



The Chickasaw Nation
Secondary Student Curriculum
(Student Edition)

Unit 3: Lesson 4

The History of Chickasaw Entrepreneurship

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Table of Contents

Reference Material 3
Discussion Questions13
Student Activity14
Student Quiz.....15
Reference List17

The Chickasaw Nation Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition) Unit 3: Lesson 4 The History of Chickasaw Entrepreneurship

Reference Material



Figure 1: A map of the Chickasaw Homeland, consisting of parts of present-day Mississippi, Alabama, Kentucky and Tennessee. Image courtesy of the *Chickasaw Nation Collections*.

Prior to Removal to Indian Territory in 1837, Chickasaws resided in their Homeland, consisting of parts of present-day Mississippi, Alabama, Kentucky and Tennessee. Throughout the Southeast, Chickasaws and other Southeastern Indians relied heavily on the Natchez Trace, ancient trails carved out by prehistoric animals, for transportation routes and hunting grounds. Additionally, the trace provided Chickasaws hunting opportunities for deer, elk, bear, bison, rabbit and other small animals for both food and trade resources. As such, the trace presented the opportunity for Chickasaws to communicate and trade with neighboring tribes, including the Choctaw, Natchez, Cherokee, Muscogee (Creek) and other Southeastern Indians.

Similarly to the Natchez Trace, the major waterways throughout the Southeast provided Chickasaws additional avenues to communicate and trade. The Mississippi,

Prior to Removal to Indian Territory in 1837, Chickasaws resided in their Homeland, consisting of parts of present-day Mississippi, Alabama, Kentucky and Tennessee. Throughout the Southeast, Chickasaws and other Southeastern Indians relied heavily on the Natchez Trace, ancient trails carved out by



Figure 2: A map depicting the Natchez Trace, which goes from Natchez, Mississippi, to Nashville, Tennessee. Image courtesy of the *National Park Service*.

The Chickasaw Nation

Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition)

Unit 3: Lesson 4

The History of Chickasaw Entrepreneurship

Tennessee and Tombigbee rivers were sites for trade fairs to obtain valuable trade goods. During trade fairs, families could trade items for desired goods, such as conch shells, copper, obsidian and turquoise, in addition to deer skin, pottery, bear grease and bows and arrows. Items were used for adornment and survival. These trade fairs were highly organized events that brought many tribes together.



Figure 3: Tom Phillips' painting, "Bluffs Trade Fair," depicting the Chickasaws conducting a trade fair. The Chickasaws conducted trade fairs throughout the Southeast, trading resources and supplies with other Southeastern tribal groups along the Mississippi, Tennessee and Tombigbee rivers. Image courtesy of the *Chickasaw Nation Collections*.

During the late 1600s, the trails and rivers served as the early "highways" that initiated the beginning of foreign settlement by the Spanish, British and French nations. Chickasaw leaders took notice of the trade items possessed by the European nations, and they sought to provide their people with the items. As the European nations began trudging into Chickasaw territory, Chickasaws extended their trade fairs to the Europeans to acquire their goods, including guns and artillery, beads, cloth and iron cookware, among many others. These trade fairs reinforced Chickasaws as early entrepreneurial leaders and as warriors who continued to regulate trade with both Southeastern nations

The Chickasaw Nation Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition) Unit 3: Lesson 4 The History of Chickasaw Entrepreneurship

and European nations.

Beginning in the early 1700s, Chickasaw leaders took notice of the trade items possessed by the British and agreed to a trade alliance. The British were more diplomatic with Chickasaw leaders and possessed finer trade items, as opposed to the Spanish and French. The strong negotiating and leadership skills possessed by Chickasaw leaders strengthened the Chickasaw Nation as a diplomatic nation and as a revered trading nation that stretched as far north as the Great Lakes and as far south as the Gulf of Mexico. They continued to trade with the British until the 1780s when Chickasaw leader *Piominko*



Figure 4: Painting of Chickasaw leader *Piominko*. *Piominko* selflessly worked to protect Chickasaw sovereignty and culture. Painting created by Chickasaw artist Mike Larsen. Courtesy of the *Chickasaw Nation Collections*.

signed the Treaty of Hopewell with the young United States in 1786 (see *Piominko, Payamataha and Tishominko* curriculum). This treaty marked the official alliance between the Chickasaw Nation and the United States, which greatly influenced the role the Chickasaw Nation played in the War of 1812 (see *The War of 1812* curriculum). With assistance from the Chickasaw Nation, the United States was victorious over the British.

