



# Tribal Histories

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## Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas Research Report

May 2021

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## Introduction

The TxDOT Tribal Histories Project involves creating a set of geographic historical narratives of tribal presence in Texas through collaboration with participating federally recognized Tribes. Taking a statewide approach, these histories will serve as resources to inform future statewide transportation planning, project development, tribal consultation activities, and public engagement by TxDOT.

This research report was designed to facilitate the extraction of geographic data, along with calendar and event information, to populate a GIS dataset for use by transportation planners and the Tribe (Appendix). Information from the narrative and GIS dataset (to the extent permissible by the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas) is also intended to be readily adapted for use in archeology reports and for educational outreach materials.

Ethnographic archival and documentary research for this broad overview focuses on providing background context and setting for Alabama and Coushatta peoples, tribes, and cultures associated with the region encompassing Texas. The following research report focuses on the physical locations and specific time periods during which the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes were present in Texas and is organized chronologically. This history reflects the Tribes' perspectives because the historical data sources (ethnohistories, tribal history compendiums, oral history, and folklore from both twentieth century and contemporary contexts) were recommended and approved by Bryant Celestine, the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas' Historic Preservation Officer (THPO). Mr. Celestine also provided comments on the draft report that are addressed here in the final report.

Four members of the research team, Dr. Mary Jo Galindo, M. Kelley Russell, Jimmy Arterberry, and Ryan Fennell visited the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas reservation from August 7-8, 2019 to interview the THPO. They toured the reservation's facilities such as the headquarters building, the Tribal Welcome Center in an historic school building, an historic church, the site of Peach Tree Village, and a log cabin built of old-growth pine trees for Jim Barclay, the first Indian Agent.

## Alabama and Coushatta Land Use in Texas

The Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas is, today, a single federally recognized tribe that is comprised of two distinct Muskogean-speaking tribes, the Alabama and Coushatta, who have been closely related throughout their history (Martin 1977:xvii). "Alabama" is a form of "Alibamu" or "Alibamon" meaning "vegetation gatherers" or possibly a derivative of a Choctaw word for "clear the thicket" (Hodge, ed. 1959 [1907, 1910]:43). (Choctaw along with Chickasaw and Houma form the Western branch of the Muskogean language family.) "Coushatta" is a derivative of "Kosati" which includes the words for "cane," "reed," and "white."

### *Pre-European Contact*

The Alabama and Coushatta tribes developed from the complex and diverse societies that occupied the southeastern United States for more than 10,000 years. It is speculated that the Coushatta and possibly the Alabama moved east from the western side of the Mississippi River between A.D. 800 and 1200 (May 2001:27).

### **European Contact**

Spanish explorer Hernando DeSoto in 1541 was the first European to visit Alabama townships in northeastern Mississippi and those of the Coushatta in northern Alabama (Martin 1977:xvii). By the end of the 1600's, in response to increased European (Spanish, later British and French) incursions and diseases, the native population of the southeastern United States was decimated. As a result, changes in native social and political organizations occurred. Former individual townships and chiefdoms merged for greater strength in numbers and formed new groups including, what were later called, the Creek and Choctaw (May 2001:32). The Alabama and Coushatta were members of the Upper Creek Confederacy, an organization of dominant tribes known collectively as Muskogee located in the southeastern United States. The Creek Confederacy (Upper and Lower) was formed as a defensive alliance against British settler encroachment along the Atlantic Coast and against the Choctaw Indians whose territory included Mississippi, and parts of Alabama and Louisiana (Martin 1977:xvii).

By 1686 groups of Alabama and Coushatta Creek relatives, including the Pakana Muscogee, chose to move near the junction of the Coosa and Tallapoosa Rivers near Montgomery, Alabama. There they were caught between the Spanish, French, and British who were contending for power in the region. However, like many southeastern Indians, the Alabama and Coushatta formed alliances with Europeans for trade, protection, and help with their war against other Indians (May 2001:31). By the early 1700s, the Alabama, who were initially allied with the British, became allied with the French and allowed them to establish Fort Toulouse near present-day Montgomery. As of the late 1770s, the Coushatta had formed close contacts with the Spanish who sought them to provide a barrier between themselves, other Europeans, and native tribes (May 2001:32).

### **Westward Migration**

Subsequent to the French defeat by the British during the French and Indian War, the British took over Fort Toulouse in 1763. As a result, the French influence in the region ebbed, and the majority of Alabama, Coushatta, and Pakana Muscogee people chose to migrate westward with the French into Louisiana, which was held by Spain at the time (**Figure 1**). Some travelled by land and others by water to avoid the territory of the Choctaw, one of their enemies (Martin 1977:xviii). By 1778, several Alabama towns were settled in Louisiana including one near the Caddo Indians in the northwest near Bayou Rapides and the other in south-central Louisiana near Opelousas. Another Alabama group was noted to have settled in southwestern Louisiana first along the Sabine River bordering Texas, then along the Calcasieu River. (May 2001:35). The Coushatta followed a similar path west into Louisiana ahead of European encroachment and because a notable leader, Red Shoes, opposed some of the larger Creek policies including their proposed war with other native tribes (May 2001:36). Coushatta groups settled near several of the Alabama towns including near Opelousas and along the Sabine River about 80 miles south of Natchitoches. The Pakana Muscogee settled nearby along Calcasieu Bayou, 40 miles southwest of Natchitoches (Martin 2010f). In addition to the Caddo, several other tribes lived in the region including the Biloxi, Choctaw, Taensa, Tunica, Ofo, and Pascagoula (May 2001:36). This area of Louisiana provided abundant natural resources for growing crops and hunting local wildlife. Natchitoches had long been a French and Indian trading post, and the Alabama and Coushatta traded meat, fur hides, and bear oil with the French, and later the Americans, in exchange for provisions (Smither, ed. 1932:87).

Louisiana came under control of the United States in 1803 with the Louisiana Purchase, which brought increased white settlement to the Alabama's and Coushatta's new home. Peace

surrounding the villages of the two tribes didn't last long as in 1808 four Alabama men were accused of murdering a white man in Opelousas. Two of the men were pardoned and the other two hanged, which appeared to appease both the tribes and the settlers. But harmony between the two groups was short-lived as several Americans and Indians were murdered and each side blamed the other. Once again in response to European pressure, the tribes looked west for an undisturbed location to settle (Malone 1960:11-13; Smither, ed. 1932:89).

