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**Tishomingo County Archives & History Museum**  
**203 East Quitman Street**  
**Iuka, MS 38852**  
**Phone: 662-423-3500**  
**E-mail: [tcarchives@nadata.net](mailto:tcarchives@nadata.net)**  
**URL: <http://www.rootsweb.com/~mstchgs/>**

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## **Chief Tishomingo, Chickasaw Warrior, and Chieftain**

Source: Henderson, Richey. "Pontotoc County Men of Note: Biographical Sketches of Men of Note Who Have Played a Part in Our History from Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century." Pontotoc Progress Print, 1940. [Transcribed by Cindy Nelson and RaNae Vaughn, February 7, 2007.]

Tishomingo, a renowned warrior and chieftain of the Chickasaws, lived in what is now the Bethany Community, in the northwestern part of Lee County, but at the time of Tishomingo's residence was a part of Pontotoc County. Here Tishomingo owned two sections of land. These lands are described in an old record book in the Chancery Clerk's office at Pontotoc as "Sections 13 and 24, township 7, range 5, east of the basis meridian, Pontotoc County." These lands were allotted Tishomingo under the Treaty of Pontotoc, in 1832. Section 78 of the same treaty also made the further provision for Tishomingo:

"The Chickasaws feel grateful to their old chiefs for their long and faithful services in attending to the business of the Nation. They believe it a duty to keep them from want in their declining age. With these feelings, they have looked upon their old and beloved chief Tishomingo, who is now grown old, and is poor and is not able to live in that comfort which his valuable life and great merit deserve. It is therefore determined to give him out of national funds one hundred dollars [sic] a year during the balance of his life, and the Nation requests him to receive it as a token of their feelings for him, on account of his long and valuable services."

Cushman, the historian of the Chickasaws, says of Tishomingo:

"He was a wise counselor and brave warrior among the Chickasaws, which is about all that has escaped oblivion; little has been preserved of his life by tradition or otherwise. He was the acting Tishu Miko of Ishtehotopah (the king) at the time of the removal of his people to the west. He died in 1839, a year before his royal master. He was appointed during life as one of the chief counselors of Tshtehotopah, and when he advised the king, upon any mooted question, so great was his influence over the other counselors, as Governor Harris stated, that they at once unanimously acquiesced in his proposition, but invariably with the reiterated exclamation, "That's just what I thought!" "That's just what I thought!" While the king said little, he generally acquiesced to Tishomingo's suggestions."

By the Treaty of Pontotoc, the Chickasaws agreed to give up their lands and locate in the west. Tishomingo, in spite of his advanced age, decided to migrate with his tribe, and in May, 1836, he sold his land to one Wyatt C. Mitchell. The deed by which he conveyed his title to the purchaser is recorded on page 65, Book 1, Records of Land Deeds, Pontotoc County, and reads as follows:

"This indenture, entered into the fifteenth day of May 1836, between Tishomingo of the Chickasaw Tribe of Indians, in the State of Mississippi, of one part, and Wyatt C. Mitchell of the other part, witnesseth that the said Tishomingo, for and in consideration of the sum of twenty-four hundred dollars, to him in hand paid, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, hath bargained, sold and conveyed unto the said Wyatt C. Mitchell, two sections of land situated, lying and being in the County of Pontotoc, and State of Mississippi, to wit: Sections 13 and 24, in township 7, range 5, east of the basis meridian, it being the land which the said Tishomingo is entitled to under the Treaty of the 24<sup>th</sup> of May 1834, between the Chickasaw Tribe of Indians and the United States. To have and to hold the aforesaid land and bargained premises in fee simple to the only proper use and behalf of the said Wyatt C. Mitchell, and his heirs and assigns forever



Which said BILL OF INDICTMENT is endorsed as follows:

TISHOMINGO, prosecutor;

JOHN MEASLE, sworn in Court as interpreter, and sent to the Grand Jury to interpret the testimony of TISHOMINGO in this case of the State vs. Benjamin Ellis, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1837.

JAS W. DRAKE, Clerk.

A TRUE BILL, JOHN W. WRAY, Foreman of the Grand Jury, April 1837 Term of Circuit Court, Pontotoc County, Mississippi.

