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The Great Health Giving Mecca and Summer Resort:

Platt National Park, The Early Years

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Historic Resources Study
National Park Service
Santa Fe Support Office
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Preface

This study examines the early history of that section of Chickasaw National Recreation Area originally known as Platt National Park. For many decades, Platt enjoyed a reputation for being the National Park System's smallest national park, at somewhat over 600 acres, yet it became one of the most heavily visited due largely to its location midway between two growing metropolitan areas, Oklahoma City and Dallas/Fort Worth. There were, in fact, political attempts to transfer it to the State of Oklahoma, or at best, demote the park to the status of a national monument, because of a perception that it lacked the exceptional resources normally associated with the likes of Yellowstone and Grand Canyon. Nevertheless, the park survived, due in no small part to the fervent support of the townspeople of adjacent Sulphur, Oklahoma.

When the Bureau of Reclamation dammed Rock Creek below the park in the late 1960s, a large reservoir was formed that eventually covered more than 2,400 acres and increased the total park area to nearly 10,000 acres. An agreement between the bureau and the National Park Service gave the latter responsibility for managing the recreational

aspects at the newly formed Arbuckle Lake. During the next few years, support grew for combining Platt National Park and Arbuckle Lake into a single unit administered by the National Park Service. The consolidation was achieved in 1976 with the passage of legislation establishing Chickasaw NRA, a designation recognizing the American Indian tribe that had originally ceded the land at the turn of the century. Merged into the larger recreation area, Platt National Park lost its identity.

A few special studies have been completed previously concerning the area's natural, geologic, and ethnographical aspects, but more recent human history of the park has attracted less attention. In fact, only one comprehensive treatment has reached publication. Dr. Palmer H. Boeger, a long-time seasonal ranger and professor of history at nearby East Central Oklahoma State University, authored *Oklahoma Oasis: From Platt National Park to Chickasaw National Recreation Area* in 1987. Despite the general reliability of that comprehensive work, park staff more recently recognized a need for another treatment casting Platt National Park against the backdrop of Indian Territory and early Oklahoma. This study, therefore, was initiated to focus on development of the region surrounding Sulphur Springs during the nineteenth century, subsequent formative years as a health Mecca and recreational attraction, and the park's first half-century under government administration.

The author has necessarily retraced much of Dr. Boeger's trail through the park archives. I have, however, expanded upon that foundation by investigating additional primary and secondary sources in an attempt to provide sharper focus on the creation and early development of the park. I have relied heavily upon agency records at the Southwest Region of the National Archives in Fort Worth, Texas, combining those with letter files and reports in the park archives to flesh out some aspects of the story presented by Dr. Boeger. The annual reports of the Secretary of the Interior, as well as local newspapers, also contained much useful information. A wide range of secondary sources contributed to a discussion of the early Chickasaw-Choctaw occupation in the region, and how their presence, coupled with incursions by Anglo-Americans, led eventually to the settlement and early economic development of south central Indian Territory. Particularly significant was the network of transportation routes that eventually crisscrossed the area, mere trails initially later followed by railroads, thus laying the foundation for tourism and making possible the successful transition of Sulphur Springs from a recreating place for local residents to a full-fledged park attracting visitors nationwide. To my disappointment, I found that Sulphur Springs remained largely invisible in the historical record until the early 1890s, except for vague references that Indian peoples may have visited the place for many years previously, and no doubt they did. Still, the Chickaws, comparative latecomers to the region, apparently attached no particular significance to

the spot, largely because their cultural heritage lay in their former homeland, Alabama and Mississippi.

The story of Platt National Park is inseparable from the early development of the town of Sulphur, which originally occupied the area in the immediate vicinity of the springs. In a truly unique circumstance, the Euro-American inhabitants recognized and seized upon the recreational potential of the mineral springs and encouraged government acquisition of the property, thus sealing the fate of the original village. However, that movement gave rise to an entirely new town on adjacent lands. Thus, a common thread throughout this narrative is the unusually close relationship between the park and local citizens. While that bond was certainly not devoid of stressful moments, most residents and most government officials recognized that cooperation was as essential as it was mutually beneficial. Indeed, the pride and sense of ownership demonstrated by the residents of Sulphur for "their" national park figured significantly in its success over the years.

