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# SOJOURNERS AND STATEHOOD

**F**LOODING, THE TERM SO OFTEN USED to describe the status of streams in the Creek Nation, also aptly describes the rush of pioneers over the Federal Road. In August 1800, the white and black population of the portion of the Old Southwest that became the state of Alabama was 1,250; in June 1830, the state census revealed 309,527 residents; and ten years later the number had leapt to 590,756.<sup>1</sup> Settlers were flocking into the section over more than one route, but the major thoroughfare for the lower Mississippi Territory was the Federal Road. Passing over the narrow track through the woods were emigrants from the East propelled by the promise of fertile lands beyond the Creek Nation, purchasable on easy terms. This westward thrust of settlement was evident as soon as the military road was opened. Benjamin Hawkins's report that, in the six months between October 1811 and March of the following year, 233 vehicles and 3,726 persons had headed west past his Indian Agency on the Flint River was merely an indication of the first wave of emigration.<sup>2</sup> By 1817, the movement was described by James Graham, with an italicized misspelling that further emphasizes how the phenomenon in North Carolina resembled a plague. "The *Alabama Feaver* rages here with great violence and has *carried off* vast numbers of our Citizens. . . . There is no question that this *feaver* is contagious . . . for as soon as one neighbor visits another who has just returned from Alabama he immediately discovers the same symptoms which are exhibited by the one who has seen alluring Alabama."<sup>3</sup>

In a rhetorical pronouncement worthy of Thomas Paine and ringing with unconscious irony, Benjamin John McKinley of Alabama justified the exodus by declaring, "It is better to be a tenant on rich land than a landlord on poor; it is better to be a free man in the West than

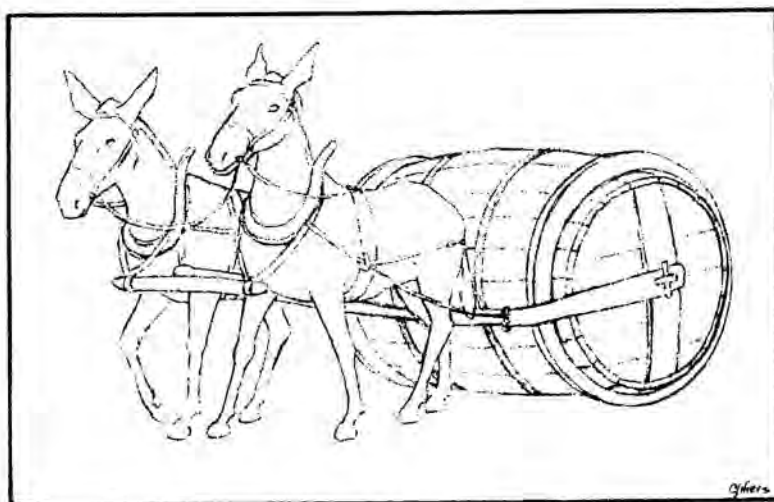
a slave to a manufacturer in the East."<sup>4</sup> One reason given for the lack of population growth in North Carolina was the mass migration from 1820 to 1840, when many of the best citizens left "to the enrichment of Alabama and Mississippi."<sup>5</sup> Not coincidentally, this twenty-year span also was the high-water mark of the Federal Road, over which these "best citizens" and many more of lower social status were streaming into the section.

They came walking ("riding shank's mare," it was often called), or with their worldly goods in hogsheads fitted with trunnions and axles so that the whole barrel could be pulled by horse or hand, or in the variety of vehicles, from light carriages to crude wagons, described by the travelers. Although a few had the dreams and the means for setting up plantations along the fertile watercourses, most fit the description of Mississippi pioneers in William Faulkner's *The Hamlet*.

[They came] in battered wagons and on muleback and even on foot, with flintlock rifles and dogs and children and homemade whiskey stills and Protestant psalm books. . . . They came from the Atlantic seaboard and before that, from England and the Scottish and Welsh Marches, as some of the names would indicate. . . . They brought no slaves and no Phye and Chippendale highboys; indeed, what they did bring most of them could (and did) carry in their hands. They took up land and built one- and two-room cabins and never painted them, and married and produced children and added other rooms one by one to the original cabins and did not paint them either. . . . Their descendants still planted cotton in the bottom land and corn along the edge of the hills.<sup>6</sup>

The attitudes and fortunes of those coming over the Federal Road to settle in the new territory ran the register, as three examples will demonstrate.

In 1811, Peggy Dow was returning eastward over the recently opened road, its trees still "fresh marked" to serve as guides, with her husband, Lorenzo, a Methodist evangelist, who was raising his voice on this, his tenth trip through the wilderness. After crossing the Alabama River at Fort Mims, they met land seekers who had just faced one of the sadder consequences of early travel, though with a reaction that startled Mrs. Dow.