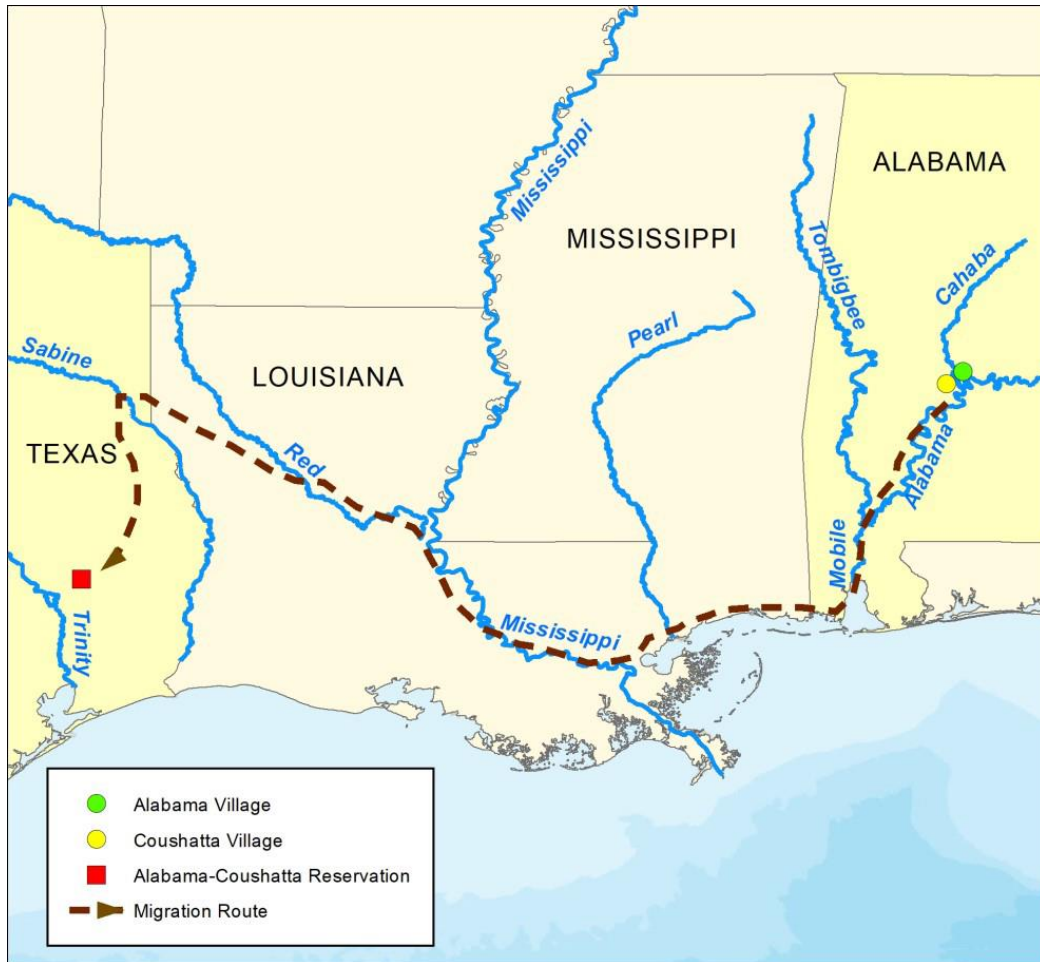


Figure 1. Migration route of the Alabama and Coushatta Tribes, circa 1763-1780

### *Spanish Provinces of Texas and Nuevo Santander (1780-1821)*

As trouble increased for the two tribes in Louisiana, the Spanish welcomed them into Texas. As early as the 1780s, Alabama and Coushatta crossed the Sabine River into southeast Spanish Texas, just two decades after the beginning of their westward migration. Offering land, the Spanish hoped the Alabama, Coushatta, and other “friendly” tribes would guard against the French in Louisiana and later the Americans after 1803 (Martin 1977:xviii). The Americans also vied for the tribes’ loyalty. The Alabama and Coushatta capitalized on this tug-of-war between the European settlers by accepting gifts of clothing, knives, guns, and more (Martin 1977:xviii). It should be noted that the many Alabama and Coushatta villages were not a result of intratribal fracture, but a common occurrence throughout Creek nations. Both tribes maintained associated tribal townships that were connected through language, clan

membership, and marriage and each made autonomous decisions including movement and village locations (May 2001:37).

Southeast Texas was a unique natural region that was an excellent hunting ground with an abundant supply of animals, birds, and fish. Known as the Big Thicket, the dense wilderness of this area of Texas was somewhat of a barrier to prospective European settlers. While groups of both tribes remained in Louisiana, by the 1780s several Alabama and Coushatta villages were settled in Texas. Over the next few decades, at least six Alabama and Coushatta towns were established in Texas within 70 miles of Nacogdoches. The Alabama had established a village along the Angelina River and several tribal members had built homes along the Neches River and Attoyac Bayou by 1805. The combined population of both tribes in Texas was approximately 1,650 in 1809 (Martin 1977:xviii; May 2001:36).

While Texas was under Spanish rule, there were several American and Mexican filibusters, or unsanctioned attempts to seize Texas from Spanish rule, as part of the Mexican War of Independence. One of these was the self-proclaimed Republican Army of the Magee-Gutiérrez expedition of 1812-1813 in which American Lt. Magee teamed with Spanish Col. Gutiérrez to wrest Texas from the Spanish Royalists. After capturing Nacogdoches and several other East Texas settlements in 1812 the expedition headed westward along with Coushatta reinforcements. At the Battle of Rosalis or Rosillo (confluence of Rosillo and Salado Creeks in Bexar County) in the spring of 1813, the Coushatta led the charge to help defeat the Spanish (**Figure 2**) (Marshall 2015:400; Martin 1967:42). The expedition gained more support after the victory, and the Coushatta remained loyal to help the Republican Army fight in the Battle of Medina in August of 1813 about 20 miles south of downtown San Antonio. However, the Spanish unexpectedly overpowered and defeated the Republican Army in what is known as the bloodiest battle fought in Texas (**Figure 3**) (Marshall 2017:351; Thonhoff 2018). Although the Spanish Royalists were the victors, the Coushatta earned the reputation as outstanding fighters and gained the trust of some of the American settlers (Martin 2010c; May 2001:41; Rothe 1963:79).

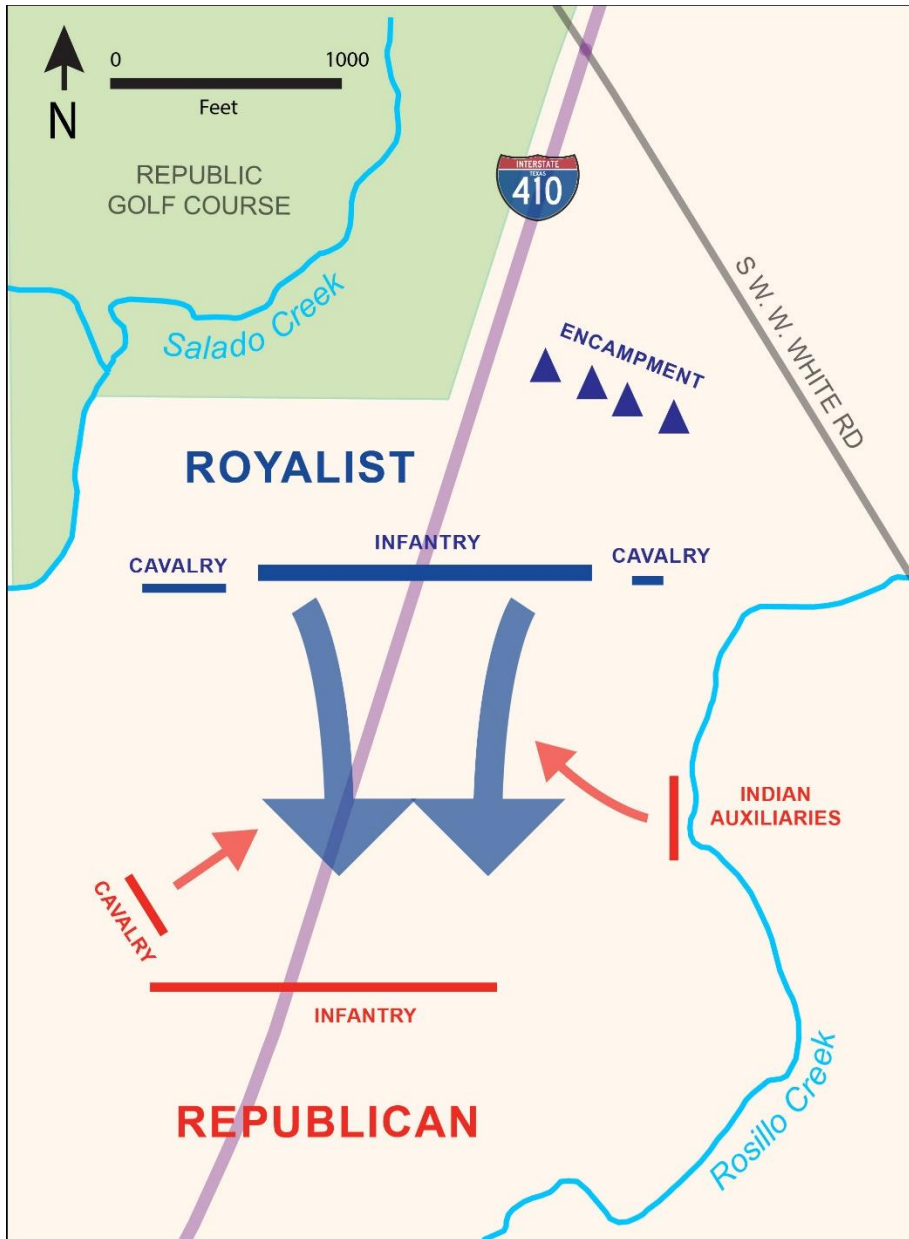


Figure 2: Battle of Rosillo Creek, (adapted from Marshall 2015: 401)





Figure 3: Battle of Medina, (adapted from Marshall 2017:357)

### *Mexican Province of Coahuila y Texas (1824-1835)*

#### *Villages*

By 1830, while Texas was under Mexican rule, Alabama and Coushatta villages were given the same land allowances granted to them by Spain. In an effort to maintain peace and create loyalty in 1835, the Mexican Government ordered several white families to vacate Coushatta land and rebuked a government employee for surveying within the boundaries of the Alabama and Coushatta villages (Winfrey and Day, ed 1966[1]:6).

Three Coushatta communities with 600 combined members had been established along the Trinity River in San Jacinto and Polk Counties (**Figure 4**). The Upper Coushatta Village, or Battise Village, was located in San Jacinto County along the west side of the Trinity River. This



location, now under Lake Livingston, was situated on the west side of the river across from present-day Onalaska. The Lower Coushatta Village, or Colita's Village was about 10 miles downstream and was home to one of the most well-known Indian leaders in East Texas, Colita. The Middle Coushatta Village or Long King's Village was the most prominent of the three Coushatta villages as it was the home of Long King who was a Principal Chief or *Mikko*. Colita succeeded Chief Long King as Principal Chief of all the Texas Coushatta. Long King Village was situated equidistant from the two villages on the east side of the Trinity River and at the confluence of Tempe Creek and Long King Creek, approximately two miles north of the Lake Livingston Dam. (Martin 1977:xix).

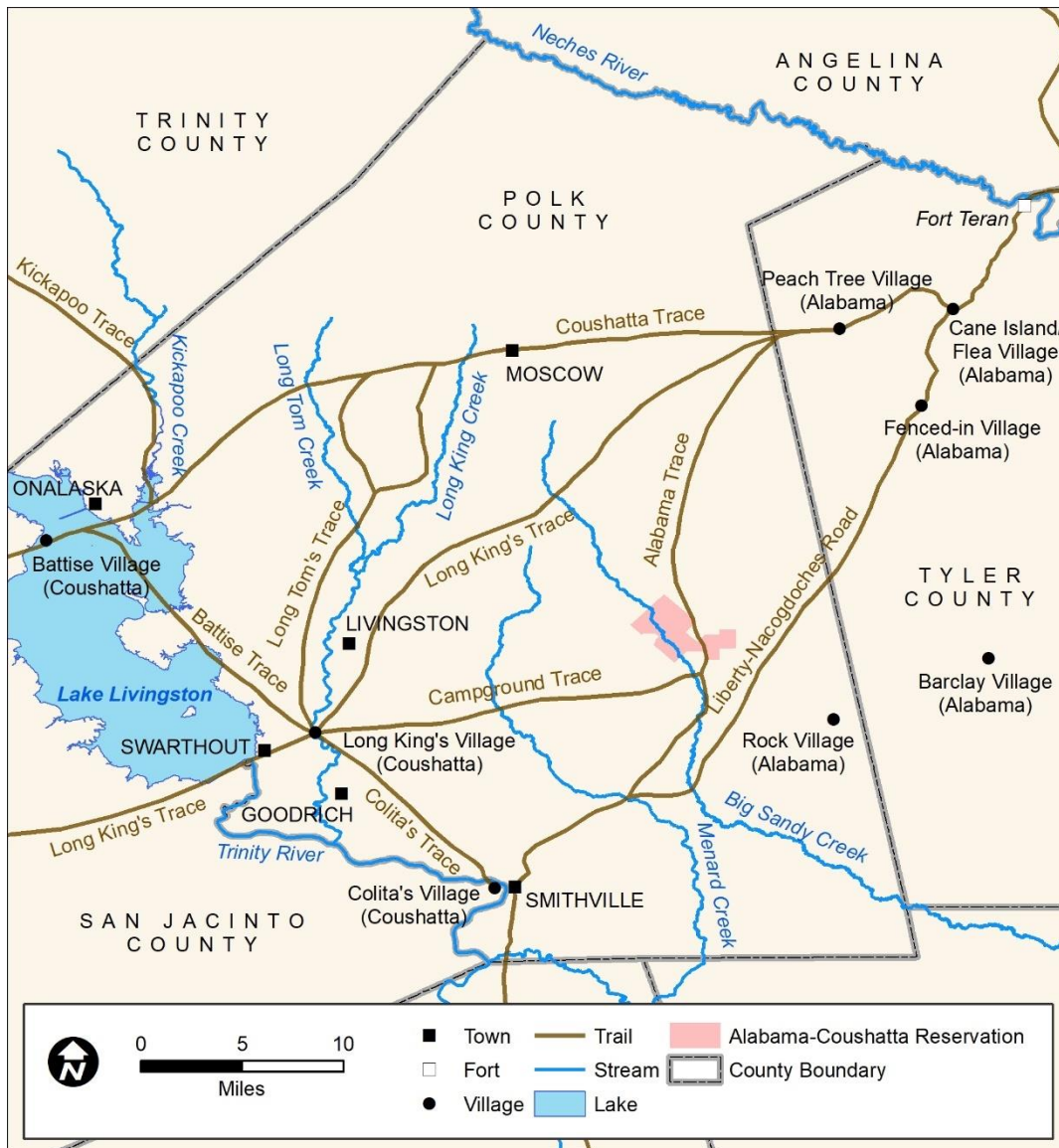


Figure 4: Alabama and Coushatta Villages and Traces

Situated some 40 miles northeast of the Coushatta, three Alabama towns were clustered just west of the Neches River in northwest Tyler County (see Figure 4). The largest and most prominent Alabama community was Peach Tree Village, which was named for the trees

planted using wild peach pits that the Alabama brought with them from the southeast on their journey west. In 1966, an Official Texas Historic Marker was erected at the location of the site of Peach Tree Village along FM 2097 (**Figure 5**). Fenced-in Village was situated five miles to the southeast along Horse Pen Creek and was second in importance. The third Alabama community, Cane Island Village or Flea Village, was located between Peach Tree Village and Fort Teran, a Mexican military encampment along the Neches River (Martin 1967:36-37; 1977:xix; Rothe 1963:83).



**Figure 5: Site of Old Peach Tree Village Texas Official Texas Historic Marker.** (Photo courtesy of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas Tribal Archives)

As in their previous villages in the southeast, each community had a core area or town square for group governmental, social, and religious activities with several neighborhoods of cabins grouped in family or clan units scattered throughout wooded areas. They cultivated crops including corn, beans, and sweet potatoes and raised domesticated cattle and hogs. The surrounding land provided bear, deer, fish and other game to supplement their diet. (Martin 1977:xix; Rothe 1963:80).

### *Traces*

Travel between the villages was vital to maintain familial and tribal connections and trade with European settlers, and thus many traces or trails were established by the Alabama and Coushatta, some of which extended east into Louisiana (**see Figure 4**). In addition, several of the traces extended west, far beyond the Alabama and Coushatta communities. The traces were usually straight, if possible, between destinations and often followed higher ridges

between drainage streams avoiding major water crossings while staying close to fresh water (Martin 2010c). The Coushatta Trace was a long and vital trail that stretched from a Coushatta village on the east bank of the Sabine River at Quicksand Creek and extended west across ten Texas counties to La Bahía (now Goliad). The trace also connected Cane Island Village, Peach Tree Village, and Battise Village (Martin 1967:36-37; 1977:xviii). Because of its location, the narrow path of the Coushatta Trace became a thoroughfare into the wilderness for many including Indian Tribes, smugglers, and adventurers between Mexico and Louisiana. It became so heavily travelled that the Spanish built Fort Teran (1831-1834) at the crossing of the Neches River and posted Coushatta lookouts along the trace in order to inform them of movement of illegal or undesirable traffic into East Texas (Martin 1977:xvii; 2010b).

Long King's Trace travelled west from Peach Tree Village through Long King Village then merged with the Coushatta Trace. The Alabama Trace began east of Nacogdoches along the Old San Antonio Road and extended southwest through an Alabama Village on the Angelina River, then through Peach Tree and Cane Island Villages, through an abandoned Alabama village (now the site of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas reservation), and terminated at Colita's Village on the Trinity River (Martin 1967:36-37; Martin 2010a). Two shorter trails, the Battise Trace and Colita's Trace, linked their respective villages to Long King's Village. Also connected to Long King's Village was Long Tom's Trace which started at Long Tom Creek and the Campground Trace which began just south of the present-day Alabama-Coushatta Reservation. Travel to a Kickapoo Village near Palestine, Texas began at Battise Village along the Kickapoo Trace. The Alabama and Coushatta tribes also traversed the Spanish Liberty-Nacogdoches Road which extended from Nacogdoches through Fenced-In Village to the mouth of the Trinity River near Houston (Martin 1977:xvii, 2010a, 2010b).

### **Republic of Texas (1836-1845)**

Sam Houston became the general of the provisional Texas government during the impending Texas Revolution and helped to negotiate a treaty in 1835 with several East Texas tribal representatives including those from the Alabama, Coushatta, and several other tribes. In an effort to ensure neutrality during the Texas Revolution, the treaty declared peace between both parties and promised to respect the land rights of the Indians within East Texas and establish clear boundaries with the tribes; the same rights that they had under the Spanish and Mexican governments. The land between the Angelina, Neches, and Sabine Rivers, and the Old San Antonio Road (part of the Camino Real de los Tejas) was to be reserved for Indian occupation and use, much smaller than the amount of land that the Indian tribes in East Texas had occupied. In accordance with the treaty, the Indians could live under their own laws, trade with the Texans, and expect justice from the new government. However, when delegates met at the Texas Congress Convention on March 2, 1836, they declared their independence from Mexico then refused to discuss, much less ratify, the treaty. This failure was viewed by the Tribes as a betrayal and the threat of war between Texas and the East Texas tribes continued (Winfrey and Day, ed 1966[1]:14; TSLAC 2019).

The broken treaty left many of the East Texas tribes like the Caddo, Cherokee, Kickapoo, and Shawnee supporting Mexican overtures and promises of land in exchange for attacking the Texans. This resulted in several raids by Indians on northeastern Texas settlements. During this time, Sam Houston visited the Alabama and Coushatta and asked them to aid the Texans



in the revolution or remain neutral. Although they had sympathy for the Texan's cause and a friendship with Sam Houston, the Alabama also had a strong desire for peace and the majority of the Tribe temporarily moved to Opelousas, Louisiana during the Texas Revolution (Rothe 1963:81).

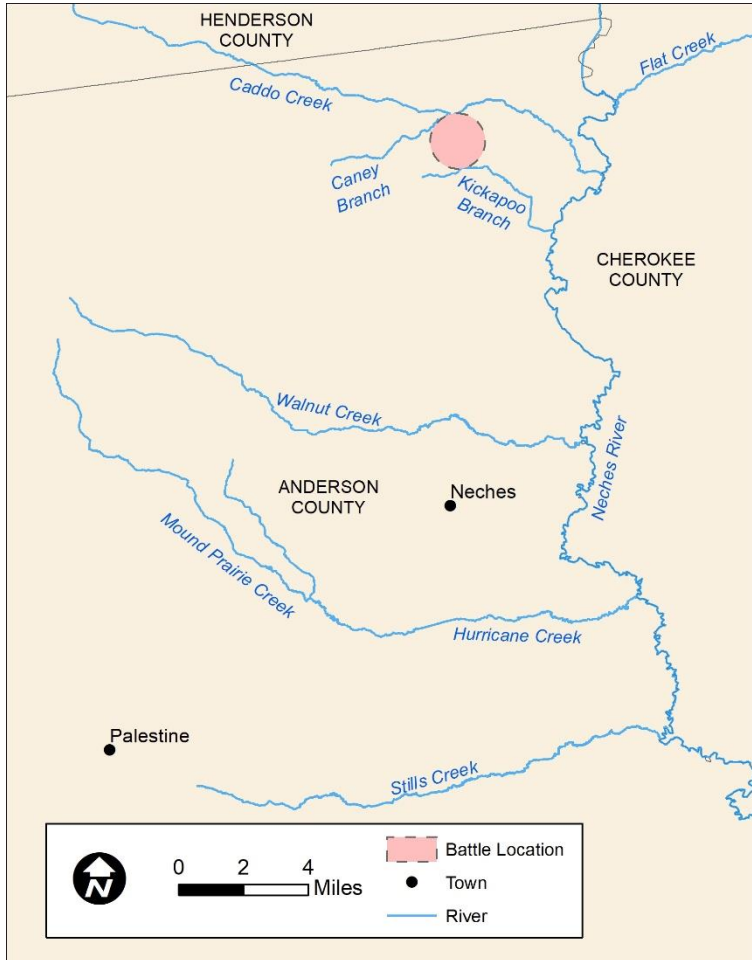
Though the Coushatta were previously involved in filibusters with the Americans while under Spanish rule, neither they nor the remaining Alabama actively participated in the Revolutionary War of the Texans against Mexico. However, they did not observe strict neutrality either. Chief Colita and his people remained in the Coushatta villages and his decision changed history for the tribe and the settlers (Martin 1977:xix; Rothe 1963:81). The Texas Revolution began with the battle of Gonzales in October 1835 and ended at San Jacinto on April 21, 1836 with the defeat of the Mexican army.

After the fall of the Alamo and ahead of Santa Anna's advancing army in March of 1836, white settlers fled into East Texas along Long King's Trace toward the Alabama villages and aiming for Louisiana as part of the flight known as the Runaway Scrape. When they reached the crossing of the Trinity River, the settlers found it swollen due to recent flooding and a washed-out ferry that threatened to block their escape with their wagons. Fortunately for the settlers, Chief Colita and the Coushatta Indians were able to come to their rescue. The Coushatta helped remove the wheels from the settler's wagons and attached wooden poles underneath, essentially turning them into rafts. The Coushatta navigated the refugees across the river to safety, saving the settlers' lives. Afterwards, the Alabama and Coushatta also fed and cared for the colonists turned refugees in Long King Village and escorted them through the Big Thicket and into Louisiana (Celestine 2019; Martin 1977:80-81). This act of bravery is part of the Alabama and Coushatta's identity as tribes that now reside in Texas.

In addition, several Coushatta served General Houston by spying on the Mexican Army. Their effort proved to aid Houston in his strategic maneuver that surprised and overtook Santa Anna's army at the Battle of San Jacinto (Rothe 1963:84). When the war was won, Chief Colita personally carried the news of the Texan's victory to Louisiana and helped the refugees return home (Rothe 1963:81). With the Texan win for independence in April of 1836, the Alabama and Coushatta transferred their allegiance to the new government and now President Sam Houston hoping that their loyalty to the republic would be repaid in kind.

The Congress of the Republic of Texas established the General Land Office in 1836 to issue land grants to white colonists and those that had served in the Texas Army (Johnson 2010). When surveyors began to encroach on Indian-occupied lands in East Texas to survey for white claimants, they and the settlers were met with raids from "hostile" Indians. Colita managed peaceful relations with the colonists, but the Coushatta were not able to entirely avoid the turmoil of 1836 to 1839. In the Córdoba Rebellion, Mexican agents took advantage of the situation and incited a counterrevolution in East Texas and were able to influence the Kickapoo, Delaware, Caddo, Cherokee, and, on occasion, the Coushatta to join several raids against the Texans during 1838. General Thomas Rusk mobilized a militia to counter the raids. In retaliation for a raid known as the Killough Massacre, the militia attacked and defeated Córdoba's combined group of Mexicans and Indians at the Battle of Kickapoo Village near Frankston in Anderson County (**Figure 6**). Both sides lost men including several

Coushatta who were visiting the village (Martin 2010d). Determined to keep the peace with the Alabama and Coushatta, Houston sent a message of peace expressing sorrow for the warriors who had died as a result of the skirmishes with the militia and surveyors. Houston promised that if they stopped participating in raids the retaliatory action would cease (Barker and Williams 1938:293-294).



**Figure 6: Battle of Kickapoo Village**

Mirabeau B. Lamar succeeded Houston as president of the Republic of Texas in late 1838 and as his political rival, he adopted a program that included exterminating the hostile tribes and removing friendly tribes or moving them to reservations in Texas and Indian Territory (Oklahoma) (Martin 2010a). Via use of Texas troops, and the murder of their chief Duwali, Lamar succeeded in removing the Cherokee from northeast Texas and into Indian Territory, and forced several other tribes including the Delaware, Choctaw, and Shawnee to the upper Brazos River where they built a small village, beyond the line of Texas settlements. There were a few isolated families of Indians, but by 1840 most of the immigrant tribes had been removed from Texas (La Vere 2004:175).

Remarkably, Lamar's harsh policy was not applied to the Alabama and Coushatta. However, in spite of their exemption, tensions between the two tribes and the white settlers persisted. In 1839, the Coushatta had moved south into Liberty County along the Trinity River as white settlers had begun to encroach on their land to the north. While in Liberty County, several Texas settlers murdered five Coushatta, who according to Colita were wrongfully accused of horse theft, a serious crime. In a letter to Lamar, Colita expressed his anger over the injustice and the "White Man lies," especially given the Coushatta's previous aid to the Republic and peaceful interactions. He also lamented that if left to persist, it would "cause a wound never to be healed" (Winfrey and Day, ed 1966[1]:72; Rothe 1963:84). Lamar responded to both Chief Colita and the citizens of Liberty County by blaming both groups for the problems and appointed Indian agent Joseph Lindley as mediator to help avoid "an Indian War" (Winfrey and Day, ed 1966[1]:72-74). In addition to attacks from white settlers, the Alabama and Coushatta also contended with other Indian tribes. A Comanche raiding party approached the Coushatta's Long King Village from the north in 1839. The Comanches were met by the Coushatta in the valley of Long King Creek who defended their territory in a fiercely fought battle forcing the Comanche to retreat (Martin 2010c).

Lamar recognized the good relationship that the Alabama and Coushatta had established and in an attempt to honor previous assurances, he recommended that they should not be "interrupted of their present possessions" (Smither, ed, 1932:11-12). In 1840, the Fourth Congress of the Republic granted the Alabama and Coushatta tribes two leagues (900 square miles) of reservation land each, provided for an Indian agent, and stipulated that the Republic of Texas would have jurisdiction over them and could remove them when it was "deemed expedient." Both tribes had been forced to move from some of their previously established villages when white settlers wanted the land and many times they left after their lives were threatened. Under the act, the land that was granted to the Alabama included Fenced-In Village in Tyler County. Lands granted to the Coushatta included Colita's Village and Battise Village along the Trinity River (Winfrey and Day, ed 1966[1]:102-103; Martin 1977:xix, 2010c; May 2001:36). Unfortunately, though the land that was granted to the Coushatta was surveyed and the field notes filed, it was never made effective because white settlers had previously claimed the land (Martin 1977:xx). The upper Coushatta league that included Battise Village was already occupied by settlers who refused to leave. The lower league that contained Colita's Village in San Jacinto County had been previously claimed as a plantation by Colonel Hamilton Washington. He too refused to give up his claim but agreed to allow the Coushatta to stay on the land that they had occupied. The Coushatta had previously built houses in Colita's Village near the bank of the Trinity River and cultivated crops. Joseph Ellis, then agent for the two tribes, procured farm equipment from the Indian Bureau to help further develop the Coushatta's farms (Winfrey and Day, ed 1966[1]:147; Smither, ed. 1931:94).

The Coushatta that were previously displaced from Long King Village and Battise Village took refuge and lived wherever they could. While some remained in Texas, the lack of secure land, conflict with the settlers, and epidemics, spurred some the Coushatta to return to Louisiana. They settled at a site along the Calcasieu River that still bears the name "Indian Village." The remainder resided about seven miles west of Colita's Village while others lived near Alabama villages (Martin 1977:xx; May 2001:48).



The Alabama occupied Fenced-In Village at the time of the issued grant in 1840. However, when the surveyors arrived at the village, the Alabama believed that the survey was once again intended for white settlers and departed the village for other homesites including Opelousas, leaving the 200 acres with their homes, hogs, cattle, and crops. They soon returned to Texas, found their former village site occupied, and as they had done many times before, the tribe relocated and established a new village, this time 15 miles to the south of Fenced-In Village (Winfrey and Day, ed 1966[2]:147).

### ***State of Texas (1845)***

In 1845 the United States annexed Texas into the Union. Although the United States assumed responsibility for the Indians in Texas, for the next several years the federal government was concerned primarily with the hostile Comanche and Kiowa, while the Alabama and Coushatta remained under the protection of the state. Remaining largely unnoticed and receiving no federal or state annuities, they grew crops and hunted in the Big Thicket forest area—a vacant, unappropriated area in Polk County. Around the same time, the Alabama relocated themselves at the confluence of Big and Little Cypress Creeks nine miles southwest of Woodville in northwestern Tyler County. The Alabama remained at the site until the early 1850s, long enough to erect cabins and establish farms. It was later known as the Jim Barclay Village as Barclay, a state agent for the Alabama, purchased the land in 1852 which included the village and permitted the Alabama to continue to reside there. Barclay's 1842 log cabin home which may have been built using Alabama labor, still stands (**Figure 7.**) The tribe relocated by 1853; however, the Alabama continued to use the village site for temporary camping trips throughout the 1880s (Winfrey and Day, ed 1966[2]:147; Martin 1977:xx, 2010f).



**Figure 7: Jim Barclay's 1842 Cabin** (Photo courtesy of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas Tribal Archives)

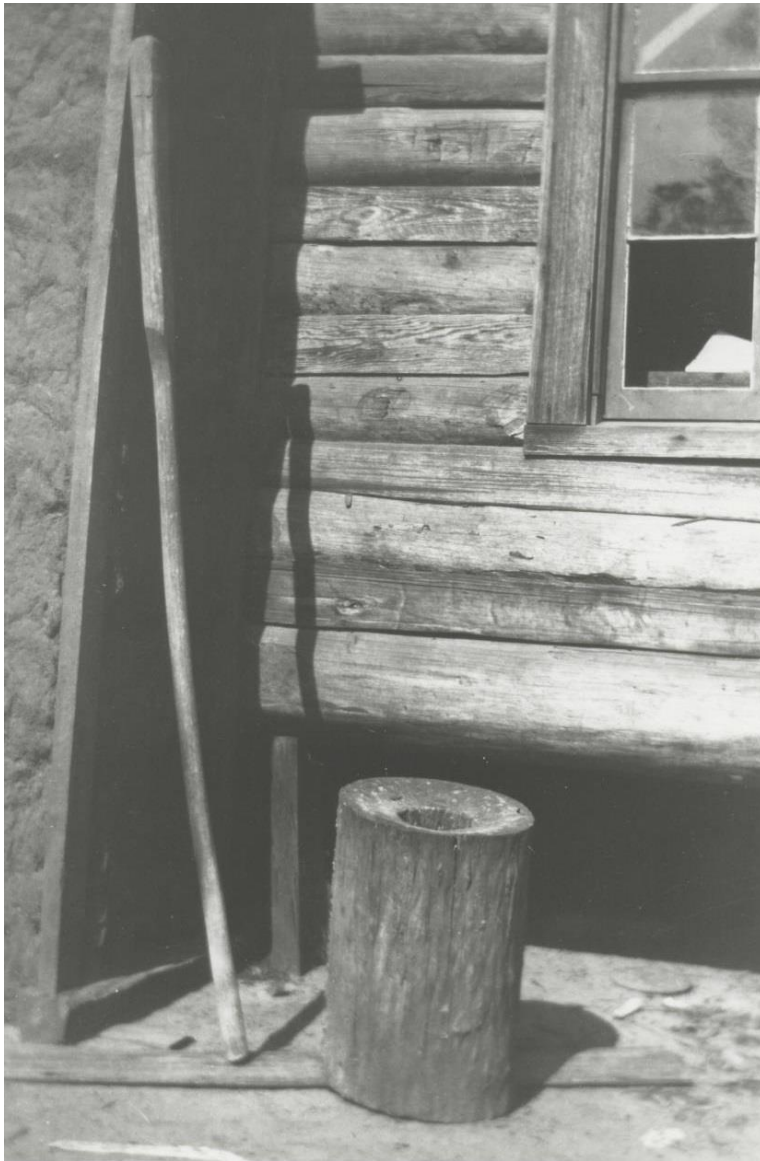
#### *Reservation (1854)*

Around 1853, the Alabama departed Jim Barclay Village and established a new community at Rock Village along the Liberty-Nacogdoches Road, 3 miles northeast of present-day Dallardsville. While the Alabama were living in Rock Village, Principal Chief Antone, Second Chief Colabe Cillistine, and prominent citizens of Polk County presented a petition on October 29, 1853 to the Texas legislature requesting land for a reservation. The Alabama cited the wrongs and land losses they had suffered since they had been despoiled of the land that was granted to them in 1840. They were not willing to move to the Indian reserve on the upper Brazos River because it had been previously attacked by white settlers, it would have been a drastic change from the familiar woodland environment they were accustomed to even before their move west, and it could not provide the pine and river cane that were essential to their culture. It was a wise decision, as the Indians within the Brazos Reserve were later removed to Oklahoma. Instead, the Alabama asked for 1,280 vacant acres near Rock Village on Big Sandy Creek in Polk County within the Big Thicket which was still largely unsettled and uninhabited. It was also within the territory of their original settlement in Texas (May 2001:48; Martin 2010e; Smither, ed. 1932:97). The efforts of the Alabama were successful and in February of 1854 the Texas Legislature approved 1,280 acres of land for the Alabama Indian reservation. About 500 tribal members settled on this land during the winter of 1854–55 (Martin 2010a).

