

## Foreword

This book is an important reference for anyone interested in Oklahoma history, Muscogee (Creek) history, or for those who are descendants of the Muscogee (Creek) Tribe. Martin, Mauldin, and McGirt are experienced translators and editors of Creek documents and have spent years working on this project. While I am completely biased, I believe that this is their best work and an important account of Creek history and of the removal and relocation of the Creek Nation to what is now Oklahoma.

I first met Dr. Jack Martin in 2004. He was returning home to Williamsburg, Virginia from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and had been searching for several years for descendants of James Hill. Since I worked in Washington, D.C. then, we agreed to meet in Bethesda. He had just spent a month researching and copying the Creek manuscripts of Mary Haas, my great-grandfather James Hill, and my grandparents Fanny Hill Sulphur and Alex Sulphur. Seeing documents written by my great-grandfather was incredibly emotional for me. I was in awe. I was so impressed that someone of Dr. Martin's experience and credentials would be interested in editing these Creek writings. I knew that this would be a daunting task. You see, all of the writings, stories, and personal history of James Hill, a full-blood Creek, were written in Creek. Therefore, you would need to find someone who could read Creek and understand the "old" Creek language. That person would have to interpret the writings and then be able to express them in English. This seemed so very difficult since our Creek language has changed so much even in my own lifetime. I am one of those American Indian children who was rounded up and sent to a federal boarding school. They had done their job well. They forbade us from speaking Creek and took my language away from me. It is hard for me to speak and read, but I understand it clearly.

So when we had our first meeting in 2004 in my favorite cafe in Bethesda, I was skeptical of his motives. When he arrived and addressed me, *hen'sci* in Creek, I greeted him back in English. We introduced ourselves and he began to tell me how he became interested in the Haas/Hill project. I was further intrigued when he told me that the manuscripts were housed in the American Philosophical Society Library in Philadelphia. I had not heard of the collaboration between Haas and my grandmother and great-grandfather. I was so very impressed that I immediately called my mother Billie Scott and my close friends about my meeting and the pending book. I told my mother, "Do you know how weird it was to have a white man, a PhD, speak Creek to me in this fancy cafe in Washington, D.C.?"

You see, I am Robyn Sulphur York of Eufaula, Oklahoma. I am the great-granddaughter of James Hill and the granddaughter of Fanny Hill Sulphur. I am a descendant of wise, resourceful and literary Creeks. My people could read and write in both English and Creek. I have always been proud of being Creek and a Hill-Sulphur. If you know even a little about Creek history, you know that there has been a fine line drawn by missionaries for our Tribe and tribal members even before the Removal. You were a good Creek if you attended a Protestant church and a bad Creek if you practiced the old ways, our

ceremonial grounds or “Stomp Dance” ways. But I was truly lucky growing up in the late 1950’s and 1960’s. My grandmother Fanny took care of my sisters Ruth, Alexis, and me while my mother went to school and worked as far away as Seattle, Washington. As she said, it was no place for children and kept us home in Eufaula, Oklahoma.

My grandmother Fanny was a child of a preacher (James Hill) but was raised without a mother and taught herself to read and write English. She met and married Alex Sulphur, a traditionalist and medicine man. So their children and her grandchildren were brought up believing that both Christians and traditional people worshipped a higher being responsible for the earth and life. We were taught that we could be both Protestant and traditional. We were taught to appreciate both expressions of Creek life, and my grandmother would fiercely defend our family’s right to practice both. My grandmother Fanny was well educated and well traveled. She could read and write in English and Creek. She was a Creek interpreter for families and friends in federal court and in oil, gas, and land dealings with the federal government. She could translate federal laws, court proceedings and procedures, and read and interpret legal documents such as leases, contracts, title, and business papers to her clients. My mother told me that there would be months and months when she had to maintain the home while grandmother was back east helping her clients. I also recall helping my grandmother Fanny clean her house as she aged. I found pictures of a group of people in front of the U.S. Capitol and the Supreme Court Building. The people were Anne Walker, a friend, an unknown man, grandfather Alex Sulphur, and her. When I asked her, were you really in D.C.? She matter-of-factly said, yes, helping people fight with the BIA.

One mystifying point here is the family history of my great-grandfather. You see the family tradition about James Hill is that he made the walk on the Trail of Tears as a child of 8 to 10 years of age. His true age was unknown to his family. I have a memory of sitting at his feet and looking up at him and Uncle Jeff Hill, my grandmother’s brother. I remember the smell of joint ointment like Ben Gay, and the rough feel of his gray wool pants with suspenders. I strongly recall his beautiful white hair and him talking to me in Creek. My size then was quite small, as I was sitting on his lap. I remember the lace curtains in the long, old-fashioned windows. My mother confirms the house as one where my great-aunt Mandy Hill Phillips lived in McAlester, Oklahoma. My grandmother, Uncle Jeff, and Grandpa Hill, as he was called, would often visit.

I hope that you enjoy this book. We are most grateful to Jack B. Martin, Margaret McKane Mauldin, and Juanita McGirt for bringing it to a larger audience. Our family is very proud of our history and our family members, who have left an enduring legacy for us and our children.

Robyn Sulphur York  
Glenpool, Oklahoma

## Preface

When Mary R. Haas died in 1996, she left behind several thousand pages of notes and texts in the Creek (Muskogee) language. She had collected these materials in eastern Oklahoma between 1936 and 1940, shortly after completing her doctorate in linguistics at Yale University. The majority of the texts in the collection came from the unpublished writings of James H. Hill of Eufaula, an especially knowledgeable elder who composed texts for Haas using the traditional Creek alphabet. Twelve other speakers, including one Seminole and one Creek freedman, served as sources for dictated texts. The texts cover traditional folktales, descriptions of ball-games and traditional activities, autobiography, history, sermons, and prayers.

Haas likely would have revised and published her collection had it not been for the outbreak of war in 1941. This volume represents a completion of her ambitious project to survey and document Creek literature. All the texts have been checked, transcribed, organized, and translated in a way that is consistent with Haas's final practices and current standards. Traditional Creek spellings for the texts have been added to make the work accessible to a larger audience.

Mary R. Haas was a gifted linguist whose studies of Tunica, Natchez, Creek, and Thai show a remarkable talent for phonetic detail, rigorous analysis, and careful regard for language in context. The Creek texts she gathered with James H. Hill and others are an important record of the traditional languages and literatures of the American South.



## Acknowledgments

The editors would like to thank Mary R. Haas for opening her notebooks to us. Leanne Hinton helped facilitate the photocopying of her manuscripts. Sally McLendon, Catherine Callahan, and Victor Golla offered advice on format. Robyn York provided family history on her great-grandfather James Hill. Two reviewers provided helpful comments. The National Endowment for the Humanities (RT-21566-94) and the National Science Foundation (SBR-9809819) funded a dictionary and reference grammar that allowed us to begin our study. A grant from the American Philosophical Society (Phillips Fund) funded an initial set of translations. A subsequent Resident Library Fellowship from the same institution allowed Martin to examine Haas's original notebooks and papers. The bulk of the research was supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Had she lived to see the publication of these texts, Haas would have noted that her field work in Oklahoma between 1936 and 1940 was conducted under the auspices of the Department of Anthropology, Yale University, the American Council of Learned Societies' Committee on Research in American Native Languages, and the American Philosophical Society (Penrose Fund). Several students, including William Shipley and Harvey Pitkin, provided clerical assistance funded by the Committee on Research, University of California, Berkeley.

