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GRADUATE COLLEGE

A SURVEY OF THE SEMINOLE FREEDMEN

A THESIS

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

A SURVEY OF THE SEMINOLE FREEDMEN

A THESIS

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degree of

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The writer is indebted to Drs. Robert S. Bell, Earl Smith, and Paul Garvin, of the Department of Anthropology, University of Oklahoma, for their helpful advice and assistance in the preparation of this report. The investigator is particularly indebted to Dr. Park Schultz for his encouragement and direction of the field work.

Helpful advice from Mrs. Donald S. Stewart and Lewis E. Millien, Department of Sociology, University of Oklahoma, is also appreciated.

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All the informants, Freedmen, State Colored, Indian, and White, remain anonymous throughout this paper. Special thanks are extended to all these people, for without their assistance the field work could never have been undertaken.



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## A SURVEY OF THE SEMINOLE FREEDMEN

### CHAPTER I

#### INTRODUCTION

The specific objective of this paper is to present a survey of the Seminole Freedmen, placing particular emphasis on the situation as it exists at the present time. Whenever possible, the existent information will be interpreted with reference to information of the past in order that the reader can acquire a better insight into the change that has occurred. Although there is an abundance of material in the literature dealing with the Seminole Indians, there is rarely any mention of the Seminole Freedmen, and for that reason the material presented in this paper is considered a contribution to knowledge. The present effort is merely a scratch upon the surface of a very interesting problem, and it is hoped that this survey will be of help to future students, and to laymen who are interested in Negro groups of Oklahoma.

The relations between Southeastern Indian groups and Negroes is an interesting, but noticeably neglected chapter in American ethnology. These two races came into contact at an early date, often found mutual understanding in that they were both fleeing from the Whites, and frequently found themselves banded together in resistance to White domination.



This is particularly true of the Seminole Indians and the Seminole Negroes, both of whom, after having fled to Florida, became closely associated in their united resistance to the Whites. This paper attempts to present a survey of that group of Negroes who attached themselves to the Seminole Indians, but as previously mentioned it deals primarily with the present situation, and only lightly delves into past history.

Intensive library research, and an even more exhaustive program of direct field work have preceded the writing of this paper. Most known sources have been consulted, and in addition the author has spoken with a large number of people outside the Freedmen group. This entailed a great number of casual conversations with merchants, lawyers, and townspeople, both black and white, all of whom were in direct or indirect contact with the Freedmen. Needless to say, an astonishingly large number of people consulted were not aware that such a group as the Seminole Freedmen existed.

A particularly valuable collection of information on outgroup relations was that divulged by the many State-Colored and Indian hitchhikers whom the author had occasion to pick up while traveling through Freedmen communities. Perhaps realizing they would probably never see the investigator again, many of them proved to be quite talkative. Most of the people in this category lived among the Freedmen, hence their information is considered valuable, especially from the standpoint of ingroup-outgroup relations (Chapter VI).

However, most of the information was collected during seven months field work with Freedmen informants, one month of which was utilized

in making contacts and becoming familiar with the area. Six informants<sup>1</sup> were employed extensively, three from each band. Two men and one woman were selected from the Dosa Barkas Band, and two women and one man were chosen from the Caesar Bruner Band. Ages of these informants range from approximately sixty-eight to seventy-six. During the later phases of field work interviews were conducted primarily with two of the six informants, and at the same time an intensive plan of visiting was inaugurated. There was also much information gathered from many Freedmen who were not directly employed as informants, but who volunteered valuable data in casual conversations, etc.

At first contact all informants were offered an informant fee of fifty cents per hour, and although a few graciously refused to accept money, others were remunerated at the established rate. After a few months in the field two of the more cooperative informants declined to accept further money, and from that time on they were given clothes, food and gifts in return for their valuable assistance.

As field work progressed the investigator found it more and more to his advantage not to have utilized any local White contacts in establishing himself with the group. It should be noted that during the early stages of field work it was found that open-ended questioning yielded the most information, whereas a little later more direct questions were accepted. Best results were obtained by letting the informant digress as long as desired, and the investigator often volunteered reciprocal information

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<sup>1</sup>Names of all informants are on file in the Department of Anthropology, University of Oklahoma.

during such discussions. In most interview situations it was possible to take notes in the presence of the informant, although in a few cases it was found better policy to refrain. In all cases the interview was conducted on an equal level, and it was found that a preliminary knowledge, whenever available, was helpful to the investigator.

All field data was kept in a field manual, and within a few hours following each interview the information was evaluated and filed by informant headings, with corresponding sub-headings for each kind of data. All questionable data were cross-checked with at least two informants, and usually with more, and the results thus obtained are here presented as the average situation. In only two or three situations was it desirable to consult more than one informant at a time, since it was found that interviews where several informants were present usually resulted in argument and confusion.

Upon first contact the author found most of the Freedmen to be very suspicious, but in most cases this gave way to cooperation when it was explained why the study was being conducted. Very few people refused to talk with the author, and it was seldom that the investigator was not asked to enter a Freedmen home. All people consulted conversed in fluent English, and there were five who claim they can still speak Seminole. Older Freedmen appear to have a dialectal variation from the typically "southern Negro dialect" spoken by the younger Freedmen and State Colored people. However, the author had no opportunity to make a linguistic study of the group.

Name of the Group

Terminology Throughout History

The general term Negro, used principally as a racial description, is the one term which has consistently been applied to the Freedmen group. Throughout American History various other terms have been applied to them, depending upon the particular time and situation.

The earliest ancestors of the present-day group were known as Africans or African Slaves, alluding to their country of origin, and to their initial status in the New World. However, from the very beginning of the institution of slavery in the New World, there were slaves who fled their bondage to seek refuge with the Creek Indians or with the Spanish in the Territory of Florida. The settlers and colonial officials called these runaway slaves Exiles, whereas the Creeks called them "Seminoles", after a Creek word roughly translatable as "runaway", or "wanderers". Herskovits refers to these early runaways as "Maroons",<sup>2</sup> based on the term employed by the Florida Spanish, meaning "Free Negroes".

Upon arriving in the West, in what is now Oklahoma, the term Seminole Negroes came into general use. In the literature this designation is used quite frequently, and apparently continued until after the Civil War, when all ex-slaves became known as Freedmen. This latter designation has persisted to the present day.

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<sup>2</sup>Melville J. Herskovits, The Myth of the Negro Past (New York: Harper & Co., 1941), p. 91.

### Preferred Terminology

The discriminatory connotation of the word "nigger" completely disqualifies this term when speaking to a Seminole Freedman. Negro is acceptable to most of the people, although the majority of people consulted, when speaking of the Freedmen in a racial context, appeared to use the word Colored more often than Negro. Some informants referred to their group as Indian Negroes, others called themselves Seminole Negroes, but both terms are the exception. The preferred term, and the one most often encountered when listening to conversations between Freedmen, is Native. When speaking about themselves to members of their own group, this designation is used almost exclusively. On the other hand, when a Freedman speaks to an "outsider" concerning his Native group, he will in most cases use the common term Freedmen. As one old informant told the investigator: "If'en I didn't say Freedman when I wuz talkin to white folks, they wouldn't know what I wuz talkin 'bout. Some don't even know then. Seems they would though, don't it?"<sup>3</sup> The preceding statement is fairly indicative of what was received from several informants, when in casual conversation they were queried as to how they referred to themselves in the presence of Whites.

It is interesting to note that two of the well-educated Freedmen told the author that they objected to the use of the word Freed, giving as their reasons the fact that they were not slaves and never had been, even though there was a possibility that their ancestors might have held

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<sup>3</sup>Informant E

such status. In their opinion the present-day use of the designation serves only to signify that they are associated with the Indians.

Negroes who are not known as Freedmen, are by the Freedmen called "State Colored". In a few instances the term "foreign colored" was used to designate the outgroup Negroes, but this was rare, and upon being questioned the informant invariably changed to the term given above. Creek and Seminole Indians, particularly the latter, are in most cases referred to as Natives, whereas other tribes are usually referred to by specific name. Freedmen of other tribes are spoken of as "Creek Freedmen", "Choctaw Freedmen", or perhaps "Creek Natives", etc. Whites are in conversational context singled out by the speaker, usually explaining to the listener, "he is a White", or "that White man (or woman)".

In the present study, members of the group will be designated Freedman, Freedwoman, Freedmen, or Freedwomen, as the case may be. Freedmen from other tribes will be designated Freedmen, preceded by the name of the Indian tribe of which they are a member. Non-Freedmen Negroes will be called State Negroes, following customary Freedmen terminology. All communities, towns, and landmarks will be referred to in the same terminology as that employed by the Freedmen.

For obvious personal reasons the actual names of all Freedmen, State Colored, Indian, and White informants will be omitted. For reference purposes each Freedman informant has been designated by a capital letter, and will be referred to in footnotes by this letter.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Around 1630, in the early stages of the establishment of the prosperous slave trade, the Colony of Carolina by her first and second charters claimed a vast extent of country, embracing St. Augustine and most of Florida. However, the Florida territory was originally settled by the Spanish in 1558, and their continued claim to this area became the basis for open hostilities between the two groups.

By 1700 the slave trade of the Spanish had blossomed into a very lucrative business, and at the same time the Carolinians were exploiting the cheap labor offered by the institution of slavery. In fact, Carolina colonists had enslaved many of the Indians who lived in their vicinity, hence in the early slave codes of the Carolina colony there was reference to "negro and other slaves", meaning, of course, the Indians whom they had enslaved for labor purposes.

Upon settlement of the Carolina and Florida boundaries, the two factions found themselves separated by the territory now constituting the State of Georgia. This territory was occupied almost entirely by the Creek Indians; thus, soon after the colony boundaries were established the enslaved Indians began to make their escape into this region, and many of the Negro slaves followed the example of the Indians. It should,

however, be pointed out that many of the escaped Negroes eventually made their way into Florida.

The colonists immediately complained to the Colonial Government that many of their slaves were seeking freedom in Creek Indian Territory. The situation was somewhat smoothed over when the English established the free colony of Georgia, stating in effect that there would be no slaves in said colony because of the imminent possibility of a Spanish-incited revolt of such a group. The Carolinian who saw some measure of relief in this arrangement found that it was to be short lived, for some eight years later slavery was introduced into the colony.

In the meantime the Spanish government of Florida had granted complete freedom to the many Negroes who had fled to that territory. These Negroes were now called "Seminoles" by the Creek Indians, which can be roughly translated as "runaways".<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to note that the name now applies to a tribe of Indians, although the original designation applied to runaway Negroes, and was used long before the Seminole Indians had separated from the Creeks.

Soon after Georgia became a slave-holding colony a split developed among the Creeks, as a result of which a chief named Seacoffee took a large number of his followers south into Florida territory. The Spanish accepted these Indians in the same manner that they had the Negroes, granted them protection, and let them settle on any unoccupied lands they could find. Hence from around 1750 on these Indians refused to be associated with the Creeks, held themselves to be completely independent, and in

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<sup>4</sup>Joshua R. Giddings, The Exiles of Florida (Columbus: Follet, Foster & Co., 1858) p. 3.



a short while they had united with the Mickasukies. The Indians settled in the vicinity of the Seminole Negroes, intermarried with them, associated with them, and in general remained on friendly terms. Giddings has the following to say regarding this first contact:

They settled in the vicinity of the Exiles, associated with them, and a mutual sympathy and respect existing, some of their people intermarried, thereby strengthening the ties of friendships, and the Indians having fled from oppression and taken refuge under Spanish Laws, were also called Seminoles, or "runaways."<sup>5</sup>

The Seminole Negroes of Florida established themselves on suitable agricultural lands, built homes, acquired stock, and took full advantage of their newly acquired freedom. Knowledge of their enviable status soon found its way to the slaves of the colonies, thus precipitating a general Negro movement into Florida which attained such proportions that the slave-holding colonists registered urgent complaints with the newly organized United States Government. Immediate negotiations were started between United States officials and officials of the Creek Indians, the United States making the obvious error of recognizing the Seminoles as being a part of the Creek tribe.

The treaty which was finally agreed upon by the representatives of the two nations, interestingly enough the first treaty entered into under our present form of government, went into effect August 1, 1790. Under terms of this agreement the Creeks were to receive certain disputed lands from Georgia, and in return were bound to deliver all escaped prisoners, whether white or black, "to the commanding officer of the troops of the United States stationed at Rock Landing, on the Oconee River."

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

The United States considered the Seminoles of Florida a part of the Creek Nation, and even though the Seminoles were under Spanish laws it was expected that they would turn over to the "proper authorities" the Negroes who were then living among them.

This foolish expectation under the prevailing circumstances failed completely. Giddings aptly explains it in the following words:

this attempt to bind the Seminole Indians to surrender up the Exiles, who were their friends and neighbors, and who now stood connected with them by marriage, and in all the relations of domestic life, constitutes an inconsistency....<sup>6</sup>

Indeed it did constitute an inconsistency, an inconsistency on the part of our federal government not to realize that the social bonds between the Seminole Negroes and Seminole Indians were strong enough to keep them united. The Spanish authorities had granted equal asylum to both Indians and Negroes, and the two groups were making the most of it. Consequently, in 1792 an agent by the name of Seagrove<sup>7</sup> represented the United States in an attempt to induce the Spanish authorities to return the Seminole Negroes to Georgia. Needless to say, the appeal was refused, the Negroes remained in Florida, and again there was added incentive on the part of enslaved Negroes to seek their freedom under Spanish rule.

Further attempts were made by the United States, including additional treaties with the Creeks, and still the Seminole Negroes remained under the protection of Spanish laws. Finally the explosive situation erupted, and in 1817-18<sup>8</sup> Andrew Jackson with a force of some

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 13

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 17

<sup>8</sup>John R. Swanton, "Indians of the Southeastern United States", Bureau of American Ethnology, Bul. 137 (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1946) p. 181.

3,000 men, many of whom were Creeks, invaded the Spanish Territory of Florida with the express purpose of capturing the Seminole Negroes. After several skirmishes this first of the Seminole wars was concluded with the battle of Suwanee, where the combined forces of Indians and Negroes scattered to the south. Still, nothing had been accomplished beyond the loss of several lives and the destruction of much property.

Having thus failed to acquire the Seminole Negroes by either treaty or force, the United States negotiated with Spain for the purchase of the Florida Territory. Negotiations culminated in 1819 when the United States acquired Florida for the sum of five million dollars, thus bringing the Seminoles under its jurisdiction. Immediately white settlers migrated to Florida, and in order to retain their freedom the Seminoles moved to the interior, leaving their dwellings, cultivated fields, and most of their possessions behind.

For the Seminole Negroes another threat arose, that of the slave-catcher who could see only monetary gain in people of the dark skin. Many were captured and sold on outside markets, but even then slaves were still escaping from the plantations and fleeing to the Florida swamps.

A new situation arose in 1823, when the United States dispatched a commission to Florida to negotiate a treaty with the Seminole tribe, now recognizing them as a separate and independent group. Attempts at treaties were futile until 1832, and in the intervening years the conflict between Negroes-Indians and Whites became worse and worse. However, in the latter year the treaty of Payne's Landing was agreed upon, stipulating in effect that the Seminoles would send eight of their principal

chiefs to visit the western country to ascertain the desirability of moving there. The group had the secondary purpose of determining the feasibility of reuniting with the Creeks who had already migrated to what is now the State of Oklahoma. Two Negroes, Abraham and Cudjoe, were to accompany the chiefs to act as interpreters.

It should be mentioned that the Negroes enjoyed a favorable position among the Seminoles, both for their knowledge of the Whites, and for their knowledge of English. This is illustrated by the following quotation from Sprague:

Seminoles had learned to speak the Indian language, which, together with a knowledge of English and intimacy with the habits of whites soon gave them an ascendancy when the slave becomes the master.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the fact that the treaty of Payne's Landing had been repudiated by most of the tribe, the Seminole delegation traveled to the western territory to look over the lands in question. They returned and gave an adverse report to the tribe relative to settling with the Creeks. However, by order of the President another treaty had been presented to the chiefs at the time they were visiting the West, under the assumption that the chiefs were representing the entire Seminole tribe. Thus, on March 28, 1833,<sup>10</sup> the commissioners obtained the signatures to this "additional treaty", whereby the Seminoles agreed to emigrate to the western country "so soon as the United States shall make the necessary

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<sup>9</sup>J. T. Sprague, Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1848) p. 309

<sup>10</sup>Joshua R. Giddings, op. cit., p. 84

preparations."<sup>11</sup> This additional treaty also stipulated that the Seminoles were to have a separate tract of country apart from the Creeks. This latter arrangement is thought by many to have been the result of the Negro interpreter Abraham's influence over the group. This seems logical in view of the fact that the Negroes seemed to prefer to remain to themselves or with the Seminoles than to be under Creek jurisdiction.

However, the Creeks heard of this arrangement and protested to Lewis Cass, then Secretary of War, who upheld their complaint. The government then declared the "additional treaty" void, and proceeded to enforce the original treaty, although the Seminoles claimed they had not accepted the conditions of the treaty. The result of the attempted removal was the second Seminole War which broke out in 1835 and was not terminated until 1842.

The second Seminole War is well known in the annals of American history as very bloody, costly and, from the point of view of most historians, very treacherous on the part of the United States. Jumper and Osceola were the principal leaders of Seminole resistance, and the treachery involved in capturing the latter is a blot upon the military history of the United States. The number of Negroes associated with the Seminole Indians at the start of the second Seminole War has been estimated at around fourteen hundred.<sup>12</sup>

When the second Seminole War finally came to a close most of the Seminoles, Indian and Negro, had either been forced to emigrate to what is now Oklahoma or had done so of their own free will. They were trans-

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 85

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 97

ported to New Orleans, and from there brought by boat up the Mississippi River to the junction of the Arkansas, thence up the Arkansas River to Ft. Smith, eventually arriving at Ft. Gibson (Oklahoma). The cost of the war was estimated at some forty million dollars, or around eighty thousand dollars per each of the five hundred persons who were captured and enslaved. Casualty figures of the United States forces indicate that approximately three Whites were expended for each captured black.<sup>13</sup> In all due respect to the Seminoles it should be pointed out that there were many who were never expelled from Florida; the descendents of these people reside there to this day, and apparently still cling to many of their old customs.

Those Negroes and Indians of the Seminole tribe who withstood the rigors and hardships of the trip west, found their troubles only beginning. The government insisted that they be placed under the jurisdiction of the Creeks, and the Creeks, sensing the opportunity to acquire custody of the Seminole Negroes, were very much in favor of this arrangement. Even much earlier the Seminoles and Creeks had not been on good terms with each other, and the recent developments in the second Seminole War, when the Creeks helped the United States troops, didn't promote good feeling.<sup>14</sup> The Creeks were making limited demands on the government that certain of the Seminole Negroes should be given to them in return for their services in the battle against the Seminoles in Florida. This was an immediate source of friction between the two Indian tribes, the Creeks

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 315

<sup>14</sup>J. T. Sprague, op. cit.,

on the one hand desirous of obtaining slaves, and the Seminoles on the other appearing to be extremely attached to their Negroes, and not agreeing to part with them under any terms whatsoever.

This strong attachment of the Seminoles to their Negroes appears to have been rooted in intermarriage, similar if not identical social customs, and the extremely close associations between both groups over a long period of time. Giddings states the situation as follows:

But at no period had the Seminole Indians regarded the Exiles with greater favor than they did when removing on to the territory assigned to the Creeks. Although many of them had intermarried with the Seminoles, and half-breeds were now common among the Indians; yet most of the descendants of the pioneers who fled from South Carolina and Georgia maintained their identity of character, living by themselves, and maintaining the purity of the African race. They yet cherished this love of their own kindred and color; and when they removed on to the Creek lands, they settled in separate villages; and the Seminole Indians appeared generally to coincide with the Exiles in the propriety of each maintaining their distinctive character.<sup>15</sup>

At the outset though, the Seminoles settled in the western part of the Creek Nation, between the North and South Canadian Rivers, and resumed their agricultural habits. Their Negroes, as was their custom, established themselves in separate villages near those of the Indians. No sooner had the Negroes settled than they were claimed by the Creeks as slaves. In rebuttal the Negroes and Seminole Indians replied that under the treaty of 1845 the President was bound to hear and determine all questions arising between them. The presidential ruling on the matter was slow in coming, so, in order to eliminate the possibility of violence, the Negroes repaired in a body to Ft. Gibson, and demanded protection of General Arbuckle. The Negroes were directed to encamp around the Fort, and to draw government rations for subsistence.

<sup>15</sup>Joshua R. Giddings, op. cit., p. 324

Finally, in 1848, the President ruled that the Seminole Negroes "had the right to remain in their villages, free from all interference, or interruption from the Creeks." The Negroes then returned to their homes, and resumed their agricultural life. However, in a short while the slaves from neighboring tribes, and those in nearby Arkansas, began a clamor for equal privileges such as those granted to Seminole Negroes. It was about this time that around one hundred Negroes, including the very influential Gopher John, were brought in from Florida and turned over to the Seminoles. Gopher John had been declared a free Negro by the Seminole Council in 1843, and upon arriving at Ft. Gibson he conducted the Negroes to a place to set up their own town. This settlement bore the name of Wewoka, and was located on the north side of a creek (later Wewoka Creek), about thirty miles from the Seminole Agency.

The Creeks, spurred on by slave-buyers from Arkansas, persisted in kidnapping Seminole Negroes and selling them into slavery, giving as their reason the fact that the Negroes were living in Creek territory, and that most of them were without owners. There was much friction, frequently leading to open conflict, which ultimately resulted in a large band of Negroes, under the leadership of the Seminole Indian Wild Cat, making their way into Old Mexico. Abraham, now quite old, was among the group which emigrated south, and rumor has it that he became a sort of ruling prince of his people.<sup>16</sup> In 1850 Wild Cat returned to the Seminoles, gathered together some one hundred Negroes, and attempted to return with them to Old Mexico. The Creeks ambushed them, capturing around sixty of

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 337



the unfortunate people, and killing many others. A few years later Wild Cat died in Mexico, and we are told that many of the Negroes made their way back to the Seminoles.

In 1856 the federal government finally made a treaty with the Creeks and Seminoles, whereby the latter would get a long narrow strip of land...

lying between the Canadian River and the North Fork of the Canadian River and extending from about the middle of what is now Pottawatomie County, Oklahoma, northwestward to the One Hundredth parallel, or the present western boundary of Oklahoma, and estimated to embrace 2,169,000 acres.<sup>17</sup>

Some of the Seminoles attempted to settle on this land, but were prevented from doing so by the hostility of the western Indians, notably the Comanches.

In the summer of 1859 the Seminole people held a general council to discuss setting up a government such as was enjoyed by the other immigrant tribes. The Civil War interrupted their plans though, and it was not until 1866 that a new treaty was made. Under the terms of this agreement the Seminoles ceded their land back to the United States and in its place received a portion of the Creek Territory comprising what is now Seminole County, Oklahoma. Laws were set up, a council was organized, and in 1898 the tribal land held in common was equally divided among the members of the tribe, Negroes included. Seminole law prevailed until the formation of the State of Oklahoma in 1907.

