***The Spread of Freemasonry Among***
***the American Indians of the United States***

by

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On January 20, 1791, a curious assembly of Americans appeared before the brethren of the *Prince of Wales Lodge #259* in London, England. The minutes of the Lodge recorded the event:

> William Augustus Bowles, a Chief of the Creek Nation, whose love of Masonry has induced him to wish it may be introduced into the interior part of America, whereby the cause of humanity and brotherly love will go hand in hand with the native courage of the Indians, and by the union lead them on to the highest title that can be conferred on man, to be both good and great, was proposed by the Right Worshipful Master, with the Approbation of the Prince to be admitted an Honorary Member of this Lodge. He was seconded by the Secretary, and received the unanimous applause of the whole Lodge.[1]

Though Bowles was not actually an American Indian, he was considered among the Chiefs of the Creek Nation by the Indians themselves and was also appointed by the Grand Lodge of England to the "provincial grand master of the Creek, Cherokee, Chickasaw, and Choctaw Indians."[2] Bowles was accompanied by three Cherokee and two Creek headman and it is reported that they visited the Grand Lodge of England as well as several other lodges.

Though Bowles and his associates were "lionized by London society in 1791," he and his associates were neither first Native American Freemasons nor even the first Indian Freemasons to visit England. That honor belongs to Joseph Brant (Thayendanegea), the principal War Chief of the Mohawk Nation who also translated the

[1] William R Denslow, *Freemasonry and the American Indian* (St Louis: Missouri Lodge of Research, 1956, 125.

[2] Denslow, 58.

Gospel of Mark and the Book of Common Prayer into his language. He received his degrees in *Hiram's Cliftonian Lodge No. 417* at some point before the onset of the Revolutionary War. When he sailed to England in 1776, Brant was presented to the court, wined and dined at the expense of the government, and had his picture painted by one of the outstanding artists of England. The British government, who sought to bestow degrees and Masonic titles as a means of soliciting support among influential colonists pulled out all stops for Brant; it is given on good authority that Brant received his Masonic apron at the hands of King George the Third.[3]

The British appeal worked perfectly. Brant spent much of his time trying to amass the support of his people, but many natives resented his fidelity to the British Crown. In fact, revisionists often hold Brant accountable for dividing his people and destroying the League of Six Nations. While nations such as the Mohawks and the Seneca sided with Britain; the Oneida and the Tuscarora supported the Americans throughout most of the Revolutionary period.[4] Even though he sided with the British, his loyalties were never unclear; on several occasions, Brant spared the lives of fellow Freemasons and yet enemies when at the point of despair, they presented "the great mystic appeal to a Mason in the hour of danger." [5]

In case it has missed your grasp, we appear to have plunged right into the deep with respect to the spread of Freemasonry among American Indians; that is with intent. We are not addressing "Indian Masonry." There have been numerous treatises written the

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[3] Denslow, 101-102.

[4] History Television [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation], "Joseph Brant" [http://www.historytelevision.ca/chiefs/htmlen/mohawk/sp_brant.asp] (Accessed September 13, 2003)

[5] Sidney Hayden, in Cornelius Moore, *Leaflets of Masonic Biography, (*n.p., 1863), 27.

attempt to find relationships between the philosophies and practices of the indigenous peoples and their corresponding principles and practices within Freemasonry. There have also been quite a few discussions of how travelers to the Western Frontier encountered native peoples who hailed them with the signs and symbols of the brotherhood. Equally so, many persons have found affinities between Indian "secret societies" and "fraternal orders" and those of Freemasonry; even the great Arthur C. Parker, himself a Freemason, stated that:

> The Masonry of the Indians as philosophers dealing with moral truths grew out of their experiences with nature and the actions of humankind. The wise men of the tribes knew that a band of men pledged to uphold morality and to enact rituals its advantage would constitute a dynamic influence.[6]

However, in his work *Indian Masonry*, Robert Wright comes to the following conclusion:

> There us no Indian Masonry in that small and narrow sense which most of us think of; that is one who pays lodge dues, wears an apron like ours gives signs so nearly like ours that we find him perforce a Mason in any degree or degrees we know, and which degrees we are prone to watch, just as we do a procession of historical floats, which casually interest us, and maybe a little more so if we can but secure a place at the head of the procession, the true meaning of which we have but a faint idea about. This makes our own Masonry as meaningless as the interpretation of Indian signs by an ignorant trapper. [7]

What we are addressing is the spread of Freemasonry among those persons of American Indian heritage and brought up within the culture and traditions of the indigenous peoples of the Americas in general and the United States in particular. It is quite important to stress at this point that there is no such thing as an "American Indian" in the generic sense in which they have easily definable common traits and characteristics any more than we can state that the Irish, the German, and Italian have the same. The native peoples of the Americas had thousands of mutually unintelligible languages and

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[6] Arthur C. Parker, *American Indian Freemasonry* (Buffalo, *Buffalo Consistory*, A. A. S. R. N. M. J. U. S. A., 1919), 36p.

[7] Robert Wright, *Indian Masonry*. Ayer Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago, IL., 1905.

distinct social, political, and cultural practices that defined and often set themselves in opposition to other indigenous persons in the midst and from afar. Today there are about 500 American Indian peoples, each with its own language and cultural traditions rooted in their historical experience with their surrounding environment, the creatures that inhabit it, and whatever divine force they believe made it all possible.

Why would persons of Native American descent wish to become associated with the philosophical traditions and ritual practices of Freemasonry? To me, there is a very simple answer -- for the very same reasons that every other person who has chosen to become affiliated with the craft. I will no more attempt to articulate these reasons for you that I would ask you to expose the inner workings of your own heart and soul to a curious and exploratory, but often ignorant, interloper. What is important is that countless American Indians across history have chosen to become Freemasons and continue to do so even unto this very day. They are our brothers in every sense of the word and whatever political, religious, and even cultural differences that they express from us are eclipsed by the three great lights of our brotherhood. There can be but one simple answer to this question as to why Native Americans join our brotherhood…

> "so to act, that the principle of his actions may be exalted to a law of nature; to act in that manner only in which he thinks that He who has given to nature its immutable laws, would have compelled him to act, had He chosen to introduce compulsion into the realm of mind, in order to realize his design."[8]

That they have done so is indisputable. Some of the most important leaders of the various nations that make up our indigenous peoples have chosen to become a part of Freemasonry. Tecumseh, a Shawnee prophet who reportedly "was made a Mason while on a visit to Philadelphia," was the leader of a Pan-Indian movement in the eighteenth century. Alexander McGillivray, a mixed blood leader of the Muskogee, and Louis Annance, of the Alnombak people of the Abenaki Nation, were skilled political leaders. Red Jacket, famous orator of the Seneca and leader of the traditionalist resistance among the Iroquois, was a Freemason. His nephew, General Ely S. Parker, was General U.S. Grant's Adjutant and drew up the conditions of surrender at Appomattox. He went on to

[8] The Masonic Monthly, "The Lesson Taught By The Three Great Lights" [http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/three_great_lights.htm] (Accessed September 13, 2003).

be the First American Indian Commissioner of Indian Affairs under Grant. Leaders on both sides of the Civil War in the Indian Territory including John Ross, Opothle Yahola, Elias Boudinot, John Jumper, Peter Pitchlyn, Stand Watie, the last Confederate general to surrender. Coming forward into history, we find Carlos Montezuma, doctor and spokesman for the Yavapai Indian; Arthur C. Parker, Scientist, Scholar and Literary Figure from the Seneca Nation; Philip DeLoria, Sioux leader and Episcopal Priest; and last but certainly not least Will Rogers, American humorist and philanthropist. [9] Though many of these names may not be familiar to you, they can be considered among the illuminati of the First Nations of the United States.

