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Two Ghosts

A COVERLET WOVEN ON A LOOM by Sarah Ann Stephens, an early settler in Chambers County, Alabama, in what had recently been the Creek Nation, memorializes the Indian wars in woolen yarns dyed with poplar and oak bark into lavenders and earthen browns, in configurations of strong double-walled stockades defined against a white cotton background.[1] The Chattahoochee valley artifact is historically symbolic for more than its materials, colors, or pattern. The last days before the migration of the Creek Indians and the fading of the Federal Road were marked also by an interweaving of the forces and the people that played prominent roles in the transformation of western Georgia and Alabama. Familiar elements in a struggle dating at least from the opening of the horse path in 1806 reappear to complete the design: tensions between Creek factions and between whites and Indians generally; the conflict over national and states' rights; the peace treaties that brought war; the claims to land entitlements that brought bloodshed and lawsuits; a standing cast of characters—Andrew Jackson, Little Prince, Big Warrior, Menawa, William and Chilly McIntosh, William Walker, David Moniac, Jere Austill, Matthew Arbuckle, and Edmund P. Gaines; and the Federal Road itself, with all of its ruts, swamps, and sandbeds, still the agent of intrusion. To be sure, other factors, political, economic, and technological, also figured in the disappearance of the Federal Road as the nineteenth century progressed, but none was as important as the removal of the Indians.

By the start of the third decade of the century, it was evident that no permanent peace was likely between the Creek Nation and the United States government; the civil strife that had been a prelude to the First Creek War, in 1813–14 was destined to turn outward once more in what early historians were fond of calling "depredations"

against the whites, whom the Indians regarded as the true predators. One sign that the smoldering hostilities would erupt again came in 1825, when William McIntosh, the Creek-Scottish chieftain-general who fought with the Americans against both the Red Sticks and the Seminoles, signed his fifth and final treaty with the United States. He had been a principal signatory of the first Treaty of Washington (1805), ceding lands to the Ocmulgee and granting rights for a postal horse path; the Treaty of Fort Jackson (1814), ceding lands in the Alabama and Tombigbee river valleys; the Treaty of the Creek Agency (1818), ceding a parcel of land in lower central Georgia; and the first Treaty of Indian Springs (1821), ceding the lands from the Ocmulgee to the Flint.[2] He presumed to speak for the entire Creek confederation and even opened his own road through the Indian territory; it was advertised in the Tuscaloosa *American Mercury* as having been built by General McIntosh through the upper part of the Creek Nation. Estimated to be 118 miles long, the road ran from the Coosa River opposite Shelby County, Alabama, to Fayette County, Georgia, with stops at James Kelly's, a Colonel Hawkins's (the Indian agent had died in 1816), and General McIntosh's place at Indian Springs. The newspaper reported that "not long since three wagons have traveled this road, heavy loaded, and came through with the greatest ease."[3] After McIntosh signed away even more Creek territory, moving the boundary westward to the Flint in the 1821 Treaty of Indian Springs, leaders of the Creek Nation became alarmed; at a council of Tuckabatchee in May 1824, a law was passed forbidding further sale of tribal lands, under penalty of death.[4]

Meeting later in 1824 with federal commissioners at Broken Arrow, south of Fort Mitchell on the Alabama side of the Chattahoochee, the Indians heard that the president of the United States had "extensive holdings beyond the Mississippi" that might be exchanged for their land. The Creek chiefs' response, as recorded by the Americans, showed reasoning grounded in experience.

> Ruin is the almost inevitable consequence of a removal beyond the Mississippi, we are convinced. It is true, very true, that "we are surrounded by white people," that there are encroachments made—what assurances have we that similar ones will not be made on us, should we deem it proper to accept your offer, and remove beyond the Mis-

> sissippi; and how do we know that we would not be encroaching on the people of other nations?[5]

Sensing that the faction led by McIntosh favored the removal, one of the U.S. commissioners, Duncan G. Campbell, reopened the treaty negotiations at McIntosh's place. Not only were Big Warrior and Little Prince, chief of the Creeks, absent as a protest against the authority of McIntosh, they had given him warning of the tribal sanction. Campbell pressed the negotiations, and on February 12, 1825, McIntosh, whose actual authority was as chief of the Lower Creeks, and his son Chilly, merely a town chief, signed the second Treaty of Indian Springs. It ceded lands from the Flint to the Chattahoochee in exchange for $400,000 and lands of "like quality, acre for acre, westward of the Mississippi."[6] McIntosh was tried in absentia by the Creek council and convicted. Big Warrior died on March 8, 1825,[7] and Little Prince, acting as principal chief of the confederation, ordered McIntosh's execution. A party of more than a hundred horsemen under Chief Menawa, who had led the Creeks against Jackson at Horseshoe Bend, descended on McIntosh's home at dawn on April 30, 1825. They burned it and killed McIntosh, carrying his scalp back to Tuckabatchee as a return of the order of execution. His son Chilly escaped; the many intermarriages had taken most of the red from his skin, and he was allowed to slip out unrecognized with the white residents of the house.[8] The fate of the Creeks, which was the real reason for the sadness described by Lafayette's secretary a month earlier, was about to be realized; in 1828, as Major Chilly McIntosh, he led the initial contingent of Lower Creeks in their removal to the West.[9]

The 1825 Treaty of Indian Springs gave all of the present state of Georgia to the Americans.[10] When President John Quincy Adams found that it had been negotiated with only a few Creeks, he ordered a new one drawn up in 1826, ceding only all lands east of the Chattahoochee and a tract of land west of the Chattahoochee but within the state of Georgia. Adams contended that the new treaty, the second Treaty of Washington, was a valid cancellation of the 1825 treaty. Gov. George Troup did not recognize the cancellation and claimed state jurisdiction over all lands contained within the boundaries of Georgia. The dispute was not settled until yet another treaty was

WILLIAM MCINTOSH AND CHIEF MENAWA
Depending upon the point of view, William McIntosh (1775–1825) was either a martyr or a betrayer. As a chief of the Lower Creeks, he signed many treaties granting Indian territory to the United States; as a soldier in the American cause, he fought against hostile Creeks and Seminoles and earned the rank of general. McIntosh lived a life reflecting both his white, Scottish ancestry and his Indian blood. After he signed a treaty in 1825, a Creek council ordered his execution; it was carried out by Indians under Chief Menawa (c. 1776–c. 1836), who had led the Creeks in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend. These photographs were made from portraits done by Washington artist Charles Bird King when Indian chiefs were visiting Washington to sign treaties during the 1820s and 1830s. (Reprinted, by permission, from the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution)

signed at the Creek Agency on November 15, 1827.[11] These subsequent treaties did not reduce the tensions between the Upper Nation and the Lower Nation, or calm the anxieties of Creeks who sensed what was coming.