I extend my profound appreciation to Barbara Rust and her staff at the Fort Worth branch of the National Archives for their generous assistance, always cheerfully rendered, during my visits to the facility and to my follow-up requests. DeAnn Blanton and Carolyn Bernowski of the National Archives Main and College Park branches, respectively, in Washington, D. C. graciously responded, as always, to my special long

distance requests. Superintendent Rick Schireman and the staff at Chickasaw National Recreation Area did everything possible to accommodate my research at the park. In particular, Park Ranger Judy Kahlor, who served as project coordinator, went beyond the call in facilitating my work, familiarizing me with the collections, and orientating me to the park and the surrounding area. I am also indebted to staff members at several repositories, including the Mary Logsdon at the Newspaper Department, Oklahoma Historical Society; Josh Clough, graduate assistant at the Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman; the Sulphur Public Library, the Davis Public Library, East Central Oklahoma State library, Ada; and the Special Collections staff at the University of Arizona library. Once again, my friend Venice Beskey with the Wyoming State Library went beyond the call to retrieve documents not readily available elsewhere. Joseph Ditta, reference librarian with the New York Historical Society, and Joyce M. Cox, Nevada State Library and Archives, are commended for their prompt and thorough responses to my e-mail requests. National Park Service colleagues Robert L. Spude and Art Gomez in the History Division, Santa Fe Support Office, lent encouragement and assistance, as always, throughout the duration of the project.

Chapter 1

Opening-Up the Country

Much of the year, Sulphur Springs was a drowsy little village nestled in the folds of the prairie skirting the northern fringe of the ancient Arbuckle Mountains. A few hundred residents, mostly whites and mixed bloods of Chickasaw and Choctaw Indian ancestry, inhabited an assortment of simple frame dwellings strewn haphazardly near the confluence of Rock and Sulphur Creeks. The business district was not unlike other rough-hewn frontier towns in the Indian Territory during the 1890s—two general mercantile stores, a druggist, grocery stores, a couple of livery stables and a blacksmith, restaurants, and that always essential symbol of community stability, a bank. There were hotels too—in fact, Sulphur boasted an inordinate number of hotels for a town its size. Among them were small board-and-batten affairs like the Brown Cottage, providing beds at budget prices, to intermediate-class accommodations exemplified by the Harper Hotel and the

Shannon House. Occupying higher ground, and commanding commensurately higher prices, was the first class White Sulphur Inn.

Unique to Sulphur were natural mineral-water springs gushing forth in several places, most prominently, Seven Springs—right in the middle of the town square. Nearby were a few primitive bathhouses, where visitors suffering from various maladies might immerse themselves in the reputedly healing waters. They also came to drink the various waters—bromide, sulphur, and fresh spring water—because they were touted as a cure digestive disorders. During summer, in fact, people came from all over, including places as far away as Dallas, Fort Worth, and Oklahoma City, to partake of the waters. The town of Sulfur Springs was transformed seasonally into a bustling place out of all proportion to its size and comparatively remote location.

Just when people began using the springs for such purposes is uncertain.

Archeological evidence suggests that indigenous Native American people, ancestors of tribes later identified as Caddos and Wichitas, camped in vicinity of the springs as early as the 1100s during hunting forays. There were, however, no indications of permanent habitation.¹

¹ Clare Sue Kidwell, "Ethnographic Overview: Phase II – American Indian Occupation and Use of the Chickasaw National Recreation Area," typescript, no date, filed in library, Chickasaw NRA.

