

“‘Tubbee’ and His Nieces: A Colloquy on White Men, Choctaw Women, Intermarriage and ‘Indianness’ in the *Choctaw Intelligencer*, 1851”

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The *Choctaw Intelligencer*'s editorial commentary varied greatly when it came to Choctaw-Chickasaw relations with the United States in 1849-1852.¹ The most poignant opinions expressed in the *Intelligencer*, published in Doaksville, Choctaw Nation, came from letter writers and centered on the roles of men and women and what it meant to be “Indian.”² Spanish, British and French colonialists had disrupted traditional gender roles of all Southeastern tribes centuries before.³ By 1851, traditional roles were being turned on their heads in Indian Territory. Traditional Choctaws reacted with hostility to the gender bias imposed by American missionaries and the patriarchal role foisted on men accustomed to a tradition of matrilineal property rights and autonomy. Later in the 1850s, civil war threatened between traditionalists and proponents of assimilation, with social tension exacerbated by sharp increases in the number of white intruders.⁴ Concepts of race, likewise, were in flux. Americans and many elite natives considered “mixed bloods” to be above “full bloods,” but

¹ This paper adapted from Richard Mize, “Civilized Scribes: Voices of Opinion in the Choctaw Press, 1849-1852” (M.A. thesis, University of Central Oklahoma, 2004), 56-57, 81-88.

² In its February 26, 1851, issue the *Choctaw Intelligencer* described Doaksville, which was about 70 miles east of present Durant, Oklahoma: “Doaksville is situated on Gates’ creek, 1 mile from the U.S. military post, Fort Towson, 5 miles north from Red river, near the foot of the Southern branch of the Ozark mountains, and within 40 miles of the eastern boundary of the great Western Prairies, which extend to the Rocky Mountains. We are 40 miles from Clarksville, Texas, 125 miles from Washington, Ark., 140 miles from Fort Smith, and 55 miles from the eastern boundary of the possessions of the Choctaw Nation. Our population consists of 43 natives, 37 whites and 68 slaves, total 148. We have 3 dry goods stores, 1 hotel, 1 tinner’s shop, 1 saddlers shop, 1 wagon-maker’s shop, 1 blacksmith shop, 2 churches, 1 hall occupied by Choctaw Division No. 51, Sons of Temperance, numbering 70 members, 2 saw mills, 1 grist mill, 1 bakery, 1 printing office and 1 physician. The town is surrounded by cool, refreshing springs, the most delicious wild and domestic fruits, in their respective seasons; and the country around us is unsurpassed for fertility of soil.” Doaksville was surrounded by another 12,000 Choctaws and Chickasaws in the Apuckshanubbee district, one of four political units totaling 27,700 population (23,000 Choctaws, 4,700 Chickasaws), according to the March 5, 1851, *Choctaw Intelligencer*. Like the rest of the Trans-Mississippi South, Doaksville looked to New Orleans, “the great Southern metropolis,” as the center of gravity for commerce, if not morality. Editors cautioned “our Choctaw and other friends” traveling to New Orleans to be on the lookout for danger and vice, and wondered, perhaps tongue in cheek, whether it might behoove “our people to send missionaries there to enlighten the denizens of that city.” *Choctaw Intelligencer*, April 23, 1851, p. 2, col. 1.

³ Michelene E. Pesantubbee, *Choctaw Women in a Chaotic World: The Clash of Cultures in the Colonial Southeast* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), especially 34-36.

⁴ Donna L. Akers, *Living in the Land of Death: The Choctaw Nation, 1830-1860* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004), 34, 95, 98, 107-108, 126, 149.

below whites.⁵ “Tubbee” and his nieces and other native writers touched on all of these issues in letters to the editor of the *Choctaw Intelligencer* in 1851. The words in the letters are themselves artifacts of native literacy, considered then as the most important mark of “progress.” Historian Jill Lepore observed that Indian literacy, among nineteenth-century Americans as well as pro-assimilation natives, “most of all, marked the line between savagery and civilization.”⁶

