UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

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WHO SHALL GAINSAY OUR DECISION?

CHOCTAW LITERARY NATIONALISM

IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

A DISSERTATION

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A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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THIS STUDY IS DEDICATED

TO THE CHOCTAW PEOPLE

like a full moon over a thunderhead

in the east
in a buoyant blue
late afternoon sky
i see your imagination

as a people
you rise early
you are visible
even the light of the sun
cannot burn you off

through a dark night
you are there
on the other side of earth

the glare of transplanted cities
cannot hide your agriculture
your stories
your flare for oratory

you speak
you listen

you persevere

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the writing of a group of young Choctaw intellectuals, the first generation of that society of American Indians to embrace literacy as a fully viable tool of discourse. Working in the pre-removal period, 1824-1831, as the Choctaws made preparations for their great emigration from the state of Mississippi to their new sovereign soil west of the Mississippi River, their writing evinces a nationalistic fervor. In conversation with each other, the tribal intellectuals conceptualize their transition from a pre-modern ethno-historical group to a fully-fledged constitutional republic. Primary focal texts for the study include James L. McDonald's Spectre Essay of 1830 and Peter Perkins Pitchlynn's journal of 1828. McDonald's essay presents a translation of an old Choctaw legend into English and a comparative analysis of Choctaw language arts with English language art forms. Pitchlynn's journal chronicles the findings of a multi-tribal delegation, dispatched to explore the southeastern section of Indian Territory, present-day Oklahoma, when the region was largely uninhabited and unimproved wilderness. Pitchlynn reports his encounters with such famous nineteenth century Native luminaries as Tenskwatawa, the Shawnee Prophet, and Pahuska, great chief of the Osages. Secondary texts include correspondence between McDonald, Pitchlynn and their peers in the period right after the removal Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek was signed, but before the emigration actually took place.

Introduction: Recovering the Choctaw Nineteenth Century

In terms of weighing the aggressive forces of change at work on the North American continent during the nineteenth century, no other factors equal in magnitude the emergence of the United States of America. One could say with credibility, however, that the United States' experience was an outgrowth of the sprawling rise of nations and nationalism in Europe. Indigenous American tribes, bands, and confederacies, were not separated from, but integral to, the rise of nations.

European powers treated with Indian tribes as sovereigns, as even a cursory examination of treaty language will show. This important recognition of tribal polities by the relatively new and still vulnerable nations of Europe, showed respect for the powers and traditions of the societies indigenous to this land, as well as deference to the tribes' sovereign titles to the coveted soils they each inhabited. European national governments (and later the United States) vigorously pursued the political necessity, however, to be recognized themselves as sovereign entities in these government-to-government negotiations. Diplomatic and military alliances were sought out and made by all parties, Native and European. Often, the primary motive for these alliances was to edge out competitors, Native and European, for the valuable land, resources, and trade on this continent.

Trusting this appraisal of the evolving relationships between indigenous American sovereigns and European proto-national sovereigns,[1] one may easily imagine the race for nationhood shaping up in the minds of the early nineteenth century Choctaw idealists,[2] Peter Perkins Pitchlynn and James L. McDonald, whose writings form the foundation of this study. Both were young men[3] when they wrote the core texts examined in this study; both were already acknowledged by other Choctaws as intellectuals and as ascendant political leaders. Peter Pitchlynn, or Hachotakni ('Snapping Turtle'), would continue to develop as a leader, serving as principal chief in the dangerous Reconstruction period, 1864-1866. Pitchlynn also served as one of the Choctaw delegates[4] to Congress, during the five-year period before the Civil War, 1856 through 1860 and into 1861, and for the remainder of his life after the Civil War, 1866 –

[1] I refer to England, France, Spain as proto-national because in the early nineteenth century all three still had powerful lords, kings, queens, or emperors, although the distribution of political power was slowly, but contentiously, becoming more democratic. The United States should at this time be regarded as most fitting the definition of a democratic republic, but this nation was also young and fragile, as the Civil War would so painfully prove.

[2] I use the descriptor, idealist, carefully. Pitchlynn and McDonald were idealists insofar as a lot of the work going on in their early writing is conceptual—conceptualizing a new nation and its institutions. This work required the imagination of an idealist, but did not permit too much conflict with practical considerations, because the stakes were so high. I am certainly *not* using " idealist" in the sense of German (Kantian) idealism, a version of which Emerson brought home to America after meeting Coleridge, Wordsworth, Mill, and Carlyle on his tour of Europe in 1832 and 1833, although a comparison of nineteenth century Choctaw idealism and the American idealism of Emerson might be interesting and useful.

[3] Peter Pitchlynn was 18 years old in 1824, the date of the earliest letter I examine, and by my best estimates, McDonald was between 20 and 22 years of age in 1824.

[4] They were popularly called delegates, but since American Indian nations had no representation in Congress, in modern professional terms we would see them more as a combination of lawyers and lobbyists. They frequently presented memorials to Congress. They were highly visible in Washington City, hobnobbing and bargaining in social settings, and hired lawyers from time to time, to file suits against the federal government and its contractors, for recovery of undelivered, or mis-delivered, treaty obligations. Pitchlynn and his fellow delegates performed work that was essential to the survival of an old tribal society in the process of becoming a viable modern nation.

1881.[5] McDonald's life and career were cut tragically short by his apparent suicide in the late summer of 1831.[6]

The Dancing Rabbit Creek removal treaty was signed in September 1830. The treaty initiated a process of forced choice, resulting in roughly three-quarters of the Choctaw population emigrating to Indian Territory over the next decade, rather than staying in Mississippi and accepting United States citizenship. Actual large scale emigrations did not begin until the next winter after the Treaty, the winter of 1831-1832.

The letters examined in this study, composed or received by McDonald and Pitchlynn, as well as Pitchlynn's journal of a joint expedition with Chickasaws and Creeks to explore their new country in what is now Oklahoma, emanated in the dynamic period of 1824 through 1831. The manuscripts open an amazing window into the mental processes of these Choctaw intellectuals in the crucial pre-removal period. Their writings during this period show a high regard for traditional Choctaw beliefs and practices, alongside a prominent discourse focused upon designing a nation.

At work in the decades of often ephemeral treaties and alliances leading up to the removal, was the comfort American Indians felt with concepts of territorial sovereignty, the sovereignty of a ruler, or the complexities of political hierarchy, but I suspect the semantic concept of "nation" at some point was new and somewhat foreign, inviting suspicion. Scholars have speculated that the term sovereignty originated with the French

[5] W. David Baird, *Peter Perkins Pitchlynn: Chief of the Choctaws* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 189- 199.
[6] Henry Vose, Letter to Peter P. Pitchlynn, Sept. 13, 1831. *Peter Perkins Pitchlynn Collection*, Box 1, Folder 26 (Norman: University of Oklahoma, Western History Collection). Vose's letter, discussing McDonald's death, strongly intimates that his death was suicide.

term and word, "souverain," referring to a king with absolute power.[7] The concept of a noble ruling sovereign was not foreign to Mississippian cultures in North America or to their descendants, the Choctaws, under discussion here.

Some of the Choctaws' neighbors, for example, the Natchez tribe, as recorded in the eighteenth century journals of the French colonist and explorer, Le Page du Pratz, deferred to the absolute authority of their divine right kings and queens, whom they called Suns. In contrast to his experience with European kings and queens, however, the French ethnographer observed that Natchez people brought their tributes of game and other valuables to their reigning Sun voluntarily and cheerfully. This detail suggests that the Natchez people shared a common and agreeable value system, which included, Le Page notes, the practiced ethic that the Sun's most sacred duty was to secure the well-being of the tribe.[8]

Based on real truths and important existential realities, terms like sovereignty and nationalism have become buzzwords in Native American studies, generally, and in Native literary criticism, in particular. Definitions of the terms, nevertheless, are sometimes elusive. When the term *sovereignty* is mentioned, for example, a tribal chief

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[7] For an excellent and detailed history of the evolution of term, sovereignty, see Scott Richard Lyons, "Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want From Writing?" in *College Composition and Communication*, 51:3, February 2000.

[8] Gordon Sayre, a prominent du Pratz scholar, writes that Antoine-Simon Le Page du Pratz was probably born around 1695. He came to Louisiana in 1718, and remained until 1734. He had some training in engineering, architecture, and astronomy, and enough wealth to obtain a concession near Natchez, in today's state of Mississippi, under the entrepreneurial colonization scheme organized by John Law and the Company of the West. He lived at Natchez from 1720 to 1728, along with a native woman of the Chetimacha tribe (with whom he seems to have fathered children), and a few African slaves. His familiarity with the local Natchez, and knowledge of their language and customs, is the basis for some of the most unique and fascinating parts of his writings. He returned to New Orleans to take an appointment as manager of the Company's plantation, and thereby avoided being killed in the so-called Natchez Massacre of 1729. This uprising, which he described in detail, destroyed the French Fort Rosalie and nearly all the colonists there, and led to the King ending the concession of the Company of the West, and seizing control of the plantation that Le Page du Pratz was managing. He published his observations of the Natchez, but not until 1758, in *L'Histoire de la Louisiane*. [http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~gsayre/LPDP.html]

or governor may be thinking, "courts, legislature, and laws," while a scholar may hear, 'decolonization and inherent rights,' and yet another visualizes, 'poems and pottery.' This imprecision and ambiguity are probably a good thing in the dialectic process of creating good definitions, but the ambiguity sometimes results in the tendency to favor jargon over analysis. Geary Hobson, in his introduction in 1979 to *The Remembered Earth* anthology, humorously, and memorably, characterizes mis-directed or under-informed critical approaches to Native literature as "an exercise in futility, like rattling bee-bees around in a boxcar."[9]

An example of such confusion is the tendency to conflate the terms, *sovereignty* and *nationalism*. In my opinion, a tribe can be sovereign without being a nation, although neither status is automatically superior or inferior to the other. I hasten to add, that I favor recognizing every historically legitimate tribe's sovereignty claims and their rights to self-determination. We have suffered quite enough in the world from historically persistent colonial and neo-colonial aggression, which results in the subjugation of indigenous peoples, and in far too much cultural homogenization.

I use the term nationalism to mean the ongoing agendas and pursuits of collective citizens, usually sharing a common ethno-historical background; agendas intended by them to build political philosophies and to advance social institutions within their societies, which, in turn, will ensure their society's growth and development as a nation. When I use the term sovereignty, I am usually referring to the fundamental rights of tribes, bands, and nations, to self-determination, and to their fundamental rights to carry

[9] Geary Hobson, *The Remembered Earth*: *An Anthology of Contemporary Native American* Literature (Albuquerque, NM: Red Earth Press, 1979), 6.

on various government-to-government relations, regardless of the simplicity or complexity of their government.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, no one in the world could quite predict what final shape, or shapes, the plethora of nations would take in the future, but a sense of obsolescence hung over monarchies and monarchs (and Suns perhaps). No sizeable group of people that I know of has ever agreed to not be viable in the world. Isolationist religious sects and nonconformist groups or movements, for example, in varying manners agree to live apart and distinct from mainstream society. In defending their creeds, nevertheless, such groups will argue their goal is to be *more*, not less, viable in the world, collectively choosing to reject features of modern life which bring people down.

Choctaws officially accepted their designation as a "nation," from the earliest treaty writings, reasoning that their best chances for viability and continuity lay in some level of subscription to these powerful European post-tribal notions of nationhood. The writings of McDonald and Pitchlynn suggest strongly that they measured importance and value in the modern concepts of nationhood. The operational tenets of nationalism would have been hard to miss with the boldest experiment in nationalism in history, the United States, going on all around them. It was imperative, they thought, for the Choctaws to make all the adjustments required to re-invent themselves as a nation in order to avoid being swallowed by one of the world's fastest growing empires. Included in these adjustments, apparently, from McDonald and Pitchlynn's shared perspective at least, was to posit a national cultural identity as insuperable as a national political identity.

McDonald and Pitchlynn's actions in this regard may serve as a point of clarification in sovereignty debates. Judging from their initiatives before removal, to set

down in writing a Choctaw legend, and to attend it with a strongly nationalistic comparative literary analysis, one could certainly infer (among other inferences, of course) that they believed, when the nation was threatened, after life itself, preserving knowledge and aesthetic tradition are paramount. This should help us focus and agree on some definitions.

In a modern Choctaw national government sense, the apparatuses of republican government—legislature, judiciary, and elected executive leadership—are very close to the center of the meaning of sovereignty. These are not ethnic/tribal concepts; these are nationalistic concepts. Among their Choctaw contemporaries, Pitchlynn and McDonald were perhaps the best schooled in concepts of nationalism, so their judgments of the importance of stories, story media, and the role of these things in preserving knowledge deserve our most careful consideration.

The importance to modern-day scholars of understanding their positions may be to see *how much* value they placed on negotiating for the preservation of knowledge and artistic traditions. They may have believed that the practice of advancing aesthetic-critical knowledge and preserving tribal literature ranks as highly, or at least nearly as highly, as constitutions, laws, treaties, contracts, and other legal bargaining. I can't tell a traditional story and feel comfortable about it, they may be saying, if my nation is homeless. Likewise, on the other hand, I can't feel good about my nation, even if it has a secure home, if its knowledge and arts are obscured. I emphasize *obscured*. I did not say lost.

Following a trail of historical clues, I can attempt to track down the precise date and circumstances of when a pre-modern society becomes a nation, but such an exercise

will likely be largely ineffective. The trail is fraught with sharp curves and switchbacks—with complicated considerations of transitional points.

Terminologically at least, this maize of transitions has been neatly bridged by Anthony D. Smith,[10] who co-opted the French word *ethnie* as a specialist term to describe a pre-national ethno-cultural group. He posits six pre-requisites for an *ethnie:* a collective name, a myth of descent, a shared history, a distinctive shared culture, an association with a particular territory, and a sense of solidarity. Such entities have existed throughout history, although their persistence is not inevitable. Some will make the transition into nationhood, Smith asserts; others will remain ethno-cultural groups. There appears to be no feature which makes it possible to predict in advance whether this transition will take place.[11]

A working definition of *nation* shares some of the same basic features of an ethnie, but with a much more formalized structure. A nation is usually a large body of people, associated with a particular, carefully demarcated, territory, that is sufficiently conscious of its unity to seek or to possess a government peculiarly its own.

This peculiarity of government usually involves a written constitution and written laws which formalize governmental structure and agencies, and which provides for modern forms of military authority, law enforcement, a judiciary, a representative legislature or parliament, and methods to collect revenues to guarantee its fiscal continuity as a nation.[12] I claim little expertise in the sociology of nationalism, but I do find Smith's terminology useful in talking about what I see in McDonald's and

[10] Anthony D. Smith (born 1933) is Professor Emeritus of Nationalism and Ethnicity at the London School of Economics, and is considered one of the founders of the interdisciplinary field of nationalism studies.
[11] Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 19-22.
[12] Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*, 8-9.

Pitchlynn's work of the early nineteenth century. His definitions are most useful in answering questions regarding whether or not their writing is nationalistic.

In Chapter One of this study, "James L. McDonald's Spectre Essay: Choctaw Literary Criticism in 1830," I present and analyze a ten-page letter written by McDonald in December of 1830. Within the letter, McDonald sets down a surprisingly literary translation of "The Spectre and the Hunter: A Legend of the Choctaws," along with his analytical commentary on the comparative force of the Choctaw and English languages, as well as a comparative analysis of storytelling modes and styles in the traditions of the two languages. I pose questions and look for answers regarding whether or not McDonald's essay can be regarded as an early example of tribally specific literary criticism.

In Chapter Two, "Peter Pitchlynn: His Journal of 1828," the study focuses on an extensive journal written by Pitchlynn while he participated in an exploratory expedition to the new Indian Territory west of the Mississippi River, into what is now southeastern Oklahoma. On the journey he encounters such interesting historical personalities as Tecumseh's brother, Tenskwatawa, better known as the Shawnee Prophet, as well as Chief Pahuska of the Osages. Also in this chapter, I contend with a Pitchlynn biographer regarding what I judge as faulty conclusions about Pitchlynn's character and motivations as a Choctaw politician.

In Chapter Three, "Unity is Everything: Pre-removal Choctaw Correspondence," I examine the dynamics of the Choctaws' pre-removal conversations, carried on in letters, concerning the project of nation-building in the new territory west of the Mississippi. Finally in this chapter, I extend the context of the writings of these Choctaw intellectuals,

comparing them with the work of other indigenous authors who published books in the first half of the nineteenth century, particularly focusing on *Life, Letters and Speeches* by George Copway.

Given the large archive of Choctaw writing contained in the Western History Collections of the University of Oklahoma, I regard the study to be much more exploratory than exhaustive. As much as anything else, my work is the work of cultural recovery, in that it begins to fill in one of the numerous voids in the narrative of Choctaw history. This primary research can provide valuable insights and useful touch points in reading indigenous writing in the nineteenth century, writing just prior to the onset of industrialization, and contemporaneous with a decline in religious and dynastic legitimacy as a basis for governing authority. Another goal of the study is to endeavor to place the writings of these early Native American laborers in the arts of literacy within nationalistic arcs of consciousness, which hopefully illuminate our work as scholars in the twenty-first century.

The only disappointment I have with this study is that the archive of manuscripts is voluminous, and I have only scratched the surface of the scholarship that needs to be done on Choctaw writing, both in Oklahoma and Mississippi. I feel a bit like a person who has just turned on a flashlight in a dark space, full of interest and valuable things, and whose batteries for this evening have played out. I feel certain that I will keep returning, with fresh batteries, to this vault filled with treasures.

Chapter One

James L. McDonald's Spectre Essay: Choctaw Literary Criticism in 1830

"I resume the task which I left unfinished (or rather untouched) a few days since, in an attempt to prove that our vernacular tongue is more expressive than the English. Should you coincide with me in opinion who shall gainsay our decision? It may indeed be said that the parties interested will generally decide in their own favour. But let the question for the present rest."

---- James L. McDonald, writing to Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, December 17, 1830.

Peter Perkins Pitchlynn was Chief of the Choctaws during the last year of the Civil War and the first year of Reconstruction (1864-1866). His close friend and fellow Choctaw, James L. McDonald, who like Pitchlynn was born in Mississippi Territory in the first decade of the nineteenth century, has received some historical note as a shrewd legal analyst in treaty negotiations.

McDonald's early childhood details are less well-documented than the more famous Pitchlynn's, but if they met as children, they would have certainly hunted, fished, and roamed the Mississippi hills and creek bottoms together. We know that they were well-acquainted by the time Pitchlynn turned 18, because McDonald wrote informal letters to him while on the famous journey of Choctaws to negotiate the momentous treaty of 1825 in Washington City. That delegation included three Choctaw chiefs, lesser officials, and McDonald, the first American Indian admitted to the bar in the United States.

Choctaw lands became part of Mississippi Territory at its establishment in 1798. Shortly thereafter the Choctaw Nation ceded to the United States over 2.5 million acres of land along the Yazoo River in the Treaty of Fort Adams in 1801. Choctaws were pressured into successive land cessions to the United States that ended seven treaties later

with the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in the fall of 1830. In the last treaty, Choctaws agreed to be removed to new lands west of the Mississippi River.

In this climate of receding territorial titles, it became clear that young bright students like Pitchlynn and McDonald would need strong literacy skills, as well as legal and political acumen, to help preserve Choctaw interests in a rapidly changing political landscape. In 1820, the first census after Mississippi statehood (1817), counted the state population as 75,448. By the 1830 census, that number had swelled to 136,621 residents, and that number more than doubled again after Choctaw removal to 375,651 in 1840.[13] The Choctaw population when removal began in 1831 was about 20,000.[14] These numbers speak volumes about the competition the Choctaws were up against in Mississippi for real estate. In such an atmosphere, a good lawyer is probably a necessary ingredient for success.

In this study, nevertheless, I am proud to introduce McDonald's work in another light, for its contributions to the debate over critical approaches and models for studying Native American literature. It may be said with some certainty that this young Choctaw intellectual was the first literary critic among the Choctaws to formally set down his evaluations in writing. Both Pitchlynn and McDonald grew up speaking Choctaw, although Pitchlynn was bi-lingual from childhood, a detail the significance of which I will show later.

McDonald's conventional letters, written in English, and his more literary epistles to Pitchlynn are preserved in the Western History Collection at the University of Oklahoma. These manuscripts have been examined by a few historians and at least one

[13] United States Census Bureau data. [www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/.htm]
[14] Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 69.

folklorist.[15] His correspondence with Pitchlynn between the years 1824 and 1831, to my knowledge, has never heretofore been examined by a literary scholar for its potential value as literature or as literary criticism.

The distinctiveness of McDonald's writings, particularly a 3600-word letter composed during a cold week in December 1830, which I have come to call the "Spectre Essay," lies chiefly in the relatively early dates of the writing, the quality of the writing, and in its almost uncanny foreshadowing of modern critical conversations about American Indian literature—namely the importance of tribal specificity in models for criticizing Native literature.

McDonald divided his long letter to Pitchlynn (the focal text of this chapter) into two sections. The first section, dated December 13, 1830, describes the story styling methods and techniques of a typical Choctaw storyteller of the period. This first section serves, further, as a preamble to the presentation in the second section of the letter, dated December 17, 1830, of "The Spectre and the Hunter, a Legend of the Choctaws." A complete transcription of the Spectre Essay, including the legend, is presented in Appendix One.

The legend itself, a horror story, is presented by McDonald as a translation into English of a traditional story told to him by a relatively primitive and unnamed young

[15] Charles Lanman, *Haw-ho-noo: or, Records of a Tourist* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1850). Lanman's book is the only book I know of that published any portion of McDonald's letter of December 13 and 17, 1830, which was presented to Lanman by Peter Pitchlynn. Lanman only published the story, "The Spectre and the Hunter," representing Choctaw oral tradition. This affirms my assertion that McDonald and Pitchlynn intended the Spectre Essay for publication. Since Lanman and his publisher elected to only publish Indian 'folk tales,' the book is an early example of the American literary establishment's insistence on treating Indian cultural productions as artifact, rather than as art or, God forbid, analysis. The moral imperative for this treatment by publishers of Indian writing is that it rests a lot easier on the American collective conscience to have treated aborigines telling primitive stories around the campfire so brutishly, than to have treated educated scholars this way. The pervasive view of pre-twentieth-century Indians as primitives persists largely unchanged to the present day.

Choctaw storyteller. He declares further that the story reminds him of stories he heard frequently as a boy.

My thesis in this chapter is that McDonald's work was designed by him to be useful in building a critical model for reading Choctaw literature. He ultimately offers no critical model as such, nor do I, although it is reasonable to say that we both are trying to identify foundational principles for such a critical model. I am resisting the caution to qualify this claim any further. The only caveat is that there is no reason to believe that McDonald intended his example to be *the only* useful way of reading or hearing Choctaw stories.

There is ample evidence, on the other hand, that McDonald understood that his was the first element of an ongoing discourse involving Choctaws writing in English. His critical disposition, as revealed in the Spectre Essay, was self-consciously nationalistic, but also one that fortuitously followed literary rules set out in English language schools, while maintaining and proclaiming aesthetics with deeper roots in American soil.

The First American Indian Lawyer and the Treaty of 1825

Other than the few details he reveals in the manuscript of 1830 explicated here, I have been able to uncover little of James L. McDonald's early life. He describes to Pitchlynn how as a child he often got together with other Choctaw boys and exchanged stories that they called "shookha noompas," which means "hog stories" [shukha anumpa, 'hog talk']. The tone of familiarity with which McDonald addresses Pitchlynn in the archived letters suggests that they were probably close friends from childhood.

According to Choctaw scholar D.L. Birchfield, McDonald was sent east at age 14 on Chief Pushmataha's recommendation to be a ward in the home of Colonel Thomas L. McKenney. McKenney, the first Commissioner of Indian Affairs, reports in his memoirs that he placed McDonald first under the tutelage of Rev. James Carnahan, who soon after became president of Princeton College (1823–1854). After receiving a typical classical preparatory education which likely included instruction in English grammar, common arithmetic, history, geography, surveying, and moral philosophy from Carnahan, McDonald was sent to Ohio where he read law in the office of Judge John McLean (who later became a Supreme Court Justice). Birchfield, a lawyer himself, credits McDonald with being the first American Indian admitted to the bar and further credits him with 'saving the day' for the Choctaws in the treaty negotiations of 1824-25 in Washington City.[16]

After the unfortunate deaths of the two chiefs, Apuckshunubee and Pushmataha, it fell upon McDonald in the early days of 1825 to guide the delegates in negotiating with the U.S. government. According to Birchfield, his legal skills:

> . . . saved the Choctaws from losing much of what they had gained in the Treaty of 1820, and they [his skills] had gained for the Choctaws significant benefits and payments for those portions of the Treaty of 1820 which the United States had sought to negate, as well as requiring

[16] D.L. Birchfield, *The Oklahoma Basic Intelligence Test* (Greenfield Center, NY: The Greenfield Review Press, 1998), 165-166.

that the United States settle many outstanding Choctaw claims of a wide variety before the Choctaws would entertain the notion of modifying the Treaty of 1820.[17]

Teaching leadership qualities and skills was part of the Latin grammar school model prevalent in the early republic and the first style of education experienced by promising young American Indian scholars. Education in Latin and the Classics was a pre-disposition that changed later in the century, turning toward basic literacy and manual skills training.[18] Reflecting on the qualities of his former ward's performance in the 1824-25 treaty negotiations, McKenney said, "I found him so skilled in the business of his mission . . . as to make it more of an up-hill business than I had ever before experienced in negotiating with Indians. I believe Mr. Calhoun thought so too."[19]

A Writer Emerges from the Oral Tradition

Contrary to portrayals of Choctaws facing Removal as powerless victims, reading the letters of the Choctaw correspondents isolated for this study reveal an optimism, a confidence, even an exalted enthusiasm for re-establishing Choctaw education, agriculture, culture and commerce in their new sovereign nation. This optimism, it should be said immediately, was likely more evident among educated mixed-blood Choctaws than it was among full-bloods who, for the most part, held a less liberal view of

[17] D.L. Birchfield, 166.
[18] Amanda Cobb, *Listening to Our Grandmothers' Stories: The Bloomfield Academy for Chickasaw Females, 1853-1949*, Lincoln: Nebraska UP, 2000, 46.
[19] qtd. in Birchfield, 167. "Mr. Calhoun" refers to John C. Calhoun of South Carolina. He served as Secretary of War under President James Monroe and was Vice President-elect under President John Quincy Adams at the time of 1825 treaty negotiations.

modernity. Nevertheless, I sense in reading McDonald that he regards oral tradition not as a dead artifact but more an art in a state of transformation.[20]

McDonald, in the immediate throes of leading the incorporation of literacy into Choctaw discourses, seems very excited by the transformation going on; certainly, not perplexed by the end of one tradition and the beginning of another. Though his evaluations tend to romanticize and perhaps overestimate the superiority of Choctaw to English, his essay is neither nostalgic nor defensive.

I am calling the 10-page letter an essay, because I think that was his sense of what he was writing. The legend McDonald presents is by all appearances a direct translation from the Choctaw oral tradition. The story represents roughly half the document, and the other half serves as an introduction to the legend, as well as a critical commentary on Choctaw oral performance compared to English storytelling styles.

McDonald's essay, besides showing oral tradition as a dynamic art in a state of transformation**,** presents the commentary and legend as powerful examples of how literacy impacts oral tradition. My first impression as a reader of the Legend in its immaculate hand-written form was that it has a markedly literate quality. Just the fact that a writer of letters has to accomplish effects in the writing that a live storyteller would achieve by gesture, inflection, and other languages of the human body may necessarily result in a transformation of a story that has existed viably for perhaps centuries only in the memory of tellers.

[20] Lisa Brooks argues forcefully that one of the strengths of stories in the oral tradition is their ability to be re-adapted or "transformed" to satisfy contemporary cultural needs, in her essay, "Digging at the Roots, Locating an Ethical, Native Criticism," in Acoose, Brooks, Foster, Howe, Justice, Morgan, Roppolo, Suzack, C. Teuton, S. Teuton, Warrior, and Womack, *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective* (Norman: Oklahoma UP, 2008), 234-259.

"The Spectre and the Hunter" is a tale of horror. It is also a cautionary tale which portrays what tragically happens to a tribal member, the great hunter-warrior-athlete, Ko-way-hoom-mah[21] [koi humma, 'red wildcat'] who:

> questioned the existence of It-tay-bo-lahs ['iti boli,' an imaginary creature or phantasm] and Nan-ish-ta-hool-ahs [nanishtahullo, witch], and as to Shil-loops [shilup, 'ghost'] he said he had never seen them—then why should he fear them? –Dangerous it is to trifle with beings that walk unseen among us.[22]

Even though McDonald interrogates beliefs about witchcraft, labeling them absurd, waning superstitions,[23] he explains that the story was told to him by a hired hand during a season of employment at McDonald's home place. The unnamed young Choctaw storyteller has been run out of his hometown having been accused of witchcraft by a conjurer. The narrator remained in his employment, McDonald relates, until he could earn enough money to buy a good rifle and ammunition and emigrate to the new nation in the western Indian Territory. The inescapable implication here is that Choctaw mythic values, and the language forms they reside in, embodied in people like the young storyteller, are moving West intact with the Nation.

"Young men now are not what their fathers have been," the legend claims in its first paragraph, suggesting strongly that a central motif of the story represents cultural

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[21] The reasons why McDonald writes Choctaw words as syllables strung together with hyphens are obscure. As I speculate that McDonald expected to see his essay and legend published, I expect that McDonald used this method in deference to white readers who might want a guide to pronunciation.
After seeing this form, Choctaw linguist Marcia Haag said that these incorrect usages "drive linguists crazy. That system completely obscures the morphology, and it's rather offensive." The more correct orthography that literate Choctaws use is given inside the brackets in quoted text. In my discussions of McDonald's protagonist, I use the correct spelling, Koi Humma.

[22] James L. McDonald, Letter to Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, Dec. 13 and Dec. 17, 1830, p. 5. The original handwritten letter is archived in the Peter Perkins Pitchlynn Collection, Box 1, Folder 19, Western History Collection, Bizzell Memorial Library, University of Oklahoma. Appendix One contains a copy of McDonald's original handwritten 1830 letter, and Appendix Two is a complete transcription of the letter.

[23] ibid., 5.

values that deserve revival and preservation. Koi Humma's derision of the power of the spirits and his fierce individualism prove to be his downfall. After setting out on a hunting trip accompanied only by his loyal dog:

> Ko-way-hoom-mah [koi humma, 'red wildcat'] kindled a fire, and having shared a portion of his provisions with his dog, he spread his deer skin and blanket by the crackling fire, and mused on the adventures of the day already past, and on the probable success of the ensuing one.[24]

As he settles into a dreamy state of slumber, soothed by his expectations of the next day's successful hunt, he is startled by a cry in the distance. "He listened with breathless attention," the legend continues, "and in a few minutes he again heard the cry—keen—long—and piercing, as that which the Tik-ba-hay-kah [tikbaheka, 'leader'] gives in the dance preceding the Ball play."[25] The cry was distinctly human, not animal, even though he could summon no reasonable explanation for its source. The fact that such a cry and the accompanying ball play would be a daytime activity no doubt heightened his anxiety even more.

Fearful, he rekindled his fire, folded his blanket around him, and waited, for the voice was evidently approaching his camp. Soon, a ghastly figure emerged from the woods surrounding his campfire.

> It seemed to be the figure of a hunter like himself. Its form was tall and gaunt—its features livid and unearthly. A tattered blanket was girded round his waist, and covered his shoulders; and he had what seemed to have been a rifle, the barrel

[24] ibid., 6.
[25] ibid., 7.

> corroded with rust, the stock decayed and rotted, and covered here and there with mushrooms.[26]

Koi Humma felt his flesh and hair creep as the spectre advanced and stretched forth his bony hands to the fire, shivering with cold. He (or it) fixed his hollow gaze upon the hunter, but spoke not a word. With instinctive courtesy, Koi Humma offered his grim visitor his deer skin as a seat. The spectre shook his head and instead plucked up some briars from the nearby thicket, spread them like a bed by the fire, and reclined as if to fall asleep.

After a tense interval during which Koi Humma was "petrified with mingled fear and astonishment," his dog miraculously begins to speak. "Arise and flee for your life. The spectre now slumbers; should you also slumber you are lost," said the dog. "Arise and flee, while I stay and watch."[27]

Koi Humma takes flight, runs for miles, finally stopping to rest on the banks of a roaring river. He feels safe for a moment, but then hears the spectre crashing through the woods toward him, with the dog baying in the chase. Koi Humma dives into the stream and swims the cold current. By the time he reaches the center of the river, the spectre comes to the river bank and plunges in after him.

Koi Humma imagines the macabre ghost glaring at him with glassy eyeballs and reaching for him from the air right above the river with skeleton-like hands:

> With a cry of horror, he was about giving up the struggle for life and sinking beneath the waves, when his faithful dog, with a fierce yell, seized upon his

[26] ibid., 7-8
[27] ibid., 8.

master's enemy. After a short and desperate struggle, they both sank, the waters settled over them, and our exhausted hunter reached the shore in safety.[28]

Koi Humma returned home an altered man, "shunned the dance and the Ball play, and his former hilarity gave place to a settled melancholy. In about a year after his strange adventure, he joined a war party against a distant enemy and never returned."[29]

It is difficult to determine what McDonald's agenda may be in transcribing a story from the oral tradition and making it the centerpiece of a critical commentary. It is probably what it purports to be—a story that will entertain and instruct an audience, and a comparative analysis of how the forms and techniques of Choctaw storytelling stack up against English modes. One thing seems certain. McDonald is fascinated with interplay of oral and written texts.

Indigenous Criticism: Assimilating English Writing

The only commissioner representing the Choctaw Nation in its Treaty with the United States in the winter of 1824-25 who signed his name in English was J. L. McDonald. Other Choctaw commissioners, Moshulatubbee, Robert Cole, Daniel McCurtain, Talking Warrior, Red Fort, Nitakechi and David Folsom signed with an 'x' mark, and their names were recorded by a clerk of the treaty conference.[30] This excursion to Washington City has been mentioned most often in history books as the one where two Choctaw chiefs died. Chief Apuckshunubbee died en route to the conference in Maysville, Kentucky, as the result of an accident, and the more famous Chief Pushmataha died of the croup on Christmas Eve, 1824, after indulging in a $6000

[28] ibid., 9.
[29] ibid., 9.
[30] 1825 Treaty of Washington City. [http:www.choctawnation.com/History/Index].

cornucopia of oysters, liquor, lodging and other festivities provided by the U.S. government.[31]

The few white people that McDonald had encountered growing up in the old Choctaw Nation in Mississippi had adopted Indian customs and dress. After receiving an education in the English language and experiencing increasing levels of contact with white people, he began to analyze the differences between the two cultures. McDonald was certainly not the first Choctaw to engage in this sort of analysis, but he appears to have been the first to attempt to formally set down such evaluations in writing. McDonald's presentation of a traditional story situated in a critical context is important, among other reasons, because the essay was written *before* the dissolution of the original nation—before, in the words of Daniel Heath Justice, "the invasion of [their part of] Turtle Island by Europeans resulted in a devastation of apocalyptic proportions."[32]

Virginia Woolf in a famous essay written in 1942 referred to letter-writing as "the humane art," the art "which owes its origin to the love of friends" and its texture to the primacy of the conversational paradigm.[33] In her essay she examines the letters of the famous British art historian and politician, Horace Walpole. Although Walpole published several books, the most famous of which was a novel, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), his widely-read letters, according to Woolf, had held for almost two centuries more literary influence.

Woolf in her essay is contending with Walpole's biographer, whom she says argues that "Horace Walpole's letters were inspired not by the love of friends but by the

[31] Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman: Oklahoma UP, 1961), 50.
[32] Justice, 4.
[33] Virginia Woolf, *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1942), 58.

love of posterity."[34] She is questioning the assertion that Walpole was just using his carefully chosen correspondents as relatively unimportant "pegs" when he wrote letters on important literary, historical or political subjects; that his arguments are actually aiming at a much wider audience, at posterity.

"The letter writer is no surreptitious historian," she writes. "He is a man of short range sensibility; he speaks not to the public at large but to the individual in private."[35] Woolf is writing specifically of Walpole's letters, but suggests a broader principle. If we regard the letter writer as an historian or critic in disguise, she argues, we may be denying his peculiar genius as a letter writer.

Following Woolf's logic, I am running a serious risk in my assessment of James L. McDonald's letter. In styling his long letter in 1830 to Peter Pitchlynn as a critical essay, rather than as simply an eloquent personal correspondence, I risk underestimating McDonald's genius as a letter writer. Also, by extension, I risk under-appraising letter-writing as a literary genre itself. Nevertheless, it is my contention that McDonald meant his letter to be an enduring essay with valuable and significant dimensions beyond a demonstration of his personal eloquence. It certainly could be true that the immaculately penned finished copy of the letter that he delivered to Pitchlynn was meant to be a handsome souvenir of their literary conversations, but from my first reading 175 years after it was written, I considered the letter to be an essay on comparative linguistics, comparative literature, and as critical commentary regarding the interesting interface of oral traditions with the practices of literacy.

[34] Ibid., 56.
[35] Ibid., 57

McDonald's letters deserve our attention in several degrees of valuation. First, and perhaps foremost, his letters are useful in trying to understand how a people and their cultural institutions operating primarily in an oral tradition cope with, transition to, become subsumed by, or perhaps assimilate a dominating new literate tradition. With these questions in mind, we observe that McDonald and his peers occupied a vantage point that twenty-first century literary critics cannot personally experience and which, at best, we can only roughly estimate. McDonald was an important Choctaw intellectual living and writing in a colonial contact zone alongside a burgeoning population of white American citizens on the expanding U.S. southwestern frontier in the early nineteenth century.

Mary Louise Pratt defines "contact zones" as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths... ."[36] In Pratt's view, the concept of the contact zone helps us understand "why subordinate cultures feel invisible, why they may feel self-hatred, why they feel such powerful pressures to be like (or assimilate to) the dominant culture, and why they need to be so resilient and inventive as they find ways to negotiate, resist, or undermine the dominant culture."[37] I find this contact zone abstraction useful in understanding McDonald's work, except for (at least) one essentially flawed presupposition—that McDonald and his peers assimilated "to" the dominant culture that was treating and litigating Choctaws out of their ancestral homeland in Mississippi. Choctaws were preparing, both materially and culturally, to

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[36] Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Ways of Reading: an Anthology for Writers*, edited by Davis Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky (Boston: Bedford Books, 1996), 530.

[37] Pratt, 531.

emigrate to a new sovereign country. Based on a reading of his correspondence, McDonald's project was more evidently one of active assimilation "**of**" the English language and the technology of literacy, and was one of lively negotiation with the problems and potentialities inherent to literacy.

Important questions come to mind when examining Choctaw writing from this period. Was McDonald aware that scholars would someday read his letter as an example of comparative literary analysis? Were he and Pitchlynn and others, perhaps, involved in ongoing discourse about the impact of dramatic shifts underway among Choctaws from the oral intellectual traditions to written productions? How do Choctaw and other indigenous letter-writings rank in importance with published articles? How do we read these commentaries in the context of political upheavals during the 1820's and 1830's? What can we know about McDonald just from his writing? I believe that at least partial answers to these questions are available from an examination of written correspondence between these members of the first generation of Choctaws to incorporate literacy into their lives as a fully viable tool of discourse.

McDonald's letter to Pitchlynn fulfilled a promise he had made "to reduce to writing a tale which I have repeated to you, as illustration of the imaginative powers of our countrymen." McDonald thanked his "esteemed friend" for the "hint that has recalled it to mind: For I am confined to the house by the gloomy weather which prevails without, and a little exercise of the pen will be an agreeable relief."[38] McDonald explains that "The Spectre and the Hunter, A Legend of the Choctaws," was typical of stories he had heard as a child of five or six ("some twenty years since") when it was the custom of

[38] James L. McDonald, Letter to Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, Dec. 13 and Dec. 17, 1830, 1.

Choctaw boys to assemble together on pleasant summer evenings and tell stories in rotation.

