

## A STORY OF CHOCTAW CHIEFS<sup>1</sup>

By Peter James Hudson

From time immemorable when the Choctaw people were living in Mississippi, they were divided into three divisions, not geographical divisions, but by clans, namely: the Western Division, called by the Choctaws, "Okla-Falaya," the Middle Division, called by the Choctaws, "Haiyip Atukla," and the Southwestern Division, called by the Choctaws, "Okla-hvnnali" or "Six-Towns." Each of these divisions had a head chief and in governing they were independent of each other. They didn't have a national capital. The only occasions upon which they all met together were when they had dealings with the United States Government, when they designated a place convenient for all divisions to meet.

The Western Division's hereditary chief was Apvckshvnbbee who served from 1802 to 1824.<sup>2</sup> He died on the way to Washington in November, 1824, and was succeeded by Robert Cole. I have been told by a Mississippi Choctaw that the body of Apvckshvnbbee was brought back to Mississippi and buried at his home place. Robert Cole's appointment as successor to Apvckshvnbbee may be found in the Treaty of 1825, with a salary of \$150.00 per year for a lifetime. A new plan was adopted in 1826 and Greenwood Leflore succeeded Robert Cole when he had served only about a year and a half. It is said that Greenwood Leflore was a nephew of Robert Cole. Perhaps he was from the fact that Robert Cole made no objection to being succeeded by him.

The Middle Division's hereditary chief was Mosholetvbbi who served from 1809 to 1826. Miko Homastvbbi, the father of Mosholetvbbi, died in 1809, and was succeeded as hereditary chief by his son who served from 1809 to April, 1826. He was forced

<sup>1</sup> This article was written in April, 1934. See R. L. Williams, "Peter James Hudson, 1861-1938," in this issue of *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*.

<sup>2</sup> According to Mrs. Rella Looney, Archivist of the Oklahoma Historical Society, Peter James Hudson stated that the Choctaws used the letter "v" instead of "u," as in Apvckshvnbbee. They also indicated a nasal sound by placing a straight line under a vowel as in *Miko*.

to resign his office as District Chief and Colonel David Folsom succeeded him as chief by election.

Colonel David Folsom was District Chief of the Middle or Mosholetvbbi from April, 1826, to March, 1830. He emigrated to Indian Territory and located at Doaksville, in what is now Choctaw County, Oklahoma, and died and was buried there. He was born on January 25, 1791, in Mississippi, and died on September 27, 1847. He was a son of Nathaniel Folsom, a white man. His mother was a niece of Miko Puscus, a full blood Choctaw, and a hereditary chief of some Choctaw clan. Possibly he was a brother of Miko Homastvbbi, father of Mosholetvbbi, and if that be true, then Mosholetvbbi was correct when he called Peter P. Pitchlynn his nephew, John Pitchlynn, father of Peter P. Pitchlynn having married Col. David Folsom's sister, Rhoda. After the death of Col. David Folsom's mother, his father, Nathaniel Folsom, married her sister, and was the father of two large sets of children, twenty-four in all.

The southwestern division's hereditary chief was Pushmataha who served from 1803 to 1824, when he died in Washington, D. C. He was buried at Washington, D. C., with military honors. He had been known as General Pushmataha. There is a nice monument in Congressional Cemetery, Washington, marking his grave, bearing the following inscriptions:

On the south side: "A Choctaw chief lies here. This monument to his memory—erected by his brother chiefs who were associated with him in a delegation from their Nation in the year 1824 to the Government of the United States."

On the North side: "He died in Washington on the 24th day of December, 1824, of the croup in the 60th year of his age. Among his last words were the following 'when I am gone, let the big guns be fired over me.'"

On the East side: "Pushmataha was a warrior of great distinction. He was wise in council, eloquent in an extraordinary

degree, and on all occasions and under all circumstances, the white men's friend."

Pushmataha's nephew named Oklahoma succeeded him as hereditary chief but did not serve long because of his dissipation. This is the first time the name Oklahoma appears in history.

