



# Mingo: Southeast Missouri's Ancient Swamp and the Countryside Surrounding It

*Cletis R. Ellinghouse*

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**Mingo: Southeast Missouri's Ancient Swamp and the Countryside Surrounding It** Cletis R. Ellinghouse Tribesmen regarded Mingo Swamp as a rare wildlife haven and made it a favored hunting ground long before white settlers discovered it, but in even earlier times, the storied Mississippi River passed through it moving to Arkansas. The soggy countryside around it made a good part of the neighborhood virtually inaccessible and therefore sparsely settled at the time of the Civil War; but Mingo, nevertheless, became one of Missouri's more hotly contested battlegrounds. Guerrillas fighting for the Lost Cause made its cypress and water tupelo forests their hideout, and it is identified to this day with one of the state's bloodiest encounters, the Battle of Mingo Swamp. The treacherous swamp's abundance of natural resources first attracted hardy backwoodsmen, but the entire countryside remained commercially undeveloped until arrival of the railroad and the founding in 1883 of Pucksekaw, now Puxico, which quickly became the base of a great logging and tie operation headed by newcomer Thomas J. Moss, the town's esteemed merchant prince who quickly became the largest tie contractor in the state. After the great timber boom ended in the early 1900s, newly organized Mingo Drainage District, encompassing 39,786 acres in Stoddard and Wayne counties, sought to clear the stumpage and drain the swamp to enhance agricultural pursuits and control costly St. Francis River overflows. After that glorious adventure failed in the 1930s, the federal government stepped in to acquire land for construction of two ambitious projects that changed the countryside forever, the 21,676-acre Mingo National Wildlife Refuge and, just beyond it to the west, a dam on the St. Francis River that created sprawling Lake Wappapello, which, in both land and water, encompasses more than 44,000 acres. Shortly thereafter, in the early 1950s, the Missouri Conservation Commission acquired the rest of the swamp to establish what now is Duck Creek Conservation Area, which encompasses 6,234 acres in Wayne, Bollinger, a

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