

☆ NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

Origin of the Place Name “Broken Arrow”

By Donald A. Wise

According to the 1990 Federal Census, the City of Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, is the fifth largest city in the state and the second largest urban area in eastern Oklahoma. In his standard reference, *Oklahoma Place Names*, George H. Shirk stated that the town name of Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, derived from “a Creek ceremony following the Civil War, in which an arrow was broken to symbolize a reunion of the two Civil War factions.”¹ The information undoubtedly came from a 1937 interview of Merida Caleb “Mac” Williams (1868–1963), an Arkansas native who settled in the present City of Broken Arrow when it was established in 1902.² However, any number of historic records and maps indicate that the name of Broken Arrow as a place name had a much earlier antecedent.

The place name of Broken Arrow actually is derived from an Indian community, *Thlikachka*, or Broken Arrow, in Alabama on a tributary of the Chattahoochee River. When the Creek Indians from Thlikachka moved to Indian Territory in the 1830s, they settled along the Arkansas River in the vicinity of a tributary now known as Broken Arrow Creek. There they established a town square where they held ceremonial and political meetings and around which an Indian community grew. Walter McHenry indicated that the site of the old community square was west of Broken Arrow Creek and north of East 121st Street, South (Tucson Street) within the present boundaries of the City of Broken Arrow.³ The present City of Broken Arrow was platted in 1902 about five miles north of the Indian community.

Supporting evidence for the origin of the place name Broken Arrow is found in a number of primary and secondary sources in Indian Territory, Alabama, and Georgia. For example, William Alexander Read in his 1937 *Indian Place-names in Alabama* states that the place name of Broken Arrow was “a creek in Russell County [Alabama]. A Lower Creek town called *Likachka* was situated on the Chattahoochee [River] near this creek. The source of the name is Creek: *li*, ‘arrow,’ and *kachki*, ‘broken,’ from the Creek, *Kachkita*, ‘to be broken.’ The settlement was evidently founded by Indians who broke reeds there to make arrows, or it received its

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name because a band of Indians broke away from the Coweta mother town and formed a new settlement."⁴ The *History of Russell County, Alabama*, published in 1982, states that this "village was given the name because of the luxuriant growth of reeds for making arrow shafts and which were found along the stream, called in the Indian period *li-i-Katska*. . . . It was a war ford, referred to as a 'military ford,' rising about two miles west of Fort Mitchell, and flowing in a general easterly direction, entering the Chattahoochee River one and one-half miles east of the old town. Today, the stream is known as Broken Arrow Creek."⁵

Albert Gatschet prepared a historical and linguistic study of the Creek Indians for the U.S. Bureau of Ethnology in 1884. He stated that *Le-katchka*, *Li-i-katchka*, or Broken Arrow was a Lower Creek town about twelve miles below Kawita (Coweta) on the Chattahoochee River in Alabama.⁶

Henry Gannett in his 1905 *Gazetteer of Indian Territory* described Broken Arrow "as a post village in the Creek Nation and as a creek in Creek Nation, a left-hand branch of Arkansas River."⁷ In 1933 Charles N. Gould in *Oklahoma Place Names* mentioned the "use of Indian names among the creeks" and cites "Broken Arrow" as an example.⁸

Primary records provide the best documentation for the town's existence before the Civil War. The *American State Papers*, a collection of legislative and executive documents of the United States published from 1832 to 1861, frequently mentioned the Creek Indian town of Broken Arrow in connection with Little Prince or Tustennuck Opoyow, who was chief of the Broken Arrow Indian tribe. For example, a letter from James Carey, a U.S. interpreter to the Creek Nation, to Governor William Bount on November 3, 1792, refers to Broken Arrow, a Creek Indian town, and to Indian Chief Talotiskee of Broken Arrow. By 1825 Broken Arrow was referred to as the capital of the Creek Nation, where all business of a public nature was transacted.⁹

