

## INDIAN RECORDS IN THE OKLAHOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHIVES

By Lawrence C. Kelly\*

On March 27, 1934, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed into law a bill which authorized the Oklahoma Historical Society to assume archival responsibility for a large mass of records and documents relating to the history of the Indians of Oklahoma. A few months later, however, the precedent which this act set was negated when Roosevelt signed a second bill, the National Archives Act. This second piece of legislation created the National Archives and Records Service, charging it with the custody and safekeeping of all non-current federal records.

The bare outline of the negotiations which led to this unique acquisition of federal Indian records by the Oklahoma Historical Society has been previously recorded in the minutes of the Society. Thus, a more detailed examination of those negotiations and a brief assessment of the importance of the collection which they made possible should be of interest to all western historians.

Two men, Grant Foreman and Judge Robert Lee Williams, were the driving forces behind the acquisition. Foreman, a native of Illinois, came to Muskogee, in the Creek Nation, in 1899 as a legal advisor to the Dawes Commission, which had been created to liquidate the tribal property and governments of the Five Civilized Tribes. After four years, Foreman resigned his position to embark upon the private practice of law in Muskogee. Several years later, upon witnessing the widespread looting of Indian lands which resulted from the removal of federal protection, Foreman joined the Indian Rights Association of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and plunged into his lifelong examination of the history of the Five Civilized Tribes. By the early 1920s he was financially comfortable enough to abandon the active practice of law and to devote his attention to historical research and writing.<sup>1</sup>

Like Foreman, Robert Lee Williams was a lawyer who had emigrated to Oklahoma. In 1893, he left his native Georgia to take part in the run on the "Cherokee Strip" but, when this enterprise failed, he returned home to study for the ministry. After a brief, three year career as a Methodist minister, Williams resigned and once again headed for Oklahoma, settling first in Atoka, in the Choctaw Nation, and then in Durant. This time his career

\* The author is a member of the History Department at North Texas State University, Denton, Texas.

<sup>1</sup> Stanley Clark, "Grant Foreman," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXXI, No. 3 (Autumn, 1953), pp. 226-242.



The second home of the Oklahoma Historical Society was this space in the new Carnegie Library in downtown Oklahoma City in 1902

prospered. Admitted to the Territorial Bar in 1896, Williams' ambition led him into politics. As a delegate to the Oklahoma Constitutional Convention in 1906-1907, he distinguished himself as one of the "big five" who were credited with shaping the final draft of that document. After statehood Williams became the first Chief Justice of the Oklahoma Supreme Court, a position which he held until 1915, when he resigned to run successfully for governor on the Democratic ticket. Upon completion of his term in 1919, he was rewarded for faithful party service by an appointment as Judge of the United States District Court of Eastern Oklahoma in Muskogee.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Charles Evans, "Robert Lee Williams," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXVI, No. 2 (Summer, 1948), pp. 120-131.

It was during Williams' term as governor that the Oklahoma Historical Society began its transformation into a respected research organization. Founded in 1893, primarily to house Territorial newspapers, the Society led an orphan's existence for its first fifteen years. Its first home was in Norman where office space was provided by the University of Oklahoma; a small annual appropriation by the Territorial Legislature after 1895 enabled it to meet its bills. Before long, however, the university appeared to threaten the Society's independence, and in 1902, the board of directors approved a move to Oklahoma City where the newly completed Carnegie Library made space available.<sup>3</sup>

One of the major achievements of Governor Williams' term was the construction of the present state Capitol building. An avid builder, Williams took personal charge of the construction of the Capitol in 1915. When it was completed three years later, he was able to announce that he had saved the taxpayers \$2,000,000 of the \$3,500,000 which the legislature had authorized. It was also during his years as governor that Williams became a member of the Oklahoma Historical Society. With his support and encouragement, the Society once again moved its collection in 1918, this time into the new Capitol building.<sup>4</sup>

