

Preeman Johnson McClure

Choctaw Politician, Leader, Census Taker



From the Gateway to Oklahoma History (accessed 1 Sep 2017) crediting the Oklahoma Historical Society

From the beginning, the United States vacillated on how to enumerate American Indians. The U.S. Constitution specifically excluded “Indians not taxed” (defined as those living in tribal relations as part of a sovereign community) from the census count. However, the federal government soon recognized that they would have to count the American Indian population, even if the numbers were not part of the apportionment decisions. In 1850, the United States began sporadically conducting separate censuses for these communities, a practice that continued for almost 100 years. In 1860, for the first time, American Indians not living on tribal lands had their own racial category on the census. The 1880 Census contained the first full count of Alaska Natives, while the 1900 Census was the first to count and classify all Indians living in the United States, regardless of their status. Throughout the evolution of the enumeration of American Indians and Alaskan Natives, census officials have embraced the hiring of a diverse workforce representative of the local communities.

Preeman Johnson McClure was born September 11, 1864 near Bryan County, Oklahoma, to Laura Ann Ashford, a white woman, and Isaac McClure, a Choctaw Indian. Preeman attended the Spencer Academy, a boarding school for Choctaw Indians administered by the Presbyterian church which gained fame for employing Wallis Willis, who wrote several famous spirituals such as “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.” The 1885 Choctaw Census listed Preeman as living with his parents, most likely helping his father farm the family’s 40 acres.

Preeman’s 1910 Census

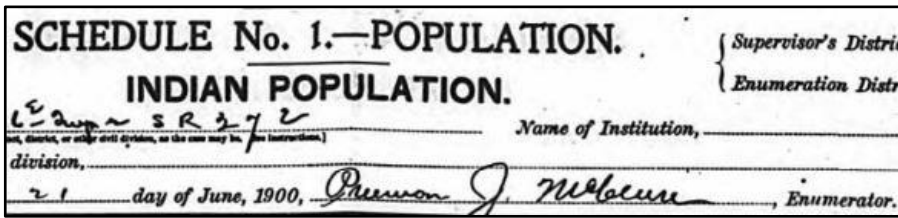
In addition to his reputation as a successful farmer and stockman, Preeman represented his community as a politician by serving multiple terms in the Territorial Congress in the 1890s.

Commissioners take the census and prepare citizenship rolls were appointed for the various counties as follows:
Atoka—Emerson Folsom, Martin Charleston, Chas. LeFlore.
Tobucksy—Wm. Ansley, P. J. McClure, Alfred Folsom.

Muskogee Phoenix (Muskogee, OK) 24 Sep 1896

Preeman’s first census taking experience came in 1896, when he enumerated Tobucksy County. The 1896 enumeration also served as Choctaw citizenship rolls due to the requirements of the Dawes Commission, which attempted to allocate lands to members of the Five Civilized Tribes in exchange for the tribal titles. Although this resulted in land for all tribe members, it also meant that the land could now be sold to outsiders.

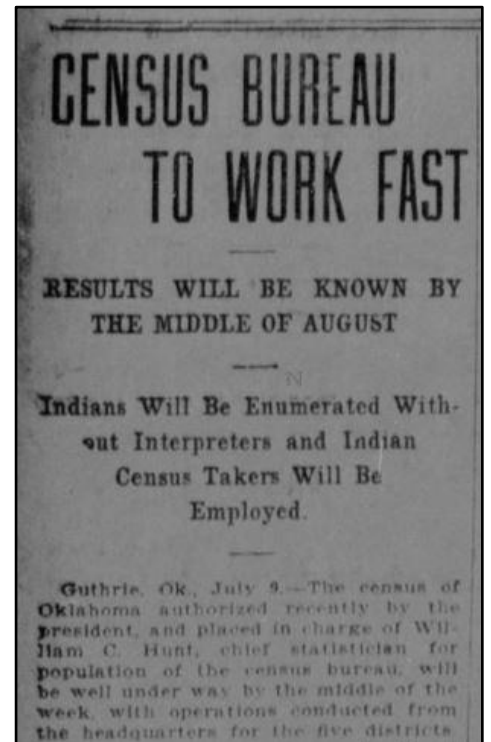
Following his recent 1896 experience, Preeman also enumerated his community in the 1900 Census. Compared with earlier censuses, like those of 1880 and 1890 which only counted Indian Territory due to later amendments to the authorizing census act, the 1900 Census accounted for the enumeration of Indian Territory in the initial census act. The 1899 Census Act limited the census to questions regarding population, mortality, agriculture, and manufacturing, with special censuses conducted later for topics such as disabilities and mining. In 1902, Congress authorized



Preeman's signature on one of his 1900 census schedules.

the creation of a permanent U.S. Census Bureau to conduct surveys, in addition to the decennial census, and deal with the increasing statistical analysis.

In November of 1906, Preeman worked towards the statehood of Oklahoma when he travelled to Guthrie as the representative of the 111th District for the state constitutional convention. The convention completed the majority of their work by March 1907, with a few minor revisions added during that summer. At the same time, the new Census Bureau conducted one of its first special surveys—the 1907 Census of Oklahoma—by special order of President Theodore Roosevelt. A group of 25 census clerks traveled from census headquarters in Washington, DC, to Guthrie, OK, to assist with the enumeration. In addition to five supervisors, over 1,400 enumerators worked from July 1 through September 10, 1907, counting 1,414,177 people in the former Oklahoma and Indian Territories. Although Preeman received a recommendation to work in this census as an enumerator, it is impossible to verify his records. The only surviving schedules from the 1907 Census of Oklahoma are those for Seminole County.



The Wichita Beacon (Wichita, KS) 9 July 1907

On September 17, 1907—120 years to the day after founding fathers signed the U.S. Constitution in 1787—the people of Oklahoma voted and approved their state constitution by 71 percent. On November 16, 1907, having completed all requirements for statehood, including a current census, Oklahoma became the 46th state.



The Oklahoma State Capital (Guthrie, OK) 15 Dec 1906

The addition of Oklahoma, and the five seats allotted to the state in the House of Representatives, revealed a minor paradox using the apportionment method devised by Alexander Hamilton. Although Congress originally intended to simply add five seats to the total in the House of Representatives, the total population of Oklahoma skewed the distribution numbers between states so that Maine gained a seat while New York lost one. The apportionment method continued to evolve to avoid these unintended results until 1941, when the current Huntington-Hill/Equal Portions apportionment method and a stable 435-seat legislator became the law of the land.

Preeman married twice: first to Caroline Schermerhorn in 1886 and secondly to Laura Dyer in 1898, with each marriage resulting in three children who reached adulthood. Preeman passed away on September 22, 1910, on his land near Broken Bow, a town incorporated a year after his death.

The Census Bureau is thankful for Preeman's contributions to our nation and his community.