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A Brief History of Chucalissa

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHUCALISSA

- 1100 Prehistoric Indian village, site 40SY1, later to be known as Chucalissa, founded.
- 1550 Prehistoric Indian village abandoned.
- 1895 Personal journal of Irene Catherine Farrow references visit to Indian Mounds from "Heartsease" house on Weaver Road, built in 1840.
- 1938 Land purchased from Dover Barrett to create T.O. Fuller State Park. CCC Camp established for park construction. Reference to Indian Mound City.
- 1939 CCC excavates for swimming pool and finds prehistoric artifacts. Site is first called Shelby Archaeological Park and, later, Fuller Mounds. University of Tennessee, under direction of T.M.N. Lewis, begins excavation of the site. Site supervisors are George Lidberg and Charles H. Nash.
- 1940-41 T.M.N. Lewis writes proposal for development of Chucalissa. World War II delays development.
- 1952 Memphis Archaeological and Geological Society (MAGS), under the direction of Kenneth L. Beaudoin, begins site excavation. Society members spark interest in developing the site by the Tennessee Division of Parks.
- 1953 Kenneth Beaudoin's report of excavations is privately published.
- 1955 Through the influence of MAGS and others, Charles H. Nash is hired as state parks archaeologist to direct work at Fuller Mounds. Kirk Osoinach serves as assistant. Nash publishes article entitled "The Fuller Mounds" in Tennessee Archaeologist, Vol. 11, No. 2.
- 1956 Shelby County Penal Farm provides inmates to help clear the site. Early excavations are conducted by Charles Nash, with assistance from the Shelby County Penal Farm inmates and MAGS volunteers. Volunteer excavators include: Dr. P. Bynum, Mrs. J.O. Holbrook, Mrs. James Merrin, Mrs. Robert Cox, and Mrs. Harry Holbrook. Popularity of Chucalissa as an attraction jumps from 12th to 5th among Tennessee state parks. The site is officially named "Chucalissa."
- 1956-58 Unit 3, which became the burial exhibit, is excavated.
- 1957-59 Excavations in Unit 2, the area south of the museum, are conducted. The first reconstructed hut is finished.
- 1958 L.D. John and Harry Martin, Choctaw Indians from Mississippi, are hired as the first guides. The museum building is finished and opens on Oct. 1.

- 1959** Southwestern (Rhodes College) offers first credited classes in archaeology at Chucalissa. More Choctaw families arrive to work at Chucalissa. Mr. and Mrs. Hensley Gibson, who bring their two children, begin work. Later, Grady John and family arrive.
- 1959-61** Annual field schools through Southwestern continue at Chucalissa.
- 1960s** The excavation of Unit 4, the small mound, is on-going.
- 1960** Nash published article entitled "Choctaw Blowguns" in Tennessee Archaeologist, Vol. 16, No. 1.
- 1961** First Indian born at Chucalissa in over 400 years arrives to Grady and Betty John; Sandra Kay John is the first of many Choctaws to live at Chucalissa. First Chucalissa American Indian Pow Wow is held Aug. 25-27.
- 1962** On Jan. 9, Chucalissa is officially transferred to Memphis State University, creating the beginnings of the Department of Anthropology. The first anthropology courses are offered as part of the curriculum, taught by C.H. Nash and Kirk Osoinach. "Dagger of the Moon," an outdoor theatrical performance sponsored by Chucalissa and the MSU Speech and Drama Dept., is performed in the village area. World Champion Fancy War Dancer, George Watchetaker, performs at the Pow Wow. Charles Nash and Rodney Gates publish article entitled "Chucalissa Indian Town" in the Tennessee Historical Quarterly, Vol. 21, No. 2; illustration of Chucalissa appears on the cover.
- 1963** The first MSU field school is offered; work begins on Unit 6, a village area behind the chief's mound. The Chucalissa Discovery Trail is inaugurated; over 500 Boy Scouts hike the 18-mile trail, visiting the museum and learning about Indians, to receive their badge. Chucalissa is featured in a National Geographic article about Indians. A severe summer drought occurs; the Commercial Appeal photographs Grady doing a "rain dance" down the steps of the chief's mound; it rained the next day and every other day for the next six months.
- 1964** The first annual Mid-South Choctaw Indian Games are held.
- 1965** John Hesse begins work at Chucalissa.
- 1968** Charles H. Nash passes away. Gerald P. Smith is named new director. Exhibits preparator, Billy Hancock, is hired; begins development and construction of the current exhibits.
- 1969-71** The excavation of Unit 5, the chief's mound, is conducted.
- 1971** Wood Bell begins work at Chucalissa. Museum staff participate in archaeological survey on the Tennessee River.
- 1972** A report on the excavations at Chucalissa, by C.H. Nash, entitled "Chucalissa: Excavations and Burials Through 1963," is published by Memphis State University, as Anthropology Research Center Occasional Papers No. 6. The chief's house is reconstructed.

- 1973 \$183,000 is appropriated for the museum addition.
- 1974 The ground breaking for the museum addition is held. MSU President, Billy M. Jones, attends.
- 1976 New museum building is dedicated. Architect Claire Jones wins an award for the addition. The first Indian Crafts Fair, a Bicentennial Event, is held.
- 1977-85 Established events and activities continue.
- 1980 Museum publishes Chucalissa coloring book, drawn by Billy Hancock.
- 1985 A state law is passed that prohibits the display of human remains. Excavations at Unit 1 are conducted. The construction of new housing units for the staff are begun. Exhibit in chief's house is totally refurbished.
- 1986 The burial exhibit is closed.
- 1987 The Unit 6 excavation is closed. Billy Hancock leaves Chucalissa to work at Jamestown Settlement Museum.
- 1988 The museum staff participates in the excavations of the "ghost boats" on the Mississippi River. Memphis State University publishes report of excavations, by Lisa Lumb and Charles McNutt, entitled "Chucalissa: Excavations in Units 2 and 6, 1959-67," as Anthropological Research Center Papers No. 15.
- 1989 A research associate and technical clerk are hired full-time to inventory and manage the museum collections. After a 2-year vacancy, an exhibits curator is hired.
- 1990 Chucalissa participates in the Memphis in May International Festival for the first time.
- 1991 Four new events are added: Girl Scout Badge Day, More Than Bows and Arrows, Archaeology Day, and the annual exhibit of children's art.
- 1992 Major changes in administration occur; Gerald Smith transfers to main campus to develop archaeology contract program. Pottery and beadwork classes are offered to the public. Chucalissa participates in the Elderhostel sponsored by the Department of Anthropology. The exhibits curator position is lost. A Christmas tree decorated with hand-made Indian craft items is displayed; about \$1000 in sales are made.