

CHOCTAW INDIANS IN MISSISSIPPI
SINCE 1830

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By

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PREFACE

Though I lived less than one hundred miles from the center of the area most thickly populated by the Choctaw Indians east of the Mississippi River, I did not know that any Indians resided in the state. A great majority of the people of the state shared in my ignorance.

While in school in Newton county I learned that some eighteen hundred Choctaws were still in Mississippi. In an attempt to learn more about these people I made a close study of all available written material and found that most authors had neglected recording any facts concerning these Indians. I was firmly convinced that someone could make a worth while contribution to history by making a study of the Choctaw Indians east of the Mississippi River since 1830. With this in mind I have made this study hoping that by so doing I might make some valuable contribution to history, especially Mississippi history.

I wish to express my appreciation to the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College Library Staff, all members of the History Department of Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, the typist, the Choctaw Indian Agency Staff, the Missionary among the Indians, teachers of the Choctaw "day schools", those Choctaw Indians who so patiently and willingly gave valuable information that no one else could give, my wife, and others who in any way have assisted me in this work.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

When the white men came to America the Choctaw confederacy, composed of a loose alliance of tribes, chiefly of Muskogean stock, occupied southern Alabama and Mississippi, along with the adjacent gulf coast of western Florida and eastern Louisiana, with the Choctaws proper occupying south central Mississippi.¹

The Choctaw Nation, with a population of about twenty thousand people, was divided into three districts: the Southern District or Sixtowns, the Northwestern District or Upper Towns, and the Northeastern District or Lower Towns. Of these the Northeastern District was the most thickly populated; and its towns were more compact for protection against possible attack by their eastern neighbors, the Creeks.²

The Choctaws began to come into close contact with the French at New Orleans and with the British from the Atlantic seaboard, and acquired some of the white man's ways. When the United States won her independence the Choctaws entered into treaty relations, and from time to time they ceded portions of their territory to the new republic. They always boasted that they never made war against the United States. When they were invited by Tecumseh to join his Indian Confederacy against the United States in the War of 1812, they refused because of the

¹J. W. Powell, "Cherokee Myths," Nineteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 500.

²John R. Swanton, "Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians," Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 103, 56-58.

influence of the great Pushmataha, chief of the Southern District. Instead, they joined General Andrew Jackson in his war against the Creeks, and then helped him in the Battle of New Orleans. Shortly after this they came still more strongly under the influence of the United States when missionaries were sent to their country to establish schools and churches.³ By the Treaty of Doak's Stand October 24, 1820, subsequently modified by the Treaty of Washington, January 20, 1825, the Choctaws gave up a considerable part of their land holdings in Mississippi in exchange for the southern half of the present state of Oklahoma.⁴

Pushmataha died in 1824 during the negotiation of the Treaty of Washington. Oklahoma, his nephew, succeeded him as chief of the Southern District, but because of his neglect of duty and dissipated habits, he was soon deposed and the warriors elected Natticache to succeed him.⁵ Like all full-bloods, he was opposed to any further cessions of land to the United States. Mashulitubbee, another full-blood, was chief of the Northeastern District, and like Natticache, was opposed to selling any more of their land. Both of these chiefs adhered closely to the dress, usages, and traditions of the tribe.

³Angie Debo, The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic, 26-44.

⁴The Statutes at Large of the United States, VII, 210, 247.

⁵Henry S. Halbert, "Benard Roman's Maps of 1772," Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, VI, 416.

Chief Greenwood Le Flore and Sub-Chief David Folsom of the Northwestern District were educated mixed-bloods. Both believed that submission and removal of the Choctaws was inevitable. They knew their country would be swamped with land speculators and settlers. They could see their people involved in disputes, quarrels, and law suits, followed by a state of general demoralization. But the full-blood chiefs closed their eyes and turned a deaf ear to all arguments and appeal for removal.

In 1828, the United States sent representatives to the Choctaw country to persuade them to give up their lands east of the Mississippi River and move to their new purchase in the West. A general council was convened. Here the mixed-bloods, backed by the agents of the United States, insisted that a treaty of sale and removal should be made. But the full-blood chiefs knew the agents had bribed the mixed-bloods with lavish promises of protection and other favors; so they held out in their refusal to treat, and withdrew from the council. It looked as though civil war would follow. Both sides collected their forces. But when they met, David Folsom and Natticache discussed the whole question and smoked the peace pipe.⁶

Conditions for the Indians became almost intolerable. In 1829, the Mississippi legislature, believing that the national Congress was about to act to force the removal of the Indians, and probably with the private sanction of President Andrew

⁶J. F. H. Clairborne, Mississippi as a Province, Territory, and State, I, 506-507.

Jackson, extended the laws of the state, so as to embrace the Choctaw lands. A year later, 1830, a supplemental act by the state legislature abolished their tribal government, declared the office of chief to be non-existent, and made the Indians citizens of the state.⁷

In 1830, President Jackson sent Secretary of War John H. Eaton and John Coffee to the Choctaw country with instructions to obtain a treaty whereby these Indians would relinquish claims to all land east of the Mississippi, and agree to move to the West. Because of the pressure by these United States representatives, the State of Mississippi, a part of the Christian missionaries, and the mixed-bloods, a general council was called to meet at Dancing Rabbit Creek, September 15, 1830. Here again, Le Flore and a few others favored the sale of their land in Mississippi and removal west, and the full-bloods held out in their opposition to any treaty that gave up more of their land. When the question of a treaty or no treaty was submitted to the council, September 23, the majority there present voted against it. Red Post Oak, a leading chief of the Okla hannali, or Six-town Indians, considered the action final. He accordingly left the treaty ground and started for home.⁸

⁷Henry G. Brunson, "The Beginning of a New Period in Mississippi," Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, XI, 321.

⁸Henry S. Halbert, "The Last Indian Council on the Noxubee River," Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, IV, 271.

When the council voted against making a treaty, Major Eaton took the stand and made a threatening speech. Coffee then said that he could not support Eaton, either in the contents or language of his speech. Many of the Indians became indignant at Eaton's bullying, and withdrew from the council. But even with these staunchest opponents of removal gone, Eaton and Coffee still were unable to get the Choctaws to treat until the famous Fourteenth Article was inserted into the treaty.

Article Fourteen allowed the head of any family to remain in his native Mississippi. For himself, he would be allowed one section, or six hundred forty acres of land; for each child over ten years of age, one-half section, or three hundred twenty acres; and for each child in the household under ten years of age, one quarter section, or one hundred sixty acres. It was provided, however, that such claims should be filed within six months of the signing of the treaty. The claimant had to declare his intention of becoming a citizen of the state, and reside upon his claim for five years after ratification of the treaty, before a patent would be issued.⁹

The three district chiefs, Greenwood Le Flore, Natticache, and Mashulitubbee, were liberally rewarded, or bribed, by Article Fifteen, which provided that each should receive four sections of land, and an annual monetary allowance of two hundred and fifty dollars.¹⁰ Then having satisfied the leading chiefs of the nation, the commissioners found it necessary to gain the

⁹The Statutes at Large of the United States, VII, 335.

¹⁰Ibid., 335.

support of certain other Choctaws. Thus, by Article Nineteen, David Folsom was awarded four sections of land, eight others were given two sections each, and several others received smaller allotments. The treaty was finally signed September 27, 1830.¹¹

By a Supplementary Article, adopted September 28, 1830, various Choctaw persons, having been presented by their chiefs with a desire that they be provided for, the commissioners agreed to make provision for these people and the President and Senate concurred with the request. In this Supplementary Article, thirteen persons were each to receive two sections of land. Nine of the thirteen were to select land adjoining their improvements; the other four could select one of their two sections anywhere in their respective districts. Other than these thirteen, eight persons were to get one and one-half sections each; several others were to get one section; and many others, fractions of sections.¹² Apparently this generosity on the part of the United States was to compensate these Choctaws for using their influence to secure the passage of the treaty.

By agreeing to this treaty, the Choctaws, according to Article Three, ceded to the United States all of their land east of the Mississippi River, and all who wished to retain their tribal institutions agreed to remove to their land in the West. To prevent excessive suffering and hardship, the time of

¹¹ibid., 336.

¹²ibid., 340.

migration was to extend over a period of three years. Thus, the fate of the Choctaws of Mississippi was sealed.¹³

Immediately after the conclusion of the treaty, many of the Indians began to prepare for the long trek to their new homes in what is now Oklahoma, some willingly, some otherwise. By the summer of 1831, the tribe was in motion, and approximately four thousand individual Indians were on the gathering ground at Vicksburg in November, ready to move over the river. Urged on by the United States Government, this stream of emigration continued through 1832 and 1833, leaving only about seven thousand Choctaws still in Mississippi.¹⁴ Of the three leading chiefs, Natticache and Mashulitubbee elected to share the fate of their people in the West, but Greenwood Le Flore remained in the old home.

A study of the history of the last Choctaw cession shows that from the beginning of negotiations at Dancing Rabbit Creek, to the final completion of them, that treaty is marked with fraud, intimidation, violence, and trickery on the part of the white man. And, from that time on, fraud, violence, and trickery have been associated with the Choctaw lands in Mississippi.

¹³Ibid., 333.

¹⁴Grant Foreman, A History of Oklahoma, 16.

CHAPTER II

THE CHOCTAW LAND FRAUDS

Most of the seven thousand Choctaws remaining in Mississippi were clustered around leaders who refused to go west. Many Indians wished to take advantage of Article Fourteen of the treaty, accept individual allotments of land and remain in their native country. But here the incompetency and neglect on the part of Colonel William Ward, the agent in charge, and lack of information on the part of the Federal Government, brought much suffering and hardship upon the Indians.

Chief Red Post Oak, who lived in what is now Jasper county, Mississippi, was very much opposed to moving to the West. He wanted to stay with the bones of his ancestors, as did many of the braves that he represented. They held a council and decided that he and Atonamastubbee, another Sixtown Mingo, would go to the council house on the Noxubee River, where Colonel William Ward, the United States agent, resided to file claims for their lands. Each head of a family selected one stick for himself; one long stick for each child over ten years of age; and a shorter stick for each child under ten years of age. The correct number of sticks was then tied in a bundle and marked by some distinguishing marks. This done, Chief Red Post Oak and his aids set out for the Great Council House. When he arrived and asked to see Ward, he was told the agent was unable to see him. The chief waited and finally was given a chance to talk with the official. The agent told the Indians that too many of them wanted to stay in Mississippi, when in reality the purpose of the

treaty was to remove the whole nation to the West. At first he refused to register any of them, but the chief insisted. The agent finally told Red Post Oak that if he would leave the bundles of sticks at the council house, he would register all for the proper amount of land. The Indians, believing that the agent of the United States Government would be as good as his word, left the bundles and departed for their haunts.¹

Red Post Oak was satisfied in his own mind that he had secured for his people a right to live and die in the land of their fathers. This feeling of security was short lived, for government agents notified the Indians that in accordance with the treaty they must move to the West. Red Post Oak and his followers were greatly chagrined and angered. They immediately protested, declaring that they had complied with Article Fourteen of the treaty and wished to remain in their Mississippi homes. Red Post Oak was ready to go on the war path, but was persuaded that it would be a useless sacrifice of blood. The fingers of the strong arm of the United States, backed by the greed and lust of the unscrupulous white man, were clutching ever tighter about the fertile soil of Mississippi and the home of the Choctaw. By 1836, Atonamastubbee and most of Red Post Oak's people migrated to the West, but the chief chose to stay in his native land.²

Another instance of mass dissatisfaction among the Choctaws

¹Henry S. Halbert, "The Last Indian Council on the Noxubee River," Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, IV, 279.

²Ibid.

was the Oka Hullo village in what is today east central Kemper county. These people also wished to take advantage of Article Fourteen, but as in the case of the Jasper county group, failed to secure the privilege promised because of the fraudulent action of Agent Ward. These Indians were highly incensed. Dissatisfaction among them reached such a high state that the white settlers of the vicinity became very uneasy. It appears that this uneasiness was utterly baseless, but to satisfy their apprehensions, the settlers sent a messenger to Jackson to inform Governor Hiram G. Runnels of the unrest among the Indians.

