

CHIEF SPLITLOG AND THE CAYUGA MISSION CHURCH

By Velma Nieberding

In northeastern Oklahoma today there are few landmarks reminiscent of the period during which the Cayugas, Senecas, Wyandots, and other once-great Indian tribes came to settle after their final trek into the Indian Territory. Where the town of Cayuga stood, nine miles northeast of Grove, in Delaware County, there remains only an old church. It stands in lonely vigil on a little-used road, a stone's throw from the cemetery where its builder, Matthias Splitlog, is buried.

The history of early Catholicity in Oklahoma would not be complete without a sketch of Cayuga Mission-Church, (called also "The Splitlog Church" and the Church dedicated to St. Matthias, the Apostle. In no other part of the state—possibly in the United States—did an Indian build out of his own funds, a church worth \$35,000 today. Cayuga Mission was the crowning achievement of a long life of building for Matthias Splitlog, pioneer of four frontiers.¹

Distinguished, even in his early years, for his sound business sense, a mechanical and inventive turn of mind, and the ability to estimate the possibilities of the future, Splitlog possessed the quality known as vision. "He was of a peculiar, eccentric disposition" relates one chronicler, "His ideas were ahead of his time. He was always planning and building."²

You have to turn the page of old history books, read yellowed newspaper clippings, or talk to Splitlog's grandchildren, to catch again his dream for his people. Gone was the mighty confederacy of the Iroquois which had linked the Senecas and Cayugas with Onodagas, Oneidas, Mohawks and Tuscororas until the American Revolution split that confederacy. Far removed were the council fires which Splitlog left when the Wyandots quit-claimed their Ohio reservation back to the United States in exchange for a home "west of the Mississippi" in 1842.³ Splitlog was still looking for the promised land—the land of final settlement—when he came to the Indian Territory in 1874. Splitlog had fought as a "Soldier of the Cannon" under Colonel Mulligan of the Union Army. He had received his allotment of land when the Wyandots were allotted

¹ Ohio, Kansas, Missouri, Indian Territory.

² Nannie Lee Burns, "Matthias Splitlog" *Indian Pioneer History* S-149. December 3, 1937. See also, *Proceedings and Collections of the Nebraska State Historical Society*, second series Vol. III, edited by William E. Connelly, 1889.

³ Kappler (ed.) *Laws and Treaties*, II, p. 395; Grant Foreman, *The Last Trek of the Indians*, p. 94-95.

their lands in severalty in Kansas under the treaty of 1855.⁴ The sale of these lands had made him wealthy but he had seen his fellow tribesmen dismayed and unhappy at the encroachments of the whites. He came to the Indian Territory believing that the idea of tribal responsibility had not died although much had been done to discourage it.

This sketch cannot encompass an account of Splitlog's activities in Ohio, Kansas and Missouri—how he built the first grist mill in Kansas, his ambition to build an empire in the fertile, wooded lands of northeast Indian Territory and the measure of his success. The building of his railroad is a story in itself and the amazing accomplishments of this man who could neither read nor write, yet could speak seven languages, would fill a book. He was an old man when he came to the Territory in 1874. He had outlived his wife and all his ten children, but one, when he undertook to build Cayuga Mission. He was to live less than two months after the Church was dedicated. These are facts that make his story unusual.

Family accounts have Matthias Splitlog born in New York in 1812, his ancestry one-half Cayuga, one-half French. He was removed to Ohio with a portion of the Cayugas when he was three years of age.⁵ We find him as a young man living in Sandusky, Ohio among the Wyandots. It was here that he met and married his wife, Eliza Barnett, and by this tribal marriage became a member of the Wyandot Tribe.⁶

Splitlog, with seven or eight hundred members of the tribe migrated to Kansas in 1843.⁷ Members of the Splitlog family have described this journey as one of intense hardship. Over land by wagon and on the rivers by steamboat the Wyandots came, each family burdened with possessions they were trying to bring to the new home. The Wyandots had been assigned a tract of 148,000 acres to be located on the Neosho. When this tract proved unsatisfactory to the leaders of the tribe, they turned to the Delawares and purchased from them thirty-nine sections of land lying in the fork of the Missouri and Kansas rivers (the present site of Kansas City,

⁴ By this treaty, competent Wyandots became citizens of the United States. *Kansas Historical Collections*, Vol. XV, (1919-1922) edited by William E. Connelly.

