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## Tockshish

by Dawson A. Phelps

JOHN McINTOSH

Tockshish, a name with romantic overtones, must have intrigued the ears of the men and women who traveled the Natchez Trace, 1800-1825, as it does modern travelers who read it on [a] map or roadside sign. It derives from a Chickasaw word which was variously spelled *E, tok, shish, Estokish* or, *Estokshish*. T. L. McKinney, who went to the Indian country as an inspector for the Office of Indian Affairs in the 1820s defined it as meaning the “root of a tree.”<sup>1</sup> He may have been right for there is in Choctaw, a closely related language, a word *itakshish* having the same connotation. Whatever its original meaning, the word, changed to Tockshish, became a place name—either the home of John McIntosh, or the settlement in which he lived. So far as now known, it first appeared in writing in 1805.<sup>2</sup> In 1822 it became the name of a station of the Chickasaw Mission, and still later a community.

Tockshish is one of the few places in North Mississippi, or for that matter, in the entire state, associated with British activities during

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This article was originally published in the July 1951 edition of *The Journal of Mississippi History*. Some of the language may be offensive because the article is a product of its time and place. The article is reprinted verbatim to reflect the scholarship as it was presented at the time.

<sup>1</sup> T. L. McKinney, *Memoirs, Official and Personal, with Sketches of Travel Among Northern and Southern Indians*, 2 vols., 1946, I, 158.

<sup>2</sup> Rush Nutt Diary, in Jesse D. Jennings, “Nutt’s Trip to the Chickasaw Country,” *Journal of Mississippi History*, IX, ([January] 1947), 41. Cf. also B. L. C. Wailes, Field notes, MS. Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

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DAWSON A. PHELPS, who earned his doctorate at the University of California, Berkeley, and who was recognized as an authority on the history of the Natchez Trace, served as a National Park Service historian from 1938 until his retirement from federal service in 1965. Dr. Phelps, who was an active participant in the reorganization and reactivation of the Mississippi Historical Society in 1952-1953, died on July 14, 1981.

the years 1763-1783. During the French and Indian War, John Stuart was appointed as Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Southern District, to handle all colonial and imperial relations with the tribes of the region. Within a short time, he had appointed agents to the various tribes of the Old Southwest.

John McIntosh, one such agent, is one of those shadowy figures whose name would scarcely appear, even as a footnote in local history, except for the fact that he had elected to live his obscure life on an Indian trail which became a historic road. Some time prior to 1770, Stuart had appointed him to be "Commissary for Indian Affairs for the Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations." For a time [McIntosh] lived among the Choctaws, but for some reason moved to the Chickasaw country where, there is reason to believe, he set up a plantation or farm and made it his permanent home.<sup>3</sup>

[McIntosh] was present at a conference held at Mobile, December 31, 1771 – January 6, 1772, between the Governor of West Florida and the principal chiefs and warriors of the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations. The minutes of the conference fail to reveal that he took an active part in the proceedings. Several Choctaw chiefs mentioned him during the proceedings. From their remarks we gather the impression that a commissary was a sort of public defender of the Indians. He was supposed to exclude unlicensed traders, to enforce honest weights, and see that the natives were not overcharged, or otherwise cheated.<sup>4</sup>

For a brief glimpse of the man, we are indebted to a single extant letter from him to Stuart, dated "Chickasaw Nation 3d September 1772." [McIntosh] described conditions among the Indians, the attitudes of the chiefs, and the prospects for maintaining peace among them. It shows that McIntosh returned to his post after the Mobile conference, and describes the activities of an Indian agent. The letter reveals some of the man's qualities. He obviously was a man of some education.

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<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Dunbar Rowland, "Peter Chester," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, Centenary Series, V (1925), 149. Cf. also the Purcell map of the Indian country, published in John R. Swanton, *Early History of the Creek Nation and Their Neighbors*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 73, 1922, plate 7. This map, compiled not later than 1770, shows "Commissary McIntoshes Plantation" to be located on an Indian trail, obviously the future Natchez Trace, about twenty-five miles southwest from the Chickasaw Old Fields, in approximately the same location as that shown on the first township plat, sixty-two years later.