#### ROLLING HOGSHEAD OF EARLY SETTLER

Some settlers unable to afford better vehicles put their worldly goods in barrels, or hogsheads, into the ends of which had been fixed trunnions, housings into which axles could be fitted. These were pulled by horses or oxen or by hand into the new country. (Drawing by Charles J. Hiers)

We came across a family who were moving to the Mississippi—they had a number of small children; and although they had something to cover them like a tent, yet they suffered considerably from the rain the night before: and to add to that, the woman told me they had left an aged father at a man's house by the name of *Manack* one or two days before and that she expected he was dead perhaps by that time. They were as black almost as the *natives*, and the woman seemed very much disturbed at their situation. I felt pity for her—I thought her burthen was really heavier than mine. We kept on, and about the middle of the day we got to the house where the poor man had been left with his wife, son, and daughter. A few hours before we got there, he had closed his eyes in death—they had lain him out, and expected to bury him that evening; but they could not get any thing to make a coffin of, only split stuff to make a kind of a box, and so put him in the ground!

I thought this would have been such a distress to me, had it been my case, that it made my heart ache for the old lady. But I found that she was of that class of beings that could not be affected with any thing

so much as the loss of property; for she began immediately to calculate the expense they had been at by this detention—and I do not recollect that I saw her shed one tear on the occasion.<sup>7</sup>

Better luck followed the cheerful family of Gideon Lincecum, a frontiersman who wrote about traveling from the Ocmulgee over the Federal Road.

My father loved a border life, and the place he had purchased on the Ocmulgee, as the people had already commenced settling on the opposite side of the river, was no longer looked upon as a border country. He sold his place and was soon equipped and geared up for the road, and so was I. I had been reared to a belief and faith in the pleasure of frequent change of country, and I looked upon the long journey, through the wilderness, with much pleasure.

Our company consisted of my father and mother and eight children, with six negroes; Joseph Bryan, my brother-in-law, and his wife and two negroes; my wife and me and two small sons and two negroes. We had good horses and wagons and guns and big dogs. We set out on the 10th of March, 1818. I felt as if I was on a big camp hunt.

The journey, the way we traveled, was about 500 miles, all wilderness, full of deer and turkeys, and the streams were full of fish. We were six weeks on the road, the most delightful time I had ever spent in my life. My brother Garland and I "flanked it" as the wagons rolled along and killed deer, turkeys, wild pigeons and at nights, with pine torches, we fished and killed a great many with my bow and arrows, whenever we camped on any water course. Little creeks were full of fish in that season.<sup>8</sup>

Lincecum settled in the log-cabin village of Tuscaloosa in 1818, in the wildest, least-trodden, and most "tomahawked country" along the Tombigbee system, and expressed his energy as a jack-of-all-trades.<sup>9</sup> He had confidence that he could provide for his family, "for I was as strong as two common men and could do anything from cutting and splitting fence rails to fine cabinet work." Moreover, in mercantile action he "was familiar with all the duties from the lumber house to the counting room."<sup>10</sup> The frontier restlessness caught up with Lincecum eventually, and his door could have been marked "G.T.T.," as were those of other Alabama settlers who had gone to Texas.

In 1829, when Benjamin Porter came from South Carolina with his

young wife to settle on the Alabama River ten miles above Claiborne, they had the all-too-normal Federal Road experiences—frights from “half-naked savages and beastly Negroes” maddened with rum, “unjust exactions” by Creeks at the many toll bridges, and unfair prices for corn, charged by the whites beyond Line Creek. But worst of all was the pierced illusion when he got to his destination.

We had an uncle in Monroe, an early settler, to whose mansion we were hastening. We indulged in golden dreams of his appearance and that of his house. We pictured him a portly, well-looking old man; and his homestead the very abode of comfort. A large white house, piazzas and green blinds floated before our eyes; and amidst the toils and privations of our long journey, we rioted, as we neared his home, upon the vapors of benevolence which rose from his face, and the savory smells from his kitchen. But alas, for our round-bellied uncle, and the white house and green blinds; alas for the fat turkeys and old hams! We found our uncle a small man, with a very lean girdle—his house was a rail pen, full of squalling, mischievous babes, and snapping bull puppies; and our supper a rasher of bacon with boiled greens.<sup>11</sup>

With a hatchet, saw, old plane, and chisel, Porter made a “not contemptible bedstead, table, and arm chair” from a large poplar, but he learned an even more important lesson from “the manufacture of children.” As Mrs. Porter was approaching her first confinement, he engaged an old midwife in Claiborne, ten miles away, and was “continually swimming the two large creeks” between his house and the town in anticipation of the delivery. Since the Porters were novices, the good nurse charged them thirty-five dollars and made Porter give her a receipt for the receipt she had given him. After that well-documented initiation Porter learned what the going price was, “and my other children have cost only five dollars a head for being introduced into the world.”<sup>12</sup>

Porter also learned firsthand how the patriotic residents regarded state laws pertaining to road work. “I was summoned and, of course, went. I toiled for three days with slaves in the hot sun. The whites who were also summoned sat under the shade and talked and laughed. I was so young and foolish that it never occurred to me that one required to perform a public duty could neglect it. I injured my

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 fenatives, and one copy of the journals of the Legislative Council,  
 GABRIEL MOORE,  
 Speaker of the House of Representatives,

JAMES TITUS,  
 President of the Legislative Council,  
 Approved, the 3d day of February,  
 1818.