In 1858 the state legislature under Governor Hardin R. Runnels passed a bill for the removal of the remainder of all Texas Indians to the Brazos Reserve. However, a condition prerequisite was that relocation must be with the consent of the Indians to be removed. James Barclay was appointed agent for the Alabama and Coushatta with instructions from Runnels to “proceed to obtain voluntary consent of the chiefs for the removal of the tribes to the Indian Reserves of the Brazos.” However, as the party of Barclay and the tribal chiefs was reaching the Brazos River, they learned that white settlers had attacked the lower reserve. Upon hearing of the assault, Runnels remarked “charity and humanity forbid... carrying them were they might at any time be indiscriminately slaughtered...” The matter of relocation was then dropped (Smither, ed. 1932:102; Winfrey and Day, ed 1966[3]:287-288, 293-294, 315-316).

The Coushatta had been previously displaced from Battise Village and Long King Village. During the struggle for a permanent residence, two events further darkened the Coushatta prospects. First, Chief Colita died at an estimated age of 100 in 1852 while on a hunting expedition. He had been such an effective and well-known leader that the *Galveston News* and the *Texas State Gazette* featured articles regarding his life. His death left the Coushatta leaderless at a critical time. Second, a comparable land grant for a Coushatta reservation was not successful. In 1855 aided by Sam Houston, the Coushatta petitioned the state for reservation lands. The Texas Legislature approved a grant of 640 acres for a permanent home in Polk County, but suitable land for growing crops and grazing cattle was no longer available in the county, and the grant remained only a scrap of paper. Fortunately, four years later in 1859 their kinsmen gave permission for the Coushatta to settle on the Alabama reservation. A few Coushatta remained on the site of Colita's Village in San Jacinto County until 1906, when they joined the others on the Polk County reservation (Martin 1977:xx; Smither, ed. 1932: 100).

The Alabama and Coushatta reservation land within the Big Thicket was densely forested with pine trees that in addition to wood, provided abundant game. The tribes cultivated crops such as corn, sweet potatoes, melons, and cotton in clearings near their homes within the areas that were suitable for farming (Rothe 1963: 870). Corn was ground by hand using wooden mortar and pestle (**Figure 8**). Early Alabama and Coushatta residences were rectangular with vertical wood planks or split logs lashed with horizontal poles and fibrous cords. A smoke hole on the gabled-ends of the bark-covered roof allowed for the exchange of smoke for fresh air from the central fire (Martin 1979:102-103). Winter homes, rectangular pine log cabins with chimneys at the gabled ends were later adopted by the Alabama and Coushatta (**Figure 9**). Summer houses were open walls with brush roofing, similar to those used for the busk ground Council structure (**Figure 10**). The tribes also raised domesticated animals including hogs, cattle, and horses. In addition to subsistence farming and hunting, they were supplemented by trading and selling goods such as pine needle baskets, dressed deerskins, and moss saddle blankets to the white settlers (Rothe 1963:87).



**Figure 8: Wooden mortar and pestle** (Photo courtesy of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas Tribal Archives).





**Figure 9: Replica of a winter home** (Photo courtesy of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas Tribal Archives)



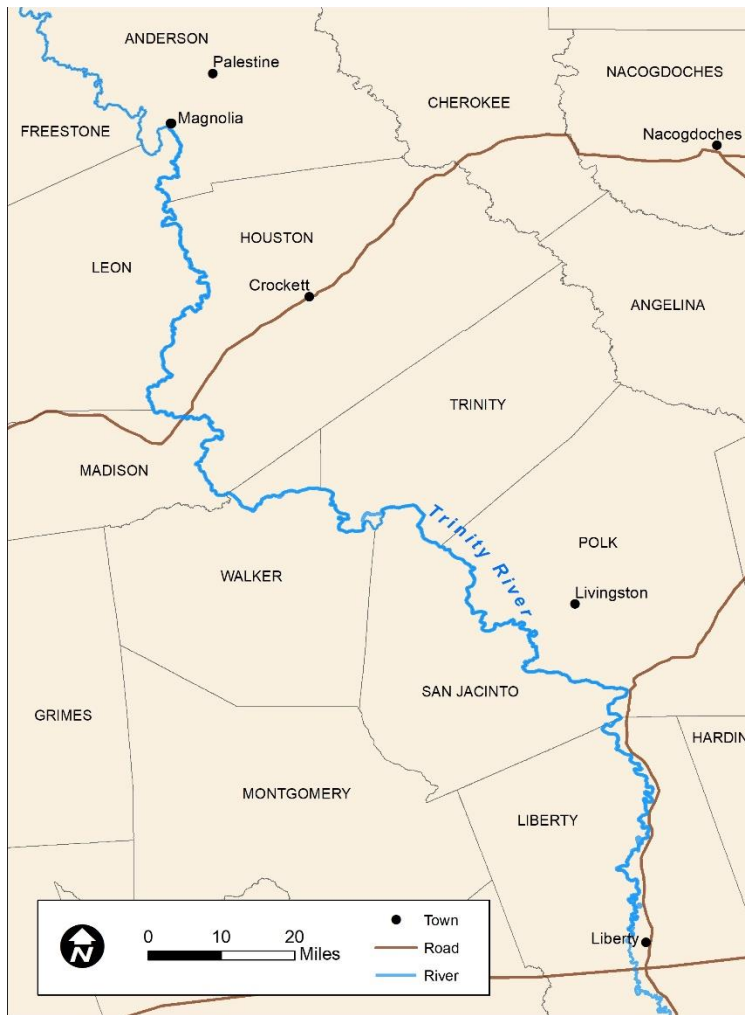
**Figure 10: Busk ground Council structure** (Photo courtesy of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas Tribal Archives)

#### *Civil War (1861–1865)*

The Alabama and Coushatta were considered excellent horsemen, and they played a minor role in the Civil War by aiding Confederate forces along the Texas Gulf Coast. John Scott, who later became principal chief of the Alabama and Coushatta, and 19 members of the tribes were sworn into Confederate service on April 11, 1862 with Company G, Twenty-fourth Texas Cavalry, at Arkansas Post. The Company G commander discriminated against them and discharged the warriors. They returned home and 45 men were organized into a cavalry company by Captain Beazley as an unattached regiment. In December 1864, this company listed 132 men on its roster as part of the Sixth Brigade, Second Texas Infantry. The company was called Company A, the Indian Company of Drew's Landing, Polk County, Texas and was primarily responsible for constructing and operating flat-bottom boats to transport farm produce to Confederate forces along the Gulf Coast (Martin 2010c; Rothe 1963:87).

