

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MUSIC

**The Historical and Modern Significance of the Choctaw Hymnody**

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by

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## **Abstract**

Working with the Native Choctaw populations of early America, missionaries did much in the way of music and composition. One result was a compilation of original hymns written by English missionaries in the native Choctaw tongue, but there were also Choctaw composers and contributions. Singing these hymns in church services, gatherings, and social situations remains an activity where the Oklahoma and Mississippi tribal members participate today. The recorded history of the known hymns and composers is scarce and is disappearing daily in favor of teaching the ancient cultures rather than the religion of the white colonists. The research chose a qualitative method to study the lives, backgrounds, and motivations of the Choctaw composers of these hymns. The study further employed a form of historical observation to examine the members of the tribe who promoted the hymns throughout the community and the white missionaries that collaborated with them to translate the hymns into their original tongue. Little has been written or published regarding hymns in the Choctaw language. A few writings on the subject exist from the 1940s and the 1970s. The study should specifically target the Choctaw community by reevaluating the origins of these hymns and their place in modern and historical Choctaw culture. Additionally, the results of such an investigation should benefit and further other studies into Native American cultures of various tribes and the outside and inside influences regarding Christianity and musicality within those tribal cultures.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The Choctaw tribe is a large and popular Native American population in the central and southern United States. There have been over 250 books written about the tribe, and their sophisticated culture has earned them a reputation as one of the most civilized Native American tribes.<sup>1</sup> History shows that this Native American population was known as one of the five civilized tribes of America.<sup>2</sup> Three Choctaw tribes are federally recognized: the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, and the small Jenna Band of Choctaw Indians in Louisiana.<sup>3</sup>

The spirituality of the Choctaw people is long and storied. There are several contradicting stories of creation to which various regional members of the tribe subscribe. One creation story tells of two brothers, Chata and Chicksa, who led their people from someplace in the far West and ended up in Mississippi, where they rested. Chata stayed with half the tribe in the south and became the Choctaw people, and his brother, Chicksa, took the rest of the tribe up north, and they became the tribe known as the Cherokee.<sup>4</sup>

Spirituality among the Choctaw people is essential and very personal in the past and the present.<sup>5</sup> In tribal history, things such as public religious services or ceremonies did not exist,

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<sup>1</sup> Victoria Lindsay Levine, "Musical revitalization among the Choctaw." *American Music*, vol. 11, no. 4, 1993, 391.

<sup>2</sup> Katherine M. B. Osburn. *Choctaw Resurgence in Mississippi: Race, Class, and Nation Building in the Jim Crow South, 1830-1977* (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 56.

<sup>3</sup> Hiram F. Gregory, "Jena Band of Louisiana Choctaw," *American Indian Journal* 3, no. 2 (1977): 2.

<sup>4</sup> Tom Mould. *Choctaw Tales* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 61.

<sup>5</sup> Clara Sue Kidwell. *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi 1818-1918* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 8.

for the most part, outside of weddings or funerals. Only close family or friends would participate with those.<sup>6</sup> The people did not widely discuss private beliefs and ideas, and every man was allowed to worship whomever or whatever he desired in any way he chose.<sup>7</sup> For this reason, the preaching and teachings of the missionaries must have been a culture shock for the Native Choctaws, and more than likely, it felt pretty intrusive – at least at first.

During the tumultuous times of removal and reservation placement, the American government sent missionaries to work with the Native Americans living on the reservations.<sup>8</sup> It is also important to note that many Choctaw chiefs, such as the Trail of Tears Chief Mushulatubbee and others, welcomed and even invited missionaries to come and serve the Choctaw people.<sup>9</sup> The American government's motivation was to civilize the tribes; the missionaries had an entirely different agenda. Civilization was a goal, but the missionaries cared more for the people's souls. In attempting to lead the Choctaw people to Christ, the missionaries cared for them in ways they needed: feeding, clothing, hygiene, and medicine. One minister, Byington, and others helped the Choctaw people develop a written alphabet, eventually leading to the writing of the Christian Choctaw hymns.

Studying the Choctaw Hymnody and its composers was accomplished by establishing specific objectives in research. Researching past writings and primary source materials was vital, as well as the definition of terms involved in the study and those that regularly occur during the

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<sup>6</sup> Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi*, 8.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Joel W. Martin and Mark A. Nicholas. *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 40.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

research and study, the theoretical framework, hypotheses, methodology, and literature review.

### Background of Topic

Music is vital to any society, and the culture of the Choctaw Nation is no exception.<sup>10</sup>

The tribe created music and songs long before the influence of Western missionaries. This music was and is still today used to celebrate, encourage, educate, and inform others of tribal culture.

Before Christians began missions within the tribal communities, the music's religious tones turned more towards worship of nature or earth rather than a Creator.<sup>11</sup>

To study the Choctaw tribal hymnody, written with much help from the Protestant Missionaries, a look at the traditional music of the tribe was needed as well. Doing this helped the research define which elements of the hymnody are exclusively Choctaw and which are influenced by the missionaries and white hymn writers. "The Protestant missionary, in effectively communicating the Gospel, was required to study the culture and language of the tribe."<sup>12</sup> Studying the culture and language allowed the missionaries to relate to the Choctaw culture. The Protestant missionaries' work also helped inspire those with open hearts to convert to Christianity.<sup>13</sup> This dynamic serves the research well, as the overall goal is to connect the work of God with the writing of these popular Choctaw Christian hymns.

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<sup>10</sup> George William Stevenson. "The Hymnody of the Choctaw Indians of Oklahoma." PhD diss., 1977, 22.

<sup>11</sup> Stevenson, 30.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

The *Chahta Uba Isht Taloa = Choctaw Hymn Book*<sup>14</sup> and its sister book, *The Cherokee Hymnbook*,<sup>15</sup> are still used prevalently in today's Choctaw society. A closer look at the missionaries who inspired these hymnals was essential to this study, as well as the social histories and ethnological studies of Choctaw chiefs and the Choctaw composers of the hymnody. Any commercial recordings or interviews were pertinent, as well as reports from missionary accounts regarding the interactions with the Choctaw. Recordings of hymn singings, too, were researched and examined to investigate further the compassion for the gospel and the furtherance of the gospel throughout the modern tribal communities. This research also looked at newspaper articles, websites, and writing about the Choctaw Christian society and traditional culture, including the official websites for the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians<sup>16</sup> and the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.<sup>17</sup> The researcher visited cultural centers on both reservations in Oklahoma and Mississippi to discover whether additional primary source materials exist and are not easily accessible online or in digital format.

A closer look at the two men credited with the hymnal compilation gives us some idea of who these men were and how they interacted with the Native Choctaws. Cyrus Byington is the missionary who worked with the Choctaw Chief and his people to develop a written alphabet and language for their native tongue.<sup>18</sup> Byington left the law profession to become a man of God, and

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<sup>14</sup> Alfred Wright and Cyrus Byington. *Chahta Uba Isht Taloa = Choctaw Hymn Book* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1900), 1-253.

<sup>15</sup> *Cherokee Hymn Book*. (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1866), 1-48.

<sup>16</sup> "Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians." Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. Accessed June 06, 2021. <http://www.choctaw.org/>.

<sup>17</sup> "Homepage | Choctaw Nation." Accessed June 6, 2021. <https://www.choctawnation.com/>.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Burl Austin. "Cyrus Byington." *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 7, no. 1, 1948:85.

he had a heart for missionary work immediately.<sup>19</sup> He was sent to Mississippi by request of the Choctaw Chief and worked with them for years. Byington then traveled with the tribe to Oklahoma – where they had been “removed” from Mississippi.<sup>20</sup> Byington became more than the preacher for the tribe. He served as their lawyer, teacher, preacher, and, sometimes, physician. He built schools and diligently worked on translating Scripture into the Choctaw language.<sup>21</sup> “Cyrus Byington was the most productive translator of the materials used in education and the propagation of the Christian faith. Although credited with just seventeen hymns in the hymn book, Byington was responsible for numerous tracts, a grammar, and the dictionary.”<sup>22</sup>

Alfred Wright is the other credited author of the Choctaw Hymnal. Wright was born in Connecticut, and his paths in life led him to seminary and then to mission work. He had accomplished many feats in the mission world, some with the Choctaw tribe in Mississippi, before being called to Indian territory in Oklahoma.<sup>23</sup> While in Oklahoma, he worked with Cyrus Byington to translate Biblical passages and textbooks for the Choctaw Nation.

The research focused, as well, on the differences in lifestyle, opinion, religious practices, and use of the Choctaw hymnody in the two halves of the Choctaw population – those residing in Oklahoma and those living in Mississippi. The removal and relocation attempts of the tribal members were not so long ago that the separation and resistance are not still both positively and negatively affecting modern tribal members.<sup>24</sup> There exist opinions that state Mississippi

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<sup>19</sup> Austin, 81.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>22</sup> Stevenson, 124.

<sup>23</sup> “The Chronicles of Oklahoma.” Library journal 114, no. 9 (1989).

<sup>24</sup> Osburn, *Choctaw Resurgence*, 56.

Choctaw tribal members hold more to tradition and are more authentic, and Oklahoma Choctaw tribal members are more advanced in education and technology.<sup>25</sup> In reality, the popular focus in modern times may be the harmful and hurtful practices of colonists and those who attempted to civilize the Native American peoples when first arriving in America.<sup>26</sup> However, the Protestant missionaries' work and the Choctaw people's contributions in creating the Choctaw hymnal were undoubtedly unifying at its time, certainly for its contribution to the written Choctaw language and alphabet, and is still a unifying piece of work today.<sup>27</sup>

Further research and analysis of the hymnal and its contributors may heal some of these past hurts. With the research on native hymnal contributors to the forefront, it may instill a sense of pride and ownership of the Choctaw Christian faith. This way, the Choctaw tribal members who attend Christian churches on the reservation in Mississippi can feel that the relationship to the Christian faith is their own and not being put upon them by any previous or modern oppressor. Additionally, the research may inspire new hymn writers to create in the Choctaw tongue, furthering the Christian faith among their people and teaching/preserving the language that the tribe holds so dear.

No matter the conflict, a Christian has the support of his Master. No matter the ethnicity, a Christian's contribution to the Great Commission is the most significant in life.<sup>28</sup> This research hoped to accomplish much but, most importantly, desired that the ultimate result would

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<sup>25</sup> Howard, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Martin, 40.

<sup>27</sup> LeAnne Howe. "Embodied Tribalography: Mound Building, Ball Games, and Native Endurance in the Southeast." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 26, no. 2, 2014, 75.

<sup>28</sup> John MacArthur. *Worship: The Ultimate Priority* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2012), 98.

inspire modern tribal members and other readers of the final product to consider a relationship with Jesus Christ.

### Problem Statement

The fundamental premise of this research was the appreciation and general knowledge that is missing in the collective minds of the people who utilize the Choctaw hymnody the most –the Choctaw people themselves. The rampant use of the hymnody today within the Choctaw communities in Oklahoma and Mississippi warranted a deeper study of precisely who the creative minds behind this collection of works were and the motivations for creating it. The distinct writing and unique tonality and melodic patterns of the work, too, sparked a vast interest in further study.

When it comes to the creation and use of this hymnody, a rift exists between indigenous and colonizing communities, and a need for healing exists.<sup>29</sup> The research results and writing here may help resolve bitterness about removal, reservations, and colonization that are pushed to the surface by some facets – and heals hearts and souls to make them pliable for the gospel of Jesus Christ. The research results may also exemplify unity and peaceful collaboration for future generations within and without the Choctaw people group. The hymnal of the Choctaw people is a source of modern pride, and this should be a positive tool for Christian pastors, music ministers, church members, and followers of Christ. These groups already exist within the Choctaw communities today.

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<sup>29</sup> Michelene E. Pesantubbee. "Culture Revitalization and Indigenization of Churches among the Choctaw of Oklahoma." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1994, 76.

### Purpose Statement

This study aimed to highlight any contributors to the Choctaw Hymnal from the Mississippi Choctaw Tribe and to reveal the purpose of the hymnal and its use in modern Christian and Choctaw communities in both Oklahoma and Mississippi.<sup>30</sup>

### Significance of the Study

There is no question that Native American peoples have suffered significant loss, tragedy, and injustice from the beginning of colonization through even modern-day America.<sup>31</sup> The research and analysis/interpretation here did not discount those sufferings. In fact, in highlighting the efforts of the Choctaw contributions to their hymnody, still being used in communities today, a greater sense of pride and accomplishment for those exposed to the research and ultimate thesis may develop. Significant to the study, as well, was the work of the Protestant missionaries who created a written alphabet and written version of the native Choctaw tongue<sup>32</sup>. Also noteworthy was the work of the missionaries who ministered to them and gave them hope in Jesus Christ. Their efforts resulted in collaborative work<sup>33</sup> between the preachers, English Christian composers, and Choctaw composers and writers still being used in the churches and communities of the Choctaw tribal communities today.

Although the significance of the contributions discussed thus far was necessary for the result, the focus on the first research question guided the beginning of the thesis journey. Not

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<sup>30</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*, 1.

<sup>31</sup>Ashley Woods. "Historical Trauma and Approaches to Healing among Choctaw American Indians." Order No. 10928233, University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2018, 11.

<sup>32</sup> Louis Coleman, *Cyrus Byington: Missionary and Choctaw Linguist* (Kearney, NE: Morris Pub., 1996), 6.

<sup>33</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*, 1.

much has been investigated or written about regarding the Choctaw hymnal. Still, within what was already studied and written, there is no mention of contributions from the Mississippi portion of the Choctaw tribe. The population of Choctaw tribal members from Mississippi takes pride in the many accomplishments their tribe has achieved since forming their government and accepting their first tribal constitution in 1945.<sup>34</sup> However, the discovery of Mississippi contributors to the hymnal still used widely within the community may bolster more pride in self-sufficiency. This pride boost may be because people could now understand more about how these Choctaw writers made the Christian faith their own. If the collaborative work included contributions from the Mississippi Choctaw population, it could smooth over the minor rivalry between Choctaw people in Mississippi and Oklahoma.<sup>35</sup>

Motivations for the contributions that may or may not exist was the more difficult question. Doing so meant digging deep into the spiritualization of the Choctaw people and all of its facets.<sup>36</sup> The spirituality of the Choctaw people is complicated, at the least. As with other cultures, varied views on traditional spirituality versus Christianity or a mix of the two exist. A natural bitterness still resides within the minds of many of the Choctaw members regarding the path taken by the American government in using the Christian missionaries to “civilize” the tribes.<sup>37</sup> There are, however, populations of Christians within the Choctaw communities who desire to follow Christ and share His gospel while simultaneously honoring the traditions of their

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<sup>34</sup> Osburn, *Choctaw Resurgence*, 125.

<sup>35</sup> Pesantubbee, 77.

<sup>36</sup> Howe, 76.

