

Introduction

In 1936, at the age of just 26, Mary R. Haas moved from New Haven, Connecticut to Eufaula, Oklahoma to begin a study of the Creek (Muskogee) language. It was the height of the Great Depression and Dust Bowl, and jobs were scarce, but with help from former teachers Haas found meager support for her research until the threat of war in 1941. The texts in this volume are a result of that project.

About Mary R. Haas

Mary R. Haas was born January 23, 1910 in Richmond, Indiana to Robert Jeremiah Haas and Leona Crowe Haas.¹ She received three years of tuition scholarships at Earlham College, where she studied English.² She also received a scholarship in music during her final year and graduated at the head of her class in 1930.³ She entered graduate school in the Department of Comparative Philology at the University of Chicago the same year. There she studied Gothic, Old High German with Leonard Bloomfield, Sanskrit, and Psychology of Language with Edward Sapir.⁴ She also met and married her fellow student Morris Swadesh. The two traveled to British Columbia after their first year to work on Nitinat, and then followed Sapir to Yale University's Department of Linguistics in 1931. She continued her studies there of Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit and took two courses in Primitive Music.⁵ Haas worked as Sapir's research assistant from 1931 to 1933.⁶ In the summer of 1933, she received funding to conduct field work in Louisiana with the last speaker of Tunica, close to where Swadesh was working on Chitimacha.⁷

Haas's next project was the Natchez language of eastern Oklahoma. A fellow graduate student at Chicago named Victor E. Riste had been sent to work on Natchez in 1931. The field situation was difficult, however, because the last two speakers knew some Creek and Cherokee but spoke no English. Research on Natchez was thus conducted with Creek-speaking interpreters. In 1934, Franz Boas wrote to Haas that Riste had "fallen down completely on his Natchez work" and so, after consultation with Edward Sapir, Boas asked whether Haas would consider revising Riste's work by conducting field work of her own.⁸ After Haas agreed, Boas had Harry Hoiijer send Riste's Creek and Natchez field notes to her.⁹

Haas made her first field trip to Oklahoma in the fall of 1934.¹⁰ Her work required that she learn some Creek while she worked on Natchez, and she elicited two Creek texts from Nancy Raven, one of her two Natchez consultants. She then returned to New Haven to complete a grammar of Tunica, for which she was awarded a doctorate in 1935. In 1936, Haas returned to Oklahoma to work on Creek.¹¹ Unlike Tunica and Natchez, Creek was then very much a living language, with monolingual speakers of all ages. Her notes indicate that she contacted a number of older individuals—mostly men—in the Creek and Seminole nations. She gathered vocabulary, texts, and grammatical paradigms, as well as information

on kinship, naming, town relations, and ball-games. When possible, she hired literate native speakers to write texts for her. James H. Hill was Haas's primary source. She then had other speakers read his writings to her while she made phonemic transcriptions.

The four years between 1936 and 1940 were lean ones for Haas. Jobs for academics were difficult to find, and linguists were usually forced to choose between teaching anthropology or languages. Haas chose instead to continue field work.¹²

In May, 1937, Haas wrote to Swadesh about getting a divorce.¹³ They had lived separately for some time, and Haas felt it might be hard to get a teaching job as a married woman. Swadesh agreed and accepted a two-year position the same year at the University of Wisconsin.¹⁴

Haas's and Swadesh's much-admired teacher Edward Sapir died in 1939. This must have made it more difficult to find jobs, but Sapir's students persevered and planned several collections of papers. Leonard Bloomfield advised Haas to publish more articles, advice which she readily took to heart.¹⁵ She published an article on Natchez and Chitimacha clans and kinship in *American Anthropologist*.¹⁶ The following year she published an article on Creek aspect in *Language*.¹⁷ She published a grammatical description of Tunica the same year, managing, after much wrangling with Boas, to shorten her dissertation from some 650 pages to 143.¹⁸ In 1941, in a volume dedicated to the memory of Edward Sapir, she published an influential classification of the Muskogean languages.¹⁹

While the 1930's were difficult years for Haas, she clearly enjoyed field work. She wrote to Alexander Spoehr in 1940,

I have received a letter from Boas telling me that the Committee has awarded me a new grant for the continuance of my work. So my worries on that score are over for a while. This means that I shall get to do some work on Yuchi. I am glad of this for I seem to have a natural affinity for field work. I shall also have to go ahead and do what I can toward producing a Natchez grammar, though I have only recently finished up my large Tunica grammar. If this keeps up I'll soon have the world's record for putting out grammars.²⁰

By this time Haas was in danger of accumulating more data than she could process. She had a Tunica dictionary and text collection to complete. She had copious notes on Natchez and Creek, and she had conducted, or was planning work on, Hitchiti, Yuchi, Koasati, Alabama, Choctaw—almost any language she could find. As she wrote to Swadesh, “the harder I work the more material I pile up to work on.”²¹ She still had not published anything substantial on Natchez though, and by the spring of 1941, with war fast approaching, her funding ran out.

