



# Tribal Histories

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## Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana Research Report

April 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 TxDOT transportation planners and the Tribe. Information from the research report and GIS dataset (to the extent permissible by the 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 Coushatta associated with the region encompassing Texas. The following research report focuses on the physical locations and specific time periods during which the Coushatta of Louisiana were present in Texas and is organized chronologically. This history was developed in collaboration with the Coushatta of Louisiana using references and data sources recommended and approved by Dr. Linda Langley and Raynella Fontenot of the Coushatta of Louisiana Tribal Historic Preservation Office.

## Coushatta Land Use in Texas

The Sovereign Nation of the Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana is a federally recognized Native American tribe whose members live primarily north of Elton, Louisiana. The Coushatta speak a living language called Koasati, a member of the Muskogean language family. “Coushatta” is European derivative of Koasati which is a phonetic spelling that comes closest to the tribal pronunciation of the name of their language as well as the name they call themselves (Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana 2021).

### *Pre-European Contact*

The Coushatta tribe 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 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 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 Coushatta as well as the Alabama 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 Coushatta and Alabama Creek relatives 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 other southeastern tribes, 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 aligned 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 Coushatta and Alabama people chose to migrate westward with the French into Louisiana, which had been recently ceded to Spain (**Figure 1**). Some travelled by land and others by water to avoid the territory of the Choctaw (Martin 1977:xviii). Around 1765, approximately eighty Alabama and Coushatta, led by Coushatta Chief Tamatle Mingo settled temporarily on the east bank of the Mississippi River south of Manchac and north of New Orleans. A second group of two hundred Alabamas followed to Louisiana after a brief relocation to Florida. In 1771, sixty-four Alabama warriors and their families also migrated west and settled on the banks of the Mississippi River near the Iberville River. They stayed long enough to raise crops and trade at New Orleans; however, nearby Anglo-American encroachment spurred them to continue westward. Sometime after 1773, forty Alabama families were at a permanent location near a creek in the Opelousas District of south-central Louisiana. Another thirty families established a village sixteen miles above Bayou Rapides near the Red River. By 1804 this group had relocated further north along the Red River in Caddo territory (Shuck-Hall 2008:106-108).

Though some remained in Alabama, the majority of Coushatta and Alabama reunited in Louisiana after the Americans expelled the British from what later became the southern United States, despite their temporary separation. In 1797, approximately 400 Coushatta followed a similar path further west into Spanish Louisiana to avoid Anglo-American encroachment. The group was led by Chief Stilapikhachatta or “Red Shoes,” who opposed some of the larger Creek policies including their proposed war with other native tribes including the Chickasaws. They initially settled on Bayou Chicot in the Opelousas District near the Alabama town (May 2001:36; Langley and Langley 2003:9). By 1801 approximately 200 men and their families migrated from this settlement to southwestern Louisiana near the east bank of the Sabine River and the Texas border about 80 miles southwest of Natchitoches, near the current town of Merryville (**Figure 2**) (Martin 1976; Tanner 1820). Natchitoches had long been a French and Indian trading post, and the Coushatta and Alabama traded meat, fur hides, and bear oil with the French, and later the Americans, in exchange for provisions (Smither, ed. 1932:87). 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.



**Figure 1. General migration route of the Coushatta and Alabama Tribes into Texas, circa 1763-1780**

Movement westward and within Louisiana continued. In 1804 Coushatta Chief Pia Mingo led a group of approximately 450 Coushatta men and their families from Creek Territory in Mississippi to live in detached settlements along the Sabine River north of Red Shoes' village (Langley and Langley 2003:10). By 1805, the population of Alabama and Coushatta in Louisiana numbered approximately 1,650. In addition, several of the Coushatta families who had remained in the Bayou Chicot village relocated north to join the Alabama village on the Red River in Caddo territory, a move that further integrated the two tribes. (Shuck-Hall 2008:109).

