

HEALTH CONDITIONS IN THE INDIAN TERRITORY FROM THE CIVIL WAR TO 1890

By *Bernice Norman Crockett*

Health conditions among the Indian tribes of the Indian Territory, in the years immediately preceding the Civil War were good. Reports from the Indian agents for the Five Civilized Tribes were enthusiastic and showed how well the people had adjusted to their new country west. They were well settled, and for the most part (except for occasional feuding among the people of some of the tribes) seemed to be happy. The gradual change from old tribal ways was evidenced in a report on Cherokee life in 1853:¹

Many of the full-blood Cherokees yet have a great aversion to the medicine of the regular faculty, and prefer the roots and herbs of their own native doctors. The more enlightened portion are fast losing that prejudice, and always call in a regular physician when one can be had; and it affords me much pleasure to be able to state that they have among them several physicians, both whites and natives. The Cherokees have great reason to be thankful for the abundant yield with which the earth has repaid the labor of the husbandman. The common people are making slow but steady advances in the science of agriculture; the more enlightened and intelligent portion who have means live much in the same style of the southern gentlemen of easy circumstances. Many of the dwellings of that class are large, comfortable, and handsome buildings; their fields, too, are well enclosed with good rail fences, and their yards and gardens are handsomely paved in, and the grounds tastefully laid off and ornamented with rare and beautiful shrubbery. The moral influence which is being brought to bear upon the youth of the country through the indefatigable efforts of the principal chief, and other intelligent and leading men of the Nation, in the great cause of education, must tell powerfully upon the rising generation. The schools were never in such a prosperous condition

The Civil War brought the tribes of the Indian Territory into a turmoil. Most of the Indian agents were thoroughly Southern in their sympathies. Elias Rector, the Superintendent of the Southern Superintendency which included the Five Civilized Tribes with the Indian agents under his direction, resigned to join the Confederacy.² This group of men "together with delegations from Arkansas and Texas that alternately urged and threatened, persuaded the Indians to join the South."³

¹ "Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1853, p. 382," in Appendix XVII, J. B. Thoburn and Muriel H. Wright, *Oklahoma: A History of the State and Its People* (New York, 1929), Vol. II, p. 813.

² Edward E. Dale and Jesse Lee Rader, *Readings in Oklahoma History* (New York, 1930), p. 282.

³ *Oklahoma, A Guide to the Sooner State* (Norman, 1941), p. 23.

Gittinger states that it was the position of the Five Civilized Tribes on the border, not their sympathy for the Southern Confederacy, which caused them to participate in the War between the North and South. Whatever the cause, the results were again to retard the Five Civilized Tribes for the second time in the 19th Century. The Indian Territory was abandoned by the United States, the Confederate forces moved in and took charge; treaties were made with the various tribes and, for the most part, the Indian people were allied with the Confederate States.⁴ The first suffering experienced because of the Civil War came for that portion of the Creek people and their allies among the Seminoles and Cherokees who failed to join their old southern friends and who were forced to flee to Kansas behind the Union lines.

The condition of these people—Creeks, Seminoles and Cherokees—who were defeated at the battle of Chustenahlah in December, 1861, and driven northward toward Kansas by Confederate troops, was truly pitiful, as shown by a report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1862:⁵

On arriving in Kansas I learned from General Hunter that the rebels, being largely re-inforced by troops from Texas has fought a third battle with the loyal Indians, resulting in the defeat and complete overthrow of the latter, who, with their old men, women, and children, had been compelled to flee for their lives from the country, and to the number of from 6,000 to 8,000 under the lead of O-poth-lo-yo-lo, a very aged and influential Creek, had taken refuge near the southern border of Kansas, and were being fed from stores provided for the army of General Hunter, who, upon learning their disastrous condition, instantly detailed officers to go to their assistance, and was doing everything in his power to alleviate their sufferings.

They had left their homes and had been put to rout in battle in the dead of winter, without supplies for a journey overland. Their clothes were inadequate, they were almost destitute of food, and there was no shelter. When they arrived in Kansas, naturally no preparation had been made for their coming. "Within two months after their arrival two hundred and forty of the Creeks alone died, over a hundred frosted limbs were amputated within a like period of time."⁶

Because the General could not furnish provisions for all the Indians nor could he furnish them with tents or clothing to fill their needs, Superintendent Coffin "exhausted (every

⁴ Roy Gittinger, *The Formation of the State of Oklahoma, 1803-1906* (Berkeley, 1917), pp. 56-57; Thoburn and Wright, *op. cit.*, Vol. II p. 829; Dale and Rader, *op. cit.*, pp. 282-283.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 311; Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1862.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

fund at his command) and a considerable debt was incurred besides."⁷ Previously he stated:⁸

I do not propose to furnish them with anything in the way of clothing (he had already sent in five wagon-loads of blankets, clothing, shoes, boots and socks were distributed) but a pair of shoes, socks and blankets, or its equivalent in other coarse clothing—since less than this would look like cruelty—and tobacco, which to an Indian, is about as essential as food, more so than clothing, as you are aware.