The newspaper, although a general-circulation paper—probably never more than 300, but more widely distributed and read than average because of its unusual status as an Indian newspaper—did not strive for “objectivity” the way modern media usually do. Its editors and publishers were not disinterested journalists. The *Choctaw Intelligencer*, with L.D. Alsobrook as publisher and J.P. Kingsbury and the Rev. J.E. Dwight as editors, became the second newspaper published in the Choctaw Nation in late 1849, after the commercial failure of the *Choctaw Telegraph*.⁷ Not much is known about Alsobrook, but an accountant by the same name helped sell lots for the new town of Georgetown, Alabama, on land ceded by the Chickasaws, in 1836. Operation of a counting house being a good background for the publisher of a newspaper, this could have been the same Alsobrook.⁸ Kingsbury was a son of the Rev. Cyrus Kingsbury, a Presbyterian missionary to the Choctaws, pastor of a church at Doaksville and early minister to slaves.⁹ Cyrus Kingsbury, a native of New Hampshire, came west with the Choctaws from Mississippi. The Yankee missionary personally opposed slavery, but accepted it as a legal institution.¹⁰ Dwight, a Choctaw, later worked with J.P. Kingsbury to translate hymns into the Choctaw language.¹¹ Alsobrook, J.P. Kingsbury and Dwight spelled out their goals in their prospectus for the *Choctaw Intelligencer*:

⁵ Theda Perdue, *“Mixed Blood” Indians: Racial Construction in the Early South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 86-87.

⁶ Jill Lepore, *A is for American: Letters and Other Characters in the Newly United States* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 82.

⁷ Mize, “Civilized Scribes,” 56-57.

⁸ *North Alabamian* (Tuscumbia, Alabama), Dec. 16, 1836.

⁹ Robert Elliott Flickinger, *The Choctaw Freedmen and the Story of Oak Hill Industrial Academy, Valliant, McCurtain County, Oklahoma* (Pittsburgh: Presbyterian Board of Missions for Freedmen, 1914; reprint, Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 2002), 28, 65-66, 105, 353, 356, 378.

¹⁰ Arthur H. DeRosier Jr., “Cyrus Kingsbury – Missionary to the Choctaws,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 40, no. 4 (winter 1972): 267-287; Clara Sue Kidwell, “The Language of Christian Conversion among the Choctaw,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 77, no. 3 (fall 1999): 143-152; W.B. Morrison, “Diary of Rev. Cyrus Kingsbury,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 3, no. 2 (June 1925): 152-154; Michael C. Coleman, *Presbyterian Missionary Attitudes toward American Indians, 1837-1893* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 13, 61; Arminta Scott Spalding, “Cyrus Kingsbury: Missionary to the Choctaws” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1974); Cyrus Kingsbury, “Autobiography of Cyrus Kingsbury,” 4 May 1869, Sue McBeth Collection, 82.61, Folder 3, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City.

¹¹ Carolyn Thomas Foreman, *Oklahoma Imprints, 1835-1907: A History of Printing in Oklahoma Before Statehood* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1936), 151.

We wish to make it a permanent paper—useful to the citizens and residents of the Choctaw Nation; and a Channel through which the people can communicate with each other on all matters of Public Interest. To this end, for the benefit of such as may not understand English, we design to devote one page of each number, to the Choctaw language.¹²

Kingsbury and Dwight intended the *Intelligencer* to be “an advocate of genuine morality, sound education, and Temperance; and a source of information in regard to agriculture, and the markets, &c. &c.” They promised that space would be given to “sketches of history, Indian traditions, manners and Customs, and to such other subjects as may be suitably introduced in a Family newspaper.” They invited communication from across the Choctaw Nation—and the world.¹³

“Tubbee,” the *nom de plume* used by an obviously mixed-heritage Choctaw, joined a public colloquy on the types of settlers welcome in the Choctaw Nation with an open letter “To the Young Men of the United States” published June 4, 1851.¹⁴ He proposed to throw open the doors of the Choctaw Nation to white settlers—but not just anyone, only “those of you who have attained twenty-one years—those of you who are not married, and those of you who have neither lands nor homes.” First, however, Tubbee wanted white readers to know about their potential hosts:

I shall in the first place tell you that we are Choctaws, and that we are no savages. Those of you who have never heard of or seen us, may consider that we are real savages, sure enough; but gentlemen, I assure you that we are not in the same condition we were when your forefathers first found us. Here we have schools. Here we have religion—and, thank God, it is the true Protestant religion.¹⁵

Tubbee then got right to the point, staking a clear position in a debate over “Indianness” that persists in Oklahoma, giving an early example of the kind of thinking that led eventually to the nations being subsumed by white civilization. More to his immediate point, Tubbee further narrowed the invitation:

¹² *Choctaw Intelligencer*, September 4, 1850, p. 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ “Tubbee” means “killer” as explained in Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, 2d ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 17: “Choctaw children were usually named after animals, or for some incident connected with their birth. Later in life they received new names as a recognition of some special achievement, or from some incident or adventure, or as an indication of some personal characteristic. . . . The word *humma* or *homma*, meaning ‘red,’ was often added to a man’s name as a mark of distinction, and a great proportion of the war names carried the termination *abi*, signifying ‘killer,’ which was corrupted by the whites into the ‘tubbee’ so frequently found in later Choctaw names.”

¹⁵ *Choctaw Intelligencer*, June 4, 1851, p. 2, col. 3.

Gentlemen, I believe very strongly in the doctrine of amalgamation of the Anglo-Saxon blood and of the Aboriginal race. I consider it is the best in the whole world. Gentlemen, would you leave the land of your birth and come and seek *Big Fortune* in this far off west? I invite you to come. You will certainly find it. Now, young gentlemen, take good notice. I am only inviting such of you as would make good citizens. If you follow gambling, we don't want you. If you use profane language we don't want you. If you are given to low cunning and chicanery, we don't want you. If you are descendants of the Tories of the revolution, we don't want you. If you are in the habit of drinking liquor why, we don't want you at all. We don't make any ardent spirits here; stay where you are and drink your liquor. We don't want you here. We have one or two white men among us who love to drink liquor, and who are very hard to govern. These are as many as we can possibly get along with. We don't want any more of this class of white men among us, if we can help it. Please to excuse my roughness.¹⁶

Tubbee's letter expressed remarkable candor. Tubbee explicitly invited the kind of "settlers" that historian Francis Jennings so baldly—and fairly—described as those for whom "the common purpose was to exploit rather than to settle" in his remarkable 1975 work, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism and the Cant of Conquest*.¹⁷ Tubbee would give Jennings' upside-down thesis—it was the Americans who invaded America—another twist: Come, Americans, and invade the still-new Choctaw Nation now, as well.

Seen through a twenty-first-century lens, Tubbee's letter seems almost a parody: "Gentlemen, I will tell you that our girls are tolerably well educated. They are fully capable of attending to housewifery, and there are no young men to marry them. I have now come at last to the very point. Your fortune, your happiness and your all, are centered in these two words, 'feminine gender.'"¹⁸ Could it have been written by a speculating white masquerading as a Choctaw? The editors printed the letter without comment, which suggests that they accepted it at face value. Despite his apparent enthusiasm, Tubbee did not paint a picture of pure paradise. He pointed out that Choctaw law required that whites live two years in the nation "before taking a 'squaw,' and, during which time he has got to prove himself to his intended companion by 'making' big thumping ears of corn." Two years would pass quickly. "Marriage is then solemnized and consummated. After this he goes and selects a rich spot for his farm and residence. Now mind, young gentlemen, he gets his good farming land without paying a cent for it!"¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1976; reprint, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 32.

¹⁸ *Choctaw Intelligencer*, June 4, 1851, p. 2, col. 3.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Some context for Tubbee's letter emerged three weeks later, in the June 25, 1851, issue of the *Intelligencer*. "Herodotus," another Choctaw alias, wrote in praise of Colonel John Drennen, acting superintendent of the Western Territory, for giving "notice to those white men, who are not fit to dwell among us, to leave the Nation." Allowing them to stay, with their drunkenness, gambling and other vice, would "certainly infect us with their contaminated influences and examples," Herodotus warned. Herodotus wanted to rid the Choctaw Nation not only of recent white settlers of questionable character, but certain mixed-race descendants of white men who had intermarried with Choctaw women before the removal. He carefully avoided condemning all whites or their mixed-race descendants:

I am really happy to say that we have had some noble white men; who came and married among us. It was these very white men, who preserved our national existence; and their descendants have taken their place in upholding the Choctaw Nation from sinking into oblivion. We have some noble ones among us now, and they are a great blessing and honor to our country. I am for raising a noble race of men. My countrymen, what do you say to this? Will you *give* your daughters in marriage to these low, trifling, and loafing white men? Shall we all give our *daughters* to such men? I tell you my countrymen, it would be the worst thing we could do. I tell you, that they are not the descendants of the immortal *Washington*. It would be very hard for them to trace up their genealogies. If we were to give our daughters to them, what a generation *vipers, drunkards, gamblers and cut-throats* would be raised up!! My country-men, I tremble! at the idea of raising up such men.²⁰