And Afterwards, to wit: On the 10<sup>th</sup> day of May 1837, the Defendant and his sureties, Littleberry Leftwich and Rolling C. Burnette appeared in open Court and made bond for \$2,000.00.

And afterwards, to wit: On the eleventh day of May 1837, the case was set for trial on Tuesday next, and that subpoenas issued to James Trimble and Milton Thompson, and subpoena duces tecum, issue to Kennedy of Tishomingo County.

And afterwards, to wit: On the sixteenth day of May 1837, it being a day of the term of said Court, the following proceedings were had to wit:

The State vs. Benjamin Ellis. — Indictment for Larceny. In this case the Defendant, by Attorney, makes application, supported by affidavit, for a change of venue, and for sufficient reasons appearing satisfactory to the Court, it is ordered by the Court that the venue be changed to the County of Lafayette, and that the clerk of this Court do make a transcript of the proceedings had hereon, and transmit to the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Lafayette County.

I, Jas. W. Drake, clerk of the Circuit Court of said county, do certify the foregoing to be a full, true and complete record of all the proceedings had in the foregoing cause in said Court.

JAS. W. DRAKE, clerk, Circuit Court,  
Pontotoc County, 16<sup>th</sup> May, 1837.

No record of the conclusion of this case can be found in the records of the Circuit Court at Oxford, and it is probable that they were destroyed when the courthouse was burned during the Civil War. It is not likely, however, that Ellis was convicted for old school records show him to be a trustee of the school at old Ellistown a year or so after the indictment was returned against him by the Grand Jury at Pontotoc.

With this trial, the curtain of history closes on Tishomingo's eventful life in Mississippi. He migrated westward with his people about the year of 1839. On the journey westward, smallpox broke out among the Indians, and old Tishomingo was one of the malady's first victims. *The Commercial Appeal* [Memphis, Tenn.] of November 1, 1894, published the following interesting interview of a reporter with an aged resident of Arkansas, which if authentic, is a vivid description of Tishomingo's last journey and his subsequent death and burial:

"You are well aware, I have no doubt," began the old gentleman, "That many years ago the county immediately surrounding this was the home of the Chickasaw Indians. There came a time, as you are doubtless aware, when the Government made arrangements to plant these Indians along with others of the race, in what has since been known as the Indian Territory. To you

young people, that may seem a long time ago, but to me it is only yesterday. I was one of those selected to accompany a large party of redskins on their journey.”

“When the Chickasaws first departed their old homes in Mississippi to go to Arkansas, there were two points they were escorted to by the government, one being on the Red River, and the other, Fort Coffee, being on the Arkansas River. The party I was with went overland to Fort Coffee. This was in March 1839. Large quantities of provisions for the subsistence of the Indians were stored at the forts, but when we arrived, we found the flour and pork were all spoiled and could not be used. Following close on the heels of this misfortune came a fearful outbreak of smallpox, a disease with which the Indians were afflicted. This outbreak occurred in our camp just as we crossed the Arkansas River, near where Dardanelle now stands. When we reached Fork Coffee, we found a large number of Chickasaws already camped there, among whom the epidemic soon spread, and the fatality of the disease was about the worst that has ever been known.”

### **Death of Tishomingo**

“Among one of the first victims was Tishomingo, who was one of the oldest chiefs of the tribe. His was a noteworthy personage. He was a man of imposing presence, perfectly erect in his old age. He was such a man as Fenimore Cooper loved to write about. He and his family were encamped about two miles from the fort.”

“After his death, his daughter came to me and requested me to see the commanding officer and have the old chief properly buried. She went on to tell me that they were poor, and could not afford to buy powder to fire over the grave, which was considered a very necessary part of the funeral obsequies among the Chickasaws at that time.”

