

Ben Marshall and His Prize Peaches



Porter, Oklahoma, is well-known in Oklahoma for its peaches, and that all started with Ben Marshall. Marshall was the son of a wealthy and **prominent mixed-blood** Muskogee/Creek man who brought 19 **slaves** with him when he came west from Alabama in 1835 and settled at the **fork** of the Verdigris and Arkansas Rivers.

Ben was born in 1866 on his father's farm. He attended Tullahassee Mission and then went on to Carlisle in Pennsylvania, a college for Indian students. The famous athlete Jim Thorpe also attended Carlisle.

When Ben returned home he poured his energy into farming. He raised hundreds of acres of corn and cotton, cattle and hogs, and his operation was known as one of the finest farms in Indian Territory.

In 1890 he planted a peach **orchard**, the first in the area, about five miles southeast of Porter. The orchard was a great success. In 1904 Ben took his peaches to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis. The peaches were highly acclaimed at the World's Fair and were awarded a Gold Medal for their quality.

Peaches emerged as a major **cash crop** in the area after that and have been an **economic mainstay** ever since.

Vocabulary

cash crop— a crop produced for its commercial value rather than for use by the grower

economic— of, relating to, or based on the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services

fork— the place where something divides into branches

mainstay— a chief support

mixed-blood— individuals of mixed European and Native American ancestry

orchard— a place where fruit or nut trees are grown

prominent— distinguished

slave— a person who is owned by another person and can be sold at the owner's will