WM. W. BIBB,  
 Governor of the Alabama Territory.

#### AN ACT

To amend the Laws now in force respecting public roads.

Sec. 1. *Be it enacted by the Legislative Council and House of Representatives of the Alabama Territory, in General Assembly convened,* That it shall hereafter be lawful for the overseer of any public road, if he deems it necessary, to require all and every person, or persons residing within his precinct, and not exempted from such service by law, to work on said road ten days and no longer; except when bridges and

Overseer to require all persons residing within his precinct, and not exempted from such service by law, to work on said road ten days and no longer.

except.

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 causeways may require repair, and in that case as long as may be necessary for that purpose, not exceeding twenty days.

Sec. 2. *And be it further enacted,* that hereafter the overseer of any public road shall be liable to be fined on presentment, at the discretion of the Jury trying the same, if the road of which he is overseer shall have remained out of repair for the period of twelve days at any one time, provided such overseer have any notice thereof.

Overseer liable to fine.

Sec. 3. *And be it further enacted,* that hereafter when any delinquent shall be returned to a justice of the Peace, by the overseer of a public road, and it shall become necessary to issue process against such delinquent, such process shall be issued, and all further proceedings carried on in the name of the Territory; and if the prosecution fail, the cost shall be adjudged as in other Territorial cases; and the court may, if it appear that the return has been made, or the prosecution commenced by such overseer from malicious motives, tax him with cost.

Overseer to pay cost on return cases.

#### ALABAMA TERRITORIAL ROAD WORK ACT

In addition to revealing the state-of-the-art printing done at St. Stephens in 1818, these passages excerpted from the territorial code of Alabama show what was required of citizens eligible to do work building and maintaining roads. Despite the stern language in the code, there is little evidence that it was strictly enforced. (Courtesy of the Brantley Collection, Samford University Library, Birmingham)

reputation very seriously by working, instead of sitting in the shade!"<sup>13</sup>

Although the main attraction for these settlers was the opening of the land, assuming ownership was not a simple matter, because of legal entanglements and shady sales practices. Joseph Glover Baldwin, a Virginia lawyer best known as the author of *Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi*, one of the standard works of Old Southwest humor, described the unlimited opportunities for young attorneys. The fiction he wrote in the new country was grounded in fact; the litigation growing out of the Indian claims to land under treaties, the preemptive rights of settlers on public lands, and the various land sales all provided a field for unbridled speculation. Land was bought and sold on credit, and often that land had defective title. The carelessness of public officials and a varied assortment of frauds prompted a circus of lawsuits. In light of the treaties and the actions

by local officials, Baldwin was not indulging in hyperbole when he wrote of the "swindling of Indians by the nation! . . . Stealing their land by the township."<sup>14</sup>

To acquire a land title involved clearing prior claims through French, British, and Spanish grants and settlement, surveying the land, and selling the land, all by the United States government. France relinquished the region to the British in 1763. Spain's possession south of the thirty-first parallel was confirmed by Britain and the United States in 1783, but Spain claimed that West Florida's north boundary extended from the mouth of the Yazoo on the Mississippi River due east to the Chattahoochee ( $32^{\circ} 28'$ ). In 1795, Spain recognized the claims of the United States to all lands above the thirty-first parallel, but later claimed all of West Florida up to the Yazoo-Chattahoochee line. Spanish troops were not ordered south of this line until 1799.<sup>15</sup>

In a division of the region, Tennessee became a state in 1796, with its southern boundary fixed on paper but not on the ground. The central portion of the southern boundary of the state of Tennessee was established by Thomas Freeman on October 12–15, 1807, at a point north of Huntsville, Alabama, and later extended east and west.<sup>16</sup> In 1798, the Mississippi Territory was formed from the land ceded by Spain in 1795, framed east and west between the Chattahoochee and the Mississippi rivers, on the north by the Yazoo-Chattahoochee line, the old northern boundary claimed by Spain, and on the south by the thirty-first parallel, above which was built Fort Stoddert in 1799. Cessions within this territory gradually increased the domain of the United States. State claims by South Carolina and Georgia were surrendered in 1787 and 1802, although the South Carolina cession was dubious and the Georgia cession was subject to certain stipulations and payments. These lands were formally added to the Mississippi Territory in 1804. Lands south of the thirty-first parallel and west of the Pearl River were made part of the Orleans Territory in 1810, and those between the Pearl and Perdido rivers were joined to the Mississippi Territory in 1813. In 1816, both the Chickasaw and Choctaw ceded lands west of and adjacent to the Creek cession of 1814, opening even more land for survey and settlement.<sup>17</sup>

