

Ultima Thule Ark
March 18th 1867

Hon. Commissioner
Indian Affairs
Washington, D.C.

Sir:

I deem it a duty that I owe myself and family as well as to others similarly situated to address you this letter.

I was formerly a slave of William R. Harris, who married a sister of Col Peter P. Pitchlynn. I relate this much of my personal history that you may know whom I am and to what extent you may rely upon my statements. On the first of Jan'y 1866 we were told that we were free to act for ourselves - turned loose without clothing, provisions, farming utensils, stock of any kind or a dollar in money to commence with, we could do no better than to make contracts for the year with our former masters. We did so, and worked for one half the crop.

With defective seed and a very unfavorable farming season we almost made an entire failure in crops.

The first of Jan'y 1867 found us quite as destitute as we were in Jan'y 1866.

During 1866 a Treaty was ratified by the Senate of the U.S. under which certain rights and privileges were granted to persons of African descent, provided they complied on their part with the terms of said Treaty - to wit: They were to be residents of the Choctaw Nation at the time of the Fort Smith Treaty and were to remain in said Nation until the Choctaw Council decided whether they should be made citizens or not; and if the said Council refused to act in the matter within the time prescribed by the Treaty, we were then to be removed within ninety days from the expiration of the time by the U.S. and unless these terms were complied with we would forfeit our rights to the One hundred dollars per capita, this is my understanding of the Treaty - consequently we were compelled to remain another crop season and again we entered into contracts with our former employer.

We commenced farming operations early this season hoping thereby to make amends for our failure of last year and were progressing finely when about two weeks since I received a letter from Mr John Howell a nephew of Col Peter P. Pitchlynn threatening to kill me if I did not leave the Nation immediately - I reported in person with the letter to St Willis Judson's Agent at Parachitta Ark - St Willis ordered Mr Howell to report forthwith to him at Parachitta - Mr Howell sets up the plea that St Willis has no jurisdiction over the case,

In the mean time I am a fugitive from home and I am afraid to return. I have left the Nation, not of my own free will and accord for I do not wish to forfeit my rights under the Treaty; and I furthermore in consequence of being driven off and a cripple with a large family dependent upon my exertions for a living, demand and claim from the Choctaw Nation damages for the treatment I have received and I desire you or some one authorized to look after our interests and welfare to instruct me how to proceed with my suit or as to secure from the Choctaw Nation damages commensurate with my wants and ill-treatment.

I shall keep a copy of this letter and will wait a reasonable length of time for an answer and should no reply be returned I will forward a copy to some suitable member of Congress - but I sincerely hope that you will answer at your earliest possible convenience

Very Respectfully
Yr. Obedt. Srv

Nelson Harris
Freedman
Choctaw Nation