2

STAYED COURIERS

ATTEMPTS BY THE UNITED STATES POSTAL Department to build the mail route through the Creek Nation provide a study in frustration—in particular, the failure of the young central government to comprehend the mission. Initially, authorities in the Postal Department, aware of the national impetus for the shorter, faster route to New Orleans, did not regard the construction of a post road as a hazardous or slow undertaking. The first comments from Gideon Granger indicate that the postmaster general approached the project with the confidence of an absentee administrator. In 1803, he had written to the chairman of the House Committee on Post Offices and Post Roads, "As New Orleans will unquestionably be the place of deposit for the products of the Western World, its connection with the Atlantic Capitals must be incalculably great and important. The road to and from thence will become the great thoroughfare of the United States."[1]

Granger and other officials believed that, in the Treaty of Washington of 1805, they at last had a binding agreement with the Creeks—not knowing that not even Alexander McGillivray, the powerful chief who died in 1793, had had the power to speak for the entire confederation. National attention was directed to larger threats—to the British, with their eye on New Orleans, and to the Spaniards, still strong enough to cause trouble from their base in West Florida.

Col. Benjamin Hawkins, the seasoned Indian agent who lived among the Creeks and who had established a reputation for being fair but firm, appeared to be the man to direct the project. Accordingly, on April 14, 1806, Granger informed him of the congressional act appropriating $6,400 for the post road and instructed him to begin the construction at Athens.[2] Although the point of origin of the postal horse path is sometimes given as Athens, actually the "High

Shoals" of the Apalachee, in the headwaters of the Oconee in upper central Georgia, was the point at which it entered lands that had belonged to the Creek Indians prior to the recent Treaty of Washington in 1805. The ax work on the critical part of the path building in the Creek Nation began in 1806 on the west bank of the Ocmulgee.

Granger instructed Hawkins to begin the construction and to continue toward Fort Stoddert by way of Burnt Village, just south of the Creek village of Coweta on the west bank of the Chattahoochee, below present-day Columbus.[3] If followed, this route would have passed through Tuckabatchee, northeast of the junction of the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers, not far from the site of Montgomery, in the heart of the territory of the Upper Creeks. General Wilkinson had earlier pointed out to Granger that a route could be established that skirted these settlements to the south.[4] For whatever reason, Granger changed his instructions to Hawkins to say that the route could run more directly south below Coweta to strike the ridge on the east of the Alabama watershed. Hawkins was told that it was his responsibility to superintend the conveyance of mail from Coweta to Fort Stoddert; in addition, he was to keep the route passable and to move the mail at 120 miles in twenty-four hours. The order was a tall one, even for a man of Hawkins's stature and experience, and doubtless he could have done the job well; but on August 4, Granger had to inform Jefferson that Hawkins was sick and unable to attend to the construction.[5] As events transpired, this misfortune set the tone for the entire post-route project.

In Washington, and "at a loss and unable to determine what is best," Granger had a choice of two successors to Hawkins.[6] One Samuel F. Bloomfield, a post rider who was living at Tuckahatchee, offered a description and an estimate for a road to be constructed from "Coweta to Tombeckby," although his description, as it came to Granger, stopped at a point on the east side of the Tensaw River, twelve miles from Fort Stoddert. Bloomfield's knowledge of the land and the climate is reflected in his careful, precise estimate. Numerous bridges and causeways would have to be constructed along the 208-mile route from Coweta. Timbers would be placed across the road and dirt packed between these logs to complete the causeways and keep horses from bogging to their bellies in the swamps.[7] Bridges would keep the oiled, deerskin mailbags, or portmanteaux,

above the water and preserve contents, which even the postmasters were forbidden to tamper with; "filing the chain of the mail portmanteau" was an expressly stated offense.[8] In building these bridges, the planners would have to take account of the seasonal floods. Bloomfield noted that one stream, to be crossed where it was not flanked by the usual swamps, would require "a very high bridge otherwise the rise of water being too rapid it will be carried away." According to Bloomfield's projection the construction could proceed at less than 23 miles a day, or not more than 180 miles in eight days.[9] This conservative estimate did not please Thomas Jefferson; on August 9, he wrote Granger that "Col. Hawkins's illness and the feeble idea of Bloomfield for making only 23 miles a day are sufficient grounds for our looking to other resources."[10]

