

THE GREAT SEAL OF THE CHOCTAW NATION

The design for the Great Seal of the Choctaw Nation, a facsimile of which appears in colors on the front cover of this number of *The Chronicles*, was adopted by an Act of the Choctaw General Council during its regular session at Doaksville, and approved by George Hudson, Principal Chief of the Choctaw Nation, on October 16, 1860. A description of the seal that appears in Section 4 of this Act, defining certain duties of the Principal Chief, is as follows:¹

The Principal Chief shall procure, at an early day, at the cost of the Nation, a great seal of the Nation, with the words "the great seal of the Choctaw Nation" around the edge, and a design of an unstrung bow, with three arrows and a pipe hatchet blended together, engraven in the center, which shall be the proper seal of this Nation, until altered by the General Council, with the concurrence of both Houses thereof.

This official seal appeared on all Choctaw national papers from 1860 until the close of the Choctaw government when Oklahoma became a state in 1907. The devices of the official seals of the Five Civilized Tribes that had operated their respective national governments in Oklahoma for seventy-five years before this time appear in the rays of the five-pointed star which centers the Great Seal of the State of Oklahoma. The State Constitution, Article VI, Section 35, describing the device of the State Seal, says in part: "The upper left hand ray shall contain the symbol of the ancient seal of the Choctaw Nation, namely: A tomahawk, bow and three crossed arrows."

The Choctaw seal is Indian in motif that symbolizes tradition and history in the tribe, for the old custom of smoking the calumet or pipe in the council circle during deliberation of important matters was particularly significant of Choctaw character. The pipe-hatchet in the center of the seal represents this, the pipe-hatchet introduced by European traders having generally taken the place of the old calumet among the American Indians. This trade pipe, called the "tomahawk," had been first manufactured in war-minded Europe. The calumet on the other hand was not an instrument of war but purely ceremonial, with a pipe bowl of red or black stone and a stem decorated with feathers and sometimes with rare fur.

¹ "Acts and Resolutions Passed at the October Session, A.D. 1860," in *Constitution and Laws of the Choctaw Nation* printed at Boggy Depot, Choctaw Nation, by J. Hort. Smith, Proprietor of the *National Register*, 1861, p. 26. This is the only book of Indian laws published within the region included in the Confederate States governments.

Calumets for peace councils were decorated with white feathers, and those for war, with red.²

The Choctaws though peaceable in nature were noted for their strength as a tribe in defending their homes and country, having produced many great warriors in historic times. The unstrung bow in their national seal represented peace yet preparedness for defense, with three arrows ready. These symbolized a united people, one arrow for each of three great chiefs, in history, Apuckshunubbee, Pushmataha and Mosholatubbee.³ They had signed the Treaty of Doaks Stand in Mississippi, in 1820, the terms of which provided for the exchange of valuable tribal lands in Mississippi for a vast domain in the West including Southwestern Arkansas, all of Southern Oklahoma, across the Panhandle of Texas to the headwaters of the Red River in Eastern New Mexico. When this country within the confines of present Oklahoma, lying south of the Arkansas and the Canadian rivers to Red River, was organized under the Choctaw government after the Indian Removal from Mississippi, it was divided into three districts named for these three noted chiefs.

The Choctaw was the first of the Five Civilized Tribes from the Southeastern States granted a domain in Oklahoma. The Nation was organized in 1834 under a written constitution, the first constitution written within the boundaries of this state, adopted in a council held on the location which was named the Capital, Nunih Wayah. This constitution provided an executive department of three chiefs, one for each of the three districts in the Nation; a judicial department of supreme court and district courts; and a legislative council which met annually in the commodious council house at Nunih Wayah. Before the Great Seal was adopted in 1860, there were a number of changes in the constitution: The first change was made in 1842,

² The Indian calumet on the face of the device in the center of the Oklahoma State Flag was suggested from the design of the Choctaw seal shown on an old flag born by the Choctaw Confederate Regiment during the War between the States that can be seen on the walls of the Confederate Memorial Room in the Oklahoma Historical Society.

