The collection of six papers provides information on the history and culture of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians that has not been readily available before. The papers, written by college-bound Choctaw high school students, concern three legends of Nanih Waiya, the Mother Mound of Choctaws in Mississippi; the traditional Choctaw courtship and wedding ceremony; Apushmataha, Choctaw chief of the early nineteenth century; the negotiations for the 1830 Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek; the equipment and rules for Choctaw stickball; and an overview of Choctaw self-determination. Each paper is illustrated with black and white photographs. (SB)
The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians.
This book was developed by the Choctaw History, Culture and Current Events Staff of the MISSISSIPPI BAND OF CHOCTAW INDIANS.

Tribal Chief
Phillip Martin

Director, Choctaw Department of Education
Carolyn Collins

Chairperson, Education Committee
Luke Jimmie

Director, Research and Curriculum Development
Bill Breścia

Choctaw History, Culture and Current Events
Advisory Committee
Terry Ben
Bob Ferguson
Patricia K. Galloway
Eddie Gibson
Kevin Grant
Sharon Cauthen
Wanda Kittrell

For further information contact:
Museum of the Southern Indian
Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians
Route 7, Box 21
Philadelphia, Mississippi 39350
(601) 656-5251
FOREWORD

This book is one of several planned publications of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians for use in secondary schools. In the past, textbooks and material about the Choctaw tribe have been either of a scholarly nature and unavailable to tribal members, or have not been representative of tribal opinion. This collection of papers, written by the students and edited by the staff of the Choctaw History, Culture, and Current Events (CHCCE) project, is an attempt to fill some of this gap.

The CHCCE class at Choctaw Central High School was developed by the tribal Education Department as an experiment. Only students who are interested in pursuing college careers attend the class; and the purpose of the coursework is to provide students with necessary reading, research, composition, vocabulary development, and study skills to succeed in post-secondary work. These papers are final products of the first year's class; two more books of this type are planned.

The papers in this publication were edited according to three criteria: for clarity, through verification of sources, and by correction of mechanics. The editors have also provided additional information to expand original drafts.

This book, as well as the others in the planned series, is not designed to serve as a textbook of Choctaw history. There is information that is not yet available to us, in such places as the National Archives of France and Spain, which would preclude a project of that scope for the present. For the production of these papers, we have compiled many good resources from the Smithsonian Institute, the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, and the Museum of the American Indian. This project, in conjunction with several other projects now underway, will make available information that heretofore has only been available to those with the time and resources to do the necessary research.

I would like to praise the work of the young Choctaws just beginning their academic careers which makes up this book, and commend individually the CHCCE project editors, Kenneth York, Jane Anderson, and Bill Brescia.

Phillip Martin, Chief
Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Legends of Nanih Waiya by Sandra Tubby</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Choctaw Wedding Ceremony by Sharron Cauthen</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Apushmataha by Jane Lewis</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek by Debra Smith</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Choctaw Stickball by Bradley Williams</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Choctaw Self-Determination: An Overview by Reginald Gardner</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LEGENDS OF NANIH WAIYA
Sandra Tubby

Nanih Waiya, the Mother Mound of the Choctaws, is located in east central Mississippi, Winston County, near the Choctaw community Bogue Chitto. The mound sets in an open area, surrounded by farmland and woods. A creek, with the same name as the mound, runs nearby. About one-and-one-half miles due east of Nanih Waiya is a cave that is associated with the mound through oral narratives. In addition, several small mounds are in the vicinity. In 1898, Halbert described the mound thusly:

The mound is oblong in shape, lying northwest and southeast, and about forty-feet in height. (Today the mound is about forty feet high. It is believed that at one time, its height was more than fifty feet, weathering being the reason for its present height.) Its base covers about an acre. Its summit, which is flat, has an area of one-fourth an acre. The mound stands on the southeastern edge of a circular rampart, which is about a mile and a half in circumference. According to Indian tradition, there were originally eighteen parts or sections of the rampart, with the same number of gaps. (Today no visible signs of this structure remain.)

Since little excavation of the mound has been undertaken, the initial purpose for the mound is not certain. However, three theories have been considered. Nanih Waiya may have been used as a burial mound, for protection from enemies and high water, or as a temple mound for ceremonies. It has been estimated that the construction of the mound lasted two or three generations. Large baskets, carried on the back, were used to carry the dirt that made up the mound.

Legends, passed down through oral narratives, surround Nanih Waiya. Some of these legends were recorded for the first time in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Three of these legends will be described: two migration legends and one creation legend.

The first migration legend discussed is the legend described by Halbert. This version was related to Halbert by Rev. Peter Folsom, a Choctaw Baptist Missionary. The ancestors of the Choctaws and Chickasaws, in ancient days lived in the far west and were led by two brothers, Chahta and Chikasa. Due to their increased number, it became necessary to find a new, more protected area in which to live. Their prophets told of a land to the east with fertile soil and plentiful game. The entire group decided to make the

journey eastward to find this happy land. The group was led by a great prophet who carried a pole and at the end of each day's journey, the pole would be stuck into the ground in front of the camp. Each morning, the pole would be checked to see which direction it was leaning, as this determined the direction for that day's journey. Finally, "after the lapse of many moons, they arrived one day at Nanih Waiya. The prophet planted his pole at the base of the mound. The next morning the pole was seen standing erect and stationary. This was interpreted as an omen from the Great Spirit that the long sought-for land was at last found." Rev. Folsom's version explains the formulation of the two separate tribes—the Choctaw and the Chickasaw. The day that the pole stood erect, Chahta's group camped at Nanih Waiya while Chikasa's group crossed the creek and camped there. A great rain fell that night and continued for several days, Nanih Waiya Creek and the Pearl River became impassable. After the water receded, Chahta sent messengers to bid Chikasa and his group to cross the creek because the pole had designated the end of their search. The messengers, though, found that Chikasa and his people had journeyed northward. Chahta and his people remained at Nanih Waiya, the center of their new home.2 The second migration legend discussed is related by Lincecum. As the ancestors of the Choctaw were searching for a new home, they carried with them the bones of their ancestors. Since this migration lasted many years, some of the families were loaded with so many of the bones of their deceased relatives that they could carry nothing else, and they got along very slowly. At this stage of the journey, there were a greater number of skeletons being packed along by the people, than there were of the living. The smallest families were heaviest loaded; and such were their adoration and affection for these dry bones, that before they could consent to leave them on the way, they would, having more bones than they could pack at one load, carry forward a part of them half a day's journey; and returning for the remainder, bring them up the next day. By this double traveling over the route, they were soon left a great distance in the rear. They would have preferred to die and rot with these bones in the wilderness, sooner than leave them behind.

Lincecum goes on to state that the leader gave a lot of thought to this dilemma of the burdensome bones. Scouts reported a lovely place of tall trees, running brooks, plentiful game, and abundant fruits and nuts. Finally, after a few more days travel, the chief went to observe the leader's pole, "which, at the moment of sunrise, danced and punched itself deeper into the ground; and after some time settled in a perpendicular position..." Here, the chief decided, would be their stopping place.3

---

1 Halbert, p.p. 228-229.
Ethridge writes the following description of the burial of the bones that established Nanih Waiya as the Choctaws' permanent home. It was decided that they would:

in the most respectful manner bring together and pile up in beautiful and tasteful style, the vast amount of bones packed so far, and with which many people have been so grievously oppressed. Let each set of bones remain in its sack, and after the sacks are closely and neatly piled up, then let them be thickly covered over with cypress bark. After this, to appease and satisfy the spirits of our deceased relatives, our blood and kin, let all persons, old and young, great and small, manifest their respect for the dead by their energy in carrying dirt to cover them up, and let the work be continued until every heart is satisfied.