The United States government recognized General Humming Bird as his successor. He died on September 28, 1828, and is buried at Kusha Cemetery in Mississippi, where a sister of Pushmataha, Hotema, was buried. General Humming Bird with sixty Choctaw warriors joined General Anthony Wayne during the Indian War in Ohio.

According to Article XXI of the Treaty of 1830 there were at least twenty Choctaw warriors yet living who marched and fought with General Wayne, and it was provided that they should each receive \$25. a year while they lived.

General Hummingbird was succeeded by Nitvkechi who was said to be a nephew of Pushmataha.

The record is lacking but during the year 1826, the Western Division followed the policy of the Middle Division and elected Greenwood Leflore as their chief for four years to succeed Robert Cole.

The Southwest Division in 1826 selected Sam Garland as their chief for a term of four years.

This marks the beginning of the Choctaw government. Both Nitvkechi and General Hummingbird, hereditary chiefs of the third or Southwest District, refused to recognize Sam Garland as chief.

In the spring of 1830 Greenwood Leflore called a Choctaw council to meet and proposed the Treaty of Removal. David Folsom and Sam Garland resigned their offices as District Chiefs on the ground that they were elected chiefs as against the Treaty of Removal. Chief Greenwood Leflore became the only chief who prepared the Treaty of Removal. David Folsom and Sam

Garland signed it as common warriors. The United States refused to adopt said Treaty. I have not yet found the record of the election but the government recognized Greenwood Leflore, Mosholetvbbe and Nitvkechi in making the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in September, 1830. It is said that George W. Harkins was elected in 1830 as the successor of Greenwood Leflore while he was in Indian Territory inspecting the country before the removal. George W. Harkins was a nephew of Greenwood Leflore.

There is a letter dated November, 1830, from John H. Eaton, Secretary of War, to the Choctaws, saying that he will not recognize Joel H. Nail as chief of the Middle District and as successor of Mosholetvbbi.

The Middle District met at Dancing Rabbit Creek on January 16, 1831, when Mosholetvbbi offered to resign in favor of Peter P. Pitchlynn, his nephew.

The United States government refused to recognize all this and in the meanwhile the migration proceeded during the years 1831, 1832, and 1833.

Nitvkechi, the chief of the Southwest Division, was the only chief recognized from 1830 to 1834.

Mosholetvbbi and Nitvkechi while they were still in Mississippi, before the removal, without consulting Greenwood Leflore who was a half-breed, agreed to designate or lay off the new Choctaw country West of the Mississippi River into three geographical divisions, namely Mosholetvbbi, First District, situated between the Arkansas and Canadian rivers on the north, by the Winding Stair Mountain on the south, and by the State of Arkansas on the east. The Second District, first known as Red River District, then Okla-Falaya, and later Apuckshunvbbi District, situated east of Kiamichi River, south of Winding Stair Mountain, north of Red River and west of the state of Arkansas. The Third District, known as Pushamtaha District, to be situated west of Kiamichi River, north of Red River, south of Canadian

River, with no western limit. The purpose of this was to transfer their people from Mississippi into this country just as they were at home. But on account of the method of removal the clans were all destroyed and the Choctaw people were all scattered. The leaders succeeded in reaching the districts to which they belonged but the Choctaws in general did not. However, since the country had been divided into three districts, they proceeded with the three chiefs as heretofore, namely: Mosholetvbbi, Nitvkechi, and Thomas Leflore, who had succeeded Greenwood Leflore.

During the year 1834 the four years having expired, Mosholetvbbi, Thomas Leflore, and Nitvkechi were reelected as District Chiefs of their respective districts.

In October, 1834, the chiefs of the three districts with their friends and leading men met at a location selected by them as being centrally located in the new Choctaw Nation, which place was a mile and a half west of what is now Tuskahoma, Oklahoma, as the first capital of the Choctaw Nation, as one nation, and was called Nanih Waya. This was done in accordance with Article XX, in the treaty of 1830, which provided for the erection of a council house for the nation at some convenient central point after their people shall be settled, and a house for each chief, also a church for each of the three districts, to be used also as school-houses until the nation may conclude to build others; for which purposes \$10,000 was to be appropriated. They named the place Nanih Waya in honor of the Mound which they had just left in Mississippi, and which they had held sacred from time immemorial.

