THE CHICKASAW NATION ON THE EVE OF THE CIVIL WAR

*By Stephen Steacy**

On a clear, hot July morning in 1861, there was greater than usual activity at Bloomfield Academy. It was the day of public examination, held every year to display the progress made by the girls at the institution. It was always an impressive occasion, with speeches by local dignitaries and the superintendent of education of the Chickasaw Nation. As usual, the families of the girls would be in attendance, beaming with pride at the accomplishments of their daughters. It was often a rather tearful ceremony, as graduations sometimes are, but this year the event held more than the normal amount of pathos. As Reverend J. H. Carr, the superintendent of Bloomfield Academy knew, this examination would be the last for many years. The United States was already torn by civil war and now the conflict seemed certain to reach the Indian nations of Indian Territory. Fearing for the safety of their children, most of the parents were planning to withdraw their daughters, forcing the Mission Board of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South to close the school. Who could know when, if ever, the school might be reopened? It was sad, Reverend Carr thought, that all the good work done here would have to end this way. Certainly much good work had been done here in the seven years since the school's founding. Reflecting upon his life in the Chickasaw Nation, Reverend Carr recalled the fine progress the Chickasaws had made over the years both in education and government. He firmly believed that education had uplifted every facet of the everyday life of the Chickasaws. He also believed that such was the fiber of these people that whatever might befall them, they would rebuild and begin anew. He was startled from his reverie by a sudden flurry of activity behind him; the ceremonies were about to begin.

This brief glimpse gives a view of one facet of Chickasaw life, that of education, on the eve of the Civil War. There were other aspects as well, including the social structure, politics, and the economy. All of these make up the development of the Chickasaw Nation for the period under consideration.

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SOCIAL STRUCTURE

By the time the Chickasaws left their ancestral homes in Mississippi and came to Indian Territory they had, in large measure, adopted the society and many of the habits of the white man. They had dispensed with their hereditary king in 1838, following the removal. This king or *Minko* had no real powers. A council of chiefs would override any objections he might have so his powers were very much circumscribed. Thus, the Chickasaws embraced the white man's form of government. Society itself was patterned after white models.[1]

Three different kinds of associations existed in Chickasaw society. These were: (1) a dual division, (2) totemic subdivisions or clans, and (3) large numbers of cantonal or local groups, usually bearing names indicative of their locality. The two main groups, called the Panther group and the Spanish group, were subdivided into clans bearing the names of animals. Among the various clans were various local divisions. There was a certain hierarchy in the clan configuration which was adhered to whenever camp was made or a meeting held. The Chickasaw camp was formed in a square which was divided in half with each main group taking a side. The clans of the group were then arranged with the highest ranked clan at the top of the square.[2]

There were fifteen clans or *iksas* in the Chickasaw tribe. These clans were, Minko (chief clan), Spanish, Raccoon, Panther, Wildcat, Fish, Deer, Bird, Skunk, Squirrel, Alligator, Wolf, Blackbird, Fox or Red Fox, and Haloba (meaning either eagle or buffalo, the translation being uncertain). These clans were exogamous, meaning that a man or woman usually married outside his or her clan. The two large divisions, the Panther and Spanish groups, were endogamous with members of these divisions marrying members of the same group.[3] This somewhat elaborate structure notwithstanding, clans were only important in intertribal affairs to establish protocol. In everyday life, the actions of the many local groups had a much greater influence on each individual.[4]

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[1] John R. Swanton, "Social and Religious Beliefs and Usages of the Chickasaw Indians," "*Forty-fourth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1926-1927* (Washington, D. C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1928) p. 191.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 193-194.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 196-198.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 203.

Among the Chickasaws there was a communal feeling concerning property rights. Land was held in common by the tribe except for use of ownership to those who built houses or cleared land in certain areas. This communal arrangement obtained in the case of the town garden. With regard to property of a deceased person, this would not go to the decedent's children but instead passed to the brothers and sisters and children of the deceased's sister. In this way the property remained in the clan.[5]

Punishment for crime among the Chickasaws was rather severe based on a Chickasaw version of the old Hebrew Mosaic Law. If a man or woman killed another, the perpetrator of the crime was killed by relatives of the deceased after the manner of a Sicilian vendetta. If the guilty party could not be found the brother of the murderer or his nearest male relative was killed. This expiated the crime. It might also be noted that equals killed equals, a man was killed for a man and a woman for a woman. Even the close relatives of the guilty party did not interfere. If this seems a bit harsh, it can be noted that the perjury law passed during the second session of the 1857 Chickasaw legislature called for severe whipping and in some cases death by hanging.[6]

Adultery was severely punished in earlier times. The favorite method was to shoot the offending party with barbed arrows. The attrition was too great so a less drastic method was introduced. If a husband had it on good authority that his wife was unfaithful, he and a group of friends simply sought an opportune moment and chastised her severely, after which the usual thing to do was to cut off her hair, a portion of her nose, and in certain cases a lip also. There were, however, certain gradations of severity. For the first offense a woman might have her hair cut off and her ears cropped and a man might have his ears cut off close to his head. The second offense was often punishable by the cutting off of the nose and upper lip. The third transgression might mean death although this was rarely the case. Minor offenses such as horse stealing were punished by whipping. After a man was punished in this way, his debt to society was considered paid and no social ostracism followed him.[7]

Many historians have alluded to the idle and indolent nature

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[5] *Ibid.*, p. 216.