To get first hand information and to appeal to the Choctaws in person, Governor Runnels went to Oka Hullo. When he arrived in the town, a council was held and to the assembly of warriors, the governor made a very conciliatory speech. In consequence of this talk, the dissatisfaction began to die out and a better feeling began at once to prevail among them, and the white people no longer complained of fear of the Indians.³

Though this was the last threat of force and violence on the part of the Indians, they were not completely satisfied. But there was little they could do except abide by the laws of the white man. These laws were often overstepped by the white man in his greed for the Indians' land.

In the late 1820's, there had been many thriving Choctaw villages, but the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek brought about

³A. J. Brown, "Antiquities of Newton County," Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, VI, 446.

their doom. The settlements were broken up and the Choctaws were scattered; some moving to the West, and others joining groups of Indians that remained in the state.

Coosha Town, in Lauderdale county, is a good example of these doomed villages. It had a delightful location on the north prong of Lost Horse Creek, beginning not far above the junction of the two prongs, and extending about a mile up the creek. Between one quarter and one-half mile north of the junction of these two prongs is a hill, and on this hill were located the dwelling and store house of Charles Jugan, who died about 1840. His wife, Phoebe, was the daughter of Oklahoma, the leading man of the Coosha Town people.

Besides these important people, Coosha Town had many other attractive features for the Choctaws. The dense canebrake lying between the forks of the creek was the home of bear, deer, turkey, squirrels, panthers, and wild cats. These animals were hunted by the Indians: the meat for food and the pelts either to sell, trade, or for domestic use for making clothes, drum heads, ball sticks, and other articles. The high wooded bluffs and hills that overlooked this canebrake, besides being a place of refuge for the animals from high water, added much to the beauty of the scenery of Coosha Town. Other than game of the forest, the people of this village had fish, which were abundant in Lost Horse Creek and other nearby streams. In addition, they raised corn and vegetables, and had orchards of peaches and plums. In this area there is today, and the Indians say there was then, an abundance of crab apples, hickory nuts, blackberries, and haws,

which were used for food by the people of Coosha Town.

Near the eastern border of the settlement can be seen the graves of the Coosha Town people. This cemetery, the abiding memorial of Coosha Town, which comprises about one-half acre, is covered with timber, and has been carefully preserved by owners of the farms. Here were buried the sisters of Pushmataha, Tapena Homo, and Nakotima. According to tradition, Oklahoma was also laid to rest here, but his nephew, Jack Amos, of Newton county, claims that Oklahoma was buried on his farm on the south side of the creek about a mile from the town. Regardless of where he was buried, the people gradually abandoned Coosha Town after his death in 1846. Some went to the new home of the Choctaws in what is now Oklahoma. Others went into the hilly section of Kemper and Neshoba counties, known as the Government Hills.⁴

In west central Kemper county was the Choctaw town of Hankha Siloa, built about a pond on a flat hillside. This was a well populated and thriving village. The Indians were content until in the late 1830's an eagle swooped down upon a small child, who was in the yard, and carried it away. The child was that of a great hunter. The people of Hankha Ailoa believed this to be an omen of bad luck and immediately abandoned their homes, some migrating to their new nation in the West, and some joining other Choctaw communities in Mississippi.⁵ Thus in

⁴Henry S. Halbert, "Benard Roman's Maps of 1772," Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, VI, 416-418.

⁵Ibid., 422.

various ways, one Choctaw settlement after another was abandoned, so that by the time of the Civil War none of the original towns was in existence.

As has been said before, there was no satisfactory settlement of the land question among the Choctaws. Articles Fifteen and Nineteen, and the supplementary treaty specifically provided for certain people.⁶ These people, and the few that were able to get Colonel Ward to register their claims within six months after the signing of the treaty, were the only Choctaws that legally had a home in Mississippi. Many others that had tried to sign within the prescribed time limit believed they had a legal right to a home; but their land was soon sold, and white men came in to take possession. The Indians were forced to leave their life-long homes.

Even those who succeeded in obtaining titles to their land failed to hold it. Even Mashulitubbee was swindled out of his land. He sold two sections to D. W. Wright, a land speculator, for two negro boys, between the ages of fourteen and thirty, one negro girl, between twelve and twenty years of age, payment of a one hundred dollar doctor bill, a sixty-five dollar note, and fifty dollars in cash.⁷

As soon as the Choctaws were allowed to sell, unscrupulous white men began to pour into their territory, and speculate in

⁶The Statutes at Large of the United States, VII, 335-340.

⁷American State Papers, Document of the Congress of the United States in Relation to Public Lands, VII, 19.

their land. One of these swindlers, John Johnson, had as his partner Wylie Davis. These agents went among the Indians, and ascertained the amount of land to which each was entitled by the Treaty of 1830; then they got the Indian's consent to handle the claims. They charged one-half of the land as a fee, and obtained the power of attorney to sell the other half for the Indian. They started with no money, but soon had in their possession through fraud, claims amounting to two hundred and fifty or three hundred sections of land. Johnson told Captain John Watts, a citizen of Mississippi, he had already sold one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in claims and expected to clear six hundred thousand dollars out of the operation before it was over. In the same conversation, he told Watts that he expected Congress to grant his claims, because the government had defrauded the Indians by refusal of the agent to register their names. He asserted that Agent Ward did refuse to register their names, that he threw away their sticks, and told them, "Damn you, I won't register your names. You ought to go over the Mississippi." Johnson also asserted that four or five pages of Ward's register were torn out.⁸

Johnson and Davis were not the only white men connected with the Choctaw land frauds. Charles Fisher of North Carolina was interested in these claims. He even sent agents into the Chickasaw country and got those Indians to locate in the Choctaw area; then he got possession of their land. Some of these Indians

⁸Ibid., VIII, 507.

inter-married with the whites. Many of their descendants are still located in the Eupora - Ackerman area.⁹

By the terms of the treaty of September 27, 1830, any Indian who moved beyond the Mississippi River and came back to his old home could not file a claim for an allotment of land. Some of the Choctaws who had moved west of the Mississippi, became discouraged and returned. Fisher and his agents influenced these Indians to file claims unjustly.¹⁰

These agents made no secret of their attempts to get control of the Choctaw lands. Hugh McDaniel, an agent of Fisher, was seen at Garland's Ball Ground with hundreds of Indians crowded around him. He was getting the number of their children, and making their marks, assigning their claims to the Fisher Company. The poor, ignorant Indians never touched the pen. At a later date, this same agent of Fisher's told Representative James Ellis of Neshoba county, "When the general government left the door open for fraud, there was no harm in making use of it."¹¹

Fisher and his agents had two thousand sections of land claims assigned to them. The Indians were to receive one thousand sections and Fisher, five hundred; the other five hundred were to be divided among Hugh McDaniel, D. W. Wright, W. W.

⁹Ibid., 509.

The writer has visited the home of one of these families at different times.

¹⁰Ibid., 508.

¹¹Ibid., 506-507.

Gwinn, and Alexander F. Young, all members of Fisher's organization.¹²

Johnson was questioned by Watts as to how he and Fisher got along taking names among the same Indians. He replied that Indian names were difficult to spell, and that by spelling them differently, one Indian would be entitled to two reservations. He said that they had more names than there were Indians.¹³

These frauds connected with the Choctaw lands were too much for the honest people of Mississippi. Accordingly, the legislature of Mississippi instructed her senators and requested her representatives in Congress to get some official action as soon as possible to prevent the completion of titles to Choctaw land, if said titles had originated in fraud.¹⁴ In January, 1836, Congress appointed a "select committee of the House" to investigate the fraud charged to have been committed under the Fourteenth Article of the Treaty of 1830.¹⁵

Colonel Ward was called before the committee and sworn in. He stated that he knew of no company or companies that were organized for the purpose of purchasing the land of the Choctaw Indians. He testified that he did keep a register of names as required by the treaty, and that he did not refuse to register any Indian that applied in his own proper person, but did

¹²Ibid., 509.

¹³Ibid., 507.

¹⁴Ibid., 506-507.

¹⁵Franklin L. Riley, "Choctaw Land Claims," Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, VIII, 358.

refuse applications when one Indian tried to register for several others. When asked about the missing leaves in the register, he said only one leaf was lost and not more than six names were on it.¹⁶

Major William Armstrong, superintendent of the Choctaw removal, testified that the register in possession of Colonel Ward was in part destroyed.¹⁷ Reuben H. Grant and Jefferson Clements, citizens of Lowndes county, Mississippi, stated under oath that Ward was at times too drunk to attend to business. They also said they had known Colonel Ward to reject a good number of applicants, and that he was so careless he left his register on a shelf or table outside the office, and anyone could check his books as he pleased. Major John Pitchlyn testified that he knew some of the names turned in to Ward during the prescribed time were not registered. Gabriel Lincecum also said that Ward did not place all names on the register. Many others gave similar testimony.¹⁸

After this investigation, Congress, on March 3, 1837, passed an act for the appointment of commissioners to adjust claims to reservations of land under the Fourteenth Article of the treaty. These commissioners were to be appointed by the President. They were to meet in Mississippi at a time and place designated by the President. They were to ascertain the name of every Choctaw

¹⁶American State Papers, Document of the Congress of the United States in Relation to Public Lands, VIII, 507.

¹⁷Ibid., VII, 11.

¹⁸Ibid., 629-630.

Indian who was head of a family at the time of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, who had not already secured a reservation under that treaty, and who could produce satisfactory evidence that he or she had complied or attempted to comply with Article Fourteen. These commissioners were also to get the number of children of each family over ten years of age, and under ten years of age at the date of the treaty. They had power to summon witnesses, and could request aid and legal advice of the federal district attorney in Mississippi. They were to decide the section of land to which the head of each family was entitled, show whether any part of the land had been sold by the government, and present proof with each case. This information was to be reported to the President, and he was to lay it before Congress for remedial action. The Indians were given one year to file their claims. This time limit was too short for the commission to complete its assignment. To enable the commission to adjust all claims the time was extended by an act passed in 1838.¹⁹

On August 23, 1842, Congress passed an act to provide for satisfaction of these claims. A claimant under Article Fourteen was defined as an Indian who had registered, or offered to register, with the agent within six months of the ratification of the treaty, had owned an improvement at the time of the ratification, and had lived upon it five years since that time, unless he had been dispossessed by the United States Government, and particularly had never removed west of the Mississippi River.

¹⁹The Statutes at Large of the United States, V, 180, 211.

If the commissioners were satisfied the Indian had met all the preceding provisions, they would ascertain the quantity of land the Indian should have and locate him. Land of the children was to be located adjacent to the improvements of the father when possible. The President was to issue patents to such land.

If it should prove impossible for the land of the children to be located contiguous to the parents' improvement, or if the government had disposed of any land to which an Indian was entitled, the commissioners were to estimate the quantity of land due such Choctaws, and they would be allowed to select an equal amount of public land in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, or Mississippi. However, if the land was not in the tract ceded to the United States by the Choctaws in the Treaty of 1830, the Indian was not allowed to live on it. Instead, it was subject to private sale. Certificates, later called "land script," were issued the Indians by the Secretary of War, but to force them to leave Mississippi, half the amount of each certificate was withheld until their removal to the Choctaw country in the West.

Land claims under Article Nineteen of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek were not valid, if they had not been registered with Agent F. W. Armstrong, a brother of William Armstrong, who was sent to the Choctaw country for the purpose in 1832. If these registered claims had been located, the Indian was allowed to remain on his improvements. If the land to which he was entitled had been disposed of by the government, he was allowed two-fifths of an acre for each acre of his claim, and certificates to that effect were issued at fifty cents an acre. The

commissioners were to deliver no title to claims to any white man; the title was to be issued to the claimant, or to his heirs in case of death. If the original claimant had disposed of, or agreed to assignment of his or her claim prior to February 4, 1832, no patent was to be issued. In case of partial assignment or agreement to a partial assignment, the commissioners were to issue patent to land on which the original claimant was at that time the bona fide proprietor.

In an attempt to prevent further fraud among the Choctaws, and to move more of them to their new homes in what is now Oklahoma, the act provided that all claims under the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, and all supplemental articles to that treaty, must be presented to the commissioners for allowance not later than August 23, 1843.²⁰

By this act, John Johnson, Wylie Davis, Charles Fisher, D. W. Wright, and other defrauders were denied the great fortunes they hoped to gain, and many of the Choctaws were induced to leave their native land, and seek solace among their kinsmen west of the Mississippi.

