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## HISTORY OF CHOCTAW AND CHICKASAW

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To write of the earliest known legends of the Choctaws we must include the Chickasaws. Tradition says in ages past the tribes were one, living far to the northland. Fierce and warlike, very powerful. At last a greater chief than all came to rule over them, the Supreme Spirit sent him two sons near of an age. Chihta, the younger, peace loving and beautiful. When the final summons came the aged chieftain called his council and announced his intention to leave to his sons the sceptre of power, making both chiefs of equal rank. For many years Chihta and Chahta governed wisely, wresting a living from the frozen north. One day a weary band of travellers appeared, told of wars and desolated homes, also of a land far to the southward, where it was always summer and game was plentiful. After many debates the tribe moved southward, after

arduous weeks and months, the reward, a fair land of their own! Here the tribe dwelt governed by the chieftains in harmony. Then the inevitable happened, the brothers clashed in authority, a disastrous war followed, a compromise was effected, the powerful nation was divided. Chahta being ruler of the peace loving faction. Chihta of the restless, warlike. Even to this day do we note the difference.

The Choctaws were an extremely religious people. There is no reason to credit the statement that they were worshippers of countless gods. According to verified traditions they adored one Supreme Being, far beyond all their powers to comprehend, and rendered inferior homage to unseen spirits, the beloved of the great one.

The nation was divided into clans or families, and marriages were forbidden between persons of the same clan. If wives were scarce the braves procured them after the manner of the tribe of Benjamin. The old men were the despots, they ruled with iron hand. When a youth reached an age when conjugal bliss seemed desirable, he sought an old uncle, requested his assistance and a wife was duly provided. Sometimes a maiden was found whom the parents would spare without

recompense, but usually the aspirant to matrimony paid a good round price. The negotiations were carried on with becoming pomp as the entire clan was interested. The uncle after procuring the bride, became master of ceremonies. After a day of revelry the would-be bridegroom sought the wigwam of his bride and remained until the crowing of the cock warned him it was time to away and renew the feasting. For three days the fun was fast and furious, on the fourth accompanied by the master of ceremonies he sought openly the presence of his bride; there before the elders they partook of food from the same dish, thus signifying their unity. He contracted no ties with the family of his wife, not even friendly intercourse was allowed. The mother-in-law could not look upon the face of her son-in-law! Plural marriages were permitted but not favored. Divorce was hardly known, yet a man could dismiss his wife for infidelity.

The sons of the family belonged neither to father nor mother, but to the nation, and were so reared. Spartan training! Only vigorous boys survived.

Death was met with inexorable calm. The funeral rites were weird, depending much upon the rank of the

departed. Burying was unknown until the advent of white men. The laws, Mosaic in character, were rigidly enforced.

Previous to about the year 1827 the office of chieftain was hereditary. The honor of being the first duly elected chief of the Choctaws, by ballot, belongs to Greenwood Le Flore. He was born at French Camp, Miss., June 3, 1803. His father was a Frenchman, by name, Louis de La Fleur, the son of a French refugee. Greenwood's mother was the granddaughter of a Choctaw chief, her father an Englishman by name of Cravat. Louis Le Flore, as the name is now spelled, was a man of eminence within the tribe, the father of many sons of whom the Choctaws are proud. Greenwood was educated in Nashville, Tenn., and Europe. He was a man of great culture and extraordinary force of character, a born dictator, an aristocrat, yet a lover of his people. After his election he built a magnificent home on the heights overlooking Greenville. The furniture was imported, the walls hung with rare paintings, the floors covered with rugs especially designed. "Malmaison" yet remains as he left. He established schools, made laws, suppressed witchcraft, and introduced trial by jury for homicide. The sale of liquor



was forbidden, and many reforms introduced. He has been most adversely criticised by his enemies, it being often asserted he sold his people. The real truth of the matter is he was a man far in advance of his nation. He brought to bear upon the subject of removal a judicious mind, he realized the uselessness of struggling against the superior power. He deemed it prudent to secure the best terms possible and with characteristic energy set about obtaining them. He was a personal friend of irascible Andrew Jackson, and after the consummation of the removal treaty, that gentleman presented him with a sword, belt and medal, yet to be seen hanging beneath Le Flore's portrait within Malmaison.