In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson commissioned William Clark and Meriwether Lewis to map and explore the newly acquired Louisiana Purchase. President Jefferson sent Captain Lewis, Lieutenant Clark and members of the Corps of Discovery, comprised of peaceful soldiers, up the Missouri

The Chickasaw Nation Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition) Unit 3: Lesson 4 The History of Chickasaw Entrepreneurship

River to its source in the western mountains and beyond to the Pacific Ocean. The explorers, trekked hoping to uncover new opportunities the Americans desperately wanted (Bredenberg, 2000). This large-scale land purchase included present-day Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota and Wyoming (The Louisiana Purchase, 2013). President Jefferson hoped the expedition crew would be able to find the elusive Northwest Passage, a water route across the country, which it was believed, could greatly assist the U.S. economy (Bredenberg, 2000).

Additionally, the land was speculated by many to have new animals and contain large amounts of fertile soil and other natural resources. The news of the purchase and opportunities rapidly spread throughout the East Coast, and many Americans began traveling west to seek out the new possibilities. Traveling west, though, was no easy task. While the Southeast was home to beautiful mountains, prairie bluffs and ridges, it was also home to dense vegetation, thorny thickets and overgrowth. If an inexperienced traveler were to venture off the trails or to travel alone, it could ultimately mean death.



Figure 5: The Natchez Trace served as the early “highways” that weaved in and out of Chickasaw and other Southeastern Indian’s homelands. Image courtesy of the *National Park Service*.

As more and more travelers began to advance into the Southeast seeking new opportunities, many found themselves lost, hungry and afraid due to the demanding environment. Taking advantage

The Chickasaw Nation Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition) Unit 3: Lesson 4 The History of Chickasaw Entrepreneurship

of the situation, Chickasaw families residing along the Southeast's trails began to establish "stands," or wayside inns, that served as early "bed and breakfasts" for weary travelers. Each stand was a Chickasaw family's home, and they were located along the



Figure 6: Located along the Natchez Trace, Colbert's Stand and Ferry was owned and operated by George Colbert and his family during the early 1800s. Courtesy of the *Natchez Trace Parkway Association*.

Natchez Trace, approximately one every 5 to 6 miles. The stands served as blossoming businesses for many Chickasaw families, providing a warm meal and shelter to the American explorers in exchange

for economic gain. Additional provisions, including corn, meat and fresh water, were provided to the travelers for monetary gain and other desired supplies.

American explorers and the military also found themselves at the mercy of the Chickasaw people when it came to crossing the major waterways. Many Chickasaw families who operated stands also operated ferries and provided assistance crossing the waterways. Colbert's Ferry, located along the Natchez Trace, was a ferry operated by George Colbert and his family from 1800 to 1819. It is documented that he once charged Andrew Jackson \$75,000 to ferry his Tennessee Army across the Tennessee River.

These early entrepreneurial examples showcase the Chickasaws' tireless spirit to

The Chickasaw Nation Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition) Unit 3: Lesson 4 The History of Chickasaw Entrepreneurship

provide for their own. The Colbert family was one of many Chickasaw families during the 1800s who utilized their businesses to improve the economic well-being and quality of life for their families. However, after the passage of the Indian Removal Act in 1830,

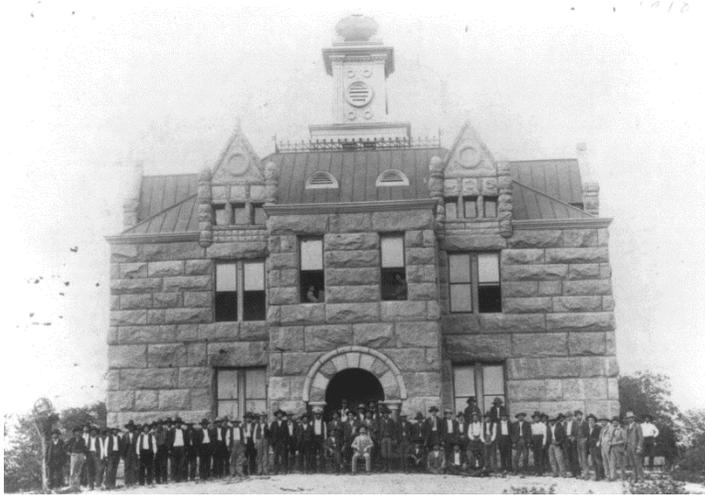


Figure 7: Chickasaw leaders pose in front of the newly constructed Chickasaw Capitol during the dedication ceremony in 1898. Courtesy of the *Oklahoma Historical Society*.

