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## JUAN DE LA VILLEBEUVRE AND SPANISH INDIAN POLICY IN WEST FLORIDA, 1784-1797

by JACK D. L. HOLMES\*

**B**ORDERLANDS SCHOLARS who have studied Spanish policy toward the Indian tribes of North America have remarked on the notable difference between the mission- *presidio* system of the "New Southwest" and the trading-post techniques of the "Old Southwest." In the area stretching from Memphis on the north to the Gulf of Mexico on the south, and from the Mississippi River to St. Augustine on the Atlantic coast, Spain followed the successful patterns established first by the French until 1763, and thereafter by the British in West Florida until the close of the American Revolution.<sup>1</sup>

Success in winning the friendship and military support of an estimated 20,000 Indian warriors was considered one of the key points in Spanish defensive policy, not only against the English but also against the United States of America. The longtime Spanish military "expert" in the vast Louisiana and West Florida provinces, Colonel Francisco Bouligny, noted this in his famous memorial to the Spanish government in 1776, when he emphasized the role of the Indians: "Without their friendship and good relations, it will not be easy for us to ascend the Mississippi without employing superior forces and making expenditures. On the contrary, assuring ourselves of their friendship, not only will we have free passage on the river, but they themselves will be the

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\* Mr. Holmes, former professor of history at the University of Alabama in Birmingham, is director of the Louisiana Collection Series. This paper was read at the Western History Association, San Diego, California, October 19, 1979.

1. The best short analysis of Spanish-Indian policy in Louisiana and West Florida is by Herbert E. Bolton, "The Cession of Louisiana and the New Spanish Indian Policy," *Athanase de Mezieres and the Louisiana-Texas Frontier, 1763-1780*, 2 vols. (Cleveland, 1914), I, 66-79; reprinted in John Francis Bannon (ed.), *Bolton and the Spanish Borderlands* (Norman, 1964), 176-77. See also David K. Bjork, "The Establishment of Spanish Rule in the Province of Louisiana, 1762-1770" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1923), 206.

guards and defenders of our rights, impeding and containing any insult or invasion which we might fear from the English."<sup>2</sup>

A more recent scholar has also commented on the basis of Spanish defenses of West Florida: "To control the Floridas effectively," he writes, "Spain had to win over the Indians, and to win them over she had to furnish the accustomed manufactured goods."<sup>3</sup> As the British had finally succeeded in winning the loyalty of such powerful Indians as the Choctaws from the French, it was a challenge to Spain to wrest the red man's loyalty from the British in favor of Spain. This program began at least as early as the governorship of Alexander O'Reilly (1769-1770), but achieved its most notable early success among the Choctaws during the American Revolution. Joseph Boisdoré had undertaken a dangerous mission to the Choctaw Nation in 1779, and persuaded seventeen chiefs and 480 Choctaw warriors, who were said to represent the majority of their fellow braves, to come to New Orleans, where they ceremoniously exchanged their British patents, medals, and gorgets for Spanish ones with the likeness of Carlos III.<sup>4</sup>

As was generally true with most of the southeastern Indian nations, there were pro-Spanish and anti-Spanish factions in each camp. "The Choctaw towns in what is today extreme southern Mississippi," writes another historian, "were factionalized by the Spanish."<sup>5</sup> During the 1779 Spanish campaign against the British

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2. Gilbert C. Din (trans. and ed.), *Louisiana in 1776: A Memoria of Francisco Bouligny*, Vol. III, Louisiana Collection Series of Books and Documents on Colonial Louisiana (New Orleans, 1977), 65-67. Bouligny stressed using British techniques of "exact and swift justice" without force, and by "educating the youth." "The Indians will surely come [to Spain] if we completely adopt the same way of behaving towards them." *Ibid.*, 68.
  3. J. Leitch Wright, Jr., *Anglo-Spanish Rivalry in North America* (Athens, 1971), 138.
  4. On early Spanish-Indian policy, see John Preston Moore, *Revolt in Louisiana, the Spanish Occupation, 1766-1770* (Baton Rouge, 1976), 84-102, 220-21, and Bibiano Torres Ramirez, *Alejandro O'Reilly en las Indias* (Sevilla, 1969), 146-49. The most ambitious study of Spanish policy is Vicenta Cortés Alonso, *Historia de los indios del sureste de los Estados Unidos durante la segunda mitad del siglo xviii*, 3 vols. (Ph.D. diss., University of Madrid, 1956). Boisdoré's mission is explained in Bernardo de Gálvez to Josef de Gálvez, no. 390, June 5, 1780, Archivo General de las Indias (hereinafter cited as AGI), Papeles procedentes de la Isla de Cuba thereinafter cited as PC), legajo 223-B.
  5. James H. O'Donnell, III, *Southern Indians in the American Revolution* (Knoxville, 1973), 74. See also, *ibid.* 100-01, for Choctaw comments on the Spanish.