By the time Williams left Oklahoma City for Muskogee in 1919, he had become a director of the Historical Society and its most ardent champion. It was at his urging that *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* was initiated in 1920, although it was three years more before the journal resumed publication on a regular basis. In Muskogee he and Foreman soon became fast friends, with the result that in 1924, Foreman was named a director of the Historical Society at Williams' request. Assigned to the publications committee, Foreman quickly revived *The Chronicles* which he forged into an important vehicle for scholarly publication by the end of the decade.<sup>5</sup>

By the mid-1920s Foreman's interest in the history of the Five Civilized Tribes and Williams' growing desire to make the Oklahoma Historical Society a leader in its field merged into a plan to build the present Historical Society building on the grounds of the Capitol. The key to their plan was the acquisition of an important historical collection which would justify a legislative appropriation for a permanent home for the Society. In Musko-

<sup>3</sup> Charles Evans, "The State Historical Society of Oklahoma and its Possessions," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXIV, No. 3 (Autumn, 1946), pp. 248-264.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 249-250; Evans, "Robert Lee Williams," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXVI, pp. 249-250.

<sup>5</sup> Clark, "Grant Foreman," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXXI, pp. 228-229; William S. Key, "Dr. Grant Foreman," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXXI, No. 3 (Autumn, 1953), p. 244.

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

gee, the tribal records of the Five Civilized Tribes, dating back to the 1830s in some cases, and the records of the Dawes Commission lay moldering in the attic of the federal building where they not only took up valuable space, but where they were also virtually inaccessible for historical research. If the Historical Society could persuade the Federal government to transfer custody of these records to itself, thereby adding substantially to its collection and its reputation, it would have the argument it needed to appeal to the legislature for a permanent and separate home.

On February 1, 1927, Foreman submitted a resolution to the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Historical Society which called for the acquisition of "this valuable addition to the archives of the Oklahoma Historical Society." Unanimously adopted by the Board, the resolution made the acquisition contingent upon the construction of a "fire proof building" in which to house the collection. Copies of Foreman's resolution were then sent to all members of the Oklahoma Senate and House, and within two weeks, a resolution supporting the acquisition passed the lower house. Obtaining support for an appropriation to construct a building, however, proved more difficult. It was not until February, 1929, that a bill authorizing \$500,000 for this task finally cleared the legislature and was signed into law by acting Governor William J. Holloway. In late 1930, the building was dedicated. By that time, however, negotiations for acquiring the Indian records from the Federal government had become entangled in Washington, D.C.<sup>8</sup>

The difficulty was that neither Foreman nor Williams had ever received more than a verbal pledge from the Indian Office that the records would be transferred once the Historical Society Building was completed. In late 1928 or early 1929, just prior to the authorization of construction funds for the Society building, they apparently talked with Indian Commissioner Charles Burke in Muskogee about the records. Burke and the Superintendent of the Five Civilized Tribes agreed at that time that the Society "might place a person in the office of the Superintendent for the Five Civilized Tribes and have these papers sorted, filed and calendared and placed in steel cases." Shortly afterwards, Burke was forced to resign from office.

---

<sup>8</sup> "Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Oklahoma Historical Society," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. V, No. 1 (March, 1927), pp. 110-111; *ibid.*, Vol. VII, No. 1 (March 1929), pp. 3-6, 137; Grant Foreman, "A Survey of Tribal Records in the Archives of the United States Government in Oklahoma," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XI, No. 1 (March, 1933), pp. 1-3; Foreman to Robert L. Williams, January 3, 1927, and Foreman to Charles A. Moon, February 15, 1927, Grant Foreman Papers, Indian Archives Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. To obtain needed legislative support for the Oklahoma Historical Society Building, the final bill provided that the building should also supply offices for a variety of veterans organizations: The Union Soldiers of the Civil War, the Confederate Soldiers, the Spanish-American War veterans and "any other veteran and service organizations."



