

GREENWOOD LEFLORE

In the early 1700s the Chakchiuma Indian tribe lived in the vicinity of present-day Greenwood Mississippi, in Leflore County. They were located between the Chickasaws to the north and northeast, and the Choctaws to the east and south. They lived principally around the confluence of the Yalobusha and Tallahatchie Rivers which forms the beginning of the Yazoo River. The Chakchiumas were a very aggressive, warlike people. Because of this activity against their neighbors, the Chickasaws and Choctaws formed a joint war party and in one day and night completely eliminated the Chakchiumas as a tribe. The only survivors were some women who came to live with the Choctaws and were assimilated into their tribe.

One of the survivors of the raid was a Chakchiuma maiden named Shumaka. She became the wife of a man named Roscoe Cole and lived until about 1830 and died just south of the present-day Grenada.

Roscoe Cole's origins are in dispute, but a man of that name was captured at Ft. Vause in Virginia in June of 1756 during the French and Indian War. He was captured by the French and Shawnees. It has been suggested that he escaped Shawnee captivity and found refuge among the Chakchiumas. At any rate, a man named Roscoe Cole became the husband of Shumaka and the marriage produced five known children. The son was named Robert Cole and he served as Chief of the Oklawaha District of the Choctaw Nation in Mississippi from 1824 to 1826. The four daughters were Mikahoke, Mishahoya, Hannah, and Nahotima. Nahotima married a French trader named Jean Cravatt. Their marriage produced at least two daughters, Rebecca and Nancy. Both of these daughters became the wife a man named Louis Lefleur around 1790.

Louis Lefleur was erroneously called a French Canadian even by some of his descendants. He was, in fact, born on June 28, 1762, in Mobile, French Territory, West Florida. He was the son of Jean Baptiste Lefleau and Marie Jeanne Girard. Jean Baptiste Lefleau was brought to Mobile from France around 1725 by his father and mother. Jean Baptiste Lefleau's father, Jacques Lefleau, was a fusilier in the French Army and they came to Mobile for the purpose of colonizing the surrounding area.

Louis Lefleur's mother, Marie Jeanne Girard, was the daughter of Jean Girard. Jean Girard was the commander of the French warehouse which contained the supplies used by the French army and the citizens of Mobile. As commander he also was responsible for and directed all transportation of supplies on the Tombigbee, Mobile and Alabama Rivers. He also controlled the routes to Pensacola, Pass Christian, Pascagoula, and New Orleans.

Louis Lefleur's father, Jean Baptiste Lefleau, worked for Jean Girard and learned to operate ships, both keelboats and flatboats, and in turn taught his son, Louis, these skills. Upon the death of his father, Louis Lefleur began, as a teen, operating his own boats for trade and became very prosperous for the times. He operated keelboats across the West Florida, Alabama, Mississippi and east Louisiana coasts and up the rivers which flowed into the Gulf of Mexico, including the Pearl. He followed what was known as the "river route" from Pensacola to Natchez – across the Gulf Coast from Pensacola to Lake Ponchartrain, through Lake Ponchartrain to Lake Maurepas, then up the Amite River to Bayou Manchac and then following Manchac to the Mississippi River. Then up the Mississippi to Natchez. In the latter part of the 18th century he established a trading post on what became known as Lefleur's Bluffs. This later became the site of the Old State Capitol Building in Jackson, Mississippi.

Louis Lefleur was not only a trader among the Choctaws but also served as a Major in the United States Army. This was during the War of 1812. He took part in campaigns against the Creek Indians in Alabama and was a participant in the Battle of New Orleans under General Pushmataha and General Andrew Jackson. While at Lefleur's Bluffs a son was born to Louis and Rebecca on June 3, 1800, who was named Greenwood Lefleur. He was named after a business acquaintance of Louis, a sea captain named Greenwood.

By the time of Louis' participation in the War of 1812, he had moved his family to a location on the Natchez Trace – that wilderness road between Natchez and Nashville. He established his trading post, known as a "stand" about 1812. The location of his trading post and inn is now known as French Camp (originally called Frenchman's Camp) in Choctaw County, Mississippi.

The Natchez Trace was a major route for flatboatmen returning to the North from New Orleans and for the movement of both mail and military traffic, such as the Army of General Jackson after the Battle of New Orleans.