<sup>4</sup> Rowland, "Peter Chester," 155.

His writing was characterized by good grammar, few misspellings, and clear and concise explanations of rather difficult matters. It furnishes no clue, however, as to why he should have settled among the Indians and adopted their way of life.<sup>5</sup>

The brief appearance of John McIntosh in the history of the Old Southwest was followed by a period of twenty-five years during which the name does not appear in any written record. In 1797 a British traveler, Francis Baily, noted in his journal that a Mr. McIntosh was living in the Chickasaw country.<sup>6</sup> From another source we learn that this man's full name was John McIntosh.

According to local tradition, as reported by several Mississippi writers he was the John McIntosh who had settled among the Chickasaws before 1770. However, Samuel Mitchell, the United States Indian Agent, specifically said that John McIntosh who had lived at Tockshish in 1803 was "a natural son of John McIntosh the agent for his Britannic Majesty in this Nation."<sup>7</sup> Apparently his mother was a white woman since he is never mentioned as a half breed. From the few known facts of his career, it is virtually certain that the elder McIntosh continued to live in the Indian country until his death. When this occurred we have no means of knowing.

The son continued to live in the Indian country, and became a well-known figure in the Chickasaw Nation during the years 1797-1803. That the father had provided the younger McIntosh with some education is certain. It is most unlikely that an illiterate man should become a United States postmaster.

Local tradition, however, has preserved the memory of only one John McIntosh. It has credited him with being the man who persuaded the Chickasaws to scatter from their central villages and settle on individual farms.<sup>8</sup> Whether one or the other, or both McIntoshes may be credited with having initiated such a change is a debatable matter. That the change was in process, around 1800 and

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>6</sup> Francis Baily, *Journal of a Tour in the Unsettled Parts of North America, in 1796 & 1797* (London: Baily Brothers, 1856), 370.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Mitchell to W. C. C. Claiborne, August 15, 1803, RG 2, Territorial Governors' Calendars, Series 488, Administration Papers, 1769-1817, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Warren, "Missions, Missionaries, Frontier Characters," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, VIII (1905), 585.

later, is not. Chickasaw families are known to have abandoned their historic villages prior to 1800, and to have settled, individually, or in small groups, at many places throughout their country. The original township plats, made during the 1830s of the Chickasaw lands show a widely dispersed population. One such community was centered near Tockshish which was, during the last years the Chickasaw remained in Mississippi, an incipient cultural center from which some civilized influences radiated.

### A HOUSE OF ENTERTAINMENT ON THE NATCHEZ TRACE

In 1797, twenty-five years after the elder McIntosh was last heard from, his son appeared on the stage of written history. Many things had happened in the interim. Great Britain had lost control of the Old Southwest; the United States was now solidifying its control. Settlements at Natchez and Nashville had proved their stability and were growing. Both river and overland traffic between them was increasing. Tockshish lay directly on the overland route connecting the two towns.

Under such circumstances the younger John McIntosh, whatever his own wishes may have been, found himself operating a house of entertainment providing food and shelter of a kind to an ever increasing horde of tired hungry men. Frontier travelers were not modest in requesting food and shelter, and custom required compliance.