"These stories they facetiously styled 'shookha noompas,' or hog stories, [shukha anumpa, 'folk tale (lit. 'hog talk')']" he relates, "but the reason why they were so styled, I have now forgotten if I ever knew."[39] He declares that he remembers distinctly a number of these stories, and "compares them with others which I have heard in after years among the white people, and I can truly say that the Indian loses nothing in comparison."[40] He goes on to write that regarding the stories designed to captivate the attention and enlist the feelings of children, that "the Indian has decidedly the advantage."[41]

One could read McDonald's essay as romanticized self-adulation, not criticism at all. His claims about the advantages of Indian stories over the whites' are not supported with any textual evidence from white writers or orators, and the only non-Indian title he even mentions is Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle," which he alludes to in an ironic post-script at the end of the essay. Nevertheless, the more I read this communication the more I have come to believe that McDonald meant it to be, perhaps naively, an enduring essay of comparative language and literature.

His argument is discreetly constructed, consciously aimed at contending with the counter-argument that his is simply a nostalgic view of a "vanished" culture. The tone of the letter suggests that Choctaw writers are carefully and selectively assimilating the English language and literary styles into older, more established language art forms. The distinction between 'assimilating' a contact zone culture, as opposed to 'being

[39] ibid., 1.
[40] ibid., 1.
[41] ibid., 2.

assimilated by' a colonial culture, is an important one. This is one of the pivot points in the elaboration of Native literary criticism as articulated by Creek novelist and scholar Craig Womack in *Red on Red*.[42]

`"We need, for example, to recover the nineteenth century," Womack writes, "especially in terms of understanding what Native writers were up to during that time and how their struggles have evolved toward what Indian writers can say in print today, as well as the foundational principles they provide for an indigenous criticism."[43] McDonald seems to be reaching for some of these foundational principles.

"He [the Choctaw storyteller] is in general more familiar with the objects of nature than the white man," McDonald argues, "and hence can enliven his stories with more apposite and striking illustrations."[44] Alluding to previous conversations with Pitchlynn on these issues of technique and epistemology, McDonald writes:

> You have remarked how exactly he [the Indian] can name the different trees of the forest, and the almost numberless plants of the field. You know that not a beast ranges the hills, not a reptile crawls on the plains which he cannot name. The fowls that sail the air and the birds that warble in the grove are equally familiar. In his lonely wanderings, they have become as dear and cherished companions. He has learned all their names and can describe to you their habits and distinctive histories."[45]

In a few sentences McDonald sketches a picture of nineteenth-century Indian versions of silviculture, botany, zoology and ornithology. I find that this part of McDonald's

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[42] Craig S. Womack, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
[43] ibid., 3.
[44] James L. McDonald, Letter to Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, Dec. 13 and 17, 1830, 2.
[45] ibid., 2.

argument resonates interestingly with Cheryl Suzack's twenty-first century argument outline for Native literary criticism. She calls for a criticism that "eschews the self-evident in critical engagements with Native literary texts to formulate instead a form of critical discourse that reads across the genres of literary, legal, and social positioning."[46] McDonald, I think, is saying essentially the same thing. The Choctaw storyteller can enhance his/her stories with "more apposite and striking illustrations" precisely because the telling of stories ranges across a broad geography of arts and sciences, each informing the other. Using Suzack's term, McDonald is "positioning" the typical Choctaw producer of a language art form as one unwilling to divorce the arts from the sciences. He concludes this paragraph with a quantitative estimation of the difference between white and Indian experience and education: "Almost every Indian can do this, and nine tenths of white people cannot."[47]

Trying to be even-handed in his comparative analysis, but without devoting even an entire sentence to the concession, McDonald declares, "I believe that in tales of high imagination the Indians are deficient**;** but it is, as I conceive, simply for the want of improvement."[48] Perhaps suggesting a direction in national education policy, an arena toward which correspondent Pitchlynn devoted a lot of his professional career energy, McDonald writes, "They have the stamina, if in early life it could be drawn out, cultivated and polished."[49] Turning to a direct comparison of indigenous and colonial languages, the author observes:

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[46] Cheryl Suzack, "Land Claims, Identity Claims: Mapping Indigenous Feminism in Literary Criticism," in Acoose, et al., *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 175.

[47] James L. McDonald, Letter to Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, Dec. 13 and Dec. 17, 1830, 2.
[48] ibid., 2.
[49] ibid., 2.

> There is also, it seems to me, much more force and precision in the Choctaw language, than in English;--or do I only think so because it is my mother tongue? It may not be so varied, so rich as the English language; its vocabulary is far from being so copious; but as far as it goes, is it not stronger, more nervous?[50]

He supports this admittedly over-romanticized claim of linguistic force by explicating in rich detail how a warrior or hunter describes his adventures "with a clearness and distinctness which make you feel as if you had been with him.... You become completely identified with the narrator;--in short, you enjoy the pleasures of the chase, without the fatigue."[51] McDonald's central point in this passage of the essay is that the selection of animated details by a Choctaw storyteller gives a high degree of presence to his story and creates a clear connection with his audience. Again, he is arguing that technique and form tend to trump content or context as a critical consideration.

These meta-linguistic and meta-discursive comments by McDonald, a Choctaw intellectual immersed in the early stages of incorporating literacy into Choctaw language arts traditions, are crucially important. When any writer, worker, or professional is in the dialectical crunch of blending older conventions with newer ones, both conventions are laid bare. This is especially true of language conventions, which govern our discourses routinely on a sub-conscious plane. McDonald is metaphorically standing in a doorway through which exciting new language art forms are passing into his possession. His conviviality in welcoming what he perceives as the promising potentials of literacy is surprising. There is no evidence in his scrutiny that suggests that he expects literacy to

[50] ibid., 2.
[51] ibid., 3.

replace orality, or orality to subdue literacy. It is more accurately inferred that he expects each to perform a transforming and edifying work on the other. We may choose to regard this as what Womack refers to as a foundational principle of indigenous criticism.

McDonald's Critical Project

I will interject the important question here: What was J. L. McDonald's purpose in writing what is essentially a 10-page essay on Choctaw storytelling? Why, for example, is there not a single reference to politics as such in this correspondence between two young and prominent Choctaw political leaders, a letter crafted within a tense national setting just two-and-a-half months after the signing of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek (September 27-28, 1830) which sealed the fate of Choctaw removal from their ancestral homeland? The answer may be that literary criticism is very much a political act. Education is an intensely political process of indoctrination. Literary criticism informs these doctrines, not only in the vital terms of what texts are employed in the literacy-based classroom, but also in terms of *how* and *why* these texts are taught.

I will speculate that McDonald's and Pitchlynn's stewardly concerns for the integrity of Choctaw institutions and traditions were, in fact, heightened by the impending emigrations; that paramount amongst a plethora of cultural concerns were the directions they would lead in the reconstitution of the Choctaw Nation west of the Mississippi. Pitchlynn did, in fact, become the primary leader in the establishment of the Choctaw school system in the new Choctaw Nation in what is now Oklahoma.[52]

[52] Pitchlynn's role in establishing the new Choctaw Nation's school system, as well as the other interesting politics of re-constituting an entire nation, are richly detailed in W. David Baird's biography of Pitchlynn, *Peter Pitchlynn: Chief of the Choctaws* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972).

In the first sentence of his letter addressed to Pitchlynn, McDonald writes: "The promise which I once made you to reduce to writing a tale which I had repeated to you, as illustration of the imaginative powers of our countrymen, had nearly escaped my recollection and I thank you for the hint which has recalled it to mind." It seems safe to me to speculate that Pitchlynn's request, *after* the Treaty and *before* emigration, for McDonald to begin writing down Choctaw stories and his critical commentary on rhetorical practice, hinged on two important recognitions. The first recognition was that if Choctaws failed to develop their own school curricula, much would be lost in terms of native epistemology, belief, and practice. The second recognition, which I base on the quality I see in J. L. McDonald's writing, was that he was probably the most gifted and skilled literary person in the nation, and therefore, was the man for the job.

Other than an occasional trapper or trader who had married into the Choctaw Nation, McDonald knew few if any Europeans as a child, experiencing little but Choctaw tradition, speaking and hearing almost exclusively the Choctaw language. In the spring of 1819, at the urging of, and with a commitment of tribal monies from Chiefs Pushmataha and Moshulatubbee, missionary teachers from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions opened the first literacy-based school, the Eliot School, on the Yalobusha River in the Choctaw Nation.[53] Like the Cherokees in Georgia, Choctaws felt that assimilating literacy and associated technologies would give them the best odds for maintaining control of their homeland. "Choctaw leaders were eager for education, not Christian salvation," Clara Sue Kidwell writes. "They were willing to

[53] Clara Sue Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818-1918* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 30-38.

follow the civilization policy of the federal government and learn to live with their white neighbors."[54]

The advent of Eliot School may have been the first opportunity that McDonald, a teenager in 1819, had for learning to read and write in English. This school is probably where McDonald was attending and excelling when Pushmataha recommended to McKinney that he take him east with him for a better education. The rest of the story we know. At twenty years of age he served as English language interpreter for, and participated ultimately as a commissioner in, the negotiations in Washington City for the Treaty of 1825 between the Choctaw Nation and the United States. Unfortunately, McDonald's untimely death in 1831, nine months after he penned the Spectre Essay, tragically cut short what surely would have been a stellar career as a writer and participant in future Choctaw political affairs.

Another question we may ask of the Spectre Essay is "What can we know about J. L. McDonald just from his writing? One vital statistic that we may glean from his manuscript is that at the time of this letter (late 1830) he was approximately 25 or 26 years old. A thorough literature and internet search turned up very little biographical, and no genealogical, information on him. Apparently, no one claims him as a famous ancestor, a statistic which strongly suggests he never fathered children, or that perhaps, like all but one member of my Choctaw/Chickasaw family who immigrated to Indian Territory from Mississippi, his descendants fell victim to smallpox. The self-reporting in the letter makes him roughly the same age as Peter Pitchlynn, born in 1806, and it is my

[54] Kidwell, 28.

conjecture that they were probably close friends from childhood until McDonald's untimely death in the fall of 1831.[55]

Letter-writing has been termed by various scholars as a dying art.[56] "Lacking a basic instrument for surveying, let alone criticizing, the letter," Leslie Mittleman writes, "scholars have tended to treat collections as discrete entities rather than according to general principles that might elucidate the letter as an art form."[57] In the absence of prescribed methodology, I have found myself studying this and other letters more like a detective: one who examines hard evidence for what it is, while at the same time searching—endeavoring to remain open to 'clues' to larger unsolved mysteries.

An examination of the four letters from McDonald to Pitchlynn in the Western History Collection at the University of Oklahoma reveals an interesting feature of the "Spectre Essay." McDonald, in all four letters, exhibits a skilled penmanship as well as a sophisticated command of the English language. The 'essay' letter, however, was written in a more beautiful and controlled handwriting and with more careful organization than the other three letters, suggesting perhaps one or more rough drafts before the final letter of December 13-17, 1830, was produced.

Even though "the letter [as a literary form] has remained a kind of stepchild of literary affections,"[58] it seems safe to say that McDonald intended his 'essay' letter to endure as a work of literature. We can speculate that his intent was to see it published, perhaps in a journal or newspaper. Even more likely, based on McDonald's claim in the

[55] The circumstances surrounding McDonald's death, possibly by suicide, are examined in Chapter Three, based on a letter from Henry Vose to Peter Pitchlynn, written in the fall of 1831.
[56] See, for example: Claudio Guillen, "On the Edge of Literariness: The Writing of Letters," *Comparative Literary Studies*, 31.1, 1994, 1-24.
[57] Leslie Mittleman, "Is Letter-Writing a Dying Art?" *World Literature Today*, Spring 1990, 221.
[58] ibid., 221.

December 17th installment that the young man who told him the story entitled, "The Spectre and the Hunter, A Legend of the Choctaws," had drawn it from "his store of *shookha noompas"* [shukha anumpa, 'folk tales (lit. 'hog talk')'][59] he intended to publish a collection of these stories and commentaries. McDonald wrote in one of the more conversational, less literary, letters to Pitchlynn, dated March 18, 1831: "I finished the story of the Hunter and the Spectre some time ago, and will send it to you some time or other. But I am not pleased with it on paper."[60] The critical comment on his writing disciplines confirms the Spectre Essay as a work in progress which had demanded the revision and careful editing that the physical examination of the documents suggests.

In the section of the essay which serves as a preamble to the Legend McDonald describes in great detail the methods employed by a typical Choctaw hunter, and then by a typical Choctaw warrior, in telling the stories of their adventures. Of the first, he writes, "You may have heard a young hunter giving the stirring details of a bear hunt, and what sportsman would not warm with the tale?"[61] McDonald is pointing out here what he regards as a level of universal appeal in this form of storytelling. "The first cry of the dogs--the rushing of the animal through the tangled underwood—the snapping of cane—the confusion of the fight—the inspiring calls of the hunter—and the death scene when gun after gun is discharged into the head of the bear."[62]

The exposition of essential elements of style, rhetorical delivery, and the estimation of audience impact enumerated by McDonald, I would argue, are features of

[59] James L. McDonald, Letter to Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, Dec. 13 and Dec. 17, 1830, 6.
[60] James L. McDonald, Letter to Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, March 18, 1831, Peter Perkins Pitchlynn Collection, Box 1, Folder 21, 3, Western History Collection, Bizzell Memorial Library, University of Oklahoma.
[61] James L. McDonald, Letter to Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, Dec. 13 and Dec. 17, 1830, 3.
[62] ibid., 3.

an analytical criticism. As critic, McDonald concludes the hunter storytelling paragraph with an emphatic statement of comparative analysis: "According to Indian custom: all is told with a clear connection, and depicted with a vividness, which I should despair of hearing in the English language."[63] If McDonald had not died young, it would have been fascinating and valuable to see how this claim would have fleshed out in subsequent analyses.

McDonald then turns to the story-narrating techniques of a warrior to further support his claim that Indian storytelling is in important aspects superior to its counterparts in English. "He shall be a warrior in the prime of life—not young, nor yet aged.... Imagine him returned from his war expedition."[64] McDonald flexes his critical muscles by asking the reader to "imagine" he/she is hearing the oral presentation. I believe McDonald is conscious of the meta-discursive quality of his evaluations at this point in the essay. In other words, he is engaged with perhaps the most enthralling feature of criticism—that it is discourse about discourse—in this case, writing to readers (the practice of literacy) about a story being told to another audience (oral discourse). "He is seated; his friends are around him, silent but attentive; not one obtruding a question; but all waiting for his pleasure to begin."[65] McDonald infuses his essay with the sense of theater which is such an integral part of the storytelling/hearing experience. Actors have told me that a stage play is relatively meaningless in rehearsal, that a play takes its fully intelligible form as art only in the presence of an audience. Further, they say that different audiences substantially alter the overall experience resulting in the pleasant organic feel of live acting. McDonald seeks to convey the

[63] ibid., 3.
[64] ibid., 3.
[65] ibid., 4.

organic-dynamic of Choctaw storytelling and story/hearing to a reader of inscribed language. This is a bold critical move in my opinion. With the finesse of a playwright, McDonald combines what might be regarded as set directions and script in his example:

> He has just smoked his pipe, and adjusts himself for the narration. He tells of the days and nights he travelled before he approached the hunting ground of his enemy. He describes the different objects he saw in his route, the streams he crossed, and his camping places. Here he killed a bear, there a buffalo. He marks on the ground a rude map of the country, to give a better idea of his travels. He describes where he first discovered the trail of his enemy. In such a quarter lay their town; here he concealed himself until he should discover some straggling foe. He describes the rivulet that quenched his thirst and the tree that sheltered him. Not an incident is forgotten; and every incident heightens the interest of his perilous situation.[66]

McDonald's story of the warrior's story continues in marvelous and compelling detail. The protagonist determines to elude his enemies, if possible, but is prepared to die like a warrior if conflict is unavoidable. "He puts in requisition every wile and stratagem of which he is master," McDonald continues. "At length he discovers an Indian, recognizable as foe by his painted face and peculiar head dress."[67]

At this point in the story of a story, I, a twenty-first century reader, am hanging on every word of this page-turner. "Our warrior crouches low, takes a deadly aim, and brings..." Tragically, in my view, the next page of McDonald's manuscript is missing. I prayed that the archivist had simply failed to copy one of the pages, but upon returning to

[66] ibid., 4.
[67] ibid., 4.

the collection and reviewing the original manuscript, regrettably, that page was, in fact, not there. We may never know what his conclusions were on that final page in this first half of the essay. He had already made his case convincingly, however, for the potency of Choctaw orality.

Fortunately, the last half of the essay, containing the text of "The Spectre and the Hunter, A Legend of the Choctaws," is complete, intact. In his introduction to that second part of the essay, the section dated December 17, 1830, containing the legend, he reiterates that his project is "an attempt to prove that our vernacular tongue is more expressive than the English." Implying communality with Pitchlynn in the rhetorical undertaking, he asks a powerful question concerning rhetorical sovereignty,[68] "Should you coincide with me in opinion who shall gainsay our decision?" He then addresses the problem of competing criticism. "It may indeed be said that parties interested will generally decide in their own favour. But let the question for the present rest."[69]

Letters as Literature

The question no longer rests. A great deal of brain power has been expended in this era of culture studies to create what Robert Warrior terms a praxis, or guiding principles, for delineating native intellectual histories. "After more than two centuries of impressive literary and critical production," he writes, "critical interpretation of those

[68] Scott Richard Lyons, "Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want From Writing?" *College Composition and Communication*, 51:3, February 2000, 449-450. Lyons defines rhetorical sovereignty as: the inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit [of self-determination], to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse."

[69] James L. McDonald, Letter to Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, Dec. 13 and Dec. 17, 1830, 6.

writings can proceed primarily from Indian sources."[70] Warrior's scholarship suggests a groundwork for reading across time and genre barriers in Native literature. This approach to texts, he argues, "...provides a new historical and critical site that invites us to see contemporary work as belonging to a process centuries long, rather than decades long, of engaging contours of Indian America."[71] Debates occur and re-occur in English, social science and humanities departments across the country whereby scholars brood over how to classify and criticize Native literature. Broad definitions of intrinsically problematic terms like American Studies and Native American Studies cast stumbling blocks into our pathways. In a narrower sense, however, all literature scholars grapple with the questions governing our judgments of "What is literary?" Can readers regard James L. McDonald's letter essay as literary, for example, and if it is to be judged literary, how do such writings rank or compare with published articles and books?

By way of comparing things literary, McDonald's framing of 'stories within stories' immediately brings to my mind a couple of N. Scott Momaday's well-known works and, also, *Heart of Darkness,* by Joseph Conrad. In *House Made of Dawn*,[72] as well as *The Names*[73] by Momaday, the author frames his stories in more or less present time within the bookends of ancient myth. In *Heart of Darkness*,[74] five men sit on board the Nellie, a boat docked in the Thames. An unnamed narrator introduces the four other characters besides himself to the reader: the owner of the boat, a lawyer, an accountant,

[70] Robert Warrior, *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), xvi.
[71] ibid., 2.
[72] N. Scott Momaday, *House Made of Dawn* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).
[73] N. Scott Momaday. *The Names: A Memoir* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1976).
[74] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Garden City, New York: International Collectors, 1902).

and Charlie Marlow. The author lets Marlow's story of his journey into the African jungle spin out of their casual conversation.

Similarly, in his introduction to the Spectre legend, McDonald claims that the story was told to him by a young orphaned Choctaw while employed in his household. McDonald writes:

> He worked with us faithfully during the busy part of the season, and with the avails of his labour, purchased a good rifle and ammunition, and started west of the Mississippi. During his stay with us, I found he was remarkably intelligent for his opportunities. He did not speak a word of English. His father and mother, as he informed me, were both dead; and he had but few near relatives living. He had been charged with witchcraft by a conjurer of his neighborhood—(I am glad this absurd superstition is wearing away among the Choctaws)—and had been obliged to fly from the nation to save his life. This young man frequently entertained us with tales during the intervals of labour. He possessed an easy flowing elocution and from his store of "shookha noompas" [shukha anumpa, 'folk tales (lit. 'hog talk')'] one evening told us the following story.[75]

Again, McDonald cleverly employs several rhetorical devices to historicize and legitimate the legend. Overall, in this passage, he accomplishes three tasks, all essentially literary.

First, and perhaps most importantly, our author connects the story being told in the present with the past and with the future of Choctaw artistic/intellectual and mythic tradition. The young, monolingual storyteller's harrowing escape from "his

[75] James L. McDonald, Letter to Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, Dec. 13 and Dec. 17, 1830, 7.

neighborhood" after being accused of witchcraft (a capital offense) by a conjurer rhetorically certifies his placement squarely within the heart of Choctaw mythic tradition.

Furthermore, it places him definitively *outside* English language and other European discourses. "Purchasing a good rifle and ammunition" for his journey to the new nation west of the Mississippi serves to rhetorically and materially 'transport' that mythic tradition and its store of story forms, structures, and tropes into the future. McDonald leaves no gaps which would require an imaginative stretch to make this interpretation of rhetorical purpose.

Second, McDonald places *himself*, the critic, within this tightly connected stream of Choctaw intellectual history. He not only cites how mainstream ("this young man frequently entertained us") these stories are within the leisure schedule of his family, but also harks back to the December 13th half of the essay, in which he declared the importance of the "shookha noompas" tradition in his own boyhood.

Third, he establishes his essay, essentially a critical analysis of a story-within-a-story, as a work of literature. Webster's Unabridged Dictionary defines "literary" as "appropriate to literature rather than everyday speech or writing." That lexicon defines "literature," in one of its important senses, as "the class of writings distinguished for beauty of style or expression, as poetry, essays, or history, in distinction from scientific treatises which contain positive knowledge." Certainly, in my view at least, McDonald's essay fits both definitions. In this passage just set forth, he contextualizes the legend within an ancient oral tradition, within a complex contemporaneous cultural and political landscape, within the materializing future landscape of the Choctaw Nation West, and

within a tradition inherently implicit in what he is practicing—the written tradition. These are brilliantly self-conscious and self-critical moves.

I will finish the discussion here by examining the epilogic remarks McDonald makes at the end of the Legend translation, which serve as the conclusion of the Spectre Essay. "Such, my dear sir, is the substance of the tale as related to me; and as I review what I have written, it seems to me faint and feeble compared with the animated and vivid touches of my Choctaw narrator," McDonald writes.[76] Again, as if self-consciously, McDonald alludes to the reflective and recursive problems of literacy compared to the enlivened discourse of the storyteller. This is, he continues:

> another evidence which I might assign of the superior force of our own vernacular, were I not aware that it might be said (perhaps very justly)that I am ignorant of the force and power of the English language, and therefore, not a competent judge.[77]

With this thinly modest caveat, wholly confounded by the force and power most readers would have perceived in what they had just read in English, he signs off the essay with a typical epistolary closing sentiment to Pitchlynn. In a post-script, however, he references "a singular story" he once read:

> of one Rip Van Winkle, who went out hunting and, feeling somewhat fatigued, lay down to take a nap. His nap it seems proved to be a long one; for when he awoke, he found his gun covered with mushrooms. I remember having been

[76] ibid., 12.
[77] ibid., 12

particularly struck with the "mushroom gun" in my Indian's story—and I think I can safely affirm he had never heard of Rip Van Winkle.[78]

In the end, and perhaps more so in 1830 when Washington Irving's tale was fresh and more popular than today, the reader is presented with a captivatingly literary twist. Striking parallels, in fact, exist between "The Spectre and the Hunter" and Irving's short story. In spite of dramatically different settings and characterizations, both are tales of men who wander off alone, except for the companionship of their loyal dogs, experience encounters with supernatural beings, and return home to tell their stories. Both stories, as McDonald points out in his post-script, contain the symbolically rusty, time-worn rifle. Irving frames his tale of "Rip Van Winkle," published in 1819-1820 in *The Sketch Book of Sir Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.,* as a "discovery" within the (obviously fictional) posthumous writings of Diedrich Knickerbocker.[79] McDonald's oral tradition story is similarly situated within the voice of a shadowy narrator, the unnamed young Choctaw sojourner.

Ultimately, McDonald's highly ironic post-script leaves his essay wide open to a variety of interpretations. Perhaps McDonald's recording of the legend, as told by the young Choctaw outcast, is entirely a fiction—not simply a fiction, but a Choctaw revision or parody of Irving's "Rip Van Winkle." McDonald immediately subverts this tempting explanation, however, by disavowing the possibility of a direct connection between the two short stories. If not a parody, or an example of Choctaw assimilation of an English language story, then perhaps McDonald is highlighting the humanistic similarities between stories crafted primarily for children springing from seemingly diverse cultures.

[78] ibid., 12.
[79] Washington Irving, *The Sketch Book of Sir Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (London: John Murray, 1820).

McDonald's allusions to "Rip Van Winkle" remind me of what Acoma poet laureate Simon Ortiz observes in his famous essay about the Native nationalistic impulse—how his people had absorbed and transformed Catholic rituals received from the Spanish into their own celebrations and art forms. This "speaks of the creative ability of Indian people," Ortiz writes, "to gather in many forms of the socio-political colonizing force which beset them and to make these forms meaningful in their own terms."[80] Whatever his intent in his references to "Rip Van Winkle," McDonald leaves the nineteenth century, or the twenty-first century, reader or critic much to imagine in terms of language, tradition, and literature.

Useful Principles to Apply to Early Indigenous Writing

I was struck with a sentiment early in my reading of these hand-written treasures very much like what Lisa Brooks declares about her readings of writers Joseph Brant and Hendrick Aupaumut: that "we may have as much to learn from the relations between early native writers as we do from the writings themselves."[81]

The concept in Abenaki philosophy of one's natality (the transformation of birth connected to homeland) contrasted with a consciousness of one's mortality, Brooks writes, **"**provides a striking contrast to the stereotypical European constructions of native "tradition" as static and potentially destructible (mortal), while confirming the idea of tradition, so present in much of contemporary native literature, as an ongoing process, both cyclical and transformative."[82] McDonald, in the immediate throes of leading the

[80] Simon Ortiz, "Towards a National Indian Literature: Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism," *MELUS*, Vol. 8, No. 2, *Ethnic Literature and Cultural Nationalism* (Summer, 1981), 8.
[81] Lisa Brooks, "Digging at the Roots: Locating an Ethical Native Criticism," 254.
[82] ibid., 237.

incorporation of literacy into Choctaw discourses, seems very excited by the transformation going on; to be sure, he is not perplexed by the end of one tradition and the beginning of another.

Working on independent projects examining original manuscripts from diverse, geographically and culturally separated Native nations, Lisa Brooks comes to surprisingly similar observations to my own. In "Digging at the Roots: Locating an Ethical, Native Criticism," an essay within *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective*,[83] she reports that besides the more-often-studied published works of authors such as William Apess and Samson Occom, Joseph Brant and Hendrick Aupaumut "each produced enough writing to fill volumes and both men's influence on early American Indian policy was considerable."[84] Choctaw leaders/writers such as McDonald and Pitchlynn also produced volumes, especially if we consider the multiple post-Removal revisions of the Constitution of the Choctaw Nation, as well as petitions to U.S. government, correspondence, treaties and intervening negotiations with the Chickasaw and other native nations.

The most interesting writing, however, as Brooks suggests, may be the written communications between the Native writers themselves. Brooks' admonition relative to sometimes united, sometimes conflicting, written debates between Brant and Aupaumut, that "any reading of their journals demonstrates the need for those of us who analyze their writings to be highly educated in and aware of the nuances of those [respective] traditions,"[85] applies with equal force to Pitchlynn, McDonald and their contemporaries.

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[83] Acoose, et al., *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008).
[84] ibid., 251.
[85] ibid., 252.

I will state the obvious. Some scholars from each band, tribe and nation need to realize both the responsibility and the opportunity of discovering the roots of their own intellectual traditions. An excellent place to begin this voyage of discovery is with primary research in the library, museum, tribal government, and private archives, which have in the past been the academic terrain of historians and folklorists, but largely ignored by literary critics. The search and discovery experiences for me rank among the most personally and professionally enriching of my life, because to actually *read* (rather than to imagine the dispositions of) McDonald, Pitchlynn, Brant or Aupaumut connects and validates me as a writing Indian across a gulf of time with relatives grappling with virtually identical issues 175 or more years ago.

Brooks emphasizes how the writing Indian William Apess employed the creative, regenerative and reconstructive power of language, both written and spoken, to establish "a refuge from tyranny and persecution."[86] Apess's postmodern-like use of a multiple-voiced narrative in *Indian Nullification*[87] not only included various newspaper authors in support of the Mashpees, but also included published voices in opposition to the Mashpee argument for restoration of their rights to self-determination. The final showdown of opposing orators in the Massachusetts State House resulted in a spontaneous ovation after the Mashpees finished their speeches. Their arguments accomplished the passage of *The Mashpee Act*, restoring Mashpee rights, without a single dissenting vote.[88] I, as she, regard this remarkable historical event and its written traces as illustration of the foundational importance in any Native critical methodology of the early writers.

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[86] ibid., 247

[87] William Apess, *Indian Nullification of the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts Relative to the Marshpee Tribe; or, The Pretended Riot Explained* (1835), in Barry O'Connell, ed., *On Our Own Ground* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 166-274.

[88] Lisa Brooks, "Digging at the Roots: Locating an Ethical Native Criticism," 248.

I agree further with Brooks that analyzing how indigenous writers viewed certain pan-tribal issues, like common-cause dealing with the then young United States nation, affords tight relevance to our current conversation. The ways Joseph Brant, for example, developed his ideas to build a multi-national Indian alliance called the "United Indian Nations,"[89] may inform our current grappling with an ethical Native literary criticism. We indigenous writers of the twenty-first century are not defining ourselves so much as separatists as we are writing from an already separated context as circumscribed and imposed by U.S. treaty, law, and doctrine. The Aupaumut, Brant, and McDonald documents exhibit this separateness. Echoing Robert Warrior's call in *Tribal Secrets* "to root our work in analysis that is spatially and historically specific," Brooks asserts that the early Native writers of the Northeast were ". . . thinkers who inhabited many spaces of interaction, just as we do today."[90] Though their metaphors and theoretical dispositions are in important ways uniquely Mohawk, Mahican, Abenaki, or Choctaw, the early writers from these traditions lead both Brooks and me to remarkably similar conclusions. She writes:

> Aupaumut's and Brant's narratives attest to the interrelationship between oral and written literature within northeastern native communities, where writing is informed and infused by oral tradition, and the continuance of oral tradition is aided by the tool of literacy.[91]

J. L. McDonald in his Spectre Essay argues with expressive passion that the force and precision of Choctaw oral storytelling modes and styles exceed those same features in

[89] ibid., 252.
[90] ibid., 242.
[91] ibid., 251.

their analogue in the English language. Whether we regard orality and literacy in our intellectual traditions as old, new and dichotomous techniques, or as reciprocal and indivisible, it is imperative that we inform ourselves fully of the themes, arguments, usages, and critical dispositions of our literary ancestors.

Intertextuality in the Spectre Essay

An interesting feature of McDonald's essay is its presentation of a fictional story from the Choctaw oral archives translated into written-down English, alongside a non-fictional commentary and contextualization of the story. Where my analysis diverges from Brooks' examinations is in the immediate intertextuality of this side-by-side presentation. She shows how the human origins story of *Sky Woman* both generates and reflects Abenaki philosophy. She then demonstrates effectively how that philosophy informs the largely political texts of Aupaumut, Brant and Occom, the early day writers of the Northeast. In McDonald's essay, we have text drawn from a deep vein of Choctaw mythos and meta-text which seeks to situate that primary text for 'modern' readers. His literary performance is very similar to what many native writers of fiction, poetry and drama, as well writers of literary criticism today are doing.[92]

The logical question here becomes: If McDonald is doing literary criticism, what kind of criticism is it? First, McDonald's criticism is different from the romantic expressivist criticism that Coleridge among others was doing at the turn of the nineteenth century, which hinges on the view that poetry and other literatures grow out of, and are organic expressions of, nature. This expressivism is what one might expect of someone

[92] I could list many examples, such as the dialogic approach of essays and essayists demonstrated in *Reasoning Together*. A very interesting dynamic emerges at the point(s), in any society I suppose, where writing emerges from an oral tradition.

like McDonald educated in English language schools of the period. Rather, in my view at least, McDonald's commentary reads as a formalist type criticism, since he more strongly focuses on form than content, more on the techniques of telling the story than on the material of the story.

His particular focus may reveal a significant relationship between text and criticism in indigenous writing. When inscribed texts perform in such close proximity to dominant oral traditions, as McDonald's is, and as many current productions by indigenous authors consciously do, the forms and structures of the oral stories duplicate themselves to varying degrees in the written texts. Even though many Native critics acknowledge post-structuralist and postmodern dispositions in Native literature—carefully situating that literature in the complex social spaces in which it originates—few would deny the militancy of centuries-old forms, tropes, and structures in determining the products of Native poets, novelists, playwrights, and even literary critics. Conversely, few would deny the dramatic and dynamic impact of Native writing upon Native oral performance and upon what we regard as oral tradition. Considering the paradigms of the culture studies era we find ourselves operating within in 21st century English departments, a critical revolution or two removed from the formalisms of the early and mid-20th century, one might describe some of the propensities of current Native scholars as a neo-formalism, or more specifically, a Native formalism.

Formalism is an inherently ambiguous term that the twentieth century formalists (who often eschewed the label for its connotations of aridity) could never unanimously agree upon in defining. The sense of formalism to which I'm referring here is the idea that *what* a work of literature says cannot be separated from *how* the literary work says it. A

formalist, as I understand formalism, would say that the form and structure of a work are, in fact, part of the content of the work, rather than just the package for its content. The rigorous attention to recognized and ancient forms, structural elements, and artistic techniques is prominent in Native literary criticism.

Brooks, for example, extensively uses the forms, tropes, and structures of Sky Woman as a model to explicate not only Brant's and Aupaumut's political philosophies reflected in their prolific writings, but also to ground her own claims that participatory and relational schemes are to be preferred over oppositional schemes in criticizing the world, its people, or the literature we create. She asks:

> How might we follow the example of the water animals, of Sky Woman, of Skyholder in our own writing? The academy asks us to think about our careers, our professional progress as individuals, and our production of knowledge, with little regard for our position as members of native communities. Does this necessitate following Flint's rocky path? How can we ensure that our scholarship does not destroy our mother? What would it mean to participate in criticism, to make our writing participate in and create community?[93]

It is an intriguing reality in Native writing that poets, novelists and critics hold so tenaciously to the mythos of our respective tribes. Although essentialism has been thoroughly indicted as a negative trend in twentieth-century Native literary criticism, one might regard the tendency to zealously match contemporary literate work with ancient oral forms as an almost universal essence in Native writing. Perhaps this is one area where essentialism, as Womack argues, may not always be a dirty word.

[93] Lisa Brooks, "Digging at the Roots: Locating an Ethical Native Criticism," 240-241.

The Ethic

The book, *Reasoning Together*, mentioned above, was a three and a half year project, in which twelve Native scholars, including myself, attempted to do a very difficult thing. I was arguably the least experienced in the field, but many were young and fairly new to the profession. The project was conceived and designed with one guiding question: "What is an ethical Native literary criticism?" Our task was initially to write an essay in response to that question. We were then to read each others essay/answer and subsequently to critically dialogue with other's arguments.

It took most if not all of us a while to get into the conversation that the book set out to be. Writing within the individualistic confines of my university office, for example, like a monk in an abbey, I felt the *individual honor* of being asked to join the group of notable scholars writing for this anthology. But what I felt was the typical self-conscious, competitive and hierarchical honor that so pervades the academic experience. Embarrassingly, my motive to write more or less evaded the concern for Indian people as communities, and as *a community*, that propelled me after another professional career and after raising a family to enter the academy in the first place. The conversation imperative never fully crystallized in my thinking until I read Daniel Heath Justice's confession in the second formal revision of his essay, "Kinship and Literary Criticism: Red Tongues Aflame." He writes:

> This essay is written in Fire; it's about relationships and the attentive care we give to the ongoing processes of balanced rights and responsibilities that keep kinship going in a good way. Kinship, like

> Fire, is about life and living; it's not about something that *is* in itself so much as something we *do*--actively, thoughtfully, respectfully.[94]

I expect that every essayist in the volume was moved by this passage, and for good reason. Only after we have considered the epistemologies of our ancestors, our kin, especially epistemologies reflected in writing, do we fully realize what Brooks calls the regenerative power of the written word. And only after this realization do we realize the primacy in language of the conversational paradigm. It is by, and only by, engaging in fruitful conversation, that we guarantee the survival and flourishing of our communities.

I recently heard a sage and respected colleague[95] from another component of the University of Oklahoma English Department say that the next new wave of theory after postmodernism will be ethics. I do not wish to fully explicate the idea, but I think she meant, translated into Indian, something like what follows. Postmodern theorists feel more or less comfortable in trashing old reliable meta-narratives like the Bible or Sky Woman, by asserting the hybrid unreliability of individual subject identities, like Native American or feminist.

The postmodern paradigm succeeds further in reducing the historically central concept in the United States of the individual from a civic-minded voting capitalist to a lone-wolf in chaos. If ethics are codes, laws, or just rules of thumb that govern our discourses, forming an invisible cement that holds social groups, like native lit crit specialists, together, then groups composed of lone-wolves in chaos are in big trouble.

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[94] Daniel Heath Justice retained this paragraph in the final version of his essay, entitled, "*Go Away, Water!* Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Imperative," in Acoose, et al., *Reasoning Together*, 148.
[95] Kathleen E. Welch, Samuel Roberts Noble Family Foundation Presidential Professor of Composition, Rhetoric, and Literacy.

This is the case because the first goal of any group must be to agree on its ethics, if it desires to be, and to continue to be, viable.

I'm going the long way around to arrive at the point I want to repeat and emphasize. We can't have coherent ethics without coherent conversation. We could not have had a coherent conversation in an overly competitive, anti-conversational, and purely individualistic collection of essays. Just as postmodernism will find that its most constraining dismissal is that of ethical talk, native literary critics must not speak and listen just to a computer screen, but must, like the nineteenth-century Choctaw writers examined here, speak and listen to each other.

It is an ignoble tribute to the success of the United States' westward expansion that it has taken James L. McDonald's essay 175 years to come to its first published use as a critical text. On the other hand, the fact that McDonald and his peers heartily engaged literacy and allowed the new technology to amplify an already rich language arts tradition should stand as a credit to their generation and as an inspiration to ours. Craig Womack declares in his treatise on Creek national literature that "without Native American literature, *there is no American canon*."[96] Robert Warrior asserts that sovereignty is a way of life and a decision, "a decision we make in our minds, in our hearts, and in our bodies—to be sovereign and to find out what that means in the process."[97] Similarly, in his epistolary conversation with Pitchlynn, McDonald asks his colleague concerning their critical project: "Should you coincide with me in opinion, who shall gainsay our decision?"[98]

[96] Womack, *Red on Red,* 7.
[97] Robert Warrior, *Tribal Secrets*, 123.
[98] James L. McDonald, Letter to Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, Dec. 13 and Dec. 17, 1830, 6.

So, who is the who, and what is the decision? There is such a beautiful rhetorical melody in this question: Who shall gainsay our decision? Who shall speak against our judgments? I tend to want to let it remain a rhetorical question—a question with so obvious an answer, it need not be stated.

The tone of the question suggests that the decision is important, perhaps even gravely so. The decision connects in the text most logically with what they are doing, which a complex combination of performance, criticism, and creating authoritative literate texts, perhaps even the seminal essay for a text book, or perhaps an 1830 popular culture book to sell on the street, so to speak. McDonald did make allusion to Washington Irving, and Irving was the first American to make a handsome living selling his writing.

McDonald is making critical judgments about Choctaw language and English language. So ultimately, perhaps what they are doing most precisely is criticism. The 'decision' involves saying one thing is better that the other: that Choctaw is more forceful, has more precision than English; that nobody can beat the performance of a Choctaw storyteller, whether he is hunter or warrior. The vocabulary may not be so copious as English, McDonald concedes, but is it not stronger, he asks, more nervous? But the analysis is more refined, more critical, attempting to find the best in both languages perhaps, in both traditions.