<sup>37</sup> Linford D Fisher. "Native Americans, Conversion, and Christian Practice in Colonial New England, 1640—1730." *The Harvard Theological Review* 102, no. 1 (2009): 101-24.

native people.<sup>38</sup> These populations are the motivations for the present use and state of the hymnal that is the focus here.

Discovering the motivations of writers, translators, or artists involved much analysis of original writings, recordings, and other materials. Additionally, interpretations of how the contributors, writers, and artists may have been motivated to create these materials are vital because they may inspire other creations from future generations in the Choctaw population.<sup>39</sup>

The social implications of the Christian faith and how it came to be present within the Choctaw community are complicated. Because of its introduction by the white missionary workers in what was a violent and oppressive time for Native Americans, several groups resent its existence. Among many other writers, Michelene Pesantubbee, a Native American scholar of Choctaw culture, wrote of this “vexed history of grossly uneven” treatment of Native peoples in her dissertation regarding the indigenous churches of Oklahoma.<sup>40</sup> Research that unifies the spirits of the Native people and the spirits of the surrounding cultures would benefit the future of the relationships between these groups.

### Research Questions

A compilation of Choctaw Christian hymns was published in the late 1900s, and only one dissertation, written in 1977, has examined the collection since then. That dissertation focused on the hymnody, the language, the Protestant missionary influence, and the tunes associated with the hymns.<sup>41</sup> The study needed a thorough look at the hymnody and the composers to analyze

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<sup>38</sup> Pesantubbee, 65.

<sup>39</sup> John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 5th edition. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2018), 76.

<sup>40</sup> Martin, 3.

<sup>41</sup> Stevenson, 1.

the usage and significance of the hymnody today. The Choctaw Nation includes those who migrated (or were removed) to Oklahoma. The population of Choctaw tribal members in Oklahoma is the more substantial portion of the tribe overall. The other significant population of Choctaw people resides as part of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians.<sup>42</sup> This group of Native Americans is unique for several reasons. For one, they believe that the ancestors who chose to stay in Mississippi (the accepted creation spot for Choctaw people)<sup>43</sup> were superior for doing so, and those who migrated (or were removed) to Oklahoma lost something of their culture for that choice. The previous study on the hymnody of the Choctaw people focused solely on the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.<sup>44</sup> The primary focus of research here was a look into the contributions of many composers, writers, or translators that were members of the Mississippi population of the Choctaw tribe.

Avoiding the current trendy discussion of the modern term “decolonization,”<sup>45</sup> this study attempted to inform on the everyday struggle of Christians who want to use the hymnody to minister to the younger population and are coming against a wall of resistance in the name of culture and tradition. The use of the original hymnody is still prevalent in both the Oklahoma and Mississippi populations of the Choctaw tribe.<sup>46</sup> We do not know much about the Choctaw

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<sup>42</sup> Osburn, *Choctaw Resurgence*, 2.

<sup>43</sup> John R. Swanton. Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off, 1931. *Choctaw Creation Story (1931)* ABC-CLIO, 2017, 1.

<sup>44</sup> Swanton, 1.

<sup>45</sup> O'Malley, 3.

<sup>46</sup> "Choctaw Hymnal App Now Available: Choctaw Nation."

composers; nothing is known of Mississippi Choctaw hymn composers if any exist. Several important research questions presented themselves here.

### **Research Questions**

Research Question 1: What contributions were made to the Choctaw hymnody by composers from the Mississippi population of the tribe?

Research Question 2: What were the primary motivations for original Choctaw sermons and hymns?

Research Question 3: What are the challenges facing the continued use of the historical hymnal?

### **Hypotheses**

Proposed answer to Research Question 1:

H1: Contributions to the Choctaw hymnody<sup>47</sup> by composers from the Mississippi population of the tribe might include translations, hymns, and collaborative efforts.

Proposed answer to Research Question 2:

H2: Major motivations for Choctaw sermons and hymns might include the desire to evangelize within the tribe, the intrinsic need for leadership in the church and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Proposed answer to Research Question 3:

H3: Challenges facing the continued use of the Choctaw Hymnal could include the teaching of traditional Native American nature worship, the fear of the extinction of the Choctaw language, and modern apathy towards Christianity.

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<sup>47</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*, 1.

## Core Concepts

The research kept several concepts at the forefront in surveying the collection of hymns in the Choctaw hymnal and investigating the composers' and contributors' lives and motivations. First, the missionary work with Native Americans in the 1800s and 1900s had to be at the core of the study.<sup>48</sup> With that in mind, there was an emphasis on converting to Christianity in Native American populations and whether these conversions were beneficial as opposed to traditional Native American religion.<sup>49</sup> Pertinent to the study was the concept of Choctaw musicality and Christian Choctaw compositions, including hymns, sermons, devotion, and other writings that may have occurred due to conversion and inspiration from conversion.<sup>50</sup> Modern views on Christianity in the Choctaw community were essential to studying the Choctaw hymnal in today's activities within the tribe.<sup>51</sup>

Christian church services in the Choctaw communities are also influenced by, and even mixed with, traditional Native Choctaw religious ceremonies, services, and culture.<sup>52</sup> The concern over whether these hymns and works are authentic exists throughout the Choctaw consciousness.<sup>53</sup> In these cases, Choctaw Christian traditionalists are using the churches to

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<sup>48</sup> Levine, 391.

<sup>49</sup> Pesantubbee, 76.

<sup>50</sup> David James McMahan. "Songs Inside the Silence: Unlocking the Mysteries of Native American Musical Cultures in Early Colonial-Era New England." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2013, 12.

<sup>51</sup> McMahan, 15.

<sup>52</sup> Valerie Lambert. *Choctaw Nation a Story of American Indian Resurgence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 86.

<sup>53</sup> Levine, 390.

advance the cause of Christ while simultaneously attempting to preserve cultural aspects such as language, traditional dress, ancestral crafts and skills, and various other cultural matters.<sup>54</sup>

Storytelling, or *shoka anompa*<sup>55</sup>, a long-standing tradition within most Native American tribes and specifically within the Choctaw tribal peoples, was an important tradition to address in this study.<sup>56</sup> *Shoka anompa* is the Choctaw phrase that translates to “hog talk,” commonly used to refer to the storytelling craft<sup>57</sup>. Storytelling is a vital and respected craft in the Choctaw communities, and the people who did the storytelling are like heroes and celebrities to their people.<sup>58</sup> The art of storytelling serves many purposes, from entertainment and social interaction to thought-provoking and education, not to. This storytelling is how much of the Choctaw history passes into modern days.<sup>59</sup> Within the pool of famous and documented Choctaw storytellers, the researcher hoped to find some Mississippi composers who contributed to the hymnody still used today.

To be sure, the research could not eliminate the concept of decolonization from this study. In the heat of the early nineteenth-century conflict with Native Americans, removal was the tool meant to colonize the tribes.<sup>60</sup> In modern society, this term arises no matter the topic, and Christianity exacerbates the idea with its level of current and historical controversy.

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<sup>54</sup>Martin, 75.

<sup>55</sup> Carolyn Keller Reeves, *The Choctaw before Removal* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 3.

<sup>56</sup> Mould, 94.

<sup>57</sup>Reeves, 3.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>59</sup> Mould, 97.

<sup>60</sup>Stevenson, 36.

Decolonization is not a new controversy, but the theory has recently obtained its label and popularity among progressive thinkers in America.<sup>61</sup>

In addition to this issue, a conflict exists between traditionalists and those who want to follow a Christian lifestyle. There is a natural and steady push to return Native American tribes, including Choctaw tribes, to a more traditional mode of life.<sup>62</sup> This dynamic presented itself throughout the study; researchers identified it as needed in the research and literature review. Decolonization and the conflict between traditional and Christian lifestyles arose in studying the Choctaw hymnal. As these issues relate to the everyday use of the hymnal and its influence on the families and communities of the Choctaw tribe, it was clear these issues needed investigation and inclusion in the study.

#### Definition of Terms

**Anumpa isht auehinchi:** The Choctaw word for a tradition.<sup>63</sup>

**Chatah:** The traditional Choctaw word for Choctaw frequently appears within the hymnody and other writings.<sup>64</sup>

**Chisvs Kilaistn:** Choctaw translation of Jesus Christ, or “the name of our Saviour, Mark 1:1.also Chisvs Klaist.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Patrice Hollrah. "Decolonizing the Choctaws: Teaching LeAnne Howe's Shell Shaker." *American Indian Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (Winter, 2004): 24.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>63</sup> Cyrus Byington, John Reed Swanton, and Henry S. Halbert. *A Dictionary of the Choctaw Language*. (Washington: Govt. Print. Off., 1915), 23.

<sup>64</sup> Byington, *Dictionary*, 42.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 59.

**Chvch:** a church<sup>66</sup>

**Chukfalhpowa apistikeli:** original meaning “domesticated rabbit-watcher” imposed Christian meaning “shepherd.”<sup>67</sup>

**Culture:** Here, the studied culture is Choctaw tribal culture and, more specifically, its musical culture – the things which are essential musically to the tribe.<sup>68</sup>

**Hymn:** In most societies, a hymn is a song that praises God or tells of God's good works. This definition is the case within this study, but the word “hymn” can be looked at as a literary form, as well, that praises God or edifies other church members.<sup>69</sup>

**Nanìh Waiya:** Literally, this phrase means “bending hill,” but if you ask, most Choctaws accept the definition “creation place” or “place of creation” because of the creation story accepted by portions of the Choctaw people.<sup>70</sup>

**Okchalinichi:** “saved” or, as the original meaning states, “delivered from danger.”<sup>71</sup>

**Protestant:** Within the concepts of the research, here, Protestant refers to the Protestant denominations of Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Byington, *Dictionary*, 43

<sup>67</sup> “Chahta Vba Isht Taloa: The Choctaw Hymns.” *Choctaw Nation Biskinik*. February 1, 2014, 11.

<sup>68</sup> Levine, 360.

<sup>69</sup> Stevenson, xiii.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> “Chahta Vba Isht Taloa: The Choctaw Hymns.” *Choctaw Nation Biskinik*. February 1, 2014.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

**Secular:** Choctaw music that is separate from the hymnody studied here.<sup>73</sup> The tribe would use this music for celebratory, educational, ceremonial, and other religious ceremonies outside Christianity.

**Stock tunes:** A handful of repeated songs used in Choctaw secular music carried over, in some cases, into the Choctaw hymnody.<sup>74</sup>

**Taloo:** “to sing; to praise in song; to carol; to chant; to hymn; to tune; *intaloo*, v. t., to praise him; to sing to him; *isht taloo*, to pitch, as a tune; to sound; to warble; *ilhtvwa*, songs.”<sup>75</sup>

**Transliterations:** “translations or paraphrases of familiar texts, most notably those of Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley. These appear with original missionary and native Choctaw hymns in the Choctaw Hymn Book, the primary extant collection of Choctaw hymns.”<sup>76</sup>

**vba anumpuli:** the word the Choctaw gave the preacher or the missionary. It is pronounced (ooba anoom poolie).<sup>77</sup>

## Chapter Summary

This research attempted to connect the writers and composers of the Choctaw tribal members in Mississippi, the writers and composers of the Choctaw tribal members in Oklahoma, and the work of the Protestant missionaries that worked with them. This collaboration helped

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<sup>73</sup> Stevenson, xiii.

<sup>74</sup> Levine, 360.

<sup>75</sup> Byington, *Dictionary*, 396.

<sup>76</sup> Stevenson, xiii.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

not only develop a written language in their native tongue but to create and compile the Choctaw hymnody that has been used for a century and is still in widespread use today.

Native Choctaws were actively involved in composing the hymnody and translating English hymns into the Choctaw language.<sup>78</sup> The hymns played a significant role in comforting those who experienced “removal.”<sup>79</sup> The hymns were also used for educational purposes, not only to teach the doctrine of the church and Christianity but to teach the Choctaw language and promote the Choctaw culture.<sup>80</sup>

The present state of the hymnody and its use in modern worship and culture within the Choctaw communities in Oklahoma and Mississippi was a primary focus of this research study. Decolonization was also crucial in this discussion but is not the primary focus. Christianity in the Choctaw community is still important to the people, as is the church and a real relationship with Jesus Christ.<sup>81</sup> The research investigated modern usage of the Hymnody here to capture what stands out as necessary to those with traditional beliefs close and those with more modern Christian mindsets. This researcher also investigated the current usage level among contemporary groups and how they utilize the hymnal.

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<sup>78</sup> Stevenson, 177.

<sup>79</sup> Kenny Franks. “A Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church” Sep 1, 1975; 44, 3; ProQuest pg. 319.

<sup>80</sup> Stevenson, 178.

<sup>81</sup> Pesantubbee, 82.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review and Related Research

This study explored a variety of sources to find out more about the Choctaw hymnody and its history. The purpose of the study was to discover the hymn writers, learn the contributors' motivations, and pinpoint any challenges facing the continued use of the hymnal. Therefore, this chapter will discuss the hymnody's historical context, including pre-contact Choctaw life, tribal ethnogenesis, environmental events, post-contact Choctaw life, and the creation of the hymnody.

### Historical Context

The Choctaw nation is one of the largest tribes in America to date.<sup>82</sup> The tribe faced many hardships yet thrived despite all it endured.<sup>83</sup> For context, this study looked at events happening in the world during the hymnal creation and the events taking place in the area of the hymnal creation.

For context, this study looked at historical events happening in the world and in the area where writers penned the Choctaw hymnal. The emphasis remained in North America, where the Choctaw tribe originated. This historical research includes a look at (and comparison of) Choctaw Tribal and American societal climates, education, religion, and any conflict or controversy during the following periods: Pre-contact (the 1500s-1600s), National Environment/Contact (1660s-1750s), and Post-contact (1750s-1900s), and Modern (1900s-2000s). Pre-contact refers to the time before the Europeans made contact with and affected the Choctaw tribes. The National Environment/Contact section reviews what happened in America during the period (both outside and inside the Choctaw communities) and discusses European

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<sup>82</sup> Woods, 4.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

contact with the tribe. Post-contact refers to the period after contact with Europeans transpired, and the Modern section discusses the current Choctaw time.

Within this same section is a look at the tool of American citizenship.<sup>84</sup> American citizenship granted to Native Americans meant different things to the organizations and people groups within each period mentioned above. Therefore, the research discusses how the tool of American citizenship was viewed and used.

### Pre-Contact

To understand the hymnal and the motivations of the writers, research needed to take a look at what life was like for Choctaw tribal members before European contact. Looking at the elements of Choctaw life during this time helped to realize the effect that contact had on the lives and culture of the tribe. The study explored pre-contact society, education, religion, and music.