Grant Foreman and Judge Robert Lee Williams were instrumental in obtaining the federal Indian records for the archives

Whatever knowledge the Washington office had of the arrangement was quickly forgotten. Williams and Foreman, meanwhile, proceeded on the assumption that when the work of calendaring the records was completed and a fire proof building was available, federal legislation authorizing the transfer would be approved by the Indian Bureau.<sup>7</sup>

During the summer of 1929, Williams and Foreman succeeded in obtaining funds to employ a "copyist" to calendar the records in Muskogee. Foreman, who was placed in direct supervision of the work, turned for advice to a young woman who he had known since World War I, when he directed the local chapter of the American Red Cross, Mrs. Rella Watts—later Mrs. Rella Watts Looney. When she learned that the position would pay \$125 a month, \$25.00 more than she was then making, Mrs. Looney volunteered for the position herself. Originally appointed for two years beginning September 9, 1929, she was to spend five years sorting and cataloging the papers before they were fully accessioned. She then accompanied them to Oklahoma City where she became archivist in charge of the collection until her retirement in May, 1974.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Williams to J. Henry Scattergood, August 3, 1932 and Williams to John Collier, December 21, 1933. General Service File, National Archives and Records Center, Washington, D.C.

<sup>8</sup> Foreman, "A Survey of Tribal records in the Archives of the United States Government in Oklahoma," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XI, pp. 3-5; interview with Mrs. Rella Watts Looney, March 21, 1974; *The Oklahoma City Times* (Oklahoma City), May 28, 1974, p. 16.

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

While Mrs. Looney worked in Muskogee calendaring the records of the Five Civilized Tribes, Foreman journeyed to Washington in early 1930, to make copies of documents there relating to the tribes. After nearly six months in the Indian Office and the War Department archives, he returned by way of Montgomery, Alabama, where he also made copies of records on deposit at the Alabama State Department of Archives and History. After receiving Foreman's report on his activities at its July, 1930, meeting, the Board of Directors voted at the November meeting, just prior to the dedication of the new Historical Society Building, to establish a committee to "take up with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the matter of transferring the archives of the Five Civilized Tribes to the new Historical Building." The committee was composed of Judge Williams, Foreman and Thomas H. Doyle.<sup>9</sup>

The record is not clear on what, if anything, the committee did to facilitate the transfer until the spring of 1932. During the interval, according to a report published by Foreman in 1933, the task of calendaring the Five Civilized Tribes' records proceeded on an orderly basis. By the end of 1932, Mrs. Looney had sorted and filed much of the loose manuscript materials and had prepared a 55,000 card catalog of the documents. Foreman, meanwhile, had thumbed through the bound manuscript volumes in which each tribe had recorded the proceedings of its legislative assemblies, its courts and its business offices. In all, these bound volumes, each containing several hundred pages, totaled 949 volumes. The Cherokee and Choctaw collections were the largest, Foreman reported, the Creek and Chickasaw were both considerably smaller. The Seminole collection was "almost negligible."<sup>10</sup>

In January, 1932, with the work on the Five Civilized Tribes records proceeding smoothly, Williams and Foreman decided to enlarge their original goal. Martha Buntin, the daughter of a former Indian agent at the Kiowa Agency in Anadarko, Oklahoma, was employed to survey and classify the records of the other Indian agencies in Oklahoma. Unlike the records of the Five Civilized Tribes, these records had not been carefully preserved.

Miss Buntin's field work began at the Kiowa Agency in Anadarko. In the "loft of an old frame warehouse," she found an estimated 75,000 documents littering the floor "to a depth of from one to three and even four feet

<sup>9</sup> "Minutes of the Board of Directors," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. VIII, No. 3 (September, 1930), p. 347; *ibid.* (December, 1930), Vol. VIII, No. 4, p. 441; Foreman, "Report of Grant Foreman . . . to the Board," *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, No. 1 (March, 1936), pp. 3-8.

<sup>10</sup> Foreman, "A Survey of Tribal Records in the Archives of the United States Government in Oklahoma," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XI, pp. 4-7.

in some places." These records pertained to the Indians under the jurisdiction of the old Wichita Agency, between 1864 and 1878, and to the Kiowa and Comanche Indians since 1878. From Anadarko, she travelled on to Concho, Oklahoma, where she located several large boxes of Cheyenne and Arapaho records in the agency basement, along with "more than a hundred letterbooks stored in the coal bin." Some of the agency records at Concho, she reported, had already been lost, while others had been destroyed in a fire and still others by the "elements."