³ Apuckshunubbee was the oldest of the three chiefs. He died in Kentucky on his way to Washington as a delegate from the Choctaws in the making of the Treaty of 1825. Pushmataha (spelled Pushamataha in some early records and laws) served as a delegate from the Nation in Mississippi at this same time. He died in Washington and was buried with honors in the Congressional Cemetery, in 1824. He had come west to the Oklahoma region as early as 1806, on hunting and war expeditions. In history, he is counted the great national hero of the Choctaws. Mosholatubbee was one of the three leading district chiefs who signed the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830, providing the removal of the tribe from Mississippi, the first of the Five Civilized Tribes that came as a tribe under U. S. Government supervision to the Indian Territory, now Oklahoma. Mosholatubbee was chief in the West and served in the important inter-tribal councils at Fort Holmes and Fort Gibson before his death in 1838. He made his home in the chief's house in Mosholatubbee District, erected by Treaty provision at what is now known as "Council House Spring" at the site of Iatham in LeFlore County. He is thought to have been buried at this location, in the old cemetery which has now almost disappeared.

incorporating the Chickasaws as a fourth district of the Choctaw Nation and providing for the organization of a General Council composed of a House of Representatives and a Senate. A new building was erected for the meeting of the House. The Senate met in the original council house which was accidentally destroyed by fire in 1849. The following January a convention of Choctaws, with Peter P. Pitchlynn as President, met at Doaksville, and adopted constitutional changes that provided the organization of counties and county courts in the four districts. The General Council met annually on the first Wednesday of November at the new capital at Doaksville, beginning in 1851.

The founding of a separate government by the Chickasaws in the western part of the Choctaw Nation, in 1856, called for another Choctaw constitution, known as the Skullyville Constitution adopted the next year, patterned after state governments, and providing for one executive to be called "Governor." These innovations and the fact that the old districts were done away with roused much opposition among the Choctaws for fear that these were the first steps to take away their country as had been done in Mississippi at the time of the removal Treaty at Dancing Rabbit Creek in that state, in 1830. Determined opposition to the Skullyville Constitution resulted in a convention of Choctaw citizens held in 1860, at Doaksville where necessary changes were made and a constitution finally drafted, referred to as the Doaksville Constitution, which remained in full force and effect in the Nation until its close in 1907. The executive was henceforth titled the Principal Chief, with three district chiefs in an advisory capacity, one for each of the three districts designated in the written law: Mosholatubbee District, Pushamahata District, Apuckshunnubbee District.⁴ And the Great Seal was provided by law in the first meeting of the General Council under this Doaksville Constitution.

During the nearly three quarters of a century under their own government in Oklahoma, the Choctaws experienced periods of trouble, especially the time of the War between the States, yet they advanced and developed in American civilization: farms and plantations were opened, trading stores were operated, towns grew up, churches and schools were established, newspapers and books were published, coal mining and timber industry were carried on. As the years passed, boys and girls who attended the Choctaw national academies and were prepared in their studies were sent to colleges in the

⁴A fourth district comprising what was known as the Leased District lying west of the Chickasaw Nation, was nominally organized as Hotubbee District, Choctaw Nation, at this same time. It comprised all of present Southwestern Oklahoma, west of the 98th Meridian and south of the Canadian River. No Choctaws nor Chickasaws made their home in this region since it had been leased to the United States by the Treaty of 1855, for the settlement of the Wichitas and other Plains tribes. No chief was provided in the Choctaw Nation for Hotubbee District.

states for higher education. When Oklahoma became a State, many Choctaws were counted among its leading citizens in the professions and in official life. The design of the Choctaw seal within the Great Seal of the State of Oklahoma fittingly symbolizes the history of this Indian nation.

—The Editor.

⁵ There are a number of publications on the history of the Choctaws, of which the following are among available references:

Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman, 1943); W. B. Morrison, *The Red Man's Trail* (Richmond, 1932); Grant Foreman, *Indian Removal* (Norman, 1932), and *The Five Civilized Tribes* (Norman, 1934); Muriel H. Wright, *A Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma* (Norman, 1951); Edwin C. McReynolds, *A History of the Sooner State* (Norman, 1954).

Many articles on Choctaw history have been published in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, among which are:

Muriel H. Wright, "Removal of the Choctaws to the Indian Territory, 1830-1833," Vol. VI, No. 2 (June, 1928), and "Brief Outline of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations, 1820 to 1860," Vol. VII, No. 4 (December, 1929); Natalie Morrison Dennison, "Missions and Missionaries of the Presbyterian Church, U. S.," Vol. XXIV, No. 3 (Spring, 1946); James D. Morrison, "Problems in the Industrial Progress and Development of the Choctaw Nation, 1865 to 1907," Vol. XXXII, No. 1 (Spring, 1954); Oliver Knight, "Fifty Years of Choctaw Law, 1834 to 1884," Vol. XXXI, No. 1 (Spring, 1953).