[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 217-218.

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 218-219.

of Indian men with regard to the more menial and mundane chores of life. This was apparently not the case among the Chickasaws. Although women occupied a somewhat inferior status socially, it appears that the men did most of the agricultural work. In addition to this, the men did the house-building and hunting, and of course held complete sway in the various ceremonies.[8]

With regard to religion the Chickasaws always seemed to have believed in a supreme being who was characterized as *Ababinki* or "father above." This concept was probably due to Christian influence. Before this there was a supreme but not sole deity, dealing with the sky or sun. "A multiplicity of celestial powers" was the rule. They were called the spirits of the "clouds, sun, clear sky, and He that lives above the clear sky".[9]

Some of the more exotic customs of the Chickasaws concerned burial practices. The dead were often buried under the floor of the house in which they died, together with their personal belongings. If the deceased were a man, he was interred with his rifle and other hunting equipment. If the person was a woman or child, the few simple possessions that he or she might have treasured were buried with the body. Mourning went on for an extended period of time, in some instances for a year. Widows were often made to wait three years before remarrying. If they remarried sooner they could lay themselves open to a charge of adultery. These and similar customs persisted even after the Civil War. For instance, if the decedent had been an important man, all the women of the neighborhood would cry in front of his house for half an hour. They no longer buried the dead in the house, but they continued to erect small log houses over the grave to symbolize the older custom. The survivor, either husband or wife, wept and wailed over a grave, morning and evening, for a month. Chickasaws who were past middle age in the early twentieth century remembered the custom well.[10]

Of all the Chickasaw religious customs, one of the most important was the *Pishofa* ceremony. This ceremony was a feast and a dance accompanying the treatment of the sick. The "treatment" usually began on the third or fourth day of illness.[11] The ceremony was preceded by a banquet with the entire village tak-

[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 228-229.

[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 247-248.

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 231-233.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 258.

ing part. This was followed by a dance, the arrangement of which depended upon the eccentricities of the "attending physician." The participants danced with great vigor as it was believed that the vitality of the dancers imparted strength to the sick person.[12]

Recreation was a vital part of Chickasaw life, and a ball game similar to lacrosse was the favorite pastime. The game was played with sticks, perhaps two and one half feet long, which had a sort of leather webbing for catching a feather-stuffed buckskin ball. The object was to throw the ball through the opponent's goal. These games were hotly contested and were played until well past the time of removal to Indian Territory. Other games were also played, including one in which both men and women participated. There were also contests similar to soccer and field hockey.[13]

The Chickasaw mode of dress, at least for half-breeds, resembled that of his white counterpart on the frontier. Coarse homespun cloth was made into trousers, shirts, bandanas and sashes for men. Women wore long frocks of homespun or calico. Footwear for both sexes consisted of shoes or moccasins.[14] This differed from the dress of most fullbloods which resembled that worn by the Creeks and Seminoles. This would consist of a turban, shirt, a frock with a fringed cape, a bead belt, a beaded pouch, leather leggings, moccasins, and a knife in the belt. Women wore long dresses of ticking, calico, or sometimes silk, neckerchiefs, and shoes or moccasins.[15]

Much of the social life in Indian Territory found expression in parties, dances, or other such gatherings. The Chickasaws who occupied the region around the Red River can be considered as typical. A favorite social event there was the "hanking," the Chickasaw equivalent of a quilting bee. The whole day would be topped off by a sumptuous repast followed by music and dancing. The dances were primarily traditional Indian works but waltzes and reels were sometimes added to the repertoire.[16] Also big in

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[12] *Ibid.*, p. 261.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 242.

[14] Norman Graebner, "Provincial Indian Society in Oklahoma," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXIII (Winter, 1945-46) pp. 331-332.

[15] Ethan Allen Hitchcock, *Traveler in Indian Territory*, Grant Foreman, ed. (Cedar Rapids, Ia: Torch Press, 1930), p. 199.

[16] Graebner, *op. cit.*, *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXIII, pp. 336-337.

the local calendar of events were camp meetings which were as much social gatherings as religious experiences. Many of these meetings lasted for three weeks with families coming for miles to be in on the festivities.[17]

EDUCATION

Education seemed to be an area of much concern to the Chickasaws. Prior to the removal in 1837-38, there were four mission schools in Mississippi. The first and probably the most significant of these schools was Charity Hall, founded in 1820, under the auspices of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.[18] Under its director, Robert Bell, the school became a center of Chickasaw education. This school was carried on in the Oklahoma Territory under the name of Burney Academy, which was situated near the present day town of Lebanon. It was called by various names including Lebanon Institute and the Chickasaw Orphans Home.[18a]

Soon after their arrival in Indian Territory the Chickasaws in 1842 asked the Secretary of War for a large manual labor boarding school so the young men would not have to be sent out of the nation to be educated. The usual bureaucratic procrastination followed and the request was not acted upon. The Chickasaws also contacted various religious denominations concerning the establishment of mission schools, but again they received little encouragement. The situation continued to deteriorate and by 1847, there were no schools at all in the Chickasaw district. The last teacher had abandoned his post and there were no missionaries.[19] But by 1848, contracts had been made and by 1852 the Chickasaw Manual Labor Academy opened, followed within two years by Bloomfield Academy, Wapanucka Academy, and Colbert Institute. The Manual Labor Academy, Bloomfield and Colbert were operated in conjunction with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South while Wapanucka Academy was under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church.[20] Prior to this, the few who were educated were sent to Choctaw schools in the Choctaw Nation or in Ken-

[17] *Ibid.*, pp. 336-337.