By the summer of 1932, Miss Buntin had completed a preliminary catalog of the Kiowa records and had made arrangements for beginning work on the Cheyenne and Arapaho documents. She then journeyed to Shawnee, Oklahoma, where she located "nine large packing cases" of letters relating to the Indians under the supervision of the Shawnee Agency. Accompanied by a clerk of the Shawnee Agency, she also visited Stroud, Oklahoma, which had been the site of the old Sauk and Fox Agency before it was closed in 1918 and its activities transferred to Shawnee. There she found a cache of 50,000 documents relating to the Sauk and Fox, the Mexican Kickapoo, the Shawnee and other smaller tribes. These records were found in two abandoned frame buildings which Foreman reported were "now used by an Indian for storing vegetables." The roof of the building leaked, and the papers were in immediate peril from accumulated moisture.<sup>11</sup>

Miss Buntin's discovery of these new records coincided with Judge Williams' discovery that the Historical Society was being threatened by a rival plan emanating from the University of Oklahoma. Although the University's proposal was essentially for a federal subvention to construct an Institute of Indian Culture at Norman, and had been in the works for almost a year, newspaper accounts appearing in Oklahoma in early May, 1932, thoroughly alarmed Williams. Fearful that the Society had been too complacent in its earlier negotiations for the Indian records, Williams moved at the July 28, 1932, meeting of the Board of Directors to appoint a new committee to correspond with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the deposit of the records which Miss Buntin had uncovered. At the same meeting, he urged an acceleration of the activities of the earlier committee which had been created in 1930 to secure the records of the Five Civilized Tribes.<sup>12</sup>

The University of Oklahoma proposal that so alarmed Williams was the idea of President W. B. Bizzell. It was apparently born of his desire to

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-10; Williams to J. Henry Scattergood, August 10, 1932, General Service Files; Martha Buntin to Judge Williams, September 17, 1932, *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> "Quarterly Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Historical Society," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. X, No. 3 (September, 1932), p. 440.

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA



Professor Edward Everett Dale, Chairman of the University of Oklahoma Department of History

have the University of Oklahoma participate in the reception of federal funds which, rumor had it, were to be appropriated as part of a huge public works project to combat the worsening depression.<sup>13</sup> In October, 1931, Bizzell wrote Oklahoma Congressmen Jed Johnson and Fletcher B. Swank for their support of a plan to have the Federal government construct a "building devoted to Indian culture on the campus of the University of Oklahoma. At the present time," he continued, "there is not a place in the United States, so far as I know, where the traditions, culture and civilization of the Indian are studied as an educational enterprise." The idea for such an Institute, he said, came to him during a recent trip to Chicago, Illinois, where he learned that the University of Wisconsin had received a similar grant of \$2,000,000 for a wood products laboratory. "Isn't it just as

<sup>13</sup> The papers of President Bizzell in the Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, make no mention of this particular project.



logical," he asked, "for the Federal Government to provide funds for a building of this character as it is to build a wood utilization laboratory on the campus of the University of Wisconsin?"<sup>14</sup>

Both Johnson and Swank reacted favorably to Bizzell's request for support; each wrote Indian Commissioner Charles J. Rhoads immediately. Commissioner Rhoads, for his part, replied in a neutral tone. While he was "very much interested" in Bizzell's proposal, he wrote, he was not quite certain "just what part the Department of the Interior might play in the plan." Meanwhile, he turned the matter over to his Director for Indian Education, W. Carson Ryan, who was scheduled to visit Oklahoma later in the fall.<sup>15</sup>

Sometime in late October or early November, 1932, Ryan visited the University of Oklahoma campus where he conferred with his old friend, Professor E. E. Dale, the chairman of the Department of History. In the late 1920s, Dale and Ryan had served together for eighteen months as members of a Brookings Institution research team which was conducting an investigation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The report of this "Meriam Commission," as the research team was popularly known, was published in 1928 and called for extensive reforms in the administration of Indian affairs, particularly Indian education. It was one of the factors which led to the resignation of Commissioner Charles Burke. Since that time, Ryan and Dale had remained close friends. Although the two of them discussed the Bizzell proposal, Ryan did not meet Bizzell who was absent from the campus.

