Forces that led to Indian removal in the nineteenth century might be said to have started with the arrival of Europeans on the North American continent, but as federal Indian policy, it had begun with Thomas Jefferson after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Between then and 1820, the push for removal of the Southeastern tribes, including the Chickasaws, gained momentum. The Chickasaw Nation to which young Thomas C. Stuart had gone in 1820 was grappling with changes that made Chickasaw life difficult and were pushing the people rapidly toward removal. The changes had resulted primarily from the establishment of the American government and subsequent pressures by that government and its peoples. Treaties before 1820 had ceded Chickasaw lands so that by then, Americans were pressing on the nation’s borders on several fronts. Although the changes had made significant inroads on traditional Chickasaw life ways, the most rapid changes were yet to come: during the next decade, the Chickasaws would see their government continue to move away from its traditional structure; their country invaded by Americans, some seeking to “civilize” them through Christian religion and American-style education and others to exploit them by usurping their lands and conducting illicit trade; their laws and government extinguished by the states of Mississippi and Alabama; and their existence as a nation placed in jeopardy by the specter of removal.

One of the most significant changes Chickasaw society had undergone by 1820 was governmental. The council that Stuart attended in 1820 reflected the major governmental transition that was taking place within the Chickasaw Nation. The Chickasaw leaders who gathered in council at Tockshish did not only represent the nation at
large, but also four districts that were of recent vintage. In the early American period, the Chickasaw population had begun to disperse from the concentrated area of their traditional towns, and by 1805 the population had settled in four distinct geographical areas. Ten years later, to make annuity payments more efficient, Chickasaw Agent William Cocke formally organized four districts. The annuity of 1818 was paid to the chiefs of the districts—Samuel Sealy, Coahoma (William McGilivray), Tishomingo, and Apassantubby—who passed the annuity on to the people. Although the districts were numbered, agents commonly referred to each by its chief’s name. Tishomingo’s district was the northeastern, McGilivray’s the northwestern, Sealy’s the southwestern, in which the Chickasaw Agency and present-day Pontotoc were located, and Apassantubby’s the southeastern in which present-day Tupelo is located.1 The four chieftainships did not change until Apassantubby died in 1831.

This new structure had revolutionized the centuries-old traditional leadership system. Though the system is somewhat ambiguous today, the Chickasaws had traditionally been led by a minko (called “King” by the Europeans), who was a hereditary peace leader, and the Chief Warrior, often referred to by the Americans as the “Chief” or “principal chief,” who achieved rank through warfare or international affairs. By the time the district structure emerged, Chinnubbee was minko and Tishomingo, who opposed the district structure, was at least nominally the chief, although the powers traditionally associated with his position were apparently in the hands of others. When Chinnubbee died in 1819, he was succeeded by his nephew Chehopistee, a twenty-year-old who died after a short time in office.2 Chehopistee was succeeded by Ishtehotopa, also a nephew of Chinnubbee, and it was Ishtehotopa’s induction that Thomas C. Stuart witnessed at the council in 1820. Although Ishtehotopa was destined to be the last hereditary minko of the nation, his position and the Chickasaw loyalties to the traditional leadership later provided a means for the Chickasaws to retain a form of government after the states of Mississippi and Alabama forbade government by chiefs in 1830 and 1832.

The traditional system of minko and chief leadership had become weaker during the preceding decades by the rise to power of the Colbert
brothers. The Colberts—William, George, and Levi—had distinguished themselves in warfare in behalf of the Chickasaws during the 1790s. William served first as chief. Then, because of George’s service in the field as an interpreter, the council elected him their spokesman, and for twelve years he served as their head chief. Late in 1813 he resigned as chief, and he and his brothers joined the fight against the Creeks. Then Levi Colbert became chief and spokesman for the Chickasaw Nation, a position he held until his death in 1834.³