Louisiana came under control of the United States in 1803 with the Louisiana Purchase, which brought increased white settlement to the Coushatta and Alabama's new home. Peace surrounding the villages of the two tribes didn't last long. In 1807 Coushatta chiefs Pia Mingo and Red Shoes abandoned their two villages on the Sabine River and relocated west into Spanish Texas along the Trinity River. The move was seemingly in response to feared retribution after a Coushatta warrior reportedly killed a white man in retribution for the murder of Red Shoes' brother which had gone unpunished (Shuck-Hall 2008:128). Additionally, 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). However, those living in the Alabama village along the lower Red River and the Alabama and Coushatta who resided in the upper Red River village chose to remain in their new homeland believing that the Americans would grant them land. A small group of Coushatta also chose to remain near Caddo territory near present-day Shreveport. Many Coushatta that stayed in Louisiana settled near the east bank of the Calcasieu River around 1812 in the vicinity of present-day Elton (Shuck-Hall 2008:133).

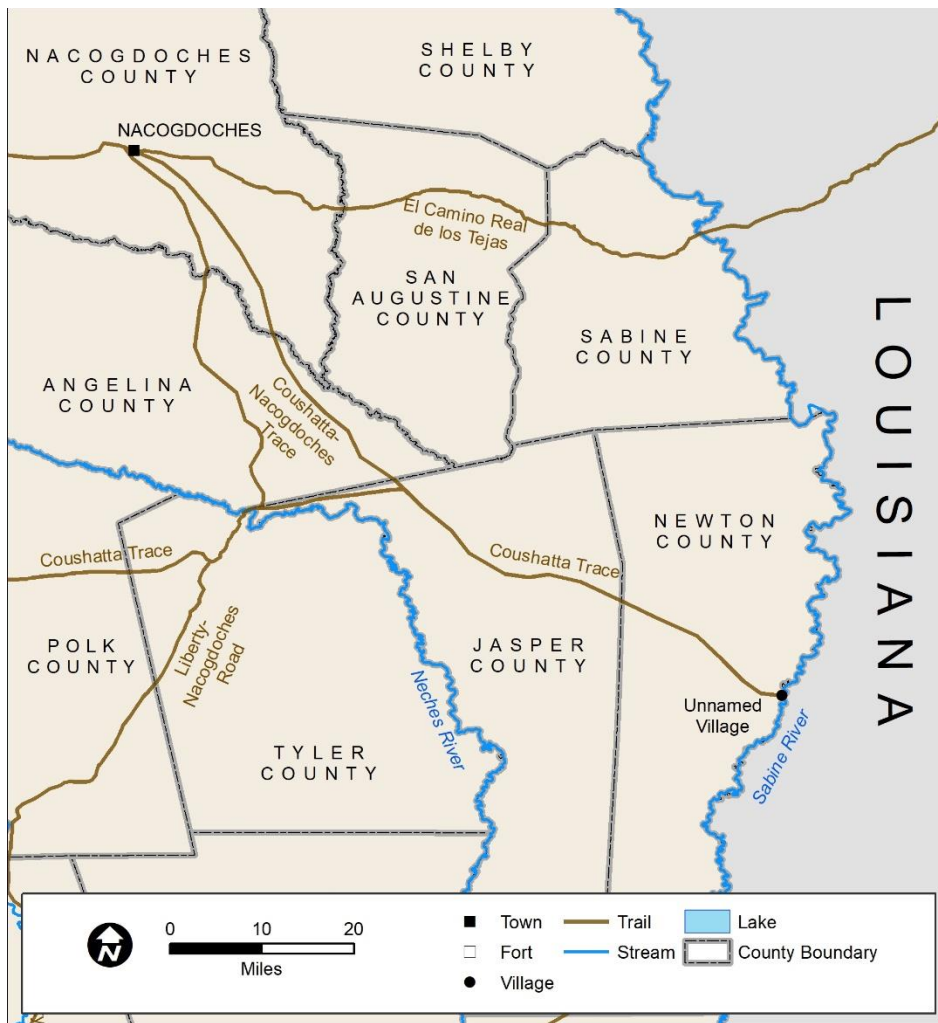


Figure 2. Coushatta village along the east bank of the Sabine River and upper Coughatta Traces

**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, groups of Coushatta and Alabama crossed the Sabine River into Spanish Texas, just two decades after the beginning of their westward migration. Offering

land, the Spanish hoped the Coushatta, Alabama, 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 Coushatta and Alabama capitalized on this tug-of-war between the European colonizers by accepting gifts of clothing, knives, guns, and more (Martin 1977:xviii).