The condition of the Cherokees in 1863 seems typical of the sufferings and hardships experienced by other tribes of the Indian Territory in the wake of War. With the capture of Fort Gibson by the Federal forces under the command of Colonel William A. Phillips, the Indians who had refugeed in the North followed the advancing army back to their homes. A report by their agent Justin Harlan to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs showed how the Cherokees had fared during 1863:⁹

As near as I have been able to ascertain from all the sources at my command, I judge there are not far from 21,000 . . . of these about 8,000, in the year 1862 joined the rebels . . . the men have since entered the rebel army and are now beyond the Arkansas river. Most of their women and children have also left the Cherokee territory, most likely never to be allowed to return to or from part of the Cherokee nation. The balance of the nation are loyal; almost all the men and large boys are in the Union army, doing good service. Many have been killed in battle, and died of wounds, sickness, and exposure.

The women and children have been still more exposed to sickness and death than the men, and great numbers have died. Robbed by the rebel army and driven from their homes, some took refuge in the mountains, and others fled out of the territory in inclement weather, and by exposure contracted diseases of which they died, and many others, no doubt, are yet alive who will die from the same cause.

According to Harlan's report their condition was the "most pitiable imaginable." Reduced from the most powerful, wealthy tribe in the United States of only a few years ago, their prospects for the future were very dark. Before the Confederate forces were defeated in the Indian Territory those Indians who were loyal to the Union paid a heavy price. The military authorities of the Federal Government became interested in the welfare of the Indians and by public proclamation "assured them they had protected and would protect them." (Harlan's comment on this is curious. He wrote, "The Indians believed it, if I did not.")¹⁰ Because of these promises, some

⁷ *Ibid.*, Letter from Superintendent Coffin to William P. Cole, Feb. 1862, in Appendix, pp. 837-838.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Report of Justin Harlan to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1863, pp. 214-16.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

of the Cherokees and the tribes of the Quapaw country north-east went back to their homes in the Territory, only to be overrun by three different raids led by Colonel Stand Watie of the Confederate Army. His command "drove the women into Fort Gibson, took everything he could ride, or drive, or carry off, and destroyed their crops. . . ."¹¹

The prospects of these people, as seen by Harlan, were dark, even though he stated, "the wide world is before them. They can begin the world again, and all they make and save they will have, nothing more." They had nothing to live on so "their bread and groceries must come from abroad . . . or Fort Scott, a distance of 165 miles. The next point is on the Neosho, not less than two hundred miles," and there was no forage for the teams. It was Harlan's opinion that if the Indians stayed in their own homes they would inevitably starve. He suggested an early removal either to head of the Verdigris River at Le Roy, Kansas, or Fort Scott. "My preference is for the Verdigris, as the country there can supply them cheaply with corn and flour."¹²

Wiley Britton in *The Civil War on the Border*, shows further the suffering undergone by the refugee Indians returning to their homes. Smallpox struck them while they were encamped at Bentonville, in February and March of 1863. The white soldiers, for the most part, escaped the disease, having been previously vaccinated. The Indians, however, had not had that advantage and "many died before the surgeons could check the spread of the disease by vaccination." A smallpox hospital was set up to isolate cases and try to stop the disease, but it was spring before it was checked because of the habit of "refugee families to mingle freely together."¹³

An epidemic of measles at Neosho during the winter of 1862 to 1863 had exacted a heavy toll among the children. The reunion of returning families was not one of rejoicing because of this catastrophe from epidemic disease.

According to Britton, there was not a great deal of damage done to the homes of the Indians who had fled. He stated however, that the military authorities of the Union forces were so appalled at the problem of providing for all these "loyal Indians" that they literally shoved them back to their old

¹¹ Report of Justin Harlan, 1863.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Wiley Britton, "The Civil War on the Border," (New York, 1904), Vol. II, pp. 25-28, 34-37.

homes that crops might be put in and the government relieved of their responsibility.¹⁴

A different picture of the amount of damage done by the Civil War to the Five Civilized Tribes was given by a leading Cherokee, Colonel William Penn Adair, recently aligned with the Confederate States:¹⁵

The War of the Rebellion cast still another cloud of darkness over our general prosperity and progress in civilization. Unfortunately for us, our common country was a battlefield for both the Union and the Confederate Armies; and our people by military necessity were forced to take the one or the other side in the conflict between the United States and the Confederate States. It was as you all know impossible to observe neutrality in this contest. During the four years of the war in the contending armies, directly and indirectly, plundered our country and what one army did not take the other did so that between their depredations and the general effect of the war, the Cherokees, Creeks, and Seminoles lost all their property of every description and had their houses destroyed or so wrecked as to render them of little value A remarkable circumstance connected with the loss of the Cherokees is that the war destroyed about one-half their people, for at the beginning of the war, they had a population of about 25,000, whereas at the close of the Rebellion, the census rolls showed their population to be only 13,000. As regards my own people, the Cherokees, I can say with truth that at least one-half of them had no animals or plows or farming implements of any kind with which to cultivate the soil. These had to cultivate their little patches with sharpened sticks and such animals and plows and hoes as their more fortunate neighbors could loan them, and I have known one solitary plow and horse to pass from house to house, over large settlements under loan for a whole season during the first two years succeeding the war.