posts on the Mississippi, Choctaws were among the Indians who joined Bernardo de Gálvez and honored themselves by showing great mercy and compassion toward the vanquished foes.<sup>6</sup> During the subsequent Gálvez campaigns against Mobile in 1780, and Pensacola in 1781, Choctaws were involved on both sides, and those who fought against the British urged a "get-tough" policy against their own brothers who had supported the enemy cause.<sup>7</sup>

Initial Spanish success with the Choctaws during the American Revolution was followed by almost two decades of rapid pro-Spanish support from the Choctaws, due in part to the Spanish contract with the British mercantile firm of Pantón, Leslie and Company, and because of the benevolent, but firm, Spanish policy of key frontier agents. One of the most valuable in helping to cement Choctaw-Spanish relations was Juan de la Villebeuvre. Virtually the whole story of Spanish success with Choctaws is interrelated with his career in Louisiana and West Florida.

Born in the Breton capital of Rennes in 1732, de la Villebeuvre came to Louisiana about 1764, just at the time that the French army there was preparing for the cession of Louisiana to Spain.<sup>8</sup> Like many French career officers who chose to transfer into Spanish service, Sublieutenant Jean de la Villebeuvre, after two years' duty with the French, joined the Louisiana Infantry

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6. Bernardo de Gálvez to Josef de Gálvez, October 16, 1779, AGI, PC, legajo 223-B; Jack D. L. Holmes, *The 1779 "Marcha de Gálvez": Louisiana's Giant Step Forward in the American Revolution* (Baton Rouge, 1974), 12, 19.
  7. Pedro Juzan to Josef de Ezpeleta, February 19, 1781, Lawrence Kinnaird (ed.) *The Revolutionary Period, 1765-1781, Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 1765-1794, Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the year 1945*, 4 vols. (Washington, 1949), II, pt. 1, 419. In December 1777, two Choctaw delegates came to New Orleans to confer with Bernardo de Gálvez about exchanging their British flags, medals, and patents for Spanish ones. They also asked Spain to provide the goods formally obtained from the British; not yet at war, Gálvez agreed only to provide merchandise. Bernardo de Gálvez to Josef de Gálvez, December 30, 1777, AGI, PC, leg. 16.
  8. He was born September 24, 1732, and was baptized Jan (Breton for Jean) Louis Fidelle Farault de la Villebeuvre on November 23. He was the son of the Rennes chief clerk, Louis François Farau(l)t, Sieur de la Villebeuv(r)e, and his wife, Janne (Breton for Jeanne) Bocou (Breton for Beaucourt). Baptismal record of Toussaint (All Saints) Parish of Rennes (now in the Archives Départementales, Rennes), Vol. 1729-1732. This correct information was not available when the author wrote the sketch, "Juan de la Villebeuvre: Spain's Commandant of Natchez During the American Revolution," *Journal of Mississippi History*, XXXVII (February 1975), 97-129, where, on p. 98, it speculates that he was born in Vernes between 1735 and 1737.