The other bid Granger had in hand was from Col. Joseph Wheaton, who offered to cut the road from Athens to Coweta—and presumably beyond—and to carry the mail from Washington to New Orleans in fourteen days. The Postal Department quickly contracted with Wheaton for both jobs. Trimming to a bureaucratic fine point, the contract signed on August 15 specified that, instead of fourteen days, the mail was to be moved from Washington to New Orleans in thirteen days and seven hours. Wheaton was also put in charge of constructing the entire road from Georgia to Fort Stoddert.[11] Two days later he got his cash advance of $2,700, representing $2,000 for carrying the mail and $700 for cutting the road, a ratio which reflected the priorities of the postal officials but not a comprehension of the terrain or the principal chore. Furthermore, Wheaton accepted a short deadline; he was given three months, to November 15, 1806, to come from Washington, put his crew together, and complete the horse path, with some assistance from Bloomfield and one other party.[12]

A report prepared by Wheaton as a special pleading and presented to Granger two weeks after the deadline had been missed traces his efforts in the wilderness. On August 20, he left Washington, stopping by Monticello for consultation with the president on some points important to the safety and dispatch of the mail. At the "high shoals of the Appalachy river on the frontier of Georgia," between the ninth and thirteenth of September, he collected horses, provisions, and men. A march of twenty miles the next day brought him to Little

River, one of several southern streams by that name, where he hired two more men, making a total party of thirteen. They crossed the Ocmulgee River at Lloyd's Ferry the next day and camped on Indian lands. Since there was no ford, he found a place for a permanent ferry with a good and sufficient flat and there "Marked a Large Oak with the initials of the Orleans Post Road."[13]

Wheaton's party began cutting, clearing, and blazing the path for the mail on a course west-southwest to connect the Indian trail from Coweta with the four fords of the Ocmulgee where the mail had previously passed. On September 16, they made about twenty miles to the crossing which led to the Upper Creeks and to McAllister's store. On September 17, Wheaton sent Robert Stirry ahead to arrange for carrying the mail between Fort Stoddert and New Orleans. He also sent Swan Hardin to the Marshalls' house at Coweta for an Indian runner and provisions. They camped on the Flint River and caught plenty of fish. The next day they cleared the road and stopped at Crow Creek. On the morning of September 19, Wheaton wrote a letter "on my knee to Col. Hawkins," telling the Indian agent he had a message for him from the president. By late afternoon the party arrived at Coweta and was invited into the town-house square by Chief William McIntosh, the Long Lieutenant, and others.

September 20, 1806, was spent in preparing provisions, conferring with McIntosh, and attending Indian ceremonies at the council square. Colonel Wheaton informed McIntosh that the mail had to be exchanged on the east side of the river. McIntosh drew a map on the ground with his pipe hatchet, indicating a shorter route than the old path, and Wheaton agreed to be guided accordingly. Speeches were exchanged. On the twenty-first the party crossed the Chattahoochee and cleared the path to McIntosh's plantation, where Wheaton dined with him in his two-story log house, where one of his wives lived. Wheaton then went on to "one Miller's house," where another McIntosh wife lived, and was caught in a heavy rain. The next day they cleared a path into low, swampy ground, and finally McIntosh had to acknowledge that a path in that location could not be built. Abandoning their work of the past two days, they reverted to the old path leading to Tuckabatchee. After clearing beyond the Pensacola path, they found a little-used trail, not one of the proven, high-ground Indian trails, leading in what Wheaton thought to be the right direction.

They took it, without a guide, trying to avoid the swamp—a costly mistake for Wheaton, as it turned out.

On September 23, he received a message from Hawkins, stating that Bloomfield and six axmen, acting under separate orders from Hawkins, were to have cut a path all the way from Alexander Cornells's between Coweta and Tuckabatchee, to Fort Stoddert, but had cleared only about twenty miles. In addition, a party under Rhode Early was to make a path from Early's mill to Burnt Village. The guide, John Field, reported that they had met so many streams of the Ocmulgee and so many swamps and mountains that, after preparing about forty miles, this route had been abandoned.