East Texas was a unique natural region that was an excellent hunting ground with an abundant supply of animals, birds, and fish. While groups of both tribes remained in Louisiana, by the 1780s several villages were settled in Texas. Over the next few decades, at least six Coushatta and Alabama 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 (Martin 1977:xviii; May 2001:36). This included approximately 200 Alabama men and their families who left the upper Red River village in 1809 and those that left the lower Red River village in 1813 (Shuck-Hall 2008:135).

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 Lieutenant Augustus Magee teamed with Spanish Colonel Bernardo Gutiérrez de Lara 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 3**) (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 twenty 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 4**) (Marshall 2017:351; Thonhoff 1952). 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 (May 2001:41; Rothe 1963:79).

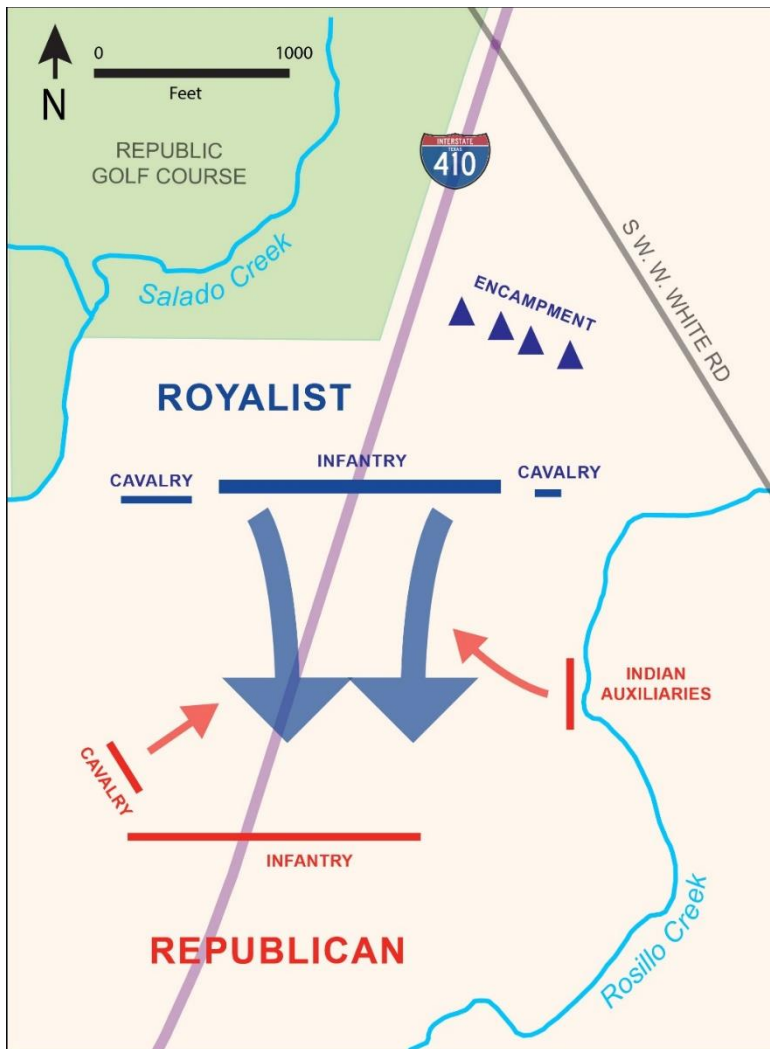


Figure 3: Battle of Rosillo Creek, (adapted from Marshall 2015: 401)





Figure 4: Battle of Medina, (adapted from Marshall 2017:357)

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

#### *Villages*

Texas became under Mexican rule in 1821, and by 1830 Coushatta and Alabama villages were given the same land allowances granted to them by Spain. In an effort to maintain peace and create loyalty, the Mexican Government ordered several white families to vacate Coushatta land in 1835 and rebuked a government employee for surveying within the boundaries of the Coushatta and Alabama villages (Winfrey and Day, ed 1966[1]:6).