[18] Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "Charity Hall, an early Chickasaw School," *ibid.*, Vol. XI, (September, 1933), pp. 913-920.

[18a] Muriel H. Wright, "Education in the Chickasaw Nation," *ibid.*, Vol. XXXLV (Winter, 1956-1957) pp. 466-467

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 467.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 468.

(Oklahoma Historical Society)

OLD BLOOMFIELD ACADEMY, 1854

Old Bloomfield Academy was southwest of Achille in Bryan County, and about 1½ miles southwest of the second site of Bloomfield Academy and just west of the abandoned Bloomfield cemetery. Print from original painting by Alice Hearrell Murray, wife of the late Gov. William H. Murray of Oklahoma, 1931-35.

tucky Several also attended Plainfield Academy, located at Plainfield, Connecticut.[21]

Of all the schools in Chickasaw territory, Bloomfield Academy had the longest existence. (It received its name when the Superintendent, J. H. Carr, was attempting to give directions as to how to reach the school. He mentioned that the site was situated in a beautiful field filled with blooming wild flowers. Bloomfield was adopted as the official designation of the school.)[22] The school began actual operations in 1853 as an institution under Methodist aegis. Superintendent Carr was with the school in its initial stages and remained in that post throughout the 1850's.

The first contract called for a total enrollment of forty-five girls, but only thirty were at the school during its first three years. During this period, the Chickasaw Nation appropriated $1,000 a year for the pupils out of tribal funds. In 1857, this allowance was increased to $3,000 and the Church's share of the expense was to be $500 although it ran much higher. In 1858, the enrollment was fifty-four girls with an average attendance of forty-five. In 1859, the annual allowance was again increased to cover not only the expenses of the individual student but also $12.00 per year for clothing as well. By 1860, the school's enrollment had increased to sixty In the summer of 1861, the pressures of the Civil War caused the families of the students to withdraw them from school, thus forcing it to discontinue operations. The physical plant of the school was not affected appreciably during the war.[23]

The curriculum at Bloomfield was the same as that followed in most of the Indian mission schools during this period. It included instruction in the English language and alphabet, spelling, reading, writing, and arithmetic, both written and mental. As the students advanced, natural philosophy, grammar, botany, and United States history were added. The girls were also taught to cut, make, and mend their own clothes. The afternoons were largely devoted to sewing, weaving and embroidery work, drawing, painting, and vocal music.[24] For all this, the teachers at Bloom-

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[21] Carolyn Foreman, "Education Among the Chickasaws," *ibid.*, Vol. XV (June, 1937), p. 148.

[22] Wright, "Education in the Chickasaw Nation," *ibid.*, Vol. XXXIV, p. 488.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 488.

[24] Susan J. Carr, "Bloomfield Academy and its Founder," *ibid.*, Vol. II (December, 1924), p. 369.

field received the sum of $100 per year plus room and board. This was gradually increased to $250 by 1861. During the entire period, Superintendent Carr received $600 per year.[25]

The Chickasaw Manual Labor Academy was probably the most noteworthy of the schools in the Chickasaw Nation both in terms of size and accomplishments. The Chickasaws had asked for such a school in 1842. Suitable plans were drawn and a contract made in 1844 for a large coeducational academy Four years elapsed before construction was even begun. It was not until 1852, ten years after the initial request, that operations at the school commenced. The delay caused the Indians to distrust the white man's promises. Under the able leadership of its superintendent, Reverend John C. Robinson, the school made good progress. In 1854, the coeducational format was dropped and the school became an all male institution. By this time the enrollment reached one hundred twenty, a figure that remained constant up to the Civil War.

The school was a joint enterprise of the Chickasaw Nation and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Under the terms of the contract, the ratio of financial support was to be $7,000 yearly provided by the Chickasaws and $1,500 annually donated by the Church. In 1857, the Chickasaw legislature authorized a supplemental grant of $1,250. After this, such aid was appropriated as financial exegencies dictated.[26]

Under Robinson's management, the Chickasaw Manual Labor Academy became very progressive in its industrial arts program. The main thrust of this program was directed toward farming and stock raising. In 1856, Reverend Robinson began teaching scientific farming to the boys at the academy Such subjects as improved seeds, care of the land, and other forms of good farm management were stressed. In 1858, a flour mill and a saw mill were set up at the school. At the same time, Reverend Robinson also subscribed to various learned agricultural journals so the students might keep abreast of new developments and techniques.[27]

The program of study at the school paralleled that of the other mission schools in the Nation. The students, however, were not typical. Most of them were grown men who came to the school

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 389.