The cession of Georgia's claims to its western lands raised a particular set of complications. The agreement required the validation



of all British and Spanish titles by persons residing on the land in 1795 as well as the removal of Indian claims of title to all land in the state of Georgia, as soon as practicable, at reasonable prices. A board of commissions for lands east of the Pearl River was set up in 1803; it met at Fort Stoddert, heard claims, and adjourned in 1805. Needless to say, overlapping titles and inconsistent practices were common. Some settlers had their prior titles confirmed, others were donated their land because of long possession, and still others were given first priority to purchase the lands to which they claimed preemptive rights; a century of litigation of land-title claims followed.<sup>18</sup> The Yazoo claims, arising from Georgia's spurious sale of lands west, were settled when Congress issued \$8 million in scrip that could be used in purchasing land.

The presence of land, money, and buyers and the absence of clear lines of authority created an ideal climate for speculators seeking a quick profit and a rapid turnover. They made down payments, hoping for a sale before the next payment came due, and some public officials used knowledge gained through their office as a basis for personal speculation and profit-splitting contracts.<sup>19</sup> To this day, the term *land-office business* refers to the frenzy of trade inspired by these frontier conditions.

The process that ended in so many conflicts had had a more orderly beginning. In accordance with the Land Ordinance Act of 1785, all lands in the Mississippi Territory to which Indian titles had been extinguished were to be surveyed into townships and subdivided into half-sections. In 1807, land offices were set up at St. Stephens and Huntsville. The St. Stephens base line (east and west) was established substantially along the Ellicott line (the thirty-first parallel), and the principal meridian (north and south) ran through St. Stephens. The Huntsville base line was established along the southern boundary of Tennessee, and the principal meridian ran through Huntsville. Lands surveyed from these points of reference were to be sold for a minimum of two dollars per acre, payable over a four-year period, and cash discounts were allowed for those with currency in hand. The first sales were made at St. Stephens on December 26, 1806, but no sales of Tombigbee land were made until September 2, 1811.<sup>20</sup>

Overseeing this imposition of the European and American system

of land division on the new territory were military surveyors. Although the survey of these public lands by the U.S. government was begun by Maj. Thomas Freeman in 1807, progress was interrupted by the Creek Indian War of 1813-14. Freeman had been the surveyor of the Mississippi Territory, but Gen. John Coffee, close friend and able second to the then politically powerful Gen. Andrew Jackson in the War of 1812, was also a surveyor and desired employment as such. William H. Crawford, secretary of the treasury, was impatient to have these surveys completed and in March 1817 had Coffee appointed surveyor general of public lands for the northern portion of the Mississippi Territory. Freeman continued to survey, north from the St. Stephens principal meridian, the area which on December 10, 1817, became the southern portion of the Alabama Territory. Location of the Federal Road is shown on section and township plats of government land surveys which crossed the road and were made after its completion in 1811. Freeman completed the survey of the southern portion before Coffee finished the northern part and stopped with regular sections at a line running east and west through Fort Williams, one of Jackson's forts built during the Creek War of 1813-14, located southwest of Sylacauga on the Coosa River. Coffee later completed the survey south from the Huntsville principal meridian and tied into Freeman's northern line with fractional sections. The division between these two surveys (Huntsville and St. Stephens) is called the "Coffee-Freeman Line." In 1818, Coffee's authority was extended to all of the Alabama Territory and Freeman's to the state of Mississippi.<sup>21</sup> (One vestige of the military system still present in both states is the use of the term *beat* for Alabama and Mississippi voting districts.)

The tremendous influx of settlers, some coming through Huntsville but most entering the southeastern portion of the Mississippi Territory over the Federal Road, had a great influence on the changing sectional and political situation and on the issue of whether the territory should be one state or two—and, if two, where the dividing line should be. From the onset of emigration, two population centers developed, one near Natchez on the Mississippi, the other on the Tombigbee. The Mississippi settlement was larger, grew faster, and dominated the early government; it was deaf to the pleas of the Tombigbee settlement for more adequate protection against the Indians