Three Coushatta communities with a combined population of 600 had been established in southeast Texas along the Trinity River in San Jacinto and Polk Counties (**Figure 5**). Known as the Big Thicket, the dense wilderness of this area of Texas was somewhat of a barrier to prospective European settlers. 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 along the west side of the river across from present-day Onalaska. The Lower Coushatta Village, or Colita's Village was about ten miles downstream and was home to Colita, one of the most well-known Indian leaders in East Texas. 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 during the latter half of the 1830s. 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 present day Lake Livingston Dam. (Martin 1977:xix). It should be noted that the various Coushatta and Alabama 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).

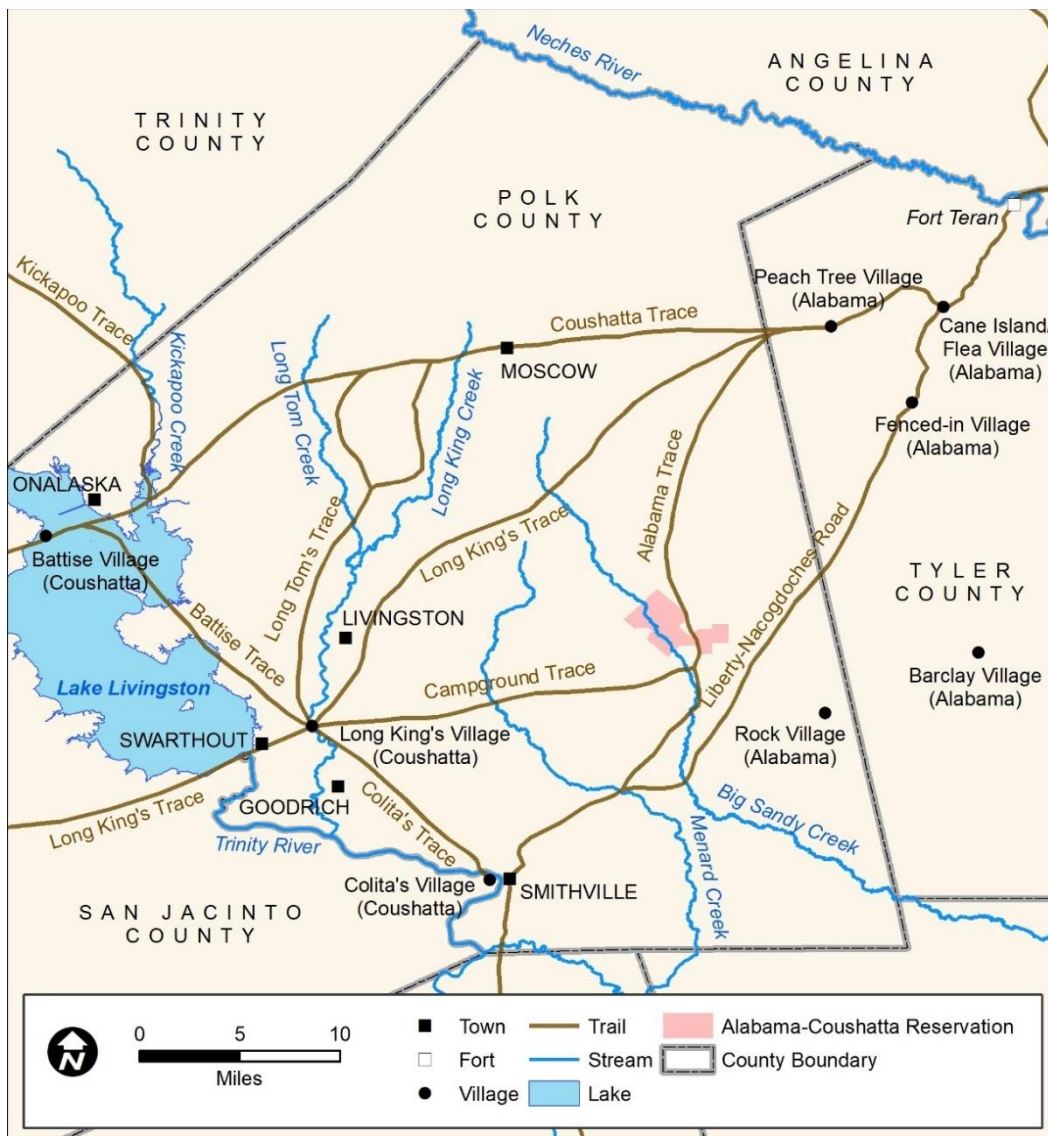


Figure 5: Coushatta and Alabama villages and within the Big Thicket

Situated some forty miles northeast of the Coushatta, three Alabama towns were clustered just west of the Neches River in northwest Tyler County (**see Figure 5**). This included the largest and most prominent Alabama community of Peach Tree Village along current FM 2097, Fenced-in Village five miles to the southeast along Horse Pen Creek, and Cane Island Village or Flea Village, 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).

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 in Texas and Louisiana was vital to maintain familial and tribal connections and trade with European settlers, and thus many traces or trails were established by the Coushatta and Alabama, some of which extended east into Louisiana (**see Figure 5**). In addition, several of the traces extended west, far beyond the Coushatta and Alabama 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-Nacogdoches