

**MURIEL  
HAZEL  
WRIGHT**  
**1889-1975**



**HISTORIAN  
AND  
CHOCTAW  
ACTIVIST**

Muriel Wright was instrumental in preserving Oklahoma history. She was one-fourth Choctaw and also from distinguished colonial ancestry, tracing her genealogy to descendants aboard the Mayflower in 1620. In her position at the Chronicles of Oklahoma, she was able to emphasize the role of the Indian in the history of Oklahoma.

Muriel Hazel Wright was born in March 1889 in Lehigh, Choctaw Nation. Her Scottish-English mother Ida Belle came to Indian Territory as a missionary teacher. Her father Dr. Eliphalet Nott Wright, a graduate of Union College and Albany Medical College, practiced medicine and served as company physician for the Missouri-Pacific Coal Mines.

Her paternal grandmother, Harriet Newell Mitchell came to the Choctaw Nation as a missionary teacher, and her grandfather Reverend Allen Wright served as Principal Chief (1866-70). While serving as a Choctaw delegate to Washington at the close of the Civil War, he coined the name “Oklahoma” for the area that was named Indian Territory in the Treaty of 1866, meaning “Land of the Red Man”.

In 1895, the family moved to Atoka, where Muriel attended Presbyterian and Baptist Academy elementary schools until 1902. The family then returned to their farm near Lehigh, and Ida Wright tutored her two daughters at home. In 1906, Muriel went east to school, entering Wheaton Seminary, later Wheaton College, in Norton, MA.

Her family moved to Washington D. C. in 1908, where her father served as resident delegate of the Choctaw Nation to the U. S. Government. Muriel studied privately, taking French, piano and voice lessons. When the family returned to Lehigh, she enrolled and graduated in 1912 from the newly founded East Central State Normal School in Ada.

Muriel first taught at Wapanucka and Tishomingo, before returning to Wapanucka, where she taught Latin, English, and history, coached the girls’ basketball team and directed the senior play. She began work on a master’s degree in English and history at Barnard College, Columbia University, in New York City but the outbreak of World War I forced her to return to Oklahoma in 1917. In the Hardwood District School, she started an assistance program for school supplies for those without funds.

Her interest in Choctaw history began as a hobby after meeting author Joseph Thoburn in 1914. They collaborated on a four-volume work “Oklahoma: A History of the State and its People” (1929), still the most comprehensive study of the state’s history. She published “Our Oklahoma” (1939), “A Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma” (1951), and “The Oklahoma History” (1955), providing balanced accounts of Native Americans in shaping Oklahoma history.

Muriel was also involved in Choctaw politics, successfully helping restore the Council House at Tuskahoma, becoming a candidate for principal chief in 1930 and leading the fight to make the federal and state governments pay compensation to the tribes for the loss of their former lands. When her father died in 1931, she moved to Oklahoma City.

She worked on the Chronicles of Oklahoma starting in 1929, became associate editor in 1943, then editor from 1955 to 1973. Wright received numerous honors included the Oklahoma Hall of Fame (1940) and the National American Indian Women’s Association ‘Outstanding Indian Woman of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century’ (1971). Wright died in February 1975 at age 86 in Oklahoma City. When OHS launched the Oklahoma Historians Hall of Fame in 1993, Muriel was among its first four inductees.