Angie Debo tells much of interest in regard to the part the Choctaw people took in the War Between the States: "They (the Choctaws) were eager to adopt civilized customs that they considered superior to their own, but they had a strong elanishness that made them desire to live by themselves and work out their own destiny. They had a record of orderly development almost unprecedented in the history of any people."¹⁶

In their settlement of a wild frontier, the southern tribes accepted and adjusted to an alien religion and code of morals. They modified their agricultural and commercial practices. In other matters concerning them, they had never showed resentment for the Government; only wishing, in their established state, to "live and let live." When the war came the Choctaws immediately allied themselves to the Confederacy and continued

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Colonel William Penn Adair, "Indian Territory in 1878," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. IV, No. 3 (September, 1926) p. 255-74, reprinted from *Indian Journal* at Eufaula, October 9 and 16, 1878.

¹⁶ Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, (Norman, 1934), p. 78.

that alliance until the end of the war. "Quickly and almost lightly they entered the conflict."¹⁷ The war brought not only defeat and great loss of life, but to the Choctaw people it brought both heartbreak and tragedy. One estimate was that one-third of their people were entirely destitute. "The food situation among the Choctaw in 1865 was complicated by the presence of large numbers of Cherokee and Creek refugees who had fled from their homes when the Federal forces occupied their country After the war ended, relief was distributed by the United States agents at Boggy Depot."¹⁸

The part some of the Indians of the Five Civilized Tribes had taken during the Civil War (when the time for treaty making came, the government accused all of them of being entirely and completely partisan to the Confederate cause) gave the government leeway in furthering Indian tribal consolidation in what is now the state of Oklahoma. After the Federal Government had abandoned Indian Territory in the beginning of the War, the Indians had been forced, more or less, to recognize the authority of the Confederate States. "After the war, the United States made this recognition a pretext for disregarding old agreements."¹⁹ This useful philosophy enabled the Government to work on the plan for consolidation of all the tribes. "The history of the Indian Territory from 1866 to 1879 is the history of a struggle for the concentration of the Indians and the establishment of a territorial government."²⁰ The former was accomplished while the latter was not.

SETTLEMENT OF THE PLAINS INDIANS ON RESERVATIONS IN THE INDIAN TERRITORY

In the years following the Treaties of 1866 with representatives from each of the Five Civilized Tribes, these Indians "agreed to free their slaves, give them tribal rights, or lands; grant right-of-ways to railroads across their country; and to give up a large part of their western lands to furnish homes for other Indians of the plains."²¹

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁹ Gittinger, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

²¹ Dale and Rader, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

Thus began the removal of those tribes, sometimes called "blanket Indians," to the Indian Territory.²³ Indians from Kansas, Nebraska, and other western states and territories were brought into what is now Oklahoma, until, "within twenty years, the work was complete, and Oklahoma had seven Indian agencies, two in the eastern and five in the western part of the present state. These agencies had jurisdiction over more than a hundred thousand Indians embracing some twenty-five or thirty tribes."²³

In 1867, a treaty with the Comanches and Kiowas was completed and signed at the Medicine Lodge Council in Kansas, which included among other provisions made by the government, the furnishing of "physicians, teachers, blacksmith, and such other employees as might be necessary."²⁴

A description of the warrior of the Plains by De B. Randolph Keim in 1870 showed some of the physical differences apparent among the many Indian tribes. He stated that the warrior of the Plains was less muscular in development than those of the race which occupied the mountain districts, even though his wild and independent life should have induced the most perfect specimen of "manly form." The fact that he was almost the reverse was a source of amazement to Keim who described him as being "tall but his limbs are small and badly shaped, showing more sinew than muscle. His chest however, is deep and square. His bearing is erect, with legs considerably bowed, the effect of constant use of the saddle. His hair is long and black and worn at full length, streaming over his shoulders."²⁵

The scalp-lock, according to Keim, or that hair growing on a diameter of two inches on the vortex of the skull, was always artistically plaited. The fact that the Plains Indian plucked his beard, moustache and eyebrows was disgusting to Keim who said the mutilation was nothing more than the gratification of vanity and that the practice produced a feminine appearance.

²³ A chronological listing of when the various Indian Tribes were brought to Oklahoma showed: 1867, Shawnee, Potawatomi, Wichita, Caddo, Comanche, Kiowa; 1868, Apache; 1869, Cheyenne-Arapaho; 1872, Kaw or Kanza, Osage; 1867, Pawnee; 1882, Otoe, Missouri; 1883, Kickapoo, Iowa. Others included the Waco, Keechi, Quasaw, Peoria, Wyandot, Miami, Seneca, Ottawa, Modoc, Tawakoni.—Buchanan and Dale, *A History of Oklahoma*, (New York, 1935), pp. 145-165.

²⁴ Dale and Rader, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

²⁵ Thoburn and Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 859.

²⁶ De B. Randolph Keim, *Sheridan's Troopers on the Borders*, (Philadelphia, 1885).

He was interested in the great variety of features encountered among the Indians: "Some have features perfectly Caucasian, while others closely resemble the narrow faced Malay, or the oval-countenanced Mongolian, and with the different shades of color, from a dark reddish brown to a perfect olive."²⁶

Theories as to the origin of the race, as far as the Plains Indians were concerned, could cover a wide range, according to Keim:²⁷

Judging from their resemblance to any particular people of the old world, a sufficient variety of facial angles could be found to support any theory. The expansive flat face, high and receding forehead, sharp and small black eyes, thin lips, well arched mouth, high cheek-bones, nose more or less beaked, or Roman, and rather flat across the bridge, but thinning out towards the point, ears large, well-formed, and setting well upon the head, represents the type most commonly met.

