



## Dwight Mission, Indian Nation, August 15, 1828

### Introduction

Hiram Abiff Whittington's letters, which he wrote to his brother Granville Whittington in the late 1820s and early 1830s, remain one of the most valuable personal accounts of daily life in Arkansas shortly before Arkansas Territory became a state. Whittington was one of many entrepreneurial men who moved to Arkansas seeking exciting opportunities and new life in what was at the time the frontier of the United States. He was born in 1805 in Boston, Massachusetts, and moved to Little Rock in 1826. He was a skilled printer and book binder and had experience in book trade and publishing. In Little Rock, he worked as a printer with the *Arkansas Gazette* but in 1832 he moved to Hot Springs. He settled there hoping that the spring waters would have a healing effect on his deteriorating health. He opened several businesses, created first lending library in Arkansas, and established a successful political career, eventually serving as a state representative. In 1836, Whittington returned to Boston to marry Mary Burnham. The two moved back to Hot Springs and had six children. Whittington died in 1890 in Hot Springs.

Whittington's letters provide an account into the daily life in Arkansas Territory from a perspective of a white middle class educated man. Access to Whittington's original letters, which are housed at the Special Collections Department of the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, is limited due to the documents' fragility. To make these rare and extremely valuable records more accessible to researchers, educators, and students, Whittington's letters were typed. Activities in "Arkansas Before Statehood" are based on six typescript letters (typed copies of the original letters) selected from a collection of sixteen letters housed at the Center for Arkansas History and Culture in Little Rock (Hiram A. Whittington Papers, 1824-1834, UALR.MS.0157).



CENTER FOR ARKANSAS  
HISTORY AND CULTURE  
UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS AT LITTLE ROCK

Dwight Mission, Indian Nation,  
August 15, 1828.

Dear Brother:

You will be surprised to find by the caption of this letter that I have left Little Rock but so it is. I am now in the heart of the Cherokee Nation of the Indians, about one hundred miles from Little Rock. You will recollect in my last letter I complained of ill health, occasioned by being confined too close at the office, and an opportunity appearing I determined to avail myself of it and take a little exercise.

Mr. Brown, the principal of the Little Rock Academy has a sister attached to this mission and being about to visit her during his vacation, invited me to accompany him, which I immediately agreed to do. We left Little Rock on the 4th inst. and arrived here on the 7th. This Mission was established by the Presbyterian Board about eight years ago for the purpose of civilizing the Cherokees. There are eight families attached to the Mission - all from New England, all yankees. There is one old lady from Boston, Miss Stutson, who has charge of the female scholars. She appeared to be very glad to see me, merely because I was Boston born. She is an old maid, and is thought by some to be a real man hater; she is very severe with her scholars, many of whom are women grown, and as handsome as any women I ever saw. not-with-standing they are squaws,-- there are about thirty or forty girls that belong to this school from five to twenty years of age-- some can talk as good English as I can, and some a good deal better. All that have been in the school one year can talk some English -- some of them have light hair and as white skin as

- 30 -

Hiram Abiff Whittington to his brother Granville Whittington, Dwight Mission, Indian Nation, August 15, 1828 (Hiram A. Whittington Papers, 1824-1834), p. 1

2

History Alive: Virtually!

Supported in part by a grant from the Arkansas Humanities Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities  
UA at Little Rock Center for Arkansas History and Culture  
ualr.edu/cahc | 501.320.5780



CENTER FOR ARKANSAS  
HISTORY AND CULTURE  
UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS AT LITTLE ROCK

any white girls in Cohasset. There are a great many white men married to Cherokee girls, and settled in the Nation -- most of the girls who receive their education here marry white men, and generally make the most affectionate and most industrious kind of wives.