Euro-Americans took little, if any, interest in the area for centuries, even after the occupation of New Spain. Perhaps the first white incursions into the region occurred when the Spanish established a trail along the Red River connecting the towns of Natchitoches and Nacodoches with their far-flung outpost at Santa Fe. At that, only a few priests, trappers, and traders ventured along the wilderness route. They apparently clung closely to the river both as a guide and a reliable source of water and did not depart from it to strike northwest until they reached the Deep Red, southwest of modern-day Lawton, Oklahoma.²

Following American acquisition of the Louisiana Purchase, President Thomas Jefferson sought more detailed information concerning the presumed western boundary of the new territory. To accomplish that, Congress funded an expedition in 1806 headed by Natchez scientist William Dunbar and surveyor Thomas Freeman, accompanied by a small military escort, to explore up Red River from its mouth. Spain, however, remained extremely sensitive to Americans, particularly United States soldiers, intruding on its territory. The Dunbar-Freeman party had proceeded only about 635 miles, to a point near the present-day southeast corner of Oklahoma, where they encountered a Spanish patrol

² Grant Foreman, "Early Trails Through Oklahoma," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, (June 1925), p. 100 (hereinafter cited as "Early Trails").

sent to intercept them.³ Outnumbered, the explorers were compelled to turn back downstream. That proved to be the only American penetration of the region until Major Stephen F. Long, returning from his 1819 trip to the Rocky Mountains, mistakenly turned down the Canadian, rather than Red River as he had intended. In so doing, his expedition circumvented the Arbuckles some distance to the south of his line of march. Long failed to discover his error until he suddenly encountered frontier settlements in western Arkansas.⁴

Nomadic tribesmen occasionally frequented the mineral springs in subsequent decades, but there is no record indicating that whites found the place until considerably later. Colonel Henry Dodge conducted the only other significant military reconnaissance of the region in 1834 when he led a column of the First Dragoons from Fort Gibson southwesterly to strike the Washita River few miles above its mouth at a point northwest of present-day Durant, Oklahoma. There he established camp and was soon joined by troops from nearby Fort Towson. Taking half the command, Dodge proceeded northwest with the intention of making a peaceful contact with the Wichitas and Comanches on the plains to pave the way for the arrival of the Chickasaws in their eastern hunting range.

³ The western boundary of the Louisiana Purchase would remain uncertain until it was officially defined as a provision of the Adams-Onis Treaty of 1819. Thomas A. Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People*, (New York: 1964), p. 173.

⁴ William H. Goetzmann, *Army Explorations in the American West 1803 - 1863*, (New Haven: 1959), pp. 34-35, 42-43 (hereinafter cited as *Army Exploration*).

The expedition followed the Washita nearly due west for some distance, passing within about twenty miles of the natural springs without being aware of their existence.⁵

The army had established Fort Gibson on the Arkansas River, a few miles above its confluence with the Canadian, more than a decade earlier for the purpose of averting intermittent warfare between the transplanted Osage and Cherokee people residing in that area. Soon afterward, Major Alexander Cummings, Seventh Infantry, was sent to construct a second post, christened Fort Towson, on Gates Creek, six miles above the Red. Its mission was to control the U. S. - Texas border, as well as preserve order among the Chickasaw and Choctaw Indians. These were the first military posts to be established in Indian Territory, and both stemmed from the federal government's policy to displace the so-called Five Civilized Tribes (Cherokee, Creek, Seminole, Chickasaw, and Choctaw) from their homeland in the South during the 1820s and 1830s.⁶

⁵ Stan Hoig, *Beyond the Frontier: Exploring the Indian Country*, (Norman: 1998), pp. 140-41; For a general map of Leavenworth's route, see John W. Morris, Charles R Goins, and Edwin C. McReynolds, *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma*, (Norman: 1982), pp. 17-18. This map indicates that the expedition veered away from the Washita about where it bends north, perhaps near present-day Dickson, Okla.; Foreman, "Early Trails," pp. 102-03.

⁶ Fort Towson, first established on Gates Creek above Red River in 1824, survived only five years at that location. In 1831 it was relocated about a mile distant from the original site, near the present town of Fort Towson, Oklahoma. Its mission was to guard the frontier boundary between the U. S. and Texas and protect the Choctaws and Chickasaws from lawless elements as well as marauding plains tribes to the west. The army later established Fort Washita, near where Dodge's 1834 camp had stood, in response to requests for protection by the more recently arrived Chickasaws and Choctaws. Robert W. Frazer, *Forts of the West: Military Forts and Presidios and Posts Commonly Called Forts West of the Mississippi River to 1898*, (Norman: 1977), pp. 125-26 (hereinafter cited as *Forts of the West*).

