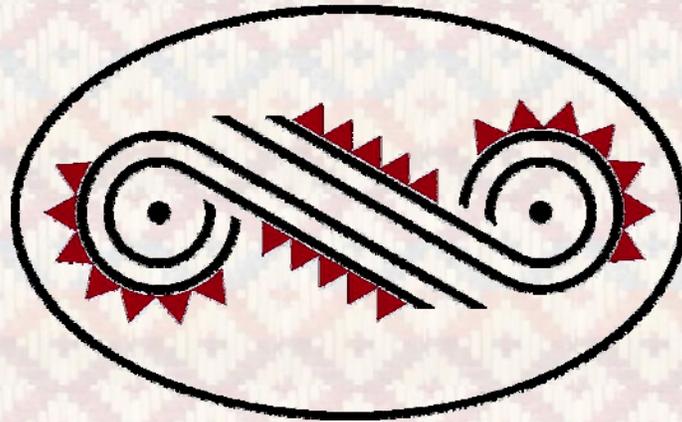




DEPARTMENT OF CHAHTA IMMI

“Lifeways of the Choctaw People”

A Profile of DCI



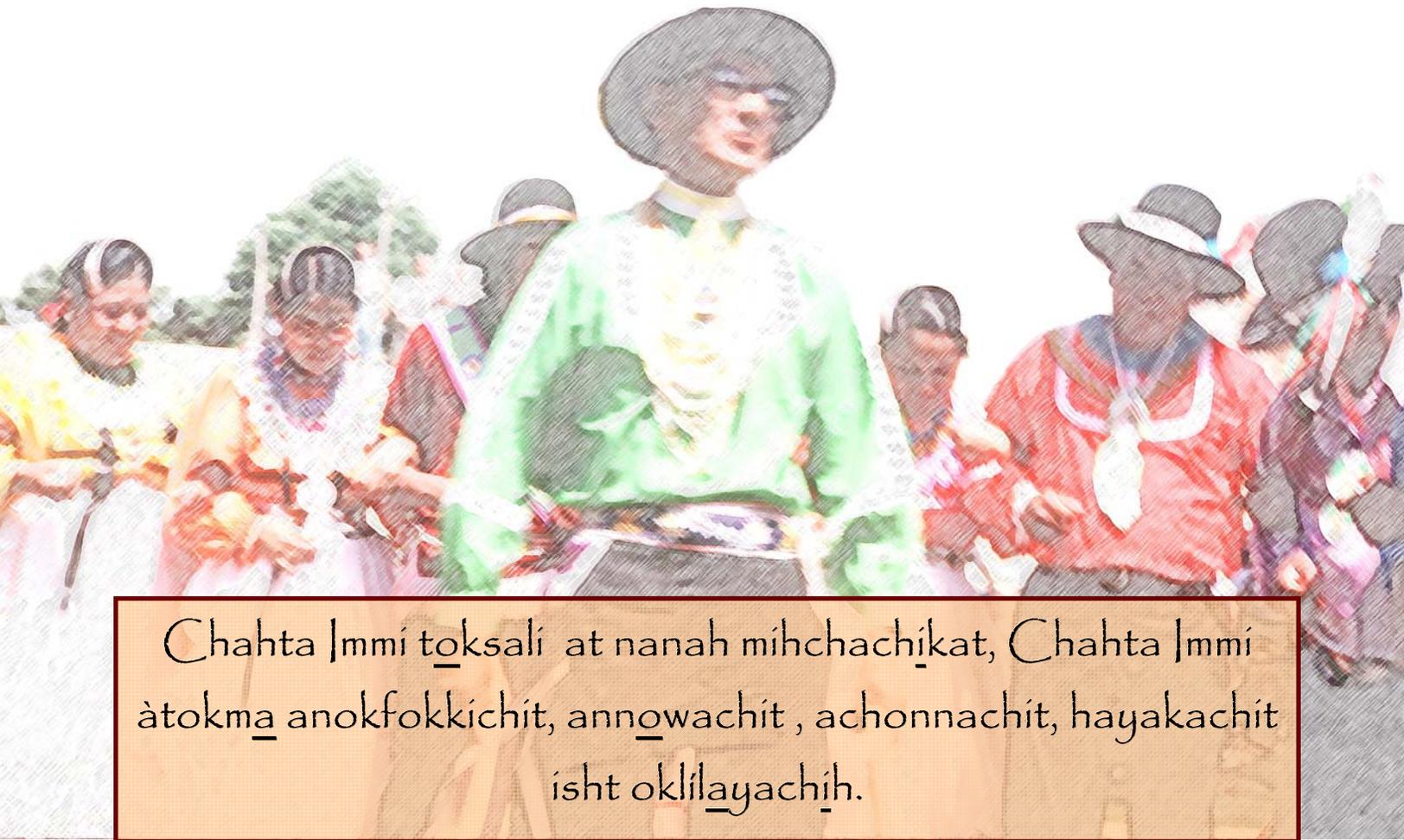
Choctaw Expressions : An Overview of Tribal Traditions



Halítóh!

The Department of Chahta Immi (DCI) Profile provides information of DCI Programs and their services: Tribal Language Program, Tribal Archives, Choctaw Museum, Special Projects/Media Program, the Cultural Affairs Program, and the Chahta Immi Cultural Center.

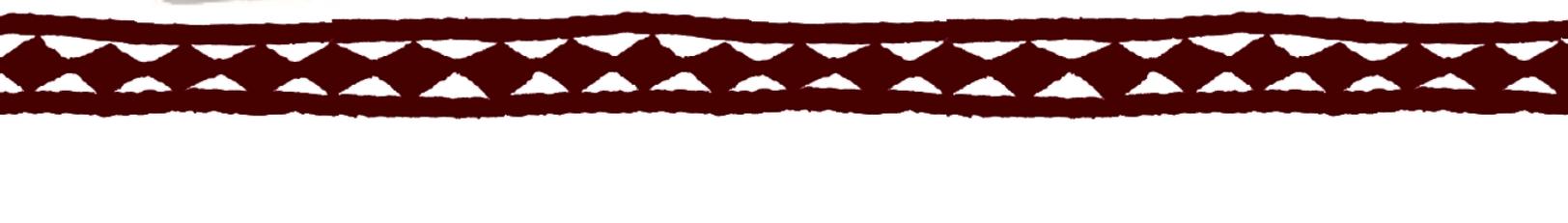
Choctaw Expressions: Showcases the living traditions of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians by providing an overview and a glimpse into the rich heritage of the Choctaws.

