

Key Vocabulary

self-determination

Adams-Onís Treaty

Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Great American Desert

traditionalists

animism

Indian Removal Act

Trail of Tears

Treaty of New Echota

Treaty of Doaksville

Worcester v. Georgia

Trail of Blood on Ice

Battle of Honey Springs

First Kansas Colored Infantry Regiment

Learning Outcomes:

The learner will be able to...

- Compare and contrast the impact of European and American explorations in Oklahoma.
- Describe the unique cultural and political organization of the Five Tribes in the southeastern United States.
- Discuss how the southeastern Native nations prepared for and resisted removal prior to the Indian Removal Act.
- Explain the motivations for the forced removal of American Indians and the passage of the Indian Removal Act.
- Summarize the impact that the Civil War had on tribal control of lands in Indian Territory.

Compelling Question:

- How have voluntary and involuntary migrations shaped Oklahoma's history?

Chapter Overview

Following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, US expeditions into what would become Oklahoma resulted in a federal presence and federal vision about land use. The US government forcibly removed the Five Tribes from their ancestral homelands in the southeast United States to Indian Territory. After relocation, the Five Tribes rebuilt their homes and communities while also navigating tense relationships with other Tribal nations. As learners will read, by the 1860s, the Civil War forced tribes to choose sides between the Union and the Confederacy.

"We are overwhelmed. Our hearts are sickened," wrote Principal Chief John Ross of the Cherokee Nation to the US Congress in 1836. "We are deprived of membership in the human family!" Ross feared that new government policies would leave his nation with "neither land, nor home, nor resting place." He tried without success to appeal to the sense of "justice, the magnanimity, the compassion" of Congress.



Fig. 3.1: Principal Chief John Ross served the Cherokee Nation for nearly forty years. Ross was against removal to Indian Territory. He wanted his people to remain in their homelands in the Southeast. In addition, Ross wanted the US government to uphold treaties that guaranteed their tribal lands. When removal did come, Ross led Cherokee citizens from their homelands to Cherokee lands in present-day northeastern Oklahoma.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Exploration, Removal, and Civil War

UNIT 1

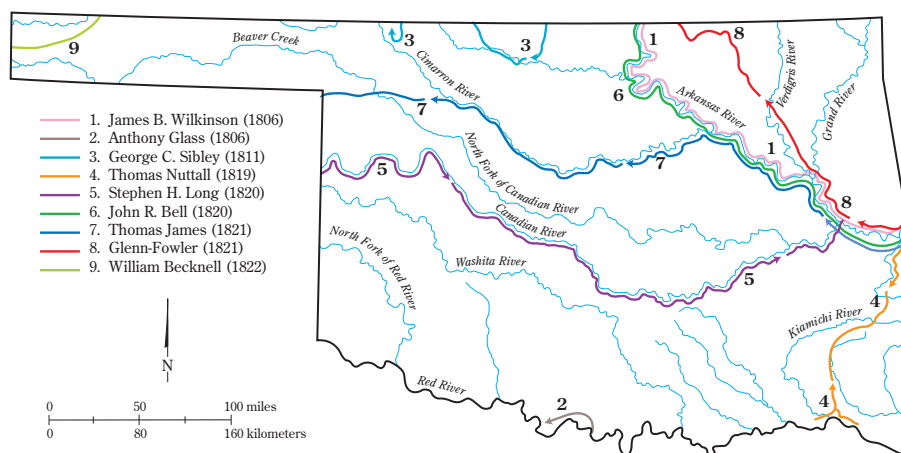
While Ross wrote this letter to protest the removal of the Cherokee from their ancestral homelands in Georgia and Alabama, it could just as easily have been written thirty years later following another loss of Cherokee land in Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma) after the Civil War. His letter illustrates the devastating impact of US policies on Cherokees and other Native nations. The Louisiana Purchase, removal of tribes, and the American Civil War each in their own way directly led to the loss of tribal land and attacks on tribal sovereignty and **self-determination** (the right to govern oneself).

In the early 1800s, competing ideas about land led to significant changes. The Louisiana Purchase opened the door to exploration and excitement about “new” land that could be offered to settlers and mined for its natural resources. At the same time, the Louisiana Purchase gave the US federal government the opportunity to use some of that land for the forced removal of Indigenous people living in the Southeast. This chapter examines the period following the Louisiana Purchase and how that transaction shaped the formation of Oklahoma. It explores the voluntary and forced nature of exploration, relocation, and adaptation to present-day Oklahoma. It shows the implications of these developments on Indigenous people and nations, including the southeastern tribes, commonly referred to as the Five Tribes before and after removal. Finally, it describes the impact of the American Civil War on Indian Territory.