Numerous references to Little Prince are found in the records, some as early as 1796. By 1825 Little Prince had become the ranking chief and he is known to have welcomed General Lafayette on the latter's visit to the nation.¹⁰ Little Prince was given title to land at Broken Arrow, Alabama, under the terms of the 1832 removal treaty. He died soon afterwards and was buried along Broken Arrow Creek. In 1834 his wife and daughter Sally still owned and farmed the land which they described as Section 23, Township 16, Range 30.¹¹

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Creek census records from Alabama and Indian Territory also provide evidence of the place name's origin and transfer. The *Parsons and Abbott 1832 Census of the Lower Creek Indians in Alabama* listed the Creek Indian town of *Thla-Katch-Ka* or Broken Arrow.¹² The *Creek Old Settler by Towns Census of 1857* listed the name of the Broken Arrow Indian community in Indian Territory.¹³ In 1891 a complete census of Creek citizens made by the Creek Council in Indian Territory listed 431 persons living in the community.¹⁴

Several maps from the pre-removal period contain the place name Broken Arrow. These include the Samuel Lewis *Map of Georgia, 1795*;¹⁵ the William Barker *Map of Georgia, 1795*;¹⁶ the P.F. Tardieu *Carte des Etats-Unis de L'Amerique Septentrionile . . .*, 1812, 1820;¹⁷ the Francis Shallus *Map of Mississippi Territory, 1814*;¹⁸ the Matthew Carey *Map of Mississippi Territory, 1814*;¹⁹ and the Enoch G. Gridley *Map of the State of Georgia, 1814*.²⁰ The spelling of the Indian name for Broken Arrow varies (*Clackatka*, *Clay Cotska*, and *Clayatskee*) as does the spelling of Coweta. However, all the maps place the site on the Chattahoochee River south of Coweta.

A number of maps from Indian Territory depict the place name Broken Arrow. One of the earliest is a map produced by the U.S. Engineer Bureau of the War Department in 1866. The map shows the location of Thomas Store along the north side of the Arkansas River and opposite the point where Snake Creek flows into the Arkansas. This store also was known as the Broken Arrow Trading Post and was located between Coweta Mission and Rockepoche (Tulsa).²¹ Other maps of Indian Territory, including the Asher and Adams map of *Arkansas and Portion of Indian Territory, 1870*;²² G.W. and C.B. Colton's *Grays Atlas Map of Indian Territory, 1872*;²³ *Colton's Indian Territory map, 1872*;²⁴ and *Colton's New Map of the State of Texas: The Indian Territory . . .*, 1873,²⁵ show the same location for Thomas Store. An 1891 map, L.C. Perryman's *Map showing locations of Creek Towns . . .*, calls the site Broken Arrow.²⁶ In 1907 Frank Speck produced a map showing the locations of Creek Nation towns to accompany an article he wrote for the American Anthropological Association. The Broken Arrow Indian community is shown north of the Arkansas River and about half-way between Coweta and Locker Poker (Tulsa).²⁷

The Broken Arrow Trading Post/Thomas Store existed as early as 1866 and was a regular camping ground for travelers and freighters between Texas and Fort Scott and Coffeyville, Kansas.²⁸

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The Broken Arrow Indian community had a flourishing Baptist Church of about fifty members as early as 1853.²⁹ The Indian Methodist Church at Broken Arrow was led by the Reverend James McHenry, a Creek Indian missionary, in 1876 and remains an active congregation today. It is located about one and one-half miles east of Broken Arrow Creek on 141st Road, southeast of the present City of Broken Arrow.³⁰

The first Broken Arrow Post Office was established in 1881 in the trading post. Charles H. Thomas served as postmaster with Thomas Ward Perryman (1830–1903) his assistant.³¹ The Dawes Commission used the Broken Arrow Post Office during the 1899–1902 census enumeration of the citizens of the Creek Nation.³²

