The people of Charlestown had become accustomed to the sight of colorfully garbed and painted Indians in town, and the delegation who came to see Governor Francis Nicholson on September 14, 1723, would not have drawn particular attention. The governor received them cordially, passed around the obligatory tobacco pipe, and served refreshments. Gifts were expected on such occasions, and the governor presented the headman with a British flag and a drum and distributed little gifts to the children, one of whom was the leader’s daughter. Through interpreter Matthew Smallwood, the leader of the visiting delegation introduced himself as Fanni Mingo, a name that translates into Squirrel King. He outdid the governor in bestowing presents. In addition to a coronet adorned with feathers and two calumets of peace, he unfolded a deerskin with an elaborately drawn map showing the location of the various Indian tribes of the interior.

The governor graciously accepted the proffered gifts and inquired, “How do you like Savannah Town?” “We like the place very well,” replied the leader, adding, “We like Captain Monger, too.” The remark represented a gesture of courtesy to Gerard Monger, commanding officer at Fort Moore, who had escorted the Indians to Charlestown and who now sat with the group. “How many are you?” the governor asked. “About forty men and forty women and children,” came the answer. Squirrel King added, “We expect others of our people to come and settle with us in the Spring.” The governor was pleased to hear that. He shared the conviction of many Carolinians that the presence of Chickasaw warriors on the borders guaranteed security. That conviction had led the Carolina General Assembly to make repeated requests to the Chickasaws in their remote homeland to come closer to Carolina.

Governor Nicholson must have been bewildered by the deerskin map, unless Squirrel King explained it to him. If Squirrel King drew it, he displayed
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A remarkable grasp of the demographics of the vast Indian country with its myriad of tribes. Gregory Waselkov paid this compliment to the author of the map: “The range and depth of the unnamed Chickasaw headman’s cartographic knowledge was extraordinary.” Waselkov explained that the map covers over seven hundred thousand square miles of territory, touching Texas and Kansas on the west and the Atlantic Ocean on the east, and reaching from the land of the mid-Florida Yamasees to the upper New York Iroquois, with the important rivers and trails in between. Squirrel King’s possession of the map indicated either that he had done it or that important Chickasaws had entrusted it to him as their representative to the governor. Either way, Squirrel King came with credentials.2

Further evidence of the leader’s standing among his people is provided by an early settler at Savannah Town who said that the chief had shown him “the peace treaty which they had made with the king in England.” A Chickasaw delegation had signed a treaty with the Carolina officials in 1717. If Squirrel King had the treaty, he must have been one of the delegates, or those who were there entrusted it to him. Of those two possibilities the more
appealing, and perhaps the more likely, is that Squirrel King had come with the 1717 party, had liked what he saw at Savannah Town, and returned to a familiar area in 1723.\(^3\)

The point here is that the Chickasaws came to the Savannah River not as outcasts or renegades but as respected members of their nation and invited by the Carolina government in the person of Colonel Theophilus Hastings.\(^4\) The historic moment deserves a better chronicle than the stark report that Nicholson sent to the Board of Trade. The meeting with Nicholson began a half century of Chickasaw residence on the banks of the Savannah River and a remarkable record of service to the people they had settled among.

Squirrel King and his adult companions grew up in a time of radical change in their homeland, the fertile fields drained by the headwaters of the Tombigbee River. According to South Carolina trader Thomas Nairne, seven hundred Chickasaw warriors with their women and children lived in eight scattered villages in 1710. Nairne admired the Chickasaws as a “proper handsom people.” Compared to the nearby Tallapoosa Creeks, they were “as men of Quality among us are to the peasants.”\(^5\)

Ties of kinship and a common culture bound the eight towns together. Historian Arrell M. Gibson lists the six clans: the Minko (Chief), Shawi (Raccoon), Koisho (Panther), Spani (Spanish), Nani (Fish), and Hashona (Skunk) and acknowledges that the number varied over the years.\(^6\) Because clan members married outside their own clan, their relatives were scattered among the villages. When Squirrel King’s band moved to the Savannah River, they retained important blood connections with the villages of the homeland. Each clan had its leader or headman, and one of these, because of his wisdom or prowess in war, would be recognized as the spokesperson of the village. Like other southeastern Indians, the Chickasaw were matrilineal; the children belonged to the mother’s clan. The Chickasaws shared other traditions with their neighbors: the annual harvest ceremony, or busk, a belief in a supreme being and an afterlife, and a division of labor between men and women in which men did the hunting and fighting and women farmed and took care of domestic chores. The Chickasaw men were distinguished from other tribes by their superiority in warfare and by their pride in that superiority. Their women sometimes followed them into battle, chanting war songs.

