

## Historical overview provides good start for inquisitive readers

*The Creeks*, Michael Green, Chelsea House Publishers, 1990, 128 pages

Both the strengths and the weaknesses of this short overview of Mvskoke history are illustrated on its front cover.

A color photograph shows an attractive beaded velvet cap made in the 1820s by an unnamed Mvskoke. The cap was presented to a U.S. Army general who visited the Muscogee Nation on a diplomatic mission. This book includes a number of excellent photographs and other graphic illustrations that add a great deal to the historical narrative.

Unfortunately, the author has focused his attention on events of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, providing readers with very little information about Mvskoke life since Oklahoma statehood.

Green begins his overview of Mvskoke history by quoting from a traditional origin account recorded in 1735 — the oldest documented version of Mvskoke origins. He then suggests how archaeological research can be used to gain additional insights on what scholars call the Mississippian culture of the southeast. Information about early Mvskoke culture can also be found in records left by Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto, who led his army through Mvskoke territory in 1539 and 1540.

Mvskokes had little interaction with other Europeans until 1670, when the English founded Charles Town as the capital of the Carolina colony. This marked the beginning of a period of extensive trade between English merchants and the people called "Creek" Indians, who were known for building their towns next to rivers and streams. Mvskoke communities gradually became part of an expanding global market in deerskins — and of a commercial agricultural economy that relied on slave labor.

Mvskoke society prospered under these circumstances, but the power of the English, French, and Spanish also grew as trade flourished and immigration increased. In 1720, tribal town leaders formed a national council in hopes that a unified policy of action toward the colonists would help protect Mvskoke interests.

It became harder for the Confederated Mvskokvike to maintain political power after England drove France and Spain out of North America in 1763. International relations grew even more difficult after the Revolutionary War established U.S. independence two decades later. England and the United States were unable or unwilling to control their own citizens, who repeatedly encroached

on Mvskoke territory.

Mixed-blood Alexander McGillivray rose to prominence during this challenging period. He encouraged tribal town leaders to strengthen the Council and to negotiate treaties protecting Mvskoke interest. But McGillivray's untimely death left a political vacuum allowing tribal factions to grow, ultimately weakening the confederacy.

These political factions contributed to the losses suffered by Mvskokes during the Red Stick War, the Removal era, and the Civil War.

Green devotes more than half of this book to events of the nineteenth century. Indian agent Benjamin Hawkins spent two decades working to change Mvskoke political and cultural traditions, introducing legislative districts and mission schools. Traditional leaders opposed these changes and the Red Stick War ensued (1813-14), which gave frontier settlers an excuse to invade Muscogee territory. General Andrew Jackson led the attack. He later became president of the U.S. He led the effort to drive the Mvskokes out of their southeastern homeland also.

Those Mvskoke surviving removal reestablished their tribal towns in Indian Territory. The National Council reconvened in 1840 and the people were soon prospering.

By 1861, the war between the states had divided the Mvskokvike again. Some Mvskokes supported the Confederates, while others fled north with Opotheyahola. After the war ended, Mvskoke leaders attempted to unify their people by drafting a constitution and legal code.

Mvskokes quickly rebuilt their towns and farms. But by the end of the 19th century, their lives were increasingly disrupted by the railroads, cattle ranching, and noncitizen intruders pouring into Indian Territory.

The Curtis Act of 1898 forced individuals to accept allotments of land, and the Dawes Commission began compiling an official citizenship roll. Chitto Harjo led a group of Mvskokes opposed to these changes and established a traditional government at Hickory Ground. Pleasant Porter led other tribal governments in proposing to organize Indian Territory and seek admission to the union as a new state called Sequoyah. Neither effort was successful, and Oklahoma was admitted to the union in 1907.

Green describes the widespread fraud committed against Mvskokes following allotment and briefly mentions a few other twentieth-century developments. But clearly, he is not as interested in contemporary Mvskoke

life as he is in the past. This bias is understandable, since Green is a professor of history at the University of Kentucky and the author of *The Politics of Indian Removal: Creek Government and Society in Crisis* (University of Nebraska Press, 1982). Yet this book would have been improved by including more information about recent events in the Muscogee Nation and by incorporating some living Mvskoke voices.

Overall, Green's book is a good basic introduction to Mvskoke history and culture. It was written for young adult readers and would be an appropriate starting point for anyone wanting to learn more about the Muscogee Nation. The book ends with a short bibliography and a glossary that includes some Mvskoke-language terms.

The book's strongest feature is its extensive use of graphic illustrations — paintings, photographs, maps — including several pages of color photos of traditional Mvskoke textiles.

*The Creeks* is one volume in a series of books on Indians of North America. The back cover mentions that three books in the series were written by American Indians, but this hardly seems like a statistic worth bragging about since there are sixty-three volumes in the series. Perhaps it is time for more Mvskoke writers to step forward and tell our people's story.

— James Treat, University of New Mexico

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James Wolfe, managing editor  
Stephanie Berryhill, senior staff writer  
Summer Barnes, secretary

### Letters to the editor

Council representative thankful  
Editor:

I want to thank all of those that sent cards, flowers, and food during the time of my surgery and recovery. Will Freeman and his staff are to be commended for their generosity. Several of the National Council members called or visited. I especially want to recognize the National Council staff for their support. Many thanks for the prayers. I have always believed prayer is an answer for a lot of things.

Anderson Hale, Mounds

Editor's note: Hale is a two-time Okmulgee district representative. He had surgery in July to amputate his lower leg resulting from injuries and complicated by diabetes.

### 1997 pageant videos available

OKMULGEE — Videocassette tapes of the 1997 Miss Mvskoke (Creek) Nation Pageant featuring 1997-98 Miss Mvskoke Nation Terri Endres are available through the tribal communications department for \$10 each. The tapes are VHS format and are of high resolution. For more information about this or other video cassette tapes available, contact Gerald Wofford at (918) 756-8700, ext. 300.

### Clarification

Troy Aikman, a Henryetta native and quarterback for the National Football League Dallas Cowboys has led the team to three Super Bowl victories: 1993 (Buffalo); 1994 (Buffalo); and 1996 (Pittsburg) [The MNN, July].