



George Washington and the Chickasaw Nation, 1795

Author(s): A. L. Crabb

Source: *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Dec., 1932, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Dec., 1932), pp. 404-408

Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of Organization of American Historians

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1892758>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Organization of American Historians and Oxford University Press are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*

JSTOR

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

GEORGE WASHINGTON AND THE CHICKASAW NATION, 1795

EDITED BY A. L. CRABB

On August 22, 1795, President George Washington delivered a "talk" to a delegation of Chickasaws who visited the president to emphasize their need of protection from the continuous depredations of the Creeks as well as the insistent encroachments of the Spaniards. Washington forwarded a copy of the "talk," bearing his signature, to Brigadier-General James Robertson, his agent for Indian affairs in the Southwest.

It should be remembered that Washington was entirely conscious of the destructive power of war, and earnestly desired to avoid all conflicts whatever. He knew that the young republic could ill afford the use of its resources in carrying on war against the combined armies of the Cherokees and Creeks and that, in such issue, the enmity of the Spanish would likely be added. Furthermore, he was nine hundred miles from the trouble, and therefore perhaps inclined to underestimate its seriousness. The most troublesome of all the southern Indians were the Creeks, who had pillaged the white settlements from the beginning, and who, enraged at the Chickasaws because of their friendship for the whites, were carrying on raids against their villages. Timothy Pickering, secretary of war, in presenting the views of the administration as to relations with the Creek Indians had created a most unhappy feeling among the settlers of Cumberland. He had insisted that all punitive expeditions against the Creeks and Cherokees must be abandoned. He represented the government as suspecting that the whites were aggressors and that the Indians were more in need of protection against the whites than they against the Indians. Particularly, was Secretary Pickering incensed by the capture on September 13, 1794 of Nickajack, a stronghold of the Cherokees, and the ford where the Creeks crossed on their expeditions. The cap-

ture, which was achieved under Colonel James Ore, and by orders of General Robertson was in direct retaliation for countless massacres and scalplings which the two tribes were carrying on insistently. This invasion was contrary to the explicit prohibitions of the war department, and seems to have placed Governor Blount in a very delicate position with the authorities at Philadelphia, so that he promptly disavowed all connection with it. Entire responsibility then fell upon Robertson. The unanimity with which the settlers rallied to the support of Robertson must have given the governor some pause since two months later General Robertson received this letter from him.

Taking into view the many years the Creeks have continued to kill the Citizens of the District of Mero, without any Cause whatever of Justification, the Proceedings of the late Congress upon the first Memorial from this Territory, the many Murders and Thefts as stated in the second, as well as many Murders and Thefts committed since its date, and the situation the United States are placed in by the Victory of General Wayne, and the happy suppression of the Fort-Pitt Insurgency, I cannot suffer myself to doubt but the present Session of Congress, will Order an Army in the course of the next Spring or Summer sufficient to humble if not to destroy the Creek Nation, and thereby give peace to the Southwestern Frontiers, from the mouth of the St. Mary's to the Banks of the Ohio — I am with respect your

Obedient Servant

WM BLOUNT

All of these matters provoked some resentment on the part of Tennesseans against Washington. Andrew Jackson in the House of Representatives voted, with eleven others, "no" on a resolution of confidence in the administration. This irritation passed presently, and there is reason to believe that beyond a momentary sting Robertson even accepted with tolerance Washington's rebuke: "General Robertson did wrong in telling. . . ." The main force of the Tennessean's resentment fell upon Pickering, who seemed singularly indifferent to the predicament of the southern colonists.

It seems probable now that Washington's policy in the conduct of Indian affairs was wise and beneficent, but it is equally as clear that the settlers could not afford the practice of passive resistance.

Another factor aggravated the situation. The Spaniards, under command of Governor Gayoso of Natchez, erected a fort at Chickasaw Bluffs, now Memphis, late in June, 1795. This was plainly an affront to the Chickasaws, and to the United States, the fortification being within the acknowledged boundaries of that country. As a consequence, the delegation visited Robertson to protest jointly against the activities of the Creeks and the Spaniards. Both Blount and Robertson knew the tendency of Indian delegations to visit Tennessee officials merely preparatory to a longer, more desirable, and generally more fruitful visit to the "Great White Father" at Philadelphia. The expense of these junkets was, of course, provided by the government. Anticipating the request in this instance Governor Blount advised Robertson: "Turn them back from Nashville if you can. They confuse things up there." Robertson tried to "turn them back," but vainly. In the end he equipped them for the journey, and on the twenty-second day of August, 1795, Washington received them and delivered the "talk," which denied the main boon for which they prayed but apparently gave them much pleasure. They remained in Philadelphia ten days.