The 'who' may be anyone who thinks they are better qualified to make critical judgments about Choctaw aesthetics, about Choctaw arts and the sciences, about Choctaw performance in either the live interaction or performance on the page. Who shall gainsay our decision? The question is so friendly but forceful. The question has

range. At once it suggests that we are so confident, we welcome an attempt to controvert what we have said about these matters, but at the same time the question seems open to the possibility that there may be a better decision, one more worthy to make.

As Professor Henry McDonald (no relation) suggested to me after his close reading of the Spectre Essay, the ethical pivot point is perhaps in the first half of the phrase, "Should you coincide with me in opinion." This shows J. L. McDonald's willingness to place himself at the service of that community without the guarantee of predictability of the consequences of the act. Professor McDonald also connected it with my comment that the storytellers' acts were precise and scripted and only fully enlivened when an audience is present, as in a live play. This adds another dimension to the letter itself. Is it performed, fully realized, possessed of a new dynamic when Pitchlynn becomes the audience? Or would it be, as I expect, fully realized when McDonald read it aloud to Pitchlynn, or Pitchlynn to McDonald, McDonald to Pitchlynn's whole family?

There is further, an honest patriotism to the question, a love of country, a love of community, of communality in the question. There is a sense of brotherhood in the question, a tenor of athletic enthusiasm, a friendly challenge. But also in the period after the removal treaty and before emigration there is a sense of solidarity, a sense of courage, of gravity, a tone of fearfulness and fearlessness in the same utterance.

Indeed, I certainly coincide in opinion and decision with McDonald, though I claim no "radical incommensurability"[99] in how a reader or critic outside the Choctaw Nation might read Choctaw literature. I do, nonetheless, claim knowledge and an aesthetic and intellectual trajectory that are mine and that I share with my kin. Choctaw

[99] This term, drawn from conversation with other native critics, has been attributed to Creek scholar, Tol Foster.

novelist LeAnne Howe describes this trajectory as a "tribalography" that "comes from the native propensity for bringing things together, for making consensus, and for symbiotically connecting one thing to another. It's a cultural bias, if you will."[100] I say that it is our right as free intellects, our privilege as Choctaws, and our duty to our local and professional communities to criticize, interpret, and integrate our present, past and future tribal literatures as we walk a centuries-old road.

McDonald probably didn't learn all he knew about critical analysis in Mississippi missionary schools. The confident tone with which he delivers his critiques strongly suggest that his and ours are part of an ongoing, perhaps ancient, discourse—a discourse which in his day was coming to terms admirably with literacy. Especially in what sometimes seems like an overly legalistic debate, precedent is important. An appeal to precedent is rooted in the human desire not to re-argue issues which were settled in the past. McDonald's treatment of Choctaw literature is a commendable attempt to establish a clearly outlined ethic—that Choctaw intellectuals are uniquely and peculiarly qualified to evaluate Choctaw literature. What is called for, further, is perhaps a blend of Native formalist discourse that acknowledges and articulates the irresistibly powerful story forms and mythic structures that determine, as they should, much of what Native authors write, with the post-structuralist notions of a freeplay of signifiers which help us interrogate and destabilize obstinate residues of colonialism that constrain our work, not only as human beings trying to contribute to healthy communities, but as critics carrying out the missions of scholarship.

[100] LeAnne Howe, "The Story of America: A Tribalography." *In Clearing a Path: Theorizing the Past in native American Studies*, ed., Nancy Shoemaker (New York: Routledge, 2002), 42.

Chapter Two

Peter Perkins Pitchlynn: His Journal of 1828

For some time now work is being done on the History of the Middle Ages; by pulling out chests of archives and wiping the dust off old papers, scholars are helping to throw light on the origins, changes and embroilments of sovereigns by means of a quantity of chronicles, documents, and memoirs. It will soon be necessary to go and make inquiries among the Chinese and Arabs in order to complete the history of mankind to the extent that we can obtain it from the extant works or monuments, whether they be in writing or on stones or metals, or even in the memory of men, for we must not neglect tradition, and I maintain that of everything not written the spoken languages themselves are the best and the most significant remains of the past on which we can draw for light on the origins of peoples, and often, on the origins of things. --Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "New Proposals," 1696

Most of the fancy horses were to fail, because they did not understand the prairie. It takes a prairie-bred horse to dodge badger holes and gopher mounds and hit the bunch grass with a sure foot. Moreover, speed was only one requisite for winning this peculiar race; the consistent winners were to be men off the ranges with good mounts and plenty of gun bluff to clear off those who had arrived ahead of them. The race might be to the swift, but the land was going to the tough. –Seth Humphrey. *Following the Prairie Frontier,* 1931 (237)

As the above quotation from Leibniz early in the European Enlightenment suggests, it seems certain that history is often located in terms of the "origins, changes and embroilments of sovereigns." My story here originates in the early nineteenth century embroilments of the United States and some of the sovereign first nations of North America. The second epigraph, full of United States nationalistic zeal, was extracted from Seth Humphrey's recollections of the Oklahoma land rushes of the later nineteenth century. Humphrey's blunt declaration that "the race might be to the swift, but the land was going to the tough," was an assumption all too obvious to Choctaws during Peter Perkins Pitchlynn's time in the sun.

Just as Pitchlynn's early nineteenth century journal examined in this chapter deals with the exploration of then little-known lands west of the Mississippi River being

proposed by the United States in trade for the remainder of Choctaw territory in Mississippi, my adventure in analyzing these texts is largely exploratory. I had hoped for great sweeping resolutions to literary critical questions, much like I expect Pitchlynn was hoping to find broad fertile valleys in the lands west of Arkansas. Instead, Pitchlynn found craggy mountains, knobby hills, tangled Cross Timbers creek bottoms, and strangely foreign people. I have similarly found some elevation in critical vantage points, but, after all, what I have discovered is an intellectual landscape still underlain with thorny critical issues that needs a lot more clearing and cultivation to make it fruitful.

The original manuscript journal of Pitchlynn's 1828 expedition is located in the Western History Collection of the University of Oklahoma. The diary itself is often difficult to read because much of it is written in pencil and sometimes messy. Pitchlynn no doubt made entries while on horseback, sitting on a rock beside a stream on a windy prairie, and certainly after dark in the dim light of a wilderness campfire. For many years, the diary was owned by Lester Hargrett, a rare manuscript collector, who had deciphered, typed and made useful notes on a lot of it before donating it to the Western History Collection shortly before his death in 1962**.**

In this chapter, I hope to do several things. First, I examine the journal of Peter Perkins Pitchlynn written in 1828, which can provide contemporary Choctaw citizens and scholars with insight, rare and valuable touch points, just before the Removal of the entire nation from Mississippi to the Indian Territory. Like the work of Pitchlynn's close friend and contemporary, James L. McDonald, examined in the previous chapter, Pitchlynn's work must be viewed as foundational in the written tradition of Choctaw people. From this early platform of Choctaws writing in the English language, modern day Choctaw



Peter Pitchlynn, as a young man

intellectuals, scholars, writers, artists, politicians, and rank and file citizens can point to resources reinforcing the important assumption that we today are not working in a vacuum. We can thus connect our own arcs of consciousness with those of our ancestors.

The second issue addressed in this chapter is the problem of history. I explore, in particular, elements of W. David Baird's biography of Pitchlynn, published in 1972 by the University of Oklahoma Press. My argument recognizes the usefulness of excellent research done by non-Native scholars such as Baird in constructing the narrative of

Choctaw history, but problematizes the damage that may have been done to Pitchlynn's historical reputation resulting from faulty conclusions based on that research. Intrinsic to this discussion are some of the recurring questions in Native American studies, chiefly the questions of authenticity, identity, and sovereignty. Again stressing the importance of Choctaws' writing our own histories and of writing criticisms of our literate ancestors, I am connecting with McDonald's powerful ethical question to Pitchlynn in his Spectre Essay letter of December 1830, "Should you coincide with me in opinion who shall gainsay our decision?"

Further in the chapter, I examine four other selected letters contained in the Peter Pitchlynn archive of the OU Western History Collection. These letters reveal Choctaw daily life experiences in the post-removal Choctaw Nation, Pitchlynn's attitudes toward slavery, and viewpoints of outsiders concerning the Choctaw Nation in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the conclusion of the chapter, I try to unravel some of the mysteries associated with identifying as Indian in my own family by examining how events and realities of the nineteenth century connect with and illuminate the silencing of Indian identification in the first half of the twentieth century.

Historical Context

Pitchlynn's 1828 journal is fascinating reading in and of itself. It is better understood, however, placed in the context of the 1820s. When I hear the phrase, The Roaring Twenties, I think of flappers and speakeasies and the crash of the Stock Market

in 1929. The 1820s also has, to me, its own peculiar sort of "roar." Nonetheless, to understand the 1820s, we must first glance back to the volatile 18-teens.

The War of 1812 between the United States and Great Britain foreshadowed the type of international tensions that would lead to worldwide wars early in the next century. Besides fighting the United States on American soil, the over-extended British were fighting the French under Napoleon in Europe at the same time. Stretched thin, the British employed largely defensive strategies on American battlefronts incorporated with strike, disrupt, and retreat tactics. Many, including Secretary of Indian Affairs Thomas L. McKenney, saw Washington sacked and burned by the British in July, 1814.

A civil war between the Upper and Lower Creeks had broken out the year before in Alabama, the boiling-point event being the massacre of 250 Lower Creeks and white settlers at Fort Mims in Southern Alabama in 1813. This event aroused public sentiment against both the British, who notoriously recruited Native nations or factions as allies, and the Red Sticks (Upper Creeks). In the spring of 1814, Major General Andrew Jackson's Tennessee militia allied with Cherokee and Lower Creek warriors attacked and killed approximately 800 Upper Creeks at their fortified camp at the Horseshoe Bend in the Tallapoosa River in east central Alabama. Jackson's victory was his first step to national prominence.

Eight months later, he commanded about 4000 troops, composed of U.S. Army troops (Tennessee, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Louisiana Militia), U.S. Marines, U.S. Navy sailors, Barataria Bay pirates, Choctaw warriors, and free black soldiers in the Battle of Chalmette Plantation, better known as the Battle of New Orleans. A peace treaty had already been signed by the warring nations, but word had not yet reached New

Orleans. Although badly outnumbered and out-equipped, Jackson's forces fought back the British invasion, a military victory that inflamed nationalistic pride in the United States and which would ultimately propel Jackson to the White House in 1828, the year of Pitchlynn's exploration of the land west of Arkansas.

In between the two great battles, and much to the Lower Creeks' chagrin and despite their protest, their ally General Jackson parlayed the public's ill-will against the Upper Creeks into a 23 million-acre cession of Creek lands. On August 9, 1814, Jackson forced the Creeks to sign the Treaty of Fort Jackson, giving up the greater part of their territory—half of Alabama and part of southern Georgia. These military victories and enormous acquisitions of territory were the early growling gestures in what would become the roar of the 1820's, the roar of the beast of United States westward expansion.

By the time Jackson was elected president in 1828, the handwriting was clearly on the wall. Near the close of the 1820's and before the first Removal treaty was signed, the U.S. government was making budget, counting the costs of Indian Removal.

On April 30, 1830, Thomas L. McKenney, in his capacity as Superintendent of Indian Affairs, issued a report estimating the cost-per-head to remove the approximately 80,000 Indians living east of the Mississippi. "If fifty-five dollars be assumed as the cost attending the removal of each Indian, and supporting him for a year after his removal," McKenney wrote in his report to Secretary of War Eaton, "and if there are, as is presumed to be, eighty thousand Indians east of the Mississippi, the entire cost will be, for removing them, and supporting them for a year, four millions four hundred thousand dollars."[101]

[101] Thomas L. McKenney, *Memoirs, Official and Personal: Thomas L. McKenney [1846], With Introduction by Herman J. Viola* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 214-215.

McKenney then elaborates ways in which the government might trim these removal costs. "If from this be deducted the difference between the actual cost of the first [most expensive] and the last party [least expensive], it would cost two millions eight hundred and eighty thousand dollars; and if one-third be deducted from this, under a system of contracts, which I think would be a fair reduction, it would be two millions two hundred and ninety-four thousand dollars."[102] McKenney's rhetoric is dispassionate, as if the freight costs on a shipment of livestock were being calculated.

He doesn't spell out exactly what system of contracts he's referring to, but presumably it is revenues to be generated by the real estate purchase contracts entered into by settlers buying the formerly Creek, Cherokee, or Choctaw, but soon-to-be government, lands. "The value of improvements abandoned by the Indians is not included; nor is it supposed it was intended to be," McKenney writes, "since what is paid for these will be reimbursed, it is fair to presume, in the additional value which these improvements will give to the land."[103] Barely veiled in those long bureaucratic sentences is the simple declaration that it is not going to cost the United States government much out-of-pocket to freight the Indians out of the entire eastern half of middle North America.

The Trail of Treaties Leading to Removal

Although some may regard Thomas Jefferson as liberal-minded in his policies toward Indians after he assumed the Presidency in 1801, when it came to acquiring real estate for the young republic, he was cool, conservative, and calculating. Writing in 1803

[102] Ibid., 215.
[103] Ibid., 215

to Indiana Territory Governor William Henry Harrison concerning American Indian reluctance to cede lands, Jefferson revealed this strategy:

> To promote this disposition to exchange lands, which they have to spare and we want, for necessaries, which we have to spare and they want, we shall push our trading houses, and be glad to see the good and influential individuals among them run in debt, because we observe that when these debts get beyond what the individuals can pay, they become willing to lop them off by a cession of lands. At our trading houses, too, we mean to sell so low as merely to repay us cost and charges, so as neither to lessen nor enlarge our capital. This is what private traders cannot do, for they must gain; they will consequently retire from the competition, and we shall thus get clear of this pest without giving offence or umbrage to the Indians. [104]

Jefferson's remarks to Governor Harrison demonstrate that consumerism is not a new pattern of human behavior. His indifference to the wellbeing of private traders might also call into question the assertion that a free market is foundational to the American economy. The attitude expressed in the letter does, on the other hand, clearly demonstrate the craftiness with which early leaders of the United States established Indian policy. The stated goal of this approach to frontier commerce is to expand United States real estate holdings by driving the Indians deeply into debt. Jefferson's policy cleverly created circumstances that would force Indians to cede (sell) their lands to retire the debts they would accumulate for buying attractively priced pots and kettles, blankets, traps, axes, plows, sugar, coffee, rifles and ammunition from the government stores on credit.

[104] quoted in R. Douglas Hurt, *The Indian Frontier, 1763-1846* (Albuquerque: New Mexico UP, 2002), 44.

The strategy was successful. Beginning the count with the Treaty of Hopewell in 1786, by 1830 the Choctaw Nation signed nine treaties with the United States. With the Treaties of 1786, 1801, and 1802, the Choctaws had already ceded 2.76 million acres of land to the United States.[105] The U.S. "factory system"[106] resulted in large trading post debts accruing to the Choctaws, which debts were relieved by the cession of 4.99 million acres of additional lands in the Treaties of Hoe Buckintoopa in 1803 and of Mount Dexter in 1805.[107] The Choctaws were off to a bad start in the real estate business at the dawn of the nineteenth century.

The following map shows Choctaw land cessions to the United States in Mississippi closed in the aforementioned treaties, as well as in the four treaties following 1805. The map also shows the boundaries of the 13 million acres of land the Choctaws acquired in Indian Territory, by terms of the Treaty of 1820, with which to establish their new nation west of the Mississippi River.

The Treaty of Doak's Stand in 1820 was the event that irrevocably opened up discussions of Removal. Andrew Jackson served as the chief negotiator for the United States. In this negotiation the Choctaws traded more than five million acres of agricultural land for nearly three times that much relatively unimproved land west of the Mississippi. Some historians assert that this treaty was ill-advised and ill-fated, largely

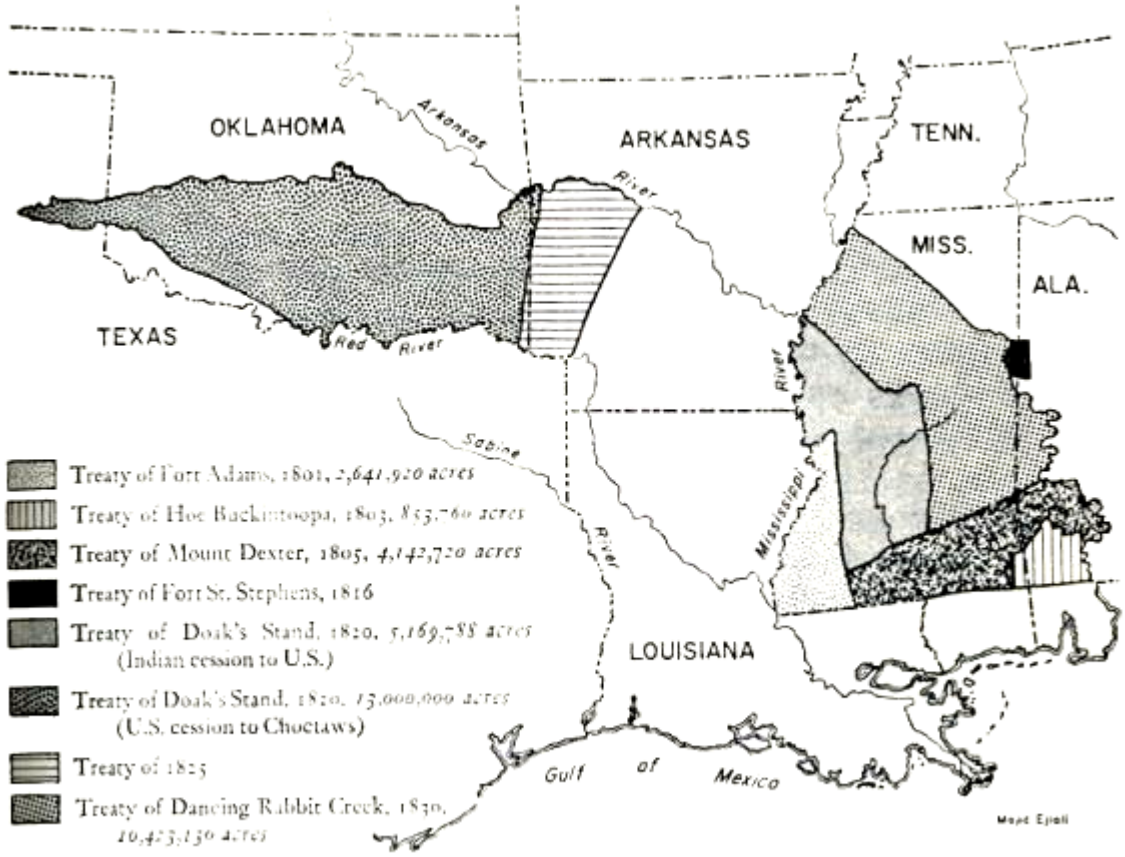
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[105] Reeves, Carolyn Keller (editor) *The Choctaw Before Removal* (University Press of Mississippi, Jackson; 1985), 214-215.

[106] The term factory system comes from the British vocabulary for trading posts, whose proprietors were called factors. The Indian factory system in America was created by Congress in 1795. Forts were often constructed to protect factors and their allies. Two Choctaw land cession treaties were signed at such forts in Mississippi Territory—Fort Confederation (1802) and Fort St. Stephens (1816). Wayne Morris, "Traders and Factories on the Arkansas Frontier, 1805–1822," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 28 (Spring 1969), 28–48.

[107] Arthur H. De Rosier, Jr., *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1970), 30-32.

because a significant portion of the acreage traded by the U.S. lay in Arkansas and was already settled by white people. Others, like former Oklahoma Governor William H. "Alfalfa Bill" Murray, see the outcome of the Treaty of 1820 in a different light.



Land Cessions and Acquisitions
(Map from De Rosier[108])

One of Murray's first jobs when he started out his law practice in Tishomingo, Chickasaw Nation, Indian Territory, was as legal counsel to the Chickasaws. He was hired in 1898 by Chickasaw Governor Douglas H. Johnston, married Johnston's niece, Alice Hearrell, a year later, and became the Governor's lifelong friend. In his eulogy in

[108] Ibid., 29.

1939 to Governor Johnston, delivered at the Oklahoma state capitol while Johnston lay in state in the capitol rotunda, Murray takes another view of the 1820 treaty.

After relating an anecdote of how delighted Governor Johnston was after checking tribal rolls and finding that every eligible Chickasaw had enrolled for the World War I military service draft, Murray offers the following observations. "Let no man say the Chickasaws lacked patriotism; and again that illustrated the prophecy of the greatest Indian that ever lived, Pushmataha. Pushmataha was always a friend of the United States," Murray declared. "Pushmataha, who died on Christmas Eve, 1824, was buried with a military escort more than a mile long, with a monument in the Congressional cemetery at Washington to commemorate his memory."[109] Murray next explains that Pushmataha was a Brigadier General who fought for the United States, under Andrew Jackson's command, at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend and in the Battle of New Orleans. After noting that Pushmataha spent three years in what would become Indian Territory, from 1815 to 1818, Murray asserts:

> Pushmataha approached General Jackson to buy the Western Lands for the Choctaws. Of course Jackson would be glad to do anything for him, and he and General Hinds negotiated a treaty, in which he traded lands in Mississippi for lands West. On October 18, 1820 [the date of the Treaty], Pushmataha bought every foot of land in this state south of the Canadian River. Some day Oklahoma will honor Pushmataha with a monument. He was not only a statesman, but a great warrior, a great general and a man of high honorable character. When he

[109] William H. Murray, "Funeral Address at the Oklahoma State Capitol, June 29, 1939, at the Funeral of Douglas H. Johnston, Governor of the Chickasaw Nation," recorded by WKY broadcasting station of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, transcript p. 6.

> concluded everything he called on Jackson to agree to take fifty square miles of their land east of the Mississippi and sell it and re-invest the funds and let the interest become a perpetual fund for the education of Choctaw youths; he rose and complimented the Indians and said to Jackson: 'This treaty for a new home in the West, with that provision for education, I predict there will grow from that, the time in the future when the Indians of that section will be holding office in the white man's government and fighting in the white man's wars'."[110]

Murray lists the names of Choctaw and Chickasaw war heroes as examples of Pushmataha's predictions coming true. After mentioning Ben Colbert, a Chickasaw, who served as orderly for Colonel Theodore Roosevelt in the Spanish-American War, he praises Joseph Oklahombi, a Choctaw from Wright City, Oklahoma, and Otis Leader, an Oklahoma Chickasaw. "In keeping with that prediction of Pushmataha's, the Chickasaws and the Choctaws, as well, gave the greatest heroes of the World War. A far seeing statesman was he, and such was Johnston," Murray concludes.[111]

Nevertheless, the Treaty of 1825 was called to order in Washington to correct Jackson's blunder regarding the disputed Arkansas Territory. As mentioned in Chapter One, armed with the legal counsel of James L. McDonald plus the experience of the elders gained in previous negotiations, the Choctaws were doing even better by 1825 in the real estate business. As shown in the map on the preceding page, they were giving up in 1825 a large tract of land (southwestern Arkansas) gained in the 1820 Doak's Stand treaty, but receiving respectable compensation. Besides forgiveness of some outstanding

[110] Ibid., 7.
[111] Ibid., 7.

debt with the United States store on the Tombigbee River and the reservation of a section of land for each Choctaw family already living in the Arkansas territory, Article 8 of that treaty called for a perpetual payment of 6000 dollars a year for education.[112] This sum may not strike a modern reader as a significant annuity, but $6000 in 1825 was worth the equivalent $129,000 in today's dollars.[113]

The Choctaw Treaty of 1820 at Doak's Stand[114] was made in the context of ongoing discussions at the time of removing the Indians in the eastern section of the United States and its frontier to lands west of the Mississippi River. It would be ten years before the removal fate of the Choctaws was sealed by the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, concluded on September 28, 1830. In the interim between the 1820 Treaty at Doak's Stand and the Dancing Rabbit Creek Treaty, Choctaws in concert with Chickasaws and Creeks agreed that they needed some formal reconnaissance of the lands they had acquired or would acquire west of the Mississippi. Peter Perkins Pitchlynn's journal of 1828 records his observations of the important joint expedition to explore those lands.

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[112] *Treaty with the Choctaws, 1820; A treaty of friendship, limits, and accommodation, between the United States of America and the Choctaw nation of Indians, begun and concluded at the Treaty Ground, in said nation, near Doak's Stand, on the Natchez Road.* Article 8**.** To remove any discontent which may have arisen in the Choctaw Nation, in consequence of six thousand dollars of their annuity having been appropriated annually, for sixteen years, by some of the chiefs, for the support of their schools, the Commissioners of the United States oblige themselves, on the part of said States, to set apart an additional tract of good land, for raising a fund equal to that given by the said chiefs, so that the whole of the annuity may remain in the nation, and be divided amongst them. And in order that exact justice may be done to the poor and distressed of said nation, it shall be the duty of the agent to see that the wants of every deaf, dumb, blind, and distressed, Indian, shall be first supplied out of said annuity, and the balance equally distributed amongst every individual of said nation.

[113] Computed using the calculator at Measuringworth.com

[114] Doak's Stand was located on the Natchez Trace in central Mississippi.

Pitchlynn's 1828 Journal

Besides its value as literature, the 1828 journal forms one bookend early in Pitchlynn's dramatic life as a representative leader and negotiator for Choctaw sovereignty interests. The other bookend is the period of his leadership in arguing the "Net Proceeds" claim in Congress and Washington lobbying circles during the last 25 years of his life, 1856-1881.

The 18th Article of the Treaty of 1830, the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, provided that "the lands hereby ceded [by the Choctaw Nation] are to remain a fund pledged to the fulfillment of the treaty provisions." The net proceeds are defined as the money left over from the sale of the ten million acres of land ceded to the U.S. in Mississippi, after deducting all surveying, administrative expenses, and other costs of sale incurred by the U.S. government. The government had reaped a huge profit. The federal treasury had received sale revenues of over eight million dollars, and even after their most creative audit of the books, the United States still owed the Choctaws three million dollars.[115]

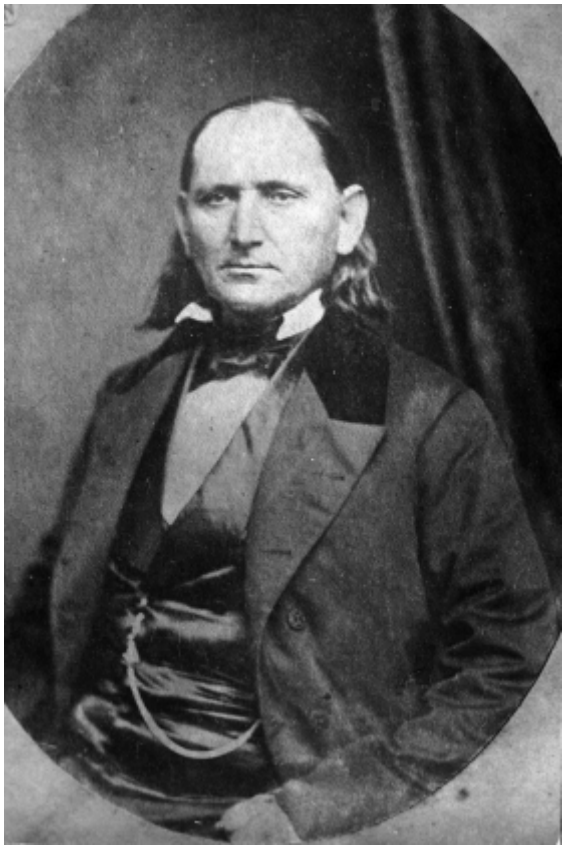
Pitchlynn and the rest of the Choctaw team composed of lawyers, sympathetic former legislators, and tribal delegates, petitioning Congress for the net proceeds, proposed that the government should pay the whole sum to the Choctaw Nation and then let the nation settle privately with individual claimants. This made good sense, since it obviously avoided the expensive bureaucratic nightmare of the United States having to judge and settle individual claims. Significant progress was made on the claim in the late 1850's, but the outbreak of the War Between the States in 1861 set back the whole process, and the claim was not actually paid until shortly after Pitchlynn's death in 1881,

[115] Clara Sue Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818-1918* (Norman: Oklahoma UP, 1995), 174.

fifteen years after the war ended. I will go into more detail on the Net Proceeds claim later in the chapter.

Thirty-six years earlier Pitchlynn had embarked on his first international mission for the Choctaw Nation. His journal picks up with the joint delegation of Choctaws, Chickasaws and Creeks leaving St. Louis on Oct. 21, 1828 "for the purpose of examining lands to the North and West of the State of Missouri and Arkansas: proceeded without any delay through St. Charles, Franklin, and arrived at Independence on the 1st of November."[116] In the first part of the diary we follow the tour organized by the government for the purpose of encouraging the voluntary emigration of the wary Chickasaws, Choctaws, and the Creeks. The Reverend Isaac McCoy, a well-known Baptist missionary to the Pottawatomies, was a leader of the expedition, but Captain George H. Kennerly of the United States Army was in actual command. Lieutenant Washington Hood was topographer, and George P. Todson was the expedition

[116] Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, *Journal of 1828*, Box 5, File 16, Peter Perkins Pitchlynn Collection, in the Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma Library, 1.



Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, as he looked when he was Chief of the Choctaws, 1864-66

physician. All held their appointments from the Secretary of War. Isaac McCoy's *History of Baptist Indian Missions*[117] contains a history of the expedition.

The entire company consisted of thirteen Chickasaws, six Choctaws, and four Creeks, along with various white men serving as interpreters, and a few black slaves. Pitchlynn was one of the delegates of the Northeastern district of the Choctaw Nation. Harper Lovett, the Creek interpreter, died two weeks after the party left Saint Louis. Seven "hired men," or camp helpers, were employed at Saint Louis, and the Osage

[117] Isaac McCoy, *History of Baptist Indian Missions* (Washington : W.M. Morrison, 1840).

interpreter, Noel Mograin, joined them at the western line of Missouri. They thus numbered more than forty men and, according to McCoy, some sixty horses.[118]

One can imagine that Pitchlynn was thinking about his fellow Choctaw citizens and not only their need to know, but perhaps their intense curiosity to know, about what in late 1828 was already looking to some like the nation's inevitable emigration to a new homeland. He gives a detailed and concrete description of the vicinity around Independence:

> The soil rich and fertile, timber in abundance, principally of the following kinds viz Walnut, Hickory elm, ash, black and white oak, coffee nut, hackberry, mulberry . . . . The country is well watered . . . the little blue river, a tributary of the Missouri, the water of this river is clear and rapid, but is quite narrow, corresponding with its name.[119]

He describes Independence as a town not more than one year old with a courthouse as the principal building "and that which necessarily follows it, the jail . . . built of logs." He notes that there is a log tavern and two brick buildings under construction, and though young, he predicts that Independence will develop into a thriving community.[120]

On Sunday, November 2, the group left Independence, traveled four miles to the Big Blue River, and then another eight miles before arriving near the western boundary of the state where they encamped. The next day ". . . we received a visit from the Shawnee Prophet, brother of Tecumseh; he made his appearance on horseback with a suite consisting of three followers, young men of the nation, the appearance of horseman

[118] Ibid., 12.
[119] Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, *Journal of 1828*, Nov. 1st entry, 2.
[120] Ibid., Nov. 1st entry, 2.

and horses, by no means prepossessing."[121] This was apparently Pitchlynn's polite way of saying that the Shawnees were not very good-looking, and that their riding stock also looked rather poor. Pitchlynn was perhaps more interested in describing the people he met along the way in his fact-finding tour as he was with concrete details of the landscape, the potentialities of the soil for farming, and its potential for raising livestock. He describes Tenskwatawa, the Shawnee Prophet, as approximately 50 years old, 5'-8" tall, stoutly built, of commanding appearance, blind in his right eye, his nose and



"Ten-squat-a-way," as painted in 1830 by George Catlin,
about two years after Pitchlynn met the Shawnee Prophet.

ears containing each a ring of silver, and with a forehead adorned with a silver plate. He was quite taken with the fashions of the famous Shawnee seer.[122] Particularly catching his attention was a cylindrical tube at the rear of the silver head plate:

[121] Ibid., Nov. 2nd entry, 4
[122] Tenskwatawa, better known as the Shawnee Prophet, had a vision in 1811 which inspired his brother, the famous warrior Tecumseh, to campaign to raise an army of confederated Indian tribes throughout the

> . . . through which was passed a lock of hair proceeding apparently from the crown of his head, the remainder of his hair was cut close; his head was enveloped in a cotton handkerchief (striped); a black silk cravat was wrapped loosely around his neck, these together with a common light blue hunting shirt of cotton with a long cape fringed with white, bluecloth leggings and mockasins [sic] completed his dress; the back of his head was adorned with a few hawk feathers standing out from it so as to present the appearance of a quadrant.[123]

Pitchlynn further observed that Tenskwatawa bore himself with an independent air, seating himself on a bear skin without waiting for an invitation, with the obvious intent on receiving the deputations. Pitchlynn indicates that the meeting that afternoon was largely social, and that after dining together the Shawnee Prophet made his departure about four o'clock.

Principal Chiefs Perry and Corn Stalk visited the territory travelers the next day, November 4. Pitchlynn goes into detail again in describing their dress and their physical appearance, as if the purpose of his mission was comparative decorum. "All the men of the Shawnee nation leave the hair of their upper lip to grow; the remainder is taken off from their faces." The visit was brief, perhaps recognizing that the travelers needed a day of rest after two weeks on horseback.

> The official meeting would take place on November 5th. Pitchlynn writes:
>
> A young Shawnee came express to our camp to inform their younger brothers the Choctaws, Cherokees and Creeks that the chiefs and prophet were coming to have

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front tier area of the U.S. westward expansion movement. Tecumseh's goal was to ally with the British to drive United States citizens back eastward across the Appalachian Mountains. Choctaws and Chickasaws had refused to join the confederacy.

[123] Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, *Journal of 1828*, Nov. 3rd entry, 6.

> a general talk with them; a few bear skins were soon spread on the ground, in the form of a parallelogram, and the Indians of the party took their seats and awaited the coming of the Shawnees . . . .[124]

Chief Perry presented to each of the chiefs of the Chickasaws, Choctaws and Creeks as a mark of peace and friendship three strands of white beads tied together. Connected with the strands at one end was a small piece of tobacco. The prophet arose and spoke of the great ignorance of the Indians generally and advised all present to obey as the Shawnee had the Great Father (the President), because he knew better than they did what was for their benefit. He ended, presenting purple strands of beads to the different chiefs.

Major Colbert[125], the Chickasaw delegate, in reply observes that:

> although the whites have conquered the red skins, and are now making proposals to them to remove from their own country to some more distant land yet they understand fully that is almost a farce for them to say whether they will or will not go, for as soon as the United States makes the proposition, it becomes almost absolutely necessary for them to remove."[126]

Pitchlynn does not add political commentary of his own. He is styling himself as chronicler, not as value judge, or political judge. I'm not sure what to attribute this styling to. He continues however to carefully chronicle Major Colbert's response to Tenskwatawa:

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[124] Ibid., Nov. 5th entry, 7.

[125] This is almost certainly Levi Colbert, Principal Chief of the Chickasaws, who, according to Arrell M. Gibson in his history of the Chickasaws, led a delegation of 12 Chickasaws participating in the 1828 expedition. Levi Colbert was the son of a Chickasaw mother and James Logan Colbert, "a Scotsman who in 1729 began a forty-year residence in the Chickasaw Nation. His sons, William, George, Levi, Samuel, Joseph, and Pittman (James), were the principal Chickasaw spokesmen for well-over a century." Arrell M. Gibson, *The Chickasaws* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 65, 167-168.

[126] Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, Journal of 1828, Nov. 5th entry, 6.

> He observed that the whites had driven them further and further continually from the same country, and said what the prophet said was true, and it probably was the best thing they could do, to continue the cultivation of the ground for as they were now driven to the jumping off place, he did not see any other way to proceed.[127]

The resentment of, but resignation to, Removal seems to be the dominant sentiment of the Southeastern deputation as well as that of the Shawnee leaders.

The next day the travelers pushed on in their journey, having been invited to visit the Shawnee in their home town. They stop on the way to rest beneath a "towering oak" beside the Little Blue, which Pitchlynn remembers later as he makes his journal entry:

> After passing this stream you ascend a steep proclivity about 50 ft. and the Indian village [Shawnee village] bursts upon the sight, and to the civilized man it presents a pleasing appearance; the arrangement of the buildings, in the form of two sides of a square, the houses one story in height, built of logs after the form of those inhabited by civilized man; a large fire of logs was built in the center of the village, and at about eight feet from each side hew'd logs were placed to accommodate their visitors.[128]

The Shawnee women served everyone a meal of boiled beef, corn bread, a bread of pumpkin and corn meal, roast beef , and a "drink made of beat parched corn and honey." Chief Perry apologized "for the poverty of the fare." Pitchlynn understands that the Shawnees are sacrificing to share this much food with them and feels honored. Again, carefully noting decorum, Pitchlynn observes that the Shawnees waited for their guests to finish eating before they dine at all. He also seems pleased to report that their cooking,

[127] Ibid., 6.
[128] Ibid., Nov. 6th entry, 7.

neatness, and cleanliness are "the best since Franklin [Missouri]."[129] Pitchlynn, in articulating the particulars of each scene and custom, appears to be developing diplomatic skills that he perhaps senses will be needed if they in fact are forced to emigrate to a new country.

Pitchlynn and the others apparently see adapting to, and to some degree at least, integrating with the advancing civilization preferable to being annihilated by it. His attitude here reminds one of Charles Eastman's concessions to civilization, after the Sioux become one of the last nations to succumb to U.S. authority.[130] "In this people we see the first advances made by the savage toward civilization," Pitchlynn writes, "and truly it is gratifying to behold a set of men, who a few years since were roaming the wood at large now brought together and pursuing the manners and customs of those whom they see around them." In discussing this issue he soberly presents as wisdom the need for Indians to be resigned to patterns of modernity which "will make white men deal with them on the same terms in which they now meet one another." Pitchlynn notes that the great prophet keeps a tomahawk under his arm during the entire after-dinner conversation. As the day draws to a close, Major Colbert thanks them for their kindness and expresses his belief that peace and prosperity alone should occupy young men's minds.[131] By 1828, everyone represented at this meeting seems to be weary of war and conflict and interested in advancing the interests of his nation in an atmosphere of peace and progress.

On November 7th, the group spent part of the day waiting for the interpreter sent after when they first arrived in Independence, and on whose account they had spent so

[129] Ibid., Nov. 6th entry, 8.
[130] Charles A. Eastman, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization* (Lincoln: Nebraska UP, 1977, c1944).
[131] Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, *Journal of 1828*, Nov. 6th, 8.

much time at this place. Pitchlynn calls him by the name of Mograin[132] and states that he lives at Harmony Mission and has the reputation for being the best guide west of the Mississippi. When Mograin finally arrives, the Choctaws express concern about passing through the territory of the Osage, their historical enemies. Mograin reassures them that they will be safe. The expeditionary group rides out about twelve miles into the Shawnee lands, passing through Fithes Town and then another four miles reaching the trading house for the Shawnees and Kansas nation. "Saw today the Prophet, shook hands with him for the last time," Pitchlynn writes. "Killed today two turkey hens," he continues. "I neglected to place in my book that I killed another deer. Kincaid another. Red Dog also another."[133]

With Mograin leading the way they continued to move southwesterly, and on November 11, they travel in an area where the Blue and Osage Rivers approach one another in present-day eastern Kansas. "The waters of the Blue and Osage nearly reach each other. There is a dividing ridge between them extending east and west, on which we saw much elk sign but not deer. The company travelled about fourteen miles, and I about twenty. This would be the prettiest country in the world if it was only timbered, but it is all prairie." They camp this night on the banks of the small fork of the Osage, exploring locally.