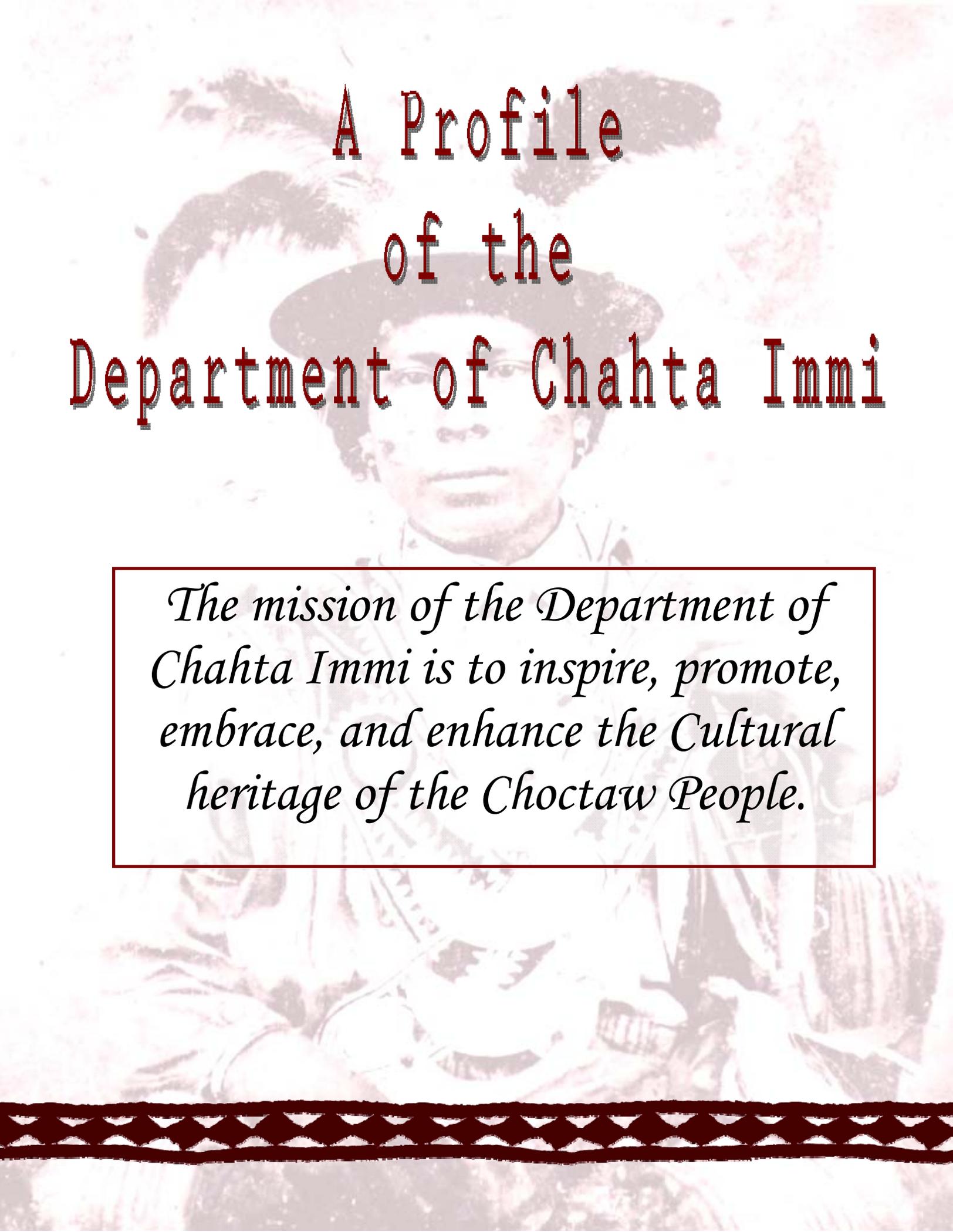


Chahta Immi toksali at nanah mihchachikat, Chahta Immi àtokma anokfokkichit, annowachit , achonnachit, hayakachit isht oklilayachih.

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A Profile of the Department of Chahta Immi

The mission of the Department of Chahta Immi is to inspire, promote, embrace, and enhance the Cultural heritage of the Choctaw People.



DEPARTMENT OF CHAHTA IMMI

"Lifeways of the Choctaw People"

TRIBAL LANGUAGE PROGRAM

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CULTURAL AFFAIRS PROGRAM

Phone: 601-650-7506
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CHAHTA IMMI CULTURAL CENTER

Phone: 601-650-7369





TRIBAL LANGUAGE PROGRAM

The Tribal Language Program's mission is to halt the rapid decline of the Choctaw language among our children by working with the Tribal Education System through trainings, language assisted classrooms, and mentoring programs; and also, Tribal members, parents and children through Immersion camps, Community literacy classes, translation services, and the development of the Mississippi Choctaw Dictionary.

Services Provided:

- Community – Choctaw Literacy Class at various communities focusing on reading and writing the Choctaw language.
- Translation of materials into the Choctaw Language.
- Awareness activities through various media outlet: Choctaw Community News, Choctaw Video Productions, and other organizations.
- Language Services to the Division of Early Childhood Education: Choctaw Language Development and training Early Childhood teachers on immersion techniques, methods and strategies.
- Staff Language Training: Speakers and Non-Speakers
- Translation of Documents, forms, and other materials for Tribal Government and non-Tribal governmental entities.
- Summer Choctaw Language Immersion Camps are held at two selected communities.



TRIBAL ARCHIVES

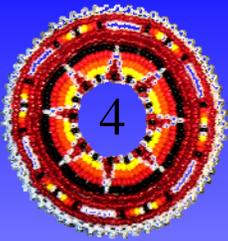


The MBCI Tribal Archives is dedicated to collect, preserve, and make accessible for research and educational purposes the permanent records and its culture materials regarding the historical and cultural identity of the Mississippi Choctaw.



Services Provided:

- Guides in Research (Academic, Literature, Legal, Genealogy)
- Donation and Gift Programs.
- Records Management Assistance and Training.
- Provide Archiving storage and retrieval assistance to MBCI Tribal Administration and other Tribal Programs.
- Serve as a hub for research related to the MS Choctaw Tribe with universities, museums, cultural and other research organizations.
- Collaborate with Tribal, state, regional and Federal agencies to address issues related to the care and preservation of holdings in small collections and protection of identified Choctaw artifacts.
- By request, provide a cultural overview spokesperson to Tribal and non-Tribal entities.



CHOCTAW MUSEUM

The Choctaw Museum was established in 1981 to share the Choctaw culture for visitors to better understand and appreciate every aspect of the Mississippi Choctaw's way of life and to give insight into Tribal Government.

Services Provided:

- Information Center into the History and Government of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians.
- Provide tours for groups through the Museum Gallery.
- Craft demonstrations by Choctaw Artisans and Craftsmen.
- Showcases Choctaw Culture, History, Government, and Traditional Artforms through exhibitory.
- Research and Development for permanent, temporary, and traveling exhibits.
- Work with Choctaw Artisans to develop artwork for original designs for souvenir items for retail.
- Retail outlet for Choctaw Artisans and Craftsmen.
- Pay-roll deduction and no interest applied for Tribal Employees.
- Outreach Programs for cultural education through exhibits in local, regional, and national venues.
- Partnership with other organizations around the state of Mississippi for awareness programs on Chahta Immi – Lifeways of the Choctaw People.
- Choctaw Décor for Tribal Events, special functions, and promotions.
- A venue for Tribal and non-Tribal filmmakers and photographers for documentaries, photos, graphics, and other media formats.



SPECIAL PROJECTS/ MEDIA

The Department of Chahta Immi's Special Projects/ Media program provides support and services to the DCI entities, Tribal Programs, Tribal Members, and MBCI Partners with educational and promotional materials utilized in interpreting the life ways of the Mississippi Choctaw.

Services Provided:

- Multi-media information center into the traditions, history and culture of the Tribe.
- Development and distribution of cultural multi-media for educational and promotional purposes.
- Provide technical support and service to the DCI programs through training and assistance.
- Promote the services and activities of DCI through various media outlets.
- Inspire, promote, embrace and enhance the Choctaw heritage through presentations and performances.
- Provide graphics, audio, and video for cultural media development/
- Serve as a liaison with the MBCI Information Technology Department and the Office of Public Information for cultural education programming.





CULTURAL AFFAIRS PROGRAM

The Cultural Affairs Program (CAP) was established in 1995 to promote and preserve the cultural traditions of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. The program's mission is to strengthen cultural knowledge among the Choctaw people and to increase public awareness of the tribe's history and culture.

Workshops

The Cultural Affairs Program holds community workshops on a regular basis. Workshops topics are determined by community interest.

Research

Identifying and documenting endangered traditions is another part of the community-based work of the Cultural Affairs Program. Staff members conduct research and interview Tribal elders to obtain first-hand knowledge of Choctaw history and culture.

Public Education

Public presentations about Choctaw culture are another service provided by the Cultural Affairs Program. In addition to coordinating the dance ground and the Choctaw Ways Path, staff provides cultural presentations and demonstrations to schools, civic organizations and other groups around the state and region who come to the reservation.