To make matters worse, Wheaton, who was already off track, became ill with a "high billious fever" and fell from his horse after having cleared about fifty miles from Coweta to Alexander Cornells's. He took Cornells with him as an interpreter and proceeded in search of Bloomfield, first to Zachariah McGirth's house and then to Colonel Hawkins's former residence. After a march of twenty-five miles, they came to a large stream of the Alabama River and were drenched by a heavy rain. Wheaton's fever reached its highest, and on September 25, he was having "fainting fitts" and was unable to sit on his horse. Three of his men were in similar condition. He abandoned his objective and ordered travois, or horse litters, made of the tents. After two nights at Bloomfield's, one at Cornells's and one on the path, he reached Coweta on the twenty-ninth and received aid from Capt. Thomas Marshall. The men were paid and all reached the frontier safely.[14]

On October 1, Wheaton went to Colonel Hawkins's house to arrange for expediting the mail and to recover from his illness. There he made a contract with McGirth, who owned some property in the vicinity. When McGirth realized the difficulties in carrying the mail from Coweta to Fort Stoddert in three days, he became alarmed and abandoned the contract before getting started. At the special recommendation of Hawkins, temporary arrangements were made with Bloomfield to carry the mail from Coweta to Fort Stoddert in only three days instead of the usual eight. On October 16, Wheaton left Colonel Hawkins's residence and returned to Washington by way of Fort Wilkinson, taking thirty-four days for the trip.

Neither cutting the horse path nor carrying the mail ran smoothly

for Wheaton. On December 22, 1806, a circular was sent by Gideon Granger to all postmasters on Wheaton's route, requesting them to report immediately any neglect or inattention of any contractors or riders in conveying the mails. Granger also asked some postmasters, by postscript, why Wheaton frequently failed to deliver the mails on schedule and to report, for the next three months, the condition of the mail services along the line serviced by Wheaton.[15] On January 20, 1807, Granger advised Wheaton that he would be responsible for the delivery of mail to the postmaster in Athens in accordance with the schedule. Wheaton was to dispatch an express on the road and also to send a circular by each rider, "authorizing and commanding him and them" that, whenever the rider or horse should give out, a new rider and horse be furnished, so that, whatever the peril, the mail would be delivered on time.[16]

On February 12, Capt. Edmund Pendleton Gaines at Fort Stoddert received letters of instruction from Granger dated December 18 and 20, 1806. Gaines's reply mentioned repeated failures of the mail service between Fort Stoddert and Athens, but previously he had not been convinced of any wrongdoing by Bloomfield. Gaines had sent dispatches to the War Department by John Holcroft, who found "at Coweta three portmanteaux" which should have been carried to Fort Stoddert by Bloomfield's post rider the next day. The rider arrived at Fort Stoddert with only one portmanteau and could not account for any others.

The most graphic evidence of bungling came in a report from Lt. H. R. Graham, who had been requested by Gaines to investigate abuses of the mail between Fort Stoddert and Athens and to convey his findings to Granger.[17] He found the route "by no means calculated to ensure a safe or speedy conveyance of the mails." He had met a post rider named Allen and another named Len McGee and had learned that post riders sent to Fort Stoddert had not passed each other, because they had traveled old and new roads, alternate routes cut in places to avoid hazards. On February 19, at Bloomfield's, where Graham had been assured that every attempt had been made to expedite the mail to Fort Stoddert, he found that a mail bag that left Washington January 24 was at Coweta on February 5, but not until February 10 was it recognized as an express mail. "This discovery however did not add to it acceleration," Graham reported to the

postmaster general. Whatever smugness that might be inferred from Graham's account is offset by his own apologies. "You will perceive, Sir, I traveled very slowly—my horses were extremely jaded—some of them with sore backs—the waters very high—all swimming, and roads very bad." He recommended that Gaines hire two carriers at Fort Stoddert, that Alden Lewis, the postmaster at Athens, employ two others, and that each rider make the entire trip in seven or eight days by changing fresh horses at appropriate points within the Creek Nation.[18]

While the U.S. government was concerned with Wheaton and the particulars of mail delivery, two other incidents heightened the need for a military communication route. The Spaniards, evicted from New Orleans and still unfriendly to the United States, moved into the old French garrison at Natchitoches, which had been established sometime between 1714 and 1716.[19] It was located on the east bank of the Sabine River, formerly the French boundary and, after the Louisiana Purchase, considered the western boundary of the United States. When the Spaniards posted cavalry east of the Sabine in 1806, the United States sent troops to occupy Natchitoches; by September, the Spaniards returned to the west side of the Sabine, and by December the U.S. militia had returned home.[20]