US Exploration

Shortly after Congress approved the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, President Jefferson ordered numerous expeditions to chart the vast new territory. The land known as the Louisiana Territory was quickly carved into separate, smaller territories and eventually states. Present-day Oklahoma, for example, was part of several territories over time, some for a very short period. Oklahoma went from being part of the Louisiana Territory to being part of the Arkansas Territory to becoming Indian Territory and then the twin territories of Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory, and finally the state of Oklahoma. It is important to remember that the boundaries that define present-day Oklahoma were very much in flux during much of the nineteenth century. This uncertainty was especially problematic for expeditions prior to 1819. The southern border between Louisiana Purchase land and Spanish-controlled areas, including present-day Texas, was in dispute. Much of the land along the Oklahoma–Texas border was not yet fully mapped by the Spanish, French, or Americans, which made efforts to agree on boundaries even more difficult. Indigenous knowledge about the land and environment went largely untapped as this process unfolded.

During the first two decades of the nineteenth century, several expeditions traveled through what would become Oklahoma.



Map 3.1: European and US explorers, 1806–1822. This map includes the routes taken by George Sibley, Thomas Nuttall, Stephen Long, and John Bell.

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In the first expedition in 1806, US army captain Richard Sparks, along with a group of infantrymen and local guides, encountered many obstacles along the Red River and in the Wichita villages on either side of the river. However, Spanish forces brought an end to the Sparks Expedition almost before it started by claiming that the group was trespassing on Spanish land. That same year a second expedition also set its sights on the area that would become Oklahoma. The Pike–Wilkinson Expedition eventually split into two groups, with James Wilkinson leading men into Oklahoma while Zebulon Pike’s group ventured farther west. Wilkinson and his men encountered Osages and noted the region’s potential resources, including waterways and the Great Salt Plains, as the site would later be called. Despite struggling with freezing temperatures and hazardous conditions, Wilkinson expressed optimism in the reports he wrote about the newly purchased land.

Wilkinson's findings led to another expedition whose purpose was specifically to study the salt plains. In 1811, George Sibley visited the vast salt flats in the present-day counties of Woods and Alfalfa.



Fig. 3.2: George Sibley led expeditions to present-day Woods and Alfalfa counties in northwestern Oklahoma to examine the Great Salt Plains in 1811 and later to survey the Santa Fe Trail. The Sibley expedition to the Great Salt Plains, called the Grand Saline at the time, was led by an Osage man named Sans Orielle. Sibley described the salt-producing region as “resembling a large pond of water covered with rough ice,” or white salt. You can visit the Great Salt Plains from April 1 to October 15 to “dig for diamonds,” or selenite crystals.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Sibley wrote enthusiastically about both the high quality and quantity of salt. In addition to finding salt in Woods and Alfalfa counties, explorers found it in several other counties in the northwestern part of present-day Oklahoma, including Harmon, Beckham, and Woodward. These were significant discoveries because the salt could easily be transported after it was collected. Oklahoma stood well poised, it seemed, to become important to the US national economy, due to its rich natural resources, including rivers that served as a useful means of travel and transporting goods.

Both the Wilkinson and Sibley expeditions took place in the more northern portions of present-day Oklahoma, and so their members did not have to worry about disputed borders in the Spanish-controlled territories to the south. Pike's portion of the expedition did have cause for worry, though. As Pike and his men headed west toward present-day Colorado, they were captured by Spanish soldiers and imprisoned for several months before they were released.

In 1819, the United States and Spain signed the **Adams-Onís Treaty**. Among other things, this treaty defined the southern border of the Louisiana Purchase and established the Red River as the border between present-day Oklahoma and present-day Texas. Some dispute remained for another one hundred years because existing maps of the Red River were incomplete at the time the two countries signed the agreement. The treaty did, however, result in fewer conflicts between US explorers and Spanish forces. After the signing of the treaty, more expeditions took place, including two especially significant ones. One of those expeditions was led by the scientist Thomas Nuttall.

Section 1

Exploration, Removal, and Civil War

UNIT 1

The second noteworthy expedition during this time was led by US Army Major Stephen Long and US Army captain John R. Bell. Despite multiple favorable descriptions from Nuttall and other explorers, the Long–Bell Expedition, which took place during the summer of 1820, reached very different conclusions. As it happened, the expedition involved a series of unfortunate experiences, none more so than encountering a very hot and very dry Oklahoma summer. When the voyagers reached the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains, the expedition split into two groups. Major Long took his men south looking for the source of the Arkansas River and Captain Bell headed back east with his men along the Arkansas River. The heat became nearly unbearable for both groups. The hot, dry conditions made it difficult to find enough food. As Long’s men ventured into present-day Oklahoma, he called the area the “great desert” on the map he drew. The label would stick, and Oklahoma would become known for many years as the **Great American Desert**.