### **Pre-Removal Society**

Pre-contact, the Choctaw lived primarily as farmers, hunters, and gatherers.<sup>85</sup> They were an agricultural society that lived well amongst one another. The Choctaw people of that time were known as the best farmers of any other tribe or any other people group in America. They were “in the habit of selling their surplus”<sup>86</sup> to other Indian tribes nearby. Primary crops were corn, beans, melons, and pumpkins, and the farmers enhanced the land rather than destroying it in their production of crops.<sup>87</sup> The pre-contact Choctaw were also said to have been resourceful

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<sup>84</sup> Katherine M. B. Osburn (2016) Tribal “remnants” or state citizens: Mississippi Choctaws in the post-removal South, *American Nineteenth Century History*, 17:2, 199-214, DOI: 10.1080/14664658.2016.1215017, 199.

<sup>85</sup> Reeves, 32.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 35.

and keen on using the assets available<sup>88</sup>. The people of the tribe “used the teeth of beaver, and the outer bark of cane and reed dried hard for knives. They made bags of the bark of trees, twisted and woven by hand. Ropes were made of the bark of trees. Blankets were made of turkey feathers.”

The pre-contact Choctaw people communally owned the territory they occupied, but “each family was responsible for its substance.”<sup>89</sup> In other words, the tribe, as a whole, owned the lot, but the family would hold it as long as they took care of and lived on the land they occupied. If the family were to vacate the spot, “the title would revert to the nation.”<sup>90</sup>

Naturally, American citizenship at this stage was nonexistent within the tribe and not yet necessary or desired. The tribe, at this moment, held its hierarchy of rule and organization. Socially, the tribe organization was a “moiety system - also called dual organization, a form of social organization characterized by the division of society into two complementary parts.”<sup>91</sup>

“The Choctaw tribe was divided into two moieties, which consisted of six to eight clans. Each clan was further divided into local groups that might consist of a group of towns, a single village, or, on rare occasions, part of a village. These divisions dominated Choctaw social and ceremonial life. Marriage within a moiety was forbidden. Spouses were required to belong to opposite moieties, and children became members of their mother’s group. Fathers had no authority over their children; rather, the children were watched over by their oldest maternal uncle. ... Through this system, the Choctaws achieved an efficient and democratic political system.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Grant Foreman. *The Five Civilized Tribes*. The Civilization of the American Indian Series. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=site>, 18.

<sup>89</sup> Reeves, 35.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> T. Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica,. "moiety system." Encyclopedia Britannica, June 19, 2016. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/moiety-system>.

<sup>92</sup>Walter Prescott Webb, Horace Bailey Carroll, and Jeffery D. Carlisle, “Choctaw Indians,” in *The Handbook of Texas* (Austin, TX: Texas State Historical Association, 1952), 42.

Politically and societally, the Choctaw tribe thrived before coming in contact with Europeans in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Still, this study wanted to look at the other aspects of the tribe, including education and religion, and how the tribe implemented those things. This information was crucial as it related to how and why the Choctaw hymnal and its historical/modern significance came about.

## Education

Before contact with Europeans, the Choctaw education mainly consisted of learning how to survive in Choctaw society and abide by Choctaw tradition.<sup>93</sup> Choctaw communities taught their practices and skills through particular familial lines, which complemented the moiety that the tribe held as a principle.

“Seen as imperative for both males and females, education was gender-based, with girls learning from the women and boys learning with the men of the tribe. Boys were not directly taught by their fathers; instead, their uncles would instruct them, generally along matrilineal lines, meaning that a nephew would be taught by his maternal uncle. In this way, young Choctaw were taught the necessary skills to hunt, farm, and promote tribal prosperity for centuries.”<sup>94</sup>

Education at this time also included the tradition of storytelling, or *shoka anompa*<sup>95</sup>, which allowed elders to pass tribal history and belief systems from one generation to the next. Writers and researchers have suggested that “the value of storytelling to Choctaws was to impart the knowledge and experience of the nation and society so that younger generations might be

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<sup>93</sup> Reeves, 35.

<sup>94</sup> Suzanne Delap. "Educational Achievement, Engagement, and Persistence in Choctaw Nation: A Study of the Success through Academic Recognition Program." Order No. 27742432, University of Denver, 2020, 17.

<sup>95</sup> Reeves, 3.

cognizant of the manners and customs of their forefathers."<sup>96</sup> There were three types of Choctaw storytelling: legends, myths, and fables.<sup>97</sup>

“Legends provided young Choctaws with a knowledge of their history, their manner of government, and of the responsibilities which were necessary for the well-being of their people. Myths provided spiritual explanations for the existence of things in the environment which could not otherwise be understood. The fables helped to govern their behavior toward one another by giving instruction regarding the consequences of unrestrained actions.”<sup>98</sup>

The elders also took the younger and taught them skills in homemaking, agriculture, hunting, and living as tribal members.

### Religion

Although the Choctaw tribe pre-contact was reasonably practical and lived as simple farmers, the population had an enormous spiritual side. Even so, the activities outside of farming always pointed back to their agricultural way of life. “Myths, songs and dances, and magic and religion, together with joyous feasting, helped the Choctaw reduce the drudgery of life while emphasizing food-getting activities.”<sup>99</sup>

Before contact with the Americans or Europeans, religion in the Choctaw tribe was personal and private within each family unit. The people would recount some mystical tellings and myths at their many large feasts and perform dances honoring these myths and legends. Still, the tribe itself did not dictate the spirituality of the individual family unit.<sup>100</sup> Each man was to

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<sup>96</sup> Grason B. Noley. "THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN THE CHOCTAW NATION FROM PRECOLONIAL TIMES TO 1830." Order No. 8006034, The Pennsylvania State University, 1979. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, 90.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 92.

<sup>98</sup> Noley, “The History..”, 92..

<sup>99</sup> Reeves, 41.

<sup>100</sup> Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi*, 8.

lead his family in spiritual things; this did not have to be approved or discussed amongst others in the tribe. No regular religious ceremonies would be celebrated tribe-wide outside marriages, funerals, and large feasts.<sup>101</sup>

## **Music**

Music for the pre-contact Choctaw society was used for a variety of purposes. Most beloved was performance, and participation in, the music and dance pertaining to game night and sporting events. Other purposes were for ceremonies, conflict, and honor for the nature that provided food and protection.<sup>102</sup> The elements of the pre-contact Choctaw music were simple. Instruments were mostly of the percussion family.<sup>103</sup> The flute, or uskala, was used in some ceremonial instances as well. The vocalization consisted of chanting with no real set melodies attached. The chanter would lead the chants and dances and the rest would follow, loosely, the chant and dance of the leader.<sup>104</sup>

## **Conflict/Controversy**

Pre-contact Choctaws were warlike when needed, and there are war records between the Choctaws, the Chickasaws, and the Creek Indian tribe.<sup>105</sup> The smattering of explorers, tradespeople, and others who visited and made contact with the Choctaw tribe describe, in their writings, a tribe that is peaceful yet strong. This tribe would defend itself handily if confronted.

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<sup>101</sup> Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi*, 8.

<sup>102</sup> Howard, 66.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Reeves, 57.

Outside of the conflicts above, they were few and far between as the Choctaw people were not apt to look for trouble but would solve any problem threatening their way of life and their well-set agricultural economy.<sup>106</sup>

### National Environment/Contact

The world was changing fast around the Native Americans in the mid to late 18<sup>th</sup> century. A new force was taking over the land they had owned and cherished for as long as they knew. This section details information found regarding the environment of the Choctaw people during this time.

### Political and Social Climate

Pre-revolution, the British colonial government for the colonies in North America included 13 territories with a charter or a list of statements and provisions agreed upon between the King and the settlement itself.<sup>107</sup> Not much of this governing changed after the Americans broke free of England's rule except, of course, being ruled by the King of England.<sup>108</sup> Late 18<sup>th</sup> century America saw governance by several, including George Washington – credited as America's first president, and John Adams after. A two-party system emerged during this time, and the young nation struggled to govern a wild and expanding land with differences of opinion each way one turned.

Life for the early American citizens was difficult. A great spirit of hope drove them to work hard and live on little in favor of building a nation.<sup>109</sup> While learning to live and grow

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<sup>106</sup> Reeves, 61.

<sup>107</sup> Craig Green. "United/States: A Revolutionary History of American Statehood." *Michigan Law Review* 119, no. 1 (10, 2020), 17.

<sup>108</sup> Green, 19.

<sup>109</sup> David Stephen Heidler, and Jeanne T. Heidler. *Daily Life in the Early American Republic, 1790-1820: Creating a New Nation*. (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2004), 166.

together as colonists, the Native American communities unwittingly interacted with these new citizens. America was bustling and bursting with new citizens and, all the while, driving the original citizens into despair.<sup>110</sup>

The disparity for the Native Americans during this time was due to the relentless pursuit of land by the newly formed American government. More space was necessary for the development of the new nation. About “Anglo-American population growth in the South, the expansion of the short-staple cotton industry after Eli Whitney’s cotton gin became widely available in the 1790s, the discovery of gold and other minerals on some Indian land, and simple racism.”<sup>111</sup> Slavery was still legal and rampant in America during this time. The undertones of the class systems carried over from England were alive and well if challenged heavily by those who wished to move in a new and better direction.<sup>112</sup>

### **Contact Events**

This study focused on the contact between the Americans and the indigenous Choctaw of Mississippi. A connection was made with the Choctaw tribe from the 1600s into the 1750s, primarily by tradespeople, explorers, and travelers. During the American Revolutionary War, rumors stated that the Choctaw tribe supported the Americans against the British. However, historical records show that “the Choctaw were torn between the Spanish and British, whom both offered trade and foreign goods, but the most significant battles, particularly the defense of

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<sup>110</sup> Heidler, 170.

<sup>111</sup> Greg O'Brien, “Mushulatubbee and Choctaw Removal: Chiefs Confront a Changing World,” *Mississippi History Now* 2001, <https://www.mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/mushulatubbee-and-choctaw-removal-chiefs-confront-a-changing-world>.

<sup>112</sup> Jonathan Leitner. "Classical World-Systems Analysis, the Historical Geography of British North America, and the Regional Politics of Colonial/Revolutionary New York." *Journal of World - Systems Research* 24, no. 2 (2018): 404.

Pensacola, saw the Choctaw side primarily with the latter.”<sup>113</sup> However, by the early 19th century, new American citizens had gathered in the south.<sup>114</sup> This influx of people meant an urgent need for more space and land in Mississippi, which belonged to the Choctaw tribe of Mississippi.<sup>115</sup> “On September 15, 1830, Major John H. Eaton and Colonel John Coffee arrived at the council grounds near Dancing Rabbit Creek hoping to persuade the leaders of the Choctaw Nation to exchange their territory in Mississippi for lands in Indian Territory.”<sup>116</sup> Indian Territory defined initially as “all of that part of the United States west of the Mississippi, and not within the States of Missouri and Louisiana, or the Territory of Arkansas.”<sup>117</sup> Indian Territory, however, was not an organized or set area until it was “restricted to the present state of Oklahoma, excepting the panhandle and Greer county.”<sup>118</sup>

After fierce negotiation, President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act into law in 1830. Under the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek<sup>119</sup> in 1831, the Choctaw people who agreed to leave and make their new homes in Oklahoma made their way along the Trail of Tears.<sup>120</sup> This agreement was the first of two waves of Choctaw removal to Oklahoma, which

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<sup>113</sup> Gary C. Cheek, Jr., 2009. “Pre-Removal Choctaw History: Exploring New Paths.” *Ethnohistory* 56 (2): 336–38. doi:10.1215/00141801-2008-077, 377.

<sup>114</sup> O’Brien, , “Mushulatubbee and Choctaw Removal: Chiefs Confront a Changing World”.

<sup>115</sup> Osburn, *Choctaw Resurgence*, 11.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>117</sup> James P. Ronda. “‘We Have a Country’: Race, Geography, and the Invention of Indian Territory.” *Journal of the Early Republic* 19, no. 4 (1999): 742. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3125141>.

<sup>118</sup> "Indian Territory." In *World Encyclopedia*. : Philip's, <https://www-oxfordreference-ezproxy.liberty.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780199546091.001.0001/acref-9780199546091-e-5727>.

<sup>119</sup> Joyce Ann Kievit. "Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek." In *The American Mosaic: The American Indian Experience*, ABC-CLIO, 2022. Accessed July 11, 2022. <https://americanindian2-abc-clio-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/Search/Display/1670278>.

<sup>120</sup> Frank Kelderman. “Walking the New Jaw Bone: Song, Slavery, and the Literature of Choctaw Removal.” *MELUS* / 44, no. 4 (2019): 3.

saw most of the population of the Choctaw tribe relocated to the new area.<sup>121</sup> Some Choctaw people took advantage of a deal the Mississippi government offered to stay in their homeland. “Around 6,000 Choctaw decided to take advantage of Article 14 of the treaty, which provided an opportunity for the Choctaw to remain in Mississippi; any head of the household could apply for and receive US citizenship, along with 640 acres of land.”<sup>122</sup> Although the descendants of these brave Choctaws eventually formed the Mississippi Band of Choctaw and grew as a nation, the trials were not over for these first Mississippi hold-outs. Most of them lived as squatters and sharecroppers on white farms and endured harassment, racism, and abuse.<sup>123</sup>

Citizenship was used as a tool during this time for various reasons. “Federal and state officials initially envisioned American citizenship as a tool to promote either removal or the assimilation of Indigenous peoples, whose land they coveted.”<sup>124</sup> In Mississippi, the local government used the Choctaw’s American citizenship as an excuse to abolish tribal government altogether and move the indigenous tribe from lands it was attempting to utilize.<sup>125</sup>

## Post-Contact

### **Post-Removal Society**

In Mississippi, the Choctaw who stayed behind faced new life and identity issues. Though they were granted the same rights and privileges as white citizens of Mississippi, “their

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<sup>121</sup> Kelderman, 12.

<sup>122</sup> Kievit, *Treaty*.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Osburn, “Tribal Remnants”, 200.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

racial identity meant that they did not hold white social status.”<sup>126</sup> African-Americans, both enslaved and free, faced an onslaught of oppression nationwide. The Choctaw did not want their situation or name associated with the plight of the African-Americans because they were proud of their indigenous status and the fact that no one had ever enslaved their people.<sup>127</sup> This group of Choctaw people who chose to make their homes in Mississippi held on to their customs and culture in any way they knew.

In Oklahoma, the Choctaw in their new Indian Territory struggled to carve out their unique existence. Oppression also existed here, but with the Choctaw having a designated space, it was easier for them to avoid it.<sup>128</sup> In this new place, the Choctaw leadership strove to keep customs and culture close while incorporating some organization and leadership adapted from the contemporary Western culture they were experiencing.<sup>129</sup> For instance, before removal to Oklahoma, laws were unwritten – told only in an oral tradition. This tradition began to move towards more Western customs of writing rules down as they compiled their first set of laws and treaties.<sup>130</sup> This process could have happened more easily in Oklahoma, as the Missionaries Cyrus Byington and Alfred Wright assisted the Choctaw leaders in creating the written Choctaw alphabet and language.<sup>131</sup> The laws and treaties were written in both English and Choctaw.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Osburn, *Choctaw Resurgence*, 20.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>128</sup> Austin C. Megli \* (2018). ARTICLE: The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma: History, Influences, and Contemporary Setting of the Choctaw Legal Structure. *Tribal Law Journal*, 18, 1.

