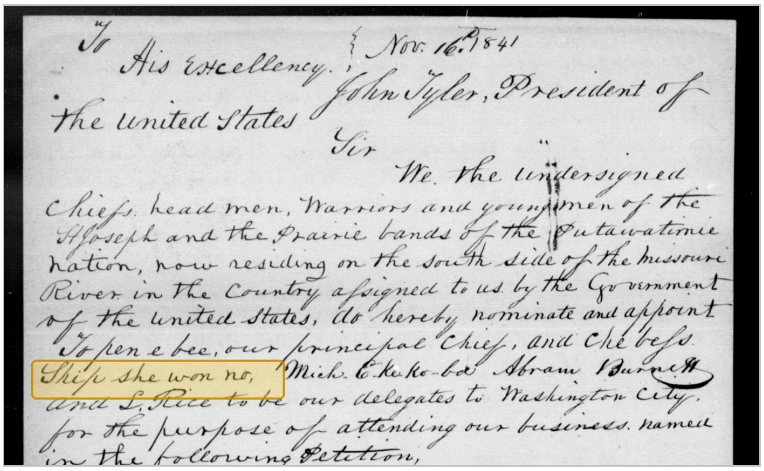
Alive in 1841?

The town of Shipshewana, Indiana, is named for a Potawatomi chief. A plaque put up by the lake in 1931 says he was removed to Kansas in 1838, came home a year later and died by the lake in 1841. In the National Archives there is a petition signed in Kansas in November 1841, and a letter written in Washington that December. Read them, and decide what they tell you.

DOCUMENT A · THE PETITION, 16 NOVEMBER 1841: THE OPENING



To His Excellency, John Tyler, President of the United States

Nov. 16th 1841

Sir

We the undersigned Chiefs, head men, Warriors and young men of the St Joseph and the Prairie bands of the Putawatimie nation, now residing on the south side of the Missouri River in the Country assigned to us by the Government of the United States, do hereby nominate and appoint To pen e bee, our principal Chief, and Che bess. Ship she won no, Mich. E ke ko-ba Abram Burnett and L. Rice to be our delegates to Washington City, for the purpose of attending our business, named in the following Petition,

Highlight added by Project Scroll.

TRANSCRIPTION, SPELLING AS WRITTEN

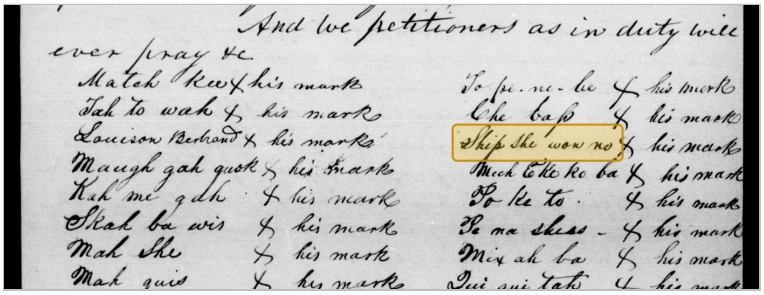
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DOCUMENT B · WHAT THE PETITION ASKS FOR (TRANSCRIPTION)

"Whereas we the St Joseph and the Prairie Putawatimies have now resided in this country four years … We therefore, petition and pray, that the Government of the United States do send us a portion of that one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, for the purpose of building horse or ox Mills in our own Country, to open farms and to buy some live stock … they need it now; for their help and encouragements in their new homes. … the Osages and Kansas have repeatedly stolen our horses … in 1838 & 39, there were portions of their annuities retained by the Government, without their Knowledge …"

