

## THE ARMSTRONGS OF INDIAN TERRITORY

By Carolyn Thomas Foreman

## INTRODUCTION

The Armstrong family was represented in Oklahoma by three generations of men bearing that name and all of them added to the fine reputation their ancestors had borne in the East and South in colonial days.

There is only one other case, as far as the writer has discovered, in the annals of the Indian Territory where three men of the same family held important positions under the jurisdiction of the United States government, and exercised the good influence among the Five Civilized Tribes that the three Armstrongs did for many years.

It is gratifying to learn that all of these officials were held in high esteem in Washington and their humanity to the Indians under their charge caused them to be loved by the red men.

Colonel James Armstrong, familiarly known as "Trooper" Armstrong, the founder of the family in America, was first mentioned in United States history in 1777, in Abingdon, Virginia. Before emigrating to America Colonel Armstrong had been an officer in the Enniskillen Dragoons from whence he derived his soubriquet "Trooper." He "had seen service in Europe, and was familiar with foreign etiquette" and when he appeared at Governor Blount's council with the Cherokees at White's Fort, now Knoxville, July 1791, he was "arbiter elegantiarum." The treaty ground was at the foot of Water Street and Governor Blount appeared in full dress. "He wore a sword and military hat and acted throughout the occasion the polite and accomplished gentleman, the dignified officer and courteous negotiator. He remained seated near his marquee, under and surrounded by tall trees which shaded the banks of the Holston, . . . One of the interpreters introduced each chief to Armstrong, who then presented him to the governor, announcing each chief by his aboriginal name." He presented forty-one Cherokee chiefs in the order of age and not by their rank. There were 1200 other Indians on the ground and the braves were decorated with eagle feathers on their heads. All were unarmed.<sup>1</sup>

Colonel Armstrong married about 1782, Susan Wells, daughter of Charles Wells, founder of Wellsburg, West Virginia. Her mother was probably Ann Tevis. The Colonel and his wife died about 1817 and were buried on what is now known as the Brice Farm in Knox County, on Flat Creek, about fifteen miles from Knoxville. Colonel

<sup>1</sup> J. G. M. Ramsay, *Annals of Tennessee* (Philadelphia, 1853), p. 555.

Armstrong bought the property from Francis Maybury of Knox County, January 22, 1801, paying "twenty hundred pounds current money of Virginia." The estate aggregated 2,180 acres. In deeding this property on December 5, 1818, the heirs of James Armstrong signed their names as follows, though the names are not given in order of birth:<sup>2</sup> (1) Francis Armstrong (2) Nancy (Ann) Tevis Armstrong; (3) Jane Crozier Armstrong; (4) Robert Armstrong; (5) William Armstrong; (6) Joshua Armstrong; (7) John Armstrong.

"Trooper" Armstrong was the father of General Robert Armstrong, the hero of Emuckfaw,<sup>3</sup> who was born in East Tennessee in 1790. He commanded a company of the Tennessee artillery under Jackson in the Creek War of 1813-1814, and was distinguished for bravery. At the battle of Talladega, Alabama on January 24, 1814 he was dangerously wounded, but recovered, and again distinguished himself in the Battle of New Orleans, and on November 21, 1836, as a brigadier general he commanded the Tennessee mounted volunteers at the Battle of Wahoo Swamp, Florida.

He was postmaster of Nashville from 1829 to 1845 when he was appointed United States consul to Liverpool, remaining in England until 1852. Subsequently he became owner and editor of the *Washington Union*, and he was the confidential adviser of President Polk. General Jackson bequeathed him his sword.<sup>4</sup>

### Francis W. Armstrong

Francis W. Armstrong was born in Virginia and appointed to the army from Tennessee. He became a captain of the Twenty-fourth Infantry on March 12, 1812; major June 26, 1813; honorably discharged June 15, 1815; reinstated December 2, 1815 as captain Seventh Infantry with a brevet of major from June 26, 1813; resigned April 30, 1817.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Zella Armstrong, compiler, *Notable Southern Families* (Chattanooga, 1926), Vol. 3, pp. 4-6.

<sup>3</sup> The battle of Emuckfaw was fought by General Jackson on January 22, 1814, at six o'clock in the morning on Emuckfaw Creek which runs south into the Tallapoosa River. Under him were nine hundred soldiers and two hundred Cherokees and Creeks. He was attacked by five hundred Indians, and after fighting all day he drove them off and returned to Fort Strother (H. S. Halbert and T. H. Ball, *The Creek War of 1813 and 1814* (Montgomery, 1893), pp. 273-74; Albert James Pickett, *History of Alabama* (Birmingham, 1900), p. 581 note). Lieutenant Armstrong was wounded in the battle (*ibid.*, pp. 582-83).

<sup>4</sup> *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American History* (New York, 1888), Vol. I, p. 91. The *Washington Union* was founded in 1845 by Thomas Ritchie, known locally as Father Ritchie. He had previously edited the *Richmond Enquirer* for forty years (*Washington City and Capital* [Washington, 1937], p. 175).

<sup>5</sup> Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army* (Washington, 1903), Vol. I, p. 169.