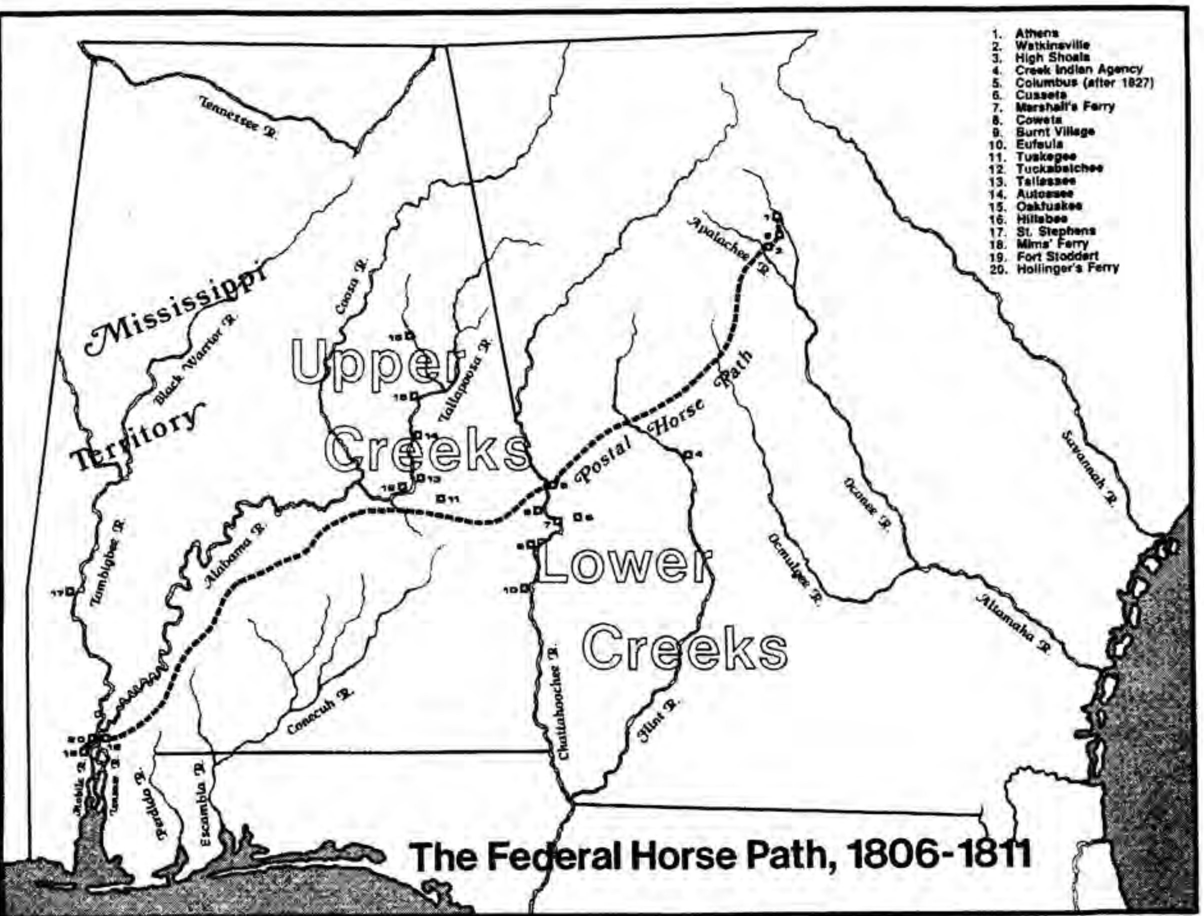
Tensions among settlers of the Old Southwest and the settlers in West Florida were further increased by the Aaron Burr episode. Burr, who had served as vice president during Jefferson's first administration, had been discredited following the death of Alexander Hamilton from their duel in July 1804 and was thought to have developed grand plans with the controversial Gen. James Wilkinson to establish an empire west of the Mississippi River. Influenced by the proclamation of President Thomas Jefferson, Col. Ferdinand L. Claiborne arrested Burr in January 1807. In court held at Washington, near Natchez, Burr's demands that he be released were denied. By the next day, when the court convened, Burr had forfeited his bail bond of $10,000 and fled.[21] Burr spent the nights of February 18–19, 1807, at the home of Col. and Mrs. John Hinson in Wakefield, Washington County, in the Alabama area of the Mississippi Territory. The following morning, he was again arrested by Capt. Edmund P. Gaines and taken to Fort Stoddert. After March 6, Col. Nicholas Perkins

headed an expedition to accompany and guard the prisoner on his trip to Virginia for trial.

