

## ITI FABVSSA

### **A New Chahta Homeland: A History by the Decade**

Over the next year and a half, Iti Fabvssa will be running a new series on Choctaw history that will cover each decade from 1830-2000. Since the 1830 Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, many Choctaws have lived in what is now known as Oklahoma, the overlapping homelands of Caddo and other Indigenous nations. Choctaws were removed here to establish a new home where we would govern ourselves alone and eventually consolidated as the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Although our current territory is not where we came from or where hundreds of generations of our ancestors have been laid to rest, we have transformed it into our new home filled with important histories, ideas, and relations. Over the past 190 years, Choctaws have accomplished much by creating a new society. In Indian Territory/Oklahoma, we have experimented and innovated with new forms of government and laws in ways that align with the values and traditions of our ancestors. It is a rich history that we wish to explore in-depth with our readers here.

Over the course of this series, we hope to clear up some common misconceptions about Choctaw history and provide better context. For instance, some think that when Choctaws arrived in Indian Territory, we were poor and had nothing when we arrived. While the immediate time after removal was difficult, Choctaws drew on collective knowledge to create a new society in a new homeland. Throughout the 1700s and 1800s, Choctaws shared knowledge with Europeans to adapt to social changes. Choctaw leaders used missionaries to teach their children English and sent them to boarding schools so they could learn how to deal with Euro-American society. With a Euro-American education, people like Peter Pitchlynn and Allen Wright became scholars, diplomats, and lawyers who helped Choctaws navigate a tumultuous period of rapid change. After removal, Choctaws quickly established a new government, constitution, set of laws and the largest school system west of the Mississippi River. As Choctaw became a written language, local newspapers increasingly published in multiple languages. Choctaw elders have referred to the 1830-1906 period of Choctaw history as a “golden era” because of all the innovations and dynamic history. Nevertheless, many people do not know this history.

Indigenous history is integral to Oklahoma and U.S. history, so we want to take the opportunity to share our unique Choctaw history in greater detail. This will not be the entire history because that could fill numerous books. Instead, the series will focus on key historical events, laws, and social movements – all explained through a Choctaw worldview grounded in the values of our ancestors. In telling our history, this is not only an opportunity to reflect on our ancestors’ legacy but also to show how Choctaws have been important actors in shaping contemporary Oklahoma, United States, and world history. Choctaws came up with ideas that other governments have since copied or learned from. In this series, we will cover the various changes to Choctaw government, how Choctaws developed a new economy (particularly around coal mining), interactions with the U.S. government and American settlers encroaching on Choctaw lands and sovereignty, allotment, Oklahoma statehood, and how Choctaws have lived up through the year 2000. We will provide snapshots of each decade so we can better understand what life was like for our Choctaw ancestors.

Our status as a sovereign nation is especially important to remember because some federal Indian laws did not apply to Choctaws living in Indian Territory. While we share a lot of history and experiences with other American Indians (and the Five Tribes especially), Choctaws have a distinct history and relationship with the U.S. government. For instance, Choctaws were not included in the 1887 Dawes Act that allotted Choctaw lands. Choctaw allotment did not begin until after 1898 with the Curtis Act and this had important legal implications. Choctaws who took allotments were also granted U.S. citizenship in 1901 – before Oklahoma statehood and long before the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act, which gave the majority of American Indians citizenship. Because of removal, the Five Tribes have comparatively stronger treaties than the nations that made treaties with the US government after them. This is important because it has helped us protect our sovereignty today. We have a different worldview than other Indian nations, which inform our leaders' decisions. To really understand our history, we have to pay close attention to our cultural, political and legal uniqueness as Choctaw people.

Perhaps most importantly, we will share this history from a Choctaw perspective, as Choctaws have lived and experienced it. Although there are numerous books and articles on Oklahoma Choctaw history, many are largely written by non-Choctaws, and the people that wrote them often do not consider Choctaw-authored accounts of what happened in the past. Instead, they mostly relied on U.S. government records, which are filled with their own biases that undermined Choctaw nationhood, culture, and our unique perspective. Furthermore, because many Choctaws were educated in the western tradition, there is an enormous collection of documents written and produced by a wide range of Choctaw people that has yet to be fully examined. Such a large archival collection is rare among American Indian communities. There are still so many untold stories and perspectives hidden in archives that have yet to be interpreted and written about. Many of those stories give us new and important insights that challenge some of the ideas that we believe today. There are also many documents in Choctaw language that have yet to be translated. By writing a history sourced from these underexamined primary sources, we are doing something new both in these articles and in the ongoing work of Cultural Services/Historic Preservation, the Choctaw Language Department, and Choctaw Nation museums with archives and museum collections.

