

## UNITED STATES INDIAN AGENTS TO THE FIVE CIVILIZED TRIBES

By LeRoy H. Fischer\*

### *Introduction*

A series of four articles on the United States Indian Agents to the Five Civilized Tribes in Indian Territory are presented in this issue and the next following issue of *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*. These articles are the first attempt to study collectively the biographical profiles, problems, and concerns of the United States Indian agents that were prepared under my supervision in a graduate research seminar at Oklahoma State University by students working on the Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy degrees in history. Although several of the agents have been the subject of geographical sketches in historical journals such as *The Chronicles*, their specific contributions as Indian agents have not been delineated.

The agents were a part of the administrative structure of the Office of Indian Affairs (renamed the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1947), which in turn was an agency of the War Department until 1849, when it was transferred to the new Department of the Interior, where it continues to the present. Within this jurisdictional framework the agents were supervised by a superintendent who headed first the Western Superintendency and later the Southern Superintendency. Superintendents had general responsibility for Indian affairs in a geographic area. Their duties include supervising relations among the tribes in their superintendency and with other tribes and people having business with them; they also oversaw the accounts and conduct of the agents.

The Western Superintendency was headquartered in Indian Territory at the Choctaw Agency near Fort Coffee in 1834. The office of the Southern Superintendency was originally at Van Buren, Arkansas, but in 1853 was moved to Fort Smith, Arkansas, where it remained until the outbreak of the Civil War. The Arkansas Superintendency was the Confederate equivalent of the Southern Superintendency. The new superintendent for the United States Southern Superintendency, unable to reach Fort Smith because of Confederate occupation of that military post, established his headquarters in Kansas. His first office, located at Humboldt, was soon burned

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by Confederate troops. He opened an office next at Leroy, but for most of the Civil War his office was at Leavenworth. In 1865 the superintendent's headquarters was at Lawrence; in 1866 it was returned to Fort Smith; and in 1868 it was located at the Creek Agency on the Deep Fork of the Canadian River, about fifty miles west of Fort Gibson.

The agents of the Five Civilized Tribes of Indian Territory worked under the direction of the following superintendents:

<i>Western Superintendency</i>	<i>Date Appointed</i>
Francis W. Armstrong	June 30, 1834
William Armstrong	September 8, 1835
Samuel M. Rutherford	July 10, 1847
John Drennen	May 29, 1849
<i>Southern Superintendency</i>	
John Drennen	March 12, 1851
Thomas S. Drew	April 8, 1853
Charles W. Dean	March 3, 1855
Elias Rector	March 17, 1857
William G. Coffin	May 3, 1861
Elijah Sells	April 28, 1865
William Byers	September 20, 1866
James Wortham	March 27, 1867
L. Newton Robinson	June 17, 1868
Bvt. Maj. Gen. W. B. Hazen	June 30, 1869

In the earlier years most agents of the Five Civilized Tribes were virtually diplomatic representatives of the United States. Later they attempted to preserve peace, distribute money and goods as required by treaties, carry out other treaty provisions, assist with education, and promote general tribal well-being. Finally, in 1874, the Choctaw-Chickasaw, Creek, Seminole, and Cherokee agencies were consolidated to form the Union Agency, with headquarters in Muskogee, Oklahoma.

The Choctaw agents were located, beginning in 1831, on the Arkansas River near the site of Fort Coffee. (This agency was at the site of Skullyville.) In 1854 the agency was moved to the abandoned garrison at Fort Towson near the Red River. In 1855 the Choctaw agent was placed in charge of the Chickasaw Agency, and in 1856 the Chickasaws were permanently assigned to the Choctaw Agency. The combination of agencies was often called the Choctaw and Chickasaw Agency. In 1856 the Choctaw and Chickasaw agent moved from Fort Towson to the old Chickasaw Agency buildings near Fort Washita. This agency was the site of Hatisboro, less than 1/2 mile west of the forts. During the Civil War most of

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the Choctaws and Chickasaws joined the Confederacy, but the very few who remained loyal to the United States took refuge in Kansas, where their agent established temporary headquarters first at Leroy and then at the Sac and Fox Agency. During 1865 and 1866, the U.S. Indian agent lived at Fort Gibson and Fort Smith. The agency was located at Scullyville in 1866, and in 1867 the agent stayed at Boggy Depot.