With conditions worsening, it was very hard for Long to protect his men and their animals from heat exhaustion. As if that was not bad enough, the group had a terrible time with seed ticks, as recorded by one of Long’s men, a botanist named Edwin James. James described the extreme discomfort caused by “the almost invisible seed ticks.” He wrote that the tiny but insistent parasites “excite such intolerable itching that the sufferer cannot avoid aggravating the evil by his efforts to relieve himself of the offending cause.” James had more positive things to say about the wildlife they encountered, but the heat and lack of rainfall had a decidedly negative impact on how Bell and Long viewed Oklahoma. To make matters worse, Long’s group mistook the Canadian River for the Red River. They did not realize the mistake until they arrived back at the Arkansas River, never making it as far south as they had imagined.

Perhaps the most significant outcome of the Long expedition was the focus on the desert-like conditions the group encountered. Long referred to parts of Oklahoma as “disgusting, incurable bareness and dreary with temperatures up to 100 degrees.” Decades later, Nuttall’s more positive view of Oklahoma, especially of its diverse ecology, would lead people to reconsider Long’s insistence that the area was not fit for settlement.

It is important to consider the time of year these expeditions took place and the impact of weather conditions on the explorers—and how their experiences affected future perceptions of Oklahoma. The belief that Oklahoma was not suitable for farming or settlement is part of why it would be set aside as a place to relocate Indigenous people who were living on what was viewed as far more desirable land. To understand how that process played out, it is first helpful to discuss the culture of the southeastern tribes who were removed to Indian Territory (in present-day Oklahoma) in the 1830s.

Southeastern Native Nations

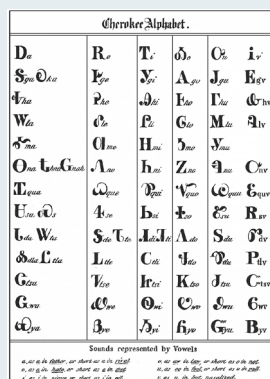
While explorers were busy documenting their positive and negative views of Oklahoma, they could not have known that what they said and wrote would have dire consequences for scores of Indigenous people living nowhere near the so-called Great American Desert. This was especially true for those living in the Southeast. The southeastern Native nations or Five Tribes are the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Muscogee (Creek), Seminole, and Cherokee peoples. Well before they first had contact with Europeans, the tribes that were forced to abandon their ancestral homelands in the Southeast had thriving communities with sophisticated structures of government, commerce, and society. Many members of these tribes incorporated aspects of European culture following the American Revolution in the late eighteenth century. They hoped their adaptations would help protect them from further loss of land and attacks on their culture and way of life. Members of the southeastern tribes married non-Native people, and these unions, especially between white men and Indigenous women, led to close familial bonds and cultural exchanges. However, adopting the cultural and economic practices of white Americans was not enough to protect these Native nations from ongoing dispossession. The US government, in other words, took ownership or possession of land that belonged to the tribes.

For close to two hundred years, the Choctaw, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Muscogee (Creek), and Seminole nations were known as the Five “Civilized” Tribes. The term “civilized” came into use because in the minds of many white observers, the governments, economic structures (including the ownership of slaves), and cultures of the Five Tribes seemed to closely resemble those of European settlers. The Five Tribes largely, though to varying degrees, tried to accommodate white settlement and growth in the Southeast by adopting aspects of non-Indigenous culture and entering into treaties on a government-to-government basis. That said, they often blended their own cultures and beliefs with those of white men and women rather than replacing them. And some rejected these efforts altogether. Traditionalists within each of these Native nations remained dedicated to preserving their own traditional beliefs, practices, and ways of knowing.

Members of the Five Tribes held varied beliefs and practices but also had much in common. They were (and remain so today) **matrilineal** tribes, which means that clan identity, community affiliation, and tribal membership passed from mothers to their children. It also meant that the oldest woman in a family had control over the home and that when men and women married, they became part of the woman’s family of origin. Another common practice was that the father and brothers of women played a significant role in making decisions about a woman’s children, including advising on marriage and other important matters. This was very different from most European traditions where a woman’s identity (political, legal, familial, and so forth) was determined mainly by the identity of her husband.

Another difference between the southeastern tribes and Europeans had to do with religion. The religious systems of the tribes were—and are to this day as well—rooted in their creation stories as well as a belief in **animism** (the idea that all things have a spiritual essence). Southeastern tribes also shared a belief in three worlds: the upper, middle, and lower. The upper world was occupied by a divine force or forces, which could include a single creator or multiple spirits or gods. For Cherokees, the upper world was occupied by numerous male and female gods who looked out for the welfare of the people and provided them with gifts to improve their way of living. Muscogees on the other hand believed in a single divine creator but also, like the Cherokees, honored the spiritual connection between all living things. The lower world (also called the underworld) was inhabited by ancestors as well as monsters. This lower world could be chaotic, but it was not all good or bad. The middle world, or this world, was where people were living in the present. It was the world occupied by Indigenous people as well as those they encountered. While belief systems were not uniform among the southeastern tribes, there were more similarities than differences.