Herodotus's letter perfectly framed the thin line separating the prevalent ideas of civilization and savagery and indicated how easily that line could blur. To borrow the simple matrix historian Robert F. Berkhofer Jr. used to explain the fictional western and the Indian in popular culture, some white men in Herodotus's world and their mixed-heritage descendants played the role of outlaw and some played the role of hero. Herodotus, and, arguably, the *Choctaw Intelligencer* itself, played roles as agents of civilization.²¹

The next month, another Choctaw, supposedly a woman writing under another pen name, "Squaw," responded to Tubbee directly. Squaw's letter purported to answer for all Choctaw women and read like a compilation of thought from several individuals. The letter-writer seemed to hold whites in general in lower regard than did Tubbee, and suggested that only the organized authority of the Choctaw Nation kept whites under control. It is impossible to tell whether the letter is what it appears to be. As with Tubbee's letter, the editors printed Squaw's with no comment:

²⁰ *Choctaw Intelligencer*, June 25, 1851, p.2, col. 3. A note on the reference to "immortal Washington": The Choctaws had a particular fondness for George Washington and the newspapers at Doaksville reflected it. The *Choctaw Telegraph* of September 20, 1849, gave front-page play to an "Extract from Washington's code of manners written in his early youth," p. 1, col. 3.

²¹ Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979; reprint, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 97.

There are several white men in these parts who are married in the Nation, and some single gentlemen, and if they are specimens of the whites, we think they would be more than we could manage individually; and that we are doing very well to marry our own Tubbees. Besides, it would look curious for a young gentleman who had been well brought up and well educated, to come out here and marry a squaw. We really do think that only trifling ones do come out; we would rather they would stay where they are, for we dislike very much to be troubled in any way with them.²²

Squaw also took exception to Tubbee's desire to see men with no homes or lands come to the Choctaw Nation: "We wish plainly to be understood that we do not want such young men who have no homes, for if they were of any account they would have homes, and not be wandering about through the Indian nation in quest of homes."²³ Finally, Squaw dismissed Tubbee's contention that Choctaw girls went wanting for husbands in a way that shows just where racial lines were drawn 150-plus years ago in the Choctaw Nation:

Our young gentlemen of the Nation have homes. If it is said that there are none to marry us, we can say that there are a good many young gentlemen that are married and doing well, and what is the reason why it is thought the rest of them will not do as well. If we are squaws, we are doing far better than the young ladies of the Abolition land, where they are courted and gallanted by the Darkey gentlemen, and even marry these very Mr. Kinky Heads.²⁴

In late August, the editors finally offered their own limited remarks on the subject of intermarriage in the form of an introduction to a yet another anonymous letter, this one from a white man living in western Arkansas, signed "A Friend to the Indian Lassie." The tone of the editors' remarks seemed to suggest—but only to suggest—that the entire exchange of letters might have been written at least somewhat tongue-in-cheek. The male editors surely found the discussion amusing at least: "Although we are not permitted to name the author, we will take the liberty of mentioning to our young lady readers, that he is young, handsome and vain, and is doubtless their friend. Perhaps some silent sorrow makes him speak feelingly on the subject."²⁵ "Friend" complained that Choctaw and Cherokee marriage laws worked against progressive Choctaw and Cherokee parents. The Choctaws required white men to teach school or farm for two years to earn the right to intermarry; the Cherokees required public application for a marriage permit from the National Council. Friend complained that such obstacles discouraged good white men from residency in the Indian nations even as the number of "cultivated and refined young ladies in want of husbands" grew, spurred by the "the pride of

²² *Choctaw Intelligencer*, July 16, 1851, p. 2, col. 2.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Choctaw Intelligencer*, August 27, 1851, p. 2, col. 1.

parents, who procure them instruction in philosophy and music, thus fitting them for husbands, and society, and rendering them more tempting to us young white men.” In the United States, Friend wrote, young white men had no reason to toil two years before being allowed to marry. Friend found Choctaw and Cherokee marriage laws simply “selfish and cruel.”²⁶