Accounts of Burr's removal show how travel had to proceed through the Creek Nation. Burr and his captors rowed up the Mobile and Tensaw rivers to the boat yard near Fort Mims and began their journey through Indian Territory, essentially along the post route that became the Federal Road. The route went about eight miles south of Econchate (now the site of Montgomery), by the residence of "Old Milly," and crossed Okfuskee (Line), Cubahatchee, and Calabee creeks, which the travelers swam. At the Chattahoochee, Flint, and Ocmulgee rivers, they crossed in canoes, with the horses swimming alongside. At Fort Wilkinson (near Milledgeville) they crossed the Oconee River by ferry, and a few miles to the east they stopped for breakfast at a house of entertainment, the first seen on their trip.[22]

Failure to complete the horse path on time and to establish dependable mail service along this route, together with publicity from the Burr conspiracy, invited congressional inquiry. A more subdued Postmaster General Granger stated, on February 5, 1807, that he was not against the mail route, but that he was opposed to "large expenditures in unsuccessful attempts to force rapid mail service through an immense wilderness filled with streams and marshes where no sustenance or aid can be given to either man or beast."[23] On February 11, Granger informed Josiah Meigs, at Athens, that express mail service had been instituted between Washington and New Orleans. Horses and riders were provided by the government, and certain persons were authorized to remove "any one, though faithful, where there was reasonable ground to believe that the Officer or Agent was directly or indirectly implicated by, or attached to the existing conspiracy."[24]

On February 16, 1807, Granger appointed Denison Darling as agent for running regular express mail between Athens and Fort Stoddert and for improving the route, and as postmaster of the Lower Creek Nation, with headquarters at Coweta. Granger suggested that Darling purchase the horses that Bloomfield and others were using. Col. Benjamin Hawkins was considered ill and aged, though he was only fifty-two, and Granger, on February 25, authorized Gen. David Meriwether of Georgia to complete the road be-


1. Athens
2. Watkinsville
3. High Shoals
4. Creek Indian Agency
5. Columbus (after 1827)
6. Cusseta
7. Marshall's Ferry
8. Coweta
9. Burnt Village
10. Eufaula
11. Tuskegee
12. Tuckabatchee
13. Tallassee
14. Autossee
15. Oakfuskee
16. Hillabee
17. St. Stephens
18. Mims' Ferry
19. Fort Stoddert
20. Hollinger's Ferry
Tennessee R.
Mississippi Territory
Black Warrior R.
Coosa R.
Upper Creeks
Tallapoosa R.
Apalachee R.
Postal Horse Path
Savannah R.
Oconee R.
Ocmulgee R.
Altamaha R.
Tombigbee R.
Alabama R.
Lower Creeks
Conecuh R.
Chattahoochee R.
Flint R.
Mobile R.
Tensaw R.
Perdido R.
Escambia R.
The Federal Horse Path, 1806-1811

tween the high shoals of Apalachee and Fort Stoddert and to establish stages where horses could be kept and riders housed at thirty-mile intervals.[25]

Granger and Wheaton had yet to come to terms over the broken contract. The account of the General Post Office for Wheaton showed the cash advance on August 17, 1806, of $700 (part of the check for $2,700) and a notation claiming that the road had been opened as far as Tensaw. Trees had been felled over all streams whose width could admit such bridges between Coweta and Fort Stoddert, but none of the marshy places were causewayed. Twenty miles of the road had been opened by Colonel Hawkins, and the distance from Tensaw to Fort Stoddert was nineteen miles, making a total of thirty-nine miles. A deduction of $65 was made for the road not cut and $57.62 for the causeways and bridges not made, for a balance due from Wheaton to the General Post Office of $122.62.[26]

Granger and Wheaton signed a statement dated July 6, 1808, before C. Swan and John P. VanNess, referees, that all depositions, affidavits, letters, and certificates should be allowed in evidence. On July 9, Granger outlined to these referees the incidents of breach of contract by Wheaton.[27] Alden Lewis, the postmaster at Athens, informed Granger on January 17, 1807, that Wheaton's wages were not sufficient to retain faithful mail riders and, as if to sink a barb, stated that Wheaton was a great admirer of Aaron Burr and thought that Burr would be the next president of the United States.[28]

Other evidence of confusion was the status of Samuel F. Bloomfield, who was at a loss to know whether he had been acting under the authority of the General Post Office or on behalf of Wheaton. On May 31, he was carrying the mail for Wheaton and also at the same rate for Darling. This past due account for carrying the mail and expense of opening the horse path amounted to $1,671.37. After crediting the government for horses he had acquired from the government, $256.50 was due him, which he requested, apparently without reservation, by the next mail.[29] Bloomfield claimed that he had not made an accurate survey of the path but had cut the path as near a direct line as practicable; he had cut the path six to ten feet wide nearly to the "Bigbee" settlement, placing logs over all streams not too wide for the length of the tree; he had been instructed only

to ascertain the length of causeways needed, not to build them; and he found that, on Wheaton's portion of the path, not a bush had been cut, even in the thickets.