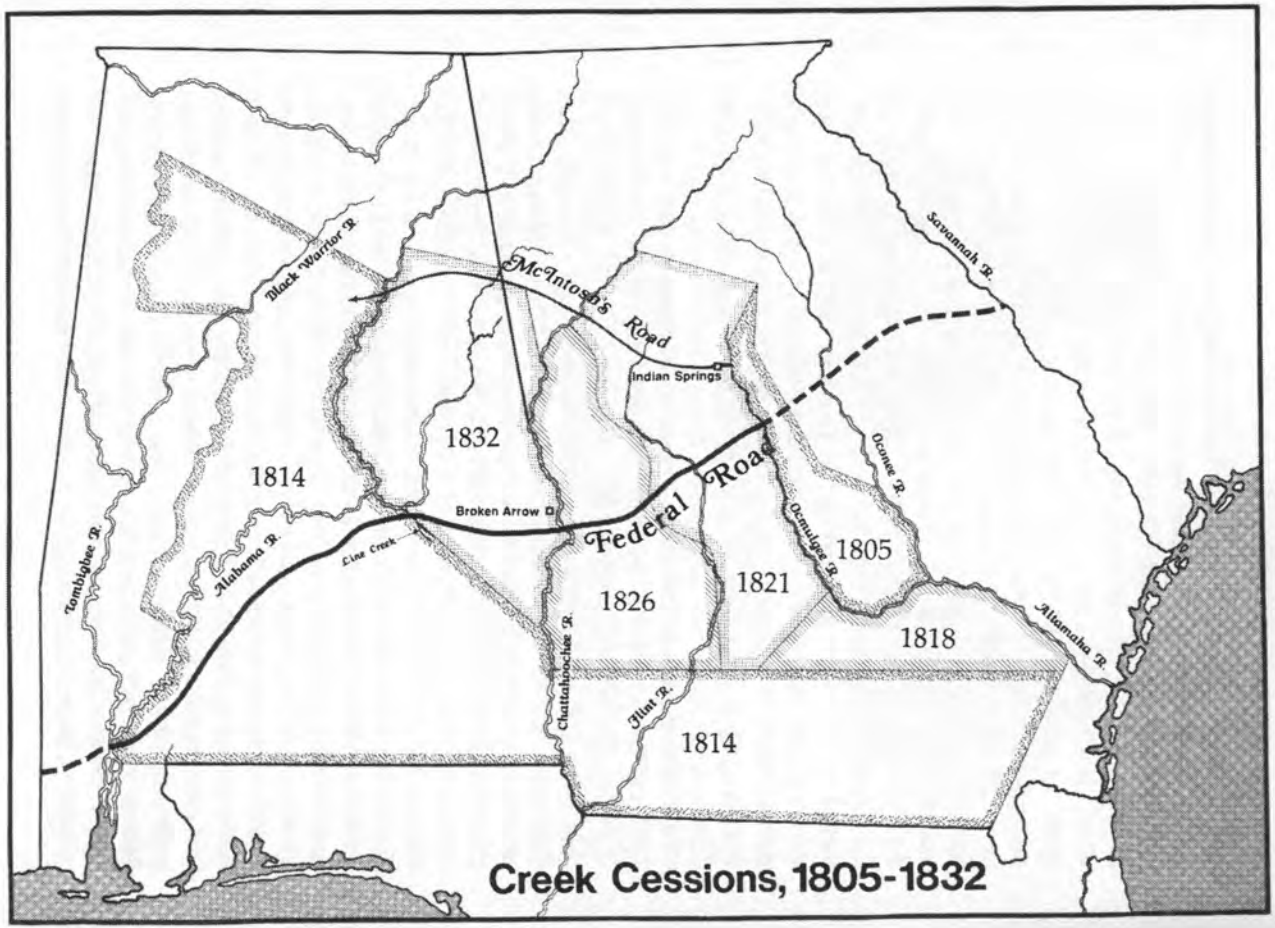
Adams's new treaty squeezed the Indians into an even smaller area of east Alabama and northwest Georgia, closing them off from other traditional homelands.[12] The Indians Harriet Martineau saw on the streets of Columbus in 1835 had been present since the city was founded in 1827. Dislocated and often desperate, they came across the Chattahoochee during the day by the hundreds, sometimes thousands, but were banned from the Georgia side after dark. Residents

of Columbus regarded them as a band of beggars and drunkards whose "object was to get something to eat or steal."[13]

The final drama took another turn when the Creeks' old nemesis, Andrew Jackson, became president. If he had not effectively rung down the curtain on the Creek Nation at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, he would do so by supporting new legislation and by interpreting the existing treaties—particularly the term *removal*—to the benefit of his frontier constituency. Soon after his inauguration, Jackson stressed that the Creeks should migrate as soon as possible.[14] On May 28, 1830, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act, providing for the exchange of lands with the Indians and for the removal west of the Mississippi. Jackson then proved that the iron will he had displayed in Alabama in negotiating the Treaty of Fort Jackson had not softened. After the Creeks protested the removal act, the president granted them an audience "on the condition that they would be fully empowered to negotiate in conformity with the wishes of the Government."[15]