Trace connected the Coushatta village on the east bank of the Sabine River in Louisiana to Nacogdoches extending west across Newton County, Jasper County, and through Angelina and Nacogdoches Counties (**see Figure 2**). Nacogdoches was a Spanish post and served as a governmental administration center, military post, as well as a trade and distribution center for the Coushatta and other tribes (Martin 1994). The Coushatta-Nacogdoches Trace merged with the Coushatta Trace which connected Cane Island Village, Peach Tree Village, and Battise Village, then continued southwest as a long and vital trail that traveled through ten Texas counties to La Bahía, now Goliad (**see Figure 5**) (Martin 1952, 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; Martin 1994b).

Long King's Trace also known as the Lower Coushatta Trace travelled west from Peach Tree Village through Long King Village, then merged with the Coushatta Trace (**see Figure 5**) (Martin 1995f). The Alabama Trace began along the Old San Antonio Road about three miles west of San Augustine and extended southwest through an Alabama village on the Angelina River, then through Cane Island and Peach Tree Villages, passed 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 1952a). Two shorter trails, the Battise Trace and Colita's Trace, linked their respective villages to Long King's Village (Martin

1995a, 1995b). 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 (Martin 1995d). The Alabama and Coushatta tribes also traversed the Spanish Liberty-Nacogdoches Road which began in Nacogdoches and extended south through Cane Island and Fenced-In Villages, then east of present-day Alabama-Coushatta Reservation, merged with the Alabama Trace and turned south at Colita’s Village (Figure 6). It continued south following the Trinity River to its mouth near Houston (Martin 1977:xix,1995e).