On March 3, 1845, Congress appropriated \$115,540 for the removal of these Choctaws to the West, and for their subsistence for one year. A fund was created for them by converting into cash a part of the land script allotted to them in lieu of actual land allotments. From the proceeds of this fund, they were placed on a basis of equality with those already in the West,

²⁰Ibid., 513.

so far as annuities were concerned.²¹

The prospect of annuities forever, and immediate relief for one year after their removal, caused many of the Choctaws to leave their homes and loved ones to go west. Encouraged by the government, and crowded by the white people, the Choctaws were on the move again. In 1846, 1,786 migrated; in 1847, 1,699 moved west. By 1853, there were not more than 2,500 Choctaws left in Mississippi, and the Choctaw land frauds were thought to be forever closed.²²

²²Grant Foreman, A History of Oklahoma, 36.

CHAPTER III

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS - NINETEENTH CENTURY

After the mass removals of the 1831-34 period, the subsequent history of the Choctaws follows two trends, the one pattern that of the Choctaws in the West, the other that of the Choctaws in Mississippi. Except for the migration of a few Mississippi Choctaws during 1844-45 after they found that their hope of retaining land allotment had faded, no major movement takes place until the period of the Dawes Commission activities during 1902 and 1903.¹ For a period of over fifty years a group of approximately 2,500 Choctaws remained in their eastern homes, following a social and economic pattern which changed little throughout that period.

The economic status of the Mississippi Choctaws during the nineteenth century varied from that of wealthy planter to poverty-stricken tenant farmer. Representative of the wealthy mixed blood aristocracy of the Eastern Choctaw was Greenwood Le Flore.

Le Flore was the only wealthy Choctaw Indian left in Mississippi after the removal. This great chieftain was born June 3, 1800, the son of Louis Le Fleur, a French trader, and Rebecca Cravat, a woman of mixed white and Choctaw blood. When Greenwood was twelve years old, his father established a trading post and tavern on the old Natchez Trail at French Camp in Choctaw county, Mississippi. There was a mail carrier, Major John Donley, who made regular trips between Nashville and Natchez. He often

¹Angie Debo, The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic, 70.

stopped at the tavern, and took a fancy to young Greenwood; finally he obtained the parents' permission to take their son to Nashville so that he could attend school there. The youth boarded in the Donley home, and fell in love with the daughter, Rosa. But Le Flore felt that this gentleman of the old school would not consent to his daughter's marriage to one of mixed blood; so he submitted a question to Donley: "Sir, if you loved a beautiful maiden and her parents objected to the marriage, what would you do?" To this the major replied: "I would steal the girl and marry her anyway." Acting accordingly, Le Flore married the daughter of his benefactor.

In 1817 he returned to his home in Carrol county, Mississippi, and in 1824 he was chosen chief of the Northwestern District. Although he favored the treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, he remained in Mississippi at the time of the removal of his people. To the land given him by the government for his assistance in securing the treaty, he added more by purchase. At one time his plantation consisted of fifteen thousand acres. This Choctaw chief, the proud master of more than four hundred slaves, was for two decades one of the South's wealthiest planters.

On his plantation he built a dream house, Malmaison, one of Mississippi's largest and most beautiful prewar mansions. It was full of fine furniture. In the spacious living room, two hundred guests could be entertained at the same time. A pleasant and amiable host, Le Flore was never happier than when his house was filled with company.² This mansion, at one time the

²Greenwood Commonwealth, Special Edition 1941, No specific date given.

scenes of much gaiety and entertainment for the rich and the poor alike, burned March 31, 1942.³

During the Civil War, Le Flore was sympathetic with the cause of the South, but refused to take up arms against the Union, because he had taken an oath at the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek that he would support the government of the United States. On his death bed in August, 1865, he requested the Stars and Stripes be unfolded above him. This request was granted, and a United States flag covered his body when he was buried. Among the trophies still preserved by the descendants of Le Flore are a saber and a bronze medal presented to him by President Jackson in token of the friendship between the United States government and the Choctaw nation.⁴

Most of the other Choctaws who elected to remain in Mississippi were full-bloods, adhering stubbornly to their tribal customs, generally ignorant and unprogressive. Only a few could speak any language except their native tongue. In spite of a thin veneer of Christianity, they retained many of their ancient traditions and customs, especially burial and marriage customs, and traditions concerning childbirth.

Certain of the old tribal customs were retained much longer by the Mississippi Choctaws than by the Choctaws in the West. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, an Indian burial

³Memphis Commercial Appeal, April 2, 1942.

⁴Greenwood Commonwealth, Special Edition 1941, No specific date given.

ceremony covered several days. The actual burial was a drawn out affair. The body was placed in the grave and covered with earth. Two short poles and one tall pole were placed on either side of the grave to let strangers know that a member of the tribe was dead and the friends were still mourning and that he should likewise stop at the grave and mourn. After the poles were planted, friends and relatives gathered around the grave and gave out cries of lamentation. Then the people departed. This was followed by thirty days of mourning, during which members of the family and close relatives of the deceased wore only simple clothes, returned every day to the grave to wail. On the last day, all the friends and relatives were invited to the "big cry". They came in great numbers to join in the final tribute to their deceased comrade.

Just before sundown the people began to gather in an opening near the burying ground. They feasted and danced all night. Just before daylight, while the young folk were still dancing, a short cry was made by one of the bereaved sitting by the campfire. Other mourners gathered around, covered their heads with blankets, and for about ten minutes gave vent to cries of wailing and lamentation. The head man announced it was time for the last cry, and all went to the grave where everyone except the head man and pole pullers knelt on the ground and wept loudly. At the big cry the poles were pulled. As the pole pullers left the grave with the poles, all mourners ceased to mourn. The crowd left the vicinity of the grave, but the immediate family lingered. A lock of hair was clipped from the head of the mourning women and men to be left at the grave. After this, all

joined in a great feast prepared for the occasion. Then the mourning, pole pulling, and feast were followed by an all-night dance. After this dance, the deceased was never spoken of to any member of the family, because the Choctaws believed the one spoken to would soon follow to the grave.

There were but few established cemeteries. Occasionally babies were buried under the house in the yard of the parents. Older people were usually buried near the home. The wife or husband of the deceased was permitted to remarry six months or a year after the big cry.⁵

According to Chief Cemeron Wesley, a burial among the most backward Mississippi Choctaws of the present time still has many characteristics of the ancient ceremonies. About two days after death, the deceased is buried with a simple ceremony. One month after burial, the funeral is held. Between the time of burial and the funeral the family of the deceased return daily to the grave of the departed member to mourn. After the funeral another month is designated as the cry. During this month the relatives may go either to the home of the dead, or to the home of the chief. The big cry is at the end of the thirty days set aside for the cry. It is always in the chief's yard late in the afternoon and followed by an all-night dance. The husband or wife of the deceased may remarry after six months.⁶ The more advanced

⁵John R. Swanton, "Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians," Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 103, 187-194.

⁶Personal interview with Chief Cemeron Wesley, Chief of the Mashulaville group of Indians, June 15, 1946.

Choctaws of this area have funerals just as the white people about them.⁷

From 1830 to the beginning of the twentieth century, the courtship of the Mississippi Choctaw was not a long drawn out affair. When the Choctaw man found the girl of his choice, he waited for the opportune time, then merely tossed a pebble near her feet. If she failed to see or hear the first pebble, he would toss the second or third until the rolling object was noticed. Then the maiden quickly accepted the proposal by a nod of the head and a pleasing smile cast in the direction of the suitor, or she refused the gesture by a look of scorn. In either case, the suitor understood exactly where he stood.

It was not always convenient for the Choctaw man to approach the girl of his choice out in the open space where he could toss pebbles at her feet. Therefore, he was compelled to resort to what might be called a "parlor date." He simply entered the cabin occupied by the woman, and laid his handkerchief or hat upon the bed. This act indicated his desire for the woman to share his couch and house. If she did not want to marry him, the object was immediately snatched off the bed, and the rejected suitor made a hasty retreat from the cabin, for he knew it would be useless to push the courtship further. But if the girl accepted the proposal, the object was allowed to remain on the bed, and relatives of both parties immediately began preparing for the wedding which was sure to be in the very near

⁷Personal interview with Wilton W. Simpson, Baptist Missionary among the Mississippi Choctaws, June 16, 1946.

future.⁸

A wedding was a gala affair among the Choctaws. Mr. Henry S. Halbert, the first instructor in the Catholic mission school at Tucker, and a life-long resident among the Choctaws, witnessed a wedding ceremony of two Sixtown Indians, Oliver Chubbee and Susan Simpson, in August, 1891. He described it as follows:

"The Indians in large numbers arrived on the ground on the evening before the wedding day, and spent the night in their camps. The next morning, extensive preparations were made in the way of cooking the big dinner which was to follow immediately after the marriage ceremony. The place was a kind of glade in the woods. Pots, kettles, and pans were there in profusion, and a number of Indian women were soon immersed in the culinary operations, preparing beef, bread, coffee, pudding, and pie for the marriage feast. About eleven o'clock the long table was set, and it was announced that the marriage would soon take place. Miss Susan then modestly made her appearance on the spot selected for the ceremony. A shawl was spread upon the ground, upon which she seated herself, and four men took another shawl, and held it, one at each corner, over her head. 'Halbina, Halbina' (presents, presents) was the cry that now resounded on every side. Forthwith many came forward and threw their presents on the shawl upheld by the four men. These presents consisted of bundles of calico, ribbons, and other female paraphernalia, and even some little money--whatever in fact the donors chose to give. The presents, however, were not for the bride, but for the female relatives. They were intended as kind of remuneration to these relatives for their assistance in cooking the marriage dinner. When all the presents had been deposited on the shawl, Miss Susan arose, walked off about fifty yards, where some of her female friends were assembled, and again seated herself. Here the presents were brought, taken possession of by some of the women and distributed among Miss Susan's female kinfolk. At the same time Miss Susan had seated herself on the shawl, and while the men were holding the other shawl over her head, Mr. Chubbee came within about twenty feet of her, spread a blanket on the ground and seated himself upon it, and quietly waited the passive part he was to perform in giving a finality to the marriage ceremony. When Miss Susan rose from the ground, some half dozen men, relatives of Chubbee, came forward

⁸Swanton, op. cit., 131.

and seated themselves in a line on his left. The male relatives of the bride now in succession, approached the patient bridegroom, addressing him by the title of relationship created by the marriage, and delivered a short complimentary or congratulatory address.

"When each had finished his talk to Chubbee, he then moved along the line, and shook hands with each of Chubbee's seated kinsmen, calling him by the term of relationship created by the marriage, to which the kinsmen responded simply by the assenting term Ma----. Only two or three women came forward and spoke to the bridegroom and to him alone, for they paid no attention to the other men on the ground----- . When the men had finished their little congratulatory to Chubbee, the marriage was complete, the bride and bridegroom were now one. Without any further ceremony dinner was now announced to which all hands forthwith repaired and did it full justice."⁹

This wedding ceremony differed a little from the usual Choctaw custom. Usually the wedding took place about sundown, and following the feast was an all-night dance. At weddings of the more backward Choctaws, the presents were not so gently distributed as were those at Susan Simpson's wedding. They were cast upon a shawl and immediately snatched by some female relative of the bride. In all weddings, the groom never looked at or spoke to the bride until the end of the ceremony. Then when all were ready to go home, he approached her. Together they left the marriage ground, and made their way to their new home. The house was usually a small cabin, and furnishings consisted of a few pots and pans, and a little furniture made by the young man or his friends or relatives.¹⁰

This simple wedding of the forest was quite different from

⁹Ibid., 132.