He was assisted in making the treaty by the hereditary chieftains, Mitachachie, Moshulatubbee, and Pushmataha. The latter the idol of his people, the last to place his name to the document and the only chief to come with the Choctaws to the new country.

Le Flore, Mitachachie and Moshulatubbee remaining in Mississippi on large grants of land given them by the United States.

During the Civil War Greenwood Le Flore remained on his plantation; did not enter either army,

yet openly avowed his sympathy for the Union. Unafraid, he dwelt within the stronghold of the Confederacy until death found him upright, undaunted, Aug. 3, 1865.

The Choctaws found not a land flowing with milk and honey, but a harsh, inhospitable country, untrod by civilized man. They had left homes and farms, and the bones of their ancestors in fair Mississippi and found here virgin forests and wide prairies. It is useless to dwell upon that winter, many died of exposure, many of starvation. Famine stalked throughout the land, a handful of corn was a feast! Yet, with indomitable perseverance they renewed the task of completely civilizing the tribe, re-lighted the council fire, revised and enlarged the laws made by Greenwood Le Flore, opened schools, built churches, and thus commenced the edifice we now view with complacency. It would be a labor of love to dwell upon the work of these pioneer men brave and unfaltering in their pursuance of the right, determined to prove to an adverse world that Indians were not of an inferior race, but could march side by side with their pale face brethren.

The following is a list of chiefs from the

adoption of the constitution now in force: Thomas Le Flore, George Hudson, Samuel Garland, Basil Le Flore, Tandy Walker, Alfred Wade, Peter Pytchlynn, Allen Wright, Wm. Bryant, Coleman Cole, Isaac Garvin, Jackson McCurtain, Edmund McCurtain, Thompson McKinney, Benjamin Smallwood, Wilson Jones, Jefferson Gardner, Green McCurtain, Gilbert Dukes, Green McCurtain.

Our last chief, the one whose hand extinguishes the council fire our tribe lighted ages ago, that its origin is lost in legend and story, Green McCurtain, was born about twelve miles east of the Winding Stair mountain, on the old Fort Towson road, in Sugar Loaf county. I. T., Nov. 28, 1848. He attended the neighborhood school at old Skullyville. His tutor was William Wilson, from Boston, a man credited with being the best teacher the Choctaw nation ever had. Our last chief, unlike our first, is not a product of foreign schools but one to whom we can proudly point and say "He is ours, the fruit of the wisdom of our pioneers." Yet, like unto the first he is a man of advanced ideas, one to whom progression is the law of life, a dictator a born leader. He has so far outstripped many of his nation that he too has been

accused of selling his people. When in the calm, cold light of history his actions are viewed, he shall be called great and the last chief shall be our children's pride.

He too was called upon to make a momentous decision, not a removal, but a complete breaking up. Should his people become truly citizens of the United States? With the indomitable spirit of a noble soul he has pursued the course wisdom dictated. The Atoka Agreement must ever stand as a monument to his ability to procure the best possible terms for his nation. His political life has been so crowded with important events it would be impracticable to dwell upon any special theme, within the space of this article. The majority of his people uphold him, witness the number of terms he has served as chief executive. The highest honor within the gift of his nation is his. He has full and unrestricted liberty to represent the Choctaws, after March, 1906, in all dealings with the United States government until the finish of affairs!

It would be incomplete to speak of the father and not the son. D. C. McCurtain is yet young but he has proved himself worthy of such a father, and his tribe has reposed much trust in him.



Chief McCurtain's last message to council is in full accord with all his utterances, full of quiet dignity, common sense and gentle yearning for his own. He is not given to bombast or rhetorical flights--calm, sane, judicious, a man, every inch of him--"It may be that during the brief period of transition our people have learned much that will be of value to them in after years. It may be that a majority of them will adopt frugal habits and through energetic efforts keep pace with the advance of civilization and after all the things that seem most distasteful now may in the end prove blessings in disguise. I feel at any rate this is the proper view of the change now upon us, and that it is the duty of those who understand the situation to teach their less fortunate brothers the necessity of thrift economy in order that they may conform to the new conditions and reap whatever benefit merit deserves. It is not unreasonable to hope that in the years to come the high standard of citizenship in the new state, may be attributed in large measure to those who can proudly lay claim to their Choctaw ancestry."