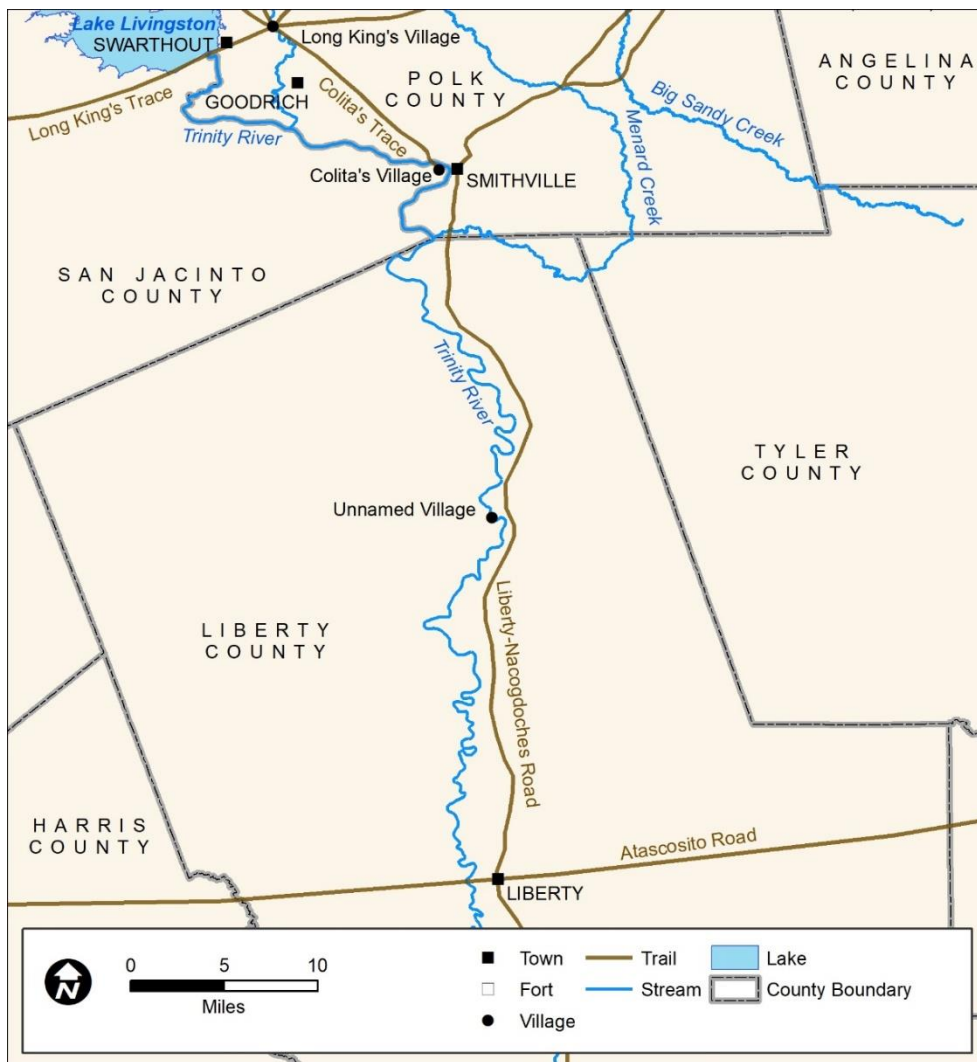


Figure 6: Liberty-Nacogdoches Trace and the Liberty County village

**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 Coushatta, Alabama, 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 tribes 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 Coushatta and Alabama and asked them to aid the Texans in the revolution or remain neutral. The majority of the Alabama temporarily relocated to Louisiana during the Texas Revolution. 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 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 Coushatta and remaining Alabama 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).

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's win for independence in April of 1836, the Coushatta and Alabama 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 1976). 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 7). Both sides lost men including several Coushatta who were visiting the village (Martin 1976). Determined to keep the peace with the tribes, 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).