Services Provided:

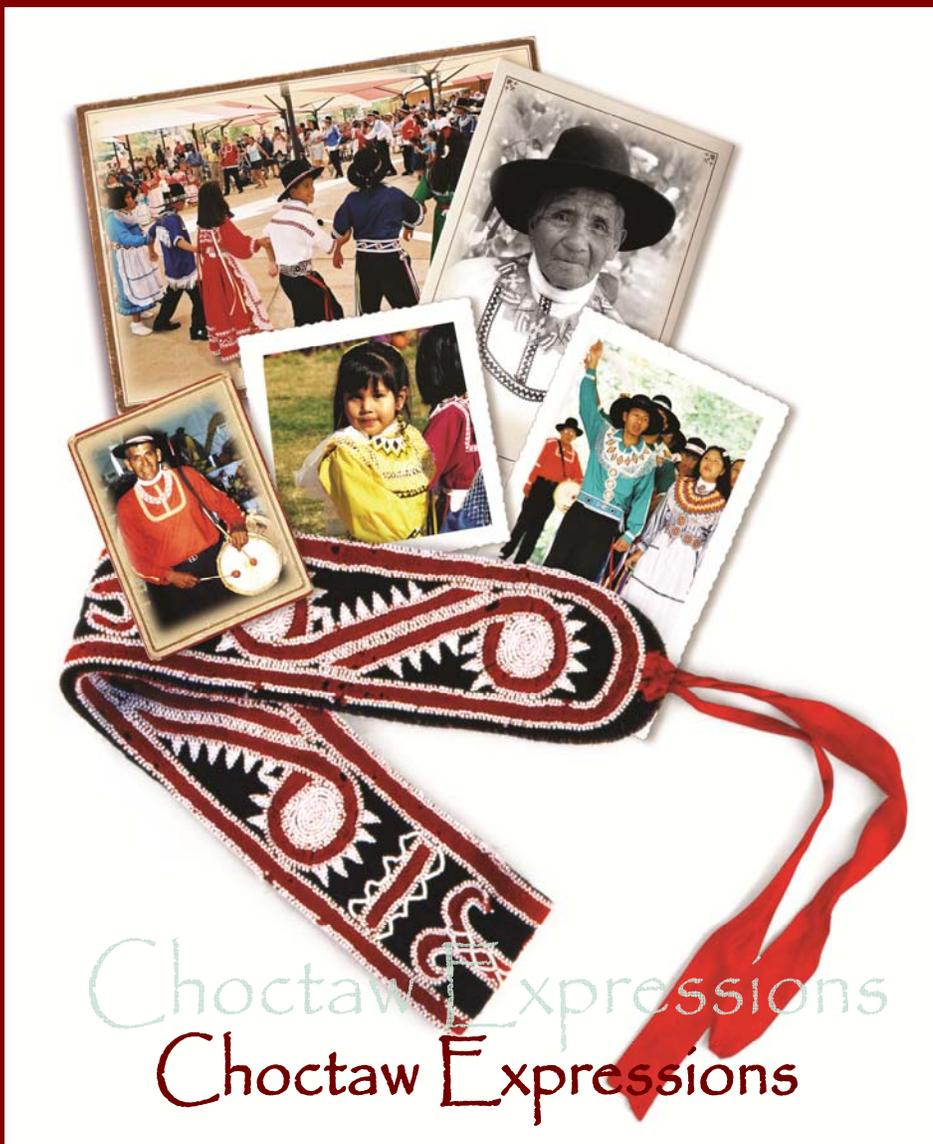
- Provide bi-monthly cultural workshops.
- Provide Choctaw Cultural Arts classes for parents/ community.
- Staff Training on Traditional Choctaw Artforms
- Provide cultural demonstrations for MBCI, Dept. of Ed., and general public.
- Conduct cultural education programs at different venues.
- Assist with Choctaw Expressions: An event for cultural education and retail for Tribal Artisans and Craftsmen.
- Chahta Immi I Hinóshi (Choctaw Ways Path)
 - Demonstration and interactive activities area for children
- Research, Educate and Promote “Chahta Immi
 - Lifeways of the Choctaw People” for Tribal Members

Chahta Immi Cultural Center



ENGAGE. INFORM. INSPIRE.

The CICC has been developed to showcase and provide cultural education through exhibitory on Choctaw Artforms. The Center includes the Archives Collection and the Institute of Chahta Immi.



Services Provided:

- Information Center into the History and Culture of the Tribe.
- Showcase the traditional artforms of the Mississippi Choctaws.
- A place-based learning for Choctaw Artforms through exhibits, classes, and special events.
- Promote Choctaw Language throughout the center.
- A multi-media experience on Choctaw Artforms.
- Showcase Choctaw Pottery and the revitalization of this artform.
- Place-based learning:
 - Mom's Morning Out – Monthly, Saturday 9 am – 12 pm.
 - Summer Outdoor Events by the Pond
 - Storytelling by Tribal Elders
 - Regularly scheduled Events of Choctaw Artisans and Craftsmen
 - Cultural Educational Programming.
- Institute of Chahta Immi provides retail on Choctaw Experiences, Information on Mississippi Choctaws and a training area for learning Choctaw Language and Culture.

Choctaw culture is a vital aspect of community life. The entire community turns out for school spring festivals to watch their children dance and to enjoy a traditional meal of hominy, fry bread and fried chicken. The skills of Choctaw dressmakers are evident each year at the Choctaw Indian Fair, where community dance groups perform for friends and visitors.

Traditional dress is an important element of the Choctaw Indian Princess Pageant.

Social dance, stickball, basket making, traditional clothing, foodways and other cultural traditions are places where the generations intersect, passing on wisdom along with recipes, advice about life as well as dance steps, and Choctaw words along with basket patterns, each generation teaching the next what it means to be Choctaw.

A Choctaw Expressions event provides communities to showcase their versions of traditional art forms.



Choctaw Expressions



Tradition is a living thing, weaving its way through the lives of a people like a pattern in a basket or the steps of a dance. When it freezes, it dies. There may be changes in the type of appliqué or number of ruffles on a Choctaw dress. Hominy may be cooked in a crock pot instead of outdoors. Commercial dyes may take the place of dyes from nature, providing a wider range of colors for basket makers. Beadwork designs from other tribes may become a part of traditional Choctaw dress. Still, Choctaw traditions belong to the Choctaw people, with each generation forming a link between those who have gone before them and those who are yet to come. Every Choctaw who moves through the steps of a social dance, cuts, dyes, and weaves cane into a basket, or tosses a handmade stickball down the field, is taking up a legacy from his or her ancestors and leaving a legacy for the Choctaws of the future.





For centuries, Choctaw basket makers have created works of art from the swamp cane that flourishes along Mississippi creek banks.

When a present-day basket maker seeks out, cuts and prepares her cane, she uses the same methods as generations of Choctaw women before her. Baskets were used in the field and in the home. Even today, some of the basket styles reflect their original functions.

Egg baskets, hamper baskets, and vegetable baskets once held farm produce. Now they hold a place in treasured collections.

Basket making begins with gathering the cane. This is not an easy task, since cane grows in wet, swampy areas and is increasingly difficult to find. Fall is the best time to harvest cane, but it may be cut at other times of the year if the need arises.

The ideal size is a matter of individual preference; most basket makers like to work with cane that has matured to a height of at least six feet.

Once the cane is cut, the weaver uses a small, sharp knife to slice the thin top layer into strips.



A skilled maker can get from four to six strips from a single piece of cane, but this is a matter of individual preference.

The next step is to dye the cane strips. Originally, basket makers used natural materials such as berries, flowers, roots, or bark to color the cane. Commercial dyes are used almost exclusively today because of their durability and the wide range of colors available. Basket makers create a variety of patterns by weaving together the colored and natural strips of cane. While traditional forms such as the egg basket and traditional patterns like the diamond design are common, many basket makers like to experiment with color, pattern and shape.



Choctaw Baskets



Choctaws have kept with the times, but still hold strong to their traditions. Basket makers express themselves the same way other artists do. There are certain rules to follow when creating a work of art, such as the technique, but ultimately, the final product reflects the imagination and aesthetics of the creator.



THE NATURAL PROCESS OF COLORING BASKETS

-  **YELLOW** - Choctaws gathered puccoon plant root in the fall and boiled it. The resulting liquid was strained and stored for later use.
-  **RED** - This color could be obtained from puccoon, as well. Sometimes, Choctaws made red from the top of fruit, or sumac.
-  **PURPLE** - Choctaws found purple dye from alder (*alnus serrulata*) bark or maple. Alder also produced lavender, red, and a drab or gray color when harvested at different times.
-  **BROWN** - Almost any part of the walnut tree would yield a brown dye, but bark and husk of the nut were mostly used.
-  **BLACK** - This color was made from the ashes of Post Oak or Blackjack Oak and boiled with copper.

