ABOVE: Choctaw Apache Chief Tommy Bolton stands in the dry lake bed of the Toledo Bend Reservoir near the site of the Spanish Mission Las Cabezas where his people once hunted and fished in smaller waterways. The water level of the reservoir is low due to low rainfall this spring.

RIGHT: Members of the Caddo Adai tribe, sitting from left to right, are: Lee Solice, Jeanette Grant, Debbie Garrett, Mary Rodriguez and Lee Irwin. Standing, from left to right, are: Caddo Adai Chief Rufus Davis, Howard Rosales, Mickey Irwin and Pat Applewhite at the Caddoan Mounds State Historic Site near Alto, Texas, about 90 miles southwest of Shreveport. The group gathered at the site to raise awareness of the park. Behind the group is a Caddoan burial mound. The Caddoan mounds mark the most western site where Mississippian Mound culture is found.
Reclaiming The Past

Larry Rainwater, chief of the Louisiana Band of Choctaws, raises a new pipe to the west as he circles a Medicine Wheel during the blessing of the pipe. Flint knapper Kenneth Gill, left, made the pipe with stone from Minnesota. The pipe is in the shape of a buffalo. A white buffalo symbolizes unity with all Native American tribes.

Louisiana Native Americans seek Federal recognition

He stooped and picked up a pot sherd from ground once covered by water. The lake is lower now because of lack of rain. "It's all right to pick one up, as long as you put it back where you found it. I know it's considered all right to keep anything found on the surface, but I don't think it's right. It's disturbing what the old people put there," he said.

The people of his community, who have Spanish and Anglo blood mixed with their Native American ancestry, arrived in Louisiana toward the middle of the 18th century, he said. "In 1760, this community was formed by people run out of Texas by the Spaniards," Bolton said.

"When they created the lake, the waters covered a wealth of Indian artifacts," he said. "Now that the lake has dried up, people are finding all sorts of things — pottery sherds, arrowheads. The site of an old village is over there."

"Newer families came in 1835. We have 900 members locally and another 900 spread out across the United States, from New York to Minnesota and Nevada. People left looking for jobs. When we started having powwows, people planned their vacations to come home. It's not only a family reunion but a chance to get together with other Indians," he said.

Most people today know very little about their Indian ancestry, he said. Genealogy and historical research revealed their backgrounds.

"People were chastised for being Indian. One grandfather was listed in the 1795 census as half mestizo (half Spanish, half Native American). By 1805, he was all Spanish, according to the census."

The Choctaw-Apache were recognized by the state as a tribe in 1978, and Bolton said he is confident they will be federally recognized in three to five years. There is such a backlog facing the Bureau of Indian Affairs that it is not uncommon for the process to take 10 years.

Bolton said he attended a workshop seminar in Oklahoma City about writing a history of the tribe. It is one of the requirements for federal recognition. "They told us to write our own history from our own perspective and get it right. Indian histories are usually written from the white perspective," he said.

Continued Page 20

Editor's note: Four of the five state-recognized tribes are the Choctaw-Apache Tribe of Ebarb and Zwolle, Louisiana Band of Choctaw found in East Baton Rouge Parish and scattered around the state, Clifton Choctaw of the Clifton community near Gardiner and Caddo-Adai of Robeline. Because of work schedules and illness, the Clifton Choctaw craftspeople were not available for interviews or photographs.

The fifth tribe, United Houmas Nation, will be featured on June 23. Most of the five state-recognized groups are going through the lengthy process of applying for federal recognition as sovereign tribes. Seeking state recognition as a tribe is the Apalachee group near Alexandria.

STORY BY SARAH SUE GOLDSMITH, ASSOCIATE EDITOR
PHOTOGRAPHS BY TIM MUELLER, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Choctaw-Apache Tribe of Ebarb

Chief Tommy Bolton of the Choctaw Apache Tribe of Ebarb stood in the dry lake bed of Toledo Bend Lake and made a sweeping motion with one extended arm. "When they created the lake, the waters covered a wealth of Indian artifacts," he said. "Now that the lake has dried up, people are finding all sorts of things — pottery sherds, arrowheads. The site of an old village is over there."
Four Tribes

Continued from Page 19

But it isn't easy reconstructing the past when for many years the government told the people to lose their traditions and act like white people, he said.