In 1797, [Francis] Baily rode from Natchez to Nashville. Forewarned, he had carried food for the journey. He preferred sleeping in the open rather than in the rude frontier houses along the way. Consequently, he did not seek the hospitality of McIntosh, but briefly characterized the man and his abode:

We arrived there before sundown, and, kindling a fire, and fixing our encampment about a quarter of a mile from the plantation, walked down to see the possessor of it, Mr. McIntosh . . . He had early imbibed the habits of the Indians, and wandering into the country, had set himself down here. The Indians had given him as much land as he wanted, and he cultivated part of it in a loose and slovenly manner, though much better than the Indians themselves. He has got several negroes under him, whom he employed on his plantation

Because he feared an impending attack by the Creeks,

Mr. McIntosh was fortifying his plantation with a regular stockade, raised about twelve feet high, and formed of thick planks. This surrounded the house at a convenient distance so as to allow free room for the besieged within; and was constructed upon nearly the same plan as those places which are called 'stations' in the United States. We entered his habitation, which was a poor sorry place, little better than an Indian hut . . . and appeared to have everything which such a country affords in the greatest abundance . . .<sup>9</sup>

Among other travelers who saw McIntosh was the Rev. Joseph Bullen, a Presbyterian missionary to the Chickasaw, who reported:

This day we came to Mr. McIntosh's, who talked in a discouraging manner, and deems it a weakness in any man to think of making Christians of Indians . . . On being further acquainted with this man, we found him an honest, agreeable man, and useful, as he talks good Indian, in helping me to hold good talks to the Indians, who continually frequent this place and wish to know the beloved speech.<sup>10</sup>

That Tockshish, after considerable traffic between Nashville and Natchez had developed, became a recognized stopping place on the Natchez Trace is apparent from the fact that it is frequently mentioned in records left by travelers. William Stanley, who retraced Baily's steps a year later, mentioned "arriving at McIntoshes in the Chickasaw Nation."<sup>11</sup> Philip Buckner, a Virginian, reported:

Thursday [May] 28 [1801] . . . to Mackintoshes about daylight shut in, got corn for our horses; all well Friday 29<sup>th</sup> Stayed all day at Mackintoshes . . .<sup>12</sup>

Aside from the meager information provided by Baily, almost all that we know of the younger McIntosh is learned from [Samuel] Mitchell, the Chickasaw Agent.

The 4<sup>th</sup> instant William Mcintosh [sic] arrived here with a letter

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<sup>9</sup> Baily, *Journal*, 370-372.

<sup>10</sup> "Extracts from the Journal of the Rev. Mr. Bullen, missionary to the Chickasaw Indians from the New York Missionary Society," *New York Missionary Magazine and Repository of Religious Intelligence*, I (1800), 267.

<sup>11</sup> "Diary of William Stanley 1790-1810," Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio, *Quarterly Publications*, XIV (1932), 31.

<sup>12</sup> William Buckner McGroarty, ed., "Diary of Captain Phillip Buckner," *William and Mary Quarterly*, VI (July 1926), 192.

from Col. Hawkins a copy of which I inclose you, to claim the property of John McIntosh of this nation lately deceased—I appointed the 6<sup>th</sup> to meet at Mrs. McIntoshes, after stating the business to the widow. She named to me that most of the property was her own prior to the departure of Mr. McIntosh and that the residence was given her by Mr. McIntosh before he left the Nation, in case he should not live to return, he was going to the warm Springs west of the Mississippi . . .<sup>13</sup>

The widow, the second wife of McIntosh, was the mother of James Colbert.<sup>14</sup> James was a brother or half-brother of three influential Chickasaw chiefs, all of whom were closely associated with the Natchez Trace. They were: George, who operated a ferry where the Trace crossed the Tennessee River; William, who as a partner of John Gordon operated a ferry at Duck River; and Levi, the proprietor of Buzzards Roost Stand.

Because of the facts stated to the agent, supported by the affidavits of two white men, James Allen and Thomas Love, and because he, McIntosh, was a natural son in whose estate other relatives had no legal right, the property passed to the widow. She, it may be assumed thenceforth operated the stand, or, and this is more likely, turned it over to her son. That this is what happened is indicated by the fact that from 1812 to 1822 a place was listed as James Colberts, nine miles north of the Chickasaw Agency, in the roster of Natchez Trace stations published in the *Louisiana-Mississippi Almanac*.

