A map showing the difference in boundaries of the pre-removal Chickasaw Nation between descriptions in the Treaty of Hopewell and by Piomingo.

Chickasaw Nation Archives

Introduction

CHIKASHIYAAKNI' TINGBA', THE EARLY CHICKASAW HOMELAND

Although the early Chickasaw homeland's residential and political center was located at the site of today's Tupelo, Mississippi, the tribe's entire domain encompassed a vast area of more than 38,000 square miles. The first documented description of the eastern portion of those lands was given in November of 1783 by war leader Piomingo (*Hopayi' Minko'*, also known as Piominko)[1] and by the Chickasaw civil leader, the so-called Red King (*Minko' Homma'*), during negotiations for a treaty of peace and trade with a delegation of Virginians at French Lick near today's Nashville, Tennessee.[2] Piomingo, who was also styled "Mountain Leader" by his white contemporaries, affirmed his nation's eastern boundaries again at deliberations prior to the signing of the Treaty of Hopewell in South Carolina in January of 1786. He would set forth those claims for yet a third time at a multi-tribal conference convened by the first United States agent to the Chickasaw and Choctaw in order to thwart contemporary Spanish overtures to the southern tribes, a gathering held once more near Nashville in August of 1792.[3]

1. In 2014 the Chickasaw Nation officially established the spellings of the names of two of its historic leaders, changing Piomingo to Piominko and Tishomingo to Tishominko. The change reflects a desire to restore traditional Chickasaw orthography that more accurately reflects the Chickasaw language.

2. Piomingo did not specify the Chickasaw Nation's territorial boundaries west of the Tombigbee. At the time of his initial and subsequent descriptions, only the eastern extent of the early homeland was subject to counter-claims by other tribes and to the increasingly worrisome expansionist designs of the United States.

3. Robert S. Cotterill, "The Virginia-Chickasaw Treaty of 1783," *The Journal of Southern History* 8: 4 (November 1942): 495. Regarding the Treaty of Hopewell (1786) and the Nashville Conference, see James R. Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 128-33; 149-55. Nothing in Piomingo's name/title suggests "Mountain Leader," an

> I will describe the boundaries of our lands; It [sic] begins on the Ohio at the ridge which divides the waters of Tennessee and Cumberland, and extends with that ridge eastwardly as far as the most eastern waters of Elk River; thence to the Tennessee, at an old field, where a part of the Chickasaws formerly lived, this line to be so run as to include all the waters of Elk River, thence across the Tennessee and a neck of land to Tenchacunda Creek, a southern branch of the Tennessee, and up the same to its source; then to the waters of Tombigby, that is, to the west fork of Long Leaf Pine Creek, and down it to the line of the Chickasaws and Choctaws, a little below the trading road.[4]

Piomingo brought up the same boundary issue for a fourth time at a meeting of Chickasaw dignitaries with President George Washington in Philadelphia in July of 1794. As a result of Piomingo's insistence, President Washington and Secretary of War Edmund Randolph signed a letter acknowledging the validity of the Chickasaw border claims and providing the tribe with an updated map of its territory:

> George Washington
> President of the United States of America.
>
> To all to whom these presents shall come:
>
> Know ye that the Nation of Indians called Chickasaws inhabiting the District of Country herein described to wit: Beginning on the Ohio at the ridge which divides the waters of the Tennessee and Cumberland and extends with that ridge eastwardly as far as the most eastern waters of Elk River, thence

epithet that no doubt arose from his early residence among the Cherokee, where such a name or title has been documented (Brian Hicks, *Toward the Setting Sun: John Ross, the Cherokees, and the Trail of Tears* [New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2011], 30). That Piomingo's nickname as "Mountain Leader" was not unique to him is further confirmed by a letter from Captain Zebulon Pike, Sr., to militia Brigadier-General James Robertson in 1796 in which Pike refers to the Chickasaw "Mountain heads or Chiefs of their Nation" (Atkinson, *Splendid Land*, 126). One later writer proposed erroneously that Piomingo's nickname had come from the "mountain pinnacle" on which he lived above the Scoona River in today's northeastern Calhoun County, Mississippi (Richey Henderson, *Pontotoc County Men of Note* [Pontotoc, MS: Pontotoc Progress Print, 1940], 23). Piomingo's home, however, was in *Chokka' Falaa'* or Long Town in today's Lee County (Atkinson, *Splendid Land*, 126).