According to *Notable Families of the South*, compiled by Zella Armstrong, Francis Wells Armstrong was born about 1783. He was a son of Colonel James Armstrong and Susan Wells Armstrong. It is reported that Francis Armstrong was the inventor of the Derringer pistol. William Park (husband of Jane Crozier Armstrong), a brother-in-law of Armstrong and Hugh L. McClung were with the officer when he gave the pattern of the pistol to Derringer.<sup>6</sup>

Francis W. Armstrong married Anne Willard of Baltimore and Washington, and they had at least one son. Her second husband was General Persifer Smith.<sup>7</sup> After the death of General Smith, his widow, who was a Catholic, entered a convent and became a Mother Superior.<sup>8</sup>

The following statement sheds light on Francis W. Armstrong's activities during the campaign for the election of Andrew Jackson as President in 1829:

"Majr. F. W. Armstrong was a clever man & was brother to Genl. Armstrong a pet of the President had served with credit in the army . . . had after the war entered into business in Mobile supported by my friends—had been unsuccessful & had turned politician. He had talked loudly in the Presidential canvass in Alabama (where by the bye there was no need for it) for General Jackson had by his services, on our soil, entrenched himself firmly in the hearts of the people: But Majr Armstrong wanted office; and Genl. Cass<sup>9</sup> wanted Tennessee; & was looking out to secure that state & an office for the Major. . . .

Major F. W. Armstrong, of Tennessee, was appointed on April 26, 1831, to take a census of the Choctaw tribe in Mississippi, before their removal west to the Indian Territory. George S. Gaines, a licensed trader and friend of the Choctaws, was expecting orders from the War Department to commence removal of the Choctaws in May, 1831, when Major Armstrong called upon him and asked Gaines to introduce him "to some of the most influential chiefs; having been sent by the Secy. of War to prepare them for removal. He appeared to be entirely ignorant of the actual state of things:

<sup>6</sup> According to Webster's Dictionary the Derringer pistol was named after the American inventor. It is a short-barreled pocket pistol, of large caliber. See *Appendix*.

<sup>7</sup> Persifer Frazer Smith was born in Pennsylvania and entered the service as colonel of the Louisiana Volunteers February 2, 1836. He became colonel of the Mounted Rifle May 27, 1846 and on September 23 he was brevetted brigadier general in several conflicts at Monterrey, Mexico; the following year he became a major general for gallant and meritorious conduct in the battles of Contreras and Churubusco. He died May 17, 1858.—Heitman, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 902.

<sup>8</sup> Armstrong, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>9</sup> Lewis Cass, a native of New Hampshire, held many distinguished positions in the United States. He was a celebrated officer in the Army, governor of Michigan Territory, secretary of war in 1831-1836, minister plenipotentiary to France, United States senator from Michigan, candidate for president in 1848. He died in his home in Detroit June 17, 1866.—L. D. Ingersoll, *A History of the War Department of the United States* (Washington, 1880), pp. 476-80; *A Biographical Congressional Dictionary 1774 to 1903* (Washington, 1903), p. 444.

& I am satisfied had no knowledge of my expectations. . . . I rode with him several days, introducing him as my friend, & desiring the chiefs to confide in him as they had always confided in me, and aid him in preparing for their removal." The Choctaws told Armstrong that they would be ready for removal when Gaines was ready. Armstrong reported this to the War Department and Gaines was appointed "Superintendent of Subsistence and Removal of the Indians" east of the Mississippi on August 12, 1831, a position he reluctantly accepted. Major F. W. Armstrong had begun his work on the Choctaw census early in July and completed it on September 7, 1831.<sup>10</sup> On this same day, he was appointed as Choctaw Agent West of the Mississippi, the agency headquarters to be established in the Choctaw country west of and near Fort Smith.

Soon afterward (September, 1831), Captain William McClellan, sub-agent for the Choctaws, located the new Agency about fifteen miles west of Fort Smith. The building he planned and had erected consisted of two large rooms of hewed logs connected by a "runway." There was a porch across the entire front of the house which faced east. Major Armstrong brought his family to live at the Choctaw Agency on September 11, 1833.<sup>11</sup> His son, Frank C. Armstrong, was born there in 1835, the same year that Major Armstrong died. He was succeeded by his brother, William Armstrong, who occupied the agency building until his death on June 12, 1847.

Major Francis W. Armstrong requested Commissioner Herring on September 25, 1834, to see that he was sent \$362.00 to complete the Choctaw Agency:<sup>12</sup>

"The fact is that when I came here, there was nothing but the body of a double log house. I found the roof and porches rotten; and the Agency in a most dilapidated state; with but one chimney.

"With the additional sum now asked for, all will be under an entire new roof; with good stone under-pinning, new floors, chimneys, &c. The Agency will then be comfortable, plain and substantial; and nothing more will be required as long as the roof lasts. . . . The comfort of my family, makes it necessary that the work should be done before the winter sets in. . . ."

During the removal of the Choctaws from Mississippi to their new home in the west, beginning with the arrival of the first parties in 1832, a village grew around the Agency. The location was healthful and a group of springs supplied all the water necessary for the

<sup>10</sup> Muriel H. Wright, "The Removal of the Choctaws to the Indian Territory," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. VI, No. 1 (March, 1928), pp. 111-19.

<sup>11</sup> Grant Foreman, *Indian Removal* (Norman, 1932), p. 58 and note 8.