The third legend discussed, a creation legend, is related by Halbert (1898). Many Choctaws regard Nanih Waiya as the birthplace and cradle of the mound, they say, ages ago, the Great Spirit created the first Choctaws and through a hole or cave, they crawled forth into the light of day. Some say that only one pair was created, but others say that many pairs were created. Old Hapahkitubbe (Hopakitobi), who died several years ago in Neshoba County, was wont to say that after coming forth from the mound, the freshly made Choctaws were very wet and moist, and that the Great Spirit stacked them along on the rampart, as on a clothes line, so that the sun could dry them.

These legends, that are part of the lore of the Choctaw, are three versions of several existing legends and, certainly, add a pleasing dimension to the factual history of the Choctaws. As to the answer to the questions: Who were the builders of Nanih Waiya? ... "all the evidence shows that they were Choctaw. There is no evidence that any race preceded the Choctaws in the occupancy of Central Mississippi. And it is not at all probable that the Choctaws would have held this mound in such excessive reverence if it had been built by an unknown or alien race." Just as there is not a definite account of the origin of Nanih Waiya, there is not a definite interpretation of the meaning of Nanih Waiya. Lincecum says that Nanih Waiya means "leaning hill". Halbert says that it means "bending hill". According to Kenneth York, a Choctaw living on the reservation near Nanih Waiya, a

---

5Halbert, p. 229-230.
6Ibid., p. 233.
7Lincecum, p. 523.
8Halbert, p. 224.
possible interpretation could be Nana Alaya, "a place of creation". Whatever the translation, the name Nanih Waiya holds special meaning for the Mississippi Choctaw.

A visit to the mound is a pleasant experience; and as one ascends to the top via wooden steps, it is not uncommon to feel a sense of respect and reverence for what Nanih Waiya means to the Choctaws. The site is now a state park and is protected from damage under state park laws. Until it became a state park, the mound was covered with trees—now it is covered with grass and stands as a quiet monument to a dignified group of people.

Editor's Note: After this paper was accepted for publication in this anthology, one of the editors had an opportunity to visit the Nanih Waiya area. The mound described in this account is the mound that is referred to on maps and in conversation when one speaks of visiting Nanih Waiya Mound. However, this mound may not be the "Mother Mound" referred to in Choctaw oral narratives. It is believed that this mound was one of four. One of these was completely destroyed many years ago by farmers who leveled it to increase farming area. Another, has yet to be located; however, at present, a group of Choctaw educators is searching for the location of this mound. The remaining mound in the Nanih Waiya area lies approximately one and three-fourths miles east-northeast of the mound indicated on maps as Nanih Waiya. This tree-covered mound is much larger and higher. Archeologists believe that the swamp/creek to the north of the mound formed when the Choctaw took dirt from that area to build the mound. In the bottom of the mound is a cave that has various chambers and passages. If one enters the cave, just inside the opening, the sound of dripping water can be heard. This cave is believed by many present day Choctaws to be the cave mentioned in the creation legend; and this mound is believed to be the Mother Mound. The other mound (map mound) is thought to be a temple mound.

Interview with Kenneth York, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Philadelphia, Mississippi, 12 July 1983.

Bibliography

Ethridge, George H. The Choctaw Indians, Clarion Ledger, 10 July 1939.


Illustration of Nanih Waiya site, drawn by B.L.C. Wailes. "A" is the principal mound, the other letters are not explained. Tribal members have questioned the accuracy of this map; however, it is the first drawing of the Nanih Waiya site. — Reproduced by Theron Denson
On Wednesday, December 6, 1854, B.L.C. Wajles recorded in his journal the following measurements for Nanih Waija: "180 to 200 ft. long West to East and perhaps 100 to 125 ft. wide from North to South." — Reprinted by permission Mississippi Department of Archives and History
Nanhi Waiya Mound Early 1900's (bare trees), Nanhi Waiya State Park — Reprinted by permission, Mississippi Department of Archives and History
Nanih Waiya as it stands today. This structure is believed to have been a temple mound. — Photo by Bill Brescia
Early in the 1800's, probably around 19,000 Choctaws were living in Mississippi. Today, there are approximately 5,000 Choctaws residing in the seven communities that constitute the Choctaw Reservation near Philadelphia, Mississippi. Like many distinct cultures, the Choctaws are rich in terms of traditional customs and ceremonies. Certainly, over the span of years, the apparent developments in the social structure of the tribe have caused some changes in their customs and ceremonies; but, still, they remain a vital part of Choctaw lifestyle. The Choctaw wedding ceremony has several customs that have been preserved through the years. The following is a discussion of this ceremony and its custom changes.

Benson states that “Marriage ceremonies were strictly observed by the Choctaws. Ministers, the agent, chief, interpreter and light-horsemen were legally authorized to solemnize the rites of matrimony.”

Many years ago, when a Choctaw man discovered that he was interested in a woman and his thoughts were of marriage, one of the first considerations was to determine whether or not they were relatives. If they were not, the parents or guardians would decide whether or not the young ones could marry. If the decision was in favor of the marriage, the plans would be made by the parents or guardians.

The Choctaw courtship was not a lengthy process, but rather brief. Cushman (1898) describes the procedure by explaining that when a young man decided upon the young woman that he wanted to marry, he would visit her home and in the midst of her family he would find “an opportunity to shoot slyly and unobserved, a little stick or small pebble at her.” By this action, she knew that he was asking her to marry him. If she agreed, “she returned them as slyly and as silently as they came. If not, she suddenly sprang from her seat, turned a frowning face of disapproval upon him and silently left the room. That ended the matter, though not a word had been spoken between them.” Providing the girl consented to his “proposal”, he would soon leave, telling the parents “I go” whereupon they would respond “Very well”. In a few days he returned with gifts for the parents and to secure their approval. Cushman continues by stating that the date was then set for the ceremony and friends were invited to attend. When the scheduled date arrived, the bride and groom were put in separate rooms. About two or three hundred yards from the house, a pole was set in the ground. Next, the girl
would leave the room in which she had been waiting and run towards the pole. When she had a good headstart, the boy would leave his room and try to catch her. She usually allowed him to overtake her just before she reached the pole. This act let the boy know that the ceremony would continue. It was possible, at this time, for the girl to change her mind and not let him catch her, but that was a rare occurrence. If, though, that did happen, the incident would be regarded as a public acknowledgement and the boy would be disappointed. As soon as he caught her, they exchanged a few words, then he led her back toward the house where they would be met by her lady friends. They would lead the girl to a blanket placed on the ground. A circle of women formed around the girl, each holding a bridal gift. The gifts were then tossed on the girl's head and immediately grabbed by someone in the party. The bride did not receive any of the gifts. When all of the gifts were disposed of, the couple was pronounced married. After this, a feast was enjoyed by all.