There are about as many boys as girls who go to school here. The missionaries chose a very good place to locate themselves it is on the Illinois Creek, and about the center of the Nation. They have about thirty buildings of one kind and another-- a dining room about one hundred feet in length, where all the scholars, amounting to from sixty to seventy-five and every one attached to the mission as well as those who visit them, sit down together. The fare is plain but wholesome. There is a young man here by the name of Thornton, a Cherokee, who is studying medicine, and who has been very attentive to me since I have been here, we ride out every day or two and visit his friends and relations, where we generally see some pretty little girls, and get as many melons and peaches as we can eat. Day before yesterday we rode about seven miles to a friend of his where we staid all day. The man is French and his wife is Cherokee, he has one very pretty daughter about fourteen years old, who speaks and understands three languages, French, Cherokee, and American, she is as white as anybody and is certainly the most interesting little thing I ever saw.

Next Thursday there is to be a Grand Council, about forty miles from here, at a place called the "Horse Head", at which I shall attend with Mr. Washburn, the Superintendent of this Mission. You will recollect that the treaty which was made with

- 31 -

Hiram Abiff Whittington to his brother Granville Whittington, Dwight Mission, Indian Nation, August 15, 1828 (Hiram A. Whittington Papers, 1824-1834), p. 2



CENTER FOR ARKANSAS  
HISTORY AND CULTURE  
UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS AT LITTLE ROCK

the United States by the Cherokees last winter at Washington, one thousand dollars was appropriated for the purchase of a printing press and types for the use of the Cherokees, which will probably go into operation as soon as the Cherokees get moved into their new land, which is about two hundred miles farther up the Arkansas; my object in attending the council is to get the appointment of printer to their paper when it is put in operation, should I succeed it will not interfere with my intended visit to "sandy Cove" next summer, as the press will not go into operation before a year or eighteen months from this date. As soon as the council adjourns I shall return to Little Rock.

The paper will be similar to the one printed in the old Nation, part in English and part in Cherokee language; and in Cherokee characters as invented by George Guess, one of the chiefs. When I return to the Rock I will send you one of the Cherokee papers printed in the old Nation. I will write to you as soon as I get to the Rock and tell you something about the council, I anticipate a good deal of sport there with the Indians as there will be a great many present. I hope you are all well at home. Give my best respects to Father, Mother, and all the family.

Yours etc.,

H.A. Whittington.

- 32 -

Hiram Abiff Whittington to his brother Granville Whittington, Dwight Mission, Indian Nation, August 15, 1828 (Hiram A. Whittington Papers, 1824-1834), p. 3

4

History Alive: Virtually!

Supported in part by a grant from the Arkansas Humanities Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities  
UA at Little Rock Center for Arkansas History and Culture  
ualr.edu/cahc | 501.320.5780



**Questions:**

1. The word “mission” means several different things. What is “mission” in Whittington’s letter? If you are not sure, look it up in a dictionary.
2. Who established the mission that Whittington visits and where was it established?
3. Who are the Cherokees? What does it mean when Whittington writes that the mission’s purpose was to “civilize the Cherokees”?
4. What do we learn about the school that the mission runs? Who attends the school and who teaches in it? Look up the word “squaw” if you do not know its meaning.
5. What do we learn about interactions between white settlers and the Cherokees from Whittington’s letter?
6. Whittington plans to attend a meeting with the Cherokees. Why does he want to attend it? What is his goal?
7. What do we learn about the newspaper that is planned to be created by the Cherokees? Who was George Guess? Look him up. What was his contribution to Native American history and US history?
8. Whittington writes that the Cherokees will soon move “into their new land ... two hundred miles further up the Arkansas.” To what historical events does he refer? If you are not sure, investigate how and when the Cherokees first arrived in Arkansas and what happened to them in the 1820s and 1830s.
9. What do we learn about the lives of Native Americans in Arkansas from this letter? Consider Whittington’s point of view. How could Whittington’s background influence what he wrote about the Cherokees? Keep in mind that Whittington was not a Native American. He was a white middle class educated man who moved to Arkansas from Boston, which at the time was one of the largest cities in the United States.
10. Whittington writes that the Dwight Mission provided education to the Cherokees. Research the role of Christian missions and their schools in Native American history. In what other ways, besides education, did the missions impact the lives of Native Americans? Was the impact of Christian missions on Native Americans beneficial or disadvantageous? You can find more information about the Dwight Mission here: <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/dwight-mission-2473/>.