¹⁰Ibid.

the wedding forty years earlier at Malmaison, the home of Greenwood Le Flore. The wedding of Rebecca Le Flore and James Harris was a social event of note. It was attended by the great planters of Mississippi and dignitaries of the state. Her wedding feast was not on the ground in a secluded forest. It was in the gorgeous dining room of a magnificent Delta plantation mansion. When Rebecca returned from her honeymoon, she went to the well furnished Malmaison, where she lived until her death in 1922.¹¹

Among the Mississippi Choctaws custom dictated that a pregnant woman was not to drive a wagon. She would not cross a running stream, because she thought she would leave the spirit of the child on the other side, and its life would be short. She was not allowed to get off the ground. It was thought to be good for her to walk a great deal. It was believed that a cough would displace the baby and make childbirth hard. Before the child was born, the father had to quit work and remain quiet. The prospective mother was attended by an old woman skilled in midwifery. At the time of birth, no one was present except the midwife and husband. Just after birth the infant was dressed and plunged into water. Then they took him back to the house, and let his clothing dry on him.¹² When asked why there were no mixed bloods among the present Mississippi Indians, Chief Cemeron said that immediately after a baby came into the world the infant was placed in a stream. If the child was

¹¹Greenwood Commonwealth, Special Edition 1941, No specific date given.

¹²Swanton, op. cit., 118.

a good Choctaw, it would not drown. Mixed bloods were not considered good Choctaws.¹³

Although the Mississippi Choctaws did not know enough about Christianity to have a Christian wedding, they had some traits that would do credit to a highly Christianized society. No Choctaw would idly sit by and see his fellow man suffer; he would make every effort in his power to aid. There was no such thing as one Choctaw's having a full corn crib and smoke house, while his neighbor suffered from hunger. A poor Indian simply took his family and visited the more fortunate Choctaw, who willingly shared his food and shelter. When the food was consumed, they all suffered the same fate. The giver was never known to complain that his less fortunate neighbor was lazy. The next year the same process was repeated.

The Choctaws in Mississippi were scattered over about thirty counties of the state, but throughout this period most of them were concentrated in Neshoba, Kemper, Winston, Lauderdale, Newton, Leake, and Scott counties. Since they had been defrauded out of their land, part of these Indians lived on farms or plantations of white men. In the post-Civil War period they preferred to be share-croppers rather than renters. For the share-cropper the landlord furnished the field, seeds, implements, and live stock, and the Indian furnished the labor. This could have been a good thing for the Choctaw, if he had

¹³Personal interview with Chief Cemeron Wesley, June 15, 1946.

known anything about farming, had worked steadily, and had stayed with his crop. But often when he should have been plowing, he was hunting or visiting his neighbor, so that his fields tended to produce weeds rather than cotton.

The white man also seldom carried out his part of the contract with the Indian share-cropper. He was his own bookkeeper and forced the poor ignorant Indian to settle by his books. He generally saw to it that the Indian did not make enough to "pay off the furnish." This was true especially if the Indian was a good worker. A share-cropper or renter was not supposed to move unless satisfactory arrangements could be made with the landlord.¹⁴ By keeping the Indian in debt to him, the landlord was assured of a supply of labor. The Choctaws of Mississippi remained in this virtual state of peonage for many years.

The Indian share-cropper's house was usually a small log shack, with no more than three rooms. Many were one-room huts, with this one room serving as living room, bed room, kitchen, and dining room. The only ventilation, besides cracks in the wall, came from one door, and sometimes a shutter window. The house had a mud fire-place at one end to protect the Indian family from the cold winter, and this fire-place was used by most of the Choctaws as a place to cook their food. There was nothing to protect the family against the anopheles mosquitoes that infested the low damp farming land along the creeks and rivers. The Indian was malaria ridden, and it was doubtless his

¹⁴House Doc., 58th Cong., 2nd Sess., No. 614.

lowered vitality which resulted from this disease that caused him to remark that he did not "feel too much like work."

Many of the Choctaws moved to the rough hilly section of Neshoba and Kemper counties known as the Government Hills where some still live. They existed on what few beans, potatoes, and corn could be produced from the thin soil of these hills. The Choctaw was not suitable for day labor for the farmer or timber worker. He was not reliable. He worked a few days, then failed to show up. Such tactics caused the employer to refuse to hire him if he could possibly employ a white man or negro.

The Choctaws were frequently without sufficient food to satisfy their hunger or sufficient raiment to protect them from the cold. They had no efficient legal adviser to guard them from the unscrupulous white swindler. There was no physician to cure their bodily ills. Many times there was no minister to guide them in religious matters.

Nowhere was less progress made among the Mississippi Choctaws than in the field of education. Greenwood Le Flore saw to it that the Indians in his vicinity had a school, but before the Civil War, the other Choctaws of Mississippi had little chance of getting an education as there were no schools for them to attend. The Presbyterian Missions at Mayhew in Lowndes county, and Elliot in Grenada county, were abandoned in the 1830's when the missionaries went to the Choctaw country in the West.

After the Civil War, the Choctaws refused to go to school with the negroes, and state law prohibited them from attending white schools. If the population justified, a few of the

counties maintained a very poorly conducted school for the Indians. An Indian teacher was employed at a salary of twenty-five dollars a month. The school term was four months, and the education provided was neither adequate nor satisfactory.

The various religious groups were also slow to do anything to improve the life of the Choctaws. To help conditions, about 1875 the churches began to send missionaries among the Indians. A few Baptist preachers had come there earlier, but in most cases they did not remain at their post long enough to induce the Indians to accept the white man's religion. The Indians that were with Greenwood Le Flore could attend church, because the venerable old leader supported one for them; but after his death, these Indians drifted to the Government Hills, and were soon lost among their fellow Choctaws.

The first Baptist church during the post-war period, Mt. Zion, in Leake county, was established in 1878. Four years later, the Mississippi Baptist Board of Missions invited Peter Folsom, a Choctaw of the West, to do missionary work among the Mississippi Choctaws.¹⁵ One of his converts was Simpson Tubby, who later became a Methodist preacher and did much toward Christianizing his people. By 1900, there were four Baptist churches among the Choctaws: Mt. Zion, established in 1878, in Leake county; Hopewell, 1889, near Walnut Grove; Macedonia, 1890, near Conehatta; and Bethany, 1891, near Philadelphia.

¹⁵Henry S. Halbert, "Nanih Waya, The Sacred Mound of the Choctaws," Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, I-II, 228.

Four churches established later were: Canaan, 1905, near Philadelphia; Hope, 1907, near Philadelphia; Pine Bluff, 1912, near Sebastool; and Calvary, 1919, near Heidelberg. These eight churches were the only Baptist churches in the Choctaw country east of the Mississippi down to 1920.¹⁶

In 1880, the Right Reverend Francis Janssens, Roman Catholic Bishop of Natchez, while on a missionary journey through Neshoba county, noticed the miserable condition of the Choctaw Indians. These poor people roamed through woods, making an effort to keep body and soul together by hunting and fishing, or by working small patches of land either for themselves or for white settlers. Practically all the land in the county belonged to white settlers. The Indians had no place that they might call home. They had no church or school. No one seemed to care about their spiritual or material welfare. Bishop Janssens resolved to look for a man, a real missionary who would willingly devote his services and labor as an apostle for the conversion of the Indians to the Christian faith. His thoughts turned to his native Holland. He made a trip to Holland to visit relatives, and look for a missionary. While there he met Father B. J. Bekkers, pastor of a fashionable parish, who willingly resigned to become a missionary to the American Indians.

Father Bekkers arrived in Neshoba county in November, 1883. At first the Indians regarded this white stranger with suspi-

¹⁶Minutes of the Thirty-Fourth Annual Session of the New Choctaw Baptist Association, held with Bogue Homa Baptist Church, (October 19-21, 1945).

cion. They were mainly interested in obtaining something to eat, and had a traditional distrust of white people. Father Bekkers became acquainted with a Mr. Welsh, who had great influence with the Indians, and spoke their language fluently. Through him the priest was able to explain that he had come to help them, and bring to them and their children a knowledge of the true faith. Gradually, the Indians became more friendly and began to visit Father Bekkers, and seek his advice about their problems.

Father Bekkers now made a decision upon which largely rested the success of the Indian mission. He decided to buy a tract of land to be divided among the various Indian families. The title was to remain with the Catholic Diocese of Natchez, but the land was to be administered to provide a permanent home for the Indians. In 1884, with money collected in Holland, he purchased 480 acres of land at Tucker, seven miles southeast of Philadelphia. He set aside part of this land for an Indian village, and built a number of cabins on it. The chief of the local Indians selected one of these cabins and came to live in it. He was followed by other influential men of the tribe. Soon a large group of friendly Indians were living on the mission lands. In 1884, Father Bekkers built the first church at Tucker, close to this village. The church and the priest's house were built of logs hewn by Indian and white labor in the surrounding woods. In the belfry of this church, named Holy Rosary, was a bell purchased from the McShane Bell Foundry of Baltimore. To meet the needs of the growing membership, a new church was built in 1898. In 1900, this church had a membership of 690 Indians and 108 whites, and three priests and three

lay members were on hand to minister to the needs of the parishioners.

The Tucker Mission opened a parochial school for the Indians in 1884. At first the school was in charge of Henry S. Halbert, who stayed for one year. Twenty-six children were enrolled the first year. Then Father Bekkers asked for and succeeded in having three Sisters of Mercy come to Tucker from Vicksburg to take charge. They arrived September 30, 1885. They were very successful. They remained At Tucker until 1903. At that time the Indians at the mission were removed to the Indian Territory, and most of the mission workers accompanied the Indians to the West.¹⁷

In 1898 and 1899, Methodist churches were established in Talla Chula community, Kemper county; Conehatta community, Newton county; and Phillips Chapel and Black Jack, both in Neshoba county. These churches were established under the direction of T. L. Mellon, District Superintendent of the Newton District, with the cooperation of J. H. Mars and his son, G. W. Mars, and other white people. Both white and Choctaw preachers cooperated in preaching and conducting the religious program among the Indians. Three of these churches were discontinued after 1904 when a majority of the Indians moved to the Indian Territory; but the Black Jack church continued to function under the leadership of Simpson Tubby, an Indian preacher living in the

¹⁷Unpublished Files of the Holy Rosary Mission, Tucker, Mississippi.

community.¹⁸

From 1830 to 1918 the Choctaw Indians in Mississippi were generally neglected by the United States. They were denied an education by the state, and cheated by the white people. The Indians were forced to give up their homes and become tenant farmers. They had little food and few clothes. Thus, the Choctaw Indians in Mississippi probably lived the most wretched lives of any group of people in the United States. The only ray of hope for these Indians came in the latter part of the period when a few Christian churches were established among them.

¹⁸Unpublished Choctaw Agency Files, Brief Survey of Mississippi Indians, Philadelphia, Mississippi.

CHAPTER IV
LATE LAND FRAUDS

After 1853, the Choctaw Indians in Mississippi settled down to a routine and generally uneventful pattern of living, resolved to spend the remainder of their life in their native home. They wanted nothing quite so much as to be left in peace by the State and Federal government.

For many years only a few Indians left the state to join the Choctaw Nation in the West. This peace and contentment was again disturbed in 1897 when Congress made another attempt to remove the Indians to the West, and encourage the Mississippi Choctaws to take up residence in the Indian Territory as a preliminary step to the allotment in severalty of all Choctaw tribal lands.

In that year the Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes was instructed to negotiate with the Five Civilized Tribes in the Indian Territory, to examine the question and report to Congress whether the Mississippi Choctaws under their treaties were not entitled to all the rights of Choctaw citizens except an interest in the Choctaw annuities.¹

It was also agreed that the unsold Choctaw orphan land in Mississippi was to be taken by the United States government at one dollar and twenty-five cents an acre, and the proceeds placed to the credit of the Choctaw orphan fund in the Treasury

¹The Statutes at Large of the United States, XXX, 83.

of the United States.²

The above Atoka agreement as amended by Congress was made a law and embodied in the Curtis Bill approved by President McKinley on June 28, 1898. The Curtis Act was accepted by the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations. It provided for the winding up of their tribal government. It abolished tribal laws and tribal courts. Under authorization of this measure the Dawes Commission was empowered to proceed with individual allotment of lands as soon as the tribal rolls had been completed. Drawing up the list of Choctaws entitled to allotments was an almost unbelievably difficult task. Under this law, the Commission had to determine the identity of Indians claiming rights under the Treaty of 1830. The intent of the legislation was to secure for the Choctaws in Mississippi the rights and benefits of Choctaws in the Indian Territory, provided they could prove they complied, or attempted to comply with the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek.³ The Commission was given authority to administer oath, examine witnesses, and to perform all other acts necessary to prove the claims of the Indians, and to make reports to the Secretary of the Interior.⁴

In carrying out the agreement with respect to the Orphan land in Mississippi, the government placed two thousand six hundred and ninety-six dollars and forty cents in the Treasury

²Annual Reports of The Department of the Interior for the Fiscal year ended June 30, 1898, Indian Affairs, 443.

