

# Iti Fabussa

## Sketches of Choctaw Men in 1828 and 1830

Friday, April 16, 1830, Petit Gulf, Mississippi: James, a Choctaw man, sits for a quick sketch by a traveler James is seated on a tree stump wearing a cotton hunting shirt trimmed with blue feathers.

Black and white beads make up his necklace and decorate his red leggings and garters. On his head, James has tied a cloth and topped it with a silver head band much like those often placed on hats. The location of the drawing, Petit Gulf, is the site of a bluff on the Mississippi river with a small village nearby.

Beyond the date and location of his portrait, as well as a detailed description of his clothing, we do not know much about James. We do know this sketch of James, a Choctaw man in Mississippi in 1830, traveled a great distance to eventually end up in a French museum.



Provided by Muséum d'histoire naturelle, Le Havre  
(above) Annabé was sketched on April 6, 1830, in Memphis,  
nearly 200 miles out of Choctaw Country. (below) James, a  
Choctaw man, was drawn on Friday, April 16, 1830, at Petit  
Gulf, Mississippi.



In the last year, the Historic Preservation department has been in contact with a number of European museums in search of Choctaw traditional arts and archives relating to Choctaw people and our history. A collection of drawings by French naturalist and artist Charles Alexandre Lesueur has been an exciting addition to our growing virtual database of Choctaw cultural items curated in museums around the world. Charles Lesueur met several Choctaw people while living and traveling in the U.S. in the early 1800s.

On his trips from his home in New Harmony, Indiana to New Orleans, Lesueur took notes and sketched the surroundings and the people he met. Along the Mississippi River he stopped at various locations. Some with established Choctaw history like Vicksburg, as well as those with only a short Choctaw history such as Memphis. Lesueur drew Choctaw men in Baton Rouge, Ellis Cliffs, Petit Gulf and Memphis.

He even sketched a stickball game being played in New Orleans. Charles Lesueur returned to Europe and worked as a director at the natural history museum in Le Havre, France. This institution, the Muséum d'histoire naturelle du Havre, curates a great number of his drawings today, most of which depict the natural landscape and wildlife of North America.

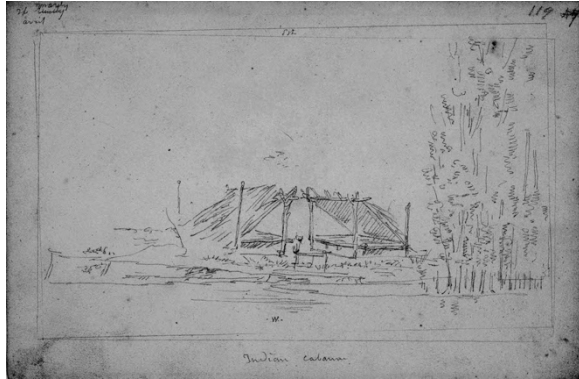
These sketches of Choctaw men are rare snapshots in time of this era. The drawing of five Choctaw men in Ellis Cliffs, Mississippi records an encounter between travelers on Thursday, May 22, 1828. These men came from Natchitoches, Louisiana, 130 miles away. As they stopped at a bluff and nearby town along the Mississippi River, Charles Lesueur met them while picking berries.

In the sketch, you can note the men's tall moccasins or leggings, hunting shirts and long hair. Historically, other tribes in the Southeast called Choctaws the Pvfalaya, or the Long Hairs, for this very reason. These men are dressed in typical wear for the early 1800s.

Common at this time period, the hunting shirt and legging combination was comfortable and comparable to the breech cloths and

moccasins Choctaw men wore in earlier centuries. This drawing from 1828 is one of only two images we have of Choctaws from so far West during this time period, just two years before the Dancing Rabbit Creek Treaty of 1830.

On Tuesday, April 22, 1828, while en route to New Orleans, possibly near Memphis, Lesueur sketched two lean-tos with raised beds. This home was probably a temporary summer style structure, built during a journey or a short-term residence by Southeastern natives moving through the area.



Provided by Muséum d'histoire naturelle, Le Havre

**The lean-to was sketched on Tuesday, April 22, 1828, while en route to New Orleans, possibly near Memphis, Tennessee. The lean-to was probably a temporary structure built during a journey, or a short-term residence of natives moving through the area.**

The drawing of Annabé in Memphis on April 6, 1830 offers us another example of a Choctaw man far from home, upwards of 200 miles out of Choctaw Country. This man wears a particularly unusual fur hat with ears at the top. Have you ever seen such a hat? These drawings reveal a quick snapshot in the lives of Choctaw people during a period of immense change.

The men could have traveled by horse or boat for any number of reasons, some of which might include hunting or trade. They likely never knew that their faces would appear in sketches in a museum's collection 4,500 miles away. Today, 187 years and many miles later, we continue to learn from ancestors through drawings like these.

See the online version of this article on [ChoctawNation.com](http://ChoctawNation.com) for references and citations used.



The drawing of five Choctaw men near Ellis Cliffs, Mississippi depicts an encounter between travelers on Thursday, May 22, 1828.