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**SUBJECT: Historical story of M. O. Ghormley**

**Judge Michial O. Ghormley  
Tahlequah, Peggs Star Route**

I went out to interview Judge M. O. Ghormley. He just liked four-months being 90-years old, and he got dinner for me and his hired man without any help. He can read without the use of glasses.

Judge Ghormley's home is a little northeast of the site of the old Cherokee Agency. Is remindful of the fact that there once lived the father of the late former United States Senator, M. C. Butler of North Carolina, who as United States agent, was in charge of matters affecting the Cherokees. That was during the late forties, and early fifties of the last century. Here Senator Butler, as he mentioned in an address in Tahlequah, forty-two years later, spent several of the happiest years of his lifetime.

Augustus Butler, a brother, who succeeded his father as agent, also lived here several years at the Agency, which was not far distant from the home of the Rev. Edward Gunter, prominent in official life of the Indian Nation, who conducted a detachment of imigrant Cherokees to the west in the removal of 1838, and who, as one of the first Cherokees to become a minister, and missionary of the Methodist denomination, rode a circuit some hundreds of miles in extent in pioneer years of the new nation in Indian Territory.

During his youthful days, Judge Ghormley, so he has been addressed for more than two decades, lived at the home of his parents near the western boundary line of the state of Arkansas. He attended the Oak Grove public school of the Cherokee Nation for several years, but desiring instruction in higher branches of learning, went to Cave Hill, Washington County, Arkansas, where he studied in the historical Cave Hill College, an institution founded a few years after the admission of Arkansas to statehood in 1836, and long in operation. The Rev. Samuel Newton, founder of the forks of the Illinois river Mission among the Cherokees in 1830, and who, somewhere near that period, bestowed the name Park Hill, notable place in Cherokee county, is reputed to have been one of those who aided in establishing Cave Hill College, an institution in which were, from time to time, enrolled students from the Indian Nation.

When the Civil war involved the Cherokee nation in 1866, Michael O. Ghormely was too young to enlist for military service, but

with the coming of 1864, then being 17 years of age, he was successful in enlisting in a company of the confederate Indian brigade, composed of Cherokees, Chostaws, Chickasaws, Creeks and Seminoles. Colonel Stand Watie, who had held that rank from nearly the beginning of the war, was in this year, 1864, promoted to Brigadier General, and continued as commander of the brigade. Ghormley was often employed as a Courier, riding over extensive portions of country south of the Arkansas river, being with other similar couriers on the alert for information, and for movements of the federal forces. When intelligence of importance was to be quickly transmitted to headquarters, a courier rode at high speed to the spot where another messenger awaited who took the dispatches and dashed away to the next waiting courier, and thus long distances were covered in relatively brief periods.

Contrary to the assertions of many who have described the Cherokee confederate brigadier general as a man six-feet in height, large, and powerful, Judge Ghormley relates that he was several inches less than six-feet tall, weighed probably 160 pounds, compactly and strongly built, and though 58 years of age in 1864, was active and strong, and a notable horseman.

In connection with the surrender of the confederate Indian brigade Judge Ghormley recalls that while Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered April 9, 1865, the Indian brigade did not surrender until June 23, 1865. Brigadier General Watie was one of several native Americans who have held that rank. Among those having such distinction were Tecumseh and Red Jacket, who held the rank as allies of the British, while Ely Stephen Parker, a Seneca Indian, was a brigadier general in the Union Army. Today Judge Ghormley is the only living veteran of the confederate Indian brigade in Cherokee county. A few years ago, comparatively, there were several living in Tahlequah in rural districts, and he is one of a few living in what was once the Cherokee Nation. It is Judge Ghormley's belief that he is the youngest Cherokee Veteran living and possibly the youngest of any of the surviving veterans in what ever states they may now reside.

A memorable incident of the late sixties at a period when food, and clothing were exceedingly scarce, was the capture of a steam ferryboat on the Arkansas river. The boat was loaded at Fort Smith which was then occupied by the federals. Little or no precaution was taken. Spies hurried away to the headquarters of the confederate brigade near Northfork on the Canadian river. General Watie, with the available men of two regiments, mounted and armed, and with two pieces of heavy artillery, proceeded rapidly to a point on a high bluff which overlooked the broad Arkansas. Forest trees and undergrowth were thick upon the height then known as Pheasant Bluff, the small town which has grown up is now called Tamaha. Hiding in the thickets, the men of the two regiments waited in silence. After some time, the steam ferryboat hove in sight, steaming steadily up stream. When it reached a place where it presented its full side to the men on the bluff, fire was opened. The artillery roared, the fire of small arms was rapid. A steam pipe was struck and broken, and the noise of escaping steam was terrific. The boat was headed for the opposite bank and struck a sandbar, and grounded. There were not more than twenty men on board as guards, and they escaped to the north bank. The ferryboat with its contents was

towed to the opposite bank, and the captors descended upon it like a flock of pigeons carrying the food products, merchandise, and settlers goods bound for Fort Gibson, to a sandy beach. But though all of the men saved something for themselves, much was to be lost. The river began to rise rapidly. Some of the men who had escaped from the boat when it grounded, wandered into the camp of Col. John Ritchie of the second Cherokee federal regiment at Mackey's salt works on the Illinois river. Forthwith Colonel Ritchie went two companies of men hot-footing it towards Pheasant Bluff. They reached the north bank early in the morning. With long-ranged rifles, fire was opened up on the confederates assembled upon the beach and soon the boxes and bales of goods were abandoned. The river rose higher and higher and in a few hours the stream was filled with floating articles from the boat, which also floated away, and sank within sight of the bluff.