4. *American State Papers*, 2, *Indian Affairs*, 286; quoted in James H. Malone, *The Chickasaw Nation: A Short Sketch of a Noble People* (Louisville, Kentucky: John P. Morton & Company, 1922), 341-2.

to the Tennessee at an old field where a part of the Chickasaws formerly lived; this line to be so run as to include all the waters of Elk River, thence across the Tennessee and a neck of land to Tenchacunda creek a southern branch of the Tennessee, and up the same to its source, then to the waters of Tombigby, that is to the west fork of long leaf pine Creek, and down it to the line of the Chickasaws and Choctaws a little below the trading path. And the Towns, Villages, & Lands of the same Community are, in their persons, Towns, villages, Lands, hunting grounds and other rights and properties in the peace and under the protection of the United States of America. Citizens of the United States are hereby warned not to commit any injury, trespass or molestation whatever on the persons, Lands, hunting Grounds or other rights or property of the said Indians. And they and all others are in like manner forbidden to purchase, accept, agree or treat for with the said Indians directly or indirectly the title or occupation of any lands held or claimed by them, and I do hereby call upon all persons in authority under the United States and all Citizens thereof in their several capacities to be aiding and assisting to the prosecution and punishment according to law of all persons who shall be found offending in the Premises.

Given under my hand and the Seal of the United States this twenty first day of July in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and ninety four, and of the Independence of the United States of America the nineteenth.

(Signed) G. Washington.

President of the United States of America.

(Signed) Edm. Randolph,

Secretary of War.[5]

Piomingo made certain that subsequent United States agents were kept aware of the American government's official acceptance of those bor-

5. *The American Historical Magazine* (Published quarterly by the Peabody Normal College at Nashville, Tenn.) 4: 1 (Jan. 1899): 94-95. For detailed background on the events that led to President Washington's endorsement of Chickasaw land claims, see Richard Green, "Witness to History: Meeting of Piomingo, Washington at President's Home," *Chickasaw Times*, June 2009, 38-39.

ders for as long as he lived. He also took great pains to inform the Spanish, who had come into recent possession of France's former Louisiana Territory, of the American president's written acknowledgement of the Chickasaw territorial boundaries as he had so often described them.[6]

The eastern frontier of the Chickasaw Nation traced by Piomingo began near present-day Smithland, Kentucky, and followed the Tennessee-Cumberland divide to the headwaters of the Elk River where Tennessee's Highland Rim meets the Cumberland Plateau near today's community of Viola. There it turned sharply back to the southwest along the upper edge of that plateau to a point north and east of modern Huntsville, Alabama. From there the line proceeded south to Hobb's Island (formerly called Chickasaw Island) and to the adjacent Chickasaw old fields below and east of the Tennessee River's Great Bend.[7] The border then continued south to the headwaters of Cotaco Creek near today's Arab, Alabama, where it turned due west in a long and sinuous line until reaching a point somewhat below present Moulton at the headwaters of the Black Warrior River's Sipsey Fork. There it took a southerly course until joining the Black Warrior proper and arriving at a territorial corner said to be marked by a flat rock immediately north of the junction of Locust Fork with the main body of the river somewhat below the southern trading path to the Chickasaw and Choctaw.[8] There the line turned west again running eventually along the

6. Atkinson, *Splendid Land*, 165, 286-7.

7. O. D. Street, "Cherokee Southern Boundary," *Report of the Alabama History Commission to the Governor of Alabama*, vol. 1, ed. Thomas McAdory Owen (Montgomery: Brown Printing Co., 1901), 373; Charles C. Royce, "Indian Land Cessions in the United States," *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution*, pt. 2 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), 672. For a map representation of Chickasaw Island, see John Melish, *Map of Alabama Constructed from the Surveys in the General Land Office and Other Documents* (Philadelphia, 1818). The *Eighteenth Annual Report* cited above also contains a map of Alabama (plate CVIII) with a view of Chickasaw Island and the adjacent old fields. The same map purports to depict the eastern Chickasaw border in north-central Alabama, but it misrepresents the actual tribal land claim which was greater than that shown.