Battalion.<sup>9</sup> Within the year he was part of the expedition under Colonel Pedro Piernas which founded a Spanish post opposite British Fort Panmure de Natchez on the west bank of the Mississippi.<sup>10</sup> For a brief time prior to the entry of Spain into the American Revolution against the English, de la Villebeuvre commanded the frontier post of Fort San Gabriel de Manchac across the Iberville River (Bayou Manchac) from the British post.<sup>11</sup>

From his frontier post, Lieutenant de la Villebeuvre wrote reports concerning the movements of the Choctaws. During the raid by American patriot James Willing against Tory plantations in Louisiana and West Florida, the Choctaws were even more destructive than the white "banditti," according to Governor Gálvez.<sup>12</sup> When Tory Chickasaw leader, James Colbert, offered the Choctaws a share in the spoils of war if they would help him attack the Arkansas Post in 1780, they refused, pledging their continued loyalty to the Spanish governor, who then assured the Choctaw representatives in New Orleans that they would always receive good treatment, consideration, and generosity from Spain.<sup>13</sup> Governor Gálvez requested additional medals to bestow upon those Indians who had renounced their ties with Great Britain.<sup>14</sup>

Following his promotion to the rank of captain, de la Villebeuvre took possession of Fort Panmure de Natchez from the British in 1779, but a revolt against Spanish rule in 1781 cost him his post and much personal embarrassment. He rarely mentioned his service during the American Revolution as Natchez commandant, and when he petitioned in 1792 for the rank of lieutenant-colonel, he did not refer to his terms as commandant of Natchez or at San Gabriel de Manchac.<sup>15</sup>

9. On the background of the Louisiana Infantry Battalion and subsequent Regiment, see Jack D. L. Holmes, *Honor and Fidelity: The Louisiana Infantry Regiment and the Louisiana Militia Companies, 1766-1821* (Birmingham, 1965).

10. Moore, *Revolt in Louisiana*, 78; Holmes, "Juan de la Villebeuvre," 100.

11. Holmes, "Juan de la Villebeuvre," 101-02; Holmes, *Marcha de Gálvez*, 12.

12. Bernardo de Gálvez to Josef de Gálvez, March 24, 1778, AGI, PC, leg. 16, cited in Manuel Serrano y Sanz, *España y los indios Cherokis y Chactas en la segunda mitad del siglo xviii* (Sevilla, 1916), 19.

13. Esteban Miró to Bernardo de Gálvez, November 7, 1782, cited in *ibid.*, 20.

14. Bernardo de Gálvez to Josef de Gálvez, October 16, 1779, AGI, PC, leg. 223-B. The supplement to the *Gazeta de Madrid*, January 14, 1780, refers to the Spanish success in winning over the Choctaws.

15. Petition of Juan de la Villebeuvre, February 24, 1792, AGI, Audiencia de Santo Domingo, leg. 2611. Microfilm copy of this petition, which details

The successful Spanish campaigns against British West Florida resulted in the Spanish acquisition of that province in the peace treaty which ended the American Revolution. The elimination of the strong British presence in Pensacola and throughout West Florida did not mean that Spain could now relax, however. The United States was Spain's new nemesis, and with a population of more than 2,000,000, and an inherited hunger for westward expansion, American frontiersmen posed a threat, not only to Spanish hegemony in the Mississippi Valley, but to the lands of the Indians which had served traditionally for hunting. The Creeks had a word for these Americans - *ecunnaunuxlgee* ("people greedily grasping after all their lands").<sup>16</sup>

Spanish policy toward the United States and the Indians was summarized by the Baron de Carondelet, Governor-General of Louisiana and West Florida from 1791-1797: "The sustaining of our allied tribes in the possession of their lands is an indispensable object both for the conservation of Louisiana under the power of Spain, and to prevent the Americans from securing the navigation of the Mississippi."<sup>17</sup> Governor-General Esteban Miró (1782-1791) had initiated the Spanish policy, but it was during the subsequent administration of Carondelet, with excellent cooperation from the governor of Natchez, Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, that Spanish Indian policy toward the Choctaws reached its greatest success.<sup>18</sup> De la Villebeuvre helped forge the Spanish frontier

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the services of de la Villebeuvre in winning and maintaining the friendship of the Choctaws, is in Special Collections, Loyola University, New Orleans. (Hereinafter cited as "Petition of February 24, 1792").