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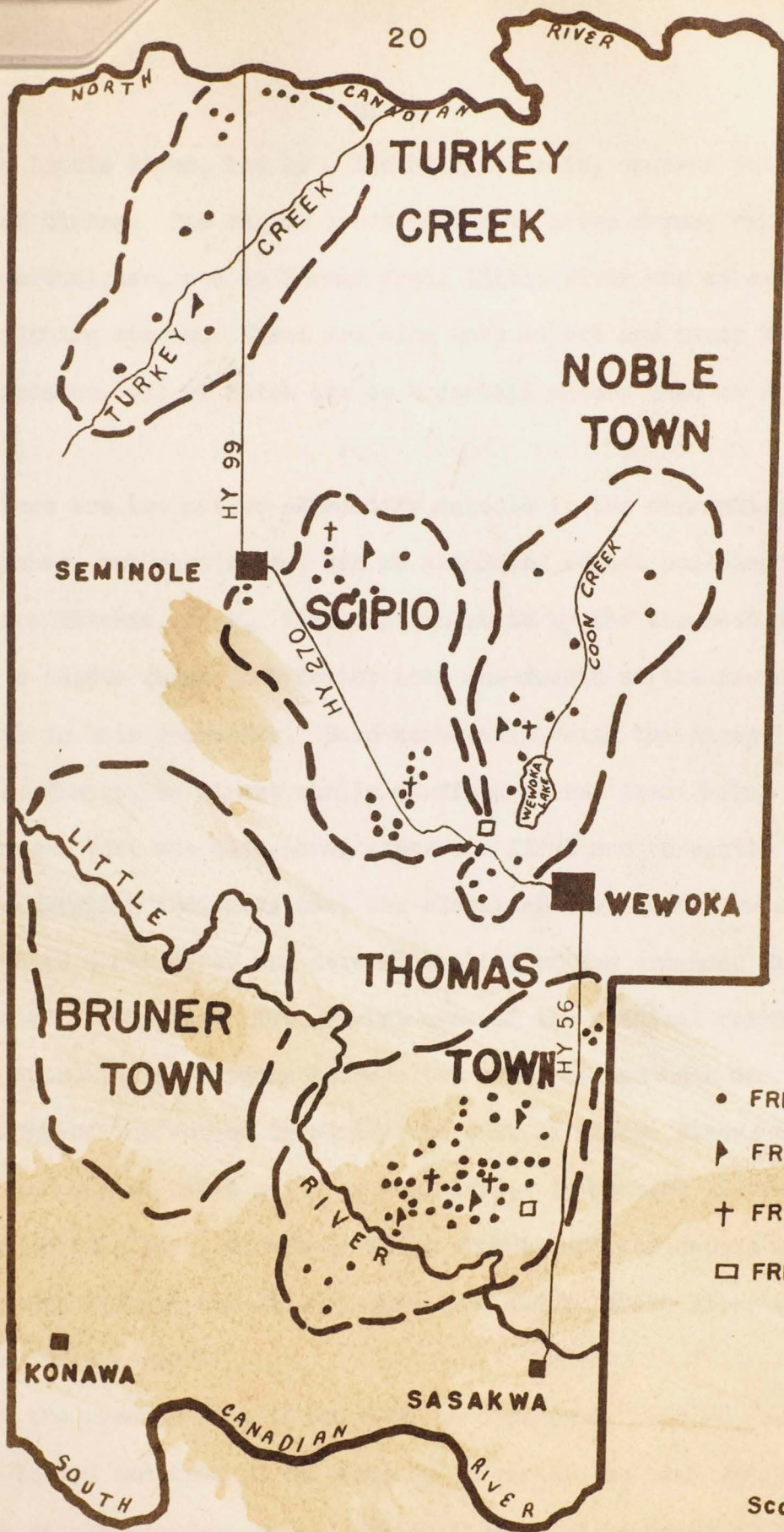
<sup>17</sup>Grant Foreman, The Five Civilized Tribes (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934) p. 270

### CHAPTER III

#### POPULATION AND TOPOGRAPHY

There are five native communities (Map 1), all of which are located in Seminole County. Four of these, Thomas Town (Little River), Bruner Town, Noble Town, and Scipio, apparently are original settlements. No definite date can be determined for the actual establishment of these communities, although it must have been some time around 1866, when the federal government by treaty granted the Seminoles the part of Oklahoma which now constitutes Seminole County. The fifth settlement, Turkey Creek, was probably formed in the late 1870's.

Thomas Town, better known as Little River, is by far the largest Freedmen community. It was originally called Thomas Town in honor of the first man to settle in that particular region, later becoming better known as Little River in view of the nearby river of that name. This settlement, the main body of which lies about eight or nine miles south of Wewoka, embraces quite a large range of territory. In its original form, the concentrated population extended over an area roughly four miles square; in addition to this fairly compact grouping, there are several families who identify themselves with this community, although they live three to four miles away from the consolidated population zone. The topography of this area is characterized by many intermittent streams, all of which are



MAP I: SEMINOLE COUNTY  
FREEDMEN SETTLEMENTS OUTLINED

oriented to Little River, and by a low hilly terrain, covered with an abundance of timber. The region lends itself to patch farms, excellent hunting opportunities, and in former years Little River was an extremely bountiful fishing stream. There are also many walnut and pecan trees, as well as persimmon, all of which are to a certain extent used as accessory foods.

There are two native elementary schools in the community, two native churches, two cemeteries, and an abandoned school building which is used for a Masonic Lodge. This settlement is by far the most populous; the author's census shows that better than one-fourth of the Freedmen still reside in this community. Band membership, with the exception of one extended family, is almost wholly confined to the Dosa Barkas Band.

Bruner Town was also named after the first man to settle in the region. Information indicates that the oldest of the Bruners settled in this area at an early date, and several members of the extended Bruner family settled around him. The general area of the original community is located approximately midway between the towns of Seminole and Konawa. The topography of the region is similar to that of Little River, with the exception that timber isn't quite so prevalent. In general the region is suitable for agriculture, with some areas appropriate for cattle raising. In former years hunting and fishing were good along Little River and its intermittent tributaries.

At the present time Bruner Town is apparently void of Freedmen. The author toured the area in the company of one of the band chiefs, but found not a single Freedmen family living there. It is known that when Caesar Bruner established the Turkey Creek community, he took a consider-

able number of his followers with him, but information indicates that many remained in the Bruner Town area. At present, there are a few families of Creek Freedmen living in the Bruner Town region, and there are several families of State Colored residing in the locality. Presumably the present occupants have acquired the land from the Freedmen allottees, the latter having emigrated to other settlements or just "scattered". Most informants, however, state that in the past Bruner Town was second in size only to Little River. Intensive inquiry failed to produce a good reason why the entire population would have been compelled to desert the native area. There is a possibility that a few Freedmen are living in the region at the present time, and that their identity has been lost among the State Colored, thus making it difficult to locate them.

Noble Town, named for the oldest settler and "the eight or ten Nobles who settled around him," is located approximately two miles north of Wewoka. Originally, the community probably started from a point about one mile west of Wewoka, extending approximately four or five miles northward. In general, the original settlement was scattered more or less along Coon Creek, around the northern edge of what is now Wewoka Lake. The topography of this region is somewhat different from that of the Little River and Bruner Town settlements. Timber isn't nearly so abundant as that found in the "woods people" area around Little River, and this particular location is characterized more by spacious clearings, and in general, not quite so hilly terrain.

At present the native population of the Noble Town region is fairly small, although indications are that in past years the settlement was quite large. Of the twenty-four people included in the author's census

of the area, fourteen are members of the Dosa Barkas Band, and ten are members of the Caesar Bruner Band. This is the only one of the native communities which approaches anything like an equal band distribution. There is a native church, and an elementary school located in the settlement. There is also a cemetery situated approximately midway between the present areas of population of Noble Town and Scipio communities. This burial ground is shared by the respective churches of the two settlements, indicating that at an early period possibly the two communities were one.

The preceding contention is advanced in view of the nearness of the two areas, and the fact that they both utilize the same cemetery. This is the only instance of such sharing between any of the native communities. A few informants were questioned as to the possibility of an original single community, and after giving it some thought, most of them said that there was such a possibility, although if so it was long before their time. Another point of interest and maybe one of substantiation, is the practice of Freedmen never to refer to Scipio as a Town. Under the terminology of the very early days such settlements as the ones under discussion were referred to as Towns, and it was only at a later date that they have been called communities, or settlements. It could have been that the present community of Scipio split off from Noble Town with the advent of the present highway, and was consequently named Scipio after Joe Scipio, presumably one of the older settlers in the region.

Whatever its origin, Scipio at present has the second largest population of all the native communities. However, the population is somewhat scattered, extending from approximately four miles northwest of Wewoka in a north and west direction to the limits of Seminole. In its

original setting the community undoubtedly was more compact. Topography is practically the same as that of the Noble Town settlement, and agriculture appears to be the main subsistence. The latter, as in the case of all the native communities, was more evident in past years than it is at the present time. There are two native elementary schools in the Scipio area, one principal church, and the previously mentioned cemetery which is shared by Noble Town. Most of the people belong to the Dosa Barkas Band, and it is interesting to note that in this particular area there were more people who were not band-conscious than in the other native localities. This was evidenced by the many responses of informants that they were members of the Joe Scipio Band, and those of others who replied: "I belong to so-and-so's band, you ask him, and he can tell you the name of it." People who live in Scipio are sometimes referred to as Lima people, after a small village near the native Scipio church, called Lima or New Lima.

The last native settlement, and the most recently established, is Turkey Creek, located approximately nine miles north of Seminole. This community was founded under the leadership of Casesar Bruner, some time in the late 1870's. Informants say that "Old Caesar Bruner, he went up north to find plenty of room so he could start a big cattle ranch." People in the southern communities often times refer to this area as Bruner's Ranch, or "The Big Ranch". The actual name for the community was adopted from the creek of the same name, so called after the many wild Turkeys which used to roost in the vicinity. In the early days there apparently were many turkey "dens" located along the Creek, and many Freedmen went on hunting excursions into the area. The original inhabitants

of the community were members of the Bruner Town settlement who followed Caesar Bruner into the region; thus one of the reasons why Bruner Town now contains no Freedmen families.

The topography of the region is characterized by several small intermittent streams, all oriented to Turkey Creek. Most of the timber of the area is to be found along the latter. In the main though, the region is ideally suited to a small-scale cattle raising economy, what with the abundant grass-lands and ample water supply. This opportunity apparently has been, and still is, utilized to the fullest extent by the Freedmen living in this area. They pride themselves on "not losing our land like most of them woods people down south done." The settlement itself was never too compact, probably because of the nature of the subsistence economy of the majority of the people. In its original extent, as born out by the author's census, the community was scattered along both sides of Turkey Creek for some seven or eight miles. Practically all Turkey Creek inhabitants are members of the Caesar Bruner Band. There is a native elementary school, which at the present time also serves as a church, since the old native church recently burned down when some children were trying to smoke a rabbit from beneath the steeple porch.

Census information indicates that all these native communities are organized in a similar manner. The dominant feature seems to be the central position of the native church, which in effect forms the nucleus of social contacts for the community inhabitants. The situation in the Little River community has remained stationary enough so that a fair example of the past state of affairs can be reasonably determined. Examining this community it can be seen that the two native churches are in the



center, with the farms located around them. Although this layout is not equally evident in the other communities, a check of former allotments indicates that formerly a comparable arrangement existed in them as well. It is not contended that the church was the initial structure in each of the native areas, but rather that after a few people settled in a locality they built a church in a central position, and later settlers established themselves as close to this nucleus as circumstances permitted. Because of the dominant majority of church members in each settlement, and since there was no other formalized community social organization, the church gradually became the focal point of social intercourse. Thus, church is the one place where Freedmen get together regularly.

In former years, and to a certain extent to this day, older men in each community were looked upon as leaders. At the present time, such men are usually deacons in the church, or perhaps they may be pastor of one of the native churches, though now there are only two Freedmen pastors left, and most of the native churches have to employ State Colored pastors. (This question will be dealt with more thoroughly in the section on religion.) The leading men referred to above are frequently consulted about domestic problems, are often requested to voice their opinion, and are asked to arbitrate personal arguments. The author has heard some of these men tell with pride about someone coming to them for advice on legal matters, or perhaps to settle personal differences. One woman was questioned as to why she sought advice from one of the older men in her community, and she answered: "He's been here a long time, and if'en anyone should outh to know, well, he should." Another woman who was standing nearby added: "He's a band chief too, you know." Another man——one whom

people frequently seek out for advice——explained the situation in the following terms:

If something went wrong in the community, like maybe husbin an wife quarrel, or maybe a quarrel 'twixt you an me, well then us, or somebody else would go to the older mens in the community for settlement. Sometimes we would might go to the band chiefs. People don't do that so fas nowadays.<sup>18</sup>

Informants agreed that in cases of community trouble there often would be several families involved, and that frequently the punishment might take the form of community sanction. This was particularly true when two of the younger teen-agers were caught performing antisocial acts, usually illicit sexual relations. Frequently several of the older people in the community would help the parents catch the offenders, after which they were usually tied up and the customary whipping administered. Information indicates that often times the older women in the community would help the parent decide what punishment to administer to an offending daughter, and the older men would do the same in regards to an offending son. However, the punishment itself was usually administered by the child's parents.

The following community sanction was related by an elderly woman:

Maybe they wuz a woman in the settlement who didn't keep her house, clothes, an stuff like that so clean. Well, the odder womens in the settlement would get together an go over to her house, go inside it, an clean it all up real spick an span, wash clothes an everything. We'd even go out'n sweep the yard. We done this to set an example for that woman who'd happen to be real dirty, and we'd tell her, 'Now that is the way a woman is sposed to keep her house', and then we'd go way. Well, in a few days or so, the womens would go back to that dirty woman's house, sort to inspect it. If it wuzn't clean like we'd made it, then the womans would take that dirty woman out

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<sup>18</sup> Informant C. In contexts of this type, Freedmen often use the word fast to convey "often".

and whip her. That didn't happen very fast, but when it did, you can bet it took only one whippin. (Her husband added: "It would take jus one whippin to do the job".)<sup>19</sup>

There is no evidence for any formalized competition between the native communities, and there is only one instance of cooperative sharing, namely, the previously mentioned cooperative cemetery shared by Scipio and Noble Town. None of the informants consulted could explain why there is not a separate cemetery for each of the native churches in their respective communities, although, casting aside an earlier contention of the author that the two communities were originally one, the nearness of the two settlements would probably explain their joint use of the same burial location. Map 1 shows that the Scipio-Noble Town cemetery is located approximately midway between the two communities.

The following table gives the comparative census figures of the Dawes Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes, compiled in 1898, a revision of the preceding figures by addition of Newborns in 1905,<sup>20</sup> and the author's census of 1950. Between 1898 and 1905 there were 128 additions, with deaths recorded at 83.

Table 1, DEMOGRAPHIC FLUCTUATIONS

	1898	1905	1950
MALES-----	438	469	200
FEMALES-----	427	441	255
TOTALS	<u>865</u>	<u>910</u>	<u>455</u>

Table 2 gives a complete breakdown of present-day Freedmen distribution, band membership, and marriage data. The information tabulated

<sup>19</sup>Wife of Informant C.

<sup>20</sup>John Campbell, Campbell's Abstract of Seminole Indian Census Cards and Index (Muskogee Oklahoma; Oklahoma Printing Co. 1925).

Table 2, SEMINOLE FREEDMEN CENSUS DATA

LOCATION	BAND MEMBERSHIP				MARRIAGE DATA				TOTALS
	Dosa Barkas		Caesar Bruner		Ingroup	Creek Freedmen	Chickasaw Freedmen	State Colored	
	M	F	M	F					
<b>NATIVE COMMUNITY</b>									
Little River	47	64	10	11	16	1	2	15	132
Noble Town	7	7	4	6	1	1	0	6	24
Scipio	19	23	2	3	3	0	1	6	47
Turkey Creek	2	0	10	7	3	1	0	3	19
Bruner Town	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>OTHER OKLAHOMA TOWNS</b>									
Ada	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Boley	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	2
Chickasha	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	1	6
Davis	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Duncan	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Holdenville	6	2	0	1	0	1	0	4	9
Okemah	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Oklahoma City	8	15	7	6	3	1	1	5	36
Seminole	3	9	0	0	1	0	0	4	12
Shawnee	3	1	2	1	0	0	0	3	7
Sulphur	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	3
Tulsa	4	2	0	1	0	0	0	2	7
Wetumka	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
Wewoka	25	41	8	8	5	4	0	15	82
<b>OTHER STATES</b>									
California	9	13	6	10	2	0	0	7	38
Colorado	3	1	2	1	0	0	0	3	7
Kansas	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Ohio	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Oregon	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
ARMY	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	3	3
RESIDENCE UNKNOWN	4	2	2	3	0	0	0	0	11
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>455</b>

in this table was obtained in a census conducted by the author, and though fairly complete for the native communities, it was physically impossible for the investigator to get complete data on those Freedmen who are residing outside the State of Oklahoma, and to a certain extent, on those in other Oklahoma towns.

A breakdown of the present-day group as indicated by the author's census reveals a total Freedmen population of 455 persons, 200 of whom are males, and 255 of whom are females. Approximately half the total group (222) are listed as living in the native communities, 316 are recorded as residents of Seminole County, 391 are citizens of Oklahoma, 50 have become citizens of other states, 3 are in the army, and there are 11 people whose addresses are unknown. These figures indicate that there still is a strong tendency among Freedmen to remain in their native localities, particularly in their native Seminole County.

Census information reveals the Dosa Barkas Band with 324 members to be much larger than the Caesar Bruner Band with 131. A breakdown of these figures show that of the 324 Barkas members 141 are males and 183 females; of the 131 Bruner members 59 are males and 72 females. Comparison of the two bands relative to the number who have remained in Seminole County (the original confines of the Seminole Tribe) indicates that a greater percentage of Caesar Bruner members have left the native areas than have Dosa Barkas people. 54 persons, or 41.2% of the Bruner Band, have left Seminole County, as opposed to 71 persons, or 21.9% of the Barkas Band.

Table 3 gives additional census data pertaining to family and marriage.

Table 3, MARITAL STATUS

	DOSA BARKAS BAND	CAESAR BRUNER BAND	TOTAL
Number Freedmen Families*	101	47	148
Freedmen married to State women	21	10	31
Freedwomen married to State men	31	20	51
Widows and Maids	38	12	50
Widowers and Bachelors	18	11	29

\*Man, wife, and children. A few families one parent only.

Land and Substances

A Federal treaty with the Seneca tribe, negotiated by the House Commission in 1856, set forth the following regulations for the allotment of lands:

All lands belonging to the Seneca tribe of Indians shall be divided into three classes, designated as first, second, and third class; the first class to be apportioned at five dollars, the second class at two dollars and fifty cents, and the third class at one dollar and twenty cents per acre, and the same shall be divided among the members of the tribe so that each shall have an equal share thereof in value, so far as may be, the location and fertility of the soil considered, giving to each the right to select his allotment so as to include any improvements thereon, owned by him at the time of such allotment shall have the sole right of occupancy of the land so allotted to him, during the continuance of the present tribal government, and until the members of said tribe shall have become citizens of the United States. Such allotments shall be made under the direction and supervision of the Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes in connection with a representative appointed by the tribal government and an attorney of said Commission shall execute an affidavit to each allottee a certificate describing wherein the land allotted to him.

By virtue of a previous treaty<sup>22</sup> the Freedmen were officially recognized members of the Seneca tribe, and as such were entitled to an allotment as provided by the above treaty.

<sup>22</sup>Charles J. Kappler, *Indian Affairs, Laws and Treaties*, Vol. 1 (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1904-15) p. 225

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 910 Treaty with the Seneca, 1856.

## CHAPTER IV

### MATERIAL CULTURE

#### Land and Subsistence

A federal treaty with the Seminole Tribe, negotiated by the Dawes Commission in 1898, set forth the following regulations for the allotment of lands.

All lands belonging to the Seminole tribe of Indians shall be divided into three classes, designated as first, second, and third class; the first class to be appraised at five dollars, the second class at two dollars and fifty cents, and the third class at one dollar and twenty cents per acre, and the same shall be divided among the members of the tribe so that each shall have an equal share thereof in value, so far as may be, the location and fertility of the soil considered; giving to each the right to select his allotment so as to include any improvements thereon, owned by him at the time; and each allottee shall have the sole right of occupancy of the land so allotted to him, during the existence of the present tribal government, and until the members of said tribe shall have become citizens of the United States. Such allotments shall be made under the direction and supervision of the Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes in connection with a representative appointed by the tribal government; and the chairman of said Commission shall execute and deliver to each allottee a certificate describing therein the land allotted to him.<sup>21</sup>

By virtue of a previous treaty<sup>22</sup> the Freedmen were officially considered members of the Seminole Tribe, and as such were entitled to an allotment as provided by the above treaty.

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<sup>21</sup>Charles J. Kappler, Indian Affairs, Laws and Treaties, Vol. 1 (Laws) (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1904-13) p. 663

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 910 "Treaty With the Seminole, 1866".

Freedmen received their allotments, proceeded to develop them, and all went well until 1905, at which time the Federal Government decided to place the Freedmen in an "unrestricted" category, which meant allowing them freedom to dispose of their allotments without government advisement or restraint. Land grafters quickly moved into the area, and a great many Freedmen literally had their land stolen from them.

These land grafters utilized various methods to acquire Freedmen land, including such common malpractices as false deeds, faked signatures, and intimidation. The situation became even worse when in the early 1920's oil was discovered in the Wewoka region, creating a condition which made it more difficult than ever for the Freedmen to cling to their land. As could be expected, bitterness toward the Whites became paramount, and though rarely displayed, much of it prevails to this day.

In former years, before "there was anything here but Indians and us Freedmens," people lived almost altogether by hunting, fishing, and gathering, with a little agriculture on the side, consisting primarily of a garden. Men did the hunting and fishing, whereas women did all the housework, cooking, and most of the gardening. Occasionally, if the family had a big garden or perhaps a "feed patch", the men would help with plowing and planting. Plowing was originally done with an all-wood "Georgia stock" plow, but this was soon replaced by a more practical metal-shear turning plow which the blacksmiths could make and "could sharpen 'em up real sharp for you." The plows were pulled by a team of horses, or often by a yoke of oxen. Eye hoes were used for planting, chopping weeds, etc.

People used to raise chickens, turkey, geese, ducks, sheep, goats,



and cattle...

We used to get the cattle out'n the woods. Every man had a pen of cattle, an that feller what didn't have none wuz jus too lazy to go out and get them. Used to always have chickens an things like that aroun...big fat turkeys.<sup>23</sup>

Prior to statehood, hunting apparently supplied most of the food. This was done on an individual or family basis, although many informants related stories of collective buffalo hunts which had been told them by their parents. Practically all hunting of the past, and of the present, is done with a gun, dog, or both. Animals which formerly were hunted were deer, squirrel, opossum, wild hog, skunk, coon, and rabbit; the following birds were normally utilized for food: quail, crow, prairie chicken, dove, blackbird, and turkey.

Although fish today seldom constitutes a major food item, indications are that in former years the opposite was the case. Various methods were given as to the best means of catching fish, chief among which is the practice of "drunking" them with "devil's shoe string,"<sup>24</sup> or "drunking" them by taking a tree brush and muddying the water in a still pond. Both "drunking" methods appear to have been collective enterprises, with the participants dividing the catch. At the present time Freedmen use the conventional hook and line for fishing, and many have told the investigator that "we never trap fish like a lot of Whites do."

Just prior to statehood, when so many people began to come into the territory, game became scarce, and it was necessary for the Freedmen

<sup>23</sup> Informant C

<sup>24</sup> Aloniski (Cracca virginiana). Used by the Creeks for same purpose. See John R. Swanton, "Religious Beliefs and Medical Practices of the Creek Indians", Forty-second Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1924) p. 658

to look for a different system of economy. The people of Turkey Creek had already become well established in their cattle raising system, but the others, by far the majority, became dependent upon increased agricultural production for their food supply. In addition to their gardens, they now planted large fields of corn, and occasionally oats, and they began to grow more potatoes, peas, rice, and tobacco. At first, women did practically all the farm work, and the men still hunted. With the steady decrease in game, however, the men turned more of their attention to farming, and to taking care of their animals, until at the present time they do most all the outside labor, much of which was formerly considered "woman's work."

