The Caddo Indians originally lived in the Red River Valley and the adjacent territory of Louisiana, Northeast Texas and Southwest Arkansas. The Caddos were a Confederacy made up of several tribes who had a similar language. Caddo is a popular name contracted from Kadohadacho -- (Kado-ha-dacho) -- meaning "our own people." The number of tribes varied from time to time -- probably from eight to twenty-five. Among them were the Natchitoches, the Adai, the Yatasi -- all of whom lived in what is the present State of Louisiana. A group west of the Sabine River had permanent homes in the area along the Neches and the Angelina Rivers, where they had developed a notable degree of civilization. They were known as the Hasinai, or Texas. The latter word, meaning "friends" or "allies" was taken up by the Spaniards who spoke of these as the Texans Indians. It was through these Indians that the name of the State of Texas was derived.

The Kadohadocho occupied the land between the Sulphur and Red Rivers in Northeast Texas and in Arkansas on the Red near the juncture of the Little and the Saline Rivers. This group is imminent above all the rest and is known as Caddo proper.

Sometime during the early 19th Century, the Kadohadocho left their fertile lands on the Red River bend, which they had occupied from time immemorial, and moved to a location a few miles northwest of the present location of Shreveport. One account says the reason for the move was the constant warfare which the Osages of Arkansas waged against them; another narrates that they had an epidemic of severe illness which made them dissatisfied. Dr. Sibley, who in 1805 was appointed Indian Agent of this area by the United States Government, reported that due to war and illness the warriors of the ancient Caddo Nation had been reduced to about one hundred and that they were looked upon somewhat like the Knights of Malta, or some distinguished military order.

After the United States came into possession of Louisiana in 1803, they sent Indian Agents here to protect the rights of the Indian against the invasion of the white man. With the opening up of Red River by Captain Henry Miller Shreve, there was a new channel of commerce opened to the West with much fertile land which was desirable for the growth of cotton. The Indians recognized the fact that it was becoming more and more impossible to keep back the invading whites. Under the influence of the Indian Agent, Jehiah Brooks, they were persuaded to sell their claims and move to the West.

At that time, the Agency House was located on Bayou Pierre, a few miles below Shreveport. On July 1, 1835, representatives of all the tribes met on that spot and with a cross mark signed the contract of sale, their names having been written in previously. The head chief was Tarshar, the Wolf; the sub-chief Tsauninot. The interpreter for the Indians was Larkin Edwards.

The terms of the agreement were that the Indians would move within a year and that they would receive $80,000 in goods and money. On the ratification of the treaty, they were to receive goods to the value of $30,000.00 and for the next five years an annual payment of $10,000.00.
The Indians loved their interpreter, Larkin Edwards, and had reserved 640 acres of land as a gift to him. Edwards sold the land for the sum of $5,000.00 to eight men who formed a corporation for the founding of a town. This town is Shreveport. It's first name was Shreve's Port, so called from Captain Henry Miller Shreve who was here at the time and one of the stockholders of the corporation.

The Caddo tribes were peace-loving and boasted that they never killed a white man except in defense. Sometimes they were forced to go on the warpath to fight enemy tribes and then there was no limit to their barbarous practices. So fertile was the valley where they lived that it was not necessary for them to rove for a living. There was an abundance of wildlife such as deer, bearm raccoon, buffalo, turkey, and a plentiful supply of fish. There were small animals and birds of all kinds. There were many fruit and nut bearing trees. The rich soil needed but to be scratched to produce such vegetables as pumpkins, beans, corn and sunflower seeds.

The planting of seed was a community project, initiated with great ceremony and carried on by both men and women. House building, also, was a cooperative project and since they were not rovers, the houses were built in a more or less permanent manner. They were well supported domes of mud, thatched with straw. They were not grouped closely together, but were scattered some distance apart.

In winter, they covered their bodies with animal skins and in summer they went without clothing. They had a peculiar way of wearing their hair, having it cut closely on both sides of their head and leaving a top-knot which was generally wound in a silver tube. They tattooed their faces and all over the body. Another peculiar custom was the wearing of rings on either side of the nostril.

The chief wore beautiful white blankets, made from the bark of trees, which they spun. His rule was absolute. He attended to all matters without consultation and he and his wives and children were treated with great deference.

The Caddo had additional assets which were a commercial advantage to him. There were salt deposits in the valley which he found valuable as an article of trade with other groups, and he learned to make very fine bows from the bois d'arc and osage orange trees which were found in this area. These bows also became a great article of trade. His flints which were used in the arrow were of superior quality. This was found in Southwest Arkansas.

In his most primitive stage, the Caddo traveled in boats made of a log by burning out the center; after the Spanish came among them, they acquired ponies which they prized very highly.

Too little has been known of the life and character of the semi-civilized Indians until recently, through translation of the reports of Spanish and French explorers and missionaries, which has been largely done by the University of Texas, we are learning more about him.

Public Relations Department
Shreveport Chamber of Commerce
529 Crockett Street (P.O. Box 74)
Shreveport, Louisiana 71102
Phone: (318) 424-2001