The story of the first American Indian Freemasonic lodges has yet another interesting aspect. J. Fred Latham, in *The Story of Oklahoma Masonry,* reports that not only were Native "chiefs" made Masons in the East, but that because both the Native American leaders and the military officers who removed them during the "Trail of Tears" were Masons, it made the process of removal "more orderly."[10] General Winfield Scott, a Freemason, who presided over the removal of the Cherokee, gave explicit orders to pursue this distasteful activity with civility, "Every possible kindness...must therefore be shown by the troops, and if, in the ranks, a despicable individual should be found capable of inflicting a wanton injury or insult on any Cherokee man, woman, or child, it is hereby made the special duty of the nearest good officer or man, instantly to interpose, and to seize and consign the guilty wretch to the severest penalty of the laws.[11] When asked by the leaders of the Cherokee Nation to postpone removal because of drought and sickness among the Cherokee, General Scott again showed compassion for his fraternal brothers. Negotiating with General Scott was Chief John Ross, a Master Mason in good standing with the Olive Branch Lodge of the Free and Accepted Masons in Jasper, Tennessee.[12]

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[9] Patrick Minges, "Famous Native American Freemasons" [http://www.people.virginia.edu/~pnm3r/freemasons/] (Accessed September 13, 2003).

[10] Latham, 2.

[11] Winfield Scott quoted in Grace Steele Woodward, *The Cherokees* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 204.

[12] Woodward, 214.

Finally, when it appeared that his troops could not handle the process of removal as well as the Cherokee themselves, Scott agreed to a plea from Chief John Ross to allow the Cherokee to manage removal themselves. When Andrew Jackson, Former Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Tennessee, heard of Scott's brotherly relief, he wrote, "I am so feeble I can scarcely wield my pen, but friendship dictates it and the subject excites me. Why is it that the scamp Ross is not banished from the notice of this administration?"[13]

Upon arrival in the new territory, former members of the Freemasonic lodges from the East began to organize the craft in their new home. J. Fred Latham describes this particular phenomenon in *The Story of Oklahoma Masonry*:

> The history of the Indian Territory, and indeed that of Freemasonry in the present state of Oklahoma, is so closely interwoven with that of the Five Civilized Tribes it would be difficult -- almost impossible -- and entirely undesirable to attempt to separate them. [14]

A number of the ministers, merchants and military personnel were members of the craft. Along with the many Indians inducted into the craft, they began to have meetings throughout the Indian Territory. These meetings moved from very informal social groupings into fellowship meetings where Masons met and enjoyed fraternal discussions. Applications for authority to organize lodges in several places were made, but urgent domestic problems prevented the satisfactory organization of lodges. According to J. Fred Latham, members of the craft took an active part in the stabilization of the community through the organization of law enforcement and through their activity in the political affairs of the Five Nations.[15]

In 1848, a group of Cherokee Freemasons made application to Grand Master R.H. Pulliam of the Grand Lodge of Arkansas and were granted a dispensation to formulate a "blue lodge" in the Cherokee capital [16] Brother George Moser, Secretary and Historian of

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[13] John P. Brown, *Old Frontiers* (Kingsport: Tennessee, 1938), 511.

[14] J. Fred Latham, *The Story of Oklahoma Masonry* (Oklahoma City: Grand Lodge of Oklahoma, 1957), 8.

[15] Latham, 5.

[16] Albert Mackey describes a "blue lodge" as: "A symbolic Lodge, in which the first three degrees are conferred, is so called from the color of its decorations." A "blue lodge" is the common determination for

the Cherokee lodge presents the information as follows, "Facts as taken from the proceedings of the Grand Lodge Free and Accepted Masons of Arkansas show that the Committee on Charters and Dispensations did, on November 7, 1848 at the hour of 9:00 a.m., recommend that a charter be granted to 'Cherokee Lodge' at Tahlequah, Cherokee Nation, and that it be given the number '21'".[17] The officers were sworn in at Supreme Court Headquarters on Keetoowah Street on July 12, 1849; it was the first lodge of Indian Freemasons established in the United States.[18]

In 1852, the Cherokee National Council donated several lots in Tahlequah to be used jointly by the Masonic Lodge and the Sons of Temperance for the construction of a building to house their respective organizations. The building was erected in 1853, and owned jointly by the two organizations; the Sons of Temperance [19] occupied the first floor and Cherokee Lodge #21 occupied the second floor. The lodge building was used for a number of community services, including lodge meetings, temperance meetings, educational instruction, and church meetings; later, because of the noise, both organizations used the upper floor, leaving the lower floor for church services and public meetings.[20]

Freemasonry flourished among the Native Americans in Indian Territory, leading the Grand Master of Arkansas to comment upon his "red brethren" in 1855:

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this lodge as opposed to lodges that grant higher degrees such as the Scottish Rites or York Rites. (Mackey, 120)

[17] George Moser, quoted in Latham, 6.