The first Chickasaw agent in Indian Territory took office in 1837.<sup>1</sup> The agent usually stayed near Fort Towson, until in 1842 when permanent buildings were erected near Fort Washita. These structures, in use as the Chickasaw Agency headquarters until the Choctaw and Chickasaw agencies were consolidated in 1855-1856, became the location of the combined agencies.

The agents of the Choctaws and Chickasaws were generally Southerners and Democrats. They dealt with illegal trade in liquor, with alcoholism, disagreements with the military, and attacks by the Plains Indians. Almost all promoted education. Some were indifferent and some were dishonest. A close working relationship which developed between the agents and the mixed-bloods enabled some of the agents to take advantage of the full-bloods and generally isolate them politically and socially.

These men served as agents of the Choctaws and Chickasaws in Indian Territory:

<i>Choctaw Agency</i>	<i>Date Appointed</i>
Francis W. Armstrong	Assigned September 7, 1831
William Armstrong	September 8, 1835
Samuel M. Rutherford	July 10, 1847
John Doennen	May 29, 1849
William Wilson	June 30, 1851
Douglas H. Cooper	April 18, 1853
Isaac Coleman	July 31, 1861
Martin W. Chollar	August 22, 1866
Capt. George T. Olmstead	June 23, 1869
Theophilus D. Griffith	October 21, 1870
Albert Parsons	April 1, 1873
 <i>Chickasaw Agency</i>	
Gaines P. Kingsbury	June 11, 1837
A. M. M. Uphaw	March 4, 1839
Gabriel W. Long	November 6, 1849
Kenton Harper	June 30, 1851
Andrew Jackson Smith	September 1, 1851

<sup>1</sup> The first Chickasaw Agency was at Boggy Depot on west side of Clear Boggy River. The agency was moved about 2 miles south in 1871, to a site called New Boggy Depot on the old Texas Road.

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Cherokee agents were located at or near Fort Gibson from 1830 to 1851. Buildings for the agency were erected in 1839 on Bayou Menard some eight miles southeast of Fort Gibson, but this housing was not always in use. In 1851, when the Southern Superintendency replaced the Western Superintendency, the Cherokee Agency was moved from the area of Fort Gibson to a location near Tahlequah. During the Civil War, those Cherokees remaining loyal to the United States were forced to take refuge in Kansas; thus the Cherokee agent established temporary headquarters at the Sac and Fox Agency. At the height of the war, the agent and the Cherokees attempted to return to Tahlequah, but were unable to remain; and the agent established his office at Fort Gibson, then held by Federal forces. Since the agency buildings at Tahlequah had been destroyed during the war, the agent remained at Fort Gibson even after the military operations ceased, and not until 1871 was the agency headquarters finally returned to Tahlequah.

The agents of the Cherokees in Indian Territory, with but few exceptions, lacked any special training or experience for their tasks. Some were prominent political figures, such as Montford Stokes and Pierce M. Butler, who were former state governors, and others were obscure persons. Their problems were especially difficult. In addition to the usual conflicts with other tribes and with non-Indians, they had to contend with bitter factionalism within the tribe caused by removal. Although the removal conflicts were not solved by the agents prior to the Civil War, they were in part submerged by time, by the war and its aftermath, and by new conditions demanding urgent attention. Illegal trade in liquor and attendant alcoholism problems among the Cherokees chronically plagued their agents.

These men served as agents of the Cherokees in Indian Territory:

<i>Cherokee Agency</i>	<i>Date Appointed</i>
George Vashon	March 12, 1830; became subagent under regulations adopted July 7, 1834
Montford Stokes (subagent) (agent)	Accepted March 25, 1836 March 8, 1837
Pierce M. Butler	September 13, 1841
James McKissick	August 19, 1845
Richard C. S. Brown	February 14, 1848
William Butler	May 29, 1849
George Butler	Notified October 31, 1850
Robert J. Cowart	March 12, 1860
John Crawford	April 5, 1861

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Charles W. Chatterton	March 6, 1862
Justin Harlan	September 11, 1862
John J. Humphreys	September 25, 1866
William B. Davis	November 29, 1867
Capt. John N. Craig	June 22, 1869
John B. Jones	December 9, 1870