On August 24, 1835, eight Indian tribes made a treaty of peace at Fort Holmes among themselves and Mosholetvbbi signed said treaty as the chief of Mosholetvbbi District, and Nitvkechi signed it as the chief of Pushmataha District. This treaty was concluded May 19, 1836. That is the last record of Mosholetvbbi signing any paper as chief. It is said that he died in 1836. No one knows where he is buried.

Joseph Kincaid was selected to fill out the unexpired term of Mosholetvbbi. It is not known where Joseph Kincaid lived in Indian Territory after he migrated here, but he had a brother named Robert Kincaid who was a student at Choctaw Academy, Kentucky, who migrated to Indian Territory, and located about three miles west of what is now the town of Shady Point, Oklahoma. Last February, 1934, an old log house said to have been built by Robert Kincaid, which had been occupied by his relatives, was burned down. I passed by where it had stood just after it had burned. I assume then that Joseph Kincaid probably lived in that vicinity.

Thomas Leflore, son of Michael and cousin of Greenwood Leflore, was elected chief of Apuckshunubbi District in 1834 for a term of four years. Capt. Thomas Leflore was the son of Michael Leflore, a Frenchman, the brother of Louis Leflore. His father remained in Mississippi. He was first cousin of Greenwood Leflore and Brazil Leflore. Thomas Leflore lived near Wheelock, a short distance from what is now the town of Millerton. The house which the Government built under Treaty provision and which the chief occupied as long as he lived, still stands. Thomas Leflore died about 1850 and is buried about one-fourth mile from his house near Millerton. There is no mark to show which is his grave. No one cares for the old home place.

Nitvkechi was elected chief of the Third or Pushmataha District in 1834 for term of four years.

During the election in 1838, John McKinney was elected chief of Mosholatubbee or First District, for a term of four years. John McKinney was a lawyer and held many offices. He lived, died and is buried about one mile east of the town of Howe, Oklahoma, on the Ft. Smith-Ft. Towson Military Road.

James Fletcher was elected chief of the second district or Apuckshunubbee District in 1838 for a term of four years. He lived on Rock Creek, probably near Spencerville, Oklahoma. At one time he was not present and Capt. Okchiya acted for him as

Chief. Capt. Okshiya had an English name, William Winans. He was a Methodist preacher. He lived at a place known as Okchiya Station, six miles south of Standley, Okla., on the Military Road. On his return from attending a church meeting in Cherokee Nation he took sick and died in Fort Smith and was buried on the bank of the Arkansas River.

Pierre Juzan was elected chief of the Third or Pushmataha District in 1838 for a term of four years. He was a student of Choctaw Academy in Kentucky. His father was a Frenchman named Pierre Juzan who married a niece of Pushmataha, and a sister of Oklahoma. Pierre Juzan, Jr., student of Choctaw Academy in Kentucky, removed to the Choctaw Nation and located somewhere near Hugo, Oklahoma. He was related to Chief Nitvkechi. They lived on Red River, south of Bennington. He died in office and was buried in August, 1841.

Isaac Folsom filled out the unexpired term of Pierre Juzan, Chief of Third District, from 1841 to 1842 and was reelected in 1842 for four years. He lived on the west side of the Kiamichi River.

In 1842, Nathaniel Folsom, Jr., son of Nathaniel Folsom, a white man, who married an Indian woman, was elected chief of the First of Mosholatubbe District, Thomas Leflore was elected in 1842 to succeed James Fletcher as chief of the second or Apuckshunubbee District. Nitvkechi was elected chief of the third or Pushmataha District for four years, but he died in 1846 and was succeeded by Silas D. Fisher, who served the remainder of his term. It is said that Oklahoma, brother of Nitvkechi died in Mississippi in 1846 and that Nitvkechi went there to attend the funeral and died while there. There is another story that Nitvkechi was shot while visiting in Texas.

