

PETER P. PITCHLYNN

From: J. B. Thoburn and M. H. Wright,  
Oklahoma: A History of the State and Its  
People (New York, 1929), p. 847.

Just as the Choctaws had been first in espousing the cause of the seceding states, so they were seemingly the first to take thought for eventualities in the possible downfall of the Confederacy, although, having been practically unanimous in their original declaration as compared with the other tribes of the eastern part of the Indian Territory, as a nation they maintained their allegiance to the Confederacy to the end. In the tribal election of 1864, the Choctaws elected Peter P. Pitchlynn for the office of principal chief of the Nation. (Two years previous to this time, at the end of George Hudson's term of office, Samuel Garland, of white and Choctaw descent, had been elected and served a term as chief. Garland was reported to have been Union in his sympathies at one time during his administration. He had served on the delegation of the Net Proceeds claim with Peter P. Pitchlynn since 1853.) Pitchlynn, who had long been prominent in the Choctaw Nation, made no secret of

the fact that his sympathies were with the Union, though he had not actively opposed the course chosen by his people when he found that they were so nearly unanimous. Still, his election, under the circumstances, may be fairly regarded as indicating that the Choctaws wished to be in a position to make the best terms possible in event that the issue of the war should go against them. Nor was it a poor choice, for Pitchlynn was a farsighted and shrewd counselor to his people, his influence being felt far beyond the borders of the Choctaw Nation.

Peter P. Pitchlynn was born in Noxubee County, Mississippi, January 30, 1806. His father, John Pitchlynn, was a white man who settled among the Choctaws about 1780, later marrying Sophia Folsom, of Choctaw descent. (Her father, Ebenezer Folsom, was a white man a native of North Carolina and of New England extraction.) Before there were any schools among the Choctaws, Peter P. Pitchlynn was sent to Tennessee where he attended an academy: subsequently, he entered the University of Nashville, where he pursued a full course and graduated. Returning home from school once as a boy, he found his people making a new treaty with the Government, some of the terms of which he so strongly disapproved that he refused

to shake hands with Gen. Andrew Jackson, who was one of the Government commissioners. Although he afterward became a very warm friend of General Jackson, he never became reconciled to the treaty, which was the first of those that provided for the sale of Choctaw lands in Mississippi and for the removal of his people to the West. In 1828, although he was but little more than a youth in years, he accompanied the Choctaw and Chickasaw delegation on an exploring expedition to what is now Oklahoma, prospective of the settlement of the two nations in this country. The journey was made by way of Memphis and St. Louis to Independence, Missouri. Leaving that settlement the party made its way directly into the country of the Osages, who had been hereditary enemies of the Choctaws for many generations. The Osages were not inclined to consider any offer of peace at first but, in the end, the boldness and diplomacy of Peter P. Pitchlynn convinced them and the pipe of peace was smoked.

After the treaty at Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830, Pitchlynn took an active part as a leader of some of the first migrating parties of Choctaws to the Indian Territory. He was one of the list of special persons mentioned in the Removal Treaty, who

received a land claim of several sections of the tribal domain in Mississippi. Disposing of this to advantage, he invested the proceeds in negro slaves that he brought with him to the new country in the West. One of his plantations, among the first in Southeastern Oklahoma, is pointed out today near Eagletown, just east of the bridge across the Mountain Fork River, on the highway between Broken Bow, Oklahoma, and the Arkansas line.

In 1853, Pitchlynn was appointed by the Choctaw Council as one of the delegation to Washington to further the Net Proceeds claim, and from that time was a frequent visitor to the National Capitol. He was personally acquainted with Henry Clay and Charles Dickens who described him as a man of great physical beauty and a natural orator. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Pitchlynn was in Washington, when he called upon President Lincoln and assured him that he hoped to be able to hold the Choctaws neutral during the impending struggle. He is said to have remained firm in his attachment for the Union, though three sons were in the Confederate Army. As a result of the War, he lost a large amount of property. He was one of the leaders of the Choctaw delegation during the negotiations of

the Treaty of 1866 with the United States. From that time he lived permanently in Washington, where he died in 1881 and was buried in the Congressional Cemetery, Gen. Albert Pike pronouncing the eulogy.

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