

## Transcriptions of Chickasaw Chiefs in the Summer of 1736

The Chickasaws and Carolina had been trading partners since at least the 1690s. But in 1733, a new British colony, Georgia, was established that was closer to the Homeland and potentially could have been another badly needed trading partner. So after the dust had settled following the Battle of Ackia, a delegation of 20 Chickasaws traveled to Georgia in the summer of 1736. Two chiefs among them were identified as Postubee (*Ipashi' Isht Abi'*) and Mingobemingo (*Minko' Abi' Minko'*).

They hoped to meet the colonial governor, James Oglethorpe, in Savannah, the town he had founded less than a year before. Although the colony, named for George II of Great Britain, was intended to be an “asylum” for English debtors, these Chickasaws hoped that Georgia and Carolina would supply the armaments that were critical to the tribe’s survival.

They met with Oglethorpe, and later the Reverend John Wesley, and portions of both meetings were transcribed. We learn that Postubee was a young man, while Mingobemingo was old. That’s an intriguing combination in light of the Chickasaw belief that elders were (and are) venerated for their wisdom. Why then would a young man be permitted to negotiate such serious and sensitive matters? Perhaps Postubee was acknowledged to have had exceptional powers.

Postubee could be the “Pastabe,” who is mentioned in the Carolina colonial records, assisting English traders James Adair and John Campbell in 1746 in negotiations with Choctaw Chief Red Shoe. Author James Atkinson, in combing through the colonial records to research his book, did not find the name Mingobemingo anywhere else. The name means “Chief who killed a Chief” and probably was miscommunicated.

En route, the delegation visited with their brothers, the Savannah River Chickasaws (see *Chickasaw Lives, Volume Three*) in early July. Historian Edward Cashin writes that these Homeland Chickasaws got conflicting advice about their mission. They were warned away from Savannah, possibly by rival English traders, calling it a “French town.” Others encouraged them to visit Oglethorpe, who was identified as a “red man’s child,” either by someone who didn’t know him or was speaking symbolically.

Despite the conflict, the Chickasaws journeyed hundreds of miles and were within 120 miles of Savannah. Besides, the rumor of Oglethorpe’s “Indian blood” probably was too tantalizing to pass up. Canoeing south in the Savannah River, they reached Savannah on or about July 12 and had their first meeting with the governor.

Although the participants would have smoked the calumet and had other welcoming ceremonies, Postubee—in what purports to be a transcript—got right to the point: “We have many Enemies, and beg Powder and Shot.” Mingobemingo: “We walk about very poor, we want Guns.”

After Postubee complimented Oglethorpe on the



Photo by Wakeah Vigil.

town he had founded, Mingobemingo, with possibly a wry sense of humor, broached the subject of the governor's "Indian blood." "We heard you was a Red Woman's Child ... but now I have seen you, I believe you have as white a body as any in Charles Town."

"I am a Red Man," answered Oglethorpe, who may have paused theatrically, watching for signs of incredulity or confusion, before adding that he was "an Indian in my heart... ."

"We believe you are a Red Man in your heart," said Postubee, complimenting the man who held the key to more arms and ammunition. The chief's next remark could have been meant as another compliment or teasing, if he were alluding to the governor's "Indian blood"—"We have brought our wives and children to see you too."

They talked about going to see some "great houses" and "great water" and Mingobemingo, in referring to them, said, "if you bid us, we will go over it." Seven years

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To Chickasaws, the gorget was a decoration as well as a symbol of the traditional tribal lifestyle. The number of bars indicated the power and position of the wearer—tribal leaders and officials often wore gorgets with three or more bars.

later in 1743, Oglethorpe did take an unidentified Chickasaw chief with him across the "great water" to London.

Mingobemingo told Oglethorpe they had been warned that the trip was risky. If Savannah was a French town filled with French men, the chief would "die quickly." But since he was "an old man ... it was time for me to die." He also told Oglethorpe that they might have stayed until winter, but that they would have to return home soon. The Chickasaws in the Homeland had too many enemies, and his "wife is an old woman, and I believe every man would take care of his wife."

In a second talk held on July 13, the recorder of the transcript didn't identify the "Chickasaws" who made their case for a trade agreement. After reiterating their need for bullets and powder, they listed some of their enemies, adding that the paper (being used as a record of the meeting) "would not hold them all."

To illustrate the perilous situation of the Chickasaws and the British, an unidentified Chickasaw drew a map in the sand. The Chickasaws and British were represented by circles, presumably the British to the right (or east) of the Chickasaws. Both were apparently encompassed within a larger circle, representing the French and their allies. Although the sand map was

not described in detail, it probably resembled a map that was painted a year later on a deerskin and given by Mingo Ouma (*Minko' Homma'*) to an Alabama chief to share with their French allies. Because it was copied by a French engineer, Alexandre de Batz, the map has survived and depicts "nations friendly and hostile to the Chickasaws."

In referring to Ogoula Tchetoka (*Chokkilissa'*) and Ackia (*Aahikeki' ya'*)—two Chickasaw towns unsuccessfully attacked by a French-led contingent earlier that year—a Chickasaw war chief said that, "seven hundred men came into our Towns twice, but have not killed us all, for some you see are alive yet." Since the French-led armies were decisively defeated, this was quite an understatement!

His next declaration was an overstatement. He said that the French had forts in all of their allies' nations, and "keep them always in readiness to send against us." Although France was never able to keep its Indian allies in guns and bullets, the speaker continued, saying the "people of Carolina promised white men and arms, but never sent them."

After the governor promised them gunpowder, the Chickasaws wanted to know if he believed the report