

ITI FABVSSA

A New Chahta Homeland: A History by the Decade, 1840-1850

Over the next year and a half, Iti Fabvssa is running a series that covers Oklahoma Choctaw history. By examining each decade since the Choctaw government arrived in our new homelands using Choctaw-created documents, we will get a better understanding of Choctaw ancestors' experiences and how they made decisions that have led us into the present. This month, we will be covering 1840-1850, a period when Choctaws dealt with the complications of incorporating Chickasaws into their territory, two new constitutions and the expansion of its economy and school system.

At the start of the 1830s, Choctaws began the process of removal to their new homeland. In 1837, they had to deal with another difficulty— that of the Chickasaw Removal. The Chickasaw Nation would be removed into the Choctaw Nation when they arrived in Indian Territory. In working to resolve this new, complex issue, Choctaws and Chickasaws passed a new constitution in 1838 that brought the two nations together under one government. Although Choctaws and Chickasaws were united under this constitution, the newly created Chickasaw District maintained its own financial separation. Another significant feature of the Choctaw-Chickasaw relationship was that they had to share ownership over the entire territory that Choctaw Nation had previously received by treaty with the US government. This meant that the two tribes had to agree and work together when negotiating with the U.S. government – a provision that is still in effect today when it comes to issues over land and water. Aside from this main difference, Chickasaw and Choctaw families could live in either the Chickasaw district or any of the three Choctaw districts and have full citizenship rights. This consolidation of the Choctaws and Chickasaw nations was pushed by the U.S. government in the hope that they would combine into one people. As time progressed though, this arrangement proved to be a source of strain between Choctaws and Chickasaws.

When Choctaws and Chickasaws revisited their constitution in 1842, they made several changes. At the urging of Choctaw leader Peter Pitchlynn, the legislature was divided into two parts: House and Senate – just like the U.S. Congress. Pitchlynn learned how Congress worked while working as a Choctaw representative in Washington D.C. and saw this bicameral legislature format to be a solution to a problem between the four districts. Because Choctaw laws stated that legislative representation was based on population, the smaller Choctaw districts felt that they did not have as much influence as the larger districts which had more representatives due to their populations. Another change was the creation of a national court system that would oversee the smaller district courts. As Choctaw Nation continued to grow, it eventually required further changes to its constitution in 1850, which we will learn about more in next month's Iti Fabvssa.

Beginning in 1845, another significant wave of Choctaws arrived from the original homelands to Indian Territory. The 1830 Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek had allowed Choctaw people to stay on their lands in Mississippi. This part of the treaty was not honored, and the 7,000 Choctaw people who had initially chosen to stay in Mississippi faced incredibly harsh conditions. Beginning in 1845, 1,280 of these Choctaw people emigrated to Indian Territory. Other

federally operated removals would continue throughout the rest of the 1840's. Throughout the 1840s, life in Choctaw Territory became increasingly prosperous through trading. Despite the U.S. government's failure to provide items like looms and spindles as promised in their removal treaty, Choctaws made the best of their situation. Families with small farms produced enough food crops to sell their surplus at markets while some prominent leaders and their families established plantations that grew cotton. Choctaw women contributed greatly with their spinning to create cloth for their families and sale. As Choctaw settled into their new homelands, they grew the local economy through the trading center of Doaksville. Located near Fort Towson, Doaksville also later became Choctaw Nation's capital for a short period. Choctaw people did not just trade with Americans in Texas and Arkansas, some Choctaws traveled down as far as New Orleans by boat. While Choctaws developed their economic power, this also made them targets by less honest traders who used alcohol to take advantage of Choctaws. This led to the development of temperance societies that advocated for the banning of alcohol. This overall prosperity did not escape the notice of U.S. government administrators which noted Choctaw Nation's economic and political successes.

Throughout the 1840-1850 period, the Choctaw/Chickasaw General Council passed a series of laws to regulate and expand the existing public school system. As early as 1833, Choctaws planned to spend their 1830 treaty annuity on constructing new schools. In 1842, General Council passed "An Act regarding public schools," which established its boarding school system. This included the establishment of Spencer Academy, Fort Coffee Academy, Koonsha Female Seminary, Iannubbee Female Seminary, Chuwahla Female Seminary, and Wheelock Female Seminary. Funding for these schools primarily came out of funds secured by treaties with the United States. The General Council also decided that various missionaries should run these schools – as they had already been doing at a smaller scale in the various communities. Each school had Trustees to examine the accounts of the schools. In this period, General Council also sent Choctaw students to American colleges and universities so they could come back and help lead Choctaw society. It also ensured that one-tenth of all pupils would be orphans, demonstrating how Choctaw Nation cared for its most vulnerable people.

Relatedly, by this period, the Presbyterian missionary Cyrus Byington had established his church circuit where he visited churches and preached in Choctaw. Elsewhere throughout the Choctaw Nation, Baptist and Methodist ministers also preached. Byington's circuit was particularly important because his work preaching in Choctaw helped to normalize the usage of Choctaw language in the church – which is an uncommon experience outside of Indian Territory. After removal in these churches, Choctaw men became ordained as ministers and pastored some of these churches. This made churches into centers of Choctaw gathering. It was also from working with these Choctaw communities that Byington gained a better understanding of the language. This work led Byington to revise and improve the Choctaw dictionary that he first put together while at the mission in the original homelands – which he could not have done without the aid of Choctaw people. Choctaws further made significant contributions by translating parts of the Bible and created a number of songs that are part of the Choctaw Hymnal. Choctaws today still benefit from this work done by Choctaws working with Byington. Additional reading resources on this period are available on the Choctaw Nation Cultural Service webpage (<https://choctawnationculture.com/choctaw-culture/additional-resources.aspx>). Follow along with this Iti Fabvssa series in print and online at

<https://www.choctawnation.com/history-culture/history/iti-fabvssa>. If you have questions or would like more information on the sources, please contact Megan Baker at meganb@choctawnation.com. Next month, we will cover the period of 1850-1860 when Choctaws continued expanding their economy.



Choctaw Female Seminary, four miles west of Tuskahoma, Oklahoma. Image courtesy of the Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma.