



**The Chickasaw Nation**  
**Secondary Student Curriculum**  
**(Student Edition)**  
**Unit 1: Lesson 4**  
***Indian Territory Government***

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**Table of Contents**

Reference Material ..... 3  
Discussion Questions ..... 9  
Student Activity .....10  
Student Quiz.....11  
Reference List .....13

# The Chickasaw Nation Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition)

## Unit 1: Lesson 4 Indian Territory Government

### Reference Material

The Chickasaws were removed from their traditional homeland, including parts of present-day Mississippi, Alabama, Kentucky and Tennessee, beginning in 1837 and continuing into the 1890s. Upon Removal, the Chickasaws found themselves limited and

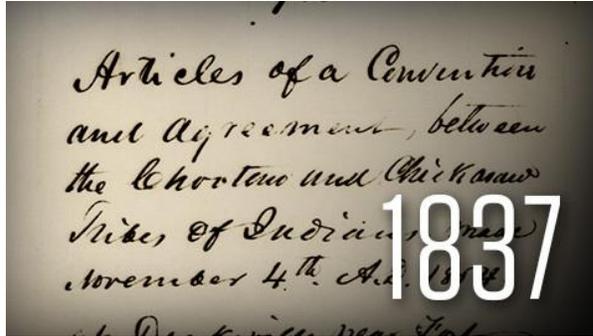


Figure 1: 1837 Treaty of Doaksville text.

bound to the Choctaw Nation's constitution and laws in their new land.

Chickasaw leaders had negotiated and signed an agreement with the Choctaw Nation in 1837, called the Treaty of Doaksville, which provided a western home for the Chickasaws. They

gained some control over part of the territory the Choctaws had received from the American government. This territory, which would be called the Chickasaw District, was roughly the western two-thirds of the Choctaw lands—with the other third being the Choctaw District. However, citizens of both nations could settle anywhere in the Choctaw or Chickasaw districts of the Choctaw Nation.

While in their new land of Indian Territory, Chickasaws continued to refer to their leaders as *minko'* (leader). At the same time, many leaders began to utilize the European title of district *chief*, though this was not a traditional title for the Chickasaws like *minko'*. The position of the *minko'* was commonly hereditary, meaning rank was passed down from generation to generation. Although a *minko'* inherited his rank, he had to earn his power and influence; it was never given to him at birth. However, not all Chickasaw leaders who served as the *minko'* were hereditary. Some leaders received their position through leadership and negotiating skills, a strong commitment to the Chickasaw people, culture and sovereignty, and possessing prowess and a fierce attitude on the battlefield.

Traditional Chickasaw leaders who served in Indian Territory included *Ishtehotopa* [ish-tee-ho-to-pah] and *Ishteukahtubby* [ish-tee-you-cuh-tubby], among others. Both men served as the Chickasaw leader during different years following

# The Chickasaw Nation

## Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition)

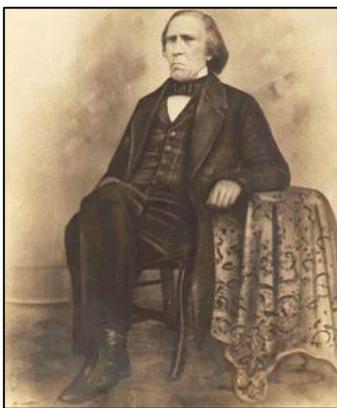
### Unit 1: Lesson 4

#### Indian Territory Government

Removal.

During the 1840s, the role of the *minko'*, and the title itself, in Chickasaw society began to decline in Indian Territory, and the Chickasaw Nation began to transition into a more modern form of government to adjust to the ever-changing times. Until 1856, this new form of government in Indian Territory would incorporate the title of district chief to oversee the operations of the Chickasaw Nation. The transition would allow them greater opportunities to compete with their non-Indian counterparts and help reestablish themselves in their new land.

At a time when the Chickasawq community seemed to be in dire straits, there was a renaissance of personal and group pride that produced a fresh sense of purpose and direction. They adapted to their new land and forged a new way of life to match the challenges they faced. A new group of Chickasaw leaders stepped forward—men like Edmund Pickens, Cyrus Harris and Winchester Colbert. These men were not hereditary Chickasaw leaders, but they each possessed strong leadership skills and devotion to Chickasaws, like a hereditary *minko'*. Pickens, Harris and Colbert, among others, would go on to serve the Chickasaw people in Indian Territory respectfully.



**Figure 2: Edmund Pickens, the Chickasaw District Chief of the Choctaw Nation.**

As the new leaders of the Chickasaw Nation emerged, the tribe sought to adopt a constitution to establish their government in the new land. On Nov. 4, 1848, the Chickasaw Nation adopted the Choctaw Nation's constitution at Boiling Springs near Fort Washita in the Chickasaw District. An official leader was needed to oversee the Nation, as outlined in the constitution. Pickens was appointed by the Chickasaw Council (later the Chickasaw Legislature) as the *Chief of the Chickasaw District of the Choctaw Nation*. The title of district *chief* was selected to reflect the Choctaw Nation's leader, a requirement of the adopted Choctaw constitution. Pickens' extensive service and dedication to the Chickasaw Nation helped lead the Chickasaw people toward progress and the signing of the 1856 Chickasaw Constitution. Pickens

# The Chickasaw Nation

## Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition)

### Unit 1: Lesson 4

#### Indian Territory Government

continued to serve the Chickasaw Nation as district *chief* until 1856. He is remembered as a leader who exhibited some of the finest qualities known to man: honesty, integrity, high moral values and common sense.

As the Chickasaws moved into their district, they found the Choctaw Nation laws oppressive. The laws further united the Chickasaws in opposing their unification agreement with the Choctaws. By 1853, after many lobbying trips to Washington, D.C., Chickasaws won official support for separation from the Choctaws. At Washington, in June 1855, Chickasaw and Choctaw commissioners met and negotiated an agreement dissolving their 1837 compact. The treaty permitted Choctaw and Chickasaw citizens to settle in the territory of either nation. It recognized Chickasaw sovereignty by guaranteeing them “unrestricted right of self-government and full jurisdiction over persons and property within their respective limits,” except trade and enterprise, which were to be regulated by the U.S. government.

On Aug. 1, 1856, the Chickasaw people met at Good Spring, present-day Tishomingo, on Pennington Creek. Leaders collected huge amounts of food, including 5,000 pounds of fresh beef, to feed their people. Under a large brush arbor, Chickasaws rested on log seats while the leaders conducted business on a crude platform. Old business was closed out. Then the assembled Chickasaws resolved into a constitutional convention. Jackson Kemp was elected convention chairman. After an extended discussion of constitutional rules, Kemp recessed the convention, and a drafting committee went to work. The convention re-assembled at Good Spring on Aug. 30 and ratified the new constitution for the Chickasaw Nation. The ratification of the constitution ushered in a new wave of resurgence for all Chickasaws in Indian Territory. Kemp would



Figure 3: Pennington Creek.

# The Chickasaw Nation

## Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition)

### Unit 1: Lesson 4

#### Indian Territory Government

go on to serve as the Governor Pro Tempore (Tem.) for the Chickasaw Nation in 1866 and as the president of the Chickasaw Senate in 1867.

The constitution provided for three branches of government (Executive, Legislative and Judicial). The constitution also provided the Chickasaws the opportunity to refer to their leader as they saw fit. The title of governor was selected to represent the supreme executive power of the Chickasaw Nation. The legislature had both a House of Representatives and a Senate. The Chickasaw judiciary, as defined by the 1856 constitution, consisted of a supreme court made up of a chief justice and two associate justices, as well as circuit courts and county courts. Additionally, the constitution defined the four counties (or districts) of the Chickasaw Nation—Panola, Pickens, Tishomingo and Pontotoc—and provided a structure for elected local governments, including a sheriff and constables.

Cyrus Harris was the first elected governor of the Chickasaw Nation. Harris was at the core of implementing the first Chickasaw government and constitution in Indian Territory. Through his formal education, he was fluent in both English and Chickasaw, and this helped bridge the gap with the U.S. government during legislative processes. Described as a man of “great generosity, integrity, patriotism and self-sacrifice,” Harris lived a noble life, dedicated to serving his fellow Chickasaws.

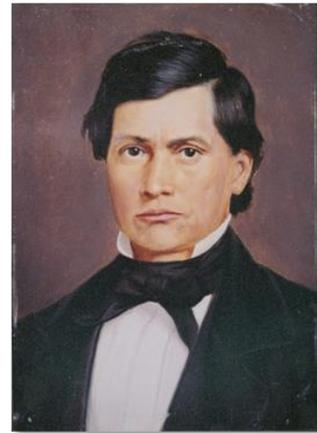


Figure 4: Governor Cyrus Harris, as painted by Chickasaw historian and author Juanita Tate.

Chickasaw schools and academies began to appear throughout their new land. Knowing that education was crucial to their survival and witnessing the bad treatment other American Indian children and families were facing, Chickasaws continued to educate their children and reestablished their boarding schools and academies in Indian Territory. The first tribal academy, McKendree Academy, was established in 1844 and would later become the Chickasaw Manual Labor Academy in 1852. Soon thereafter, additional schools were developed that would broaden the Chickasaws’ understanding of the changing world,

# The Chickasaw Nation Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition)

## Unit 1: Lesson 4 Indian Territory Government

including the Wapanucka Female Labor School and the Bloomfield Academy for Chickasaw Females in 1852, Colbert Academy in 1854 and the Burney Institute for Girls in 1859, among many others.