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[132]Isaac McCoy names Noel Mograin as the guide, but this may be Charles Mograin, named in Article 6 of the land cession Treaty of Sept. 29, 1865, entered into at Canville Trading Post, Osage Nation: In consideration of the long and faithful services rendered by Charles Mograin, one of the principal chiefs of the Great Osages, to the people, and in consideration of improvements made and owned by him on the land by this treaty sold to the United States, and in lieu of the provision made in article fourteen for the half-breed Indians, the heirs of the said Charles Mograin, dec[ease]d, may select one section of land, including his improvements, from the north half of said land, subject to the approval of the Secretary of the Interior, and upon his approval of such selection it shall be patented to the heirs of the said Mograin, dec[ease]d, in fee-simple

[133] Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, *Journal of 1828*, Nov. 7th entry, 9.

Pitchlynn's observations the next day, November 12, are that the timber and soil are poor, and remarks that "McCoy and some of the whites with us say that it is first rate, and compared it to those in the vicinity of Lexington, Kentucky." It is interesting to note here that Pitchlynn does not seem to self-identify with the whites, though David Baird, a Pitchlynn biographer, accuses him of identifying more strongly with his white ancestors than his Indian forebears.[134]

On the 13th the group ranges upon the high hills overlooking the Osage River. "Thirteen Indians visited our camp—of the Kansas tribe," he notes. Winter weather threatens the expedition the next couple of days. The next day while hunting, Pitchlynn's friend Love[135], shot at a deer, and they both heard a scream nearby, which had been uttered, they soon discovered, by a woman of the Kansas tribe. "She seemed very much affrighted," he writes. "I was sorry for her; she was rude and wild in her aspect." They travelled onward in the rough gullied terrain which required "turns in every direction," and encountered another Indian, who "begged my friend Love for his dog, and then for his tobacco."

They surmised that he was the husband of the frightened woman they had met. "Also a Kansas," Pitchlynn writes, “his dress consisted only of an old blanket that he wrapped around his shoulders in the Indian fashion, leather leggings and moccasins."[136]

An important part of Pitchlynn's mission is to record physical features of the country, and so a lot of the writing is like that of a naturalist:

[134] W. David Baird, Peter *Perkins Pitchlynn, Chief of the Choctaws* (Norman: Oklahoma UP, 1972). Baird repeats his thesis that Pitchlynn was more white than Indian throughout the biography.
[135] Probably Benjamin Love, interpreter for the Chickasaws.
[136] Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, Journal of 1828, Nov. 14th, 12.

> The timber here is a quarter of a mile wide. The bottoms are rich, but never can be tended. The lands we have seen today have been poor, stony and gravelly. The wind has been very high all day. So much so that it was very unpleasant to travel. Cold also. Some aluminum and silex [indicating the presence of flint or silica]. I have several pieces of rock put away for my own curiosity."[137]

Pitchlynn's disposition as a writer in the journals varies between the voice of a naturalist, a role he seems to enjoy the most, and the voice of a reconnaissance officer constrained to an economical gathering of raw data on topography, soil condition, watershed, timber and other features of the landscape, as well as the availability of game. One might also view this data gathering more fundamentally as the predictable vantage point of a farmer.

On Sunday, November 16th, after morning prayers led by Rev. McCoy, the deputies, who must have been anticipating their upcoming rendezvous with the Osages, proceed due south until they reached the Neosho River and then camped a few miles downstream from their point of contact. "We are situated on the eastern banks of this beautiful stream in a place that is truly romantic," Pitchlynn writes in one of his better passages of prose. He continues:

> There is in front a wall of solid rock and just behind us the Neosho [River] winds her course. We have a fine pasture for our horses. We are within a few miles of the Osage villages. Mr. Mograin tells me that the meaning of Neosho is good water, "Ne" water, and "osho" good. He says that it is six days travel to where the buffalo ranges. I killed today an animal that I shall call the prairie badger. I killed also a prairie hen. This place we have agreed to name the Plains of Marathon. The soil of this valley is rich. The weather has been pleasant, but

[137] Ibid., Nov. 15th, 13.

> owing to the hard winds we had to face yesterday and the fatigues of my watch last night I have been indisposed and unable to enjoy it. We saw today before us four Indians running with all their might to the patch of woods to our right on the creek. They seemed to be wild. I ascended a mound and beheld the whole country for some distance around, and far away to the west the country rolled off beautifully, and about six miles away I saw a person riding. Stopped at half past four, travelled eighteen miles. . . . My packhorseman, Tishosho Tushka, is unwell.[138]

Three things stand out prominently as I read the foregoing passage. First, the interesting name of Pitchlynn's packhorseman, Tishosho Tushka, translates from Choctaw as "one who serves a warrior," or, "one who lights the pipe of a warrior." This name suggests that the "old ways" are still being observed in Choctaw culture. Charles Hudson, in his excellent study, *The Southeastern Indians*, which traces the prehistory of the peoples indigenous to the American Southeast, points out that every male member of the tribes is subject to strict rankings.[139]

In Southeastern Indian chiefdoms, younger and lower ranked men were often assigned menial tasks, like carrying water or lighting the older men's pipes. "Men ranked themselves in terms of a strict hierarchy, from highest to lowest, partly with respect to age, and partly with respect to their accomplishments as warriors, leaders of men, and as religious and medical practitioners," Hudson writes. "James Adair tells us that if a man were foolish enough to take a seat in the council house that was above his rank, he would

[138] ibid., Nov. 16th, 12.
[139] Charles Hudson, *The Southeastern Indians* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 202-203.

be peppered with humiliating catcalls and would immediately take a more appropriate seat."[140]

Second, the language of the journal entry above, written on the banks of the Neosho River, shows the honing of the senses, imagination and intellect that perhaps only travel in a wilderness can effect. It has been nine days since Pitchlynn shook Tenskwatawa's hand for the last time and the expedition headed south into a wilderness that is today called eastern Kansas. Though fatigued, Pitchlynn is absorbed, and I believe infatuated, with new species of wildlife, pristine creeks, rivers, canyons, and timber, fringed with an occasional inland prairie sea of tall grass.

Third, this passage exemplifies a quintessential moment in an incredible confluence of world cultures. The adventurers' agreement "to name this place the Plains of Marathon" is striking. The consortium of Choctaws, Creeks, Chickasaws, and Euro-Americans was anticipating an encounter of ancient American warring nations on the broad prairies thereabout, not without similarity to the clash of Persians and Greeks on the Plains of Marathon. A Choctaw with European ancestry and his mouth full of the flavor of Osage words and wild game is traveling to a historic encounter with the old enemy Osages. His twenty-two-year-old mind is beset with vague and incomprehensible monoliths, like the idea of moving a whole nation. Like the idea of Persian conquerors landing on the Plains of Marathon below Athens in 490 B.C. only to be slaughtered by a superlative army of vastly outnumbered Athenian warriors. I feel sure that in this current nine-day span of wilderness horseback riding, he must have also recalled the December day when, at nine, he watched 500 Choctaw fighters ride off toward Chalmette Plantation with Major Gen. Jackson to fight the Battle of New Orleans. And how could

[140] Ibid., 203.

he think about the Plains of Marathon without remembering most of those 500 warriors coming home again, having participated in the complete rejection on the Mississippi Delta of an invasionary force of 10,000 British regulars.

The journal entries for November 17, 18, and 19 trace the expedition's travels down the Neosho to the Osage Agency, and then southeast to Chief White Hair's village.[141] "Soon after our arrival we had a council," Pitchlynn writes on November 20th, "and talked with the principal man of the Osages on the subject of making peace. Growing late, we smoked the pipe of peace and then returned to our camps." The morning of November 21st was snowy and cold and the delegates were invited for a mid-day meal with Pretty Bird. "He is their great man in war, and the orator in council," Pitchlynn writes. They were then invited to dine with White Hair. "He said what he gave us was the best he had," Pitchlynn records, "which was what the Choctaws call Tamfulla, and it was good. I had been wishing for some of it since I left the Nation."[142] In this homey, secure detail in his diary, one can almost read the sigh of relief Pitchlynn is uttering because of the friendly and peaceful relations he is enjoying with the Osages, the Choctaws' former enemies. From two in the afternoon until an hour after dark, the delegates worked out the details of the peace agreement with the Osages. Speeches were given by Major Colbert; then by Amulbby, Red Dog, and Kincaid.

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[141] Chief White Hair was also known as Pahuska, the namesake the modern town of Pawhuska, Oklahoma.
[142] Tamfulla is jokingly referred to in many Choctaw stories as "Tom Fuller." The recipe is described colorfully in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. 4, No. 1, June 1926. "The Choctaw women were adept at preparing foods from the articles at hand. Schooled to forest life, used to a plentiful lack, they worked wonders with corn and meat. A kind of hominy was made of rudely cracked corn, called "tomfalla." Dry corn was beaten in a wooden mortar until the husks were loose. Reed fans were operated by hand during this process to blow away the husks. After all the husks were blown away the meal was put in iron pots and cooked about four hours. It was eaten either fresh, or stale, hot or cold, and was very nourishing. Some liked 'tom fuller' sour; so it was set by a fire overnight, with fresh water poured over it."

Pitchlynn delivered the farewell speech to the Osages, declaring that "the Choctaws now have laid by everything like war, and wish to be at peace with all nations, and particularly with the nations of red people." Pitchlynn rhetorically offers the Osages the Choctaw hand and heart of friendship. "Let that great light that shines on all nations never again witness any more of war between the Choctaws and the Osages," he concludes. "Let our future paths be in future paths of peace."[143] The complete text of Pitchlynn's peace speech to the Osages is transcribed in Appendix Three.

The delegation left White Hair's village the next morning, November 22, heading toward Fort Gibson and reached A.T. Chouteau's trading post on the evening of the 24th. On the evening of November 25th, they reached the Creek Agency.[144]

The following remarks by Pitchlynn are contained in journal entries made while camped a mile below the Creek Agency. These entries, among the most interesting in the journal, seem to lose effect in my attempts to paraphrase them, so I am transcribing them here verbatim:

> *Nov. 28, 1828*. Spent the day principally writing. In the evening I visited the Creek camps and saw them dance. I am extremely sorry to find people of my own color (Indians) so full of vice as I have found the Creeks are. There is no distinction between them and the Negroes within themselves. They mingle together in society upon terms of equality. There are among them a great many mixed breeds and some of them are influential characters. The Negro men, it

[143] Recalling this speech later, Pitchlynn dramatized it, saying that the Osage were showing signs of their ancient enmity for the Choctaw and only a slashing oration by him prevented trouble. ("Peter Pitchlynn," *Atlantic Monthly*, April, 1878) In his biography of Pitchlynn, (Oklahoma, 1972), W. David Baird overcorrects the exaggeration by implying that Pitchlynn made no speech at all. As evidence he cites the fact that McCoy didn't describe any such speech and that McCoy deemed the "civilized and half-civilized Indians as less eloquent than the Western Indians."

[144] This is the Western Creek Agency, housed in buildings bought from A. P. Chouteau in 1827.

seemed to me, were the head managers of the dance. In fact, I have seen no Indian men dancing. They were Negro men and Indian women. Two hundred thirty Creeks arrived today from the old Nation, and have just crossed the Verdigris and are camped on the opposite banks. Colonel Brearly[145] is their agent. The women of the Creeks are very lewd.

Nov. 29, 1828. I did not get up very well this morning, and I yet feel not so very well. Mr. Richard Fields of the Cherokees (Old Nation) came to my camp and we have become acquainted. He is a half-breed, and is quite intelligent and a young man of steady habits. He seems to have strong feelings of attachment for his old country, and have not the sanguine opinion of the new country I find with many of the Creeks. I find the Creeks generally pleased with the country.

Major Colbert's horse being lost, we are detained, and have not left here today. At sundown I got on my horse and rode over to the Creek village, where they were dancing. I joined with them in three reels and then came off. Just upon my arrival, an old woman died within twenty steps of the place where they had made arrangements to have the dance, owing to which the party moved their dance three hundred yards away. This proves that these people are so full of vice that they regard not the death of their nearest neighbor. The dance was carried on near where McIntosh[146] resides.

Nov. 30, 1828 (Sunday). Owing to my ramble last night over to the Creek village, I feel drowsy this morning, yet am well. The sun rose this morning beautifully,

[145] Colonel David Brearly was agent for the emigrating Creeks from 1826 through June, 1829.
[146] The newly arrived Creeks were Chilly McIntosh's followers. The Creek members of the exploring party would remain here with the McIntosh group of fellow tribesmen, then depart back to the East with a letter from McIntosh inviting those still in the East to come to the new country.

> and the weather is really very pleasant. Everything seems to rejoice. The birds are singing their harmonious notes, the heavens are without a threat of a cloud. This morning Pretty Bird came to my tent and took breakfast with me, after which we were requested to go to the Reverend Mr. McCoy's tent to receive the benefits of prayer. At 10:00 we set out from camp and took the road to the fort, crossing a beautiful creek, near which some new cabins had been erected by the Creeks. The lands between the Creek agency and Fort Gibson is good in places.

The three foregoing entries are interesting from several perspectives. They reveal one of the tragic flaws of the Choctaws—their disdain for blacks and their support of the institution of slavery—-largely attributable to ascendancy of mixed-blood factions to positions of leadership in the Choctaw Nation. Pitchlynn was shocked to see the Creeks mixing freely with black folk, to see the intermarried genotypes, and to even see a black man lead the dance. Though educated, Pitchlynn was obviously enduring the culture shock one might expect of a largely provincial young man out to see a new and stunning world, and was showing perhaps more of the influence of the white and Old South portions of his heritage than he realizes. The early mix of early-emigrating Cherokees and Creeks, and U.S. soldiers and commissioners operating out of Fort Gibson[147], in some respects overwhelmed the young Pitchlynn. He was not so shocked, however, that his shock kept him from a "ramble" over to join in some of the dancing on Saturday night.

Charles Hudson asserts that "one cannot understand the history of the Southeastern Indians in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries without

[147] According to Grant Foreman in *A Brief History of Fort Gibson* (Norman: OU Press, 1936), early work on the construction of Fort Gibson began in April, 1824, and proceeded steadily in the following years.

understanding something of the sociology of the Old South, and specifically the Old South from 1800 to 1830, before the Southeastern Indians were forced to emigrate west of the Mississippi River." Hudson explains how that the first agribusiness entrepreneurs in the Southeast were cattlemen, when the region was largely unfenced and unroaded. By 1791, however, plantation owners were converting raw land to cotton fields and producing the fiber in large quantities. The hardest obstacle to cotton profits for the planters was keeping enough labor to work the vast cotton plantations.[148]

They overcame this obstacle by bringing in African slaves in ever increasing numbers. The equivalents of agricultural machines of the day were human beings. The white planters' greatest fear was rebellion by the slaves, who were a majority of the population in many regions of the South. If the potential for slave revolts was not bad enough, according to Hudson, the planters feared even more so the potential alliance of blacks and Indians. Laws like Georgia's prohibition of marriage between blacks and whites or Indians were part of a concerted effort by white society to stigmatize any friendly association whatsoever between blacks and the other races present.[149]

After a day of hunting and resting on December 1st, the expedition headed out the next day for the Canadian River. Pitchlynn records details concerning terrain, soil, timber resources, game and wildlife, and river and creek drainages during the next few days, noting his disappointment on December 7th that "the Choctaw lands are generally poor and unfit for cultivation, no springs." He records further disappointment that day that "our leader, Captain Kennerly, had left us." Pitchlynn regards Kennerly as a gentleman of good principles, but thinks less of Rev. McCoy.

[148] Charles Hudson, *The Southeastern Indians*, 444-446.
[149] Ibid., 447-448.

"McCoy is a missionary to the Pottawatomies and has been leader to our parties, but he is, upon examination, rather superficial in his opinion of things," he writes. "It seems to be his object to concentrate all the Indian nations within the limits of the United States over on the western side of the Mississippi."[150] Pitchlynn wanted more time to explore the Choctaw lands, and was disappointed again when his "friend and Uncle Kincaid" left for home on December 11th. "I am sorry also at parting with my Chickasaw friends and brothers," he writes in the same entry. "They left here a few minutes before Captain Kincaid . . . and I was invited to visit Capt. John Rogers, Chief to the Cherokees, who I am now with. I find him an intelligent man with a strong mind."

Pitchlynn remained in the Choctaw country for the rest of December, exploring, hunting, and socializing with an interesting assortment of Choctaws, Cherokees, Delawares, and white traders around the Choctaw Agency on the Poteau River. Pitchlynn was overjoyed to meet up in this assortment with his great-uncle, Edmund Folsom, and his son Peter, who "has made considerable improvement and speaks good English." On January 4th, Pitchlynn and the few remaining emissaries left Fort Smith and headed for home. They reached the Post of Arkansas on January 17th. While waiting anxiously on the banks of the Mississippi for passage, Pitchlynn writes:

> I shall soon be striding once more over the lovely hills and plains of the Choctaws, where I long to be. It is now almost four months since I took leave from home, and during that time I have not had the pleasurebut once of hearing

[150] The splitting up of the party is the occasion for Pitchlynn's summary comments on the two leaders. In his official report, McCoy states that after having been in the new Choctaw country for only two days, the parties were now splitting up. The two Southern delegations were expected at that time to proceed to Fort Smith, but some of them wanted to remain a while longer to hunt and better acquaint themselves with the country. Captain Kennerly, Lieutenant Hood, Mr. Bell, Dr. Todson and McCoy proceeded back through Fort Gibson and reached St. Louis on the 24th of December.

> from my relations and friends. I have naturally a stronger affection towards my relations, and especially for my parents. I have had many a melancholy hour on their account, as I know they have grieved much at my being separated from them.[151]

The stress of the arduous four-month journey is strongly visible in these remarks by Pitchlynn. Just before arriving back home, Pitchlynn wrote on January 24th from Jackson to his uncle Edmund Folsom of the hardships of his journey across Arkansas, including running out of money and having to borrow ten dollars from polite and friendly people at Dwight, the Missionary Station. "We spent a day with them," he writes in the letter. "The time passed off very agreeably, for we were among people that were pretty much like us—the Cherokees who were there at school."

It may be an understatement to say that this four-month adventure had a formative influence on the young man, the 22-year-old Peter Pitchlynn. Depending on who is making the judgment, one might say that this journey is emblematic of his ambition to succeed in the world. It can as easily be suggested that this journey is emblematic of Pitchlynn's lifelong commitment to the best interests of the Choctaw Nation.

Baird's Biography

American Indian history and biography are being written and re-written at a feverish pace these days, thankfully by an increasing number of American Indian authors and by non-Native authors sensitive to the sovereignty concerns of Native nations. American Indian biographers often work from scratch while doing a great deal of primary research. As often as not, the life story they are writing has not been written before.

[151] Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, *Journal of 1828*, Jan. 17, 1829, entry, 22.

Indian biographies and autobiographies always seem to attract critical attention. Laura L. Mielke points out in a 2002 *American Indian Quarterly* article,[152] for example, that when William Apess self-published his autobiography in 1831, it was quickly reviewed by the *American Monthly Review*. The reviewer expresses frustration over an "error" Apess commits in describing his ancestry. Apess, a Pequot Indian, claims his grandmother was the granddaughter of King Philip, the famous Wampanoag leader, and in doing so he misidentifies Philip as a Pequot. The reviewer concludes by voicing a concern that Apess's future attempts to write Native American history will be inaccurate:

> If Mr. Apess should undertake the work he proposes, we recommend to him great diligence, discrimination, and accuracy, otherwise he will suffer imposition, and unawares impose upon others. He must enlarge the boundaries of his knowledge of Indian history, and not allow himself to be carried away by every slight and imperfect tradition.[153]

Mielke asserts that through the word *tradition*, a term associated at this time with the oral transmission of facts, beliefs, or social codes, the reviewer strongly implies that Apess's attempt to write his personal and tribal history is tainted by Indian sources. Echoing the nineteenth century reviewer's language, one might state that those of us endeavoring to redress bad biographies of American Indian historical figures are often dealing with personal and tribal history tainted by white judgments.

In this argument I hope to illustrate the heavy determinism exerted by the *zeitgeist* of biographical work. By *zeitgeist*, I am using the original German sense of the expression,

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[152] Laura L. Mielke, "Native to the Question: William Apess, Black Hawk, and the Sentimental Context of Early Native American Autobiography," *The American Indian Quarterly* 26.2 (2002), 246-270.
[153] Review of *A Son of the Forest*, 2nd ed., by William Apess, *American Monthly Review* (August 1832): 150.

meaning "the spirit (*Geist*) of the time (*Zeit*)." It denotes the intellectual and cultural climate of an era. It is a term that refers to the ethos of a cohort of people that spans one or more subsequent generations, who despite their diversities experience a certain world view, which is prevalent at a particular period of socio-cultural progression. Zeitgeist is the experience of a dominant cultural climate that defines an era.

I am attempting, therefore, to do a difficult thing. I am trying to redress the injury to the historical reputation of Peter Pitchlynn, the injury done by W. David Baird's oft-quoted biography of Pitchlynn published in 1972 by the University of Oklahoma Press. The judgment of Pitchlynn as an overly ambitious promoter, concerned primarily with the advancement of his personal interests is one frequently leveled by Baird. I will first discuss in general terms the problems with Baird's biography.

In Baird's hour of publication, in 1972, one prevailing viewpoint was that Indians had been the helpless victims of unscrupulous white men throughout the post-contact period. The second most popular box office attraction in 1971, for example, was the movie *Little Big Man*. The main character, Jack Crabb, is an extremely old man who claims he is the lone White survivor of Custer's Last Stand, and he convincingly tells his tale to a fictional editor, Ralph Fielding Snell. Although the movie was one of the earliest with a sympathetic attitude toward American Indians, it basically portrays how Cheyennes were victimized and conquered by the evil white men's whisky, cunning and cruelty. Another example of Indians' sad plight was delivered in the hit song, "Indian Reservation," written by John D. Loudermilk and recorded by Paul Revere and the Raiders:

Cherokee people, Cherokee tribe,

So proud to live, so proud to die.

But maybe someday when they learn

Cherokee nation will return, will return,

will return, will return.[154]

The pop culture productions of the early 1970s mentioned above deploy vividly the concept of the American Indian who has vanished because of the superior cunning of the white man. At about the same time, however, a shift in artistic perspective and cultural critique was occurring and being published. Books like Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968), Vine Deloria's *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (1969), and Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (1970), did not ignore the suffering of American Indians, but portrayed Indians as survivors.

Baird's judgment of Peter Perkins Pitchlynn as "more white than Indian," more or less sanitizes his frequent assertions of Pitchlynn as "shyster" and "self-interested promoter." It is impossible to know with certainty if Pitchlynn was a self-serving opportunist or a respectable public servant. I suspect that some of Baird's judgments of were faulty, because they seem to rise from the stereotypes that Indians were, for the most part, gullible victims and white people were generally cunning and dishonest. American Indians are not well-described as helpless victims. Indians have, in fact, fought the forces of colonization valiantly, and with some success, in 500 years of face to face conflict.

[154] John Loudermilk, " The Lament of the Cherokee Reservation Indian," recorded by Paul Revere and the Raiders, Columbia Record Company, released June 30, 1971.

The most blatant error in warrant, however, assumes that Indians like Pitchlynn were automatically corrupted by white blood. That error is built on the egregious assumption that white blood and white civilization automatically trump and dominate Indian blood and Indian culture—that the Indian who marries into a white family is automatically and irrevocably "white-icized," and the white who marries into an Indian family is seldom, if ever, "Indianized."

Besides the fact that I, an Indian who sunburns easily, find this particular assumption personally highly offensive, it is simply not true. Europeans and their descendents, even if no Indian blood and family culture is at work to Indianize us, eat foods indigenous to the Americas, breath indigenous air and spring indigenously from the same land as those of us who regard ourselves as indigenes spring from and claim vigorously to have been formed by. To suggest that descendents of Welshmen or Scots who married Indians generations ago in the Southeastern Forests and American Bottom or upon the Great Plains have not been Indianized is about as likely as generations of a family living in the Swiss Alps not wearing leather shorts, nor being good climbers and yodelers.

So, am I arguing that Pitchlynn's white progenitors were more likely Indianized by his Indian ancestors than he was white-icized by his white ancestors? I suppose I am. But I am arguing definitely that he is at least more likely Indianized in the Choctaw Nation than white-icized there. Pitchlynn literally grew up in the midst of Choctaws defending their ancestral homeland against its takeover by people outside the nation.

If all one is looking at is costume, public religious ceremony, or architecture, then certainly some white modes have ascended to dominant angles of influence. But if you're interested in marking up some sort of cultural scorecard, first let me say the obvious: that

culture runs deeper than the shape of your hat or the thatch of your roof. Culture goes to the depths of your ethics and to the depth of your aesthetics. Again, I think, like the conservation of energy in physics, this is an assumption we can all share. Allow me to repeat it: culture is rooted in the depths of human beings being human. Being human cannot be separated from its place of being.

Charles Hudson takes up the issue of Indian identity persuasively in *The Southeastern Indians*. Although the Indians of the Southeast have "an unimpeachable claim to Indian identity [they] are not all the same," he writes. "One familiar, though erroneous, way of conceptualizing this difference is to distinguish between 'full bloods,' whose genetic ancestry is presumably all Indian, and 'half bloods or 'mixed bloods,' whose ancestry is part Indian, the implication being that full bloods are necessarily more Indian in their identity than half bloods or mixed bloods."[155]

Hudson asserts that a person can be Indian in at least three ways and that these categories are more or less independent of one another:

> A person may be Indian in a *genetic* sense, meaning that he is noticeably Indian in his physical appearance. A person may be an Indian in a *cultural* sense, meaning that he sees the world from a point of view, whose premises are historically derived from an aboriginal belief system, and he probably also speaks an Indian language. And finally, a person may be an Indian in a *social* sense, meaning that he occupies the status of Indian in a social system, usually as distinguished from whites and blacks. A few people in the Southeast are Indian in all three of these

[155] Charles Hudson, *The Southeastern Indians*, 478.

senses—they look like Indians, they think like Indians, and they are socially Indians.[156]

Since Hudson's Indian identity formulation in 1976, a fourth classification of Indian identity—*legal*—has risen in some systems thought and practice. This identity category has become important largely because of the value placed on federal recognition of Indians in terms of issuance the Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) cards. The CDIB card determines one's eligibility for federal government services to Indians. Many tribes also use the CDIB filter to determine eligibility for tribal membership and privileges. In my opinion, the cultural category of Indian identity is most important, while legal identity is the least important.

Peter Pitchlynn would have qualified as Indian in all three of Hudson's categories. He was born to a Choctaw mother, he was immersed in Choctaw culture and fluent from childhood in the language, and the social system he occupied was thoroughly Choctaw. He was, as an adult, fluent in English, as well as educated, informed in, and conversant with white culture. It seems a difficult task, nevertheless, to construct a persona of Peter Pitchlynn which is dominated by white genetic, cultural or social traits.

It is well-known and frequently argued that collective peoples in diaspora tend to retain the practice of their ethnic and national traditions, especially their religious ceremonies. This tendency is often very strong, as in the case of the Jews since their exile to Babylonia in 586 B.C., who retained in diaspora their traditions for more than twenty-five hundred years before becoming reestablished as a modern state in 1948.

Likewise, European colonists, when they identified with the American Revolution and the United States, certainly did not totally discard their respective cultural traditions.

[156] Ibid., 478-479.

They did, however, progressively subordinate those traditions to the protocols of the new nation they helped to found. It is a fair statement to suggest that they prized any of their ethnic traditions that became incorporated and ceremonially important as American decorum—the playing of Scottish bagpipes in military ceremonies, for example. It is also generally true that ethnic animosities diminished over time with increasing devotion to American ideals. Dutch-Americans, for example, are probably no longer angry that the colonial city they founded, New Amsterdam, became New York.

One may posit with confidence that the concept of 'nation' is a political one first, and an association with traditions, second, although the degree to which a nation emanates from a political starting point, compared to an ethno-historical center, varies with each instance. The United States of America may be the chief example of a nation based on a predominantly political definition, to the necessary subordination of ethnic identifications.

"It is an immense benefit to the European immigrant to change him into an American citizen," writes Theodore Roosevelt in *American Ideals*, four years before he became president. "To bear the name of American is to bear the most honorable of titles; and whoever does not so believe has no business to bear the name at all, and, if he comes from Europe, the sooner he goes back there the better."[157] Roosevelt's statement reflects the bravado of United States nationalism.

Claims, such as the one Baird makes, that Pitchlynn is virtually automatically corrupted by his white blood and by his cunning white ancestors, may be attributable to this pervasive rhetoric of United States nationalism. Besides reflecting naïve premises of

[157] Theodore Roosevelt, *American Ideals and Other Essays, Social and Political* (New York: Putnam, first edition, 1897), 69.

white supremacy and noble savagery, this claim seems intuitively untenable, contradicted by observations of our own family lives, or simple observations of other families. Individual siblings, produced by the same family culture, even identical twins, are inevitably surprisingly unique persons. Although each twin or sibling bears the strong imprint of their shared family culture, they can be, and usually are, notably different.

I have made a claim that, by my own logic, pivots (or wobbles) on the same point of controversy. I argue that European Americans who married into Choctaw families in the eighteenth and nineteenth century were likely to become more Choctaw in their deeper senses of identification than they were to influence (or magically induce by the power of their whiteness) their new Choctaw relatives to become more European. I acknowledge the fact that the spread of Christianity through Native America has been potent, fairly pervasive in the Southeast, and that it tends to make its Native practitioners appear, especially from outside our communities, to have been assimilated by European thought and institutions.

The Christian denominational churches and their missionaries have often been criticized for the structures that they have put in place, some would say imposed, upon American Indian communities. In many cases this indictment is painfully correct. Instances and patterns of abuse and the destruction of indigenous lives, property, and cultural assets, sanctioned by church establishments, are well-documented. These assaults were particularly grim and destructive in early European encroachments into the Americas. These facts of history lead to a strange paradox in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Indian churches in the modern era, ironically perhaps, have been among the strongest agents in preserving traditional practices among the Choctaw and other Oklahoma Indians. Along with ball fields, the churches became primary gathering places for traditional Choctaws, especially after the dissolution of tribal governmental structures and severalty of the tribal estates concurrent with the Dawes Act era and Oklahoma statehood. Choctaw (as well as Chickasaw) churches in southern Oklahoma became the gathering places for extended families, communities, and the sites where the older traditions such as pashofa feasting were observed. In a period when speaking Choctaw was often forbidden in the schools, churches were 'safe zones' where speaking the language was encouraged, practiced and preserved.

Colonial cultures on American soil (diasporal themselves in the general sense of being removed from their traditional homelands) mingled inevitably with indigenous societies. As mentioned earlier, Simon J. Ortiz observed how Acoma people have appropriated and adapted Catholic rituals to their older Acoma rituals. He suggests that people with strong ethno-historical traditions often absorb powerful new influences, such as Christianity, without destroying or completely transforming their older traditions. A visit to a typical Choctaw community church, especially in the areas least modernized, like Goodland Mission Church or Shoat Springs Baptist, illustrates my point better than a great deal of conversation. One hears the Choctaw language spoken, eats traditional foods in communal meals, hears hymns sung in the ancestral language, and experiences the deep importance of kinship relations in community life. One typically does not experience denominationalism, exclusiveness, or an obeisance to an exclusively American concept of citizenship.

It is commonplace in indigenous religions to identify the earth as that point, both physical and spiritual, of our common origins as human beings. Many Choctaw Christians are quite comfortable simultaneously acknowledging God, the father, and Earth, the mother. That we are all made of physical stuff from the earth, hardly anyone denies. Regardless of political persuasion or ethnicity, most Americans believe that being born here is a highly formative, if not a transformative, event.

Therefore, to suggest that Peter Pitchlynn, who is dozens of generations deep a Choctaw, two generations deep a European, and zero generations a citizen of the United States, is more influenced by his white blood than his Indian blood is to deny and disassociate the obvious relationships between place, ethics, aesthetics, and other aspects of cultural identification. (To assume that Pitchlynn was 'necessarily' corrupted by his white blood is to overestimate the power of whiteness.) Even if European and United Statesean settlers were not in earnest quest of transformation, which I believe most were, it may be naive to argue that Europeans transformed America rather being transformed *by* America. The claim that white blood trumps red blood is rooted in the economics and politics of dominance, not in reality.

Certainly, Pitchlynn and other Choctaws trained for the word-warfare of treaties, legislation, and litigation, showed remarkable skills in arenas in which the rules of engagement were written by parliamentarians and private property specialists rooted deeply in European legal logic and in European jurisprudence. Pitchlynn and other Choctaw politicos were skilled also in processes of participatory democracy, certainly as skilled as the descendants of English Lords, traders, and serfs re-organizing themselves on a new continent. For Baird to judge Pitchlynn as a "self-interested promoter," largely

because he was working on contingency fees drawn from any settlement recovered for his clients (in this, and all cases, the Choctaw Nation), is not credible. Baird further contends that Peter neglected his family too much, and strongly implies that Peter should have been home in the Territory, like the "good Indians" (full bloods, of course), quietly farming, I suppose.

I do not mean this as an *ad hominem* attack upon Professor Baird, nor do I mean to belittle his beautifully researched biography. I have examined many of the same documents, and greatly admire the thorough and exhaustive research that was required to construct this narrative of the life of Pitchlynn. In terms of chronology and of minimizing the number of speculative gaps in the narrative that some biographies are damaged by, Baird's book ranks near the top in terms of scholarship of the many biographies I have read. Furthermore, if the archival evidence reports to a scholar that a political leader advanced his personal interests over the interests of the people he represents, it is that scholar's responsibility to expose the misconduct and to exert his/her influence to prevent any further injustice.

From my vantage point, however, Pitchlynn, whose abundant political acumen is as likely to have come from his Choctaw mother as from his English father, legitimately represented the interests of the Choctaw people. I don't think nineteenth century Choctaws were too ignorant to judge the character of their representatives, particularly over a career of more than 50 years of public service like Pitchlynn's. The cases he argued, and the argument, were too important, in terms of Choctaw survival and sovereignty, to entrust to anyone but the most qualified and sincere. Leaders like Peter Pitchlynn and James L. McDonald had to step up to the bars of the courts and Congress

against the United States of America and demand payment of money owed, debts usually decades old. This was slow-paying hard work. Baird acknowledges that Pitchlynn exhausted his personal fortune in these endeavors on behalf of his people.

Baird, nonetheless, points to a number of issues that Pitchlynn was on the 'right' side of. In some of these issues, like who to side with in the Civil War, the Choctaw Nation failed to follow his leadership and suffered negative consequences. Pitchlynn worked tirelessly in Washington from 1856 to 1861 on the Net Proceeds claim, and the House and Senate voted in March, 1861, to award the Choctaws $500,000 in partial satisfaction of their claims. On April 12, as shells fell on Ft. Sumter, Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase paid $115,000 ($3,187 in cash and a draft on a New York bank for $112,000) and asked them to wait two weeks for $250,000 in bonds. Understanding the deteriorating situation in these early moments of the Civil War, Pitchlynn only waited eight days before going to collect the bonds from the Treasury Secretary Chase, but was turned away because of "administrative complications" (Baird 123).[158]

Pitchlynn left Washington on April 21, convinced that the Choctaws must remain loyal to the Union. Israel and Peter Folsom, with the $112,000 check, had crossed the Potomac the day before to Alexandria, Virginia, and headed back to the Nation. Principal Chief George Hudson agreed with Peter that they dare not join the Rebellion, but threw away his speech to the National Council after R.M. Jones, the largest slaveholder on the Council, declared convincingly that people opposing secession should be hanged. On July 12 the Choctaw Nation signed a treaty of alliance with the Confederate States of America. Peter was out-voted on the Council, but ever persistent,

[158] W. David Baird, *Peter Pitchlynn: Chief of the Choctaws* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 123.

succeeded in requiring through the treaty that the Confederacy assume the Net Proceeds obligation.[159]

The 1861 settlement voted by Congress was a good thing, but a $112,000 check drawn on a Union bank was not. It was illegal to carry or otherwise transfer money from the Union territory to the Confederate States. The Choctaws dealt with this problem in an intriguing way. The tribal treasurer turned the check over to a local mercantile company owned by John Kingsbury and Sampson Folsom, who for a 20 percent commission promised to secure payment. They hired two sympathetic Presbyterian missionaries, Benjamin Hotchkins and John Stark, to travel behind Union lines to New York City. They got the money but could not re-cross the line at St. Louis with the silver and gold coin. They left $33,000 with a banker in St. Louis, presumably to avoid a total loss if they got caught, and smuggled the rest back into Indian Territory and turned in over to Sampson Folsom in October, 1861.[160]

Pitchlynn remained at home on the Mountain Fork River for the next three years of the war, serving as a senator to the council and national auditor in 1862 and as Confederate postmaster in Eagletown in 1863. His neighbors elected him captain of the home guard in 1863, and in July, 1864, he offered his company for regular service in the Second Choctaw Regiment. Colonel William A. Phillips had led a Union invasion of the Choctaw Nation in February, 1864, almost to Fort Washita. Phillips distributed President Lincoln's Amnesty Proclamation along the way, and sent a message to the Choctaw council with the ultimatum, "choose between peace and mercy and destruction."

[159] Ibid., 128.
[160] Ibid., 128-129.

Pitchlynn was elected principal Chief of the Choctaws on October 6, 1864, succeeding Hudson, three weeks after General Sherman had forced General Hood out of Atlanta. The council understood that a reckoning was at hand in making peace with the Union, and that Peter's familiarity with the Lincoln government and his experience in Washington might be their best chance to survive Reconstruction.

Other Letters

Acknowledging the limited usefulness of metaphor to critically analyze Native writing, Robert Warrior in *The People and the Word: Reading Native Nonfiction,* nevertheless finds the figure of intellectual trade routes applicable in comparing diverse examples of Native nonfiction texts spanning the better part of two centuries. Reflecting on Edward Said's work concerning how ideas travel and nourish culture and intellectual life, Warrior coins the term, intellectual trade routes, to describe the pathways upon which ideas travel. The ideas are exchanged between people and are changed in the process of traveling "across great geographical or cultural divides."[161] Warrior observes that "The tradition of Native nonfiction has developed along the modern version of such trade routes [old footpaths and primitive roads that have become major highways and centers of commerce] and is written on palimpsests of earlier forms of intellectualism."[162]

Warrior's trade routes metaphor is applicable to Pitchlynn's travels in 1828 with his international array of deputies and commissioners. They first travel up the Mississippi River and interact with the burgeoning settlements of Euro-Americans along with their casts of characters, Native and non-native. They ride overland across Missouri

[161] Robert A. Warrior, *The People and the Word: Reading Native Nonfiction* (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2006), 183.
[162] ibid., 183.

where they must stop and interact with citizens of the Shawnee nation awaiting diplomatic permission and escort to travel inside the Osage territories. The collision of ideas and culture is virtually palpable as I read his accounts of these encounters.

Aside from revealing great adventures and perilous undertakings, such as the emigration of a whole nation of people, the letters between Pitchlynn and his contemporaries reveal ordinary life. It is easy to elicit a head-nod of affirmation to the assertion that life was complex in the old or new Choctaw nations. It is another thing altogether to gather a sense of the nuances of life in those historical spaces. In a letter to Pitchlynn on May 15, 1837, McKee Folsom, a friend from childhood and a brother-in-law, writes:

> I have a house full of children to support and work hard for them too. However, I went to the Choctaw Agency in a few days past and had great dancing and frolicking with the pretty girls like a young man.
>
> I should have now a great many hogs but most are gone wild. I should have now about four or five hundred head. I have some hogs that run about ten miles from home. George Hudson will tell you all the particulars
>
> on Hushma-leen as he has been at this place with me about three days. George Parsly has a great many hogs and also old Billy Jones and some others. Brother Adam is well and his family, excepting his daughter
>
> is still in a bad situation yet. You must tell Sister Rhoda that we are all well. Give my respects and affectionate regards to her and the children. Tell
>
> Push that he must not forget me and Peggy too. They are dear to my heart and I want to see them very much.

McKee Folsom, son of Nathaniel Folsom, was a fourth generation descendant of John Folsom, the English ancestor of the family who came to the American Colonies at a very early period. Nathaniel Folsom, a white man, the immediate ancestor in the Choctaw family, was born in Rowan County, North Carolina, in May, 1756, and moved from Georgia to Bok Tuklo (Two Creeks), in the old Choctaw Nation, in Mississippi, following the Revolutionary war.