It should be pointed out that there are very few Freedmen who have their original allotments intact, hence there are few who still rely entirely upon agriculture for their subsistence. What land hasn't been lost to grafters, is usually rented or leased out to Whites or State Colored people, with perhaps a few acres retained by the owner for gardening or pasture for a cow or two. There are a few cases where members of the older group still try to farm a small field, perhaps to raise grain, peanuts, or some other crop which might bring in a few dollars. For the most part though, those Freedmen who still farm usually limit their crops to what they need for food, many of them probably never having had to rely on commercial agricultural markets for their existence. The fact that so much of the Freedmen's agricultural land is leased, rented, or has been sold, is due in part to the general exodus of young people from their family allotments. In every instance known to the author, Freedmen emigrants to other Oklahoma counties, or into other states, are in the

middle or lower age groups. The result is that the majority of the allotments are still retained by the original allottees, most of whom are too old for manual labor, and are content to cultivate a small garden plot and subsist from their old-age pension checks. In addition, they are sometimes helped out by a small lease or rent payment.

The situation just described doesn't exactly conform to that of the cattle-raising people in the Turkey Creek community. The latter group, favored by bountiful grasslands and an ample supply of water, have always been occupied with cattle raising, supported by a limited amount of agriculture consisting primarily of grain and silage crops. One informant explained her situation to the author as follows: "I'm one of the oldest settlers in the Turkey Creek community. My people has always been, and they still is, cattle raisers. We jus don't farm like them Freedmen down south."<sup>25</sup> Many of the people in this particular community pride themselves on the fact that "we has hung onto our land better'n them 'woods people' down south," and some are boastful of their accumulated property, citing such examples as new furniture, new pickup trucks, the number of cattle they own, or luxuries they can afford for their homes.

Actually, the situation in this small community apparently has remained fairly stationary for a considerable period of time. This could in part be due to the fact that the economy here is such that it can be sustained by the older generation much more easily than that of the agriculturalists. Although tending cattle in this area formerly appears to have been the customary task of men and boys, a dual function has arisen,

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<sup>25</sup> Informant F.

where women are equally adept as ranchers. This is born out by the fact that one of the more prosperous ranches in the Turkey Creek community is supervised and operated by an elderly woman, who takes pride in her success. On the other hand, what agriculture is practiced in this area was formerly considered to be "women's work," although at present men perform all of it except for gardening which is still considered a woman's task.

To summarize: at the present time, Freedmen do most of the agricultural tasks, with Freedwomen doing the housework, most of the gardening, and minor chores, such as milking or perhaps feeding the cattle. With the exception of housework there is no strict division of labor; it is common to see women working in the fields for short periods, or to observe men assisting the women in gardening work, milking, or feeding the stock. Children are expected to help their parents perform daily tasks, and no matter how long they remain in the parental household they are expected to contribute to the support of the family.

A brief word should be said relative to those Freedmen who have left the native communities and settled in town, or who have migrated to other towns or states. Information indicates that a large percentage of Freedmen residing in Wewoka or other urban areas fairly close to native settlements are subsisting from pension checks, with perhaps a little income from rent or lease lands. Some of the younger or middle-aged Freedmen have become quite successful in business ventures, particularly in Wewoka. One man has one of the better grocery stores in Wewoka's colored section, another has made considerable money in the garage business, and still another has done very well with a taxi service. The latter individual is from the Little River community, and apparently has hired most

of his cab drivers from that settlement. He has also established a restaurant, and as some of the older, more staid Freedmen expressed it, "he's made lots of money selling that old beer stuff"; a few individuals expressed the knowledge that the man in question had also made considerable money by "selling or delivering whisky, I jus don't know which." A Freedwoman has also established a beer tavern in Wewoka, several others have married successful business men in the town, and there are two others recorded as school teachers. One of the most financially successful men, at least in the eyes of the Freedmen, is a man who has established a reputation as an herb doctor, drawing his clients from Negroes, Whites, and Indians. Practically all Freedmen will attest to the curative powers of this man's herb medicines, and many will resort to their herb compounds upon the slightest indication of sickness.

Most of the Freedmen who have migrated to other Oklahoma towns and other states are employed as laborers on construction jobs, factory employees, defense workers, hotel porters, etc. Many of those who have moved to Oklahoma City are said to be working at Tinker Field or on construction jobs, whereas those who have moved to other states are generally thought to be employed in defense industries, and in all probability originally left the native areas to find such jobs. Many of the older people in the native communities will condemn the younger members for having left Seminole County, but there are others who will take the opposite stand, stating in effect that there isn't any land left for the young people, and besides they could make more money in the city anyway.

It can be seen then that the Freedmen living in the native communities have a different subsistence pattern and material culture from

those living in urban areas, particularly areas considerably removed from native settlements. Therefore, in the discussion to follow, all descriptions of material culture will be confined to the native communities, with an occasional reference to some parallel or outstanding difference in urban adaptations.

### Foods

In former years sofkey was the most important food, and to a limited extent Freedmen still make this corn dish. It is prepared by beating corn, formerly in a mortar but now in a heavy kettle, until it takes the form of hominy grits or coarse corn meal, after which it is cooked until it forms a thin gruel. After cooking the corn, a little "drip lye" is added, the latter having been prepared by running boiling water through oak ashes. This mixture is set aside for a couple of days and allowed to ferment. The finished product is sour, although sugar can be added to kill the "biting" taste. The liquid from the mixture is drunk as a beverage, with the corn residue being eaten as a food. As one informant stated: "Not too many years ago you could go to any house and you'd be offered sofkey." Some Freedmen relate that they used to make sofkey from hickory nut kernels in the same way as that described above, and that hickory sofkey was a very rich mixture.

Practically all fresh vegetables are grown in the family garden plot, which is usually located near the house. Some of the things grown are potatoes, beans, peas, radishes, tomatoes, mustard, lettuce, cabbage, and of course, the very important corn. There are probably other vegetables grown, but these were listed specifically by informants as being

the most prominent. As mentioned previously, most of the gardening is done by the women and children, with the men occasionally helping to break the soil, or do other heavy work.

Surplus vegetable foods are canned for future use, and in the "old days" potatoes were kept by baking them until they were "hard as rocks", then storing them away for future use. When the family was ready to eat these baked potatoes, they were prepared by putting them in hot water, making "them potatoes jus as soft as if you'd jus cooked 'em."

Several Freedmen have established small orchards on their farms, and in good years they realize fresh fruit from their trees. In many of the creek bottoms, or in the Little River bottom, there are pecan, walnut, hickory, and persimmon trees which are utilized as a source of food. Wild plums and currants are also gathered, as well as mulberries.

Chicken is the principal fowl consumed, with many families having a few turkeys or perhaps a few guineas for eating purposes. On the whole though, chickens are raised for their egg production and for a supply of meat. In the fall, it is not uncommon for Freedmen to bring small chicks inside the house to keep them warm. Other birds used for food are the crow, quail, blackbird, and dove, all hunted with a shotgun.

Freedmen living in rural areas frequently butcher hogs, and in rare instances might kill beef, although the latter are usually considered too valuable. In former years pork was preserved by rendering the lard, then immersing the pork into the rendered fat, leaving it there until it was needed for consumption. However, many of the Freedmen now have frozen-food lockers in Wewoka in which they store their perishable produce, although instances of salting and smoking pork are still common. Another

method of curing meats which is no longer employed is the practice of drying beef strips.

Animals hunted for food are the squirrel, rabbit, coon, skunk, and opossum, using a dog, gun, or both. Baking is considered the best method for preparing opossum.

#### Animals

Practically all rural Freedmen have a milch cow, and a small plot of pasture land near the house in which the cow is allowed to graze. Although not a rigid rule, women usually feed and milk the cow, or cows. Another occasional source of milk is the goat, although in most instances this animal is used for meat.

Freedmen who practice agriculture even to a limited extent usually have one or two horses for draft purposes. Several instances are known where a family might have only one horse, used to pull the garden plow, or often serving the dual function of a work animal and a saddle horse. Information indicates that in years gone by practically all Freedmen had saddle horses, and it is still common practice for many of the older people to brag about what excellent horsemen they were. To a certain extent many of the rural Freedmen are still dependent upon the horse for transportation, since a team of horses is usually required to pull a wagon, often a family's only means of conveyance.

Dogs are found at practically every Freedmen home. Many of them are pets, whereas others are used for hunting. Hunting hounds are commonly found in the Little River area, and it is in this community that "hunting with hound dogs" has developed into a prominent sport for the



males. Frequently several men will get together, each bringing his hounds, and hunt skunks and opossums up and down the creeks practically all night long. Hunting is now done more for sport than for subsistence, since often only the furs of the animals are kept and later sold for a small price. A few Freedmen have bird dogs with which to hunt quail, but such instances are rare. There are also a few families who own cats used for pets and ratting, but cats aren't nearly so prevalent as dogs.

#### Houses and House Furnishings

Poorly constructed unpainted frame houses are common, particularly in the rural communities. They vary in size, but are usually about twenty by thirty feet, with apparently no preferred floor plan. There is usually a living room, one or two bedrooms, and a kitchen. All houses have some sort of front porch, usually covered, and a small back porch or shed-room which usually is a catch-all for extra foods, fuel, discarded jars, and household items not in use. Many interior partitions are nothing more than heavy cardboard, whereas others might be fairly well constructed. In either case the inner walls and partitions are usually papered. Town houses are often larger, better kept, and better constructed than rural homes.

House furnishings are variable both in quantity and quality, depending upon the financial means of the family. However, most homes manage to have a living room suite of some sort, with a couple of extra chairs and perhaps a small table. Often there is an extra "company" bed in the living room, usually covered with a fancy bedspread. Heat for the living room is supplied by a wood or coal-burning stove, or in the case

of townspeople, gas. The living room walls are usually adorned with pictures of the family or relatives, Indian friends, or attractive calendar pictures. The living room is always kept neat and tidy, since this is the room where guests are received and entertained. Indications are that when guests aren't present, most of the time in the house is spent in the kitchen, with the exception of warm summer days, when most members of the household spend their leisure time on the front porch.

The kitchen usually serves as the dining room; there are very few houses with a separate room for this purpose. Most kitchens have a dining table with several wooden, cane-bottomed chairs, and a "good" set of dishes for company. These "company" dishes are often cheap porcelain or "oatmeal" dishes, while the everyday meals are sometimes eaten from tin plates. Utilitarian silverware, cups, and glasses are also used; the latter sometimes is a special set for company. There also is a work table in most kitchens, usually covered with oilcloth, and usually some kind of cupboard for storage of dishes and groceries. The usual pots and pans for cooking purposes are found, and these are often stored in the stove oven, or merely left on top of the wood or kerosene-burning cookstove. The kitchen floor is usually covered with lineoleum, which sometimes extends on through the living room.

Bedroom furniture consists primarily of a bed, a chair or two, and perhaps a small closet. Some families have a stove in one of their bedrooms, although frequently the living room and kitchen stoves serve the entire house. Many houses have a small dressing table in the bedroom, and there usually is a mirror. Floors are often bare, but sometimes are covered with lineoleum, or there may be a few wool or cotton

throw rugs placed around the bed. When there are two bedrooms, one is usually decidedly better than the other, and it is always the one reserved for guests.

Lighting, with the exception of town houses, is usually by means of a kerosene lamp or Coleman gas lantern; most of the townspeople have electricity in their homes, although a few are too poor to afford it.

Some of the miscellaneous objects of the Freedmen household are the following: Curtains or window shades are highly optional, some people use both on their windows, others use either, and still others neither. Another object noted, particularly in the rural settlements, is the large black kettle located in the back yard of most of the people. These kettles are used for washing, and when a hog is butchered the lard is rendered into it. These are only two of the many functions for which the kettle is used. Another object found in most homes is the ever-handly "spit-can"; it is the custom of a good many of the women to "dip snuff," hence this can is always handy. Another object which will bear mentioning is the quilting frame which many of the older women utilize, particularly in the fall of the year. These frames are made of wood, and consist of two saw-horse structures, each having deep notches cut along the top, supporting two long poles. The quilt is fastened to the two poles which are cut so as to fit snugly into the saw-horse notches, and as the manufactured quilt becomes larger, the two poles are separated so as to retain tension on the quilt and thus make it easier to piece together. The entire framework is about two to three feet high, giving the quilter plenty of room to sit in a chair with her knees placed under the quilt which is drawn up close so that she doesn't have to bend over while working. Two

of the women were questioned as to where they got their quilting frames, and both replied that Indians had made them for them.

Water is usually obtained from a well or cistern which is in most cases located near the house. The average Freedman home is usually placed near the road, and the yard is in most instances fenced off from the surrounding fields. The garden is always situated near the house, and there are also usually a few fruit trees nearby.

In the rural areas there are several out-buildings apart from the dwelling unit, usually consisting of a toilet, barn, chicken house, and often a small storage shack. When the latter is used to cure or store meat in, then it is called a smoke house. This building can also be used as a place in which to store garden tools or surplus materials from the house. Some houses have a garage, although these are the exception rather than the rule.

#### Miscellaneous

Freedmen clothing is much the same as for any State Colored or White family, although quality values are probably different. Most of the women wear cotton print dresses around the house, and many of them wear a loose fitting, sack-like piece of cloth on their head. They have a "dress-up" outfit which they wear to church or to town, or perhaps when they go visiting. Most of the men wear blue denim overalls while working in the fields or around the house, although some wear khaki trousers and shirts. "Dress-up" clothes for the men often consist of nothing more than clean khakis or clean overalls; a few of them own an old, worn suit. Children up to a few months of age wear dresses, then they are clothed in

much the same manner as their parents, particularly little boys. All men wear hats, but among women hats seem to be optional.

#### Values and Money

Frugality is a prominent characteristic of most of the people, but there is little money to be saved. Expenses seem to consist mainly of food costs and perhaps a few items of clothing, although the latter in most cases hardly constitutes an expense since many people depend on gifts of second-hand clothing and seldom purchase any of their major items of attire. A sufficient quantity of food is without doubt considered the most important asset.

A person's worth is usually figured in terms of the material objects which he owns, or is able to provide for his family. Apparently, few people indulge in luxuries, even those who have good incomes, and those who do are often considered showy, or prudes. However, a person with a good house and furnishings is envied by all of the people, and in most instances, such people are thought to be quite successful. All Freedmen are aware of modern conveniences, although many of the older people have not the slightest idea what such things would cost. In this respect, they do not appear to be adverse to advancement, but seem resigned to the fact that it is financially impossible for them to obtain such equipment.

## CHAPTER V

### THE LIFE CYCLE

#### Birth and Child Training

Large families of the sort encountered a few years ago are seldom found in the present day middle aged group. This apparently is not the result of the parents not wanting more children, but rather stems from the fact that most of the younger parents are more conscious of the economic liabilities that they have to assume. This is obviously overlooked by many of the older people, some of whom lament the small families that their sons and daughters have.

Based on the results of the author's census there are 455 people who are considered Freedmen, and all told there are 148 conjugal families. Thus, the average size of a family is 3.07 persons. When these figures were shown to one of the older informants, he had this to say: "They must have some way to keep from having them now, cause I knows they jus ain't many born anymo. In the old days, what I mean, womens really birthed the kids."<sup>26</sup>

True, most of the younger married people are aware of contraceptives, but in the contrary cases where it is hard to have children, or when children are slow in coming, the older Freedmen give the following

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<sup>26</sup> Informant C

advice:

If'en a person can't get in no fix to have children, then a friend should shoot a ole hoot owl, cook it, an make soup out'n it. Then they 'vites the childless people over to eat wif 'em. They'll begin havin kids not long after. I 'member JD done that...had kids right away.<sup>27</sup>

In former years when a woman became preganant she immediately called in a midwife, a priactice which still has limited distribution. The midwife, usually an old woman who has had much experience in such matters, advises the prospective mother on proper foods to be eaten, how to care for herself, and administers herb medicines if she deems it necessary. The investigator was not able to determine the exact number of midwives among the Freedmen at the present time, although at least three have been made known in one community, and there is every reason to believe that there are others in the remaining communities. One aspect of the midwife custom on which all informants placed special emphasis, was the fact that if a family was not financially able, the midwife would not expect to be paid.

There are certain restrictions placed upon a pregnant woman, mainly that she is not supposed to get mad or scared, and she must be careful regarding what she sees, hears, or says; an expectant mother should not go to the extremes on anything, and above all, she must be careful to eat just the right foods. It is believed that a violation of these restrictions will mark the baby.

A short time prior to confinement, "your woman will tell you when," the husband stops sleeping with his wife, and must abstain from

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<sup>27</sup>Informant E.

intercourse until two to five months after the baby is born. "Your wife will let you know when you can get back in bed with her."

In addition to the midwife the expectant mother's mother is usually present to assist with the birth, both women arriving a short time prior to when the baby is expected. The father must stay clear of the delivery room, appearing only when he is requested to bring in hot water, medicines or linens. Labor is in a reclining position, or, "the most comfortable position she can get in." The midwife would cut the "noble cord" from the baby, and then bury or burn it. On the other hand, if the child was born with the amnion sack intact, the midwife would put the sack over a bottle or jar to dry.<sup>28</sup> It is believed that a child born with this sack intact will be able to see ghosts or other invisible things, whereas a child born with the amnion not intact is considered normal. Relative to this superstition, one informant related the following story:

Ole HD, my wife's uncle, who's dead now, wuz born with that sack aroun him, an he always claim he could see ghosts. I didn't have that sack aroun me, but I wuz never cryin cause I couldn't see no ghosts. Ole H has pointed 'em out to me, but I never could see 'em.<sup>29</sup>

The midwife will help the new mother care for her baby for a considerable period of time following the birth, and in addition she will advise the proper foods for the mother, frequently preparing them herself. It is important that the mother doesn't eat anything which will cause constipation to either herself or the baby. Several years ago the minimum confinement period for mother and baby was thirty days, although people

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<sup>28</sup>Unable to determine the superstition connected with this.

<sup>29</sup>Informant C.



today "get 'em outa bed real quick like." During the confinement period the father was supposed to stay out of the room occupied by his wife and child, and as one man told me, "it was over a month before I ever saw my boy."

Sometimes the child is named after a relative, and when this is the case the honored individual usually gives the baby a calf, pig, or some other object of value. It is also customary for the parents to give the child a similar present, usually livestock, and to keep the animal in trust, along with any increase which might occur, until the child becomes of age. Informants verified that coming of age meant when the child was old enough to be married.

Mothers usually nurse the baby from their breast, resorting to a bottle only when there is insufficient breast milk. Immediately following birth, when the breast has insufficient milk, a "sugar teat" is often used. This consists of mixing fresh butter and sugar together, putting the mixture in a cloth bag, and letting the baby suck on the concoction. There is no indication that the "sugar teat" was ever used as a pacifier in weaning children.

Children are weaned at the discretion of the mother, however, they are weaned at an earlier age today than they were several years ago. One informant stated that his baby sister was at least five years old before she was weaned, although the investigator found no such extreme cases existing today. On the average, information places the weaning age between one and two or three years, with this period shortened in the event a second child is born. Methods of weaning are variable; the most popular is to let the child's grandmother keep him for a couple of weeks. Another

popular method is to substitute a bottle for the breast, at the same time letting the baby sleep with other members of the family. Other methods are to apply a bitter substance to the nipple, and there is some indication that women have been known to color the breast in an attempt to frighten the child away, although the latter cannot be substantiated.

After weaning the child the mother employs various methods to dry up the breast, the most important of which is the practice of bathing the breast in camphor water. A variant of this method is to brown cotton over the cook stove, soak the cotton in camphor water, and then lay it across the nipples. A popular superstition for drying the breast is to thread a needle and suspend it around one's neck; another superstition is to heat a rock in the fire and then milk some of the breast milk onto the hot rock. As one old woman stated: "Maybe them things don't do no good, but we believe in 'em, and thats what counts."<sup>30</sup>

Another superstition concerned with the breast milk has to do with the cause of "summer complaint" in the child, technically a form of dysentery. It is believed if the mother has sexual relations with a man other than the child's father, "and the child is still sucking her milk, then you can be sure that kid'll have the summer complaint." This will occur only if the mother has intercourse with someone other than the child's father; intercourse with the father is considered alright<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Wife of Informant C.

<sup>31</sup>This is an interesting variant from that recorded by Karl Schmitt among the Wichita Indians. The Wichitas believe that the mother and father should abstain from intercourse until the child is weaned, the theory being that the seminal fluid will go into the milk, thus causing "summer complaint" in the child.

Toilet training is started at an early age, with old and young Freedmen alike giving the same solution. The principal method used in such training is to have a small pot for the child, and immediately upon his finishing a meal, place the child upon the pot and encourage him to make use of it. A variant of this pattern is to take the child to an out-door toilet, or "just any place out-doors," and make him assume the proper position for bowel movement. Although nothing definite could be ascertained, the author was led to believe that the child's mother should demonstrate to the child what he is supposed to do. For children who urinate in the bed, the only solution offered was to give them a "good thrashing."

Practically all of the older Freedmen consulted believe that the children of today are cuddled and fondled too much, and that they are in general too spoiled. There is some mention that today's youngsters do not have proper respect for older people; this is substantiated by the fact that many of the young people will address elders by their first name, butt into their conversations, and have a tendency to disregard aged opinions. Older people believe that parents of today do not teach their children how to behave.

The Freedmen father and mother both teach their children to be honest and to exhibit respect to their elders, although the present-day values assigned to these two aspects of childhood behavior are somewhat lax in comparison to comparable values of a few years ago. Much emphasis is placed on honesty, and this phase of child training is begun at an early age. While very young the children of both sexes are given small tasks to do around the house, usually helping their mother, or perhaps

gathering kindling wood or some other odd job. As they grow older the father will teach his boys to "plow a straight furrow," the best methods for hunting and fishing, how to care for animals, and in general, all the duties they should know about running a farm or raising cattle. At the same time, a young girl's mother will instruct her in the art of cooking, sewing, keeping house, and any other tasks which the child should learn.

"In the old days" if children didn't have a father it was the duty of the paternal grandfather or uncle to teach and prepare them for adulthood. On the other hand, if the children were without a mother, it was expected that the maternal grandmother or aunts would teach them the things the mother normally would have. However, upon careful checking of the information it was found that either the paternal or maternal relatives could help equally with either sex. Indications are that the present day situation is very loose, and as one lady so aptly put it:

It used to be that kids wuz trained by doin, an that everyone in the native communities would take an interest in seein that kids wuz learned the right things. Anymore it seem they kinda have to shift for themselves.<sup>32</sup>

All informants are in general agreement that the principal method of child correction is whipping, although the majority seem to believe that children aren't whipped nearly as much today as in former years. Thus, when a child is visiting in another person's house and does some wrong it is expected that he should be whipped, and his parents later informed of the child's behavior and the resulting punishment. As several informants stated: "In the old days a kid couldn't go wrong away from home like they can now."

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<sup>32</sup> Informant A.

Each of the Freedmen communities has a grade school where the children get their elementary education. Attendance is fairly good, but often the older children must remain out of school to help with the farm work. Most of the children go on to high school, usually in Wewoka or Seminole, traveling to and from town on the school bus.