The introduction of firearms by Carolina traders marked a major transition in Chickasaw behavior. In the first decade of the century, the men of the tribe found an occupation more profitable than that of hunting game. They raided their bow-and-arrow neighbors for slaves to sell to the traders for servitude on the sugar islands of the West Indies. The Chickasaw women, moved by admiration for the traders or their wares, produced children of
mixed blood in such numbers that the traders came to refer to the nation as “the Breed.” Nairne insists that Chickasaw women did not cohabit promiscuously or without proper ceremony. The woman in question required that the suitor approached her mother’s brother for his consent. The swain then would send gifts to the mother, who had to deliberate with her brothers and
Fanni Mingo

sons before accepting the gifts and allowing the union. With their permission
the match was consummated, and the trader became an affiliated member of
the clan. Marriage to one woman did not prevent the man, whether Chicka-
saw or British, from taking a second or a third wife.

In addition to one or more wedding ceremonies, Squirrel King must have
gone through an elaborate ritual by which he received his title of fanni mingo
or miko. Thomas Nairne described the process. A family needing protection
would apply to a great warrior in another family to be its protector. If he
accepted the invitation, an elaborate four-day series of ceremonies followed
during which the man was showered with gifts. By extension, a village, a
tribe, or a nation could choose a protector in another village, tribe, or nation.
Nairne explained, “His bussiness is to make up all Breaches between the 2
nations, to keep the pipes of peace by which they first contracted Friendship,
to devert the Warriors from any designe against the people they protect . . .
and if after all ar unable to oppose the stream, are to send the people private
intelligence to provide for their own safety.”

Historians have experimented with the notion of a fanni mingo in inter-
esting ways. Patricia K. Galloway describes a fanni mingo as “a revered person
who could intercede with his own group for the group that so honored him.”
She suggests that the Choctaws attempted “to create a French fanimingo for
themselves” by ceremoniously honoring the governor of Louisiana. Joshua
Piker explains, “The Creeks and their native neighbors believed that a corpo-
rate group could adopt an individual who would serve as mediator between
his natal polity and his adopted one.” Such a person was a fanni mingo. He
suggests that the Upper Creeks of Okfuskee saw themselves in a fanni-mingo
relationship with Charlestown.

It is not known which Chickasaw family or village might have conferred
the honor upon Squirrel King. If Nairne’s definition can be taken literally, a
village not his own would have given him the title. It is idle to speculate
whether his people or his adopted people or both followed him eastward. In
any case he was their acknowledged protector and head warrior. On the
other hand it is not idle, in this history of Squirrel King’s Chickasaws, to
wonder whether the chief by virtue of his being invited to Carolina saw him-
self as a fanni mingo to his new neighbors. The fact is that during all the rest
of his life (he died in 1755), he acted as the guardian and protector of his
neighbors on both sides of the Savannah River. While acknowledging that
the Chickasaws were “bloodthirsty” in war, one who lived among them de-
scribed them as good Samaritans and “kind toward people they meet on the
road or in the woods, they show people who have lost their way the right way,
and do not deny one anything as long as they have something.”
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While serving his Savannah River neighbors, Squirrel King also served his own people, those who accompanied him and those who remained behind in the homeland, by protecting the trading lifeline that ran from Charles-town through Savannah Town to the Indian nation. Edmond Atkin, the first royal Indian superintendent, would say of the Savannah River Chickasaws, “The chief service they are of in that post is the guarding of our Traders up and down in time of any Danger between their Nation and the Creek Country.”

They had heard of Squirrel King in Charlestown. Atkin stated that Squirrel King had won the reputation of a great warrior and the respect of tribes other than his own before coming east. Atkin was certainly mistaken when he wrote that Squirrel King “was the Man that opened the Indian War in 1715.” The Chickasaws played no part in the Yamasee war of that year. But Squirrel King might have won his reputation in the first Chickasaw-French war of 1720. Prior to that year Chickasaws had confined themselves to raids against the French-allied Choctaws. In 1720, accusing a Frenchman living among them of being a spy, they executed him. They then raided settlements along the Mississippi River. The French retaliated by instigating a major Choctaw invasion of the Chickasaw country in April 1722 that resulted in the destruction of three Chickasaw villages. French accounts state that four hundred Chickasaws were killed and one hundred taken prisoner, probably an egregious exaggeration but indicative of serious damage. Louisiana Governor Jean Baptiste Lemoyn, Sieur de Bienville boasted that he stirred up the war between the Choctaws and Chickasaws “in order that their destruction may make it impossible for them to unite against us as might happen sooner or later.”