With the signing of the third Treaty of Washington, on May 24, 1832, the Creeks surrendered all tribal lands east of the Mississippi. In return they were promised removal at the expense of the United States and given subsistence in their new home for one year. The treaty provided for allotments of a half-section (320 acres) to each orphan and head of a family, and a section to each of the ninety tribal chiefs and town headmen, with 16,000 acres to be sold for the benefit of the tribe.[16] Out of a total of 5,200,000 acres credited to the Indians, 2,187,200 acres of the Creek Nation were reserved for them. The census taken on May 1, 1833, to fulfill the provisions of the 1832 treaty revealed 14,142 Creeks in the Upper Nation and 8,552 in the Lower Nation, with heads of families totaling 6,557. Squatters and intruders on Indian lands could also be removed, although, as subsequent events demonstrated, physical force from either the United States or the Indians themselves might be required. Often, fraudulent certification to land speculators went unprosecuted, which aggravated matters and prompted the Creek Council to inform Secretary of War Lewis Cass that, "instead of our situation being relieved as was anticipated, we are distressed in a ten-fold manner."[17]

In 1833, the issue of who held authority over the land exploded in


Black Warrior R.
McIntosh's Road
Indian Springs
Savannah R.
1832
1814
Broken Arrow
Federal Road
Oconee R.
Ocmulgee R.
Tombigbee R.
Alabama R.
Line Creek
1805
1821
1826
1818
Chattahoochee R.
Flint R.
Altamaha R.
1814
Creek Cessions, 1805-1832

the Hardeman Owens incident. Owens had moved into the Indians' territory as one of the commissioners sent by the Alabama legislature to organize Russell County, one of nine to be created from the Creek Nation.[18] Under the treaty of 1832, however, all whites on the land before the survey was completed were intruders, and the Land Act of 1807 provided procedures for their removal. Alabama officials led by the pro-Jackson governor, John Gayle, did not believe the federal statutes would be enforced. Moreover, Cass had answered Gayle's inquiry on the matter by stating that white persons not bothering Indians or who had not forced Indians off any land could stay until the survey was completed—a violation of the treaty but one that Gayle took for official policy.[19] In response to complaints from the Indians, a deputy U.S. marshal, Jere Austill, who had gained fame with Sam Dale and others in the Canoe Fight twenty years earlier, was sent with a detachment of Fort Mitchell soldiers to evict intruders, even those settling under the aegis of the state of Alabama. Owens, who, according to some reports, had robbed Indian graves and taken one hundred acres of good land from Indians, said he would die before leaving. He mined his house with gunpowder, invited Austill in, and fled out the back door. Austill had been warned and was not in the house when the powder went off. After Owens was caught, he drew a gun on the soldiers, and one of them killed him. For those siding with Gayle, Owens became a martyr.[20]

The Fort Mitchell commander, Maj. James McIntosh, aware of the mob mentality, refused to surrender the soldiers to Russell County authorities. After an appeal to Jackson by the state's congressional delegation, Francis Scott Key, a skillful Washington lawyer as well as author of the "Star Spangled Banner," was sent by the president to Fort Mitchell to adjust the differences. Key also did not trust the higher county officials, but he persuaded McIntosh to agree to a bond giving officers responsibility for bringing to trial the soldiers who had been witnesses and the one who had fired the gun.[21] The issue began to cool further after it was announced that the survey would be completed by January of the following year, and after Lt. Col. J. J. Abert, the engineer supervising the survey, showed settlers in advance where the Indian reserves were. For his part, Key ordered that no Indian could sign away his land rights for less than $1.25 an acre. At Tuscaloosa he charmed the governor's wife (Sarah Haynes-

worth Gayle described him in her journal as a "man of much intelligence—a lawyer of high standing—a man of honor—a *poet* and a Christian) and attempted to calm Gayle.[22] The soldier who shot Owens did desert, as McIntosh had feared he would; but Gayle's feathers were still ruffled over the treatment in Washington, and he promoted resolutions, which were artfully tabled, denouncing removal of the settlers.[23]

The tensions reflected in the Hardeman Owens incident had flamed up also in the confrontation between soldiers and intruders of Irwinton, formerly the Creek village of Ola Ufala, and now the city of Eufaula. Whites drove off the Indians, burned their homes, and erected a village of log houses, which was incorporated as Irwinton in 1831. A federal marshal sent to evict the intruders in 1832 had to call for help from a detachment of Fort Mitchell troops. After the whites were forced out, their town, like the Creeks', was burned.[24]

The settlement of jurisdictional questions was cold comfort to the Creeks. With voluntary emigration already underway and removal by force imminent, hostilities escalated into what is called the Second Creek War, or the Creek War of 1836. In their last struggle, the Creeks attacked whites and the Indians and half-breeds who favored the treaty of 1832. The alarm among the whites resulted in the formation of the Columbus Guards in 1835. Whites were murdered, homes burned, and stages plundered; by 1836, about two thousand citizens from rural areas sought protection in Columbus.[25] Smaller, makeshift forts were also built where settlements had started after the 1832 treaty; the ruins of one may still be observed south of the railroad crossing of Cusseta, Alabama, northeast of Opelika. The U.S. Army was ordered into the section, and Gen. Thomas Jesup commanded both Alabama volunteers and more than 70 friendly Creeks under Jim Boy.

The pathos and terror of transition were recorded by Dr. Jacob Motte, an army surgeon from South Carolina, who described a "journey into wilderness" and a Federal Road more threatened with violence than it had been since Floyd's campaign in 1813–14. He arrived at Fort Mitchell on July 4, 1836, "a day of feasting and celebration throughout the Union," in time to see "the emigrating party of hostile Indians."