Mothers always advise their daughters prior to the first menstruation, letting them know what to expect and cautioning them not to be alarmed. Usually the daughter is told to come to the mother as soon as she experiences the first menstrual symptoms, the mother then explaining to her the proper method of caring for herself. Several years ago it was customary for the mother to instruct her daughter in sex matters, "sometimes even telling her how to conduct herself with her husband." Several informants, both men and women, related that it used to be that the girl knew more about sex matters than did her prospective husband, and that frequently upon marriage, it was necessary for the girl to explain certain things to her husband. However, in the opinion of the investigator such instances must have been quite rare, citing as an example the premarital sex play which all informants admit occurred. The author questioned various people about the present-day situation in this matter, and received the following as a fairly typical answer: "Nowadays even little boys know more than lots of grown-up men knew when I wuz a kid."

Fathers usually caution their sons against indulging in masturbation, telling them "if you plays with yourself you'll be sickly." Some of the older male informants confided that even though they never explained it to their sons, the main reason they had warned them against masturbation was the fear that the practice would cause them to have a large penis.

Among the older males this was evidently an undesirable characteristic, and reasons given for a man having a large organ were masturbation, and intercourse at an early age. When one informant was intensively questioned he gave the following as his reasons:

Back in my coming up all that stuff was on the sly (he refers here to sex activity between unmarried young people), an you had to be sure an not hurt one of them girls, or the word would get aroun. When that happen you wuz really in for it...other girls wouldn't have nothin to do with you, an that girl's folks wuz liable to really lay the wood on you. I'll bet a boy today don't have no worry 'bout that though, not the way these young girls run aroun. Well, we didn't have to worry in the old days as long as we fool aroun with Indian girls. Them Indians didn't seem to mind 'bout things like that. <sup>33</sup>

Circumcision was not practiced, although most informants acknowledged there was a need for it. However, some of the children today are circumcised "when they has they tonsils out."

Adoption of children is comparatively rare, and occurs only in those cases where both parents are dead, and even then it is considered proper for the relatives to take charge of the children. One instance is cited where a Seminole Freedman was obligated to take two of his nieces who were Creek Freedwomen, and he had to assume the responsibility of looking after their affairs with the Creeks concerning allotments, etc.

Children are usually baptized into the church when they are nine to twelve years old, at which time most of the parents figure they know right from wrong. Prior to baptism the children have been fairly well indoctrinated in religious principles, both at home and in the church. They are cautioned on what is right and wrong, particularly regarding the use of alcohol.

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<sup>33</sup> Informant C. Obviously, much of this statement is a rationalization on the part of the informant. However, it gives an average opinion on the younger generation, and casts some light on Freedmen-Indian relations.

Freedmen apparently think nothing about children beginning to smoke at a very early age. One informant stated that his younger sister was smoking a pipe before she was ever weaned.

By way of summary it seems fairly evident that older established birth customs revolving around the midwife are being eliminated in favor of modern medical facilities. However, as a matter of financial necessity there are still many people who must utilize the midwife.

Child training at the present time appears to be much less rigid than previously, particularly in the matter of discipline. This in turn facilitating the eternal cycle of the aged condemning the young, in this case perpetrated by juvenile ignorance of respect for their elders, and the usual lament that younger people ignore the old and established customs.

#### Marriage

"In the old days a man could have two wives, but you couldn't keep them in the same house like the Indians did."<sup>34</sup> There are no cases of polyandry, and in polygynous unions the wives lived in separate houses, with the husband visiting one for awhile, then visiting the other. As one informant related:

So long as you put them womens up in a house of they own, and fed and take care of them, they wuz you wives, an no one else could bother them. At least, they wuzn't sposed to bother them. Even, say if'en I wuzn't married, I still wouldn't be 'lowed to bother one of your wives. Course that wuzn't always the way it wuz.<sup>35</sup>

Premarital sex play was quite common, although if caught, both parties were subject to a severe flogging. Apparently Freedmen parents

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<sup>34</sup> Informant E.

<sup>35</sup> Informant C.

kept a fairly close watch over their daughters, because several men in the older group related to the investigator that it was much easier to "get an Indian girl than it was a Freedmen." Among the older men and women contraceptives were unheard of, although the present generation use them quite freely. No evidence (of practice) of abortion can be found, and in case of premarital pregnancy the two people involved must get married. There are exceptions to this, mainly that a girl from one of the "higher" families isn't condemned nearly as severely as one from a poorer family; another exception being if the boy or man involved is not of good reputation, then the girl's parents will in some cases insist that she does not marry, and will rear the child under the mother's maiden name.

It used to be that courtship was a very difficult problem. Before so much intermarriage with the State Colored the Freedmen parents were very strict with their daughters, and about the only times the children could get together was at church services, community functions, and the like. In former years, aside from secret rendezvous there was little formal courtship, although at present the younger generation indulges in the modern dating pattern. Many of the older Freedmen lament the fact that today there is more premarital sex activity than when they were children, and in each case this was attributed to the present intimate contact with State Colored. One elderly Freedwoman explained the situation as follows:

In former years the mother didn't try to conceal a girl's guilt like most women do nowadays. When a girl got in trouble the mother would just make her look the situation squarely in the face, and not try to hide her shame like they do now.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Informant A.



Prior to statehood there was no formal marriage ceremony. However, the custom then, and one that prevails to a certain extent to this day, was for the boy to ask the girl's parents for her hand in marriage. If the parents were favorable toward the union it was believed consummated, and in the case of well-to-do families a feast was given. If the bride's parents did not approve of the prospective bridegroom, then an elopement was the usual result. In most instances the newly-weds will live in their own dwelling, although if they are not financially able to provide one it is considered proper that they be allowed to reside with the boy's parents for a short while. It should be noted that there is no established custom of patrilocal residence, and that instances of newly-weds residing with the bride's family are extremely rare.

A generation ago the preferred marriage was within the Freedmen group, but with the influx of State Colored people this preference has become attenuated. Prior to statehood there were several Freedmen-Indian marriages, and although they were not as preferable as ingroup unions, they were readily accepted. All informants corroborate the existence of a prevalent common-law practice, using this term for unsanctioned unions of short duration.

In a census conducted by the author it was found that there are sixty-eight Freedmen who have engaged in ingroup marriages, making a total of thirty-four families. On the other hand there are eighty-two Freedmen who have married into the State Colored group. A further breakdown of these figures indicates there are approximately twenty-five widows of Freedmen, and approximately twelve widowers of Freedwomen. This would raise the total of Freedmen unions to seventy-one families, which means

that there are 105 living Freedmen who have been united in an ingroup union. There are also nine unions with Creek Freedmen, and four unions with Chickasaw Freedmen. Indications are that more Freedwomen marry into the State Colored group than do men. Figures show that thirty-one men have married State Colored women, whereas fifty-one women have married State Colored men. However, of the 455 people accounted for in the census tabulations there are 200 men and 255 women, hence the proportions are fairly equal.

There are no fixed ages prerequisite to marriage, but the general consensus of opinion seems to be that girls marry from fifteen to eighteen, with the boy usually being a little older. Marriage unions between partners of considerable age difference are for the most part condemned by the majority of the people, and usually bring forth such comments as these: "robbing the cradle," "the devil is behind that," "it won't last," and "whatever happens to him (or her) will be deserved."

At the present time common-law unions are strongly condemned by the church, although it is admitted that several church members indulge in this practice. Freedmen will acknowledge the fact that there is some racial admixture with Whites, and this is directly attributed to common-law unions, or "careless conduct." Several informants stated "we ain't proud of our White blood like the State folks are." A query as to the reason brought forth varied answers, mostly to the effect that mixture with Whites placed the participating Freedmen "out of their race." An interesting point to be mentioned here is the fact that intermixture with the Seminole Indians was condoned, whereas some of the more staid Freedmen of the older group will condemn Freedmen-State Colored unions with the

same explanation as that mentioned for Freedmen-White relations. However, in spite of such condemnation of miscegenation with Whites, the author observed that light skin color was considered desirable, and various informants related with pride, "he (or she) was so light he (or she) could pass for a White."

The fact that divorces occur more often now than before statehood is attributed by many to be the result of increased intermarriage with the State Colored people. According to data received from several informants, there are few divorces among the Freedmen unions, the majority occurring in mixed marriages, presumably with the State Colored. Reasons given for the divorces in mixed unions center upon the hypothesis that Freedmen have been subjected to different training from that of the State Colored people, and for that reason there is excellent opportunity for argument and disagreement. Two women related that the increased divorce rate among the Freedmen unions was because "women just don't take as much nowadays as grandmother did." At any rate, in the opinion of most Freedmen a person should have a very good reason to leave their spouse, whether he or she be State Colored or Freedmen. One specific case is known to the investigator where a Freedman left a State Colored woman to live with a Freedwoman who owned considerable property and cattle. When informants were questioned regarding this man they all voiced the same opinion, that he did not have any business leaving his original wife, and they thought that he did it purely for mercenary reasons. However, after living with the Freedwoman for about three years, and according to most of the people, being unable to get possession of her wealth, the man left her and returned

to live with his first wife. In the opinion of most Freedmen the woman did wrong by taking the man back.

Formerly, when two individuals divorced they were not under any restrictions regarding a future marriage. However, prior to statehood and the acceptance of Oklahoma laws, if a woman's husband died and left her with small children, the deceased's brother or first cousin could forbid the widow's remarriage for a period extending for as long as five years. If the widow was placed under such restrictions she wasn't supposed to "comb her hair or fix up pretty at all." This sanction apparently was applied to protect the children from a stepfather, the assumption being that the latter wouldn't look after the children, or be as good to them as the real father would have been. In such a situation it was the obligation of the deceased man's parents and relatives to help the woman care for the children. This taboo upon a widow's remarrying strongly resembles that mentioned by Swanton for the Southeastern Indians.<sup>37</sup>

Another former custom of the Freedmen, which they attribute to their contact with the Seminole Indians, was the treatment of an adulteress. If a woman was convicted of this crime, she and her accomplice were taken to Wewoka, made to strip to the waist, and each received a prescribed number of lashes across the back. Upon completion of the punishment the man with whom the woman had been intimate was forced to take her as his wife, that is, if the offended husband did not wish to keep her for

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<sup>37</sup> John R. Swanton, "The Indians of the Southeastern United States" Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 137 (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1946), p. 705.

his own. Punishment in such cases was administered by the Light Horsemen, and word was circulated so that all the people who wished to could witness the flogging. This is very familiar with what Swanton has to say concerning adultery in the Southeast.<sup>38</sup> All informants agree that adultery under the "old way of life" occurred quite seldom, and were in unanimous agreement that the practice is much more prevalent today. Again, this is directly attributed to increased intermarriage with State Colored, with the usual inference that the moral standards of the latter group are considerably inferior to that of the ingroup.

Relations between husband and wife appear for the most part to be quite harmonious, although it is conceded that the present day situation is not as good as in former years. A more thorough discussion of family relations is reserved for a later section. However, there is one aspect of married life which should be mentioned, especially since it is one of the older customs that has to a limited extent survived to the present time. This concerns the husband's avoidance of the wife during menstrual periods. The avoidance consists of the husband refusing to sleep with his wife during this period, although as a couple of the older informants stated, "we Freedmens never got as bad as them Indians. They wouldn't even eat out'n the same dishes." One woman informant related the taboo as follows:

Why, my family men wouldn't even think of sleeping with a wife when she wuz in that fix. In fact, they wouldn't even sleep in the

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<sup>38</sup>John R. Swanton, "Social Organization and Social Usages of the Indians of the Creek Confederacy", Bureau of American Ethnology, Forty-second Annual Report, (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1928), p. 351

same room, an I've known of some that wouldn't dare go into a room where a woman slept durin that period.<sup>39</sup>

The author knows of a few instances where middle aged families still follow this practice, and when they were questioned regarding this custom most of the answers centered on this typical quotation: "its jus unhealthy for a man to sleep with a woman in that fix."

It was further determined that in cases where the couple was away visiting relatives or friends, and the woman should begin menstruating, it was permissible for husband and wife to sleep in the same bed only if each slept under a separate set of covers. The taboo is in effect for four days following cessation of menstruation.

#### Family Relations

The Freedmen father is considered absolute head of the household, and in the event of his death the mother is considered to hold the head position, although the latter can delegate to her eldest son the power to attend to her business affairs. Indications are that the conjugal family is a closely knit unit, and an analysis of the native communities reveals a gregarious tendency on the part of the extended family.

For instance, the Little River community is comprised primarily of four major extended families, two of which are quite large, and several smaller groups. Using the two large extended families as examples, it is found that brothers originally settled near each other, forming the nucleus around which their offspring have settled. The author's census

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<sup>39</sup> Informant A.

shows 132 people in the Little River community, and a breakdown of this number reveals that in the two representative families, one has 27 members in the extended group, and the other has 37, making a combined total of 64, or slightly more than half the total population of the community.

Most of the older informants stated that in the "old days" children wouldn't think of living outside the country in which their parents resided, and in most cases verified the above contention that children formerly settled near their parents. However, information indicates that beginning with World War I many of the Freedmen left the native communities, and that it was during this period that the big families began spreading out. The emigration didn't become serious until World War II, at which time a general exodus to the large city defense jobs occurred.

The ideal pattern is for the child always to obey his parents, especially the father, and this obedience should continue as long as the child lives in the parent's house. The word of the father is law, a fact which all informants emphasized most strongly.

Freedmen parents do not care how long a child remains with them, just as long as the child helps support the family, although after marriage the offspring are considered to be on their own. All members of a family residing together are expected to help all they can. Girls help with the house work, and in former years they would have helped in the fields; however, today there are few of the younger women who do field work. On the other hand, boys help their father with farming duties and with care of the animals, and if caught up with their own work they might hire out to some of the White farmers in the area.

From personal observations it is the opinion of the investigator that Freedmen husbands and their wives are very congenial toward each other. It was noted that either spouse delighted in joking with the other, and the end product of such byplay was equally enjoyed by both parties. In most instances observed by the author, the husband would almost always joke with his wife prior to leaving the house to make a trip into town. This usually consisted of such things as "we going into town now to see that other woman," or "I can't go see another woman when you don't give me no more money than this." The wife usually answers with such things as "you get outa here an don't come back," or "I don't care if'en you do go see another woman."

There is a moderate respect relationship between parents and their children, and though not extreme, it apparently eliminates most of the parent-child joking tendencies. However, it is not uncommon to see a Freedman joking with the child of a friend or relative, and in many instances this joking seems to be anticipated by both parties. On the other hand, the grandparent-grandchild relationship is one of affectionate tolerance, and evidences more of an open display of affection.

Kinship terminology appears to follow standard procedures of the English system, but was not investigated in detail.

#### Sickness and Medicine

The most prevalent ailments reported by Freedmen are common colds, kidney trouble, flu, and fever accompanied by chills. There is a native remedy for each of these ills, and a physician is consulted only in cases of extreme emergency. In former years, with no outstanding herb



specialists within their own group, it was customary for Freedmen to consult Indian doctors. However, at the present time there is a Freedman who has established an outstanding reputation among Whites, Indians, and Negroes as an herb doctor, and it is to this man that many of the Freedmen turn in times of sickness. They also have favored patent medicines which can be purchased in drug stores in the nearest town.

There are many of the older Freedmen who attest that Indian doctors in the old days could doctor people much better than "these city doctors" can now, and that when an Indian doctor cures you with herbs, "they only has to cure you once, an then you stays cured." It is also generally believed that there is more sickness now than in former years, although most people are at a loss for an explanation as to why this is so.

In the "old days" when an Indian doctor was summoned for aid, he would come into the house, bringing with him a white root which he placed in a basin of water. If the root floated the doctor would treat the patient; if it sank that was an indication that the patient was going to die, and it would be to no avail to treat him. In the event that the doctor did treat an ailing individual, after prescribing medicine and treatment it was customary to place the sick person on "puskie". This meant there were certain negative sanctions which an ill person had to obey, some of which were related as follows: must abstain from eating salt and certain kinds of meats; could not drink cold water; could not go into town; must not shake hands; and should not go around graves.

Formerly the most common illness was malaria, and the best method of treatment for the accompanying fever were cold baths, taken regardless of the seasonal temperature. Several informants told of having been

subjected to cold water baths,<sup>40</sup> and all testified that they were very helpful in their individual cases. Another remedy for fever which is supposed to be good, is for the ailing person to boil "Broom Weed" to make a tea; the tea is drunk, with a bath taken later in the same mixture. "This will cure the fever, you can bet your life on that. It's bitter as the devil, but it works."<sup>41</sup> Chills which follow malaria fever are best doctored by various herb tonics, or by massages. The best of these herb tonics is one made by steeping black root, or "hooeynichi",<sup>42</sup> giving a tea which is consumed in large quantity. Other teas which are good for chills are those made by steeping corn shucks or dogwood, and some informants mentioned they had used prickly ash with good results.

The most common method of warding off sickness, particularly colds, is to wear asafetida<sup>43</sup> around the neck. This is accomplished by purchasing some asafetida, "you can get it in any drug store," putting a little in a bag, and draping this bag around the neck so that it is suspended next to the wearer's chest. This custom, though quite old, is still practiced by many of the people today. The only other preventive which was related to the author is one that supposedly prevents pain to a child who is cutting teeth. This preventive consists of a string of beads made from approximate one inch lengths of Jerusalem<sup>44</sup> weed, sewn to a string,

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<sup>40</sup>See Appendix A.

<sup>41</sup>Informant C.

<sup>42</sup>Also used by the Seminole and Creek Indians, usually as an emetic. The "black drink" used in ceremonies of these two tribes.

<sup>43</sup>Webster's Dictionary, "The fetid gum resin of various Oriental plants of the carrot family, used in medicine as an antispasmodic."

<sup>44</sup>Probably a common variety of the Sunflower plant.

and placed around the child's neck. "This will sure keep his teeth from hurtin him."

Colds are the most common ailment described by the Freedmen today. There are a number of ways to treat this illness, most of which entail the making of some type of tea. The most frequently mentioned "cold teas" are those made from steeping "Broom Weed", or "ash tea", which is made by scraping ashes from the chimney into a glass of water, letting the ashes settle in the glass, then drinking the water. Another method for treating colds is to grease the chest and the bottom of the feet with beef tallow, or if the cold is bad and perhaps develops into flu, then it is best to eat a red onion every night, followed by a glass of warm soda water. The onion must be eaten raw, "jus like an apple." There is also an onion tea flavored with beef fat which is supposed to be excellent for breaking up a cough. Children's colds are best doctored by making a tea from asafetida.

Other diseases which Freedmen mention are such things as asthma, dysentery, small pox, and measles. However, specific treatments were not given for these ailments, with the explanation that "drug store men can give you things to cure" such ills.

#### Burial Customs

"When people dies nowadays they is always embalmed, and if they is too poor to pay for it, then the church will help 'em out." This statement is indicative of that received from practically all informants when asked about burial customs. Aside from the fact that embalming is a necessary preservative for delayed funerals, no reason can be advanced

for this insistence upon embalming other than "its jus the thing which should be done."

Queries as to how bodies were preserved in the "old days" when it was necessary to delay a funeral, brought forth several interesting methods of preservation. However, most informants were in agreement that in former years whenever possible the body was buried the day of the death, and not later than the day following. From most instances cited though, it appears that few people were buried the same day that they died.

Several informants stated that an early method of preservation was to sprinkle the body with salt, covering all but the head. However, this was done only when it was desired to hold the body for a few days, usually to return it home for burial. Two informants mentioned that in the early days there was some method of injecting a salt solution fluid into the corpse, but no further corroboration could be established.

A later method of preserving, and one that apparently was more satisfactory, became established with the introduction of ice into the Freedmen area. Apparently this method was used extensively until the first modern embalming techniques were introduced. Ice preservation consisted of placing the body in a large wooden box, and then covering it with ice, "jus like you do fish nowadays."

Before modern embalming techniques and modern caskets appeared, the first thing a Freedmen family did upon the death of one of its members was to inform the "coffin makers" of the death. There were one or two men in each community who specialized in the art of coffin making. The family would purchase the materials from which to construct the coffin, and if they were able they paid the coffin makers a fee, although all

informants agreed that the latter wasn't always necessary. Coffin makers didn't depend upon this trade for their livelihood, and whether the family was able to pay for the labor or not, it was expected that these men would build the coffin. However, in instances where the deceased's family could not pay for the coffin materials, members of the community would frequently donate money for this purpose.

The old fashioned coffins of the Freedmen were tailored affairs, hexagonal in shape, with the head tapering out to the widest portions at the shoulders, and tapering from the shoulders inward to the feet. For those who could afford it, coffins were lined with black velvet and white silk, whereas coffins of the poorer people were lined with black crepe and white muslin. In either case the cloth was tacked into place with silver and gold-headed tacks, no glue being utilized. In some instances no coffin was used, in which case the coffin makers would fell a tree, hew slab timbers from it, and build a sort of box in the bottom of the grave. The body was lowered into the "grave box" by means of a blanket, after which the blanket was folded over the corpse, and the box was covered with boards and filled over with dirt.

A former widespread custom, and one that still prevails in the Little River and Scipio communities, is that of conducting a night-long funeral wake the night immediately preceding the funeral. In days gone by it was customary for a rich family to have the wake in their home, and for a poorer family to utilize the church for such a function. However, the rule wasn't strictly adhered to, and at present those families who still believe in conducting wakes always use the church.

Late in the afternoon of the day preceding the funeral the body is taken to the church, and shortly thereafter all people who wish to pay homage to the deceased or the family begin to arrive. Each brings some food, most of which is already prepared, to be eaten during the night, or prior to the funeral the next day. Before the establishment of funeral parlors, it was customary for friends to come into the deceased's home and prepare the body for burial. This preparation consisted of washing, and dressing the corpse in his best clothes; under no circumstances was it proper to leave these tasks for the family to do. However, today this is all taken care of by the undertaker.

Early in the evening, usually around 8:00 or 9:00, the minister or one of the deacons begin the service. The service, which lasts the entire night, follows no rigid pattern, although it is customary to have a "preaching sermon," singing, and praying. About midnight or a little after, the people all go into the eating house for food and drink. Each eating house is equipped with a stove, thus, many of the foods can be warmed over, coffee can be made, or some foods can be cooked. Following this meal the people again retire to the church and procede with the wake service, this part usually consisting of prayer and singing. During the wake service people are allowed freedom of the church, particularly the children, but no gaiety is tolerated and everyone is expected to conform to a pattern of solemnity.

Early in the morning of the funeral day, usually around daylight, the wake participants eat breakfast. Immediately following breakfast several of the men will go to the grave yard and dig the grave, although as one informant related, "if they feels real good they might even dig

the grave afore they eats breakfast."<sup>45</sup> All informants agree that the grave is never less than six feet deep, although none could give an explanation why. Two who were obviously rationalizing stated they thought that it was because in the "old days" it was customary to bury material articles with the body, and that much room was needed in order to get all the stuff in. At any rate, immediately following breakfast and the grave-digging, there was another service of preaching, praying, and singing, which usually lasts until around 11:30 a.m., after which the people prepared and at lunch, then awaited the actual funeral service.

About 1:00 or 1:30 in the afternoon, the funeral service begins. This service usually lasts for about an hour, and follows approximately the same pattern as that of any other baptist church, although until recently there was one main difference, in that the Freedmen didn't make use of the obituary. One informant stated it thusly:

In the old days we didn't have such a thing as a written obituary. Perhaps old acquaintances and friends would get up and say a few words about the dead, but there was no written obituary like we have today. Some times favorite songs of the dead person were sung.<sup>46</sup>

A few informants in Little River and Scipio were questioned about the use of an obituary in a present-day funeral, and it was discovered that although one is usually given, the practice of testimonials by friends of the deceased is still quite common.

