

STATE OF SEQUOYAH

The State of Sequoyah was the proposed name for a state to be established in the eastern part of present-day Oklahoma. In 1905, faced by proposals to end their tribal governments, Native Americans of the Five Civilized Tribes in Indian Territory proposed such a state as a means to retain some control of their land. Their intention was to have a state under Native American constitution and rule. The



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proposed state was named in honor of Sequoyah, the Cherokee who created a writing system in 1825 for the Cherokee language.

Native Americans held their land in common. No individual "owned" any of it. Individuals had the right to stake out an area for their use and build improvements upon it. The improvements were theirs to do with as they pleased. Under Cherokee law an individual could sell any improvements they made but the penalty for selling the land was death.

The Dawes Act, adopted by Congress in 1887, authorized the President of the United States to survey Indian tribal land and divide the land into allotments for individual Indians. The Act was named for its sponsor, Senator Henry L. Dawes of Massachusetts. The stated objective of the Dawes Act was to stimulate assimilation of Indians into American society. Individual ownership of land was seen as an essential step. The act also provided that the government would purchase Indian land excess to that needed for allotment and open it up for settlement by non-Indians.

The impact on Indians of the Dawes Act was negative. The act "was the culmination of American attempts to destroy tribes and their governments and to open Indian lands to settlement by non-Indians and to development by railroads." The important provisions of the Dawes act were:

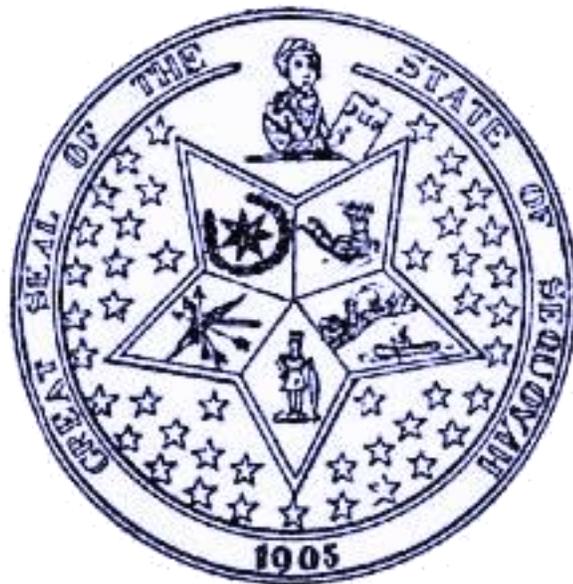
- 1) - A head of family would receive a grant of 160 acres, a single person or orphan under 18 years of age would receive a grant of 80 acres, and persons under the age of 18 would receive 40 acres each;
- 2) - The allotments would be held in trust by the U.S. Government for 25 years;
- 3) - Eligible Indians had four years to select their land; afterwards the selection would be made for them by the Secretary of the Interior;
- 4) - U.S. citizenship would be conferred upon allottees who abandoned their tribes and adopted "the habits of civilized life."

The Curtis Act of 1898 was an amendment to the United States Dawes Act that brought about the allotment process of lands of the Five Civilized Tribes of Indian Territory: the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Muscogee, Cherokee, and Seminole. These tribes had been previously exempt from the 1887 General Allotment Act, also known as the Dawes Act (also known as the Dawes Severalty Act, named for its sponsor and author Senator Henry Laurens Dawes). By effectively abolishing tribal courts and tribal governments in the Indian Territory of Oklahoma, effective March 4, 1906.

The Act, officially titled the "Act for the Protection of the People of Indian Territory", is named for Charles Curtis, its original author. He was of Kansa, Osage, Potawatomi, and French descent, was raised on the Kansas Reservation, and was a member of the United States House of Representatives.

Although Charles Curtis was the author of the original draft of the Act, by the time the bill HR 8581 had gone through five revisions in committees in both the House of Representatives and the Senate; there was little of Curtis' original draft left to become law. In his own hand-written biography, Curtis noted that he was unhappy with the final version of the Curtis Act.

In a convention at Eufaula in 1902, representatives of the Five Civilized Tribes started a drive towards statehood for the Indian Territory. In 1903, the delegates met again to organise a constitutional convention. The Constitutional Convention met at Muskogee on August 21, 1905, presided over by General Pleasant Porter, Principal Chief of the Creek Nation. Vice-presidents were the high representatives of each of the five 'civilized tribes': William C. Rogers (Cherokee), William H. Murray (Chickasaw), Green McCurtain (Choctaw), John Brown (Seminole) and Charles N. Haskell (Creek).



The convention drafted a constitution, drew up a plan of organization for the government, put together a map showing the counties to be established, and elected delegates to go to the United States Congress to petition for statehood. Two of the "hot" topics of discussion of the convention were Woman Suffrage and prohibition. The Cherokee delegation wished to allow women the right to vote, but the rest were

against it. The convention's proposals were put to a referendum in the Indian Territory, where they were overwhelmingly endorsed.

The Sequoyah delegation received a cool reception in Washington. Eastern politicians, fearing the admission of two more Western states, with a relative increase in political power, put pressure on the U.S. President, Theodore Roosevelt. He ruled that the Indian and Oklahoma territories would be granted statehood only as a combined state.