

COLE, PETE W.

NARRATIVE
Atoka County

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Personal Narrative of Pete W. Cole
 Indian-pioneer history, Field Worker
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ATOKA COUNTY: A FURTHER HISTORY

When an Act and Resolution was passed in regular session in November, 1855, the following was the designated boundary line of Atoka County.

"Beginning where the road from Fort Smith crosses the Chickasaw district boundary; thence to Boggy Depot; thence to Clear Boggy; thence down to Samuel Tolson's ferry; thence take Atoka's road to his house; thence take the road from Atoka's to Buddy Boggy; thence up said Boggy to the Fort Smith road; thence to dividing ridge; thence to where the line of Mosholabubbee District strikes Chickasaw district line; thence along said line to the beginning."

Such was the treaty made by the United States Government with the Choctaw Indians when this agreement was

made, and today the land area of Atoka County is 997 square miles.

The last census of the county showed the population to be 14,533. Atoka County has several hundred full-blood Choctaw Indians as well as the intermarried and mixed bloods.

Before this country was opened to settlers and before statehood, there were no towns to speak of; but the country

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was inhabited mostly by the early Indians. Wild game was plentiful. In fact, everything that was needed for the people was available, so it was not necessary for one to store away food for future use.

The Choctaw were not born farmers. They liked to hunt and fish, which provided the necessities at home for food. They would fence off a small tract of land for corn, sweet potatoes, beans, and other garden vegetables. Seeds were kept from last year's harvest. For farm implements they had an old axe of stone, a shovel of wood or a shoulder blade of animal or now and then an old hoe either made of round, for which a farmer would make a new handle of hickory timber, and which he used to an advantage in working his crop. His plow was made of wood. Points, beam and handle were all made out of wood.

The land cultivated was black and rich, and when one was ready to farm he would plow a furrow one way and check the rows by plowing cross ways and plant his corn by checking. He planted one to three grains of corn to

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a hill. By this method some of the labor was saved as it prevented thinning the corn later. Of course weeds grew then as now. There were enemies and diseases of the crops, but the Indians had no protective sprays or dusts with which to combat the pests; and there were birds, mice, moles, rabbits, and rodent animals

that were destructive to crops as well. Crows were not the worst enemies but the wild pigeons came in by millions.

But in spite of these difficulties, and contrary to the belief of some historians, we know by record that the Indian was an excellent farmer. Of course the Indians had no large farms or plantations, because it was not necessary for them to grow large crops for there were no ways of

disposing of ^{a/crop} after it was made. There was no market, no demand for products and no factories or manufacturing plants that could handle these products at that time.

The different varieties of corn that we know were raised at that time were dent, flint, sweet and popcorn. These different kinds of seed were planted differently and at some distance from the other crop that was to be used for home consumption/ ^{and} the seeds from these special patches were gathered for seeds for the next spring.

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Before they lost their farms these Indians were a sedentary, agricultural people. The land in many places was farmed continuously and the fertility of the soil was maintained. Some fertilized their land, which helped much in the upkeep of the soil. They fed themselves and their families. They preserved the soil and they improved their crops. No people anywhere in the country at any time have accomplished so much by plant breeding. Since at least one-third of our agriculture in the United States today is of American origin, and since in many fundamentals our methods are also those of the Indians, they are to be credited with their maintenance of the soil.

Later tillage was practiced by the Indians, who had the system perfected. To this day, species of crops and fundamentals are much the same in the same localities. Other crops were raised in quantities. Sunflowers were often planted after the crop was laid by to enrich the soil.

Such was the condition of the country when the Indians were in the country, Atoka County was one of the counties

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included in the great run for settlement in Oklahoma.

Atoka County, as well as the state of Oklahoma, is

a home for the Indians. The products raised by the people consist of corn, cotton, oats, fruits and pecans.

In the animal industries there are beef cattle, dairy cows, hogs, sheep, goats and poultry.

We also have coal and other minerals. Any quantity of coal can be mined in the county. It has other minerals, such as asphalt, for all the pavements and roads needed in the state. Oil is being found in some sections of the county and some day Atoka County will see oil derricks, storage tanks and other buildings and will share in her part of the oil and gas that is underneath her soil.