⁵ Interview with Grover Splitlog, grandson of Matthias Splitlog. Dec. 10, 1953.

⁶ Eliza was the daughter of John Barnett and Hannah Charloe. Henry Jacques (pronounced "Jocko") belonged to that part of the Wyandot nation composed of the Barnett and Charloe families. He was one of the Chiefs who signed the Treaty of March 17, 1842. Mr. Barnett's grandfather was a white man who had been made prisoner by the Indians almost in infancy. John Barnett was not a Chief but he was an educated man and sat in all the Wyandot Councils.—*Proceedings and Collections of the Nebraska State Historical Society*, op. cit., p. 225.

⁷ Other leaders of the Wyandot tribe at this time included Silas Armstrong, Francis A. Hicks, William Walker (later Provisional Governor of the Territory of Nebraska) Mathew Mudeater, John Greyeyes, Isaac Zane. Splitlog became famous as the "Indian Millionaire".

Kansas.) Grant Foreman comments that this purchase had been conceived and negotiated by shrewd members of the tribe who had the vision to discern the commercial location of the land.⁸

Within the next twelve years the whites realized that the land on which the Wyandots had settled was too valuable to permit them to keep it. Then began the familiar story of Indian removal. In 1855, they discarded their treaty and tribal rights and became citizens of the United States with the immunities and privileges of white people, including the right to sell their lands.

Many years before, the Wyandots had befriended the Senecas by giving them forty thousand acres of land on the Sandusky river in Ohio.⁹ The Senecas had promised their benefactors that should misfortune ever overwhelm them they would take them in as brothers and give them a home. By 1857, the Wyandots were homeless, having sold or lost their Kansas holdings. The Senecas made their ancient promise good and conveyed a strip of land 30,000 acres across the north end of the Seneca reservation in the Indian Territory.¹⁰ A large number of the Wyandots came here and settled under the leadership of Matthew Mudeater, Chief.

It was not long before Splitlog's friends began to send word to him to join them in Indian Territory. He had sold some of his land in Kansas City, including his home,¹¹ and was looking for a new location. In 1874 he journeyed by way of Fort Scott, Kansas, crossed the grassy lands of the Quapaw country and came to the wooded hills and clear running streams of the Seneca lands. He chose as a site for his new home land near both the Grand and the Cowskin rivers. On it was a large spring which he named "Cayuga" in remembrance of his tribe and of the boat he had owned as a young man on Lake Michigan. The town which he subsequently built came to be known as *Cayuga Springs*.

Splitlog first built a sawmill with which to utilize the timber covering the hills of his land. He built a grist mill for grind-

⁸ Although the Delawares expressed themselves as being anxious to have the Wyandots settle among them, the Wyandots complained that although they had "spread a blanket" for the Delawares when they needed help in Ohio, they thought they had been asked an exorbitant price for the thirty-nine sections of land sold by the Delawares. *Proceedings and Collections of the Nebraska State Historical Society, op. cit.*

⁹ Treaty of 1817. Grant Foreman, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ "Splitlog Hill" stood between Barnett and Tauromee Avenues and 4th and 5th streets in what is now Kansas City, Kansas. Standing in his front yard Splitlog could look over the Kaw and Missouri valley for miles. In 1857 the Wyandotte City Company bought the land out of which the city was plotted, they offered to buy Splitlog's home. He shook his head. "Good for you, good for me" he said and lived on his land until 1860. Three acres of this land was purchased by Father Anton Kuhls and became the site of St. Mary's Church. The price, \$800.00. D. B. Hadley, article in *Kansas City Globe*, February 10, 1890.

ing and established a ferry and a general store. Machinery for his projects had to be shipped to Fort Scott and freighted by wagons across the muddy prairie lands to Cayuga. Later on, when the railroad reached Baxter Springs, it became the terminal for his shipping. His building projects gave employment to large numbers of people and it was said of him that he always paid good wages and that his employees were treated kindly.