[18] T.L. Ballenger, *History of Cherokee Lodge #10*, T.L. Ballenger Papers, Ayer Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago, IL., 5; J. Fred Latham, *The Story of Oklahoma Masonry* (Oklahoma City: Grand Lodge of Oklahoma, 1978) 5- 8.

[19] The Sons of Temperance modeled its constitution on those of the Freemasons and Odd Fellows and based their organization around simple initiation rituals. As time progressed, the Sons of Temperance and organizations such as it developed increasingly complicated rituals even further aligned with those of the Freemasons. (Carnes, 8)

[20] Ballenger, 6. It is important to note that the Cherokee Indian Baptist Association, consisting of six "colored churches" held its first organizational meeting in the Cherokee Masonic Lodge in 1870. [J.M. Gaskins, *History of Black Baptists in Oklahoma* (Oklahoma City: Messenger Press, 1992), 118)]

> All over the length and breadth of our state the (Masonic) Order is flourishing, and amongst our red Brethren, in the Indian Territory, it is taking deep hold, and now embraces a goodly number of Lodges and Brethren. The members of these Lodges compare very favorably with their pale-face neighbors. In fact, it is reported of them that they exemplify practically the Masonic teachings and ritual by living in the constant discharge of those charities and moral virtues so forcibly inculcated in our lectures, thereby demonstrating to all that Masonry is not only speculative, but that it is a living practical reality; of great utility to the human race, and of eminent service to a social community.[21]

Freemasonry was indeed "taking deep hold." From the very first lodge formed among the Cherokee in Tahlequah, the brotherhood had spread among missionaries, merchants, and Native Americans throughout Indian Territory. Reverend John Bertholf, member of Cherokee Lodge #21, relocated to the Creek Nation and was appointed Superintendent of the Asbury Mission in Eufaula in 1859. George Butler, government agent and junior warden of Cherokee Lodge #21, became one of the charter members of the military base lodge at Fort Gibson Lodge #35. Doaksville Lodge #52 was organized in the Choctaw Nation and led by Chief Peter Pitchlyn, Sam Garvin, Basil Laflore, plantation owner Robert Jones, and also American Board missionary Cyrus Kingsbury. Walter Scott Adair, Worshipful Master of Cherokee Lodge #21, left Lodge #21 to organize Flint Lodge #74 near the Baptist Mission deep in Keetoowah country in the southeastern corner of the Cherokee Nation.

Joseph Coodey, nephew of John Ross and Junior Warden of Cherokee Lodge #21, resettled in the Creek Nation at North Fork Town near Eufala.[22] In the Creek Nation, Benjamin Marshall, George Stidham, and Samuel Checote, all affiliates of the Asbury Mission, formed Muscogee Lodge #93 at the Creek Agency near the border of the Cherokee Nation. One of the early members of Muscogee Lodge #93 was a prominent

[21] Ballenger, 5.

[22] G.W. Grayson, *A Creek Warrior for the Confederacy: The Autobiography of Chief G.W. Grayson,* W. David Biard, ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 127.

traditional leader (and relative of Asi Yahola, i.e., Osceola ) [23] by the name of Opothle Yahola.[24]

When the winds of the Civil War hit the Indian Territory, it sent a bitter chill through the lodges. In 1855 Brother John Ross, the Chief of the Cherokee Nation, discovered the emergence of "a secret society organized in Delaware and Saline Districts" dedicated to the promotion of slavery and the removal of abolitionist interests from the Cherokee Nation.[25] According to Ross, at the core of this "sinister plot" were so-called "Blue Lodges" established in the Indian Territory by officials from Arkansas. [26] Many of the pro-slavery factions in the Cherokee Nation had ties to Arkansas and it was believed by Ross that these elements were using the "Blue Lodges" associated with the Arkansas Grand Lodge to "create excitement and strife among the Cherokee people."[27] The "Blue Lodges" were so closely affiliated with the Southern Methodist church that some considered them to be the spiritual arm of the organization, "The [Southern] Methodists take slavery by the hand, encourage it, speak in its favor, and brand all those who oppose it with opprobrious epithets. As they support slavery, of course slavery supports them."[28]