Although some letters did move through Georgia and the Creek Indian territory, most of the heavy mail for New Orleans continued to travel by Knoxville, Nashville, and the Natchez Trace.[30] The horse path through the Creek Nation had not relieved the pressure for the fast route needed to communicate with New Orleans. If anything, the post road had increased pressure; more traffic by the white man through the Nation over the next five years contributed to warmongering among one faction of the Creeks, who were receiving arms and ammunition from the British through the Spanish at Pensacola. These natives would see to it that a new hazard was added to the route by 1813.

The Federal Road

through Georgia, the Creek Nation, and Alabama, 1806–1836

Henry deLeon Southerland Jr.
and Jerry Elijah Brown

The Federal Road project began in 1805 when the Creek Indians gave permission for the development of a "horse path" through their nation for more efficient mail delivery between Washington City (D.C.) and New Orleans. Deriving its story from the diaries and journals of travelers, both famous and infamous, *The Federal Road* covers the first days of mail delivery, the widening of the Federal Road into a "war road" during 1811, and the use of the road during the removal of Creek Indians to the West.

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HENRY DELEON SOUTHERLAND JR.,
AND JERRY ELIJAH BROWN

MAPS BY CHARLES JEFFERSON HIERS

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To Louise Harris Southerland
and to the Memory
of John M. Fletcher of Hallewokee Farm

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THE FEDERAL ROAD
through Georgia,
the Creek Nation,
and Alabama,
1806–1836

INTRODUCTION

"But for the Federal Road . . ."

IN 1806, A PATH FOR THE HORSES OF POST RIDERS was opened from middle Georgia to lower Alabama, through Indian country in the section of the United States once called the Old Southwest. Five years later the mail path was widened and rerouted over much of its length to create a military lane for the movement of troops, supply wagons, and ordnance. Instantly, use transcended intention: the road built for soldiers, who would confront the Creeks before engaging the British, became a major pioneer highway, an artery for all travel. Now, after more than 175 years, during which time the road has virtually vanished into the landscape, we can understand how it has meandered into history; we can recognize it as a source and a solution of conflicts, a factor in the location and growth of cities, a consideration in decisions civil and military, and a contributor to local, state, and national identities. Now we can see that one road as more important than it ever appeared in its own time, when it was merely a track, muddy or sandy, through forests and swamps; when, as the official highway, it afforded pioneers the strength of numbers and the refuge of forts and inns.

Although the insight now possible into that Federal Road approaches epiphany, it is not unique with respect to rivers and roads. When T. S. Eliot saw the full influence of the Mississippi on Huckleberry Finn—on the book, the boy, and the writer, as well as on the country—he called the river "a strong brown god"; similarly, twentieth-century Americans who made their escape to the West knew that, when U.S. Route 66 was replaced by the interstate highway system, more had disappeared than cracked pavement, Burma Shave signs, and lonely diners.

Though the sense that a road may be more than a route for travel or a conduit for commerce comes readily, it is difficult to specify par-

ticular contributions. Because a road is not a human character and because it may appear simply as part of the scenery, wandering through the events that occur on or around it, we hold back from arguing that even a prominent road is the sine qua non of a major historical change; none but the naive are likely to be convinced. One may suggest, however, without forcing the thesis, that such a thoroughfare was the Federal Road, sometimes called the Old Federal Road. It was built in 1811 from west-to-east, from Fort Stoddert, near Mount Vernon, on the Mobile River, to Fort Wilkinson, near Milledgeville, on the Oconee, then the capital of Georgia. From Fort Stoddert to the Chattahoochee, across present-day Alabama, the Federal Road coincided with the post riders' horse path that had come down from Athens, Georgia, to make the New Orleans connection in 1806. Where the horse path had turned north, at the falls where Columbus would be located, the Federal Road continued east, to areas where soldiers could be recruited and supplies procured. There, too, in Georgia and the Carolinas were waiting the Americans eager to settle in the fertile new lands to the west.

