

# Star of the Republic Museum

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## Notes

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## Native Americans and the Republic



*Line drawing by J. J. ...  
after T. H. ...*

### Cheraquis.

*Cherokees: Indigenes des E. U. ou N. Amerique emigrés aux  
environs de Nacogoches.*

TEXAS, *definition*. 1. From the Spanish *Tejas*, a tribal name for the Hasinai Indians of East Texas, and sometimes applied to the Nadedache Indians. 2. From the Comanche word, *tehas*, meaning happy hunting grounds, *i.e.*, the "abode of the departed spirits." 3. From the Caddo word, *tayshas*, meaning friends.

Texas has been characterized as the biological crossroads of North America. Perhaps it could also be considered a cultural crossroads as well, for in the nineteenth century, Texas "became the home of more [Indian] tribes of a diversified character than any other state or region in the United States." By the early nineteenth century there were at least twenty-three different tribes residing in the Republic. Some of these tribes, like the Cherokee and the Comanche, would become an integral part of the Republic's culture and history, while other tribes faced the issues of cultural survival (accommodation and acculturation), removal, or even extinction, in relative obscurity.

There were the Eastern Woodland tribes such as the Caddo and related tribes, in addition to others which were relatively recent immigrants to Texas: the Cherokees, Creeks, Shawnees, Delawares, and even Seminoles. There were the Prairie Tribes, represented primarily by native Texas Indians: the Wichitas, Wacos, Tonkawas, and immigrant Kickapoos. Finally, there were the tribes representing Plains Indian Culture: the Kiowas, Lipan Apaches and Comanches.

As the first Anglo settlers entered what would become the Republic of Texas, they not only encountered Mexicans, but also the first Native Texans - the Indians. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Texas Indians had already experienced three centuries of exposure to various "Spanish, French, and Anglo-American explorers, freebooters, missionaries, traders, soldiers, and settlers."

The impact of this contact was immense, from the acquisition of the "white man's dog" (the horse), to the introduction of diseases like measles and smallpox, and the resulting epidemics. By the early years of the Republic, the eastern and coastal tribes had been decimated by diseases, and

most of the first Anglo settlements were "outside the Comanche range." Consequently, Stephen F. Austin's colonists incorrectly perceived Texas to be mostly uninhabited and theirs to claim.

On the eve of the Texas Revolution, the relationships between Native Texans, Mexicans, and the newly arriving Americans were entering a period of reassessment. The perceptions which Texas Indians held towards non-native Americans are interesting. Generally, through their art and sign language, Indians "distinguished the White from the Indian by representing the former as a hat-wearer." In sign language, the white man was designated by "simply passing the right hand across the brow, palm down, to convey the idea of a hat brim or visor."

Many Texas Indians, such as the Comanche, despised the Spaniards and later, the Mexicans. One writer noted that Indians "consider the Spaniards lawful game," while the Comanche contemptuously called the Mexicans their "stockkeepers." In the early 1830's, Mary Austin Holley observed that the Comanches "call the people of the United States their friends, and give them protection, while they hate the Mexicans." By the end of the decade, the same distinctions were being made between the Indians' hated foes, the "Texians," and Europeans. While visiting Texas in the late 1840's, the German, Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels, observed: "The Indians can very well distinguish the European, who has not done them any harm, from the American [Texan]." The pioneer missionary, Z.N. Morrell, perhaps best described the relationships between the various Texas Indian tribes, noting that the Comanches were "enemies to each other and enemies to everybody else."

The prism through which these Native Texans viewed themselves and the world was profoundly different from Anglo culture. Kinship and shared traditions represented the organizing principles of their societies. There was an emphasis on sharing rather than accumulating; Indians were more concerned with "living than getting." These cultural traits contrasted starkly with the Anglo immigrants to Texas, who lived in complex societies bound together by "formal institutions of government and written law."

## Acculturation

*While traveling to Coles Settlement in Washington County, two settlers found themselves "face to face with ten or fifteen Comanches. Extending their hands as they approached, they [the Indians] said: 'Howdy, howdy.' "* Noah Smithwick

By the early nineteenth century, almost all Texas Indians reflected some degree of acculturation. There were no "pristine sons of nature." Arrow points were now made from "iron barrel hoops," and their drums consisted of "the round containers some cheeses come in," with tanned deerskin stretched over them, while the paper from books was used "for making cigarettes." In 1838, while traveling through east Texas, Gustav Dresel attempted to purchase some Indian corn and sweet potatoes from Alabama Indians who already knew some English and Spanish. "When I offered paper money in exchange, the old squaw began: 'No gshaw, papeshillo; plat, plata, shocke ma fina!' ('That is nothing man; silver, silver is fine; good the sterling!') I gave silver coins, whereupon she took up one of them and tried to find out whether it was genuine!"