<sup>12</sup> Office of Indian Affairs. Retired Classified Files. 1834 Choctaw West (Agency), F. W. Armstrong asks for funds for repairs.

small town that became well known as Skullyville.<sup>13</sup> Major Francis W. Armstrong undoubtedly made necessary improvements on the Agency building since it has been described as containing three hewn log rooms with a stone foundation of four feet and a roof covered with red cedar shingles which lasted for sixty years before it was necessary to replace them. This was one of the oldest buildings in the state of Oklahoma, and it is regrettable that it was destroyed by fire in the recent past.<sup>14</sup>

The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek authorizing the removal of the Choctaw tribe of Indians from the East was executed in Mississippi, on September 27, 1830. On November 21, 1831, after his appointment as Agent to the Choctaws in the West, Major Francis W. Armstrong was given \$50,000 to supply emigrating agents with funds for which they were clamoring to be able to perform their duties. He left Washington with the funds for Captain Jacob Brown at Little Rock and Lieutenant J. R. Stephenson at Fort Towson. Armstrong arrived in Little Rock on January 22, 1832 and then journeyed on to Fort Towson which he reached on February 20.

Armstrong attributed his delay in remaining at his home in Nashville until January 1 to the<sup>15</sup>

" . . . . *unexampled severity of the winter, such as has never been felt in the country before. . . . I have prevailed on my brother William to go to Arkansas with me. The truth is, I preferred confidential company, because the small sized notes, in the proportion directed in your letter, makes the money quite a bundle, and the rapidity of the Mississippi settling about the swamps makes me feel the risk greater than I thought it was when in Washington. You see a few days ago a set of villains boarded, while aground, the steamboat Favorite, and plundered and burnt her. Two Armstrongs are better than any insurance office.*"

Major Armstrong obtained from the government at Washington an order calling on the commanding officer at Cantonment Gibson to furnish a detail of soldiers to construct a wagon road from Fort Smith to Red River over which the emigrants could pass. Lieutenant Colonel James B. Many in command at Fort Gibson, ordered Captain John Stuart on March 22, 1832, to begin construction of the road.

Armstrong had written Colonel Many that he had made the necessary examination for the purpose of ascertaining the utility and practicability of the contemplated road and that he was fully satis-

<sup>13</sup> The Agency building later was purchased and became the home of the well known Governor Tandy Walker, of the Choctaw Nation. He maintained a stage stand at the old Agency building for the Overland Mail Route to California in 1858. —W. B. Morrison, "The Saga of Skullyville," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XVI, No. 2 (June, 1938), pp. 234-5; Muriel H. Wright, "Historic Places on the Old Stage Line from Fort Smith to Red River," *ibid.*, Vol. XI, No. 2 (June, 1933), p. 810.

<sup>14</sup> Muriel H. Wright, "Old Choctaw Agency, Oldest Building in Oklahoma Burned in 1947," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXVI, No. 1 (Spring, 1948), p. 90.

<sup>15</sup> F. W. Armstrong to Gen. George Gibson, January 3, 1832, Office of Indian Affairs," 1832 Choctaw Emigration; Foreman, *Indian Removal*, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

fied of its importance to the public. He selected "Colonel" Robert Bean to accompany the command "to point out the precise ground over which the Road will run." The work was executed under the command of Captain Stuart accompanied by Bean, and the road completed in the spring of 1832.<sup>16</sup>

Sub-Agent D. McClellan wrote to Major Armstrong from the Western Choctaw Agency on May 23, 1832 regarding affairs under his jurisdiction:<sup>17</sup>

... We are getting along tolerable smoothly the greatest difficulty with me at this time is the want of money, it will require nearly five thousand Dollars, to defray the expences that has and will accrue at this agency up to the last of June which amount you will please have forwarded as early as practicable as I have strained my credit by borrowing money to enable me to get on with the business of this agency. The Steam Boats claim pay at this place for transportation of Choctaw Rifles and stores to Fort Smith.

I have been obliged to buy Powder, Lead, and steel; there is not Lead to be had, at this place to make an Issue. The two Pounds of Powder and Lead per man is much needed, it will be found to be very troublesome to make half Issues.

I have made one trip with the Public waggons to Red River and am now on the way with the second loads, the weather being so warm and the flies getting bad, I fear that I will not be able to make any more this season, for that reason I have hired two private teams to take one load each at four Dollars per hundred pounds, Should the flies not prove bad I will try another load in July.

The Troops have not yet completed the Road. I will travel the new rout this time as far as Kiamesha (*sic*) and then fall into the old Road.

Col. Bean is here with me and will set off to join the Road cutters on tomorrow, Lieut Rains and myself will accompany him back to Cavanole mountain and to the mouth of Frish (*sic*) Maline for the purpose of looking out a Road from that place to intersect the one the Troops are now opening, back to the Cavanole mountain I will then proceed on after the waggons to Towson.

Col. Bean said the Road from Fort Smith to Red River can be made an excellent one, but that Capt. Stewart [Stuart] said his orders will not suffer him to Causeway any of the marshes it will be of great importance to have all the Boggy places causewayed, without I fear waggons will not be able to pass at certain seasons of the year, When I return from Red River, I will be better able to give you information on this subject as I will travel that Road on my return. Col. Bean said the navigation of Kiamesha will be good from the mouth of Jacks fork to the Red River, and Jacks Fork I think a good situation for a ware house.

