

## MALMAISON TODAY

By George H. Shirk

Greenwood, Mississippi, holds a place of special importance in the history of Oklahoma. There was located the magnificent and renowned home of Chief Greenwood LeFlore of the Choctaws. Although he himself did not migrate to Oklahoma, his name and tradition loom high in this State.

Greenwood LeFlore was born in the year 1800 at LeFleur's Bluff, then a settlement of importance located near present Jackson, Mississippi. His parents were Louis LeFlore, of French Canadian extraction who had risen to a position of eminence within the community, and Rebecca Cravat, the daughter of a prominent Choctaw-French family. They named their child Greenwood after a sea captain and long-time friend of Louis LeFlore.

When young Greenwood was at the age of twelve, Major Donley, the contractor for the mail route along the Natchez Trace, took an interest in his progress and persuaded his parents to allow Donley to take the boy to Nashville for his education. He completed his formal education at the age of nineteen, and was soon taking an active part in Choctaw tribal affairs. He was selected Chief of the Northwest District in 1826.<sup>1</sup> On March 16, 1830, he was elected to the newly created post of Chief of the entire<sup>2</sup> Nation.

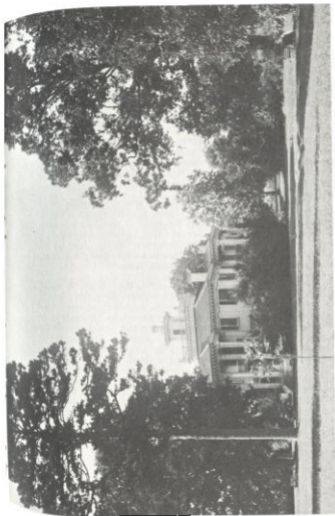
Greenwood LeFlore was married three times. His first wife was Rosa Donley, the daughter of his childhood benefactor. His second wife was Elizabeth Coody, daughter of the noted Cherokee, William Shorey Coody.<sup>3</sup> Priscilla Donley, a sister of Rosa, was the third wife.

In 1835, LeFlore built a frame dwelling on land grants he had secured near Williams Landing, a settlement on the Yazoo River in Mississippi. The settlement, named for John Williams, had come into early prominence following the treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek (1830) as a shipping point for the expanding cotton industry.

<sup>1</sup> Grant Foreman, *Indians and Pioneers* (Norman, 1936), p. 263.

<sup>2</sup> Grant Foreman, *Indian Removal* (Norman, 1932), p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Emmet Starr, *History of the Cherokee Indians* (Oklahoma City, 1921), p. 410, (genealogical section of the Ross Family). Elizabeth Coody (or Coodey) was the niece of Chief John Ross of the Cherokee Nation.—Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "The Coodey Family of the Indian Territory," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXV, No. 4 Winter, 1947-48, pp. 323-341.



(Photo. Oklahoma Historical Society Museum)

Charles Chief Greenwood LeFlore's Mansion, "Museum"  
erected (1854) in Carroll County, Mississippi

Due to a disagreement with some of the shippers at Williams Landing resulting in the damage of some of his cotton through exposure to the weather, Greenwood LeFlore decided to establish his own landing facilities three miles up the Yazoo River from Williams Landing. There he established Point LeFlore, and constructed a cinder roadway from his rapidly growing estates to the landing docks. Ambitious for the success of Point LeFlore, the Chief established at this place, a church, school, hotel, a brickyard and saw mill. He placed the entire enterprise under the supervision of Ely Waites, his brother-in-law.

Point LeFlore, probably due to disastrous overflows of the Yazoo, was not to survive; and now all that remains to tell of its past importance is a historical marker. In an irony of fate, Williams Landing continued to grow and eventually absorbed the remaining activity of Point LeFlore. As though to recompense, however, the expanding Williams Landing, upon incorporation, adopted the name of Greenwood.

The mansion was built in 1854 in accordance with plans prepared for Chief LeFlore by James E. Harris, an Eastern architect whose work had caught the fancy of the Indian leader. Harris later became a son-in-law of Chief LeFlore. LeFlore had always been an admirer of the Bonaparte family, and so he selected the name of one of Josephine Bonaparte's homes, "Malmaison," as the name for his own home.\*

Upon inquiry at Greenwood in 1962, the County Seat of LeFlore County, Mississippi, it was learned that the site of Malmaison is in fact in Carroll County, the adjoining county to the east, and that the road from Greenwood to Malmaison is now somewhat circuitous. Instructions received from the LeFlore County Sheriff, George Smith, proved adequate. Driving north from Greenwood on State Highway No. 7 for approximately 3½ miles a large fill and bridge over Big Sand Creek is reached; a few hundred feet farther north is an unimproved road to the right. On this road after several miles, tall TV or radio towers are passed; and after the third tower is reached, approximately 6½ miles from the turnoff from State Highway 7, an even less improved road is found making a sharp, almost hairpin, turn to the right. This was at one time the entrance road to Mal-

