



ARKANSAS BEFORE STATEHOOD: LITTLE ROCK, AUGUST 30, 1828

***For additional information, see letter from August 15, 1828**

Introduction

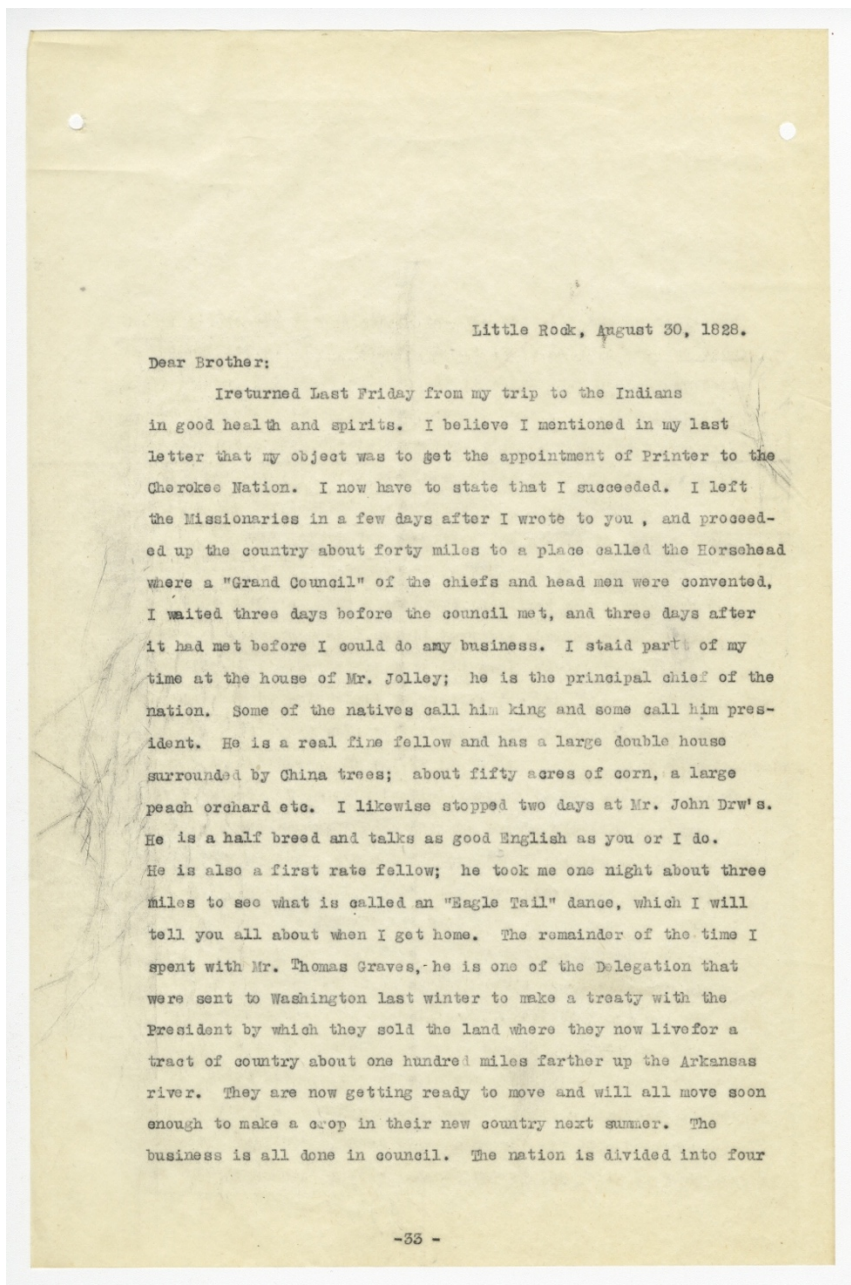
Hiram Abiff Whittington's letters, which he wrote to his brother Granville Whittington in the late 1820s and early 1830s, remain one of the most valuable personal accounts of daily life in Arkansas shortly before Arkansas Territory became a state. Whittington was one of many entrepreneurial men who moved 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).

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Little Rock, August 30, 1828.