<sup>16</sup> Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "Report of Captain John Stuart on the Construction of the Road from Fort Smith to Horse Prairie on Red River," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. V, No. 3 (September, 1927, pp. 33-47); Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "Colonel James B. Many," *ibid.*, Vol. XIX, No. 2 (June, 1941), p. 123; Muriel H. Wright, "Historic Sites in the Vicinity of Tuskahoma," *ibid.*, Vol. IX, No. 1 (March, 1931), p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> National Archives. Office of Indian Affairs: Choctaw (Emigr.) F. W. Armstrong. D. McClellan Re. to Choctaw cattle, etc.

The Choctaws are very anxious to get the number of cattle they turned over to the Government in the old nation, and money for the lands they relinquished please instruct me on that subject.

Enclosed is a petition from Nittuccachee and his captains

I have heard it mentioned by some of the merchants below the line that they would petition to have Lieut Rains removed from fort Smith, they can have no other objection to him only that he watches them closely and tries to suppress the vending of spirituous liquors to the Indians, and adheres to his duty strictly. suffice it to say that there could not be an officer, sent to that post that would do it the same justice that Lieut Rains has and will do.

When Major Armstrong arrived in the Indian Territory for the first time on February 20, 1832, he set up his headquarters in the store of Josiah H. Doaks near Fort Towson and called a meeting of the head men of the Choctaws recently arrived. That was probably the first meeting of the emigrants of this nation west of the Mississippi. Nitakechi was present and the Indians wished to organize their government and enact laws, but Armstrong informed them that as only one-fourth of the tribe had arrived in the west, "the government would not approve any laws enacted by them, and advised them to wait until a majority of the tribe was represented."

The Agent issued a notice to all fugitives from justice and all other persons not belonging to the Choctaw tribe to remove from their country. On March 1, 1832 he reported that there were 4,500 Choctaws west of the Mississippi, and on the fourth of that month he appointed Israel Folsom official interpreter for the United States, requiring him to live at the Agency near the Arkansas River.

Major Armstrong as Agent was confronted with a situation new in his experience when he learned that a party of Shawnee Indians living in the Choctaw country on Red River had lately killed a Choctaw woman, claiming that she was a witch. The agent ordered them captured and handed over to the military authorities. He learned that the Choctaws had also executed two of their own people on the same charge so he convened the chiefs in council and threatened death upon any one committing such a crime in the future, and a whipping to any person making a charge of witchcraft against a member of the tribe.

Armstrong delivered to his charges 225 blankets, 106 axes, 196 hoes, twenty-nine ploughs, fifty-five pounds of powder, 110 pounds of lead, as well as flintlocks, rifles, iron and steel. When he returned to Fort Smith, he found a party of Choctaws camped in the vicinity, and he rebuked the special agent for leaving them where white men could furnish them with whisky so that many of them were constantly drunk.

A new set of regulations for carrying on the Choctaw removal was issued by the War Department in May, 1832. On July 2,

Francis W. Armstrong was appointed Special Agent and Superintendent for the removal and subsistence of the Choctaws from the Mississippi River to their new home west of Arkansas. He also continued in his duties as Agent at the Choctaw Agency, of Skullyville. Also, on July 2, his brother, Captain William Armstrong, of Tennessee, was appointed Special Agent and Superintendent for the removal of the Choctaws from their old homes to the Mississippi River. With these appointments, George S. Gaines was succeeded in his position in the Choctaw removal. He was a brother of Edward Pendleton Gaines.<sup>18</sup>

Late in November, 1832, Armstrong ordered Lieutenant Jefferson Van Horne to join him at Little Rock to take charge of 1,800 Choctaws who were approaching that place from Rock Roe. The Lieutenant conducted his party to four miles east of Clear Creek (in present McCurtain County) where a final encampment was made on December 18.

When the Folsom party arrived at Memphis on October 31, they were terrified by the presence of cholera in the city. On all of the steamboats coming down the Mississippi had occurred deaths from that disease and F. W. Armstrong reported from Nashville in June that his wife had just recovered from it and that business in Tennessee had been entirely suspended because of it. Cholera added to the hardships of emigrants and their conductors and there were many deaths among the Choctaws. Major Armstrong wrote to General Gibson: "In some cases the people refused to come near us, or to sell us anything we wanted. . . . In ascending the river the woodyards were abandoned; and they had cause for alarm, for scarce a boat landed without burying some person."

Armstrong later wrote:

"No man but one who was present can form any idea of the difficulties that we have encountered owing to the cholera, and the influence occasioned by its dreadful effects. It is true, we have been obliged to keep everything to ourselves, and to browbeat the idea of disease, although death was hourly among us and the road lined with the sick . . . fortunately they are people that will walk to the last, or I do not know how we could get on."<sup>19</sup>

Major Armstrong in his new assignment as Superintendent of the Choctaw removal west of the Mississippi arrived at Little Rock, Arkansas, on January 22, 1833. Shortly thereafter, a boat arrived which brought a quantity of rifles, ammunition, hoes, axes intended

<sup>18</sup> State Department of Archives and History, Birmingham, 1928. Historical and Patriotic Series No. 10. "Dancing Rabbit Creek Treaty." This pamphlet is a reprint of an article entitled "The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek between the United States and the Choctaw Indians in 1830." by Anthony Winston Dillard, pp. 15-16.

<sup>19</sup> Foreman, *Indian Removal*, pp. 66, 67, 75, 87, 91, 93.



for the Indians. Some of these supplies were issued by the Agent to Chief Nitakechi's party of 1,400 at Little Rock.