The adaptation of western artifacts reflects the extensive Indian trading network of this period. This was made possible because of the phenomenal dispersal of feral Spanish horses on the North American plains. Indians like the Comanche captured these horses, stole them from settlements, and even bred them, to trade with the French, and later Americans or Texans.

In addition to horses, Indians also stole mules on their annual raids in the northern province of Mexico. The animals were an important article of trade and, when tamed, were worth about \$40.00 on the average. Mules represented "one of few things Indians could always trade for gunpowder - getting as much as twenty loads of powder in exchange for a mule." According to one scholar, the "mules-for-powder trade" was ironic, as the Indians used the powder for raiding, while the Rangers purchased the mules to pursue the Indians.

Some of Stephen F. Austin's colonists carried on a "clandestine trade in arms and ammunition with the Indians." In the 1830's Holland Coffee had a trading post on the North bank of the Red River. There he advised his Comanche, Waco and "Tawakona" customers to "go to the interior and kill Mexicans and bring their horses and mules to him and he would give them a fair price."

In addition to the mustang trade, there was also a thriving fur trade. According to an official report, in 1830, the Indians brought to traders at Nacogdoches "40,000 deer hides, 1,500 bearskins, 1,200 otter skins and 600 beaver skins in less than a year."

Individual settlers also traded with the Indians. As an Austin Colony colonist, Robert Hancock Hunter's father often bartered with the local Coshatta Indians. "Pa ust to traid up the San Jacinto river with the Coshatta indians, would buy deer skins, bare skins, coon skins & all kind & bares oil. Pa don write smart traiding with the indians."

It is important to note that what the Indians were taking and trading for, "represented only those things, like guns and iron, things they could fit into their existing cultural patterns." To the Indians, the idea that their own culture should be adapted or adjusted was an alien concept.

Yet, it was their different perceptions of land which would ultimately prove the greatest source of conflict. Europeans or Anglos saw themselves as separated from nature and the supernatural. The Texas of Stephen F. Austin and his early colonists was a "howling wilderness" of fertile lands, teeming with wildlife to be "expropriated, delineated, and rendered hospitable." In contrast, Indians perceived themselves in an almost symbiotic relationship with nature

and the supernatural. The Cherokee word for land, *Eloheh*, also means "history, culture and religion." One could not "own land," since it was held in common, while individual responsibility for the land reflected a sense of stewardship.

The Native Texans of the Republic were very aware of these differences and the implications for their own existence. Perhaps sensing what the future would hold for "the people," in the early 1830's

Muguara, Chief of the Penateka Comanches, told the Republic settler, Noah Smithwick: "We have set up our lodges in these groves and swung our children from these boughs from time immemorial. When the game beats away from us, we pull down our lodges and move away, leaving no trace to frighten it, and in a while it comes back, but the white man comes and cuts down the trees, building houses and fences and the buffaloes get frightened and leave and never come back, and the Indians are left to starve."

## THE NATIVE TEXANS: The Tribes

### Karankawa

Along the Republic's coastal regions lived the Karankawa or "water walkers," a tribe which one scholar suggests had cultural traits similar to the "tribes of the Pacific Northwest." The name Karankawa was derived from the Spanish word "*comecrudo*," meaning "raw food eaters."

In 1828, while traveling through Texas, the French botanist and ethnologist Jean Louis Berlandier described the Karankawa as "extremely brave and excellent swimmers. They have a musky odor, which the Spanish call *amizle*, acquired from eating alligator." Actually their "abominable body odor" was caused by the alligator grease which they smeared on their bodies as protection against mosquitoes. Noah Smithwick described them as "giants, for they were most magnificent men in size and strength, seldom below six feet in height" (in the 1840's the average height for a man was 5'4"). Decimated by disease, by the 1840's Texans no longer considered them a threat. In 1843, William Bollaert was told that there were only "some dozen individuals of the Kronks at Corpus Christi and another small remnant at Matagorda."

### Caddo Confederacy

In the early nineteenth century, Anglo settlers were unaware of the great Caddo Confederacy that had once dominated the lands of east Texas. From the eighth to the thirteenth centuries, the Caddo were "part of the great mound-building culture of eastern North America." Tragically, sev-

eral smallpox epidemics had "caused great ravages among them," and by the 1830's only a remnant of this confederacy remained, composed of the Caddo proper, Hasinai, Eyeish, Abadarko, Abadoche, and Nadedache tribes. They lived in a few scattered villages in the great bend of the Red River and along the upper Neches and Angelina Rivers. By the Republic period, the Caddo were unable to prevent even other Indians from settling on their former territory.