Occasionally, nowadays, a traditional Choctaw wedding will be performed. Mary Morris, a Mississippi Choctaw, in a taped interview describes the ceremony. The wedding arrangements are made by the bride's mother and the groom's sisters, mother, and aunts. The decision for the date is made jointly by both sides of the families, but the bride's family is given preference. The suggested date is then approved by the groom's sisters, usually about two weeks hence. Once the date has been selected, the ceremony must take place on that date. According to custom, the ceremony is never held after noon, but always during the morning. In fact, the ceremony must be completed by noon. Should it rain or storm, the ceremony is continued but that is considered to be a bad omen.

The girl is expected to sew her own dress. Material for the dress, apron, and for giving to relatives is requested by the bride's mother from the boy's parents. In addition, her beads and shoes will come from his family. The relatives, upon being invited, are given a piece of cloth and are expected to bring some food for the feast. The boy's family provides the traditional food. Three traditional foods are prepared by the girl's family: meat, bread, and coffee. Many years ago deer meat was requested, then beef, but today, pork is the common meat requested. The hog is butchered, skinned, gutted, and presented whole to the girl's family. The boy's father and uncle pay for the hog. No matter how many relatives are expected, it is improper for the boy's family in any way to refuse to provide the food.

Friends are invited to the ceremony and can participate in the activities of both families or can choose to remain with one family. Many times, they bring gifts of food.

Two spokespersons are selected to perform or direct the ceremony. These spokespersons are selected from both sides of the family and will be a respected elder. During the ceremony, they face one another and give
directions and advice about life and of the world all during the ceremony.

Prior to the ceremony, the women of the girl’s family prepare walakį (dumplings) and the men of the girl’s family provide banah (corn bread mixed with peas). The walakį and banah are used during the ceremony.

On the day of the ceremony, the girl’s family eats the traditional food provided by the boy’s family. About 11:00 a.m., the boy’s mother and aunts will arrive at the girl’s house to see if they have finished eating the meat, bread, and coffee. At that time, the girl’s mother and aunts will tell the boy’s mother and aunts how much walakį and banah is available as the boy’s family will eat that later.

At that time, the boy and his family are gathered about one mile from the girl’s house. When the news comes that the girl’s family has finished eating, the boy and his family start walking toward the girl’s house led by the spokesperson. About one-half mile from the house, the man’s spokesperson yells, “We are coming.” The girl’s spokesperson yells back, “Come on.”

At the house the girl’s uncle has placed two chairs for the couple on the ground. The boy’s mother places a red cloth or a blanket on the chairs and during the ceremony, whenever the bride and groom move, the groom’s sister moves the cloth or blanket. This is called “placing the mat” for the bride. The walakį is set beside the girl’s chair and the banah is set beside the boy’s chair. The girl’s uncle picks up the banah and the boy’s sister picks up the walakį.

After the chairs are prepared, the bride’s sister-in-law brings her out of the house and places her on the chair. The bride’s mother’s brother and brother-in-law escort the groom to his chair.

Next, the groom’s family “decorate” the bride with ribbons by placing them all about her head. As the ribbons are placed on the bride’s head, they are collected by the girl’s brothers on behalf of her family.

As the ceremony ends, both families congratulate the couple. Now, there exists a bond between these families that was created through this ceremony. It is an unwritten law that this relationship is more important than material possessions. The families are now obligated to be kind to one another.

The bride’s sister-in-law leads the girl to a secluded room. After the groom’s family finish eating, they ask the girl if she is ready. She then leaves with them, taking all her belongings.

In keeping with the idea that human relationships are more important than material possessions, no “gifts” are exchanged. The girl is the gift to the man’s side and food is the gift to the woman’s side.

The Choctaw wedding ceremony, as described here, represents an important tribal custom. Rich with family participation and meaningful,
colorful ceremonial segments; it remains an integral part of Choctaw traditional heritage.

Bibliography


The respective mothers and aunts meet to make arrangements about two to three weeks before the wedding day. — Photo by Brantly Studio
The site of the wedding. The bride's side of the family says they are ready for the wedding to start. They have prepared dumplings (valaksi) for the groom's family to eat after the wedding. The dumplings are placed in lard buckets. The procession is led by the spokesperson (a respected elder) for the bride. — Photo by Brantly Studio.
Gifts are given to the bride's uncle who distributes them to the bride's family as part of the "shower." — Photo by Brantly Studio
Before European contact, the Choctaw couple sat on a bear or deer skin during the wedding. Today, trade cloth is placed on the chairs. Mary Morris, second from right, was our consultant on the Choctaw Wedding. — Photo by Brantly Studio
The bride and groom are led to a place where they will be congratulated by members of both families. — Photo by Branly Studio
The families assemble to congratulate the couple. The man on the far right is the spokesperson for the groom's family.

— Photo by Brantly Studio
The wedding day is completed with everyone eating. The dumplings (walak§) are in buckets and the bread (banaha) is in the bag. — Photo by Brantly Studio.
CHAPTER 3

APUSHMATAHA

Jane Lewis

During the early 1800’s, the Choctaw Nation was divided into three districts: the Western District, the Central District and the Southern District. These districts were made up of several villages with each village having its own leaders, and each district its own chief. Apukshunnubb4 was chief of the Western District, Musfulatubbee was chief of the Central District, and Afishmataha was chief of the Southern District. Apushmataha was the most famous of the Choctaw chiefs and was admired and respected by those who knew him.

He was born in 1764 in one of the villages of the Six Towns people. Apushmataha and his sister were left orphans when their parents were reportedly killed by the Creeks. The first recollection of Apushmataha’s appearance among the Choctaw was in the company of some hunters. According to Harkins, the fellow hunters were curious about the identity of this newcomer; but, because the Choctaw considered it discourteous to question strangers, they were reluctant to question him. However, his hunting skill soon brought enough attention that an old man of the hunting party was sent to inquire as to his identity; when asked, the boy “merely replied, ‘I am Choctaw’."

For some time after, he was called Hohchifoiksho (Nameless).2 The true origin and meaning of Apushmataha’s name may never be known. Among the suppositions are: “completion of a child separated from his mother”, and “one whose tomahawk is fatal in wars or when hunting”. When comments were made about his daily hunting successes, it is reported that Apushmataha replied, “It is nothing” and “it was nothing to what he could and would do”. Then he was called Istalauta “Braggart”. In several battles between the Choctaw and the Creeks over boundary disputes, he earned the reputation of a brave warrior throughout the nation. Because of his distinguished accomplishments, he was given the name Koi Hosh (The Panther). The Choctaw engaged in a squirmish with the Osage in the Red River country because they invaded the cane brakes in the Yazoo Delta.

3 Harkins.
4 Ethridge.
5 Harkins.
6 Ibid.

* Other common spellings Pushmataha or Pushmatahabi

21 The previous numbered page in the original document was blank.
Harkins say that "Koi Hosh was placed in supreme command of the three divisions. The campaign proved a great victory for the Choctaws." Again his name was to be changed; this time to a war name. At the ceremony to confer his new name, the warriors and chieftains took numerous agates from the medal bag to decorate Koi Hosh. Soon, the agates were all removed and "the chief among them thereupon said: I will now confer upon you the greatest name ever given a warrior; I will call you Apushmataha, meaning "No more in the bag." Finally, Apushmataha was to be given a name that would be permanent. Apushmataha, according to Lincecum, was about five-feet ten inches in height, stood very erect, full chest, square face, broad shoulders and fine front and elevated top head. His mouth was very large, lips rather thick; eyes and nose very good, projecting brow, and cheek bones very prominent. He lacked a great deal of being what the world calls handsome. But he had that inexplicable attribute about him which belongs only to the truly great, that which forced the ejaculation, "Who is that?" from all observant strangers.