In March, 1834 a Choctaw warrior was murdered while out hunting at the mouth of the Washita River. The Choctaw chiefs addressed a petition to Armstrong, asking the government to erect a fort for their protection as promised in their treaty. Before the agent set out for Washington he was visited by some of the Indians who urged him to impress upon the government the importance of keeping the promise made to them four years before, to protect them from the hostile red men living on the Arkansas and Red Rivers.<sup>20</sup>

Choctaw Agent F. W. Armstrong, Washington City, April 6, 1833, wrote to Secretary of War Lewis Cass that under his order of July last arrangements had been made to vaccinate the Choctaws:

"It was expected that this humane object would be performed when they assembled for the purpose of taking up their march for their new country. This turned out to be impracticable because the Physician failed to attend after having been notified, as I understand from Superintendent East of the Mississippi; and if he had made his appearance at the time, I doubt whether they would have availed themselves of his services, when on the eve of setting out on their march. I confess that, for one, I was fearful of commencing it at that time, and under the existing circumstances; for many of them would have been unable, for at least some days, to travel. . . ."

Armstrong advised Commissioner Indian Affairs Elbert Herring on November 8, 1833, from the Choctaw Agency, of the death of Dr. M. Curry who had been employed to vaccinate the Indians; he was a native of Tennessee, only about twenty-five years old and he left a wife and one child. The Indians of the neighborhood continued in ill health.

Agent Armstrong encouraged the Choctaws to build log school houses and organize the schools as provided for in the treaty annuities.<sup>21</sup>

"The removal of the Choctaws to the country assigned to them west of the Mississippi river, having been effected, the investment of the large portion of their annuities which the chiefs have devoted to the purposes of education, has engaged the attention of the department and of the tribe, aided by the suggestions of the agent for the Choctaws, Major F. W. Armstrong, who has applied the energies of an active and disciplined mind to their improvement. . . ."<sup>22</sup>

When a majority of the Choctaws had arrived in the West, Agent Armstrong in April, 1833 was instructed to carry out the terms of the treaty. Ten thousand dollars was appropriated to build a council

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 126-7.

<sup>21</sup> Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, (Norman, 1934), p. 60.

<sup>22</sup> *Report, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1833*, p. 187.

house for the nation, homes for the chiefs of the three districts, a church in each district to be used for a school house until others were built. Armstrong decided on the plans for the buildings, and let contracts for their construction.

In spite of great internal strife and jealousy, Major Armstrong, in December, at Doaksville, directed the Choctaws to organize their government and to take over their internal affairs heretofore exercised by the war department. The Indians decided to meet at Turnbull's on the Kiamichi River on February 1, 1834, to hold their first general council and form a constitution. Unfortunately the meeting was attended by only part of the tribe; the representatives from Nitakechi's district prepared and adopted a constitution, but the citizens of Pushmataha District, with no constitution or laws selected a chief for the entire nation.

Naturally such actions increased the discord in the nation and Armstrong declined to recognize chiefs chosen in such a manner and he directed them to assemble all of their chiefs and ninety-nine treaty captains into council and set up a government before electing officers.

Another matter in which Francis W. Armstrong was engaged in 1833, was making a treaty with the Osages. Montfort Stokes wrote to Secretary of War Poinsett that "Major Armstrong who was a good man, with the aid of Genl. Arbuckle, Genl. Dodge, Col. Chouteau and myself made a good Treaty with the Osages, which would have preserved that nation from the ruin that now threatens them. . . ." <sup>23</sup>

It was charged in 1833 that Choctaw hunting parties were crossing into Arkansas and depredating on the live stock of the white people, but Choctaw Agent F. W. Armstrong was in Little Rock when a memorial was circulated to have the Seventh Infantry returned there, and he wrote to the officials in Washington on October 16, 1833, ". . . to a man here looking on, this is a ridiculous farce." It appears from contemporary records that the movement was so Captain John Rogers could sell his land to the government for an army post. <sup>24</sup>

The introduction of whiskey into the Indian country by way of the Arkansas River had become such a menace to the welfare of the arriving emigrants that Major Francis W. Armstrong asked for troops to police the river; Captain John Stuart, with his Company C. of the Seventh Infantry, was ordered from Fort Gibson to the abandoned Fort Smith to intercept shipments of liquor. The outfit arrived on March 22, 1833, and the Captain and his fifty-one men took up quarters in the old buildings. Captain Stuart published a notice warning masters of boats in the transportation of merchandise west

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<sup>23</sup> Grant Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes* (Norman, 1934), pp. 25, 26, 165.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

of Fort Smith to touch at the landing at that town, and show that they were not carrying liquor to the Indians. The owners of Fort Smith groggeries became so incensed that one of them assaulted Captain Stuart with a club and almost killed him.

On September 12, 1833, Lieutenant G. J. Rains wrote to General George Gibson from the Choctaw Agency West that Major Armstrong and his family had arrived there the previous evening.<sup>25</sup>

It was finally decided to move the troops up the river where they would have a better chance to outwit the whiskey dealers. In June, 1834 the soldiers occupied Swallow Rock, ten miles above Fort Smith, where the high bluff gave them an unobstructed view of the river. The new military post was called Fort Coffee.