"You can't take 200 years of denial (of Native American heritage) and being put down and expect them to suddenly admit who they are," he said.

Bolton said he'd like to conduct a study to determine what his people's aptitudes are and then capitalize on those in developing new businesses.

"Phillip Martin of the Mississippi Choctaw said that when he got back from World War II, more than 60 percent of his people were unemployed. Now they own several businesses - one that provides audio speakers for Ford cars, a construction company, a casino and a Hallmark cards business." He'd also like to provide good nursing homes and educational opportunities, he said.

"We have a high dropout rate in 8th or 9th grade. Kids see the dead end. There's no way they can go to college, so they quit school and go to work," he said.

"We'd like to be able to provide funds for educational advancement. The Ebarb (95 percent Native American students) needs a new cafeteria. The one they have was built in the '20s. We're trying to raise $85,000 to build one. The gym is 70 years old. We need to replace it, too," he said.

"People don't realize how many of our elders live on $400 a month. Some couples live on $7,000 a year on welfare. Some live in substandard housing. One-third of our people lost their homes when the lake came up. We used to be self-sufficient. We farmed, hunted and fished. But when Toledo Bend Lake was created, we lost all that land. It's now under water. The people were paid $25 or $30 per acre for their land. That wasn't enough to buy acreage anywhere," he said.

Land was lost in other ways, he said.

"They used to buy seeds on credit and pay the bill after harvest. Timber people would pay the bill and claim the land. In other cases, Indians would owe property taxes, and a timber company would say, 'Don't worry about it; we'll take care of it,' then keep the land.

"The parish would raise taxes and not tell the people. Timber companies would pay the taxes and tell them they could live on the land until they died. They'd sign a paper. The young ones would come back when the old ones died and were told the land wasn't theirs.

"If the Indian people of Louisiana got back what was theirs, they'd be richer than the Arabs," he said.

There is no reservation for the Choctaw-Apache. Many rent their homes, while others own modest acreage. Nearly everybody is related, Bolton said. They live far out in the country.

Bolton's Aunt Sally - Sally Selphaloo - Procell - has lived in the log cabin she and her husband built for more than 63 years. She is in her 80s.

The small, sturdy house on 20 acres has a small fenced yard, a barn and several outbuildings. Electricity and water were added years ago. More recently, Procell's grown children have added an air-conditioning unit and electric heater for her comfort.

Her four children were reared on the place, wearing meal sacks for diapers, she said. They raised sweet potatoes, peas, corn and peanuts, she said.

"I wouldn't want to live nowhere else but here. I love the country and my little shack," she said.

"We had a lot of lakes with clean water before the lake came up. We'd carry water in jugs - pure, clean, sweet. We used to fish every Sunday," she said.

"I was the cook for Mama. I was the oldest one. We had cows to milk, hogs and chickens to feed.

"My mama's daddy taught us how to play bingo. He'd cut up cardboard boxes and mark them off for bingo, then go out in the barn and get some corn to use as markers.

There were no prizes. That's how we learned our numbers. He'd say 'Don't stir my Indian blood.' That's the only indication we had that we were Indian blood. I grew up not really knowing I was Indian. I was just a human being. She'd like to know more about her heritage. "Let the people know who they are," she said.

People in the Ebarb/Zwolle communities are known for their tamales. Locally owned Zwolle's Tamales markets both hot and mild versions all over the state.

![Advocate staff photo by Tim Mueller](image)

Louisiana Band of Choctaw member Ralph Murphy at his Ville Platte home.

**Louisiana Band of Choctaw**

Larry Rainwater would like to put the Louisiana Band of Choctaw back on its feet after being "dormant" for several years, he said.