Washington directed Gayoso to remove the fortification at The Bluffs, but he did it with such superb diplomacy and patience as to secure the end desired at the cost of the least friction.

It is known that as time passed Washington's esteem of Robertson grew, and that he came to consider him as one of the great influences in the destiny of the nation.

The Talk of the President of the United States to Major William Colbert, John Brown the Younger and William McGillivray, Chickasaws, and Malcolm McGhee Interpreter, representing the Chickasaw Nation.¹

My Children

I have considered the written Talk from the Headmen of the Chickasaw Nation, which you delivered to me four — days ago. The subject I had before considered in consequence of the written talk presented to me last month by James Kemp and other Chickasaws, who were here with some Choctaws. As I pretty fully expressed my ideas upon it in the talk I addressed to them, I must refer you to it for the general an-

¹ This "Talk" is found in the James Robertson Collection belonging to the Library of Peabody College, Nashville.

swer to your present application. A copy of all the proceedings with James Kemp and his Companions was delivered to him for the information of the two Nations: but for your satisfaction I shall now deliver to you another.

My Children,

I sincerely regret the difficulties in which you are involved by the mistaken opinions which have been entertained of the intentions and obligations of the United States towards their friends the Chickasaws. It was never the design of the United States to interfere in the disputes of the Indian Nations among one another unless as friends to both parties, to reconcile them. In this way I shall do every thing in my power to serve the Chickasaw Nation. The Commissioner at the Conference at Nashville had no authority to promise any other interference. General Robertson did wrong in telling your nation last year that he expected the United States would send an army against the Creeks this summer. Your strong expectation of seeing such an army, and probably other encouragements of support, may have led you to strike the Creeks, which now occasions so much distress. It seems also that the Commissions which were given to a number of the Chickasaw Chiefs were not truly interpreted. They were expressly confined to operations against the Indians Northwest of the Ohio. —

My Children,

If I were to grant you the aid of my warriors, which you request, the consequence would be a general war between the United States and the whole Creek Nation. But the power of making such a war belongs to Congress (the Great Council of the United States) exclusively. I have no authority to begin such a war without their consent.

My humanity and particular friendship for the Chickasaws will not permit me to let them suffer from the want of provisions. Governor Blount will receive my orders on this subject.

The act of the Spaniards in taking possession of the Chickasaw Bluff is an unwarrantable aggression as well against the United States, as the Chickasaws to whom the land there belongs. I shall send talks, and do what else shall appear to me proper, to induce the Spanish King, or his Governor, to remove their people from that Station, and to make no more encroachments on your lands.

My Children,

There is one thing requested in the written talk you delivered to me, which perhaps may be useful to us both — that is to send you an honest man to act as the Clerk for your Chiefs, who may write me truly of all

things concerning your interests and those of the United States. Of this I will further consider and hereafter inform you by letter. —

G. WASHINGTON

United States

Philadelphia Augt. 22, 1795.

A POSTSCRIPT TO THE FOUNDING OF NEW MADRID

By MILLEDGE L. BONHAM JR.

In the REVIEW for June, 1932 (see *ante*, XIX, 30-56), Dr. Max Savelle tells in a scholarly and entertaining article, the story of the founding of New Madrid, Missouri, in 1789, by Colonel George Morgan. Perhaps the readers of this valuable essay may be interested in another Morgan's connection with this town.

James Morris Morgan, the great-grandson of George Morgan, was born in New Orleans, March 10, 1845, and died in Washington, April 21, 1928.¹ He entered Annapolis in 1860, being a member of the first class ("the Brood of the *Constitution*") to use "Old Ironsides" as a training ship. When Louisiana seceded in 1861, young Morgan resigned from the Academy and returned home. He was appointed a midshipman in the Confederate navy and assigned to duty with the Mississippi River flotilla, commanded by Flag-Officer George N. Hollins. Morgan's exploits are set forth most entertainingly in his fascinating autobiography *Recollections of a Rebel Reefer*.² Commodore Hollins' squadron participated in the fighting about New Madrid and Island Number Ten, February-April, 1862.³ Morgan's connection with New Madrid at this time is best related in his own words:

The houses of New Madrid interfered with our fire. They were just as their owners had left them when they fled in such haste that they had not time to move their furniture or belongings, and it had up to this time

¹ "The Rebel Reefer Furls His Last Sail," in *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* (New Orleans, 1917-), XI (1928), 582-606.

² James M. Morgan, *Recollections of a Rebel Reefer* (Boston, 1917).

³ *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, 1880-1901), ser. 1, vol. VIII, *passim*; *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* (Washington, 1894-1922), ser. 1, vol. XXII, 828-36.