³The Statutes at Large of the United States, XXX, 502-503.

⁴Ibid., 503.

of the United States to the credit of the Choctaw orphan fund. This amount was the computed value of two thousand one hundred and fifty-seven acres of land designated as Choctaw orphan land in Mississippi. Not one cent was given to those Choctaws who desired to stay in that state.⁵

The Choctaws in Mississippi did not know what was taking place outside of their immediate community, and to most of them "Atoka Agreement, Dawes Commission, and Curtis Act" were meaningless phrases. They had to be told of the renewal of their claims. The Dawes Commission sent representatives to instruct the Mississippi Choctaws of the opening of claims, the opportunity that was now theirs to secure allotments in Indian Territory, and to give them a chance to enroll. In January, 1899, the Commission proceeded to Mississippi for the purpose of identifying Mississippi Choctaws who claimed a share of land in the Choctaw Nation under the Treaty of 1830. On March 10, 1899, the Commission submitted a report to the Department of the Interior containing nearly two thousand names of claimants identified by the Commission as Mississippi Choctaws, but without evidence substantiating their rights to participate in the distribution of land in the Choctaw Nation. However, the Department decided to accept tentatively the names appearing on this report subject to action when the final roll came to the Secretary for approval.⁶

⁵Annual Report of The Department of the Interior, 1900, 525.

⁶Annual Report of The Department of the Interior, 1901, Part I, 157.

An Appropriation Act passed May 31, 1900, provided that Mississippi Choctaws identified by the Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes had a right to settle in the Choctaw or Chickasaw Nation at any time before the approval of the final roll by the Secretary of the Interior. On proof of such settlement, said Mississippi Choctaws would be entitled to allotment. All contracts or agreements for the sale or encumbrance of land allotted to Mississippi Choctaws were declared null and void.⁷

The Commission, being desirous of reaching as many Mississippi full-blood Choctaws as possible, mailed printed notices to every post office in the state and advertised in the leading newspapers that from December 17 to December 22, 1900, an office would be open at Hattiesburg, Mississippi, for the purpose of hearing applicants for identification as Mississippi Choctaws. During that week ninety-three original applications were filed.⁸

The law of 1898 placed full-bloods and mixed bloods on equal footing. Claimants came in from all parts of the United States. Many white people and negroes filed claims on grounds that they were part Choctaw, hoping to secure for themselves a rich homestead in the Indian Territory. A number of attorneys and alleged real estate agents, sensing the possibility of getting rich, went to the Choctaw country in Mississippi to canvass the full-bloods and others who might have a little Choctaw blood in them, urging them to submit an application for a claim.

⁷The Statutes at Large of the United States, XXXI, 236.

⁸Annual Report of The Department of the Interior, 1901, Part II, 21.

These agents or attorneys agreed to help the prospect secure an allotment for one-half of the benefit, a rather sizeable fee for these questionable "legal" services.

In 1901 the Commission made another attempt to gain information on the Choctaws in Mississippi. From April 1, 1901, to April 30, 1903, representatives of the Commission were again in Mississippi to hear application for identification as Mississippi Choctaws. In addition to receiving applications, a great deal of time was spent in securing data concerning the full-bloods of the state.

Daily sessions were held in the United States Court House at Meridian, Mississippi, from July 1, 1901, to October 10, 1901. Applications of one thousand three hundred and ninety-three people were heard.

Many full-bloods refused to appear before the Commission at Meridian. The examiners, being anxious to reach as many full-bloods as possible, decided to provide a field party to visit those areas where full-blood Choctaw Indians resided. The party, composed of one examiner, a clerk, two stenographers, two interpreters, a cook, and teamster with camping equipment, left Meridian October 11, 1901. This group visited Indian communities in Jasper, Scott, Newton, Leake, and Neshoba counties. On this field trip the party devoted its time to receiving applications and collecting information regarding the full-blood Choctaw Indians. Few besides full-blood Indians made application to the field party. With the examiner in their community, many of the full-bloods refused to come out and file application for identification. To secure the desired

information, the examiner and interpreter went to the home of the Indian to ascertain whatever facts they could relative to the Indians. On January 13, 1902, the field party returned to Meridian to receive other applications. The office was flooded with claimants, white, negroes, and a few full-blood Choctaw Indians.⁹

A party set out on the second field trip February 17, 1902, to visit other full-blood communities of the state and to re-check some of the communities already visited. As before, the Commission found the full-blood Choctaw Indians unwilling or unable to give any information or to take an oath. The Indians were suspicious of all white people because some had been among them trying to secure for themselves a part of whatever allotment the Indian might receive in the Choctaw Nation west of the Mississippi River. This second field party was back in Meridian April 13, 1902. The Commission remained in Meridian until April 30, 1902, to receive other applications for identification, then returned to the Indian Territory.¹⁰

It was now apparent that the ignorant full-blood, for whom Congress intended to provide, had no record of his ancestry, and could not prove his rights under the law, and if required to do so, would fail to receive the benefit of the legislation. In order that this might not happen, Congress passed a law July 1, 1902, declaring all full-blood Mississippi Choctaw

⁹Annual Report of The Department of the Interior, 1903,
Part II, 24.

¹⁰Ibid., 26.

Indians or descendants of any Mississippi Choctaw Indian, whether of full or mixed blood, who had received title to land under the Treaty of 1830 and had not moved West before June 28, 1898, would be deemed as Mississippi Choctaws and entitled to benefit or allotment in the Chickasaw or Choctaw Nation in the Indian Territory, provided they made bona fide settlement there within six months after identification.^{11,12}

Now that the full-bloods were assured of their claims, the grafters turned their attention to them. These agents rode over the country, signed contracts with the Indians, had them gather at a nearby station, loaded them on the train, and left for the Indian Territory. The Indians were too poor to pay for their own transportation, so the agent paid the fare. Upon arrival in Oklahoma, the Indians were traded by the agent to some person who wanted to profit at the expense of the Indian, the profit to take the form of a lien on the allotments.¹³

Robert L. Owens, Charles F. Winton, and associates had hundreds of these contracts which would have enabled them to collect many thousands of dollars, and when they were denied the privilege of collecting, they submitted the case to the

¹¹The Statutes at Large of the United States, XXXII, 651-652.

¹²Note the Supplementary Agreement which required no proof of full-bloods, only of mixed bloods, thereby assuring all Mississippi Choctaw full-bloods of immediate rights to western lands. (Debo- P. 274).

¹³John W. Wade, "Removal of the Mississippi Choctaws," Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, VIII, 397-426.

Court of Claims. After several years of wrangling, the Court, in 1922, granted them \$175,000 to be paid out of the Mississippi Choctaw per capita fund.¹⁴

The time to apply for identification expired March 3, 1903. At the close of the fiscal year June 30, 1903, the Commission had identified one thousand seven hundred and thirty-eight Mississippi Choctaws as entitled to rights in the Choctaw Nation, and had refused identification for twenty-one thousand six hundred and six claimants. Twelve hundred and ninety claims had not been settled.¹⁵

In the fiscal year ending June 30, 1904, the Commission rendered three hundred and ninety-three decisions affecting three thousand seven hundred and eighty-three persons. Of this number, five hundred and eight were identified as full-blood Mississippi Choctaws. The remaining three thousand two hundred and seventy-five applicants were refused identification.

The Indian Appropriation Act of March 3, 1903, set aside \$20,000 to be used in defraying removal expenses of the Indians who were too poor to pay their own fare. August 13, 1903, a special train arrived at Atoka Indian Territory with two hundred and sixty-four full-bloods. In addition, twenty-six identified full-blood Mississippi Choctaws were removed to Fort Towson, Indian Territory, on October 9, 1903. The appropriation was expended in the removal and subsistence of these two

¹⁴Indian Affairs, Laws and Treaties, IV, 367.

¹⁵Annual Report of The Department of the Interior, 1903, Part II, 14.

hundred and ninety persons until they could take care of themselves.¹⁶

During the fiscal year ending June 30, 1905, the Commission identified an additional three hundred and ninety-four persons as Mississippi Choctaws.

While in existence, the Commission had twenty-four thousand six hundred and thirty-four applicants who claimed to be members of the Mississippi Choctaws. Of this number, approximately two thousand were identified by the Commission and approved by the Secretary of the Interior.¹⁷ About three-fourths of this group was moved to the West, and eventually received allotments as stipulated by law. The Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes was terminated July 1, 1905.¹⁸

The Commission passed upon most of the claims during its existence. Some applications were incomplete at the time the Dawes Commission was disbanded and had to be gone over again to give the applicants a chance to produce more evidence. The Interior Department wished to dispense with all pending cases as rapidly as possible. To get the needed additional information, it was necessary to again send envoys to Mississippi where the claimants lived. The following field appointments were held during the month of March, 1906: Bay St. Louis, March 20-21;

¹⁶Annual Report of The Department of the Interior, 1904, Part II, 14-15.

¹⁷Annual Report of The Department of the Interior, 1905, Part I, 596.

¹⁸The Statutes at Large of the United States, XXXIII, 204.

DeKalb, March 22; Philadelphia, March 27; West Point, March 30; and Dossville, March 31. Some of the remaining cases were cleared up and confirmed; others were left pending further action.

The Commission had before it the problem of solving the identification of children and grand children of Susan S. Burton and others for whom no application was made within the time prescribed by law. The Commission submitted these cases to the Interior Department, which decided that if these were children of parents enrolled or partially enrolled, or beneficiaries of Article Fourteen of the Treaty of 1830, and were living March 4, 1905, they would be identified as Mississippi Choctaws.¹⁹

By 1907 the second removal of the Choctaws was completed. During this period of the activity of the Dawes Commission a total of one thousand six hundred and thirty-nine Mississippi Choctaws were certified as entitled to allotments in Indian Territory. There still remained in their native home, however, a small group of Mississippi Choctaws, who remain there to this very day. Their total number is impossible to fix exactly, but it would seem to have been about one thousand and five hundred in 1905. This group was made up in part of Choctaw full-bloods who had stubbornly refused to register for allotments, and in part of tribesmen who even after enrollment could see no reason for removal to the West. These people remain a small but distinctive portion of the present population of Mississippi.¹⁹

¹⁹Annual Report of The Department of the Interior, 1906, 615-619.

CHAPTER V
THE NEW PROGRAM

Much of the history of the Choctaws who remained in Mississippi after the Atoka Agreement and the application of the Curtis Act is obscure. Even though it is a problem of recent history, much of the story of the Choctaws was never put on record. One fact is startlingly noticeable, however, namely that it is certain that the Mississippi Choctaws were at a serious disadvantage socially and economically. The miserable educational conditions, the very poor health conditions, and the destitute status of the Choctaw Indians were important factors which led to the establishment of the Agency in 1918.

In May, 1918, Congress appropriated \$75,000 to provide for school facilities and other relief for the Choctaws in Mississippi. The sum of \$5,000 was to be used for the salary of a special agent, who was also to be a physician, the salary of one farmer, and one field matron; \$20,000 for their education, including purchases of land, construction, and maintenance of buildings; \$25,000 for the purchase of farm land; and \$25,000 for the purchase of seed, live stock, and for building homes.¹ That same year Commissioner Cato Sells, who was in charge of Indian affairs, made a personal visit to Mississippi where he traveled among the Indians of Leake, Neshoba, Kemper, and

¹The Statutes at Large of the United States, XL, Part I, 573.

Newton counties.²

After the Sells investigation, the Agency was set up in 1918 with headquarters in Philadelphia, Mississippi. Since that time through its services an effort has been made to educate and improve the social and economic status of these Indians.