The Chickasaws, most central to this story, were probably first contacted by Europeans about 1540, when a Spanish military force under Hernando DeSoto moved from Florida up the Tombigbee River toward its headwaters in what would later become northern Mississippi. Although initial interaction between the Chickasaws and the Spanish was amicable enough at the outset, the relationship rapidly deteriorated when the Indians became disenchanted with the interlopers, whereupon they killed several of De Soto's men.

Not until late in the seventeenth century did Europeans again venture into Chickasaw territory, beginning with explorations by the French. Upon discovering the rich economic potential of the Mississippi Valley, they seized the opportunity to develop it as a convenient avenue from the Gulf of Mexico to their settlements in the Ohio country. The British, concurrently extending their frontiers westward, quite naturally opposed any expansion of French influence in the region by initiating a brisk competing trade in manufactured goods with the Chickasaws, in exchange for slaves and furs. Both countries introduced the Indians to Christianity by inserting missionaries throughout the region. The struggle for control eventually pitted the Chocktaws against the neighboring Chickasaws, and divided the latter into French and British factions. Intrigue and economic competition eventually culminated in the Seven Years War, in which France lost much of her influence in the New World, including the cession of Canada and Illinois

to Great Britain and Louisiana to Spain. The Chickasaws, at the same time, gained British assurances that their lands would be reserved from white settlement.

While the Chickasaw alliance with the British worked to the tribe's favor in the short term, they found themselves in opposition to the upstart colonists during the American Revolution. The most significant action in that region occurred at Fort Jefferson on the Ohio River, where Chickasaws laid waste to the countryside by destroying farms, then kept the fort's garrison under siege for a year. American forces eventually saved the garrison, but the strength of Chickasaw resistance nevertheless forced abandonment of the post.

The three decades following the Revolution were crucial for the Chickasaws, as well as the other Civilized Tribes. Although Great Britain had surrendered its claim on most of the country west to the Mississippi, Spain still held the lower Southeast. The newly formed United States government was too preoccupied with its own affairs at that time to devote attention to Indian affairs or to exert authority over the Chickasaw Nation. The Spanish, meantime, took advantage of that opportunity to negotiate agreements with the tribal factions in the south in an attempt to retain their allegiance, thereby solidifying an economic advantage over their recent enemies, the Americans. They even went so far as to pronounce themselves protectors of the Indians and encouraged the tribesmen to resist any kind of U. S. traffic over their lands. Discovering the ploy, Congress authorized

a commission to conclude new treaties favorable to the United States. Traders and agents immediately went among the various tribes in an attempt to win their loyalty through bartering and supplying better quality manufactured goods than their Spanish competitors. For a number of years, agents from both countries vied for the Indians' favor for their respective nations, including handing out liberal quantities of gifts. Eventually, in early 1786, the Chickasaws signed the Treaty of Hopewell with the United States, creating the first official relationship between the two entities. Significantly, the treaty specified that the government would have exclusive right to regulate commerce in the Chickasaw Nation.

Despite the supposed sovereignty of Indian lands, state and territorial boundaries were imposed over Indian reserves. That circumstance gave rise to certain legal issues when it came to the application of state laws to Indians. Moreover, a seemingly innocuous clause in the treaty granted the government complete authority to manage the affairs of the tribe in the best interests of the Indians. That was to have far-reaching effects on the tribe.

While the Spanish element of the Chickasaws settled near their benefactors, the American faction, actively supported by the United States with supplies of arms and munitions, carried out a war against the pro-Spanish Creeks. In 1795, a large Creek force invaded Chickasaw territory with the intention of capturing Long Town, headquarters of

the Chickasaw loyalists. But, the well-prepared Chickasaws soundly defeated the Creeks, thus weakening the position of their Spanish allies. A subsequent treaty with Spain confirmed U. S. dominion over the previously disputed lands north of thirty-one degrees latitude, thus defeating a Spanish plan to create an Indian buffer in Alabama and Mississippi. A separate agreement brought a lasting peace between the Creek and Chickasaw tribes.