> It was a melancholy spectacle as these proud monarchs of the soil were marched off from their native land to a distant country, which to their anticipations presented all the horrors of the infernal regions. There were several who committed suicide rather than endure the sorrow of leaving the spot where rested the bones of their ancestors. One old fellow was found hanging by the neck the night before he was to leave Fort Mitchell for the West, preferring the glorious uncertainty of another world to the inglorious misery of being forced to a country of which he knew nothing, but dreaded every thing bad.[26]

When his party got to Montgomery, one of the Indians escaped and found a knife too dull to cut his throat, but with both hands he "forced it into his chest over the breastbone, and by successive violent thrusts succeeded in dividing the main artery, when he bled to death."[27]

Dr. Motte was ordered to Tuskegee but stalled until he could travel with a military escort because "it would be running the risk of almost certain death to attempt the journey alone." Along the Federal Road, he observed the same destruction he had seen recently at Roanoke, in Stewart County, Georgia. In Alabama he saw "new made graves, where the murdered travelers had been hastily buried beside the road," and a road blocked in one spot by "half-burnt remains of stages and wagons that had been pillaged by the Indians."[28] The bones of men and horses from a similar attack in 1835 were pointed out to the Virginia lawyer James D. Davidson during his harrowing night ride into Columbus in 1836.[29] In one place Dr. Motte witnessed the sight of a Federal Road filled with coffins, scattered by Indians who had attacked the wagons sent out to bring in the dead for burial.[30]

At Creek Stand, Dr. Motte also met David Moniac, "the lieutenant of the escort," who introduced Motte to his father, Sam Manack, "a venerable old Indian." Until that moment, Motte had thought the officer was white. Motte then heard the romantic story of the West Point graduate's two lives, as an Indian who "ranged with native freedom over the woods and plains" and as an officer who showed "gratitude to the government which had fostered him in his youth."[31]

There were enough Creeks left for Motte to observe their ways and hear their speech, which he attempted to record and to form into a grammar. Ordered to join troops at the burned-out village of

Irwinton, he was not able to secure an escort; the fear of "straggling parties of hostile Indians" had caused the settlers to vacate the countryside, leaving Motte with only his "good steed" for a companion. He saw moccasin prints, but was never fired on; and he had the good fortune of coming upon a happy company of flatboatmen, most of them black, as soon as he reached the Chattahoochee. Since the vessel was in the service of the United States, the captain welcomed the army surgeon aboard, provided him with fish-and-bacon chowder served from a tub and coffee from a hand basin, and gave him his mosquito bar to sleep under. Motte made it in to Irwinton "without the occurrence of any further moving incidents by either flood or field."[32]

As Motte was writing, Indians were already on the "trail of tears," called, with accuracy, "one of the blackest stains upon American history,"[33] and a "betrayal of the five civilized tribes."[34] Although U.S. troops were present to assure the eventual removal of the Indians, contractors hired by the government have borne most of the blame for the atrocities. Many of the Creeks, particularly Lower Creeks, came from points east and south to Montgomery, where they were gawked at by the whites. After a brief stay, they went down the Alabama by steamboat and sailed into the Gulf of Mexico for New Orleans. Eventually they went up the Mississippi, or, if the water was high enough, up the Arkansas River to Little Rock, and by land to Fort Gibson. Some traveled overland to Muscle Shoals on the Tennessee River and then went most of the remaining way by steamboat; still others went overland by foot and wagon all the way to Memphis.[35] On every route, the toll in human life was heavy. The boats chartered by the contractors were described in a September 22, 1837, letter from one official as "rotten, old, and unseaworthy"; Indians were crowded aboard in "cabins offensive to every sense and feeling" and kept in a "state unfit for human beings." At Profit Island Bend in the Mississippi, the steamboat *Monmouth* sank, drowning 611 Indians, of which 311 were from Alabama. Four of the children of Jim Boy, who had led the friendly Creeks fighting with General Jesup, were among the victims.[36]

Creeks not departing of their own will or in chains had the option of joining the Seminoles in a war that was an extension of the outbreak of 1836. The fighting in Florida dragged on until 1842, increas-

ingly remote from the Federal Road. On November 15, 1836, six days after he was promoted to major, David Moniac was killed at Wahoo Swamp, leading U.S. troops against Indians fighting under Osceola.[37] Another familiar figure from the Federal Road, Capt. William Walker, a company commander at Fort Decatur during the War of 1812, Big Warrior's son-in-law, keeper of the tavern at Pole Cat Springs for twenty years, and operator of a stage line between Montgomery and Columbus, died at Apalachicola, Florida, on October 20, 1836, while in command of a regiment of Creek warriors under General Jesup.[38] Edmund Pendleton Gaines, a captain at Fort Stoddert when the horse path was being surveyed in 1806, the officer in charge of investigating unreliable mail deliveries, and whose troops helped to maintain the Federal Road, was Major General Gaines, under the command of Gen. Winfield Scott, in the Second Seminole War.[39] Another familiar name from the earlier days is that of Matthew Arbuckle; the captain whose troops were "cutting a road to Georgia" in 1811 was the general who received the Indians when they arrived in Fort Gibson and Fort Scott in Arkansas, after their long ordeal.[40]

The war that continued in Florida was the Creeks' last protest over the invasion and the failure of the United States to uphold the spirit of the 1832 Treaty of Washington. The 1832 treaty also gave the Creeks the right to tribal self-government; in an understatement of duplicity, it did not "compel any Creek Indian to emigrate, but they shall be free to go or stay, as they please."[41] Whatever pleasures the Creeks might have derived from their limited independence in Alabama were weighed against the increasing conflicts with the swelling numbers of whites and their habit of exploitation. The Creeks were easy prey for the unscrupulous, especially since whiskey was available.[42] The climate for violence was created over the years by the whites' behavior toward the Indians generally, not simply in their perpetration of land frauds. When Lafayette's party came through in 1825, his secretary saw how an Indian desperate for whiskey was treated by a Federal Road merchant.

> The evening of our arrival at Line Creek, I went into a store to make some purchases, and whilst there, an Indian entered and asked for twelve and a half cents worth of whiskey. The owner of the shop re-

ceived the money, and told him to wait a moment, as the concourse of buyers was very great. The Indian waited patiently for a quarter of an hour, after which he demanded his whiskey. The trader appeared astonished, and told him if he wanted whiskey he must first pay him for it. "I gave you twelve and a half cents a few moments since," said the Indian. The poor wretch had scarcely pronounced these words, when the trader sprung forward, seized him by the ear, and assisted by one of his men, brutally turned him out of the shop. I saw him give the money, and was convinced of the honesty of the one and the rascality of the other. I felt strongly indignant and notwithstanding the delicacy of my situation, I would have stept forward to interfere, but the whole scene passed so rapidly that I hardly had time to say a few words. I went out to see what the Indian would do. I found him a few steps from the house, where he had been checked by his melancholy emotions. An instant afterwards, he crossed his arms on his breast, and hurried towards his own country with rapid strides. When he arrived on the margin of the stream, he plunged in and crossed it without appearing to perceive that the water reached above his knees. On attaining the other side, he stopped, turned around, and elevating his eyes toward heaven, he extended his hand towards the territory of the whites, in a menacing manner, and uttered some energetic exclamation in his own language. Doubtless, at that moment he invoked the vengeance of heaven on his oppressors, a vengeance that would have been just, but his prayer was in vain.[45]

Even after the Indian wars in the South were over, and the Creeks removed to Arkansas and Oklahoma, the legal debate over whether the Indians should be repaid for the myriad frauds perpetrated against them had not been settled. In 1933, the U.S. Court of Claims ruled on a case that had been filed in 1924. The report of the deliberations contains a restatement of the conditions that had brought on the final fighting and the removal a hundred years earlier. Game was disappearing, and the Creeks, despite Benjamin Hawkins's efforts, never became successful farmers; the extension of Alabama civil and criminal jurisdiction over the Indians made the chiefs powerless; and the Indians were surrounded by white settlers. The treaties drawn under these circumstances—compounded by the Indians' lack of basic understanding of the terms—resulted in the "most dastardly frauds by impersonation," the court conceded. Nevertheless, U.S. agents had visited each village and worked out a fair system of as-

signing "reservations," the allotments provided under the treaty, to the Indians. Those who did not have an attachment to a specific parcel or who had not improved a spot of land they might claim were called "floaters," and their properties had been assigned by lot. The court found that though "gross frauds" had been perpetrated against the Indians, agents had investigated the complaints from knowing chiefs and fraudulently procured sales contracts were canceled; new ones had been drawn, certified by the president and approved by him. The court also rested its decision against the Indians on an 1856 treaty in which the Creeks relinquished all claims, with minor exceptions, to lands east *or* west of the Mississippi.[44]

The names of Indians of the Creek Nation are still found in title searches conducted when ownership of land is changing hands or being contested. In March 1943, when examining a chain of title, a Tuskegee lawyer inquired about a parcel of land, questioning whether a patent was necessary from the government. He received a reply from the commissioner of the General Land Office of the U.S. Department of the Interior that stated in part: "Our records show that the above-described lands were reserved for a Creek Indian by the name of Ich-che-yo-ho-lo. However, our records do not show that a patent has ever been issued thereon." The commissioner cited an act of June 4, 1912, whereby the United States gave up all of its lands which had previously been set aside for the Creek Nation, to "those persons, estates, firms or corporations who would be the true and lawful owners of said lands under the laws of Alabama." A patent from the U.S. government was not required—and the rights of the states, argued for by Troup and Gayle, were finally confirmed in a federal statute.[45]

The departure of the Creeks removed the need for a single artery through the section from the Chattahoochee to Line Creek. Settlers were free to fan out across the Creek Nation and were no longer compelled to travel over the one road that provided the safety of numbers, forts, taverns, and an occasional military escort. This change alone would not have been a sufficient cause for the disappearance of the Federal Road, had not other factors also obtained. Why would a road, already established, slip back into the landscape, even though it remained a principal link between the Georgia capital and a succession of Alabama capitals, from the territorial center at St.

Stephens to Cahaba, Tuscaloosa, and finally Montgomery? Why would it not be built to the highest standards of nineteenth-century road construction and justify its name as a "federal" road? Why was only a minimal amount of money ever allocated to building and maintaining the road, despite its service to the Post Office Department, the War Department, and the general population? Obviously a grand plan set forth in 1808 by Albert Gallatin, Jefferson's secretary of the treasury, calling for a national system of roads and canals—and specifying in particular a road from Athens to Natchez—was never executed. Jealous competition for sparse funds and the conflict between states and federal rights worked together to prevent its enactment.[46]

A well-researched and closely reasoned opinion on the Federal Road in its physical and political setting is buried in a report of the Board of Internal Improvement to the secretary of war made on April 11, 1826, for transmittal to the Congress. The engineers charged with reconnaissance for a national road defined three possible routes from Washington to New Orleans: the *eastern* route, through Richmond, Raleigh, Columbia, Milledgeville, and across Alabama; the *middle* route, with two options—an upper section through Charlottesville, Lynchburg, Danville, Spartanburg, Athens, and Monticello, Georgia, and a lower section through Alexandria, Fredericksburg, Cumberland Court House, Greensboro, Salisbury, Charlotte, Lawrenceville, and Monticello; and the *western* route, through Fairfax Court House, Rockfish Gap, Lexington, Salem, Abingdon, Knoxville, Centreville, and Demopolis.[47] The eastern and middle routes could join near Montgomery. The delineations indicate that, through western Georgia and Alabama, the eastern route would run near or on the Federal Road, and the upper section of the middle route would intersect the horse path of 1806 at Athens. Although the eastern route had the advantage of linking capitals of five states, the engineers described difficulties that earlier road builders, soldiers, travelers, and settlers had learned by heart. The eastern route was shorter than the western, but it required almost a mile more of bridges than the middle; also, the middle route was shortest, and in its vicinity more materials for construction were available—particularly the stone to crush for macadam.[48]