Keim remarked, as did Catlin some forty years before him, on the resemblance of the Indians to European people. Keim said they had seen one band which, except for color, were perfect Italians, with a few resembling Germans, and quite a number, the "Jews of today." Catlin also remarked on the idea that the American Indian might possibly be of Jewish origin.

This same variation, in connection with the general types, was, according to Keim, apparent in all the "wild tribes." The Cheyennes and Arraphos he thought to be more purely Indian, with the Kiowas and Lipans next in line. He stated that the Comanches, due to intermixture with the Mexican, did not exhibit true Indian lineage. He commented on the fact that the women of the Plains tribes, though smaller in stature, showed a much more perfect development than did the male.

Keim was also interested in the primitive dress of the Plains Indians, which consisted of a breech-clout in the summer, worn with moccasins and leggins.²⁸

In winter this attire is reinforced by a buffalo robe, worn with the hair inside, and wrapped the whole length of the body, with a sufficient allowance to cover the head. The robe is held in place by a belt around the waist. On milder days the portion of the robe above the belt is allowed to fall back; which leaves the upper part of the body perfectly bare, while around the legs it makes a sort of skirt, with the hair both inside and outside. Sometimes a blanket is used instead of a robe.

The women dressed about the same as the men. The men wore their leggins high up above the knee, supported by a

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

²⁸ *Ibid.*



Quaker, U. S. Indian Agents, 1872. Standing left to right: Isaac Gibson, Osage; Doctor Roberts, Shawnee; Enoch Hoag, Supt. Central Superintendency; Jonathan Richards, Wichita-Caddo; John Hadley, Sac and Fox; Lewis Tatum, Comanche-Kiowa. Seated left to right: Hiram W. Jones.

strap fastened to the waist-belt, used with the breech-clout. The women fastened their leggins below the knee and turned a cuff down at the top. The Kiowa women wore an ornamented flap attached to the top and rear part of the leggins, which trailed at their heels. All leggins were made of buckskin. Moccasins were made of buckskin with raw-hide soles.²⁹

Instead of a breech-clout the women wear a skirt of buckskin, calico, or strouding, extending from the waist to the top of the leggins, and supported by a belt. (In some tribes the women did wear breech-clouts beneath their skirts; these, made of woven grass or soft weeds, were donned at puberty, were worn until they simply degenerated from age and were then replaced.) Mothers wore their buffalo robes full at the back, above the belt, to give a convenient place for carrying a papoose. The children dressed exactly like the adults . . . according to sex.

A census of Indians living in what is now Oklahoma, in 1866 showed the following figures: Cherokees: 14,000; Chickasaws: 4,500; Choctaws: 12,500; Creeks: 14,000; Quapaws: 350; Seminoles: 2,000; Senecas: 130; Seneca-Shawnee band: 210; Mixed tribes of the Wichita agency: 1,800.³⁰

In 1869 to 1872, Quakers were appointed as Indian agents for the Wichita-Caddo and affiliated tribes.³¹ G. W. Conover, who was employed in the government service in the Indian Commissary, told of his experiences in the Indian country, working with the Quakers. They erected two rock buildings, one of which was to house a doctor, his family and his supply of drugs. This doctor, who was named Tomlinson was the Quaker physician, and a minister also. He and his wife worked among the Indians ministering to bodies and souls simultaneously. Conover's description of Indian rations and the distribution of them was as follows:³²

When the Indians were placed on the leased district, the Government agreed to issue to them certain rations at intervals for so many years. These rations were as follows, namely: beef, bacon, flour, sugar, soda, coffee, soap and tobacco. These in ample supply were issued to them every two weeks, and the chiefs divided it out to the different families. They would pour out the sugar upon a

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

³⁰ *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1866*, p. 351. (All Indian population numbers shown in the published records of the U. S. Indian Bureau are only an approximation of the actual figures at any time up to the late 1890's when the final rolls of the members of the different tribes were made for the purposes of allotment of tribal lands, in Oklahoma and Indian territories. Researchers find that most of the so-called Indian census records, if not all, are in error, except for the period of about 1895 to 1910 when a fairly accurate approximation could be made based on the final tribal rolls.—Ed.)

³¹ *Oklahoma Red Book* (Oklahoma City, 1912), p. 250.

³² G. W. Conover, *Sixty Years in Southwest Oklahoma*, (Anadarko, 1927).

sheet and dip it up with a measuring cup, and give it to the woman who sat or stood around in a circle. And so with other articles that could be handled in that way. The rations were issued to the chiefs at first to be divided by him to the families, but later on, the rations were issued to each family separately. Some of these rations the Indians had no use for, especially the bacon and the flour. They would throw away the bacon or sell it at a mere nominal price to anyone who wanted it, and often pour out the flour to get the sack, or sell the hundred pound sack of good flour for a dollar. They learned better later on.