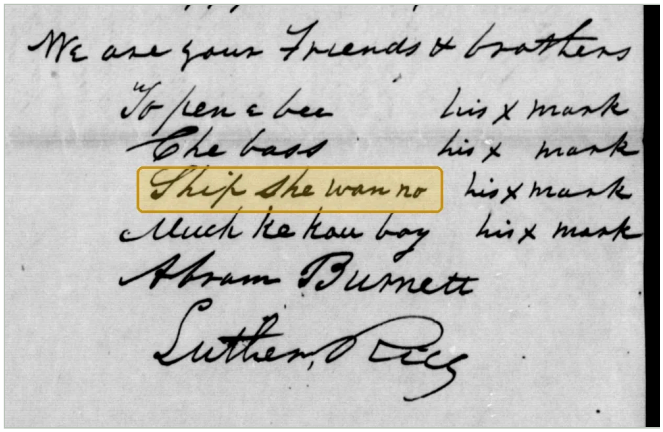
DOCUMENT C · THE SIGNERS, AND THE LETTER FROM WASHINGTON, 15 DECEMBER 1841



And we petitioners as in duty bound ever pray &c

Match Kew his mark — To pe. ne- be his mark
Tah to wah his mark — Che bass his mark
Louison Bebrand his marks — Ship She won no his mark
Maugh gah quok his mark — Much E ke ko ba his mark
Kah me gah his mark — Po ke to his mark
Shah ba wis his mark — Pe na shess his mark
Mah She his mark — Mix ah ba his mark
Mah quis his mark — Qui qui tabi his mark

The marks under the petition. Highlight added.



We are your Friends & brothers

To pen e bee his x mark
Che bass his x mark
Ship She won no his x mark
Much ke kau bay his x mark
Abram Burnett
Luther S Rice

The foot of the delegates' letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Washington, 15 December 1841. Highlight added.

Sources: National Archives, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs (microfilm M234), roll 642, Osage River Agency, images 515–521; National Archives Catalog NAID 164251872. Public domain. Transcribed by Project Scroll from the page images.

WORDS TO KNOW

Petition: a formal written request to someone in power, signed by the people making it.

Delegate: a person chosen to speak and act for a group.

Annuity: a yearly payment; here, money the United States promised the Potawatomi in treaties in return for their lands.

Sub-agent: a government official who dealt with a tribe for the Office of Indian Affairs.

“His mark”: a signer who did not write English made an X, and the clerk wrote his name and “his mark” beside it.

SOURCE IT

1. Who put these words on paper? Who signed them? Who certified that the signing was fair?
2. The name is written “Ship she won no” in November and “Ship she wan no” in December. Why might the spelling change from one document to the next?

READ CLOSELY

3. List three things the bands asked the government for.
4. The petition says the bands had lived in the West “four years.” About what year did they arrive?
5. What does “they need it now” tell you about life in their “new homes”?

COMPARE

6. The 1931 plaque says the chief died by the lake in 1841. What do Documents A and C say about a chief of that name in November and December 1841?
7. Are we sure the man in these documents is the chief of the plaque? What evidence would you need to be sure?

THINK ABOUT IT

8. The people who made the 1931 plaque wrote that “little if anything is of record” about the chief. Why might a town tell a story the records do not support?
9. These delegates traveled to Washington to speak for their people. What does that tell you about them?

FOR THE TEACHER

Answers in brief. (1) A clerk wrote the petition; the chiefs and men made their marks; the sub-agent Anthony L. Davis certified it was signed “by unanimous consent.” (2) Different clerks wrote the name as they heard it; there was no fixed English spelling. (3) Money from the 1833 Treaty of Chicago for horse or ox mills, farms and livestock; protection from horse thieves; the return of annuity money kept back in 1838 and 1839. (4) About 1837. (6) A chief named Ship she won no was alive and signing papers in Kansas and Washington. (7) No: the name and the band (the St. Joseph Potawatomi) match, but no record yet proves the 1841 delegate is the chief of 1828 or of the plaque. Good answers ask for a record that links them.

Speaking with respect. The Potawatomi are not a people of the past. Potawatomi nations today govern their own lands in Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, Kansas and Oklahoma, and First Nations in Ontario. Use present tense for the nations, and the names the documents use for individuals.

The whole story, the page images and every source
projectscroll.com/news/who-was-shipshewana

From “The Shipshewana Puzzle: One Name, at Least Five People,” Part 1 of a series on Shipshewana, Indiana, by Michael Urbanski, Project Scroll (projectscroll.com).
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