The tribe received state recognition in 1972, but members are so spread out that it's been hard to organize them, he said. He said there are more than 400 members on the tribal roll.

"I sought spiritual guidance to re-establish our tribe," Rainwater said. "The white buffalo has been born, and the prophecy says the people will reunite when the white buffalo is born."

Now that he's chairman, the Baker resident has a lot of plans, beginning with establishing a clan system based on location, not on bloodlines. Each clan will have its own chief.

One clan has been organized in Farmerville, headed by Jamie Thornton, Chief Fawn of the deer clan. She is also secretary-treasurer for the Louisiana Band of Choctaw.

"My main goal is to bring together not only Choctaws but all bands to preserve our history," she said. "When we all get together we can feel the same thing as our ancestors felt. We can be proud of who we are and where we come from."

She said she works for Grand Village in Natchez, making pottery the old way and firing it in an earth-dug pit, which takes three days. "It's a wonderful thing to be able to do what my mother, grandmother and great-grandmother did," she said.

Rainwater plans to have a ceremonial gathering of all Louisiana tribes at Poverty Point on Saturday, Oct. 26. In ancient times, Poverty Point was the hub of the people, like an Egyptian empire," he said. The medicine men will gather the night before to prepare for the sunrise gathering, he added.

"I do walk the path of practicing Native American religion. I've always been interested in my heritage. I was very active in the Christian religion, then had a spiritual awakening. But I was reborn with a Native American vision. The spirit of a great bird appeared to me. I had been using the gift of healing in the past. I studied Native American teachings to learn what the spirit of the hawk meant. I became a warrior for the people in the spirit. I began to be led into shamanic teachings. I have read books about shamanism and spiritual teachings," he said.

"Chris Perez (a Houma tribe member) is a very gifted medicine man working with me. My father preached all his life that the people must work together or we would become non-existent. I've read that this is a prophecy that will take place," Rainwater said.

He held several ceremonies to honor the earth and the ancestors, including one on the LSU Indian Mounds and one at Bayou Sorrel.

His plans include teaching crafts like beadwork, leather working, drum making and flute making to children and adults. He wants to offer lessons in speaking Choctaw.

Where does he hope the tribe will be 10 years from now?

"I asked Mayor Tom Ed McHugh to find some land for us to establish a reservation," he said. "I want no casino, no gambling, no liquor sold around our people. I'd like to build a mock village - a time tunnel - for tourism with people in traditional dress making crafts," he said.

There's a lot of state and federal land laying around unused. The school board has land not in use - like 400 acres on Plank Road. Maybe Dow Chemical or one of the other big companies would give us land for educational purposes. Any land we get, we'll want to show how it was long ago."

He visualizes a school on the property to teach children Native American culture and to prepare them for jobs. He'd also like to set up summer retreats for children and for troubled children and adults. He believes that people alcohol and drug problems will find healing in the ancestral teachings. "Different races have different ingrained teachings, and when they turn their backs to their..."
“Grandfather told us we couldn’t go around telling people we were Indian. We were persecuted for it if we did.”

— Larry Rainwater, Louisiana Tribe of Choctaw tribal chairman

Four Tribes

(Continued from Page 20)

ancestral teachings, a lot of their problems and how to deal with society are solved," he said.

A lot of the problems faced by Native Americans stem from their denial of their heritage, he said. "Grandfather told us we couldn’t go around telling people we were Indian. We were persecuted for it if we did," he said. "I learned that my grandfather was a shaman. He healed with plants and herbs. If a baby had a thumb mouth, full of sores, he would open the baby’s mouth, say a word and breathe into it, and the baby would be healed in a few days.

"Several of my family are gifted, but not all of us accept that they are gifted," he said.

Tribal member Ralph Murphy lives in Ville Platte now that he’s retired, but when he was an iron worker and ran a gunsmith shop, he and his wife, Gwen, lived in Baker.