There were also issued to them once a year what was called annuity goods. These goods consisted of blankets, muslins, calicos, hosiery, needles, thread, men's and boy's suits, beads, tin cups, butcher knives, iron kettles, other cooking utensils, axes, hoes, etc. This was in accordance with the "Medicine Lodge" treaty made in 1867 whereby the government was to feed and clothe the Indians for thirty years. This treaty ended in 1897, but to some extent kept up for several years after.

The Indians really appreciated the beef issued to them "on the hoof" because they liked to chase the beef cattle wildly across the prairie and kill them. When buffalo were plentiful, they cared very little about beef, and would leave a carcass where it fell, without even skinning it.³³

Transportation for the sick was also described by Conover. He said that the Indians had absolutely no use for a wagon, and wouldn't use one if it was given to them. They carried all their possessions packed on a travois, two poles which were extended from a sort of collar on their ponies. A bed was arranged on these poles "which made a fairly comfortable method of transportation."

Another doctor mentioned in this account of life in the Indian Territory some eighty years ago, was a Dr. Shirley. Dr. Shirley built a store on a bluff on the north side of the Washita north of the present townsite of Anadarko, which overlooked the valley. Dr. Shirley "swallowed some poison thinking it was medicine prepared for him." Mr. Conover stated undramatically that "it resulted in his death."³⁴

The coming of the railroads to Oklahoma during the 1870's sounded the death knell of the buffalo, which in turn marked another important change in the habits of the Plains Indians:³⁵

So long as the products of the buffalo hunt—hides, tanned robes, dried meat and tongues—had to be transported hundreds of miles, by wagon, to the Missouri River for shipment, the buffalo herds were free from danger of immediate extermination, even though each succeeding year saw their ranges slightly narrowed by reason of the extension of the settlements.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

³⁵ Thoburn and Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 479.

The first railroad, the Missouri, Kansas & Texas, was followed shortly by another, the Atlantic and Pacific (now the Frisco), was built (1872), effecting a junction with the M. K. & T. at Vinita.³⁶ Railroads brought the extinction of the buffalo upon which the Indians had so long depended for food, for clothing and for shelter.

The year 1871 found the Osages very much disgusted at the unsettled conditions of their affairs (because no definite boundary lines had been set), and they would not allow their women to plant the crops. There was trouble and more trouble with squatters. During the fall, the military had removed a number of white settlers who had moved into Indian Territory land which bordered on Kansas. As soon as the soldiers left the whites promptly moved back into Indian Territory.

"Early this spring," wrote Isaac T. Gibson, Indian Agent, to Enoch Hoag, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, "I asked for the removal of nearly one hundred families from the Osage lands . . . the Osages feel that their new home is being wrested from them even before they have got possession."³⁷ In spite of all this, Mr. Gibson was able to report that a good physician had been employed who had "succeeded well in restoring health, and had introduced favorably our system of medicine among the blanket Indians who had heretofore avoided the white man's medicine."³⁸

Among the Choctaws and Chickasaws at Boggy Depot in the Choctaw Nation in August of 1871, conditions were far more satisfactory where "health was concerned," but the agent complained about the illegal sale of whiskey which was being introduced to the Territory in spite of constant watchfulness. "Whites on Red River, Texas, are selling whiskey freely to Indians, in violation of law, and go unpunished."³⁹

At the Seminole Agency in We-Wo-Ka, Indian Territory, Henry Briener, in 1871, U. S. Special Indian Agent, was not so optimistic in regard to improvement on the part of his charges. He admitted that both the temporal and moral conditions of the Seminoles had improved, but he felt that "their mode and habits of life, contrary to the general opinion, were detrimental to their physical growth and perfection; and con-

³⁶ *Oklahoma Red Book*, p. 251.

³⁷ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1871, pp. 484-

485.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ T. D. Griffith, U. S. Indian Agent for Choctaws and Chickasaws. *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1871.

sequently, a gradual degeneracy, which, according to the universal law of nature, is imparted to the offspring."⁴⁰

Exposure, lack of sufficient and the proper kind of clothing "adapted to the different and extreme changes of the season"; living in dark, cold cabins, an insufficient diet, lack of cleanliness in body and in food preparation; "add to all these causes of physical degeneracy the greatest of all moral and physical evils—the promiscuous intercourse of the sexes, which is very common, thereby engendering disease, and transmitting it down through many generations, we have the sum and substance of the seeds of ultimate extinction." He attributed to all these factors the Seminole's lack of resistance when acute disease struck.

Agent Briener condemned heartily and long-windedly the Indian medicine men whose potency—if any—seemed to lie in the "blowing and pow-wowing" rather than the pot of herbs employed. These cases usually ended fatally he noticed, and they were of lives which should have and could have been saved. In making a plea for better care of the Seminoles, he wrote of their complete ignorance of the laws of health, and of disease, and its treatment:⁴¹

If it be, therefore, desirable on the part of the government and benevolent institutions that these tribes should be perpetuated, civilized and christianized, and made useful citizens of this, or an independent government of their own, it would not only be an act of generosity and philanthropy, but of economy, for them to put forth every effort and use every means to accomplish these desirable objects. It is always more economical to perpetuate, civilize, and christianize, than it is to exterminate a race

Soon after Mr. Breiner was established at "We-Wo-Ka," he found that the salary allowed agents was insufficient for a man and his family to live on, especially if that agent was called upon for medical supplies. He made application to the department for medicines and for permission to practice, and both requests were granted. He felt that he had already affected much good among the people under his supervision, with this effort but he was also convinced that more importance should be attached to proving to the Indians the advantages of "the arts and sciences of civilization." He spent much of his time in the practice of medicine and "bestowed much labor to as poor and thriftless a class of people as I have ever seen." He completed his report with a statement of his intentions to "do this extra service so long as good can be accomplished and the Department will furnish the means."⁴²

⁴⁰ Henry Briener, U. S. Special Indian Agent, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1871, pp. 581-582.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 581-2.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 586.