Between the years 1780 and 1790, while Nathaniel Folsom, who was widely engaged as a trader among the Indians, he met and married Aiah-ni-chih-oh-oy-oh. She was a full blood Choctaw woman, her name meaning, "A woman to be preferred above all others." She was descended from a long and ancient line of chiefs of the Iksa-hattick-ihal-ihta clan. Nathaniel was the ancestor of the great Choctaw family of Folsoms.[163] Concerning himself, Nathaniel Folsom made the following statement to Reverend Cyrus Byington, in June, 1829:

> I traded a long time in the Nation, sometimes taking up three or four thousand dollars worth of goods. I followed trading about thirty years. I lived principally at Bok Tuklo; there was a great town of about four hundred Indians. The French King lived there. (This great French King was, no doubt, Bienville, or some one of his officials.) I learned the language very slowly; I was never perfect in the language, but after ten years I could do any business with the Choctaws. I joined the Church at Mahew, in 1827, in my seventy-second year. I have been the father

[163] Phil D. Brewer. "A Biographical Sketch of Rev. Willis Folsom with excerpts from his Diary." *Chronicles of Oklahoma*. Volume 4, No. 1, March, 1926, 57-58.

of twenty-four children, fourteen of whom are living. I have lived to see six of them join the church, and three others sit on the anxious seat.[164]

Nathaniel, the grandfather, McKee, the father, and Willis Folsom, removed from the old Nation, east of the Mississippi River, to Indian Territory in the Great Choctaw migration in the year 1832-1833, and settled at Mountain Fork, later called Eagle Town, Red River County. There Nathaniel died on October 19, 1883. McKee had died sometime shortly prior to 1864. Willis Folsom in early life, settled near Fort Smith, in the Choctaw settlement, called Skullyville[165], and died there in 1897, and was buried at a place called Pocola, the word meaning "Ten."

The Folsom family illustration also serves to complicate the often simplistic perceptions of what constitutes an authentic Indian. Is the only real authentic Choctaw Indian in the Pitchlynn/Folsom family history the full blood Aiah-ni-chih-oh-oy-oh? What about the children of Nathaniel and Aiah-ni-chih-oh-oy-oh, many of whom married other full bloods and mixed blood spouses whose strongest identifications were things Choctaw? According to Charles Hudson's accounts of traditional kinship values of matrilineality among the Choctaws, the beloved grandmother would have claimed all her children as "blood" relatives, as well as all her descendants along the female lineage.[166]

We may speculate, further, that the first Folsom, rather than marrying an Indian woman and carrying her and her offspring back to "civilization," was assimilated and deeply acculturated into Choctaw culture. Subsequent generations did not correct this

[164] ibid, p. 58.
[165] The name is derived from the Choctaw word for money, "iskulli" or "iskuli", as originally this was the place where annuity payments were collected. Iskulli in a Choctaw adaptation of the Old French word, *escalen*, which means money.
[166] Charles Hudson, *The Southeastern Indians*, 185-192.

"error or folly" by returning their Euro-American spaces and ideologies, but appear to have fully adopted Choctaw ways and thought, migrating across time and space to become integral members of the Choctaw tradition.

Other letters in the collection reveal a general public curiosity if not a serious level of interest in the affairs of Indian nations. A letter written to Pitchlynn by Congressman Robert Dale Owen of Indiana in the summer of 1845, for example, exhibits sympathy for the future of the Choctaws. Owen sent the following letter to Pitchlynn, following up on a conversation between the two on an unspecified steamboat passage on which they met:

> Perhaps you may remember that in conversation with you on board steamboat, relative to the probable application of your Nation for admission into the Union as a Territory, I stated to you, that I did doubt that I could get some of the most influential papers to take up and advocate the matter. The enclosed paragraphs, form the "New York Sun" (daily circulation the largest in the world, being upwards of forty thousand) will show that I did not neglect the matter. I furnished to the principal editor of that paper some of the particulars you gave me; and, as the Sun articles are very extensively copied throughout the Union, the effect will be to arouse, and probably to enlist, public opinion.
>
> If I should be re-elected, as from present appearances is likely, and if you find no one to whom you prefer to entrust your application, I shall, with pleasure, take charge of it in Congress. And, meanwhile, if you see fit to communicate to me

such further information as you may wish to see laid before the public, I will procure its dissemination through the same channel.

Not knowing your address (which please send me) I address this under cover to the postmaster at Little Rock, who doubtless knows it. --Dear Sir, Sincerely Yours, Robert Dale Owen[167]

The article in the *New York Sun* Owens refers to is an editorial advocating the admission of the Choctaw Nation as a territory to the Union. The editorial extols the Choctaws' virtues of possessing a large land base, "secured to them in fee simple, about as large as the state of Indiana," a constitution and representative government with a democratically elected Chief roughly equivalent to the office of Governor. The editorial misstates that the present chief of the tribe is Pitchlynn, perhaps a lie told by Pitchlynn or a mistaken memory by Owen. The *Sun* editorial, presumably written by Owen himself, describes Pitchlynn:

> He is a half-breed, of middle age, with handsome Roman features and mild but determined countenance, and has especially distinguished himself by his zeal in the cause of public education. The results of his efforts have been of vast importance to the Choctaw nation. This tribe numbers about *twenty-five thousand* and Pitchlynn has succeeded in diverting the various annuities and other public monies coming to them, so that they form a noble fund, amounting to about forty

[167] Robert Dale Owen (New Harmony, Indiana), Letter of June 8, 1845 to Peter P. Pitchlynn, Peter Perkins Pitchlynn Collection, Box 1, Folder 93, Western History Collection, Bizzell Memorial Library (Norman: University of Oklahoma).

thousand dollars, the whole of which is applied to public instruction.[168]

Owen's editorial continues with more detail on seminaries and common schools, some of which "are on the Manual Labor principle, and they procure farmers of experience from the older States, who instruct the young Indians in improved systems of agriculture." The piece concludes with the exhortation: "Is there a white man in the Union so heartless that he will refuse to welcome the territory of the redeemed Red race to all the privileges of the Union?"[169]

Robert Dale Owen was a longtime exponent in his adopted United States of the socialist doctrines of his father, the Welshman Robert Owen, as well as a politician in the Democratic Party. Born in Glasgow, Scotland, Owen emigrated to the United States in 1825, and helped his father create the Utopian community of New Harmony, Indiana. After the community failed, Owen returned briefly to Europe, then moved to New York City and became the editor of the *Free Enquirer*, which he ran from 1828 to 1832. Owen's *Moral Physiology*, published in 1830 or 1831, was the first book to advocate birth control in the United States (specifically, coitus interruptus). Along with Fanny Wright, he was an intellectual leader of the radical Democratic faction, the Locofocos. In contrast to most other Democrats of the era, Owen and Wright were opposed to slavery, though their artisan radicalism distanced them from the leading abolitionists of the time.[170]

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[168] ibid., *New York Sun* clipping, absent date.
[169] ibid.
[170] Lott, Eric. *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, Oxford University Press, 1993.

Reviewing archived manuscripts not only sheds light on and gives texture to life in a historic period, but it also can correct errors that have been repeated in written histories. The accidental death of Chief Apuckshunubee, for example, has been reported in several sources to have occurred on September 23, 1824, in Maysville, Kentucky, near the Ohio River. Chief Moshulatubbee's letter to Pitchlynn on October 10, 1824, from Georgetown, approximately 50 miles southwest of Maysville, gives no indication that the event has yet happened. The letter is addressed to Mr. P.P. Pitchlynn, Choctaw Nation:

> Dear Nephew: We have got thus far safely on our journey. In about four days from this time, we take the stage, and proceed to Washington City. I wish you to attend faithfully to the business with which I entrusted you. Use all your exactness to maintain order and sobriety in my district. If anything should go wrong, I wish you to inform me immediately of it. Write to me at Washington City. Inform me, also, of the health and situation of my family. Present my best respects to the chiefs and warriors whom I have left behind me. Your Uncle, Moshulatubbee.[171]

Moshulatubbee's assertion that the delegation has traveled safely thus far suggests that the accident has not yet happened.

This assertion is further confirmed by another letter in the archive, to Col. William Ward at the Choctaw Agency from John Pitchlynn, Peter's father, who was part of the delegation to Washington who was to negotiate the treaty of 1825. John Pitchlynn

[171] Chief Moshulatubbee, Letter of Oct. 10, 1824, to Peter P. Pitchlynn, Peter Perkins Pitchlynn Collection, Box 1, Folder 5, Western History Collection, Bizzell Memorial Library (Norman: University of Oklahoma).

had long served as the English language interpreter for the Choctaw Nation, a service which was at the time being in the process of being handed off to young James L. McDonald, also among the traveling party. Mr. Pitchlynn, Sr., under the heading "Chillicothe, Ohio, October 17, 1824," writes:

> Dear Sir: We arrived at Maysville the evening after date of my last letter [probably posted on or around October 10 from Georgetown, Kentucky, like the previous letter from Moshulatubbee to Peter]. The Chief, Puckshunubee, breathed his last in about one hour after our arrival, having lived about 48 hours after the accident happened. It is extraordinary he was not immediately killed by his fall. It seems as if his spirit could not take its flight until we had all arrived to witness his last moments. It was truly a melancholy event, and will be the source of much affliction to his family. Every attention was shown him. The citizens of Maysville were making arrangements to bury him with military honors.—After holding a consultation and fearing to lose the stage, a part of the company came on here. The remainder will stay and attend his burial. They will come on the next stage. In seven or eight days from this time (if no accident happens) we shall be in Washington City. Yours with respect, John Pitchlynn.[172]

This letter reveals the dramatic edge that attended Choctaw negotiations with the U.S. through the first third of the nineteenth century. Even the death of an important friend and leader could not justify delaying the timely arrival of the delegation in Washington for treaty negotiations.

[172] John Pitchlynn, Letter of Oct. 17, 1824, to Peter P. Pitchlynn, Peter Perkins Pitchlynn Collection, Box 1, Folder 7, Western History Collection, Bizzell Memorial Library (Norman: University of Oklahoma).

One of Pitchlynn's letters from the early period after removal to Indian Territory bears examination for its personal qualities, its reflections on everyday life, and for its illumination of issues regarding slavery among the Choctaws. He was writing to his first wife Rhoda from Low Blue, Choctaw Nation, September 10, 1837:

> My Dear Wife:
>
> We are encamped at present at George Williams—he has returned home after following the Comanches about a thousand miles—he did not overtake them and has come back without buying any mules. This is bad news with us—we may have the same luck, but we are determined to go on, and it will no doubt be a long time before we will return. We will not return under three months—therefore do not look for us soon. Do the best you can. Should any of the blacks get unruly, send word to Brother Thomas and get him to whip them.
>
> I believe I left full instructions what should be attended to. Do not fail to have the wheat sown in time. Should Anderson quit minding the stock on Rio River get some one as soon as possible to go there; but tell Anderson that if he will attend to the stock I will pay him well. Tell him that I have confidence in him and that he ought not to disappoint me. In regard to the Corn in Boles field I think it best be hauled and put into the crib that is already built there. It will give more time for building which is very necessary; should be done before the winter sets in. This is all I have to say about the affairs at home.
>
> The people here on Boggy have all been sick. Arty Beamis' daughter died about a week ago of fever. We are all well and in lively spirits. We shall soon be

among the Buffalo. Tell Malvina and Peggy to look on the map for Blue and False Washita rivers. This is a Prairie Country. The timber is only on the river and creeks. Get on a high place and one can see as far as the eye can reach. In a few days we shall be beyond the Cross Timbers where there is scarcely a tree to be seen. I mention this for the girls as they have studied Geography.

If the public school teacher should not come on early this fall, I think you ought to keep the children at their books several hours every day regularly. The older ones might well spend two hours with the globe and map. By doing this they will not forget what they have already learned. Tell Lycurgus to be a good boy. If he learns his books well, I will have some thing to give him when I return—and also to Leonidas. Tell Malvina I expect she will learn more than any of the girls. You must all kiss Capt. Lysander every day for me until I return. And granny must also kiss him for me every time she comes.

Should mother come on this side of the River to live, you must let the children visit her very often. Present my compliments to mother and to all my relations and friends. Israel and Jacob are well—we have no sickness

in company.

This may never reach you as there is but little chance to send letters from here to Eagletown. This is the last settlement in the west. Before us is the interminable prairie. There are nearly (if not more) twenty of us in company. I do not apprehend any danger from the Indians. Our horses may be stolen, but we are on our guard. If I keep my health I will enjoy much sport among the Buffalo. I will have a long story to tell you and the little boys when I get back. I have already

learned several Comanche words. I am told they shake hands with left hand—because it is nearest the heart.

I am your affectionate husband, P.P. Pitchlynn.

Post-script: Sept 21st. I brought this along with me from George Williams for I forgot to leave it there, but it is well I did as I have now a chance of sending it to Fort Towson where it will be mailed and you will get it the sooner. I will be about three hundred miles west about the time you receive this—in a wild looking part of the world. I will have much to tell you when I return. Keep in good spirits and do the best you can. If I have luck my part will be about thirty mules, which will at least be good for two thousand dollars. I am undergoing hardships in hopes to benefit you and the children. Therefore you do the best you can. May the Lord be with you and the children in the sincere prayer of your husband.[173]

Of many interesting revealing features in this letter, ones that seem to jump out at the reader are the activity of tracking down wayfaring Comanches to buy what is apparently a large herd of mules that they have, the almost casual reference to whipping slaves, and the interesting names of Pitchlynn's male children. Lycurgus, Leonidas, and Lysander Pitchlynn were each named after Spartan lawmakers and military heroes. The naming of his children further illuminates the passage in his 1828 journals, where Pitchlynn and his fellow adventurers name to prairies of southeastern Kansas, the Plains of Marathon.

Conclusion

[173] Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, Letter of Sept. 10, 1837, to Rhoda Pitchlynn, Peter Perkins Pitchlynn Collection, Box 1, Folder 54, Western History Collection, Bizzell Memorial Library (Norman: University of Oklahoma).

There are many gaps in Native American political, cultural, and intellectual history. Most Choctaw college graduates probably know more about the history of classical Greek thought, for example, than they know about classical Choctaw thought. Even as much closer than we are to ancient Choctaw knowledge as Pitchlynn was, it is obvious from the last letter examined, that Pitchlynn was much closer his EuroAmerican education than he was to ancient epistemologies of the Choctaws in the Americas. This is probably because a lot of that knowledge had been lost.

Most Choctaws probably have little or no concept of a classical period in Choctaw history at all; almost as if Choctaws didn't exist a thousand years ago. Counterparts of epistemologies which educated people in western civilizations take for granted have, in many indigenous American societies, been displaced by the historically brutal disruptions of colonization. As corny as it may sound, it is harder to face the future without a past.

For this reason, and another, I am temporarily departing in this segment of the chapter from the strict objectivism of the university research model, patterned interestingly I think after the German university model. I am going to consider among other things some important questions concerning silence in the previous generation of my family, a rather typical mixed blood Indian family from Oklahoma. These are topics that I hear Indian people in my community talk about from time to time—topics concerning the complicated interface of modernity, traditional language, and traditional life ways that were abandoned, often by very tradition-rich, tribally-centered Indians, in the twentieth century, sometimes for reasons that were born in the nineteenth century.

Since this departure reflects my secondary concentration in composition, rhetoric and literacy, I will offer one theoretical reference that I think warrants my right to make this departure. The example is drawn from a discussion of gender bias in composition theory by Patricia A. Sullivan of the University of Colorado.[174] Sullivan tells the story of a female graduate student who found it difficult to meet her professor's expectations about what constituted successful writing in a seminar on Shakespeare. Sullivan writes:

> When it came time to analyze the experience . . . I overlooked connections between gender and composing. In the six position papers the student was required to write, she tended to explore thematic issues she discovered in the plays she was reading rather than argue with critics' assessments of those plays, and she chose to proceed inductively and recursively rather than adopt the 'thesis-proof model' her professor specifically asked for. Her term paper similarly reflected exploratory rather than critical modes of discourse.[175]

Understanding that this woman had made A's in writing as an undergraduate, Professor Sullivan reports that she concentrated at first solely on the disjuncture between the teacher's expectations and the student's performance. "Hence, I 'saw' deficiency where I might have only seen difference," Sullivan writes. Sullivan reviewed her own analysis later, realizing she had attributed the result to a deficiency in the graduate student, rather than to student's own sense as a woman "that the terms of academic discourse were not her language." Had she looked at her experience through the lens of gender, Sullivan admits, instead of substandard performance, she might have judged the

[174] Gesa Kirsch and Patricia A. *Sullivan, Methods and Methodology in Composition Research* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992).
[175] ibid., 42-43.

woman's performance as simply nonstandard, "in a course where male conventions of discourse were allowed to define the standard." I am briefly invoking a feminist principle in the following discussion, that at once acknowledges the objectivist perspective as academically dominant, but, briefly at least, departs from what Sullivan terms, "the disputational discourse or father tongue of the academy."[176]

Among the most puzzling events that I regularly encounter are the reactions I get when I mention to almost anyone outside of the academy, and to many within the academy, that I'm working on a PhD in American Indian literature. These reactions range from a blank stare to an insubstantial comment or two. Even with members of my family, there is a ready willingness to acknowledge our shared Indian ancestry, but a marked tendency to neither strongly identify nor strongly dis-identify personally and rhetorically as Indian. These are the same kin who seem to virtually hallow the Indian land we have kept in our family since the Dawes Commission allotments.

The deafening silence that often accompanies my report of academic discipline seems eerie to me as I review in these moments at my desk the many examples of the silent response recorded in my memory. In these abbreviated conversations it's almost like I've encountered a taboo, perhaps like the taboo of mentioning the names of the dead—as if there's inherent danger, great risk, great folly, or something counterfeit in my identification and choice of discipline. I connect this with the extreme irony in my life experience that my dad was the only member of his extended family, which comprises a dozen or more allotments, to keep his Indian land and pass it on to his children, but who never identified himself openly as Indian. He died in 1976, long before I took up my

[176] ibid., 46.

studies to determine what it means to me and others to be Indian. So, I can't simply ask him the reasons for his silence on the subject.

Chickasaw scholar Amanda Cobb points out in Telling Our Grandmothers' Stories, which chronicles the history of Bloomfield Academy for Females that schooled young Chickasaw women from 1852 to 1949, some of the contradictory impulses that caused Congress to establish the American Board of Foreign Missions in 1810 and later in 1817 to pass the Indian Civilization Fund Act which provided $10,000 per year to fund mission schools among the Indians. Among the stated purposes of these schools were the imperatives to provide religious literacy education so the Indians could be Christianized and to provide secular subject education so they would be better suited to work productively within the American economy. Cobb explains that this strange-to-the-modern-point-of-view joint venture of church and state was consciously designed to acculturate Indians as productive Christian individuals, but craft them at the same time as people comfortable with their subservient relationship to the white race.[177] Evidently the "truth will set you free" element of Jesus' doctrine in the minds of these missionaries did not extend to political freedom and civil rights.

Cobb contrasts the relatively respectable experience of women in Chickasaw schools, which were mostly funded, established and controlled by Chickasaw national government officials, with the harsher experiences of Indian pupils enrolled in federally established and controlled schools. Many studies[178] have appeared in recent years

[177] Amanda J. Cobb, Telling Our Grandmothers' Stories: The Bloomfield Academy for Chickasaw Females, 1852-1949 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 26-27.
[178] See for example, Jon Reyhner and Jeanne Eder, *American Indian Education: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004). In this comprehensive history of American Indian education in the United States from colonial times to the present, historians and educators Reyhner and Eder explore the

chronicling the all-too-often harsh and humiliating boarding school experiences of other American Indians, especially those enrolled in federally administered boarding schools. Cobb argues convincingly that the schools had set up a risky agenda: give Indians enough education so that the truth could set them free spiritually, but not enough education and truth to set them free politically. Perhaps the cause of my conundrum regarding the reluctance of mixed blood Indians to affirm their Native identities lies rooted somewhere in this gap between spiritual and political freedom.

In order to enjoy the freedoms that Americans have been crowing so loudly about since the inception of the Republic, perhaps Indians of my dad's generation (he was born in 1903) felt that they must inhabit this ultimately unhealthy gap between spiritual and political freedom in order to enjoy their share of the American Dream. He was 21 years of age, for instance, when all Indians not yet citizens but residing in the U.S. and its territories acquired the legal right to vote in the elections.

The 15th Amendment to the Constitution granted African American men the right to vote by declaring that the "right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Although ratified on February 3, 1870, the promise of the 15th Amendment would not be fully realized for almost a century. Through the use of poll taxes, literacy tests and other means, Southern states were able to effectively

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broad spectrum of Native experiences in missionary, government, and tribal boarding and day schools. This up-to-date survey is a useful source for those interested in educational reform policies and missionary and government efforts to Christianize and "civilize" American Indian children.

disenfranchise African Americans, and, though less publicized, non-citizen Indians.[179] According to Stetson Kennedy, an ethno-historian, writing in 1959:

> American Indians are in the anomalous position of being at the same time citizens of the U.S.A. and wards of the Government, the net result being far from first-class citizenship. The U.S. Congress has adopted no less than 5,000 laws which apply to American Indians as such, and these, together with more than 2,200 regulations imposed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, regiment the lives of Indians from the cradle to the grave.[180]

It would take the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 before the majority of African Americans in the South were registered to vote. Likewise fifty four years after the 15th Amendment was passed, the passage of the Citizenship Act granted citizenship and 15th amendment protection of voting rights to all Indians living within the U.S. or its territories. Although my father was a citizen by virtue of his inclusion in the allotment treaty provisions, he surely felt the stigma of second class citizenship accorded to many Indians in the U.S. Perhaps this was one of the reasons he remained so silent on the issue. He was a loyal U.S. citizen, and true to the warrior class he descended from, he served two voluntary tours of duty overseas during World War II. He and his older brother, both beyond the maximum age of conscription, served for almost the entire war.

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[179] For other articles about Jim Crow style laws restricting Indian voting rights, see Orlan J. Svingen, "Jim Crow, Indian Style," *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No 4, 1987, 275-286; "Transcript of National Congress of American Indians Convention," 15-18 November 1944, 35, Colorado Historical Society (CHS),Denver, Colorado; Cohen, *Handbook*, 157-158; Deloria and Lytle, *American Indians/,American Justice*, 222-225; Daniel McCool, "Indian Voting," in *American Indian Policy in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Vine Deloria Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press,1985), 105-116; Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 163-166;

[180] Stetson Kennedy. *Jim Crow Guide to the USA* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1959), 12.

His brother, my uncle William Allen Morgan, perished in the Pacific in April 1945, two months before the war ended.

World War II brought profound changes to Indian lives, as tens of thousands left reservations to serve in the military and work in wartime industries. In 1943 alone, over 46,000 took jobs off reservations in shipyards, lumbering, canneries, mines, and farms. Over 24,000 served in the armed forces--over a third of all Indian men between 18 and 50. Unlike African Americans, Indians were not confined to separate military units, performing all kinds of military duties. This policy increased the integration of many Native Americans into the dominant currents of American society.[181]

Nevertheless, voting rights for Indians were still being denied by state law in many of the western states well after WWII. President Truman's Committee on Civil Rights agreed in 1947 that Indians were United States citizens and entitled to the "civil rights guaranteed to all citizens," but that they also "retained their tribal membership, as well as their wardship [trustee] status." Though the movement to "terminate" American Indian national existence gained momentum in the Eisenhower administration, Truman vetoed a pro-termination bill in 1949 because it "violated … 'one of the fundamental principles of Indian law . . . namely the principle of respect for tribal self-determination'"[182] Indians who wanted to vote in New Mexico were still fighting state

[181] Mintz, S., "Native Voices: Introduction, Part IV," *Digital History*. Retrieved Dec. 1, 2007, from http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/native_voices/nav4.html.
[182] Paul C. Rosier, "'They Are Ancestral Homelands': Race, Place, and Politics in Cold War Native America, 1945–1961," *Journal of American History* 92:4 (March 2006): 1307-1309.

laws disenfranchising them until 1957, and Utah laws preventing the Native vote survived into the 1960's.[183]

My father's integration into mainstream society was likely furthered by his war experience, as well as successes he enjoyed in mainstream business enterprises before the war. Beyond those experiences, however, his silence on issues of Indian identity suggests that some of the burden of contradictions entangling the American identity were more easily forgotten than resolved, and more easily set aside in favor of the hoped-for benefits of a relatively amorphous integration into modern American society. The most obvious speculative reason for my father's generation of mixed blood Indians, particularly those with lighter skin, to reject their Indian identities is that they were embracing the economic and social advantages of whiteness, rejecting the economic and social liabilities associated with being Indian.[184]

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[183]Daniel McCool, Susan M. Olson, Jennifer L. Robinson. *Native Vote*: *American Indians, the Voting Rights Act, and the Right to Vote* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[184]Charles Eastman is an interesting example of the mood of some Indians at the bleak turn-of-the-twentieth century, a period during which the North American Indian population had declined from many millions at the time of European contact to about 400,000 recorded in the 1900 census. Eastman was 35 years old when my dad was born, and I can look for answers in his work. There is a tendency in discussions of identity politics, especially in criticism of Native American literature, to reduce the terms of discussion of political agendas to those which originate either in the "white world" or the "Indian world." This point of origin or etymological approach to studying Charles Eastman is the one I would use if I were trying to prove a case against him as an assimilationist, a charge frequently leveled against Eastman. I believe that Charles Eastman, like his intellectual forbears and descendants, was actually a person trying to make it in "the world," a singular place, not a dichotomy. Eastman, along with Gertrude Bonnin, Carlos Montezuma, and others, were early members of the Society of American Indians (SAI), which has been widely criticized for its assimilationist stance on many important issues.

Since elements of his 1916 autobiography, From the Deep Woods to Civilization, as well as the title, suggest that he organized the world into binary oppositions, a popular philosophical trend in the nineteenth century, this point of origin approach to understanding his ideas is not without merit. It pleases me more, however, to yield to my sense of the text, which reveals a remarkable Sioux man embracing change, which is consistent with Sioux tradition. Robert Warrior points to what seems to be "the blinding progressivistic optimism of Eastman," referring to his statement before the first meeting of the SAI, twenty-one years after the Wounded Knee massacre, the aftermath of which he witnessed firsthand. "I wish to say," Eastman spoke, responding to a previous speaker's list of injustices, "that really no prejudice has existed so far as the American Indian is concerned." This surprising, seemingly ridiculous, statement, Warrior concedes, was more likely a symptom of the integrationist legacy of post-Wounded Knee existence, in which native intellectuals were grappling with issues that threatened the complete dispossession of Indian interests if open resistance continued (7). Eastman's political position, I would

As mentioned earlier, the officials of the United States government dealing with the "Indian problem," first advocated the training of Indian students as cultural leaders. These leaders they speculated would take the valuable things they learned back to their tribes and serve as agents of assimilation. Choctaw scholar D.L. Birchfield points out in his assessment of McDonald's impact on the Treaty of 1825 negotiations in Washington, this young lawyer, educated in prominent New England law offices, brought a lot of savvy to the table, greatly limiting Choctaw losses in that treaty in terms of land cessions to the United States.[185] McDonald was educated when teaching leadership qualities was a pedagogical objective in the instruction of American Indian pupils. Pitchlynn was also educated in this period. It became increasingly obvious to federal officials, legislators,

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speculate, though seeming naïve perhaps to a twenty-first century critical view, was in his mind a version of a "real world" necessity. I can further speculate that if I were faced with the untidy choice between integration and annihilation, I might likewise choose integration. "The pages of history are full of licensed murder and the plundering of weaker and less developed peoples, and obviously the world today has not outgrown this system," Eastman writes in his conclusion to *From the Deep Woods to Civilization* (194). This statement suggests that Eastman had not forgotten the massacre at Wounded Knee, or, earlier, the worst mass execution in U.S. history following the Santee uprising in 1862, in which 38 Sioux men were hanged, and from which his father almost miraculously had escaped.

Jacob "Many Lightnings" Eastman, Charles' father, insisted that Charles go to school and "learn the English language and something about books, for he could see that these were the 'bows and arrows' of the white man" (Deep Woods 16). So, Charles enrolled in the mission school at Flandreau and later attended Santee Training School, Beloit College, Dartmouth, and finally Boston University School of Medicine where he graduated in 1890. In comparing Cobb's analysis of the Bloomfield Academy women to Robert Warrior's reading of the work of Indian pupils at the Santee School, we see that both scholars regard the history of indigenous education as a useful virtual roadmap by which one might trace American Indian intellectual growth over the last three centuries. Warrior, in People and the Word, argues for "a new agenda in educational and literary scholarship that encompasses the fullness of who Natives have become, not just as students, but as leaders (teachers, professors, professionals) who have emerged on the other side of the educational process" (100).

Warrior traces a shift in the evolution of Indian education from the relatively benign Santee School experience, which taught in both English and Lakota, with the idea of training cultural leaders among the Indian students who would go back into their communities equipped to lead their people into full acculturation and assimilation into modernity, to the harsher versions of Indian schools later in the nineteenth century whose aims were less benevolent. Warrior quotes Delores Huff who argues that "Indians were defeated not by military force . . . but by politically restructuring the institution of education to mold a colonial ethos." The process of colonial schools which deliberately caused Indian students to believe they were inferior to whites and lose confidence in their own leaders and ways of life, according to Huff, "chipped away at Indian culture, making it more and more difficult for each succeeding generation to lead autonomous and pro-active lives" (qtd. in Warrior 105).

[185] Don Birchfield. (*The Oklahoma Basic Intelligence Test*, p #?).

and competing lawyers that higher education for Indians was not in the best interest of uncontested American westward expansion plans. Since this policy in fact raised leaders more sophisticated in resistance to federal aims and policies, harsher utilitarian educational policies replaced leadership training later in the nineteenth century.

When Craig Womack enjoins younger Native literary critics to work through issues of hybridity and essentialism rather simply remaining in the back of the seminar room taking whatever theories they are handed and carrying them into perpetuity, another bookend of the American Indian educational narrative is revealed.[186] I am frequently impressed in my readings of Pitchlynn, McDonald and other Choctaw intellectuals grappling in their present tense during the three decades before 1850 with issues like Removal, for example, with their parallels to modern critical and political issues. However, they didn't have the option of accepting a well-turned academic theory on how to approach these problems. They were confronted with the necessity of creating usable theory in a life and death struggle.

"We can either remain in a state of constant lamentation, bemoaning all the different ways from kindergarten to graduate school we are told about our intellectual deficits as Native people, or we can do something about it," Womack writes. "Most critics will choose lamentation because creating indigenous knowledge is more difficult than bemoaning white hegemony."[187]

[186] Warrior, Weaver, and Womack. *American Indian Literary Nationalism*, 91.
[187] ibid., 92.

My opinion on the argument between hybridity and essentialism is that it is, after all, another damaging and contrived binary opposition.[188] There are, in fact, more than those two theoretical positions we can inhabit. Certainly, no ineluctable or holy essence exists that can describe Native American experience and cultures. "In the United States there are some 560 federally recognized Indian nations, and perhaps another 400 that are not recognized," writes Harvard-trained Ojibwe sociologist Duane Champagne. "Most Indian nations have distinct language, ceremonies, traditions, religion, and other institutional relations. Since we can identify and conceptualize significant differences in institutional and cultural order among many Native communities we understand and give empirical reference to their diversity."[189]

It is beyond any concept of probability to conceive of one Native American essence, although it is entirely reasonable to claim that there are essential, definable differences between those 960 or so native tribes, bands, and nations. At the same time, I find the application of a term like hybridity, as if we were botanists studying roses or cash crops, to be an oversimplification, a convenient objectivist formula, to describe the marvelous interpenetrations of diverse cultures and genotypes. It is well known that in most American Indian societies, marrying within your own clan is forbidden. This taboo is based on the scientific certainties that diversity in breeding is generally good for any population of human beings and that in-breeding can have disastrous results.

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[188] Jace Weaver argues, for example, in *American Indian Literary Nationalism* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), co-authored with Robert Warrior and Craig S. Womack, that if we accept the idea that hybridity invalidates American Indian nationalist perspectives, "Any claim to self-determination or any form of separatism will disappear. The 'Indian Problem' will have achieved the final resolution reached for in Termination. We will have been defined out of existence" (29).

[189] Duane Champagne. *Social Change and Cultural Continuity Among Native Nations* (Lanham MD, Plymouth UK: AltaMira Press, 2007), 3.

Common sense, as well as the historical record, would suggest that cultural interpenetration and even assimilation of desirable traits of other cultures is also welcomed by Native peoples, as well as an acknowledgment of some risks involved in such adaptations. There is no real evidence that Choctaws and other indigenous societies eschew change and embrace some idea of Choctaw essence, for example, although the innate conservatism of human beings argues for resistance against radical change in tribal institutions over short periods of time.

The concept of cultural diversity is sometimes compared with biodiversity, each being declared necessary to the survival of life on Earth. Like the differentiation of species, societies and cultures can be differentiated not only in terms of ceremony, dress and language, but also in terms of shared moral, ethical aesthetic values. By extension, it may be argued that preservation of indigenous cultural diversity is as important as preservation of biodiversity in the survival of our species.

Those who reject this argument might say that we are depriving "under-developed" societies from the benefits of modern medicine and technologies by respecting their desire to maintain their traditions ways and beliefs. In addition, there are many, like the missionary societies so active on the nineteenth century American landscape, who consider it their moral imperative to evangelize and convert indigenous peoples to their own models of moral success.

Native pre-modern nations like the Choctaws on the U.S. frontier were the object of such evangelistic zeal, but as I noted in the previous chapter, Choctaws in the early 19th century welcomed the missionary schools for their usefulness in teaching secular

literacies necessary for national survival and viability in a radically changing political landscape more than they desired a renovation of their religious institutions.[190] The competition between secular and religious interests is not likely to end soon in American society.

The re-emergence of Native nations in visible, culturally and materially viable institutions is a refreshing feature of our era. The silencing of Native voices and tribal identifications such as my father's and mother's generation endured, as well as the obfuscation of tribal histories, are thankfully on the wane. The curious phenomenon of Native nations operating as sovereign entities under the sovereign aegis of the United States is not as strange as it may seem to some. Various forms of government like state, county, and city governments exert their own authority as sovereigns within the U.S., and the conflicts arising from having to subordinate to the ultimate sovereignty of the federal government have not resulted in military confrontation for many decades. The reluctance in the granting of political and cultural sovereignty to nations senior to the U.S. on American soil, in claims for land base and the right to self-determination, is being righteously eroded.

In terms of the Choctaw intellectuals and their writings examined here, and the national interests that they represented in the nineteenth century, it is delightful to see their work emerge from its superimposed obscurity. The usefulness in examining the writings of Pitchlynn, McDonald, and other Choctaw historical figures, cannot be overestimated in its value to their descendants. These studies have been the most

[190] Clara Sue Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818-1918*, Norman: Oklahoma UP, 1995, 28-38.

personally fulfilling undertakings in my life. I am honored to be one presenting these texts and my reflections on them to my friends, neighbors, and other interested persons. Constructing narratives of Choctaw intellectual and literary critical history is the minimum platform necessary from which to launch critical contemporary critical work.

The pictures of my grandchildren on my desktop suggest that the stakes are just as high for me as Peter Pitchlynn felt they were for his grandchildren. The written records that he and his generation left behind for us to study are like pieces of a treasure map. When we gather the pieces and put them together, we can see definitively who we were. Seeing who we were puts us on the path of finding perhaps the most precious treasure of all—-understanding who we are.

Chapter Three

Unity is Everything: Pre-Removal Choctaw Correspondence

> *There is much to do, but you are competent to it all. What a proud era would it be, if the Choctaws would, one and all, devote themselves to the arts and sciences! Why may they not perpetuate their name to the latest generations? Why may they not become the manufacturers of the south and the carriers for the remote west? . . . Unity is everything; without it, the proudest nations must fall.*
>
> -----Henry Vose, writing to Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, September 13, 1831

Archival research holds one of the keys to building greater vibrancy and viability into Native American Studies. This scholarship is promising also in its watershed potential in effecting Native American cultural recovery on a community level. By cultural recovery, I mean regaining fundamental knowledge once owned by "nine tenths of Indians,"[191] as James L. McDonald phrased it in his Spectre essay—-knowledge of plants, animals, seasons, medicine and nutrition, bound together by traditions of performance, teaching, aesthetics, and ethics. The research, though painstakingly demanding and often less predictable in its methodology than literary criticism of published work, holds the same promise of unifying the sovereignty concerns of indigenous tribes, bands and nations, that I believe Henry Vose is calling for in the epigraph above.

Vose's letter to Pitchlynn in the fall of 1831, a year after ratification of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, was written shortly before the first wave of Choctaws left Mississippi on their emigration journey to Indian Territory. Vose didn't know, of course,

[191] James L. McDonald, Letter of Dec. 13th and Dec. 17th, 1830, to Peter Perkins Pitchlynn, Western History Collection, Peter Perkins Pitchlynn Collection, Box 1, Folder 19 (Norman: University of Oklahoma), 2.

that the brutal Arkansas winter of 1831-32 was about to take hundreds of Choctaw lives on what Choctaw Chief Nitakechi[192] came to call "the trail of tears and death."

The correspondence between the Choctaw intellectuals in the period leading up the removal forms the primary focal point for this chapter. At first, I was just puzzled by the writers' enthusiasm. Within the dates these letters were written, animosities were still running deep after the removal treaty. Almost a year-to-the-day before Vose wrote his letter to Pitchlynn mourning McDonald's death, on September 17, 1830, upwards of 6,000 Choctaws had assembled in three camps (roughly organized by home district)to treat with Secretary of War, John Henry Eaton, and his commissioners on the council grounds located between the two forks of *Bok Chukfi Luma Hilha* (Dancing Rabbit Creek). Negotiations were contentious. Tempers flared.

The Mississippi legislature was about to pass laws prescribing stiff fines and jail time for anyone calling themselves a mingo,[193] or failing in any other way to submit to the sovereignty of the State of Mississippi. Early in the meetings, United States commissioners threatened that they would leave the Choctaws to the fate of having to escape Mississippi on their own, if they didn't sign the removal treaty. Little Leader, a close warrior friend of Pushmataha and renowned for his heroics in the War of 1812, reacted to the commissioners' pressure tactics by proposing war to defend the homelands.

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[192] Nitakechi succeeded as chief in the Pushmataha District after the more famous chief's death. His name is derived from *nitak*, day, and *echi*, to begin, and therefore translated, *in the forepart of the day*. Chief Nitakechi, describing the Choctaw removal emigration in the bitter winter of 1831-1832 to an *Arkansas Gazette* reporter was quoted as saying that the removal to that point had been a "trail of tears and death." According to Len Green, "the 'trail of tears' quotation was picked up by the eastern press and widely quoted. It soon become a term analogous with the removal of any Indian tribe and was later burned into the American language by the brutal removal of the Cherokees in 1838." Len Green, "Choctaw Removal Was Really a 'Trail of Tears'," *Bishinik* [newspaper], November 1978, 8-9. The quote is also credited to Nitakechi in: Sandra Faiman-Silva, *Choctaws at the Crossroads: The Political Economy of Class and Culture in the Oklahoma Timber Region* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 19.

[193] Anglicization of *m i c o*, chief.

Other chiefs likewise felt betrayed by the government, and recited the many battles fought side by side with U. S. forces.

The major compromise that had facilitated the signing of the agreement on September 27, 1830, was the provision (Article 14) that Choctaws could stay in Mississippi, become citizens of the United States if they wished, and receive allotments of up to 640 acres. Initially, about one quarter of the Choctaw population remained in Mississippi, but the majority elected to move to the new territory where Choctaw sovereignty could be maintained.[194]

In Vose's letter, fervor for undertaking the new nation-building experiment is palpable. Some of the zeal expressed by these idealistic young Choctaw men had no doubt rubbed off on them from the lust for success and swaggering nationalistic pride exhibited by the whites they frequently traded with in Mississippi. It finally became clear to me that the central theme in these writings is just that—-an inspired ambition to build a nation from a sovereign, yet pre-modern, Choctaw society. Their keenness for becoming a modern nation, which I had puzzled over for some time, led me finally to re-read other early American Indian writers through the same lens. I was surprised by some of the features I now noticed, which had not been apparent to me before, and which improved my reading of the Native authors, Samson Occom, William Apess, and George Copway, all of whom published before 1850. I will present my commentary on those readings later in this chapter.