It was at this critical juncture that Haas's former Sanskrit professor Franklin Edgerton stepped in. He wrote describing how the American Council of Learned Societies, with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, was seeking to develop teaching materials in “living oriental languages.”²² Haas was offered a position to produce materials on Thai in

Washington, D.C., and through this work came to meet a second husband (Heng Ritt Subhanka) and a teaching position at the University of California, Berkeley. She taught there in the Department of Oriental Languages and then in the Department of Linguistics until her retirement in 1975.

Haas returned to Oklahoma for several brief trips in the 1970's. Most of her consultants had died by then, but James Hill's daughter Fannie Hill Sulphur was still alive. Haas worked with her on Creek accent patterns. She also assisted Susannah Factor and others in producing elementary school reading materials in Creek.²³

By the 1980's, Haas's eyesight had weakened. A conference was held in her honor in 1986.²⁴ She died in 1996. Although only a small portion of her work has appeared in print, Haas is widely recognized as one of the great descriptive linguists of the twentieth century. Among her many publications are a Tunica grammar, text collection, and dictionary, a Thai student dictionary and teaching materials, a monograph on language pre-history, and a large number of essays.²⁵ Haas was a Guggenheim Fellow, president of the Linguistic Society of America, a member of the National Academy of Sciences, and chair of the Department of Linguistics at the University of California at Berkeley. The twenty-two doctoral students she supervised at Berkeley were crucial in shaping twentieth-century work on American languages and linguistics.

About James H. Hill

James H. Hill (1861–ca. 1953) was the source of 106 of the 156 texts in the Haas collection. He wrote the texts in Creek on loose sheets of lined paper, a writing pad, and three composition notebooks. Hill's originals are preserved in the Mary R. Haas Papers at the American Philosophical Society. As far as we know, these are the only writings he left.²⁶

James Hill was Aktayahchi clan and a member of Hilabi (or Hillabee) Canadian tribal town, where he was known as Katcha Homahti (*ka-ccahomáhti*).²⁷ He was also a member by marriage of Kialegee and Arbeka tribal towns, where he was called Aktayahchochi (*aktayahcocí*).²⁸ We learn from his autobiography that he was born in July 1861 near Greenleaf tribal town, Creek Nation, Indian Territory.²⁹ His father's name was Hilly, nephew of Sikomaha. During the U.S. Civil War, his family fled south toward Denison, Texas. After the war they settled in the area of Shell Creek, west of Eufaula in present Burton township, McIntosh County. Hill never attended school, but he learned English and taught himself how to read and write Creek.

During Isparhecher's rebellion, Hill sided with the Muscogee Nation and helped arrest followers of Isparhecher. He participated actively in traditional ball-games and dances, and in 1895 was elected to represent Hilabi Canadian tribal town in the House of Kings (analogous to the U.S. Senate). He held that position until Oklahoma statehood, when he began attending Thlewahle Baptist Church near Hanna. In 1915 he was made Head Deacon

and in 1921 became a preacher. In 1938 he was, along with Arthur E. Raiford, one of five candidates for Principal Chief.³⁰ He died about 1953.³¹

It is important to realize that Hill converted to Christianity following Oklahoma statehood, and that his descriptions of traditional practices are based on memories of an earlier era. His descriptions are thus placed in the remote past, but others were continuing those practices at the time of his writing and are still practicing them in 2014.

James Hill is listed as No. 6373 on the Dawes Final Rolls. His first wife was named Louisa.³² His second wife was named Polly.³³ His children's names were Luella, Katie, Leah, Fannie, Jefferson, Lucy, Amanda, and Eugene. Fannie (Hill) Sulphur assisted Haas in checking and interpreting her father's texts, and her husband Alex Sulphur was a source for several texts.

The Hill family remembers a few stories about Haas, then a young woman. Robyn York, who was raised by her grandparents Fannie and Alex Sulphur, heard that Haas would sometimes walk miles from Eufaula to their home to work. She would write all day, and then they would feed her. They liked feeding her. One time, when first working with Jim Hill and Fannie, she turned to Fannie and said, "Ask him to say that again." Fannie said, "You ask him—he speaks English!"

Haas's methods

Haas's aim in her field work was to obtain a diverse collection of texts, to determine the contrastive sounds (phonemes) in the language, to compile a vocabulary, and to study the grammar of the language. She was also obligated to complete the work promised in her grant applications: from 1936 to 1938 she received funding from the Department of Anthropology at Yale and was free to collect a wide sample of texts; from 1938 to 1939 her work was funded by a research grant from the American Philosophical Society (Penrose Fund) to examine the history and organization of Creek tribal towns.