Over time, some tribal members, including many leaders, made the conscious decision to adopt more European or American ways of living. They did this for several reasons. Some liked the new ways and wanted to include them. Some believed that if they were more like white Americans, they would be protected from having their land taken from them. Some believed that having a written language and learning to read and write English was an important means for them to understand and negotiate with American leaders. The best example of this is the creation of the Cherokee syllabary by Cherokee linguist Sequoyah.



*Courtesy of the Capitol Art
Collection, Oklahoma Arts Council.*

*From James Mooney, Myths of the
Cherokees (Washington, DC: Bureau
of American Ethnology, 1900), 113.*

In 1824 Sequoyah received a medal from the Cherokee National Council to honor his creation of the Cherokee syllabary. Four years later, the Cherokee Nation chose Sequoyah to serve as a tribal delegate in Washington, DC. While there, he sat for a portrait by artist Charles Bird King. Sequoyah's cabin, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, still stands near the city of Sallisaw in the Cherokee Nation.

Some members of the Five Tribes made economic gain a new priority. For example, the Five Tribes developed plantation-style farming and used enslaved labor. The rise of cotton, a labor-intensive crop known, increased the demand for enslaved labor. It also allowed some members of the Five Tribes to become very wealthy. Historians have had many debates about whether members of the Five Tribes and southern whites treated enslaved people in similar or different ways. No doubt individual enslavers (both Indigenous and white) treated enslaved people in varying ways. What is clear is that this form of enslavement, which treated human beings as property, was raced-based and inherited from one generation to the next, and there was little opportunity for enslaved people to escape their situation. The unfree status of enslaved people, which lasted for centuries in the United States before it was outlawed, continues to complicate discussions about race and racism today. And the formerly unfree status of Black people enslaved by the Five Tribes continues to complicate questions about tribal membership, politics, and identity.

The Five Tribes had complex political and economic structures and thriving societies in the southeastern United States, and this continued into the early 1800s. The Cherokee Nation, for example, adopted a constitution in 1827 that was based on the US Constitution. By the early 1820s, however, states like Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi began pushing hard for the federal government to move Native nations to parts of the new Louisiana Purchase territory. The states wanted to open up more land for white southerners. They made multiple efforts to convince tribes to relocate, and those efforts were met with mixed results. Some Indigenous leaders believed that if they did not agree to move, they would be forced to do so under worse terms than they were being offered. Others were committed to staying in the Southeast. They either thought negotiation was still possible or that they could simply reject efforts to force them to leave their land. The debate over relocation led to bitter divisions and mistrust both within Native nations and between Native nations and the US government. Some individuals belonging to the Five Tribes left well ahead of forced removal. The Muscogee, Cherokee, and Chickasaw Nations all had members already living in Indian Territory by the 1820s. Eventually all the Five Tribes (with the exception of some bands who broke away to avoid going) were relocated to present-day Oklahoma. The process of removal varied among tribes, but it was a deeply painful experience for most individuals who experienced it.



Fig. 3.6: The *Cherokee Phoenix*, published as a bilingual newspaper in Cherokee and English, was the first newspaper to be published by Native Americans. For its Cherokee text, it used the syllabary created by Sequoyah. The first issue was produced in New Echota, Georgia, in 1828.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

beginning in the 1840s, the Cherokee Nation launched a new weekly newspaper, the *Cherokee Advocate*, in Cherokee and English. The newspaper was published in Tahlequah, the new Cherokee capital, and continued until 1906, when the federal government dissolved the Cherokee Nation. The *Cherokee Advocate* resumed after the restoration of the Cherokee government in 1975. Then, in 2007, the newspaper took on the name of the nation's original newspaper, the *Cherokee Phoenix*. The Phoenix covers Cherokee Nation news and events to this day. until 1906, when the federal government dissolved the Cherokee Nation. The *Cherokee Advocate* resumed after the restoration of the Cherokee government in 1975. Then, in 2007, the newspaper took on the name of the nation's original newspaper, the *Cherokee Phoenix*. The *Phoenix* covers Cherokee Nation news and events to this day.