Opinions of historians like Arrell Gibson, who long ago described the role of the Colberts during the period leading to removal, have generally gone unchallenged until recent years. Gibson and others have argued that the Colberts were representative of the Chickasaw mixed bloods who rose to power, took advantage of the full bloods to achieve that power, used their position to enrich themselves, dominated the Chickasaw economy and international affairs, and shaped the direction of Chickasaw society. That the Colberts, especially Levi, were self-serving, perhaps even avaricious and open to being bribed, can generally be supported. However, more recent scholarship makes a compelling argument that the full bloods and the mixed bloods were not at odds over the direction of Chickasaw affairs, that the Colberts were acting upon the wishes of a majority of the Chickasaws, and that the actions of the Colberts, in effect, held the Americans at bay in the pre-removal period.⁴ Throughout the period of Colbert political domination, the Chickasaws retained the hereditary minko in Chinnubbee, Chehistopee, and Ishtehotopa and the chiefs such as Tishomingo and Emmubbee.

While there is little debate about the political power of the Colbert family, their effectiveness in manipulating the direction of Chickasaw culture has also been brought into question. The most prominent mixed-blood family, they certainly dominated Chickasaw foreign affairs for many years. However, there is little evidence that they were the head of a “clique” of mixed-bloods. Historian James Atkinson argues that there is “no substantial support for Gibson’s insinuation that the mixed-bloods as a whole were manipulating and thus altering the general Chickasaw population’s cultural, political, and social configurations.”⁵ There is little doubt, however, that the economic success of the
Chickasaw Removal

Colbert and allied families in the first two decades of the nineteenth century contributed significantly to the changing economies of the Chickasaw Nation. However, history ultimately deals with the Colbert family, their role was undeniably significant in Chickasaw history during the three decades leading to removal. A good example is their assistance to the missionaries, including the Reverend Thomas C. Stuart, in their early endeavors among the Chickasaws.

Stuart was a harbinger of changes to come. Christianity, to the Americans, was a necessary ingredient of their definition of “civilization.” When Stuart returned to the Chickasaw Nation in early 1821, he was intent on bringing “civilization” to the Chickasaws. Only the month before, he had been ordained by the Synod of South Carolina and Georgia as the first missionary to the Chickasaws. Zealous and accompanied by a small party of mission workers, he arrived at the site of the future Monroe Mission, two miles from Tockshish on the last day of January 1821, when they felled the first tree, an event that, to Americans, always symbolized the advent of “civilized” society. He was joined by carpenter Hamilton V. Turner and farmer James Wilson and their families from South Carolina; the Reverend and Mrs. Hugh Wilson of North Carolina; and the Reverend William C. Blair of Ohio.6

As the Chickasaw leadership understood it, the primary purpose of the missionary presence in the Nation was American-style education, not religion, for the chiefs found little in Christianity that appealed to them. Thus Stuart and the mission group spent the first two years clearing a farm and building a school, which was ready by the spring of 1822. Stuart first sought out children who lived in the neighborhood, unprepared as he was at the time to take in boarders. With some difficulty he obtained a promise from a local widow to send her two children only after he promised to clothe them and feed them during the day. These children later became known as William H. Barr and Mary Leslie, the first two Chickasaw students to be schooled at the mission, and later, along with their mother, they became members of the church.7

In the spring of 1823, the school entered full operation. District Chief Samuel Sealy made an official speech to open the school and enrolled his son, who later became known as T. Carleton Henry. Most
Tockshish. From the Cession Surveys of 1832.

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE CHICKASAW NATION GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION DEPARTMENT.

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of the fifty students boarded at the school with the mission workers. Also in 1823, the Reverend Hugh Wilson established a school two miles north of Monroe near Tockshish, which outlasted the Monroe school and remained in operation almost until the Chickasaws left for the West. The process was “the Bible and hoe” system. Besides the academic curriculum, there was a daily routine of religious instruction and prayer, and the boys practiced American-style agriculture on the mission farm, where they raised food for the mission’s consumption. By 1824, the missionaries had to limit the number of students they admitted. The Chickasaws, they wrote, “begin to see the necessity of a different mode of life from that which they have hitherto pursued.” The Chickasaws were turning, they wrote, from game to agriculture.