In anticipation of another attack the Chickasaws grouped their villages more closely after the Choctaw attack. South Carolina’s overtures to come east reached the nation at the time of this disruption. Squirrel King and his followers accepted the invitation to relocate upon the Savannah River, expecting others to follow. Two other important leaders of the group were Mingo Stoby and The Doctor. Mingo Stoby may well have been the recognized leader of those who invited Squirrel King to be their protector. The Doctor’s name probably indicates that he held a privileged place as “medicine man.” Mingo Stoby and the Doctor occupied places of honor among their people, and British officials treated them with respect, but both Mingo Stoby and the Doctor deferred to Squirrel King in matters pertaining to war.

British traders, inconvenienced by the Choctaw war and aware that a continued migration away from the homeland would deprive them of a trading base, persuaded the Chickasaws to send peace offers to the Choctaws in 1723.
The French debated whether or not their honor had been satisfied, but in view of the fact that the Choctaws who actually did the fighting had accepted the calumets of peace, the French also agreed to stop the war. The cessation of fighting lessened the pressure on the other Chickasaws to leave their homeland. Though no large group joined Squirrel King, small parties continued to come and go between the western villages and the eastern camp. In 1741 a group of Chickasaws established a village on the Coosa River among the Upper Creeks as an intermediate base between Savannah Town and the nation. Traders referred to the village as “the Breed Camp.”

Carolina traders established a trading post with the Savannah Indians in 1692 to exploit trade in slaves, deerskins, and furs with the various Indian tribes who came to be collectively known as Creeks. The outpost was called Savannah Town. When a wandering member of Robert Cavelier de La Salle’s expedition found his way up the Tennessee River system and down the Savannah River to introduce himself to the English traders there in 1699, the Louisiana French set their ambitions on the Savannah River as the eastern boundary of their territory. They established a post at Biloxi, Mississippi, in 1699 and at Mobile, Alabama, in 1702. During the war between the Carolinians on one side and the Yamasees and a faction of Creeks on the other, the French allied with the Creeks and reinforced their claim to all the land west of the Savannah River. Carolina responded by erecting Fort Moore at Savannah Town in 1716. Louisiana countered with Fort Toulouse at the confluence of the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers in Upper Creek country. Governor Robert Daniel stressed the importance of Fort Moore to the Carolina Assembly: “I look upon Savano Garrison as the Key to our Settlement, it is the storehouse where we lay our Arms, ammunition and necessaries for the supply of the Charikes and other friendly Indians, and should that place be deserted through Famine, I believe it would be of fatal consequences to this Government.” Fort Moore, with its flimsy four-foot walls and antiquated weaponry, represented a fervent aspiration for security rather than a guarantee. Not until the Chickasaws came did the Carolinians feel somewhat safe from marauding enemy Indians; even then theirs was a fragile sense of security.

Carolina’s postwar treaty with the Creek Indians represented by Coweta headman Brims confirmed the Savannah River as the dividing line between Indian and British land. (Surprisingly it remained so until 1763.) During their visit to Charlestown in April 1717, the Creeks asked for a resumption of trade that had been interrupted by the recent war. Historian Stephen C. Hahn refers to March 23, 1718, as a “red-letter day” in Creek history. On that
day the assembled chiefs endorsed the treaty and agreed upon a policy of neutrality toward the competing European powers that Hahn calls the “Coweta Resolution.” Brims’s successors, Chigelli and Malatchi, adhered to that strategy.

In June 1717 a delegation of Chickasaws made an even longer journey to Charlestown by way of Savannah Town to make a similar request. In view of the great distance of their villages from Charlestown, they were willing to set up a post on the Coosa River as a terminus for supplies. On this occasion the commissioner of Indian trade broached the subject of their settling on the Savannah River. The record of the interview contains an ambiguous statement: “They were asked if any more of their people would settle at Savano Town, to which they replied they would mention the same to them (the head men of the nation) likewise and send an answer.” The statement led historian James Atkinson to conclude that “a group of Chickasaws migrated in about 1717 to near Fort Moore, on the South Carolina side of the river.” However, there is no evidence that any Chickasaws stayed for more than a brief period prior to Squirrel King’s settlement. If the delegation included Squirrel King or members of his group, they must have liked what they saw of the fertile fields overlooking the broad river valley at Savannah Town.