A large blacksmith shop, essential in those days, was early established and when his own home had been completed and his family moved from Kansas, Splitlog built a factory consisting of three stories and a basement. Here were manufactured buggies and two-seated hacks. Another product of the factory was coffins. A supply of seasoned walnut was always kept on hand. When a death occurred in the community all other work was stopped and the men would be put to work making a coffin. Clothing for the deceased would be taken from the Splitlog General Store. "Grandpa buried many people at his own expense and helped many more," stated a Splitlog grandson. It was said of Sarah Splitlog Evans, a daughter, that "she constantly tried to help the girls of the tribe by encouraging them to acquire an education and by taking them into her home to teach them, herself." Sarah Splitlog, beautiful and accomplished, had been educated at a Convent school in Canada.

When Cayuga was founded there were no public schools. Splitlog started a subscription school, furnished a building and allowed the teacher all she collected in tuition from her pupils as her salary. Mrs. Charles T. Roller, a native of the region, remembered that as one of those pupils she paid five cents a day for tuition.¹²

All of the Splitlog buildings were solidly and substantially constructed and they were characterized by much "gingerbread" carving and enhanced by cupolas. Many of the family buildings were surrounded by board fences painted a dazzling white. The town stood a gem in the wilderness of the Indian country. Joseph Splitlog, one of Matthias' sons, had been appointed Postmaster at Cayuga in June, 1884.¹³

As the turn of the century approached, it became apparent to the far-sighted Splitlog that transportation other than horse and

¹²"Cayuga Waters Chase the Ghost", *The Daily Oklahoman*, June 23, 1940.

¹³The Postoffice did not operate during the period 19 November 1884 to 23 June 1890. George H. Shirk, "First Postoffices Within the Boundaries of Oklahoma", *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXVI, No. 2 (Summer 1948), p. 193.

Joseph Splitlog died January 4, 1887 and his brother, Thomas, was appointed Postmaster. Thomas died in 1895 and Matthias Splitlog was appointed Postmaster but hired a substitute, Plese Tie. Joe Bombary followed Tie as Postmaster and the postoffice was moved two miles west of Cayuga, for awhile but was moved back to Cayuga and was there when the building was destroyed by fire, according to Grover Splitlog. (January 13, 1954).

buggy was the one factor that Cayuga lacked to become a booming border town. At Joplin, Missouri, and in the Ozarks, talk of mining was in the air. The rich ore, that would a few years later drop millions of dollars into the coffers of the neighboring Quapaw tribe, lay as yet unsuspected. Yet, Splitlog seemed to sense intuitively that this Indian Territory region with resources untapped could become a great mining and industrial empire, linked with all parts of the world—if it had a railroad.

The building of his railroad, the three million dollar "Splitlog Line", forerunner of a portion of the present Kansas City Southern Lines, begun in 1887, ran from Joplin to Neosho, Missouri and thence to Splitlog City and was completed by 1889.¹⁴ The dream that it would reach Cayuga never materialized. The business deal that had given it impetus turned out to be a scheme to swindle Splitlog. Blinded by the promises of friends whom he trusted, confident that in bringing the railroad to Cayuga he would insure prosperity for his tribal brothers, Splitlog plunged recklessly when he was shown a fake gold mine near Anderson, Missouri.¹⁵

The Splitlog Land and Mining Company had been organized in the winter of 1886, with Splitlog as president and M. C. Clay, a shrewd promoter from Kansas City, as business manager. As the reports of the assay claiming heavy deposits of gold and silver spread over the countryside, a fever of mining excitement gripped the people. Splitlog City was laid out, a daily stageline begun to Neosho and a newspaper was established. The roads were lined with white-topped wagons bearing the slogan "Bound for Splitlog."

On August 15, 1887 Splitlog drove the silver spike that signified the completion of the railroad to Neosho. The Indian Band that he had organized among the young men of Cayuga was present and played for the occasion.¹⁶ Work on the railroad was suspended until October 15 of that year. The line to Splitlog City was completed in October, 1889. At this time he made a speech. "I go on," he promised. "I make Cayuga and Splitlog biggest towns in the Ozarks."¹⁷

¹⁴ History of Newton, McDonald, Barry and Laurence County. 1888. Booklet, "100 Years of History and Progress, McDonald County, Missouri", published by Joe Taylor, Neosho, Missouri. 1949.