Haas took field notes on lined paper and then copied these in bound composition books. She completed twenty-two notebooks on Creek, each about 190 pages in length. Most of her transcriptions from the fall of 1936 to about May of 1937 were phonetic, after which she used phonemic transcriptions.

Haas began by eliciting verbal paradigms for person and tense. She then moved on to possession, infinitives and nouns, plural forms of verbs, and agent nominalizations. By page 25, she felt ready to collect her first text, the story of Rabbit and the Tar-Baby. She did this by asking a speaker to read or dictate a text, which she transcribed in her own orthography. She would then have the text interpreted, usually with another speaker. She would transcribe the text again in this second session along with word for word translations below each word. She would make a note of any corrections or alternate pronunciations offered by the second speaker. When a correction was made, she would write "orig.: ..." on the opposite page, or if a correction might be made, "read: ..." For an alternative pronunciation, she would write "or:

...” on the opposite page. Less accurate transcriptions made in the fall of 1936 were checked again in May of 1937.

Before the advent of computers, linguists made extensive use of file slips. Every word in a text was copied on a piece of paper along with the phrase it occurred in so that the linguist would have an index of every word in context. These slips allowed vocabularies to be compiled and helped identify inconsistent transcriptions or speaker variation. Slips were also made of grammatical topics or specific affixes. Haas had students help her copy her file slips, just as she had helped Sapir at Yale.

As part of the next stage, Haas had the texts in her notebooks typed. The typist would type the Creek and the English glosses on separate pages, drawing a vertical line in the notebook at the end of a line. Slashes were used in glosses to align Creek and English equivalents. Haas would then have planned to translate the texts using the glosses, but she only drafted a few translations this way.

Haas made almost no use of sound recordings. In many cases she relied on dictation, but when speakers were literate in their language, it was faster and more accurate to have them write texts for her. Jim Hill made lists of topics to write about in his notebook, and she or he would sometimes add further details. In one place she notes: “Tobacco was also used for medicine, e.g., for toothache, but H[ill] will write this out later as it is quite long.”³⁴ Punctuation proved difficult for her: in more than one place she notes, “Punctuation marked as written by informant.”³⁵

Haas's other sources

Haas generally worked with older individuals who were knowledgeable about traditional practices. She elicited texts from 13 people, all men. Of these, one was Seminole (Wesley Tanyan), one was a Creek freedman (A. Grayson), and the rest were Creek. They represent several different tribal towns (Hilabi, Arbeka Talladega, Coweta, Kasihta, Hickory Ground, Eufaula, Thlopthucco). The majority of the texts were by James Hill, and the majority of the checking was done with Arthur E. Raiford or Fannie (Hill) Sulphur.

The following list of consultants is based on information in Haas's notes, supplemented by genealogy and family history.

Jasper Bell was a member of Cussetah tribal town, Bear Clan, a resident of Okmulgee, and a medicine maker.³⁶ He was introduced to Haas by Morris and Catherine Opler, and Haas in turn recommended him to Sigmund Sameth.³⁷ He was born six miles southeast of Okmulgee in 1874.³⁸ His name at Cussetah was Micco Hutke (*mi-kkohátki* or White King).³⁹ His mother Yana (*yá-na*) was Creek, and his father George Bell was half-Irish and half-Creek.⁴⁰ His father was a Lighthouse Captain until his death.⁴¹ His older brother was named Jim Bell.⁴² Jasper Bell used to do cattle ranch work for D. H. Middleton.⁴³ He served as an interpreter for the Creek Council.⁴⁴ He is listed as No. 3062 on the Dawes Final Rolls.

Jim Bullet was a member of Hilabi tribal town. He is listed as No. 589 on the Dawes Final Rolls.

Daniel Cook was a member of Thlopthucco tribal town, Bird clan.⁴⁵ His father was Tukabahchee town, Raccoon clan and was a nephew of Tukabahchee Harjo, one of Opothleyahola's captains during the Civil War.⁴⁶ He lived near Holdenville and was born about 1870. He is listed as No. 2283 on the Dawes Final Rolls.

Earnest (or Ernest) Gouge was a member of Hickory Ground tribal town, Beaver clan.⁴⁷ His father was Tukabahchee tribal town, Raccoon clan.⁴⁸ His wife Nicey was a member of Hilabi Canadian tribal town, which he joined. He lived west of Eufaula and was born about 1865. He is listed as No. 8497 on the Dawes Final Rolls. Gouge and his younger brother, "Big Jack," had previously worked with John Swanton.⁴⁹ Gouge is best known for a collection of 29 Creek stories he wrote for Swanton in 1915.⁵⁰ He died on September 4, 1955.

Adam Grayson was a Creek freedman who was bilingual in Creek and English. He was introduced to Haas through Sigmund Sameth, who had been conducting research in Okemah for a master's thesis on race relations.⁵¹ He was also interviewed for the Indian-Pioneer History, where he describes how prophets were traditionally trained.⁵²

[som] Field is listed as No. 7072 on the Dawes Final Rolls.