Apushmataha was considered by Harkins to be "the greatest Indian who ever lived, based upon his accomplishments in life; and a humanitarian second to none, in the Western Hemisphere." His accomplishments were many. Following is an overview that describes some of his accomplishments for which he is known: In 1811; the Shawnee Chief, Tecumseh, acting as a spokesman for the English, attempted to enlist aid of the Choctaws, Chickasaws, Cherokees, Muscogees, and Seminoles as allies against the Americans. Tecumseh, along with thirty Shawnee warriors, asked for a meeting with the Chickasaws and the Choctaws. The theme of Tecumseh's talk was to convince the Southern tribes to join the English in their fight against the Americans. His speech was effective and it was obvious that many were responding to his proposals. Some of the Chickasaw and Choctaw chiefs concurred with Tecumseh and it appeared that his efforts had been successful when Apushmataha addressed the assembly. According to Cushman, he was "the most renowned and influential chief of the Choctaws, a man of great dignity, unyielding firmness, undisputed bravery, undoubted veracity, sound judgment, and the firm and undaunting friend of the American people." The Indians referred to him as "Waterfall" because of his pleasing, rhythmical voice. After he completed his eloquent,
moving speech, it was obvious to Tecumseh that Apushmataha had persuaded those present to remain loyal to the Americans. The debate between Tecumseh and Apushmataha has been referred to as "one of the most classic debates in history, establishing the course of Indian-white relations in the South. After this declaration of loyalty to the American people, Apushmataha proved himself again and again a strong American ally. At a council meeting he made the statement that if any Choctaws joined the Muscogees and British they should be shot. In the Creek War, Apushmataha and seven-hundred minkos, medal-chiefs, and warriors fought with General Andrew Jackson. In the Battle of New Orleans, 1812, he was there with five-hundred warriors. Harkins reports that when five-hundred settlers were slaughtered at Fort Mims on August 30, 1813, Apushmataha, along with his warriors, offered their help to the American forces. Shortly after these events, Apushmataha

was commissioned a brigadier general in the American army by General Andrew Jackson. General Claiborne presented (him) with a splendid suit of regimentals, gold gussets, sword and silver spurs, and a hat and feather for his valiant war services against the Muscogees. The state of Mississippi also presented the "Indian General" with a rifle because of his gallantry in the protection of white settlers.

Through his many accomplishments in the public realm of his life, Apushmataha evolved into an honorable man, respected and admired by both Indians and whites. From the few glimpses into his private life that history affords, it appears that he was equally honorable in personal actions. One account by Cushman describes an occasion when Apushmataha defended his wife's honor. In 1814, during the Creek War

a white soldier, grossly insulted the wife of the distinguished Choctaw chief, for which the justly indignant chief knocked him down with the hilt of his sword. Being arrested for the just and meritorious act, and asked by the commanding general the reasons, he fearlessly answered: "He insulted my wife, and I knocked the insolent dog down."

According to M'Kenny, Apushmataha was an expert stickball player (kaboce toli) and spent many hours playing and perfecting his skill. When

12Howard P. Hildreth, White Man's Chief Unpublished Document Preface, p. 3.
13Harkins.
14Cushman, p. 266.
Apushmataha was about sixty years of age (1823), he walked to a council meeting about eighty miles from his home. Present at the council were John Pitchlynn, United States interpreter to the Choctaw and Ward, a United States agent. They decided to purchase Apushmataha a horse with the restriction that he would not sell the horse. Later, Apushmataha visited the agency without the horse and when Ward inquired as to the whereabouts of the horse, Apushmataha replied that he lost it in a stickball bet. "But you promised . . . that you would not sell the horse" (said Ward). "True, I did," reported the venerable old chief. "But I did not promise you and my good friend, John Pitchlynn, that I would not bet him in a game of ball."  

Of the nine treaties between the United States and the Choctaw Nation from 1786 until 1830, Apushmataha's name appears on three. The first is the Treaty of Mount Dexter, November 15, 1805, when 4,142,720 acres of Choctaw lands were ceded. The second is the treaty of Fort Stephens, October 24, 1816, when about 10,000 acres of Choctaw lands were ceded. The third is the Treaty of Doak's Stand, the sale of a portion of the tribal lands to support schools thereby enabling Choctaw children to attend the Choctaw Academy near Blue Springs, Scott County, Kentucky, established in 1825. Although, he never attended a formal school, his associations with Indian and white contemporaries, in war and peace, proved him the "peer of them all."  

In 1824, Apushmataha was a member of a Choctaw delegation to Washington, D.C. While there, he died on December 24. He was given a military funeral and was buried in the United States Congressional Cemetery. As a memorial to this Choctaw statesman, a sandstone grave marker was placed at his gravesite. Today, that marker stands in the Museum of the Southern Indian on the Choctaw Reservation near Philadelphia, Mississippi.

I am glad that his mortal remains were buried in the soil of our national capital; that a monument was there erected containing the noble tribute of John Randolph of Roanoak, rendered as an appreciation of his greatness and his friendship. I am glad that his memory has not passed away; and I hope that the historian may yet discover more of the details of the scenes in which he was an actor and that a better story of his life may be written than has yet appeared. He deserves it. May his eloquent mantle and profound wisdom descend upon more of his tribe; and may his memory be preserved to all who appreciate his native ability and superb eloquence. May his sleep be peaceful and serene until the land and the sea shall give up their dead.

— George Ethridge, 1939

*Cushman, p. 268.


*Harkins.
Bibliography


Ferguson, Robert B. *Treaties Between the United States and the Choctaw Nation*. Unpublished Document.


Apushmataha, 1764-1824. Noted Choctaw Chief (Miko). From an oil painting by C. B. King — Photo courtesy of Museum of Southern Indian, Choctaw Reservation, Photo by Claude Allen
upushmataha, copied from King's original oil painting — Photo courtesy of Museum of the Southern Indian, Choctaw Reservation, Photo by Claude Allen
Apushmataha, wearing native Choctaw jacket or coat — Theron Denson, Artist
Apushmataha, dressed in formal wear — Photo courtesy of Museum of Southern Indian, Choctaw Reservation, Photo by Claude Allen
Apushmataha, grave marker now in the Museum of Southern Indian, Choctaw Reservation.

Photo courtesy of Museum of Southern Indian, Choctaw Reservation, Photo by Claude Allen
TREATY OF DANCING RABBIT CREEK
Debra Smith

During 1830, the Andrew Jackson Administration and the Choctaw Nation signed the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. In 1831, 1832, and 1833, most of the Choctaws moved west of the Mississippi, but a few remained in Mississippi. The major purpose of this paper is to explain the conditions stated in the treaty. In addition, there will be a discussion of some of the hardships the Choctaws faced and the agony they suffered. Through this treaty experience the United States Government learned a valuable lesson, i.e. the U.S. Government established a perpetual obligation to provide education, health, and general welfare services to the Choctaw people.