Beazley's cavalymen built most of the boats at Magnolia, a Trinity River port in Anderson County (**Figure 11**). Each boat was manned by an Indian crew that stopped at plantation landings along the river to pick up produce and other supplies requisitioned by Confederate authorities. The boat operators delivered the boats and supplies to Confederate officials at Liberty in Liberty County. The Indian cavalymen-sailors were met by their sons on horseback at Liberty and rode with them back upriver to the reservation. Unlike non-Indian Confederate veterans, the Alabama and Coushatta never received pensions for their military service (Martin 2010c; May 2001:49).





**Figure 11: Route of Alabama and Coushatta cavalymen during the Civil War**

*The Dark Days (1866-1880)*

Throughout the Civil War, the state continued to assign Indian agents and make appropriations to the tribes. However, after 1865, the Alabama and Coushatta faced abject poverty and abandonment by the state and federal government. They had a permanent home, but little else. The state government focused its concern on the aftermath of the Civil War during Reconstruction and provided no real assistance to the tribes. In 1866, Governor James W. Throckmorton proposed to transfer the guardianship of the Alabama and Coushatta to the United States government. He suggested in a letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that the tribes would benefit because of the poverty of the State of Texas after the Civil War. In 1870 the two tribes were placed under military jurisdiction and, although the local commander in Livingston volunteered to serve as temporary agent, the federal government declined to appoint an agent until 1928. The official government neglect mirrored that of the civilian antipathy as fighting between the white settlers and “hostile” tribes such as the Apache, Comanche, and Sioux spurred the negative attitude that most settlers had towards

Indians. Thus, there was little public sympathy for the Alabama and Coushatta or the Polk County Indians as they were also called (Martin 1977:xxi, 2010c).

The 1870s also brought some deterioration of the Alabama and Coushatta culture and way of life. An influx of white settlers into the Big Thicket resulted in a large amount of cleared forests and increased plowed farmlands that nearly destroyed the hunting, fishing, and gathering practices of the two tribes. They were forced to rely primarily on the crop yields on the reservation land and/or to seek limited employment opportunities outside the reservation (Martin 1977:xxi).

### *Pakana Muskogee*

In 1834 a group of approximately 150 Pakana Muskogee travelled into Texas from their previous home on Calcasieu Bayou in Louisiana to a site on Penwau Slough two miles east of the Trinity River in Polk County. They were initially led by Chief John Blount who died enroute to Texas. The new village was established on a hill along a narrow peninsula that extends into current Lake Livingston and is now referred to as Indian Hill. Sometime after, John Burgess, a Frenchman married a Pakana Muskogee woman and the tribe was invited to live on his 640 acres along Kickapoo Creek near present-day Onalaska, north of Indian Village (**Figure 12**). These locations were partially inundated by Lake Livingston in 1969. Subsequent to Burgess's death, his wife inherited the property which also became the permanent home of the Pakana Muskogee in Polk County. The Pakana Muskogee were granted acreage for reservation land in Polk County in 1866, but as with the Coushatta, suitable land was not found, and they remained on the Burgess property. The population of the Pakana Muskogee community declined slowly and by 1859, only 50 remained. In 1882, the population was down to 42. By 1899, most of the Pakana Muskogee had intermarried into and/or were absorbed into the Alabama and Coushatta tribes or moved north to the Muskogee (Creek) Nation Reservation in Oklahoma (Martin 2010g).



Figure 12. John Burgess' land grant superimposed on present-day Lake Livingston.

### 1881-1927

After 1880, three factors had a vast influence on the welfare of the Alabama and Coushatta in Texas. First was the construction of a line of the Houston-Shreveport Railroad through Polk County in 1881. By the following year over 10 sawmills were operating along its right-of-way. The railroad and the sawmills provided steady cash income to many tribal families for the first time (Martin 1977:xxi-xxii). The second factor that influenced the welfare of the Alabama and Coushatta was the arrival of Presbyterian missionaries to the reservation in 1881. The missionaries provided schools, agricultural education, and vocational training in addition to some health care. However, their new philosophy was also a detriment to some of the native culture and beliefs (May 2001:51). In 1894, the first Christian wedding was officiated on the reservation (**Figure 13**). The third influential factor was the work of Judge J. C. Feagin of Livingston. He advocated for the Alabama and Coushatta tribes through constant letters, reports, and demands to the state and national government. His efforts successfully brought attention to the conditions and needs of the tribes, which was the first phase of a campaign

that lasted until Feagin's death in 1927. His advocacy dramatically improved life for the two tribes.



**Figure 13: First Christian Wedding on the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas Reservation. (1894)** (Photo courtesy of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas Tribal Archives)

Because of their unique land situation, the Alabama and Coushatta were able to avoid the General Allotment Act of 1887. Also known as the Dawes Act, it allowed the federal government to break up reservation land that was previously held in common by all tribal members into individually owned land plots. Its stated purpose was to assimilate Indians into white society, but it also allowed for excess allotments to be purchased by non-Indians. However, because the Alabama and Coushatta reservation land had been donated by the State of Texas, the federal government could not force the tribe to comply with the Dawes Act. The Alabama and Coushatta's avoidance of allotment helped to not only retain their land, but also their culture (May 2001:50).

#### *Reservation Expansion (1928)*

In 1928, Clem Fain, Jr. of Livingston was appointed agent for the Alabama and Coushatta, the first in almost 50 years. Building on Feagin's earlier campaign, the new agent continued to focus public attention on the tribes. Fain travelled with Chief Charles Martin Thompson and Speaker Chief McConico Battise to Washington, D.C. to appeal for assistance. The campaign was successful and in June 1928 the U.S. Congress appropriated \$40,000 for the two tribes. Of this amount, \$29,000 was used for the purchase of 3,071 acres of land adjoining the original reservation, while the remainder was spent primarily for horses, cattle, hogs, and

livestock feed. The deed for this additional land was issued to the Alabama and Coushatta tribes, and the name "Alabama-Coushatta" has been used since 1928 as the official title of the enlarged reservation. In 1929 the State of Texas appropriated \$47,000 for the construction of a gymnasium, a hospital, a home for the reservation administrator, and twenty-five cottages (Martin 1977: xxii; 2010a).

The Alabama-Coushatta Indian Tribe of Texas now occupies a 4,593.7-acre reservation on U.S. Highway 190, about 17 miles east of Livingston in Polk County (Martin 2010a).

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