The committee's report cataloged the requisites not easily met by

the eastern route: a military road was needed—and the western route would be best because Tennessee and Kentucky, as inland states, could better reinforce the maritime states; a postal road was needed—and the middle route would be better than the eastern because of the availability of forage for horses; a trading road was needed—and the middle or western routes would contribute more than the eastern "to the development of internal commerce and industry." Although the report weighs the political advantages of the eastern route, the accumulated arguments tip the balance to the western and middle routes. Population growth along the eastern route was not as great in 1824 as it was along the middle and western; moreover, the report took note of the 1:1 ratio of whites to blacks along the eastern route, as opposed to a 3:2 ratio on the middle and a 2:1 ratio on the western. Obviously more votes were distributed along the middle and western routes. Conspicuously absent is direct mention of any threat posed by the Indians; the engineers did note in italics, however, that the *probable distance* from Milledgeville to New Orleans was 479 miles because "the country being thickly settled in the Territory occupied by the Indians, the board found it difficult to keep within the line."[49]

This Internal Improvement Report, filed in 1826, looked toward the time when Indians would not be a factor in deciding where to put a national road; but the other obstacles along the lower eastern route—the many watercourses and the soil too weak to bear heavy traffic—would remain persistent foes. The country had learned a lesson from the twenty years of struggles over, and on, the Federal Road—namely, that the costs for building and maintaining a passable thoroughfare would be high where the materials for roadbed construction were scarce and the demands for bridges and causeways great. Without great political pressures to create a better road through the lower South, the status quo prevailed; even as the issue was being considered, it appeared that those who were complaining about the ordeal of overland travel by horse- or footpower via the Federal Road would be delivered from their suffering by new means of transportation.

On paper the Chattahoochee and the Alabama rivers might have seemed from the outset more satisfactory options than the hazardous horse path, later the wider but no less difficult Federal Road. The

downriver journeys to Apalachicola or Mobile by canoe, dugout, or flatboat were farther, slower, and equally dangerous, however, and the poling or paddling upriver against the current was more taxing than fording streams or slogging through swamps. The movement of humans and freight, even south, was easier over the Federal Road, until the steamboats appeared.

The Federal Road had been in use for a decade when the first regular steamboat to reach Montgomery, the *Harriet*, arrived on October 23, 1821, in seven days from Mobile. The *Cotton Plant* arrived the next year, followed in 1824 by the *Osage, Elizabeth, Henderson, Arkansas*, and *Columbus*.[50] Although steamboat travel offered its own menu of disasters—explosions, fires, groundings, snaggings, and collisions—it was preferred by most travelers, as the various narratives indicate. The head of navigation on the Alabama was at Wetumpka, but Montgomery, only a few miles downstream, was near the Federal Road, which became a feeder line, increasing traffic and the growth of the city.[51] The road was also a factor in the development of Columbus, since it crossed the Chattahoochee at the falls, the head of navigation. The first steamboat to reach Columbus was the *Steubenville*, which arrived on February 22, 1828, followed in 1830 by the *Baltimore* and the *Georgian*, and in 1831 by *Herald, Plaquemine, Marion*, and *Jenkins*.[52]

For those who could afford it, steamboats also provided the additional option of no overland travel. In the 1830s, ocean passage might be taken between Charleston and Mobile; with the advent of railroads, a combination of transportation could take a traveler across the lower South entirely by steam power. In 1840, the Brunswick and Florida line advertised travel from Charleston to Brunswick, Georgia, by steamboat; by railroad to St. Marks, Florida; and from there by steamboat through the inner passage to Mobile, a circumnavigation of the Federal Road.[53] By the 1850s, as the economy improved and the traffic increased, the competition in transportation was between steamboats and railroads.[54]

The presence of steamboats gave new energy to long-standing arguments in favor of canals as the best means of internal communications and travel. In many parts of the United States, canals were an attractive option. Even in the South, federal money assisted in the construction of the Dismal Swamp Canal and the Carondelet Canal at

New Orleans—and a canal between the Tennessee River and the Tombigbee-Mobile system, not to be realized until late in the twentieth century, was also discussed. Although canals were not a precise alternative to roads and could not replace such an artery as the Federal Road, they competed well for the national dollar. Their major rival was not the Alabama-Georgia road but such major national highways as the Cumberland Road, which ran from the head of navigation on the Potomac, across Maryland, present-day West Virginia, and Pennsylvania to the Ohio River.[55]

The coming of the railroads ensured the demise of the Federal Road. With the opening of lands in the Creek Nation, the eyes of the railway men in Montgomery turned eastward. On January 20, 1832, four months before the treaty of final cession was signed in Washington, the Montgomery Railroad Company was chartered; it was rechartered two years later, and in 1841–43, it was reorganized.[56] The assets were purchased by Charles T. Pollard and eight other men, and on February 13, 1843, it was incorporated as the Montgomery and West Point Railroad Company, with Pollard as president.[57] The direction of the rail laying was west-to-east, unusual in America, and the progress was slow. By 1840, the first twelve miles east of Montgomery had been completed, and by 1847, the road had been opened for forty-nine miles to Notasulga. Rail traffic reached West Point, Georgia, by April 1851.[58] In that year a joint timetable issued by the Montgomery and West Point Railroad and the Lagrange Railroad offered a schedule by rail from Montgomery to West Point, by four-horse stagecoach from West Point to Palmetto, and thence by rail to Atlanta for connection with Georgia Railroad, the Macon & Western Railroad, and the Western & Atlantic Railroad.[59] This route went north of the Federal Road and took travelers to a part of the state that was growing and to a city that in 1868 would become the state capital. The imperfections of journeying "on the cars" inspired briefer, less eloquent complaints than the jeremiads of Federal Road travelers. For example, Daniel R. Hundley complained about a red-hot stove, and Sir Charles Lyell, accustomed to superior British trains, could not understand why Americans were satisfied with speeds of only fourteen to sixteen miles per hour.[60] George Featherstonhaugh, the British writer who had nothing good to say about travel over the Federal Road by "private conveyance," complained about the foul

language used by the passengers and said that white, yellow, and black passengers were "indiscriminately packed together."[61] These criticisms were merely carpings, however; no matter how inconvenient rail travel might have been, it was preferable.

National economic issues related to trade and travel reduced travel on the Federal Road. On July 10, 1832, President Jackson vetoed the bill to recharter the Bank of United States, which was to expire in 1836. Federal money was deposited in state banks, called "pet banks" by Jackson's critics.[62] By 1835–36, speculation in land was rampant, with land sales on credit and real estate values both escalating rapidly. Bank notes were discounted, and on July 11, 1836, Jackson prohibited payment for public lands in anything but hard currency, which was in short supply.[63] In this Panic of 1837, many who had purchased land on credit lost it or settled for a reduced acreage. The demand for Alabama land was considerably reduced, and the flow of settlers down the Federal Road decreased. Emigration from eastern and tidewater lands declined for another reason as well. Due to the efforts of Edmund Ruffin, writing in the *Farmer's Register*, and others who promoted scientific farming, soils considered worn out in Virginia and the Carolinas were being improved. The renewed fertility in the years between 1820 and 1850 made the land values in tidewater Virginia alone increase by millions of dollars.[64]

Finally, the telegraph key tapped out the epitaph for the Federal Road. In 1845, one year after Samuel F. B. Morse had sent a message from Washington to Baltimore over a wire, the *Columbus Times* reported: "Space is annihilated as to the transmission of mind, almost as to matter, by the Telegraph and Steam."[65] In 1847, the Georgia city granted to the telegraph company the right to erect poles and extend its line through the city, to cross streets and commons, and to attach wires to the river bridges.[66] The "Wire Road" through Columbus was located on the Upper Federal Road, which had opened in 1833. West of Columbus it followed the Upper Federal Road to its junction with the Lower Federal Road beyond Tuskegee and from there on to Montgomery.[67] On July 18, 1848, the Montgomery-to-Macon connection to the New Orleans Telegraph line was completed.[68] It extended from Girard (formerly Sodom, now Phenix City) through Montgomery to Cahaba along the Wire Road and thence to Mobile,

approximately along the railroad route. By the early 1850s, telegraph lines under private company ownership for public patronage had been extended to principal towns of the Black Belt.[69] The development of the telegraph system relieved much of the pressure for fast military and governmental communications and reduced the role of the Federal Road as a postal route through the lower South to New Orleans.

These economic factors, together with the development of faster, safer, and more reliable alternatives, and eventually the construction of a network of county, state, and U.S. highways, contributed to the demise of the Federal Road. Though it did not disappear overnight, most of the road was gone before the twentieth century demanded highways suitable for automobiles. When those roads were built, better and straighter routes and new methods of construction were possible.

Today the Federal Road is a shadowy presence, a wraith that runs beside farm-to-market roads, old U.S. highways, and its latest descendant, the interstate highway system. Several segments overlap current roads. One four-mile, unpaved stretch, still declared a public road on Macon County maps, on the ridge between Warriorstand and Fort Hull, has the appearance of the earlier Federal Road; it turns east off U.S. 29, just north of Davisville between Tuskegee and Union Springs. The banks of that section are recessed, as Lyell described them in his 1846 visit, and the road retains the look described by travelers of the 1820s and 1830s. An existing unpaved county road from Russell County 51 west to Boromville and Creek Stand nearly coincides with the Federal Road, and the old roadway itself may still be observed. The fort sites, for the most part, remain unrecognized. Fort Mitchell has been given permanent notice with the location of a national cemetery adjacent to the site in 1987, and Fort Deposit has kept its status as a post office and a town. Archaeologists will have to determine the precise location of Sand Fort in Russell County, where innkeeper Royston was besieged by Indians in 1836 and forced to make his bread from whiskey.[70]

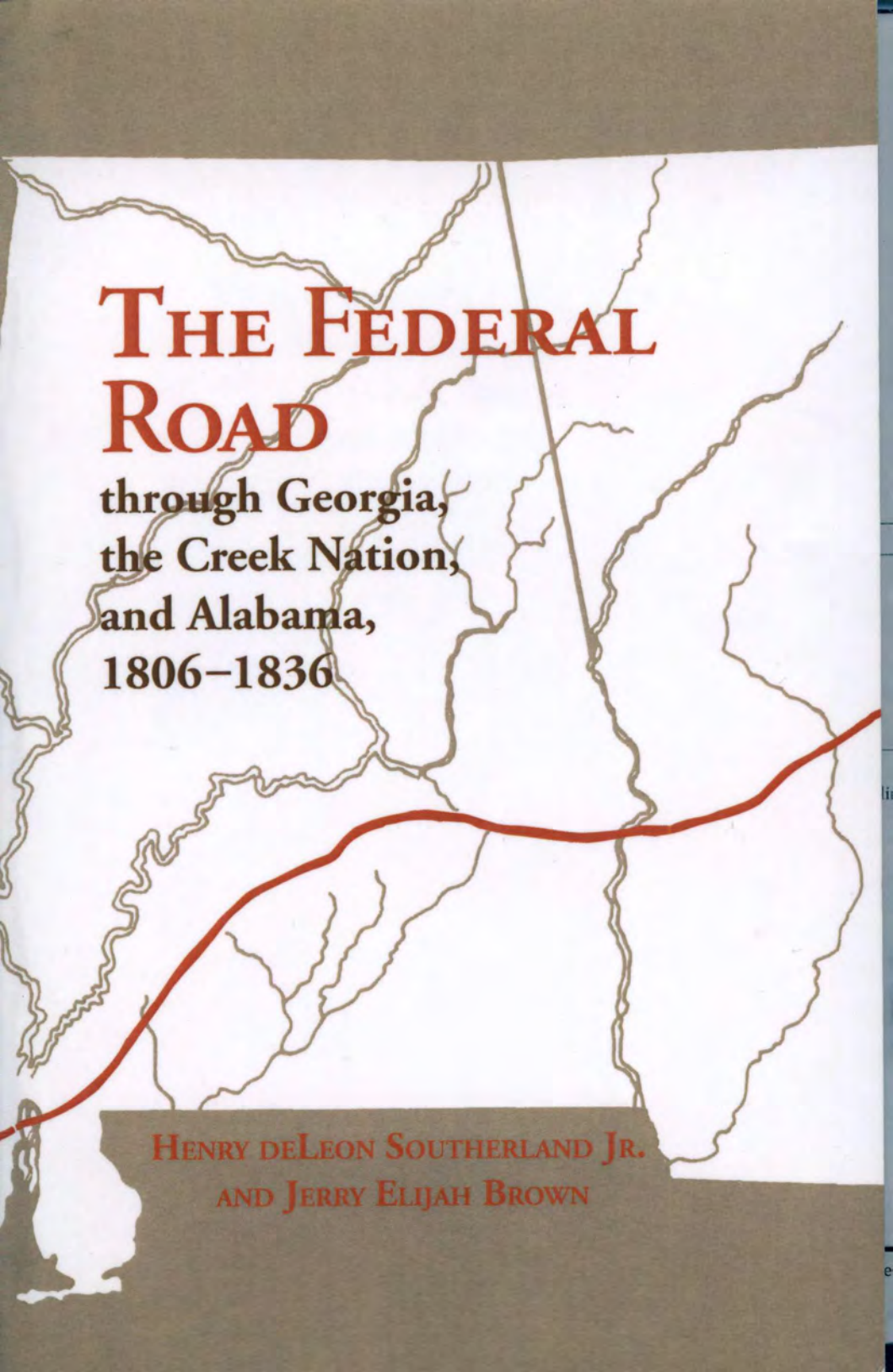
Except for occasional notations on county maps, most of the stands are gone, too. An explorer with Macon and Russell county maps may find Creek Stand and Warriorstand and might determine the approximate location of Fort Bainbridge. Lucas Tavern, where Lafayette