16. Benjamin Hawkins, the American agent among the Creeks, uses the word. See *Letters of Benjamin Hawkins, 1796-1806*, Vol. IX, *Collections of the Georgia Historical Society* (Savannah, 1916), 252.
17. Baron de Carondelet to Luis de las Casas, No. 135, confidential, June 13, 1795, AGI, PC, leg. 1447. This has been quoted in Louis Houck (ed.), *The Spanish Regime in Missouri*, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1909), II, 111-13, and Jack D. L. Holmes, "Spanish Policy Toward the Southern Indians in the 1790's," *Four Centuries of Southern Indians*, ed. by Charles M. Hudson (Athens, 1975), 66.
18. Holmes, "Spanish Policy Toward the Southern Indians," 65-82; Jane M. Berry, "The Indian Policy of Spain in the Southwest, 1783-1795," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, III (March 1917), 462-77; Mary A. M. O'Callaghan, "The Indian Policy of Carondelet in Spanish Louisiana, 1792-1797" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1942); and Jack D. L. Holmes, *Gayoso, The Life of a Spanish Governor in the Mississippi Valley, 1789-1799* (Baton Rouge, 1965), 3-33, 136-61. For a highly critical and unbalanced treatment of Spain's Indian policy, see Theodore Roosevelt, *Winning of the West*, 4 vols. (New York, 1895-96), especially III.

policy; he was involved in all the major defensive steps during the 1790s; and at least three of the key Spanish posts were established after his careful diplomacy.

Governor-General Miró sent de la Villebeuvre to the Choctaw villages on April 15, 1784, with instructions to persuade them to come to Mobile and discuss affairs with the Spanish officials.<sup>19</sup> Even Miró was astonished to see 185 Great Medal and Small Medal chiefs and war captains, who joined Miró, Mobile commandant Lieutenant-Colonel Enrique le Gallois Grimarest, Intendant Martin Navarro, Pedro Juzan, Indian agent for Mobile, and Simón Fabre, the interpreter, for negotiations. When they signed the Mobile Treaty on July 14, 1784, the Choctaws promised to preserve peace, loyalty, and obedience as vassals of the Spanish king, and at the same time, gain such advantages which would accrue to both nations—the defense of Louisiana, Mobile, and West Florida. Speaking for the Spanish government, Miró promised to provide “a permanent, stable trade” except during the emergency of war, and to establish a written schedule of what would be paid for Choctaw peltry and what would be charged for the trade goods the Indians might desire. In other respects, the treaty was similar to others signed at Mobile and Pensacola in 1784 with Spain’s other Indian allies, except for the Cherokees.<sup>20</sup>

In the “chess game of Indian diplomacy,” Spain had apparently made a good opening gambit with the Treaty of Mobile. Undaunted, however, the United States persuaded a small faction of Choctaws to affirm the Seneca (or Hopewell) Treaty on January 3, 1786, in which the Choctaws were persuaded to cede three strategic spots, measuring two leagues square, and to become vassals of the United States. It was Spain’s move next, and Captain de la Villebeuvre probably scored his greatest diplomatic triumph with his successful mission to the Choctaw town of Yazoo.

His detailed instructions from Governor-General Miró were dated September 21, 1787, just three days before he left New

19. Miró’s instructions to de la Villebeuvre, April 15, 1784, AGI, PC, leg. 2360. A transcript is in the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Provincial Archives, Spanish Dominion (8 vols.), II, 85-89.

20. Copies of the treaty are in AGI, PC, legajos 15 and 2360, and in the Archivo Histórico Nacional (Madrid), Sección de Estado (hereinafter cited as AHN, EST.), leg. 3885. It is also printed in Serrano y Sanz, *España y los indios*, 82-85. An appraisal of the treaty and its effects is in Jack D. L. Holmes, “Spanish Treaties with West Florida Indians, 1784-1802,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XLVIII (October 1969), 144.

Orleans in the company of longtime Indian language interpreter Louis Forneret.<sup>21</sup> The trip, as described in de la Villebeuvre's journal, covered 128 leagues through hostile and uncomfortable terrain.<sup>22</sup> The Spanish officials arrived at the village of Yazoo on September 26 and waited for the Choctaw chiefs to assemble with him and the interpreter.<sup>23</sup>

The instructions covered various complaints from the Choctaw leaders, some of them in reference to the 1784 Mobile Treaty. A few traders had apparently declined to accept some of the pelts brought in by the Choctaws, and this antagonized the chiefs. Also, in contravention of the tariff schedule established in 1784, some of the traders had been charging higher prices for goods to the Choctaws. A few Choctaws still kept their English medals and refused to trade them for Spanish ones. Finally, the Hopewell Treaty between the Choctaws and the United States threatened the Spanish-Choctaw alliance. It was a big job, one which challenged de la Villebeuvre's talents and skills.<sup>24</sup>