Apparently encouraged by Dale's report of his conversation with Ryan, President Bizzell wrote Ryan on November 28, 1931. For some time now, he reported, he and Dale had been discussing "this complicated problem" of Indian education. Since the publication of the Meriam report there had been considerable talk about the need for revamping the Indian educational system, he stated, and "while I do not know exactly what is contemplated, it has occurred to me that the University of Oklahoma might become the center of education on the higher levels for the Indian population of the country." Acknowledging that "your encouragement and assistance will have much to do with the outcome of the undertaking," Bizzell concluded his letter with a plea for Ryan's support in the Indian Commissioner's Office.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Bizzell to Jed Johnson, October 15, 1931; Frederick B. Swank to Charles J. Rhoads, October 20, 1931, General Service File.

<sup>15</sup> Rhoads to Swank, November 10, 1931 and Rhoads to Johnson, November 14, 1931, *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Bizzell to Ryan, November 28, 1931, *ibid.*; Lewis Meriam (ed.), *The Problem of Indian Administration* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1928).



Oklahoma Congressman William W. Hastings

In December, 1931, Congressman Swank introduced a bill for the construction of a building "for the higher education of native American Indians and their descendants" at the University of Oklahoma. Going beyond Bizzell's original proposal, his bill made the construction of such a building contingent upon the university creating a degree granting "college of Indian education and research." In January, United States Senator Elmer Thomas introduced an identical bill into the Senate. Neither man had checked with the Interior Department, according to a memorandum from Ryan, who nevertheless advised Commissioner Rhoads on January 14 that he believed the Indian Bureau could approve the idea of a "building for Indian culture" at federal expense, but that it should disapprove the Indian college provision and the submission of such a bill in 1933. Acting upon Ryan's advice, Rhoads drafted a report which stated that "while the proposal may have consider-

able merit, it is not essential at this time and in view of the existing financial situation, the enactment of the legislation is not recommended." In spite of the unfavorable report, the United States House of Representatives Committee on Indian Affairs on May 18, 1932, recommended that the building be funded at a cost of \$100,000.<sup>17</sup>

Although the Indian Institute bill was lost in the last days of the Congress, it was the announcement in Oklahoma newspapers that the House Committee was considering the project that first brought the matter to Judge Williams' attention. He immediately wrote Assistant Commissioner Henry Scattergood in opposition to Bizzell's proposal. Reminding Scattergood that the Oklahoma Historical Society had for some time been planning to make its new building the chief repository of Indian records and artifacts in the state, he denounced Bizzell's plan as "merely a duplication of effort and expense." If any such plan were approved in Washington, he argued, "it should be to promote the historical society in assembling Indian research and getting into its museum Indian relics." In reply, Scattergood wrote that the bill had little chance of passage because "of the need of saving every dollar possible," but he urged Williams to work together with all like-minded groups in Oklahoma so that "all such collections" could be concentrated "into one really representative, good one."<sup>18</sup>

It was in response to the potential threat from the University of Oklahoma that the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Historical Society formed a new committee to pursue the acquisition of the Plains Indian records and also instructed the previously created committee for the acquisition of the Five Civilized Tribes records to continue its work. By August, Judge Williams was showering Assistant Commissioner Scattergood with requests for the transfer of the records. He was not so much concerned with the records of the Five Civilized Tribes in Muskogee, whose safety was assured, Williams wrote, as he was with those of the other Indian agencies which were subject to loss or destruction because of inadequate facilities. Nor, was he seeking title to the papers, instead he stressed that "We understand that the title of this property is in the United States Government and that it could not be conveyed to the Historical Society without an act of Congress, and we are not asking for that, merely to be the custodian of same and to preserve it in our fire-proof building and in proper vaults." Williams was also firm in stating the purpose which the Society had in obtaining custody of the records and declared, "It is my ambition that our Historical Society shall become for that part of the southwest embraced in what is now Okla-

<sup>17</sup> For the bills introduced by Swank and Thomas and the Indian Bureau correspondence which related to them see General Service File.