stayed on April 2, 1825, has been moved from its location just west of Line Creek and is handsomely restored as part of Old Alabama Town, the Landmarks Foundation project in Montgomery. The streams that imperiled the pioneers are now passed in a twinkling by travelers of Interstate 85 and 65. Line Creek, between Montgomery and Macon counties, is marked on Interstate 85, but Milly's Creek, that small stream beyond which travelers could take their turn for Fort Stoddert or St. Stephens, is crossed on a bridge too short to notice. Farther south the Federal Road forms the boundary between Conecuh and Monroe counties. The ferry from Fort Mims to Fort Stoddert has been replaced by twin, dual-lane bridges more than seven miles long, which alone cost the government more than $120 million—more than 20,000 times the original 1806 appropriation of $6,400 for opening the horse path all the way from Athens, Georgia, to the Pearl River, and about 2,500 times the $48,295 appropriated for the road during its entire history.[71] Over most of its route, the Federal Road has been reclaimed by nature, by subsequent growths of trees—though the majestic chestnuts are gone—and by a tenacious twentieth-century settler, kudzu, which in summer spreads a green blanket over the erosion of sandy soils started by the iron rims of the wagon wheels.

It will remain for archaeologists and historians, amateur and professional, to discover more about the road that is considered by many the most important in the history of Alabama. That it opened the section with a postal horse path, that it allowed military transport to protect New Orleans and the new Sabine River border, that it caused the Creek War of 1813–14 and helped win the War of 1812–15 against the British, and that it permitted tens of thousands of people from the Atlantic seaboard to come into the Old Southwest and settle in undeveloped territory must all be taken into account by way of eulogy. It would be an understatement to say that the region the horse path entered in 1806 differed from the section in which the Federal Road began to disappear in 1836. The Mississippi Territory had become two states; nationalism in the South was fading, and sectionalism had become an issue; the controversy over slavery was warming and would result in war twenty-five years later; and the state of Alabama was poised to become part of a solidifying South.

Absent from this section as a physical threat, much less a political

force, were the Creeks, almost all of whom had died, fled to the Seminoles, or joined the surviving remnant in the West. From its inception, the Federal Road had spelled out their fate, and they, ironically, by their hostilities kept it defined and required that it be reinforced. When the power of the Creek Nation was broken in 1836, it was logical and inevitable that alternative routes would develop and that, in the Old Southwest, the Creek Indians and the Federal Road would become ghosts together, yoked in history, leaving the land to new stewards, moving over other roads.



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."

—*Georgia Historical Quarterly*

"A well-researched and interesting book, a colorful portrayal highlighted by the personal accounts of brave travelers, including Aaron Burr under arrest, the evangelist Lorenzo Dow, and Lafayette, all of whom contended with a poorly built wagon road made frequently dangerous by flooding streams and hostile Indians."

—*Journal of the Early Republic*

"This unique study reveals that the Federal Road actually helped create history."

—*The Alabama Review*

"Southerland and Brown have an excellent command of details but never lose sight of the broad picture. They use the Federal Road to tell the story of a young country, a receding frontier, and a state being born. Their perspective is unique and welcome. Good research, documentation, and excellent maps make the book valuable to scholars and laymen. It should be on the bookshelf of all students of Alabama history."

—*Gulf Coast Historical Quarterly*

"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."

—*American Indian Quarterly*

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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 Hallewokee Farm

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

HISTORIES OF ALABAMA are replete with references to the Federal Road, but except for an unpublished thesis written in 1936 by Mary Ida Chase at Birmingham-Southern College (dealing with only the Alabama portion of the road), a documented history drawn from original sources does not exist. This book began as a master's thesis at Samford University in 1983 and has been extended with joint authorship to a larger exploration of the topic.

The authors are indebted to many who have gone before, particularly to Peter A. Brannon, who wrote widely and well of Alabama's formative period, and to Fletcher Hale, a topographical draftsman who traced the exact route of the Federal Road by studying aerial photographs. Special gratitude is due to the late Dr. James Lewis Treadway, who collected and shared much data on the Federal Road.

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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.