During the period 1800 – 1818, the United States concluded four additional treaties with the Chickasaws, all aimed at reducing their land holdings in the so-called Natchez Trace. Resident agents and commissioners, advantageously using a keen understanding of intra-tribal relationships and politics, played off tribal factions against each other to obtain willing signatories. The taking of twenty million acres of land from the Chickasaws in those years bore mute testimony to the effectiveness of their methods. A positive development, at least from the white perspective, was the arrival of missionaries, the establishment of schools, and the temporary placing of Chickasaw children in the homes of white settlers. Full-blood Chickasaws, however, viewed the erosion of traditional tribal culture with skepticism. Nevertheless, over time nearly all

Chickasaws gained a fluency in English and exposure to white society that were to benefit them as individuals and as a tribe in the future.⁷

Government efforts to wrest land from the Chickasaws intensified during the 1820s. Working hand-in-glove, both Mississippi and Alabama adopted laws placing the Chickasaw Nation under their respective jurisdictions and, in the same stroke, seriously eroded the authority of the tribal government. The Indians, meantime, began considering the government's suggestion that they relocate on public lands west of the Mississippi in the Louisiana Purchase. Their former neighbors, the Choctaws, had resigned themselves to exchange their lands in central Mississippi and to move west as a result of an accord signed in 1820. Despite increasing personal abuse from local white interlopers, the Chickasaws stubbornly refused to relinquish their lands until another decade had passed. Only when Congress enacted legislation granting the president executive power to remove the tribes from their lands and to relocate them in the West did they finally concede to the inevitable. The states, anxious to complete white acquisition and settlement of their territories, began organizing counties and towns within Indian tracts. In the 1832 Treaty of Ponotoc, the Chickasaws succumbed to the inevitable by

⁷ The foregoing is a synthesis drawn from Arrell M. Gibson, *The Chickasaws*. (Norman: 1971) and Grant Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes*, (Norman: 1934).

consenting to move to Indian Territory as soon as suitable lands could be found.⁸ This decision had far-reaching effects on the Chickasaws because it tended to segregate the members. Elderly full-bloods were emotionally tied to the land of their forefathers, and even younger, but more practical mixed bloods were loath to leave their businesses, farms and hard-earned developments. Removal only accelerated the gradual disintegration of traditional culture that had been degenerating for centuries as the result of the introduction of alcohol, previously unknown diseases, and intermarriage with whites.

Finding most of the lands suitable for agriculture in Indian Territory already claimed, the advance party discovered that the Choctaws were willing to allow the Chickasaws to settle upon the central and western portions of their enormous tract (which they were unable to fully utilize anyway) and establish their own tribal government. In return for that privilege, the Chickasaws would pay their Choctaw brethren \$530,000, though people from both tribes could live in either section. The trail across the prairie left by Colonel Dodge was used to define much of the eastern boundary of the Chickasaw district.⁹

⁸ The Chickasaws ceded some 6,422,000 acres, their total southeastern domain. Homesteads temporarily held by whites within the nation accounted for about one-third of the total. The remaining four million acres were disposed of at public auction from time to time, the last being held in 1854. Gibson, *Chickasaws*, p. 179.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 178, 217; Foreman, "Early Trails," pp. 103.

The great migration occurred in two phases, the first one in fall 1837 followed by another a year later. Traveling overland and by steamboat, the people disembarked at Fort Coffee, on the Arkansas below Fort Gibson, four to six weeks later. At the time of their arrival on the frontier, a smallpox epidemic was devastating settlements along the Arkansas and the Canadian. The Chickasaws sought to minimize the dangers by separating into five groups, each establishing its own camp approximately a hundred miles distant from the others, but all within the Choctaw district. This precaution, however necessary under the circumstances, nevertheless had the effect of further fragmenting the tribe and destroying its former sense of community.

Licensed traders Edwards and Shelton soon established a post, later known as Edwards' Post (or Settlement), at the confluence of the Little Red and the Canadian to supply the newcomers. As business expanded, trading caravans began plying a trail from Camp Holmes southwesterly into Texas and back, crossing the Red River about where present-day Ryan stands. That route passed a short distance north and northwest of the mineral springs, but there is no record of any travelers straying from the trail to examine the nearby Rock Creek area.¹⁰

¹⁰ Edwards' Post was situated southeast of present-day Holdenville, Oklahoma, where Dodge's trail crossed the Canadian River. Nearby was abandoned Camp Holmes, established by Dodge in 1834 and maintained for about a year thereafter. From the Canadian, this route approximated Oklahoma Highway 1 on a southwesterly course from Atwood to Ada to the Davis area, perhaps intersecting the Interstate 35 corridor near Exit 51. It traversed Ponotoc, Murray, Carter, and Jefferson counties. *ibid.*; Frazer, *Forts of the West*, pp. 121-22.