Shortly after the Removal Act of 1830, President Andrew Jackson appointed Secretary of War John Eaton and General John Coffee to meet with the Choctaws for the cession of all their land. President Jackson chose the Choctaws because they had contact with white people long before other Southeastern Indians had. Also, the Choctaws had sold some of their land to the white people at an earlier date. Because they sold some of their land before, the U.S. Government assumed the Choctaws would give up their land without hesitation, or question.

The location for the signing of the treaty was in what is now Noxubee County, Mississippi. It was between the forks of Dancing Rabbit Creek. About six thousand Choctaws, or one fourth of the Choctaw population, came to the Treaty grounds.

They were divided into groups of one hundred and each Choctaw received a ration of one and one-half pounds of beef, a pint of corn daily and a quart of salt. In addition to the Choctaws, came the worst element of white society (gamblers, saloon-keepers, frontier rowdies, and prostitutes) to meet the government negotiators.

Secretary of War John Eaton and John Coffee ordered “all missionaries away from the treaty ground on September 15 on the pretext that the presence of missionaries would be ‘improper’, for the commissioners and Indians were negotiating a treaty - not holding divine services.”

2 Ibid., p. 375.
3 Arthur H. DeRosier, Jr., The Removal of the Choctaw Indians, Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1970, reprinted, 1972) p. 120.
4 Ibid., p. 120-121.
On Saturday, September 18, 1830, the treaty negotiation formally opened with speeches delivered by the Commissioners. The Commissioners urged the Choctaw Nation to consider President Jackson's proposal of land cession and removal to lands across the Mississippi River. The original treaty presented by the Commissioners stipulated that the Choctaw "evacuate all of their Mississippi land and emigrate en masse to the Choctaw lands retained by the Treaty of 1825." Eaton also told the Choctaws if they removed themselves to the west of the Mississippi River they would continue their own tribal government, but if they remained in Mississippi they would be subjected to United States laws. In addition, the Choctaws were to receive "money, farm and household equipment, subsistence for a full year, and pay for (any) improvements they have made on their land in Mississippi." As the days continued, there were numerous inducements for the Choctaws to reach the decision that the commissioners wanted to hear. One of the Commissioners gave to the Choctaw delegation during the negotiations the following rationale:

It is not your lands, but your happiness that we seek to obtain... We seek no advantages; we will take none. Your Great Father will not approve such a course... He has sent us not as traders, but as friends and brothers... Are you willing to be sued in courts, there to be tried for any offense you may commit; to be subjected to taxes, to work upon roads, and attend in musters? For all these you must do. If under this state of things you can be contented and happy, then dwell upon the land where you live. But if you are satisfied that under such a state of things you cannot be happy, consent to remove beyond the Mississippi when you will be away from the white people and their laws and be able to live under your own... Decide to remove and liberal provisions will be made to carry you to a country where you can be happy, and where already a portion of your fathers and brothers have gone in peace to reside. It is a desirable region, double extent to the one you occupy, and large and fertile enough for twice and three times the number of people you have. There your Great Father can be your friend; there he can keep the white man's laws from interrupting and disturbing you; and there, too, he will guard you against all enemies, whether they be white or red; there no State or Territory will be created, and he will have it in his power to protect you fully in your usages, laws, and customs. Here you can do these things, because neither he nor Congress possess authority to prevent the States extending their jurisdiction over you and throughout their limits.

Ibid., p. 121.
Ibid., p. 122.
Ibid., p. 122.
Brothers, in the country to which you go west the United States will protect you from your enemies. Their object will be to preserve you at peace with yourselves and with all mankind, to perpetuate you as a nation and to render you a happy and prosperous observation shows that wretchedness and distress will be yours to remain where you are. The kind and friendly feelings of the Great Father will be inefficient to preserve you from these inevitable results.

On September 23, 1830, the Choctaw delegation surprised the Commissioners by rejecting the President's proposal. The Choctaw delegation provided two reasons for their rejection. They were: (1) The Indians wanted a perpetual guarantee that the United States would never try to possess the Choctaw’s new home in the west; and (2) they were dissatisfied with the lands that were offered them in Indian territory. However, Secretary Eaton and General Coffee believed that the Choctaws were bluffing. The Commissioners told the Choctaw delegation that the armed forces of America would completely destroy the Choctaw Nation within two weeks if they should challenge the U. S. Government. The federal negotiators told the Choctaws that they were leaving for Washington City the following day and they wanted the treaty to be signed. Although the end of the Choctaw Nation was inevitable, the Choctaw leaders delayed their decision until September 27, 1830.

After many days of consideration and negotiation the Choctaw delegation finally made their decision to sign the treaty. The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek was signed on September 27, 1830. The remaining 10,423,130 acres of Choctaw land transferred to the U. S. Government. Three years were allowed by the U. S. Government for the removal. One group was to leave in the fall of 1831, another in 1832, and the last in 1833. The removal in 1831 had a late start and the Choctaw people were exposed to severe winter storm blanketing the Missouri-Arkansas area. One observer wrote that the removal agents saved “thousands of them from the ‘living hell’ of the winter of 1831-32.”

Those Choctaws who wished to remain in their ancestral homeland could do so under provisions of Article Fourteen of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. The article of the treaty stated:

ARTICLE 14. Each Choctaw head of a family being desirous to remain, and become a citizen of the States, shall be permitted to do so, by
signifying his intention to the agent within six months from the ratification of this treaty, and he or she shall thereupon be entitled to a reservation of one section of six hundred and forty acres of land, to be bounded by sectional lines of survey. In like manner, shall be entitled to one half that quantity, for each unmarried child which is living with him, over ten years of age, and a quarter section to such child as may be under ten years of age to adjoin the location of the parent. If they reside upon said lands intending to become citizens of the states, for five years after the ratification of this treaty, in that case, a grant of land in fee simple shall be issued; said reservation shall include the present improvement of the head of the family, or a portion of it. Persons who claim under this article shall not lose the privileges of a Choctaw citizen, but if they ever remove, are not to be entitled to any portion of the Choctaw annuity.

Due to mismanagement by Indian agent, William Ward, numerous Choctaws who registered for reservation land did not receive their treaty rights as stipulated in Article 14. The frauds uncovered by the 1838 Commission were so obvious and overwhelming that other investigations were launched in 1842, 1845, and on through the nineteenth century and even into the twentieth century.

Those Choctaws who were removed to Indian territory experienced extreme hardship. Approximately one hundred Choctaw migrants were reported dead in the first removal. In a report by the Choctaw agency in southeastern Indian territory, of the three thousand Choctaws migrating up to that time, some six hundred, or 'one-fifth,' died either on the five hundred mile journey west, or soon after arrival. Chief David Folsom summed up the feelings of the Choctaw people in a letter to the Presbyterian ministers in the nation. He wrote, 'We are exceedingly tired. We have just heard of the ratification of the Choctaw treaty. Our doom is sealed. There is no other course for us but to turn our faces to our new homes toward the setting sun.'