and better representation in governmental affairs. The Tombigbee people requested separation into two states to prevent domination by the Mississippi River settlers, who were benefiting from the single-government system. Some time after Georgia's western lands were added to the Mississippi Territory, George Poindexter, the territorial delegate in Congress, proposed division by a line running due east from the mouth of the Yazoo—the same 32° 28' line used to form the initial northern boundary of the Mississippi Territory—with the entire southern part admitted as the state of Mississippi. Settlers in Madison County, Alabama, above the proposed line, where the population center at Huntsville was growing, favored Poindexter's plan because it would separate them from control by the Mississippi settlement, but the Tombigbee settlement vigorously attacked the proposal. In 1812, the proposition passed in the House of Representatives, but the Senate recommended postponement to study division along the line of the Tombigbee.<sup>22</sup> In 1815, the new territorial delegate, Dr. William Lattimore, favored admission as one state. The House passed a single-state bill after receiving a petition from the territorial legislature, but the issue quickly became national. Southern senators wanted as many slave states as possible, and the Senate followed their lead, rejecting the act of the House.

A more local balance-of-power controversy developed as the Tombigbee country began to fill with settlers. The eastern portion soon was more populous than the Natchez-Washington area, and the capital of the single state could be moved east to St. Stephens. Realizing the shift, the Mississippi settlement desired immediate statehood, over the protests of Judge Harry Toulmin, Col. Sam Dale, and others of the Tombigbee settlement. By December 1816, a committee of the House of Representatives was unanimously in favor of a division, with the western portion admitted as a state and the eastern portion given territorial status. Although the southern boundary of Tennessee would be a horizontal line, where to draw the vertical line was still at issue. Some wanted the Pascagoula River and others the Mobile-Tombigbee as the line. Charles Tait, then a U.S. senator from Georgia, and others favored a compromise line in between, which was acceptable to Judge Toulmin. That issue resolved, the Alabama Territory was formed in March 1817, and Mississippi became a state in December of the same year.<sup>23</sup>

The settlers coming from Georgia over the Federal Road had great influence on the timing of the division and the location of the line between Alabama and Mississippi, and their politics had much to do with the survey and sale of lands. Commissioner Josiah Meigs, who corresponded with U.S. Postmaster Gideon Granger about the horse path and who had served from 1801 to 1810 as president of the University of Georgia, directed Thomas Freeman to give priority to surveying the better lands along the Alabama River. These were placed on sale in 1817—not at the Alabama land offices, but at Milledgeville. This scheme made buying the land easy for the friends of the political kingpin William H. Crawford but impracticable for settlers in the territory. After the best lands had been sold at Milledgeville, the land office was moved to Cahaba, and later a land office was opened at Sparta in Escambia County.<sup>24</sup>

The debt to Crawford traveled with the Milledgeville settlers over the Federal Road. Their patron had been elected U.S. senator from Georgia in 1807, when he was thirty-five years old. He was elected president pro tem in 1812, and the next year he left the Senate to accept President Madison's appointment as minister to France. In 1815, Crawford returned to serve a few months as secretary of war and then as secretary of the treasury under Madison and Monroe.<sup>25</sup>

Crawford's position in the state and the nation gave him great influence in early Alabama appointments to public office. As one historian has summed it, "Crawford was in control of public office and put his friends into office whenever he could."<sup>26</sup> William Wyatt Bibb, Bolling Hall, Charles Tait, and George M. Troup all served in the United States Congress with Crawford.<sup>27</sup> Bibb resigned as senator in 1817 because of the protests over his voting to increase the salaries of senators; Tait likewise came under fire but remained in the Senate until Alabama became a state in 1819 to make certain the dividing line was west of the Mobile-Tombigbee river system. Bibb was appointed governor of the territory in 1817 and was elected first governor of the state in 1819. Tait, who had recently moved to Wilcox County, was appointed judge of the Federal District Court, with jurisdiction over all of Alabama, when the court was formed in 1820.<sup>28</sup> Hall, who had served as representative from Georgia from 1811 to 1817, moved to Alabama and became a member of the Crawford political machine. He settled on a plantation in a part of Autauga County



**WILLIAM HARRIS CRAWFORD**

William Harris Crawford (1772–1834), from his position in Washington, greatly influenced patronage in the Mississippi and Alabama territories and in the state of Alabama, though he was never a resident. He was United States senator from Georgia, 1807–13; minister to France, 1813–15; secretary of war, 1815–16; secretary of the treasury, 1816–25; and unsuccessful candidate for president in 1825. The Crawford, or Georgia, machine finally gave way to the North Carolina faction. (Reprinted from Rebecca Crawford Hamilton photo album in the private collection of H. D. Southerland, Jr.)