¹⁵ O. Vance Hawkins, "Grand River Empire Visioned in '89", *The Tulsa Daily World*, July 27, 1941.

¹⁶ This Band, equipped with uniforms and instruments by Matthias Splitlog who organized it, played for Indian feasts, political meetings, and for a "Wild West Show" according to Grover Splitlog. Splitlog also furnished a wagon and team to transport the Band members about the country. Grant Foreman in *The Last Trek of the Indians* (Chicago, 1946), p. 198, makes a reference to this Band playing at "a good old fashioned basket picnic" on August 15, the date of the Green Corn Dance. (The Senecas of today celebrate the Green Corn Dance, annually).

¹⁷ Hawkins, *op. cit.*

In 1890, Splitlog was elected Chief of the Senecas. The day he was installed he gave a feast for the tribe. Three beef animals were prepared for the feast and the bakery at Southwest City furnished 1500 loaves of bread for the affair.¹⁸ At this time Splitlog pledged his influence and money on obtaining back pay on treaties the Senecas had made with the United States. Shortly after this he went to Washington to transact tribal business. Afterwards, he made three trips and always at his own expense. The outcome of his efforts was that a payment of \$372.00 per capita was secured for the Senecas.

Despite some opposition from a group of mixed Senecas and Shawnees who protested that Splitlog was a white man and should not have been adopted into the tribe, the aging Splitlog never wavered from the promise he had made to Joseph Spicer, old Chief of the Senecas, who had adopted him for a payment of \$500.00¹⁹

Spicer knew that Splitlog was the only person who had the time and money to go to Washington to plead the cause of the Senecas. Splitlog's cousin and old friend, John Winney, was first Councillor when the tribe met in the "Council Chamber, Cayuga, I. T. June 20, 1894" and authorized Splitlog to "Take such action and necessary means to secure a complete statement of any and all accounts now standing between our nation and the federal government and to make settlement with our nation through proper channels." George S. Doane, U. S. Indian Agent, addressed the United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Washington, introducing Splitlog: "Matthias Splitlog, Chief of the Seneca Tribe of Indians, the bearer of this letter, is one of the most progressive Indians and his word can be strictly relied on."²⁰

In 1874, when Matthias Splitlog came to the Indian Territory, it was a part of the Catholic Diocese of Arkansas. The Indian tribes in what is now northeastern Oklahoma had been visited periodically by Jesuit priests stationed at Osage Mission (now St. Paul) Kansas. It had been more than 200 years since the Wyandots had been members of the Huron Confederacy ministered to by French Jesuits. But there were still many adherents to the Catholic Faith.²¹ However, since 1816, there had been a Methodist Mission and school among them and since the coming to the Indian Territory, Quaker missionaries had likewise been active among the tribe.

¹⁸ Nannie Lee Burns, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ National Records and Archives Service, Washington, D. C. "Letters Received by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs relating to Matthias Splitlog," 1894, 1895, 1896, 1897.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ William E. Connelly, "Religious Conceptions of the Modern Hurons", *Kansas Historical Collections*, Vol. XV (1919-1922), pp. 92-102.

Splitlog was nominally a Catholic. "I was baptized when a little baby" he had told Father Ketcham.²² Until he met Father Ketcham, the first ordained priest for the Indian Territory there is little religious history in connection with Splitlog, his migrations west having tended to separate him from the influence of the "Black Robes". He had become well versed in the cosmology of the Hurons and assisted one historian in research on that subject.²³

The coming of Father William Ketcham to Muskogee in 1892 is unquestionably an event of great importance.²⁴ Under his jurisdiction were all the tribes in the northeastern section—the Creeks, Quapaws, Peoria, Ottawa, Shawnee, Modoc, Wyandot, Seneca and Cayuga Indians. The young priest began his missionary work against almost impossible obstacles. There were few white settlers, business was bad, there had been crop failures, the great natural wealth of Oklahoma had, for the most part, not been discovered. He traveled to his missions by horseback or buggy and no chronicle of early territorial days has ever failed to mention the conditions of those early roads!²⁵

Splitlog heard of Father Ketcham's work among the Quapaw and sent for him. This is the first mention we find of any religious interest on the part of the enigmatic old Indian. Mrs. Splitlog was, at the time, a devout Quaker and the Splitlog General Store had for a number of years been available for religious services by any denomination. "Grandfather would provide a meeting place," one

²² Children of St. Mary's, *Noble Lives of a Noble Race*, (Minneapolis: Brooks Press, 1908).