— *Basketry of Southeastern Indians*
 Marshall Gettys, Editor
 Museum of the Red River 1984





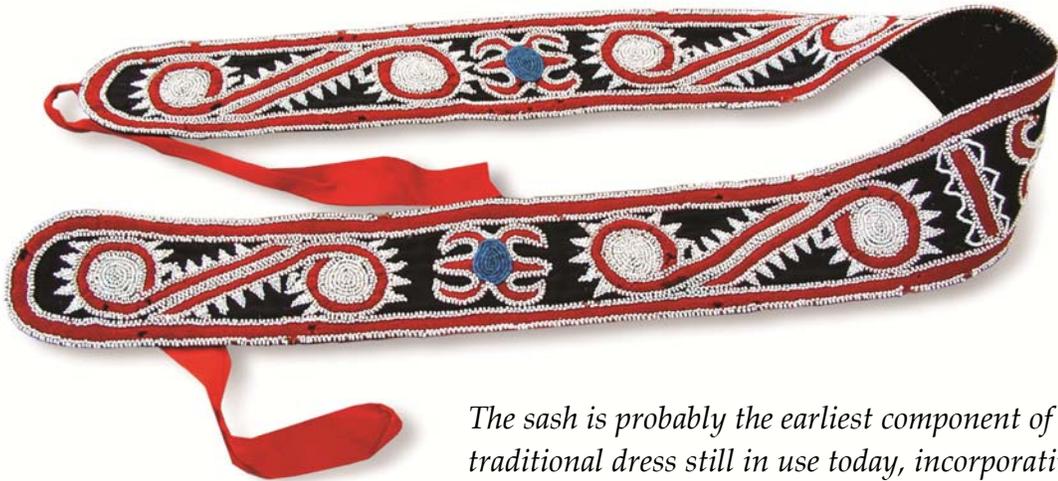
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Choctaw Beadwork

Collar necklaces are worn with traditional clothing by both women and men. This style of the necklace may be fairly simple, like the one pictured at right, or may be larger and more elaborate, incorporating designs such as human figures in Choctaw clothing or colorful sunburst patterns.



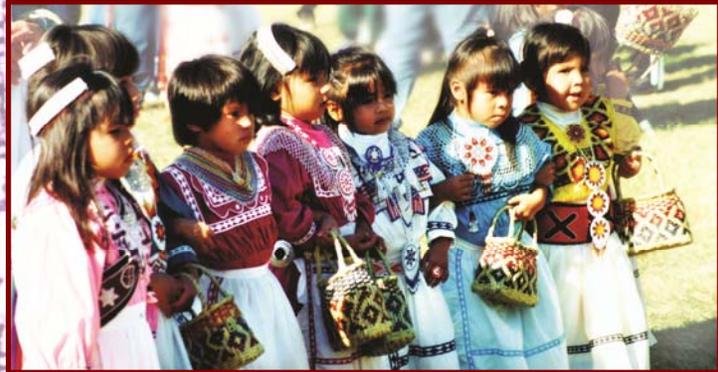
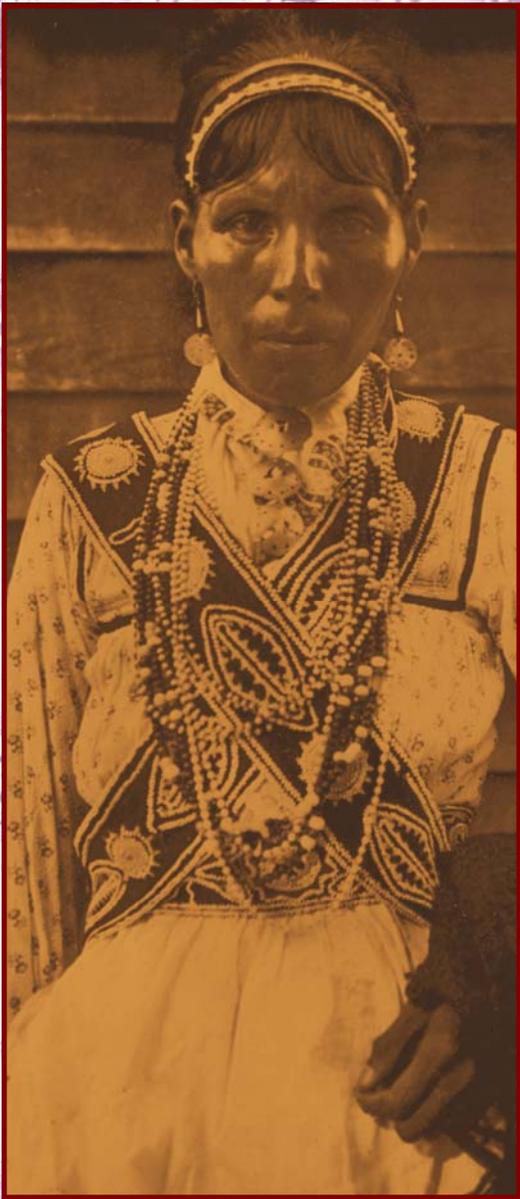
The round comb pictured at left resembles one photographed around 1930 in Philadelphia by Smithsonian researcher Frances Densmore. This comb was probably made between 1950 and 1960.



The sash is probably the earliest component of traditional dress still in use today, incorporating symbols that may also be seen on Eastern Woodland, Mississippian and Early Historic period pottery.



Shikalla



Men and women alike often wear decorative beadwork with traditional clothing.

A beadwork set for women often consists of a belt, medallion, collar necklaces, earrings, ribbon lapel pins, and a handkerchief lapel pin.

Designs and colors are the artist's preference. Many women also wear round combs with their Choctaw dresses. Old drawings and photographs suggest that originally these combs were made from silver or other metal. Photographs from the turn of the 20th century show Choctaw men wearing shirts and ties along with strings of multi-colored beads, but this style gave way to the collar necklaces, hatbands and beaded belts worn by contemporary Choctaw men. Both men and women wear sashes, known as the most traditional accessory, featuring both beadwork and appliqué.





Stickball has been a part of Choctaw life for hundreds of years.

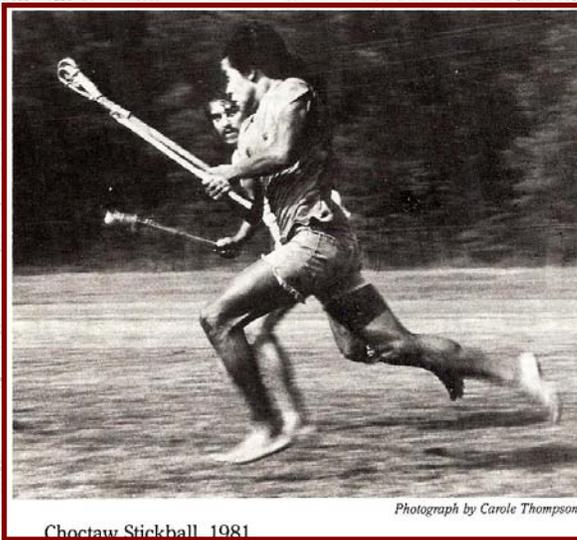
Opposing teams use handcrafted sticks or kabochcha, and a woven leather ball, or towa. Each team tries to advance the ball down the field to the other team's goalpost using only their sticks, never touching or throwing the ball with their hands. Points are scored when a player hits the opposing team's goalpost with the ball.

The earliest historical reference to Choctaw stickball was a Jesuit priest's account of a stickball game around 1729. During that period, the Choctaws lived in towns and villages scattered across the area that is now southern Mississippi. When disputes arose between these communities, stickball provided a peaceful way to settle the issue. These games were hard-fought contests that could involve as few as twenty or as many as 300 players.

Mississippi Choctaws continue to play stickball. When the first Choctaw Fair was held in 1949, stickball was an important event, but only a handful of teams took part. Today, anywhere from 8 - 10 teams meet during the fair in a single elimination tournament. The championship game closes out the fair, with the fans filling the football stadium to cheer their teams on.



Kabochcha



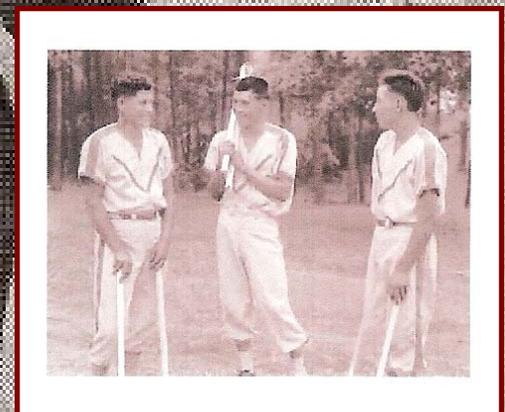
Choctaw Stickball 1981

Photograph by Carole Thompson



Modern stickball has few more rules than its historical predecessor. The rules are printed and distributed to all players before the fair begins. The game is played in four fifteen-minute quarters. Players still score points by hitting a post set up in the middle of the football goal post. They still advance the ball without touching it, using only their kabochcha.

The appearance of the players is different, too. For most of the 20th century, players wore hand-made uniforms consisting of pants hemmed just below the knee and open-necked, pullover shirts. These were made in the community colors and decorated with the diamond patterns found on traditional clothing. In the late 1970's, those uniforms gave way to gym shorts and team t-shirts, but many players now wear head-





Traditional Cooking



Food is a central part of many kinds of Choctaw gatherings. Families and friends come together around the table to celebrate birthdays, weddings, and reunions.