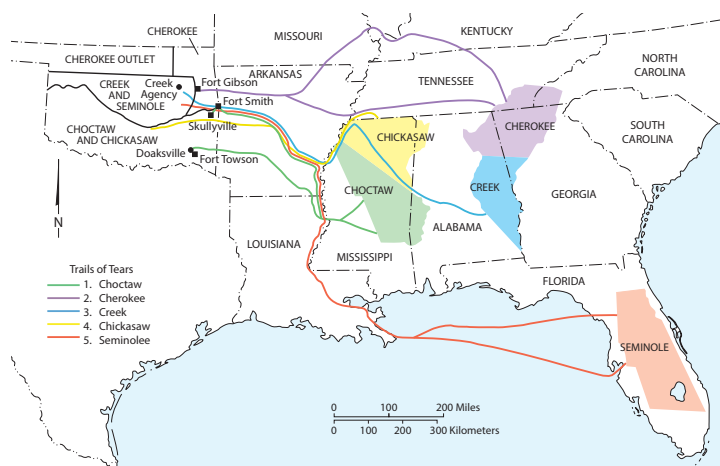
Cherokee Newspapers

The Cherokee Nation established the *Cherokee Phoenix* in 1828. Published in both English and Cherokee using Sequoyah's Cherokee syllabary, it was the first Indigenous newspaper to be published in the United States. The General Council of the Cherokee Nation worked with Samuel Worcester, one of approximately sixty white Christian missionaries living among the Cherokee people in the 1820s and 1830s, to create the newspaper, and Cherokee statesman Elias Boudinot was selected as the paper's first editor. Worcester owned a print shop in New Echota, Georgia, capital of the Cherokee Nation. He was already known for his work in translating the Bible into Cherokee using Sequoyah's syllabary. In the 1830s Boudinot and Principal Chief John Ross used the newspaper to share their views against the Indian Removal Act of 1830.

After removal to Indian Territory and

Removal

Fort Gibson played an important role at several stages of removal and resettlement in Indian Territory. Fort personnel served as mediators between Native nations, including the Osages and Cherokees. As outside tribes such as the Cherokees moved to the area, the Osages came under pressure from the US government to revise their previous treaty agreements. This resulted in the Osage Treaty of 1825, which required that the Osages give up all land in Missouri and Kansas. The treaty stipulated that the Osages would move to land between the Arkansas River and the Kansas border. A specific clause allowed Osage people to hunt freely in lands to the west. Fort Gibson was abandoned by the US military in 1857 only to be reactivated during the Civil War. Fort Gibson later served as the headquarters of the Dawes Commission for their work in enrolling members of the Five Tribes. Commission members focused on Cherokee Freedpeople, formerly enslaved people and their descendants.



Map 3.2: The removal of the Five Tribes. Following removal to Indian Territory, the Five Tribes spent much time and investment rebuilding their nations. They opened new schools, businesses, and churches.

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The pressure on southeastern tribes to move to Oklahoma increased throughout the 1820s. In the minds of those who pushed for removal, the Great American Desert, as Oklahoma continued to be characterized, seemed like the right place for Indigenous tribes to go. The Muscogees were among the first to agree to western removal. They signed the Treaty of Indian Springs in 1825, which was replaced the following year by the Treaty of Washington). The new treaty was less harsh and allowed the Muscogees to keep a small amount of land on the border of Alabama and Georgia. Most Muscogee people opposed the move, but they worried that they had no real choice. When the Muscogee (Creek) Nation tried to fight the move, things only got worse for those who refused to leave. In 1832, tribal leaders signed the Treaty of Cusseta, which required that the Muscogees give up their remaining small portion of land

in Alabama and Georgia in exchange for land in present-day Oklahoma. Tribal leaders then realized that little could be done to stop the forced removal from taking place. The federal government had grown impatient with trying to convince the remaining Muscogee people and other members of the Five Tribes to exchange their land in the Southeast for land in present-day Oklahoma. Some members of the Five Tribes had already relocated. However, the government's efforts at persuasion were not well received by most of the remaining members of the Five Tribes and became a source of great division within the tribes. The Muscogee (Creek) Tribal Council, for example, passed a law that sentenced tribal members to death if they ceded (gave up) Muscogee land without the approval of the council. By then it was too late, though. Today some Muscogee historians debate whether the law was formally adopted. Nevertheless, the law as it was initially proposed still provides insight into the painful nature of persistent attacks on land and sovereignty.

In order to complete the process and end any genuine effort to persuade tribes, President Andrew Jackson signed the **Indian Removal Act** into law in 1830. This gave the president the authority to oversee the removal of tribes from one area of the country to another. It also meant that tribal leaders had little choice but to negotiate the best treaties they could to ensure that their people would be able to survive the move and have the resources necessary to rebuild. Over the course of the next decade, the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Muscogee, and Seminole Nations endured multiple waves of dispossession and relocation to Oklahoma. The process unleashed great trauma and is often called the **Trail of Tears** because of the large amount of suffering and death that took place during the journeys. For example, Choctaw men, women, and children were forced to travel from Alabama and Mississippi to what would become Oklahoma during the bitter winter of 1831. They did not have enough food or warm clothing. Many people got sick and died. Other tribes had similar experiences. Muscogee people refer to their removal as their “road of misery and suffering.” These words reflect the deeply traumatic nature of their experience.

Following the signing of the **Treaty of New Echota** in 1835, which laid out the terms of Cherokee removal, approximately 25 percent of the people who left Georgia on the Trail of Tears died without ever completing the journey. The following year, in 1836, Seminoles began their removal process from Florida to what would become Oklahoma. A small number managed to stay behind but most ended up moving to present-day Oklahoma over the next few years. Most Chickasaw people left Mississippi in 1837 following the **Treaty of Doaksville**, which specified the terms of their removal. Even though Chickasaws were able to sell their land in Mississippi to pay for their removal (which they had no real choice but to do), they suffered in much the same way as did the other tribes. Today the Chickasaw Nation describes their removal to Oklahoma as “the most traumatic chapter in Chickasaw history.”