### **Buried With Military Honors**

“I spoke of this request to the commanding officer, Capt. John Stewart of the Seventh Infantry, and I want to say of him that a braver or more noble officer and gentleman never lived. As soon as he heard what was wanted he said certainly. The dead chief should be buried with all the honors customary with the tribe. Capt. Stewart forthwith ordered that a coffin be sent out and that the remains be brought in to the fort, to remain until the funeral rites should be performed. They were left in state on the parade ground covered with the national emblem; and a grave was dug for them in the post burial ground. When the time for the interment came around, a squad of six soldiers thus carried in all of the state and pomp that a small military post could muster. The grave was surrounded by all the members of the tribe that were able to climb out of bed. There was a detail of six men from the company to fire six volleys over the grave, thus satisfying the demands of the Chickasaw funeral etiquette. The obsequies took place about sundown, thus carrying out another of the tribal customs. It is needless to say that all this was very gratifying to the tribe, but particularly to the members of the dead chief’s family.

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### **Learning His Identity**

“On the morning after the funeral the fort was visited by a daughter of the deceased, the same that had come first to ask for the proper burial. She was this time accompanied by several of her friends. They came to me, for I, having a very good knowledge of their language, was generally chosen to act as interpreter. They requested me to thank the commanding officer for his kindness in burying the old chief in the elaborate manner in which it was done. At the same time the girl produced from under the folds of her garments a piece of soiled and much worn parchment, which she gave me with the request that it be handed to the Captain. I went to the Captain and,

after telling him what the girl had said, handed him the scroll. He unfolded it and at once exclaimed: ‘Great God! Had I known of this I would have had the whole command out for the funeral.’”

“The Captain handed me the parchment to look at it. It was the commission of Tishomingo, chief of the Chickasaws, in the American Army, and signed by George Washington.”

So ended the career of Tishomingo, the great chief of the Chickasaws, and ever the friend of the Americans. His obituary, written by Peter P. Pitchlyn, and published in the *Arkansas Gazette*, reads as follows:

### **OBITUARY, CHOCTAW NATION, MAY 6<sup>th</sup>, 1841.**

“Captain Tisho Mingo, a veteran warrior of the Choctaws (Chickasaws) departed this life on the 5<sup>th</sup> inst. Although but little known beyond the limits of his nation, yet he was a man that had seen wars and fought battles—stood high among his own people as a brave and good man. He served under General Wayne in the Revolutionary War, for which he received a pension from the Government of the United States; and in the late war with England he served under General Jackson and did many deeds of valor. He had fought in nine battles of the United States. As a friend, he had served the white man faithfully. His last words were: “When I am gone, beat the drum and fire the guns.”

“I hear the sound of the drum—the report of the ‘death guns’ is ringing in our valley—a warrior spirit is passing away. The brave TISHO MINGO, the veteran warrior of our tribe, is gone. His clansmen are gathered around his corpse. Long years have passed away since first his native hills reechoed his war-hoop—when grey haired warriors gathered around his war dance and said: ‘Go young warrior, go. It is the beloved Washington who calls for help.’ Our aged warriors and chieftains are all gone. TISHO MINGO, the last of the braves is gone. THEY ARE ALL GONE.”

Tishomingo County, Mississippi, is named for the great chieftain of the Chickasaws, as is the city of Tishomingo, Oklahoma, first capital of Indian Territory.

The little stream that runs through the acres that Tishomingo once owned in Mississippi likewise bears his name. The name of “Tishomingo Creek” has been perpetuated in the history of the Civil War battle of Brice’s Cross Roads, for it was near the bridge over this creek where the Union Commander, General Curtis, made his last stand and where much of the severe fighting took place.

Recently the 75th anniversary of this noted engagement was observed with fitting ceremonies on the battlefield. Concurrently with the battle’s anniversary, newspapers carried the story of “Princess” Te Ata, a young woman of the Chickasaw royal line, appearing before the king and queen of England at the summer home of President Roosevelt in Hyde Park. The “Princess” Te Ata is a Chickasaw-Choctaw Indian, native of Oklahoma, and a descendant of Tishomingo. She is famous for her presentation of Indian legends, songs and dances. In private life she is the wife of Dr. Clyde Fisher, a noted scientist, and lives at 41 West 72<sup>nd</sup> Street, New York City.

Last September, Te Ata and her distinguished husband were visitors to Pontotoc, accompanying Mr. E. T. Winston on his annual trip to see the Mississippi Choctaws at Union, in Neshoba County.