<sup>129</sup> Megli, 18.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>131</sup> Byington, Cyrus, and Dr. Brinton. “Grammar of the Choctaw Language.” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 11, no. 81 (1869): 24.

<sup>132</sup> Megli, 19.

## Education

While education in the Mississippi and Oklahoma Choctaw communities still relied on passing information, culture, customs, histories, and storytelling from the elders to the youth through oral traditions, Western influences also took over in this area. The settlers built schools and churches to help “civilize”<sup>133</sup> the newly placed tribes. The Oklahoma schools served as boarding schools for the Choctaw children for several decades until the Civil War. The schools suffered, and the soldiers used them as hospitals and headquarters during battles.<sup>134</sup> The Choctaw schools in Mississippi started in the Catholic missions, and later, these missions translated into the first Choctaw schools in Mississippi.<sup>135</sup>

## Religion

Post-removal Western influence, too, had its way with religion. Although the idea was initially forced upon the tribe by the American government, Choctaw tribal chiefs wanted civilization and education for their people. They saw the path to this through Christianity.<sup>136</sup> The Choctaw creation story explains that the “Great Spirit”<sup>137</sup> molded the Choctaw out of the “moist ground in Nanih Waiya.”<sup>138</sup> The missionaries who came to minister to them thought they would easily persuade into the Christian religion. Although the tribal members were accepting of the way of Christ, the missionaries found themselves primarily educating the children of the tribe.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Dennis B. Miles, “Choctaw Schools,” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, 2012, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=CH049>.

<sup>134</sup> Miles, 48.

<sup>135</sup> Fredrick L. Hickmon, “The Creation of Choctaw Central High School and Its Transition to A Bureau of Indian Affairs Contract School: An Oral History” (2017). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 498, 50.

<sup>136</sup> Kidwell. *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi*, XIV.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 3.

When the removal occurred, missionaries Cyrus Byington and Alfred Wright relocated to Oklahoma along with the Choctaw tribe.<sup>140</sup> There, they built churches, ministered to the people, created the Choctaw alphabet, and helped to create the unique Choctaw Hymnody – a compilation of hymns in the Choctaw language.<sup>141</sup>

## **Ethnogenesis**

Overlooking the apparent issue of the anthropological view concerning how people first came to reside in the Americas, we focused on what is known as the creation of the Choctaw Nation for this study. Several publications and journals discuss the Choctaw creation story, passed down through generations<sup>142</sup>. Mould<sup>143</sup> describes two versions, with a migration version as a third option. The migration explains that the Choctaw people got to Mississippi through “divine providence”<sup>144</sup> from the West of the Americas. In one version of the Choctaw creation story, the “Creator”<sup>145</sup> molded the Choctaw man from the moist ground in Nanih Waiya and laid them out to dry on the land.<sup>146</sup> A small portion of the Choctaw is that the Choctaw and Chickasaw people emerged together through a cave near the Nanih Waiya mound in Mississippi.<sup>147</sup> This event is important because the conversion of the Choctaw people contrasts

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<sup>139</sup> Austin, 82.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>142</sup> Swanton, 1.

<sup>143</sup> Mould, 61.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 64.

these stories and, in some cases, their creation stories.<sup>148</sup> “Native communities have long woven the stories, signs, and practices of the Christian tradition into the fabric of their lifeways, in rich and resourceful ways, even under the direst of colonizing circumstances.”<sup>149</sup> The spiritual history of the tribe came into play here, as well, because of how readily they accepted Christianity into their lives. Kidwell<sup>150</sup> spoke of the origin of the Choctaw Nation’s spirituality, its private nature, and how it carried out ceremonies and public worship. Kidwell also wrote about the indigenous nation after Christianity came into their world.<sup>151</sup>

### **The Call for Missionaries**

Chiefs Mushulatubbee and David Folsom requested that missionaries come to the Choctaw Nation in Mississippi in the early 1800s.<sup>152</sup> The two chiefs had spent time away from the tribe – learning and making themselves aware of civilized living and education.<sup>153</sup> The two chiefs also served with American armed services in one way or another in the early 1800s and had gleaned a sense of pride and honor.<sup>154</sup> They desired to educate their people and elevate their knowledge, spirits, and lives. Several missionaries worked closely with the Choctaw chiefs and, at the assistance of those leaders, taught the native children to read, write, and speak the English

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<sup>148</sup> Fisher, 117.

<sup>149</sup> Michael D McNally. “The Practice of Native American Christianity.” *Church History* 69, no. 4 (2000): 834. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3169333>.

<sup>150</sup> Kidwell. *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi*, 32.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

<sup>152</sup> Coleman, 42.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>154</sup> Barry Thorne. 1981. “David Folsom and the Emergence of Choctaw Nationalism.” Stillwater, Oklahoma: Oklahoma State University, 11.

language (Austin 1948). However, Cyrus Byington and Alfred Wright were the most critical and influential missionaries as the tribe underwent its most challenging trial.<sup>155</sup>

### **Removal and Resistance**

The Choctaw people and the Chickasaw, Cherokee, Creek, and Seminole people were part of the “Five Civilized Tribes”<sup>156</sup> categorized by the federal government of America in the early 1800s. Choctaw tribes were so organized because they had taken to, learned from, benefitted from, and enhanced their lifestyles with the ways of the white settlers.<sup>157</sup> Indeed, until the enforcement of Andrew Jackson’s Indian Removal Act of 1830<sup>158</sup>, the Choctaws made significant advances toward civilization using no outside influence. They did things such as open inns for travelers, spin cotton into wool and make clothing, and economize their agriculture production.<sup>159</sup>

In 1830, the U.S. Government and the Choctaw tribe signed the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek (Martin 2010). With this, the Choctaw people agreed to move their population to a reservation in Oklahoma in exchange for recognition as the Choctaw Nation.<sup>160</sup> While most of the Choctaw population did relocate to Oklahoma, a portion of the tribe stayed behind in their homeland, taking advantage of a provision in the treaty that made them the first non-European native peoples to become citizens of the United States (Hollrah 2004).

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<sup>155</sup> Coleman, 60.

<sup>156</sup> Foreman, 17.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Foreman, 15.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>160</sup> Hollrah, 24.

## Creation of the Hymnody

Choctaw Christian church services are distinctive: Native American demographics, indigenous customs mixed with modern traditions, and more. One of the most noteworthy elements of their services involves the hymnal used – the *Chahta Uba Isht Taloa = Choctaw Hymn Book*.<sup>161</sup> “For many people, Choctaw hymns like #48 and #21 have become as much a part of their Choctaw identity as *bvnaha* bread and stickball.”<sup>162</sup>

The hymnal is unique in that the writings are in the native Choctaw language, and this book was why the missionaries and the Choctaw chiefs put the Choctaw language into written form in the first place.<sup>163</sup> While the hymnal publication date was later than the Removal Act<sup>164</sup>, sending most of the Choctaw population and several missionaries to Oklahoma, the contributors laid the groundwork earlier in Mississippi for the future book of Christian songs.

### Work in Mississippi

Before the removal and treaty of Dancing Rabbit, the Protestant missionaries worked tirelessly to learn the Choctaw language verbally to communicate with and teach English to the Choctaw people. “Beyond just learning the language, they also had to figure out how to communicate specialized Christian concepts, which the Choctaw language was not necessarily designed to communicate.”<sup>165</sup> They used Choctaw words and concepts already in existence to

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<sup>161</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*.

<sup>162</sup> “Chahta Vba Isht Taloa: The Choctaw Hymns.”, 11.

<sup>163</sup> Austin, 86.

<sup>164</sup> Kievit, *Treaty*.

<sup>165</sup> “Chahta Vba Isht Taloa: The Choctaw Hymns.” *Choctaw Nation Biskinik*. February 1, 2014, 11.

explain the concepts of Christianity and being born again, yet their most challenging work still lay ahead of them.

The Choctaw leaders and the people enjoyed the missionary introduced from the outside, but they greatly desired to sing about their newfound faith in their native tongue. They were so enthusiastic that they were composing their hymns<sup>166</sup>— even though, at this time, the Choctaw language was not at all in written form. Before too long, that problem was solved with the Choctaw leaders and the missionaries, led by Cyrus Byington, working diligently for several years. They wrote and published an alphabet and dictionary of the written Choctaw language (Byington, 1915).

Once the language could be written and read, the hymnal began to take shape. The newly-converted Choctaw people were full of spirit and zeal for the faith in Jesus they now professed, and they could not wait to sing hymns in their native tongue (Stevenson, 1977). Thus began the formal Choctaw hymnal composition. The first of the Choctaw hymnals was published in 1829 and contained 55 hymns by the missionaries and Choctaw contributors (Wright, 1900).

#### Choctaw Contributors

While Cyrus Byington, Alfred Wright, and two other missionaries named John Kingsbury and Loring S. Williams composed many of the hymns in the Choctaw hymnal, the rest were written by Choctaw men (“Chatah,” 2014). These men endured many trials and hardships but accomplished so much for their people in their time. This study observed the hymnal as a whole but desired to focus on these Choctaw contributors and their specific writings and compare them with each particular writer’s lifestyle and life events.

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<sup>166</sup> “Chahta Vba Isht Taloa.”

As mentioned before, David Folsom was instrumental in bringing the Protestant missionaries to the Choctaw country in the first place.<sup>167</sup> One writer describes his immense efforts towards teaching missionaries the Choctaw language, then helping to develop the written Choctaw language, and finally contributing several hymns to the finished hymnal.<sup>168</sup>

David Folsom was born in Oklahoma in 1791.<sup>169</sup> His mother was a Choctaw woman, and his father was a European trader.<sup>170</sup> Folsom grew up bilingual – English and Choctaw – and studied partly in European academics.<sup>171</sup> For this reason, he was “well-liked”<sup>172</sup> and quickly ushered into Choctaw leadership. At first, and for a long time, Folsom fought feverishly against removal, along with other prominent Choctaw leaders such as Greenwood LeFlore, chief in the northwestern Choctaw district.<sup>173</sup> When, in the end, he saw the enforcement of the Removal Act, Folsom took charge of his people as a true leader.

During removal, Folsom led many groups of tribal members from Mississippi to Oklahoma along the Trail of Tears. Many believe they sang some of the newly-composed hymns along that trail for encouragement (“Chatah,” 2014). He became one of the most powerful chiefs

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<sup>167</sup> Thorne, 20.

<sup>168</sup> Stevenson, 169.

<sup>169</sup> Carolyn Yancey Kent. "David Folsom." In *The American Mosaic: The American Indian Experience*, ABC-CLIO, 2022. <https://americanindian2-abc-clio-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/Search/Display/1595719>.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Stevenson, 169.

<sup>173</sup> Kent.

of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (Kohl, 1986). In the hymnal, Folsom is credited with several creations using his initials: DF.<sup>174</sup>

Another admired Choctaw chief, Peter P. Pitchlynn, was also a hymn-writer for the published hymnal. Pitchlynn was born in Mississippi to a wealthy, Native American trader and a woman of mixed white and Native American blood.<sup>175</sup> He had a first-rate education for his time and was interested in leadership positions within the tribe.<sup>176</sup> As a young child, he earned the nickname “Ha-tchoc-tuck-nee,”<sup>177</sup> which means “Snapping Turtle,”<sup>178</sup> the name of the clan he belonged to within the tribe. He worked his way up through the ranks and eventually became chief of the Choctaw tribe in 1864.<sup>179</sup> As he led his people, he wanted them to excel in education, community, and more.<sup>180</sup>

Pitchlynn was particularly interested in reforming his people through lifestyle and education. For instance, he worked tirelessly to reduce the sale and consumption of alcohol within the Choctaw communities in Oklahoma.<sup>181</sup> One of his chief projects was the effort to ban sales of alcohol in Oklahoma Indian Territories in 1825.<sup>182</sup> As a Christian Native American,

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<sup>174</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*, 46.

<sup>175</sup> Caryn E. Neumann, "Peter Pitchlynn." In *The American Mosaic: The American Indian Experience*, ABC-CLIO, 2022. Accessed March 15, 2022,2. <https://americanindian2-abc-clio-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/Search/Display/1557747>.

<sup>176</sup> Neumann, 4.

<sup>177</sup> Byington, *Dictionary*, 332.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Neumann,4.

<sup>180</sup>Osburn , *Choctaw Resurgence*, 12.

<sup>181</sup> Neumann, 4.

<sup>182</sup> Peter Pitchlynn. "A Man Between Nations: The Diary of Peter Pitchlynn." *The Missouri Review* 14, no. 3 (1991): 58. doi:10.1353/mis.1991.0017.

Pitchlynn brought missionaries to work with his people in Mississippi and, after the removal, in Oklahoma. Letters from Pitchlynn to friends and family back in Mississippi reveal his faith and desire for his family to know Jesus and follow His teachings.<sup>183</sup>

Pitchlynn was well-educated for a man of his status<sup>184</sup>, so he, in turn, desired the education of Choctaw youth to be top-notch. He convinced the National Council of Choctaw to found the Choctaw Academy in Blue Springs, Kentucky, to which later he would be named director.<sup>185</sup> Chief Pitchlynn is credited with several songs in the hymnal using the initials PPP.<sup>186</sup>

Rev. Allen Wright did not contribute to the hymnal studied here, but he is well worth mentioning. Wright, whose Choctaw name was “Kiliahote – we must go forward,”<sup>187</sup> was born in Mississippi and later immigrated to the Indian Territory with his family after the removal. Notably, Rev. Wright named the new Indian Territory “Oklahoma,”<sup>188</sup> the Choctaw word that means “land of the red people.”<sup>189</sup>

Rev. Wright identified, first, as a man of God – a Presbyterian preacher, and, as well, “served as Chief of the Choctaw Nation from 1866 to 1870.”<sup>190</sup> He was successful as both chief and religious leader amongst his people.

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<sup>183</sup> Pitchlynn, 53-62.

<sup>184</sup>Neumann, 4.

<sup>185</sup>Foreman, Carolyn Thomas. “The Choctaw Academy.” *Chronicles of Oklahoma*. 10, no. 1 (1932).

<sup>186</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*, 46.

<sup>187</sup>Abigail Ogle, “Purely Oklahoma: Family Tells Story of How Ancestor Named Oklahoma,” *KOCO* (KOCO News, July 25, 2019), last modified July 25, 2019, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://www.koco.com/article/purely-oklahoma-family-tells-story-of-how-ancestor-named-oklahoma/28497514#>.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Byington, *Dictionary*, 219.

<sup>190</sup> Shannon L. Rich, “Wright, Allen.2019.” *Oklahoma Hall of Fame*, Member archives. (Oklahoma city, January 12, 2019), 32.