[26] Wright, "Education in the Chickasaw Nation," *ibid.*, Vol. XXXIV, p. 489.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 489.

to learn better methods of agriculture. In addition to religious instruction, which was strongly emphasized, simple spelling and reading were main subjects as a great many of the students were illiterate. Charles A. Goodrich's graded readers, his *History of North America* and *Ancient History*, plus Samuel A. Mitchell's *Primary Geography* were the main text books.[28] According to Reverend Robinson, the school possessed a competent and dedicated staff, including Mr. S. W. Dunn, Reverend William Jones, and Miss Ellen Steele. These people were credited with the success of the school.[29]

The academy was under the direct control of the Indian Mission Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South which appointed the superintendent who governed the school. His job was not an easy one, as he was accountable not only to the Mission Conference but also the board of trustees and the other authorities of the Chickasaw Nation. It would seem that the job called for much patience and tact. He was also responsible for fixing the salaries of teachers and assistants and for allocating the school's $10,000 annual operational budget.[30]

It would appear that the future of the Manual Labor Academy was bright. Reverend Robinson's ambitious program was working well. The school had 200 acres of land enclosed with 160 acres under cultivation. In addition, the farm was well equipped with modern implements.[31] The students of the academy were acquiring a broad general knowledge and seemed content with their lot and were not prone to run away.[32] But the image was soon tarnished by the Civil War. At the end of the term in June 1861, the school closed and did not reopen until after the end of the war.[33] It was not so fortunate as Bloomfield, incurring rather extensive damage during the conflict.

Wapanucka Academy, like Bloomfield Academy, was a school for girls. It was operated by the Presbyterian Church and was opened in 1852. The name is derived from *Wapanachki*, a Dela-

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[28] Carolyn Foreman, "Chickasaw Manual Labor Academy," *ibid.*, Vol. XXIII (Winter, 1945-1946), p. 343.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 344.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 349.

[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 346-347

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 343.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 349.

ware Indian word meaning "eastern land people."[34] During its first years, it was known locally as Allen's Academy after a certain J. S. Allen who first headed the school's construction in 1851-52. The school was established under a contract between William Medill, Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Chickasaws, and Walter Lowrie acting in behalf of the Mission Board of the Presbyterian Church of the United States. J. S. Allen served as interim superintendent until 1852, when the Reverend Hamilton Ballentine, his wife, and two teachers took over operation of the school, with forty girls soon in attendance.[35]

At the outset, there seemed to be some misunderstanding on the part of the Chickasaw officials with regard to the financing of the institution. On October 19, 1852, the council voted to appropriate $2,500 per year for the maintenance of 100 girls at Wapanucka. This fell far short of the calculations of Medill and Lowrie who had figured $75.00 per girl annually from the Chickasaw Council plus the amount donated by the Board of Missions. They believed the Council should pay three quarters of the cost and the Mission Board one quarter.[36] Actually, there were two points of conflict regarding this matter of finances. In the first place, Lowrie held that the Chickasaw Council ought to pay $75.00 per girl annually for 100 girls whether that number was actually enrolled or not. He also believed that the tribal legislature should appropriate additional funds to cover the expenses incurred in adding two wings to the building in 1852. The Chickasaws contended that they were only obligated to pay $75.00 annually for each pupil actually enrolled at the school. They flatly refused to appropriate funds for the additions to the building which were ordered constructed on Lowrie's own authority without the approval of the Chickasaws. This squabbling went on for some time. In fact the Chickasaws even considered taking over the school and planning for its management under a private contract, but this did not materialize. The dispute was finally settled on October 5, 1854, when the Chickasaw Council repealed its 1852 resolution and agreed to pay the $75.00 per pupil but only for the number actually enrolled.[37] In this sense they had won out over the board.

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[34] Muriel H. Wright, "Wapanucka Academy, Chickasaw Nation," *ibid.*, Vo. XII (December, 1934), p. 405.

[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 406-407

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 408.

[37] *Ibid.*, pp. 415-416, 420.

This was not an isolated case. In the long run, the Mission Board spent much more than the Chickasaws paid out. In the written accounts of the Mission Board for June, 1860, the records show that over a period of years, the Board paid out $10,555.25 more than it got from the Indians. From 1852 to 1857 the Church spent $9,440 more than the Council appropriated besides $5,000 in additional expenditures from 1857 to 1860. In the eight years between 1852 and 1860, expenditures for all purposes on the part of the Mission Board came to $25,000.[38] It seems that the Chickasaws relied heavily upon the munificense of the Mission Board rather than their own treasury

On July 6, 1860, following the close of the school term, the Board decided to cease operations because of insufficient funds to operate the institution. All the furniture, horses, wagons, cattle, and other goods and provisions were sold, and the academy was closed for eight years.[39] It had to its credit, however, one distinction; it was the only school in the territory mentioned in a treaty In the second article of the Treaty of Separation between the Choctaws and Chickasaws in 1855, it was stipulated that should the new tribal boundary line not place Wapanucka Academy inside Chickasaw territory, an offset would be made to correct the situation. A survey subsequent to the treaty's ratification placed the school two miles within the Chickasaw Nation.[40]

The method of operation at Wapanucka closely resembled that of the other schools with its long forty week term and in the meager salaries of the teachers. One facet was unique, and that was the method of instruction in home economics. At Wapanucka, all the girls were divided into "families" with all ages and sizes represented and were under the care of an adult supervisor. The older girls would handle the younger ones and in this way it was believed that the school situation would more closely approximate the conditions of home life, making for a more meaningful learning experience.