By Act of Congress of June 30, 1834, all of the territory west of the Mississippi River, except the State of Missouri and the Territory of Arkansas, was made "the Indian country" and the whole Indian service was reorganized. At that time Francis W. Armstrong was appointed acting superintendent of Indian affairs in the "Western Territory" with particular jurisdiction over the Choctaw Indians and their country. Subagencies under his jurisdiction were organized for the Osage, western Cherokees, western Creeks, and immigrant Senecas, Shawnees, and Quapaws.

This appointment gave Major Armstrong authority over a large area occupied by Indians of different tribes and it must have increased his difficulties in managing them and their affairs.<sup>26</sup>

Superintendent Armstrong in February, 1834, asked Colonel Arbuckle for the loan of 500 bushels of corn to relieve the distress of the Choctaws who were in a deplorable situation; many of them had been from four to six days without food. Some of them had acorn meal and Lieutenant Rains had a quantity of damaged pork which he was issuing to them.<sup>27</sup>

The spring of 1834 was a time of great distress for the Choctaw Indians, many of them were destitute and Agent Armstrong was issuing a pint of corn to each individual. The water was so low that the boats could not get up the river and the agent wrote Commissioner Elbert Herring that he feared some of them would perish of hunger.<sup>28</sup>

Armstrong made a contract with Robert Baker of Nashville to make spinning wheels for four dollars each and looms for \$17.50

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<sup>25</sup> *Document* 512, Vol. I, p. 850. The index in Vol. I gives 54 references to Francis W. Armstrong and 52 to William Armstrong.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29 (and note 31), 185.

<sup>27</sup> National Archives. Office Indian Affairs, February 25, 1834. "Choctaw West."

<sup>28</sup> Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "The Choctaw Academy." *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. IX, No. 4 (December, 1931), p. 402.

each for the Choctaws. "The contractor Mr. Baker . . . is a worthy man and is now with a number of hands engaged near my agency in this work."<sup>29</sup>

A treaty concluded May 24, 1834 between the United States and the Chickasaw Nation was signed in Mississippi, by George Colbert, Isaac Albertson by mark, and Martin Colbert, Henry Love and Benjamin Love on the part of the Chickasaws. F. W. Armstrong, Choctaw agent was one of the nine white witnesses, and his name also appears on the supplementary articles under the same date.<sup>30</sup>

Major Francis W. Armstrong returned from Washington in time to attend the great Indian council at Fort Gibson in September, 1834, and he had been commissioned to wind up the affairs of the United States commissioners. Colonel Dodge and Armstrong attempted to explain to the wild Indians the object of bringing them together and the benefits that would accrue to them under the protection of the United States. They were successful in creating a friendly feeling so that at the end of the meeting the different chiefs and warriors embraced each other.<sup>31</sup>

In 1834 took place the important expedition to the western Indians, commanded by General Henry Leavenworth and Major Henry Dodge. A meeting took place in the summer of this year, at the Wichita village on the North Fork of Red River at which the officers were successful in inducing a delegation of Indians to go to Fort Gibson where they arrived the middle of August. Runners were sent out to summon members of the Creeks, Osages, Choctaw, Cherokees, Wichitas, Wacoos, and Comanches and then began one of the most important and picturesque councils ever held in the west. Among the speakers were Colonel Dodge and Superintendent Armstrong, as well as chiefs of the various nations present. The president had appointed Governor Montfort Stokes, General Matthew Arbuckle and Major Francis W. Armstrong as commissioners to negotiate with the Indians who had never before made a treaty.<sup>32</sup>

Colonel Henry Dodge and Major F. W. Armstrong dispatched a message to the Committee on Indian Affairs September 7, 1834 regarding the Indian council at Fort Gibson in which they wrote: "We feel confident that this meeting will have a most happy effect upon the wild tribes residing on the head waters of our water courses.

<sup>29</sup> Office Indian Affairs. "Choctaw Emigration" Letter from Armstrong to Cass May 18, 1834.

<sup>30</sup> *Constitution, Laws, and Treaties of the Chickasaws* (Tishomingo City, 1860), pp. 199, 202.

<sup>31</sup> Grant Foreman, *Advancing the Frontier* (Norman, 1933), pp. 29 (and note 31), 131-32.

<sup>32</sup> Grant Foreman, *A History of Oklahoma* (Norman, 1942), pp. 19-20; George H. Shirk, "Peace on the Plains," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 1 (Spring, 1950), p. 1-41.

The Indians brought from the villages by the colonel and his command, appear to be much gratified. We have no fears but the intercourse is now sufficiently established to enable the government to convene the tribes hereafter and form a lasting peace between all parties on this frontier." The army officers suggested the use of presents as "The Indians do not understand friendship to be words alone—they want something tangible that they can carry with them and show to each other."<sup>33</sup>

Secretary of War Lewis Cass on March 23, 1835, appointed Montfort Stokes, General Matthew Arbuckle and Agent Francis W. Armstrong to negotiate a treaty with the Comanches and other wandering tribes of Indians west of Missouri and Arkansas Territory for the purpose of perpetuating peace and friendship between the United States and the Comanche and Wichita nations, and their associated bands.<sup>34</sup> It proved impossible to hold the meeting at Fort Gibson as the Comanches had sent a war party into Texas, and the other tribes were on a hunting expedition.<sup>35</sup>

