

Oklahoma Had 63 Indian Tribes Immediately Before Statehood

In the period just before Oklahoma became a state, it was said the territory included more Indians than all of the states combined.

This number included 63 tribes and a population of hundreds of thousands, even though by that time white settlers and others had them outnumbered.

Each tribe had its own customs, and several could boast of a number of university-educated leaders, capable of dealing with the white men on business-like terms. The chiefs remained the rulers,



however, deciding most tribal matters. The chiefs usually were elected because they were great warriors or had otherwise won the respect and love of their people.

Because the chief had to persuade his people to follow his de-

cisions, he ordinarily consulted with other leading members of the tribe.

The Indians believed in an evil spirit and in a good spirit. They believed that after death their souls lived in a beautiful land. Their medicine men not only

were doctors, but also performed the functions of priests.

Each tribe also had its own language, and few could understand the languages of other tribes. Communications often was carried out by sign language.

According to "the Story of Oklahoma" by historian Muriel Wright, the Indians liked to make speeches and tell stories. It was in the form of stories, carefully told by the old men to young men in the tribe, that the Indians preserved their history.