²³ W. E. Connelly, *op. cit.* Connelly wrote, "Through his (Splitlog's) influence I saw the pagan ceremonies at that time observed by some of the Wyandots, though they were for the most part concealed from Christians. Splitlog, himself, knew much, especially of the doings of the Great Council composed of what I have called the Minor Gods, Once Mr. Splitlog and I were out at night. It must have been 1883 or 1884. Just before daylight a great comet became visible. He exclaimed, 'The Chariot of our grandmother, the Little Turtle'. Then he told me the story of the work of the Little Turtle."

²⁴ William Henry Ketcham, born in Sumner, Bremer county, Iowa, June 1, 1868, was the son of Alonzo Ketcham and Josephine Shansfelt. After completing successfully his classical studies and a course of philosophy at St. Charles' College, Grand Coteau, Louisiana, was pursuing the studies of theology at Mount St. Mary's of the West, Cincinnati, Ohio, when in 1889 the Territory of Oklahoma was opened to white settlers and his parents moved to the new country. Two years later upon completing his ecclesiastical studies he applied for adoption to the newly appointed Vicar Apostolic of Indian Territory (The Rt. Rev. Theophile Meerschaert). Two months after Bishop Meerschaert's arrival in Oklahoma, on December 20, 1891, Father Ketcham received the tonsure and the four minor orders and was ordained a Subdeacon on December 27, and a Deacon on New Year's Day, 1892. He was elevated to the priesthood on March 13, 1892. This first ordination of a priest for the Indian Territory must always be considered as a signal distinction and honor pertaining exclusively to Father Ketcham. He is known in ecclesiastical history as the "proto-priest of Oklahoma."—"Father Ketcham's Work Among and For The Indians of Oklahoma", *The Orphans' Record*, Vol. 3, No. 3, p. 60.

²⁵ *The Orphans' Record*, *op. cit.*

of Splitlog's grandsons said, "but he never took any part in a religious service."²⁶

Father Ketcham exerted a powerful influence upon the Splitlog family. Mrs. Splitlog became his convert and the baptismal records of Muskogee and Vinita churches show twelve Splitlog baptisms during the five years Father Ketcham was stationed at Muskogee. Another distinguished missionary who visited often at the Splitlog home was Father Arthur Versavel of Vinita.²⁷

The Rt. Rev. Theophile Meerschaert, Vicar-Apostolic of the Indian Territory (and later first Bishop of Oklahoma) had dedicated the newly completed church *St. Mary's of the Quapaws*, on November 26, 1893. At this Pontifical Mass Matthias Splitlog was confirmed. The Bishop mentions in his private diary that "Splitlog, of the Senecas, their great Chief, drove forty miles through all that bad weather to be confirmed." Concerning the weather on that day, Father Ketcham wrote: "Notwithstanding the cold winter and a continuous rain, the church building (at Quapaw) was crowded this morning and evening by Indians of various tribes, and whites residing among them. This mission is attended from Muskogee and the priest has hertofore celebrated Mass in 'God's First Temples' under the shade of forest trees."²⁸

It is not certain just when Splitlog began to think of building Cayuga Mission. His wife was incurably ill with cancer and it is possible that he intended the church as a memorial for her. He first had the idea of buying a large bell to call the people to worship in the loft of his store where Mass was celebrated. But Father Ketcham, explaining to him that the bell would be blessed (as is Catholic custom) asked him to wait until he had a building worthy to house such a bell.²⁹ The priest helped Splitlog to draw up the plans for the church but certain designs of Splitlog's own were incorporated into the plans. These include a carving of one letter

²⁶ Wrote Jeremiah Hubbard, Quaker Missionary, in his book *Forty Years Among the Indians*, (Phelps Printers, Miami, 1913). "Matthias Splitlog had fitted up a room over his store for the meetings and I have often began (*sic*) a meeting without a soul present besides myself."