Tucker Marshall was a member of Arbeka Talladega tribal town, Raccoon clan.⁵³ He is listed as No. 6561 on the Dawes Final Rolls. His mother Betty Tullamassee (*talamá-si*) was part Natchez, and his mother's mother spoke Natchez.⁵⁴ He lived in Burton township, McIntosh county, with a wife Minnie and twelve children.⁵⁵ He was a minister at Tuskegee Indian Baptist Church.⁵⁶ He died April 5, 1939 at the age of 75.⁵⁷

Paskofa, or Johnson Late, was a member of Tukabahchee tribal town, Raccoon clan, born about 1851.⁵⁸ His father was a member of Hilabi tribal town, Ahalakalki clan.⁵⁹ He lived near Holdenville.⁶⁰

Arthur E. Raiford (1878–1964) was a member of Coweta tribal town, Beaver clan.⁶¹ He is listed as No. 5691 on the Dawes Final Rolls. As he describes in one story, his father Philip Raiford was captured by the Comanches. Raiford lived in Eufaula, McIntosh County.⁶² He had a wife Tookah Raiford, a daughter Alice E. Raiford, and sons William A. Raiford and Felix E. Raiford.⁶³ Raiford told a few stories he knew and assisted in checking stories told by others.

Daniel Starr was a member of Arbeka Talladega tribal town, Alligator clan.⁶⁴ He was born July 4, 1857.⁶⁵ His father Ben Starr (Tu-sek-a-ya Hut-ke) was Bear clan.⁶⁶ Chitto Harjo was his uncle.⁶⁷ He lived near Arbeka ceremonial ground.⁶⁸ He is listed as No. 5672 on the Dawes Final Rolls.

Alex Sulphur was a medicine maker, a member of Eufaula tribal town, and a "lost" member of Little Tullahassee.⁶⁹ His father was a member of Hickory Ground.⁷⁰ He was married to James H. Hill's daughter Fannie.⁷¹ He is listed as No. 9621 on the Dawes Final Rolls.

Wesley Tanyan was a Seminole, Hitchiti band, Deer Clan.⁷² He was introduced to Haas through Alexander Spoehr, who had employed him as an interpreter.⁷³ Tanyan was only 35 when Haas met him. His father was Nina Tanyan and his father's father was Waxie Tanyan.⁷⁴ His great-grandfather A-ha-lak E-math-la was a medicine maker who assisted Wild Cat.⁷⁵ He is listed as No. 152 on the Dawes Final Rolls.

In addition to the above primary sources, Haas attempted to check and correct Creek texts gathered by Victor E. Riste. Riste transcribed texts that had been dictated phonetically.

Victor Emerson Riste was born 14 November 1897 in Oberlin, Kansas, the fifth of seven children.⁷⁶ In 1929, as a student at the University of Washington, he was awarded a field-training scholarship from the Laboratory of Anthropology at Santa Fe. There he and his fellow students (including Harry Hoijer) learned linguistic field techniques from Edward Sapir.⁷⁷ He subsequently joined Sapir and Hoijer at the University of Chicago. In July, 1931, he traveled to Oklahoma to conduct field work on Natchez and Creek, supported by the Committee on Research in American Native Languages. He managed, in a short period, to fill five writing pads with Natchez notes and four more on Creek.⁷⁸ After World War II, he worked for the State of Illinois in the Unemployment Division, where he worked as a manager over a large section of that department.⁷⁹ He died of a heart attack on 28 February, 1958.⁸⁰

Riste worked with several Creek speakers, but did not always indicate who dictated a text. **John Toney** dictated the text "Curing the Back-ache." We know only that he was from Braggs, Oklahoma. **Peter Ewing** (1860–1932) dictated the text "The Singing River." Haas's notes indicate that Ewing was from Hitchiti tribal town, Wind clan. He served for many years as a Baptist minister and was elected Chief of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation in 1931.⁸¹

Haas spent considerable time forming her own opinions about Creek and Natchez before checking Riste's texts. She clearly intended to include them in her own collection, but never finished correcting them. Riste's Creek and Natchez notebooks are housed with Haas's papers at the American Philosophical Society.

Editorial methods and conventions

Editing this text collection was challenging because of its size and because there were often different versions of the same text. We knew from speaking with Haas that she wanted the texts to be checked and corrected. She also left instructions among her papers:

The work that remains to be done is as follows: (1) The texts should be rechecked with native speakers in order to eliminate all possibility of phonetic error. (2) It will be necessary to provide finished translations which reflect as nearly as possible the spirit and mood of the original texts. (3) It would also be desirable to annotate the tales with a view to pointing out any similarities that exist between them and tales told by other tribes.⁸²