8. O. D. Street, "Cherokee Southern Boundary," 374n15. Early maps show the likely location of that "flat rock" in the 1820s-1850s as a river crossing or rocky ford labeled as Great Shoal or Great Shoals in, for example, Henry Schenk Tanner, *Georgia and Alabama* (Philadelphia, 1823) and *The Traveler's Pocket Map of Alabama* (Philadelphia, 1830); Samuel Augustus Mitchell, *A New Map of Alabama* (Philadelphia, 1846); Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co., *A New Map of Alabama* (Philadelphia, 1854). The Chickasaw-Choctaw trading path to which Piomingo referred is designated as Trail #60 by William E. Myer in his "Indian Trails of the Southeast," *Forty-Second Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1928), 727-847, plates 14-17. The trail is also mentioned as a branch of the Lower Creek Path leading west from the Alabama settlements by Verner W. Crane in *The Southern Frontier, 1670-1732*, ed. Steven C. Hahn

southern edge of Luxapallila Creek and the aforementioned trading path until reaching the mouth of Tibbee Creek across the Tombigbee from today's Columbus, Mississippi.[9] Ascending Tibbee Creek north of modern Starkville, the boundary then struck a straight northwesterly course up to the east bank of the Mississippi River at a location nearly opposite today's Helena, Arkansas. The border then turned north again, following the east side of the Mississippi River to the mouth of the Ohio and thence along its southern bank eastward to the place of beginning.

As indicated earlier, west of the Tombigbee River the Chickasaw Nation's southern, western and northern borders were without ambiguity or dispute, although the names by which we recognize those tribal frontiers are from languages other than Chickasaw. For example, the Chickasaw knew the northern Tombigbee as *Chisha' Tálla'a' Okhina'*, Post Oak Grove River, because their settlement of that name was reachable by following the river northward. Tibbee Creek or, more accurately, *Okti Abíha* ("Ice Is in It") was what the Choctaw called that stream. Its earliest recorded

(1929; repr., Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 136.

9. Luxapallila (also spelled Luxapalila), is very probably that stream's Choctaw name. I believe it represents *Luksi abalili* in Choctaw but that it was misheard as a meaningless *Luksi apalili*. Its true sense is "where turtles run," and its name would be spelled *Loksi' aamalili'* in Chickasaw. If I am correct, it is very likely that the creek was thus called for one or more locations on it where turtles were noted to scurry away and slide into the water when they sensed danger approaching. "Floating Turtle" has often been given as the English translation of this creek's name and that version appears on several printed maps (for example, Thomas Gamaliel Bradford, *Alabama* [1832]; John LaTourrette, *A Map of the State of Alabama* [1844]). The name has also been translated as "Crawling Turtle Creek" from Choctaw *luksi abalali* (William A. Read, *Indian Place Names in Alabama*, rev. ed., James B. McMillan [Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1984], 42; Virginia O. Foscue, *Place Names in Alabama* [Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988], 88). Phonology does not seem to favor either of those two latter translations. "Floating turtle place" in Choctaw is *luksi aiokpalali*, and the sound of *ok* is nowhere represented in Luxapallila. As for "Crawling Turtle," the lengthened next-to-last syllable *-la-* in *abalali* ought to be perceived as sufficiently distinct from the lengthened sound of *–li-* even for a non-speaker of Choctaw, despite this translation's general acceptance (Keith A. Baca, *Native American Place Names in Mississippi* [Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007], 52). By way of contrast, the confusion of the initial consonants in *malili/balili/palili* is common enough for those bilabial consonants, as is the rendition of the unstressed final syllable of *palili* as *palila* for many English speakers. ("Missoura" is a frequent pronunciation of that state's name, as is "Miama" for the tribe in Oklahoma and the county in Kansas.) One of the best-known instances of initial *m/b* confusion is early French explorer Pierre LeMoyne d'Iberville's recording of the lower Mississippi's native name as *Malbanchia* or *Malbanchya*, whereas its true name was *Balbáśha*. As for the occasional final "i" pronounced and written as "a" by English speakers, see Looxahoma for Choctaw *Luksi homa* and Tallahatchie for Chickasaw *Tali' Hachchi'* (Baca, *Native American Place Names*, 51, 102; Dawson A. Phelps and Edward Hunter Ross, "Names Please: Place-Names along the Natchez Trace," *Journal of Mississippi History*, 14 [October 1952]: 226, 232; *Iberville's Gulf Journals*, trans. and ed. Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams [Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1981], 5-6, 49, 60, 71, 82, 84-85, 89-90).