Food prepared by family, neighbors and friends is shared at wakes along with memories of loved ones who have passed on. Church meetings and school spring festivals include community meals. Tables are laden with homegrown vegetables, fried chicken and boiled pork, biscuits, sweet tea and homemade desserts.

Hoponih



For generations, Mississippi Choctaws grew vegetables, raised livestock, hunted and fished to put food on the table. This was not uncommon in the rural South, but two dishes in particular, hominy and banaha, became staples of the Choctaw diet and are still traditional favorites.

Hominy is made from corn that is dried in the husk. The traditional cooking process takes several hours, with the hominy simmering in a large iron pot over an open fire.

Before most Choctaw homes had electricity, food was prepared indoors on a wood burning stove or outside over an open fire. Whenever possible, people would often cook outdoors to avoid heating up the house and to minimize the danger of fire.

Today, Choctaws still prepare hominy outside when cooking for large groups, not only because it is traditional, but because it is still the best way to ensure a proper cooking time.

Banaha is another traditional dish that Choctaws enjoy. Like hominy, it contains ingredients that are affordable and could be grown at home during the hard times when store-bought, prepared foods were out of reach for most Choctaw families.

The combination of peas and cornmeal produces a complete protein, so banaha provided a high energy meal for hungry farm laborers.



The colorful dresses worn by today's Choctaw women are made by hand and probably adapted from a 19th century dress design. No pattern exists for the dresses, which consist of the bodice with a fitted waist and a long, full skirt trimmed with ruffles and hand sewn appliqué. The dressmaker simply takes a series of measurements from the person who will wear the dress and cuts out the shapes that will make up each part of the dress. A white apron, trimmed in the color of the dress, completes the woman's traditional outfit. Men's shirts, designed with either a round neckline or an open collar and appliqué work on the front and sleeves, are made in much the same way.

Choctaw dresses are usually trimmed with one of three motifs: full diamond, half diamond, or a series of circles and crosses that may represent stickball and stickball sticks, but may have their origins in earlier designs. The diamond design, which is often seen on Choctaw baskets as well, is said to represent the eastern diamondback rattlesnake.



Chakta Ilokka



A few elders still prefer Choctaw dresses for everyday wear. These dresses are made from print fabric and are shorter than the dresses worn for dancing. Instead of time-consuming hand appliqué, these dresses are usually trimmed with commercial trim. The apron may be worn with these dresses as well.

Most Choctaws today wear Choctaw dresses and shirts mainly for special occasions. They are made from cotton fabric, in solid colors with a contrasting trim. Occasionally, women choose silk or velvet fabric for traditional dresses, usually for events such as the Choctaw Indian Princess Pageant.



Choctaw Pottery

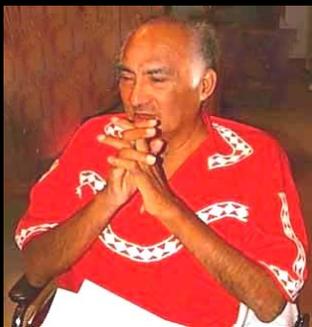


Choctaw pottery survived into the 20th century with only a few practitioners. Grady John, who learned the craft from his late cousin L.D. John, created duck, crawfish, and opossum effigy pots as well as bowls and jars using all the traditional ways. Both, Mr. John and his uncle worked at the Chucalissa archeological museum in Memphis, TN for many years. Sadly, Grady passed away in 2002. One of his students in the late 70's was Mrs. Laura Solomon - a Choctaw woman also living in Memphis. Along with Grady's surviving wife, Laura is also one of the very few active Choctaw potters.

Laura Solomon was born in Conehatta, Mississippi on Sept. 16, 1943. About 25 years ago (around 1977) she started learning the methods of traditional pottery from a Choctaw gentleman, Grady John. Through the years she remained active; but over the last couple years, her output of pottery has increased significantly. Her main outlet for her pieces is the Chucalissa Archeological Museum in Memphis, TN.

Her clay comes from the banks of the Mississippi and utilizes a different type of clay also along the Mississippi to provide the temper. The clay is cleaned and prepared. After hand coiling the pieces and finishing by traditional methods, Laura digs her own pit in her backyard to fire the pots.

Ampatoba



An article reprinted on the late Grady John

CHOCTAW MUSEUM SHOPPE

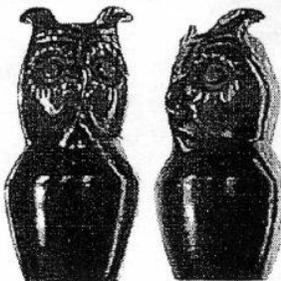


**POTTERY
BY
GRADY
JOHN**

Grady John describes himself as "one of the few old-time Choctaw potters". Known in his native Choctaw as a *Chahta shoti ikbi*, a Choctaw pot maker, he is acknowledged as a skilled Native American artist.

The quiet and soft-spoken master craftsman has been a student of the ancient pottery tradition for over 20 of his 50 years. Much of his knowledge stems from a close friendship with his cousin L.D. John, a noted Choctaw potter who died in 1974.

"When I came to the Chucalissa Indian Museum in 1962," Grady said, "I watched L.D. who was working at Chucalissa then and learned to make pots from him. I used to walk with him and we would sit down and talk about the old people and how they might have made their pots. I got a lot of ideas from



Horned Owl Effigy by Grady John and A.D. 1500.

L.D.; He was a good teacher."

L.D. John became interested in the pottery traditions of his people around 1945 when his grandparents told him that the Choctaws of long ago made pots. When he began to work at the Chucalissa Indian Museum in Memphis, Tennessee in 1962 he continued his earlier interest in pottery and was helped by anthropologist Charles H. Nash, the museum director. L.D. was the first Choctaw potter to revive the old ceramic traditions since they ended in the late 19th century. Since that time Grady has followed in L.D.'s footsteps.

Grady notes that, "L.D. used to tell me that I should not copy his designs, but that I should make pots in my own way. Now I work with the design the old people used here at Chucalissa or I tryout some of my own ideas."

L.D. and Grady's interest in reviving the craft of coiled, or pinch-pot, making resulted in a series of experiments with various clays and firing techniques.

"When I went back to Mississippi in 1965", Grady said, "I tried different clays and found those that worked best. In the beginning I experimented by making small pots. Then, I tried to figure out how the old people made pots. One thing that L.D. and I learned is that you have to cook the pots real slow. When the pots got hot we would take them from the fire and dip them in hot grease. They would burst into flames and become coated with carbon. This produces the shiny black color and seals the pores of the pot."

"When I returned to Chucalissa in 1974, I kept making pots. Now I make duck, crawfish, and opossum pots, and bowls and jars."

Grady has a strong sense of the continuity between himself and the prehistoric Mississippian period Indians who lived at Chucalissa between A.D. 1000

CHOCTAW MUSEUM SHOPPE

"I have a feeling that the old people who made the pots at Chucalissa represent my ancestors," Grady said. "I know that these people lived close to the river and got their clay from some of the same places where I now get my clay. Sometimes I can sense the old people, and I am a part of their traditions. I often wonder how they learned to make pottery and how it was passed down through their descendants to the younger generations. I want to continue this tradition and hand it down to the young people today."

"It hurts that so much of our tradition is gone. I want to teach the young people how to make pots so that they will keep up the traditions and realize how important it is to be Choctaw. I believe that our traditions will never fade away now, because the children are beginning to be proud to be Indian."

"When I was young I didn't think too much about being Choctaw but as I grew older I saw how important it was to be proud of my heritage."

"My grandfather used to sit down and tell us that the tradition ought not be lost, that I should

learn from him about our past. After I began to show an interest in making pots, Grandpa later said *your days I may not live to see, but people will come by and and buy your pots. This will be our history, and it will come back.*"

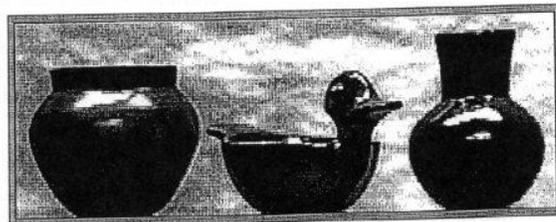


Water Bottle

Younger Choctaws have been slow to learn the older generations' crafts, but they are beginning to show an interest, because of better marketing and the greater prices that can be demanded for Native American crafts.