There was no doubt some truth in what the missionaries said, but American education was most popular among those families that had earlier sought education for their children. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, a few intermarried whites and mixed bloods sent their sons and daughters for private education in Florida, Tennessee, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. As early as 1803, the Chickasaw leaders requested establishment of schools in the Nation, but it was not until a decade later that a short-lived school was established near the agency. Then in 1820, the Cumberland Presbyterians established a school at Levi Colbert’s home near Cotton Gin Port. Called Charity Hall, the school opened in his home while a structure was built about three miles south of Cotton Gin Port. The complex consisted of a log classroom, rooms for students, outbuildings, and a mission farm used to teach the boys American agricultural methods. The girls were taught spinning, weaving, and other domestic activities. With these few efforts, education was not widespread among the rank and file Chickasaws.

The Chickasaw leaders, however, saw the need for education. In 1824 the chiefs lent their support to the establishment of schools, appropriating $5,000 to build two additional schools and guaranteeing an annual appropriation of $2,500 to support them. The schools were placed under Stuart’s direction. One was called Martyn on Pigeon Roost Creek near present-day Holly Springs and was taught by William C. Blair. Caney Creek School was on the Tennessee River near
Cession area of 1832

Arkansas
Tennessee
Mississippi
Alabama

Cotton Gin Port.

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Cession area of 1832

Martyn Mission Station. From the Cession Surveys of 1832.

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE CHICKASAW NATION GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION DEPARTMENT.
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The Chickasaw Nation, 1820-1830

Tuscumbia, Alabama, and was taught by the Reverend Hugh Wilson, who was replaced at Tockshish by James Holmes of Pennsylvania. The four schools combined enrolled 120 boys and girls, men and women. In 1826, the schools were transferred to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. By that time, after having gotten off to a good start, the schools had begun to falter. By 1827, there were preaching stations, as well as schools, at Monroe, Martyn, Tockshish, and Caney Creek. The school at Monroe, however, had suspended for a year, and two of the others were “embarrassed” for lack of teachers.11

The alliance with the Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions gave the schools a lift. By 1831, they enrolled 88 students. The Monroe school had closed in 1830. The school at Tockshish, which had also been suspended, reopened in the fall of 1830. Students who lived far from the school boarded with the mission family or people in the surrounding neighborhood. At Martyn there were buildings and a small farm, supported primarily by the Chickasaw annuity that had been set aside for education. The Chickasaws in that area were primarily mixed-bloods who understood English and wanted their children educated in English. In the fall of 1830, the missionaries reported twenty-nine students, both local and boarding, girls outnumbering boys almost two to one. They studied arithmetic, geography, English grammar, and composition. Nearly all spoke English. Teacher James Holmes said, “The girls are taught to work.”12 What Holmes meant by “work,” of course, was American-style domestic work. The missionaries touted their successes to their supporters back East as evidence that their “Bible and hoe” method was working, but the number of students was insignificant in comparison to the total number of Chickasaws who followed the systems of knowledge that had been practiced by their people for centuries.

The missionaries also reported what they considered “successes” at Caney Creek. There were thirty-nine students, of whom eight were men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one. Hugh Wilson, the teacher, put the students into a program that was three or four years old and resembled what was called the “outing” program later in the century at Carlisle Indian Industrial School. The students spent most of the year in nearby areas of Alabama and Tennessee among white families
Monroe Missionary Station. From the Cession Surveys of 1832.

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE CHICKASAW NATION GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION DEPARTMENT.
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in order to give them “an acquaintance with the English language” and “the habits of civilized life.” All spoke English fluently, it was reported, acted “with a good degree of propriety, and seem[ed] thoroughly domesticated.” All could read and most could write. After a year, Wilson was contemplating bringing them back to the Caney Creek station, for he believed his objective had been reached during their stay in white society. Like most zealots in other times and places, Wilson did not realize that the type of education he touted rarely prepared his subjects for life in the American world, nor did it necessarily make them better members of their own society.