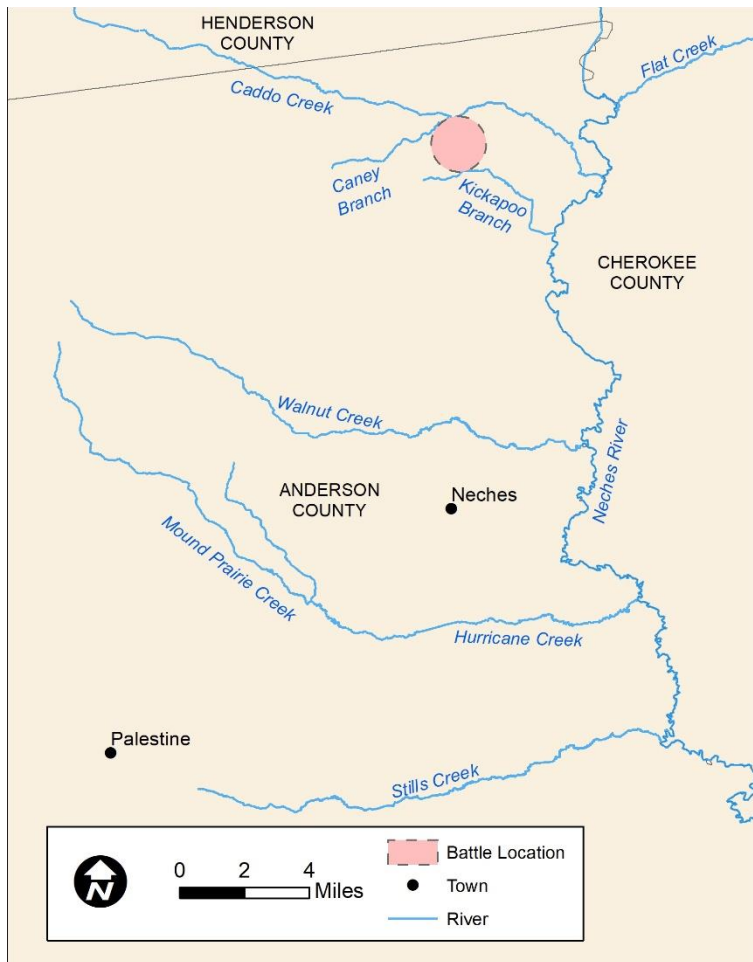


Figure 7: Battle of Kickapoo Village

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 1976). 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 Coushatta and Alabama. However, in spite of their exemption, tensions between the two tribes and the white settlers persisted. By 1839, the Coushatta had moved south into Liberty County near present-day Liberty along the Trinity River as white settlers had begun to encroach on their land to the north (**see Figure 6**). 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 Coushatta and Alabama 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 Coushatta and Alabama 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 Coushatta and Alabama 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 already occupied. The Coushatta had previously built houses in Colita's Village near the bank of the Trinity River and successfully 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 where 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 with their kinsmen at the "Indian Village" in the vicinity of Elton, Louisiana. The remainder resided about seven miles west of Colita's Village while others lived near Alabama villages (Martin 1977:xx; May 2001:48).

### ***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 Coushatta and Alabama 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 later known as the Jim Barclay Village. 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 where they remained until the early 1850s, long enough to erect cabins and establish farms (Winfrey and Day, ed 1966[2]:147; Martin 1977:xx, 2010f).

### ***Reservation (1854)***

Around 1853, the Alabama departed Jim Barclay Village and established a new community at Rock Village along the Liberty-Nacogdoches Road, three 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 that 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 where 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. While many Coushatta moved to the Texas reservation, others chose to relocate and join the Coushatta settlement of Indian Village in Louisiana. In addition, 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 (Langley and Langley 2003:16; 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. Early Coushatta and Alabama 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 Coushatta and Alabama. Summer houses were open walls with brush roofing, similar to those used for the busk ground Council structure. 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).

*Civil War (1861–1865)*

The Coushatta and Alabama 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 forty-five 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 8**). 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 Coushatta and Alabama never received pensions for their military service (Martin 2010c; May 2001:49).



**Figure 8: 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 Coushatta and Alabama 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 Coushatta and Alabama 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 and Comanche, spurred the negative attitude that most settlers had towards Indians.

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

The 1870s also brought some deterioration of the Coushatta and Alabama 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).

### *1881-1927*

After 1880, three factors had a vast influence on the welfare of the Coushatta and Alabama in Texas. First was the construction of a line of the Houston-Shreveport Railroad through Polk County in 1881. By the following year over ten 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 tribes 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 their native culture and beliefs (May 2001:51). In 1894, the first Christian wedding was officiated on the reservation. The third influential factor was the work of Judge J. C. Feagin of Livingston. He advocated for the Coushatta and Alabama 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 in Texas (Martin 1977:xxii).

Because of their unique land situation, the Coushatta and Alabama 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 Coushatta and Alabama 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 Coushatta and Alabama'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). The Coushatta of Louisiana reservation is located near Elton, Louisiana near Indian Village established by their ancestors. They received federal recognition in 1973.

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