Chickasaws were forced to abandon their businesses and remove west. While Chickasaws were removed from their Homeland, leaving behind the tangible structures resonating Chickasaw economic development in the Southeast,

they did not leave behind their skills and identity as early entrepreneurs.

Majority of Chickasaws were removed from their Homeland from 1837-51. However, Chickasaw families continued to arrive in Indian Territory up to the 1890s as evidenced through Chickasaw tribal enrollment in the Dawes Rolls. Once settled in Indian Territory, Chickasaws worked diligently to rebuild. In less than 19 years, they reestablished their businesses, homes, schools, farms, families and government in their new territory (see *Indian Territory Government* curriculum). Chickasaw families regained their footing as successful businessmen and entrepreneurs in the following areas: merchandising, ranching, sand and rock quarrying and farming. From Oklahoma Statehood in 1907 and into the 1970s, Chickasaws remained determined to improve the lives of their own through continued and new business endeavors.

The Chickasaw Nation Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition) Unit 3: Lesson 4 The History of Chickasaw Entrepreneurship



Figure 8: Photograph of the Chickasaw Motor Inn. Courtesy of the Chickasaw Nation Collections.

In September 1972, the Chickasaw Nation purchased the Artesian Motor Hotel, located in Sulphur, Oklahoma (Lance, 2012). While many Chickasaw families owned businesses prior to this, the motor hotel was the tribe's first

owned and operated business as a whole. Forward-thinking Chickasaw leaders, including former Governor Overton James and current Chickasaw Nation Governor Bill Anoatubby, utilized Bureau of Indian Affairs' grants to renovate and remodel the facility.



Figure 9: The Chickasaw Nation's Artesian Hotel Casino & Spa was opened in 2013, and it replaced the former Chickasaw Motor Inn. Courtesy of the Chickasaw Nation Collections.

With a new business plan, the Artesian Motor Hotel quickly became a profit-making venture for the Chickasaw Nation, earning approximately \$100,000 in its first year of operation (Lance, 2012).

Shortly thereafter, the tribe renamed the motor hotel the Chickasaw Motor Inn, and it served as the tribal headquarters until the official Chickasaw Nation headquarters building in Ada opened in 1977 (Lance, 2012). In 2006, the former motor inn was demolished to make way for the Artesian Hotel Casino & Spa, which opened its doors in 2013. The new hotel

The Chickasaw Nation Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition) Unit 3: Lesson 4 The History of Chickasaw Entrepreneurship

provides comfort and amenities to satisfy every need of the modern traveler. Similar to the “stands” in the Chickasaw Homeland, the Chickasaw Motor Inn attracted individuals to the area, serving as a meeting space and place to dine. Today, the Artesian Hotel Casino & Spa continues to carry on the legacy of the Chickasaw Motor Inn and the importance it had to the hospitality of Chickasaw people.

The Chickasaw Nation continues to provide for its citizens in all areas of life, including health care, nutrition, education, arts, culture and more. With more than 100 enterprises, the tribe is economically strong, culturally vibrant and full of energetic people still dedicated to improving the lives of Chickasaws. The WinStar World Casino and Resort, the world’s largest casino, is owned and operated by the tribe and has made a tremendous impact on the Chickasaw people and the state of Oklahoma. Opened in 2004, the casino now provides thousands of jobs for Chickasaws and non-Chickasaw citizens.

The tribe continues to expand its business ventures to include businesses such as a chocolate factory, cultural center and other professional services, led by Chickasaw Banc Holding Co., which operates Bank2 in Oklahoma City, and Chickasaw Nation Industries,



Figure 10: The WinStar World Casino, owned and operated by the Chickasaw Nation, is located in Thackerville, Oklahoma. Courtesy of the *Chickasaw Nation Collections*.

The Chickasaw Nation Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition) Unit 3: Lesson 4 The History of Chickasaw Entrepreneurship

which provides services for state, federal and private clients. Additional businesses include manufacturing, tourism and energy (Mize 2012). Continuing the legacy of helping others, the Chickasaw Nation bolsters more than just its citizens, but also the state of Oklahoma. Bill Lance, secretary of the Chickasaw Nation Department of Commerce, stated, “We [the Chickasaw Nation] consider the state of Oklahoma a partner, and we share a common goal to strengthen the economy and produce as many jobs as we can.” The Chickasaw Nation remains committed to its citizens and

partnerships. In 1987 when Bill Anoatubby was first elected Governor of the Chickasaw Nation, the tribe had 250 employees. Today, the tribe employs nearly 14,000 people, both Chickasaw and non-Chickasaw.



