

**ALICE  
BROWN  
DAVIS**  
**1852-1935**



**CHIEF  
OF  
THE  
SEMINOLES**

Army surgeon John Brown emigrated from Scotland in the early 1800's. The government assigned him to accompany the Seminole tribe on their hazardous journey along the Trail of Tears to Oklahoma. His children would emerge as leaders of the Seminole Nation from 1832 to 1935.

Alice Brown was born in 1852 near Park Hill. She attended Cherokee and Seminole mission schools, and was tutored by her father, who was fluent in several languages. In 1867, both parents died during a cholera epidemic so Alice moved to Wewoka to live with her oldest brother John, who was chief of the Seminoles.

At 22, Alice married George Rollins Davis, a European-American merchant from Kansas. They moved to Arbeka, where they managed a prosperous trading post, post office and their Bar X Bar Ranch. Alice was also superintendent of the Emahaka Female Academy. The Curtis Act of 1898 gave control of the Creek Nation's treasury to the Department of the Interior, leaving the tribe with no means to administer their school system. She refused to surrender the school in order to protect Indian education. She was finally convinced by her brother John, but did so under protest.

During this tumultuous time, Brown Davis became involved in Seminole legal affairs. She traveled to Mexico to pursue possible land grant claims, served as an interpreter in a Palm Beach murder trial and took some missionaries to visit the Florida Seminoles. She was respected for her knowledge of languages, her intelligence and her willingness to aid her people.

In 1916, John Brown resigned after 30 years as Seminole Chief, believing that all tribal business had been completed. He died in 1919. Needing a chief to manage land affairs, President Harding appointed 70-year-old Alice as Principal Chief in 1922. Her inauguration at the Federal Courthouse in Muskogee made national news, being the first female chief since the Five Civilized Tribes were forced to move to Indian Territory.

A 1910 survey transferred valuable land from the Seminoles to the Creeks. Alice refused to sign the deeds because she believed it was morally wrong to surrender the land. The government ordered the Muskogee office to nominate another chief. Their second choice, George Jones, and their third choice, Harry Tiger, refused to sign the deed. Finally, the government finalized the transaction without the signature of a Seminole chief.

In 1930 she was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. Her bronze bust, by noted sculptor Willard Stone, was unveiled at the 1964 World's Fair, and later placed in the American Indian Hall of Fame in Anadarko. Alice served as chief until she died at 82 in 1935.

Alice Brown Davis lived during a period of tremendous change. She believed that the Seminoles should adapt the white man's lifestyle to their own, retaining their heritage while taking advantage of the benefits offered by another culture. Her life was a microcosm of the trials and triumphs endured by the Seminole people.