The story of Oklahoma Choctaws is one of renewal and resurgence, adapting and overcoming challenges created by colonialism to establish new relations and paths toward the future. Telling this history requires Choctaws to be our own historians – which we have always been. We know that individuals do not have to have a degree to be a historian. Our grandparents, aunts, uncles and parents are historians. As community members and scholars have long pointed out, telling history is not a neutral project. History has high stakes. Choctaw people have often been excluded from telling our side of history because it would contradict grand narratives about how the United States came into being. We also know there is so much more to American history that has not been fully examined.

While this series will cover some of the major events, this is by no means a comprehensive Oklahoma Choctaw history. Our history in Indian Territory is rich and we want to give it the attention it deserves. Our next Iti Fabvssa article will focus on the years 1830-1840, which covers the first part of removal and the early experiences in the new homeland secured to us by U.S. treaties. We will see how Choctaw Nation was created, how it innovated with its form of

government, how it developed a new economy in a different land and interacted with increasing settler encroachment in our new homelands and jurisdiction. Additional reading resources 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](mailto:meganb@choctawnation.com).

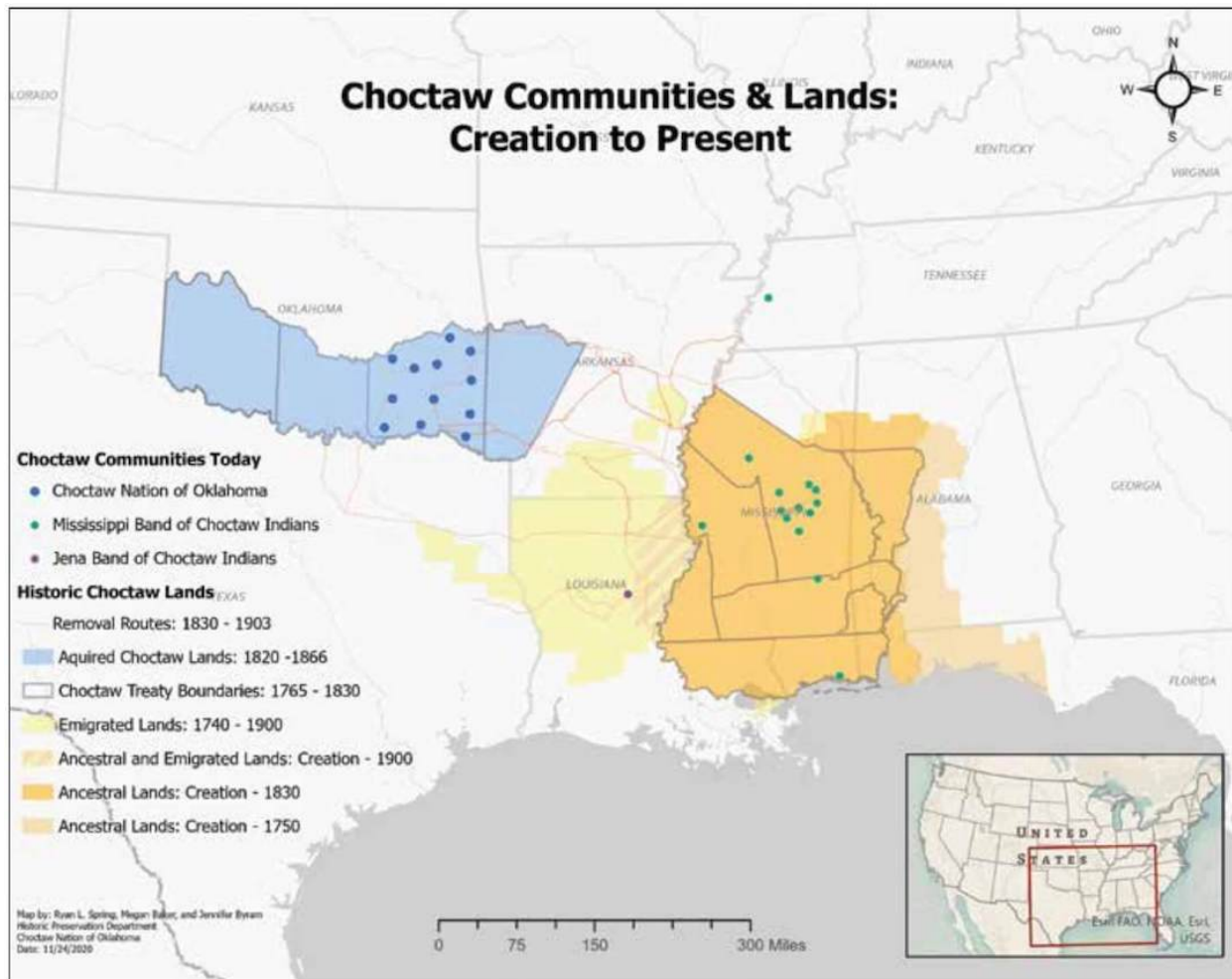


Photo Provided

This map details the lands where Choctaws have lived throughout history, including the homes of contemporary communities. Map Courtesy of Historic Preservation