Head Quarters S. W. Frontier  
Fort Gibson, July 8, 1835

Sir, [Maj. F. W. ARMSTRONG, (A.S.W.T.) Choctaw Agency]

I received your letter of yesterday's date at half past ten o'clock A.M. this day. —It is my belief that your presence here at this time, however desirable, may be dispensed with for the present. If the general meeting with the Comanches and other western tribes takes place at all, it must take place in the course of the next month, and I request that you will notify the Choctaws of this, who you say are now in council, in order that they may be in readiness to attend.—

I greatly hope that your health will have sufficiently recovered to ensure your attend. here also, as it is feared that the delicate health of Gov Stokes will prevent his attendance should the council be held at Mason's Camp or near the Cross Timbers.—Major Mason's command will be immediately reinforced by a command of the 7th Infy. which it is believed will supercede the necessity of any call on the friendly Indians at present.—

Major Mason will be notified that it is proper that he should distrust the reports he may receive from the Osages as it is not doubted they take but little or no interest in the proposed treaty, for the reason that they are not to receive a share of the presents which it is probable will be made to the Western Indians at the proposed council and it is believed that some of the Delawares or others have been tampering with the Western Indians. The Maj. has also been directed to ascertain from the Comanchis such effects he can in relation to this point.

I am Sir, Very respectfully  
Yr. Obt. Servt.

M. Arbuckle  
Brig. Gen. Comdg.

[Mason was at Camp Holmes]

<sup>33</sup> Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Box 194.

<sup>34</sup> Berlin B. Chapman, "Establishment of the Wichita Reservation," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. II, No. 4 (December, 1933), p. 1044; Grant Foreman, *Pioneer Days in the Early Southwest*, (Cleveland, 1926), p. 159.

<sup>35</sup> Howard F. Van Zandt, "History of Camp Holmes and Chouteau's Trading Houses," Vol. XIII, No. 3. (September, 1935), p. 317.

Fort Gibson July 11th 1835

Sir, (To Maj. F. W. Armstrong, A.S.W.T. Choctaw Agency)

You will herewith receive a copy of a letter from Maj. Mason Comdg. a Squadron of the Regt. of Dragoons on the Western border of the Cross Timbers.—We have fully considered of the contents of this letter and have come to the conclusion that the commissioners in order to meet the wishes of the government and to ensure a general meeting between the Red people on this frontier & those farther west, that it is necessary that a time and place for such meeting should be determined on by the commissioners, and as it is necessary that the Western tribes should immediately have this information, we have regarded it our duty to instruct Maj Mason to notify the Western tribes, that we will be at his camp on the 20th of the next month, as a longer delay we believe might disappoint the expectations of the Western tribes and prevent their attendance.

Mr. Chouteau Sub Agent to the Osages is here and will remain until the return of the express, to receive your instructions.—We are of the opinion that you ought to require his presence at the genl. meeting where we have no doubt he will be of much service to the commissioners, and on his way to the upper bands of Osages he can have the Senecas, Quapaws &— notified of the time of the genl meeting & that deputations from their bands are expected to attend.

We hope it will be convenient for you to attend here in a few days, that such measures in relation to presents and other expenses & matters connected with the treaty may be decided on. . . .

We are Sir, With sentiments of high respect

M. Stokes  
M. Arbuckle

From Fort Gibson on July 1, 1836, General Matthew Arbuckle addressed a long letter to Major Armstrong relating that he had received a communication from Major Richard B. Mason in which he wrote that the Western Indians who had assembled at and near his camp, were very restless, and that it would be difficult for him to induce them to remain until the middle of August.

Governor Montfort Stokes and General Arbuckle had written to Mason to urge him to induce the Indians to remain near his camp until the time appointed for the general meeting. They could not meet those red men sooner as it would require some time to assemble a deputation from all of the tribes on the frontier near Fort Gibson, and to provide a means of transporting "the articles the president of the U. States wishes to present to them. . . ."

Major Mason was further urged to endeavor to induce the western Indians to send delegates from their tribes to meet the commissioners at Fort Gibson; that was urgent because of the serious illness of two of the commissioners. "Governor Stoke is now too feeble and unwell to attend to business of any kind, and it is my decided opinion that his ill health will prevent him attending the General Council. . . ." Mason told Agent Armstrong:

"You will therefore see the great importance of your attendance at this post in one week from this time, provided your health will possibly permit, as it would be impossible for me to act alone, at the General Council, or at least without the outlines of the Treaty the commissioners may regard proper to offer to the tribes having been agreed on, by all provided the Governor and yourself may be unable to attend or at least two, of the commissioners as well as everything concerned with the purchase and distribution of the presents. . . ."

Mr. [John] Dillard wished to take out some supplies for the troops, and a small quantity of goods to trade with the Indians provided Major Armstrong was willing to grant him a license. Arbuckle was in favor of that plan as it would probably amuse and employ the Indians until the time for the meeting.<sup>36</sup>

When the removal of the Choctaws had been effected, the investment of a large part of their annuities engaged the attention of the War Department and Choctaw Agent Major Francis W. Armstrong, "who has applied the energies of an active and disciplined mind to their improvement." Twelve log school houses were to be built, books bought and for teachers steady, sober married men were to be selected.<sup>37</sup>

Governor Stokes and General Arbuckle concluded a treaty with the "Witchetas" and Comanches, with the co-operation of Major Armstrong. "He had left home to attend the council, but was suddenly arrested by disease, which ended in death before he could reach his destination. By this unhappy event the Government lost a meritorious and efficient officer, and the Choctaws were deprived of a faithful and devoted agent."