The very presence of the Chickasaw and Choctaw settlers lured Comanche raiders and Texas outlaws to the eastern district seeking livestock and whatever loot they might steal. The problem reached such serious proportions by 1841 that the tribes appealed to the government to provide them with military protection. Soon after Colonel Zachary Taylor assumed command of Military Department No. 2, headquartered at Fort Smith, he saw the advantages of establishing a fort in the vicinity of Dodge's old camp on the Washita. At that strategic point, U. S. troops would be positioned to thwart hostile incursions from both Texas and the plains west of that stream. Taylor also foresaw the day when steamboats could ascend the Red and the Washita to simplify supply and communications with the new post. Captain George H. Blake, Second Dragoons, arrived in the area in April to select a site about thirty miles above the mouth of the Washita. A battalion of that regiment had just been transferred from service against the Seminoles in Florida to the far-western frontier, one company taking station at Fort Towson and two forming the garrison at new Fort Washita.¹¹

¹¹ Camp Washita was garrisoned by federal troops until 1861, when it was evacuated in the face of invasion by Texas Confederate forces. It was burned when abandoned by the Confederates at war's end. The military reservation was granted to the Chickasaw Nation in 1870. Frazer, *Forts of the West*, pp. 125-26; Raphael P. Thian, *Notes on Illustrating the Military Geography of the United States 1813 - 1880*, (Austin, Tex.: 1979), pp. 36-37; Herbert M. Hart, *Old Forts of the Southwest*, (New York: 1964), p. 14; Theophilus F. Rodenbough, *From Everglade to Canyon With the Second United States Cavalry*, (Norman: 2000), pp. 83-84.

The post thus became a crossroads for several important travel routes through the region. A military road led eastward to Fort Towson, while another route diverged northeast to Boggy Depot, established as the annuity distribution point for the Chickasaw tribe shortly after their arrival in 1837.¹² A third route, tracing the old dragoon trail east of the Washita, led to Edwards' trading post and Fort Gibson. The promise of land in the young Republic of Texas created a rush of homesteaders from the States. Subsequently during the mid-1840s, emigrants pioneered the Texas Road leading from Fort Gibson to the Red River. The road forked at Boggy Depot, one branch crossing the Red nearly due south of that point, the other reaching a more westerly ford on the river via Fort Washita.¹³

Because of its central location, Indian Territory (sometimes referred to as "the Nations") soon figured into westward expansion. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ending the Mexican-American War, resulted in the surrender of Mexico's entire northern frontier to the United States. Santa Fe continued to be a vital center of commerce and

¹² Boggy Depot stood on the Clear Boggy River, flowing southeasterly to its confluence with the Red. Accessible by boat, the depot was a logical distribution point for government annuity supplies shipped from the gulf. It was located within the eastern, or primarily Choctaw district, where many Chickasaws initially resided. A history of the place is found in Muriel H. Wright, "Old Boggy Depot," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, (March 1927), pp. 4 - 17.

¹³ The Texas Road served as a major artery of emigration and commerce for several decades beginning in the mid-1840s. It also facilitated Southern troop movements during the Civil War and figured in the Battle of Honey Springs. Proving the practicality of the route, major portions of it came into use by Texas cattlemen after the war as the Shawnee Trail to reach shipping points in Missouri. Foreman, *Early Trails*, p. 117; Morris, et al., *Historical Atlas*, maps 17 and 46.