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\* Mrs. Leo J. Langley, "Malmaison, Palace in a Wilderness, Home of General Greenwood LeFlore," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. V, No. 4 (December, 1927), pp. 381-90. (It is worthy of note in this Centennial Commemoration period of the Civil War that Chief Greenwood LeFlore though a prominent citizen of Mississippi of the "Deep South" remained loyal to the Union throughout the War. During his last illness, it is said that he asked his grandchildren to hold the United States flag over him that he might die under the folds of the Stars and Stripes.—*ibid.*, p. 390.)

maison. After a drive of a mile or so, two large brick columns may be seen. These were the original entrance columns to the grounds and served as the main gate to Malmaison and its spacious lawn until the destruction of the home.

Malmaison was destroyed by fire on the evening of March 31, 1942. At that time, the premises yet remained in the LeFlore family and Malmaison was then occupied by Mrs. F. R. Montgomery and Miss Florency Ray, both granddaughters of Greenwood LeFlore. A defective flue was believed responsible and within hours the structure was a total loss. Today the surrounding brush and undergrowth have again reclaimed everything and only a few piles of brick and rubble remain.

The property is now owned by Claude Shook of Charleston, Mississippi. Malmaison was located on a commanding site on the north side of Big Sand Creek with at least a half mile of fertile bottom land stretching for some distance between the home and the stream. The premises are now occupied by Booker Green (Route 2, Box 100, Carrollton, Mississippi), who lives in a nearby cottage. He is extremely proud of his two daughters now serving in the Peace Corps; and so shares his visitors' time while telling of the past history of the place with the accomplishments of his daughters.

The old LeFlore house was a fine example of modified colonial architecture. The main part of the building formed a square, with halls running both north-south and east-west making a maltese cross. The north-south hall measured 50 x 20 feet while the cross hall was 65 x 14 feet in size. Each had double doors 10 feet in height, 6 feet wide, and over 2 inches thick, and opened onto four separate porticos. On the northwest side of the central house was an ell extension, containing a dining room 50 feet in length. The second floor plan was the same as the floor below, opening on four balconies surrounded by wrought iron balustrades. The ceilings of the balconies were finished with the same plastering as the interior.

There were 15 rooms in the house. Eleven of them contained mantles of black Italian marble. The inside doors from each room measured 10 feet in height.

For entertaining, the main dining room on the first floor was also used for dancing, while refreshments were served in other rooms. The kitchen was outside, in the style of the time, connected with the house by a narrow covered gallery 50 feet in length. Separate buildings included two carriage houses and a smoke house. The servants quarters were some distance to the north, with the stable still farther away.

The furniture was of gold leaf covering French hickory. The style was of the Louis XIV period, with upholstery of



**View of Dining Room in Chief Greenwood LeFlore's Mansion.**



**View of Living Room in Chief Greenwood LeFlore's Mansion.**

crimson silk brocade damask. The window cornices were of gold leaf corresponding with the style of the furniture, with draperies all of heavy silk damask in the same design as the upholstery. Over the marble mantle in the parlor was a large mirror measuring over 6 x 5 feet, with a clock and candelabra of brass and ebony. The clock depicted a crusader on horseback with spear uplifted to attack. The candelabra depicted soldiers supporting clusters of fleur-de-lis, with each holding nine candles.

After the fire, the home was described in the *Greenville Press*:

Most of the furnishings were brought from France. The silver, glass and china, imperial in its significance, came in sets of twelve dozen pieces. The furniture was made by special order. An example was the marvelous drawing room set of 30 pieces of solid mahogany, finished in genuine gold and upholstered in priceless silk damask. It is said that the Duchess of Orleans tried to purchase the set before it was shipped to America and failing, ordered a duplicate for herself. Then there were beautiful mirrors, tables, large four poster beds of rosewood with silk and satin canopies and four tapestry curtains depicting the four places of Napoleon and Josephine--Versailles, Malmaison, St. Cloud, and Fontainebleu. The furnishings were planned for the entertainment of 300 guests at a time.

Nearby the site of Malmaison is the family burial plot. Now overgrown and difficult to locate, the headstone of one of the great Chiefs of the Choctaws, obscure now among the undergrowth, in its way tells of greater days for his tribe and finer days for the spot. The headstone reads:

Greenwood LeFlore  
Born June 3rd, 1800  
Died August 21st, 1865  
The last Chief of the Choctaws  
East of the Mississippi

Time has obliterated even the site of Malmaison, but the tradition of this beautiful old residence lives securely in the history of the Choctaw Nation of Indians.



Clud Crawford Leffler's Family Coach with some of his (front, backside, inside) family members (approximately 1880).