#### ISRAEL PICKENS AND WILLIAM WYATT BIBB

William Wyatt Bibb (right) and Israel Pickens (left), travelers over the Federal Road from Georgia and North Carolina, respectively, represented two factions of settlers. As part of the William Harris Crawford machine, Bibb (1781–1820) was among the early leaders who helped Georgians get preferential treatment in land purchases and in appointments to federal offices. Pickens (1780–1827), who was the spokesman for the plain people, also had authority as register of the land office at St. Stephens. Both served in Congress before coming to Alabama. Bibb was the territory's and the state's first governor. Pickens was the state's third governor and was in office in 1825 when Lafayette made his famous journey across Alabama. (Reprinted, by permission, from the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery)

that became Elmore County and sent his wagons back over the Federal Road to Milledgeville for supplies.<sup>29</sup>

Opposing Crawford was Israel Pickens, whose tenure in the Congress (1811–17) coincided with Hall's. He came to Alabama from North Carolina, over the "almost impassable" Federal Road to become the register for the Mississippi Territory land office at St. Stephens in 1817. Waging political warfare as a spokesman for the plain people, he became the third governor of Alabama, serving from 1821 to 1825. He also served a few months as senator in 1826; he died the following year and was buried in the family cemetery near Greensboro in Hale County, Alabama.<sup>30</sup>

Although politics most often becomes the stuff of recorded history, a more representative settler than either Pickens or Hall was the

Reverend Joshua Wilson, a Revolutionary War soldier and a Methodist minister who purchased land at the St. Stephens office in 1815 but did not move his family until 1817. At the age of fifty-seven, he took his wife, children (some grown and married), slaves, livestock, wagons, carriages, and household possessions over the Federal Road and settled at Gainestown, in Clarke County, three miles from the Alabama River. His descendants became prominent in Clarke County affairs.<sup>31</sup>

Though the mails were not reliable, even after the postal horse path was widened into the Federal Road, new post offices were being created to serve the settlers. The location and dates of establishment point to where the population was growing and when. Many new post offices were created on and near the Federal Road just after July 1818. Some of the earlier post offices, postmasters, and dates of first return, as indicated in the National Archives' first returns from postmasters prior to July 1818, included:

New Orleans	Blaise Cenas	October 1, 1804
Fort Stoddert	Edmund P. Gaines	April 1, 1805
Fort Stephens	Joseph Chambers	July 1, 1805
Milledgeville	Thompson Bird	October 1, 1806
Ocmulgee Old Fields	Jonathan Halstead	April 1, 1807
Tensaw	John Pierce	April 1, 1808
Creek Agency	Benjamin Hawkins	January 1, 1810
Mobile	James B. Wilkinson	July 1, 1814
Coweta	Joseph Marshall	April 1, 1815
Fort Jackson	Walter R. Ross	October 1, 1815
Fort Claiborne	Andrew Mitchell	July 1, 1816
Fort Mitchell	Daniel Hughes	April 1, 1818 <sup>32</sup>

Mail between Washington and New Orleans continued to be carried via Natchez until 1826, when a contract was made to carry the mail via Georgia. About that time the steamboats and stagecoaches, being more reliable, supplanted the individual mail riders on horseback. This use of the Federal Road contributed to the gradual decline in national importance of the Natchez Trace.<sup>33</sup>

Although there are no accounts indicating that the many waters along the Federal Road parted to allow Christian pilgrims to pass with unmoistened feet, zeal was not dampened. Churches were

springing up across the region, and religion, as some of the travelers noticed, exerted a civilizing influence. Especially worthy of note is the growth of churches along the lower section of the Federal Road, the most sparsely populated outside of the Creek Nation. At Fort Dale in Butler County, the Town Creek Baptist Church was organized in 1819 or 1820, and the Friendship Baptist Church in 1821. In Conecuh County, three Baptist churches had been organized by 1821: the Bethany Baptist Church, on Old Stage Road; Olive Branch Baptist Church, at Gravella Station; and the Brooklyn Baptist Church, in the vicinity of Turk's Cave, where the highwayman Joseph Thompson Hare had hidden while engaged in his own preying. The Belleville Baptist Church also was located in Conecuh County, and the Alabama Baptist Convention, founded in 1823, met there in 1827.<sup>34</sup> The Methodists were not far behind: Abner McGehee made a home in southern Montgomery County about 1822 between Catoma and Pintlala Creek, near the Federal Road, and soon thereafter built the Hope Hull Methodist Church. The Reverend James King was a Methodist minister at Burnt Corn from about 1821 to 1834. By 1819, three conferences—the Tennessee, Mississippi, and South Carolina—were furnishing preachers for the Alabama circuits, and the Alabama Methodist Conference was organized in 1832.<sup>35</sup>

Because of the access provided by the Federal Road, Alabama grew at a rate of more than 1,300 percent between 1810 and 1820, much faster than either Mississippi or Louisiana. Although Alabama had less population than Mississippi in both 1800 and 1810, its population exceeded that of Mississippi in the period 1820 to 1850, and also exceeded that of Louisiana in the period of 1830 to 1850.<sup>36</sup>

