

COLE, PETE W.

LIFE AMONG THE CHOCTAW INDIANS

7677

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Interviewer.

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Life among the Choctaw Indians as
told by the Old Timers. And Manuscript
articles as read by the interviewer.

As soon as the Choctaw Indians came to this country they set to work to build up new homes, and in most cases they cleared a small tract of land, often called a "patch" of about ten acres or less. But in a matter of short time, these patches were increased in size and were enclosed according to law with a fence ten rails high or eight rails, staked and ridged.

In about the year 1838 to 1839, the Choctaws numbered about 12,000 and the Chickasaws 5,000, and the Creeks and Seminoles together about 24,000. The late thirties most of the Five Civilized Tribes had already moved and settled in their new country and were prospering as farmers and stockmen. Many of them were able to fill contracts for supplying the United States Army and the migrating Indians with their surplus stock and corn. The Choctaws, besides selling corn, sold several hundred bales of cotton, valued at \$20,000, as there were many cotton farms and two cotton gins in their part of the country.

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In these early days, cotton gins were run by horse power but after a few years there were several gins in the southern part of the Choctaw Nation.

By 1856, the agricultural possibilities of the eastern part of the Indian Territory had been tested by the people, and they were raising fine crops of corn, oats, and wheat, besides rye, peas, potatoes and kafir. Orchards of apple, peach, pear, and plum were frequently seen at farms throughout the country.

There was a minister, Reverend J. C. Robinson, Superintendent of the Chickasaw Manual Labor Academy in 1856, who said, "We think it not enough, in order to make a boy a good farmer, merely to teach him to hoe corn, chop wood, and make fence; but to bring the subject before him as requiring also the full exercise of an enlightened and cultivated mind. In short to make him as enlightened agriculturists."

As the land was held in common, the people depended for their wealth on their cattle, horses, hogs, sheep, turkeys and chickens. The stock ranged out on the rich prairie in the summer as grass was abundant or the canebrakes along the streams in the winter where they kept fat through the

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winter. By this means the poorest citizen had his little stock of horses and cattle. Where they had no work horses, some had a team of oxen, as well as hogs, sheep, goats, turkeys and chickens.

The Five Tribes did not live in wigwams but built their dwellings of logs, with a fireplace in one end of the building; sometimes they had a fireplace at both ends of the building. The house usually was built of two rooms with hallway between and a side room with the same length of the two room and a long porch across the front.

The Choctaws owned slaves. They were kept as servants. The Choctaws, Chickasaws and the Cherokees had the same viewpoint as the southerners in their treatment of the slaves and had laws against considering them as their social equals. They usually had cabins for their slaves, besides corn cribs, smoke house and other buildings in their yards.

The principal trading places among the Indians of this country before the Civil War were Fort Gibson, Tahlequah, Creek Agency, Doaksville, Skullyville, Perryville, Boggy Depot and Webber Falls. Boggy Depot, in

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Atoka County, dates as far back as 1849. It was one of the trading posts in west before and long after the Civil War. It was at this place that several thousand dollars in gold passed through as the traders had set up their establishments for the Chickasaws when they arrived to this country. It is said that later the Plains Indians added a picturesque note when they came in to get supplies. The Plains Indians have no clans like the Choctaws but bands of individuals gathered together of their own accord under a leader.

Each tribe of Indians has its own language.



Some tribes which are distantly related to one another have a few words alike but more often than not the different tribes cannot understand one another's language. The Chickasaws and the Choctaws to a great extent understand each other's language and some of the words in Creek are nearly the same as the Choctaw. Yet one will have to get accustomed to the language before one can understand. The Plains Indians of one tribe talk to those of another tribe by means of the sign language. This was a great invention and made it possible for all

of the other tribes of that part of the country to communicate with one another.

The prehistoric people or where there is no record of Indians of America, we learn through study of things they did or used in their daily life such as weapons, implements, utensils and ornaments of stone, bone or shell, clay and copper that have been found lying near the sites of the ancient village, or dwellings or by digging into the remains of their graves and mounds. There are proofs to show that the country within the state was once inhabited by a prehistoric people of Indian race, long before the coming of early settlers or explorers. Some of the remains of their dwellings may be found over the southern and eastern part of Oklahoma as well as other adjoining states.

In the eastern part of the state, there are circular mounds marking the sites of the homes of the earth house people, the most numerous of the prehistoric Indians, while in the extreme west there are rectangular mounds marking the sites of the dwellings of other prehistoric Indians and traces of probable irrigation ditches, which those people used.