

OKLAHOMA
TERRITORY

TERRITORIAL TALES

Bits of
History
Before
Statehood

INDIAN
TERRITORY

Ball Game Popular With Indian Tribes

Indians of all nations enjoyed their sport of the ball game. Historian Muriel Wright said it apparently was connected with their ancient religions.

Young men of a certain locality would challenge those of another. The number of young men in a game generally was about 40, although as many as 100 sometimes played.

Each player carried two ball sticks of hickory about three feet in length. These were looped at one end, forming a sort of cup on the end of the stick, laced with buckskin thongs.

The hard ball was made of squirrel skin with a lead or stone center and was a little larger than a golf ball. Goalposts were set up at either end of the field, which was about 300 yards long.

In trying to strike the goalposts with the ball, the naked players swung wildly at the ball with their sticks, and blood was no object.

A famous ball player among the Choctaws was Atoka. Because of his fame at ball, he was "Heto-ka," meaning "ball ground" and pronounced similar to Atoka, the English spelling.

Chief Atoka moved with his nation to the Indian Territory soon after he signed the Dancing Rabbit Creek Treaty, in which the Choctaws gave up their land east of the Mississippi River.

In spite of his protests, a county was named for him. The organization of the Choctaw Nation and the Oklahoma Constitutional Convention, meeting in 1906, determined that Atoka would remain as a county in the new state to be formed in 1907.