historical patterns of that part of the state, the Creeks and their contributions have been largely overlooked by historians.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This study is based upon original manuscripts and documents in the family collection of Mrs. A. P. Dohoney of Houston through whose kindness copies have been deposited in the Woodward Research Center at Rice University.

<sup>2</sup>In general see Angie Debo, *The Road to Disappearance* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941).

<sup>3</sup>Julia Kathryn Garrett, "Dr. John Sibley and the Louisiana-Texas Frontier, 1803-1814," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 275 XLVI (1940).

<sup>4</sup>Charles A. Gulick and others, editors, *The Papers of Mirabeau Bonaparte Lamar* (Austin and New York: Pemberton Press, 1968) I, 79 #94, April 13, 1830.

<sup>5</sup>*Lamar Papers* I, 80, Cf. #95 to G. M. Troup.

<sup>6</sup>*Dictionary of American Biography*, 70, (McIntosh), noting *American State Papers, Indian Affairs* I, II (1832-34) and E. J. Harden's *The Life of George M. Troup* (1853).

<sup>7</sup>See Annie Heloise Abel, *The American Indian as Slaveholder and Secessionist* (Cleveland: Arthur Clarke Co., 1915).

<sup>8</sup>A second slave transaction in the Dohoney papers is dated November 26, 1827, from Lawrence County, Alabama, to Benjamin Hawkins for a Negro man named Aron by William Grierson, Governor of the Hillabee Town, Creek Nation.

<sup>9</sup>Abel, I, 193; Choctaw Agency, August 31, 1836 (?), William Armstrong, Acting Superintendent, Western Territory. From C. A. Harris, Commissioner of Indian Affairs: "Sir, the first part of emigrating Creeks are now on the opposite side of the river Arkansas, on the way up . . . much dissatisfaction manifested by both Chilly and Rolly McIntosh, the latter has sworn to kill A-po-the-ho-lo who was concerned in taking the life of his father."

<sup>10</sup>Ohland Morton, "Life of General Don Miguel Mier y Terán," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 133 XLVII (1943).

<sup>11</sup>Amelia W. Williams and Eugene C. Barker, editors, *The Writings of Sam Houston* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1938) I, 299-300, 359.

<sup>12</sup>Anna Muckleroy, "The Indian Policy of the Republic of Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 259, XXV (1922).

<sup>13</sup>Houston, II, 50.

<sup>14</sup>See also, Clara L. Koch, "The Federal Indian Policy in Texas, 1845-1860," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 112 XXIX (1925).

<sup>15</sup>Mary Whately Clarke, *Chief Bowles and the Texas Cherokees* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971).

<sup>16</sup>V. H. Hackney, "Port Caddo — A Vanished Village and Vignettes of Harrison County" (Marshall, Texas, 1966) 9.

<sup>17</sup>Randolph Campbell, "Slaveholding in Harrison County, 1850-1860," *East Texas Historical Journal*, 18-28, XI#1 (1973); "Planters and Plainfolk: Harrison County Texas as a Test Case, 1850-1860," *Journal of Southern History*, 369-98, XL#3 (1974).

<sup>18</sup>Hackney, "Port Caddo"

<sup>19</sup>A good part of the Dohoney papers deal with Refuge and Phoenix Plantations.

<sup>20</sup>N. B. Hawkins to Rebecca Hagerty, March 6, 1852.

<sup>21</sup>Koch, 123, 111

<sup>22</sup>There is only one later document, which deals with settling a lawsuit involving Thomas McIntosh. Crary was probably in the 15th, 17th, or 18th Cavalry, converted to Granberry's Brigade before Arkansas Post.