Dear Brother:

I returned last Friday from my trip to the Indians in good health and spirits. I believe I mentioned in my last letter that my object was to get the appointment of Printer to the Cherokee Nation. I now have to state that I succeeded. I left the Missionaries in a few days after I wrote to you, and proceeded up the country about forty miles to a place called the Horshead where a "Grand Council" of the chiefs and head men were convened. I waited three days before the council met, and three days after it had met before I could do any business. I staid part of my time at the house of Mr. Jolley; he is the principal chief of the nation. Some of the natives call him king and some call him president. He is a real fine fellow and has a large double house surrounded by China trees; about fifty acres of corn, a large peach orchard etc. I likewise stopped two days at Mr. John Drw's. He is a half breed and talks as good English as you or I do. He is also a first rate fellow; he took me one night about three miles to see what is called an "Eagle Tail" dance, which I will tell you all about when I get home. The remainder of the time I spent with Mr. Thomas Graves, he is one of the Delegation that were sent to Washington last winter to make a treaty with the President by which they sold the land where they now live for a tract of country about one hundred miles farther up the Arkansas river. They are now getting ready to move and will all move soon enough to make a crop in their new country next summer. The business is all done in council. The nation is divided into four

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Hiram Abiff Whittington to his brother Granville Whittington, Little Rock, August 30, 1828 (Hiram A. Whittington Papers, 1824-1834), p. 1

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districts, and each district chooses annually two committeemen who prepare all the business before it is laid before the people at large. They have a log house in which they meet to do their business which is called the council house. Outside of the house is a large smooth space, where the Indians, men, women and children amuse themselves by dancing, whilst their chiefs are transacting the business of the nation.

I went before the committee and stated to them through an intrepeter that I wished to be employed to superintend their printing office. They smoked and consulted their chiefs a few hours and agreed that I should have the appointment. It will probably be a year before they get ready for their office. I expect to be authorized to promise for them when I return in the spring. The paper will be printed partly in English type and partly in Cherokee. My salary is to be _____ on when I commence my services. I am principally indebted to Mr. Woodruff and Mr. Nashburn, the superintendent of the Dwight Mission, for the appointment. There was another applicant for the situation, who was quite confident of getting the appointment and was greatly mortified when he found I had beat him.

There were about five hundred Indians present at the council, who appeared to enjoy themselves very well, and during the three days that the council was in session I did not see one who was not in a good humor., there was not a fight nor any angry words passed between any of them the whole time. Never in my life before have I seen a hundredth part as large a concourse of people assembled together without witnessing more or less broken heads and bloody noses. I felt ashamed for my own color as I thought of

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Hiram Abiff Whittington to his brother Granville Whittington, Little Rock, August 30, 1828 (Hiram A. Whittington Papers, 1824-1834), p. 2

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the angry passions I had seen excited among them on election day and the 4th of July in different parts of the Union. The comparison between the Cherokee Indians and the Nantucket oil boys is certainly very great, especially in their dances; but there is no comparison between the Cherokees and the people of Little Rock; here on any public occasion you cannot go five rods without seeing a fight. Most every man has a pistol a dirk, or sword-cane; there all was harmony, all was peace. I was so well pleased with them that I was sorry that I was obliged to return to this town, and almost wished I was an Indian. I was in the nation about four weeks, most of the time I was riding about the country with a young Cherokee by the name of Thornton, - he has a very good English education and is studying medicine. The first thing the Indians asked us when we stop at a house is to eat, and whether we stop one day or two weeks they will receive no pay; which, I believe is not the case among white people. I send you one of the papers printed in the old Cherokee Nation, edited by a Cherokee and printed by a white man, it is similar to the one to be established here.

I wish you would write to me a little oftener than what you do. I write four letters to your one, I wrote to Father six months since and have not got an answer yet. I shall, in all probability, be at Cohasset about the first of June next. It is more than likely I shall leave here in the course of two months for New Orleans, where I intend remaining until spring; perhaps I shall make another trip among the Indians during the winter. You can direct your letters here until I write again.