Dr. Rush Nutt, traveling the Trace in 1805, does not mention stopping at Tockshish, but he does add a brief description of the place and of the community.

. . . E,tock,shish, the residence of Mr. McIntosh a high and beautiful situation. fine springs, timber, blackjack, hickory, undergrowth shoemake & hickory, near Mrs. McIntosh's are six well improved farms, made by white Men & Natives who are in the habit of farming after the mode of whites; & vend surplus to travellers.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Mitchell to Claiborne, as cited in note 7. There is a strong possibility that the William McIntosh mentioned in the letter was the Creek chief who was an important figure in the early history of Alabama and became a brigadier-general in the United States Army. Cf. article entitled, "William McIntosh" in *Dictionary of American Biography*.

<sup>14</sup> Letter of the Rev. T. C. Stuart, September 7, 1861, in E. T. Winston, "*Father Stuart and the Monroe Mission*" (Meridian, MS: Tell Farmer, Printer and Binder, 1927), 86.

<sup>15</sup> Jennings, "Nutt's Trip," 41.

Another occasion on which Tockshish appeared in the records of the Natchez Trace as a stand was in 1807. Harman Blennerhassett, writing to his wife from “Tockshish, in the Chickasaw Nation (310 miles from Natchez),” remarked, “I rest here today under the most severe embarrassments [sic] I have suffered since I left you . . .”<sup>16</sup>

William Richardson, en route from Nashville to New Orleans in 1815, was not too favorably impressed with his treatment at Tockshish. This may have been due to the presence on the Trace at that time of the long column of Jackson’s army, victors of the Battle of New Orleans, returning home.

I kept company with the mail all day and arrived at 2 at J. Colberts, who after much persuasion admitted us to his home, not, however until we had tried every other in the village. We here met with the same difficulty of getting corn for our horses. As for ourselves, we fared equally bad but could bear as our little stock had not quite exhausted.<sup>17</sup>

There is reason to suppose that Tockshish continued to operate until 1822 when through traffic between Nashville and Natchez abandoned the Natchez Trace and henceforth passing through Florence, Alabama, followed the Military Road to Columbus, Mississippi, and the Robinson Road to Jackson.

## McINTOSHVILLE

Two years after the organization of Mississippi Territory in 1798, that is in 1800, the Congress of the United States designated the Indian trail running from Natchez to Nashville as a post route. The Postmaster General, anticipating this action, had, even before the enactment of the law, contracted to have the mail carried regularly for a period of one year.<sup>18</sup> During that year he doubtless assembled data concerning the necessary facilities to ensure prompt carriage of the mails through 500 miles of wilderness.

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<sup>16</sup> Blennerhassett to his wife, June 14, 1807, William H. Safford, *The Blennerhassett Papers: embodying the private journal of Harman Blennerhassett . . .* (Cincinnati, OH: More, Wilstach, Keys and Co., 1861), 232.

<sup>17</sup> [William] Bell Wait, foreword, *Travel Diary of William Richardson from Boston to New Orleans by Land, 1815* (New York: Valve Pilot Corporation, 1938), 14.

<sup>18</sup> Postmaster General to Abijah Hunt, November 20, 1799, Letterbooks of the Postmaster, MSS., National Archives. All references to letters from Postmaster General are from this collection.



I take the liberty to suggest that the establishment [sic] of a Block house near Hoalky Creek which is about halfway between Nashville and Natchez would be a great accomodation [sic] also to the public, as the mail carrier might keep spare horses there & travellers might furnish themselves with refreshments if the Officer was allowed to make provisions for that purpose at his own expense and profit.<sup>19</sup>

The Postmaster General probably foresaw War Department refusal to build blockhouses, for the same day he sketched another plan for the operation of the route. In it Tockshish, or as he termed it McIntosh's, was the most important intermediate point between Nashville and Natchez. He proposed the following schedule:

Leave Nashville every other Sunday at 9 A.M.	
Arrive McIntosh's the next Friday by 8 P.M.	
	230 miles
Leave McIntosh's the next Sunday by 5 A.M.	
Arrive at Natchez the next Saturday by 2 P.M.	
	270
	500

Returning

Leave Natchez the next day Sunday by 5 A.M.  
 Arrive at McIntosh's the next Sunday by 8 P.M.  
 Leave McIntosh's the next Monday by 5 A.M.  
 Arrive at Nashville the next Saturday by 5 P.M.