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[23] Asi Yahola (Osceola) was a prominent leader of the African American/ Seminole resistance movement in Florida. He was married to an African American runaway slave. Some reporters state the cause of the Second Seminole War was the seizure of Osceola's African wife by merchants who sought to sell her back into slavery. Osceola was finally murdered following treachery by federal authorities. In a practice which has become common among Florida authorities, his brain was "donated to science" and kept on a shelve for many years.

[24] Denslow, 70-75. For information on Opothle Yahola, see John Bartlett Meserve, "Chief Opothleyahola" *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 10 (Winter, 1931): 439-452; Clee Woods, "Oklahoma's Great Opothle Yahola" *North South Trader* 4, (January-February): 22-36; Mrs. Clement Clay, "Recollections of Opothleyahola" *Arrow Points* 4 (February 1922): 35-36.

[25] John Ross to Evan Jones, May 5, 1855, "Correspondence of Missionaries to Native Americans, [microform], 1825-1865," American Baptist Historical Society, Rochester, N.Y.

[26] I use the term "Blue Lodges" because that is what most of the scholars, including McLoughlin and Mooney use to describe these lodges. However, the fact that Ross was a Freemason meant that he understood the term "Blue Lodge" quite well and would not have used it unadvisedly. In all probability, these "Blue Lodges" were Freemasonic lodges tied to the Grand Lodge of Arkansas.

[27] John Ross to Evan Jones, May 5, 1855, "Correspondence of Missionaries to Native Americans, [microform], 1825-1865," American Baptist Historical Society, Rochester, N.Y.

[28] John B. Jones, July 12, 1858, "Correspondence of Missionaries to Native Americans, [microform], 1825-1865," American Baptist Historical Society, Rochester, N.Y.

History records the “Blue Lodges” as being the seat of the pro-slavery movement, but this appears to be an inaccuracy rooted in a too-convenient association of the “Blue Lodges” with the pro-slavery movement. It is easy to see from the membership roll of Cherokee Lodge #21 that there were also members of the Ross Party who belonged to these so-called “Blue Lodges.” It seems that there was a split within the Freemasonic lodges within Indian Territory along the lines of party affiliation related to the efforts of the Grand Lodge of Arkansas to use the lodges to promote the issue of “Southern Rights.”[29] Some members of the lodges were opposed to the efforts of the Arkansas Grand Lodge, as revealed in a later discussion by Lodge historian T. L. Ballenger:

> There seems to have developed some misunderstanding between the mother Lodge and Cherokee Lodge at that time, the exact nature of which the records fail to reveal: possibly it was a coolness that had grown out of different attitudes toward the war. The Cherokees were divided, some of them fighting for the North and some for the South. It happened that the leading members of the Lodge sympathized with the North.[30]

As a result of the split within the lodges within Indian Territory or perhaps precipitating the split, some of the members of the "Blue Lodges" became associated with a secessionist secret society by the name of the "Knights of the Golden Circle." Other members of the "Blue Lodges" within the Indian Territory became associated with a traditionalist secret society in the Cherokee Nation entitled the Keetoowah Society. Throughout the duration of the Civil War, these two competing “secret societies” fought tooth and nail for the fate of the Indian territory and the bitter struggle between these two

[29] This opinion is supported by evidence that the Grand Lodge of Arkansas refused to recognize the charters of many of the lodges in Indian Territory following the cessation of the Civil War. In addition, the Grand Lodge of Arkansas considered many of the charters “forfeited” and would only grant the lodges new charters if the were reorganized under a different name. Cherokee Lodge #21 became Cherokee Lodge #10 when it was reorganized after repeated attempts for recognition in 1877. Fort Gibson Lodge # 35 became Alpha Lodge #12 in 1878. Flint Lodge #74 became Flint Lodge # 11 in 1876.(Starr, 185). Muskogee Lodge #93 and Choctaw Lodge #52 also forfeited their charter following the Civil War. The Grand Lodge which refused the recognition was led by J.S. Murrow, the “Father of Oklahoma Masonry,” a Baptist minister who was a Confederate States Indian Agent during the Civil War. (Latham,10; West, 103)