Not only was the mission a success, but the Yazoo Conference led to a delegation of influential Choctaws accompanying de la Villebeuvre to Bay St. Louis, and from there to New Orleans to confer with Esteban Miró. The result of the Choctaw mission was to cement the alliance with Spain so strongly that only an

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21. The report on his mission is summarized in Miró to Ezpeleta, February 20, 1788, AGI, PC, leg. 1394. His instructions from Miró, dated New Orleans, September 21, 1787, are printed in Serrano y Sanz, *España y los indios*, 35-37. Forneret had served with the British in 1765, but found the sexual attentions paid by Governor George Johnstone to his wife to be more than his small salary called for, despite the land grants both had received. In truth, Forneret resented the fact that his wife had become the British governor's mistress. See Milo B. Howard, Jr. and Robert R. Rea (trans. and eds.), *The Mémoire Justificatif of the Chevalier Montault de Monberaut: Indian Diplomacy in British West Florida, 1763-1765* (University, Alabama, 1965), 120-21.
  22. The journal, compiled by de la Villebeuvre, September 24-November 24, 1787, was dated at Baye Saint Louis, November 24, 1787, AGI, PC, leg. 200.
  23. There are at least two towns designated as "Yazoo." The number of alternate spellings include Yassu, Yasu, Yazaux, Yazu, and Yashu. See Frederick Webb Hodge (ed.), *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1906), II, 995. The Yazoo referred to in de la Villebeuvre's journal may have been located in the Great Party of Choctaws. See the 1794 census in Kinnaird, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, IV, pt. 3, 282-83.
  24. Miró's instructions to de la Villebeuvre, September 21, 1787; Miró to Ezpeleta, February 20, 1788.

international treaty could destroy it.<sup>25</sup> As for Juan's contribution, Miró later wrote, "He succeeded in meeting with the principal chiefs of the two nations [Choctaws and Chickasaws], and so succeeded with them that the American treaty was all but terminated."<sup>26</sup>

During the next few years, de la Villebeuvre maintained a low profile, but he was named commandant of the Attakapas Post in Louisiana. In 1791, when his daughter Celeste married the son of Opelousas commandant Nicolás Forstall, Juan de la Villebeuvre was serving as commandant at that frontier settlement.<sup>27</sup> He was needed with the Choctaws, however, and, in 1792, he returned to Natchez.<sup>28</sup> The time was propitious to prepare defenses against new American plans to establish frontier forts at such strategic posts as the Muscle Shoals on the Tennessee River.

By 1792 the Choctaws were considered such faithful Spanish allies that their warriors even took to the field to warn hostile war parties of Tallapoosa and other Creeks against raiding settlements in the lower Tombigbee-Tensaw Valley and the Natchez District.<sup>29</sup> The only problem seemed to be Spain's construction of Fort Nogales at the Walnut Hills at the confluence of the Yazoo and Mississippi rivers. Begun in 1791 as a reaction to Georgia's attempts to colonize the land through the Yazoo Land Companies, Fort Nogales became the most important defensive point on the lower Mississippi, even to the point of overshadowing Natchez itself.<sup>30</sup>

25. Miró to Ezpeleta, February 20, 1788. The Treaty of San Lorenzo was the international agreement which finally ended the close alliance between the Choctaws and the Spaniards. See Holmes, *Gayoso*, 234-36.

26. Miró to Ezpeleta, February 20, 1788.

27. Some of de la Villebeuvre's dispatches from Attakapas are in AGI, PC, leg. 122-A, as are those of his replacement, Francisco Casa y Luengo. Juan's daughter, Maria Celeste Antonia, was born July 30, 1774, and baptized at St. Louis Cathedral, New Orleans, by Father Luis de Quintanilla, February 12, 1775. She was married at the parish church of St. Martin de Attakapas, April 27, 1791, to Eduardo Forstall, the son of militia captain Nicolás Forstall and Pelagia de la Chaise. Marriage record enclosed in *expediente* of Juana Darby de la Villebeuvre, 1798, AGI, PC, leg. 132.