People who attend the funeral usually wear their best clothes and black is considered the appropriate color. A pronounced display of grief from the family and close friends is expected, particularly from the family, and if the individual is very popular with the community,

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<sup>45</sup> Informant C.

<sup>46</sup> Informant A.

"there'll be a lot of 'em what will have the feeling." Following the funeral service in the church the body is taken to the cemetery, usually the local cemetery connected with the church. All churches, with the exception of Scipio and Noble Town who share the same cemetery, have a cemetery which is located a short distance from the church. By far the largest burial ground is that associated with the Middle Creek church in Little River community. Another fact which was repeatedly brought to the attention of the author, is that many of the Freedmen who are now living in towns return their deceased relatives to the native burial grounds, and there are a few cases known where families in other states have sent their dead "home" for burial.

Sometimes there is a grave-side service, but this is not always the case. "It jus depends on the family, or mebbe the weather." It used to be that after the body was placed in the grave the deceased's worldly possessions such as clothing, saddles, personal ornaments, etc, were buried with him, but his is no longer practiced because "they has been too much grave disturbing (robbing)." Also, in the "old days" it was customary to have an Indian doctor present to treat the grave dirt. This was done by the doctor taking a hollow cane and placing it into a solution containing "hoceynichi", after which he would sing a few songs, then blow through the cane into the solution. This was followed by some member of the family taking some of the watery solution and sprinkling it over the grave dirt. The solution was retained by the family, and each morning for four days following the burial it was customary that some member of the family should repeat the sprinkling rite, and in addition should place food on the grave. At the end of this four day period the family would



build a small house over the grave, presumably for its protection.

Another old custom no longer adhered to in the strictest sense, is the practice of neighbors and friends coming into the family's house and cleaning it up for them. Formerly, four days following the burial, these people would come into the house and wash all personal clothing and bed clothes, and any other articles used by the deceased during the time he was sick. Usually they would also clean the house and sweep the yard. Information has it that some of the older families will still do this according to custom, although the younger people are just as likely to perform these tasks the day following the funeral as they are to wait for four days.

It is interesting to note that many of the Freedmen, primarily those who are living in town, do not conduct wakes for their dead. Some of them divulged to the investigator that they objected to the present-day wakes because the solemnity was not present, and to them this is not the proper respect which should be shown the dead relative. The general opinion seemed to be that now people merely attend a wake for the abundance of food which is customarily there, and for the big get-together which a wake usually produces. However, most of the people consulted in the "native" communities still favor the wake custom, this being particularly true of the true of the older people in Little River and Scipio. It is believed that Freedmen living outside the native communities have become somewhat submerged in the religious organization of the predominantly large State Colored group, and for this reason are drawing away from the usual Freedmen burial customs, particularly the wake observance. Information indicates that very few of the State Colored group conduct wakes for their own

people, although it is not uncommon to see them present at Freedmen wakes. General reaction to the State Colored attending Freedmen wakes, with the exception of those State Colored who are very close friends, is that they seldom have the proper respect for the custom. It should be noted that Freedmen spouses will often conduct a wake for a deceased husband or wife of the State group, and that in cases where a Freedmen spouse of a State person dies, the deceased Freedmen's parents or relatives will often insist that the State person conduct a wake. Informants state that there is no friction involved in either of the above mentioned situations.

Freedmen burial customs are essentially the same as those found among the Creek and Seminole Indians of today. This is particularly so in reference to the wake, the general service itself, the practice of friends of the family digging the grave, and the building of small houses over the graves. The relationship to Creek customs of today can be easily seen by comparing these data with Watson.<sup>47</sup> The custom of friends and relatives coming to the house of the deceased four days after burial in order to clean the house and furnishings, and to rake the yard, is a close parallel to that which Seminole Indians formerly practiced.<sup>48</sup> Another Seminole Custom which can be correlated to a former Freedmen observance, was the practice of treating the grave dirt with medicine.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Mrs. Irwin A. Watson, "Creek Indian Burial Customs Today" Chronicles of Oklahoma, Vol. XXVIII, No. 1, Spring 1950, Oklahoma State Historical Society, pp. 95-103.

<sup>48</sup>Alexander Spoehr, "Kinship System of the Seminole", Anthropological Series, Field Museum of Natural History, Vol. 33, No. 2. (Chicago 1942), p. 94.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid, p. 93

## CHAPTER VI

### INGROUP AND OUTGROUP RELATIONS

#### Ego Perspective

Ask a Freedman where the group originally came from and you have opened the door for a considerable number of interesting conjectures and hypothecations. Such answers as "we has always been here," or "we used to be with the Indians" are very frequent. Aside from the young Freedmen and those who have been educated, the majority of the people are not aware of their African origin. Many of them know that a long time ago their ancestors lived somewhere in the Southeast, that there was a possibility that at one time they were an enslaved people, and that formerly there was a close relationship with the Seminole Indians. No mythology could be found; nowhere beyond Indian contact does there appear to be an origin legend, a story that can be passed on.

The Freedman sees in himself an individual of a group which was formerly associated with the Seminole Indians, a fact from the past that is generally known. He looks at the present, and if he is one of the older members of his group he can analyze the situation surrounding him today. In most cases he knows that his group is different from that of the State Colored, that the Freedmen retain many characteristics allied to the Seminole Indians, and that prior to statehood his group enjoyed a

much better status than they do at present. The discerning individual realizes that he is now a part of a minority, a minority commanding a minimum of respect from the encircling White majority. The Freedmen are inwardly rebellious of their relegated role, blaming most of their status difficulties upon the State Colored, and at the same time realizing that although they are resentful of their outgroup colored associates, the Freedmen position is one of necessity and not one of their own choosing.

The smallest recognized grouping is that of the conjugal family. It has been previously mentioned that the basic family unit is a very closely knit group, and that to a certain extent this applies to the second recognized unit, that of the extended family. This is particularly true among the families which have remained relatively intact, namely those extended groupings found in the native communities.

Aside from their recognition of the family, probably the most important unit with which the Freedmen realize they are associated is the native community, described in a previous section. Many of the Freedmen realize that the native communities are the center of fast-fading native customs, that it is here where most of their own group reside. Even the people who have moved away from one of the five communities still retain considerable attachment, and often identify themselves with their home community. The author, upon attending a native church in the Little River area, noticed that several people who had moved into Wewoka still retained their church membership in the native community.

There is also a secondary community with which the people feel they are directly associated. Reference is made to Wewoka and Seminole, the former being of necessity the economic hub for the communities of

Little River, Noble Town, and the southern part of Scipio, whereas the latter serves an identical function for the communities of Turkey Creek, and the northern part of Scipio. Although Bruner Town is now desolate of Freedmen, in former years that group was economically oriented toward Wewoka, and to a certain extent, Konawa. Wewoka is also important because it is the center of activity for the Seminole Tribe, and the County seat of Seminole County.

All Freedmen consulted were aware of the fact they were residents of Seminole County, and, as mentioned, Wewoka is important because that is where "a man has to pay his government tax." All people apparently are aware that they are inhabitants of the State of Oklahoma, and that it is a part of the United States. However, in casual conversation with several people over a considerable period of time, the author mentioned other states, or often other Oklahoma towns which were distantly located. Many of the people were not familiar with the names of many of the other states, and they usually thought of the strange Oklahoma towns as being a long way off. Some admitted never having been out of Seminole County, and it was found that others had traveled quite extensively, often to visit children in other states.

The younger people who have the opportunity to attend school are naturally familiar with world geography, although very little of it has been transmitted to some of their parents. On the other hand, many people who keep up with the war news are familiar with names of far-off places, even though they have no idea of their location.

Cross-cutting all these area groupings are the two political divisions known as bands. The organization and function of these bands

will be discussed in the section on political organization (Chapter VII), although a few words of explanation are in order here so that the reader may better understand the personal affinities of the people to these two organizations.

Most of the people, particularly those of about thirty years of age and above, know to what band they belong, whereas many of the so-called "youngsters" are only vaguely aware that such a thing as bands exists, and in many cases do not know that bands are present at all. However, if the grandparents of a family are still living, then in most instances the child will at least be conscious of the organization, although he may not realize that he could probably be considered as a member of such a division. A breakdown of the situation can be given as follows: all the people of the present-day grandparental generation are conscious of their band affiliations; most all the people of the present-day parental generation above the age of thirty are aware that there is a band division of the Freedmen, although some in this group are not aware of which band they are a member; and finally, many of the younger parents below the age of thirty, children of this latter group, and many of the children of the older parental generation, are not aware that the band organization exists, let alone realize that they are a member of a band. However, even in this latter division there may be fairly young individuals who are conscious of of the two Freedmen bands.

An interesting variant in the band organization was discovered among a few families in the Scipio area. During census work the author was told by many of the people that they were members of Joe Scipio's band, obviously confusing their band membership with the name of an earlier band

chief for whom their settlement was named. At first it was thought that possibly a third band had at one time been existent, but further investigation revealed this not to have been the case. Joe Scipio was an official of the Dosa Barkas Band, and though he was a very influential individual he apparently never attained the over-all popularity as that enjoyed by Dosa Barkas.

Finally, one of the most important features of their awareness as a group, is the knowledge of all Freedmen that they are different from State Colored people, that they are members of a distinct group within their own race, a group referred to as "Native", "Seminole Negroes", or Freedmen. Many of them base this difference on racial affinities to the Seminole Indians, qualifying their contention with "mixed blood is in both of us." However, the majority place more emphasis on the fact that they are culturally related to the Seminoles, that "we jus think and do different from them State Colored people, especially in the ole days."

This difference from State Colored people is made known to all the Freedmen children, and from available information, the distinction is realized at an early date. As one State Colored man told the author, "They makes such a difference that the little kids in school knows they are different from us."<sup>50</sup>

#### Ingroup Relations

The one prevailing factional division found among the Freedmen is that between the church people and the non-church people. However, the author discovered that practically all Freedmen profess church membership,

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<sup>50</sup> Informant G...State Colored.

hence it is assumed that the rift is more between the active participants of the church and the "back-sliders", than it is between members and non-members. One of the requisites for church membership is that the prospective candidate shall have only one wife, and that whether the candidate be male or female they shall not be practicing common-law marriage. Under the present-day situation the contention that a man shall have only one wife is probably a hold-over from pre-statehood days, when under direct Indian influence polygamy was considered permissible; hence at present this is construed to mean that a man or woman shall not live in adultery while they are lawfully married.

The active church people can cite many evil practices indulged in by the non-actives and non-members, and at the same time the latter group can offer the usual excuses that church people are meddling in their affairs, there is nothing wrong with taking a drink, nor is there anything morally wrong with a card game or going to an Indian dance. In the latter respect, Freedmen church actives are opposed to the native Seminole ceremonies in much the same manner that Seminole church members are opposed to them. It is considered ample justification to expel a church member if it is known that they attend Indian dances, and many people related that "I ain't been to an Indian dance since I joined the church." Conversely, it is known that after joining the church some members have attended Indian dances and were not expelled by their religious associates. A few of the older people confessed to the investigator that they often had desires to attend Indian ceremonies, and one man volunteered to "slip off" with the author if the latter would attend an Indian corn dance with him.



Politically, the two factions sometimes align opposite each other, particularly a few years ago when elections were held regularly. The situation as presented by most informants is typified by the following:

If they wuz two men runnin for an office, one belongs to the church, an one man don't, then them what belongs to the church would put they faith in the church member, an them what doesn't belong, would probably vot for the man that don't belong to the church.<sup>51</sup>

Information indicates that there is a very slight class differentiation made by the members of one band as opposed to members of the other band. As pointed out earlier, band membership is regional, which at the same time makes for a difference in the subsistence economy of each band. Census figures show 324 people in the Dosa Barkas Band, most of whom formerly lived, or are at the present time living in the communities of Little River, Scipio and Noble Town. These people in their native surroundings are primarily agriculturalists, the results of their labors being most of the food they can eat with very little left for sale. On the other hand, a census of the Bruner Band reveals only 131 people, most of whom now live, or formerly lived, in the communities of Turkey Creek and Bruner Town. The Bruner people in their native environment are primarily cattle raisers, with a limited amount of agriculture on the side, the latter consisting mainly of a little feed for their stock, and some gardening. Topography of the two band areas will bear out the difference in subsistence patterns (Chapter III).

Before progressing further the tremendous influence exerted by Caesar Bruner upon his band followers should be pointed out, which for the most part explains the class differentiation that members of the Caesar Bruner Band feel in regards to Dosa Barkas people. First, it was

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<sup>51</sup>Informant C.

Caesar Bruner who led the emigration out of Bruner Town, and it was he who established the Turkey Creek settlement, probably in the late 1870's.

Informants also specify that Caesar Bruner was an exceptional individual, that he got along "good" with early Whites in the area, often acting as interpreter between them and the Indians, that he was a firm believer in education, and that he had a faculty for making money. In reference to his educational views, the investigator was informed that Bruner sent all his boys back east to college, and that he was instrumental in urging his followers to send their children to school. Apparently Caesar Bruner was an exceptional leader, and in exercising pronounced influence over his followers he was primarily responsible for many of the becoming established in the profitable cattle business, and also responsible for many of the Bruner Band having achieved an education.

The two things just mentioned, education and profits from cattle, are the primary reasons upon which the Caesar Bruner people base their contention of class differences. The majority probably contend that the difference is based on subsistence, mainly that the northern people, and in this context meaning people of the Caesar Bruner Band, have a larger income, thus their living standard is somewhat better than that of members of the Dosa Barkas Band. However, there are several Bruner Band members who make their distinction of **class** on the basis of education, stating that many more of their band have been educated than have the Barkas people. The latter group constitutes a small minority though, whereas the former is by far in the majority, and from observations of the investigator they have justification for their claims. This is particularly noticeable in the material culture of the cattle raisers as opposed to the agriculturalists,

showing that they can afford a considerably greater number of luxuries, including such articles as house furnishings, kitchen extras, and the like.

It is interesting that none of the Dosa Barkas members ever mentioned any difference in the two bands, usually stating that they were both the same. One thing in particular which is of interest, is the rationalization by some members of the Bruner Band that the reason they have always had fewer members than the Barkas Band is because of the class distinctions previously mentioned. On the other hand, members of the Barkas Band do not interpret the situation in that light, but rather point with pride to the fact that they have always had a much larger organization. The realization that Bruner members to the north call Barkas members to the south "woods people", and speak of Little River and Scipio as being "down in the woods," or "down in the back country," apparently doesn't carry any derogatory implications to members of the Dosa Barkas Band. However, the author has noted on a few occasions that the preceding statements were given in such a manner.

Whatever the differences might be in the bands, all informants were in strict agreement that on matters of politics, Indian Affairs, or on any matter which required the unity of the group the two bands adhered to the same policy. They usually share the same opinions, and all information points to the band chiefs having stuck closely together in decisions which would affect the entire group. Overall, even with the small differences made by the Bruner Band members, it can be said that there is a feeling of unity which prevails throughout the Freedmen group.

During the investigation preparatory to writing this paper, it was frequently necessary for the author to visit various communities in

the company of Freedmen, many times the escorting individual not being a member of the community visited. In all but one case, and this particular woman had been having trouble with Whites, greetings were cordial and hospitality was readily extended. At each initial contact there was a noticeably suspicious attitude on the part of the informant, but this soon gave way to friendliness when the author's purpose was realized. It was noted that Freedmen invariably greet each other with a question concerning the health of the addressee or his family, the only exception being in the case of members of the same church, in which case "welcome brother," "howdy brother-so-and so," or some such salutation was used, usually followed by the customary question regarding health as mentioned above. The use of a health topic as the opening break in conversation is very noticeable, much more so than the customary parting phrases. The latter were variable, but usually were begun with the phrase "Well, we go now," and followed by "Be careful," "Come again," "Remember me to the women folks," etc. It was observed that there never seemed to be any awkwardness in greeting or departure.

Most Freedmen make frequent trips into town, and usually upon returning the first thing they do is tell their wife all the news or gossip they have heard, or tell her about the people whom they have seen. Transportation to and from town is usually by bus or on foot, or by car if one is available. While in town the men congregate on a favorite corner, in Wewoka this is "Clyde's Corner," or often they sit on a sunny bench provided by any one of several stores in "Colored Town." The time is for the most part spent in gossip, talk of religious matters, or politics.

Curiosity appears to be one of the rural Freedmen characteristics, and many times while visiting in Freedmen homes, the author has noticed that invariably, when a person passes on the road, the house occupant will hurry to the window to identify the passer-by. Upon making identification word is usually yelled to other members of the household, this in turn setting off a chain of conversation bringing forth such statements as "this is the third time they've been by here today (or this week, etc)," or "I wonder where they could be going," etc. This same situation exists equally strong in the summer, for during this time of the year much, if not all, leisure time is spent in rocking chairs or cane bottoms conveniently situated on the front porch. Time is spent talking, dipping snuff, or chewing tobacco. Conversation usually stops when someone passes on the road, and when resumed it frequently changes abruptly from the former topic to something relating to the person who has just passed.

Relatives visit quite often, and friends occasionally visit nearby neighbors. One instance is known where an old woman in her seventies frequently walks a distance of some ten miles to visit her niece.

By far the best gossip center is that afforded by pre-church and after-church gatherings. The men usually congregate in small groups outside the church, whereas most of the women and a few of the old men gather inside. Small and teen-age children usually congregate with mother or father, depending upon the sex of the child. The minister divides his time between inside and outside groups. Conversational topics of the women usually include such things as recent deaths, church work, sewing projects, foods, children, or perhaps some individual who has strayed from the righteous path. Male adults usually discuss crops and stock,

weather, recent deaths, religion, politics, and it was noted by the investigator that men frequently joke each other. After church breaks up several small conversational groups quickly form, these often containing both males and females. The principal topic now appears to be generalizations regarding the sermon, ability of the minister, or general affairs of the church.

Freedmen exhibit wide variability in their individual concepts of morals. Drinking, gambling, common-law marriages, and wife or husband desertion are all quickly condemned by most of the people. Indications are, however, that these things frequently occur, but unless there is an open flaunting of moral codes very little is said. Most people consulted listed the above as vices which were accelerated to a pronounced extent after contact with the State Colored, and when speaking of one of their group who has committed one of the above, the author has often heard the expression, "like State folks."

There are only two cases of suicide which any of the Freedmen can remember, and in both instances death was by hanging, with the reason advanced that the victims were despondent. Both of these occurred some time ago, therefore it is not possible to determine Freedmen reaction to such a practice.

There is one Freedman child in the insane asylum at Taft, Oklahoma. He is a young boy from Thomas Town, and apparently is feeble-minded. Practically all people queried on the subject of insanity think it is very unfortunate, although they recognize insanity as such, and express pity for people involved in such unfortunate circumstances.

Outgroup Relations

## Freedmen-State Colored

"I jus feel like I'm out'n my race. I know I'm a colored man, but I jus feel like I'm different from them State people."<sup>52</sup> This was the way one informant stated his relationship to the State Colored group. Others have given practically the same statements, particularly those from the older age group.

Just prior to statehood, when the State Colored people began to enter the territory in large numbers, one of the first things a Freedmen child learned was that there was a difference between his group and the incoming colored group. Information indicates that this difference was explained in terms of culture, namely that Freedmen were associated with the Seminole Indian tribe, and that as a result of this association they thought and acted like the Indians. Obviously State Colored people didn't adhere to Indian beliefs and customs, nor were they members of a tribe. The latter fact was especially prevalent in all discussions with informants about this particular outgroup relation, and was usually explained in terms of tribal affiliations and the resulting land rights of the Seminoles in this particular area. Briefly, Freedmen were members of the Seminole tribe and they were land owners in the Seminole Territory; the State Colored people were not, hence they had no business among the Freedmen people, and their presence there was considered an encroachment upon the rights of domain as exercised by the native group.

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<sup>52</sup>Informant C.

During this early era there was very little marriage between Freedmen and State Colored people, and intermarriages which did occur were looked upon with considerable disfavor. Indications are that few Freedmen ever left their native community to marry a State person, and in cases where mixed marriages occurred in the local communities people tried to make the best of the situation. However, informants agree that this was hard to do, and in many instances there was considerable ill feeling against inter-marrying Freedmen.

Offspring of these mixed unions were considered either as Freedmen or as members of the State Colored group, depending upon the maternal affiliation of the child in question. If a Freedwoman married a State man their offspring were considered Freedmen, and became members of the mother's band; if a Freedman married a State woman, their offspring were considered part of the outgroup. Prior to statehood Freedmen children attended schools with the Seminole Indians, and during this period it was the duty of the band chiefs to determine which children were eligible to attend the Indian schools.

However, with the coming of statehood and the resulting laws regulating segregation, Freedmen were no longer considered as an integral part of the Seminole tribe and were lumped with the State Colored group. Marriages with the latter group sharply increased, and former antagonisms became somewhat dormant, resulting from a necessary alignment with a lesser minority. But even after statehood there were many of the older Freedmen who were still bitterly opposed to the State Colored group, and to a certain extent, many of them still retain their resentment to this day. There appears to be a general feeling among many of the older Freedmen



that their present-day status is the result of their having to be associated with the State people. In the view of this school of thought, the contention is that had they been allowed to retain their associations with the Indian group they wouldn't be subject to their many present restrictions.

Another point of interest is that all informants place emphasis on the lowered moral standards of their group, attributing these to State Colored contact. Several older informants explicitly stated that increased sexual activity among the youngsters is a direct result of State Colored associations. It is also believed by most people that divorces are more common now than in the "old days," particularly in mixed marriages between the two groups. As one old man stated: "People jus don't believe these mixed marriages will work, that is the older people, an usually they don't."<sup>53</sup>

A Freedmen self-evaluation of their group as opposed to that of the State Colored element invariably brings forth the following answers in one context or another: Freedmen have moral standards (at least in the old days) that the State people could never hope to measure up to; Freedmen think, live and act different than do the State Colored; Freedmen are more dependable and more trustworthy than are State people; and as many informants said, "they is jus as much difference in the 'old' Freedmen and State Colored people as they is in black and white." The latter statement is interesting in that the older age group is separated out from the younger age group. This is further brought out in a recent survey of Negro-Indian relationships of the Southeast in the following:

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<sup>53</sup> Informant E.

The Seminole Negro feels himself better than or different from the "State Negro"...At least twenty aged Seminole Negroes have given the author testimony to this effect. Such an attitude may be partly expressed in the fact that of 73 marriages of Seminole Negroes in Seminole, Wewoka, and Lima, Oklahoma, only eleven have been consummated between "State Negroes" and Seminole Negroes.<sup>54</sup>

The above figures were recorded in 1935, and present a vastly different picture from that indicated by the author's census in 1950. In the latter census figures for Seminole, Wewoka, and Scipio (the Freedmen community equivalent of Lima), indicate that in 39 families recorded there is a total of 25 mixed marriages. On the other hand, of the total 163 families recorded for the entire group there are 82 families of mixed marriage as opposed to 66 strictly Freedmen unions, indicating that 132 Freedmen participated in an ingroup union and 41 married into the outgroup. The remaining 13 marriages were to Creek and Chickasaw Freedmen. Indications, then, are that the Freedmen are rapidly marrying into the State Colored group, and that it is just a matter of time until the two groups will coalesce.