Wright's "other significant accomplishments include translating portions of the Bible from Hebrew to Choctaw, creating the Choctaw dictionary, Chahta Lexicon, for use in the tribal school system."<sup>191</sup> Wright was highly educated himself, speaking "five languages; English, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Choctaw,"<sup>192</sup> and counted education as a top priority for himself and his people throughout his life:

"Learning was a lifelong passion for Wright, who earned both bachelor's and master's degrees in the 1850s, remarkable accomplishments for the times and considering he did not begin his formal education until age fourteen. In addition, he graduated from the Union Theological Seminary in New York City, the first Native American from Indian Territory to earn the degree. Throughout his life, he used his intellectual and leadership gifts for the advancement of his people."<sup>193</sup>

The Presbyterian missionaries ordained Rev. Wright as a minister in 1852 after graduating from Union Theological Seminary in New York City, NY.<sup>194</sup> His importance regarding the hymnal lies in his influence on others in his tribe, most notably Captain Joseph Dukes.

Captain Joseph Dukes, a Choctaw born of half-blood parents in Mississippi, attended the missionary schools in Mahew, MS. Hed was so brilliant that he started working as an interpreter for Cyrus W. Kingsbury.<sup>195</sup> As a young man in Oklahoma, Dukes assisted the missionary Cyrus Byington in developing the spoken and written Choctaw alphabet and language as well as the

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<sup>191</sup> Rich, 32.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Alfred Wright and Cyrus Byington. *The History of Joseph and His Brethren*. Pilling. Bibliog. Muskh. Lang., 1889., 29.

<sup>195</sup> Wright, *History*., 55.

dictionary of the Choctaw language.<sup>196</sup> He prestigiously “served as captain, or ‘head man’ of the tribe, translated the Choctaw laws, was some time judge of the Supreme Court, repeatedly chosen a member of the general council, and acted for five years as a trustee of the public schools.”<sup>197</sup> Additionally, Dukes became a preacher and helped Alfred Wright, another missionary, to translate the book of Psalms into the Choctaw language.<sup>198</sup> The Choctaw and his missionary friends regarded him as an excellent preacher in the Choctaw language.<sup>199</sup> He assisted Rev. Allen Wright in translating the Old Testament into Choctaw and possibly a portion of the New Testament.<sup>200</sup> The hymns attributed to Captain Joseph Dukes in the Choctaw Hymnal reference with the simple initial D.<sup>201</sup>

Prolific Choctaw hymnal contributor, Israel Folsom, was the brother of David Folsom. Israel “served as a Choctaw delegate to Washington DC”<sup>202</sup> and was a Presbyterian minister. He was the first translator to put the Lord’s Prayer into the Choctaw language.<sup>203</sup> Several reports about Israel reported, “ He was ever a prime mover in everything that pertained to the advancement of his people in all the arts of civilization, especially in education.”<sup>204</sup> Folsom

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<sup>196</sup> Osburn, *Choctaw Resurgence*, 33.

<sup>197</sup> John Bartlett Meserve. “Chief Gilbert Wesley Dukes.” *Chronicles of Oklahoma*. Vol. 18, no. 1 (1940), 52.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> Meserve, 55.

<sup>200</sup> Osburn, *Choctaw Resurgence*, 33.

<sup>201</sup> Wright *Hymnal*, 17.

<sup>202</sup> “Chahta Vba Isht Taloa: The Choctaw Hymns.”

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> “Rev. Israel Folsom,” *Banner of Peace*, Vol. XXIX, No. 49, May 26, 1870, page 1.

worked particularly hard to further the cause of educating the Choctaw people and focused on making education more easily accessible to young Choctaw women.<sup>205</sup> He strongly felt that educating the women, the young mothers of the tribe would lead to the teaching of the tribal youth in the future.<sup>206</sup> His character was unmarred in the eyes of the people he knew as they described his demeanor as “worthy of a Christian and a gentleman.”<sup>207</sup> Israel's hymns to the Choctaw hymnal contain his initials: IF.<sup>208</sup>

Rev. J. E. Dwight, credited in the hymnal as JED,<sup>209</sup> was the first Choctaw to attend Dartmouth College in 1838.<sup>210</sup> He reportedly took his last name from a family he stayed with during college. He was instrumental in helping to design the Skullyville Constitution – this work “fundamentally altered Choctaw governance by replacing popularly elected district chiefs with a single executive, titled “governor.””<sup>211</sup> He was a translator and interpreter for the Choctaw council, translating acts, resolutions, and other documents.<sup>212</sup> Interestingly, although written around the same time as the others, J.E. Wright's hymn contributions are not included in the hymnal versions before the 6<sup>th</sup> edition.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> “Chahta Vba Isht Taloa: The Choctaw Hymns.”

<sup>206</sup> “Rev. Israel Folsom,”

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Wright *Hymnal*, 71.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, 186.

<sup>210</sup> Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi*, 49.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Richard Mize. “Tubbee’ and His Nieces: A Colloquy on White Men, Choctaw Women, Intermarriage and ‘Indianness.’” *Choctaw Intelligencer*, 1851, 23.

Pliny Fisk was the first ordained Choctaw preacher with the Presbyterian ministry. He preached his entire life with a specific focus against the “fire water” that he believed plagued his people. He was known to quote the last words of a dying Choctaw friend to convince converts to progress into the future for the sake of their children. Those words were as follows: “You will never see your forefathers again; such men will rise no more. Nevertheless, you will see better things in learning, religion, better schoolhouses, and churches in the nation.”<sup>214</sup> The Rev. Fisk was known to be a hard-working evangelist and a pastor, sometimes traveling as much as fifty to one hundred miles outside his district to preach the gospel of Christ.<sup>215</sup>

Additionally, Rev. Fisk worked closely with the educational system led by Choctaw educators. This system helped the youth learn reading, writing, and arithmetic; all taught in the Choctaw language.<sup>216</sup> Fisk was associated with the missionaries Cyrus Byington and Alfred Wright. They were his mentors in Christian life and preaching, and Fisk helped them create the written Choctaw language and contributed several hymns to the Choctaw hymnal still used today. In the hymnal, examples of his work, such as hymn #26, are credited to Pliny with the simple initial F.<sup>217</sup>

According to which version is in hand, somewhere between 56-75 hymns are unattributed.<sup>218</sup> Many believe that unknown Choctaw contributors wrote these. Most schools of

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<sup>214</sup> Grayson Noley et.al. "Choctaw Leadership in Oklahoma: The Allen Wright Family and Education in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries. *American Educational History Journal* 36, no. 1-2(2009): 433.

<sup>215</sup> “Doc. No. 2.” House Documents, Otherwise Publ. as Executive Documents: 13th Congress, 2d Session-49th Congress, 1st Session, Volume 2, Part 3, 374.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Wright *Hymnal*, 26.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid, 1-159.

thought dictate that either these men desired to remain anonymous or, more than likely, their names were forgotten or misplaced regarding their hymns.<sup>219</sup>

### **Removal with Missionaries in Tow**

The US Government, after the Civil War, began to relocate Native Americans across the country. This process is known as “removal.”<sup>220</sup> “The Choctaws were the first to sign a removal treaty after the Indian Removal Act was passed in the spring of 1830.”<sup>221</sup> As previously discussed, the removal act saw most Choctaw people relocate to Oklahoma. A small section remained behind in what they still refer to as their “homeland.”<sup>222</sup> The ones who left brought two missionaries working with them and their children in Mississippi. Alfred Wright and Cyrus Byington made the trek on the Trail of Tears with the Choctaw people and settled with them in Oklahoma (Kohl, 1986). There, the missionaries set to work on, among other things, what would be a monumental and essential task – the written Choctaw language.

### **Work in Oklahoma**

While in Oklahoma, the Choctaw people settled, and their leaders demanded much of the missionaries at hand. Church and school development and building were enormous responsibilities carried on by the Choctaw with the help of Byington and Wright and setting up forms of government within the tribe.<sup>223</sup> These two men had trouble explaining various Christian

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<sup>219</sup> Wright *Hymnal*, 26.

<sup>220</sup> Angela Pulley Hudson. "Removals and Remainders Apaches and Choctaws in the Jim Crow South." *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 11, no. 1 (03, 2021): 82.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid*, 97.

<sup>222</sup> Lambert, 86.

<sup>223</sup> Noley, “Choctaw Leadership”, 433.

and moral concepts<sup>224</sup> to the Choctaw tribal members who sat under their teaching, so they had to devise a way to fix this issue.

The Choctaw language needed a written alphabet and definitions to educate, preach to, love, and care for the Choctaw tribe. The necessity existed to translate the Bible and other works into the native language. Cyrus Byington, a lawyer before answering God’s call to preach, and the Choctaw leaders worked tirelessly to develop the Choctaw alphabet.<sup>225</sup> Following this, Israel Folsom and Byington, and several others, worked together to create a dictionary of the written Choctaw language.<sup>226</sup> During this research, this writer faced significant challenges finding documents and writings in the Choctaw language. There is a reason that these materials are sparse and difficult to locate. In one article, a writer states:

“Efforts during the 1900s aimed to forcefully assimilate Native Americans and suppress indigenous languages Battiste and Henderson (2000). For this reason, many Native Americans did not learn their ancestral language, and few works are published in these languages. As a result of this history, the Choctaw language has few published works and little text representation online.”<sup>227</sup>

Despite this utter disregard for the humanity of the native tribes of America, the Choctaw language prevails. Currently, native instructors teach it to children in the native schools on the Choctaw reservation in Mississippi.<sup>228</sup> The older Choctaw population fears the language “faces extinction.”<sup>229</sup> Therefore, the Choctaw Tribal School system has dedicated an entire section of

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<sup>224</sup> Noley, “Choctaw Leadership”, 432.

<sup>225</sup> Byington, *Dictionary*, 317.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>227</sup> Jacqueline Brixey and Ron Artstein. "ChoCo: A Multimodal Corpus of the Choctaw Language." *Language Resources and Evaluation* 55, no. 1 (03, 2021): 242.

<sup>228</sup> "Preserving a Language, Culture: Teaching Choctaw in the Public Schools". *US Fed News Service, Including US State News*, Apr 24, 2008.

<sup>229</sup> “Preserving a Language...”, 1.

education to the Choctaw oral and written language and the Choctaw culture in Choctaw, MS – one of only 7 or 8 self-contained Native American school systems in the United States.<sup>230</sup>

The missionaries' work with the tribe resulted in a written language perfect for communication and evangelism. With the Choctaw language now written and visual, the missionaries and Choctaw Christian leaders could now work on translating Scripture into the Native tongue for teaching, preaching, and spiritual growth. Cyrus Byington used the system he and the Choctaw people created to translate Christian hymns into the newly-created written language.<sup>231</sup> Byington wrote the first contribution, then nine others in the Choctaw language. The people responded so well that other missionaries working with Byington began to compose Choctaw hymns.<sup>232</sup> The Choctaw leader and Christian converts also began to write until Byington had enough for an entire hymn book.

### Significance of the Hymnody

This research wanted to answer the following question as part of its inquiry: What was the historical significance of the Choctaw hymnody and what, if any, is its contemporary significance. To accomplish this goal, the study looked at the way historical Choctaw society used the hymnal and why it was created in the first place. Additionally, the researcher examined books, articles, news media, blogs, social media, and published videos to gain an understanding for the level of hymnal use in today's Choctaw society.

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<sup>230</sup> Osburn, *Choctaw Resurgence*, 137.

<sup>231</sup> W. B. Morrison, *The Red Man's Trail* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1932), 53.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*

## Historical

Before speaking of the Choctaw hymnody, it is worth mentioning the value of hymns overall to the Choctaw Christian converts. In Mississippi, the missionaries taught the Choctaw people Christian hymns in English. These hymns took hold in their hearts, and the natives sang them together during and without services<sup>233</sup> and were of particular value during the “Trail of Tears” journey to Oklahoma.

“That the Choctaw Christians had a deep affection for hymn tunes learned prior to tribal removal is implied by recorded observations of their hymn singing during the journey. In the absence of most of the missionaries during the “Trail of Tears,” the services of worship and ministerial duties were largely administered by the native preachers. The function of hymn singing was indispensable to the determination of the Choctaw to persevere in the face of such deprivation and sorrow.”<sup>234</sup>

How much more, then, would the hymns composed in their native tongue take hold in the hearts of the Choctaw people? There is ample proof that this hymnody soared in use among the tribe after its publishing. For instance, Choctaw Hymn #103 was a staple in the “monthly concert,”<sup>235</sup> as listed in the hymnal. The hymnal lists five hymns used for the monthly concert. The monthly concert was a hymn singing.<sup>236</sup> These hymns have an evangelistic tone suggesting the show was a singing and prayer time for God to reach out and save more of the Choctaw people. For example, Choctaw Hymn #105 begins with the statement: “This gospel of the kingdom shall first be preached in all the world, and then shall the end come.”<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Morrison, 55.

<sup>234</sup> Stevenson, 56.

<sup>235</sup> Wright *Hymnal*, 103.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid, 103-106.

<sup>237</sup> Wright *Hymnal*, 105.

Outside of concerts and social singing, schools and missionaries utilized the hymnody for education and spiritual work, respectively. A section called “youth”<sup>238</sup> is included in the hymn book. These were supposedly sung daily in the schools on the Oklahoma reservation<sup>239</sup>. Choctaw Hymn #123 pleads, “Come, children, learn of the Lord,”<sup>240</sup> and #124 states that it is a daily prayer for children.<sup>241</sup> Of course, the Christian services on tribal land always included hymn-singing: “Traditional hymn singings and liturgies spoken in the native language were common features in all Protestant Choctaw congregations.”<sup>242</sup>

### **Modern**

The use of the Choctaw hymnody also proved prevalent during modern times. Choctaw people attended singing schools throughout the United States in the late 1800s to mid-1950s.<sup>243</sup> These sparked group singings in churches and homes throughout the reservations in Oklahoma and Mississippi.<sup>244</sup> These congregational singings, in and out of churches, continue to date. An interview in 2018 garnered the following information from Choctaw citizens in Oklahoma: “They have sentimental attachments to memories of all-night gospel singing in Choctaw hymns. The Choctaw hymns are highly valued because they serve as a way for Choctaw tribal members to feel connected to the language that so often feels out of reach to them.”<sup>245</sup> Further proof exists

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<sup>238</sup> Wright *Hymnal*, 123-124.

<sup>239</sup> Stevenson, 148.

<sup>240</sup> Wright *Hymnal*, 123.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

<sup>242</sup> Stevenson, 81.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid*, 115.

<sup>244</sup> Michelene E. Pesantubbee. "Culture Revitalization and Indigenization of Churches among the Choctaw of Oklahoma." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1994, 35.