[30] T.L. Ballenger, *History of Cherokee Lodge #10*, T.L. Ballenger Papers, Ayer Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago, IL., 12; “Pin Indians” in Robert Wright, *Indian Masonry*, (n.p., 1905) Ayer Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago, IL., 105.

groups was carried out with a ferocity that left not even innocent persons unharmed. The effect upon the Indian Territory was devastating:

> The events of the war brought to them more of the desolation and ruin than perhaps to any other community. Raided and sacked alternately, not only by Confederate and Union forces, but also by the vindictive ferocity and hate of their own factional divisions, their country became a blackened and desolate waste. Driven from comfortable homes, exposed to want, misery, and the elements, they perished like sheep in a snowstorm. Their houses, fences, and other improvements were burned, their orchards destroyed, their flocks and herds were slaughtered or driven off, their schools broken up, their schoolhouses given to the flames, and their churches and public buildings subjected to a similar fate; and that entire portion of their country which had been occupied by their settlements was distinguishable from the virgin prairie only by the scorched and blackened chimneys and the plowed but now neglected fields.[31]

When the war was over and nations such as the Cherokee needed healing, they elected Bro. William Potter Ross to be the new Principal Chief of the Reunified nation. One of the founding members of Cherokee Lodge #21, he was to go on to become the Worshipful Master of the lodge in 1851 -- a time before the lodge would split over the issues that ultimately led to the Civil War. In addition, William P. Ross had been the leader of the reconciliation of the Cherokee Nation following the Treaty of 1846:

> He (Ross) and the other headmen of the Cherokee nation were at the capital to arrange a treaty made necessary by the late enforced removal of their tribe from Georgia to the Indian Territory. These headmen were arrayed in two hostile factions, and the negotiations were at a standstill. But at one of the meetings of Federal Lodge (Federal Lodge #1, Washington, D.C.), the rival leaders, all Freemasons, were brought together by the exertions of Worshipful Master S. Yorke and other members, and the treaty was successfully completed.[32]

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[31] Charles Royce, "Cherokee Nation," *Fifth Annual Report (*Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of Ethnology, n.d.), 376.

[32] "History of Federal Lodge #1," quoted in Denslow, 183. William Potter Ross was raised to the Third Degree on April 25, 1848 in Federal Lodge #1 in Washington, D.C. [Denslow, 183].

In spite of their political, social, and party differences, one of the key elements that had brought together the disparate elements of Cherokee Society had been the interest in and promotion of brotherhood by the Freemasonic lodges in the Cherokee Nation. Ross used this background to his advantage. Many of the leaders of the Keetoowah Society and the Knights of the Golden Circle were former Freemasons in the lodges of the Indian Territory. Many of the government agents, military officials, religious authorities, and influential citizens of the Indian Territory were also Freemasons. That William P. Ross was a power broker and a conciliatory force in the Cherokee Nation under the auspices of the Freemasonic brotherhood is a factor that cannot be ignored.[33]

However, Freemasonry among Native Americans is not just an historic phenomenon. In Oklahoma today, there are Freemasonic lodges in nearly every Indian Nation; the Order of the Eastern Star is also quite popular. The Oklahoma Indian Degree team is perhaps the most well-traveled of group of Freemasons in the United States; they tour the nation constantly and sometimes internationally. Dressed in the full regalia of their American Indian heritage, they raise Masons to the third degree in our ancient and esoteric ritual.