In 1872 Mr. Breiner's report included a request for a hospital. He recommended an appropriation of \$1,500 for the erection and furnishing of a small hospital in the Seminole Nation: "But I would not recommend this appropriation without the qualification that a physician shall always be appointed to this agency as the Seminole agent, and that he be sufficiently remunerated to justify him for his labor, the privations to be endured, and the inconvenience and exposures incident to the country and climate."⁴³

It was Mr. Breiner's contention that in the treatment of both chronic and acute diseases the patient should be attended by an experienced physician, and "by a careful white, or other experienced, intelligent and obedient nurse." He pointed out that there was no other locality in the Indian Territory where a physician and a hospital were more needed than at We-Wo-Ka. There was no physician nearer than sixty miles. Fort Gibson and Fort Sill were both more than one hundred miles away.⁴⁴

John D. Miles, Indian Agent for the Cheyennes and Arapahos, was working hard in 1872 to get these people interested in planting, producing crops and raising stock. It was his belief that the Indians in his agency were finally being persuaded to become serious farmers.

The desire to embrace agricultural and stock-raising pursuits as a means of living is fast gaining ground among the more influential of the tribe. Powder Face, their chief told me a few days since that . . . "I see the buffalo are fast passing away, and there is no alternative for my people but to get on the white man's road," but thinks that the cattle-herd is better adapted to the present condition of his people than the "corn-road."

Speaking of health conditions, Agent John D. Miles reported there had been much sickness among both the Indians and employees at his agency. Like Mr. Breiner, he recommended the erection of a hospital building at Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency. "I believe much suffering can be alleviated by taking care of their sick before they have been subjected to a seige of their superstitious medicine practice."⁴⁵

The report from the Wichita Agency for 1872 showed the same existing problems: predatory white settlers, lack of interest in farming on the part of the Indians. "The Wichitas, Wacoos, Tawaconies, and Keechies, have continued their former plan of planting patches of corn, melons, and garden-vegetables, the work still being done mostly by women." A few of the men worked temporarily but sickness (unidentified) prevailed

⁴³ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1872, p. 242.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 250-251.

and following their custom, the Indians moved from their villages in order that the disease would be arrested.⁴⁶ A census on these tribes at the Wichita Agency showed a total of 1,535 Indians. Tribes living there included the Caddo, Keechi, Wichita, Delaware, Waco, Ioni, Tawacani, and Comanche.⁴⁷

Concerning the population of the Indian Tribes in 1872, Colonel William Penn Adair of the Cherokee Nation, wrote that there were more than 50,000 at that time. "The Cherokees with a population of 15,000 have two boarding-schools and sixty day-schools with an average attendance of 1,989 pupils, sustained at a cost of \$25,000 last year."⁴⁸

The Creeks, who were numbered at 15,000 in 1872, had three missions, one boarding school and thirty-one day schools. These schools had an attendance of 860 pupils Choctaws and Chickasaws in the same report for 1872, numbered 20,000, had three missions, two boarding-schools and forty-eight day schools.⁴⁹

"Soon after the Indians returned from the chase in April," wrote Agent John D. Miles from the Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency August 18, 1877, "measles broke out in epidemic form, and notwithstanding the faithful and unceasing care and medical attention of our worthy agency physician, L. A. E. Hodge, the 'badge of mourning' is worn by the heads of almost every lodge in the two tribes." Seventy-four of the 113 school children were down with measles at one time and the agent, doctor, and teachers converted the school building into a hospital. Thanks to the care they received every child was saved.⁵⁰

In this we gained a very important point with the camp Indians, demonstrating the advantage of our manner of treatment over theirs, and the superiority of warm houses over that of the damp lodge in sickness. One family of five children were all taken off except one, who was in school. The Arapahoes say they lost 138 children and the Cheyennes 83 during the epidemic.

Conditions among the Pawnee Indians was much the same as of all "village Indians I have known," wrote Charles H. Searing of that Agency in 1877.⁵¹

Nearly all wear the blanket, and a great deal of dancing and gambling is done. Probably about two-thirds of them live in cloth lodges, and the rest in large sod lodges, containing several families each. The habits of many of them are filthy, and without doubt, this, with the poor protection from the weather and the radical change in climate, has been the cause of many deaths.

