

Malmaison purchase completed

• No casino, Choctaw chief says

By SUSAN MONTGOMERY
The Conservative

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians now owns the homestead of 19th century Choctaw Chief Greenwood Leflore.

The tribe and Belmont Shook Partnership, which is based in Memphis, closed the \$1.7 million transaction Friday, and their representatives recorded the deed to the 896-acre site in the Carroll County chancery clerk's office in Carrollton.

The property, known as Malmaison, is northeast of Valley Hill, near U.S. 82 and close to the Carroll and Leflore County line.

Among those on hand for the closing was Lee Abraham Jr., a Greenwood attorney and business owner who convinced the Choctaw tribe to buy the land.

He called the purchase "probably one of the most significant economic events for Carroll and Leflore counties that I can remember ... because of the potential for investment and development - historical and economic."

Abraham said the Choctaws are looking at creating a tourist attraction or resort at the site.

He said the tribe definitely expects to reconstruct Malmaison, which was Greenwood Leflore's mansion. It was destroyed by fire in 1942.

Other possibilities include a convention center, a top-flight golf course, and a Choctaw museum and cultural center.

The tribe operates one casino and is building another, both on its Pearl River Resort near Philadelphia. The Choctaws are expected to open a second casino, the Golden Moon, in the fall of 2002. However, Choctaw Chief Phillip Martin has said there are no plans for a casino at Malmaison.

Martin, tribal chief since 1979, said the Choctaws' interest in the Malmaison site is related to Leflore's contributions.

"It is a historic place," Martin said, speaking by telephone from his headquarters near Philadelphia

in Neshoba County. "Chief Greenwood was an outstanding individual who brought prosperity to that part of the state and made a lot of development there," Martin said.

Abraham said plans for a casino are not among any he has seen. Ann Shook Canale of Memphis, a partner in Belmont-Shook, has speculated about the possibility of a casino on the property.

Abraham, who held an option to purchase the property from June 6 through Oct. 6, said he did not make any money on the transaction but instead has a contract with the tribe to serve as the property's project manager, a paid position.

"Rather than try to deal with Malmaison for a short-term gain, I chose to participate on a permanent basis in the development," he said.

He said his connection with Malmaison will allow him to pursue three goals: economic development and job creation, replication of the mansion and expanded opportunities for education.

"This is a real opportunity for economic development that could be part of the funding for a school of excellence I have been working on for approximately five years," he said.

Abraham said he would use the money he earns from Malmaison for the school, which would be private but tuition-free and "open to the public at no cost to the public."

He said the Choctaw property is not being considered as a site for the school and that a site has not been chosen.

Meanwhile, Abraham said the tribe is "looking to be a great neighbor to Carroll and Leflore counties" and its new relationship with the area is a boon.

"I don't know of anybody else that is planning to come into Carroll and Leflore counties and bring developments," Abraham said.

Chief Martin said last week, "We want to come over there with good faith and good intentions."

Martin said, "We want to strike a partnership with the county." He said the tribe has been told "the opportunity is there for us to

be welcome and they would give the support that we need to develop the property."

Choctaw land held in trust by the U.S. government for the tribe's benefit is not taxed. Holdings not already in the trust can be entered into it, but the process involves impact studies, consultation with local officials, reviews, public advertisement and opportunities for appeal, according to the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Carroll County Tax Assessor Wilton Neal said his information from the state tax commission is that the land will continue to be taxed because the owner is the tribe, not the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Taxes from the year 2000 were \$2,521.

Leflore, who later became a U.S. senator, was a prosperous farmer and businessman who died in 1865. As chief of the Choctaws in 1830, he signed the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, which ceded to the United States the last of the Choctaw lands east of the Mississippi River. Greenwood and Leflore County are named for him.

Leflore, part-French and the son of a trader, already owned land at the time of the treaty, which added extensively to his holdings. Most Choctaws were deported west, although several thousand remained.

Federal law allows casino gambling on Indian trust land in states that allow gambling. With each state, a compact must be negotiated. Mississippi does not collect taxes on Indian casino revenues.

According to the law, the Malmaison property would have to be entered into trust before it could become an eligible casino site.

The law says land qualifies if it is "part of the initial reservation of an Indian tribe." Lands that are eligible for casino gambling must be "within the Indian tribe's last recognized reservation."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Susan Montgomery is the city editor for The Greenwood Commonwealth.

Pastor expresses concern of potential casino

• Potential casino proposal discussed at supervisor's meeting

By ROGER RINGO
The Conservative

Carroll County's Board of Supervisors met Monday for the first time in 2002. Typically in the year's first meeting it is the annual routine for the board to look mainly over technical items to begin the upcoming fiscal year. Monday's meeting, however, was anything but routine as a number of important issues were brought to the table for discussion.