The Oklahoma Masonic Indian Degree Team was organized in 1948 after the death of Brother Will Rogers. The team currently consists of 15 active members, 11 of which are Past Masters. Nine recognized tribes are represented: Apache, Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, Oneida, Osage, Ottawa, Seminole, and Sycamore. States visited include: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois,

[33] William R. Denslow, in his work *Freemasonry and the American Indian,* describes Ross's influence, "In later years, passions broke all bounds and some of the darkest pages of Cherokee history were written. In retrospect, the influence and principles of Freemasonry can be seen as the greatest healer of these old wounds within the Cherokee family. This fact is emphasized by the thought of Chief William P. Ross, presiding in the East over a Cherokee lodge, while the men around the altar would have thought it a patriotic duty to slay him only a short time before. The roster of the Cherokee lodge is a revelation to the student of the times, and, if it were not for its undisputed authority, it would hardly be believed in this generation." (Denslow, 69).

Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachuetts, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York and Texas. Oklahoma lodges represented are: Broken Arrow #423, Cherokee #10, Delta #425, Daylight #542, Dustin #336, Ottawa #492, Sapulpa #170 and Skiatook #416.

One of the most interesting of all groups of Indian Freemasons is the Akdar Shrine Indian Dance Unit of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Its members come from diverse nations such as the Cherokee, Navajo, Quapaw, Creek, Shawnee, Apache, and Kiowa. What unites these men of divergent nations are two things – their love of Freemasonry and their love of traditional forms of dance. They regularly perform traditional dances at special events, pow-wows, and shrine circuses in Oklahoma and throughout the Southwest and Midwest.

The Akdar Indians, being the only all-Native American unit in Shrinedom, not only share a common heritage, but also share a common bond with their fellow Nobles everywhere — to help spread the word about the free medical care offered by Shriners Hospitals for Children.

More than 40 years ago, in 1954, the unit was established as the Akdar Indian Patrol with about 20 members; today, Akdar Indians' 50 members represent six Shrine Temples and 20 Tribes from North America. Representatives of the five civilized tribes of Oklahoma — Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Seminole — along with the Comanche and Apache Indians, make up the majority of unit members. According to Bill Tyndall, an Omaha Indian from Akdar Temple, a recent change in the unit's by-laws allows Nobles from any Shrine Temple to join, as long as they are Native Americans.

Not only do they participate in many of the Temple's fund-raising activities for Shriner’s Hospitals, but they also raise money by hosting an annual Indian dinner with Native American food, and an arts and crafts show. They put on educational dances, explaining the types of dances and the clothing worn by each dancer.

Throughout the year, members perform for the general public and for various Shrine functions. Their most enjoyable performances, according to Tyndall, are the ones held at the Shriner's Hospitals. "It's there that we get to see first-hand what our hospitals are all about and we can give the kids an up-close look at real Indians and the costumes that they wear," he explained.

A unique aspect of the Akdar Indians is that the Nobles are often joined by their family members — women and children — when they perform some of their traditional dances, especially at the Shriner's Hospitals. One of the members has commented that one of the greatest benefits of being in the unit is being able to help children while educating others about his culture. "We love to promote Native American culture," he remarked. "The non-Indian sees us as we are shown on TV. But what we are trying to do is educate people about what we do and what we are about." That is, of course, in addition to informing the public that Shriner's Hospitals provide free medical care to children in need.

As we meet together here today in Columbus on this January day some two hundred plus years after Brother Bowles and his collected Indians met before their astonished British brethren, another collection of Americans is again meeting a body of astonished British brethren. Next Monday, the Oklahoma Masonic Indian Degree Team will performing demonstrations at the Surrey Secretaries' Golden Jubilee Lodge No. 9764 meeting at Surbiton and at a special meeting to be held at Croydon in the Province of Surrey England on Tuesday 27th January 2004. Just as their brothers some two hundred years ago welcomed these unusual brethren from across the seas, these modern day travelers will be equally greeted.

Rest assured that the more we learn about Native Americans and their involvement in Freemasonry, the more that we learn that their interests, inclinations, and excitement about the craft spurs from the same quest for wisdom and enlightenment that dwells within us all. Though it easy enough to put upon fanciful notions about secret signs, secret societies, and the incorporation of "pagan" rituals and symbols into the ancient and accepted order, nothing could be further than the truth. Such creations have

always been the practices of small minds and have often been the bane of the existence of reasonable and intelligent practitioners of all of the higher orders of religion and philosophy. The world will be a better place when we put myths such as these to rest.