It is true that the mission schools in the Chickasaw Nation had a salubrious effect on the people. It is also evident that despite the parsimonious propensities of the Chickasaw Council and legislature, the Nation had an abiding concern for education. In fact, much of the Constitution of 1856 was devoted to the organi-

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[38] *Ibid.*, p. 421.

[39] *Ibid.*, pp. 421-422.

[40] *Ibid.*, pp. 405-406.

zation of a national school system. A superintendent of public education was to be elected for a four-year term. Contracts between the boards of trustees of the various schools and teachers at those institutions were to have legislative approval.[41] The elected superintendent of instruction appointed the trustees of the school within the counties established in 1856. In addition, he had to ride circuit, as it were, visiting the schools every three months, at public examination time, and any time the situation at a particular school got out of hand, which rarely happened.[42]

A feature of the schools in the Chickasaw Nation at this time was the oral public examination. Reverend John Robinson provided this characterization. "The examination was without any special previous preparation, and the selections were made promiscuously from every part of the course they had studied, exhibiting the scholars in their true condition, making reasonable deduction in their favor on account of embarrassment. It was had in the presence of a large number of respectable citizens and strangers.[43] From this statement it can be inferred that these examinations were very much social as well as intellectual events.

These schools exercised a refining influence upon the natives in the areas where they operated. As Robinson stated, "Yet with the great body of the people there is a marked progressive improvement, evincing a rapid preparation to become an integral part of the body politic of the great nation by which they are encircled."[44] The Reverend Edward Cauch, superintendent of Colbert Institute, echoed this sentiment when he reported. "The people are generally peaceable, sober, and industrious and have fine crops Most of the Indians in this vicinity are advancing rapidly in civilization; they are opening good farms, building comfortable houses, and are trying to furnish their homes comfortably"[45] Certainly the philosophy of the mission schools was summed up by Reverend J H. Carr of Bloomfield when he said. "It is the theory of work that they must learn in order to be pre-

[41] Caroline Davis, "Education of the Chickasaws 1856-1907" *Ibid.*, Vol. XV (December, 1937) p. 416.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 416.

[43] J. C. Robinson to Elias Rector, August 6, 1860, United States Department of the Interior, *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1860-1861* (Washington: George W Bowman, 1861) p. 376.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 376.

[45] E. Cauch to Elias Rector, August 27, 1857, United States Department of the Interior, *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1857-1858* (Washington: William A. Harris, 1858) pp. 546-547.

pared for the emergencies of life."[46] Dedication and hard work were the watchwords in these early frontier schools.

Politics

The government of the Chickasaws during the period prior to removal was made up of a head chief referred to as "the king," and a council of chiefs. This group was at first hereditary but later became elective. This arrangement obtained until the middle 1850's. In 1855, the Chickasaw council appointed Sampson Folsom and Edmund Pickens as tribal representatives with orders to proceed to Washington to agitate for an independent Chickasaw Nation. This was brought about because "the political connection heretofore existing between the Choctaw and Chickasaw tribes of Indians has given rise to unhappy and injurious dissensions and controversies among them.."[47] The controversy centered largely around the fear of the Chickasaws that the numerically superior Choctaws might gain control of their finances.

This desire for independent status was recognized by the government in Washington. Many statements were made by the Indian Affairs Bureau noting the keen desire of the Chickasaws to set up their own nation. It was felt that such a separation "would have a decided tendency to promote their advancement and permanent prosperity."[48]

There were four prominent issues in the Washington conference of 1855: (1) The United States government sought a cession of all the Choctaw claims west of the hundredth meridian of longitude; (2) they also wanted a long-term lease of all the commonly held Choctaw and Chickasaw land between the ninety-eighth and one hundredth meridians for the purpose of settling other tribes on it, notably the Wichitas and the Delawares; (3) the Chickasaws earnestly desired political sovereignty; (4) the Choctaws were holding out for a settlement of their net proceeds claim.[49]

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[46] J. H. Carr to George Manypenny, July 28, 1856, United States Department of the Interior, *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1856-1857* (Washington: Cornelius Wendell, 1857) p. 715.

[47] Portion of the Chickasaw—Choctaw Treaty of 1855 in "Indian Documents," Vol. L, p. 87 Indian Archives, Oklahoma Historical Society Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[48] George Manypenny to Robert McClelland, November 26, 1853, United States Department of the Interior, *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1853-1854* (Washington: Beverley Tucker, 1854) p. 255.

[49] Muriel H. Wright, "Brief Outline of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations in Indian Territory, 1820-1860," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. VII (December, 1929) p. 408.