What the missionaries might have considered “successes” were in reality short-lived. By the end of 1830, Mississippi had extended its jurisdictions over the Chickasaw lands, and Congress had passed the Indian Removal Act. In the winter of 1832, Alabama extended its laws
over Chickasaw lands in that state. The disruption caused by these events in the Chickasaw Nation ensured the demise of the schools by 1834. Martyn and Caney Creek closed in 1832, as did Charity Hall, the Cumberland Presbyterian school at Cotton Gin Port. From the time the missionaries established the schools, Stuart said, they had struggled “under trials and difficulties that always attend a similar enterprise amongst an unenlightened and uncivilized people.” Looking back after more than twenty-five years, he judged the educational efforts primarily a failure: “The number who obtained anything like a good English education was comparatively small. Having learned to read and write, many of them left school, supposing they had finished their education. Moreover, the regulations of the school and the requirements of the station imposed such a restraint on their former roving habits that many of them ran off and never returned. This was often a matter of deep regret and a cause of great annoyance to us, but it was one of those discouragements with which missionaries amongst an ignorant and heathen people have always had to contend.” The schools did not prove a useful tool in Christianizing the Chickasaws. Stuart wrote, “Comparatively few of our scholars embraced religion and united with our church. In after years a good many joined the Methodist Church.”

After the schools had closed, the Chickasaws continued to send some of their children for education outside the Nation. Senator Richard M. Johnson’s Choctaw Academy had opened in Scott County, Kentucky, in 1825. When the Chickasaws began sending students there is uncertain, but in 1834 and 1835, they paid for clothing and traveling expenses for John B. Love, Stephen Perry, Maxwell Frazier, William Brown, Levi Perry, John Hall, Logan Albertson, Benjamin R. Albertson, Robert Johnson, Thomas H. Benton, Shtokaway’s son, Takintubby’s nephew, and others.

The failure of the schools to instill Christianity in its students was due, primarily, to a general lack of interest in the Christian religion among the Chickasaw people. A Christian movement among the Chickasaws had, in fact, got off to a faltering start. The Reverend Hugh Dickson of the Presbytery of South Carolina had organized the Monroe Presbyterian Church in 1823 with only nine charter members, none
of whom were Chickasaws. One, however, was a black woman, whom Stuart called “the first fruit of the Chickasaw Mission”: “Being a native of the country, she spoke the Chickasaw language fluently; and having the confidence of the Indians, I employed her as my interpreter for several years, in preaching the gospel to them.” The first members of Chickasaw households joined in 1824: Abraham, a black slave, belonging to a Chickasaw; Mrs. Tennessee Bynum; and Esther, belonging to Mrs. [William?] Colbert. During the next four years, only 16 members were added, although Monroe sat in the midst of one of the most populous sections of the Chickasaw Nation with an estimated 800 people, of whom approximately 500 were Chickasaws and 300 were slaves and a few white men with Chickasaw families.

In early 1827, however, there occurred what the missionaries termed an “awakening,” which started with a revival meeting held by Cyrus Kingsbury, Anson Gleason, and Cyrus Byington, the latter of whom preached in both English and Choctaw. Stuart credited Byington with the revival’s success. While a revival was underway at Mayhew in the Choctaw Nation, Byington, imbued with the spirit, went to Monroe and began to preach. The preachers worked hard, however, to prevent “excitement” and calculated to instruct the people in religion by holding inquiry meetings on Saturday nights. Twenty to thirty attended, some coming ten to twelve miles. By mid-summer the revival was widespread, people coming from more than thirty-five miles around “to see what was going on.” One communion was attended by about 200 people. The revival, however, netted only twenty-two members: two Chickasaws, three white men, and seventeen slaves.

By 1830, the church had only 119 members in the entire Chickasaw Nation. Only thirty-three were Chickasaws, twenty-five were whites, and the rest were blacks. These latter, Stuart wrote, lived in “considerable number in the neighborhood” of Monroe. “These generally spoke the Indian language; and being on an equality with their owners, and having more intercourse with them than is usual among white people, through their instrumentality a knowledge of the gospel was extended among the Indians. The change, too, in their deportment had a tendency to convince them of the reality and excellence of religion, and to eradicate their prejudices against it.” However, by 1830 preaching
had become sporadic. When James Holmes arrived at Tockshish in the fall of that year, only one sermon had been preached there since spring. He drew large crowds at his sermons, but lack of a large enough building meant that services were held outside, and those attending had to brave cold winds and damp ground through hours of service. In 1831, Holmes was sent to replace Blair at Martyn. He felt confident in leaving, he said, because ninety people took the sacrament at Tockshish and nearly two hundred made up the congregation. He said, “This now has assumed the aspect of a Christian settlement, and the Lord appears to prosper everything undertaken in his glory.” On the other hand, at Martyn, only ten took communion, and no more than fifty attended the preaching. While Holmes’s estimation of the Tockshish community is glowing, if not overly optimistic, the majority of the Christian community he referred to was white or black, not Chickasaw.