In 1832, two years after President Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act into law, the Supreme Court weighed in on the issue of state power over Native nations. In ***Worcester v. Georgia***, the Court ruled that Georgia did not have the right to impose its laws on tribal nations. Chief Justice John Marshall wrote that “Indian nations had always been considered as distinct independent political communities.” He added that they retained “their original natural rights as the undisputed possessors of the soil.” However, in the haste to take away Indigenous land, the sovereignty of Native nations was ignored. As we will see in later chapters, disputes concerning states’ rights versus tribal sovereignty continued to arise. The spirit of the 1832 Supreme Court decision resurfaced in the 2020 case *McGirt v. Oklahoma*, which is discussed in the final chapter of this book. However, at the time of the Court’s 1832 ruling, protecting tribal sovereignty from the encroachment of state power was not a national priority.



Despite the hardships of removal, the Five Tribes did in fact rebuild and flourish.

Fig. 3.7: Built in Park Hill, Cherokee Nation, in 1845, Hunter's Home was the plantation estate of George Murrell and his wife, Minerva Ross Murrell, niece of Principal Chief John Ross. The Murrells were among a class of wealthy Cherokee enslavers who lived in Indian Territory prior to the American Civil War. Other buildings on the property included cabins for more than forty enslaved people. Hunter's Home is the only remaining pre-Civil War plantation home in Oklahoma. The home is a National Historic Landmark and part of the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, members of the Five Tribes cultivated new farms, established new trade relationships, and explored and adapted to their new surroundings. Their exploration and adaptation to what would become Oklahoma took place as a result of dispossession and involuntary removal. Despite the involuntary nature of what brought them to Oklahoma, it is important to understand that the Five Tribes spent considerable time restoring their nations. They opened schools, businesses, and churches. They reestablished tribal governments. They sought new partnerships. And they held on to hope. They hoped that the worst was behind them and that they would finally be left alone to thrive in their new homes. Unfortunately, further struggles were ahead; the entire country was on the brink of the worst war in its history.

The Civil War

When the Civil War erupted in 1861, not many people were thinking about Indian Territory. The country was torn apart. More Americans died in the four-year conflict than all other wars in American history combined. The death of more than 720,000 people in such a short span of time upended American life. Many wondered if the country would ever recover, would ever again be united.

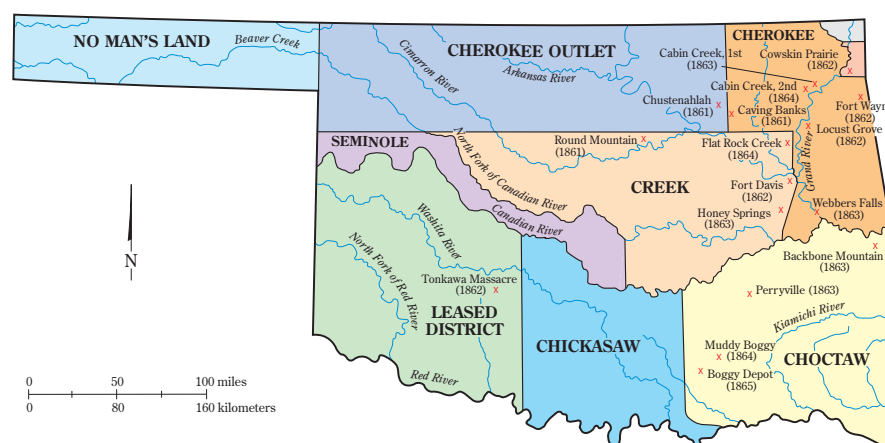
The Civil War

A major cause of the US Civil War (1861–1865) was the dispute over slavery. Before the war began in 1861, fierce debates took place in Congress and among Americans regarding the question of slavery and whether it would be legal to extend it into the new western territories. The Compromise of 1850 and the 1854 Kansas–Nebraska Act were important congressional agreements meant to preserve the Union and prevent a looming war. White southerners, especially those who held enslaved people, wanted to expand slavery. They believed slavery was at risk when Abraham Lincoln was elected president in 1860. Many white northerners, on the other hand, wanted to end slavery. Ultimately, southern states split from northern states and formed the Confederacy while the northern states remained in the Union.

Key battles included the First Battle of Bull Run, the Battle of Shiloh, the Battle of Antietam, the Battle of Gettysburg, and the Vicksburg Campaign. The Battle of Gettysburg took place in Pennsylvania and marked a turning point in the Civil War. It lasted three days and resulted in more than 50,000 casualties. Following defeats at Gettysburg and Vicksburg in 1863, the Confederacy suffered from loss of morale and yet continued fighting for almost two more years. During the Civil War more than 2 million people fought for the Union and 880,000 for the Confederacy. The four years of war took the lives of more than 720,000 people.