Several of the younger Choctaws are beginning to approach Grady seeking positions as apprentices; A former student, Harold Isaac, is a part-time potter living near the reservation in Mississippi.

Grady believes that there is still time to rekindle the old fires. "I want to make pottery because if we are to survive as Choctaws, we must keep some of the old ways alive, while learning to adjust to new ways. I want to teach my people how these things were done because I love to make pots and I want to keep our traditions alive." Schools teach new ways; Only the elders can teach the traditional ways.



In this panel of pots by Grady: 1) Shoulder bowl; 2) Wood duck effigy; and, 3) a water bottle. For size comparison, the water bottle is 5 1/2 inches tall. The horned owl effigy on the facing page is 9 1/4 inches tall. Our stock of Grady's work is quite variable and you may wish to call before you order to learn of the current pieces available. We accept MasterCard and Visa orders by phone or mail.

Grady John is a frequent guest artisan at the Museum during the Annual 4-day Choctaw Fair



Traditional Music

Choctaw Cane Flute

Aero-phones had become uncommon in the Southeast by the twentieth century, but cane and bone flutes appeared in eighteenth century sources (Swanton 1946:628). A few scholars in the 1900s described flutes, flageolets, and whistles used by the Southeast Indians as solo instruments in ritual and social contexts.

Mississippi Choctaw Medicine Men played vertical cane flutes on the night before a Ball Game and during the game to bring success to the home team players; these flutes, about 12 inches long with a sound hole and two finger holes, were etched with symbolic designs



The Choctaw Drum

One of the oldest traditional instruments that the Choctaw still use is the drum, which today is used primarily at stickball games. The drum which is now used by the Choctaw is modeled after the military drums used by the British and American troops in the late eighteenth/ nineteenth centuries, and the design has changed very little.

The body of the drum is wood or sometimes metal. The wood used for this is usually sourwood, black gum or tupelo gum. These trees are often hollow by the time they reach a suitable size for drums.

A steady beat of the drum is heard through the hills announcing a time to assemble for the Choctaw people. Dancers may be gathering, stickball teams competing for community pride or someone may be getting married. The community knows the beat of the drum as the heart of the Choctaw people.



Chakta Talówa



Other Musical Instruments

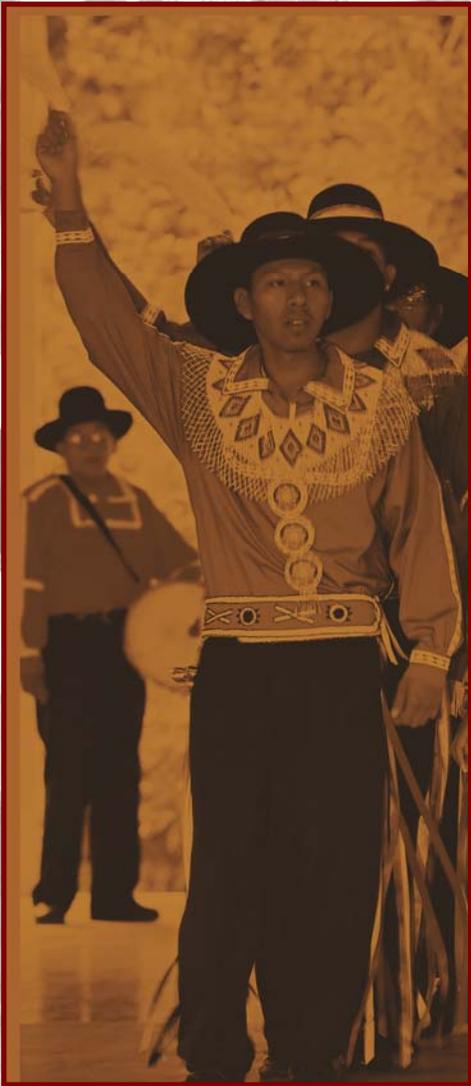
The only musical instruments used by the Mississippi Choctaw to accompany their songs is a pair of striking sticks. The sticks are not round, but slightly flattened on two sides, affording suitable surfaces for striking together. Dance chanters use them to keep time as they sing. In 1933, ethnomusicologist Frances Densmore visited Philadelphia to record the songs of Choctaw chanters. She noted that striking sticks were used by most of the men who sang for her.

The violin, or fiddle, has also found its way into Choctaw musical traditions. Like many rural southerners, Choctaws turned to the fiddle for entertainment in their isolated homes and communities. Fiddlers playing for house dances are usually accompanied by guitar players who provide a percussive rhythm. Years ago, when no guitarist was available, the rhythm was supplied by someone "beating straws."





Traditional Dancing



Choctaw dances are intended for participation and not performance. For many years, Choctaws danced for entertainment after community ball games and other gatherings. Community groups still gather sometimes just for the fun of dancing. Competition has never had a place in Choctaw dance.

Traditional dance also fosters a pride in being Choctaw. Contemporary social dance groups represent most of the Choctaw communities and their styles of dancing will often reflect their community of origin.

At the Choctaw Fair, visitors have an excellent opportunity to compare these community variations as they watch the dancers. Sometimes the difference may be in a dance step, other times, in the chant. Only rarely are actual Choctaw words heard in the chants. The dancers are led by the rise and fall of the chanter's voice; the chants are most often made up of syllables sung to carry a melody. The chanter usually keeps time by striking together a pair of sticks, called striking sticks.



Choakta Silha



Choctaw dances also exemplify a spirit of cooperation, because of the way the chanters, dance leaders and dancers work together. There are three kinds of Choctaw dance: war dances, social dances, and animal dances that recognize creatures that were important to the Choctaw people.

War dances were used by early Choctaws to prepare for battle. Choctaw war dances are unusual in that the women join the men in dancing. In most other tribes, only men take part in the war dance. Social dances mark important aspects of life such as friendship, courtship and marriage. They include stealing partners, the friendship dance, and the wedding dance, among others. Animal dances often mimic the behavior of their namesakes, with dancers darting in and out of the dance circle like playful raccoons in the raccoon dance or forming a line that coils and uncoils in the snake dance.

The House Dance is evidence of the Choctaws' ability to adapt elements of other cultures to their own. Dancers use steps and movements from Anglo-American square dance and the French quadrille and the fiddle accompaniment is adapted from Anglo-American tunes. The caller starts the dance and signals the dancers when it is time to move to the next step.

Experience “Chahta Immi Iḥinóshi” – A path into the Lifeways of the Choctaw...

Take a journey through the Chahta Immi Iḥinóshi and experience the language, the look, and the lessons of the Choctaw people set in the early history of the Choctaw. Chahta Immi Iḥinóshi is a hands-on cultural exhibit area for children to experience the traditions of the Choctaw people. Demonstrations of tribal culture are displayed by Choctaw artisans and story tellers for visitors. In addition to the activities, the look and feel of Chahta Immi Iḥinóshi will also give travelers of this unique path a step back into the Choctaw Past.

Cultural Demonstrations for Groups: pony bead beading, miniature drum making, Shokka Annopa- story telling, pottery making, and rabbit stick throw, medallion making, headband making, & coloring station.

Location: behind the Dance Ground Pavilion



Chahta Immi Iḥinóshi - Choctaw Ways Path



Nanah Waiya

Heart of the Choctaw People

Nanah Waiya: Chahta Alheha Itchokash



Several small burial mounds, now nearly leveled by plowing, are located several hundred yards away to the north/north east. A long, raised embankment and moat once enclosed the site. Most of this earthen enclosure has been destroyed by cultivation; however, a short segment remains along the edge of a swamp to the northwest of the large mound.

It is believed that Nanah Waiya Mound itself has received only minimal damage as compared to the rest of the site. Unfortunately part of the mound's ramp has been destroyed, but its overall size stands at 25 feet high, 218 feet long, and 140 feet wide, which roughly matches the earliest recorded descriptions of the site.

Built by the prehistoric ancestors of the Choctaw, the site plays a central role in the tribe's origin stories and is considered the heart of the Choctaw People. By the eighteenth century Nanah Waiya had come to be venerated by the Choctaw as their Mother Mound.

Nanah Waiya Mound, 1940.



Nanah Waiya Mound ca. 1940 (adapted from Indian Mounds of Mississippi: A Visitor's Guide).

Location: 12 Miles east of Noxapater off MS 490 or 19 miles North of Philadelphia MS 21.