Before the Agency was established, the most urgent need of the Indians was medical attention and medicine. Often physicians would not visit the sick Indians before the fee was paid in advance. As a result, very few had adequate attention when they were ill. If a physician was secured, medicine usually had to be bought and paid for and the Choctaw seldom had money to make the purchase.³

One of the chief reasons for the establishment of the Choctaw Agency was to improve health conditions. The first two superintendents, Dr. Frank J. McKinley, special agent in charge from 1919 to May 12, 1926, and Dr. Robert J. Enochs, from May 13, 1926, to July 15, 1932, were physicians. The hospital, one of the first buildings constructed, was opened for patients in 1929, and enlarged in 1931 to a capacity of thirty-five beds, an X-Ray room, operating room, and delivery room. Besides a contract physician who was in charge of the hospital, the staff consisted of one head nurse, three staff nurses, three ward attendants, two of whom were Indian girls, and a cook. Over and

²Annual Report of The Department of the Interior, 1919, Part II, 79-80.

³William Ketcham, "Report on the Choctaw Indians in Mississippi," Annual report of The Department of the Interior, 1918, Part II, 344-349.

above these, there were two other contract physicians whose services were available at all times to the Indians when needed, and a field nurse to visit the homes of the Indians to give advice on health and sanitation.

At first the Agency officials had some difficulty in persuading the Indians to patronize the hospital. In 1930, only three hundred and forty-four patients were admitted, as compared with eight hundred and six in 1939, and seven hundred and forty-eight in 1944.

Ever since the opening of the hospital, efforts have been made to get pregnant women to come to the hospital, with only mediocre success. For in spite of the effort made, out of a total of four hundred and ninety-nine births, about one-fourth of the children, specifically one hundred and fourteen, were born outside of a hospital from 1939 to 1945.⁴ Over the same period of time, of the one hundred and seventy-two deaths, one hundred and four did not occur in a hospital. Exclusive of those who were killed in an accident or found dead, twelve persons died in 1944 unattended by a physician.⁵ There still remains considerable reluctance to take advantage even of available hospital facilities.

The more prevalent diseases among the Choctaws are tuberculosis, malaria, and hookworm. An official report to the Indian Office in 1929 showed that out of two hundred and twenty-one cases examined for tuberculosis, twenty-one were found to be

⁴Unpublished Choctaw Agency Files.

⁵Unpublished Choctaw Agency Files.

active. The following year, two hundred and thirty-six cases were examined and twenty-three were found to have active tuberculosis.

Under proper guidance, and a program set up by the Agency, deaths due to tuberculosis have been on the decline, as may be ascertained by the fact that in 1929, out of a population of one thousand five hundred and twelve, there were seven deaths caused by tuberculosis, while in 1944 with a population of two thousand two hundred and thirty-two, only four fatalities were attributed to this disease.

During the fiscal year 1930-31, seventy-one of the admissions to the hospital were due to malaria. In 1936-37, the corresponding figure was ninety-one, and in 1941-42, was reduced to forty-six. In an attempt to combat this malady, houses have been screened, drives have been conducted to eliminate the breeding places of mosquitoes, and the hospital personnel and field nurse have treated those afflicted with malaria.⁶

In 1933, Dr. H. W. Stevens, Regional Medical Director, reported that out of two hundred and thirty-four specimen taken for hookworm, seventy-eight were positive. He stressed the need of education concerning this disease and recommended sanitary privies as a necessary initial measure. As a result of the anti-hookworm campaign, two hundred and two sanitary toilets were built. The incidence of hookworm has rapidly declined. In 1933, thirty-five percent of the specimen were positive while in

⁶Unpublished Choctaw Agency Files.

1944, only eight and four-tenths percent were infected.⁷ The Choctaws also suffered from other intestinal and respiratory diseases common to the area.

There are no accurate statistics available on the prevalence of venereal diseases among the Choctaws. In 1930-31, treatment was given at the hospital to three cases; in 1936-37, to twenty-five; and in 1941-42, to six. A large percentage of those treated in 1936-37 were pregnant women who had come to the hospital for other reasons.⁸ Information such as this does not seem adequate to generalize on this phase of Indian health.

At one time a traveling dentist visited the reservation twice a year, examined the children's teeth and rendered some dental service, but this practice had been discontinued because of lack of funds. Today many of these Indians have missing front teeth due to lack of proper dental care. They have been reluctant to visit the local dentist because he maintained separate operating rooms for negroes and these had to be used by the Indians.

Each year the Field Nurse has examined the vision of the school children. Serious cases of defective vision have been located. Those able and willing to pay a local specialist for optical service were examined and provided with glasses at a flat rate of fifteen dollars per person.⁹

⁷Unpublished Choctaw Agency Files.

⁸Unpublished Choctaw Agency Files.

⁹Personal interview with A. H. McMullen, Superintendent of the Agency, Philadelphia, Mississippi, June 15, 1946.

Despite the efforts put forth by the Agency to improve health, some Choctaws continued to use the Indian medicine men, of whom there were still eight in 1946, instead of the white doctors made available to them through the Agency. Sometimes a sick Indian remained at home under the care of the Indian doctor until his condition was hopeless and then went to the hospital and died. Under such circumstances the hospital was usually blamed for the death.¹⁰

One noticeable effect of the establishment of an Agency for the Mississippi Choctaws has been their gradual concentration into a smaller area. Before the establishment of the Agency in 1918, the Indians were scattered over thirty counties of south central Mississippi. Nearly all of them now live within forty miles of Philadelphia, in most cases near one of the seven day schools which have been established for them.¹¹

The federal government has in recent years consistently attempted to increase the number of landowning Choctaws. In 1918, Congress appropriated \$25,000 for the purchase and improvement of land not exceeding eighty acres for any one family for the Choctaw Indians of Mississippi. This amount was in the form of a loan to be administered by the tribal agent.¹²

In 1921 the federal government began to buy improved and unimproved land, and to construct homes and other improvements

¹⁰Personal interview with John B. Harris, Choctaw Farm Agent, June 16, 1941.

¹¹Unpublished Choctaw Agency Files.

¹²Indian Affairs, Laws and Treaties, IV, 158.

for resale to the Indians on a reimbursable basis. In the period from 1921 to 1932, three thousand six hundred and eighty acres with some homes and improvements were purchased. Additional homes and improvements were added to the unimproved lands and the entire government holdings sold to eighty-eight Indians on the reimbursable bases. All of these Indians defaulted in their payments on these lands during the years of the depression.

From 1932 to 1939, the government purchased and resold to the Indians eleven thousand five hundred and ninety-nine acres. Many of these also defaulted.

Realizing that the Indians were apparently not ready for outright ownership of land, Congress passed an Act on June 21, 1939, which provided that titles to lands purchased by the United States for the benefit of the Choctaw Indians in Mississippi under the Act of May 25, 1918, and similar subsequent acts which were not under contract for resale might at some future time be canceled were to be held in trust by the United States for the Choctaw Indians living in Mississippi and being of at least one-half Choctaw blood.¹³ Thus it seems that the policy of holding land in trust has finally been substituted for the inoperative plan of full individual ownership. This new policy reflects an interesting return to the original pattern of tribal land ownership.

In 1944 there were two hundred and fifty-five Choctaw families living on land held in trust by the government with allot-

¹³The Statutes at Large of the United States, LV, Part II, 851.

ments of from twenty to eighty acres each. Some was used for row crops and some for grazing. The remainder of the approximately fifteen thousand two hundred and eighty acres was used for timber and common grazing lands.

The chief occupation of the Mississippi Indians during recent years has been farming. Before the advent of the new land program, practically all of the Mississippi Choctaws were share croppers, but few were renters, all in a virtual state of peonage. Since the establishment of the Agency, much has been done to raise the economic status of these people. Money was included in the first appropriation to employ a farmer to assist and encourage the Indians in their farming pursuits.¹⁴

The position of Farm Agent was established in 1931 with B. E. McIntosh employed to fill the place. While in this position, he recommended that each Indian family produce enough food for its own consumption, and attempt to have a surplus to sell. McIntosh resigned October 31, 1934. The position remained vacant until February 1, 1935, at which time it was filled by O. C. Culver, who encouraged farm practices similar to those of McIntosh, and assisted the Indians in a live stock program, until he resigned March 21, 1941.

An appointment of a second Farm Agent was authorized on September 16, 1935, and the position was filled by Claude A. Chandler. He was succeeded by John B. Harris February 8, 1937. His report showed that he had established goals for the produc-

¹⁴Ibid., XL, Part I, 573.

tion of cotton, corn, gardening, and truck farming. Harris resigned as Farm Agent October 25, 1943, and the position of Farm Agent was abolished February 5, 1944, leaving the Agency without a Farm Agent.

The position of Senior Instructor of Agriculture was established February 2, 1937, and filled by A. H. McMullen until he became Superintendent of the Agency October 1, 1940. At that time the title Senior Instructor of Agriculture was changed to Principal of Schools with Jack Anderson filling the position. In 1933, the position of Farm Agent was discontinued and the duties were also assumed by the Principal of the Schools. It was the duty of the Senior Instructor of Agriculture to teach the types of agriculture common to that section of the country, to plan organizations such as the 4-H Club, and to assist the teachers in providing instruction in the field. Harris, Culver, and McMullen were successful in creating a growing interest in better farming methods on the part of the Indians. In 1939, two tractors were purchased for use by the Indians and through the efforts of the Farm Agent and McMullen pure-bred chickens, cows, and hogs were introduced among the Indians. These men sponsored community fairs to which the different communities brought exhibits and competed for awards. In addition to these community fairs, the Choctaws had exhibits in the Leake, Newton, and Neshoba County Fairs. The Indian booth at the State Fair has always been an attraction, as well as being educational to those whites and colored people of Mississippi who believed that all Indians

were west of the Mississippi River.¹⁵

The method of farming employed by the Mississippi Choctaws during recent years may seem crude to one not familiar with farming in that area. For power the two hundred fifty-five Indian families on the reservation usually had from one to five mules, and the implement shed contained a middle buster, a straight stock, one or two turning plows, a side harrow, a lap row harrow, and a few hoes. Some of the more advanced Indians owned a horse disk. None of them owned a mower or hayrake, but had access to those owned by the community. With the limited supply of farming tools and the low fertility of the soil, income from farming has always been small. However, during the years 1935 to 1938 these people canned an average per family of more than three hundred cans of fruits and vegetables, principally peas, corn, cucumbers, tomatoes, apples, plums, peaches, berries, kraut, English peas, string beans, and beets. Besides this canned food, they produced sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, peanuts, squash, and pumpkins. These foodstuffs together with corn, hay, and a little cotton made up the products of the average farm.¹⁶

The one hundred and sixty-three share cropper families lived under about the same conditions as the white share cropper in the same community.

The income of the Choctaws in Mississippi has been below average even for that state. For the five years preceeding 1944,

¹⁵Unpublished Choctaw Agency Files.

¹⁶Unpublished Choctaw Agency Files.

the average yearly farm income of the Indian share cropper was approximately \$375; the 1944 income was about \$750 for each family. Indians living on tribal land depended almost entirely on farming for their income. During the five year period, 1939-44, the average family income was \$307.30 from farm products, and an average of \$53.00 per family was earned by wage work, making a total income of \$360.30 for each family. For the year 1944, the average family income from the farm was \$682.40; in addition they earned \$60.00 from day labor. The high income for 1944 was credited to an exceptionally good cotton year and high prices for all farm products.¹⁷ In addition to farming their own crop, the men worked at near by saw mills, usually as timber cutters or loggers. A few worked on the public road system, and some as day laborers on the farm of other Indians or some white neighbors. Three have been employed as brick-layer helpers. Not a single Choctaw was employed in defense work.¹⁸

The Indians have made use of federal credit Agencies such as the Farm Security Administration, and Farm Credit Administration. The people found it difficult to repay these loans. For example, there were in 1944 thirty-eight families on the active Farm Security Administration case load of whom four paid out, seven were foreclosed, and twenty-seven were granted an extension of time on their loans.

The Farm Credit Administration was extended to the Indians

¹⁷Unpublished Choctaw Agency Files.