He explained that the Louisiana Band was "made up of different groups of Choctaws that floated into the Baton Rouge-Baker area. My grandfather’s mother came from around Broken Bow, Okla., and settled in Rapides Parish. There’s been a group in that area since historical times. There used to be a Spanish trading post in that Three Rivers area, and the Tunica-Biloxi also were there," he said.

"I was tribal chairman at one time. I always tried to be a good leader. I wrestled with the Legislature to get the Louisiana Band and the Clifton Band state recognition," he said.

State recognition brought state appropriations for education, he said. The first year, they got $30,000, "then they kicked it up to $40,000.

Then we had a housing authority bill. Victor Bussie said he was half Choctaw and had his lobbyist work with us. We connected with HUD, so we could build brick terraces," he joked.

"We don’t have the college money anymore. We lost that while Trean was governor," he said. He is putting his youngest son, Nicholas ("Buck"), through college at Concordia Parish, "but in criminal justice and computer science. He has five other children.

Murphy, born and reared in Concordia Parish, remembers when Poverty Point was undeveloped as a tourist attraction.

"We promoted the place. We used to have great dances up there and at FestForAll. We sold trinkets. We made sure we took off the Taiwan tags," he said, smiling.

"I was raised in kind of traditional fashion. I was taught to respect animals. If something wasn’t gonna harm you and you weren’t gonna eat it, don’t kill it. A teacher wanted me to bring a bow and arrows to class once. I told her I’d bring a compound bow and aluminum arrows.

Choctaw have been using guns since white men brought them.

He attended school in Acme. Grades 1-4 were in one room, and 5-8 in another.

"They told us Columbus discovered America. Grandpa said, ‘Did you ask who tied up the boat?’"

Caddo-Adai Chief Rufus Davis outside his new home in Robeline.

Clifton Choctaw of Clifton

Floyd Tyler, chairman of the Clifton Choctaw, moved home after he retired from Hughes Aircraft Company in California. He was a truck driver in the missile division.

As with other tribes, it was difficult to find a good job where he grew up, so he left the state to seek work.

He said he plans to carry on the efforts of former chief Henry Neal in seeking federal recognition for the Clifton Choctaw.

The history of the Clifton Choctaw is detailed by anthropologist Hiram F. Gregory in an article in Louisiana Folklife Vol. VIII, No. 1 (March 1983). In it, he pointed out that the “pinry woods of western Louisiana were a refuge for people of all kinds. By the late 18th century, Anglo-Americans, Choctaw and other eastern Indians fleeing from the white dominated southern cest system, seeking solace from poverty and the rigidity of caste, moved here.

The isolated groups of people, including the Clifton Choctaw, learned to rely on their survival instincts, the article continued, and made quilts, white oak baskets, carved wooden bowls and finely tanned deerskin.

Sarpy said that people are excellent crafts people today, engaging in beadwork, quilting, basket making, wood working and leather craft.

Charles Tyler, an offshore oil worker, makes saddles during his time off the rig, she said.

"Most of us belong to Caddo tribes," she said, "mixed Choctaw and Caddo. My three lines are Choctaw, Caddo and Apache. The Lippan Apaches were sold as slaves by the Caddo to the Spanish and French. Language is one thing we’ve totally lost. The old people still speak French.

My great-grandmother refused to speak English and was put in jail in Natchitoches for speaking French.”

The Clifton Choctaw community center is a simple structure with an outdoor covered pavilion, sitting on 4.7 acres.

"Most people own some acreage of their own," said Tyler. "If we get federal recognition, we hope to get some of our land back. We are surrounded by timber companies. "State recognition was granted in 1978.

Federal recognition would also enable the Clifton Choctaw to upgrade their home-health care service to a mini-hospital to better serve the needs of the community of 400-500 people, Sarpy said.

"Children go to school in Boyce, 20 miles away. Tutoring is held here. We should be able to get more tools for education."

When other Louisiana tribes were denied the right to an education, the Clifton Choctaw had a school for grades one through seven, opening in 1925.