The present city of Broken Arrow was founded in 1902 when the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad constructed a branch line from Muskogee (Wybark) to Tulsa. William Summerfield Fears (1869–1935), secretary of the Arkansas Valley Townsite Company, selected the townsite about five miles north of the Indian community in September and chose the name Broken Arrow. Samuel A. Cobb then completed a survey and prepared a preliminary plat of Broken Arrow in October.³³ Its post office was established on November 19, 1902, with William T. Brooks as the postmaster.³⁴

Perhaps the most eloquent and accurate description of the origin and history of the place name Broken Arrow was related by Mildred McIntosh Childers (1869–1944) in a 1937 interview. She and her husband, Daniel Boone Childers (1881–1946), were Creek Indian residents of the Broken Arrow Indian community. She stated:

The real Broken Arrow settlement was four miles south of the present [city of] Broken Arrow; it was a community or clan that came intact from Georgia at the time of the Removal. I was here four years before the present Broken Arrow was surveyed. . . . *Thlekackha* is the Creek Indian word for Broken Arrow. Broken Arrow town had its origin among the Creeks when they lived in Georgia and Alabama. In Georgia and Alabama, whenever a town became too large to gather around one campfire, the people divided and part of them found a new location and took a new name for their town. One year some of the Indians of a Muskogee town with their wives and children made a long journey to the Chattahoochee River bottoms, where grew canes suitable for arrow making. They were gone about a year gathering arrows for the whole town. Since the canes were "broken off" and not cut, they were referred to as broken arrows. When the Indians returned to the Muskogee camp, the town had grown too large to gather around one campfire. It seemed natural that those who had gone so long should establish a new campfire where they had been living the past year and name it Broken Arrow town. . . .³⁵ The Broken Arrow tribe, or town of

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Indians, received that name before they were removed to Indian Territory. . . . When they were removed to Indian Territory, the Broken Arrow Indians settled in the stretch of country from Catoosa to the White Church.³⁶ When the "white man's town" was established, it took the place name already used by the Indians.³⁷

ENDNOTES

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¹ George H. Shirk, *Oklahoma Place Names* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), 31–32.

² M.C. (Merida Caleb) "Mac" Williams interview, Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, September 14, 1937, *Indian-Pioneer History*, 50: 26–31, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. (Hereafter cited as IPH, OHS)

³ Walter McHenry, interview with author, June 21, 1989.

⁴ William Alexander Read, *Indian Place-names in Alabama* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1937), 9.

⁵ Russell County Historical Society, *History of Russell County, Alabama* (Dallas, Texas: National Share Graphics, Inc., 1982), C-22, C-23.

⁶ Albert S. Gatschet, *A Migration Legend of the Creek Indians . . .*, 1 (Philadelphia: D.G. Brinton, 1884): 137.

⁷ Henry Gannett, *A Gazetteer of Indian Territory* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1905), 18.

⁸ Charles N. Gould, *Oklahoma Place Names* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1933), 45.

⁹ *American State Papers* (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1832), Vol. 2-Indian Affairs: 754–755, 761, 763–764, 773, 800, 832, 843, 845, 849, 859, 861; Vol. 4-Indian Affairs: 329, 376, 768, 772–773, 827–828 836, 839, 840.

¹⁰ *History of Russell County, Alabama*, C-22, C-23.

¹¹ Letter, Sally Prince, Fort Mitchell, Alabama, to Hon. Lewis Cass, Secretary of War, Washington City, February 22, 1834, Record Group Department of the Army, National Archives.

¹² Benjamin S. Parsons and Thomas J. Abbott, *A Census of the Lower Creek Indians in Alabama and Georgia*, 1832, microfilm copy, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. (hereafter cited as OHS)

¹³ *Creek Old Settler by Town Census of 1857*, Archives and Manuscripts Division, OHS.

¹⁴ *1891 Census of Creek Citizens in Indian Territory*, microfilm copy, OHS; Angie Debo, *The Road to Disappearance* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941), 333.