¹⁸Personal interview with A. H. McMullen, June 15, 1946.

in 1933, and for a ten year period ending in 1943 the average number of families borrowing for production purposes was one hundred and three. No loans have been made through these federal Agencies since 1945.¹⁹

In 1945, a gas and oil lease was signed with the Shell Oil Company on four thousand four hundred and twenty-one acres of tribal land in Pearl River community, for an initial bonus of \$3.75 an acre and \$1.25 an acre annual rental for ten years. The bonus and first rental amounted to \$21,105.25; the second year's rental was \$5,224.75. Other leases have since been made. Money obtained from oil and gas leases and the sale of timber on tribal lands have been placed in a revolving loan fund to be used to aid Indians on the tribal land. In 1944, the year the fund was made available, eighty-eight revolving credit loans ranging from \$50.00 to \$498.00 were made amounting to a total of \$12,595.90. Eighty-five of the eighty-eight borrowers spent \$5,066.18 for fertilizer, sixty-six spent \$1,586.50 for feed, and seventy-seven expended \$2,581.75 for subsistence. The remainder of the loans was used to purchase various farm necessities ranging from \$30.00 for cattle to \$1,678.50 for work stock.²⁰

In 1945, eighty-three loans were made ranging from \$41.00 to \$682.00. Total loans amounted to \$13,748.36. These loans were expended as in the previous year with three exceptions.

¹⁹Unpublished Choctaw Agency Files.

²⁰Unpublished Choctaw Agency Files.

Less was spent for feed, and more went for the purchase of cattle and farm machinery. Under the Revolving Fund set up, loans were made for periods of from one to five years, and in case of undue hardship, the Indian was given a time extension.²¹

A majority of the Mississippi Indians have accepted Christianity, but one group in Noxubee county, near Mashulaville, still cling to the native religion. This group has a chief, not recognized by the Agency, as a leader. The forefathers of this group consistently refused to accept land from the government, and were not willing to move to tribal land provided for them. They have no church and no school, and do not want either. They say the Choctaws had religion and good common sense when Columbus discovered America. Some ancient customs are observed by these followers of Chief Cemeron Wesley, particularly relating to funerals and marriages.

A marriage of two Noxubee Indians carried out according to old tribal custom took place as follows: The week before the wedding the groom provided a dinner for the wedding feast. The wedding dance was held the night before the ceremony. The next morning the people gathered at the ball ground. One or two old men made a talk telling the groom his duties to the wife. Then, the chief made a short talk, after which the groom made a short speech in which he promised to take the girl, work and make her a living, and always be friends to her people. This ceremony was followed by a dinner, a stick ball game, and war dance. The

²¹Unpublished Choctaw Agency Files.

wedding party was over and all returned to their homes.²²

When the writer last visited the area in 1946, the followers of Chief Cemeron Wesley would not use a physician. Instead they placed their fate in the hands of an Indian medicine man. In child-birth, the mid-wife was the only one present. To keep the race pure, immediately after birth the baby was placed in a stream to see if it was a good Choctaw. Mixed bloods never floated, and full-bloods never sank,²³ so ran a tribal belief which hardly seems to be based either on laws or logic or laws of physics.

Most of the other Choctaws in Mississippi have in recent years accepted Christian customs. These Indians are predominately Baptist and Catholic with a few Methodists among them. The Holy Rosary Indian Mission, established by the Catholics in 1884, has continued to serve as a guiding light to many of the Indians. In 1921 Reverend E. J. Philippe was appointed pastor of Holy Rosary Mission. He was successful in securing the services of three Augustinian Sisters who arrived at Tucker in 1922. They, with Father Philippe, worked among the Indians until they were recalled in 1930. In 1931, the Sisters were replaced and have since been doing missionary work among the Indians. Today the Catholics have two wide awake young priests, Reverend Raphael Toner and Reverend Fidelis Becker, at Holy Rosary Mission. In addition to the church at Tucker, the Catho-

²²Personal interview with Cemeron Wesley, June 15, 1946.

²³Personal interview with Cemeron Wesley, June 15, 1946.

lics maintain missions in Conehatta and Pearl River communities. Weekly services are held in these communities. Church membership approximates three hundred.²⁴

When last reported, there were ten Baptist churches for the Mississippi Indians. All were served by Choctaw preachers, who preached in the native tongue.²⁵ The Baptist have monthly preaching service, and weekly Sunday School and prayer meeting at the church.²⁶

Preaching day for many years meant an all day worship period for the Mississippi Choctaws. Service opened about nine-thirty in the morning with Sunday School. The men had their class in the house. All married women left the church and went out into the yard where they discussed the Sunday School lesson. Single girls and boys listened to the discussion carried on by the men. After the Sunday School lesson was disposed of, the women returned to the church. At that time the preacher took over and delivered his message. All this was done in the Choctaw language. When the sermon was over, all retired from the church. The women spread food and all were invited to eat. After the women spread the table, they moved away from the table and the men ate. When the men had finished eating and left the table, the women came forward and ate what was left. About one o'clock

²⁴Unpublished Files of the Holy Rosary Mission, Tucker, Mississippi.

²⁵Personal interview with Wilton W. Simpson, June 16, 1946.

²⁶Minutes of the Thirty-Fourth Annual Session of the New Choctaw Baptist Association, 13.

all returned to the church and sang about two hours before going home. The men and boys sat on one side of the church while the women and girls sat on the other.

Though Baptist missionaries have been active among the Choctaw Indians since 1870, the Choctaws often felt that this denomination did not take much interest in them. It was frequently charged that Baptist missionaries would stay awhile and then move on, that there was little permanence in their work.²⁷ Early in 1945 the Baptist Home Mission Board appointed the Reverend Wilton W. Simpson as Superintendent of Missions among the Mississippi Choctaws. After taking up residence in Philadelphia, Reverend Simpson showed great interest in his work. During his first year he conducted the first Bible Institute ever to be held among the Indians. As helpers in this Institute, Reverend Simpson had Dr. J. B. Rounds, Baptist Superintendent of Indian Missions in the South, Prof. O. E. Sellers from the Baptist Seminary in New Orleans, and Miss Irene Chambers, field worker for the Home Mission Board.²⁸ The following year the Superintendent of Missions secured the help of Miss Mirian Withers, a student missionary, to assist in holding Vacation Bible Schools, organizing Baptist Training Unions, and Women's Missionary Unions.²⁹ In 1945 the Baptist Church had a total membership of

²⁷Personal interview with Joe Chitto, Chairman of Band of Mississippi Choctaw Tribal Council, June 16, 1946.

²⁸Personal interview with Wilton W. Simpson, June 16, 1946.

²⁹Personal interview with Miss Mirian Withers, Student Missionary, June 16, 1946.

five hundred and fourteen among the Indians.³⁰

Other denominations have secured virtually no foothold in the area. There was only one Methodist Church with approximately fifteen members on the reservation.³¹ No other religious denominations are represented in the Choctaws of the state.

In 1918, Congress appropriated money to purchase land, build, and maintain schools for the Mississippi Choctaws.³² The first "day school" for the Indians was opened in 1921. Between the years of 1921 and 1930, seven "day schools" were established at the following locations: Pearl River, eight miles west of Philadelphia on Highway 16; Tucker, eight miles southeast of Philadelphia on Highway 19; Bogue Chitto, fifteen miles northeast of Philadelphia; Red Water, two miles north of Carthage in Leake county, on Highway 35; Standing Pine, three miles east of Highway 35, and eight miles south of Carthage; Conehatta, midway between Philadelphia and Newton on the Lake-Union road; and Bogue Homa, three miles from Sandersville on United States Highway 11.

The immediate administrative head of the Mississippi Choctaw school system, responsible directly to the Superintendent of the Agency was the Principal of the Schools. He was charged with the administration and supervision of all schools in the

³⁰Minutes of the Thirty-Fourth Annual Session of the New Choctaw Baptist Association, 13.

³¹Personal interview with Baxter York, Member of the Tribal Council from Pearl River, June 17, 1941.

³²The Statutes at Large of the United States, XL, Part I, 573.

jurisdiction of the Agency. To these duties have been added the management of the revolving credit funds, including approval of loans, issuance of purchase orders, and collection of principal and interest when payment was due. One other employee with at-large responsibilities was the Home Economics teacher of the Community School. She was responsible to the Principal of Schools, and supervised the work of the housekeepers in the planning of home-making units and home visitation work.

Three of the larger "day schools" had teachers designated as Principals who worked under the direction of the Principal of the Schools in the administration of their immediate schools. Four community school teachers were charged with similar duties and responsibilities in the smaller schools. All of the principals served as classroom teachers. In addition to the above, nine community school teachers made up the teaching force of the seven "day schools". Each "day school" had one housekeeper who was always the wife of the teacher. The housekeeper, in addition to serving hot lunches daily and seeing that each child took two showers a week, instructed the Indian children in the art of good housekeeping, health, and sanitation. She supervised the canning of foods, sewing, and other similar activities. Four of the seven schools were served by six government owned busses and one contract bus, all used for the transportation of children to and from school. During the hours between arrival and departure from school, the bus drivers worked around the school cleaning the grounds, doing janitorial work, or any other things that needed to be done. All of the schools were equipped

with kitchens, dining rooms, baths, toilets, and storage space. Five were supplied with electric current.³³ Even with these facilities, the Choctaw did not take advantage of the opportunities afforded him. Attendance in school has been poor and irregular. During the session of 1944-45, one hundred and thirty-four children between the ages of six and eighteen were not enrolled in school. Four hundred and twenty-two were enrolled, and the schools had a daily average attendance of one hundred and eighty-seven and four tenths. The children living on tribal land had better attendance records than those not living on the land. Despite the poor attendance, the schools have proven their worth. The Indians have been taught the usual course of studies offered in public schools with more stress placed on health, sanitation, and vocations that would be of most value to the people. None of the schools taught above the eight grade except Pearl River where in 1945 and 1946 the ninth grade was added.³⁴

At one time the schools tried to break and destroy the native tongue, but of late years the department has insisted that the pure Choctaw language be preserved. No classes were taught in the ancient tongue, but the pupils used it freely at school.³⁵

By the 1940's the school had become a center for social activities. Adults met at the school to discuss problems common to the community. Most of the canning was done in the school

³³Personal interview with Lonnie Hardin, Principal of the Schools, June 15, 1946. Personal observation at various times.

³⁴Unpublished Choctaw Agency Files.

³⁵Personal interview with A. H. McMullen, June 15, 1946.

kitchen. The Indians brought whatever they had to can to the school and under the supervision of the housekeeper, all spent the day helping each other in learning the latest methods by which to can different commodities with modern pressure cookers. The school kitchen was available for use at any time, and has proven to be one of the greatest assets to the people. The men had regular meetings at the school to discuss their problems. Some of the schools had shops where the farming equipment was repaired and plows sharpened at no expense to the farmer.³⁶

During recent years home life among the Mississippi Choctaws has varied greatly. The home life of a share cropper or renter followed a very poor pattern. One Noxubee county family of three was observed living in a small, poorly kept, windowless, one room house, without a bed or chair. A block sawed from a tree trunk was used as a dining table, and a small cook stove served as a means of keeping the house warm in winter. The family secured drinking water from a near-by stagnant slough. The only out building was a small six by eight corn crib which was located in a pasture behind the landlord's barn. The wife had no shoes, but wore a long clean dress. A six months old baby had on a clean diaper. Two dogs, two cats, one hen, and three baby chicks made up the worldly possessions of the family. They had no Bible or other books - which would have been useless to them - because neither the husband nor wife could read.³⁷

³⁶Personal interview with Lonnie Hardin, June 15, 1946.

³⁷Personal observation and interview with Thomas Tubbee, a Choctaw Indian, June 15, 1946.

A family observed in Jones county was not as well off, and certainly did not have the pride possessed by the Noxubee county family. The Jones county family was truck farming about two acres of land. Living in a two room shack were the father, mother, and five children. All were thinly clad, filthy and dirty. An eight months old baby girl, without even a diaper, was sitting in the dust, and flies were crawling over the child. The personal property of this family consisted of two dogs and two white hens. They had no furniture and a pot and three pans served as cooking utensils and serving dishes.³⁸

All share croppers and renters did not share the poverty of these two families, but most of them were exceedingly poor. Chief Cemeron Wesley lived in a two room log house with a hall separating the two rooms. In one room he had a bed without slats for his own use. Other members of the household, including three daughters, four sons, his wife, his queen, and woman slept on piles of hay on the dirt floor.³⁹

The houses of the Indians who lived on tribal land were built by the government. Most of them had six rooms, which proved adequate for a family of five, the average size of a Choctaw family, and all were painted white. Household articles were about the same as those of the small white land holder of the county. Practically all of them owned a few hogs, chickens, and

³⁸Personal observation and interview with Thomas Riley, a Choctaw Indian, June 14, 1946.