#### Freedmen-Indian Relations

Apparently older members of both the Freedmen group and Seminole tribe still visit each other. The practice doesn't seem to be prevalent, usually occurring during times of sickness. However, this visiting practice seems to be a hold-over from pre-statehood days, at which time it appears to have been quite strongly developed. One informant summarized

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<sup>54</sup>Laurence Foster, Negro-Indian Relationships in the Southeast, p. 68. Taken from Sigmund Sameth, "Creek Negroes: A Study of Race Relations", Master of Arts Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1940, p. 75.

the situation as it existed in the "old days" in the following manner:

"It used to be that colored people and Indians were all as one. Then we'd go to see each other an visit, an we'd eat and sleep in the same room, jus like Whites do when they goes visitin.<sup>55</sup>

Needless to say, in the memories of most older Freedmen the coming of statehood to Oklahoma is a very prominent event. This is somewhat summarized in the following statement.

The law giving Oklahoma Indians the status of White men curtailed most of the social relationship which had formerly existed between the Negroes and the Indians. The law gave the Negroes separate schools and churches and provided for segregation in all forms of public services...Age long friends kept up their contact but very few new ones were formed. It is observable today that an aged Seminole, although he does not detest the Negro, does not fraternize with him as did his forefathers.<sup>56</sup>

This was primarily brought about by the race definitions given in the Constitution of Oklahoma, Art. XIII, Sec. II, which states "Colored or Negro shall apply to persons of African descent. The term white shall include all other persons."<sup>57</sup>

About the only Freedmen at present who enjoy much personal contact with the Indians are the band chiefs. The council meetings are the one remaining function where the two groups still meet on any grounds approaching equality. Theoretically the Freedmen band chief representatives in the Seminole Council have an equal voice in tribal affairs, although at the present time this privilege has diminished, and applies

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<sup>55</sup> Informant B.

<sup>56</sup> Laurence Foster, op. cit., p., 67.

<sup>57</sup> G. T. Stephenson, Race Distinctions in American Law, (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1910), p. 14.

only to discussions pertaining to business which concerns the Freedmen people. Upon talking to an Indian member of the council it was determined that Freedmen band chiefs are regular in attendance, conduct themselves properly in the meetings, are always willing to enter into discussion, or to perform any tasks which the principal chief wishes them to do. Apparently they have little to say in the council meetings, usually reserving discussion to matters pertinent to their own group.

At one time during the investigation the author was fortunate enough to get three of the band chiefs together and listen to their conversation concerning Indian council matters. The discussion indicated that the Freedmen are not in complete accord with the workings of the council, but they realize their position as a small minority and are aware of the fact that their influence is very limited. The consensus of opinion as expressed by the Freedmen band chiefs is that the Indians spend a lot of time in the council, arguing and mud-slinging, and accomplish very little. To them, Indian members spend too much time in long-winded discussions of relative unimportance, often overlooking items of business which to the Freedmen seem fairly important. It was noticed that each of the Freedmen band chiefs displayed pride in having accomplished some diplomatic feat in the council. Some of the things which were mentioned were as follows: a lost claim for tribal funds had been discovered by one of them; taking part in a tribal investigation committee; or the realization that they had thought of something before, or had accomplished certain tasks before Indian members had.

Many times during the field work the investigator had the opportunity to pick up Indians who were met on country roads, and to give them

rides to the highway or into Wewoka. This was practiced for a considerable period of time, and in the process, individuals of practically all ages were talked to. It was found that older Indians appear more friendly toward the Freedmen, with a few mentioning that the Freedmen used to live as the Indians did. However, many of the younger Seminoles were a little more hesitant to make any recognition. There were several though who stated that the Freedmen were alright, and one rather young boy related, "they're alright...and they don't give me as much trouble as the State black people do." He didn't elaborate further on what he meant by trouble.

In summary it can be said that between the older age groups of the Freedmen and Seminoles there is a feeling of mutual respect, and a consciousness of the former relationship which no longer exists. However, in view of the superimposed White cultural restrictions upon the Negroes, there is a tendency to refrain from close contact in order to conform to the cultural norm. On the other hand, younger members of the Indian group seem to shy away from any recognition which will associate them with the Freedmen, whereas the younger Freedmen do not seem to care one way or the other. Both of the younger groups are more conscious of the status position of the Freedmen, and in this respect the younger Indian group is more conscious of probable social condemnation by the Whites if they are found associating with Negroes, than are the older Indians.

Brief mention should be made of Freedmen relations with the Seminole Indian Agency. In 1905 all Freedmen were placed in the unrestricted category of the Federal Indian Service, thus were allowed to sell their lands and negotiate for themselves. At present the Agency is

concerned with the Freedmen only in the following respects: The Freedmen still get their share of tribal funds which come from oil royalties, and tribal land leases; and Freedmen still figure into any per-capita payment which the federal government makes to the Seminole Tribe. The last per-capita payment was in 1942, at which time each member of the Seminole tribe, Freedmen included, received \$30. An interesting aspect of the last per-capita payment was the fact that Freedmen were paid prior to the Indians, apparently causing some friction among the Indian group.

Another interesting result of Freedmen-Indian relations has been pointed out by the agent in charge of the Wewoka Indian Agency.<sup>58</sup> The agent explained that there are an estimated 500 to 550 Seminole Indian families under the jurisdiction of his agency, and of these families he knows of two or three instances where children were not allowed to attend Indian schools because the children were too negroid in appearance. In all cases, the families were listed as Indians.

#### Freedmen-White Relations

Prior to statehood relations between Freedmen and Whites were excellent, the latter apparently accepting the Freedmen as equals with the Indians. However, with the influx of so many State Colored into the area there was a tendency on the part of many Whites to categorize all Negroes into one group. This met with considerable disfavor among the Freedmen.

As previously mentioned the Freedmen were placed in the unrestricted category in 1905, and were then allowed to dispose of their

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<sup>58</sup>Personal communication from Leo R. Chisholm, District Agent, Wewoka, Oklahoma.

lands and make decisions as they pleased. They had all been granted government allotments ranging from 60 acres of first grade land to 240 acres of third grade soil, and in view of their land holdings they were immediate targets for land grafters. The stories which Freedmen can relate concerning this period of their history are plentiful and varied, full of bitterness and resentment. A few will be presented here so that the reader can gain an insight into the situation as the Freedmen feel it.

My wife had an aunt who couldn't read or write. One day some men come to see her 'bout her land, an while de wuz talkin, one of them men drop his writing pen. The ole woman bend over an pick it up fo him, an that wuz all they need. They make her mark on a paper, an prove she touched the pen...that paper wuz the deed to her land.<sup>59</sup>

I knew of another woman who had some land, an one day some men see her an say they wants to buy the timber off it fo railroad ties. She sign the paper, but it wuz a deed to her land. They gived her a cigar to make it real legal.<sup>60</sup>

Many of our people were uneducated, and they were an easy touch for the white grafters. These men would pretend they had a lease, but actually it would be a deed to the Freedman's land. The pay for the land was usually small, so as to insure legality. If only more of our people had gone to school, a lot of those things wouldn't have happened.<sup>61</sup>

It can be readily seen that these land grafters were a constant source of friction between the Freedmen and Whites. Information indicates that this is the result of educational deficiencies and lack of legal knowledge on the part of the Freedmen, thus making them easy prey for the land grabbing Whites. There were many ill feelings, many of which have persisted to the present day. It should also be pointed out that during this same period the Freedmen were trying to make adjustment to their

<sup>59</sup> Informant C.

<sup>60</sup> Informant E

<sup>61</sup> Informant A.

newly acquired segregated status, imposed upon them by the advent of statehood to Oklahoma. As one woman explains it:

It was better before statehood. For example, a lady over on Park Street (in Wewoka) had the only restaurant in the country. Everyone ate there, Freedmen, Indians, and Whites. Then came statehood and the Jim Crow laws, and now we don't know where we stand, or where we belong.<sup>62</sup>

Informants state that there is quite a lot of White blood mixed into the Freedmen group. Information indicates that this is the result of a limited common-law practice in the early days, and though many Freedmen profess pride in their White admixture, there are just as many who are quick to condemn any union of a common-law variety between Whites and Freedmen.

It appears that many of the Freedmen are too proud to condone open sex practices between one of their group and a White person, although at the same time they evidence marked pleasure in citing the white admixture which they possess. Several people have confided in the investigator that they know of many people in their group who can pass as Indians, and there are some who can pass as Whites. Apparently it is considered quite alright for an individual to use a light skin color to his advantage, and relatives of these individuals have boasted "I'll bet you can't tell him (or her) from a White." One man called his daughter in for the investigator to look at, in order that her markedly caucasoid features could be seen. He went on to say,

You are likely to find anything in my family. Some look like Whites, some like negroes, an others like Indians. I got relations with blue eyes an red hair; why my ole granmother wuz half white, an my own mother wuz half creole, an my dad is only one-eighth colored.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>62</sup>Informant A.

<sup>63</sup>Informant D.



Various townspeople in Wewoka were casually questioned regarding the Freedmen, and those who knew what the author was talking about usually spoke highly of the Freedmen as compared to the State Colored. It should be mentioned, however, that a large number of those questioned were not aware that there was any difference in the local colored people. In the latter case such answers as "I didn't know there was any difference," "niggers are all the same," etc, were common.

## CHAPTER VII

### POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

There are fourteen bands in the Seminole tribe, two of which are composed entirely of Freedmen. These two bands are known as the Dosa Barkas and Caesar Bruner bands, each having been named for a former band chief, and though the two men have long been dead the names have persisted.

Band membership is determined matrilineally, and in cases of mixed marriage the following rules apply: offspring of a Freedwoman and a State Colored man belong to the mother's band; offspring of a Freedman and a State Colored woman are not considered Freedmen and hence have no band membership; offspring of a Freedwoman and a Seminole Indian can be in either band, but are usually in the mother's band; offspring of a Freedman and a Seminole Indian can be in either band. It is interesting that the rules of membership are relaxed in the case of Freedmen-Indian marriages, permitting the child to retain membership in either band. This appears to represent a Freedmen recognition of superiority on the part of the Indian group, possibly going back to the early days of slavery. However, information indicates that children of mixed unions usually belong to one of the Freedmen bands.

Census figures indicated there are 324 people claiming membership in the Dosa Barkas Band, 141 of whom are males, and 183 of whom are

females; in the Caesar Bruner Band there are 131 people, 72 of whom are females, and 59 of whom are males. Distribution of the two groups shows that most of the Dosa Barkas members live in the southern part of Seminole County, whereas the Caesar Bruner people appear to be widely distributed. However, a closer check of the Bruner Band members who are now residing outside the native communities, indicates that most of them formerly lived in the Turkey Creek or Bruner Town areas. It should be pointed out that there are 21 Caesar Bruner members who are residents of the Little River community. One of these is a man who married a Dosa Barkas woman, later moving to her allotment, whereas the remaining 20 are members of an extended family. This particular family lives across the Little River, apart from the general area of settlement. They have always lived in this locality, which raises the interesting problem as to why they are members of the Bruner Band rather than the Dosa Barkas organization. With the exception of this one group, census data indicates that until fairly recently band membership was rather regional, Caesar Bruner people more to the North and Dosa Barkas to the south.

This contention is further born out when it is considered that band membership is flexible, since it is the prerogative of an individual, if for some reason he is dissatisfied with his own band, to request permission from the opposite band chief for admittance into his band. A legitimate cause for band transfer was considered to be either of the following: dissatisfaction with one's band officials; or assuming residence a considerable distance from one's band officers, thus making it more difficult to see your own band officials, when perhaps officers of the opposite band were near at hand. After requesting transfer, the

two leading band chiefs would get together to consider the request, and if agreeable to both of them the transfer was made.

Information indicates that the flexibility of band membership served primarily to keep a person as near his band officers as possible, with a few changes made because of dissatisfaction. This brings out the fact that in years gone by band members relied quite heavily on their officials for advice, settlement of personal problems, etc. This membership flexibility of the bands also clarifies an earlier contention that their regional distribution is formed along subsistence lines. In the section on Material Culture (Chapter IV), it has been pointed out that the cattle raising Bruner members lived in the northern part of Seminole County, whereas the agriculturally minded Dosa Barkas people live to the south. A further analysis would then reveal that if a person desired to raise cattle for a living he would of necessity live in the Turkey Creek area to the north, and because of the necessity of relying upon band officials for guidance and help in domestic affairs, he would also become a member of the Caesar Bruner Band, because that band's officials would be living near him. The same situation would also apply to Dosa Barkas people in the Little River, Scipio, and Noble Town areas. This would also explain the pronounced difference in population between the two bands, namely that a cattle raising economy would require more land per family than would an agricultural economy, and at the start most of the people were confined to the Seminole Indian Territory, hence even if more people desired the former system of economy there would be a natural limitation based on the land available.

In view of the above situation it would seem that upon marrying

a person and moving into their community it would be proper to change one's band to that of one's spouse. Apparently this was the case in most unions of this type, however, it is interesting to note that even today there are still individuals living in the various communities who identify themselves with the band opposite from that of their spouse or majority of their neighbors. The indication is obvious, in that the present functions of the band chiefs are practically negligible, it is assumed that these people retain their original band membership for reasons of sentiment. However, it is not postulated that the present existence of Freedmen band organization rests entirely on sentiment, although this is a minor factor. Reasons for the continued existence of the organization will be discussed following the immediate presentation of band structure.

Three men constitute the governing body of each band. These men hold the titles, in order of importance, of band chief, second band chief, and third band chief. In case of the death of one of the band chiefs the next lowest in rank moves up into his position, and a special election is called to elect a third band chief. There is no hereditary factor involved in selecting the band chiefs; the primary requirements in order of their importance are as follows: must be a man of age, high character, and with honor; must be familiar with the people whom he is going to serve; must be physically able to carry out the duties of his office; and it is preferred that the man be able to speak Seminole, and that he be one whom the Indians like.

In theory the people are to nominate the candidates for band offices. However, information indicates there are usually outstanding men upon whom most of the people are agreed, and that an election, even

in the old days when the system was strongest, seldom finds more than two or three men nominated for one office. These men are usually nominated by one of the band chiefs, and in the event that there are more than two nominated the discussion which follows will always reduce the field to the required number. Apparently little trouble was ever experienced in the selection of band chiefs, with outstanding individuals always available for the jobs. It should be noted that suitable band chiefs can be re-elected for as many terms as they can retain the people's confidence, and it is not uncommon to have a set of band chiefs for a considerable number of years. In fact, under the present-day situation the band chief positions are retained in most instances until death of the individual holding the office.

Ideally however, elections are to be held in July of every fourth year; there are indications that this was formerly the custom. At the present time though, elections are held only when an officer dies, becomes too old, or too ill to conduct the duties of his office, or is thought to be unsuitable by the people. Whether it was under the old system of electing every four years, or whether it is under the present system, the procedure is still the same. Band chiefs meet to decide when and where the election is to be held, usually choosing some centrally located spot easily accessible by all band members. It should be pointed out that under the present-day system of nominating and electing, elections are seldom held in July, but usually occur at the earliest possible date following vacancy of an office. In the case of these special "call" elections word is spread among the people, usually by post card or word of mouth, well ahead of time.

On the day of the election the band members meet at the appointed place at the designated time. Dosa Barkas members usually meet in Wewoka, at Dr. Coffee's Building, and members of the Caesar Bruner Band usually hold their elections in a school house on Turkey Creek. Indians and members from the opposite Freedmen band can attend a local election, but they are not permitted to vote. No women are allowed to vote in any of the elections. Attendance is usually confined to the older men of the particular band, and apparently is still fairly good, as is indicated by the last Dosa Barkas Band election. This particular election was held in Wewoka in July, 1949, for the purpose of electing a successor to the third band chief who had become too ill to attend the council meetings. Of an approximate 40 to 50 individuals "who would be interested in such things" 20 attended; these men agreed unanimously on the son of the retired third band chief as his successor. In this case there was only one man nominated for the position and elective procedure was simplified. However, in case two men had been nominated the established Seminole method of voting would have been employed. This system of voting is as follows: When the time for voting for the candidates arrives each man who nominated a candidate announces that candidate's name, and walks in a different direction from that of his opponent. All men in favor of each opponent follow their respective candidates to form a grouping, whereupon the band chief will count the men in each group, with the majority group declared the winner. In case of a tie there might be some debate, followed by another "run", or the presiding chief might offer the deciding vote.

Before continuing further, it should be mentioned that the

method for selecting a Principal Chief for the Seminole Tribe is done in much the same manner as that just described for a band chief election. However, in this instance there is an election held every four years, although there are no restrictions against re-electing the same man for several consecutive terms. Nominations for Principal Chief are made by the council, and in theory the Freedmen council members are allowed to nominate and discuss candidates of their choice, although no instances of Freedmen participating in nominations can be found. The council also determines when and where the election will be held, picking some date during the month of July, and some centrally located spot, usually at Wewoka, or Mekusukey Mission. All Indian and Negro members of the Seminole Tribe, women excluded, are permitted to vote, with the voting conducted in the manner just described for the band chiefs.

To continue with the discussion of Freedmen band officers, the following are listed as being their most important functions: to attend Indian Council meetings, and to present any problems which their followers wish to have brought up for discussion; to advise their band members concerning all tribal payments, mainly, the procedure and time for getting such payments; and to act as leaders for their bands, settling domestic problems within each band, offering counsel to band followers, etc. Taking each of these in order, the following discussion will reveal to the reader just how the band chiefs actually operate.

The Freedmen band chiefs attend the four council meetings, and any call meetings which are called during the calendar year. Regular council meetings are held in January, April, July, and October, with the special or call meetings being held whenever an emergency arises. Members



of the council are notified by the secretary, usually by post card or word of mouth when there is to be a call meeting. Council meetings are held in Wewoká.

The council is composed of three band chiefs from each of the fourteen bands, and the Principal Chief of the Seminole Tribe. The latter has no active function in the council, other than to see that all goes well, or to give counsel on various points. There is a chairman, or moderator, elected from the council members to preside over the meetings, and there is also a secretary-treasurer elected from the member group. Freedmen, although permitted to be active in council discussions, etc, are not permitted to hold council offices. Council meetings are conducted in Seminole, with an interpreter provided for those people who cannot understand the native language. Anyone can attend a council session, but only council members are permitted to vote, enter into discussion, or bring up new business. Half the members present constitutes a quorum, with attendance reported as good. This latter fact might be because of a former rule whereby absentees were fined, or because of the present government policy of paying council members four dollars per regular council meeting that they attend.

Any business which is to be presented to the council must be presented by one of the band officials. Thus, any personal grievances or personal conflicts are first presented to the band chiefs, who then decide whether or not they merit attention by the council. In making such decisions it is often necessary for the three band chiefs to meet and discuss the matter, and if they can come to some agreement suitable to the complaining individuals, the matter will never reach the tribal

council. Thus, the three band officials act as a sort of clearing house for minor tribal problems, particularly those of an individual nature.

Another primary function of the band chiefs is to inform their followers of the time and place for the distribution of tribal funds, and also instruct them in the proper procedure of filing for such payments. This is necessary in view of the tribal funds which occasionally build up from oil royalties or from rentals of lands owned in common by the Seminole Tribe. The federal government also holds various funds in trust for the tribe, occasionally issuing per-capita payments to each tribal member. The last of these, issued in 1942, returned \$30. to each member of the Seminole Tribe. For this purpose, each band chief is supposed to keep a roll of all his band members in order that he can refer to it whenever the need arises. However, all Freedmen born since 1905 are classed as "new-borns", and as such are not entitled to tribal privileges. Thus, the Freedmen band chiefs no longer keep a roll, because they know all of their followers who are entitled to receive tribal benefits. It is interesting that even though "new-borns" are not officially considered Seminoles, the Freedmen parents still identify their offspring with the Freedmen group, according them band status.

One of the most important functions of Freedmen band chiefs is to act as leaders for their group, settle domestic quarrels, and extend advice to all followers requesting it. In the past these duties required much more attention than they do at the present time. Information indicates that now about the only function in this list which the band chief has is to offer advice or information to people who request it. The author has personally observed the latter in operation, when in several

instances it was noted that many of the older people still consider the band chiefs as their official representatives, and often asked direct questions about what was transpiring in the Indian Council. Other times these people would request information on how to acquire certain funds which they thought the government still owed them, or on various other problems when they had, usually pertaining to the government.

All information points to the fact that very few people are of the opinion that bands or band chiefs are necessary at the present time. Among the older group, as mentioned previously, there are still individuals who rely on the band chiefs for information concerning tribal matters. However, this group is fairly small in comparison to those people who believe that band officer positions are now merely stations of honor and not necessarily of value. This is understandable in view of the relationships to the tribal council which the Freedmen now have as opposed to those prior to statehood. Younger members of the group have never had to consult band chiefs regarding tribal matters merely because of the fact that they have seldom had cause to do so. The opinion of this younger group appears to be that the band and band officers are just a means of prolonging the ultimate complete severance of tribal bonds between Freedmen and Indians. On the other hand older individuals still have the possibility of receiving tribal funds, hence they can readily understand the necessity for retaining their bands and band officials.

It has been mentioned previously that there is some sentiment attached to retention of the band organization. It should be pointed out that in this respect the sentiment comes from the older age group, from those people who can still remember the Indian and Freedmen relations

prior to statehood. To them the band organization represents the final strong attachment between their group and the Indians, and though the younger members sometimes point to this relationship with pride, it is evident that they have little sentiment for the organization as such. This is understandable when it is considered that the younger group has been subjected to a considerable amount of acculturation from the White and State Colored groups.

However, overlying any sentiment which the group has for the band organization is the necessity for having a connecting link between the Freedmen and Indians, primarily because of the monetary possibilities of tribal or per-capita payments. Information indicates that the hope of receiving additional government payments is the main factor in retention of the Freedmen band organization, which in turn indicates why it is primarily the older age group who remain the most conscious of this particular political structure. This being the situation, with the passing of the age group which at the present time are 45 and above, there will no longer be a functioning band system. The postulation here is that sentiment in the lower age levels, primarily because of the oppressive overlying White and State Colored cultures, is not strong enough to perpetuate the band organization. This contention is doubly strengthened when it is considered that the younger group will have no useful need in retaining the band system, thus the decadence of the structure is being accelerated.

Nothing definite can be established as to when the Freedmen band organizations were founded, although information seems to place their origin shortly following the Civil War. This is confirmed by Spoehr in

the following context, based on report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1869.

The chief and second chief were elected for a four-year term by a majority vote of all male citizens of age, while the council members were drawn from the fourteen towns of the Nation, each town being entitled to three representatives. Twelve of the towns were made up of Indians and two consisted entirely of Negro freedmen; the latter were full citizens of the Nation and entitled to all privileges of citizenship.<sup>64</sup>

The Towns spoken of are what are now called bands.<sup>65</sup> Thus, if a person belonged to Eufaula Town, then his band was referred to as the Eufaula band.<sup>66</sup>

It is interesting to note that whenever the original division of Freedmen into two bands, or Towns, was made, the other three communities were not singled out as separate Towns. It is known though, that Turkey Creek was settled by people out of Bruner Town well after the bands were formed; but there is a possibility that Scipio and Noble Town could have been separate communities prior to any Town designations. On the other hand, although there is no proof for this deduction, it is plausible that the original separation of Freedmen into two bands could have been accomplished by establishing Little River as the dividing line. If this is the case then all people to the east of Little River would have been placed in one band, now known as the Dosa Barkas, and all people to the

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<sup>64</sup>Alexander Spoehr, "Kinship System of the Seminole", Field Museum of Natural History, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Chicago, 1942), p. 48.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 49

<sup>66</sup>John R. Swanton, "Creek Social Organization and Usages", Forty-Second Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1928), p. 195.

west of Little River would have been placed in the other band, now known as the Caesar Bruner. If this theory is correct—and it is probable in view of the many more Freedmen dwelling on the east side of Little River—the preponderance of Dosa Barkas Band members would be explained.