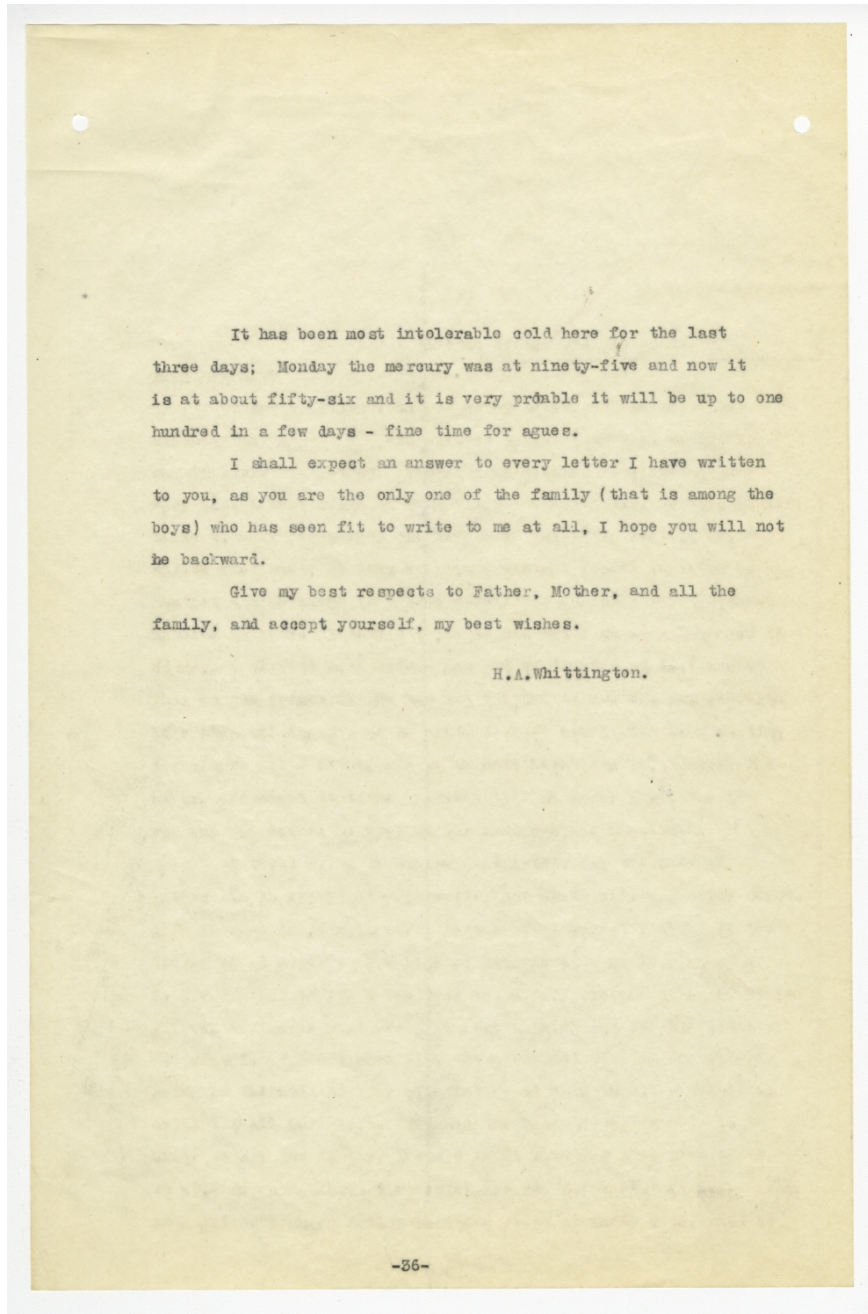
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Hiram Abiff Whittington to his brother Granville Whittington, Little Rock, August 30, 1828 (Hiram A. Whittington Papers, 1824-1834), p. 3

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Hiram Abiff Whittington to his brother Granville Whittington, Little Rock, August 30, 1828 (Hiram A. Whittington Papers, 1824-1834), p. 4



Questions:

1. Who are the Cherokee Nation? What kind of “business” did Whittington want to do with them?
2. Whittington mentions a treaty that the Cherokees signed with President of the United States “last winter.” Do you know to what treaty he refers? If not, research the Treaty of Washington of 1828. What was the outcome of that treaty? What is this treaty’s significance in the history of Arkansas and in the history of the Cherokee Nation?
3. Whittington writes that the Cherokees “are now getting ready to move” to a land “about one hundred miles further up the Arkansas river.” 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.
4. What are Whittington’s impressions of the Cherokees? What do we learn from him about their political organization (i.e., how they decided matters that affected the Cherokee Nation), customs, and behaviors?
5. What do we learn about white residents of Little Rock from Whittington? How do they compare to the Cherokees?
6. Whittington was a white middle class educated man who recently moved to Arkansas from Boston, which at the time was one of the largest cities in the United States. How could his background impact his point of view? How could his background shape his perception of the Cherokees?