The first item before the board was an order to approve bonds for assistant receiving clerk, Michael A.

Haddon and Carroll/Montgomery Correctional Regional Facility office manager, Vicki L. Yates. Supvs. Neal Blaylock motioned for approval of the measure with Supv. Mike Oliver seconding. The board then unanimously approved.

The next item was the employment of board attorney, Jim Burgoon, of Burgoon and Oakes Law Office. Blaylock motioned for the employment of Burgoon with Supv. James Cobbins seconding the motion. The motion was passed with a majority vote of five to one Supv. Lloyd "Honey" Ashline voted against the measure.

The appointment of Fire Coordinator/Civil Defense Director was the next order. Harold Struggs was the proposed appointee. Oliver motioned for the appointment to be made, and Blaylock seconded. The board unanimously approved.

The ensuing item on the agenda allotted time for Rev. Joseph Sansing to address the board concerning his and the Pastors from Carroll County Coalition's underlying motion that the county could be on the brink of having a casino built in the near future. Though the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MBCI) has officially denied interest in the construction of a casino/resort in Carroll County, the Pastors from Carroll County¹ see hesitant to believe it considering the MBCI recently purchase a significant stretch of land within the county. "We're not

sleeping on this situation at all," said Sansing. He continued, "We know all the glitz and glamour sometimes associated with the casinos, but let me tell you all here today it's what it looks like."

"I've done research and I now know the harms that can come from the casinos. So I ask that if it ever comes by a point that Chief (Philip) Martin calls you all down to "talk", please don't let the money sway you. We want to support you in being against a casino in our county. It might not ever happen, but if it does, we want to be ready."

The next order called for the board to approve the fees set for the Chancery Clerk, Stablesy "Sugar" Mullins. Cobbins made the motion to approve with Blaylock seconding. The board unanimously approved the motion.

The next item was for the approval of reimbursement for all supervisors, the board attorney and the board clerk to attend the Mid-Winter convention Jan. 7-9 in Jackson. Blaylock motioned for the approval of the measure. The board unanimously consented.

Approval for the board president, Marvin Coward, to sign the cap loan agreement and promissory note modification in the sum of \$29,745.00 for the firestation on Hwy. 430 was the next order. The board approved the measure unanimously.

The board next, with the motioning of Blaylock and the seconding of Oliver, approved the employment of new deputy Corcoran and Chancery Clerk, Julie H. Corley.

The ensuing item involved bids for county depositories. Both People's Bank & Trust Co. of North Carrollton and Valden Bank (Holmes County Bank) submitted bids. Blaylock motioned for the acceptance of both banks with Oliver seconding the motion. The board unanimously approved.

The next order involved bids for plastic culverts. ADS and G&O Supply submitted bids. Blaylock motioned for ADS's bid to be accepted with Oliver seconding. The board unanimously approved.

Bids on metal culverts (diameter 21 inches and up) was next on the agenda. Pearl River Pipe Co.

was the lone company to submit a bid. Blaylock motioned to approve Pearl River Pipe Company's bid with Cobbins' second. The board unanimously approved.

The ensuing bid on bridge lumber was the next item. Blaylock motioned for this bid to be taken under advisement. Cobbins seconded the motion. The board unanimously approved the motion.

Grader blades were the next item up for bids, with Thorpenn Equip. and Striking Equip. submitting bids. Blaylock motioned the Striking be awarded the bid, and Thorpenn be the alternate. Oliver seconded the motion. The board unanimously approved.

Bids on hot and cold mix for road work was next. Memphis Stone and Gravel, Herring Gravel Co., Inc. Lehman-Roberts Co. and J.J. Ferguson S&G, Inc.

all submitted bids. A motion was filed by Oliver to award the bid to J.J. Ferguson and to select Lehman-Roberts as alternate. Blaylock seconded the motion. The board unanimously approved.

The next order involved the board giving an inter-fund loan of \$95,040.37 from General County to the engineering fund to help with costs of ongoing projects. The money will be reimbursed within the budget year by federal monies already allocated, but stalled, by the federal government. Blaylock motioned for approval of the measure and Oliver seconded. The board unanimously approved.

The claims docket was then motioned for approval by Oliver and seconded by Blaylock. The board unanimously approved.

The next item on the agenda was the approval of contracts awarded to Rezier Construction

Co. for two separate projects in the county. Blaylock motioned for approval and Oliver seconded. The board unanimously approved the measure.

Felicia Crosby, independent consultant and administrator for the Carroll County HOME Program, presented an update to the board on the progress of the program. She reported that contracts for all services (asbestos testing, housing inspections and administrative services) to be needed had been signed. She also went on to say that construction would begin on the first three houses around the end of February or the beginning of March.

The board next scheduled a meeting for Monday, Jan. 14 at 9 a.m. at the Carroll County Courthouse in Carrollton to further discuss matters not resolved at this week's meeting.