The steady growth of a dominant, white population in the section, with its own customs, religions, and ingrained animosities against the Indians, made assimilation with the Indians out of the question. The early practice of white soldiers and traders who married Creek women and produced half-breed offspring that might partake of both white and Indian ways came to an end. It had begun as early as 1717 at Fort Toulouse, at the junction of the Coosa and the Tallapoosa, which became the site of Fort Jackson in 1814.<sup>37</sup> The French commander, Captain Marchand, and an Indian woman named Sehoy, frequently called Princess Sehoy and referred to in genealogical charts as "Sehoy I" because of the name repetition, were the parents

of a daughter, Sehoy II. Sehoy I was a member of the dominant Wind Clan of the Upper Creeks, and her children became leaders of the Creek Nation. Sehoy II married first a Tuckabatchee chieftain (or, according to one account, a Scotsman, Malcolm McPherson) and had Sehoy III, who married first a Colonel Tate and became the mother of David and John Tate. After Tate's death, she married Charles Weatherford, a Scotsman, and became the mother of William Weatherford, or Red Eagle, an architect of the massacre at Fort Mims, who surrendered to Andrew Jackson after the Battle of Horseshoe Bend and lived out his life as a planter in Monroe County, Alabama. Sehoy I, who had first married Captain Marchand, had a second husband named Lachlan McGillivray; to that union three children were born: Sophia, who married Benjamin Durant; Janet, who married LeClerc Milfort; and Alexander McGillivray, who died in 1793 and was the last chief to dominate the entire Creek confederation.<sup>38</sup> William Weatherford's daughter Betsy married Sam Manack, who operated a stand below Montgomery and whose name appears in many accounts. Their son David, who spelled his surname Moniac, was the first Indian to graduate from West Point. He was a brave, well-considered man, who easily passed for white, and was killed in the Second Seminole War—fighting against troops under the command of a half-breed who passed for Indian, Osceola.<sup>39</sup>

Another arabesque story of assimilation, marked by tragedy and significant in a study of the Federal Road, was that of the McIntosh family. John McIntosh, son of Lt. Benjamin McIntosh and Catherine McIntosh, married Margaret McGillivray; they were the parents of Capt. William McIntosh, a Tory during the Revolution. Capt. William McIntosh lived among the Creek Indians with his two wives, one of whom was the mother of Chief William McIntosh—who signed the Treaty of Washington in 1805 and later died because of a treaty. An earlier McIntosh, John McIntosh Mohr (the final name indicating "great" or "large"), had sailed from Inverness, Scotland, on October 18, 1735, in the *Prince of Wales*, commanded by Capt. George Dunbar with some two hundred Highlanders, including about fifty women, and had settled New Inverness, which became Darien, the county seat of McIntosh County, Georgia. His son Lachlan was a brigadier general in the Continental Army in the American Revolution. He is also famous in Georgia for having killed Button Gwinnett, a

signer of the Declaration of Independence, in a duel near Savannah on May 12, 1777. With John McIntosh Mohr had come two cousins, John and Roderick, sons of Brigadier William McIntosh of the Jacobite Uprising of 1715. These two McIntoshes settled at McIntosh Bluff on the Tombigbee River, near where Aaron Burr was captured in 1807; both were captains in the British Army. On a trip back to Scotland, Catherine, daughter of Capt. John McIntosh, married a British officer named Troup; she returned to McIntosh Bluff for the birth of her son, George M. Troup, destined to be the governor of Georgia from 1823 to 1827, when Creek-Georgia relations were critical.<sup>40</sup> To complete a sketch that is better than the plot for a historical romance, George Troup was governor when his first cousin William McIntosh, who signed several treaties, was killed in an act of tribal retribution at his home in Indian Springs, Georgia, on April 30, 1825.<sup>41</sup> Chief-General McIntosh had, simultaneously, three wives, one of whom, Eliza Grierson (raised by the Hawkins family), was the mother of Chilly McIntosh, whose melancholia and insight into the problems of Indians was detailed by Lafayette's secretary in 1825.<sup>42</sup>

Another contrast to the later Federal Road settlers was Abraham Mordecai (also Mordacai), whose life also deserves longer treatment. He was born in Pennsylvania in 1755 of Jewish and German descent. After settling on the Flint River to become a trader, he was employed to negotiate for the ransom of white captives held by the Indians. Sometime between 1785 and 1789, he moved to Line Creek, where he erected a house that stood there until 1812. Mordecai's place was near "Old Milly's," the tavern site east of Montgomery, not far from where the Federal Road made its southwesterly turn. Mordecai carried on an extensive trade in furs and skins, which he conveyed on packhorses to Augusta, Pensacola, Mobile, and New Orleans, assisted by the Indians. Between 1802 and 1804, Mordecai built the first cotton gin in the Mississippi Territory, just below the junction of the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers, and sold his cotton in New Orleans for as much as thirty-three cents a pound. His left ear was cut off—according to Brannon because his horse had eaten some of the Indians' corn, but according to Pickett because of an amorous affair with a pretty married squaw. The removal of an ear was, in fact, a traditional punishment for adultery. Mordecai was also beaten, and his gin was later burned, yet he remained loyal to the American cause.