It will be necessary to employ two Riders one to start from Nashville & the other from Natchez on the same day, they ought to meet at Hoolky Creek about sixteen miles to the southward of McIntosh's—it will require six horses to do the business well, one should be stationed at Nashville, one at Natchez, two at McIntoshes . . . It is supposed that horses may be faithfully kept a [sic] McIntoshes but not a [sic] Hoolky Creek, it would therefore be necessary that the rider from Nashville should lead the fresh one from McIntosh's to Hoolky and bring back the fatigued one from Hoolkey to McIntosh's ....<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Postmaster General to Secretary of War, March 12, 1801.

<sup>20</sup> Postmaster General to Matthew Lyon, March 12, 1801.

That the postal authorities should have selected Tockshish as the relay station, necessitating the clumsy arrangement outlined by the Postmaster General, suggests the esteem in which McIntosh was held by those with whom he had come in contact. Further proof of this came a few months later when on June 30, 1801, he was appointed postmaster to operate a post office established the same day in the Chickasaw Nation.<sup>21</sup> This was the second post office to be located in Mississippi, the first having been established at Natchez January 21, 1800. He continued to serve as postmaster until his death in 1803. A neighbor, James Allen, then assumed the duties of the office and held the place for more than a year.<sup>22</sup>

Even though McIntosh had ceased to be postmaster, his place continued to be a relay station as late as April 1804.<sup>23</sup> In 1808 the name of the post office had become McIntoshville, and it still was a relay station.<sup>24</sup> It continued as a post office until the route of the Natchez-Nashville mail was changed in 1822 from the old Natchez Trace to pass through Florence, Alabama and Columbus, Mississippi. The next year, fortnightly mail service was established from Columbus to Monroe Mission station,<sup>25</sup> two miles south of Tockshish.

McIntoshville appeared on maps of Mississippi during the 1830s, but fell into disuse after the removal of the Chickasaw and the opening up of the region to settlement.<sup>26</sup> Tockshish never became an officially recognized place name, but continued in local use.<sup>27</sup> When the Rev. T. C. Stuart established the Chickasaw Mission in 1821 he visited Tockshish. In 1825, that name was given to one of the stations of the Mission. After the removal of the Chickasaws the name as applied to the community continued in use. Sometime during the 1830s or 1840s, the settlers organized and established Tockish Baptist Church which is still in existence.

The location of Tockshish was in the NE¼, S 16, T 11 N, R 3 E,

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<sup>21</sup> Postmaster General to John McIntosh, June 30, 1801.

<sup>22</sup> Postmaster General to James Allen, July 8, [1803].

<sup>23</sup> Postmaster General to the Comptroller of the Treasury, April 7, [1804].

<sup>24</sup> Postmaster General to Henry Toulmin, March 11, 1808.

<sup>25</sup> Postmaster General to J. P. Neale, February 11, 1822.

<sup>26</sup> Postmaster General to Christopher Rankin, January 7, 1823.

<sup>27</sup> Three of the many maps of Mississippi that show the location of McIntoshville are: John Dutton, 1805; Anthony Finley, 1830; and M. S. Tanner, 1833. The name does not appear on maps published after the late 1830s or after the settlement of the former Chickasaw lands was well under way.

Chickasaw Cession, as shown on the original plat of the township surveyed in the fall of 1832. It is on the old Natchez Trace, near a travelled road, about two miles east from Highway 15. The traditional site of the buildings is occupied by the various structures of a modern farm.