<sup>18</sup> Williams to Scattergood, May 4, 1932 and Scattergood to Williams, May 11, 1932, *ibid.*

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

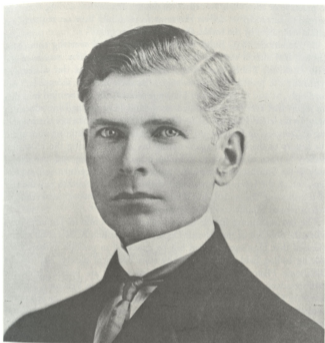
homa and Arkansas . . . insofar as it relates to Indian matters, a shrine for historical research and investigation to be excelled only by the Smithsonian Institute and rivaled only by the foundation at Santa Fe, New Mexico." To further the practicability of his plan, he informed Scattergood that "the most modern photostat machine" available had been installed in the Society Building during the summer. Once the records were received at the Historical Society, Williams pledged that legally acceptable photostatic copies of any Indian documents in its possession would be supplied to all agencies of the Federal government without cost.<sup>19</sup>

The replies of Assistant Commissioner Scattergood to these appeals have not been preserved. It is well known, however, that the fall of 1932 was not an auspicious time for Republican incumbents and, having already experienced difficulties with oral agreements in the case of one earlier Indian Commissioner, Williams and Foreman now decided to bring the matter to a head by seeking legislation directly. During the winter months, Williams conferred with Oklahoma Congressman William W. Hastings, an enrolled member of the Cherokee tribe, and at the January, 1933, meeting of the Society's Board of Directors he reported that, at Hastings' direction, he had drafted a bill to provide for the transfer of all federal Indian records in Oklahoma to the Historical Society. At this same board meeting, Foreman was instructed to prepare an article for the March issue of *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* which would describe the work he, Mrs. Looney and Miss Buntin had been performing for the past five years, "in order that such data may be available for the members of Congress and Secretary of the Interior." The Indian agents at the Oklahoma agencies were also contacted with the request that they submit "a favorable report on this plan."<sup>20</sup>

In May, 1933, Hastings introduced "House Resolution 5631" which authorized the Secretary of the Interior to place with the Oklahoma Historical Society all Indian records in Oklahoma which were in the custody of the resident agents and which were not required for the conduct of their business. The bill included, in addition to the documents at Muskogee, Anadarko, Concho and Shawnee previously mentioned, all Indian records at the Miami and Pawnee agencies and the Osage records at Pawhuska. When the new Democratic administration failed to respond, Foreman boarded a train for Washington to take the case directly to Commissioner John Collier. In early June, accompanied by Hastings, Foreman explained to Commissioner Collier the five year activities of the Historical Society.

<sup>19</sup> Williams to Scattergood, August 3, August 4, August 10, September 14 and September 23, 1932, *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> "Minutes," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XI, No. 1 (March, 1933), p. 736.



United States Senator Elmer Thomas

In spite of his presentation, Collier informed him, after he had returned to Oklahoma, that the Bureau's legal counsel had concluded that "there is no authority in the Secretary of the Interior to place the Oklahoma documents with the Historical Society." On the advice of Judge Williams, Foreman immediately responded that the Society would be willing to accept the Plains Indian papers on a "temporary" basis in order to assure that they would be protected from fire and to place them under the sole custody of George Wells, the Indian Bureau's supervisor of Indian Education in Oklahoma, who had an office in the Historical Society Building. Regardless of this offer and the subsequent ruling of the Bureau's legal counsel that he now saw "no real reason why . . . we could not permit the Historical Society

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

to preserve or store these records with the distinct understanding that they agreed to surrender or deliver the same to us at any time on request," no action was taken by the Indian Bureau.<sup>21</sup>