Finally, Tubbee wrote again. His second, and last, letter left more questions about the identities of the letter writers and their true motives than it answered. Squaw hid her relationship to Tubbee – niece – and the exchange of letters stemmed at least in part from a squabble between the older man and the younger, “ungovernable and unmanageable” woman. Tubbee wrote, “Most of the young Tubbees and young Squaws are my nephews and nieces. I am now trying my best to snatch them from dwindling into pigmies.” As for Squaw, “Our mother Eve’s fallen nature has been alarmingly and shockingly developed in every sentence she has written.” His nieces who had married “Tubbees,” Tubbee insisted, “are doing badly. They live miserable with their Tubbees.” He disputed Squaw’s claim that young single Choctaw men had homes, beyond their communal claim to Choctaw lands. But then Tubbee’s letter turned sharply as he shifted to praise the niece he had just accused of brandishing Eve’s sin so brazenly. Many young single Choctaw men who managed to live good lives, Tubbee wrote, owed it neither to Choctaw law nor whites’ influence, but to Squaw herself, who apparently worked to sway the nation’s Tubbees away from the “ball ground, grog shop, gambling table” and other sources of vice and indolence. The months-long dialogue among anonymous letter writers, after broaching topics of such broad interest for the Choctaws and their white neighbors, ended with a touching remark that showed just how personally the topics of intermarriage, and notions of civilization and savagery, resonated with individual Choctaws. Tubbee disagreed with Squaw in her estimation of young Choctaw men in general, but expressed pride in what he saw as a form of missionary work on her part:

It was this very identical female warrior who has snatched them from these places of torment. This female warrior has also converted the young men’s pistols and bowie knives into plough shears and pruninghooks. The wilderness and the solitary places in our country are now occupied by young gentlemen farmers, and they will soon make those places bloom as the rose. This is really very good news. I wish to say one word to those young gentlemen who have been saved by this wonderful female warrior. You are under an obligation to this Amazon and if any one of you should gain and bring her to the hymenial altar, you will have a warrior for your partner in this life.²⁷

The saga of Tubbee and Squaw, something of a family’s inside story, one with broad implications for the Choctaw Nation, played out in the pages of the *Choctaw Intelligencer*. The bilingual nature of the little Choctaw paper in out-of-the-way Doaksville precludes easy answers to important questions surrounding cultural differences and “Otherness” as it applies

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2, col. 3.

²⁷ *Choctaw Intelligencer*, September 10, 1851, p. 2, col. 2.

to Indian texts. Which came first, the text or the translation? Which was the “Other”?²⁸ It rattles expectations of “how an ‘Indian’ writer should talk”—a set of assumptions that are often belied when Native American writers express themselves through Euro-American culture, especially when seen through the long lens of history.²⁹ The words and thoughts of “Squaw” add considerable complexity to common modern notions surrounding Native American women in nineteenth-century Indian Territory.³⁰ She was an unusual example of the kind of important Indian woman that historian Clara Sue Kidwell considered crucial cultural mediators.³¹ “Native people,” Kidwell wrote, “have written little in their own words, and what there is has been written primarily by men. Women’s words are not the stuff of history.”³² But Squaw’s were.

Nonetheless, questions swirled from this handful of letters to the editor of a frontier Indian newspaper. Uncertainty surrounded “Indianness”—did that mean members and would-be members of the Choctaw republic or native Choctaws only? Questions emerged over the accepted roles of traditional natives versus whites and their mixed-heritage descendants. Ambiguity arose over different concepts of morality and the complex composition of nineteenth-century Indian racism. These and the purely personal elements of the “Tubbee-Squaw” family drama touched every Indian and white who read about it.

²⁸ A good discussion of these questions is David Murray, *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing & Representation in North American Indian Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 1-13.

²⁹ Barry O’Connell has a good discussion of this in his lengthy introduction to O’Connell, ed., *On Our Own Ground: The Complete Writings of William Apess, a Pequot* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), lv.

³⁰ For a discussion of persistent misinterpretations of American Indian women in history, see Devon A. Mihesuah, “Commonality of Difference: American Indian Women and History,” *American Indian Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (winter 1996): 15-27.

³¹ Clara Sue Kidwell, “Indian Women as Cultural Mediators,” *Ethnohistory* 39, no. 2 (spring 1992): 97-107.

³² *Ibid.*, 98.

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