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Choctaw Chief addresses supervisors

By ROGER RINGO
The Conservative

The Carroll County Supervisors saw a much larger group of spectators than normal Monday morning at their board meeting. Religious leaders and concerned citizens, alike, crowded the room to personally receive and, perhaps, voice a response(s) to the message slated to come from the successful, and oft controversial leader of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MBCI), Chief Phillip Martin.

Martin, the key figure in the now legendary economic rise of the



Chief Phillip Martin

Chief offers history of success as only reference needed

By ROGER RINGO
The Conservative

As Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MBCI) Chief Phillip Martin scheduled a date to address the Carroll County Board of Supervisors, many leaders throughout the county became wrangled at the notion that Martin was readying to have a casino built on recently acquired land in the county.

Others welcomed the possibility, thinking favorably of a potential boost in jobs and business expansion.

The truth of the matter is, the Martin led MBCI has over the last 30 plus years built a multi-million dollar *fortune conglomerate* that includes far more than gambling enterprises.

It should be noted that during the 1800's and early 1900's, tribal members that remained in Mississippi made their living primarily by sharecropping. They became an impoverished people with a substandard quality of life and poor health conditions. In the early 1900's, the Mississippi Choctaws were described as the poorest pocket of poverty in the poorest state in the country.

Under Martin's leadership, though, things finally began to change roughly 33 years ago:

• In 1969, the Tribe opened its first company, Chahita Development, to build houses for

tribal members.

• Packard Electric, a division of General Motors, committed to opening a facility on the Reservation.

• In 1979, Chahita Enterprise opened as the Tribe's first manufacturing company producing wiring harnesses for the automotive industry.

• American Greenings Corporation, the world's largest manufacturer of growing cards. For the first time in Indian country, Industrial Revenue Bonds were issued by the local, non-Indian government to finance the construction of a facility on the Reservation. In 1981, the 120,000 square foot plant

• The next development came in the form of a joint-venture between the MBCI and Oxford Speaker Company from Chicago. Oxford was seeking a minority partner located in the south to manufacture automotive speakers. Choctaw Electronics Enterprise opened in 1985 as the Tribe's first joint-venture.

• Industrial expansions continued throughout the 1940s and 1950s with the opening of Choctaw Manufacturing Enterprise, First American Printing & Direct Mail, and First American Plastic Molding Enterprise.

• In 1986, the Tribe opened the Choctaw Residential Center, a 120-bed nursing home that pro-MBCI scheduled as an assurance

before the board to introduce the notion of his tribe's future involvement in the economic future of Carroll County.

In mid-2001, the tribe purchased over 800 acres of land in the historic Malmison Community just outside of Carrollton. The land, which was originally a portion of the vast territory of the Choctaw Indians, was owned by 19th Century Choctaw Chief, co-conductor of the Treaty of 1830 (document surrendered most of what is now Mississippi, amongst other stretches of land to the U.S. Government) and eventual Mississippi planter and slaveowner,

Greenwood Leflore.

"As we learned more about the Malmison property and the historical significance it bears, the more we wanted to purchase the property," said Martin. "That, in fact, was our motivation... history."

It seems that whenever the MBCI has decided to invest in a project, success has been the result each time under Martin's leadership.

The primary question and concern amongst most of the people attending the meeting had nothing to do with the history of the land, or past successes of the MBCI, as much as what Martin and his administration intended to do with the land in the future.

Martin recognized this streaming curiosity and said in his address, "Obviously when you buy that much property, you want to do something with it. The question is, what can you do that would draw tourism and a return on the investment made in the property? What would prove feasible," asked Martin. He continued, "We're interested in giving to the Carroll County Community, but only if the citizens of the county welcome us. If the impression is that we are not welcomed here, then we would not feel as compelled to invest in the community."

Martin mentioned the possibility of a Boys and Girls Club Recreation Center, a Bed and Breakfast Inn, and/or a seasonal or year-long youth camp as initial suggestions for the property.

He made his first comment on the real concern of the attendees in the following statement. "Many of you here today look at me as a gambling man. You may believe that I'm here today to push for a casino. Well, if I will, it would be very progressive to do so, we don't need

anyone's permission for a casino if that was our intent. However, I'm not here for that."

Board President, Marvin Coward told Martin that what the county was actually needing was some semblance of industry in the county, and was hoping that Martin could push for that.

Martin said in response that, "We are in the initial stages of conducting a feasibility study on the land and the surrounding area to get a better idea of what would actually do well here. We estimate to take about a year, and then we'll look into infrastructural investment — roads, landscaping, and things like that."

Supervisor Lloyd "Honey" Ashmore then asked Chief Martin, "Can you guarantee the people of Carroll County that you will not build a casino here?"