By December, 1933, Judge Williams' patience was wearing thin. Mrs. Looney had almost completed the task of calendaring the records of the Five Civilized Tribes, and Miss Buntin had questioned the wisdom of returning the records she had salvaged "to their original receptacle." Accordingly, he and Congressman Hastings wrote Collier to remind him that no report had ever been submitted on the bill Hastings had introduced in May. In his letter, Hastings pointedly called for a report "before the convening of Congress on January 3rd," and Williams, after recounting once again the history of the bill and again stating his goal of making the Historical Society "a place of research as to Indian ethnology, history and lore second only to the Smithsonian Institute," agreed to accept any rules and regulations which the Interior Department wished to impose and to pay the cost of transporting the records to Oklahoma City.<sup>22</sup> Following this exchange, events moved rapidly toward enactment of the bill.

The last remaining hurdle to the bill's passage came in January, 1933, when the Solicitor of the Interior Department, Nathan R. Margold, recommended that Hastings' original bill be amended to provide authority for placing Indian field records with any state historical society, not just the Oklahoma Historical Society. For reasons which are unclear from the correspondence, this proposal was finally abandoned in February. Interior Secretary Harold Ickes then forwarded a favorable report on the bill to the United States House of Representatives. The following month the bill was approved by both Houses of Congress and signed into law on March 27, 1934. Shortly thereafter, following some prodding by Williams, Hastings and Senator Elmer Thomas, the terms of transfer and the regulations for handling the records were agreed to, and in the fall of 1934, the first group of records were delivered to the Oklahoma Historical Society.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> "House Resolution 5631; memorandum of Chief Counsel Reeves to Collier, May 31, 1933; Foreman to Collier, June 14 and June 23, 1933; and Reeves memorandum to Mr. Daiker, no date; General Service File.

<sup>22</sup> Hastings to Collier, December 14, 1933; Collier to Hastings, December 16, 1933 and attachments; Williams to Collier, December 21, 1933; *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XII, No. 3 (September, 1943), p. 370; "Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors," *ibid.*, Vol. XIII, No. 2 (June, 1935), p. 239; Grant Foreman, "Report of Grant Foreman, A Director of the Oklahoma Historical Society, To the Board," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XIV, No. 1 (March, 1936), pp. 3-8. President Bizzell's proposal for an Indian Institute at the University of Oklahoma continued on until 1937. In spite of Bizzell's failure to enlist Collier's support after trips to Washington, Oklahoma Congressmen introduced revised bills in 1936 and 1937, but

## INDIAN RECORDS

Over the years, the records continued to flow in from the agencies. In 1943, the University of Oklahoma transferred a large number of Cherokee documents from its Phillips Collection to the Historical Society. With the assistance of a Works Progress Administration grant garnered by Foreman and supervised by Mrs. Looney, the Plains Indians records were sorted and filed, and index cards were prepared along the lines of the records of the Five Civilized Tribes.<sup>24</sup> Eventually, some 2,000 cubic feet of records pertaining to the Indians of Oklahoma were accumulated.

The size and extent of the Oklahoma Historical Society collection is evident from the most recent figures released by the Society:

	<i>Manuscript Pages</i>	<i>Bound Volumes</i>	<i>Filing Drawers</i>
<b>Five Civilized Tribes</b>			
Cherokee Nation, 1867-1914	430,000	740	25
Executive Library of the Cherokee Nation		1,400	
Chickasaw Nation, 1866-1906	17,510	106	
Choctaw Nation, 1831-1907	54,083	499	
Creek Nation, 1852-1910	55,973	88	
Seminole Nation, 1897-1907	228	12	
Dawes Commission		242	19
Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency, 1869-1933	566,685	886	
Kiowa Agency, 1861-1923 (includes Caddo, Comanche, Delaware, Hainai, Kichai, Kiowa, Kiowa-Apache, Tawakoni, Waco and Wichita Indians)	749,335	519	
Pawnee Agency, 1870-1932 (includes Pawnee, Ponca, Oto and Mis- souria, Tonkawa and Kaw Indians)	211,200	907	
Quapaw or Miami Agency, 1848-1909 (includes Miami, Cayuga, Seneca, Wy- andot, Eastern Shawnee, Ottawa, Mo- doc, Peoria, Quapaw, Nez Perce, Black Bob's Band of Shawnee, and Confed-	26,089		

---

they died in committee. Collier's stated reason for opposing the project was that it would bring additional requests from other universities for similar treatment. However, since he overlooked this argument in awarding contracts to more prestigious universities under the provisions of the Johnson-O'Malley Act of 1934 and in his employment of anthropologists who came mainly from Harvard, Columbia, Yale and the University of Chicago, it is more likely that a bias against "provincial" universities, rather than reason, determined his stand.