<sup>245</sup> Woods., 91.

of this modern use as the traditional Choctaw Hymnal has recently been made available through current technology. As of June 2021, an application, or App, has been created with a selection of the hymns for use on iPhones, iPads, personal computers, and other technologies.<sup>246</sup>

The creation and eventual success of the little book of Choctaw hymns provided opportunities for the families in the tribe to not only pass on their native tongue to their younger generations but to experience their language visually, spiritually, and audibly.<sup>247</sup> The language is one of the few native languages – spoken, written, read, and discussed – that still survives in the Americas and is used in Oklahoma and Mississippi prevalently.<sup>248</sup> This pleasant after-effect accompanies positive statistics in the way of Christianity and the singing of the hymns. As recently as 1990, a study derived that 87% of the Choctaw population still spoke their native tongue fluently.<sup>249</sup> The connection between language and Christian concepts, morals, and values is so strong that it is nearly impossible to separate the two. The missionaries Cyrus Byington and Alfred Wright initially set out to put the Choctaw language in written form to impart Christian concepts to the people of the tribe in a relatable and understandable way.<sup>250</sup> Because of this, the language is still “closely associated with those Christian concepts, and children grow up strongly imbued with the values and precepts of fundamentalist Christianity.”<sup>251</sup> Today, Choctaw

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<sup>246</sup> "Choctaw Hymnal App Now Available: Choctaw Nation." Choctaw Hymnal App Now Available | Choctaw Nation. Accessed June 07, 2021. <https://www.choctawnation.com/news-events/press-media/choctaw-hymnal-app-now-available>.

<sup>247</sup> Clara Sue Kidwell. “The Language of Christian Conversion among the Choctaws.” *The Journal of Presbyterian History* (1997-) 77, no. 3 (1999): 151.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 152.

<sup>250</sup> Kidwell, 151.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

families in Mississippi proudly sing the hymns of their forefathers both in church services and public ceremonies.<sup>252</sup> Additionally, the families hold “singings” in one another’s family homes, where the hymns are sung and taught to the family’s youngest members.<sup>253</sup>

### Hymnal Elements

The researcher wanted to examine the elements of the hymns within the Choctaw hymnal collection to understand how the hymns were performed or how the Choctaw tribal members participated in the singing of the hymns. Both lyrics and tuneage were important to the study as well as dance and types of instruments that could be used. The study also looked at how the Choctaw hymn writers and the missionaries notated the melodies or, in some cases, left no notation at all.

### Lyrics

The lyrical makeup of the hymnody is primarily in the Choctaw language, save around 20 hymns printed in English.<sup>254</sup> At the time of creation, the hymnbook and translated versions of Biblical passages helped teach the Choctaw people the newly-created Choctaw alphabet and its nuances.<sup>255</sup> The original Choctaw hymns were a source of great pride among the Choctaw Nation in Oklahoma in the mid-nineteenth century. Here was a way of honoring the God they had come

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<sup>252</sup> Gary Batton. “State of the Nation Address Celebrates Choctaw Spirit.” *Choctaw Nation Biskinik*. January 10, 2018, 10-12.

<sup>253</sup> Ward, Tony. “Community Prospers.” *Choctaw Nation Biskinik*., February 2019.

<sup>254</sup> Wright *Hymnal*.

<sup>255</sup> Stevenson, 120.

to know and love, using the language of their people, and now they could not only read and write, but they could do so in their native tongue.<sup>256</sup>

Within the liturgy of the Choctaw hymnody, there are definite themes. These “themes may include praise, salvation, social concern, and eschatology.”<sup>257</sup> Most of the hymns focus on the subject of Okchalinichi<sup>258</sup> - salvation. There is what the Chatah call annumpa isht auehinchi<sup>259</sup> (tradition) weaved in between the honoring of their new savior, Chisvs Kilaistn.<sup>260</sup> In some hymns, Jesus is called Chukfalhpowa apistikeli<sup>261</sup>, or Shepherd.

### **Tunage**

The tunage of the Choctaw hymns is a vast subject and warrants a separate study. This research focused on other aspects of the hymnal, so there is no room to encompass all there is to study regarding the musicality of the Native Americans. However, the concept deserves a glimpse, at the very least. Although many traditional colonial hymns translated for the hymnal used whatever melody came along with them, the singing events and camp meetings would see a song leader add to these melodies by borrowing from others or making up new variations as well as they went along.<sup>262</sup> The people attending the meetings would also follow, singing these

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<sup>256</sup> Stevenson, 135.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid, xiv.

<sup>258</sup> “Chatah”, 2014, 11.

<sup>259</sup> Byington, *Dictionary*, 23.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>261</sup> “Chatah”, 2014, 11.

<sup>262</sup> Elaine Keillor, Archambault, Timothy, Kelly, John M. H., Kelly, John, Keillor, Elaine, and Kelly, John. 2013. *Encyclopedia of Native American Music of North America*. Westport: ABC-CLIO, LLC. Accessed July 12, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central, 304.

innovative embellishments.<sup>263</sup> According to his notion, the song leader would also speed up or “drag out” a section or two of the song to match the spirit of the moment.<sup>264</sup> The hymn notation was nearly impossible to write because of this, but some contain modern type notation for those who read music. However, contemporary Choctaw hymn singers still take liberties with these tunes as they sing them together at home or in meetings.<sup>265</sup> As long as the Taloa<sup>266</sup> (worship in song) is present, the Chatah feel worship is happening withing the singing no matter the tunage.

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<sup>263</sup> Keillor, 104.

<sup>264</sup> Stevenson, 136.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Byington, *Dictionary*, 396.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Introduction

This chapter aims to introduce the methodology for this qualitative historical research study regarding the historical and modern significance of the Choctaw Hymnody and, further, the lives, culture, and motivations of the Native contributors to the hymnal. This methodology allowed for a more profound understanding of the Native Choctaw experience while developing the written Choctaw language, contributing original hymns, and using those hymns in both religious and social settings. Additionally, this approach helped to develop theories from collected data that assist in understanding the motivations of the Native Choctaw composers.

The validity of the historical study and a qualitative approach for this study are discussed in-depth in this chapter. The research design, including the methodology, researcher background, procedures, analysis, and ethical concerns, are also principal components of this chapter.

### Research Design

Researchers use quantitative research methods for “testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables.”<sup>267</sup> Alternatively, “qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.”<sup>268</sup> Because the purpose of this study was to examine the humanity, lifestyle, culture, perceptions, and motivations of the Choctaw hymn composers who contributed to their Native hymnody and to observe the historical and modern use of the hymnody itself, a qualitative approach was the most appropriate choice. Since this study needed to be qualitative, it

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<sup>267</sup> Creswell, *Research Design*, 23.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*

employed a type of research known as non-experimental research.<sup>269</sup> This research style is “research that lacks the manipulation of an independent variable, random assignment of participants to conditions or orders of conditions, or both.”<sup>270</sup> Because this study focused on several historical primary and secondary sources rather than a relationship or correlation between two or more variables, the specific type of non-experimental research called historical study research was employed here.<sup>271</sup> The historical research design involves “synthesizing data from many different sources,”<sup>272</sup> making it the ideal methodology for this study.

### Research Questions

As previously stated, few writings about the Choctaw Hymnal exist outside the original publication and a dissertation in 1977. That publication outlined the details of the hymnal but gave little attention to the composers and compilers of the hymns.<sup>273</sup> A study was needed that focused on the humanity, culture, and motivations of the original composers involved. This study would help to discover the significance of the hymnal in past and present Choctaw communities,

Although this study investigated and analyzed the non-native contributors, it focused mainly on the Choctaw composers and their lives and motivations in contributing to the hymnal. This research also examined how the growing Choctaw communities valued and used the

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<sup>269</sup> Paul Price. *Research Methods in Psychology, 2nd Canadian Edition*. 2nd (Victoria, B.C. BCCampus, 2015), 237.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Price, 237.

<sup>272</sup> Stephan Isaac, *Handbook in Research and Evaluation*, 13th ed. (San Diego, CA: Edits Publishers, 1980).

<sup>273</sup> Stevenson, 1.

hymnal. Additionally, the study examined the modern importance and usage of the hymnody within Christian Choctaw and traditional Choctaw cultures. The use of the original hymnody is still prevalent in both the Oklahoma and Mississippi populations of the Choctaw tribe.<sup>274</sup> Little has been researched or reported regarding the composers of these hymns who were Native Americans. Therefore, the following research questions presented themselves:

### **Research Questions**

Research Question 1: What contributions were made to the Choctaw hymnody by composers from the Mississippi population of the tribe?

Research Question 2: What were the significant motivations for the original Choctaw sermons and hymns?

Research Question 3: What are the challenges facing the continued use of the historical hymnal?

### **Hypotheses**

Proposed answer to Research Question 1:

H1: Contributions to the Choctaw hymnody by composers from the Mississippi population of the tribe might include translations, hymns, and collaborative efforts.

Proposed answer to Research Question 2:

H2: Major motivations for Choctaw sermons and hymns<sup>275</sup> might include the desire to evangelize within the tribe, the intrinsic need for leadership in the church, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>274</sup> "Choctaw Hymnal App Now Available: Choctaw Nation."

<sup>275</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*, 1-253.

Proposed answer to Research Question 3:

H3: Challenges facing continued use of the Choctaw Hymnal could include the teaching of traditional Native American nature worship, the fear of the extinction of the Choctaw language, and modern apathy towards Christianity.

#### The Researcher

The researcher worked in education for 12 years and holds a Bachelor of Arts in Music Education with Certification to teach Spanish, Certification to teach English, a Master of Arts in Music Education, and is pursuing a Doctoral degree in Worship Studies. No person or group of people researched had a direct relationship with the researcher that represented a conflict of interest, such as a reporting relationship, contract, or any relationship with the researcher that may have imparted bias on the research study. The researcher has gained the skills necessary to carry out the designed research. Additionally, the researcher has worked closely with the indigenous people of Mississippi (the target demographic in this study) for the past eight years in education, music, and social events. Her time with the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians<sup>276</sup> and the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma<sup>277</sup> has contributed much to cultural and community understanding throughout this study.

#### Process of Gathering Data

This study's data collection process employed archival research and secondary data collection. The primary source for data collection was the Choctaw hymnal<sup>278</sup> – a primary source

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<sup>276</sup> Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi*, 10.

<sup>277</sup> Pesantubbee, *Cultural Revitalization*.

<sup>278</sup> Wright *Hymnal*.

of published hymns which was the main focus of this study. This source was researched both electronically and in print. In addition to many historical records, the research utilized documents, dissertations, and other primary and secondary sources.

The researcher employed memo-writing<sup>279</sup> during the data collection process. This tool allowed the researcher to record important phrases, data, and thoughts that arose during the research process. Recording facts, ideas, and other bits of observatory information using this process eliminates bias in the study because it is a reflective activity. Reflection encourages detachment in research.<sup>280</sup> Additionally, the memo-writing method helped the researcher to analyze the collected data constantly and consistently. This procedure also aided in objectivity throughout the research process. The memo-writing process and the constant analysis also assisted in the method reflection, the data quality, the theories that may emerge, and other categories of ideas.

### Data Analysis

For this study, the most important document was the Choctaw Hymn Book<sup>281</sup> itself. The study examined the Choctaw hymnal for initials representing composers, the lyrics and uses of the hymns, and the construction of the tunes. Other documents, including historical books, journal articles, diary excerpts, magazine articles, newspaper articles, biographical papers, and more, were perused and researched for information needed for this study. The researcher took several directions to make sense of the information compiled: categorization, examination, identification, interpretation, and prediction.

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<sup>279</sup> Melanie Birks, *Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide* (London: Sage, 2012), 86.

<sup>280</sup> Birks, 82.

<sup>281</sup> Wright *Hymnal*, 1-253.

## **Categorization**

First, the research separated the data into categories: biographical information, history of the hymnal, Choctaw creation stories, history of the Choctaw tribe in America, the story of the removal, and first-hand testimonials.

## **Examination**

After categorizing the documents, memos, notes, and other information into these sections, the researcher attempted to answer the research questions by reading, ingesting, and compiling the facts from the materials. Examination continued of the Choctaw tribal historical background, culture, and community. Additionally, the study looked at events in their world and environment during hymnal creation and publication, which is the focus of this study.

## **Identification**

The research made all attempts to identify all of the composers of the hymns included in the Choctaw Hymn Book<sup>282</sup>. Specifically, the researcher was interested in identifying the Native Choctaw contributors to the collection. Additionally, the writer was interested in identifying the uses of the hymn book in both religious and social settings and in the past and current times. Identifying doctrinal themes throughout the hymns and what they represent within the Choctaw Christian community was also attempted.

## **Interpretation and Prediction**

There are implications of this study that will be further discussed in Chapter IV. For the purposes of this section, the study can predict that there will be a decline in the use of the old hymnal unless certain factors present themselves in the future.

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<sup>282</sup> Wright *Hymnal*, 1-253.

## Ethical Concerns

Ethics were of the utmost concern throughout this study. The researcher is not considered an indigenous Choctaw, outside of a great-grandmother of Choctaw blood. Therefore, she acknowledges that she does not enjoy the knowledge of first-hand experience within the Choctaw community. The researcher also recognizes the sensitivity of researching outside one's ethnic group. The researcher, therefore, relies on previously-written first-hand information from within the Native Choctaw community for the observations included in the study. Further, the researcher followed the methodology and processes detailed in this chapter to ensure the validity and reliability of the research. There were no risks to human subjects associated with this study, as it used no study participants.

To avoid any bias or unintended harm from a second-hand knowledge of culture and community within the Native Choctaw people group, this researcher extensively sought proper procedures regarding best practices when researching a diverse people group.<sup>283</sup> For instance, the researcher did not compare one ethnic group with another. This intentional act aided the study not to “disregard meaningful within-group differences.”<sup>284</sup> Furthermore, the study took care to use the appropriate terminology.<sup>285</sup> Over time, specific phrases, labels, and vocabulary can grow to be offensive or may reveal themselves to be distasteful<sup>286</sup>, so researching and using the

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<sup>283</sup> A. Kathleen Burlew, Bridgette J. Peteet, Caravella McCuistian, and Brittany D. Miller-Roenigk. "Best Practices for Researching Diverse Groups." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 89, no. 3 (2019): 355.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid*, 356.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>286</sup> Burlew, 357.

appropriate terms for people and things was pertinent to the ethics of this study. Additionally, the study used “appropriate language”<sup>287</sup> when referencing any aspects of the Choctaw culture.

### Summary

This chapter outlined the study's research design, methodology, procedures, data analysis, and ethical concerns. A discussion of these elements, as well as a background of the researcher, was included. The study used a qualitative historical study methodology to develop observations and opinions on the historical and modern significance of the Choctaw hymnody. The research offered questions and hypotheses and a discussion detailing the collection and addition of data. Chapter IV aims to present the study's results and findings and ensure that the research design and methodology were implemented and followed.

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<sup>287</sup> Burlew, 360.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

This chapter introduces the methodology for this qualitative research and observation study regarding the historical and modern significance of the Choctaw Hymnody<sup>288</sup> and, further, the lives, culture, and motivations of the Native contributors to the hymnal. The methodology used was that of a historical observatory method. The historical observatory method allows the researcher to objectively observe the data and compare it to other data recorded and monitored throughout the lifetime of the subject matter.<sup>289</sup> This methodology allowed a more profound understanding of the hymnal's influence on the Native Choctaw mindset, spirituality, and society of this people group both in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the contributors created the hymnal, and throughout the decades since, including the present time.