28. Appointment of Francisco Casa y Luengo, draft (1792?), AGI, PC, leg. 122-A.

29. Carlos de Grand-Pré to Miró, June 4, 1789, copy in Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Provincial Archives, Spanish Dominion, I, 194-96.

30. Holmes, *Gayoso*, 145-50. This strategic location earned for the Vicksburg defenses there during the American Civil War the designation "the Gibraltar of the West."

Unfortunately, Fort Nogales had been built on land claimed by the Choctaws. Spanish arms had defeated the British in West Florida, but Choctaw chief Franchimastabé pointed out that the British had never paid for the strategic spot and, therefore, Spanish conquest of British West Florida could not have included the Walnut Hills. Instead of relying on de la Villebeuvre in this impasse, Governor Gayoso sent his adjutant, Stephen Minor, to confer with the Choctaws. On May 14, 1792, after elaborate ceremonies at Natchez, the Indians agreed to allow the Spaniards the small section of land occupied by Fort Nogales.<sup>31</sup>

In the meantime, Captain de la Villebeuvre was entrusted with a delicate mission to Muscle Shoals on the Tennessee River, where American commissioners had called together representatives from the five Indian nations in the Southeast. Carondelet's instructions to the Choctaw Indian commissioner urged him to counter any American offer with an invitation to the Indians to come either to Natchez or Pensacola "where Spain will make them an offer much more advantageous than any the Americans might make." Since the Creeks had come to oppose the execution of the 1790 New York Treaty, de la Villebeuvre was ordered to suggest that Spain would keep the Indians supplied with arms and ammunition should the United States attempt to occupy Creek lands by force. Spain saw the need to organize all the Indians into an alliance under Spanish leadership, and the seeds of such a conference were planted at Muscle Shoals in the spring of 1792, where the commissioner achieved notable success.<sup>32</sup>

At a time when Americans faced a growing Indian menace in the Northwest, fueled by Indian defeats of Generals Harmar and St. Clair, American Indian policy toward the southern Indians was no match for the vigorous plans of Carondelet, Gayoso, and de la Villebeuvre. Clearly the chess game was going badly for the United States. By contrast, Spanish policy was vigorous and, for a time, successful. One of the greatest accomplishments was the alliance of the southern Indian nations by a treaty of "friendship and guarantee." The Treaty of Nogales was signed on October 28, 1793, by such Choctaw chiefs as Franchimastabé, Mingo Pincus,

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31. Holmes, *Gayoso*, 150.

32. Instructions and commission to de la Villebeuvre from Carondelet, April 4, 1792, AGI, PC, leg. 18. A draft with slight variation, dated April 3, 1792, is in AGI, PC, leg. 122-A.

and Mistechico; de la Villebeuvre was one of the many Spaniards signing.<sup>33</sup>

One of the important features of the Nogales treaty was the clause calling for the appointment of Spanish Indian *comisarios* (commissioners) who would actually live in one of the important Indian towns to which they had been designated. Miró had suggested this action in 1787, but little was done until the appointment of de la Villebeuvre among the Choctaws and Chickasaws.<sup>34</sup> Such an additional responsibility carried with it an increase in salary to \$800 a year, but certainly not sufficient to allow the frontier official to live in luxury.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the job of Indian commissioner was a dangerous one. William Davenport had been named commissioner among the Choctaws and Chickasaws and was at the Chickasaw Bluffs (present-day Memphis) in July 1787, when he was scalped and killed by a Creek war party operating under orders from Alexander McGillivray.<sup>36</sup>

While the Choctaws were not as dangerous to the welfare of white Indian commissioners as were the Creeks, the care and support of the natives taxed the diplomatic ability of de la Villebeuvre. Although it was forbidden to give liquor to the Indians, such prohibition did not extend to the Spanish government or the Indian *comisarios*.<sup>37</sup> De la Villebeuvre wrote Carondelet in

33. Holmes, *Gayoso*, 150-54.

34. *Ibid.*, 153-54; Carondelet's initial appointment of de la Villebeuvre as "comisario de S.M." among the Choctaws and Chickasaws, New Orleans, July 10, 1792, draft in AGI, PC, leg. 122-A. On November 3, 1792, the Spanish Council of State approved the expenses of the Treaty of Natchez and the appointment of de la Villebeuvre as "Comisario a las Chactas." Minutes of the Consejo del Estado, Palace, November 3, 1792, AHN, EST., leg. 3887. Caroline Maude Burson, *The Stewardship of Don Esteban Miró, 1782-1792* (New Orleans, 1940), 46-47, states that he was made Indian commissioner because of his achievements in the 1787 mission to the Yazoo.