Another argument in favor of this contention is the fact that the twenty Bruner members previously mentioned, all from one extended family, who associate themselves with the Little River settlement, state that they have always lived in their present locality, just across the river southwest from said community. This group would be accounted for if the original division was made as postulated above.

Freedmen have never had clans, although most of the older people were at one time or another members of an Indian clan. When some of these older individuals were questioned it was found that they were not too familiar with the actual functions of Seminole clans, and many of them were confused regarding the difference between such an organization and that of the band. Many recognize that there is a difference, but still get them confused. The following information from an informant in the older age group is fairly indicative of Freedmen belief relative to Seminole clans.

I used to belong to a clan myself. Clan members wuz from all bands. When I wuz younger I used to belong to the Hiwatha stomp grounds, an them people folded up, so we moved in with the Eufaula stomp grounds. The Eufaula people tell me I wuz a member of the Turkey clan. I had to go to ever dance the Turkey clan had. But I didn't believe in that varmit kin business them Indians believed.<sup>67</sup>

Another man had this to say about his relationship with the clan system:

Most all us old Freedmens belong to an Indian clan. I belonged to the Tiger clan myself, an my wife belonged to the Deer clan.

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<sup>67</sup> Informant E.

According to them Indians a person ain't supposed to marry any of his clan kin; they believe that they is all related to whatever varmit 'bout which their clan is named, an they believe that everybody in a clan is related to each other. I knew all my kinfolks of the clan. But we Freedmens didn't pay no attention to anything like that, cause we figures you ain't related unless it is blood kin. Them Indians really believe in that varmit kin stuff though.<sup>68</sup>

The two preceding statements indicate the general trend of thought of all informants who were questioned on this matter. Their primary association with the Indian clan structure is the fact that "clan kin ain't supposed to marry," and their confused belief that clans are the sponsors of stomp dances. In regard to the latter belief, Towns are responsible for ceremonies conducted in their square grounds,<sup>69</sup> whereas clans play an important part in the seating arrangements and in the succession of the more important officials.<sup>70</sup> Apparently in the early days Freedmen were assigned to clans in order that conformity to ceremonial rules could easily be effected, and in being thus regimented by the clan they developed the opinion that clans assume sponsorship of ceremonials. It is reasonably evident from the data collected that this was the only aspect of the clan system in which the Freedmen actually participated, and even then, indications are that some individuals were participants in the system without actually realizing to what extent.

Another example of the confusion which some Freedmen feel in regard to clan and band similarities is that found in the names of Indian bands as related by Freedmen informants. In several instances the name

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<sup>68</sup>Informant C.

<sup>69</sup>Alexander Spoehr, op. cit., p. 50

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 106

of the band was given as that of the band chief, and in others, animal names corresponding to clan designations were received. This can probably best be explained by the fact that clans have for some time been diminishing in importance, and at present are practically a thing of the past.<sup>71</sup> At the same time the Freedmen have been conscious of the clan organization, and have to a very limited extent been associated with the clan system. However, they have concurrently been much more conscious of the very prominent band organization, and for this reason they often speak of the Indian bands and clans interchangeably. Also, this could in part be due to the fact that Freedmen fully understand the band system, whereas it is clearly evident that their knowledge of clan functions is close to negligible.

There is one outstanding characteristic of the Freedmen band organization which they have probably adopted from the Seminole clan system. Reference is made here to the matrilineal emphasis placed on Freedmen band membership as a parallel to matrilineal emphasis on Indian clan membership. However, there is the other possibility that the division into matrilineal bands may have been accomplished exclusive of clan influence. The camp organization of the Florida Seminoles, which is roughly comparable to the Town organization of the Oklahoma Seminoles, is based on the matrilineal lineage. This grouping might include the mother, her daughters, their husbands and children, the unmarried brothers of these women, and in addition it could also include women (and their families) of a more remotely related lineage.<sup>72</sup> It is entirely possible that in

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 102.



the organization of the two Freedmen bands some of the leaders of the group could have had a reminiscence of the earlier Florida camp system, thus deciding to keep the matrilineal emphasis which the matrilineal lineage of those groups stressed. In view of the lack of evidence, this is not a definite opinion, but a conjecture on the part of the author.

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

RELIGIOUS

There are very few participating organizations in which members participate, and those which are operative are very weakly developed. The women who live in towns often belong to such organizations as flower clubs, and church clubs, but these are composed primarily of white colored women.

There is a female lodge situated about one-half mile south of the Middle Creek church in the Little River country, which usually meets once, perhaps twice a month. Attendance is irregular, and at the time of this writing there is a movement afoot to build up the lodge to "what it used to be." Most of the older and the more prominent women who originally organized agreed that many of the younger ones were not interested in the lodge, and their approval sufficient to the organization is wanting to to clarify the act. Many freedmen attend religious meetings in surrounding towns. There are also several Star chapters in association with the white lodges, and many freedmen belong to these.

There are two other organizations, both religious in nature.

One of these is the Calvary and Women's Union, with membership confined to ministers and women of the same denomination.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

#### Organizations

There are very few functioning organizations in which Freedmen participate, and those which are operative are very weakly developed. The women who live in towns often belong to such organizations as flower clubs, and church clubs, but these are composed primarily of State Colored women.

There is a Masonic lodge situated about one-half mile south of the Middle Creek church in the Little River community, which usually meets once, perhaps twice a month. Attendance is irregular, and at the time of this writing there is a movement underway to build up the lodge to "what it used to be." Some of the older men who were questioned about this organization expressed regret that many of the younger men were not interested in the lodge, and their apparent indifference to the organization is causing it to slowly die out. Many Freedmen attend lodges located in surrounding towns. There are also Eastern Star chapters in association with the urban lodges, and many Freedwomen belong to these.

There are two other organizations, both religious in nature. One of these is the Ministers and Deacon's Union, with membership confined to ministers and deacons of the various churches, and the other is

the Women's Home Mission Club, which is found in all communities with the exception of Scipio and Turkey Creek. The latter meets at irregular intervals, usually in the home of one of the members. Both of these organizations are primarily associated with religious matters, and in view of the qualifications for membership, namely that a man be a deacon or minister, and a woman be an active church member, both are somewhat limited.

#### Recreation and Holiday Observances

In former years there were many Freedmen who participated in various Indian dances, but never sponsored any of the dances on their own initiative, although many of them were active participants and leaders in the Indian gatherings. Most informants agreed that they had not taken active part in Indian dances since they had joined the church..."They'd throw me out if I danced with the Indians." Many of them explained to the author that they could see no reason why the church should refuse to let them dance, because as they put it, "I always jus done that for fun anyhow...ain't no religion in it." Apparently most of the Freedmen felt this way concerning the Indian affairs, indicating that perhaps the religious significance of certain ceremonies was negligible as far as they were concerned, and their participation was more for pleasure and recreation, plus the big gathering and abundance of food which such occasions provided.

Indications are that in years gone by many Freedmen were quite skillful in the Seminole version of stick ball. They had no teams which were confined to Freedmen, but rather played on Indian teams. This

appears to have been a very popular sport with the Freedmen, just as it was with the Seminoles.

Principal recreation now is in the form of visiting. Men in particular make frequent trips to town, spending most of their time on the streets talking to other Freedmen or State Colored people. Relatives visit each other, especially in the summer time, and friends occasionally visit for Sunday dinner. Younger people go to movies and dances, and in general participate in the usual White recreations of their particular age group.

As previously mentioned (Chapter IV), men and boys do considerable hunting and fishing, much of which is done for fun rather than for the contribution to subsistence. Hunting with hounds has developed into a favorite male sport in the Little River community, and is also found to a limited extent in other communities.

At present the Freedmen actively celebrate and recognize Christmas, New Years, Easter, and Thanksgiving as their principal holidays. Prior to statehood there was another holiday, the August Fourth celebration was considered very important to the group.

No one seems to know just why August Fourth was celebrated,<sup>73</sup> nor do they know why the day is no longer observed. Information indicates the last observance of this date to have been 1901, and at this time the holiday had become somewhat of a joint affair with the Creek Freedmen, although indications are that it was still predominantly for the Seminole

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<sup>73</sup>Possibly because of a Congressional act in August, 1861 whereby captured slaves were technically the property of the United States Government...this law is considered a forerunner of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Freedmen. The festive affair was primarily a big get-together featuring a picnic, a mounted parade, selection of a queen, and climaxed by an all-night square dance. Apparently the event was very colorful and happy, with a carnival air prevailing throughout.

In former years Christmas and New Years were observed by all-night prayer services, followed by an all-day feast the next day. Both occasions were very sacred and were rigidly observed with prayer. At present Middle Creek and Thomas Town churches, both in the Little River community, cooperate in conducting the all-night services for these two holidays. One will have the Christmas service and the other will have the New Years observance, or "watch", as it is sometimes called. None of the other native churches hold these all-night prayer services, and consequently many of the Freedmen in other communities come to the Little River churches in order to observe these two religious holidays. The night services are still much the same as in the "old days," but the all-day feast is no longer observed. Instead, the participants take frequent breaks during the night-long prayer service to eat food and drink hot coffee.

Thanksgiving and Easter are usually celebrated or observed in the home, although there might be a special church service to emphasize these two days, particularly Easter. There is nothing elaborate such as that which is observed for Christmas and New Years.

Many informants emphatically stated that Freedmen do not consider the fourth of July a holiday for their race. To them, the holiday in question is not a true day of Independence. This belief is not unanimous, but prevails among those who are reasonably well educated.

## CHAPTER IX

### SUPERSTITIONS

The superstition of nokos oma, "like a bear," is probably the most prevalent one in which Freedmen indulge. Information indicates that there is a variance of opinion as to the exact form which nokos oma assumes in carrying out his mysterious actions, although all believers are in agreement that if any person sees nokos oma they are sure to die. Several people revealed that nokos oma was thought to be an animal somewhat between a bear and a wolf, of tremendous proportions, black in color, and one that walked on all-fours. This description bears strong resemblance to that given by the Creek Indians, who say that nokos oma is "a creature about the size of an ordinary black bear...and it has immense tusks...."<sup>74</sup> There are still others among the Freedmen who believe that nokos oma is something spiritual or ghost-like, that he could change into different forms. "Maybe one time he would be a varmint, the next time a man, or the next time he might be a cow or something like that."<sup>75</sup> One elderly male informant had this to say regarding nokos oma:

Old nokos oma wuz a ghost of some kind which travelled through the country. I can 'member back in the early days when we'd have a

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<sup>74</sup>John R. Swanton, "Religious Beliefs and Medical Practices of the Creek Indians," Forty-Second Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1928), p. 497.

<sup>75</sup>Informant E.

whirlwind, or a wind storm would come up real quick like, people would say old nokos oma wuz passin by. They'd all run in they house an close the doors and windows. They wuz a smell jus sorta like a skunk which always stayed on after nokos oma had done passed, an I've heard if a feller got too much of that odor it would make him sick, or mebbe even kill him. Why, I can 'member when old nokos oma would come by, an the dogs they'd bark an run under the house jus like something wuz 'bout to ketch them. That wuz nokos oma passin through. I've hear tell that if'en a person see him, an that person wuz sure to die. What I'd like to know is, if'en a person see him, an that wuz what cause him to die, how would anyone ever know it?<sup>76</sup>

There are other people who related that nokos oma used to live in the vicinity of Fred's (sometimes referred to as Mate's) Pond, presumably a bottomless hole of water located in a rather swampy area between Bruner Town and Little River settlements:

He lived somewhere around Fred's Pond, and in the old days when we was supposed to go by there we was always afraid we would see him. Some people thought that if you saw nokos oma you would die, and they was others who thought he would eat you. He was supposed to be enormous in size. When I was a kid I used to believe those things, and when I'd ride by that area I would always make my horse go real fast. I don't believe in that superstition anymore.<sup>77</sup>

There is no one who will admit having seen nokos oma, and there is only one death which a few of the people attribute to a person having seen the animal. This death, that of a man who drowned in Fred's Pond, occurred some time ago, and there are those who say that it "could have been caused" because the man happened to see nokos oma.

Indications are that in former years parents told nokos oma stories to their children, playing upon the child's fright in order to keep them within range of proper authority. A few people related how successful such stories were, in that they were scared to stray far from their house after dark for fear nokos oma would "get me and eat me," or

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<sup>76</sup>Informant A.

Informant C.

"if'en I done wrong with my parents old nokos oma would come after me."

Many of the older Freedmen will admit that their fellow citizens believe in witches, but they are reluctant to voice their own personal affirmation of such an institution. There are those who condemn belief in witchcraft, whereas others opine that there is a probable existence of witches, but in view of the fact that they have never been confronted with any of the practices of witchery they cannot positively say that it exists as a functioning institution. One informant who confessed to having been witched by a State Colored man, although reluctant, finally gave his story to the author.<sup>78</sup>

Among those people who concede the possibility of witches it appears to be an accepted conclusion that there are no witches in the Freedmen group, but rather, all witches are either Indians or State Colored people, particularly the latter. A common phrase in this respect is "them State Colored people out of the South all has witches among 'em."

Witches are thought to be very powerful, and "there must be somebody who trains them." There is apparently no differentiation made regarding the sex of witches, either male or female presumably sharing equal power and each having comparable ability for casting "spells". It is thought that witches cast "spells" on people causing them to be sick, or perhaps to die. One method of witchery which was mentioned to the investigator is that many people believe that a person (one who wishes to witch someone) can bury an object such as a knife, piece of glass, etc, near an intended victim's house, and that sooner or later the victim will

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<sup>78</sup>See Appendix B.



step on the soil above the buried object, thereby experiencing pain as though he had actually stepped on the object itself. Another sure sign of witchery comes in the form of the screech owl.

If one yells over your house at night, you had better kill him. The Indians will really go after them, and kill him good. And another thing, if one yells over your head while you is outside, then you is jus as good as dead. I'm lucky, I never had none do that to me.<sup>79</sup>

There are many Freedmen who believe in ghosts. They think of ghosts as something invisible to an ordinary person, although an individual who is born with the amnion sack intact is believed to be endowed with the power to see such things. None of the Freedmen who were interrogated concerning this issue professed the power to see invisible objects, but there were many who said they had had friends or relatives, most of whom now deceased, who had been gifted with such a power. Information indicates that ghost stories are told to most of the children, and to a certain extent they constitute a discipline factor similar to the nokos oma stories.

Freedmen place faith in dreams as a forewarning of good or bad future happenings. General information reveals that members of the older age group are more conscious of dream implications, and they appear to place more faith in dream indicatives than do the younger people. Apparently there is no way to negate the warning which a person receives in a dream, and if a person has a bad dream, then that individual should take it upon himself to be extra careful. This would imply that dream warnings are not always strictly true, that occasionally the expectation caused by a dream does not materialize.

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<sup>79</sup> Informant E.

There are several types of dreams relating to death, one of the most prominent of which has to do with a person dreaming about losing a tooth: if an individual dreams of losing a jaw tooth he can expect one of his older relatives to die; if he dreams of losing one of his other teeth he can anticipate one of his younger relatives dying. To dream of a birth is to be forewarned that a relative is dying, and to dream the reverse is to receive a warning that a birth is about to occur.

The majority of dreams are supposed to foretell impending good or bad fortunes. For instance, to dream of milk or anything white, hence considered pure, is an indication that the dreamer is in for a streak of good fortune. The same thing applies to dreams regarding eggs, provided they are not visualized as being broken, in which case the converse applies and the fantasy is an indication that bad luck is forthcoming. A dream of muddy water warns the dreamer that bad luck is soon to appear, whereas a dream of clear, running water is an excellent sign that good luck is imminent. Another dream indicative of future fortune which is rather unusual, can best be described in the words of an elderly male informant:

If'en you'd happen to dream 'bout me bein naked, then that'd mean I wuz shore in for some bad luck. On the other hand, if'en you wuz to dream 'bout you bein naked, then you'd be the one to have the bad luck. The same thing would work for me...say I dream that you is naked, that mean you in for bad luck, an if'en I dream me is naked, then I in for bad luck too.<sup>80</sup>

This informant went on to say, "now you may not believe them things, but if'en you have one of them dreams you jus watch an see what happen."

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<sup>80</sup>Informant C.

Freedmen have many superstitions relating to pregnancy, child-birth and menstruation, most of which have already been discussed in previous sections. It is significant to note that there is an abundance of beliefs concerned with drying up the breast after the child is weaned. There are also several superstitions in this connection which are attributed to Indian influence, primarily the belief that husbands shouldn't sleep with their wives during menstruation, nor until four days following; the belief that nursing children will acquire "summer complaint," dysentery, if their mother has intercourse with anyone other than the child's father; and according to the Freedmen the preparation of owl soup which is given to friends desiring children, is also the result of Indian contact.

Freedmen believe that children can be marked or gifted at birth. This usually takes the form of some abnormal action or interest on the part of the child, or perhaps is designated by some unusual physical feature. The father of the prominent Freedman herb specialist told the author that he knew his son was going to be an outstanding man because the boy had been gifted at birth. In this particular instance the father's expectations regarding his son's future were evoked by the fact that the son was born with a grey spot of hair in the central part of his head. The father went on to say that right away his son took an interest in medicine, thus he knew that his boy would be a good doctor, and would have no difficulty in learning all the herb preparations which would make him one.

There are a few taboos which older Freedmen still observe. Chief among these is the taboo against killing anything on Sunday, or using any

kind of a sharp instrument on that day. Some of the older people confessed to the investigator that they always killed their "Sunday dinner chicken" on Saturday, cutting it up the same day. Neither women nor men are supposed to use anything sharp on Sunday, which means women aren't permitted to sew, etc, and men cannot chop wood, or do other tasks which entail the use of a sharp instrument. It is also considered bad luck for a person to enter into a house with a stick of wood or an axe on his shoulder, and there are some people who believe if you point your finger at a rainbow the finger will soon be cut off. There is also a taboo against coming in contact with grave dirt, lest rheumatism result.

It is impossible to ascertain to what extent the overall Freedmen group believe in the preceding superstitions. There are a few who openly express their belief in them, and there are others who emphatically deny any superstitious belief. However, the majority appear hesitant to commit themselves one way or the other, stating in effect that they have never been noticeably affected by such signs, hence they cannot definitely say whether or not there is any truth in them. This is particularly true in instances of witches or ghosts, with an almost standard answer that "I has never been bothered by 'em, an I ain't never seen none, so I can't rightly say whether they is real or not."<sup>81</sup> The feeling of uncertainty in this respect seems to prevail throughout most of the group.

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<sup>81</sup> Informant C.

## CHAPTER X

### RELIGION

During the field work preparatory to writing this paper, the author found very few Freedmen who did not profess church membership. There were many who admitted they didn't attend church regularly, and there were others who implied that they had strayed far from their religious principles. On the whole though, most of the people are members of the Missionary Baptist denomination. This particular denomination, although not a member of the Creek Baptist Association, closely resembles the latter, and according to informants who have visited in Creek churches the two services are practically identical.

Religion to most of the people is a very serious matter, necessitating fulfillment of a righteous life based on certain moral principles, the observance of which qualifies an individual's faith. The local community church disperses religious teaching to the people, and indications are that emphasis on religion is directed primarily on saving sinners, with secondary importance attached to reprimands and lessons having to do with the negation of moral principles as set forth by the church.

The following native churches are considered by the Freedmen as centers of worship in the communities as designated: Middle Creek and Thomas Town churches serve the Little River area; Salt Creek church was

the religious leader in the now deserted Bruner Town community; Spring Creek church serves Noble Town inhabitants; Scipio church functions as the religious center for the community of the same name; and Turkey Creek church, recently burned, was the center of religion for that community. Two of these churches, Scipio and Noble Town, have Freedmen pastors, whereas the remainder are serviced by State Colored ministers. The two Freedmen ministers in question are said to be the last two pastors known among their group.

All churches are located in a prominent position, usually on a high hill, or if the surrounding terrain is level the church is situated in an area free from trees. Churches are frame structures, about twenty by thirty feet, and each is characterized by a small steeple tower supporting a bell. Interiors are practically the same, each characterized by a small room, approximately four feet square, situated on either side of the front, with the pulpit platform located between. The room on the left is for the minister and deacons, and the one on the right is for the women to store dishes and cooking utensils in, as well as a place in which to hang their wraps. The pulpit platform situated between the two small rooms, usually about a foot above the floor, extends in a semicircle outward about two feet from the two rooms previously mentioned. The altar sets forward on this platform, and there usually are a few benches in the rear part of the pulpit area.

The church is separated into two sections by an aisle down the center. In the forward part of the church there are benches parallel to the aisle, facing the center, while the seats located in the rear part of the church face the front toward the altar. The seats are usually benches

or school desks which have been requisitioned from schools which are no longer existent. Lighting is furnished by means of kerosene lamps or coleman gas burners, and heat is supplied by wood-burning stoves. There is a secretary's table situated directly in front of the altar.

Each church has what is popularly called an "eating house," which is a small building located to one side of the main structure. In two cases the "eating house" is the original church building, the latter having been replaced by a newer structure. The furnishings for an "eating house" consist primarily of a cook stove and several wooden tables, with perhaps a few benches or chairs. Two of the churches have brush arbors for use during the warm summer months. All churches have two small outdoor toilets situated a short distance from the main building.

Every church has a board of deacons, elected by the congregation, most of whom are older men in the community. This board decides who will be the pastor.

The board of deacons decide who is goin to be the pastor. He must be a good man an have a good reputation, an what is mos important he must be a man of one wife. You know that lots of men who is pastors will run aroun a little, an that is somethin that can't be put up with. When a man done that, he done stray from the path he is spose to follow. The deacons decide on a man, an we presents him to the church for a vote.<sup>82</sup>

In actual practice the board of deacons selects a pastor, usually giving him a six month trial period, with permanent appointment contingent upon his preaching ability. There is no established length for permanent appointments, and theoretically, conditions being acceptable for the minister and the congregation, a man can hold the minister's position for life.

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<sup>82</sup>Informant C.

Church expenses are paid by assessing monthly dues from the members, in the case of Middle Creek this amounts to thirty-five cents per member per month. In addition to the regular monthly payment of the "parson's fee" as it is frequently referred to, there is a collection taken up at each church service, with individuals contributing what they feel they can afford. Occasionally some emergency necessitates that certain money must be raised in addition to that in the treasury, and in instances of this sort the board of deacons convenes and decides on a "tax" for the members. After deciding on a reasonable "tax" the deacons submit their motion to the congregation, and after much discussion the motion will be passed. Frequently the church may give a box supper, or perhaps sell a quilt, or some other object which has been contributed in order to raise money. In addition to the parson's salary, which usually runs about twenty dollars per month, the church spends money on building repairs, new fixtures, and aid to the sick and needy.

Regular church services (with the pastor present) are conducted one Sunday each month, the Sunday varying with different churches depending upon when their pastor is available. Most of the pastors preach in three or four churches, and for that reason they must schedule their services accordingly. On Sundays when the pastor isn't present the deacons often take over, conducting a combined prayer and singing service. Sometimes there is a Sunday School service preceding the church meeting, but this isn't always the case. Information indicates that a few years ago Sunday School was a regular occurrence, and that several of the churches attempted young people's organizations. However, these apparently met with little success. The investigator was informed that several years



ago Middle Creek church tried to organize a boy scout unit, but the project was soon abandoned for lack of interest.

On the Saturday preceding the regular Sunday church service the deacons conduct a covenant service, at which time church members can affirm their faith in God. Attendance at the covenant is seldom as large as that for the church service the following day. In the discussion to follow relating to church services, most of the information was collected by personal observation and participation in church meetings at Middle Creek, in the Little River community. The minister of this church is considered by many to be one of the best, or at least fairly typical of the type of "preachin which we old Freedmens likes." This church is one of the most active of the native Freedmen churches, and the information here described is considered typical, or average for the general situation. Admittedly, there is a variance in individual ministers, but intensive interrogation of various informants indicates that basically their techniques are the same.