Greenwood Lefleur as a young boy of 12 in 1812 spoke little English but was articulate in Choctaw. A man from Nashville named Major John Donly had a contract carrying the mail and operating a stagecoach between Nashville and Natchez. He lived in Nashville. After becoming a good friend of the Lefleur family, he invited young Greenwood to come and live with him in Nashville and obtain an education. Greenwood's family agreed that this was a wonderful opportunity for him and he accompanied Major Donly back to Nashville.

At the age of seventeen Greenwood eloped with the daughter of Major Donly, was reconciled with her family and then Greenwood and his bride, Rosa Donly, moved to French Camp, where three children were born to them before Rosa died in 1829. During these years Greenwood began to accumulate land, livestock and slaves. He also was elected Chief of the Northwest Division of the Choctaw Nation in 1822.

As Choctaw chief, Greenwood Leflore (as he had come to spell "Lefleur") introduced reforms, abolishing many vicious tribal customs. He was always ready to rally to the defense of the Choctaws and to intercede for their rights. One example of his intercession occurred when Leflore traveled by carriage to Washington to ask President Andrew Jackson for the removal of a particular agency commissioner who was mistreating the Choctaws. Family legend has Leflore demanding the firing of the agent and President Jackson telling Leflore "I, Andrew Jackson, President of the United States, know this man to be an honorable man". Leflore's reply was "I, Greenwood Leflore, Chief of the Choctaw Indians, know him to be a damned scoundrel". The agent was removed.

The pressures on the Choctaws from the encroachment on their traditional land by the coming of the white settlers were building steadily. Previous treaties such as the Treaty of Doak's Stand had begun the cession of Choctaw land to the United States. After much work over a three year period, the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek was signed in 1830 with Leflore signing for the Choctaws.

Leflore was criticized for this treaty since it required the removal of most of the Choctaws to Oklahoma. However, the true "villain" was the United States government, which did not live up to the treaty provisions. Had they done so, the Choctaws would have been adequately supplied and transported on their trip to Oklahoma. Instead, the Choctaws had their own "Trail of Tears" with many dying on the way to "Indian Territory".

Two years after his wife Rosa's death in 1829, Greenwood Leflore married Elizabeth Cody, a cousin of "Buffalo Bill" Cody. She lived for only one year after the marriage and they had no children. Greenwood Leflore then in 1834 married the younger sister of his first wife, Rosa. Her name was Priscilla.

Greenwood and his wife Priscilla established their home between the towns of Teoc and Carrollton in Carroll County, Mississippi. This first home was a log cabin and they later moved into a larger frame house. With his businesses and farms prospering, Greenwood decided to build a large mansion, which he named Malmaison. The construction of the home was begun in 1854. It was constructed by an architect from South Carolina named James Clark Harris. Harris later constructed many fine homes in Carrollton, some of which are still standing and occupied today, almost 150 years later. Family legend indicates that Harris fell in love with Greenwood and Priscilla's daughter, Rebecca, and asked for her hand in marriage in lieu of a fee for building Malmaison. The writer, a family member, but also perhaps a bit cynical, has some doubts that some money did not change hands. After all the construction took over a year, perhaps two to finish. We know for sure that it was completed by December, 1855.

Greenwood Leflore was well able financially to construct this magnificent home. At the height of his prosperity he had 15,000 acres of land, 400 slaves, saw mills, brickyards, steamboats, warehouses and other enterprises. At one time, because of a grievance he had with the founder of Williams Landing, he established his own landing near the junction of the Yalobusha and Tallahatchie Rivers. The landing was known as Point Leflore and Leflore built a road from his plantation to the landing at great cost. Because of frequent overflows from the rivers and changing economic conditions during the War Between the States, the Leflore landing declined and the previous landing (Williams Landing) flourished. The town of Greenwood (formerly Williams Landing) was incorporated February 16, 1844, to honor the great

chief and in 1871 Leflore County came into existence and honored him also. Greenwood is the county seat of Leflore County.

During his lifetime Greenwood Leflore was not only the Choctaw Chief and an active and successful farmer and businessman, but also served in the Mississippi State Legislature. He was loyal to the United States during the War Between the States since he had pledged never to take arms against the United States and was true to his word.

Greenwood Leflore died in 1865 and he was buried in the family cemetery at Malmaison. His beautiful monument carried this inscription –

Greenwood Leflore
Born: June 3, 1800
Died: August 21, 1865

The Last Chief of the Choctaws East of the Mississippi River

Harris Leflore Coleman
September 29, 1994