35. Salaries of Louisiana Personnel (circa 1795), AGI, PC, leg. 184-A. Gayoso and Carondelet had recommended him for a raise of 850 pesos per year above his military salary; Gayoso to Carondelet, April 14, 1792, copy enclosed in Carondelet to Conde de Floridablanca, No. 24, confidential, April 21, 1792, AHN, EST., leg. 3898.

36. Miró to Marques de Sonora (Josef de Gálvez, minister of state), No. 10, confidential, June 1, 1787; Benjamin James to Mather and Strother, July 23, 1787; and Alexander McGillivray to Miró, July 25, 1787; all from AGI, PC, leg. 200, and translated in Duvon C. and Roberta Corbitt (trans. and eds.), "Papers From the Spanish Archives Relating to Tennessee and the Old Southwest, 1783-1800," *Publications of the East Tennessee Historical Society*, XI (1939), 76, 86, and 88-89, respectively.

37. "In the final analysis, it was the Spaniards' policy to provide moderate amounts of liquor at special occasions or designated times for the In-

1793 that the Choctaws had become so addicted to the volatile rot-gut rum called *taffia* that if they failed to get it from the Spaniards, they would go to the Americans for it.<sup>38</sup>

Although de la Villebeuvre's skill and diplomacy among the Choctaws had won their unwavering loyalty to Spain, and he was second among captains in the Louisiana Infantry Regiment in seniority, his petition for the rank of lieutenant-colonel was delayed for many years, although he did hold that rank as a breveted officer but with the salary of captain of grenadiers.<sup>39</sup> Undismayed at the slowness of Spanish rewards, de la Villebeuvre continued to perform outstanding service among the Choctaws and Chickasaws.

After 100 Choctaws went to the Cumberland settlement to receive generous presents from the Americans, some of the chiefs began to waver in their loyalty to Spain. Some had even expressed the doubt that Americans had ever wanted Choctaw lands. To offset this change in attitude, de la Villebeuvre visited the towns of the large and small sectors of the Choctaws and tried to reassure the Indians that they should continue their support. Bad food and a sensitive stomach confined him to a sickbed before he could visit the towns in the "six villages" sector, but he labored as best he could.<sup>40</sup>

From 1793 until his death in 1797, the courageous Indian comisario performed tirelessly and achieved notable Spanish success among the Choctaws. At Boucfouca (present-day Jackson, Mississippi) he persuaded the Choctaws to sign a treaty ceding a small section of land at the site of Old Fort Tombecbé (present-day Epes, Alabama) where the Spaniards built Fort Confederación to defend the upper Tombigbee River.<sup>41</sup>

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dians, but they tried to discourage private traders or tavern keepers from adding to the problem." Jack D. L. Holmes, "Spanish Regulation of Taverns and the Liquor Trade in the Mississippi Valley," *The Spanish in the Mississippi Valley, 1762-1804*, ed. by John Francis McDermott (Urbana, 1974), 164.

38. De la Villebeuvre to Carondelet, February 4, 1793, AGI, PC, leg. 208, and translated in Corbitt and Corbitt, "Papers from the Spanish Archives," 149.

39. De la Villebeuvre to Gayoso, "the house of Simon Favre, the interpreter," September 10, 1792, AHN, EST., leg. 3898.

40. Luis de las Casas to Conde del Campo de Alange, No. 181, May 1, 1792, AGI, Audiencia de Santo Domingo, leg. 2560.

41. Jack D. L. Holmes, "Up the Tombigbee With the Spaniards: Juan de la Villebeuvre and the Treaty of Boucfouca (1793)," *The Alabama Historical Quarterly*, XL (Spring-Summer 1978), 51-61.