¹⁵ Samuel Lewis, *Map of Georgia*, 1795 (1:240,000), Thomas Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma. (hereafter cited as TGM)

¹⁶ William Barker, *Map of Georgia*, 1795 (1:2,580,000), TGM.

¹⁷ Pierre Francois Tardieu, *Carte des Etats-Unis de L'Amerique Septentrionile . . .*, 1812 (1:1,800,000), and *Carte des Etat-Unis . . .*, 1820 (1:2,400,000), TGM.

¹⁸ Francis Shallus, *Map of the Mississippi Territory*, 1814, TGM.

¹⁹ Mathew Carey, *Map of the Mississippi Territory*, 1814, TGM.

²⁰ Enoch G. Gridley, *The State of Georgia*, 1814 (1:1,350,000), TGM.

²¹ War Department, U.S. Engineer Bureau, *Map of Indian Territory, 1866*, (1:1,500,000), TGM.

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²² Asher and Adams, *Map of Arkansas and Portion of Indian Territory*, 1870 (1:1,290,000), TGM.

²³ George Woolworth and Charles B. Colton, *Grays Atlas Map of Indian Territory*, 1872 (1:1,520,000), TGM.

²⁴ George Woolworth and Charles B. Colton, *Colton's Indian Territory*, 1872 (1:1,520,000), TGM.

²⁵ George Woolworth Colton, *Colton's New Map of the State of Texas (The Indian Territory . . .)*, 1873 (1:1,520,640), TGM.

²⁶ Legus Chouteau Perryman, *Map Showing Locations of Creek Towns . . .*, 1891 (1:760,000), Creek Council House Museum, Okmulgee, Oklahoma.

²⁷ Frank Gouldsmith Speck, "The Creek Indians of Taskigi Town," *Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association*, 2 (Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1907): part 2. Speck's map also appears in Debo, *The Road to Disappearance*, 380.

²⁸ James A. Moore interview, IPH, OHS, 37: 114–115.

²⁹ Grant Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 208.

³⁰ *Minutes of the Annual Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, (Nashville, 1876), United Methodist Archives and History Center, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey, 347.

³¹ Grant Foreman, "Early Post Offices in Oklahoma," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 6 (March, 1928): 23.

³² John Bert Campbell, *Campbell's Abstract of Creek Indian Census and Index* (Muskogee, Oklahoma: Phoenix Job Printing Company, 1915), 19–203.

³³ *Broken Arrow Ledger*, August 11, 1904; Donald A. Wise, "W.S. Fears (1869–1955)," *Myriads of the Past* (Broken Arrow, Oklahoma: Re Tvkv'cke Press, 1987), 71–72.

³⁴ Grant Foreman, "Early Post Offices in Oklahoma," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 6 (September, 1928): 295.

³⁵ Mildred (McIntosh) Childers interview, Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, October 29, 1937, IPH, OHS, 19: 464–470; H. Cecil Rhoades, *Establishment and Development of Broken Arrow, Oklahoma* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Moongate Enterprises, 1976), 10; Donald A. Wise, ed., *Tracking Through Broken Arrow, Oklahoma* (Broken Arrow: Re Tvkv'cke Press, 1987), 32, 34–37; Mildred (McIntosh) Childers, manuscript letters and notes on the Origin of the Place Name "Broken Arrow," courtesy of Mrs. Veda Walker, Broken Arrow, Oklahoma.

³⁶ White Church, also known as the Broken Arrow Church, was built around 1876. It is located south of the present intersection of East 121st Street, South (Tucson Street) and South 129th East Avenue (Olive Street) in southeastern Tulsa County and in the southwestern part of the fence line of the present City of Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. Robert A. McKim interview, IPH, OHS, 35: 281, 289; *Tulsa Democrat*, October 3, 1902.

³⁷ Mildred (McIntosh) Childers, "Another Version of the Origin of the Name Broken Arrow," paper courtesy of Elsie Esslinger, Broken Arrow, Oklahoma; Wise, *Tracking Through Broken Arrow, Oklahoma*, 33.