"The school board talked a retired teacher into coming here to teach reading, writing and math," Sarpy said. "It was listed just as a school, not as an Indian school. It was listed as a white school in 1930 and later as Indian."

Alice Tyler said that part-time work for the elderly and unemployed involves planting tree seeds in flats to be transferred as seedlings to Kisatchie National Forest.

Some 2,900 trees were planted in flats as part of the reforestation project at Kisatchie, she said.

"They’re begging for trees all over the area," added the chairman.

"We’re growing trees for private agencies, too," Sarpy said.

Economic development, to them, means building a retirement home, perhaps getting a factory-outlet mall "where we make the clothes," said Sarpy.

"I appreciate reproductions of Native American-designed clothes. A good many of our tribe are seamstresses," she said.

Caddo Adai of Robeline

The first thing the visitor notices on entering Chief Rufus Davis’ office is the feather bustle to his regalia laid out on a table. Slogans on the wall say such things as "Indians discovered America" and "The Earth does not belong to us. We belong to the Earth." Paintings, sculptures, a shelf full of books on Native American history and culture and several plaques proclaim Davis’ Native American heritage.

The office of the Caddo Adai (pronounced A-day-i) chief is a study of contrasts. Side by side with arrowheads and pottery sherds sits a fax machine.

Caddo history has been traced by archaeologists from A.D. 700 to 1835, says archaeologist George Ward Shannon Jr. in his Caddo Lore, a book that accompanies a

(Continued on Page 22)
Four Tribes

Continued from Page 22

More than a tribal group, we’re kin. They’d come home. If something happened right now, the whole tribe would know about it in a matter of minutes.

Caddo-Adai Chief Rufus Davis

Indian but didn’t know very much about it. Even when I asked my grandfather and grandmother, they were very evasive about being Indian because it was not popular to be Indian. Those customs just faded away, I tried to learn more about it, where the tribe originated. It wasn’t until Rufus came along with the research five or six years ago that I became involved,” she said.

“I love the archaeological digs and doing family history research at Northwestern University. I never knew I had so many cousins. All of us are related. People I’ve known

Eighty-seven-year-old Sally Procell sits outside her log cabin home in the Choctaw Apache community of Ebarb.

Advocate staff photo by Tim Mueller

Caddo-Adai Chief Rufus Davis

“I went to Texas in 1958 to work in construction. I started coming back when my mother moved to Shreveport to be near her sister.”

He gradually discovered that he and his wife, Ann, were spending more and more time there and decided they could run the construction business from there just as easily as from Houston.

Now that the contractor has returned home, he lives in his mother’s house while building a new home for his family across the street.

He has bought his grandfather’s house where he was born and plans to move it to his property, a contrast of old and new, modest and impressive.

“I love it here. I don’t want to leave. Being in the country is quieter. I’m doing a lot of work with the tribe and doing things in the parish,” Davis said.

Davis is a commissioner on the Cane River National Heritage Area Commission, appointed by the Governor of the Interior Bruce Babbitt. “Los Adaes State Park comes under that. We want to keep the history alive,” he said.

“Caddo Mounds, around Alto, Texas, was an active village when the Spaniards came,” San Francisco de los Adaes was the first Spanish mission. Texas

He said the Spaniards thought that was their name. That’s where they got Texas from,” he said.

“When you study one tribe, you learn the history of many, many tribes and you learn they are interconnected. A lot of tribes have the same religious beliefs,” he said.

He said he grew up in a dual world, “our beliefs and Catholic beliefs. Priests discouraged the music and dancing, but dancing is part of what you need, so I started back dancing about 15 years ago. It’s a duck out of water not to dance. It makes you feel good to participate. I go to a lot of powwows because I’ve made a lot of friends around the country.

“I don’t like to go to church, but I go. I don’t feel like I had to be in church to communicate with God. I quit going but went back because church is the heart of the community. I’m glad I did because it’s been rewarding.”

“People have the mistaken belief that we worship animals, like the eagle. We don’t worship the eagle but honor it as the Creator’s work,” he said.