On February 11, 1881, "We went to Matthias Splitlog's. Arriving there we found they had anticipated the visit by killing a beef, making 50 lbs of butter and securing 20 dozen eggs." The missionary complained however, that "The pagan Indians among the Senecas were very much opposed to my meetings. They would have their feasts at the same time to prevent the young people from coming."

²⁷ Father Versavel was born in Belgium in 1871 and came to the Indian Territory to work under the direction of Bishop Meerschaert. After nine years of missionary work among the Indians he joined the Jesuit Order and went to British Honduras as an assistant at Benque Viejo Mission. He died in Denver, Colorado, August 13, 1952. Concerning his visits to Cayuga, a granddaughter stated, "Grandpa Splitlog was very fond of Father Versavel because he could converse with him in French." Several of the Splitlog grandchildren attended school at The Sacred Heart Academy, established while Father Versavel was pastor of the Church there.

²⁸ *The Kansas City Catholic*, December 7, 1893.

²⁹ Rev. Francis T. Kramer, C.P.P.S., "A Stray Page from History", January, 1928.

of his name over each window (so that beginning on the right front of the church and proceeding around the back and to the left, one can spell out the name "Splitlog" over the arched windows). The arch of the doorway is formed of fifteen stones carved with Indian symbols.³⁰ An antique brass lock beautiful enough to grace a Cathedral, adorns the front door.

Mrs. Splitlog died in 1894 and there is a pious legend connected with her death. When it became known that she was dying the family felt it useless to try to send for the priest who was over a hundred miles away. Furthermore it was on a Saturday and they knew Father Ketcham would be enroute from Muskogee to Vinita to say Mass the following Sunday. So, they agreed it was impossible to try to send for him. However, when Father Ketcham arrived at Vinita on Saturday afternoon a telegram was handed to him which said simply, "Come at once. My wife is dying," and signed, "M. Splitlog."

The priest made all haste to hire a livery rig and start to Cayuga. It was in a pouring rain, the muddy roads were all but impassable and once the driver got into a big pasture near Fairland and had to drive for several miles before he found his way out of of the fenced enclosure. When they reached the river at midnight they were surprised to be met by the ferryman who told Father Ketcham he had been unable to sleep and for no explainable reason had walked down to the ferry crossing. Thus, Father Ketcham reached the dying woman's bedside and with Matthias acting as interpreter he administered the last sacraments of the Church. It was never determined who sent the mysterious telegram. None of the family had left Cayuga and the telegraph operator at Fairland could not identify the well dressed stranger who had sent the message and who was never seen again in the community.³¹

Building of the Cayuga church had commenced in 1893 but it was not completed when Mrs. Splitlog died. Grandchildren recall seats being improvised in order to hold the funeral services in the building.

The marble stone that Splitlog erected over his wife's grave contains an unusual inscription:

"Mrs. Eliza Splitlog, wife of Matthias Splitlog
passed away at 5:10 A.M. Sunday, September 28, 1894,
at her home, Cayuga Springs, aged 65 years.
She was the daughter of John and Hanna Barnett,
Born in Sandusky, Ohio,
And died in the Catholic faith."

³⁰ The meaning of the symbols carved on the stones cannot be explained by Splitlog's descendants.

³¹ *Noble Lives of a A Noble Race, op. cit.* This story is confirmed by Grover Splitlog who remembers the incident as a small boy and recalls the strange, death-bed scene made more dramatic by the flickering candles held in boyish hands while the priest said the prayers for the dying woman.

Early the following spring, Splitlog resumed work on the church but in November, 1895 he discontinued work on the building in order to represent the Seneca Tribe in Washington, D. C. He returned in 1896 and the church was so near completion by November that it was dedicated on November 25, 1896.