**GEORGE M. TROUP**

The life of George M. Troup (1780–1834) represents two perspectives on dealing with the Creek Indians. While Troup was governor of Georgia, his first cousin, Chief William McIntosh, was killed by his fellow Creeks after signing the 1825 Treaty of Indian Springs. Troup was born at McIntosh Bluff on the Tombigbee to Catherine (or Margaret, in some genealogies) McIntosh Troup. The McIntosh family, like the Weatherford, Cornells, and Manack/Moniac families, represented the several generations of white-Indian intermarriages that occurred before the rush of white settlers over the Federal Road after 1811. (Reprinted, by permission, from the Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta)

Mordecai's wife was described as "considerably darkened by the blood of Ham," an allusion to Negro blood. Mordecai served as a guide for General Floyd and joined in the battles of Autossee and Calabee Creek; in 1814, he returned to the Creek Nation with his family, which represented several races. A true settler, he refused to move to Arkansas in 1836 at the time of Indian removal.<sup>43</sup>

By the time the Federal Road had developed into a pioneer thoroughfare, the Indian traders with their international loyalties had either disappeared or lost their influence. In 1798 and 1799, Benjamin Hawkins had surveyed the white population of the Creek Nation and reported the names of some Indian traders and their families. He listed names and occasionally the nationality: Christopher Heinkle, a German; Christian Hagle of Germany; Richard Baily, an Englishman; Nicholas White of Marseilles; Michael Elhart, a Dutchman; Patrick Lane of Ireland; John Townshend, an Englishman; Timothy Barnard, an interpreter; Captain Ellick; Stephen Hawkins; Obediah Low; Joe Marshall; Zachariah McGive (or McGirth); John McLeod; John O'Kelley; William Pound; John Proctor; James Quarles; James Russell; and others.<sup>44</sup> Several of the later traders entered the Creek Nation under passports issued by the state of Georgia.<sup>45</sup>

Many of the children and grandchildren of the Indian intermarriages entered the American mainstream and became prominent citizens. Their Indian relations, who had been a majority in the early 1800s, were far outnumbered by whites by the start of the third decade. The total Creek population in 1825 was 20,653, with 10,703 in the Upper Nation and 9,950 in the Lower Nation.<sup>46</sup> By the time removal of the Indians was increasing in May 1833, the Upper Nation population was 14,142 and the Lower Nation 8,552, a total of 22,694.<sup>47</sup> The widening gap between the populations of the two nations points to the increase of white settlements in the Lower Nation and demonstrates that settlers were more critical than soldiers in reducing the Indian population. By the start of the 1830s, whites must have outnumbered Creek Indians in Alabama by at least a quarter million.<sup>48</sup>

Into the hands of these settlers was passing the fate of the section. Observing the people who had come over the Federal Road and the natural resources at their disposal, an English traveler in 1839, James Silk Buckingham, saw the new country's potential and what might

keep it from being realized. "It will equal, if not surpass, the very finest part of England or France; and if well and wisely governed, be as happy a country, as it is sure to become a rich and productive one. Nature has done everything to make it so; and if it fails, it will be the fault of its institutions or its inhabitants."<sup>49</sup> Even if the pioneers struggling to make their homes in the newly opened country could have heard Buckingham's charge, with its tone of admonition more audible to twentieth-century ears, they probably would not have taken his magisterial view or have been so objective about their mission. They were busy getting the land cleared not only of trees but also of what many considered the last obstacle to progress and peace of mind—the Indians.



# 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.

"This book is not only a biography of the principal southern thoroughfare but also the setting for the human drama of westward migration. Until now, the story of migration into newly opened cotton lands was thought of more as a phenomenon than as a saga. Southerland and Brown have enlivened southern history by giving faces and form to the multitudes that trekked westward in search of opportunity, and, in doing so, they have made an important contribution to southern history."

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"Southerland and Brown do a fine job of painting a scene of the deconstruction of the Creek Nation, accomplished through the construction of the Federal Road."

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

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MAPS BY CHARLES JEFFERSON HIERS

*Sponsored by the Historic Chattahoochee Commission*

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

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**THE FEDERAL ROAD**

through Georgia,  
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## INTRODUCTION

### *"But for the Federal Road . . ."*

**I**N 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.<sup>1</sup> "But for the Federal Road with its forts," Peter Joseph Hamilton had declaimed in 1898, "there had been no Alabama as we know it."<sup>2</sup> 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."<sup>3</sup> 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.