

Mattie translates Creek Indian account

Mattie Pat Shaw, our Grayling correspondent, has written in answer to our inquiries to tell the **Tundra Times** about the book she has translated from her great grandfather's manuscript.

The title of the work is "A Historical Narration of the Ispocoga or Creek Tribe of Indians," by George Stiggins, translated and notated by Mattie Stanton Shaw.

She writes, "The author was my great, great grandfather, son of a Natchez princess, Nancy Haw, and of an English trader, Joseph Stiggins. He wrote the book between 1831 and November 1845. The manuscript was written in old English, with many Natchez and Ispocoga words interspersed. It took my husband, Johnnie, and I, four months to translate it.

The manuscript has been in the Lyman C. Draper collection at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, for over 100 years. My great grandfather, Joseph Napoleon Stiggins, sent it to Draper in the hopes that it would be published and the family would reap financial benefits from it. Instead, various anthropologist and historians have freely taken from this manuscript, at least the part they could read, and have published his material in their books.

George Stiggins could speak five languages including his mother tongue, Natchez, as well as French, Spanish, English and the national language of the Ispocoga. He was born in 1797, was in the War of 1813 & 14, was a representative for the Creek Nation after their defeat by the Americans, went to Washington and tried to negotiate with the Government. He was successful in getting them to agree to let the Creeks stay in Alabama and land be set aside for all the friendly chiefs and for each head of a household.

However, the government did not keep their end of the treaty and the Creeks were soon on their way to Oklahoma on what has been called, "The Trail of Tears," and the ones allowed to remain behind, including George Stiggins, were soon relieved of their land.

George Stiggins wrote in an exceptionally factual manner, displaying very little emotion. He garnered his information from first hand knowledge and from talking with the elders of the various tribes of the Creek Confederacy in the native language. He wrote of the origins of the tribes, battles, legends, customs, the War of 1813 & 14 and the Creek Civil War, which brought about its downfall.

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● Mattie translates

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The following is a quote from the book and relates to the custom of marriage among the Ispocoga.

"That is, should she be indolent and given to quarrel with him and inattentive to his wants and disobedient to his commands, in any of the aforesaid cases, he can make complaint to her family of such and quit her and marry another without a murmur from her clan or family — but in case she should prove a lewd woman and inconstant to him, she can be punished by his family of clans people by beating her with large sticks until she cannot move and then cutting off both her ears close to her head. . ."

If this custom was still in practice, I believe we'd have a lot of men and women missing a few ears.

And writing of the Uchiss, a tribe of the Creek Confederacy:

"They are more entitled than any other tribes in the nation to the appallative of the son of the forest. . .they are more indolent more thievish, more dissipated and depraved in their morals. They are ever in feuds with the other Indians, on account of whose property they reach.(steal). . .and their dishonesty is proverbial in the nation. . .In all conversation among themselves or not they speak their own barbarous tongue. . .Which is a quick guttural stammering accent not very unlike the dying respirations of an old sow under the hands of a butcher."

The book is 150 pages of exciting, factual information on the tribes of the Ispocoga (Creek) Confederacy. It is presently in the hands of the University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma. I hope it comes out soon, it deserves a place in history. The book will also give us a few more Indian heroes.

I am now in the process of gathering information for another book entitled: *The Natchez*. I have gathered information from the National Archives in Paris, France and am writing to the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., for additional information.

I don't have an agent, and don't know the procedure for getting one. If you can help, let me know.

Before I close, would like to invite you to stay with us at the BIA School, if you happen to be in Grayling for the Iditarod, or if you'd like to come down sometime and visit a very basic and beautiful village.

Sincerely,
Mattie Pat Shaw