The negotiations lasted some three months before the agreement was signed on June 22, 1855. Under the terms of the treaty, the Chickasaws were given all the country between the eastern boundary of the old Chickasaw district and the ninety-eighth meridian to govern as a sovereign nation. In addition, the land between the ninety-eighth and one hundredth meridians was to be leased to the United States for permanent settlement of the Wichita and Delaware Indians, with the Chickasaws and Choctaws retaining full settlement rights. In return the United States treasury was to pay the sum of $800,000, three-fourths of which was to go to the Choctaws and one-fourth to the Chickasaws. The treaty was ratified by the Chickasaw General Council on October 3, 1855, with the stipulation that the nineteenth article be amended to allow for the appointment of surveyors to mark the eastern and western boundaries of the Choctaw Nation and the western boundary of the Chickasaw Nation. The Choctaw legislature failed to consider this proviso, consequently the Chickasaw council summarily rescinded its ratification. It was largely an empty gesture because the United States Senate, in executive session, ratified the treaty on February 21, 1856, thus putting its provisions into effect.[40]

With independence achieved, the Chickasaws began the task of creating a new government. The form they adopted was decidedly republican in nature. The constitution contained a bill of rights and guaranteed the right to trial by jury. Power was delegated to a bicameral legislature, an executive and a judicial branch. The chief executive of the nation was to be a governor, elected every two years, with the provision that should a candidate not receive a majority of the popular votes cast, a joint session of the legislature would elect the governor. The judiciary consisted of a supreme court, circuit courts, and county courts with the judges of the two higher courts elected by a majority in both houses of the legislature.[41]

Politically, the Chickasaw Nation was divided into four counties: Pickens, Tishomingo, Panola, and Pontotoc. This simple political configuration was convenient and kept the representative process manageable. Each county was a senatorial district, electing three senators every two years. The lower house was elected on an annual basis. Four representatives were elected in Pickens and Tishomingo counties and five were chosen in

[40] *Ibid.*, pp. 406-409.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 410.

(Wright Collection)

OLD CAPITOL AT TISHOMINGO,
CHICKASAW NATION, 1858

Panola and Pontotoc counties. Lesser officials such as sheriffs and constables were elected every two years by the voters in each county.[32]

Three of the counties in the Chickasaw Nation were named primarily after noted Chickasaw leaders or places prominent in Chickasaw history. Panola (Choctaw word for cotton) County, the smallest of the four, was located in the extreme southeastern corner of the Nation. Its boundaries corresponded closely with those of the former Panola County (the cotton plantation region) which was organized under Choctaw auspices in 1850. Pickens County was situated in the southwestern portion, wide range region, of the Nation between the Washita and Red rivers. It was named for Edmund Pickens, for many years recognized as a great tribal leader. He was one of three commissioners who negotiated the Washington treaty of 1852 which cleared up many of the misunderstandings engendered by the treaties of 1832 and 1834. He was also one of the five representatives who signed the Doaksville Agreement with the Choctaws in 1854. This laid the groundwork for the separation treaty of 1855 in which Pickens also played a significant role. He was a member of the constitutional convention in 1856 and served as a national senator from 1857 to 1861. Tishomingo County, located in the east central part of the Nation, commemorated the great leader of the Chickasaws who played such an important part in tribal history for many years. He was present at the first treaty between the United States and the Chickasaws in 1786 and played important parts in the treaties of 1832 and 1834. He died in 1838 on his way west from Mississippi. Pontotoc County recalled a location of great importance to the Chickasaws. The original Pontotoc was situated in Mississippi, and was the site of the main tribal council house. It was in this council house that the removal treaty of 1832 was signed.[33]

During the first years of the new Chickasaw Nation, probably the most prominent man in governmental affairs was Cyrus Harris. As first governor of the Nation, his job was to help get the Nation started on the right path. He was known for his administrative ability, and the people of the Nation manifested their confidence in him by electing him governor five times, a record unequalled among the Chickasaws.

Harris was born in Mississippi in 1817. He left that area in

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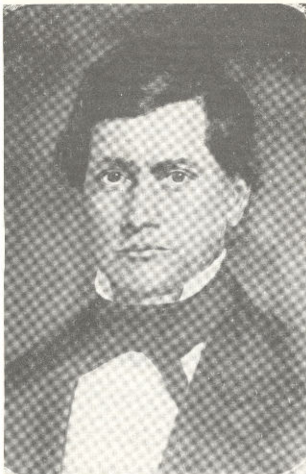
[32] *Ibid.*, pp. 410-411.

[33] Muriel H. Wright, "Organization of Counties in the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations," *ibid.*, Vol. VIII (September, 1930), pp. 328-329.



(Oklahoma Historical Society)

CYRUS HARRIS, CHICKASAW
First elected Governor of the Chickasaw Nation, 1857

1837 and settled on the Blue River in present-day Johnston County. From the beginning, he showed a marked interest in politics. In 1850, he was chosen to accompany Edmund Pickens as a delegate to Washington. During this time he also served as secretary of the National Council and as national treasurer. During this period he had moved to Boggy Depot and then to Pennington Creek. In November 1855, he moved to a new home located at Mill Creek, just northwest of Tishomingo, where he lived until his death in 1888.[54]