At the risk of expanding the scope of the study beyond manageability, I also explore in this chapter, in a more limited fashion, some connections between the Native

[194] Arthur H. De Rosier, *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1970), 69.

writers and non-native writers of the period, particularly Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. I allow the Longfellow diversion simply to illustrate that mainstream American and Native American literatures were discourses open and available to each other in that day, a fact not widely acknowledged.

This chapter deals, therefore, with a perhaps surprising selection of writers working in America in the nineteenth century that have at least a little, but sometimes a lot, in common. The most intensive gaze, nonetheless, falls on the correspondence among a small group of Choctaw intellectuals just before the removal, an emigration mostly completed in the 1830s, but which was still going on to a significant degree well into the 1840s. Chief Nitakechi led the first large removal party of about 3,000 Choctaws, beginning in October of 1831, which tragically faced an early and harsh winter. Sickness, exposure and starvation would claim hundreds of lives. Foreman quotes a newspaper article in November 1831, in which an observer "told of seeing departing emigrants touching the tree trunks, twigs and leaves about their homes in token of farewell to these old friends." Many other observers noted the desperation of the forced removal. Colonel George S. Gaines reported how painful it was to witness the Choctaws' separation from their homelands, "never to return again [to] their own long cherished hills."[195]

No one in the period of late 1830 through mid-1831 when the letters examined in this chapter were written could have foreseen, of course, the tragic scope of these first trails of tears and death. If the foreknowledge had been available, none would likely have set out on the journey, under-provisioned and insufficiently organized and led.

[195] Grant Foreman, *Indian Removal* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1932), 56.

By all indications, few Choctaws, including the youthful Choctaw politicos corresponding with each other before removal, had been in favor of removal before or even after the Dancing Rabbit Creek Treaty was ratified. These facts make it all the more surprising that the lively body of letters written by this minority of educated Choctaws evinces an enthusiasm, more than just positive thinking, about life in a totally different and new geographical and political space.

This enthusiasm, I have come to believe, exemplifies, more than any other phenomenon or philosophy, the rapidly rising consciousness of Choctaw nationhood, or nationalism, if one prefers. Rather than a mood of resigned pessimism or cynicism, or a lamentation for the lost homeland that I might have expected to find in Choctaws' writing just before removal, the written documents exhibit the anticipated vitality of becoming a fully fledged nation, one capable of advancement, in a new world of nations.

The Relationship of Nationalism and Imagination

Before examining Vose's letter to Pitchlynn in more detail, it is useful to briefly consider the thoughts of two modern-day authors and scholars of indigenous literature, N. Scott Momaday and Simon J. Ortiz. I believe their thinking may shed some light on the motives of the young Choctaw idealists of the nineteenth century.

Considering Momaday's famous assertions of the power and agency of imagination,[196] let us re-examine the question raised in Chapter One, "Is there usefulness in reading and criticizing the various American Indian authors under study here from a tribally specific, or a nationalist, perspective?" If the answer is yes, another interesting

[196] N. Scott Momaday, "The Man Made of Words" essay, in Geary Hobson, ed., *The Remembered Earth: An Anthology of Contemporary Native American Writers* (Albuquerque: Red Earth Press, 1979), 162-173.

question arises concerning the relationship of *who one is* relative to *who one imagines her/himself to be*, especially in terms of nationalistic representations.

These questions are interesting and complex. Momaday blurs the line, or lines, between imagination and tangible reality. Views of, or assertions about, reality in modern scientific thought are often assessed for truthfulness to the degree to which the assertion can be tested—-to the degree assertions can be weighed, measured, manipulated through experimental means, and then re-quantified (or re-qualified in the case of the Humanities). The acts of imagination, on the other hand, resist an interpretation that would reckon them as equally tangible existential realties, because they occur entirely within the mind of a human being. These acts of imagination, therefore, have no necessarily objective/real correlative.

"This has taken place in my mind," Momaday protests, after "that ancient, one-eyed woman stepped out of the language and stood before me on the page."[197] Momaday remembers Ko-Sahn, an important figure in the social life of his Kiowa family during his childhood, as being older than his grandparents when he knew her as a child. The marvelous image of Ko-Sahn appearing in three dimensions, having emerged from the page of his current writing, generates a conflict. "This has taken place in my mind. You are not actually here, not here in this room," Momaday says to her/writes to us.

"I have existence, whole being, in your imagination," Ko-Sahn replies. "It is but one kind of being, to be sure, but it is perhaps the best of all kinds. If I am not here in this room, grandson, then surely neither are you."[198]

[197] ibid., 164.
[198] ibid., 164.

Momaday uses language—the mechanism with which we humans identify ourselves, the mechanism of consciousness, of being—to complicate a simplistic and contradictory view of reality: the view that thoughts are not real things compared to three dimensional objects. If it occurs inside our minds, we tend to define it as imaginary and therefore not real, or at least not nearly as real. This view poses a difficult dilemma, which Momaday illuminates artistically, because as Ko-Sahn states unequivocally, if what we imagine is not real, then neither are we ourselves.

Further, an American Indian society having a "National Literature," a concept first articulated in print in the modern era by Simon J. Ortiz,[199] assumes, first, belonging to a nation, and, next, advances the idea that the character of a nation is inseparable from its literature. Ortiz supports his claim by noting that issues of racism, political and economic oppression, land theft and wasteful land use are inseparable from the cultural expressions of his Acoma relatives.

His story of how Acoma actors appropriate, largely by parody, the Catholic Christian ritual celebrations of Santiago and Chapiyuh, and transform them into authentic Acoma cultural expressions, is convincing. By extension, he argues that this is also true of Indian cultural productions in writing. In 1981, he wrote in "Towards a National Indian Literature," that "Indian literature is developing a character of nationalism which indeed it should have."[200] Certainly, many of the better novels, children's books, poetry collections, and plays before and since Ortiz's essay, have exhibited the conscious development of the respective nationalisms of their authors. These written productions

[199] Simon Ortiz. "Towards a National Indian Literature: Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism." *MELUS* 8.2 (Summer 1981): 7-12.
[200] Simon Ortiz. "Towards a National Indian Literature," 12.

reflect directly upon the principles and acts of imagination that Momaday analyzes in "The Man Made of Words."

In response to the question he styled in that essay regarding the relationship between what a man is and what he says, Momaday writes: "In our particular frame of reference, this is to say that man achieves the fullest realization of his humanity in such an art and product of the imagination as literature."[201] We are, within limits, who we imagine we are. If we imagine ourselves as citizens of particular sovereign nations, then that is who we are. Momaday acknowledges that the use of language involves risk and responsibility. It is inherent within these nationalistic stances that we must not capitulate to a vision of ourselves created in the imagination of oppressors. If we acquiesce to the identities of a vanishing race or cultural curiosities and artifacts, then that is who we are.

In that baseline sense of resistance to national/cultural identity capitulation, Momaday and Ortiz have little advantage over indigenous writers who published books in the nineteenth century, such as Samson Occom, William Apess or George Copway. Those authors argued, sometimes eloquently, from their respective historical moments, that their national identities were intact in their own imaginations. William Apess, the Pequot author writing during the same time period[202] as McDonald and Pitchlynn, perhaps most effectively of the three, never defined himself significantly any other way.

Samson Occom, a Mohegan preacher, writing in New England during the period from 1754 to 1786, was the first American Indian author whose published work was widely read. He never abandoned his Indian identity entirely, as some critics allege, but seemed more to acquiesce to his assimilation into American Christian culture. Copway,

[201] Momaday. "The Man Made of Words," 168.
[202] William Apess published five books in the seven-year period, 1829-1836.

an Ojibwe from Ontario, on the other hand, through a series of opportunistic re-definitions of himself, renders himself as something of a cultural changeling, an appraisal I will broaden with textual examples later in this chapter.

Contemporary scholars, including Momaday and Ortiz, have had the benefit, by reading the books of their indigenous literary forerunners, of seeing how the decisions those earlier authors made have played out historically. We can see that there is probably no reward, for example, in currying favor with the mainstream literary establishment, as Copway did with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and other Boston area literary elite. As I show in a later section of this chapter, entitled "The Hiawatha Connection," that sort of initiative may be as likely to result in idea and story-theft, as in any other hoped-for consequence.

The Indians of the nineteenth century, however, had the advantage over modern Native writers of closer proximity to their ancient roots, but, at the same time, they suffered more from the rupture between past and present, since the wounds inflicted by conquerors were fresh and grave. In that sense of woundedness, we in the twenty-first century enjoy some healing and rebuilding of strength that the passage of time affords.

Momaday concludes his essay with this statement: "Our best destiny is to imagine, at least, completely, who and what, and *that* we are. The greatest tragedy that can befall us is to go unimagined."[203] A critical framework for reading these early nineteenth century Native writers may be reckoned by blending Momaday's assertion, that one's "best destiny" lies in the potentials of imagining one's self, with Ortiz's equation of national character with national literature.

[203] ibid., 167.

Henry Vose's Letter Regarding the Untimely Death of James L. McDonald

In Vose's letter, initially mourning the tragic loss to Peter Pitchlynn in terms of personal friendship, we may read a concomitant mournfulness, in terms of the loss to the Choctaw Nation. Vose's letter exemplifies some of the principles laid out by both Momaday and Ortiz.

Following Momaday's logic, it is an obvious assumption that individuals cannot be citizens of any nation without first visualizing or imagining themselves as citizens of that nation. Considering Ortiz's argument advancing the importance of cultural authenticity in nationalistic thought, McDonald's and Pitchlynn's motives, to see Choctaw stories preserved and articulated, become clearer. As constituents of a plan to re-establish Choctaw schools in their upcoming emigration to Indian Territory, it seems reasonable to suggest that they were creating historically early examples of what Ortiz reasons is necessary in preserving one's nation—-investing Indian literature with a character of nationalism, which indeed it should have.

Vose's letter, like the other letters and Pitchlynn's 1828 journal examined previously, resides in the OU Western History Collection of Peter Perkins Pitchlynn's papers. In the letter to his good friend Pitchlynn, mourning the death of James L. McDonald, Vose probes Pitchlynn's feelings about "going it alone," without his intellectual peer. According to D. Clayton James, in his book *Antebellum Natchez*, Henry Vose was:

> an eccentric, journalist published in over thirty newspapers with

thousands of lines of poetry and over a hundred essays on sundry topics. With Marschalk[204] he edited a literary paper at Natchez in the late 1820's called *The Tablet.* Vose also compiled a Choctaw dictionary, and in 1835 he published a topographical study of the state. He died of smallpox at the age of 35, leaving over two thousand manuscript pages of an unfinished history of Mississippi.[205]

Henry Vose is obviously a very interesting character, and deserving of more research and contemplation. I hope that a Choctaw scholar/reader of this manuscript will as soon as possible take up research on Henry Vose. If located in Mississippi, the researcher will have an advantage, since the bulk of Vose's work is most likely recoverable there. But for our purposes here, we will focus only on Vose's letter to Pitchlynn concerning the death of James L. McDonald. Besides mourning, Vose is also engaging in the buzz of pre-removal preparations in this letter, the complete text of which follows:

Letter to PP Pitchlynn, Esq.} outside address
(Chief Arkansas District)}
Choctaw Agency,}
Choctaw Nation}
Miss. Terr.}

Inside the letter:

PP Pitchlynn Esq. Natchez, Sept. 13, 1831
Big Prairie, Chahta Nation

[204] Andrew Marschalk was the first printer in Mississippi Territory. He was born in New York in 1767 to a Dutch colonial family who were patriots during the Revolution. Marschalk, who was said to strongly resemble Ben Franklin in appearance, founded the first newspaper in Mississippi Territory, the *Mississippi Herald* in Natchez in 1802. Sydnor, Charles S. *The Journal of Southern History*. Vol. 1, No. 1. (Feb., 1935), 49-55.
[205] D. Clayton James. *Antebellum Natchez* (Baton Rouge: LSU press, 1968), 236.

Much Esteemed Sir:

You have doubtless heard before this time, of the unfortunate decease of Mr. Jas. L. McDonald. Talents and genius, by this accident, are lost forever to the world which cannot easily supply the void. I admired his transcendent abilities, while I regretted the little restraint he imposed on his evil genius. But he is gone past recall: he is returned to the source of things, far beyond human scrutiny or mental ken. How much good he might have lived to effect?—-What an imperishable fame he might have established! The act that precipitated him uncalled-for, before the throne of the Omniune, was the result of derangement. He was too brave to seek such a death in his senses. His aspirations were far too noble and his patriotism too fervent to deliberately abandon the stage of human action.

You are doubtless busied in preparing for removal. How long before you will cross the Mississippi? When will I set out? . . . You are without any one competent to tread with you the noble path of emulation directed to the regeneration of your Country. Poor McDonald! Could you and he have marched arm in arm in the efforts you are making to establish an undying fame, doubtless your task would be more cheering. But you have now <u>all</u> to do; for I fear you have none near, warm, ardent and enthusiastic as yourself, to promote the welfare of your Nation. There is much to do, but you are competent to it all. What a proud era would it be, if the Choctaws would, one and all, devote themselves to the arts and sciences! Why may they not perpetuate their name to the latest generations? Why may they not become the manufacturers of the south and the

carriers for the remote west? . . . Unity is everything; without it, the proudest nations must fall, as Assyria, Babylon, Judea and others, to rise no more.

I should like it if you could furnish me with a census complete of the three districts, and the number of them who will stay.

I intend writing occasionally in some of the papers, in order to fix the public eyes upon the proceedings of the Choctaws, and you will always receive copies.

I have seen a man who is a hatter, and is desirous of going over. Persons in that business might do very well, as their will be abundance of furs. I think it will be easy to induce many mechanics to go, but I much fear that those who would are not too sober, and, of course, not too industrious.

This town[206] is going backward. it contains 2,800 souls. In 1810 it had 1511 of which 469 were slaves. Vicksburg will soon equal it. There is a very fine Presbyterian Church here, which is the only building entitled to be called elegant.

Please remember me affectionately to your brother and respectfully to your father and mother. Receive for yourself and family my most cordial good wishes.

Your sincere friend, Henry Vose

P.S. A certain good writer has said that the first letter may contain anything so as to break the ice, and that study and ornament are superfluous in it. I have

[206] Woodville, Mississippi. Woodville is the county seat of Wilkinson County, just south of Adams County, whose seat is Natchez.

written accordingly; but such others as may follow should be a little longer and I hope more interesting.

Please address Henry Vose, Woodville, Wilkinson Co., Miss.

I have just seen the census of the state, which exhibits 71,000 whites and 65,000 blacks. The United States contain 12,900,000. H.V.

[Post-postscript] A printing press can be had here, with sufficient materials, for $500 or $600. . . . If you get government to grant 3 or 4 floating sections, or even two, a paper might be advantageously started.

[End of manuscript]

Pouring over hard-to-read handwritten manuscripts is probably not most scholars' idea of fun. That initial sense that I experienced, nevertheless, in reading McDonald's work is best described as a thrill. Except for the brief mention of McDonald in the work of Choctaw scholar Don Birchfield in his book, *The Oklahoma Basic Intelligence Test*,[207] I had never heard of McDonald when I stumbled onto his Spectre Essay letter in the archives of the OU Western History Collection. I had read Birchfield's book several years earlier and quite frankly didn't remember that I had ever heard McDonald's name.

One might imagine, though, the excitement I felt, a novice Choctaw scholar with no nineteenth century Choctaw heroes other than vague personifications of the famous war chief Pushmataha, when I stumbled across the elegant and literary critical writings of McDonald in the Pitchlynn archive. As discussed in Chapter One, after reading his

[207] D.L. Birchfield, *The Oklahoma Basic Intelligence Test* (Greenfield Center NY: Greenfield Review Press, 1998).

Spectre essay, I was eager to find more masterful works by this inspiring intellectual. At first, I found several other letters to Pitchlynn, equally interesting, but not intended by McDonald as works of literature. Contemporaneously, while plodding through the archives, I had tried to find by internet searching his descendants or any biographical information available, but there was none—a dead end—and I was perplexed. Several weeks into the research, I found this letter from Vose to Pitchlynn, discussing McDonald's death.

In stark contrast to the thrill of discovering McDonald's writing, the devastation that I felt in the moment I read Vose's letter is hard to describe. My subsequent reflections on the experience confirmed that what had been for me to that point a scholarly exercise, had turned into what felt like a presently experienced loss. I realized, more than at any other moment in all my years as a student, the strongest sense that the research was valuable. One hundred seventy five years of distance had vanished in an instant. "Talents and genius, by this accident, are lost forever to the world which cannot easily supply the void," Vose writes in the letter above. I felt the void intensely.

Although Vose's letter is the only document I have been able to find chronicling the young Choctaw writer's death, it seems likely, although somewhat coded in Vose's eulogy, that McDonald committed suicide. "The act that precipitated him uncalled-for, before the throne of the Omniune, was the result of derangement. He was too brave to seek such a death in his senses. His aspirations were far too noble and his patriotism too fervent to deliberately abandon the stage of human action." We may never know what drove McDonald to the "derangement" to "seek such a death . . . to deliberately abandon the stage of human action."

One of the interesting currents of this letter is the apprehension of the first large scale removal migrations. Vose mentions the busy-ness of preparing for removal and asks his correspondent and himself, "How long before you will cross the Mississippi? When will I set out?" These are questions in 1831 that are, no doubt, on the minds of every Choctaw adult.

Vose then returns to his eulogy of McDonald and to his lament that Pitchlynn is now without his most vital ally, his most skilled colleague in promoting "the welfare of your nation." Contained in this simple statement is perhaps a summary of the major topic of conversation these intellectual leaders among the Choctaw had been deliberating upon—the best future for the Choctaw Nation. This communication exhorts them to action in preserving their common values and ideals. The nation of the Choctaws should continue "to the latest generations," Vose writes. This is an inspiring call to sustain the sovereignty of the Choctaw Nation.

Vose then turns to his pledge to continue writing "in some of the papers, in order to fix the public eyes upon the proceedings of the Choctaws." This passage reveals several things. First, we see the confidence that Vose has in his abilities to engage public sympathies through the power of his own pen, through his own literacy. His stated intention to write for the papers carries with it the apparent assumption that he and Pitchlynn and other educated and literate Choctaws have the wherewithal to do battle successfully in the war of words which characterizes so much of the action in the frontier politics of the young United States republic.

Fundamental to this engagement is an assumption that we today prize in social and political criticism—that the crucial relationships between language and power must

be comprehended. Further, we see optimism, a hoped-for liberation of sorts, potentially available by keeping the sacrifices and other efforts of the Choctaws to cooperate with an aggressive, westwardly expanding federal government, in the public eye by way of publishing reports and editorials in the newspapers. It must have been reason for encouragement, perhaps excitement, among Choctaws, particularly to those in positions of vision, to see promising fellow countrymen capable of flexing their intellectual muscles alongside the literate legions of U.S. politicians, lawyers, teachers, and other professionals.

The remainder of the letter contains what are presented as a series of fragmented thoughts emanating from a nucleus of concerns about removal. Vose mentions a hatter he met who is "desirous of going over" and he speculates with some reservation that "persons in that business might do very well, as there will be abundance of furs."

Vose speaks to practical concerns of reconstituting a nation, such as inducing mechanics to emigrate. He also addresses issues like population loss in Mississippi, and remarks about the recent census revealing changes in Mississippi demographics. At the end of the letter, he throws out a suggestion for buying a "printing press [which] can be had here, with sufficient materials, for $500 or $600."

Again focusing on the building of a new nation, he suggests to Pitchlynn that if the government would ". . . grant 3 or 4 floating sections [presumably river barges], or even two, a paper might be advantageously started." These remarks are virtually a tincture of all the thinking in the letter, perhaps most succinctly characterized as both enthusiasm for moving into a new and exciting era in the history of Choctaw society and

the incontrovertible link between language and power. We are still schooling on these notions in the 21st century.

The Friendship of Peter Pitchlynn and James L. McDonald

An interesting contrast to the tragic end of McDonald's life can be found in a letter from him to Pitchlynn near the beginning of McDonald's legal career, written seven years before Vose's letter. In the days just before Chief Apuckshunubee's tragic death at Maysville, Kentucky, on October 17, 1824, McDonald is feeling some of the lightheartedness of a young man out to 'see the world.' The letter exudes some of the playfulness and youthful camaraderie that McDonald and Pitchlynn shared, and perhaps some of what Vose was referring to when he writes of McDonald: "I admired his transcendent abilities, while I regretted the little restraint he imposed on his evil genius."

Having just returned from his legal training and admission to the bar in Philadelphia, McDonald is enroute up the Natchez Trace through Mississippi toward Nashville, accompanying the Choctaw chiefs and commissioners on their way to the momentous meeting in Washington City to settle the terms of the Treaty of 1825. Peter's father, John Pitchlynn, was serving as interpreter for the delegation, and the purpose of the letter is to ask Peter to gather some important papers that his father left behind. He requests that Peter "enclose these papers immediately to J.C. Calhoun at Washington City and request him to deliver them to your father."

John C. Calhoun of South Carolina and Henry Clay of Kentucky were considered the strongest "warhawks" in Congress, having convinced their colleagues to declare war on Britain in 1812. Knowing that they would be going face-to-face with Calhoun, the

hawk, for the treaty deliberations must have been a daunting factor to the Choctaw delegation as they mentally prepared for the talks.

Calhoun was Secretary of War under President James Monroe from 1817 to 1825. He ran for president in the 1824 election along with four others, John Quincy Adams, Clay, William H. Crawford of Georgia, and Andrew Jackson. However, Calhoun shrewdly withdrew from the race and ran for vice president unopposed. Calhoun served as vice president of the United States in 1824 under John Quincy Adams and was re-elected as such in 1828 under Andrew Jackson. He resigned from the vice presidency in 1832 because of a disagreement with Jackson over tariffs which he felt hurt the slaveholders in the South. Calhoun would be impressed with McDonald. The young Indian lawyer's prowess in negotiating the treaty cut potential Choctaw losses dramatically.

Having opened the letter with the remark, "Nothing has occurred on our journey worth relating," McDonald then humorously references a misdeed of an undefined sort that happened the first day after they left from home in Mississippi. Then he writes:

> "I am no saint; but I am generally sensible when I commit improprieties. I have gone through a course of repentance and sinned again. I took a wine frolic a few evenings ago, with some young men of Georgetown [Kentucky], and am now suffering from the effects of it.-—I shall write to you again upon my arrival at Washington City."

The mission to Washington City was deadly serious, so McDonald's confession of debauchery seems reckless. The first time I read this letter, I remembered a phrase describing Lord Byron which could as easily perhaps apply to McDonald. It was the

famous description coined by Lady Caroline Lamb about the English poet and revolutionary, who, coincidentally, died in this same year, 1824. She described Lord Byron as "mad, bad, and dangerous to know."

McDonald's tongue-in-cheek reference to having "sinned again" is also reminiscent of William Apess' confessions of sin (an occasional slip of the tongue or running away briefly as a child) in his autobiography, *Son of the Forest* (1831). Apess frequently confesses to these relatively minor sins while in the same text laying at the feet of whites their sins of land theft, whisky peddling, rape and genocide. Both Apess and McDonald seem to acknowledge and be amused by the non-self-critical conceptions of 'sin' among the whites. McDonald, like Apess, received a large part of his education in the libraries of clergymen.

The Treaty of Washington City was signed on Jan. 20, 1825, and ratified by President Monroe a month later on Feb. 19th. The next trace we have in the archives of James L. McDonald is a letter written two-and-a-half years later to Pitchlynn on July 1, 1828. I was unable to determine from the archive what McDonald was doing between January 1825 and July 1828, but from the context of the letter we know that he had been away from home, that he arrived back in December 1827 ("December last"), and that his attitude has changed regarding the consumption of alcohol.

He mentions in the first paragraph of the letter that he had missed Pitchlynn's last letter in May because he hadn't been in Jackson for four months. Pitchlynn, who has been away to school at the University of Nashville, has also returned home. McDonald comments on Pitchlynn's absence:

I think it will enough that you have returned home. A married man

> cannot well absent himself for any length of time. The anxiety he feels to see his family will retard his progress in his studies. The experience you have had abroad will now enable you to study to more advantage at home. You own an excellent collection of books, and you have only to make good use of them.

Since a "thundering spring" in Jackson, McDonald writes that he has since then "continued quiescent at home," acting the farmer in a lazy way:

> Unpleasant as my situation here sometimes is, it is better than traveling about without any fixed object in view.—I have for the present thrown aside the idea of practicing law, and relinquished every ambitious aspiration. My only object is now to recover peace of mind, and that self-respect which I have lost in my career of dissipation.—Had a fair field for honourable emulation been open to me, I have never doubted that I could become an entirely reformed man. I could have distinguished myself. I could have made my friends proud of me. But almost every hope is cut off; and I now see more clearly than ever that indulgence in the social glass (under feelings of disappointment) will prove my destruction. I have determined therefore to keep steadily at home and to refrain from company. As to spirits, I have touched none since February last, although I have had repeated opportunities. The time once was (only a few years back) when I would have shuddered at the name of a drunkard—I would have chosen death rather than be one; but

> the evil has come on by degrees, and although I would sometimes fain persuade myself that I am not quite that odious character, yet upon severer scrutiny, I cannot disguise from myself that I have deserved the disgusting appellation.—I have a sanguine temperament, naturally, a disposition which loves to dwell upon the bright rather than upon the dark side of things, yet the prospect before me has so little of promise in it, that I feel at times exceedingly unhappy. And you may be sure that feeling is not in the least alleviated when I reflect that it has been principally brought on, though certainly not altogether, by my own folly. Write me soon, and give me the news of the nation in full.
>
> Sincerely yours, James L. McDonald

I see all the tragedy of McDonald's life encapsulated in this letter. The shining legal and literary star of the pre-removal Choctaw Nation has forecasted, in a few richly complex sentences, his own destruction. The despondency is palpable.

The letter starts off friendly, chummy, and respectful of Pitchlynn's responsibilities as a married man. McDonald then explains that he has "thrown aside the idea of practicing law, and relinquished every ambition." So, early in this letter, it's hard to discern from his tone whether McDonald is happy to become a man of leisure or not.

He soon reveals that he has come home to "recover peace of mind," suggesting that he is agitated, "and that self-respect which I have lost in my career of dissipation." He quickly adds rational explanation, an excuse of sorts, when he asserts that he could have become an entirely reformed man, "had a fair field for hounourable emulation been

open to me…." Perhaps McDonald has experienced the job discrimination one might suspect the first Indian lawyer to have encountered.

He offers no concrete explanation of what particular fields of honorable emulation had been closed to him. He sounds like a fellow who took to drinking after having the job application door slammed in his face one too many times. He more squarely places the blame for his troubles on himself, but I get a sense of a deep, more generalized disappointment, in phrases like "I could have made my friends proud of me," and "but almost every hope is cut off."

Richard Mentor Johnson, the Choctaw Academy, and Peter Pitchlynn's Education

Two other letters that contextualize this period in pre-removal Choctaw Mississippi in the lives of these young intellectual and political leaders are Richard M. Johnson's letter of recommendation for Peter Pitchlynn's admission to the University of Nashville and the subsequent letter written about a year later from the president of that university declaring that Peter has withdrawn on his own volition. Johnson writes:

Blue Spring [Kentucky], 11 March 1827

Gentlemen,

Capt. P. Pitchlynn wishes to study certain branches of science at the university; and he goes today to see upon what terms he can be admitted. I will be responsible for his board and tuition and advance what may be required. He is part Choctaw and part white blood and belongs to the Choctaw nation.

> He is a young man of amiable manners and disposition; nature has endowed him with great and good qualities; industrious and resolute; more devoted to study than is usual; he will pursue his studies with an ardor and zeal which will do honor and credit to any student. I hope he may be received upon the most favorable terms—If he finds the terms acceptable I will go with him to Lexington in a few days.
>
> With great respect, your obedient, R. M. Johnson

Richard Mentor Johnson, best known among Choctaws as the founding first headmaster at the Choctaw Academy in Blue Spring, Kentucky, was first a military and political figure in the American Midwest in the early years of the new nation. He was born in Kentucky on October 17, 1781. Trained as a lawyer, Johnson had a long and successful political career, first serving in the Kentucky legislature in 1804.

He also represented his state in both the U. S. House of Representatives (1807-1819, 1829-1837) and the Senate (1819-1829). Ultimately, Johnson was elected as Vice President of the United States, serving under President Martin Van Buren from 1837 to 1841. He died in 1850.[208]

Johnson was an interesting and controversial character, militarily, politically and personally. His relationship with Peter Pitchlynn had a long run, was complicated, and not always as friendly and congenial as exhibited in this letter of recommendation to the University of Nashville.

[208] Mark O. Hatfield, with the Senate Historical Office. *Vice Presidents of the United States, 1789-1993* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997), pp. 121-131.

Pitchlynn chaperoned the first group of Choctaw boys[209] to the 1825 opening of the first federally funded American Indian school, the Choctaw Academy, which was located in buildings and facilities owned by Johnson and located on his Blue Spring Farm near Georgetown, Kentucky. Pitchlynn later virtually single-handedly closed the Academy in 1842, as leader of the Choctaw educational system, by personally removing without Johnson's knowledge or consent the young Choctaw men enrolled at that time.

Writing to Johnson a year later, it is unclear whether college president Philip Lindsley is saying that Peter has left the University of Nashville for good, or if he has just left at the end of the regular school year and Lindsley is politely notifying his patron. He writes from the University of Nashville, April 15th, 1828:

> This is to certify that Mr. P.P. Pitchlynn has been a student of this University during the past session—that he has sustained a uniformly good moral character—that his whole deportment has been amiable, correct and gentlemanly—that he has made respectable proficiency in the studies to which his attention has been directed—and that he is now regularly dismissed from the institution at his own request.
>
> Philip Lindsley, President.

By the time he was elected vice-president of the College of New Jersey in 1817, Lindsley was recognized as one of the foremost classical scholars in the United States. In 1822 he was made acting president of Princeton.

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[209] An article by Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "The Choctaw Academy," in *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Volume 6, No. 4, December, 1928, 455, lists the first group of Choctaw boys enrolled, together with their ages—Alfred Wade, 17; Jacob Folsom, 16; Lyman Collens, 16; John Riddle, 16; Peter King, 15; Silas Pitchlynn, 15; John Adams, 15; James M. King, 14; William Riddle, 14; John Everson, 14; Charles Jones, 13; Lewis McCan, 13; Daniel Folsom, 13; Hiram King, 13; Robert Nail, 13; Charles King, 13; Picken Wade, 12; William McCan, 12; Allen Kearney, 10; Alexander Pope, 10; Morris Nail, 8. The Wade boys may be my relatives.

The next year he was offered the permanent presidency not only of Princeton, but also of several colleges and universities, including the struggling Cumberland College in Nashville, but he declined them all. In 1824, though, he changed his mind and accepted the position in Nashville. The next year, at Lindsley's instigation, the college's name was changed to University of Nashville.

The institution's new name was an indication of Lindsley's aspirations. He wished to create a center of learning and civilization in the midst of a region, the Old Southwest, which was barely out of its frontier phase. It was Lindsley who first suggested that Nashville be the "Athens of the Southwest," a sobriquet changed to "Athens of the South" seventy years later at the celebration of the Tennessee centennial.[210]

The growing reputation of the college in Nashville was probably one of the draws that Pitchlynn felt toward the institution. In his effort to develop the university into a nationally prominent institution of learning, Lindsley brought some of the most eminent scholars of the day to teach classics, languages, mathematics, and geology, among other subjects. It was likely under the tutelage of these classics scholars that Pitchlynn acquired his knowledge of Greek history that we see evidenced so strongly in his journal of 1828.

Early in his administration, Lindsley unveiled an ambitious plan for the implementation of many new academic programs, so that the university might truly live up to its name by encompassing the "universe of learning," with appropriate colleges for each division of knowledge.[211] Baird claims that Pitchlynn bragged of graduating from

[210] John F. Woolverton, "Philip Lindsley and the Cause of Education in the Old Southwest," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 19 (1960), 3-22.
[211] ibid., 22.

the University of Nashville, but never actually matriculated with a degree. This may be another example of Baird's oversimplification of Choctaw realities.

A useful comparison may be made between McDonald's letter of July 1, 1828, to Pitchlynn, in regard to Pitchlynn's decision to leave school in the above referenced letter from President Lindsley in April of 1828, and in consideration of what we may speculate was going on in Choctaw communities in the pre-removal period. In the cases of both letters, Pitchlynn's and McDonald's, one thing we can say with certainty is that young Choctaw leaders previously out "in the world" seeking their educational and professional opportunities were coming home.

In McDonald's letter of July 1, 1828, we surmise that he had been away for much of the time between negotiating the Treaty of 1825 and his return home in December of 1827. One of the things accomplished in the 1825 treaty was a more precise definition of what would likely become the new Choctaw homeland in Indian Territory if the removal aspirations of Jacksonians were realized.

Andrew Jackson's second campaign for the presidency was heating up in the spring of 1828. He had lost the 1824 election to John Quincy Adams. Although Jackson had received the largest share of the popular vote, but not enough votes for an electoral college majority, in that four candidate election, Adams was elected by a vote in the House of Representatives. Angered by Adams's selection of Henry Clay (who had endorsed Adams in the House voting) as his Secretary of State, Jackson resigned from the Senate in 1825, and mounted a popular campaign for the next presidential election.

The Choctaws were certainly aware of Jackson's popularity, as they were well aware of his militant advocacy of Indian removal. Whether Pitchlynn was called home

specifically for the job of leading the reconnaissance party to the new territory, which he chronicles in his journal of 1828, or whether that exigency unfolded coincidentally later in 1828, it is certain that the Choctaws were lining up their ducks for the grave implications of a Jackson regime.

During the 1828 election, Jackson's opponents referred to him as a "Jackass." Jackson liked the name and used the jackass as a symbol for a while, but it died out. However, when cartoonist Thomas Nast popularized it later, it became the symbol for the Democratic Party.[212]

The incumbent Adams won exactly the same states that his father had won in the election of 1800: the New England states, New Jersey, and Delaware. Jackson won everything else. Unfortunately for Adams, there was a lot more “everything else” in this election than there had been in 1800, and Jackson won in a landslide.

McDonald’s Last Months

` The last letter to be examined in this study is also the last letter I could find that was written by James L. McDonald before his death later in 1831. The letter was addressed to Alexander H. McKee of Erie, Green County, Alabama, and dated March 30th, 1831.

A great deal of searching yielded no positive identification for Alexander McKee. The only trace of him is his listing as a signatory of the Dancing Rabbit Creek Treaty. The McKee family name nevertheless is frequently found in Indian affairs across North American during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a history of affairs that I have

[212] Ilona Nickels. “How Did the Republicans Pick the Elephant, and Democrats the Donkey, to Represent Their Parties?” Capitol Questions, feature at c-span.com, September 5, 2000.

come to characterize in my mind as the Colossal Real Estate Deal. The fights, the wars, the trades, the negotiations were all about land, and centered on the United States government's designs for wresting control of, and title to, the vast holdings of American Indian nations. The agents in this seemingly endless succession of real estate deals were no less than all the major imperial Western European nations and all the first nations of North America.

I will indulge in a degree of historical detail here, not to digress from or to de-center McDonald's letter as the focus of this part of the study, but in order to illustrate a level of complexity that I believe is called for in archival research. My sub-thesis here is that we cannot fully tap the richness of American Indian history and culture in North America, nor can we realize the fullness of the heritage we receive from our Indian ancestors, without doing the work of developing context. This is a call to descendant scholars not to shy away from, but rather to embrace the complexity of context building necessary to understand our forbears. Until this work is done which places our ancestors in real life histories with allies and competitors in North America, our ancestors are only shadows with names, not real people with bodies, hearts, and minds.

Geary Hobson issued essentially the same call thirty years ago in *The Remembered Earth* when he wrote:

> In remembering, there is strength and continuance and renewal throughout the generations. It was when things became forgotten and lost, when the chain of generations was broken by European invaders, that many Native American people became lost and

forgotten.[213]

This work responds to and reissues that call in its attempts to recover and revitalize the lost and forgotten. American histories are well written in English from the perspectives of citizens of the British Empire and of the United States. It remains one of our tasks to find our people, our ancestors, one by one if necessary, and bring them out of obscurity and into the light of day.

The most prominent historical personage by the name of Alexander McKee, for example, was the half-Irish, half-Shawnee agent for the British Crown who was a pivotal figure in the struggles for real estate in the Old Northwest. He was born in 1739 and died in 1799. Serving as a junior officer in the Pennsylvania Militia in the French and Indian War, McKee joined the British Indian Department under the tutelage of George Croghan in 1759. McKee served the Crown during Pontiac's Rebellion, Bouquet's Expedition and Lord Dunmore's War.

By 1770, he had married a Shawnee woman from and established a home among the Shawnee bands that live along the Scioto River valley in present-day central Ohio. After the American Revolution he moved into Canada, supplied British arms to Great Lakes area tribes resisting United States western expansion, and remained a high ranking official in Indian affairs in British North America until his death in 1799.[214]

We find McKee's Shawnee relatives, ironically it seems, fighting against British interests south of Ohio in Lord Dunmore's War in 1774. When British officials had acquired the land south of the Ohio River (present-day West Virginia and Kentucky) in

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[213] Geary Hobson, ed. *The Remembered Earth: An Anthology of Contemporary Native American Literature*. Albuquerque: Red Earth Press, 1979, 2.
[214] Larry L. Nelson. *A Man of Distinction Among Them: Alexander McKee and the Ohio Frontier, 1754-1799*. (Kent, Ohio: Kent State UP, 1999), x-xi.

the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix from the powerful Iroquois, the Shawnees were the most powerful anti-Iroquoian nation and claimed hunting rights south of the Ohio River. They and their allies refused to sign the treaty and hostilities were inevitable between the Shawnees and settlers.

In September 1773, an obscure hunter named Daniel Boone led a group of about 50 emigrants in the first attempt by British colonists to establish a settlement. On October 9, Boone's oldest son James and a small group of men and boys who had left the main party to retrieve supplies were attacked by a band of Delawares, Shawnees, and Cherokees who had decided "to send a message of their opposition to settlement...." James Boone and another boy were captured and gruesomely tortured to death.

The brutality of the killings sent shockwaves along the frontier, and Boone's party abandoned their expedition. The massacre was one of the first events in Lord Dunmore's War. For the next several years, the Indian nations opposed to the treaty increasingly attacked settlers, and according to Faragher, mutilated and tortured to death the surviving men, and took the women and children into captivity.[215]

The decisive battle in the war occurred on October 10, 1774, when 1100 Ohio confederate warriors under the leadership of the famous Shawnee Chief Cornstalk attacked Colonel Andrew Lewis with an equal number of soldiers under his command at Point Pleasant. After a fierce battle that lasted all day, Lewis' forces drove Cornstalk back across the Ohio River. Shortly thereafter, Cornstalk and the Shawnees signed a peace agreement. Besides Tecumseh, Chief Cornstalk is the most historically revered Shawnee warrior and leader.

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[215] John Mack Faragher. *Daniel Boone: The Life and Legend of an American Pioneer*. New York: Holt, 1992, 89-96.

This chief is not the same Shawnee Chief Cornstalk that Peter Pitchlynn names and describes his meeting with in Missouri in his 1828 journal. Whether he is a direct descendent of the eighteenth century Cornstalk is unclear; perhaps in name only. Following his defeat, the more famous Cornstalk pursued a peace policy and forbade his braves to molest whites. But in 1777, with the American Revolution at its height, he returned to Pt. Pleasant with two companions to warn settlers that the British were trying to incite his tribesmen to attack them.