⁴⁶ *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1872, p. 251.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

⁴⁸ *op cit.*, p. 266.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1877, p. 85.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

One change for the better Mr. Searing noted, was that the Indians came after medicine at the beginning of their chills much better than they formerly had. The agency physician felt they were beginning to realize the importance of early treatment.⁵²

The Cheyennes and Arapahos suffered greatly from the intense heat during the summer of 1878 according to Agent John D. Miles. He estimated the number of sick people on the reservation at 2,000. Had the Agency an adequate supply of "anti-malarial" remedies at hand, he believed many deaths would have been averted. The Agency received ninety-five ounces of quinine in advance of the annual supply and this was consumed in less than two days. "The success of the agency physician has been gratifying, and the only cause of ill-success has been due to the lack of medicines."⁵³ Hundreds who applied for treatment were refused medicine and as a result resorted to their native medicine and the "perpetuation of their superstitious rites."⁵⁴

Dr. J. W. Smith, agency physician for the Kiowa and Comanche Agency reported the prevalence of malaria among those tribes in 1878. He attributed most of their malaria to their camp sites and planned to personally supervise their next selections. Syphilis was rather general and he was concerned about the future welfare of the Indians in regard to this problem. He requested a building that could be used as a hospital at the earliest possible date because of the type care the Indians received in their own camps. He was concerned over the "jugglery and manipulations of the medicine men" which, in his estimation, could not but be injurious.⁵⁵

At the Pawnee Agency in 1880, the Agent wrote: "Old men say that this year, for the first time in their lives, they had all the potatoes and vegetables they could eat." E. H. Bowman, the Pawnee agent, entertained the typical theory as to the cause of malaria: "The slimy deposits are left high on the banks (of the Arkansas and Cimarron) to evolve malaria in a tropic heat of 80 degrees to 120 Fahrenheit . . . to these sources we must look for our most permanent and general causes of malarious diseases." Mr. Bowman praised their physician, whose kind and intelligent management and treatment was decreasing the Indian's confidence in their own medicine men, and steadily increasing their confidence in the

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1878, p. 51.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

"superior resources and capabilities of the white man's system of medicine."⁵⁶

The Osages in 1881, with a population of nearly 2,000 were losing many members of their tribe from pneumonia or "quick consumption." Lack of care during the cold and wet weather, the wearing of moccasins in wet weather, their habit of sleeping on damp ground, overheating from exercise and then exposure to cold, all were practices which led to an early grave in the opinion of their agency physician. The Indians applied at the agency for cough syrups, camphor, pills, etc., thinking they could prevent severe illness, but "they seldom call for a physician in severe cases. Disease seems to be severe upon them, and it is no uncommon thing for them to be taken when apparently healthy and die in two or three days."⁵⁷

An epidemic of smallpox started during the summer of 1882 in the Indian Territory. The first report of the disease was that of the Osage agent who told of smallpox in Black Dog's Camp and other camps on the Arkansas River. "Death followed quickly in a number of cases, and it was found to be rapidly spreading." The Osages became panic-stricken and fled, some across the Arkansas River, others into the seclusion of the forest. An effort was made to protect them with vaccination but "succeeded poorly for want of good virus." By September, twenty or twenty-five had died and many others were down with the disease.⁵⁸

Much publicity was given this epidemic by both the *Cherokee Advocate* and the *Cheyenne Transporter*. In January the Cherokee Citizenship Committee met at Tahlequah to pass a compulsory vaccination law.⁵⁹ A February issue of the *Advocate* carried a description of the scourge in the Indian Territory, and stated that special provisions were being made to have the people vaccinated. After telling of the ravages of smallpox in 1882 on Grand River and other places, the article pointed out that the only way to escape the disease was by vaccination. Vaccination was free and the people would be notified when the physician would be ready for each family to come to the agency for vaccination. Co-operation with the National Council was urged.⁶⁰ Much work was done in the Creek nation by Colonel W. P. Ross, Dr. J. A. Thompson and Mr. Parris. Before the people began co-operating by allow-

⁵⁶ Report of E. H. Bowman, U. S. I. A. to Pawnee Agency, Aug. 30, 1880. *Annual Report of Com. of Indian Affairs, 1880-82.*

⁵⁷ Report of L. J. Miles, U. S. I. A. to Osage Agency, September 21, 1881. *Annual Report of Com. of Indian Affairs, 1881-82.*

⁵⁸ *Annual Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1882*, p. 72.

⁵⁹ *Cheyenne Transporter*, Jan. 11, 1883, col. pp. 4, 5.

⁶⁰ *Cherokee Advocate*, Feb. 16, 1883.



A Home in the Cherokee Nation, Indian Territory.

ing vaccination, and accepting treatment, 68 persons had been ill with smallpox and 48 had died. After the immunization and treatment program was under way, 131 had the disease and only 2 died. The article pointed out this was proof that "prompt, skilled treatment is needed."⁶¹

In February of 1883, smallpox was reported at Vinita and in the eastern portion of the Territory. "We're all surrounded," the *Cheyenne Transporter* stated gloomily, "with smallpox prevalent at Vinita, and other points in the eastern portion of the Territory, in Southern Kansas and Northern Texas."⁶²

An excellent example of the Indians' recognition of the superiority of the white man's methods in the maintenance of health (or even life) among the Cheyennes and Arapahos was evidenced in a report from the Mennonite Missionary, S. S. Haury from Cantonment, Indian Territory in August, 1883:⁶³

The health of our children has been exceedingly good during all the year. We had not one case of sickness which was at all serious. This circumstance did not escape the notice of the Indians. A father once brought his daughter, being sick with consumption and near the grave, begging me to take her in upon the plea that all children recovered if they were staying in our house.