Harris's election to the governorship was something less than a landslide. He was chosen by a joint vote of the legislature, there being no majority among the candidates. His margin of victory was one vote. His chief opponent throughout the period was Dougherty Colbert, who defeated Harris for the governorship in 1858. Harris was re-elected in 1860 and defeated again in 1862. His defeat can be attributed largely to the fact that his views toward the Civil War were not militant enough. The Chickasaws had a marked preference for the Confederacy and while Harris was certainly no Northern sympathizer, he was known to believe that disunion was not in the best interests of the Nation. Harris approved the secession resolutions on May 25, 1861 largely because the United States had abandoned its forts in Indian Territory, thus exposing the Chickasaws of the region to attack by the plains tribes. He believed that protection of the area by some power, either Federal or Confederate, was necessary.[55]

The relations of the Chickasaws with the United States date from the Confederation period. In the year 1786, the first treaty between the two groups was promulgated. This agreement called for the government to supply the Chickasaws with an annual annuity in goods. This was expanded by an act passed in 1799, which stated that the sum of $3,000 per year would be paid as a permanent annual annuity. Later, after the sale of the Chickasaw tribal lands, the funds obtained were held in trust by the United States and paid annually to the occupants of the original land in the form of annuities. Also, certain monies were invested for the Chickasaws by the government at five percent interest.[56]

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[54] John B. Meserve, "Governor Cyrus Harris," *Ibid.*, Vol. XV (December, 1937), pp. 380-381.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 381.

[56] George Manypenny to Robert McClelland, November 26, 1855. United States Department of the Interior, *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1855-1856* (Washington: Cornelius Wendell, 1856) pp. 566-567.

The Chickasaw relations with the Federal government centered largely around their dealings with the Indian Affairs Bureau and its representative, the United States Indian agent. The Indian agent usually resided in the territory he supervised and it was his job to keep things orderly and to keep his superiors in Washington apprised of any and all developments. During most of the 1850's, the main problem facing the government was continued friction between the Choctaws and the Chickasaws. Apparently the treaty of 1855 did not assuage the rankled feelings of the two tribes. Douglas H. Cooper, agent for the Chickasaws and Choctaws for most of the period, sees the trouble stemming from an "exclusiveness" which was exacerbated by separate tribal moneyed interests.[57] Because of this conflict, Choctaws who lived in Chickasaw country were denied the suffrage by the Chickasaw government although the Choctaws did not retliate. "It is evident," Cooper wrote, "that there must be antagonism of interest and feeling between the Choctaw and Chickasaw citizens so long as they look to their tribal or family funds for support of their government."[58] Cooper believed it was necessary to develop a common interest between the two tribes, an opinion shared by many of his contemporaries in the Indian Bureau. He proposed a plan which, if adopted, might have aided the situation. He called for allotting to each Chickasaw and Choctaw adult male a tract of land large enough for a homestead and making the land non-transferable for twenty-one years. The remainder of the commonly owned lands of the two tribes would be set apart as an International domain. It would also be stipulated that any person either tribe wished to adopt would have the right to settle on a tract of land equal in size to that given each Indian for $1.25 per acre, payable to the United States who would in turn use it for the benefit of the two tribes. An Indian could acquire additional land in the same way, the whole amount then to be divided up proportionately between the two tribes to support their governments and schools.[59] This plan was not adopted because both tribes objected to breaking up lands held in common.

Similar sentiments were voiced by other officials who saw the allocating of large tracts of land and the payment of annuities to the Indians for land cessions as a great mistake. They worked

[57] Douglas H. Cooper to George Manypenny, September 1, 1856, United States Department of the Interior, *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1856-1857*, p. 698.

[58] *Ibid.*, p. 698.

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 699.

for reversal of this policy but were unsuccessful. Using supposed concern for the Indian's welfare as a basis, they argued that large areas of land prevented the Indians from acquiring settled habits. These officials also felt that the payment of annuities led to dependence and idleness and made the Indians targets for unscrupulous traders.[60] Such solicitude seems hypocritical inasmuch as the Indians were practically forced off of their old lands and the per capita annuity payment in 1855 was approximately $10.00 per person.[61]

Concern on the part of the United States government was also voiced with regard to the laws and their enforcement in the Chickasaw Nation. It was noted that while the Choctaw Nation functioned smoothly in this respect, "among the Chickasaws the laws, owing to different and permanent reasons, are not well enforced."[62] The reason for this was said to be the fact that the Chickasaw Nation was made up, in large measure, of two or three very large and influential families. It was alleged that in almost every case brought before Chickasaw courts, judge and jury were related by blood ties or close friendship to one or the other of the litigants.[63] Despite the lamentable nature of the situation, not even the government could do much about family relationships.

In the final analysis, however, relations between the Chickasaws and the Federal Government were, with a few exceptions, amicable. An Indian Commission report stated, "The peace and good order prevailing amongst them and their earnest efforts to improve their physical and moral condition entitle them to the warm and active sympathies of our people."[64] Another such report read, "If any Indian tribes on the continent can be incorporated into this union it will be the Chickasaws and the Choctaws; always a peaceful and agricultural people, domestic in their hab-

[60] J. W. Denver to J. Thompson, November 30, 1857, United States Department of the Interior, *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1857-1858*, p. 292.

[61] George Manypenny to Robert McClelland, November 25, 1854, United States Department of the Interior, *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1854-1855* (Washington: Beverley Tucker, 1855) p. 631.

[62] Douglas H. Cooper to Elias Rector, September 15, 1860, United States Department of the Interior, *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1860-1861*, p. 352.