<sup>24</sup> "Report on Works Progress Administration Project 65-65-2843, at the Oklahoma State Historical Building, to July 23, 1936," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XIV, No. 3 (September, 1936), pp. 379-380.

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA



The Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Historical Society in 1932

erated Piankeshaw, Wea and Kaskaskia Indians)			
Shawnee Agency, 1840-1932 (includes Absentee Shawnee, Citizen Potawatomi, Iowa, Kickapoo, Mexican Kickapoo and Sauk and Fox of Missouri Indians)	485,362	623	
Chilocco Indian School	127,357	140	
Mekusukey Academy	64,357	30	
Cantonment Boarding School			25
	<hr/> 2,797,137	<hr/> 6,169	<hr/> 69

The most important records in the Oklahoma Historical Society collection are those pertaining to the Five Civilized Tribes. From the early 1870s to 1907, when these tribes ceased to exist as semi-autonomous nations, there was relatively little federal jurisdiction over them. As a consequence, much of what we can know about their history during this period must be derived from their own tribal records and those of the Union Agency which



were included in the 1930s transfer. Furthermore, the tribal documents, some of which antedate the 1870s, are all the more valuable because they constitute the only records of Indian self-government in the nation. The bound volumes of the Cherokee and Choctaw National Councils and the lesser collections of the Chickasaw and Creek legislatures, together with the other manuscripts relating to the activities of their courts, their schools and their treasuries, constitute a priceless collection which cannot be duplicated anywhere else.

The records of the federal agents for the Five Civilized Tribes and those of the agents in charge of the Cheyenne and Arapaho, Kiowa, Pawnee, Quapaw and Shawnee agencies while important, are not so valuable nor so unique as the tribal records of the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Creek nations. Many of them are undoubtedly duplicated in the records of the Indian Bureau deposited in the National Archives, in Washington, where the original correspondence from field agents has been preserved, as well as copies of correspondence from the Washington offices to the field agents. These Washington records are, of course, more difficult to locate and to use than those preserved in the Oklahoma Historical Society collection, and they would not be as likely to reflect local conditions and Indian attitudes and activities. However, as the Washington records were more carefully protected than the field records and because many of the field records were destroyed or lost, students who envision definitive research on any of the Oklahoma tribes will find it necessary at some stage of their work to consult the National Archives records in addition to those in the Historical Society. Fortunately, an excellent guide to the Indian records in the National Archives exists in the form of an elaborate, two volume, *Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs* which was compiled by Edward E. Hill and published in mimeograph form by the Archives in 1965. From these volumes, the student can determine not only what collections it will be necessary for him to view, but he can also determine in many instances the volume of documents with which he will have to contend.

Brief mention must also be made about the Oklahoma Indian records in the Fort Worth, Texas, Federal Records Center. In spite of the act of March 27, 1934, not all the records which the Oklahoma Historical Society was authorized to obtain found their way to its collection. The most important exception was the field records of the Osage Agency and its predecessor agencies, the Osage and Kaw Agency and the Neosho Agency. Until 1967, these records were the property of the Osage tribe. In that year, the Osage Tribal Council authorized the transfer of its archives to the Federal government—approximately 2,200 cubic feet of records from the

## THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

period 1858-1952. In addition to the Osage records, the Fort Worth Federal Records Center has been the recipient of all field records of the Oklahoma Indian agencies which were not given to the Oklahoma Historical Society. Its holdings are described in two mimeograph publications: National Archives and Records Service, *Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Region 7* (1968) and National Archives and Records Service, *Guide to Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the Archives Branches of the Federal Records Centers* (1972).