Other denominational missions had been even less effective than Stuart’s Presbyterians. From 1799 to 1803, the Presbyterian Joseph Bullen had labored among the Chickasaws but failed to establish a church. No other efforts occurred until Congress passed the so-called Civilization Act of 1819, which made federal funds available for Indian education. The Baptists began working among the Chickasaws and Choctaws in 1819, but it was not until 1828 that they finally established a mission near Tockshish. In 1821, the Methodists included preaching stops in the Chickasaw Nation on their circuit and continued them for several years thereafter. The only mission that approached Stuart’s success was Charity Hall, the Cumberland Presbyterian school established in 1820 near Cotton Gin Port. Charity Hall, like the other Presbyterian schools, declined and finally closed in 1832.

Although Stuart’s biographers later put a good face on his Presbyterian mission’s efforts, the results were far from stellar, in part, because of Chickasaw aversion to Christianity. Despite the changes that had taken place in Chickasaw social and political structures in recent decades, the people retained a strong attachment to old beliefs. Many held a disdain for Christianity, which may have related to their general disdain for the Choctaws. In 1830, one missionary at Tockshish wrote: “The great outcry against the missionaries has been, that they were not teaching school, which, it was said, was their appropriate work,
and that, if we kept on this way, we would get the people all crazy and spoiled, like the Choctaws.”

In addition to the Chickasaw aversion to mission work, the promising missionary efforts between 1828 and 1830, like those in education, were undermined, in part, by the rapid changes in the Chickasaw Nation that were pushing the Chickasaw people ever closer to removal. In 1820, the year the missionaries came, Mississippi had entered a period of concerted agitation for Chickasaw removal by attempting to extend its laws over the Chickasaw people. By the waning years of the decade, pressures to bring the Chickasaws under state jurisdiction were mounting. In 1825, Secretary of War John C. Calhoun developed a plan for removal and proposed that the Chickasaws could be absorbed by the Choctaws. The following year, the U. S. sent treaty commissioners to the Chickasaws to negotiate their removal, but the Chickasaws refused. Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas McKenny visited the Chickasaws the following year, urging them to remove west to relieve the people of the steadily increasing pressures of American society. In 1828 Chickasaw leaders sent an exploring party west to examine the country and search for a suitable site for the Chickasaws to settle, but the party made an unfavorable report. A significant event that precipitated destructive change was the Mississippi legislature’s extension of the state’s laws over the Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations in early 1829 and placing the Chickasaw Nation under the jurisdiction of county courts. A year later the state placed the Chickasaws and Choctaws and their property under state law and outlawed their tribal governments. The state of Alabama was on the verge of extending its laws over the Chickasaws as well. Part of the anti-Constitutional, states’ rights movement to usurp federal authority over Indian affairs, these moves had a two-fold purpose: to gain authority over the rich Indian lands to bolster a developing slave-based cotton economy and to force the Indians from within the boundaries of the state, if possible.

The Chickasaw leaders looked at the prospect of living under state law with dread. They held out hope even to late 1829 that their faithfulness to the United States government would make the administration save them. If state laws were extended over them, they had no faith that they would be put on an equal footing with the whites. Not understanding
the laws, they would become victims of the whites, who would uphold each other. They would be helpless to resist the encroachments of whites upon their property, and in a short time they would have nothing left. They would rather exchange their land for any they could get rather than lose their “native freedom,” they said.\textsuperscript{30} The Mississippi law “abolished and took away all the rights, privileges, immunities, and franchises held, claimed or enjoyed by those persons called Indians within the chartered limits of that state by virtue of any form of policy, usages or customs existing among them.”\textsuperscript{31} The Chickasaws sent appeals to the federal government for the United States to stand by the honor of their treaties with the Chickasaws, but officials used the occasion to argue that the only relief for the Chickasaws was to remove to the West.