Berlandier noted that "the Caddo enjoy a highly organized social life. They abhor thievery, are honest in their business dealings, and have a gift for agriculture. They do a thriving trade in furs - beaver, deer, otter - which they take to Natchitoches to exchange for guns, ammunition, tobacco and liquor, of which they are very fond."

In 1828, while inspecting Texas for the Mexican government, General Don Manuel de Mier y Terán, described some Caddo men: "The Caddos have the entire lobe of the ear pierced with holes to place glass beads, or feathers. Others, instead of metal ornaments wear well-cured heads of birds. They cut their hair in many different ways, the most striking are those in which the wearer pulls out all the hair by the roots, leaving only a band or strip along the top of the head from the forehead to the base of the head. On the artificial bald space they apply different colors in waving and snake-like stripes that reach to below the neck. They are all fond of making their faces show a vermilion red."

## WOODLAND TRIBES

Anglo settlers were not the only immigrants to Texas from the United States. Texas was seen as refuge for Indian tribes from the Southeastern states who had been impacted by the encroachment of Americans on their traditional lands. These tribes included the Alabama, Coshatta, Shawnee, Delaware, and Cherokee, in addition to numerous smaller tribes. All of these peoples were being affected by U.S. Indian policy. During the 1820's and 1830's, the United States initiated a policy of expropriating Indian lands and expelling them to newly designated "Indian territory." Conventional wisdom decreed that Indian and Anglo

cultures could not live in harmony, and “that there was no place for Indians as Indians, within the nation.” During the administration of President Andrew Jackson, these attitudes culminated in the “Indian Removal Policy Act of 1830.” This legislation would ultimately lead to what became known as “The Trail of Tears,” and the forced removal of the Cherokee to “Indian Territory” (which later became Oklahoma). Yet, even before the Removal Act of 1830, official census and travelers’ accounts documented that Texas had already become a haven and refuge for numerous displaced, “semi-civilized” eastern tribes.

Since there were not huge herds of buffalo to hunt, and it was difficult to travel on dense forest trails by horseback, these tribes never adopted the horse as an integral part of their culture. The Woodland tribes were “sedentary,” living in permanent villages or towns, which often numbered several hundred people, and surrounded by extensive fields planted in “beans, squash, maize, melons and watermelons.” These Indians had also developed a sophisticated political and social organization.

### Cherokee

The most significant of the eastern immigrant tribes was the Cherokee. Extremely acculturated, in the early nineteenth century this tribe had adopted many of the same traits as their Anglo neighbors, including literacy and slavery. By 1828, the Cherokee had founded a newspaper, *The Cherokee Phoenix*, and were printing books in their own language - “the only written one among the Indians of the Americas.”

In the years following the Revolutionary War, a large contingent of the Cherokee nation had left Appalachia and settled in Arkansas, ultimately entering Texas. With their Chief, Richard Field, they were living along the Angelina, Neches and Sabine Rivers by the 1820’s. Throughout the period of Mexican rule, the Cherokee made several attempts to obtain title to the territory between the Trinity and Sabine rivers, north of the San Antonio road. They were unsuccessful, receiving only promises from the Mexican officials. By 1833, there were 800 Cherokees living in east Texas, who “reportedly owned 3,000 cattle, 3,000 hogs, and at least 500 horses.” One Texan would

condescendingly note, “They were of all the Indian tribes the most enlightened.”

Jean Louis Berlandier described the Texas Cherokee in 1828: “They are a respected people who have made great progress in agriculture and in the fabrication of household goods, such as cotton cloth with which they clothe themselves. Their dwellings, built like those of the Anglo-Americans, are surrounded with livestock and abundantly supplied with provisions such as sweet potatoes, maize, and various vegetables. Those who live in Texas keep in constant touch with their compatriots of the northern states, writing to each other in their own alphabet. The only major vice with which one might charge the Cherokees is drunkenness.”

He also described their dress, which combined “elegance and simplicity - the head is wrapped in a turban; a short frock, ornamented with fringe, short tight-fitting trousers and slippers of deerskin complete their costume.” The women have acquired

“a bit of European taste in their toilettes, and their dress resembles that of French peasant girls.”