One important outcome of the Civil War was the end of legal slavery. In 1863, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared “that all persons held as slaves” in the rebellious territories “shall be freed.” The Thirteenth Amendment of the US Constitution, approved in 1865, made slavery illegal across the nation. Following the Civil War, the US economy continued to industrialize as the war-torn nation tried to heal.

The war tore apart families, friendships, and neighbors. Nowhere was this more apparent than among the Cherokee people. The bitter divide in the Cherokee Nation first occurred over removal when a faction of the tribe, led by John Ridge, signed the Treaty of New Echota. Elias Boudinot initially opposed removal, but changed his mind because he did not think it could be stopped. He focused instead on securing the best terms possible for the Cherokee people. Chief John Ross and his supporters, who were mostly traditionalists, had strongly opposed removal, but once in Indian Territory they made the most out of rebuilding. The onset of the Civil War led to renewed division.



Map 3.3: Civil War battle sites. More than one hundred small engagements or skirmishes took place in what would become Oklahoma. The most significant action took place at the Battle of Honey Springs in 1863.

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Ross remained a powerful leader on the eve of the Civil War. He called for the tribe to stay neutral. He worried about the consequences of choosing sides, any side. When pressed, he initially sided with the Confederacy but later switched sides to support the Union. Ross spent much of the war in Washington, DC, trying to secure support for the Cherokee Nation, whose people were suffering from hunger and violence. He remained principal chief of the Cherokee Nation until his death in 1866. In contrast, his rival, Stand Watie, who was elected chief by a band of his own followers, became a general for the Confederate army. (He was the last Confederate general to surrender.) However, the US government always recognized Ross as the legitimate leader of the Cherokee people. Other Native nations experienced similar divisions over the Civil War. In the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, Opothleyahola and his followers supported neutrality and were more inclined toward the Union while William McIntosh and his followers supported the Confederacy. In the winter of 1861, tensions became so great that Opothleyahola and his followers fled to Kansas for refuge. The journey of these Muscogees to Kansas (sometimes called the **Trail of Blood on Ice**) led to great suffering. A lack of supplies, extreme cold, and attacks from Confederate troops resulted in many deaths. The splits within both the Cherokee Nation and Muscogee (Creek) Nation illustrate how deep the divisions were not only within these two Native nations but throughout Indian Territory and indeed the whole country.

The war put Oklahoma tribes in an impossible situation. All were eventually forced to choose sides. For the Five Tribes, including the Cherokee Nation, slavery and the geographical location of their native homelands meant that they were culturally closer to the South than the North. However, it was the South that had pushed so hard for them to leave their ancestral homelands. At different points during the war members of each of the Five Tribes fought for both sides. And at one time or another, especially early in the war, members of the Five Tribes and the Confederacy entered into alliances. These did not always represent the full will of the tribe (especially in the case of the Seminoles, Cherokees, and Muscogees), who had regiments that fought on both sides). Some of the tribes switched sides over the course of the war.

Early on in the war, tribes in Indian Territory, such as the Wichitas, Caddos, Plains Comanches, Quapaws, Osages, Senecas, and Shawnees, allied themselves with the Confederacy, but as the war continued many of them changed their loyalties, just as members of the Five Tribes did. They did so for a variety of reasons. Some saw the switch as an act of sovereignty while others made the shift in opposition to slavery or because they resented the mistreatment they received at the hands of Confederate forces. It is important to remember that Indigenous people in Indian Territory were citizens of their Native nations, not citizens of the United States. Their independent nationhood further complicated their place in the conflict between the North and South. They were caught in the middle, and ultimately suffered a great deal.



Fig. 3.8: This sketch from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* depicts the end of the Battle of Honey Springs, which took place on July 17, 1863, and was the largest Civil War engagement in Indian Territory.

Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

More than one hundred small engagements or skirmishes took place in present-day Oklahoma, but the most significant conflict was the **Battle of Honey Springs**, which took place on the lands of the Honey Springs settlement in the Muscogee (Creek) Nation on July 17, 1863. Indigenous fighters outnumbered whites on both sides of the battle.

The Confederate Indian Brigade was led by Brigadier General Douglas H. Cooper while Major General James G. Blunt commanded the First Division Army of the Frontier, fighting on the side of the Union. Over 9,000 men participated in the battle, including the First Kansas Colored Infantry Regiment, an all-Black Union Army regiment. Union forces declared victory in the battle, suffering fewer than 100 casualties while they stopped the advance of Confederates, who suffered nearly 500 casualties.