Started as a post route during the first administration of Thomas Jefferson and fulfilling its usefulness as a military road near the end of the presidency of Andrew Jackson (who made and maintained his reputation by suppressing Indians in its proximity), the Federal Road has been so central that no complete history of the southeastern United States can be written without a mention of it. In 1927, Peter A. Brannon, a historian to whose spadework this study owes a considerable debt, agreed with a nineteenth-century counterpart who compared it to the Appian Way.[1] "But for the Federal Road with its forts," Peter Joseph Hamilton had declaimed in 1898, "there had been no Alabama as we know it."[2] Over this route passed post riders for remote New Orleans, militiamen to reinforce forts, stagecoaches bearing European travelers and touring theatrical companies, Aaron Burr under arrest, freight wagons, the maverick evangelist Lorenzo Dow and Peggy (his sensible wife), the horses of highwaymen, the Marquis de Lafayette in a grand entourage, Creeks taking a last look at what had been their lands, and, of course, thousands of pioneers seeking a fresh start. The chances are good that all who trace their ancestry to anywhere in Alabama south of the Tennessee Valley have a forebear who came over the Federal Road. During its period of maxi-

mum use, when "Alabama fever" was epidemic in the Carolinas and Georgia, the population of the territory (later, the state) increased by over half a million.

If the road has been so important, why is this book, published about 150 years after its demise, the first full study of it? One simple reason is that the story of the road has not been assembled; details of the conception and construction, which might seem interesting mainly to historians of civil engineering, have been strewn piecemeal in hundreds of government documents, articles and books, and private letters. Even now, we know too little of the day-to-day work involved in cutting the road, building the causeways, or establishing the ferries. The single most important reason for the absence of a book devoted solely to the road is the overwhelming presence of other subjects of such magnitude that they have obscured the story of why this road came to be, where it was located, and how it has figured in sectional development. To be sure, other stories have been more spectacular: the movements of the white traders, the War of 1812, Andrew Jackson's career, the Creek and Seminole wars, and the social and political issues pointing to the Civil War. Although a history of the Federal Road cannot be written without retelling some familiar stories (occasionally with new information), this work assumes that they are but bright beads concealing the string that joins them.

Naturally a study that proposes to isolate one element from the complex of national, regional, and state histories must steer between Scylla and Charybdis—avoiding, on the one side, the tendency to focus too narrowly and, on the other, the temptation to veer into digressions. Once upon a time historians could navigate past these perils simply by adding the phrase *incidentally of* after their main titles. (The best-known example is probably Albert James Pickett's *History of Alabama, and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi from the Earliest Period.*) This history of the Federal Road is "incidentally of" the territory and the states it influenced, with more attention paid to Alabama and to the courageous but doomed natives whose last days in the southern United States were synchronous with the appearance and disappearance of the Federal Road.

To write about these people, the places they inhabited, and the streams they lived by is to discover how little we know and are likely

to know. If it was not easy for the white pioneers to understand how the world looked to the Indians, it is only slightly less difficult now that the races are no longer at war. In the latter part of the twentieth century, we can at least empathize with the Indians' concept of stewardship of the land; the savaging of wildlife, streams, and forests, only recently an issue with us, was recognized immediately by the Indians as alien and destructive. Not directly threatened by death at the hands of the Indians, we, the de facto heirs of their land, are in a position to give a fairer assessment than our ancestors could have, a privilege that is forfeited only when sympathy for the underdog lapses into sentimentality.

What we can see now, maybe more clearly than ever, is how protracted and invasive the process of transition was. Intermarriages of whites and Indians, acceptance of the whites' mode of dress and conduct, and efforts to make Indians into farmers and craftsmen all point to the changing of ways. Though it may seem less significant, the switching over of names was a more critical signal, an indication that conceptions of man and the role of nature were changing. Unfortunately, this important point is easily lost on students struggling with the welter of alternative spellings and pronunciations that have resulted from Americans' efforts to record Creek speech. (This book uses modern spellings for names and places and standardizes punctuation and capitalization, except in those instances when the original provides a glimmer of the writer's individuality or some sharp insight into the times.) Dual Indian and English names reveal how close and how distant the red and white worlds were. As every schoolchild used to know, William Weatherford, the Creek leader who put his horse off a bluff into the Alabama River to escape death and who was so honorable that Andrew Jackson granted him a pardon, was also called Red Eagle. Few have occasion to know that Creek names, in and out of translation, were also used. In some official correspondence, Big Warrior signed his Creek name Tustenugge Thlucco, followed by the initials of the English name in parentheses. Alexander Cornells, a member of an extended family of mixed bloods, was also Chief Oche Haujo; but William McIntosh, both a Creek chief and an American general, usually went by the name of his Scots ancestors. Many whites also had Indian names; the raconteur-historian Thomas S. Woodward said he was called Chulatarle Emathla. Streams everywhere bear eupho-

nious Indian names (Chattahoochee, Cubahatchee) or names given to honor settlers or describe uses (Milly's, Line). In these small particulars is revealed the true course of transition.