In 1846, Peter Folsom was elected chief of Mosholatubbee District for four years. He was a student of Choctaw Academy in Kentucky, son of Col. David Folsom. He was a member of Peter P. Pitchlynn's delegation appointed in 1853 to have a set-

tlement with the United States government of what became known as the Net Proceeds claim. I don't know where he lived, probably somewhere near Poteau. He was President of the Choctaw Senate in 1861, First District Trustee in 1863-4. He died in 1885. He was Council member in 1860.

Thomas Leflore succeeded himself as chief in 1846 to serve for four more years. Nitvkechi was elected chief of the Third or Pushmataha District in 1846 but died in 1846 and was succeeded by Silas D. Fisher.

Silas D. Fisher was the son of Joseph Fisher, a white man. Silas Fisher lived in Blue County, Choctaw Nation, now Bryan County, Oklahoma. I do not know where he was buried or when he died.

In 1850 the Choctaw government was reorganized and in October, 1850, the Choctaw capital was moved from Nanih Waya to Doaksville.

In 1850 Cornelius McCurtain was elected chief of the First or Mosholatvbbi District for term of four years. He was the father of Jackson, Edmond, and Green McCurtain, all of whom later served as Chief of the Choctaw Nation. Cornelius McCurtain was a member of the Council in 1844, 1846, and 1855, and a member of the School Board in 1849. He was a brother of John, Luke, Daniel, Allen, William, Thomas, Dave, and Camper McCurtain, all of whom were prominent Choctaws. Cornelius McCurtain's name, together with that of George W. Harkins and George Folsom, appears as having approved Act of November 6, 1852, which changed the Kusha Female Seminary into a high institution of learning under rules and regulations indicated therein.

In 1850 George W. Harkins was elected chief of the Second or Apuckshunubbee District for a term of four years. He was a nephew of Greenwood Leflore and in 1830 had been selected chief of Greenwood Leflore District in Mississippi but was not recognized. He was a student of Choctaw Academy in Ken-



tucky. In 1854 he was again elected chief of said district and served until January, 1857, when the Skullyville Constitution was adopted. George W. Harkins was a member of the Council in 1846. He lived at Doaksville and I presume he died there.

In 1850 George Folsom was elected chief of Pushmataha District and served until 1854. He attended a school in Georgia. He was son of Col. David Folsom and was sent to Georgia to school at the nation's expense. He was a Cumberland Presbyterian preacher and was one of the nine members of the Board of Trustees in 1849 to look after organizing what were known as neighborhood schools. He was a member of the Council.

According to Article XV of the Treaty of 1830 the government agreed to pay the salary of all Choctaw chiefs for twenty years. In 1850 that twenty year period had expired, then the Choctaw council deliberately took the capital from Nanih Waya to Doaksville where the majority of the people lived. In other words the Choctaw government was reorganized in 1850 and changed the seat of government to Doaksville which is in the south part of the Choctaw Nation. On account of the change of the seat of government to Doaksville, the chief and members of the council of Mosholatvbbi District, refused to take part in the 1851 Council, making it impossible to hold the Council. In 1851 the Council at Doaksville passed a law without changing the Constitution, and changed the seat of the capital to Nanih Waya for the Council to be held in 1852. It appears that no Council was held at either place. Laws and resolutions passed by the Council in 1852 and 1853 were pronounced illegal. The Skullyville Constitution made Boggy Depot the capital of the Choctaw Nation. In 1853 Commissioners were appointed for 1853 and 1854 in lieu of the Council meeting. However in 1854 in Council at Doaksville they repealed the law making Nanih Waya the capital in 1851 and made Fort Towson the Capital. Then in 1855 and 1856 Council was held at Fort Towson. In 1854 David McCoy succeeded Cornelius McCurtain as chief of the first or Mosholatvbbi District and served until 1857. At the same

time Nicholas Cochnauer, son of David Cochnauer, succeeded George Folsom as chief of the Third or Pushmataha District and served until 1857.

In January, 1857, what is known as the Skullyville Constitution was adopted, and provided for the abolition of district chiefs, created the office of Governor of the Choctaw Nation, and selected Boggy Depot as the capital of the nation.

In October, 1857, Alfred Wade, who had been elected Governor, was sworn in and George Harkins, David McCoy and Nicholas Cochnauer received their pay as District Chiefs up to that time.

(To be continued.)