Choctaw Journey -
Chahta Alheha
Anowa, a
production about
the ancestral
mother mound,
Nanah Waiya was
performed during
the Choctaw Indian
Fair, and during the
2nd Annual Nanah
Waiya Day
Celebration.



Honoring Our Elders

We would like to thank the elders who share their skills, crafts and stories of traditional life-ways and personal experiences of growing up Choctaw in Mississippi. Many of the elders today are the last Choctaws to remember a time before tribal recognition and government programs. Many were sharecroppers, learning traditional crafts like basket weaving for a means of economics, sale and trade. Choctaw life-ways, making clothes for the family, quilting, hunting, fishing and farming stem from a heritage of living off the land and self-sufficiency. The Choctaw community survived keeping the language alive and practiced “Iyyi kowa” (neighbor helping neighbor) and kept their social structure intact with dance and games.

How will the stories of tomorrow’s elders define their community, growing up Choctaw in Mississippi?





A CULTURAL AFFAIRS TRIBUTE
TO
THE TRANSMISSION OF CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

This tribute was compiled in 2008 with the following elders involved who gave their time, pictures and permission to share their legacy.

This compilation is not a comprehensive list but a small sample of Honored Elders who have passed on and those that are keeping our traditions alive today.

Please contact or stop by the Cultural Affairs program to add on to this list to publish another edition of Honoring Our Elders in the future.



Alex, Annie Laura Ben
Pearl River, *Cooking*



Alex, Susie Comby
Pearl River, *Choctaw Crafts*



Allen, Maggie
Red Water, *Quilting*



Amos, Billy
Bogue Chitto, *Chanter*



Amos, Christine Bell
Bogue Chitto, *Traditional Cooking*



Anderson, Anita Shumake
Conehatta, *Basketry*



Anderson, Laura L.
Conehatta, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Anderson, Odie Denson
Conehatta, *Basketry*



Bell, Eva
Pearl River, *Hunting, Fishing, & Gardening*



Bell, Garland
Tucker, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Bell, Gene
Pearl River, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Bell, Joyce Ann Comby
Pearl River, *Quilting, Choctaw Folklore/Legacy & Crafts*



Bell, Mary Clemmons
Pearl River, *Traditional Wildlife Cooking*



Bell, Minnie Cotton
Bogue Chitto, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Bell, Ora
Pearl River, *Quilting & Traditional Clothing*



Ben, Arthur
Pearl River, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Ben, Margaret Billy
Pearl River, *Traditional Clothing*



Billie, Doris Isaac
Red Water, *Choctaw Crafts*



Billie, Eunice
Red Water, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Billie, Judy Mae Hickman
Pearl River, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Briscoe, Elsi York
Pearl River, *Traditional Wildlife Cooking*



Buffington, Patsy Sam
Pearl River, *First Choctaw Princess, 1955*



Chapman, Amy Anderson
Pearl River, *Choctaw Crafts*



Chapman, Dorothy Denson
Conehatta, *Basketry*



Chapman, Jimmie Lee
Conehatta, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Chickaway, Eleanor Shoemake
Conehatta, *Basketry*



Chickaway, Noleen
Conehatta, *Basketry, Traditional Clothing & Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Clemmons, Gail Willis
Pearl River, *Traditional Wildlife Cooking*



Cotton, Gloria Mingo
Crystal Ridge, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Davis, Evaline
Tucker, *Choctaw Crafts*



Davis, Lillie Amos
Bogue Chitto, *Fiddle Player*



Denson, Selma Charlie
Standing Pine, *Traditional Clothing*



Denson, Una
Standing Pine, *Choctaw Crafts*



Dixon Sr., Cecil Ray
Bogue Chitto, *Choctaw Crafts*



Dixon, Maureen Frazier
Pearl River, *Traditional Clothing, Choctaw Crafts*



Dixon, Maxine Jimmie
Pearl River, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Farmer, Franklin
Pearl River, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Farmer, Mary Francis
Bogue Chitto, *Quilting*



Farve, Corine Amos
Bogue Chitto, *Traditional Clothing & Quilting*



Farve, Laline Williams
Standing Pine, *Traditional Clothing*



Ferguson, Martha
Pearl River, *Traditional Clothing & Choctaw Crafts*



Frazier, Ann Marie
Pearl River, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Frazier, Bernice A.
Bogue Chitto, *Traditional Clothing*



Gibson, Esbie Dixon
Conehatta, *Basketry*



Gibson, Lillie Farmer
Conehatta, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Gibson, Lois Stephens
Conehatta, *Choctaw Crafts*



Gibson, Roby
Pearl River, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Gibson, William
Conehatta, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Hall, Juanita Jim
Tucker, *Choctaw Crafts*



Henry, Helen
Pearl River, *Choctaw Crafts & Quilting*



Henry, Susie
Pearl River, *Choctaw Crafts & Quilting*



Hickman, Bobby
Bogue Chitto, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Hickman, Wilcey Wallace
Crystal Ridge, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Hickman, Willie Mae
Bogue Chitto, *Choctaw Crafts*



Isaac, Judy
Pearl River, *Choctaw Crafts*



Isaac, Mandy
Tucker, *Traditional Clothing, Choctaw Crafts*



Isaac, Priscilla Johnson
Pearl River, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Isaac, Sudie Bell
Bogue Chitto, *Traditional Outdoor Cooking & Choctaw Crafts*



Isom, Jean McMillan
Tucker, *Traditional Clothing*



Jackson, Jett
Pearl River, *Choctaw Social Dancing*



Jackson, Onie Hickman
Pearl River, *Traditional Cooking*



Jefferson, Cutie Briscoe
Conehatta, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Jim, Bessie Bell
Bogue Chitto, *Wildlife & Traditional Cooking*



Jim, Odie
Bogue Chitto, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Jim, Reba Sockey
Standing Pine, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy & Quilting*



Jim, Sarah Mingo
Standing Pine, *Traditional Cooking & Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Jim, Selby
Conehatta, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Jimmie, Mack W.
Pearl River, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Joe, Austin
Bogue Chitto, *Oldest Male in Bogue Chitto*



Joe, Bobby
Bogue Chitto, *Chanter*



Joe, Maxine
Tucker, *Choctaw Crafts & Social Dancing*



John, Betty Solomon
Conehatta, *Choctaw Crafts*



John, Fannie Jefferson
Pearl River, *Choctaw Crafts*



John, Margorie Johnson
Pearl River, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Johnson, Stanly
Conehatta, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Kirk, Lisette John
Red Water, *Traditional Clothing*



Lewis, Annie Sue Charlie
Standing Pine, *Choctaw Crafts*



Lewis, Dean Eula Hickman
Bogue Chitto, *Traditional Clothing*



Lewis, John
Bogue Chitto, *Fiddle Player*



Lewis, Leland
Pearl River, *Choctaw Crafts*



Lewis, Lorena Johnson
Pearl River, *Traditional Clothing*



Lewis, Lula Mae Farmer
Standing Pine, *Social Dancing & Chanting*



Lewis, Thallis Bell
Pearl River, *Social Dancing, Choctaw Folklore/Legacy & Cultural Arts*



Lewis, Woodlin
Pearl River, *Chanter, Drummer & Drum Maker*



Martin, Bonne
Pearl River, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Martin, Evelyn Wishork
Pearl River, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Mingo, Henrietta T.
Bogue Homa, *Choctaw Crafts & Quilting*



Morris, Bessie
Bogue Chitto, *Chanter & Social Dancing*



Morris, Ina Thompson
Pearl River, *Traditional Clothing*



Morris, Lucy Frazier
Bogue Chitto, *Choctaw Crafts
& Traditional Cooking*



Morris, Prentice
Pearl River, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Nickey, Dora Thomas
Conehatta, *Traditional Clothing*



Powless, Ida Mae
Tucker/NY, *Traditional Clothing
& Choctaw Crafts*



Robinson, Emma
Bogue Chitto, *Traditional Clothing*



Sam, Lou Jane Lewis
Conehatta, *Choctaw Crafts*



Shoemake, Hubert
Conehatta, *Choctaw Crafts*



Shumake, Callie Johnson
Conehatta, *Basketry & Traditional Clothing*



Shumake, Feldon
Conehatta, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Smith, Billy G.
Conehatta, *Social Dancing*



Smith, Edna Stephens
Conehatta, *Choctaw Crafts*



Smith, Grace Farmer
Conehatta, *Social Dancing, Choctaw Crafts*



Smith, Wilbert
Conehatta, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Solomon, Catherine
Conehatta, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Solomon, Jeffie Denson
Conehatta, *Basketry*