Looking larger to understand how the Federal Road became a character in national development, one may discover an array of motives for its existence. Although the horse path from Georgia to Alabama was opened as one link in the mail route between Washington City and New Orleans, it penetrated the territory of the Muscogees—actually a confederation of tribes and clans called Creeks by the white men, who saw their villages along the watercourses—and stimulated hostilities. As a military road, the passage encouraged exploitation and made expulsion inevitable. Although the stated intent of the horse path or the road was not to remove the Creeks, the passage forced a social, military, and diplomatic confrontation with these fierce, proud people. Their final thirty years in the South were, to say the least, anguishing. As their land was being crossed by the Federal Road, they were crossed and double-crossed by the government and by unscrupulous white men and betrayed, some felt, by their own kind.

It is tempting to speculate on the motives of United States officials. Did they realize that a war with the Creeks would be a likely consequence of the road building? Obviously the more far-sighted were aware of what the intrusion would bring to the wilderness that was wedged between white-dominated sections of the lower South. In his third annual message to Congress, delivered in 1803, Jefferson defined, perhaps unintentionally, the irreconcilable forces. He referred to the "ulterior measures which may be necessary for the immediate occupation and temporary government" of the newly purchased Louisiana Territory, and the strategy he outlined was the same his administration was following in the Mississippi Territory, created in 1798. The "ulterior measures" were necessary "for confirming to the Indian inhabitants their occupancy and self-government, establishing friendly and commercial relations with them, and for ascertaining the geography of the country acquired."[3] Even as Jefferson was speaking, Georgia and South Carolina were making claims to western lands. With such a manifestly contradictory mission—believing that Indian autonomy could be confirmed while their lands were being examined for later use—the country was set

on a course that would subdue one people to make room for another.

It is also tempting to see parallels between that earlier time and our own. In extending the authority of the presidency beyond the limits set in the Constitution, Jefferson not only purchased a vast tract of land, he also left a precedent for later chief executives. Andrew Jackson effectively dealt with guerrillas and terrorists, even if his Draconian tactics now offend some sensibilities. Since the construction and implementation of the Federal Road were exercises in the use of raw power, our sense of justice is engaged as we review the consequences. Only students wearing star-spangled blindfolds can ignore the brutality that made the section safe for white travel and settlement—or pretend that the ultimate price was not paid by the Creeks. The heightened consciousness of the nation, to no one's surprise, was late in rising. In fact, the status of the black race has occupied the nation far more than have the injustices committed against the Indians.

Along with the negative moral judgments, circumspection requires that the positive results also be considered. The action started by Jefferson in response to the commonweal and completed by Jackson yielded a unified section of the country, a South that by the late 1830s was emerging from an Old Southwest and becoming an important part of the country's economy and politics. To study the changes wrought by the Federal Road is to understand the formation and the transformation of a section of the United States.

And yet the Federal Road is more than a symbol for the metamorphosis of a single geographic region. Begun in an age when travel and overland communication were synonymous, when no messages, no news, and no military dispatches moved except by horse or foot, the road lasted until rails were being laid across the swamps and ridges, steamboats were plying the Chattahoochee and the Alabama, and telegraph poles were being set in the rights-of-way. A modern world of communications options, one of them electronic even then, was in the cradle. What was happening along and to the Federal Road provides a dramatic illustration of the country's direction.

As alternate routes and alternative communications became available, the Federal Road became less central. No longer needed as the single passage through the Creek Nation, it did not become the spine

of a twentieth-century infrastructure—a network of roads, communications, and governmental functions—and gradually it faded. Today only a few remnants remain, familiar for the most part only to local historians. Over most of its length the road is obliterated, and the ruts cut by the wagon wheels of the pioneers are returned to a landscape no longer virginal and haunting, with streams decidedly less clear. To get some inkling of the world implied in the few ruins still visible involves a delving into the facts of how the road was built and maintained and how it affected and was affected by the people who passed over it. Also needed, as always in a pleasurable study of history, is the exercising of an informed imagination. If this study succeeds, the Federal Road will be regarded as a living part of our past, and an illumination of its brief life will help present-day inhabitants appreciate how we came to where we are.