Although he was not one of the Spaniards who signed the Chickasaw Bluffs Cession in 1795, the behind-the-scenes work of de la Villebeuvre convinced both the Choctaws and the Chickasaws that the Spaniards should construct a fort and trading post on the strategic Chickasaw Bluffs to protect their lands against the Americans who coveted them.<sup>42</sup> During the brief life of the Spanish Fort San Fernando de las Barrancas, Gayoso continued to work for peace between the Choctaws and Chickasaws on the one hand, and the bellicose Creeks on the other. In 1793 and 1795 Creek-Chickasaw conflict almost embroiled the neutral Choctaws, and since Spain was allied to all parties, it was essential to bring peace in order to prevent an advantage to the United States.<sup>43</sup>

By the Nogales Treaty of 1793, the Choctaws agreed to have their annual presents delivered on the Tombigbee site ceded to Spain by the Treaty of Boucfouca.<sup>44</sup> Juan de la Villebeuvre became the commandant of Fort Confederación built there, and in 1795 he compiled a valuable census of the Indian towns among the Choctaws.<sup>45</sup> With the evacuation of both Fort Confederación and Fort San Fernando de las Barrancas in March 1797, the Indian commissioner went down the Tombigbee to Fort San Estebán de Tombeché, where he served as commander until struck by fever. He compiled a census of the San Esteban post in 1797, which was probably his last significant contribution.<sup>46</sup> Confined to his bed with fever, on September 3 he drew up his will leaving his estate to his two children. On September 16, 1797, after receiving the last rites of the church, he died, and was buried

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42. Jack D. L. Holmes, "Spanish-American Rivalry Over the Chickasaw Bluffs, 1780-1795," *Publications of the East Tennessee Historical Society*, No. 34 (1962), 26-57. (See particularly 50-53).
  43. Holmes, *Gayoso*, 155; Carondelet to Luis de las Casas, No. 134, confidential, May 1, 1795, AHN, EST., leg. 3899.
  44. Article XVIII of the Treaty of Nogales. See Serrano y Sanz, *España y los indios*, 92.
  45. Dated at Fort Confederación, November 26, 1795, the census was signed by Jean de la Villebeuvre and Simon Favre, Louisiana Collection, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley, Box 3, folder 308. It has been edited by Jack D. L. Holmes as "The Choctaws in 1795," *The Alabama Historical Quarterly*, XXX (Spring 1968), 33-49.
  46. Jack D. L. Holmes, "Spanish Military Commanders in Colonial Alabama," *Journal of the Alabama Academy of Science*, XXXVII (January 1966), 61; and Jack D. L. Holmes "1797 Alabama Census According to Spanish Records," *The Alabama Genealogical Register*, VIII (September 1966), 123-24.

the following day in the cemetery of the Parish of Nuestra Señora de la Concepción in Mobile.<sup>47</sup>

He did not live to witness the execution of the Treaty of San Lorenzo, and he was unable to prevent the Choctaw hostility against the American boundary commission under Andrew Elliott. By way of irony, his request for the rank of lieutenant-colonel was granted almost a year later, along with his discharge.<sup>48</sup>

The Choctaws had fought valiantly to preserve their lands and way of life. They had served faithfully the French, then the English, later the Spaniards, and finally, during the War of 1812, supported General Andrew Jackson against the Red Stick Creeks at Horseshoe Bend in Alabama. The final reward for the Choctaws would come with their removal to Indian territory west of the Mississippi, although some few would remain on their ancestral lands in Mississippi.<sup>49</sup> As long as the Choctaws found sympathetic Indian commissioners such as Juan de la Villebeuvre, their loyalty to Spain was assured. The end of that relationship came, by way of coincidence, just after his death. He had represented the best aspect of Spanish-Indian relations in the last decade of the eighteenth century, and there is hardly a trace of the *leyenda negra* in his tireless service to an adopted sovereign.

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47. De la Villebeuvre's will, September 3, 1797, copy enclosed in petition of Jeanne (Juana) Darby to Gayoso, September 3, 1798, AGI, PC, leg. 132; Death notices of the Parish of Nuestra Señora de la Concepción, Mobile Chancellor's Office, folio 34.

48. Gayoso to Conde de Santa Clara, No. 165, July 19, 1798, AGI, PC, leg. 1501-B.

49. For this phase of Choctaw history see Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic* (Norman, 1934), and Arthur H. DeRosier, Jr., *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians* (Knoxville, 1970).