[63] *Ibid.*, p. 352.

[64] George Manypenny to Robert McClelland, November 26, 1855, United States Department of the Interior, *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1855-1856*, p. 328.

its, not fond of the chase. The experiment of constitutional government has been successful."[63]

Economy

The economy of the Chickasaws in Indian Territory was, as it had been in their original homes, largely agricultural. There was some mineral mining but most of the Indians in the territory lived on products from the soil. The Chickasaws were fortunate in possessing a considerable amount of productive land. The region, with its extensive prairies, was seen as having excellent promise both for farming and grazing. It was anticipated that the area would be suitable for large scale cattle raising to supply an ever burgeoning market.[64]

Indeed, a number of the Chickasaws flourished in their new environment. The majority of them were the half-breeds who had prospered in Mississippi and had simply transplanted their wealth to the west. In both business and pleasure, these affluent Indians resembled the southern planters among whom they had lived. Many had fine furniture and homes, owned quite a few slaves, raised large herds of fine cattle, and grew cotton. Many of these better farms grew considerable quantities of wheat, oats, rye, corn, peas, potatoes, plus orchards of peach, pear, and plum trees. These plantations were well equipped with modern implements and as these large tracts grew they fostered a network of wagon roads which not only helped move their products to market but at the same time helped the area develop more rapidly.[65]

Standing in sharp contrast with this progressive, though numerically small, group were the majority of people of the Chickasaw Nation. They lived, not in substantial homes but in log shanties. These dwellings were often of the most primitive nature with no windows, one door, a chimney of sticks and dirt, and a roof constructed of poles covered with sod. There was often little furniture and the cooking was usually done over open fires.[66]

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[63] Elias Rector to A. B. Greenwood, September 24, 1860, United States Department of the Interior, *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1860-1861*, p. 341.

[64] Kenton Harper to L. Lea, September 1, 1851, United States Department of the Interior, *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1851-1852* (Washington: A. Boyd Hamilton, 1852), p. 399.

[65] Cyrus Byington to George Manypenny July 1, 1856, United States Department of the Interior, *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1856-1857*, p. 709.

[66] Albert Love Interview, "Indian-Pioneer History" Vol. CIX, p. 419, Indian Archives, Oklahoma Historical Society Oklahoma City Oklahoma.

Economically, these people could be classed as decidedly depressed. Often the only crop was a patch of corn, perhaps not over two to five acres in size. Often the only implements in evidence would be a handmade wooden plow stock and a "bull tongue plow."[69] The more fortunate ones might supplement the otherwise meager fare with pumpkins, beans, peas, or other garden crops.

Most of these people added to the diet by regular hunting and fishing. Thus, many felt that it was a waste of effort to grow too much as long as fish and other game could be had. The favorite method of fishing was to shoot the fish with a barbed arrow with a line attached so the fish could be pulled to shore.[70] Whatever the means of livelihood might be, it was not much above the level of simple subsistence and the Chickasaw country was certainly not a region of surplus.

In the area of culinary tastes the Chickasaws were simple and unsophisticated. The menu in a comparatively well-to-do household might resemble that of many frontier families and perhaps would include pork or, more likely, fried chicken, corn bread, beans, and sliced sweet potatoes. A poorer family might make do with corn bread and rabbit, wild turkey, or fish to supply protein. A favorite dish among the Chickasaws was a sort of corn meal paste with sugar or molasses added for sweetening and eaten with the fingers.[71]

To sum up, it would appear that except for the wealthier segment of the population, the majority of the Chickasaws lived in what can only be described as poverty. A report of the Indian Bureau emphasized this: "Most . . . cultivate the soil to a small extent; but having no individual proprietorship therein, they are continually on the wing, moving from place to place, and one sees, in travelling through their country, more deserted than inhabited houses. They are generally poor farmers and poorer livers, without gardens or orchards, with plenty of cattle, but no milk or butter, caring to surround themselves with few of the luxuries or even comforts of life."[72]

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[69] *Ibid.*, p. 420.

[70] Sam Mahurdy interview, *ibid.*, Vol. XXXIII, p. 544.

[71] D. N. Dook interview, *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 544.

[72] Elias Rector to J. W. Denver, October 26, 1858, United States Department of the Interior, *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for 1858-1859* (Washington: William A. Harris, 1859) pp. 478-479.

Conclusion

It would seem that the Chickasaws had attained a social, political, and economic status far greater in complexity than many have supposed. The extent of this development is especially revealed by their political and educational systems. This is even more significant when one considers the condition of Indian Territory when they arrived on the scene. It was a country which had never felt the plow and was inhabited only by bands of nomadic plains Indian tribes.

From the beginning, the Chickasaws realized that it would be necessary to compete with the encroaching white man. The best way to achieve this, they concluded, was to embrace his customs. They adopted his style of dress, his methods of education, and his mode of government while still respecting and keeping alive their separate identity and culture. Even if this experiment was distasteful to some, in the long run it paid rich dividends because it brought the Chickasaws much closer to the world they would have to live in and to the events that were shaping that world. Despite serious handicaps, this acceptance of new ways and ideas enabled them to better contribute to the ultimate growth of Indian Territory and, later, to the state of Oklahoma.