territorial government, as well as the terminus of the ancient Camino Real linking Chihuahua and Mexico City. The discovery of gold in California immediately after the war inspired the nation to seek an all-season southern route to California and the Pacific to facilitate emigration and mail service. Accordingly, in April 1849, Captain Randolph B. Marcy was ordered to conduct a reconnaissance-in-force by escorting an emigrant train from Fort Smith to Santa Fe, and in so doing, evaluate that route as a possible corridor for a transcontinental railroad. Marcy's column essentially traced Abert's old trail westward following the south side of the Canadian, confirming its potential for a railroad, but at the same time recognizing that such a venture would be impractical until the region became more densely populated. Taking a more circuitous route on his return, Marcy hoped to chart a feasible wagon road from Fort Smith to the Rio Grande to connect with the extant trail to San Diego. That in mind, he marched southward from Santa Fe along the Rio Grande as far as Dona Ana, a farming village above El Paso, before turning east. His journey took him across the headwaters of the Brazos and eventually to Fort Washita. From there, he simply followed the Texas Road until he intersected his own trail back to Fort Smith. Marcy's expedition would have no immediate practical value, but in less than a decade it would prove to be of enormous significance.¹⁴

¹⁴ Goetzmann, *Army Exploration*, pp. 212-18.

The army constructed a second post farther up the Washita River in spring 1851 to augment protection for the Chickasaws and Choctaws, who continued to serve as prey for their less hospitable neighbors to the west. A military presence at that strategic location also served to discourage Comanche war parties from molesting traffic on the nearby trails leading to Texas and Santa Fe. Troops laid out Fort Arbuckle about five miles up Wildhorse (also called Wild Mustang) Creek, a tributary of the Washita flowing from the west. When completed, the post boasted eight sets of officers' quarters, barracks for three companies, and a number of auxiliary buildings. The establishment of the new post necessitated extending the military road from the supply depot at Little Rock via Forts Towson and Washita.

In addition to possessing a healthful environment on elevated ground, the post received an abundant supply of water from natural spring emanating from the Arbuckle Mountains. "It would be a great blessing," wrote the post surgeon, "if the men were content with this wholesome beverage of nature, but such is not the case."¹⁵ Like most soldiers of that era, the garrison spurned "Adam's ale" in preference to rot gut whiskey dispensed by the post sutler. Members of the garrison almost certainly were aware of the

¹⁵ Hart, *Old Forts of the Southwest*, p. 17; Frazer, *Forts of the West*, pp. 116-18; The site of Fort Arbuckle lies a few miles southwest of Davis, Oklahoma.

mineral springs only a few miles east of the post, and may have partaken of their waters, yet the surgeon made no mention them.¹⁶

Long and close association with whites in the Southeast had at once benefited and degraded Chickasaw society. Traditional customs were diluted through widespread interracial marriage with whites during and after the colonial era, creating a societal gulf between mixed bloods and their kinsmen. The mixed bloods tended to accept more readily farming and business interests, and became actively involved in governmental affairs. The tribe had embraced the concept of representative government by adopting their own constitution in 1834 and organizing an elected body of three chiefs and a general council composed of twenty-seven representatives. Like many Southerners, Chickasaw land owners often were slave owners as well. However disconcerting removal may have been for both elements of the tribe, it was probably more traumatic for the traditionalists steeped in the old ways and with strong ties to the land of their heritage. That factor also had the effect of widening the gulf between the two factions. Those difficulties notwithstanding, the ability of the Chickasaw people as a whole to adapt to

¹⁶ Beginning in 1868, army doctors were charged with maintaining post medical histories, including observations on weather, flora, and fauna, and geology in the vicinity of each station. Presumably, the army thought such information might prove useful militarily. Even though Fort Arbuckle was active until 1870, and therefore should have had a brief medical history, the National Archives does not have it in their holdings. Perhaps, since the fate of the post was foretold in a treaty concluded with the Chickasaws in 1866, the surgeon simply did not comply with the requirement. Author's note.

their new circumstances and meet challenges creatively bore mute testimony to their resiliency. The adjustment to the West:

... generated a renaissance of personal and group pride and produced a fresh sense of purpose and direction. The impact of these forces assuaged the chilling pangs of the Chickasaw Trail of Tears, provoked those resources essential to adjustment in the new land, and committed the Chickasaws to forge a society and way of life to match the challenge of the new land.¹⁷