### Research Design and Procedures

The researcher implemented a qualitative design for this study to answer the research questions proposed. The research did not need numerical data; therefore, no surveys or experiments were necessary. The study necessitated an observational approach to a historical primary source document: *Chahta Uba Isht Taloa = Choctaw Hymn Book*<sup>290</sup>. In addition, the study investigated various journals, dissertations, books, and other sources of information concerning this hymnal that would serve to answer the proposed research questions. Finally, this researcher viewed interviews, surveys, videos, performances, and many other types of media that might aid the data collection.

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<sup>288</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*.

<sup>289</sup> Elaine Denny and Annalise Weckesser. "How to Do Qualitative Research?" *BJOG : an international journal of obstetrics and gynecology*. 129, no. 7 (2022): 1166.

<sup>290</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*.

The questions and the proposed answer to the research questions are as follows:

Research Question 1: What contributions were made to the Choctaw hymnody<sup>291</sup> by composers from the Mississippi population of the tribe?

Research Question 2: What were the primary motivations for original Choctaw sermons and hymns?

Research Question 3: What are the challenges facing the continued use of the historical hymnal?

Proposed answer to Research Question 1:

H1: Contributions to the Choctaw hymnody<sup>292</sup> by composers from the Mississippi population of the tribe might include translations, hymns, and collaborative efforts.

Proposed answer to Research Question 2:

H2: Major motivations for Choctaw sermons and hymns might include the desire to evangelize within the tribe, the intrinsic need for leadership in the church, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Proposed answer to Research Question 3:

H3: Challenges facing the continued use of the hymnal could include the teaching of traditional Native American nature worship, the fear of the extinction of the Choctaw language, and modern apathy towards Christianity.

## Results

Much of the data examined in this study revealed itself through coding. “A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative,

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<sup>291</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

salient, essence-capturing, and evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data”<sup>293</sup> The researcher used a variety of coding methods to find themes and to link hymns with composers. The coding also helped identify the percentages of hymns written by various groups.

The answer to research question number one seemed relatively easy to discover. The study just needed to take note of the authors of each hymn and who was originally from Mississippi. However, this venture proved more difficult as many authors were unknown<sup>294</sup>, only represented by initials<sup>295</sup>, or misassigned to hymns. Additionally, most Choctaw people at this time were originally from Mississippi, so separating the true Mississippi Choctaw from the Oklahoma Choctaw proved difficult. Nevertheless, answers – at least partial ones – were found in this research.

Although the white missionaries working with the Choctaw people contributed many hymns to the Choctaw Hymnal<sup>296</sup>, Choctaw chiefs, and priests wrote a healthy portion of them. In the Choctaw hymnal, these writers, contributors, and translators “are identified by their initials, which appear in the lower right corner beneath the texts.”<sup>297</sup> A total of fifty-six hymns do not have writers’ initials. Research has provided authors, composers, and contributors for many of the given initials, but several remain unidentified.<sup>298</sup> The unattributed hymns do not have any initials or identifying symbols relating to the writer.

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<sup>293</sup>Johnny Saldaña *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Second ed. (London;Thousand Oaks, Calif;: SAGE, 2013), 3.

<sup>294</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*.

<sup>295</sup> Stevenson, 84.

<sup>296</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

The research thus far has identified the following:

<u>Initials</u>	<u>Corresponding Name</u>
A. W.	Alfred Wright
B. & P.	Cyrus Byington and Peter Pitchlynn
C. B.	Cyrus Byington
D.	Captain Joseph Dukes
D. F.	David Folsom
F.	Pliney Fisk
G. L. w.	George L. Williams
I. F.	Israel Folsom
J. E. D.	Jonathan E. Dwight
K.	Cyrus Kingsbury
L. S. W.	Loring S. Williams
P. P. P.	Peter P. Pitchlynn

The following initials are, as of yet, unknown<sup>299</sup>:

Initials

C. M.

E. M.

L. F.

S. W.

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<sup>299</sup> Wright, Hymnal, 121-165.

The following chart contains data regarding the number of hymns written by each contributor and those unattributed.

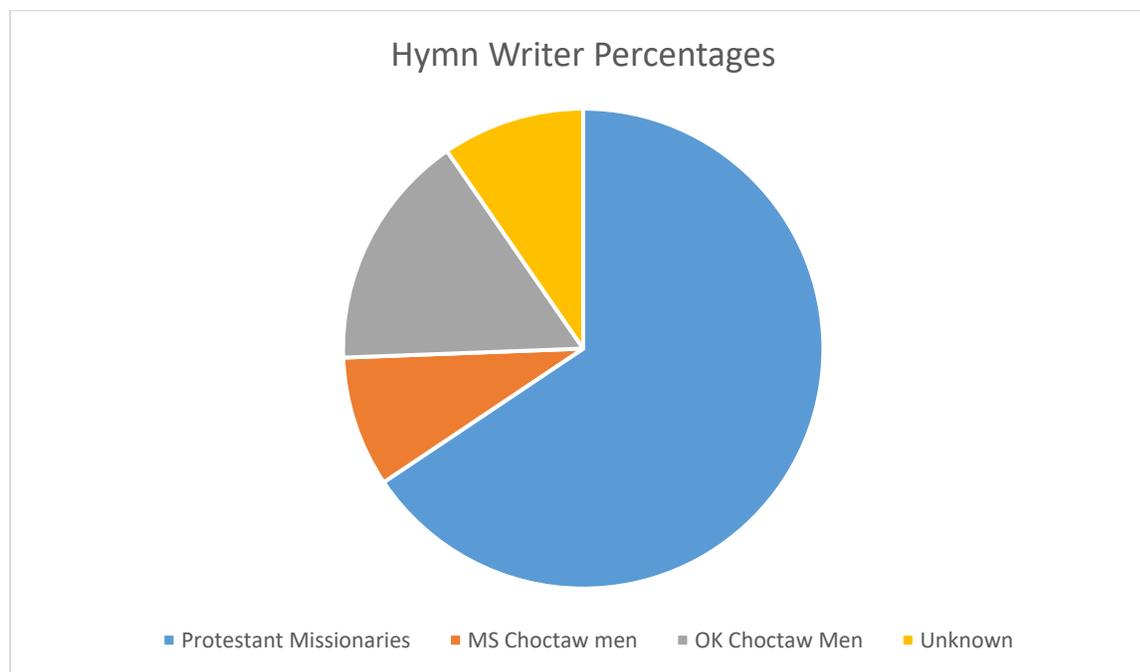


Figure 1.

The information in Figure 1. was compiled by this researcher while coding the hymnal and cross-referencing the hymnal information with various other sources, including theses, historical documents, and books. Nevertheless, this chart's accuracy probability is questionable since many writers and contributors are still unknown<sup>300</sup>. Another issue with this result is that the Oklahoma Choctaw men were once Mississippi Choctaw men and only became Oklahoma Choctaws after the removal. This researcher, however, focused on the Mississippi Choctaw men, contributors to the hymnal, who were Mississippi residents for the longest time or those who remained in Mississippi.

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<sup>300</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*, 121.

Researching for question number two yielded many answers. Motivations for writing the Choctaw hymnal depended on the writers, who varied as much in personality and stature as in culture and racial ethnicity. For the missionaries, the motivations seemed to be, for the most part, evangelistic<sup>301</sup>. The missionaries' chief goal was to reach the souls of the Native Americans with whom they were working and to have them accept Christ as their Lord and Saviour.<sup>302</sup> Cyrus Byington, in particular, wanted to translate the Biblical Scriptures into the Choctaw native language. He used the creation of the hymnal to help create the Choctaw written language to accomplish that desire.<sup>303</sup> Byington's missionary colleague, Alfred Wright, was of a similar mind and was, indeed, prone to preach, write and sing in the native Choctaw language.<sup>304</sup> In addition to caring for the souls of the Choctaw people, it is evident that the missionaries – led by Byington and Wright – sincerely cared about the health of the people's academic progress. This fact shows itself in the Choctaw alphabet<sup>305</sup> that the missionaries created, which would allow the Choctaw people to visualize, read, and write in their native tongue.

Further evidence of the missionary care for the academic progress of the Choctaw people lies in the fact that missionary schools were erected and filled with Choctaw people in Oklahoma and Mississippi.<sup>306</sup> The colonial schools on the reservations had the ominous focus of creating “New England Christian school children as quickly as possible.”<sup>307</sup> The missionaries, however,

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<sup>301</sup> Austin, 83.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Lankford, George E. “Trouble at Dancing Rabbit Creek: Missionaries and Choctaw Removal.” *Journal of Presbyterian History (1962-1985)* 62, no. 1 (1984): 55.

<sup>305</sup> Byington, *Dictionary*

<sup>306</sup> Lankford, 57.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid..

had more freedom in what they could choose to teach. "...missionaries had more liberties in what they taught in their schools than did those that were state-run. Being interested in the moral development of their students, they used the Bible and catechism as textbooks for their importance to the development of language—the foundation for any future education in the dominant culture."<sup>308</sup> Additionally, a small portion of the included curriculum focused on the newly-created Choctaw alphabet, reading and writing in the Choctaw native language, and singing from the Choctaw hymnal. Surprisingly, it even utilized native Choctaw instructors who taught cultural gems such as basket-weaving and jewelry-making.<sup>309</sup>

Outside of the motivations mentioned above, the missionaries were motivated by ambition. The two ministers responsible for writing the Choctaw Hymnal were particularly ambitious and far-reaching in their endeavors. Alfred Wright learned the Choctaw language as quickly as possible and took every opportunity to preach, write, and speak in the native Choctaw tongue.<sup>310</sup> His ambition took him to Mississippi on a mission trip, where he met Cyrus Byington. While others were happy to preach in their native English language, Byington set out to learn as much as he possibly could about the Choctaw language with the lofty goal of translating the entire Bible into the language.<sup>311</sup>

Byington and Wright were instrumental in creating the written form of the Choctaw alphabet and language and, eventually, the Choctaw Hymnal itself.<sup>312</sup> Other white missionaries –

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<sup>308</sup> Noley, "Choctaw Leadership..", 430.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid, 431.

<sup>310</sup> Noley, "Choctaw Leadership..", 433.

<sup>311</sup> Austin, 83.

<sup>312</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*, 1-253.

Baptist and Presbyterian – contributed to the hymnal with the same motivations of reaching the souls of, educating the minds of, and improving the lives of the Choctaw indigenous people on the reservations. One of these missionaries was Loring S. Williams, who wrote many documents and books in and about the Choctaw native language.<sup>313</sup>

Motivations found for the Native Choctaw contributors of the Hymnal<sup>314</sup> were a mix of similar and unique when compared with the missionary motivations. Like the missionaries who worked with them, the Choctaw preachers who contributed hymns were motivated by winning souls for the Kingdom of God.<sup>315</sup> Men like the Reverend Pliny Fisk, who worked very closely with Cyrus Byington and Alfred Wright, were no doubt spurred by the same motivations as they. Fisk worked particularly hard in spreading the gospel of Jesus to the farthest corners of the Choctaw nation as possible.<sup>316</sup> One of Rev. Fisk's primary motivations was the rampant use of alcohol among his native Choctaw people.<sup>317</sup> He saw the ruin it brought and worked hard to preach and rally against it. Rev. Fisk was so motivated by this cause that he worked closely with the Choctaw education system and helped teach native children in their native tongue to write and read.<sup>318</sup> He undoubtedly warned them against the dangers of alcohol use.

Other Choctaw men, not directly involved in ministry, contributed to the hymnal and had their motivations for doing so. For example, Choctaw chief Peter P. Pitchlynn was motivated by

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<sup>313</sup> "Chatah", 2014.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> "Doc. No. 2.", 347.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid, 346.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

his Eastern education and desire to improve his people's lifestyle and education.<sup>319</sup> Chief Pitchlynn assisted Byington and Wright in translating the original English hymns in the publication into the Choctaw language.<sup>320</sup> He wanted to help his people become much more educated in academic areas, believing this would improve their everyday lives.<sup>321</sup> As a Christian convert<sup>322</sup>, Chief Pitchlynn also wanted to reach the souls of his people for Christ. David Folsom was a prolific contributor to the hymnal, and his motivations are clear throughout his life. Folsom desperately wanted a better, more progressive way of life for his people. He worked hard to bring the missionaries to the reservation, teach them the native Choctaw tongue, and spread his Christian values throughout his community.<sup>323</sup> Folsom was a key player in helping Cyrus Byington and Alfred Wright develop a written form of the Choctaw language and met with them frequently to assist in this matter.<sup>324</sup> Many other Choctaw contributors had the same or similar motivations and drew inspiration from these Choctaw chiefs, preachers, and Christians to contribute to the Choctaw hymnody.

The third and last research question was more challenging than the first two. The difficulty may stem from the non-use of journal reports, books, articles, and other recorded and published sources. The research did yield some answers that could give insight into what

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<sup>319</sup> Neumann, 2.

<sup>320</sup> Stevenson, 57.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Neumann, 2.

<sup>323</sup> Thorne, 20-25.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid, 54.

modern Choctaw Christianity looks like and how the Choctaw Hymnody plays into the worship activities of this community.

The hymnal is still widely used among all Protestant Choctaw groups, especially in the Baptist, Presbyterian, and Methodist denominations.<sup>325</sup> Choctaw Christians, and even those who do not profess Christianity<sup>326</sup>, may attend church services and even “singings”<sup>327</sup> in homes of family members where they sing favorite hymns from the book together. The hymnal is still so popular for the Choctaw people that there is an online version to access and even an app<sup>328</sup> (digital application) for smartphones!

Research recovered even more contemporary sources and media outlets which promote the native hymnody and create content daily regarding the songbook. A recent search of TikTok, a rapidly growing new social media platform<sup>329</sup>, revealed a plethora of Choctaw users who sing the Choctaw hymns to share with the world. A Choctaw influencer who goes by the moniker “pushmatahaparton” submits posts regularly on TikTok, speaking about how he grew up with the hymnal as an integral part of his family and culture. He also offers videos of himself in a family singing using the hymnbook.<sup>330</sup> Famous Choctaw Christian artists, like Charles Shalde<sup>331</sup>, are

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<sup>325</sup> Stevenson, xxii.

<sup>326</sup> Osburn, Choctaw Resurgence 103.

<sup>327</sup> Woods, 12.

<sup>328</sup> Sovereign Communication Solutions, LLC. “Choctaw Hymns.” *App Store*. Apple, January 19, 2018. Last modified January 19, 2018. Accessed April 10, 2023. <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/choctaw-hymns/id1337193131>.

<sup>329</sup> Stokel-Walker, Chris. 2021. *TikTok Boom : China's Dynamite App and the Superpower Race for Social Media*. (London: Canbury Press.), 11.

