

The rest of the story on Choctaw counties

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By Keith Tolman

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It may come as a surprise to some, but Hugo at one time was not located in Choctaw County. For that matter, Idabel was not in McCurtain County, and Antlers did not rest in the county named for Chief Pushmataha.

The Choctaw Nation adopted several constitutions following their arrival in Oklahoma. A later one, the Skullyville Constitution of 1857, established three districts in the Nation. They were named in honor of three great Choctaw district chiefs who signed the 1820 Treaty of Doaks Stand, which resulted in the tribe's removal to Oklahoma. The three districts were named for Pushmataha, Apukshunnubbee, and Moshulatubbee.

These district units and their chiefs administered schools, courts, directed elections, and collected revenue. As the importance of the traditional tribal subdivisions faded out, the duties and importance of the district chiefs also faded. Eventually, smaller units of government were deemed necessary.

The Doaksville Constitution of 1860 established county subdivisions within each of the already existing districts. For example, the Apukshunnubbee District, occupying the far southeastern corner of present-day Oklahoma, was divided into Wade, Cedar, Nashoba, Eagle, and Boktucklo Counties. Also included in the district were Towson County, named for Fort Towson, and Red River County where Idabel was later established.

To the west, the Pushmataha District encompassed Blue, Atoka, Jack's Fork, and Kiamitia Counties. The railroad Town of Hugo, established in 1901, was located in the last named county of the Pushmataha District.

In the mountainous Moshulatubbee District to the north were located Sugar Loaf, Gaines, Skullyville, Tobucksy, and Sans Bois Counties. In this region, the more traditional members of the Choctaws lived. The more "progressive" mixed-blood faction occupied the fertile cotton-growing bottomland of the Red River Valley.

Changes were occasionally made in the boundaries, and in 1886 a new county was even created. From land taken from Kiamitia, Blue, and Atoka Counties, Jackson County came into being.

Each county in the Choctaw Nation had an elected judge, who was assisted by an appointed clerk and treasurer. A county sheriff executed judicial decrees, collected taxes, and served as census taker. A county ranger

attended to the advertising and sale of stray livestock.

As with our present system of government, the national government held the supreme power in the Choctaw Nation. The Choctaw county officials answered to higher officials in matters of national interest, and even their court cases could be appealed to a supreme court.

The Choctaw county system of government and the counties themselves ended when Oklahoma became a state in 1907. However, the names of two Choctaw political subdivisions survived the renaming to take their place alongside the state's 77 other counties: Atoka County, Choctaw Nation became Atoka County, Oklahoma, and the former Pushmataha District became Pushmataha County.

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