With suspension of the government by chiefs under threat of fine and imprisonment, the Chickasaws entered one of the most demoralizing periods of their history. White intruders in the Chickasaw country had been a long-standing problem. Though Chickasaw leaders had constantly entreated the federal government to remove the intruders and to uphold the tribe’s sovereignty according to the treaties, the United States had steadily refused to do so. In early 1830, sub-agent John L. Allen reported that he had had difficulty preventing whites from violating the federal Intercourse Law regulating trade with the Indians. The Chickasaws called for enforcement of the Treaty of 1816, which required traders to apply for a permit to trade in the Chickasaw Nation. Whites drove their livestock over the state line on to Chickasaw land, made illegal settlements, traded without permits, and stole Chickasaw slaves, horses, and cattle.\textsuperscript{32} Intruders became more numerous after Mississippi extended its laws. In applying the Mississippi legislative act, the circuit court of Monroe County claimed jurisdiction over all of the Chickasaw Nation within the state’s boundaries and nullified federal law regulating trade and intercourse with the tribal nation. The result was an influx of white squatters, who brought with them large numbers of whiskey peddlers.\textsuperscript{33}

According to the missionaries, the Chickasaws entered a period of dissipation. Both federal law and tribal law had forbidden the sale
of whiskey within the Chickasaw Nation, and until Mississippi’s act, there had been little intoxication. Holmes wrote from Tockshish in the fall of 1830, “But now, multitudes of men and women whenever they get a few dollars, are off with their kegs and pack-horses to the nearest village, and return with their poison, to retail it at 75 cents and upwards per quart.” Chickasaws would sell their horses, he said, for a keg of whiskey.34

Part of the tribe’s demoralized condition was also a result of mounting and intense pressure to achieve the states’ ultimate goal: to drive all of the tribes from within their boundaries. After the Louisiana Purchase, Thomas Jefferson and national politicians following his philosophy had considered the Louisiana Purchase as a place where tribes east of the Mississippi could be relocated. The matter did not become an issue of national debate until after President James Monroe formally urged the Congress in 1825 to adopt a removal policy. Action was delayed, however, until the election of Andrew Jackson in 1828. One of his first priorities was removal of the southeastern tribes to the West. His position had its support, which began to erode when it became evident that Georgia and other states were primarily interested in the land rather than the welfare of the tribes. The nation entered a period of intense and bitter debate over the issue of Indian removal. In May of 1830, a bitterly divided Congress passed the Indian Removal Act, which gave the president authority to negotiate the removal of tribes, who would exchange the lands they occupied for lands west of the Mississippi.

The Indian Removal Act had been the culmination of a decade of drastic change for Chickasaw society and was a portent of even more changes to come. In the wake of the act, the Chickasaw people faced the most demoralizing prospect yet—giving up their ancient homeland and moving to a new and alien place.

Notes


Apassantubby was succeeded by Isaac Alberson in 1831. An early, rather balanced account of Colbert family motives is Guy B. Braden, “The
Chickasaw Removal


17. Winston, “*Father Stuart*,” 71–72; John Wilson, “Old Monroe Presbyterian Church and Cemetery, 1821–1823” (Algoma, MS: n.d.), 5. Wilson’s typescript contains the session minutes for the church through 1842. Copy used here is from the Pontotoc Public Library, Pontotoc, MS.


21. Winston, “*Father Stuart*,” 73.


29. Muriel H. Wright, “Notes on Events Leading to the Chickasaw Treaties of Franklin and Pontotoc, 1830 and 1832,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 34
30. John L. Allen to War Department, February 7, 1830, National Archives Microfilm Publications, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, Microcopy M234, Roll 136 (this source hereafter cited as M234, followed by the roll number).


32. Allen to War Department, February 7, 1830, M234-R163.


34. *Missionary Herald* 27 (1831), 45.