Chickasaw name was *Ayanaka' Okhina'* ("Slope Creek"), although many years later the Chickasaw would rename it *Nasi' Chi'ya'*, and by then it would be called Acorn Creek in English.[10] Insofar as it served as the acknowledged border between the Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations in today's state of Mississippi, its upper course would eventually come to be known in English as Line Creek.[11]

"Mississippi" was the Algonquian name of that river, a term first docu-

10. Tibbee is the abbreviation of the creek's Choctaw name. Indeed, the anglicized form of *Okti Abíha*, Oktibbeha, is the name that was given to the county adjacent to that stream on its south side. *Ayanaka'*, a nominalized loanword apparently based on an Alabama verb, is the oldest documented Chickasaw name of Tibbee and Line Creeks, presumably because it once led to an ancient site called *Ayanaka'*, perhaps the mound at Lyon's Bluff or a proto-historic community at today's archaeologically significant Rolling Hills or Plantation Homes subdivisions north of Starkville. This southerly *Ayanaka'* and the better-known northern one mentioned by the French and by James Adair will be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter of the present work. The most reliable identification of the older *Ayanaka' Okhina'* with Tibbee and Line Creeks is to be found on a 1723 deerskin map presented to South Carolina governor Francis Nicholson by the Chickasaw leader *Fani' Minko'* shown in Gregory A. Waselkov, "Indian Maps of the Colonial Southeast," *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast*, ed. Gregory A. Waselkov, Peter H. Wood and Tom Hatley, revised and expanded ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 439-40, 475, 477, 478. According to General James Wilkinson, who surveyed and mapped the Natchez Trace Road in 1801, by that time the Chickasaw were calling Tibbee Creek/Line Creek *Nasi' Chi'ya'* (literally, "Two Seated Acorns"), Acorn Creek ("A Survey of the Route Proposed for the Highway from Nashville in the State of Tennessee to the Grindstone Ford of the Bayou Pierre in the Mississippi Territory," ca. 1801. Original at National Archives. Copy at Natchez Trace Parkway Headquarters. Although both the following writers mistakenly assumed *Nasi' Chi'ya'* to be a Choctaw name, see also H. S. Halbert, "Choctaw Indian Names in Alabama and Mississippi," *Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society* 3 [1899], 74, and Lea L. Seale, "Indian Place-Names in Mississippi" [master's thesis, Louisiana State University, 1939], 131-2).