The predecessors of the Savannah River Chickasaws, those tribal communities who had sojourned on the same high banks of the Savannah, had fared poorly. When the South Carolina pioneer Henry Woodward opened trade relations with the western Indians, the Westos occupied the crossings of the Savannah at the fall line. Eric Bowne has recently demonstrated how the Westos, with guns supplied by Virginia traders, took slaves of people from outlying tribes. The customers for this human traffic were the Carolinians themselves. Robert Weir estimates that of Carolina’s total slave population of forty-three hundred in 1708, one-third were Indians. Reports that the Westos practiced cannibalism added to the dread felt by their enemies. Some Carolina planters resented the middleman status of the Westos and instigated a war by supplying guns to a rival group, the Savannahs. After breaking the power of the Westos, the Savannahs occupied the site and gave their name to the river and town.

While the Savannahs lived at the key river crossing, Carolina traders Thomas Welch and other bold spirits extended trade to the Chickasaws, even setting up a post on the Mississippi River in 1698, the year before the French established Biloxi on the Gulf of Mexico. Though the Savannahs cooperated with the traders, they were exposed to raids by the Catawbas of central Carolina and the Cherokees on the upper reaches of the Savannah River. The Savannahs began drifting away in 1707. The Carolinians had come to regard
the Savannahs as buffers against unfriendly Indians and considered the tribe’s move as a defection. In what seems to have been a particularly impolitic decision, the assembly authorized the use of force to compel the Savannahs to stay where they were. Militia under James Moore Jr. and his Catawba allies actually attacked the Savannahs, thereby hastening their departure. Such insults were long remembered, and the Savannahs took out their resentment in periodic raids upon the allies of Carolina, the Catawbas, and later, the Savannah River Chickasaws.22

As the Savannahs left the region, Apalaches were forced by Carolinians under Moore to leave their villages along the Apalachicola River to take the place of the Savannahs. In 1708 Governor Nathaniel Johnson described them as “a considerable town of Indians that deserted the Spaniards and came with our traders from them about five years past.” He added, “They behave very submissive to this government.”23 Belligerence had not helped the Westos, cooperation had failed the Savannahs, and submissiveness doomed the Apalaches. Steven J. Oatis, in his definitive history of the Yamasee War, described them as “beasts of burden,” carrying loads of skins and furs on their backs to Charlestown. Their population numbered 1,300 in 1705 and declined to 650 in 1715. They abandoned the policy of submission and joined the Yamasees in their war against Carolina in that year. When the Creeks made peace with the British in 1717, the surviving Apalaches returned to their homeland on the Apalachicola River.24

Without an Indian buffer on the Savannah River, the Carolina leaders became frantic for their security. Paranoia replaced arrogance as the key element in their Indian policy. In 1717 a Carolina agent wrote to the proprietors of the colony, “I can see nothing but ruin to the whole country.”25 Governor Robert Johnson, son of former governor Nathaniel Johnson, lamented the state of the province in 1719, “Under God nothing can save this settlement from falling into the Hand of France upon the first Warr with that crown.”26

As the Louisiana French agitated the Choctaws and Spanish Florida supported the Yamasees, Carolina felt beleaguered. Because the Carolina proprietors did not sufficiently appreciate the colony’s plight, the people of Charlestown demanded that King George I take them under his protection, and the king did so. The leaders of the assembly thought it well to send over their best Indian fighter, John “Tuscarora Jack” Barnwell, to explain to the government the dire situation of the province. Barnwell went to London in 1720 and outlined to the Privy Council an ambitious plan, nothing less than a chain of forts stretching along the western borders from the Altamaha River in Georgia to the Tennessee in western Tennessee and bolstered by a system of townships populated by persecuted European Protestants. Their lordships
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disappointed the South Carolinians by permitting only one fort on the Altamaha, and Barnwell came home to build it. Barnwell had ample opportunity to coach the new royal governor, Francis Nicholson, on Indian policy when they traveled in the same vessel to Charlestown in 1721.27

While reaching out to the crown for security, the members of the assembly continued to seek help from the western Chickasaws. In 1721 and 1722 the assembly sent agents west inviting the Chickasaws to come settle nearer.28 If Squirrel King thought that Carolina wanted a fanni mingo as a protector, he had reason to think so. Governors Francis Nicholson, Robert Johnson, and William Bull, in particular, would treat him and his people with due deference, as did veteran members of the legislature. As a result, the Savannah River Chickasaws enjoyed a longer and more satisfactory residence at the fall line than any of their predecessors.