³⁹Personal observation and interview with Cemeron Wesley, June 15, 1946.

a cow or two. Gardens were common on the reservation. Personal filth among them was rare and their code of morals was high.

The Choctaws of Mississippi have always lived a rich social life, full of social events and recreational activities, and have continued to do so in recent years. The church services gave the Christian Indians inspiration, and an opportunity to associate with friends and neighbors.⁴⁰

The ball game was nothing new to the modern Choctaw. In 1946, the ancient game of chunky or stick ball was still played by these people, especially the Noxubee group.⁴¹ They adopted baseball as played by the white people, and contests between two Indian communities was an event attended by all people of the participating communities.⁴² Basketball has become the main sport of the Choctaw "day school". The Indian boys and girls have shown proficiency in playing the game. Good sportsmanship was continually displayed in basketball. This game has done more to break down segregation between the Indians and whites than any other one thing. A few sympathetic white school men agreed to invite the Indians to play 4-H Club teams in the school gymnasium. On some occasions after the game the Indians have spent the night in white homes where they have conducted themselves as ladies and gentlemen. On one such occasion, El-lard, the host school, was so favorably impressed that the

⁴⁰Personal interview with Wilton W. Simpson and Lonnie Hardin, June 15, 1946.

⁴¹Personal interview with Cemeron Wesley, June 15, 1946.

⁴²Personal interview with Joe Chitto, June 16, 1946.

racial barrier was forgotten, and Fannie Lou Ben, a Choctaw girl, graduate of Haskell, was employed to teach commercial subjects in the Ellard Consolidated High School for the 1947-48 session. She was the first full-blood Choctaw to teach in the white schools of Mississippi.⁴³

School plays furnished recreation as well as training for the children. Because of transportation, most of the school plays were performed in day time. Infrequently on special occasions, a play was at night. Parents and patrons were invited, and some attended.

The frolic held in the home or at the school house was enjoyed by old and young. The young people square danced, told stories, and played games, such as post office, and dropping the handkerchief. The old people took advantage of the gathering to discuss common problems and to tell jokes.⁴⁴

Another social and recreational event of importance was the working. If an Indian had work that he and his family could not do, such as building a house, or piling logs on a new ground, he invited his neighbors to help with the work. On the set day, all the people of the neighborhood came. The men came prepared to do whatever work was to be done. While the men worked, the women prepared the food. At noon a meal was served, and if the job required afternoon work, supper was served and games played

⁴³Personal interview with A. H. McMullen, June 15, 1946, and Fannie Lou Ben, April 12, 1947.

⁴⁴Personal interview with Baxter York, June 17, 1941.

arter supper.⁴⁵

The annual Gala Day, usually the first Friday and Saturday in July at Tucker school, was attended by Indians from all communities. For this event, the Indians killed beeves and cooked one large meal that was served Friday night. This was followed by an all-night dance. Saturday morning they played a soft ball game, and held a feast Saturday noon. To end this gala affair, the Indians played a baseball game Saturday afternoon.⁴⁶

The only other feast of importance was the Thanksgiving dinner at each of the seven "day schools". The principal meat for this meal was rabbit.⁴⁷

The birthday party was unique in that a Choctaw has only one in a lifetime. The party was at the church on the first or second birthday of the child. Relatives and friends were invited and brought presents. The father, preacher, and other relatives made talks. An offering was taken and given to the honoree.⁴⁸

The box supper was an event with a double purpose; it served as a social affair and also to raise funds for some community interprize. The girls and women brought boxes, highly decorated and filled with food. These boxes were auctioned off to the highest bidder. The lucky man then sought out the maiden

⁴⁵Personal interview with Amos Bell, Choctaw Indian school bus driver, June 14, 1946, and A. H. McMullen, June 15, 1946.

⁴⁶Personal interview with Lonnie Hardin, June 15, 1946.

⁴⁷Personal interview with Wilton W. Simpson, June 16, 1946.

⁴⁸Personal interview with Wilton W. Simpson, June 16, 1946.

who brought the box, and the two consumed the contents thereof.⁴⁹

The nearest approach to formality was found in the banquet which was held by the highest class in each of the "day schools," and the one for the basketball players as soon as the season closed.

The Choctaws have regularly participated in three fairs. At the school fair they exhibited needle work, canned fruits and vegetables, articles made by hand in the school, agricultural products, poultry, and live stock. This school fair was under the direction of the local teachers and the Principal of the Schools. The best exhibits were selected, pooled, and carried to the County Fair, and placed on exhibit where they competed with those of the white people for prizes. The Choctaws added an interesting and colorful note to the State Fair. The Indians dressed in highly colored clothes. The women had long hair, wore long dresses covered with beadwork, and wore no shoes. The men wore red, yellow, or green shirts and trousers not different from those worn by white men. Most of the men did wear shoes to the State Fair. All kinds of Indian hand craft and agricultural products were shown.⁵⁰

The Choctaw Indians of Mississippi did not actively participate in the first World War because they were not citizens of

⁴⁹Personal interview with Fannie Lou Ben, June 16, 1946, and A. H. McMullen, June 15, 1946.

⁵⁰Personal interview with A. H. McMullen, June 15, 1946, Lonnie Hardin, June 15, 1946, and Joe Chitto, June 16, 1946.

the United States.⁵¹ Citizenship was granted to these Indians in 1924.⁵² In World War II, one hundred and thirty-six entered the various branches of the service. Eleven were killed in action, or died of disease. Six were totally disabled and fifteen partially disabled.⁵³

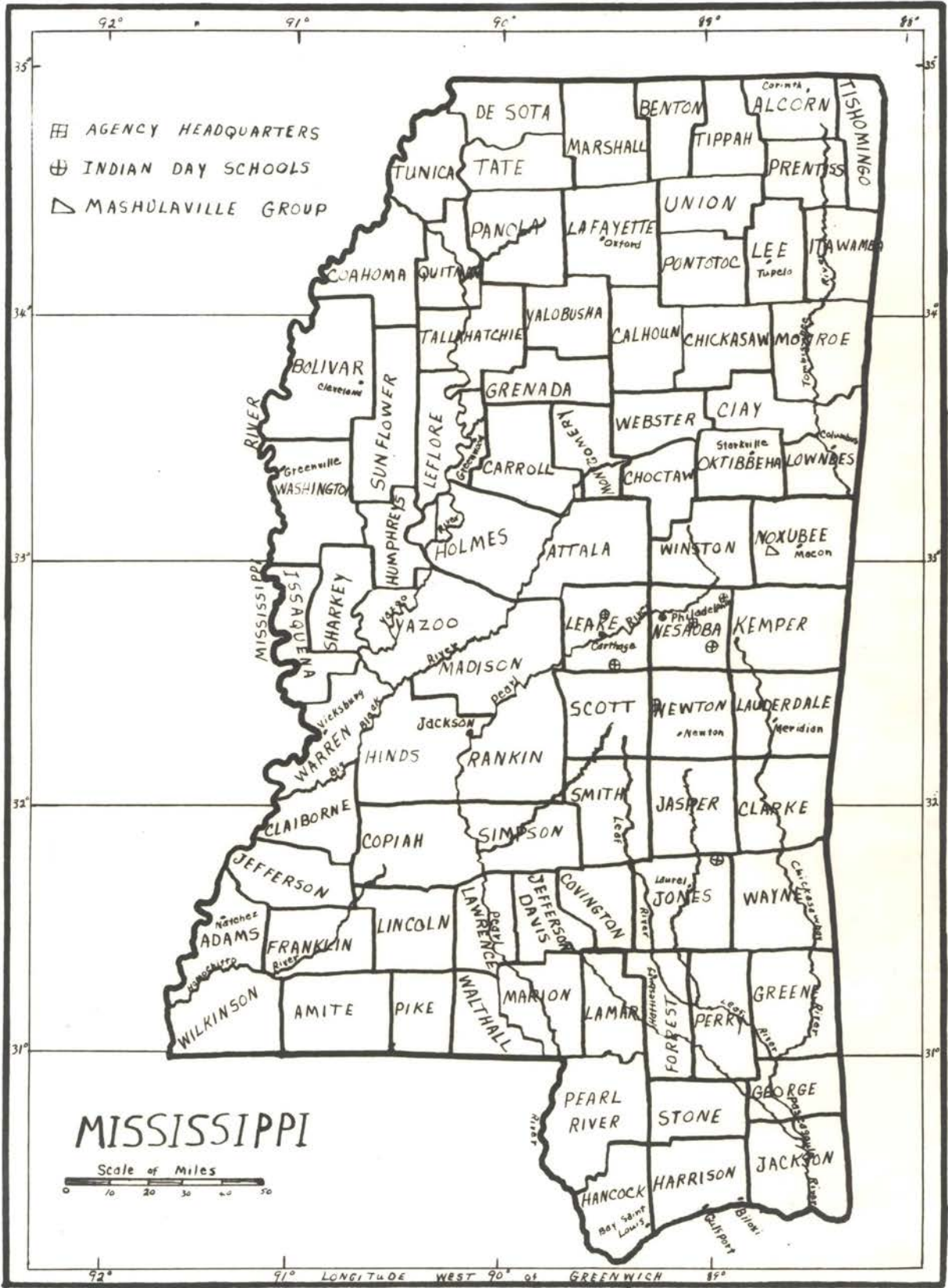
In 1946, Agency headquarters consisted of adequate hospital space for free hospitalization of the Indians, sufficient office space for all employees, and modern residences for the white employees. Under the guidance of the Agency the Indian population was gaining on an average of fifty persons a year, and the two thousand two hundred and seventy-eight Choctaws believed they were definitely making progress,⁵⁴ after long years of plunder, neglect, and harassment by the government and the local population.

⁵¹Personal interview with A. H. McMullen, June 15, 1946.

⁵²The Statutes at Large of the United States, XLIII, Part I, 253.

⁵³Unpublished Choctaw Agency Files.

⁵⁴Unpublished Choctaw Agency Files.



CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

During this period the Choctaw Indians who remained in Mississippi after the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, September 27, 1830, have lived a more dismal life than their kinsmen who were removed to the Indian Territory. Because of failure on the part of the United States Agents to make the proper allotments of land to the deserving Indians, and the unscrupulous methods used by certain land speculators in securing titles to these allotments, the Choctaw Indians in Mississippi realized very little from the land promised them by the treaty.

After the Indians lost their land they were compelled to become tenant farmers on the farms of white people, or to drift aimlessly to the government hills. Unlike the Choctaw Indians in the Indian Territory, those in Mississippi received no cash annuity; therefore, they had no means of a livelihood. The lot of these people was hard. They did not have sufficient food, raiment, or shelter. Life for the Choctaw Indians in Mississippi was almost unbearable. The Indians had no friends to whom they could look for assistance. The government had apparently forgotten them and made no effort to aid them in any way. The white population of Mississippi looked down on the Indians as an inferior race and refused to associate with them. The Indians in turn despised the negroes. The Indians in most part were illiterate. They could speak no language except their native Choctaw, and knew very little about Christianity. The

Choctaw Indians in Mississippi had become sullen and without hope. Life for them was miserable. Under such conditions it was impossible for the people to make progress.

During this period the descendants of the proud Choctaw warriors who once roamed and ruled the southern half of Mississippi, reached a very low social and economic status.

With the establishment of the Choctaw Indian Agency at Philadelphia, Mississippi, in 1918 came a gleam of hope to these wretched people. By the skillful guidance of the Agency staff great improvements have been made in the health, economical, and educational status of the Indians. By experiment it was proved that the Mississippi Choctaws were not ready for individual land ownership. They are more suited to land held in common trust by the government.

Segregation is gradually breaking down, and each year brings a higher standard of life to the Indians. Most of them have accepted Christianity, and the Choctaw Indians in Mississippi are making steady progress.

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Typest: Jacqueline C. Campbell