Bishop Meerschaert assisted by Father Ketcham and Father Versavel blessed the Church as "St. Matthias" and entered a notation in his private diary: "More than 5000 [500] were on the grounds. About 100 of them were Catholics. The people were carried away with the grand ceremony and the music."

The bell which had been cast in Belgium was blessed and was first tolled in memory of Mrs. Splitlog. It has been said that the beautiful deep tones of the big bronze bell could be heard for twelve miles.

The Church is constructed of native limestone. The rough wood parts of the building are of native timber, unusually reinforced and strong. The interior of the church is of imported lumber, every exposed part delicately and artistically carved. An engine house was built in the rear of the church so that the building might be heated by steam.³² A five thousand dollar organ was ordered for installation in the handsomely-carved choir-loft but Splitlog died before it was delivered.

In December 1896, Matthias Splitlog was again called to represent the Seneca tribe in Washington. He took leave of his family and left for the capitol city on December 22. Feeling ill he waited over in Monett, Missouri, for a day's rest and deciding he was better, continued his journey. But the old man was eighty-five years old and by the time he reached Washington his illness had tired him. He developed pneumonia and died there on January 2, 1897. His obituary reads, "Mr. William Nichols (a Seneca) had conveyed the corpse from the capitol of the States to the old Chief's Capitol at Cayuga."³³

Requiem Mass was said on January 14, in the church he had so recently completed. The Reverend Edward Van Waesberghe, more commonly called "Father Edward," past of *St. Mary's of the Quappaws*, was the celebrant, assisted by the Reverend Father Schele of Seneca, Missouri.

³² One of the legends that has grown up among newspaper writers in connection with the large steam pipes that still lead from the engine house to the church, is that the small house that contained the engine was a priest's house. The pipes became "tunnels" through which the priest could escape into the church and fortify himself against hostile Indians! The story is most amusing to natives of the region.

³³ *The Vinita Leader*, January 14, 1897.

Hundreds of relatives and friends came to pay homage to the man whose life had been so useful. Splitlog was buried beside his wife in the churchyard of the mission.

Cayuga was a mission attended from Vinita through the stormy years when Splitlog's estate was being settled. The only one of his ten children to survive him was his son, Henry, who made an affidavit that his father had meant to deed the three acres of land where the church and cemetery are located, to the Catholic Church. The estate was in litigation because Splitlog died intestate. It was known that he had made a will but it was never found. It was 1916 before Bishop Meerschaert received the deed to the property.³⁴

In 1930, due to the difficulty of supplying priests for the mission, as well as to the dwindling number of Catholics in the region, the church was sold to the Methodists by Bishop Francis C. Kelley. For some years afterwards Cayuga was used as a school-house, with occasional religious services held on Sundays. Then it fell into disuse and for many years stood, seemingly forgotten, but always of interest to tourists and persons interested in its history.

When the church was sold, the bell of which Splitlog had been so proud was taken to Nowata and placed in St. Catherine's Church. The Altar, the confessional and other special furnishings of a Catholic Church, were removed. As the years passed the stained glass windows were broken and rain began to damage the interior. The Church was at one time dynamited in four places by vandals seeking gold that Splitlog (according to legend) hid shortly before his death.

Early in 1953, Mr. Dick Sellers of Drumright, whose country home is near the site of old Cayuga town, bought the old church for purely sentimental reasons. He had grown up in the Cayuga area, had known the Splitlog family and the history of the church and could not bear to see it fall into ruin. The restoration of the church is being completed at this writing and it is the hope of Sellers to keep it a historical landmark to remind passers-by of Splitlog's ultimate achievement in building.³⁵

³⁴ The Splitlog file at the Quapaw Indian Agency, Miami, bulges with letters concerning Cayuga Mission during this period. Father Ketcham, who became director of the Catholic Indian Bureau, Washington, D. C. in 1901, was responsible for the final purchase of the church from the Splitlog heirs.

³⁵ The Cayuga bell which has been at Nowata since 1930, is soon to be returned to the Cayuga Church. The Most Reverend Eugene J. McGuinness, Bishop of Oklahoma, has consented to having the bell, because of its sentimental and historic value, returned to the church at the special request of Chief Grover Splitlog.