An MBCI lawyer attempted to interject by saying because Martin was an elected official, so he could not categorically speak on the behalf of his constituents without first assuming their position.

But Ashmore said without pause, "I didn't ask you, I asked the chief. Can you guarantee the people of Carroll County that you won't build a casino here?"

Martin stepped forward and said, "Yes I can answer that. I think that if and when we decide to move forward with a project here, after the (feasibility) study is completed, the people of Carroll County will tell us what they want. Some of you here think that casino money is bad money, dirty money, even well. I always respond to that this way. If you can take dirty money, and do good with it, then that is not so bad."

As for the guarantee, it was never given.

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Street survey of Carroll County residents voice opinions on prospect of local casino

By ROGER RINGO
For The Conservative

In light of the recent visit from Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians Chief Phillip Martin, The Conservative took to the streets of Carroll County to ascertain the feeling of local citizens in regard to the prospect of a casino operating in the county.

Until late in the assessment process, residents of Carroll County seemed to be roughly 50/50 in reference to the question, "What do you feel about the prospect of a casino in Carroll County?"

Most female respondents did not favor the prospect, citing religious beliefs as the primary factor in their opinion. Male respondents were more often in favor of a casino, but less likely to want to

be identified publically.

On Monday, 12 out of 15 asked were against a casino coming to Carroll County, with two being undecided. The final tally of The Conservative's assessment survey found 34 against a casino, 21 for a casino, and five undecided. Here are remarks from five local residents sounding off on the matter:



"I don't want to see a privately owned casino that won't benefit the people of our county whatsoever. A casino on private "reservation" land doesn't serve our best interests. Chief Martin said himself that they're looking for a return, but he didn't mention anything of a return for the county, so I'm against it. A summer camp, a children's camp, or a golf course. . . .
Remondrea,¹³
Russell Wilson, 11



"I would not agree to a casino in our area. I object because it is not something that is Christianlike. I feel it (gambling) is destroying people because of its addictive nature and the outright harm it tends to bring to those that indulge in it."

Annette Newman



"My religious beliefs are the primary reason for my saying no to the idea of a casino here. I have heard the arguments about more jobs and all that, but there has to be a better way to secure more jobs. I don't believe anything good can come of a casino, so I'm completely against it."

Anna Irwin, 29



"It would be a good deal for everybody. The problem we have now is when they built Carrollton so many years ago, they finished it, thinking nothing of tomorrow. We need it. We need something new that can bring jobs and money. I might even get me a job. We got nothing to lose from it, so I'm for it."

Willie Moore, 45



"It's too quiet of an area for something like that. It would cause too much of a change for such a place as Carroll County. There are very few places like this left, and I would hate to see such an atmosphere to be stripped away by the presence I know a casino would bring. On top of all that, I'm against gambling."

Evelyn Hollis, 46

Casino opponents set "Town Hall" meeting

By Gwen Sizem
For The Conservative

The Carroll-Montgomery County Baptist Association is trying to send a message to the Choctaw tribe who recently purchased land at Malmasion: Carroll Countians do not want a casino.

The group will hold a "town hall"-type meeting at the courthouse in Carrollton at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, April 23 as a show of support for their anti-casino movement and provide information about how gambling affects a person's life as well as economic

studies of "gambling" towns.

Rev. George Smith, director of the Carroll-Montgomery County Baptist Association said this is not a religious meeting-not just a Baptist meeting. He said it is a meeting for anyone who does not feel a casino would benefit Carroll County.

"Our main objective with this meeting is to provide a show of support, letting those who want a casino in Carroll County to see that many people do not want a casino in this community," Smith said.

Smith said his organization feels the majority of the citizens

of Carroll County do not want a casino to be placed on Carroll County land recently purchased by the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MBCI).

The organization is responding to a recent meeting of the Carroll County Board of Supervisors with MBCI Chief Phillip Martin. In the March 4 meeting, Chief Martin sidestepped a direct question about future plans for the development of the Malmasion area purchased by the MBCI in July 2001.

"There have been so many people and towns effected by casinos in a negative way," said

Archie Goodwin, pastor at North Carrollton Baptist Church. "We just don't want to see that happen to our community."

The Carroll-Montgomery Baptist Association has also asked the Tupelo-based American Family Association to become involved in this matter. A representative will be on-hand at the meeting on Tuesday to give a presentation about the effects casinos have on economic development, and the effect of gambling in a person's life.

"We just want to provide the information, and show Carroll County residents the real differ-

ence casinos have made in the community," Goodwin said. "We want to encourage people to write their local officials and let them know how they feel about this issue."

During the March 4 meeting, Chief Martin did express a desire to know more about the community's response to a particular project.

At that time, Chief Martin was quoted as saying, "...I think that if and when we decide to move forward with a project here, after the (feasibility) study is completed, the people of Carroll County will tell us what they want..."

