

ITI FABVSSA



Strategic Development strengthens the future of the tribe

\$ 1572⁷⁴ Eagle Town 18033 IND. TER'Y, April 3 1885

RECEIVED from the OSAGE COAL & MINING COMPANY the sum of
Fifteen Hundred & Seventy two ⁷⁴/₁₀₀ DOLLARS,
being in full for royalty on COAL due for month of Feb'y 1885

as follows, viz:

From MINE No.	Bush.	at	cts.	\$
7	174 000	3/8		652.50
9	144.484	1/8		541.81
10	100.916	1/8		378.43
<u>Duplicate</u>				\$ 1572.74

April 11th 1885

Royalty for coal paid to Choctaw Nation by the Osage Coal and Mining Company, 1885. Microfilm Roll 70, Minerals, Choctaw National Agency Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society.

While our needs today differ from the past, these services have deep roots in our Choctaw history. This article focuses on the Division of Strategic Development for the Choctaw Nation. Established in 2019, the Division of Strategic Development coordinates the various parts of the Choctaw Nation to work together to grow our businesses, government and communities. Whether managing casinos or taking on government contracts, this division ensures that the Choctaw Nation has the resources it needs to ensure our long-term well-being and the tools to achieve operational excellence.

Over the past 30 years, economic development by the Choctaw Nation has vastly improved Choctaw people's lives. Our current economic successes also show how far we have come since the beginning of colonization and our removal from our ancestral homelands. Despite ups, downs and close calls with tribal dissolution and termination, Choctaw leadership has made key strategic decisions to ensure that Choctaw people and lifeways would always exist. In this month's article, we will review three moments and strategies that Choctaws have undertaken to secure our ability to govern our land and ensure the endurance of Choctaw people and ways of life throughout time. The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma of today would be nothing if not for the decisions that Choctaw ancestors and past leadership made regarding Choctaw survival.

TRADE

The arrival of European settlers to North America was a key point in Choctaw history, especially since the introduction of the market economy caused immense changes to Choctaw political structures and the land's environment. The market economy, which brought in the idea of private property, was a stark difference from the traditional Choctaw economy. European traders, particularly the French who allied with Choctaws, learned to participate in Choctaws' subsistence-based traditional economy with its practice of gift-gifting steeped in our values of reciprocity and generosity. But things did not stay the same for long. As Choctaws increasingly traded with Europeans, these trade networks reshaped the land and availability of the plants and animals that the Choctaw traditional economy had been built around for so long. Over time, Choctaws became increasingly dependent on European trade for their survival as their subsistence lifestyle became harder to maintain due to increased pressures on land and food sources. For instance, demand for deerskins supplied by Choctaws led to over-hunting and a decline in white-tailed deer populations. In response, Choctaws began to move into their borderlands and increasingly engage in farming meant for selling crops in a market to ensure steady food supplies. The shift in agricultural practices was a response to the

changes in the land as well as dealing with Europeans' growing political power and demand for Indigenous land.

TREATIES

While Choctaws benefited from trade with Europeans that brought in new goods, it also was a period of massive political, economic and environmental change. Soon Choctaw leaders had to make unprecedented decisions and enter new terms of engagement with Europeans in order to maintain peaceful relations. This resulted in the signing of treaties, which recognized Europeans (and later Americans) and Choctaws as sovereign political entities. As Choctaws increasingly engaged with Euro-Americans, whether through marriages or sending delegates to Washington, D.C. to negotiate with American leaders, they realized the importance of understanding how Euro-American society worked.

EDUCATION

As British, and then American, power increased on the continent, Choctaws turned to Euro-American-style education. As previous Iti Fabvssa articles on Choctaw education and historian Clara Sue Kidwell's book "Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818-1918" have shown, missionaries were an important resource for Choctaws to learn English and the European ways of life to give them an advantage. Choctaw leaders like Pushmataha sent their children to missionary schools where they were educated in English and Euro-American ways. When Choctaws first arrived in Indian Territory, they had to recreate Choctaw society in a new land that they knew little about. Among the first things Choctaws built were schools. We built the first schools in Indian Territory, using the missionaries to ensure that Choctaw children would have an education. These schools helped Choctaws raise the next generation of leaders to govern and sustain us in our new lands.

DEVELOPMENT

Despite removal and Choctaw leaders' best efforts to protect our lands promised by treaties, our land in Indian Territory was under constant threat. Following the Civil War, Choctaws were forced to accept the Treaty of 1866. One of the treaty's most significant compromises was allowing a North-South and East-West railroad through Choctaw territory. Already dealing with issues with white intruders coming into Choctaw territory, Choctaw chiefs responded to this problem by crafting a new strategy that recognized the potential of industrial development for our people.

For additional reading:

Kidwell, Clara Sue. 1997. *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818-1918*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
Kidwell, Clara Sue. 2008. *The Choctaws in Oklahoma: From Tribe to Nation, 1855-1970*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
Lambert, Valerie. 2009. *Choctaw Nation: A Story of American Indian Resurgence*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
Miner, H. Craig. 1989. *The Corporation and the Indian: Tribal Sovereignty in Indian Territory, 1865-1907*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

In 1875, Chief Coleman Cole proposed in the *Star Vindicator*, the then McAlester-area newspaper, that the Choctaw Nation should begin developing their mineral resources in order to establish more boarding schools for Choctaw children. In this period, mining was new and growing. Chief Cole saw an opportunity for the Choctaw Nation to be at the forefront of the mining industry in our territory. He stated, "Let us educate, or we will be a lost people. Let our rising generation be prepared to meet the great change that will in course of time take place with the United States Government. At present, we are in no condition for that change." For Chief Cole, mining was an early form of economic development that could be used toward the betterment of Choctaw children who would have to deal with the United States government just as Cole's and previous generations had done.

Cole's decision to develop this industry was an important claim to our territory. This decision turned all coal lands into Choctaw property. This is significant not only because mining revenue provided funding for schools, but it also made certain the federal government would have to deal with Choctaws as a sovereign entity. While the Choctaw Nation was seen not to exist on paper after Oklahoma statehood, it still existed in practice. While operating in a minimal form via the office of the chief, the Choctaw Nation continued to live this way up into the rebirth of our government in the mid-1900s. Thanks to the diligence and commitment of Choctaw community members, Congress stopped termination and legally restored tribal government.

Despite multiple attempts by the U.S. government to eliminate Choctaws as a sovereign nation, we have survived and continue to exist as a people. Key decisions by Choctaw leadership like Chief Cole ensured that Choctaws existed legally while Choctaw people held onto our ways of life even though the U.S. government stated that we no longer existed. Today, Choctaw Nation leadership has created divisions like Strategic Development to carry on the legacy of making decisions for the betterment of Choctaw people. While departments like Strategic Development are new, they follow a long tradition of maintaining Choctaw lifeways.

In the upcoming articles, we will reflect more on the ways that the Divisions of the Choctaw Nation Executive Branch carry on ancient and important functions to the benefit of our community today. For more information, please contact Megan Baker at (580) 380-0880, or at meganb@choctawnation.com. To read past issues of the *Iti Fabvssa*, including articles on the Choctaw schools and education, visit choctawnation.com/history-culture/history/iti-fabvssa.

White, Richard. 1983. *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos*.
Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.