Solomon, Percy
Conehatta, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Stephens, Lee Mack
Conehatta, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Steve, Betty Thompson
Pearl River, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Steve, John Winston
Pearl River, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Steve, Nellie
Pearl River, *Choctaw Crafts, Chanting & Social Dancing*



Steve, Rosalie Wilson
Tucker, *Choctaw Crafts, Storyteller*



Stoliby, Suzann Thompson
Bogue Chitto, *Choctaw Crafts*



Thomas, Pearlie Shumake
Bogue Homa, *Traditional Clothing & Basketry*



Thomas, Vernita
Bogue Homa, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Tubby, Bertha Willis
Pearl River, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Tubby, Esterline Jimmie
Pearl River, *Choctaw Judge, Quilting*



Tubby, Eugene
Red Water, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy & Ministry*



Tubby, Grace McMillan
Tucker, *Quilting*



Tubby, Mary Rose Alex
Red Water, *Traditional Clothing & Quilting*



Vaughn, Janell
Bogue Chitto, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Vaughn, Jimmie
Bogue Chitto, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Wallace, Leslie Polk
Red Water, *Traditional Clothing*



Wallace, Lolaine Amos
Crystal Ridge, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Wallace, R.B.
Crystal Ridge, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Wesley, Cecilia
Crystal Ridge, *Traditional Clothing, Quilting & Choctaw Crafts*



Williams, Henry L.
Conehatta, *Choctaw Crafts*



Williams, Ruth S.
Standing Pine, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Willis, Annie Cotton
Bogue Chitto, *Quilting*



Willis, Ary
Bogue Chitto, *Basketry & Traditional Clothing*



Willis, Delphia Isaac
Pearl River, *Traditional Cooking*



Willis, Fannie Jean Gibson
Red Water, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy & Traditional Cooking*



Willis, Kirby
Red Water, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Willis, Mary Ann Bell
Bogue Chitto, *Traditional Clothing & Choctaw Crafts*



Willis, Nephus
Pearl River, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy*



Willis, R.J.
Pearl River, *Fiddle and Drum Player*



Willis, Virginia Anderson
Red Water, *Traditional Clothing*



Willis, Willie B. Thomas
Pearl River, *Traditional Clothing*

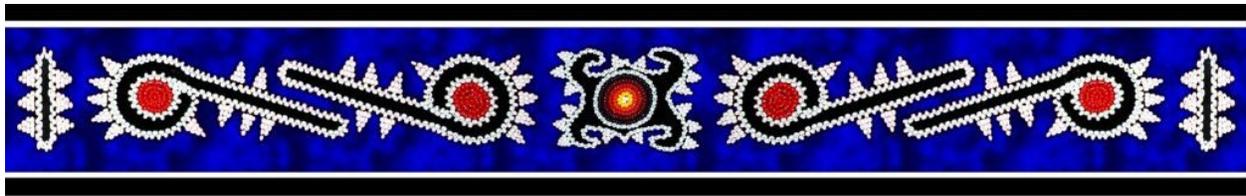


Willis, Winnie Sue
Bogue Chitto, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy & Social Dancing*



Wilson, Mary John
Red Water, *Choctaw Folklore/Legacy & Traditional Cooking*

Thanks to all tribal members not
pictured
who contribute to the preservation
and
Education of Choctaw culture.
"Yakoki"



DEPARTMENT OF CHAHTA IMMI

“Lifeways of the Choctaw People”

Tribal Archives

Choctaw Museum

Cultural Affairs

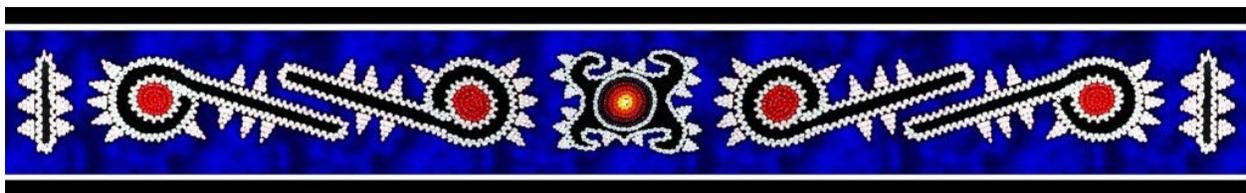
Tribal Language

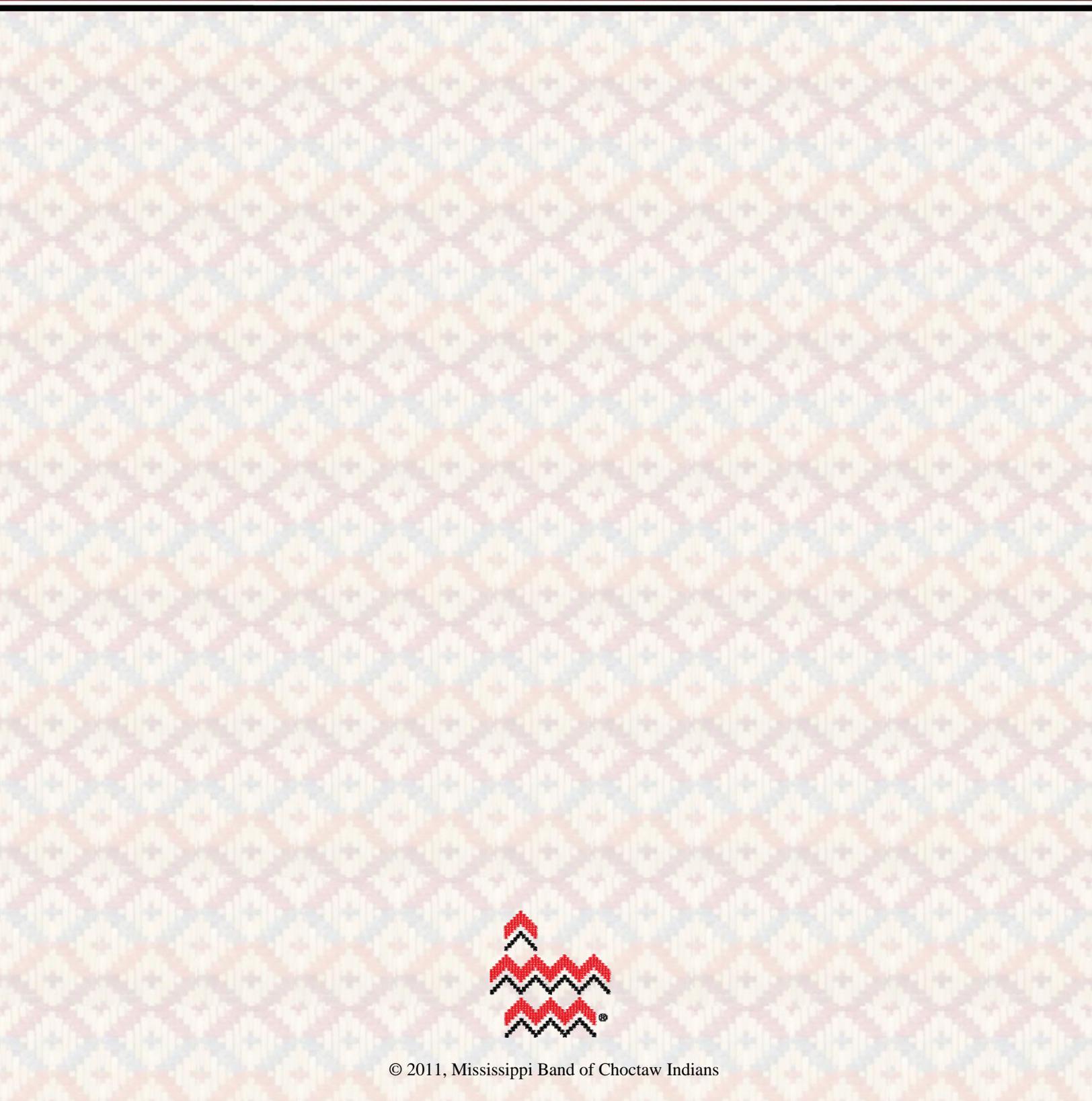
Special Projects/ Media

Chahta Immi Cultural Center

The mission of the Department of Chahta Immi is to inspire, promote, embrace, and enhance the Cultural heritage of the Choctaw People.

* For more information please call (601) 663-7506 or the MBCI Office of Public Information at (601) 663-7532 and visit the MBCI website: www.choctaw.org





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