Due to arguments about when to leave for Oklahoma and inefficiencies in the Choctaw removal to Indian territory, the expenditure for the removal was quite high. The total expenditure of Dancing Rabbit Creek Treaty and removal came to $5,097,367.50, or about two million dollars more than the amount Jackson's Administration had assured Congress would be needed to remove all eastern tribes to lands west of the Mississippi River. According
to the Jacksonian cabinet, the Choctaw removal was only a partial failure. While it was not the showcase Jacksonians had hoped for, the Dancing Rabbit Creek Treaty and removal did exemplify the wholesale removal of all other eastern tribes during this critical period in federal-Indian relationships.¹⁸

The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek was signed over a century ago. Many Choctaws still remember the westward trek as told to them by the elders. The elders continue to tell the young ones of the lands west of the Mississippi River and the promise by the U. S. Government that Indian territory will always remain in the hands of Indian people. The Choctaw Indians are citizens of the United States by the virtue of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. The members of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians still reside on the ancestral homeland of the great and powerful Choctaw Nation. Although there are Choctaw people throughout the U. S., the Mississippi Choctaws, perhaps, are the most traditional as they continue the culture, language and history of this great Indian nation. Although the Choctaw Indians were the undisputed proprietors of a large portion of the domain in Mississippi, they now occupy approximately 18,000 acres of scattered reservation land in six counties in east central Mississippi. It will take a long time, but a sovereign Indian nation is rebuilding its rightful place in today's society.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 87.
TREATY WITH THE CHOCTAW, 1830.

A treaty of perpetual friendship, cession and bounds, entered into by John E. Eaton and John Coffee, for and in behalf of the Government of the United States, and the Moravian, Cheroke, Cahtoki and Yadakoos of the Choctaw Nation, begun and held at Dancing Rabbit Creek, on the thirteenth day of September, in the year eighteen hundred and thirty.

Whereas, the General Assembly of the State of Mississippi has extended the laws of said State to persons and property within the limits of the said state, and the President of the United States has said that he cannot protect the Choctaw Nation from the invasion of the same, and the President of the United States has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE I. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE II. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE III. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE IV. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE V. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE VI. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE VII. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE VIII. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE IX. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE X. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE XI. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE XII. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE XIII. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE XIV. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE XV. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE XVI. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE XVII. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE XVIII. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE XIX. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE XX. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE XXI. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE XXII. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.

ARTICLE XXIII. The Choctaw Nation, by and between the United States and the tribe of Cherokees, and the President of the United States, has been and is now requested to confer with persons who may be friendly to the Choctaw Nation, and have accordingly agreed to the following articles of treaty.
may seat the same. Also to the three principal Chiefs and to their successors in office there shall be paid two hundred and fifty dollars annually while they shall continue in such respective offices, except to Moshelobbe, who as he has an annuity of one hundred and fifty dollars for life unless a former treaty, shall receive only the additional sum of one hundred and fifty dollars, to continue in office as Chief, and in addition to this he shall have seven men proper to effect an additional principal Chief of the same superintend and govern upon those principles and regulations he shall observe annually for his services five hundred dollars, which allowance to the Chiefs and their successors in office shall remain in force. At any time when in military service, and while in service by authority of the U.S. the district Chiefs under and by selection of the President shall be entitled to the pay of Majors; the other chief under the same circumstances shall have the pay of a Lieutenant Colonel. The Speakers of the three districts, shall receive twenty-five hundred dollars per annum, and the three secretaries one each to the three Chiefs, fifty dollars each for four years. Each shall be entitled to an annuity of twenty dollars, for the support of their families and tenancy from each district, shall be furnished upon removing to the West, with such a good stock of cattle, horses, tow and all such other produce as they shall require for their own use and the support of their families, except upon the expense of carrying the same to their new homes, and to their expense for their own use and the support of their families, except upon the expense of carrying the same to their new homes, and to the care of cattle and stock, for the support of their families.

ART. XVI. In wagons, and with steam boats as may be found necessary and all to receive from the Indians to the amount of their annuities and expenses and their cost, and all for which the same may be sold and the proceeds applied to some beneficial purpose for the benefit of said persons.

ART. XVII. The several annuities and sums secured under the Treaty shall be paid to the several districts, in the manner and on the terms above mentioned, and the surplus, not to exceed eighty, shall be paid to the President and the several district Chiefs, as the same shall be paid in money after the same shall have been sold for wagons and with steam boats as may be found necessary and all to receive from the Indians to the amount of their annuities and expenses and their cost, and all for which the same may be sold and the proceeds applied to some beneficial purpose for the benefit of said persons.

ART. XVIII. The several annuities and sums secured under the Treaty shall be paid to the several districts, in the manner and on the terms above mentioned, and the surplus, not to exceed eighty, shall be paid to the President and the several district Chiefs, as the same shall be paid in money after the same shall have been sold for wagons and with steam boats as may be found necessary and all to receive from the Indians to the amount of their annuities and expenses and their cost, and all for which the same may be sold and the proceeds applied to some beneficial purpose for the benefit of said persons.

ART. XIX. The following reservations of land are hereby admitted. To Colonel David Folsom, four sections of which he shall include his present improvement, and two may be located elsewhere. On unoccupied reserve lands, the latter to the west of the said reservation. To the President and the other district Chiefs, as the same may be sold and the proceeds applied to some beneficial purpose for the benefit of said persons.

ART. XX. The U.S. agrees and stipulates, that for the benefit and advantage of the Choctaw people, and to improve their condition, they shall be educated under the direction of the President and at the expense of the U.S. to forty Choctaw youths for twenty years. This shall be paid and the number not to exceed forty-nine. The President and the Commissioners of the three districts, shall provide for the payment of a Lieutenant Colonel David Folsom, for the support of three teachers of schools for twenty years. Likewise there shall be furnished to the Nation, three Blacksmiths, one for each district for six years, and one Woodcutter for five years. Also there shall be furnished the following articles, twenty one hundred bushels of corn, to each warrior who emigrates a rifle, moulds, wipers and ammunition. One thousand axes, ploughs, hoes, wheels and cards each, and four hundred looms. There shall also be furnished, one ton of iron and two hundred weight of diesel annually at an exchange for six years.

ART. XXI. The Chiefs of the Choctaw who have suggested that their people are in a state of rapid advancement in education and improvement, and have expressed a solicitude that they might have the privilege of Delegates on the floor of the House of Representatives extended to them. The Congressmen do not feel that they can under a strictly adoption [as the word is not readable] to the request, but at their desire present in the Treaty, that Congress may consider of, and decide the application of the same. Done and signed by the commissioners of the United States, and the Chiefs, captains, and headmen of the Choctaw Nation, at Dancing Rabbit Creek, this 2nd day of September, eighteen and thirty-five years.
have a section of land, it is accordingly granted. to be located in one
the section, on any unoccupied and unimproved land
Allen Glover and George S. Gaines, Indian Traders in the Choctaw
Nation, have accounts amounting to upwards of nine thousand dollars
against the Indians who are unable to pay their said debts, without
distressing their tenants. A desire is expressed by the chiefs that two
sections of land be set apart to be sold and the proceeds thereof to be
applied toward the payment of the aforesaid debts. It is agreed that two
sections of any unimproved and unoccupied land be granted to George
S. Gaines who will sell the same for the best price he can obtain and
apply the proceeds thereof to the credit of the Indians on their accounts
due to the before mentioned Glover and Gaines, and shall make the sa-
dilojon for a journey to Washington City, with dispatch to the Govern-
ment and returning others to the Choctaw Nation.

