

Missionaries

Christian missionaries worked among the Indians long before the Indians were removed to Indian Territory. Missionaries Samuel A. Worcester and Elizur Butler chose prison over giving up their work among the Cherokees. They followed the tribe to Indian Territory and continued their *mission* work.

Worcester was probably the most influential missionary of the time. He settled at Park Hill, near the residence of Chief John Ross, and worked on translating the Bible into the Cherokee and Choctaw languages.

The Choctaws responded to the work of Cyrus Kingsbury and Alfred Wright.

Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and Catholics sponsored *mission* efforts in Indian Territory. Others also came. The Cherokees responded to the Baptist message while the Choctaws responded to Presbyterian and

Methodist influence. An early day *convert* to the Catholic message was Victor M. Locke, Jr., later a Choctaw chief and superintendent of the Five Civilized Tribes.

The Cherokees welcomed the missionary efforts. Many of their tribesmen became preachers. Jesse Bushyhead, an important Cherokee leader, was a Baptist preacher. Although Chief John Ross was a Methodist, he cooperated with Baptist missionaries, such as Evan Jones, in their work among the tribesmen.

Mission efforts met resistance from other tribes because forced migrations caused the Indians to hate anything of white origin. Full-blood Chickasaws and Choctaws opposed *mission* efforts during the early years after their removals. For a long while, Creeks made Christian preaching a capital crime.

Finally, in 1842, the Creeks let missionaries work among their tribesmen. The first *mission* to the Seminoles began in 1848. By 1860, missionaries had begun efforts to educate the tribes. The first textbook published in Indian Territory was an elementary book for use in Creek schools.

When the War Between the States was near, the tribesmen divided over choosing sides. Many of the full-blood Cherokees sympathized with the North. Baptist missionary Evan Jones was an abolitionist and



influenced the thinking of Chief John Ross. Ross was friendly with the South but wanted to remain neutral. The Ridge party, including Stand Watie, urged siding with the Confederacy. They broke the power of Ross and joined the South. Despite the efforts of leaders such as the Creek, Opothleyahola, parties from other tribes followed the Ridges and Watie in joining the Confederate cause.

Important among the missionaries to the Western tribes was the work of the Friends (Quakers). Quaker Laurie Tatum worked among the Comanches and Kiowas. Other churches also sent missionaries to the Western tribes.

Many missionaries worked to wipe out Indian religion, dress, and traditions. Some Indian leaders resisted their efforts. Chief Joseph of the Nez Percé

wouldn't let the Christian missionaries work among his people. He said, "They will teach us to quarrel about God as the Catholics and Protestants do... We may quarrel with men...but we never quarrel about God. We do not want to learn that."

Other Indian leaders saw a contradiction between what the missionaries taught and how the whites acted. Sioux leaders told the missionaries, "It is your people, who you say have the Great Spirit's book, who bring us fire-water...Go teach them to do right, and then come to us and we will believe you."

But the work of the missionaries prevailed. Many churches sent missionaries to all the tribes. Eventually, their influences softened the opposition, and Christian churches and schools were founded throughout Oklahoma and Indian Territories.



The first church in Indian Territory, Wheelock Mission, was founded by Alfred Wright. Illustration by Charles Banks Wilson