Section 3

Exploration, Removal, and Civil War

UNIT 1

Ultimately, the war proved just as destructive for the tribes as it did for the rest of the country, if not more so. Indigenous people experienced the horrors of war firsthand no matter which side they served. Like many white Americans during the Civil War, Indigenous communities found themselves divided over which side they supported. And like others who lived through the Civil War, they too lost their belongings, suffered from food shortages, disease, and violence. They lost family members and faced great uncertainty. Thousands of civilians from the Five Tribes lived in refugee camps in the bordering states of Texas (Choctaws and Chickasaws) or Kansas (Muscogees, Cherokees, and Seminoles). Roughly 25 percent of the population of the Five Tribes died during the Civil War from fighting, starvation, and diseases like cholera.

Supporters on both sides sometimes sought opportunities to exact revenge against the opposing side. Violence became an everyday reality for many. Sallie Peacheater Manus (Cherokee) grew up in Indian Territory and was a young woman during the Civil War. Her father had opposed removal but sided with the Union during the war. He came home after losing his eyesight, and Sallie Manus recalled in an interview having to hide her father in a cave, then covering the opening with brush and grass, to protect him from Confederate supporters looking for revenge against those who supported the Union. She also described the food shortages that she and others endured during the war. She said that dead soldiers were buried in such shallow graves that hungry scavengers, including hogs, would dig them up and eat them. Eventually, Manus and others had to stop eating pork because the quality of the hog meat became so poor. This was only one of many problems Indigenous women faced during the war. There were several times when what little food she had was stolen from her by hungry troops or roaming thieves.

After the Union regained control of Fort Gibson in 1863, Sallie Manus was able to travel to the fort for supplies. "I was given a great number of shoes and other things," she recalled, and she was told to share with her neighbors what she did not need herself. When she returned home and began distributing shoes and supplies, she "had those starving women, some of whom were barefoot, looking up to me like I were a God." Sallie Peacheater Manus survived the Civil War but narrowly escaped death on more than one occasion. Violence against both men and women grew commonplace. She recalled a harrowing experience where she encountered a group of Confederate soldiers who were about to shoot her. A former neighbor, who was a minister serving with the Confederacy, recognized her and stopped the soldiers from shooting her, saying, "This war will not be won by killing the women, I want her released." Others were not so lucky. Many civilian women were brutalized and killed during the war.

At times the shared experience of deprivation blurred the lines between supporters of the Union and supporters of the Confederacy. Those who lived and remain in present-day Oklahoma during the Civil War suffered unimaginable hardships. And the end of the war ushered in a new era of difficulties regardless of which side Indigenous people had supported. After the war ended, even though some had been loyal to the Union or had switched sides to support the Union, members of the Five Tribes were harshly punished for their earlier support of the Confederacy. The Reconstruction Treaties of 1866 took land and other resources from them. The result was another phase of removal, where more tribes were forced to relocate to what would become Oklahoma. The treaties also set in motion the weakening of tribal governments and sovereignty.

Conclusion

The years between the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and the end of the Civil War in 1865 were critical to the development of what became Oklahoma. This was a place defined by both voluntary and involuntary exploration.

Early descriptions of the region on maps and in expedition reports had a major influence on the lives and destinies of its inhabitants. The “brilliant whiteness” of the salt plains and the abundant river systems sparked hope for economic development. The natural beauty described by Thomas Nuttall intrigued those interested in the complex habitats the land had to offer. But the characterization of Oklahoma as the Great American Desert justified the removal of Indigenous people of the Southeast to a place that would be theirs in perpetuity. Because no one else would want it, until they did.

The removal of the Five Tribes led to great suffering and inhumane treatment. It led to forced exploration of Oklahoma, where they would survive, adapt, and eventually thrive. Then came the most divisive and brutal war in American history. And no one emerged unscathed. The next chapter will examine the ways Reconstruction Treaties unleashed new suffering on the Five Tribes. The treaties led to another phase of removal. They led to the loss of tribal governments. They led to more land losses. They also opened up settlement opportunities for non-Indigenous people lured by the “promise” of Manifest Destiny and westward expansion.

Short Answer Questions

- 1 What boundaries did the Adams-Onís Treaty establish and which nations signed the treaty?
- 2 What was important about the work of botanist Thomas Nuttall?
- 3 What was the most significant result of US-led expeditions into Oklahoma? Explain why it was significant.
- 4 Identify two ways the southeastern tribes had similar cultural traditions.
- 5 What is one way the Indian Removal Act impacted the sovereignty of southeastern tribes?

Short Response Questions

- 1 Select two US expeditions to Oklahoma from the list below that you believe are most important. Explain where each expedition traveled, the information the expedition gathered, and the consequences of the expedition. In your response, be sure to explain how the expedition changed public perceptions of the land.

Pike-Wilkinson Expedition Sibley Expedition Nuttall Expedition Long-Bell Expedition
- 2 In what ways did the US Civil War create an “impossible situation” for tribal governments? In your response be sure to include how alliances shifted before and during the war.