Just prior to church services most of the men gather in small groups outside, while the women congregate in a large body inside the building. Various topics of conversation are discussed in these pre-church gossip groups; there is no strict adherence to religious topics. About 11:00 a.m. the people enter the church in anticipation of the beginning of the service.

The minister assumes his position on the pulpit platform, with all the church members sitting in the front seats which face the center. Non-church members, members who have strayed from the righteous path, and sinners in general, are expected to sit in the rear seats which face the

front of the church. The church secretary seats himself at the secretary's table directly in front of the altar. Men and boys sit on the left side of the church, and women and girls sit on the right side. In former years it was customary for the oldest members to sit toward the front, although the investigator was informed that this practice is no longer strictly adhered to. Men dress in everything from overalls to suits, whereas most of the women wear their "dress-up" clothes.

After everyone is properly seated the minister approaches the altar and announces that the service will now begin, and admonishes the people to pay close attention to what is being said. One of the deacons then leads the congregation in a song. There are people in every congregation who are known as good singers, and these people usually carry the melody, with many of the others relying more on volume than on quality of tone. The individual who starts a song in most cases will sing the verse, and the congregation will answer with the chorus. There is no musical accompaniment, although many of the people keep the rhythm constant by patting, and in some cases pounding the floor with their feet, while others often clap their hands.

Following the first song one of the deacons usually takes the floor, and though partially directing his address to the minister, he is primarily admonishing the church members for various things, such as small attendance, etc. Upon concluding his speech the deacon informs the minister that without further ado he will turn the meeting over to him, after which the minister rises to the altar and requests some member to lead the group in prayer.

The entire congregation assumes a kneeling position for prayer. The person leading the prayer takes the lead in a sing-song chanting mood, with the congregation singing, humming, answering him, or merely expressing themselves in any manner of vocalization which happens to possess them. Throughout the prayer the minister occasionally voices his command for the people to "pray!". Prayers are usually quite lengthy, and are terminated by an "amen", after which the people assume their regular seats. The minister advances to the pulpit and reads a few passages from scripture, pausing after each for a brief period of elaboration. This is followed by one of the deacons leading the congregation in another song, followed by a prayer, after which the pastor begins his sermon.

Ministerial technique is to gradually work the people into a state of emotional abandonment, and when the maximum fervor is attained to call for the invitational hymn. The general sermon is delivered in a sing-song chant such as that previously mentioned for prayers, with special emphasis placed on sudden rising or lowering vocal inflections. Particularly important lesson objects are impressed upon the congregation by repetition, and there is no hesitancy to utilize certain well known sinners in the community, calling them by name, as examples of moral degradation. Gestures, facial expressions, and excess of "pulpit wandering," are all employed very effectively. Perhaps the most effective tool which the minister uses to penetrate the congregation is the assumption of a dual conversational role. This is accomplished by his looking into space and talking to a personified soul, etc, as though he were the devil, then reversing his position and talking down to the same illusion as if he were some holy individual. Often times these maneuvers are quite lengthy,

dependent upon the reaction of the people. It is not uncommon for the minister to suddenly descend from the pulpit platform and parade among the congregation, sometimes talking in a low forceful medium, then suddenly dashing toward certain individuals, at the same time raising his voice to a loud pitch. Whatever movement or vocalization he is going through, the minister knows what the people like, and that is what he tries to give them. This is particularly evident when in certain instances a point is especially well received by the congregation, the minister will often refer back to that illustration with variant elaborations, each being pertinent to the topic under discussion.

The congregation reacts to the minister in a parallel with the latter's enthusiasm in delivering the sermon. The outstanding characteristic of the church assemblage is the continuous vocal affirmation substantiating the word of the minister or the deacons. This is accompanied by nodding of the head, and frequently with exclamations of surprise such as "You don't say," an explosive "Well!", "Thats right," "You is right," or "Well! I'll be." The congregation will also hum, sometimes approaching a low moan, pat or stomp on the floor with their feet, and occasionally give vent to a lusty "Amen!" following some particularly emphatic word of the minister. All in all, church is a very emotional experience for those participating, and all displays of emotion are considered reasonable.

At the height of the emotional fervor the minister calls for the invitational hymn, at which time prospective members come forward to ask admittance to the church, or backsliders (former members who have strayed) come forward to ask forgiveness and readmission. This hymn is usually

quite lengthy, with the minister often interrupting to plead for sinners to come forward and be saved. In the event a person does go to the savior's bench in front of the church and expresses a desire to be saved, then the church votes whether or not that person shall be admitted. Vote is by yea or ney. Testimonials of faith are sometimes presented during this time, or perhaps substantiating testimony in favor of the prospective member.

People file by to shake the hand of a person who has requested admission to the church. Men file by first, then return to their seats where they remain standing while the women walk by, the latter always marching in front of the men, shaking hands with each of them. While this is in progress the entire group is singing. This is followed by introduction of guests, announcements, and whatever business the church members have to discuss. Immediately following the business session the minister requests some member of the congregation to take up collection, during which some member will usually start a song, this continuing until all people have advanced to the secretary's table and made their offering. The essential part of the church service is now over, although most of the people generally remain for the prayer service which sometimes lasts for two or three hours. A regular church service and the resulting prayer meeting can sometimes take up the major part of one day.

Attendance is usually good in Freedmen churches, and in each church there are several State Colored members, many of whom are quite active. In churches attended by the investigator there were noticeably few children and teenagers present, although many adults from nearby towns make the journey back to their native churches every time there is

a regular church service. It was never observed by the author, but information indicates that various White people in the Middle Creek area of the Little River community frequently attend the church, particularly on communion Sundays.

Communion is taken following the regular church service every three months. On this day all the women bring food to the eating house, and people make preparations to spend the entire day at the church. In the winter time, immediately after church everyone adjourns to the eating house to partake of the food prior to communion services, the latter coming after the regular meal. However, during the summer months when days are longer the communion is held immediately after church, after which the congregation moves into the eating house for their regular meal. On long summer days, when people do not have to worry about walking home in the cold, the period following communion resembles somewhat of a picnic, with the people spending considerable time gossiping, etc. Several informants complained to the author that "eating Sunday" was the only time that some of the people came to church, particularly non-members, many of whom always manage to show up on this day.

Children are baptized into the church when they are "nine to twelve years old, cause they usually knows what they is doing by them." In former years baptisms were only in streams of running water, but today a tank or pond suffices. Several churches sometimes join together to baptize their converts.

Once every three months there is a Minister's and Deacon's Union meeting held in one of the native churches. This is a meeting at which all the ministers and deacons get together and talk about various problems

having to do with their respective churches. The Women's Home Mission Club also meets in conjunction with this meeting. The Home Mission organization is found in all churches but Scipio and Turkey Creek, with each club having meetings at various times of the year in the home of one of its members. The purpose of the women's organization is to raise money for the sick or needy, to help finance burials of the poor, or raise money for the church in general. They do this by selling quilts, or by having an occasional food sale.

The church council meets annually to clear up unfinished business of the church which has accrued through the preceding year. The council is composed primarily of the deacons and leading church members, although in actuality it comprises practically the entire membership. They usually meet following the covenant service preceding the last regular church service for the year. One of the most important actions assumed by this group is the expulsion of sinners and back-sliders from the church. In order to do this, and it happens only in rare instances, the majority of the church members must present the case against the individual, usually one who flagrantly sins, to the council with the minister acting as moderator. After hearing all available testimony and having discussed it thoroughly, a majority vote of the church members present is required for expulsion. Information indicates that people are rarely expelled from the church, but after having turned to a life of sin an individual is severely reprimanded when he attempts to get back into the good graces of his religious group.

Fasting was formerly quite common in the Freedmen churches, but at present Scipio is the only group that still retains the custom. They

fast on each of the four Fridays preceding Christmas. In former years it was customary to fast on each Friday preceding the serving of the Lord's Supper, prior to any important church event such as ordaining deacons, and fasts were usually held in conjunction with extensive prayer services when it was thought that church spirit was ebbing low. It is also interesting that Scipio is the only native church which still holds an annual "camp meeting," or yearly revival. In former years it was customary for each of the churches to hold an intensive week-long revival each year.

Although there are no urban churches which the Freedmen refer to as "native", many Freedmen living in town attend the local baptist church nearest them, hence brief mention should be made concerning the differences found in urban as opposed to rural churches.

Urban churches, such as those found in Wewoka, differ from the native, or rural churches in the following respect: urban churches do not seat men on one side and women on the other, but both sexes sit as one large group; urban churches utilize music; and on the average urban services are a little less emotional than are the rural services. Particularly are the urban ministers less energetic than the rural pastors. In this respect it is interesting that both State Colored and Freedmen ministers preach in churches which are predominantly the opposite from the group which they represent, and in each case there appears to be an individual adjustment on the part of the minister in order to conform to the immediate group. For instance, a minister perhaps officiates in an urban church one Sunday, and the next Sunday he will preach to a rural congregation, in each case modifying or expanding his technique to the desires of his followers.



Urbanites often refer to the rural churches as being of the "hell fire and brimstone" type, whereas they think of their own church as being a little more sophisticated. This is particularly true in churches claiming an educated following, with emphasis often placed on the fact that a certain minister has been "school trained."

## CHAPTER XI

### CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

The course of Freedmen history can be significantly divided into three time periods: the pre-Civil War era, during which time they became established with the Seminole Indians in Florida, eventually arriving in Oklahoma; the post-Civil War period, from 1865 through Oklahoma statehood in 1907; and the statehood period from 1907 to the present day.

The pre-Civil War era is characterized by the many slaves who fled their White Colonial masters, seeking refuge in Spanish Florida. Under Spanish rule the escaped slaves, or Exiles as they were frequently called, were granted complete freedom, permitted to choose land for their personal use, and to pursue their lives as they wished. At the same time there were many Indians, particularly from the Creek group, who were coming into Florida. Many of these Indians were also escapees from White slave masters, whereas others sought refuge in Spanish territory because of tribal differences. One group of Indians who split from the Creeks settled near an area largely inhabited by Exiles, and in view of the common basis for sympathetic association existing between these two races they eventually came together in a group ultimately known as the Seminoles.

Indians and Negroes lived together, and but for occasional cases of mild servitude on the part of the Negroes, the two races lived as one,

and intermarriage was not uncommon. As a result of intermarriages and close association in everyday life, social bonds between the two groups became increasingly stronger. Throughout a considerable period of time which saw the United States acquire Florida, thus opening the territory to White settlers out of the Colonies, Seminole Indians and Negroes fought side by side through two bitter wars against the United States, the ultimate result of which was the removal of the Seminole Tribe, Negroes included, to what is now the State of Oklahoma.

Upon arriving in Oklahoma the Seminole Indians and "their" Negroes became a constant source of trouble with neighboring tribes, all of which was brought about by the fact that Seminole Negroes were living in comparative freedom, and were essentially considered equals to the Seminole Indians. After considerable trouble, much of which resulted in direct fighting, various treaties were drawn up by the federal government in an attempt to settle the Seminole Tribe in an area where they would be free to live as they chose. However, the Civil War interrupted all plans, and the situation remained in a state of indecision until the completion of that war.

The post-Civil War era was initially characterized by the complete freedom granted all slaves, thus eliminating the source of trouble which had been plaguing the Seminole Tribe, and at the same time, in 1866 the Tribe was granted their own territory free from any outside interference. The Seminoles and "their" Freedmen immediately settled in their territory, what is now Seminole County, Oklahoma, with each group forming their own settlements. They continued the social bonds which had

characterized their pre-Civil War associations, and in addition, with the organization of the Seminole tribal council the Freedmen were divided into two bands and representatives from each of the bands were active in the council.

By the latter 1870's the Freedmen were divided into five communities, and into two flourishing band organizations. For all practical purposes they were members of the Seminole Tribe, participating in their ceremonies, stick ball games, intermarrying to a limited extent, and in general functioning as an integral part of the Seminole social system. During this period Freedmen subsistence was primarily hunting and fishing, with a limited amount of agriculture; one community, Turkey Creek, depended on cattle ranching for their existence.

Shortly after the period mentioned above, there began a gradual influx of a "foreign" colored group into the Freedmen area. Resentment against the incoming State Colored, as they became known, was pronounced, and at first the Freedmen would have little to do with this group. There were few intermarriages with these "foreigners", and those that did occur were looked upon with considerable disfavor. At the same time that the State Colored were entering the Seminole Territory, Whites were becoming more and more apparent in this area. By late in the 1890's when the Dawes Commission found by census that there were 865 Freedmen, the latter were still relatively hostile to the State Colored. The Freedmen were still living in their native settlements, had established a few churches, and still considered themselves associated with the Seminole Indians.

By treaty negotiated with the Dawes Commission the Freedmen re-

ceived land allotments in 1898, and by 1905 the federal government had classified the Freedmen "unrestricted", thus allowing them to negotiate for themselves in such matters as land disposal. Land grafters, White and State Colored, immediately moved in for the "kill" and began to acquire Freedmen land by various dubious methods.

The frustrating situation caused by the land "sharks" was more than doubled in 1907 when Oklahoma became a state, and in view of the resulting "Jim Crow" restrictions the Freedmen found their associations with the Seminole Indians had of necessity to be quickly modified. In effect they were suddenly "thrown" into close association with the State Colored group, and at the same time they were subjected to many new restrictions, most of which were founded on racial issues. Apparently the resulting situation created a state of disillusionment among the Freedmen, and as many of the older informants have stated to the author, "That statehood day wuz the beginnin of most of our troubles."

Indications are that the Freedmen of the older age group are of the opinion that had they not been "thrown" into their State Colored status by the advent of statehood, they could have retained their cultural ties with the Indian group, and the present discriminatory social sanctions which they are forced to endure would not have applied to them. This line of reasoning implies that many of the older Freedmen attribute social discrimination against their group to be the result of necessary associations with the State Colored people. Thus, the primary reason why the Freedmen group is rapidly losing recognition as a separate entity, is because they have of necessity become minority associates of the State

Colored. In view of the segregation laws of the State of Oklahoma, and the policy of the federal government whereby Freedmen have been removed from the jurisdiction of the Department of Interior, the Freedmen appear to have no alternative but to make a cultural adjustment to the State Colored.

In making this adjustment the Freedmen have retained several aspects of their pre-statehood social structure, many of which can be directly attributed to their Indian contacts. Chief among these has been the retention of the band organization, which at present is the primary contact between Freedmen and Seminole Indians. There are also many superstitions, particularly nokos oma, which have been retained by the group, and several aspects of Indian-Freedmen burial customs which have persisted to this day. This is particularly true of the wake institution and the customary doctoring of grave dirt; to a limited extent, the custom of friends and relatives coming to clean the deceased's house and clothing four days after death is still observed. Sofkey and gut sausage, which many of the Freedmen make today, are also considered typical Indian foods which the Freedmen have retained.

In effecting the dissolution of Freedmen-Indian contacts, and the corresponding Freedmen acceptance of State Colored social institutions, the church appears to have played a dominant role. This is one institution which afforded common grounds for both groups, and apparently was instrumental in helping to bridge the initial cultural gap between the Freedmen and the State Colored. Another major factor in bringing the two groups together has been the increased rate of marriage between younger people of the two factions. The tendency on the part of younger Freedmen

to negate the importance of former relations between the Freedmen and Seminoles is bringing the two groups closer together, in that younger Freedmen are not biased regarding intermarriage with the State Colored.

Indications are that in a relatively short time the Freedmen group will be completely submerged within the State Colored element, and that their group identification will be obliterated. However, it is the belief of the investigator that such will not be the case as long as the present older age group is still alive.

It is hoped that this survey will be of use to future students, and that, by pointing out some of the salient problems, it will provide the incentive for further investigation among the Seminole Freedmen. The author is of the opinion that the most important future study of this group should be one concerned with the acculturation of the Freedmen relative to their contacts with the Seminole Indians, State Colored and Whites. The following problems appear to warrant intensive study:

(1) Historically the Freedmen are a unique group. At an early date, as previously mentioned, they fled out of slavery into Florida, where they eventually became associated with the Seminole Indians. Although becoming somewhat acculturated to this group, indications are that the Freedmen were never completely culturally identified with the Seminoles. It appears that they accepted several aspects of the Seminole culture, perhaps those which were the most useful to them in their association with the latter group, but overall they appeared to retain much of their original culture. A complete insight into what has happened to this group would necessarily entail an investigation of the early acculturation

which they experienced from the Seminole Indians. Early Spanish and English documents might provide the necessary data.

(2) Another problem is that of the acculturation which the Freedmen have undergone as a result of their contact with the State Colored and Whites. This survey has adequately pointed out the Freedmen differences from the State Colored, and their feelings concerning the latter group and the Whites. A study of this situation would be particularly interesting in that acculturation from these two sources has been in a large part forced upon the Freedmen, rather than being actively desired by them as was partially the case with some features of Seminole culture.

(3) A comparative analysis of the three-way acculturation of the Seminole Freedmen is highly desirable. In the opinion of the author, although Freedmen culture appears to be very similar to that of the State Colored, and admittedly bears some resemblance to the Seminoles, there is a strong possibility that there are certain aspects of it which are unique to the Freedmen group. It is believed that an intensive investigation of Freedmen acculturation would reveal that the Freedmen are intermediate between the State Colored and Seminole cultures, with a more pronounced affiliation to the former.

Another problem which appears to be the result of acculturation, is the recent tendency for the Freedmen not only to move to urban areas, but for those people remaining in the rural communities to orient themselves to an urban center.

(4) A thorough study of Freedmen political organization might illustrate some processes of development of social groups. The conflicting situation found in Scipio where some of the older inhabitants were of



the opinion that they belonged to Joe Scipio's Band, when actually they belonged to the Dosa Barkas Band, opens up a possibility that further investigation might reveal an instance of incipient band formation among the Freedmen.

(5) The Freedmen data illustrate the problem of borrowing features of social organization such as the clan system of the Seminole. Certain aspects of the clan organization were taken on without being properly understood, because they were necessary for the participation of Freedmen in some phases of Seminole ceremonial life. On the other hand, the original Freedmen culture never had anything resembling a clan system, which prevented a proper assimilation of the overall functioning of the pattern.

(6) The Seminole Freedmen are only one of several Freedmen groups found in the State of Oklahoma. There are also Freedmen associated with the Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Cherokee Indian groups. A comparative study of the Freedmen in all of these groups should cast additional light on the problems previously presented.

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APPENDIX A

CURING FEVER WITH COLD BATH TREATMENT<sup>1</sup>

Once when I wuz 'bout eight or ten years old I got the "terrified" fever (malaria). I had it real bad like. Why, I wuz jus layin there wastin away, couldn't eat or nothin. Sometime I wuz even out'n my head, crazy like. My folks they had done tried everything, an finally my mother went to fetch the Indian doctor. Well, that doctor he come an see me where I wuz jus layin there in the bed so sick I wuz 'bout to die. I couldn't even move.

He jus look at me whilst I lay there, an then he taked a white root an put it in a pail of somethin, an I guess that root musta float, cause jus befo sunrise he tell me to git out'n the bed and git my clothes on. It wuz hard cause I wuz real sickly. I finally got 'em on, an he take me down to a little pond not far from our house. The doctor he make me wade out in the water clear up to my neck, an then he make me stay in that fix 'til the sun come up. We done this every mornin for four mornins. He cured me, an I hadn't had the terrified fever since.

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<sup>1</sup>Informant C.

APPENDIX B

"A STATE COLORED MAN SURE WITCHED ME"<sup>2</sup>

Once when I wuz jus a young man they wuz an Alabama colored man come into the country to set up a school. He didn't had no place to stay, so we fixed 'im up at my house with a room and some board. Well, I had a feller workin for me, a Freedmens, an I see right off that this Alabama colored man he don't like this haired (hired) hand of mine.

We went along fo quite a spell an nothin happen, but that school man he still actin awful strange. They wuz a white man what had a li'l store down the way, an he tole me I ought to git rid of that guy or some-day that school man wuz liable to kill all of us.

One day this State man went out somewheres an got him some okra, an brung it home with him. Now I'd never had okra in the house—wouldn't have a thing to do with it—got some of the slick, slimy stuff in some soup once, an it shore made me bad (sick). This southern man showed this okra to my wife, an she tole him she'd never fooled with the stuff, but she'd cook it fo him. He tole her no, that he wanted to cook it like he want it. He cook that okra hissself, an that evenin he ask the hired man if he want to eat some of it with him. The hired man he say "sure, I like the stuff." Well, jus as soon as he hired man eat it he get real spotted like, an real sickly. We wuz scared, an we know he needs a doctor real bad.

He didn't git no better, so we put him on the fust train to Shawnee so he could git a doctor. He tole me when he got on that train if'en he wuz not home by eight that evenin then I'd know he wuz 'bout ready to die. At eight that evenin he wuzn't home, so I know he must be 'bout ready to die. Well, 'bout eleven that night he come in on the local. Said the doctor had tole thim that somebody had poison him. Well, right off we know this State Colored man from Alabama had witched him. I went to that man an I tole him that he wuz goin to have to leave, to clear out, that I did'nt like that witch bizess. The hired man he tole that man that if'en they tangle agin he'd kill him fo sure.

That man, he left, an do you know that the very next mornin I

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<sup>2</sup>Informant E.

begin to swell all over. I guess he had jus got mad at me an decided to witch me too. I swell so I couldn't button my clothes aroun me. I had the boys hitch my buggy, an they took me to a State Colored woman doctor down the road a piece. She wuz suppose to know 'bout things like what had happen to me. When I got there she say she know that somethin wuz wrong an that I wuz comin to see her. She look at me good. My mouth feel like it is full of sand, but there wuz nothin in it that she could fine. I ask her if'en she could cure me, an she tole me to wait a minute. Well, she go in a room herself an read my fortune. She wuz a good fortune teller. She come out an tell me that I had a man roomin at my house, an that man he witched me. It would cost me fifteen dollars to git cured...but I tole her to op to it.

She gave me three kinds of powders, an tole me to take the fust one right then. I wuz supposed to take another kind the next night, an the last one the next night. She tole me when I take the second powder I'd feel like I wuz dyin, but that I wuzn't to mine that. Well, the next night when I take that second powder I did feel like wuz 'bout to die. I took that dose an I lost my breath from me, an I jumped right out in the middle of the floor afore I could git it back. I feel bad. The next night I take the third powder, an it didn't fect me like that.

Well, the next mornin I feel good agin, so I got up out'n my bed an went to the toilet. Do you know that when I went to the toilet there musta been a double-handful of worms come out'n me, jus like magots. That man had sure witched me good.

The ole woman doctor who give me that medicine tole me that ~~southern feller had gone to school down in Texas an learned that stuff.~~ She said they had a regular school down there where they learned people how to witch other people. I never know any of that stuff myself, but I guess I could have learned it if'en I had jus hung aroun with them kind of people enough. Them State Colored people they has a lot of that stuff amongst them, an they'll witch us Freedmens, an witch they own kind too.

The informant was very hesitant to tell this story to the author, and several times after starting it he appeared about ready to stop the discussion. He was rather nervous, and once or twice when the investigator attempted to jot down a note on the discussion, he appeared very flustered. As a result, no notes were taken during any of the conversations having to do with witchcraft or any other phase of superstition. In working with this particular informant it was necessary for the author to assume a non-committal attitude on the subject of witchcraft, although

it was evident that a slight profession of faith in the institution often kept the conversation in progress.