Completing his army service, Judge Ghormley returned to his home; engaging for awhile in mercantile pursuits, and in farming. Eventually he removed to what was then Tahlequah district. For sometime in the days of the Indian Nation he was a member of a law firm in Tahlequah, also, he engaged in agricultural pursuits, and later gave much attention to fruit culture., his apple orchard being one of the most productive in this section. Upon the admission of Oklahoma to statehood, he was elected Justice of the Peace in and for Tahlequah and adjacent territory, holding the position several terms enforcing the law impartially. Decisions made by him, when appealed to higher courts as they were in several instances, were invariably upheld. Because of his successful functioning as Tahlequah's first Justice of the Peace, he is generally spoken of or addressed as Judge Ghormley.

Concerning notables of the old Cherokee nation, Judge Ghormley has known all of the principal chiefs from John Ross the first elected chief after the establishment of the Cherokee nation in Indian Territory to and including William C. Rogers, the last elected Principal Chief, besides many other once widely-known officials. And, besides these Cherokee notables, he has known a number of the astute and able white men once identified with the Cherokees in various capacities, among them the noted Baptist Missionaries, Even and John B. Jones, Dr. William L. G. Miller, to some extent a man of my story, Private Secretary to a principal Chief: M. Dolgoranky, member of a famous Russian family, who exiled to Siberia, escaped and came to America, and reaching Tahlequah, instructed pupils seeking proficiency as pianist, besides others, some of varied and striking antecedents and attributes. Judge Ghormley is now living quietly in the appropriately named Grandview locality. He is interested in the affairs of the day, and more active and alert than many men years younger than himself.

Judge Ghormley was acquainted with the James boys, Jesse and Frank James. They had a first cousin by the name of Charley James. When the M.K. & T. RR was being built in 1871, I run a livery stable in Tahlequah, Indian territory, I would go over to Gibson station and cut hay and put it up for my teams. I got acquainted with Charley James, he was a cow man. In 1872 I went to Dennison, Texas, and put in a saloon. Later I moved down there to Caddo, Oklahoma, and Charley James had moved there also. Frank and Jesse James would come and visit Charley, and spend the winter with him. One day some men were having a shooting scrap, Frank and Jesse James

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shot into the gang, killing some of the men. One man said that who ever done the shooting, ought to be killed, so Jesse James jumped on this man and beat him up. Later the officers came up from Ft. Smith, Arkansas, and arrested the James' boys, and took them to Ft. Smith jail and set their bond at \$10,000. I went to Ft. Smith to help them get bond. I would go out on the street, and get the bums on the street, take them in a saloon and get them to feeling rich, I would take them down and they would swear that they had land and lots of cattle. I soon raised enough for the bond. When I came out of the building with the bond fixed up, I met up with Frank and Jesse James already out on bond. I asked them how that happened, and they said a friend come down from Missouri and made their bond.

Judge Ghormley has a picture of his mother taken 75-years ago. She has a home-made dress on that he helped her weave the cloth. She dyed the cloth and made it herself.

Frank J. Still  
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Michial O. Ghormley was born June 4, 1847, Brunt, North Carolina. Parents were W. C. (Elizabeth) (Taylor) Ghormley, Cherokee Indians, came to Oklahoma December 25, 1850, from N. Carolina. They came overland in a wagon, crossing the Mississippi river in an flat boat - no steam. The father taught school, and lived on own farm. Was a farmer.

Michial O. Ghormley was the first Justice of the Peace of Tahlequah after statehood. He fought in the Civil war under Stand Watie - standing guard over his tent.

For eight days I never saw a bite of bread. Aunt Martha Alberty gave us some pumpkin bread - that was the first bread we had for eight days.

On our way to Bogy, we run across a bunch of cattle, and killed a lot. About the time we had skinned the cattle, the new recruits came up, and they were nearly starved. We gave them the balance of the meat. They would take their knives and cut the raw meat and eat it. The Captain tried to get them to cook it, but they would not wait. The new recruit's horses would give out and they would just leave them and walk on to Bogy. We camped at Bogy. A man came up to the camp with some pones of corabread. I gave \$10.00 for one pone of cornbread. I guess that I am the only confederate soldier in Cherokee county that is drawing a pension.

On our trip to Bogy we camped on a high hill. Next morning some of our horses were missing. Seebolt and Bigby went to hunt the horses and the Pin Indians run them down and killed them. I helped carry the mail from Bogy to Honey Springs. We had to carry the mail horseback, and had to go in a run. After the captain let us go home to spend the winter, the next spring, I started back to my Company one of the soldiers let his gun go off and shot my mare. She fell and I got her up and went and stayed 17 days, in a Choctaw camp. The seventeenth day, I started back to camp and when I arrived they were all gone home. Peas was made and I started back home, and I swam Red river and the river was bank full, but I made it. I like four-months being ninety years old. I signed this without glasses. I can read without glasses.

Signed: M. O. Ghormley  
Tahlequah, Star Route