Fearing an attack, Colonial soldiers seized Cornstalk and his companions and imprisoned them in Fort Randolph as hostages. A month later, Cornstalk's son, Ellinipsico, came to the fort to see his father. During his visit, a soldier hunting near the fort was killed by an Indian and other soldiers rushed to Cornstalk's quarters to kill him in revenge.

Cornstalk, who is described by historians as a handsome, intelligent, and highly honorable man, stood calmly in the doorway to his room and faced his slayers. He was felled by nearly a dozen rifle shots. The soldiers then entered the room and killed Cornstalk's son and two companions. The murder of their chieftain turned the Shawnees from a neutral people into the most implacable warriors, who raided Virginia settlements for 20 years after the incident.[216]

Interestingly, one of the oldest haunting and curse legends in the United States is associated with Cornstalk's murder. Legend has it that Cornstalk in his last breath pronounced a curse of the blight of nature and the Great Spirit on the people and lands around Point Pleasant for staining the soil with his and his son's blood. A long list of disasters in West Virginia, ranging from deadly coal mine accidents, bridge collapses,

[216] "Fighting Chief Cornstalk's Remains Laid to Rest Again." *Charleston Gazette*, September 21, 1954.

airplane and train crashes, to deadly tornadoes and floods have been blamed on the curse of Cornstalk.

The widely corroborated Mothman sightings around Point Pleasant in 1966 and 1967 are attributed by West Virginians to the curse. These sightings formed the plots of the *Mothman Prophecies*, the 1976 book by John Keel and the 2002 Mark Pellington film.[217]

So, I hope that the reader is asking by now, what has all this to do with Alexander H. McKee, McDonald's correspondent in Erie, Alabama? As I read these curious and intriguing histories, my first impression was "very little or nothing," and I thought I was wasting my precious research hours. However, I could not completely shake off the allusion and connection that was lingering in my mind, a name repeated several times by that internal voice—McKee Folsom, Peter Pitchlynn's uncle.

If my winding path through the Southeastern forests has not left the reader hanging lost on a limb somewhere, one may recall the genealogy of the Folsoms that I traced in Chapter Two to demonstrate that white families sometimes became completely assimilated by Choctaw culture, rather than the often presumed vice versa. With the McKee name hanging in the Southeastern ether, as well as in the Old Northwest ether, I decided to track Indian agents named McKee.

What I found was not a direct connection to Alexander McKee of Alabama, but at least a much closer connection. This tracking also led me to an important realization—that the seeming disparate connections between aspects of The Colossal Real Estate Deal

[217] *The Mothman Prophecies*, by John Keel, Saturday Review Press, 1975 and Tor Books, (paperback) 2002. Film directed by Mark Pellington; produced by Rosenberg, Hatem, and Lucchesi; distr. by Screen Gems Pictures, 2002.

in what seem like disparate regions in North America may be more tightly connected than might at first meet the eye.

The case in point involves the huge land cessions being given by the Creeks, Choctaws and Chickasaws in Florida and Mississippi between 1800 and 1805, as well as even bigger deals like the Louisiana Purchase. Strangely and surprisingly embedded with the better known historically Spanish interests in the Far West and in Florida, and French interests along the Mississippi River, are British interests less than 15 years after the Revolution.

I had thought, perhaps naively, that the British were ejected from the lower continent by the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783, not to return until the time period near 1812. It was the British, nevertheless, in the form of Panton, Leslie and Company, the famous trading company that dominated Indian trade in Florida and adjoining areas during the twilight years of the eighteenth century, who initiated the process of trading the Indian nations into deep debt, the proximate catalyst for the large early land cessions.[218]

It was Panton, Leslie, and Company's efforts beginning in 1794 to vigorously pursue collection of debts owed by Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Cherokees that gave Jefferson the idea that this was the ideal way to separate the Indians from their real estate. "The collection campaign was long and persistent, and in its final ten years had the full cooperation of the United States government," writes Robert S. Cotterill. "It is a

[218] Robert S. Cotterill. "A Chapter on Panton, Leslie and Company." *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 10, No. 3. (Aug., 1944), pp. 275-292.

thread running through southern history from 1794 to 1812 and touching in its course foreign policy, Indian administration, frontier defense, and private intrigue."[219]

Furthermore, Panton, Leslie and Company was seeking payment for the debts in the form of land cessions within lands under the military and civil authority of the United States. It was this long campaign that gave Jefferson the idea, mentioned in my discussion of events leading up to the Choctaw treaties of 1801, 1802, 1803, and 1805, of trying to persuade the Native landowners in question to cede lands to the United States who in turn would pay cash to creditors like the British trading firm. It also gave Jefferson the idea of setting up U. S. government-operated trading stores in Native trade zones for the same purpose—to drive the Natives deeper into debt.[220] It seems the perils and pitfalls of consumerism are not as modern as one may think.

It is in this Southeastern and Old Southwestern regional context, far removed from the Old Northwest and Canada in which Alexander McKee wielded great power and influence, that we find another McKee. John McKee (perhaps the mixed blood son of the British Indian affairs consul) is named by Cotterill as the agent for the Cherokees who is sent by the U. S. government in 1796 to negotiate with Panton, Leslie and Company and to give them assurances that the government would assist them in their collections. John McKee became Choctaw agent three years later in 1799 and was one of the chief envoys of the United States in negotiating the huge cessions of land made by the Choctaws to the U. S. between 1802 and 1805 for satisfaction of debts and for other trading and annuity considerations.[221] It is entirely reasonable, therefore, to speculate that McDonald's

[219] ibid., 275.
[220] ibid., 276-280.
[221] ibid., 278-279.

correspondent, Alexander H. McKee, in the western Alabama town of Erie is one of a single family line of Indian agents scattered from Upper Canada to the Gulf Coast.

The most important fruit borne by this scenario, however, is not simply the possibility of correctly identifying the latter day McKee. Rather, it is the plausible illumination of the strikingly interconnected cast of plots, nations, and individual characters in North America during a period and within a geography frequently regarded historically as wilderness.

The knowledge of this interconnectedness combined with an understanding of the vigor with which Native American tribes not only battled the colonists militarily, but also of the vigor with which they negotiated the dramatic real estate deals, further erodes any remaining perception I have of Indians as helpless victims. McDonald's letter to McKee in March 1831, this final letter of a young genius who would soon be dead, also evinces none of this helplessness.

"I received a letter from you dated November 30th, 1830," McDonald writes. "You told me that you had failed in getting a school, and were going northward. That comprehensive turn put me entirely at a loss where to address you; otherwise I should have immediately written to you. Robert Jones tells me you are still at your father's. I shall therefore direct this letter to Erie." Again, there is little need to speculate that the father may be John McKee, except to mention that this may be another case of a white family having been completely assimilated into the Choctaw Nation.

"I have generally enjoyed excellent health since I saw you," he writes. "This refers to the body; mentally I have suffered a good deal. I am doing nothing of consequence—reading and lounging." If we connect this scene with McDonald's letter

to Pitchlynn in the summer of 1828 in which he reports the same sort of leisurely farm life, we may assume that he has still not found significant employment as a lawyer.

"Shortly, I may perhaps commence the business of electioneering," he continues. "I am nearly resolved to be a candidate for the Legislature. My friends tell me I could be easily elected—if I had not taken rather too much wine last winter—and shouted rather too lustily for Henry Clay, without paying too many compliments to Gen'l Jackson." Lots of confidence and coincidence are packed into these short statements by McDonald—lots of that small world connectedness I spoke of a few paragraphs back. Jackson was to defeat Republican Party candidate Henry Clay in the upcoming 1832 election, as well as independent John Floyd of Virginia and William Wirt of Maryland, the Anti-Masonic Party candidate.

If it is not astonishing enough to realize that the young backwoods Choctaw Nation prodigy McDonald has met and conducted business with most, if not all, these presidential candidates, something almost inconceivable by modern standards, another amazing fact is that William Wirt[222] of Maryland defeated Supreme Court Justice John McLean for the Anti-Masonic Party nomination. John McLean, as mentioned in the first chapter, was McDonald's law teacher in Ohio, graduating him just prior to the treaty negotiations of 1824-25 in Washington City. If nothing else, these facts reveal a surprising intimacy between the leaders of the United States and of the Choctaw Nation. It may also suggest a feature of frontier life and power relations experienced by our

[222] Wirt was also very much an opponent of the government's efforts in Indian removal. He wrote effectively about it in : *Opinion on the Right of the State of Georgia to Extend the Laws over the Cherokee Nation* (New Echota, Printed for the Cherokee Nation at the Office of the *Cherokee Phoenix and Indians' Advocate*, Jno F. Wheeler, printer 1830).

forbears that we may not be comfortable in acknowledging from our sanitized critical podiums in the twenty-first century—that these men held each other in high regard.

McDonald's remarks concerning running for the Mississippi legislature also reveal that he may be choosing Mississippi citizenship over emigration. His remarks further suggest that he has fallen off the wagon. He had reported that he was repenting his alcoholism in his 1828 letter to Pitchlynn. His revelation that he is drinking again ominously portends his death less than six months hence.

These details acquire a sad resonance when compared with the drinking problems that plagued the relatively young lives of other nineteenth century Indian writers—William Apess and George Copway, for example. "The truth is I did dissipate too much last winter, and my opinions of Gen'l Jackson are no secret," he adds. "I have very little expectation of being elected, but if my friends continue to press me, I think I shall run." The seeming assurance he feels in his local popularity belies the fact that he will be dead from suicide before the election comes to pass.

"Robert M. Jones,[223] and myself, would both be glad to see you down in this quarter," as McDonald continues in a friendly tone:

> The Treaty is now ratified [September 27, 1830], and you would doubtless wish to make a location as soon as possible. Call on us, and then go to <u>black</u> <u>creek</u> and visit the <u>widow</u>. I think there's a lady who will make you an accomplished wife; and if you have views that way, I sincerely wish you success.

[223] Robert M. Jones, a mixed-blood Choctaw, was the wealthiest slave owner in the Choctaw Nation at this time. A powerful politico for decades hereafter, it was largely his influence that quieted Peter Pitchlynn's recommendation to the Choctaw Council, at the beginning of the Civil War, that the Choctaws remain neutral or side with the Union.

—Your friend, J.L. McDonald

Alex McKee is obviously a friend of McDonald. The humorous reference to a possible romantic interest reveals this intimacy. The closing remarks also reveal what is in the forefront of every Choctaw citizen's mind in the spring of 1831, the impending removal.

The small world connectedness of the seemingly dissimilar cast of military, political, and commercial characters mentioned above, also leads one operating within a literary critical perspective to consider to perhaps a greater degree than ever before the connectedness of Native writers operating in different regions during the nineteenth century. A consideration of this sampling of non-fictional writing by Choctaws in the nineteenth century, largely unpublished, may not be complete without a more detailed comparison to indigenous American writers published in the same general time period. I will turn now to those comparisons.

Reading Nationalistic Tendencies in Nineteenth Century Indigenous Literature

In this final section of the study, I will test the hypothesis that there is something to be gained by criticizing nineteenth-century American Indian writing in terms of how a particular text conforms to, or diverges away from, nationalistic motifs. I will briefly discuss the work of Samson Occom (Mohegan) and William Apess (Pequot), but I have elected to focus the only detailed critique in this regard on George Copway's, *Life Letters and Speeches*, first published in 1847.[224]

[224] George Copway (Kahgegagahbowh), Lavonne Brown Ruoff and Donald B. Smith, eds., *Life, Letters and Speeches* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997; originally published, New York: S. W. Benedict, 1847 and 1850).

Indeed, the fact that Samson Occom was the main leader in the formation of the Brothertown Indian Nation in the State of New York invites a reading of his work from a nationalistic vantage point.[225] Apess, as well, especially in his *The Indian Nullification of the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts, Relative to the Marshpee Tribe: or, The Pretended Riot Explained* (1835) has much to offer in terms of understanding what defines a tribe and in how a nation is defined.

I think that later in the nineteenth century the work of John Rollin Ridge (Cherokee), especially his novel, *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta, the Celebrated California Bandit*[226] (1854), encourages perhaps an anti-nationalistic reading. Ridge, at age 12, as history recalls, experienced the grim reality of the murders of his father, John Ridge, and of his grandfather, Major Ridge, who transgressed Cherokee law in signing the Treaty of New Echota.

A nationalistic critique also shows promise in a closer reading of Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins' *Life Among the Paiutes*[227] (1883), in which she details the struggles of her tribe against corrupt Indian agents in the Far West. Because great Indian tragedies, like the massacre at Wounded Knee, are treated in *Wynema* (1891) as fatalistic inevitabilities in the greater good of the Americanization of the Indian, the work of Alice

[225] On March 3, 1839, Congress passed an act granting the Brothertown Indians U.S. citizenship, making them the first Indians with U.S. citizenship. Despite popular misunderstanding of federal Indian law and Brothertown tribal history, there is no question as to whether or not the tribe gave up their sovereignty for citizenship. The Bureau of Indian Affairs has repeatedly confirmed that U.S. citizenship and sovereignty are not mutually exclusive. This is clear when considering the fact that all American Indians are now U.S. citizens, yet there are approximately 365 federally acknowledged sovereign Indian tribes. In 1878, the federal government met with the Brothertown leaders and allowed unclaimed land in the former Brothertown Indian Reservation to be sold mainly to German immigrants. *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, Vol. I, Laws; compiled and edited by Charles J. Kappler (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904). [Compiled to December 1, 1902].

[226] John Rollin Ridge, *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta, the Celebrated California Bandit* (San Francisco: W.B. Cooke and Company, 1854)

[227] Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins. *Life Among the Paiutes* (Photographically reproduced from the 1883 original, Bishop, CA: Sierra Media, Inc., 1969).

Callahan (Creek) can be read for the effects on Indian nationalism of Dawes-era assimilation policies. To attempt all of these readings here would be repetitious and outside the reasonable scope of the present project, so I will reserve those analyses for the book-length version of this study.

Samson Occom (Mohegan) and William Apess (Pequot)

One way of setting context for the letters under examination here, nevertheless, is to briefly catalog the writings of Northeastern Native authors who were contemporaries of Pitchlynn, McDonald, and Vose. William Apess, for example, self-published his first book in 1829 in New York. He published the revised second edition of *A Son of the Forest: The Experience of William Apess, a Native of the Forest*, in 1831, around the time that Henry Vose penned the letter herewith to Pitchlynn, as well as the same year that the last letter by McDonald was written.

Also in 1831, Apess published *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ: A Sermon*. As the second title suggests, Apess was writing to a certain degree to the missionaries who were responsible for his education and for his ability to write. He was a preacher and a missionary himself.

We see little, by comparison, gospel-oriented writing amongst the Choctaws, although many were already Christian. Again, this relative absence of Christian vernacular in the Mississippi Choctaw writers' work is likely attributable to the fact that missionary education among them has come at a much later date and under different circumstances than it did in New England.

Pequots, Wampanoags, and other Native tribes of the Northeast had been largely decimated by pandemics of smallpox, spotted fever, and measles even before King Philip's War of 1675-1676 killed an estimated seven out of eight of those remaining. In 1740, at the age of sixteen, the earliest writer of the Mohegans, Samson Occom, was exposed to the teachings of Christian evangelical preachers in the first Great Awakening. He began to study theology at the school of Eleazar Wheelock in 1743 and assisted Wheelock in a variety of ministerial efforts in following years. The first missionary school in the Choctaw Nation, by contrast, was not established until 1819.[228]

One thing seems fairly certain. Indians all over the territories understood their urgent need to be educated in the white man's literacy. As I have mentioned before, if this meant joining a missionary society or enrolling in a mission school, Pequots, Mohegans, and Choctaws did so.

Joseph Kett points out in *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties*[229] that the early nineteenth century is revealed as a complicated place to get an education. There were few libraries, public schools were not found in every neighborhood, nor was there a lot of income available with which to buy books. Kett reports that a survey of wills and estate accountings during that period shows that most households owned no books. Others reported no more than one or two.

It occurred to me after reading this that Apess may have chosen religious education and vocation as the *only* way available to extend his education beyond the few winters of schooling he received in the household of Mr. Furman, his foster parent. Typical ways to get a higher education included apprenticing oneself to a professional

[228] This was the Eliot School, on the Yalobusha River in Mississippi.
[229] Joseph Kett. *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under difficulties : From Self-improvement to Adult Education in America, 1750-1990*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

person, as Jefferson did in law offices, as Apess and Occom did with the Christian ministries, and as McDonald did in both venues.

Kahgegagahbowh, George Copway (Ojibwe)

The nationalistic impulse in Native American literature before 1850 is no more evident than in the work of Ojibwe author, George Copway. He traveled through the Atlantic seaboard states in 1848 presenting his proposal for the establishment of an Indian territory in the present day Dakotas. He proposed to call the new Christian Indian territory, Kahgega, which he predicted would eventually be granted statehood. Reminiscent of, and perhaps drawing directly upon, proposals made shortly after the American Revolution by Abenaki politicos Joseph Brant and Hendrick Aupaumut[230] for a United Nations consortium of the Indians of the Ohio River valley, Copway argues for the establishment of his imagined state of Kahgega, to be owned by a consortium of northern tribes from the U. S. and Canada.

Suggesting that his project would avoid the numerous tragedies associated with the government's haphazard removal of eastern tribes to Indian Territory beginning in the 1830s, Copway proposed a new territory farther away from the agricultural center of the new West. In his collection, *Life, Letters and Speeches*,[231] first published in 1847 and

[230] See Lisa Brooks' work on these Native intellectuals of the Northeast, in Acoose, Brooks, Foster, Howe, Justice, Morgan, Roppolo, Suzack, C. Teuton, S. Teuton, Warrior, and Womack, *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective*. Norman: Oklahoma UP, 2008, 234-264. Another interesting "coincidence," an example of the interconnectedness of characters and cultures on the eighteenth and nineteenth century American landscape which I have previously stressed, is presented by Brooks in the form of a letter from Joseph Brandt to British-Shawnee agent, Alexander McKee. In petition to McKee, Brooks writes, "Joseph Brant drew on Haudenosaunee and Algonquian political ideology to envision the "Dish with One Spoon," a multi-national Indian alliance to preserve common lands." Brant wanted to build a confederation called the United Indian Nations "dedicated to maintaining the Ohio River valley as shared Native space" (252).

[231] George Copway (Kahgegagahbowh), *Life, Letters and Speeches* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997; originally published New York: S. W. Benedict, 1850).

then expanded in 1850, Copway includes the text of a speech he made, "Address before Both Houses of the South Carolina Legislature," in which he writes:

> My plan is this—-to collect the Indians in bodies in the West, in some portion of the country, where enjoying a permanent home they may improve in science, in agriculture, in morality, and the arts of civilized life. Before we can do the Indians much good, we must collect them together, for thus only they will be likely to improve. The first means to be employed in accomplishing this object is, to move Congress to apportion them a tract of country, say near the bank of the upper waters of the Missouri River, about sixty miles square, more or less, as they might need for agricultural purposes. Thus, the whole of the Northern scattered tribes, the Indians north of the southern boundary of the State of Missouri . . . might be gathered together in one general settlement. This country would become the great nucleus of the Indian nations.[232]

There is little need to read Copway's writing about his campaign for the state of Kahgega any other way than in terms of its nationalism. As he progressed in his life and travels, he became increasingly able to liberate the secular from the religious in his writings, as compared to his earlier work. Lavonne Brown Ruoff points out that "during the first half of the nineteenth century, American Indian authors . . . modeled their works on religious narratives, especially on spiritual confession and missionary reminiscences."[233] As he evolved as a writer and a public speaker of some influence, Copway felt increasingly the opportunity and responsibility to care for the pressing needs

[232] ibid., 168.
[233] Lavonne Brown Ruoff, "Literary and Methodist Contexts," Introduction to George Copway, *Life, Letters and Speeches*, 2.

of Indian people's life in the body, as much as he cared for the salvation of their souls.

Copway laid out his plan for Kahgega in great detail to the South Carolina legislators, and as he would later for the Pennsylvania Legislature. He points out the flaws in the removal of the 1830s as experienced by the Choctaws, Chickasaws, Cherokees, Creeks, Seminoles and other tribes. He writes:

> I would remark that the vast quantity of land assigned to them by the Government, amounting in all to 15,000,000 acres, is decidedly injurious to my countrymen. It encourages roving habits among themselves, and holds out a perpetual temptation to the emigrant. The lands are fertile, and the Indians are easily duped by artful speculators into selling them at a price vastly under their value. . . . If you can place them in some situation where they would have opportunities for moral, intellectual and religious instruction, beyond the sphere of the temptations and mischievous influences by which they are now surrounded, you might then hope for their permanent improvement and progressive elevation in the scale of nations.[234]

Copway's appeals received a lot of attention and support. The great losses suffered by tribes in the removals of the 1830s were widely known and acknowledged. Further illustrating the remarkable intimacy of events and personalities playing out in the enormous upheavals taking place in North America in the nineteenth century, a familiar name in the lives of Pitchlynn and McDonald reappears in Copway's work. That name is Thomas L. McKenney.

[234] ibid., 169.

Nearly twenty years after he was dismissed in 1830 by President Andrew Jackson from his post as Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Copway mentions him as a friend and supporter of his great project to create a territory for the northern Indians. In the concluding paragraph of his long autobiographical narrative, which makes up the majority of *Life, Letters and Speeches*, Copway attributes a quote to McKenney, which appears to support the Kahgega project. In a 95-word periodic sentence, Copway quotes McKenney:

> And seeing, as they[235] must see, that the plan I propose, or some other, is indispensable to the success they seek to command, I implore them to take up the subject in all its bearing, and by the instrumentalities which they have at command, manufacture, collect, and embody public opinion, in regard to what may be determined to be done;and by memorial, and personal agencies, bring this opinion to bear upon Congress, with whom alone the power is vested, to redeem, disenthrall, and save, and bless, the remnants of this aboriginal race.[236]

Copway exudes throughout his autobiography the ethos of what he imagines himself to be—an inspired mediator between the white and red races. In his campaign for a northern Indian state, he employs poetic language designed to invoke the mechanisms of public and private discourses—law, politics, journalism, public opinion, and religion--which would be required to implement such a large scale policy proposal.

Recognizing the concerns of nation-building as the central theme of McDonald's and Pitchlynn's writing examined in the first two chapters of this study has given me a

[235] "They," here, refers specifically "to those good men, who, in the character of missionaries, have kept side by side with the Indians in so many of their afflictions and migrations" (163).
[236] George Copway, *Life, Letters and Speeches*, 163, quoting Thomas L. McKenney.

framework with which to read and understand Copway. The first time I read Copway's *Life, Letters and Speeches*, I looked for and hoped to find familiar themes of Indian resistance to U. S. expansionist policies. I did, of course, find some of those stances, but ultimately that reading, of narratives steeped in missionary rhetoric, was unsatisfying. My reading felt wrong-headed; as Geary Hobson, in his introduction to *The Remembered Earth* once called such a poor approach, "an exercise in futility . . . or as Lame Deer[237] might say, like trying to pour a handful of sand into a flying duck's ass."[238]

In the end of that first reading, Copway had impressed me as an individual strongly conflicted between his Christian missions and his concerns for the basic life necessities of his Ojibwe people. I could find no satisfying explanation of motive within his missionary work that would drive him, an under-privileged American Indian, to accomplish the remarkable feat of publishing four books in four years, between 1847 and 1851.

When I read his work a second time, however, to see how nationalistic interests might inform a reading of his work, an explanation emerged. Copway, who was well-connected with the Indian leaders of the Great Lakes tribes in the West, and who was being well-received by literary people, politicians, and general audiences alike in the East, did what my small businessman Choctaw/Chickasaw father always recommended a person to do—"strike while the griddle is hot." Copway apparently believed that his great purpose and reasonable duty in that period of his life was to secure a land base his people could inhabit as a permanent home. He wanted his people to truly become a healthy, prosperous, modern nation. Again referencing Hobson's poetic refrain, located

[237] presumably Lame Deer (1903-1976), also known as John Fire, who was a Lakota holy man.
[238] Geary Hobson, *The Remembered Earth*, 6.

in a critical text published near the beginning of this present era of scholarship on Native American literature, Copway must have fundamentally known: "Land is people . . . . Remembering is all."[239]

Discussing the work of N. Scott Momaday, Craig Womack once suggested in a lecture at the University of Oklahoma[240] that the arrowmaker in Momaday's essay, "The Man Made of Words," had his quintessential being in language, a man who is what he imagines he is. Dr. Womack asked the class if the wild turns of imagination in Copway's writing and self-image were the sort of thing that Momaday may have had in mind when he made his famous assertions concerning the power and formative agency of imagination. I have pondered this question a number of times, and will revisit it here.

It is impossible to know what Momaday had precisely in mind when he conceived "The Man Made of Words," but his essay applies to all people, I think, and certainly to George Copway. The arrowmaker story, in its essence according to Momaday, "lies not so much in what the arrowmaker does, but in what he says-—and indeed that he says it."[241] The arrowmaker imagines himself confronting the potentially threatening unknown stalking him in an outer darkness and, faced with an issue of survival, he imagines himself in the surest terms he knows—-in language. "He has consummate being in language," Momaday asserts. "It is the world of his origin and of his posterity, and there is no other."[242]

In the story, the arrowmaker is plying his craft on a quiet evening, sitting at home with his wife. Momaday writes:

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[239] ibid., 11.
[240] Lecture, October 10, 2002.
[241] N. Scott Momaday, "The Man Made of Words," in Geary Hobson, ed., *The Remembered Earth: An Anthology of Contemporary Native American Literature* (Albuquerque: Red Earth Press, 1979), 172.
[242] ibid., 172.

> There was a small opening in the tipi where two hides had been sewn together. Someone was there on the outside, looking in. The man went on with his work, but he said to his wife, 'Someone is standing outside. Do not be afraid. Let us talk easily, as of ordinary things.' He took up an arrow and straightened it in his teeth; then, as it was right for him to do, he drew it to the bow and took aim, first in this direction and then in that. And all the while he was talking to his wife. But this is how he spoke:
>
> 'I know that you are there on the outside, for I can feel your eyes upon me. If you are a Kiowa, you will understand what I am saying, and you will speak your name.' But there was no answer, and the man went on
>
> in the same way, pointing the arrow all around. At last his aim fell upon the place where his enemy stood, and he let go of the string. The arrow went straight to the enemy's heart.

The arrowmaker story presents to readers or listeners a balanced template for survival. I think Momaday is saying that if we are successful in imagining our own being in terms of language, if we understand ourselves fully in relationship to the world, then our language will connect us successfully with our past (origin) and our future (posterity). This is the very definition of survival or continuance. This definition substantially contradicts the rhetorical construction of a "vanishing race."

Though assured of the arrowmaker's continuity, the hearer or reader of the story is not bothered by the complexity of the protagonist's past and future. In the story of Copway, on the other hand, we are aware of the troubling weaknesses and foibles of his character, but nevertheless, he has similar consummate being in language. In Copway's

amazing lifetime parade of changing identities, the binding glue of these identifications is language. Even considering the wild fluctuations is his behavior and the inconsistency of his ethics, one might say that Copway is a man made of words.

As a writer and lecturer in the middle of that chaotic century in Native American history, Copway's cultural productions are impressive. Some facts of his life he chose not to reveal in his writing, like his days spent in prison for embezzlement and the fact that he wrote his autobiography during the six or eight month period of his life spent "going from place to place"[243] after he got out of jail, suggest that Copway himself understood clearly that he was a man made of words.

Peter Jones, the Mississaguan missionary mentor of Copway, criticized his young colleague for being headstrong and impulsive. In 1845, Jones stated, "He has not judgment to carry out any great undertaking."[244] This emotional reaction to Copway was later repeated by some of his critics, many of whom, nonetheless, "championed" the Indian cause with their respective audiences. But Copway did accomplish great undertakings, like the writing of four books between 1847 and 1851, the founding of a newspaper,[245] and the financial support of his family through his writings and lecture tours.

Thankfully, Copway's vision of the state of Kahgega would not come to pass, considering it would have displaced various Sioux bands from lands guaranteed to them by treaty. The nineteenth-century Choctaws examined in this study were in a better position to see their dreams of creating a modern constitutional republic come true. They

[243] George Copway. *Life, Letters and Speeches*, 33.
[244] Quoted by Donald B. Smith in his Introduction to George Copway, *Life, Letters and Speeches*, 32.
[245] In 1851, he started his own weekly newspaper in New York City, titled *Copway's American Indian* which ran for approximately three months.

had already written a rudimentary constitution and were embracing some of the ethics of democracy. Choctaws established and maintained continuity in government-to-government recognition and relations, the fundamental political necessity of sovereignty and nationhood, throughout the remainder of the century. It is refreshing, nonetheless, to understand that the primary motivations of these seemingly disparate Native writers of the nineteenth century were virtually identical. They were each and all deeply concerned with the building of nations.

The Hiawatha Connection

To further extend the context of American Indians writing in the nineteenth century I have found it useful to examine their relationships with their literary contemporaries who were white. One such connection was stimulated by a reference made by Donald B. Smith in his introduction to *Life, Letters and Speeches*, containing Copway's autobiography, re-published on the 150th anniversary of its first printing. I became curious about Smith's comment concerning Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's mention of George Copway's visit to his home in Massachusetts in 1849,[246] so I searched out and found his brother's, Samuel Longfellow's, collection of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's journals and letters in the library. The book was published in 1899 by Houghton and Mifflin. On February 26, 1849, Longfellow records in his journal that "Kah-ge-ga-gah'-bowh [Copway] an Ojibway preacher and poet came to see us. The Indian is a good-looking young man. He left me a book of his, an autobiography" (v 2: 145). Almost exactly six years later Longfellow published *The Song of Hiawatha*.

[246] Donald B. Smith. "Introduction" to *Life, Letters and Speeches*, 37-38.

According to Smith, Copway was "the only Ojibwe Longfellow ever met before he wrote his famous poem based on the Lake Superior Ojibwe."[247]

Copway's visit to Longfellow came on the heels of his speaking tour of Atlantic seaboard state legislatures in the just previous summer and fall of 1848, promoting the Ojibwe state of Kahgega. Apparently, Copway was in the neighborhood for a while. Longfellow records in his journal, April 12, 1849:

> Kah-ge-ga-gah'-bowh, the Ojibway chief, lectured. A rambling talk, gracefully delivered, with a fine various voice, and a chief's costume,
> with little bells jangling upon it, like the bells and pomegranates of the Jewish priests. (v 2: 148)

The comparison to Jewish priests may have been a reference to the popular theory in the nineteenth century that the American Indians were lost tribes of Israel. Two days later on April 14th, Longfellow writes:

> After dinner go the new Athenaeum. Evening, Kah-ge-ga-gah'-bowh
> again, on 'The Religion, Poetry, and Eloquence of the Indian,'—more rambling than ever, though not without good passages. He described
> very graphically the wild eagles teaching their young to fly from a nest
> overhanging a precipice on the Pictured Rocks of Lake Superior. (v2:148)

After this date, Longfellow made no other mention of George Copway. This was about in the middle of Copway's four year book publishing period.

Five years after his encounters with Kah-ge-ga-gah'-bowh, the journals recorded that after reading the Finnish epic poem, *Kalevala*, on June 5, 1854, Longfellow came up with the idea for *Hiawatha*. On June 22, seventeen days later, he writes:

[247] ibid., 38.

> I have at length hit upon a plan for a poem on the American Indians, which seems to me the right one, and the only. It is to weave together their beautiful traditions into a whole. I have hit upon a measure, too, which I think the right and only one for such a theme. (v 2: 273)

A footnote explains that the measure he refers to is trochaic dimeter, the meter of *Kalevala.* On June 27, he began writing the poem. On the 28th he writes: "Work at 'Manbozho;' or, as I think I shall call it, 'Hiawatha,'—being another name for the same personage" (273).

There are a number of entries without much substance, between June and September, 1854, noting work on *Hiawatha,* and none reveal a direct connection with Copway's work. On September 19, Longfellow makes the journal entry: "Working away with Tanner, Heckewelder, and sundry books about the Indians" (v 2: 276). One might suspect that one of those books was Copway's.

Two days later on the 28th the entry reads: "Worked at the disentanglement of Indian legends" (276). On October 20, he writes: "The Indian summer is beginning early. A charming tradition in the mythology of the Indians, that this soft, hazy weather is made by the passionate sighs of Shawondessa, the South" (277).

Over the next few months, Longfellow plugged away at *Hiawatha,* amidst occasional readings of selections from the poem for such Massachusetts literary friends as Lowell and Emerson. He finished the last canto at noon on February 21, 1855. After the wearisome task of re-writing the long poem for the printers, *The Song of Hiawatha* was published on November 10, 1855, by Ticknor and Fields, who reported that more than 4,000 of the first edition of 5,000 were already sold (292).

Further extending the context of Copway's work to other Americanists, letters in response to *Hiawatha* demonstrate the prevailing attitude toward Indians. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, for example, in a letter to Longfellow on November 25, 1855, that he liked the poem, but gave the credit for the manuscript's appeal to the poet, not to the stories from which the poem was drawn. Emerson writes:

> The dangers of the Indians are, that they are really savage, have poor, small, sterile heads,--no thoughts; and you must deal very roundly with them, and find in them brains. And I blamed your tenderness now and then, as I read, in accepting a legend or a song, when they had so little to give. (v 2: 294-295).

Apparently, Emerson's utopian ideals held no place for Indians, and he seems, along with other respondents, quite comfortable with his racism. Other letters are replete with remarks like, "He made of his subject everything that was possible" (William Prescott letter, 295). Thomas Parsons wrote: "The measure is monotonous,--admitted; but it is truly Indian. It is child-like and suited to the savage ear" (296).

Longfellow was outraged by some critics who accused him of plagiarism, of simply imitating the Finnish poem, *Kalevala*. He writes, in a letter to Charles Sumner on December 3, 1855, "As to my having 'taken many of the most striking incidents of the Finnish Epic and transferred them to the American Indians'—it is absurd" (v 2: 297). Apparently, Longfellow acknowledges drawing on the ethnographic work of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft on the Ojibwe. Elaborated in a letter to Longfellow, Schoolcraft received the poem well (299-301). The extent to which *The Song of Hiawatha* was informed by Copway remains to be explicated.

Choctaw Nationalism Projected Forward

While Longfellow and Emerson were memorializing the vanishing Indian in Victorian verse, Native American authors and politicians were working hard to build up their respective national identities. The influence of McDonald's, Pitchlynn's, and Vose's styles of thought, writing, and political philosophy on the thinking and aspirations of descendant generations of Choctaws and other Native Americans is difficult to estimate with any precision. Pitchlynn lived a long life, was frequently in the public eye by way of newspaper editorials and magazine articles, published by or about him in New York and Washington, D. C., in Indian Territory, and occasionally in other parts of the country.

The deep commitment to sovereignty and nationhood that has been demonstrated in McDonald's and Pitchlynn's writing has helped me read and understand other indigenous writers in the same period. Issues being pressed in the work of other indigenous writers published in the nineteenth century, and in the case of Samson Occom, Joseph Brant, and Hendrick Aupaumut, in the eighteenth century, seem much clearer to me now, having peered at them through the lens of nationalism.

On a list of nationalist projects advocated by Native writers in the eighteenth century, one would certainly want to include Samson Occom's leadership in establishing the Brothertown Indian Nation in 1785 near Waterville, New York, in Oneida country. A nationalistic analysis of the Brothertown Indians' situation, however, is interestingly complicated by the fact that their original members were composed of Christian remnants of the Mohegan, Pequot, Narragansett, Montauk, Niantic, and Tunxis tribes.[248] This sort

[248] The Brothertown Indian Nation, "History." [http://www.brothertownindians.org].

of complication suggests perhaps that my definitions of ethnie and nation are too simplistic for judging the diverse landscape of Native America.

From the nineteenth century, I have presented as an example of indigenous nationalist thought, Copway's imagined state of Kahgega, a proposed Indian Territory of the north. If Kahgega had formed up along Copway's guidelines, it would be something of a blend of the concepts of the southern Indian Territory, which was established by the Indian Intercourse Act of 1834, and Brant's late eighteenth century proposal for a confederacy of Ohio River Valley tribes to be called the Indian United Nations. If one prospects for the themes, nationalistic thinking seems to be a major subject of thought and a focal point of work in the nineteenth century Native American writers. Although Kahgega never gained the support it needed to become a plausible proposal, it might be regarded as the central impetus motivating Copway to publish four books in four years, 1847-1851.

One of the reasons, no doubt, that McDonald and Pitchlynn were focused on nationalistic issues is because the Choctaws had written their first constitution in 1826, while still in Mississippi, more or less formalizing their existing political hierarchy of three district chiefs and a national council. Early on, after they took up their new residence in Indian Territory, they met in council on the Kiamichi River in 1834 and drafted the first constitution written within the boundaries of the state of Oklahoma.[249] They continued their former Choctaw practice of being governed by three chiefs, but this document also set up executive, legislative and judicial departments.

The Choctaw constitution contained a bill of rights that granted, among other rights, the right to have a jury trial. Following the 1837 Treaty of Doaksville, which

[249] Arrell M. Gibson, *The History of Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press: 1984), 48.

united the Chickasaws with the Choctaws, the constitution was changed again to create a fourth district for the Chickasaws. The number of chiefs was increased to four, one of which was to be a Chickasaw. Peter Pitchlynn was active in writing each of the successive revisions of the Choctaw constitutions. The Choctaw constitution of 1834, altered from time to time to meet changing conditions, remained in force until the Choctaw national government was dissolved just before Oklahoma statehood in 1907.

There was a period, after removal, of recovery and prosperity for the Choctaws. It came after they had had enough time to build up new farms and herds, schools and churches, ball fields and stomp grounds, in their new country. Although there were few battles fought in the territory, The Civil War devastated and impoverished the Choctaws once again, in the 1860s, as it did virtually all of Indian Territory. Under Chief Pitchlynn's careful diplomacy, the Choctaws did not lose any territory in the Reconstruction Treaty of 1866. The effects of the war passed, and the Choctaws again experienced the normal cycling of the economy and other measures of fortune. With abundant grasslands, good bottomlands for row-cropping, and plenty of water and timber, they generally prospered for the remainder of the nineteenth century.

The Dawes Act of 1887, also called the General Allotment Act, however, was the beginning of the end of Choctaw nationalism in the nineteenth century. The Dawes Act was followed by the Curtis Act of 1893, the Atoka Agreement of 1898, and the Supplemental Agreement of 1902, each Act, with increasing efficiency and inevitability, cementing the details of dissolving the tribal governments and liquidating the tribal estates.

The Sequoyah Convention, proposing the all-Indian State of Sequoyah, was a last-ditch effort to avoid combining with Oklahoma Territory in becoming one state. Interestingly reminiscent of George Copway's 1848 proposal for the Ojibwe state of Kahgega, Choctaw Chief Green McCurtain began to call for the convention in 1905, after a vigorous promotional campaign for the idea was produced by Cherokee pamphleteer, James A. Norman.

Delegates from the Five Tribes met in Muskogee, drew up a 35,000 word constitution, and submitted its proposal for the State of Sequoyah, comprising only Indian Territory, to President Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt rejected the petition, largely because Senators from the eastern states were unwilling to add two more western states to the voting mix in Congress. One new western state was bad enough, they maintained.

With Oklahoma statehood in 1907, along with the other tribes in the Territory, Choctaw courts, legislature, and elected leadership of any type were dissolved. Chief McCurtain was retained after statehood, along with Governor Douglas H. Johnston of the Chickasaw Nation, as federal appointees, to perform the duties of signing allotment patents.

The new Choctaw Nation that Pushmataha had so wisely bargained for in 1820, that Peter Perkins Pitchlynn dreamed so lustrously of while exploring the wild country north of the Red River in 1828, and that James L. McDonald had personified so richly in the winter of 1830, was dissolved. Pitchlynn worked virtually his entire life to represent the Choctaw Nation in Washington, dying penniless there in 1881. I am glad that he was not there to see Choctaw government dissolved.

Pushmataha had died there also in 1824. He and Pitchlynn are buried near one another in the Congressional cemetery. The passionate young lawyer and literary star, J. L. McDonald, may have seen it all coming, and elected out of any more pain. The resolution to remain a sovereign nation was, and is, strong among the Choctaws.