11. There have been many references over the years to Tibbee Creek/Line Creek as the natural border between the Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations. See, for example, Bernard Romans, *A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida*, ed. Kathryn E. Holland Braund (1775; repr., Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 126; Wilkinson, "A Survey;" H. S. Halbert and T. H. Ball, *The Creek War of 1813 and 1814* (Chicago: Donohue & Henneberry; Montgomery: White, Woodruff & Fowler, 1895), 41; John R. Swanton, *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw Indians* (1931; repr., Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 32; William C. Davis, *A Way through the Wilderness* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 32; Atkinson, *Splendid Land*, 206. An October 22, 1832, affidavit signed by several Chickasaw individuals and witnessed by Martin Colbert described the Chickasaw-Choctaw line and its Mississippi River terminus as follows: "We the undersigned do hereby certify and acknowledge that the true and just line between the Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations begins at the mouth of Oka-tithe-hah [*Okti Abíha*] and runs up it until it gets to the mouth of Noo-sah-chi-yah [*Nasi' Chi'ya'*], then up that creek to a large round swamp, where Noo-sah-chi-yah makes a considerable bend toward the Chickasaws. At that point it takes out, on the south side near a large pond, keeping a direct course to a grove of large Pines on the ridge about one mile beyond Wall's old stand on the Natchez Road. Thence a westward course to a point on the Mississippi River, well known by the name 'Tunica Village'" (http://web.archive.org/web/20060516080449/http://www.chickasawhistory.com/CHICL_32.htm). As for an old Tunica Village in that location, see Jeffrey Brain, *Tunica Archaeology* (Cambridge: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 1988), 292.

mented by the French in the north and subsequently adopted by the British. The only time the spelling *Massasippe* or *Mississippi'* appeared in a Chickasaw context was when the tribe's representatives needed to make certain that white men knew which waterway they were talking about.[12] The Chickasaw commonly referred to the Mississippi by two names. In its southern reaches it was called *Balbaha' Á̲sha' Okhina'* or, by contraction, *Balbá̲sha' Okhina'*. *Balbaha* signifies baby talk, prattle, babble and jibber-jabber as well as foreign speech in Choctaw, and it seems to have been in use among the Chickasaw at one time, although it is unknown nowadays. *Balbá̲sha'* means "foreign speakers are there" or "foreign speakers are upon it," and the river was so designated because of the large number of travelers and alien traders who plied its waters. Years later, for Chickasaw and Choctaw alike, *Balbá̲sha'* would come to be the native name of the city of New Orleans due to the great variety of exotic tongues heard there.[13] Further north and closer to home, the Chickasaw called the Mississippi *Sakti Lha̲fa' Okhina'*, the "Scored Bank River." That name derived from the look of the bluff at today's Memphis as seen from the waterside, its high bank etched into deep furrows by frequent rainwater coursing down its sheer face.[14]

The early Chickasaw referred to the Ohio as *Sinitowa' Okhina'*, the Seneca River, because it led eventually to that tribe as well as to the other members of the Iroquois Confederacy, and the Cumberland River seems to have been known to them as *Chalakki' Okhina'*, the Cherokee River, for the same reason.[15]

12. Waselkov, "Indian Maps of the Colonial Southeast," 475, 477, 479; Albert S. Gatschet, *Words, Phrases and Grammatic Elements of the Chicasa Language Obtained from Judson Dwight Collins, Delegate of the Tribe to the U. S. Government* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: VIP Publishing Co., 1994), 41. This title is an abridgement of Gatschet's previously unpublished manuscript, "Chicasa: Lexical and Syntactical Collection Obtained from J. D. Collins, Postoffice Stonewall, Chickasaw Nation, February 1889." Archives of the Bureau of American Ethnology, Smithsonian Institution, no. 588-a.

13. Cyrus Byington, *Dictionary of the Choctaw Language* and Ben Watkins, *Choctaw Definer*, eds. John R. Swanton and H. S. Halbert (repr.,1909; Asheville, NC: Global Bible Society, 2001), 87; Gatschet, *Words, Phrases and Grammatic Elements*, 41. *Balbaha* was current in Chickasaw as late as 1818. One of William Colbert's sons was Balbarhubby: *Balbahabi'*, "He Killed a Foreigner" (Rickey Butch Walker, *Chickasaw Chief George Colbert: His Family and His Country* [Killen, Alabama: Bluewater Press, 2012], 55).

14. John R. Swanton, "Social and Religious Beliefs and Usages of the Chickasaw Indians," *Forty-Fourth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1928), 178.

15. For *Sinitowa' Okhina'* see Waselkov, "Indian Maps," 475, 478, 480; for *Chalakki' Okhina'*,