Francis W. Armstrong encouraged the Choctaws to build schools, and in 1833-1834 some of them were opened during the winter.<sup>38</sup>

While the commissioners were arranging to go to Fort Holmes for the conference, Major Armstrong was taken seriously ill, and he died on August 6, 1835, in his home at the Choctaw Agency.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> National Archives, War Department, *Fort Gibson Letter Book*, 139, 40.

<sup>37</sup> *Report*, Commissioner of Indian affairs, 1834, p. 187.

<sup>38</sup> Debo, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>39</sup> Grant Foreman (ed), "Journal of the Proceedings of Our First Treaty with the Wild Indians", *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XIV, No. 4 (December, 1936), p. 396. The neglected grave of Major Armstrong is a few miles north of Spiro, Oklahoma, near the site of Fort Coffee. "The name of Francis W. Armstrong is closely associated with Fort Coffee. An iron gate to a lot of one of the three cemeteries at Fort Coffee bears his name. . . This gate was recently broken by vandals. Part of the rock wall around the lot remains as do the two stone posts between which the gate was swung. . . ." (*Oklahoma School Journal*, "Fort Coffee: Choctaw Monument" by Thomas H. McMurtrey, Spiro, Oklahoma, 3 [date missing], p. 31).

The September 17, 1835 edition of the *Army and Navy Chronicle* (page 301) described a meeting at Fort Coffee in honor of the late Major Armstrong at which Captain John Stuart was called to the chair and Lieutenant H. McKavett was appointed secretary.

Richard Peters (ed.), *The Public Statutes at Large of the United States of America* (Boston, 1846), Vol. 7, p. 474.

Part II, *William Armstrong*, to be continued)

## APPENDIX

### MAJOR FRANCIS W. ARMSTRONG, DESIGNER OF THE "DERINGER PISTOL."

In his fascinating account of *Henry Deringer's Pocket Pistol* (New York, 1952),<sup>1</sup> Mr. John E. Parsons states that Deringer, "though lacking patent protection," supplied the pioneers with single-shot pistols.

"Perhaps it was the name 'Deringer,' like 'Shrapnel,' conveyed no other meaning in English that it passed into the language to signify the invention of its possessor. . . .

"Henry Deringer, Jr. . . . was born in Easton, Pennsylvania, in 1786, his father being a German settler . . . who came to America prior to the Revolution. . . ." Under the treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830 Deringer supplied the warriors emigrants with flintlock and percussion rifles at \$12.50 each and he wrote the Commissary General of the Army in 1833, "I can assure you that a better set of rifles the Indians never got, and as good as any that were sent to the United States' arsenal. There never was a better rifle made for the Indians than we make at present for the Indians on Major Armstrong's pattern." The last reference was to Major Armstrong a veteran of the War of 1812, whom President Jackson had appointed agent to the Choctaws in Indian Territory.

Deringer wrote that he made the Deringer Pistol since 1825 at Philadelphia and that it first came into notice when he made a pair for Major Armstrong who was so pleased with them that he introduced them among the Indian chiefs.<sup>2</sup>

New York 5, N.Y.  
May 2, 1952

Mrs. Grant Foreman  
1419 West Okmulgee Avenue  
Muskogee, Oklahoma  
Dear Mrs. Foreman,

Thank you for sending me a copy of the review in the *Tulsa Daily World* of my new book, *Henry Deringer's Pocket Pistol*. Deringer spelled his name with one r in the middle, and at first this was the orthography of the pistol. However, for various reasons, the double r was used too and dictionaries have often adopted it, even for the gunmaker himself. As my book points out, I think they are in error.

<sup>1</sup> See Book Review in this issue of *The Chronicles*, p. 361.

<sup>2</sup> John E. Parsons, *Henry Deringer's Pocket Pistol* (New York, 1952), pp. 16, 17, 18, 25, 93. See Grant Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes* (Norman, 1934), p. 28, for a full account of the Deringer pistols shipped on September 21, 1831, from Philadelphia to Fort Smith for the Indians.



I did come across Major Armstrong in Deringer's own correspondence. He designed a rifle that Deringer made for Indians being removed to the Territory, and also was one of the first officers for whom Deringer made pistols. The maker reported that "He was much pleased with the weapons and introduced them among the Indian Chiefs, and subsequently among the heads of Departments at Washington, the members of Cabinet, etc., and they soon acquired a high reputation. Major Armstrong gave the pistols the name of the 'Deringer Pistol,' and by it they have ever been known."

I found references to Major Armstrong in "Journey to Indian Territory, 1833-1835" (letters of Cassandra Sawyer Lockwood), *Journal of Presbyterian Hist. Soc.*, December, Cong., 1st sess. (Serial 244, pp. 125, 1165, Serial 512, 23rd 256, 268, 273); Report to Sec'y of War, 1835 (Serial 286, pp. 49, 262)

I think that Armstrong helped popularize the pistol, but that the design was essentially Deringer's own. The famous pocket size was a later development from the duelling type which Armstrong undoubtedly ordered.

I shall look forward to your article in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, and hope that my book will be of interest to you.

Sincerely yours,  
John E. Parsons