### Delaware

The Delaware were descendants of a powerful people who once inhabited the Atlantic seaboard. For two centuries they were pushed west and then southward, acquiring a knowledge of English, several additional Indian languages, and “the mercenary instincts of a Yankee trader.” These “frontier entrepreneurs” would play an important role in the conquest of the West and Texas.

By the early nineteenth century a tribe of Delaware was living in East Texas, and like the Cherokee, their “housing and clothing reflected years of European influence.” Their role as interpreters, guides, and scouts was a critical factor in Anglo-Indian relations, and “there was scarcely an Indian council held but that the Delawares were



Friedrich Richard Petri, *John Conner, Delaware*. Private collection.

present as interpreters." In 1845, T.G. Western, a Texas Indian Agent, wrote, "the Delawares are, as it were, the connecting links between us and the Comanches." Individual Delaware Indians such as John Conner and Jim Shaw played an important role in the Texas Republic.

### Alabama and Coushatta

Calling themselves the "medicine gatherers" and the "white cane" people, the Alabama and Coushatta tribes have been closely related throughout their history. Originally part of the Upper Creek Confederacy, in the beginning of the nineteenth century they migrated from Alabama into Texas. They settled in several villages along the Neches and Trinity Rivers in the Big Thicket.

In 1838 a German, Friedrich W. von Wrede, spent the night in a Coushatta village. "Several colorful groups caught my eye. To my right, under a large tree, stood a mother with two daughters busily engaged preparing mortars while the mother busied herself with a row of sieves made from reeds, each one finer than the other in order to obtain the finest meal. To my left, five seven-to-thirteen year old half-naked boys amused themselves by rolling gourds or practicing with the bow and blow gun. In the evening our coffee was cooked and served Indian fashion: *i.e.*, it was boiled in a large iron pot. The men drank from a large round spoon, which was passed around. The women each had her own spoon, carved from buffalo horns."

### PRAIRIE TRIBES

To the north of these eastern tribes, along the Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma border, lived the Prairie Tribes; primarily the Tonkawas, Wacos, Wichitas, immigrant Kickapoos, and other minor tribes. In Texas they ranged from the "piney woods to the Cross Timbers" in what one scholar called a cultural "twilight zone." Semi-sedentary much of the year, they lived in villages of grass houses and raised extensive crops of corn, beans, and squash. Yet, like their plains Indian neighbors, they also adopted many horse culture trappings, holding communal bison hunts, and living in tipis. By the 1820's the Wichita and related tribes

had been weakened by disease and warfare, and were unable to effectively prevent the encroachment of Anglo settlers onto their lands.

### Wichita

In the eighteenth century, the Wichita or "Tavoyas" represented "one of the wealthiest and most powerful Nations of the north." However, by the 1830's, several smallpox epidemics, and continued warfare with other tribes had taken its toll. In 1834, the painter and ethnographer George Catlin visited a Wichita village and found them "cultivating quite extensive fields of corn, pumpkins, melons, beans, squashes; so with these aids, and an abundant supply of buffalo meat, they may be said to be living very well."

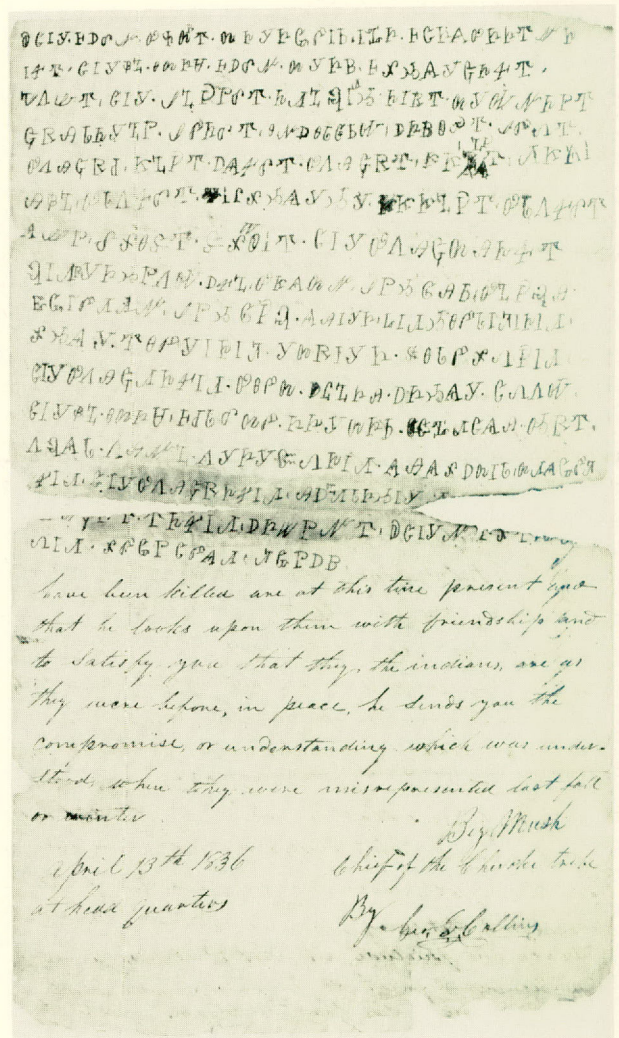
Both other Indian tribes and Anglos considered them "the most arrant horse thieves on the border." One Comanche

