

# The Chickasaw



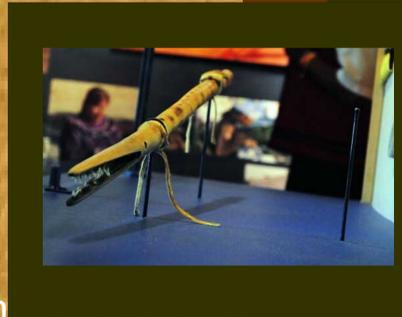
## **Social Organization:**

Clans were the major social organization unit for the Chickasaw. The clans were matrilineal. There were between seven and fifteen clans, beyond being the mode of social organization they also served a political function. Labor was divided between the sexes, with men responsible for hunting and being warriors. The women were in charge of farming, caring for the home, cooking, tending their slaves and raising their children. They were primarily monogamous, but sororal polygamy, the marriage of sisters was permitted. The training of children began at birth. Boys were placed on a panther's skin, to gain a warriors spirit. The training of the children was handled by the mother's family.

## **Clothing, Ornamentation and Body Style:**

Chickasaw men, often stood 6 feet tall, while the women average roughly 5 feet tall. They flattened the forehead of infants for aesthetic purposes.

Chickasaw women wore dresses made from skins sewed together with fishbone needles and deer sinews. In winter they wrapped themselves in buffalo-calf skins. Chickasaw women gave much attention to their appearance, they anointed and tie up their hair, except in time of mourning, and bathe daily, except during periods of menstrual seclusion. In summer men wore breechcloth and a deer skin shirt. Long shaggy garments of panther, deer, bear, beaver and otter skins, the fleshy side out, warmed them in winter. Hunters wore deerskin boots reaching to the thigh to protect against brambles and thorny thickets. There was a summer visiting dress, which because of its great length might be considered a nightgown rather than a shirt. Older men and young boys wore their hair long. The warrior hairstyle was to shave the sides of the head, leaving a roach or crest which the wearer soaked with bear grease. The men plucked all hair from their faces and bodies with tweezers. Chickasaw warriors painted their faces for ceremonies and war, the color and design indicating their clan association. They wore ear and nose ornaments and decorated their heads and shoulders with eagle feathers and a mantle of white swan feathers, the ultimate badge sought by every warrior. Some Chickasaw men practiced the art of tattooing as well.



## **Political Organization:**

Clans oversaw the day to day lives of the Chickasaws people. The clans were overseen by a council of elders and the town Chief. While each town was an independent political unit they work together with an over all Peace and War Chiefs. Chickasaw Chiefs were called Minko, and the tribal head was called the High Minko.

## **Homes and Villages:**

Each Village had a council house, ball field, log fort (for protection against attack) and an ceremonial house. They always kept at least seven main towns, but there were also a number of outlying homesteads. Each household consisted of two houses; a winter house that circular and partially underground,; a summer house that was 12'x 22' and had two rooms with woven mats on the walls for ventilation a household also had a grain storage building and a menstrual hut.

## **Economy:**

Before the arrival of white men to the area, the Chickasaw were a corn based agricultural society. After the arrival of the French and English, a large part of the economy was based on trade and war fare. The first major trade good that the colonial powers sought was slaves. The Chickasaw, who had always been fierce warriors was very successful, in fighting their enemies for the purpose of obtaining slaves to be traded for guns, ammunition and horses. By 1720, the French and British sought deerskins as trade items and the Chickasaw, dominated local trade again due to their procession of guns. by 1750 the Chickasaw had changed economic tactics again and grew cash crops and raised cattle for trade.

## **Religion, Ceremonies, and Beliefs:**

The Chickasaw believed in Aba Bihill, who was the all powerful god, as well as lesser spirits, who could effect life, the environment, illness, etc. They were very respectful of fire. It was unlawful to put out any fire, even a cooking fire with water. Their ceremonies revolved around agriculture, hunting and warfare. Their culture demanded that the body and hair be cleaned daily. Failure to keep the body or house clean resulted in having one's flesh raked with dried snakes teeth.