Reports from the agents during the 1880's indicate a general trend, among the Indians, away from their old ways of treating disease, and an acceptance of the "white man's way." Some of the tribes still lived in squalor, and if unable to get an agency physician, allowed their medicine men to practice. Some of the agents would occasionally express confidence they had completely converted the tribes under their supervision to more hygienic living, and to a more scientific approach where the treatment of disease and care of the sick was concerned. Yet their next reports would include diatribes on the "filthy and superstitious" habits of the Indians. The consensus of opinion among the agents was that to properly care for the sick among the Indians, hospitals would have to be available.⁶⁴ The Agency physician could treat the patient but until he could be removed from the camp environment, his chances at recovery—if he was acutely ill—were not too good. "We cannot expect the Indian to have confidence in the white doctor and his medicine unless he had been reasonably successful in his practice, and how can we expect him to be successful when his patients are made to pass through the ordeal the Indian medicine man imposes upon them."⁶⁵

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, Feb. 2, col. 2, p. 2.

⁶² *Cheyenne Transporter*, Feb. 10, 1883, col. 2, p. 1.

⁶³ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1883, p. 69.

⁶⁴ Report of P. B. Hunt, I. A. to Kiowa, Comanche, Wichita agency—*Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1884, p. 81.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

The supervision of the health of the Indians was carried on consistently and conscientiously (according to the agents' reports) from 1880. Before that time the employment of agency physicians had been a rather hit-or-miss proposition. In 1873 a medical and educational division was created in the Indian Bureau, but by 1874 only about one-half the agencies in the United States had been provided with physicians.⁶⁶ Lack of supplies and equipment, made medical practice and health supervision a difficult task. The medical and educational division was abolished in 1878 but the Federal Government "increased its efforts in both preventive and remedial work."⁶⁷

The Commissioner of Indian Affairs ruled in his report for 1878 that physicians employed as agency doctors in the future had to be "graduates of some medical college and have the necessary diplomas."⁶⁸ According to the reports of agents in the Indian Territory there were physicians employed in all of the agencies after 1880.

A census, taken in 1879 showed an increase in population, but this could be attributed to including whites, negroes, and mixed bloods, rather than the governmental health supervision program, from 1866. The Cherokees, in 1879, numbered 19,000. Of this number there were 6,000 of mixed blood, 3,500 negroes, and 700 whites. The 1866 census showed them to number 14,000. The Chickasaws numbered 5,800 in 1879 as compared with 4,500 in 1866. The Choctaws in 1879 numbered 16,000. Of this number 6,000 were mixed bloods, and 1,300 were whites. Seminoles in 1879 numbered 2,443, as contrasted with 2,000 enumerated in 1866. Creeks reported in 1879 totaled 14,260. In 1866, there were supposed to be 14,000 Creeks.⁶⁹ There were also 6,200 white people who had not been admitted to citizenship in any of the tribes enumerated in 1879. Twelve hundred of these were employees of the railroads, and 5,000 were intruders.⁷⁰ In 1883, the *Cheyenne Transporter* reported there were 36 tribes of Indians in the Territory.⁷¹

During 1888, agency reports showed an increasing number of Indians being treated by the agency physicians; showed also the hold still exerted on the Indians by the medicine men; the general improvement in living conditions as a result of better food, more sanitation in regard to camp life, the absence of epidemic diseases such as smallpox; the increasing rate of

⁶⁶ Edward Everett Dale, *Indians of the Southwest*, p. 201.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* Annual Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1902.

⁶⁹ Gittinger, *Formation of the State of Oklahoma*, 218.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁷¹ *Cheyenne Transporter*, September 28, 1883.

tuberculosis, and the addiction to the mescal bean among members of the Comanches and Apaches, among other topics related to health.⁷²

The population of Indian Territory in 1890 was given the same as in 1880, 1882. The Five Tribes accounted for 178,097 of this number, with the Quapaw Agency having 1,281 persons. White and colored people on the Fort Sill and Fort Reno military reservations were listed as 804.⁷³ A somewhat different classification is given in the Eleventh Census of the United States.⁷⁴ The total population of what is now Oklahoma for 1890 was 258,657. Of this figure, 172,554 were listed as white, and 21,609 were negroes.⁷⁵

From the figures quoted it is plain to be seen that the only figures which actually agree are those from identical reports. There never seemed to have been any agreement reached as to standard definitions of nationality in the Territory. One of the main reasons for the confusion where census reports were concerned was caused by the white people who wished to share in the Indian benefits. The only way they could hope to do this was by proving that they were descendants of old Indian families.

⁷² *Annual Report of the Commissioners of Indian Affairs, 1888.*

⁷³ *Extra Census Bulletin*, Department of Interior, The Five Civilized Tribes, Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1894.

⁷⁴ Gittinger, *Formation of State of Oklahoma*, Appendix D, 219.

⁷⁵ *Negro Populations in the U. S.: 1790-1915*, Government Printing Office, 1918, pp. 43-4. (The number of Negroes in 1890 for Oklahoma and Indian territories included those who had taken homestead claims in the first land opening in 1889; large groups that had come from other states to work in the coal mines; and the Freedmen [ex-slaves and their families] who had lived in the Territory before the Civil War.—Ed.)