Figure 5: Chickasaw and Choctaw female students standing in front of Bloomfield Academy. Image courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

The Chickasaw Nation partnered with Methodist and Protestant denominations in their efforts to educate the children. All curricula within the schools had academic, social, domestic and religious components. Subjects that were taught included English, history, geography, writing, logic and rhetoric, arithmetic and algebra, and natural and mechanical sciences. The Chickasaw schools continued up into the 1900s with the Carter Seminary in 1932. Remarkably, these schools were established 20 years before the opening of the first federally operated, off-reservation boarding schools, such as the 1879 Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania. While the Chickasaws were uprooted from their Homeland beginning in 1837, their determination for educating and providing for their own citizens remains unconquered.

# The Chickasaw Nation

## Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition)

### Unit 1: Lesson 4

#### Indian Territory Government

Most Chickasaws celebrated the new constitution, which created a government that would answer to the Chickasaw citizens and address their needs. Livelihoods, businesses, schools and farms were reestablished in Indian Territory, and it was the beginning of a new era of progress and success in the Chickasaw Nation. The Chickasaws were presented with many challenges in their quest for their own government in their new land. The determination and resiliency the Nation possessed in their homeland was transferred into Indian Territory, enabling the tribe to overcome the many challenges presented by their non-Indian counterparts. The Chickasaw leaders were instrumental in creating and organizing an independent Chickasaw government in Indian Territory, and their foresight and perseverance have helped create a strong Chickasaw Nation to this day.

# The Chickasaw Nation

## Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition)

### Unit 1: Lesson 4

#### Indian Territory Government

#### Discussion Questions

1. Explain what the Chickasaws faced when they arrived in their new land following Removal?
2. What did the 1837 Treaty of Doaksville mean to the Chickasaws?
3. Why did the Chickasaws want to end the Treaty of Doaksville?
4. What monumental event took place in August 1856 at Good Spring near present-day Tishomingo? Describe the work that was accomplished there.
5. Why did Chickasaws begin to reestablish schools in their new land?

# The Chickasaw Nation

## Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition)

### Unit 1: Lesson 4

#### Indian Territory Government

#### Student Activity

Based on what you have learned, prepare an essay discussing how the 1856 constitution affected the Chickasaw people in their new land in Indian Territory. Write your essay below.

# The Chickasaw Nation

## Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition)

### Unit 1: Lesson 4

#### Indian Territory Government

#### Student Quiz

1. What tribe did the Chickasaws negotiate and sign a treaty with in 1837?
  - a. Choctaw
  - b. Cherokee
  - c. Seminole
  - d. Muscogee (Creek)
2. What was the name of the territory that covered the western two-thirds of the Choctaw land in which the Chickasaws first settled?
  - a. Chickasaw District
  - b. Seneca District
  - c. Oklahoma District
  - d. Comanche District
3. In 1848, the Chickasaw Nation was administered by whom?
  - a. Governor
  - b. *Minko'*
  - c. Chief
  - d. President
4. In 1848, who was selected to serve as the *Chief of the Chickasaw District of the Choctaw Nation*?
  - a. Winchester Colbert
  - b. Jackson Kemp
  - c. *Ishteukahtubby*
  - d. Edmund Pickens
5. At what present-day town did the Chickasaws meet to ratify the new Chickasaw Constitution in August 1856?
  - a. Ada
  - b. McAlester
  - c. Tishomingo
  - d. Ardmore
6. Which is not a county or district within the Chickasaw Nation?
  - a. Panola
  - b. Ardmore
  - c. Pickens
  - d. Tishomingo

# The Chickasaw Nation

## Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition)

### Unit 1: Lesson 4

#### Indian Territory Government

7. In 1856, who became the first elected governor of the Chickasaw Nation?
  - a. Edmund Pickens
  - b. Cyrus Harris
  - c. Jackson Kemp
  - d. *Ishtehotopa*
  
8. What was the name of the first Chickasaw school in Indian Territory?
  - a. Wapanucka Institute
  - b. Bloomfield Academy
  - c. McKendree Academy
  - d. Harley Institute
  
9. What political parties are represented by individuals running for governor of the Chickasaw Nation?
  - a. Democrat
  - b. Republican
  - c. Independent
  - d. No political parties
  
10. Who served as the Governor Pro Tempore (Tem.) for the Chickasaw Nation?
  - a. Cyrus Harris
  - b. Edmund Pickens
  - c. Jackson Kemp
  - d. Winchester Colbert

# The Chickasaw Nation Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition)

## Unit 1: Lesson 4 Indian Territory Government

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