<sup>330</sup> Pushmataha Parton (@pushmatahaparton). “Choctaw Hymn @ Choctaw Tribal alliance.” TikTok, July 19, 2022.

<sup>331</sup> “Native America: The Choctaw Music of Charles Shadle,” *Arts at MIT*, last modified February 7, 2023, accessed April 12, 2023, <https://arts.mit.edu/projects/native-america/>.

producing new recordings of the old hymns, and other outlets, such as YouTube channels and blogs,<sup>332</sup> promote the hymnody regularly. The usage level of the Choctaw hymnal as a source of worship and praise has other options and challenges. Christian Contemporary music is growing by leaps and bounds and threatens the survival of the old hymns in the Choctaw hymnbook<sup>333</sup>. Younger generations and some pastors may opt for more modern-sounding worship music.<sup>334</sup> This phenomenon is most likely the greatest threat to the continued use of the hymnal. The practice of teaching the naturalistic religion<sup>335</sup> of the tribe's beginning faith also works against the hymnal usage.

Some Choctaw traditionalists rejected using the old hymnal because the white missionaries were its significant influencers.<sup>336</sup> These purists feel that accepting this document into culture is abiding assimilation as a practice.<sup>337</sup> The irony is that the music, traditions, history, and many more aspects of the Choctaw culture have almost solely survived because of the hymnal's existence.<sup>338</sup>

All challenges aside, however, the Choctaw Hymnal is still an essential part of the culture on the reservations in Mississippi and Oklahoma. The history of its use means a great deal to their people: "Singing hymns and psalms was and is central to Native experiences with

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<sup>332</sup> "Native America:".

<sup>333</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*, 1-253.

<sup>334</sup> O'Malley, 3.

<sup>335</sup> Osburn, "Choctaw Resurgence", 90.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

<sup>337</sup> Levine, 351.

<sup>338</sup> Stevenson, 79.

Christianity, integrated into formal worship services as well as social gatherings where it helped to sustain communities' spiritual strength."<sup>339</sup>Continued use in contemporary times suggests a strong connection between today's Choctaw population and the Choctaw hymnody.<sup>340</sup>

### Summary

This chapter reviewed research questions, proposed answers, and the research methods used in this study. Furthermore, the analysis presented solutions and results found within the research. The research revealed that several Choctaw men from, and possibly still resided in, Mississippi contributed to the Choctaw Hymnal<sup>341</sup>. Also, the chapter discussed the motivations of all contributors – white missionaries, Choctaw ministers, Choctaw chiefs, and other white and Choctaw contributors. Their reasons varied but were similar in that they wanted to evangelize the Choctaw people for Christianity, desired better education for the Choctaw people, and wanted to educate the Choctaw nation better. Finally, we looked at some challenges that could impend the use of the Choctaw Hymnody in the future.

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<sup>339</sup> Goodman, Glenda. "Joseph Johnson's Lost Gamuts: Native Hymnody, Materials of Exchange, and the Colonialist Archive." *Journal of the Society for American Music* 13, no. 4 (11, 2019): 484.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Summary

This study examined the modern and historical significance of the unique hymnal<sup>342</sup> written for the Choctaw Nation in the native Choctaw tongue. The research took a qualitative<sup>343</sup> approach as it studied, compiled, coded<sup>344</sup>, and assessed the data. The research questions that revealed themselves during the planning stages wanted to know the following:

Research Question 1: What contributions were made to the Choctaw hymnody<sup>345</sup> by composers from the Mississippi population of the tribe?

Research Question 2: What were the primary motivations for original Choctaw sermons and hymns?

Research Question 3: What are the challenges facing the continued use of the historical hymnal?

The primary source, the hymnal, was the most important source used in this study. Additionally, the researcher studied books, journals, theses, websites, social media, and other sources. These sources put forth several answers to the research questions presented. First, several of the Choctaw contributors to the hymnal were Mississippi men. Motivations for the Choctaw men were primarily to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ among their people<sup>346</sup>, better

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<sup>342</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*, 1-253.

<sup>343</sup> Creswell, *Research Design*, 23.

<sup>344</sup> Saldaña, 3.

<sup>345</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*.

<sup>346</sup> “Chatah”, 2014.

educate them, and teach them to sing hymns in their native tongue—the motivations for the white missionaries aligned with those of the Choctaw writers.<sup>347</sup>

### Significance

The research presented in this thesis is valuable for various reasons. There is a current struggle to determine what part of their history is genuinely Choctaw and whether colonizer-influenced. They may never find the direct answer, but studies like this one work toward some clarity. Additionally, the religious implications of the study's results could be pretty substantial. The Choctaw people are predominantly of the Protestant Christian faith<sup>348</sup>, and knowing their beginnings could help them make the choices they need to make in their own lives regarding worship. The idea that Choctaw men, some of them chiefs and preachers, wrote hymns and other religious documents in the native tongue could help to solidify their faith in God that their family elders passed down to them.

The Choctaw Hymnal<sup>349</sup> is considered a source of pride in the Choctaw community and is still fervently used today in homes, churches, festivals, and concerts. This compilation represents more than just Choctaw history. It contains one of the earliest occurrences of the written Choctaw language.<sup>350</sup> This written language is invaluable for the people of the Choctaw language, and that part of the hymnal alone is worth a great deal.

The motivational information is as significant as the previously mentioned results. Knowing that Choctaw men wrote hymns in their native language is essential because it helps the current Choctaw population relate to the hymnal personally. However, learning what

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<sup>347</sup> Noley, "Choctaw Leadership..", 433.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*, 1.

<sup>350</sup> Austin, 81.

motivated these men to contribute to such a document in collaboration with white colonist missionaries could help the Choctaw people of today make a solid connection with their past and God himself. The impact would have to be immense for the Choctaw people in knowing that their forefathers were interested in their education, health, progress, and inner souls.<sup>351</sup>

The study's look at the challenges facing continued use of the hymnal made discoveries that could assist in alleviating these issues in the future. The use of the hymnal has not diminished and continues throughout the Choctaw nation in Mississippi and Oklahoma<sup>352</sup>. The newer music that threatens to out-hip the hymns could be combined with the old songs in services to keep tradition while embracing the latest worship styles. Some Choctaw Christians may see the research and be able to determine whether some practices are contrary to the faith they hold in Jesus and whether some of them align with that same faith. This research may also inspire some artists and writers to write new hymns in the Choctaw language.

### Limitations

This study, though thorough, does have its limitations. The researcher implemented a qualitative method for this study. Qualitative research offers a particular set of problems. Primarily, qualitative research is cumbersome and requires the researcher to do more research than other types of analyses.<sup>353</sup> Qualitative methods such as the one used for this study do not allow for accuracy as much as their counterparts. With no quantitative data, it is not easy to

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<sup>351</sup> Austin, 83.

<sup>352</sup> Thorne, 54.

<sup>353</sup> Jane Noyes, Andrew Booth, Kate Flemming, Ruth Garside, Angela Harden, Simon Lewin, Tomas Pantoja, Karin Hannes, Margaret Cargo, and James Thomas. "Cochrane Qualitative and Implementation Methods Group Guidance series—paper 3: Methods for Assessing Methodological Limitations, Data Extraction and synthesis, and Confidence in Synthesized Qualitative Findings." *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology* 97 (05, 2018): 51.

authenticate the accuracy of the claims made in the study. Qualitative studies make it difficult for the researcher to “investigate causality.”<sup>354</sup> “Qualitative research requires thoughtful planning to ensure the obtained results are accurate. There is no way to analyze qualitative data mathematically. This type of research is based more on opinion and judgment rather than results. Because all qualitative studies are unique, they are difficult to replicate.”<sup>355</sup>

The sheer volume of information made assessing the data quite tricky, and with this particular qualitative study, there was an almost unlimited number of documents to research. Because the researcher used a historical observatory approach, there were no observations of real-time happenings to gather data. No interviews, experiments, case studies, or complex data support the claims presented. The researcher conducted no observations of hymnal use in real time.

Additionally, the researcher is not from the native Choctaw community, so the perspective may not align with those in the community, and the researcher may not understand the culture studied. Studying a culture outside one’s own is a tricky feat. The American Anthropological Association laid out several issues that ethnographers must avoid. These include doing more harm than good to the culture studied and having an intentional or unintentional bias because the researcher is outside the culture studied.<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> Noyes, 51.

<sup>355</sup> Valentin Radu. “Qualitative Research: Definition, Methodology, Limitation, Examples.” *Omniconvert Ecommerce Growth Blog*, 3 Apr. 2019.

<sup>356</sup> “Ethics Code.” *Nature*. 491, no. 7424 (2012).

## Recommendations

Choctaw men from Mississippi and Oklahoma contributed to the Choctaw Hymnal<sup>357</sup> published late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some of these men traveled the Trail of Tears<sup>358</sup> to Oklahoma and were originally Mississippi Choctaws. Other Choctaw contributors were born and resided in Oklahoma. Motivations for the Choctaw contributions to the hymnal were to educate their people with the hymns written in the native language and to win their souls for Jesus Christ. The motivations of the white missionaries who worked with them were closely aligned with these. There are many challenges facing the continued use of the hymnal, which is still prevalent in churches, homes, festivals, and other events. They include contemporary music preferred by the younger generation, the traditional religion of the tribe in competition with the hymn singing and resentment that white missionaries were central in helping to create the compilation.

These findings, while important, do not encompass the amount of information needed to create a permanent home for the hymnal in the place of the Choctaw nation's heart. There needs to be more information about the creation of the hymnal, why the Choctaw chiefs wanted it written and published, and why so many of the Choctaw people still sing those hymns today. This data would help build up the confidence and trust in the document and ensure future use within the community. More information is needed to connect the past to the present and to help preserve the practice of hymnal<sup>359</sup> singing on the Choctaw reservations.

This researcher recommends further study on the subject of the Choctaw Hymnal.<sup>360</sup> Additional research could shine some light on what motivated generation after generation of

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<sup>357</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*, 1-253.

<sup>358</sup> Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi*, 8.

<sup>359</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*, 1.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*

Choctaw families to sing the hymns in the hymnal together and pass this practice through the years to their loved ones. Other research models and methods could be employed to produce a more accurate and detailed result.

This researcher believes a sequel to this study would be immensely helpful in this case. The second study would employ a qualitative method as this one did. However, it would benefit from researching the current use of the hymnal, the opinions of the Choctaw people, and observations of the singings in person. For this, the study would gain reliable information by using interviews, surveys, observations, case studies, and other more aggressive research tools than were used in this study.<sup>361</sup> If these tools and methods are utilized, new research could create a more complete picture of what the hymnal means to the Choctaw nation and how long its use will continue.

A complete analysis of the hymnal would help create a comparative analysis of the hymns of Choctaw men and those of white missionaries. This comparison would help validate or disprove the motivations found and stated within this study. It would be interesting to see the differences and similarities in the lyrics, tunage, cadence, rhythm, theology, and religious concepts.

### Conclusion

The Choctaw Hymnal<sup>362</sup> aided in the preservation of culture for the Choctaw Nation. The language and history of the document are pretty exceptional and distinctive. Modern churches have added newer, flashy contemporary music to their worship services on the Choctaw

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<sup>361</sup> Radu, 2019.

<sup>362</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*.

reservations in Oklahoma and Mississippi. “Because it is one of the few links with the past, however, traditional hymnody is a significant element in both sacred and secular settings.”<sup>363</sup> Their oldest hymnbook is still on the pews, and they still utilize it along with the newer music.

## Questions

This study looked at the hymnal and how it was, and is, utilized by the Choctaw people of America. The research raised several questions:

1. Who were the contributors and composers?
2. What portion of the composers were Choctaw, and what percentage were Mississippi Choctaws?
3. What were the motivations for the writing of the hymnal? For the Choctaw contributors? For the white missionaries?
4. How was the hymnal used historically, and what was its significance?
5. Is the hymnal still part of the Choctaw culture today? If so, how is it used, and how often?
6. What challenges face the current Choctaw use of the hymnal?
7. How can further study help to preserve the use of the hymnal?

## Methods

For this study, the researcher used a qualitative method called historical observation.<sup>364</sup> This study method guided the researcher to look at primary and secondary sources such as journals, books, essays, dissertations, recorded media, social media, and websites. The primary source

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<sup>363</sup> Stevenson, 96.

<sup>364</sup> Denny, 1166.

was the hymnal<sup>365</sup>, published in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The hymnal was compiled by two missionaries, Alfred Wright, and Cyrus Byington, that worked closely with Choctaw chiefs Pushmataha and Pitchlynn, pastors, and other Choctaw leaders. Various white ministers in Oklahoma at the time also contributed to the work.

## **History**

The literature review revealed a plethora of history related to the unique hymnal. We discussed the background of each known writer, the events taking place at the time of the writings, the creation of the Choctaw alphabet and dictionary<sup>366</sup>, and the creation of the hymnal. The study further discussed the identification<sup>367</sup> (or lack thereof) of the hymn writers. It also investigated who those writers were – their backgrounds and ambitions. Additionally, the researchers studied how the Choctaw people used the historic hymnal in the past and since its creation.

## **Results**

The motivations for the writers varied little as the principal goal for white and Choctaw contributors was to reach the population for Christ and save their souls. White missionaries were motivated to "civilize"<sup>368</sup> the tribal members, which may or may not differ from the Choctaw chiefs' goals to educate the people better. The researcher considers that some founders of eastern-sent Christian schools attempted to erase any Choctaw culture and create students who

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<sup>365</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*, 1-253.

<sup>366</sup> Byington, *Dictionary*.

<sup>367</sup> Wright, *Hymnal*, 122.

<sup>368</sup> Miles, 2012.

looked, thought, and behaved like those in the Eastern U.S.<sup>369</sup> However, Byington and Wright had a heart for the Choctaw people and did not seem to possess this motivation.

The researcher also wanted to determine whether the hymnal was still in use and why or why not. Some Choctaw traditionalists reject the use of the hymnal because of its connection to the white missionaries<sup>370</sup>. They believe using the hymnal is just one more step towards assimilation into the white culture.<sup>371</sup> However, the study found that many Choctaw people consider the hymnal an integral part of their culture and still use it often. The people hold singings in their homes across the reservations in Mississippi and Oklahoma, and the hymns appear in church services, festivals, concerts, and more.<sup>372</sup>

## **Implications**

Finally, the study discussed limitations and recommendations for future research. This future research could implement tools such as interviews, surveys, case studies, in-person observations, and more that could give more detailed and accurate information. In America's current social landscape, there is a danger that outside influences could cause a decline in the use of the hymnal with the younger generations of Choctaw people. This newer study could help to connect the Choctaw people even more closely with the hymnal, its writers, their history, and their faith in God.

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<sup>369</sup> Kidwell, 151.

<sup>370</sup> Osburn, "Choctaw Resurgence", 90..

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Stevenson, 81.

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