At the express and particular request of the Chief Greenwood Leon,
there is granted to David Haley, one half section of land, to be located in
a half section on any unoccupied and unimproved land, as a compen-

Bibliography

Burt, Jesse and Ferguson, Robert B., Indians of the Southeast: Then and

DeRosier, Arthur H., Jr., The Removal of the Choctaw Indians (Knoxville:

Halbert, H. S. Story of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit. Publications of the
Mississippi Historical Society; ed. Franklin L. Riley, 6, (1902).

Satz, Ronald N., American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era (Lincoln:
University of Nebraska Press, 1975).
This marker at Dancing Rabbit Creek was donated by the Bernard Romans Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution in Columbus, Mississippi. It serves as a monument to the signing of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. — Photo courtesy of Edward John
Dancing Rabbit Creek Land Cession, 1830. The remaining 10,432,130 acres was lost in this treaty signed by the Choctaw Nation in Mississippi. — Drawing by Theron Denson
CHAPTER 5

CHOCTAW STICKBALL

Bradley Williams

The Mississippi Choctaw sport, stickball (kaboMa), is known as the "granddaddy of all American sports". The game is played annually during the Choctaw Indian Fair. The early French explorers referred to the game as 'LaCrosse'. Many modern American sports have characteristics of stickball. Football is similar in that it is an intense contact sport; basketball is similar because agility and swiftness are required and both games start with a jump ball in the center of the playing area; and hockey is similar through the use of sticks, and its rules, i.e. a player is removed from play for a designated duration of time. This paper will present a description of how the sticks and balls are made and an explanation of how the game was played long ago and is played today.

In order to make a pair of stickball sticks, the first step is to go into the woods and find a good hickory tree. These trees are probably best for making stickball sticks. Hickory can be found easily in most Mississippi woods. When a good hickory tree is found, it is either chopped down with an axe or cut with a power saw.

Afterwards, it is quarter or halved depending on the size of the wood. Next, the bark is peeled off and the basic shaping begins. When this step is completed, the shaping of the cups begins with a draw knife. This part is thinned to a certain size, and then it is dipped in hot grease so it will not break or crack while it is in the process of being bent or shaped.

After bending, it is tied with wood (hickory) strips for a certain period of time to keep the cup in shape. After a while, it is shaped further by adding human body weight on the sticks.

Then, a metal rod is heated to make three holes around the cup. The final touch is to thread laces through the holes in order to bind the cup and tightly secure it to the sticks.

According to Jackson Isaac, an elderly Mississippi Choctaw who grew up making stickball sticks, the cost of a good pair of sticks was around fifty cents to one dollar in his younger days. Now, the price of a good pair of incomplete sticks, sticks which are not tied with deerskin strings, is about twenty to twenty-five dollars. A complete pair, sticks tied with deerskin strings, is about fifty to seventy-five dollars. He also said that if one takes good care of the sticks during the games, "(They) will last . . . a long time".


2 Ibid., p. 3.
According to William Jackson, the making of a stickball requires a lot of time and practice, "but once you get the hang of it, it is easy and you can make as many as you want within a day". He says that the materials needed to make a stickball are something solid for the center, cloth strips, thread, and deerskin. William Jackson uses a one-half inch cube wood block for the center of the ball. This cube is wrapped with cloth strips until it is about two inches in diameter. The next step is to wrap white thread around the cloth in order to secure the cloth tightly. The final step is to weave deerskin strips around the ball as the covering. He says that these stickballs are made to use during stickball games, and to be sold at the Choctaw Fair.

No one really knows when or how stickball got started. The present day Choctaws know that it is a tradition. In 1564, when Rene Laudonniere came through Mississippi commanding an expedition to Florida, stickball was being played then. There were six to seven hundred players on the playing field at the same time from one team. A Choctaw man whose wife was pregnant was ineligible to play, it was believed by the Choctaws that the father had given most of his strength to the baby inside the mother. The goal posts were as far as a mile apart. Now, it is played on a one-hundred yard football field. Long ago, there could be an unlimited number of players on a team, but today only twenty (20) players from a team are allowed on the playing field. No one seventeen-years-old and under is allowed to play at the annual Choctaw Indian Fair. The teams consist of Choctaws who reside on the Choctaw Indian Reservation near Philadelphia, Mississippi.

In times past, stickball was played until a certain number of points were scored and it usually lasted one day; sometimes more than one day was needed. The team who first scored a set amount of points was the winner. Today, stickball is played in four (4) fifteen-minute quarters. The team with the most points at the end of the fourth quarter is the winner. In case of a tie, the game goes into overtime until one team scores.

A player cannot touch the ball with his hand or kick it with his feet. When a player gets into a fight with an opponent, he is ejected from the game for the remainder of the quarter. It is a rough game without any safety equipment. A stickball player really does take his life into his hands in the game of Choctaw stickball. Choctaw stickball is one of the American Indian field sports which is still being played in America today.

If one has never seen a stickball game played by the Mississippi Choctaws, they will want to see it at the Choctaw Indian Fair held on the reservation at the Pearl River Choctaw Indian Community, eight miles west of Philadelphia, Mississippi in the early part of July. Sometime in the fall,
Choctaw stickball can be seen at the annual Choctaw Indian Pow-Wow held near the same location as the Choctaw Fair.

Bibliography


The stickball stick is being shaped into a loop with a hickory bark string and a pocket knife. — Photo by Bill Brescia
The looped cup is drilled with a hot iron on three sides. — Photo by Bill Brascia
After the hickory bark string is removed, the stick is tied with leather thongs. — Photo by Bill Brescia
Cecil Dixon, as he completes a pair of Choctaw stickball sticks. — Photo by Bill Brescia
William Jackson starting to shape a Choctaw stickball — Photo by Claude Allen
A rag ball is covered with thread for the inner core. — Photo by Claude Allen.
A layer of leather is sewed over the inner core. — Photo by Claude Allen
Two examples of a completed Choctaw stickball — Photo by Claude Allen
Most American Indians now living on Indian “trust” land in the United States have their own form of government. Recent legislation, such as the Indian Civil Rights Act and the Indian Self-Determination Act, has given tribes the impetus to serve important educational, social, economic, and political functions within their boundaries. During the 1930's and 1940's, Indian tribes who wished to reorganize could do so under the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) otherwise known as the Wheeler-Howard Act.

One of the stipulations of the IRA was for the tribes to adopt a constitution and by-laws similar to those of the United States. In 1945, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians became a federally recognized Indian tribe under the IRA. The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians adopted their own constitution and by-laws with a preamble. The Preamble reads as follows:

We, the Choctaw Indians, members of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, desiring to promote the achievement of self-government for the Choctaw people, do, for our welfare and benefit, hereby adopt and proclaim the following constitution and by-laws.

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians consists of seven recognized Choctaw communities in Mississippi. The communities are: (1) Bogue Chitto, (2) Conehatta, (3) Pearl River, (4) Red Water, (5) Standing Pine, (6) Tucker, and (7) Bogue Homa. Most communities are in close proximity to the original Choctaw villages and towns. There are several non-recognized communities also.

The Community Development Clubs are one of the sound channels of communication between the community council representatives and tribal administration with the local community people. The club meetings function as a forum to air concerns and needs of the community people.

There are nearly five thousand Choctaw Indians living on or near the Choctaw Indian Reservation in Mississippi. They elect sixteen (16) members to the Tribal Council, and also the Tribal Chief, who serves as the primary administrator. Presently, membership to the tribe, residence, and age are the only requirements to be a candidate for any tribal office.