By the 1840s, however, one Indian Bureau official declared there was little perceptible distinction between the Chickasaws and the Choctaws, with whom the former had intermarried extensively. Their languages were nearly the same, and because the Chickasaws were guests in the Choctaw Nation, and therefore subject to an 1837 pact, the former began to realize they were losing tribal identity, as well as control over their own affairs. Choctaw domination engendered an undercurrent of dissent among the Chickasaws, a burgeoning movement expressed in a sense of renewed nationalism and unity. Support for dissolution of the relationship led to an independent Chickasaw Nation created by formal agreement in 1855. With the concurrence of the Choctaws, Indian Commissioner George W. Manypenny defined a separate Chickasaw District, carving out

¹⁷ Gibson, *Chickasaws*, p. 224.

a large tract from the central portion of the former Choctaw domain in which the Chickasaws would enjoy tribal autonomy.¹⁸

The mid-1850s, however, saw few Chickasaws residing very far beyond Tishomingo, the tribal capital. Assistant Surgeon Rodney Glison, serving at Fort Arbuckle in 1854, noted the absence of permanent settlers in the area surrounding the post.

With the exception of some seven or eight families, there are no inhabitants in the neighborhood of this post. The only Indians that temporarily encamp in its vicinity are roaming bands of the Kickapoos, Wichitas, Keechies, and hunting parties of Caddoes, Wascoes, Creeks, Cherokees, Delawares, Chickasaws, and Choctaws.¹⁹

Nevertheless, the next few years saw the Chickasaws, particularly the more acculturated mixed bloods, seizing economic advantages presented by the various trails crisscrossing the territory. The Butterfield Overland Mail route, joining the Texas Trail

¹⁸ The Chickasaws paid the Choctaws \$150,000 for clear title to their own district, bounded on the north by the Canadian River, on the south by the Red River, on the east along a line from Island Bayou, on the Red, northward to the Canadian, and on the west by the 98th meridian. The district embraced over 4,700,00 acres. The zone west of the 98th meridian, originally belonging to the Choctaws and later occupied by both tribes, was leased by the government as a future reserve for plains tribes. The established council grounds at Good Spring, later named Tishomingo, became the Chickasaw capital. Muriel H. Wright, *A Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma*, (Norman: 1986), pp. 90-91, Gibson, *Chickasaws*, p. 254.

¹⁹ Richard H. Coolidge, "Statistical Report on the Sickness and Mortality in the Army of the United States Compiled from the Records of the Surgeon General's Office Embracing a Period of Sixteen Years, From January, 1839, to January, 1855," *Senate Executive Documents*, No. 96, 34th Cong., 1st Sess., (Washington, D. C.: 1856), p. 275.

east of Boggy Depot near Atoka in the Choctaw Nation, became a major artery for mail, commercial caravans, and emigration after 1857.²⁰ Marcy's route was also a thoroughfare used by New Mexico-bound emigrants, though it was less popular. Troops and army supply trains frequently plied the military road from Little Rock to Forts Washita and Arbuckle. Some Chickasaws, seeing an economic opportunity, began settling along those roads to supply travelers with food, forage, and replacement draft animals for their teams, while others established farms near the forts to secure contracts for wood, hay, fresh vegetables, and beef. But the burgeoning Chickasaw cattle herds, grazing on the lush prairie grasses of the region, quickly exceeded the army's needs, a circumstance that prompted the industrious tribesmen to seek additional markets in Missouri, Louisiana, and Arkansas. Cattle raising flourished as Chickasaw ranchers migrated farther westward across the district. In addition to four licensed trading houses owned by white men, the Indians themselves capitalized on the influx of traffic and residents by establishing a number of additional posts in the district.

A few particularly imaginative individuals developed primitive resorts at the natural oil seeps along the southern base of the Arbuckle Mountains. In a statement that

²⁰ The Butterfield Mail route, chartered in 1857, crossed Red River at Colbert's Ferry, then took a wide curving course across the Texas and New Mexico plains to El Paso and Dona Ana before striking west to California. Service over the route did not begin until September 1858. Muriel H. Wright, "The Butterfield Overland Mail One Hundred Years Ago, *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, (Spring 1957), pp. 55-71.