Figure 11: Visitors enjoying a game of stickball at the Chickasaw Cultural Center in Sulphur, Oklahoma. Courtesy of the *Chickasaw Nation Collections*.

The current businesses owned and operated by the Chickasaw Nation continue to tell the story of the Chickasaw people through an entrepreneurial lens. Secretary Bill Lance indicated, “Our [the Chickasaw Nation] economic activities are part of the economic fabric of the state, and the revenues generated through our various business enterprises allow us to invest in programs and services for the benefit of the Chickasaw Nation and Oklahoma citizens” (Mize 2012). From early trading with Southeastern

The Chickasaw Nation Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition) Unit 3: Lesson 4 The History of Chickasaw Entrepreneurship

Indians and later Europeans in the Chickasaw Homeland, to strong business endeavors in Oklahoma, the Chickasaw Nation continues to strengthen the lives of its citizens through servant leadership, teamwork, a strong cultural identity and perseverance. All of which are qualities inherent in Chickasaw entrepreneurship.



Figure 12: Image of the Chickasaw Cultural Center. Courtesy of the *Chickasaw Nation Collections*.

The Chickasaw Nation

Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition)

Unit 3: Lesson 4

The History of Chickasaw Entrepreneurship

Discussion Questions

1. How did the Chickasaws benefit from the major waterways throughout the Southeast?
2. With which European nation did the Chickasaws form a strong trade alliance? Why did they choose that particular European nation?
3. How did Chickasaw “stands” contribute to the Chickasaws’ early entrepreneurship?
4. What did Chickasaws do after their forced removal to Indian Territory?
5. What are some of the current Chickasaw Nation businesses?

The Chickasaw Nation

Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition)

Unit 3: Lesson 4

The History of Chickasaw Entrepreneurship

Student Activity

Prepare an essay that showcases your very own business. Keep in mind that entrepreneurs take risks and manage businesses in competitive global markets. Be sure to explain how the proposed business will impact your communities and families. Lastly, illustrate within your essay how your proposed business relates to the Chickasaw people, their businesses, ideas or concepts. Feel free to provide drawings or sketch art that visually depicts your proposed business. Now is a time to be creative and innovative!

The Chickasaw Nation

Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition)

Unit 3: Lesson 4

The History of Chickasaw Entrepreneurship

Student Quiz

Complete the quiz below.

1. What are the ancient animal trails of the North American Southeast called today?
 - a. Mississippi River
 - b. Tennessee River
 - c. Natchez Trace
 - d. Mississippi Trace
2. The Chickasaw trade fairs were located along which two major rivers?
 - a. Mississippi and Rio Grande
 - b. Tennessee and Saint Lawrence
 - c. Mississippi and Colorado
 - d. Mississippi and Tombigbee
3. With which European nation did the Chickasaws form a strong trade alliance?
 - a. Britain
 - b. Germany
 - c. Switzerland
 - d. Russia
4. What U.S. President commissioned William Clark and Meriwether Lewis to map and explore the newly acquired Louisiana Purchase?
 - a. Richard Nixon
 - b. Abraham Lincoln
 - c. Thomas Jefferson
 - d. George Washington
5. Which Chickasaw Nation gaming facility is the world's largest casino?
 - a. Washita Casino
 - b. Gold Mountain Casino
 - c. Saltcreek Casino
 - d. WinStar World Casino and Resort
6. What were many Chickasaw families operating along the Natchez Trace?
 - a. Wal-Mart
 - b. Stands
 - c. Saloons
 - d. Piggly Wiggly

The Chickasaw Nation

Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition)

Unit 3: Lesson 4

The History of Chickasaw Entrepreneurship

7. How does the Chickasaw Nation refer to their Removal from their Homeland?
 - a. Chickasaw and Choctaw Removal
 - b. Chickasaw Removal
 - c. End of the Trail
 - d. None of the above

8. Approximately how many years after Removal did the Chickasaws reestablish their communities, families, businesses, schools and government?
 - a. 16
 - b. 17
 - c. 18
 - d. 19

9. In what year did the Chickasaw Nation acquire the Artesian Motor Hotel?
 - a. 1962
 - b. 1972
 - c. 1982
 - d. 1992

10. Approximately how many businesses or economic enterprises does the Chickasaw Nation own?
 - a. 50
 - b. 70
 - c. 100
 - d. 110

The Chickasaw Nation

Secondary Student Curriculum (Student Edition)

Unit 3: Lesson 4

The History of Chickasaw Entrepreneurship

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