After the IRA of 1934 and the adoption of the tribal constitution and by-laws, the tribal government was under the influence of the local Bureau of
Indian Affairs (BIA) Superintendent, who had a great deal of authority in Choctaw affairs. The tribal leadership recognized early that they could not achieve independence, whether educational or economic, unless they took the initiative themselves. However, the Choctaw tribe had no funds to operate programs nor experience in the American form of government. Upon the recommendation of some tribal council members, the BIA Superintendent approved the cutting of tribal timber for sale and for building wood-framed houses, some of which still provide shelter for Choctaws. Approximately thirty thousand dollars was made from the sale of tribal timber. This amount constituted the first tribal budget.

With the funding in 1966 of the Choctaw Community Action Agency under the Office of Economic Opportunity, the Choctaw government began to experience self-government. In 1971 the Choctaw Tribal Council established a broad goal of tribal self-determination by contracting services provided to the tribe by federal agencies, e.g., Indian Health Service and the BIA. This reorganization plan of tribal self-determination was a response to the aims and goals as expressed by the U.S. President, Richard M. Nixon, in his 1970 Indian Policy Statement of Indian Self-Determination. The Choctaw philosophy of self-determination is as follows:

1. The long-range goals of all tribal efforts to end Indian poverty and to substitute tribal control for federal management of Indian reservations
2. Lasting change on an Indian reservation must come from action by the Indian people
3. Fundamental change can be initiated by tribal leaders by bringing the major decision-making processes under tribal control and generating a sustained and coordinated tribal development effort
4. These efforts can only be accomplished by a strong tribal government which can retain the active support of its people

In line with this philosophy, two distinct but related goals were established by the Choctaw tribal government. The goals are as follows:

1. To reduce poverty among the Choctaw people through development of the Choctaw reservation
2. To substitute tribal control for federal management of the Choctaw Reservation

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 2.
4 Ibid.
Since 1945, the Choctaw tribal government has made great strides in improving the reservation communities. However, tribal governments as a facsimile of the larger American government are not immune to criticisms normally addressed in the political context. As Felix S. Cohen stated in his article, “Indian Self-Government.”

Self-government is not a new or radical idea. Rather, it is one of the oldest staple ingredients of the American way of life. Many Indians in this country enjoyed self-government long before the European immigrants who came to these shores did. It took the white colonists north of the Rio Grande about 170 years to rid themselves of the traditional European pattern of the divine right of kings, or what we call today, the long arm of bureaucracy, and to substitute the less efficient but more satisfying Indian pattern of self-government. Indian self-government is not a new or radical policy but an ancient fact. It is not something friends of the Indians can confer upon the Indians. Nobody can grant self-government to anybody else. The Federal Government, which is today the dominant power of the civilized world, cannot give self-government to an Indian community. All it can really do for self-government is to get out of the way.7

Since the beginning of Choctaw self-determination and reorganization, major changes in the federal Indian policy have greatly influenced the development of the reservation. Some of the changes since 1972 on the Choctaw reservation are as follows:

- Merger of the Choctaw Community Action Agency administration within the Choctaw tribal government administration
- Adoption of standard leasing procedures for tribal lands
- Adoption of Tribal Ordinance #6: An Ordinance to Establish Election Rules and Procedures of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians
- Establishment of Central Finance Office, to handle bookkeeping and accounting for all tribal programs
- Adoption of standard Tribal Financial Policies and Procedures
- Adoption of standard Tribal Personnel Policies
- Establishment of a basic departmental structure for the tribal government, currently consisting of five departments
- Adoption by the voters of a Revised Constitution and By-laws providing for the direct, at-large election of the Tribal Chief and staggered four-year terms for members of the Tribal Council.

Establishment of the Choctaw Housing Authority, Choctaw Utility Commission, and Choctaw Transit Authority, to bring housing, utility, and

The accumulation of federal grant and contract programs providing services to the Choctaw people, from an annual level of $15,000 in 1965, to a current level in excess of $9 million.

The greatest emphasis during the past decade has been in the area of economic and industrial development. A thirty-acre industrial park now has two industries -- Chahta Enterprise, a wire-harness manufacturing plant, a dedicated* supplier of Packard Electric Division, and Choctaw Greetings, a subsidiary of American Greetings Company, the second largest card manufacturing plant in the world. At present, there is no tax commission to assess corporate and-business taxes for the tribe.

Other recent accomplishments include the following:

Creation of Chahta Construction Company which contracts to build houses and facilities on the reservation. Chahta completed $3,100,000 in construction from FY 1972 to date.

 Creation of other components of the tribal government include:

- Utility Commission
- Housing Authority
- Fair Development Board
- Arts and Crafts Board
- Consumer Cooperative
- Board of Education
- Land Enterprises
- Tribal Educational Programs
- Tribal Manpower Training and Development Programs
- Tribal Facilities
- Tribal Community services
- Tribal Health Programs

As the Choctaw tribal government enters into the decade of the 1980's and what seems to be an era of "ultra-conservatism" in America, it will be well for the Choctaws to give heed to the broad perspective of government in order to excel and accomplish the tribal governmental goals of self-determination and economic self-sufficiency. Felix S. Cohen summed up the ultimate goals of Indian tribal governments when he wrote:

* Special contractual supplier relationship.

of us is a more faithful champion of his own purposes than any expert. The basic principles of American liberty is distrust of expert rulers, a recognition, in action’s words, that power corrupts and that absolute power corrupts absolutely. That is why America, despite all the lingo of the administrative experts, has insisted upon self-government rather than "good government", and has insisted that experts should be servants, not masters. And what we insist upon in the governing of these United States, our Indian fellow-citizens also like to enjoy in their limited domains: the right to use experts when their advice is wanted and the right to reject their advice when it conflicts with purposes on which we are all our own experts. The classical answer to Hamilton-Schurz -- Indian Bureau philosophy of "expert government" is the answer given by Thomas Jefferson in a letter to the Cherokee Indians in 1808. Jefferson said: "The fool has as great a right to express his opinion by vote as the wise, because he is equally free and equally master of himself." The issue is not only an issue of Indian rights: it is the much larger one of whether American liberty can be preserved.\(^9\)

Since 1945, the Choctaw tribal government has demonstrated considerable progress amid a tremendous effort from local and state governments to offset this program. In 1978, the U.S. Supreme Court denied the state of Mississippi jurisdiction over the Choctaw Reservation. With this landmark decision, the Choctaw tribal government should enter an unprecedented era of American Indian community and reservation development.

\(^9\)Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, First Annual Report, p. 4.

**Bibliography**


Choctaw Chief, Phillip Martin — Photo by Bill Brescia
Choctaw Chief, Phillip Martin — Photo by Bill Brescia
Red Water representatives Mattie Willis (left) and Maxine Dixon (right), and Conehatta representative Roger Anderson, members of the Tribal Council. — Photo by Edward John.
Front view of the Choctaw Tribal Council Hall near Philadelphia, Mississippi — Photo by Bill Brescia
Front view of Chata Development Company, a state chartered tribally owned business enterprise – Photo by Bill Brescia.
View of the Chahta Enterprise, a tribally-owned business producing electric wire harnesses — Photo by Bill Brescia