All the efforts to "terminate" the Indian nations—-the Indian Removal Act, the Dawes-era legislation, the Termination and Urban Relocation programs of the 1950s--failed in their common goal to force American Indian tribes, bands and nations into dissolution, thus ending their ancient traditions. The simple fact is that a society based on kinship relations cannot be terminated. The only way, in reality, that indigenous societies can end is by ex-termination, which American Christian ethics, thankfully, have never fully permitted.

After the social upheavals in the turbulent 1960s, including the Red Power movements, increasing civil rights awareness had caused American people to look and feel beyond their own interest groups. It was this consciousness of social justice that informed President Richard M. Nixon's surprising declaration to Congress in the summer of 1970 that, "The time has come to break decisively with the past and to create the conditions for a new era in which the Indian future is determined by Indian acts and Indian decisions**.**"[250]

In his speech, President Nixon publicly acknowledges and condemns the failure of federal forced termination policies and reaffirms the "immense moral and legal force" of United States treaty agreements with Native nations. "To terminate this relationship," he declared to the assembled senators and representatives "would be no more appropriate

[250] President Richard M. Nixon, Message from the President of the United States transmitting recommendations for Indian policy, 91st Cong, 2nd session (July 8, 1970; H Doc 91-363), 1.

than to terminate the citizenship rights of any other American."[251] This new declaration of federal Indian policy paved the way for tribal elections later in 1970 and promoted a re-constitution of the Choctaw Nation.

Since 1970, the Choctaws have once more enjoyed nationhood. The legislature, judiciary and elected executive branch have been restored. Along with the revival of governmental structure, Choctaws today are enjoying better housing, health care, and nutrition, as well as language and cultural revitalization. More Choctaws are finishing high school, going to college, and earning professional degrees than ever before. Choctaw businesses are flourishing, and the future looks relatively bright. I'm sure the ancestors, especially the ones we have visited in this study, are pleased. Yakoke! Aiokpachi! Achukma![252]

[251] Ibid., 2.
[252] Thank you! Give thanks! This is good!

Conclusion: Methodology and Other Work in the Field

> *Name the Indians who lie at rest today in the Congressional Cemetery of the Untied States. There is another one, another great Choctaw. Name the Indians who have ever acted as decisively on behalf of their own people and the American people, with such far-reaching consequences. Name the Indians who have ever been as beloved, acknowledged, and honored by the American people. Name the Indians who have ever contributed as much to the very survival of the United States of America.*
>
> --D. L. Birchfield, *How Choctaws Invented Civilization* and *Why Choctaws Will Conquer the World* [253]

A significant number of book-length works investigating early American Indian writing has appeared in the last two decades—with approaches to that writing as diverse as the critics who have produced them. One of the most recently published books which examines early Native American writing is *The Common Pot*, by Abenaki author Lisa Brooks. Her wide-ranging and colorful study explores the networks of Native writers in the Northeast. "The conceptualization of a cooperative, interdependent Native environment emerges from within native space as a prominent trope in the speeches and writing of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries," she writes, "reflected in the metaphor of the 'common pot'. The common pot is that which feeds and nourishes."[254] With an eye to the organizing principles, customs, values, and practices which inform this metaphor, Brooks implicates the emergence of writing as a tool for reclaiming Native space and history as a natural outgrowth of these values.

Brooks' work has become part of an impressive list of studies which seek out and explore the work of early writers, in order to understand historically the power and

[253] D. L. Birchfield, *How Choctaws Invented Civilization and Why Choctaws Will Conquer the World* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 28.
[254] Lisa Brooks, The Common Pot (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 3-4.

influence of the literate act on the lives and concerns of Native Americans. Her work embraces not only the published work of authors such as Samson Occom and William Apess, but also considers the significance of letters, land cases, petitions, birch bark writing, wampum, and other texts which exist more or less parallel to the published material, but which vastly exceed published Native writing in terms of volume. She has come to regard the early writing as a valuable resource in Native American cultural recovery in her northeastern Native space, which was devastated early-on by the forces of colonization. The writing shows, she posits, "the process of adaptation in action."[255]

. Likewise, the act of digging into the archived writings of my Choctaw intellectual ancestors has been a nourishing experience for me, one replete with intrigue and interest. My curiosity in knowing my ancestors in every way I could had been with me for most of my life, but my introduction to archival research came about in response to a course assignment in Robert Warrior's Native Nonfiction course at the University of Oklahoma early in my doctoral program. I had some ideas for a dissertation research focus, but nothing had fleshed out until I ran across a reference in the library catalog to "The Peter Perkins Pitchlynn Collection." I knew very little about Pitchlynn, except that he was one of the nineteenth-century Choctaw chiefs. Nevertheless, from the minute almost that I held those 175-year-old letters and journals in my hands, I was absorbed. I had no way of knowing, however, how much they would change my life.

The entire Choctaw/Chickasaw family I descend from died at Boggy Depot in Indian Territory from small pox at the end of the Civil War, except for my great-grandmother Lucy Wade, 14 years old in 1865. A lot of my Choctaw family story talk died on that day. Soon after the tragedy of losing her whole family, Lucy married a

[255] ibid., xxvii.

refugee Cherokee Pin, one of the Keetoowahs who fought as Union Rangers. The Keetoowahs represented roughly only 10 % of the Cherokees. Unpopular with the Cherokee majority who had supported or fought for the Confederacy, Allen G. Lee lived out his life with Lucy quietly in the Choctaw Nation, never again openly identifying with the Cherokees for fear of his life.

My grandmother, Alice Lee Morgan, died before I was born, my father died when I was young, and I had never even heard the name of my Choctaw great-great grandfather, William Wade, until I found his name on a deed in another archive. Discovering the political and literary writings of Choctaw intellectuals James L. McDonald and Peter Perkins Pitchlynn was the first step toward recovering my own family ancestors. Beyond personal enrichment, in the research I have recovered interesting segments of untold Choctaw history and many interesting but obscured historical characters—Choctaw-speaking intellectuals in the early 1800s surprisingly skilled in English letters and law. Remembering how Momaday's grandmother, Ko-Sahn, came alive and stood upon the page of his manuscript for "A Man Made of Words," I can sum up my archival research in one short sentence. These Choctaw ancestors have come alive for me.

The published studies of nineteenth century Native American literature range across a wide variety of texts. Maureen Konkle, for example, focuses on the paradoxical nature of treaties. Treaties, she asserts, must be entered into by autonomous political entities, by sovereign nations. The paradox is that most often the motive of the young nation known as the United States to make these agreements in the first place was to dispossess Natives of their land, but in order to make these agreements in the first place,

the treaties had to recognize each indigenous tribe, band or nation's sovereignty over the soil they inhabited. These recognitions served as acts of validation of Indian nations' status, ironically at cross purposes to the dispossession initiatives. Within a number of writings by early nineteenth century Native intellectuals which she examines, most argue for Native title to lands, deriving their chief warrants most often from the treaties.

This created a dilemma for the United States, because as the perceived need by Americans to "remove" tribes from the ancestral home lands became more urgent, the acts of accomplishing removal were difficult without undermining the major myths of the young republic—liberty, freedom, and justice, and most revered but abstract, equality. To accomplish their goals of land acquisition, Americans increasingly, as time passed, needed to invent ways to undermine Native sovereignty, and further, she argues that these same needs tend to persist today. She writes:

> It is 'intellectually satisfying' to pronounce that Indians are torn between two cultures. As an explanation, it makes sense because it has never gone out of style. The cliché locks Native peoples in time, always in the state of not being able to reconcile one 'way of life' with another, just as in earlier formulations of this same thinking, they were always in the state being just about ready to disappear. The reliance on cultural difference as an explanation merely reprises the nineteenth-century platitude that when 'civilizations clash and inferior meets superior, Indians must disappear.[256]

[256] Maureen Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations: Native Intellectuals and the Politics of Historiography, 1827-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 290.

Much of the perception of Native American history, she asserts, revolves around these oppositions of superior and inferior, nomadic and civilized, sophisticated and primitive. She pulls from obscurity a large volume of indigenous writing,[257] ranging from newspaper and magazine articles to memorials to Congress, which demonstrates how early Native literate intellectuals, relied significantly on the language of treaties to combat these stereotypes. These stereotypes persist today in popular discourses, as they do in academic circles. She notes:

> In literary studies, the observation that one writer or another is 'torn between two cultures' is regularly offered up as a critical insight. In historiography, the popularization of the 'middle ground' as a paradigm for studies of Native-EuroAmerican relations has allowed for narratives that describe how 'cultures' met and mixed in U.S. history but ultimately failed to produce a just society in the end because people could not get along, as they were too different.[258]

It was a prominent motive in early indigenous writing from all quarters, to combat these stereotypes of irreconcilable difference between the races, because the stereotypes were prominently deployed to justify such imperialistic ventures as Indian removals. I pointed out in Chapter Two how this sort of characterization of irreconcilable difference was used by a biographer to support an argument that Peter Pitchlynn was irretrievably damaged in terms of serving the interests of Choctaw people because of his white blood. Many of these rationalizations, such as the portrayal of Pitchlynn, serve to reinforce the notion that

[257] She focuses on examples of early writing among the Cherokees, on William Apess (Pequot), and upon several writers from the Iroquois Confederacy.
[258] ibid., 290-291.

white heritage and genetics are automatically more powerful than their indigenous counterparts.

Present-day Choctaw writer D.L. Birchfield concurs with Konkle in serving up an appraisal of the failures of scholarship, particularly of American History writing, but in a much more satirical fashion. In *How Choctaws Invented Civilization and Why Choctaws will Conquer the World,* he points out how historians have obscured "that long-suppressed, long-forgotten moment in American history"—the immense role that the Choctaws played in insuring, as the United States' most powerful ally, that the young republic would not be conquered by the powerful British in the War of 1812.

Birchfield describes the historic debate in 1811 between the great Choctaw war chief, Pushmataha, and the Shawnee war chief, Tecumseh, after Tecumseh arrived in the Southeast with his entourage of Indian diplomats to enlist support for a military campaign in alliance with the British against the United States. In one long periodic sentence, he writes:

> In one of the most stirringly dramatic moments in American history, as thousands of Choctaws listened, hanging on every word, those two great Indian generals, the two greatest Indians in all of U.S. history, the two biggest, baddest bastards on the American continent, went fourteen and one-half rounds for the heavyweight championship of the North American continent, as they pounded each other in the most colossal contest of wills that American history would ever see, with the highest stakes hanging in

> the balance that any debate would ever have—the fate of a frail and infant American republic.[259]

Although Birchfield's incisive rhetoric seems to be delivered tongue-in-cheek, his assertions that American citizens are completely in the dark concerning their own history, are convincing. If Choctaws, as the most powerful Native military entity in that region in that day, strategically located in the key region of the lower Mississippi valley, had joined Tecumseh's alliance with the British instead of siding with the United States, Native forces in the Southeast would have consolidated. Massacres of white settlers such as occurred at Fort Mims in southern Alabama, Birchfield speculates, would have become widespread and commonplace, the U. S. and General Andrew Jackson would have been defeated at the Battle of New Orleans, and the "infant republic" would have been doomed. "The War of 1812 was that close to being fatally disastrous for the American people," Birchfield declares.[260]

Birchfield's central thesis in "this work [which] is a hybrid between academic scholarship and creative nonfiction"[261] is that America's unwillingness to know its own history could be its downfall, and that historians have purposely and criminally failed to write Choctaw history, much to the detriment of the American people. "In the kind of republic that the United States has become," he writes, "American public opinion regarding Indians . . . now controls every aspect of law regarding Indians to a severe degree." He is referring to the fact the U.S. Supreme Court abdicated its constitutional responsibilities in 1903 in "a chilling declaration" in the case of *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock.*

[259] D. L. Birchfield, *How Choctaws Invented Civilization*, 16-17.
[260] ibid., 19.
[261] ibid., vii.

That Supreme Court decision held that the Congress has full plenary power over Indians, relegating Indians to the mercy of public opinion. "American law regarding Indians is controlled by what the 'average' American voter thinks about Indians, because those voters elect the Congress."[262] The obvious implication, which Birchfield makes sure the reader does not miss, is that the average voter has little or no knowledge of the historically pivotal contributions of Choctaws, especially of the nineteenth century, because American historians stubbornly refuse to write the truth about the Choctaws, preferring their own stale tales of the courageous, indefatigable settler/pioneer.

Lucy Maddox burnishes this view of nineteenth century Native American history, focusing on literary history and the divergence of motives and interests between Americanists and Native Americanists. Published in 1991, her study, *Removals: Nineteenth Century American Literature and the Politics of Indian Affairs*, is one of the earlier books in the current wave of criticism in early Native writing. "American history (as text) cannot accommodate Indian history (as text)," she writes, "without destroying itself." She asserts that differences of opinion arise about "whether Indian texts, either oral or written, can be made accessible to a non-Indian audience through any of the methodological approaches currently available in academic literary studies—or for that matter, whether many of the Indian materials can even be legitimately treated as *texts*."[263]

This reflects, of course, one of the problems I faced in examining the pre-removal Choctaw letters in a literary context. She aptly argues that the reluctance to admit Native writing into the canon of literature on this continent grows out of the historical reticence to admit Indian people themselves into the structures of American society. She examines

[262] ibid., viii-ix.
[263] Lucy Maddox, *Removals: Nineteenth Century American Literature and the Politics of Indian Affairs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 5.

the complicity of members of the accepted canon of nineteenth-century American writers, such as Hawthorn, Child, Sedgwick and Thoreau, in a process of myth-building concerning relations between Indians and American colonists. "Their complicity in the perpetuation of those myths [the dominant myths of nation-building] can now seem to us both naïve and so damaging in their effects on American culture," she writes.[264]

Cheryl Walker examines nation-building myths as well, in her 1997 study, *Indian Nation: Native American literature and Nineteenth-Century Nationalisms*. Until recent years, even in the academy, the notion that there were literate Indian intellectuals working and writing in the early nineteenth century was a foreign concept. In a more particular sense, Indians writing in the early period about nationhood, as the Choctaw writers examined in this study do, might be even less well-acknowledged. Citing examples of how prominent EuroAmerican authors did not always agree on how Indians should be treated in their own literary productions, Walker asserts that in the nation-building rhetoric of the early nineteenth century, the nature of nationhood itself was always being contested. "As long as we preserve the sense of multiple possibilities, we can hold America responsible for its misdeeds because we can see them as in some sense chosen." In a statement that affirms my findings in analyzing the pre-removal Choctaw writers, Walker suggests that "it is useful to look at what Indians wrote about America and nationhood in the nineteenth century because by doing so we can see that there were other ideas in play as well as those of the increasingly hegemonic discourse."[265]

Birchfield, besides extolling Pushmataha as the greatest Indian who ever lived, examines the role of James L. McDonald in the building of the Choctaw nation,

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[264] ibid,,

[265] Cheryl Walker, *Indian Nation: Native American literature and Nineteenth-Century Nationalisms* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 40.

particularly in regard to the momentous Treaty of 1825. Stereotyping American historians in a humorous way, Birchfield declares that "North American German historians have been content to assume that smallpox and Osage depredations depopulated the entire land, to leave it standing silent and empty to await the removal of the Choctaws to it." Conceding that smallpox and Osages were indeed factors, he cajoles nonetheless that "historians haven't wanted to face the awful truth of the role that the Lords of the North American Continent [as he styles the Choctaws] played in providing themselves with the home of their choice in the Trans-Mississippi West."[266]

Birchfield notes that the Choctaws "consummated that profoundly wise, visionary endeavor" by obtaining United States recognition of: Choctaw title to those silent and empty Red River valleys, throughout the entire range of the Ouachita (Big Hunt) Mountains, as well as recognition of Choctaw title to the immense sweep of land to the west of those Big Hunt Mountains, all the way to the summit of the highest peak in the southern Rocky Mountains."[267]

The Treaty of 1820 granted Choctaws deed to a vast amount of territory, from western Arkansas further west to what is today the Texas panhandle. "James Lawrence McDonald . . . held the United States to that vow [Andrew Jackson's pledge to remove white people from Choctaw lands in the West], in the treaty of 1825, at least for the western half of those Big Hunt Mountains (present-day southeastern Oklahoma)." Jackson's blunder lay in the fact that western Arkansas, granted to the Choctaws as part of the 1820 treaty, was already significantly populated by a large number of white people. In the 1825 negotiations the U. S. wanted the Choctaws to sell back that portion of

[266] D.L. Birchfield, *How Choctaws Invented Civilization*, 257.
[267] ibid., 259.

southwestern Arkansas. "But McDonald refused to even discuss any such sale," Birchfield writes, "until the United States had first fulfilled all of its outstanding treaty obligations to the Choctaws from prior treaties, of which there were quite a few, dating all the way back to the second treaty in 1801."[268]

Birchfield's Choctaw-centric creative nonfiction approach to nineteenth century intellectual and political history is unique and stands in relief to more conventional approaches. One of the richest genres of critical work on early American Indian writing focuses on the productions of Christian Indians. Bernd C. Peyer, for example, published *The Tutor'd Mind: Indian Missionary-Writers in Antebellum America* in 1997. W. DeLoss Love followed in 2000 with *Samson Occom and the Christian Indians of New England.* Also in 2000, Hillary Wyss published Writing Indians, which examines "cross-cultural mediations, appropriations, and translations that are inherent in the early texts of Native Christians." She challenges any essentializing assumptions inherent in either of the terms, Native or Christian. She analyzes the ways missionary tracts, captivity narratives, and various other writings perform in terms of the ways Native converts interact with their EuroAmerican neighbors.

Book-length studies of nineteenth century Southeastern writers are sparse in comparison with those available for the Northeastern Christian Indians, which suggests that my study will fill a niche. Primary research like I present enjoys the flexibility afforded by the reality that little work exists on these particular texts that might contradict my conclusions or that would require tedious referencing and comparison in order for the study to be comprehensive. This dearth of critical material on the manuscripts I am reading, however, is both a luxury and a burden. I have enjoyed the luxury of being

[268] ibid., 260.

somewhat independent and free-ranging in judging the manuscripts, but have had to bear the burden of building context without borrowing much context.

Thus, there have been times in this research effort when I was bogged down and needed to reach out for corroboration or revelation, and it was just not available. In most cases, with most questions and conundrums, answers were found by asking one of my committee members, who always readily and kindly provided them. Nevertheless, some questions are so endemic to a particular research problem that the answers are only available to the principal investigator of the subject texts.

For example, I spent months, though I continued with other aspects of the work, stumped on the problem of why it was so much more difficult to criticize Pitchlynn's 1828 journal than it was to criticize McDonald's Spectre essay. The answer, which seems obvious to me today, is that it is more difficult to engage from a literary critical perspective with the naturalistic/journalistic prose of the record of Pitchlynn's fact-finding mission, than it was to engage with McDonald's literary commentary and his literary translation of a complex story drawn from the Choctaw oral tradition.

I found myself with Pitchlynn's journal entries trying to "force" a literary interpretation. I was trying to get literary blood out of a journalistic turnip, and no matter how hard I squeezed, not much was forthcoming. McDonald's work, on the other hand, was loaded with literary angles—the Legend, a literary text, translated and transformed from the oral tradition, accompanied by commentary presented by McDonald with nuance, irony, critical opinions, and literary flourishes.

These examples inform a critical methodology for doing archival research. Archives are often vast in terms of numbers and diversity of texts.[269] In the Oklahoma University Western History Collection alone the Pitchlynn archives include six hundred folders, some with single letters and some with much longer documents like Pitchlynn's 1828 journal and like McDonald's Spectre essay.[270]

My first approach to the Pitchlynn archives was the elephant approach. (How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.) This approach is sure to founder the researcher. A better approach is to first survey the table of contents for the collection, if one exists. If the table does not exist, then it behooves one to make his/her own list in the most straightforward and economical fashion, establishing an overview, while identifying manuscripts that seem most interesting from one's own critical perspective. I found myself going back frequently to the collection over my first extensive period of writing and research with the foolish idea that I needed to read everything in it.

I finally realized that just the correspondence contained in the collection written during the period that encompassed the five years before and the year or two after the removal treaty of 1830 was a significant, important, and sufficient period for a lengthy exploratory study. An examination of texts representing a chronologically longer period of study would become, I decided, at best a cursory study.

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[269] The Peter Perkins Pitchlynn Collection manuscripts are listed in separate folders, annotated with explanations and dates of the folder's contents. I'm sure that some archives are considerably more chaotic and more difficult for which to organize an effective research approach.

[270] Henry Willis, first language speaker and traditional Choctaw language expert for the Choctaw Nation, in concert with Dr. Marcia Haag, Choctaw linguist, have worked, for example, for several months on the translation of a 100-page journal of a District Council Meeting held in the summer of 1827 in the old Mississippi Choctaw Nation. The journal is written entirely in the Choctaw language. I found the journal in an un-annotated folder in the Collection (because no previous investigator could read it), and it represents the oldest extant writing in Choctaw.

It took me quite a while, nonetheless, to stop indicting myself for falling short of complete coverage of the collection. This seems obvious to me saying it plainly now, but in the initial throes of the research it was not obvious to me at all. To borrow an explorer's metaphor, I felt like that in my trek through this vast Southeastern historical wilderness I was always searching for some great new discovery right around the next bend, when what I really needed to do was to settle down into one the good places to live that I had already found.

We all need theory, academics and non-academics alike, for without cohesive and usable theory, the historical narrative, for example, may amount to little more than aimless wandering in the past, perhaps entertaining but without purpose or continuity. With usable theory, the past becomes origin, the future a destination, and the present a recognizable and sustainable point in the trajectory of a people. In some ways, these assertions are self-evident, but it may be useful to readers to understand how theory played out in my particular case of archival research.

Theory guides the way we structure our studies. I started in a theoretical position and I am ending in a theoretical position. I started in the theoretical position I inherited from my mentors and gained from the readings that they assigned. The strongest influences on me were the theoretical positions inhabited by Geary Hobson, by Robert Warrior, and by Craig Womack, my major professors in both my masters and doctoral programs.

Their theories share some common ground, but ultimately each comes at Native literature from different angles. Here, I will permit and attempt some generalization for the sake of illustrating the framework from which I emerge. Hobson emphasized early

on and continues to emphasize sovereignty as the central focus and theme of American Indian writing. Warrior's work focuses on developing intellectual-historical frameworks and useful critical models, and Womack is most famous for his convincing arguments regarding the importance of tribal specificity in reading and understanding indigenous literature. I am fully aware of the overly reductive quality of this summary, but I permit it only to serve the purpose of illustrating how theory influences research, and, further, how new theory emerges from research.

I should add that all three eminent professors agreed on at least one premise, and that is the premise that it will be a bright day in scholarship when criticism of Native literature is being predominantly produced by Native scholars. Reflecting perhaps a degree of success in this common ambition, I can say proudly that in both of my degree programs, every single course I took at OU in Native literature was taught by a Native American professor. This might have been impossible just a few years ago.

My overarching goal when I began to analyze the texts of McDonald and Pitchlynn and their early nineteenth-century peers was to connect a theoretical arc between their work as critics and modern-day critics. Therefore, I examined them at length from the perspectives of sovereignty, intellectual tradition, and tribal specificity. None of these perspectives, although roughly equally applicable and useful, ultimately survived in the end as a dominant critical paradigm. What did emerge was the theory that the authors' thinking as reflected by their writing exemplified to varying degrees each of these standpoints, but predominantly shared a perspective that was, most strongly, nationalistic. Thus, in terms of a methodological formula, the mandate is to approach indigenous literature equipped with the best theories available, and then expect a

theoretical synthesis to emerge. In my research dialectic, the theories I was taught served as theses, the texts operated most often as antitheses, and the net result is a theoretical synthesis born of these agents.

A tangible metaphor for possessing knowledge of the ideological trajectories of one's own tribal ancestors, as opposed to being dispossessed of this knowledge, can be conceived by imagining two children—one who knows her parents and another who does not. The one who knows her progenitors has probably visualized a destination, a future, which consciously includes or excludes her relatives. The other child, no matter how kindly adopted or assimilated into someone else's family, will almost always feel estrangement from her past. Particularly if she has no grandparents present or other close relatives who know and can pass on family history, her past in significant ways does not even exist. It is well known that such ruptures in familial identity create anxiety towards the future making it difficult to enjoy, delight in, or feel fulfilled by one's present life.

It is certainly true that my life has been enriched by this study. In a folder without annotation, for instance, I discovered, late in my research period, an archived journal record of a joint meeting in Mississippi of the three Choctaw district councils in the summer of 1827. The small leather-bound journal was written in Peter Pitchlynn's hand, all in the Choctaw language, except for the names of the signatories to the resolutions.

Perusing the signatures recorded after each resolution, I found, in one entry, Peter Pitchlynn's signature, followed by James L. McDonald's. Three signatures down the list, I found the signature notation of my great-great grandfather, William Wade. The man, who had never been fleshed out in any substantial way, and who had been little more to me than a name which I was proud to know, suddenly came alive, sitting right across the

table from two fellows I felt I had gotten to know pretty well by that time—Peter Perkins Pitchlynn and James L. McDonald. It was at that point that the arcs of consciousness that I had sought so diligently from the beginning to establish, over a gulf of more than 175 years, applying the best theories available to me for this purpose, became palpably real.

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Appendix One: The Spectre Essay

A complete transcription of James L. McDonald's letter to Peter Perkins Pitchlynn of December 13th and December 17th, 1830, containing "The Spectre and the Hunter: A Legend of the Choctaws." A glossary of Choctaw language terms used in McDonald's document is available at the end of the transcription. Transcription from the handwritten letter, by Phillip Carroll Morgan.

December 13th, 1830

Esteemed friend:

The promise which I once made you to reduce to writing a tale which I had repeated to you, as illustration of the imaginative powers of our countrymen, had nearly escaped my recollection and I thank you for the hint which has recalled it to mind: For I am confined to the house by the gloomy weather which prevails without, and a little exercise of the pen will be an agreeable relief.

I well remember that it was the custom among Choctaw boys some twenty years since, — and doubtless, the custom to a certain extent yet survives, — to assemble together of pleasant summer evenings, and tell stories in rotation. These stories they facetiously styled "Shookha noompas," or hog's stories [shukha anumpa, 'folk tale (lit. 'hog talk')']; but the reason why they were so styled, I have now forgotten, if I ever knew. I could not have been more than five or six years of age when in the habit of listening to the "Shookha noompas" of my play fellows; and yet my recollection of some of them is quite distinct. I then knew nothing of civilization. I had seen but few white people, — and these few having mostly adopted the Indian dress and habits, gave me no adequate idea of the "world far off" (as I then believed it to be) of the white people. I can now recall to mind some of those tales of early childhood, and compare them with others

which I heard in after years among the white people, and I can truly say that the Indian loses nothing in the comparison. In fact, when we speak of tales adapted to captivate the attention and enlist the feelings of children, I am of the opinion that the Indian has decidedly the advantage. He is in general more familiar with the objects of nature than the white man; and hence can enliven his stories with more apposite and striking illustrations. You have doubtless noticed the superior facility with which an Indian, who is in the habit of roaming the woods, can detect and distinguish objects of sight and sound. You have remarked how readily he can name the different trees of the forest and the almost numberless plants and flowers of the field. You know that not a beast ranges the hills, not a reptile crawls on the plains, which he cannot name. The fowls that sail he air, the birds that warble in the grove, are equally familiar. In his lonely wanderings they become as dear and cherished companions. He has learned all their names, and can describe to you their habits and distinctive histories. Almost every Indian can do this, and nine tenths of white people cannot.

I believe that in tales of high imagination the Indians are deficient; but it is as I conceive, simply for the want of improvement. They have the stamina, if in early life it could be drawn out, cultivated, and polished. There is also, it seems to me, much more force and precision in the Choctaw language, than in the English; — or do I only think so, because it is my mother tongue? It may not be so varied, so rich as the English language; it's vocabulary is far from being so copious; but as far as it goes, is it not stronger, more nervous? —Listen to a hunter returned from the chase, or a warrior from the field of battle. The first will describe to you all the arts and wiles which he had used in approaching his game (a deer for instance) with a clearness and distinctness which

make you feel as if you had been with him. Even little incidents that had occurred, even to the rustling of a leaf, or the snapping of a dry twig, in his cautious approaches, is thrown in so naturally and with such simplicity in the progress of the story, that if you are a sportsman, it can not fail to rivet your attention. You seem to see the deer as he does; you examine localities; you make your approaches step by step as he does; you become completely identified with the narrator; —in short, you enjoy all the pleasures of the chase, without the fatigue. You may have heard a young hunter giving the stirring details of a bear hunt, and what sportsman would not warm with the tale? —The first cry of the dogs —the rushing of the animal through the tangled underwood —the snapping of cane —the confusion of the flight —the inspiring calls of the hunters —and the death scene when gun after gun is discharged into the head of the bear; according to Indian custom: —is all told with clear connection, and depicted with a vividness, which I should despair of hearing equaled in the English language.

Let us now turn to the warrior. He shall be a warrior in the prime of life—not young, nor yet aged. The lines of thought are on his brow, and he has scars that betoken many a bloody conflict. Imagine him just returned from his war expedition. He is seated, his friends are around him, silent and attentive; not one obtruding a question; but all waiting his pleasure to begin. He has just smoked his pipe, and now adjusts himself for the narration. He tells of the days and nights he travelled before he approached the hunting ground of his enemy. He describes the different objects he sees in his route, the streams he crossed, and his camping places. Here he killed a bear, there a buffalo. He marks on the ground a rude map of the country, to give a better idea of his travels. He describes where he first discovered the trail of his enemy. In such a quarter lay their

town; here he concealed himself until he should discover some straggling foe. He describes the rivulet that quenched his thirst and the tree that sheltered him. Not an incident is forgotten; and every incident heightens the interest of his perilous situation. Becoming impatient he sallies forth, and takes a rapid circuit through the heart of his enemy's country. He soon discovers, from unerring indication, that his enemies have discovered his travel, and are on the look out to intercept him. He pauses, views the critical nature of his situation; but not a cowardly thought invades his bosom. He takes his resolution on the instant. He determines to elude his enemies if possible; but if not, he resolves to die like a warrior. He puts in requisition every wile and stratagem of which he is master. His eye is incessantly on the watch, and his ear is bent to catch every sound that floats on the breeze. At length he discovers an Indian. He knows him for a foe by the paint on his face, and his peculiar headdress. Our warrior crouches low, takes a deadly aim, and brings [Last page or pages missing from December 13, 1830, installment of the original manuscript.]

December 17th, 1830.

Esteemed friend:

I resume the task which I left unfinished (or rather untouched) a few days since, in an attempt to prove that our vernacular tongue is more expressive than the English. Should you coincide with me in opinion who shall gainsay our decision? It may indeed be said that the parties interested will generally decide in their own favour. But let the question for the present rest.

Four or five years ago, a young Choctaw of pleasing countenance and modest deportment applied to me for employment. I was struck with his address, and wished to test his habits of industry. He worked with us faithfully during the busy part of the season, and with the avails of his labour, purchased a good rifle and ammunition, and started west of the Mississippi. During his stay with us, I found he was remarkably intelligent for his opportunities. He did not speak a word of English. His father and mother, as he informed me, were both dead; and he had but few near relatives living. He had been charged with witchcraft by a conjurer of his neighborhood — (I am glad this absurd superstition is wearing away among the Choctaws) and had been obliged to fly from the nation to save his life. This young man frequently entertained us with tales during the intervals of labour. He possessed an easy flowing elocution, and from his store of "Shookha noompas" [shukha anumpa, 'folk tales (lit. 'hog talk')']one evening told us the following story, which I will entitle

The Spectre and the Hunter,

A Legend of the Choctaws.

No people have been more noted for their courage and their superior skill in every manly exercise than the Choctaws. They are brave warriors, they are successful hunters, and in the Ball play they have had no rivals. Young men now are not what their fathers have been. Old men tell us, that in their day, no man could claim to speak with authority in council who had not faced an enemy. None could claim the smiles of a woman who had not proved his skill in the Ball play; and if he happened to be unsuccessful in hunting, it was vain for him to think of a wife. He became the butt of general ridicule

and the theme of many a jest. Even old women would join in the chorus, and jeeringly invite him to stay at home and mind the pots.

In those days—(it was when our fathers were young)—lived Ko-way-hoom-mah [koi humma, 'red wildcat']. He was called the Red Tiger for he had the strength and agility of that dreaded animal, and his skill and cunning were equal to his strength. Had he seen battle?—The scalps of six Wa-sha-she [Wasashe, 'Osage'] attested it. Had he proved himself a dexterous hunter?—old women lifted their children to gaze at him as he passed, and young women hung their heads and blushed as he approached them. In Ball play he had long reigned the unquestioned champion of his district. Ko-way-hoom-mah [koi humma, 'red wildcat'], then, walked the earth fearless of man or beast. He even derided the power of the spirits. He questioned the existence of It-tay-bo-lays [iti boli, 'an imaginary creature or phantasm']. An imaginary creature or phantasm and Nan-ish-ta-hool-los [nanishtahullo, 'witch'], and as to Shil-loops [shilup, 'ghost'] he said he had never seen them, —then why should he fear them? —Dangerous it is to trifle with beings that walk unseen among us.

Ko-way-hoom-mah [koi humma, 'red wildcat'] once started out on a hunting excursion. He had an excellent rifle, and he carried with him a little cold flour, and some jerked venison. His only companion was a large white dog which attended him in all his rambles. The dog was a cherished favorite, and shared in all his master's privations and successes. He was the social companion of the hunter by day, and his watchful guard by night.

The hunter had travelled far during the day, and as night approached, he took up camp in a spot that bore every indication of an excellent hunting ground. Deer tracks

were seen in abundance, turkey were heard clucking in various directions as they retired to their roosting places. Ko-way-hoom-mah [koi humma, 'red wildcat'] kindled a fire, and having shared a portion of his provisions with his dog, he spread his deer skin and blanket by the crackling fire, and mused on the adventures of the day already past, and on the probable success of the ensuing one. It was a bright star-light night; the air was calm, and a slight frost which was falling, rendered the fire comfortable and cheering. His dog lay crouched and slumbering at his feet, and from his stifled cries, seemed dreaming of the chase. Everything seemed to soothe the feelings of our hunter, and to prolong that pleasant train of associations which the beauty of the night and the anticipations of the morrow were calculated to inspire. At length, when his musings were assuming their indefinite and dreamy state which precedes a sounder slumber, he was startled by a distant cry that thrilled on his ear, and roused him into instant watchfulness. He listened with breathless attention, and in a few minutes he again heard the cry—keen—long—and piercing, as that which the Tik-ba-hay-kah [tikbaheka, 'leader'] gives in the dance preceding the Ball play. The dog gave a low, plaintive, and ominous howl. Ko-way-hoom-mah [koi humma, 'red wildcat'] felt uneasy. Can it be a lost hunter?—was the inquiry which suggested itself. Surely not; for a hunter with his rifle, and flint and steel, feels lost nowhere. What then can it be?—with these reflections, our hunter stepped forth, gathered more fuel, and again replenished his fire. Again came the cry, — keen— long, — and painfully thrilling as before — the voice was evidently approaching; — and again the dog raised a low and mournful howl. Ko-way-hoom-mah [koi humma, 'red wildcat'] then felt the blood curdling to his heart, and folding his blanket around him, he seated himself by the fire and fixed his eye intently in the direction from which he

expected the approach of his startling visitor. In a few minutes he heard the approach of footsteps; in another minute, a ghastly shape made its appearance and advanced towards the fire. It seemed to be the figure of a hunter like himself. Its form was tall and gaunt—its features livid and unearthly. A tattered blanket was girded round his waist, and covered his shoulders; and he had what seemed to have been a rifle, the barrel corroded with rust, the stock decayed and rotted, and covered here and there with mushrooms. The spectre advanced to the fire, and seemed to shiver with cold. He stretched forth one hand and then the other to the fire, and as he did so he fixed his hollow and glassy eye on Ko-way-hoom-mah [koi humma, 'red wildcat'] and a slight smile lighted up his livid countenance, but no word did he utter.

Ko-way-hoom-mah's [koi humma, 'red wildcat'] sensations may be imagined. He felt his flesh and hair creep, and the blood freezing in his veins; yet with instinctive Indian courtesy, he presented his deer skin as a seat for his grim visitor. The spectre waved his hand and shook his head in refusal. He stepped aside and plucked up a parcel of briers from an adjacent thicket, spread them by the fire, and on this thorny couch he stretched himself and seemed to court repose.

Our hunter was petrified with mingled fear and astonishment. His eyes continued to be riveted on the strange and ghastly being stretched before him, and he was only awakened from this trance of horror by the voice of his faithful dog. "Arise," said the dog, suddenly and supernaturally gifted with speech. "Arise and flee for your life. The spectre now slumbers; should you also slumber you are lost. Arise and flee, while I stay and watch." — Ko-way-hoom-mah [koi humma, 'red wildcat'] arose and stole away from the fire. Having advanced a few hundred paces he stopped to listen. All was still silent,

and with a beating heart, he continued his stealthy and rapid flight. Again he listened, and again with renewed confidence he pursued his rapid course, until he had gained several miles on his route homewards. Feeling at length a sense of safety, he paused to recover breath on the brow of a lofty hill. The night was still calm and serene. The stars shone above him with steady lustre, and as Ko-way-hoom-mah [koi humma, 'red wildcat'] gazed upwards, he breathed freely, and felt every apprehension vanish. Alas! on the instant the distant baying of his dog struck on his ear. With a thrill of general apprehension, he bent his ear to listen, and the appalling cry of his dog now more distinctly audible, convinced him that the spectre must then be in full pursuit. Again he fled with accelerated speed over hill, over plain, through swamps and thickets, until once more he paused by the side of a deep and rapid river. The heavy baying of his dog told him too truly that his fearful pursuer was close at hand. One minute he stood for breath, and then he plunged into the stream. But scarcely had he gained the center, when the spectre appeared on the bank and; plunged in after him, closely followed by the panting dog. Ko-way-hoom-mah's [koi humma, 'red wildcat'] apprehensions now amounted to agony. He fancied he saw the hollow and glassy eye balls of his pursuer glaring above the water and that his skeleton hand was already outstretched to grapple with him. With a cry of horror, he was about giving up the struggle for life, and sinking beneath the waves, when his faithful dog, with a fierce yell, seized upon his master's enemy. After a short and desperate struggle, they both sunk, the waters settled over them, and our exhausted hunter reached the shore in safety.

Ko-way-hoom-mah [koi humma, 'red wildcat'] became an altered man. He shunned the dance and the Ball play, and his former hilarity gave place to a settled

melancholy. In about a year after his strange adventure, he joined a war party against a distant enemy and never returned.

_____ _____ _____

Such, my dear sir, is the substance of the tale as related to me, and as I review what I have written, it seems to me faint and feeble compared with the animated and vivid touches of my Choctaw narrator; — another evidence which I might assign of the superior force of our vernacular, were I not aware that it might be said (perhaps very justly) that I am ignorant of the force and power of the English language, and, therefore, not a competent judge. But let that pass, and in conclusion, believe me to be

Ever sincerely yours

P.P. Pitchlynn }
Big Prairie}

J. L. McDonald

P. S. By the by, I once read a singular story of one Rip Van Winkle, who went out hunting, and feeling somewhat fatigued, lay down to take a nap. His nap it seems proved a long one; for when he awoke, he found his gun covered with mushrooms. I remember having been particularly struck with the "mushroom gun" in my Indian's story, — and I think I can safely affirm he had never heard of Rip Van Winkle.

--END OF ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT--

Glossary of Choctaw Terms in J. L. McDonald's Spectre Essay

It-tay-bo-lays (Iti boli). An imaginary creature or phantasm.

Ko-way-hoom-mah (koi humma). Red wildcat.

Nan-ish-ta-hool-los (nanishtahullo). Witch.

Shil-loops (shilup). Ghost.

Tik-ba-hay-kah (tikbaheka). Leader or conductor; leader of the dance before the Ball play.

Wa-sha-she (Wasashe). Osage.