chief said, "The Wichitas are like dogs. They will steal." Horse trading and stealing represented an important aspect of their culture, and even in the 1850's they maintained large herds of horses.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Wichita culture was their use of tattooing. In 1844 Josiah Gregg described the women: "They are chiefly remarkable for their profuse tattooing, the females particularly make a perfect calico of the whole under-jaw, breast and arms, and the mammae are fancifully ornamented with rings and rays. The tattoo, in fact, seems to constitute the chief female ornament of these tribes; for their only gown consists of about a yard and a half of strouding constituting a sort of primitive petticoat." To be continued ...

This essay represents the first in a four part series on Texas Indians in the Republic period.

Manuscript written by Cherokee Chief, Big Mush, April 13, 1836. Note the Cherokee syllabary. Courtesy, Texas State Library.



P. O. Box 317 Washington, Texas 77880

## Notes

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In 1992 the Star of the Republic Museum will present a major historical exhibition and symposium examining the experience of Texas Native Americans in the Republic period (1836-1846). The Museum will premiere the exhibition, "**Native Americans and the Republic,**" on February 29, 1992, and, on September 26, 1992, the Museum will host a day-long **symposium**. Throughout 1992 public programming at the Museum will focus on Texas Native American folkways. This project is partially funded by grants from the Texas Committee on the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Summerlee Foundation. For additional information, please contact Gayle Piper at 409-878-2461, or write the Star of the Republic Museum.

The Museum has recently received a second "**Certificate of Commendation**" from the American Association for State and Local History for the Museum's orientation audio-visual, *The Republic of Texas*, narrated by Bill Moyers. The American Association for State and Local History, a nonprofit educational organization, assists organizations throughout the United States and Canada in preserving their local heritage. Since there were only 68 awards presented nationally, it is an honor that the Museum was chosen to receive this recognition. Last year the Museum received a similar award honoring its quarterly publication, *Notes*. In addition, the Museum was recognized with **an award from the Texas Historical Commission** for the temporary exhibition, *Texas: A Beautiful, Promising Land*. The purpose of this award is to recognize museums that have contributed to the preservation, understanding, and appreciation of Texas history. Museum exhibits have won awards from the Historical Commission for five out of the last six years.

We are pleased to announce the ground-breaking of the Museum's new Collection Research Annex, due to be completed by late spring of 1992. This 4,300 square foot addition will provide a state-of-the-arts collection storage facility and curatorial work space. The project was initiated by the Washington-on-the-Brazos Park Association, and made possible through a \$250,000 grant from the Meadows Foundation, \$50,000 from the Brown Foundation, and \$25,000 from the Temple Foundation. Additional funding for the \$505,000 project came from the Museum, and the Washington-on-the-Brazos Park Association.

## Star of the Republic Museum

Please do not forget the Museum Shop for unique holiday gift-giving ideas. We have been working very hard to assure that our visitors will find authentic early nineteenth-century reproductions, from hand-blown glassware, to coverlets and pottery. The Museum shop also offers an excellent selection of Texana books, including the Museum's award-winning book, *Notes on the Republic*. An autographed copy may just be the perfect Christmas present for that favorite Texan in your life! For further information please contact Gayle Piper.

Front page illustration: *Cherokee Indians of eastern Texas*. Water color by Lino Sánchez y Tapia after José Mariá Sánchez y Tapia. Courtesy, Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, Tulsa.

**EXHIBIT SCHEDULE**  
**"Native Americans and the Republic"**  
 February 29, 1992 - October 1992

**MUSEUM SCHEDULE**  
 Wednesday through Sunday  
 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

*Administered by Blinn College, Brenham, Texas*

Director . . . . . Houston McGaugh  
 Curator of Exhibits . . . . . Sherry B. Humphreys  
 Curator of Education . . . . . Ellen N. Murry  
 Administrative Assistant . . . . . Gayle L. Piper  
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