

The Creeks

The Creek Indians were historically divided into the Upper Creeks and the Lower Creeks. The Upper Creeks, who comprised about two-thirds of the tribe, were settled along the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers in what is now the state of Alabama. The Lower Creeks lived on the lower Chattahoochee and Ocmulgee rivers in the present-day state of Georgia (Foreman 1932; Savage 1976). The Creeks were given their name by white settlers because most of their people lived on rivers and streams (Jahoda 1975).

Due to a history of tribal factionalism, the Creeks were not very effective at collaborating against the oppressive white settlers. Benjamin Hawkins, appointed in 1796 as the Superintendent of the Southern Indians and Agent to the Creek Nation, somewhat successfully persuaded the Creeks to adopt many of the white settlers' practices. Around the early 1800s, the Creeks divided into progressive and conservative factions (Jahoda 1975; Foreman 1932; Savage 1976). The Upper Creeks wished to adopt the white settlers' ways of life and recognized the necessity of removal. The Lower Creeks vied to keep their traditions, opposed removal, and destroyed properties of the whites, which only exacerbated frictions (Foreman 1932; Savage 1976).

The Treaty of Washington was signed on January 24, 1826, ceding all Creek lands in Georgia to the United States while saving their lands in Alabama. The treaty was signed by the Creek progressive leader William McIntosh, who was assassinated for the act by outraged conservatives. McIntosh's followers immediately began leaving for Indian Territory in order to claim the most desirable areas. They settled on the Arkansas River near the mouth of the Verdigris River (Foreman 1934).

The Treaty of March 24, 1832 surrendered the remaining Creek lands in Alabama to the United States. That same year 2500 Creeks emigrated west (Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, State Review Board Meeting [AHPP, SRBM] 2003b; AHPP, SRBM 2003c; Savage 1976). The treaty provisions did not force all of the Creeks to leave; instead, every second family was allowed to select and live on an allotment from the former tribal lands. Three years of turbulence followed, resulting in the Creek Wars. The United States government tried to end the war by sending out several thousand troops and volunteers under Brigadier General Winfield Scott in 1836 (Savage 1976).

While many Creeks escaped to Florida to join the Seminoles (Foreman 1932), General Scott's army captured more than 14,500. Those who were considered hostiles were put into chains and marched to Indian Territory during 1836 and 1837 (Green 1990; Savage 1976). McIntosh's followers had been living there for almost a decade; thus the conservatives were forced to resign their leadership and accept direction from the progressives (Savage 1976). Small Creek parties continued to emigrate until about 1850 (Debo 1941).

1827-1828

The Treaty of Washington, which ceded the Creek lands in Georgia, provided for a Creek delegation to travel to Indian Territory to inspect the proposed relocation lands. They departed in early May of 1827 (Agnew 1980; Debo, 1941; Savage 1976) and were escorted by Colonel David Brearley. The Creeks toured the territory along the Arkansas and Canadian river valleys (Agnew 1980). The settlement area chosen was located in what is now the eastern part Oklahoma near the forks of the Arkansas, Verdigris, and Grand rivers (Debo 1941).

After William McIntosh, leader of the progressives and signer of the Treaty of Washington, was assassinated, his followers set out from Georgia almost immediately. This faction included about 700 men, women, and children (Agnew 1980; Debo 1941). Their leader, Roley McIntosh, brought the emigrants up the Arkansas River on the steamboat *Fidelity* (Debo 1941). The party arrived at Fort Gibson in February 1828 (Agnew 1980; Debo 1941).

Colonel David Brearley returned from leading the 1827 Indian Territory exploration trip to escort another

faction of McIntosh followers to Indian Territory. This party of 500 arrived in Indian Territory in the fall of 1828 (Agnew 1980).

1833-1834

In September of 1833, 40 Creeks emigrated to Fort Gibson. Benjamin Hawkins, Indian Agent to the Creek Nation, brought 20 more a few months later (Foreman, 1932).

A party of 630 Creeks and their slaves moved to Indian Territory in December, 1834 under the charge of Captain John Page. They traveled overland from Alabama, passing through Alabama's capital, Tuscaloosa, and Columbus, Mississippi (AHPP, SRBM 2003a; Foreman 1932; King 1996b). The party averaged 10 miles a day (Foreman 1832). Sources do not agree when the party arrived at Memphis; some (AHPP, SRBM 2003a; Foreman 1832) state that they arrived December 4, 1834 while, according to AHPP, SRBM (2003c), they arrived sometime in January, 1835. All agree, however, that this was the first major Creek removal party to travel through Arkansas, and that the group arrived in Indian Territory on March 28, 1835.

From Memphis, they divided into water and overland contingents. The water party boarded the steamer *Harry Hill* and ascended the Mississippi River (Foreman 1932). They accessed the Arkansas River through the White River cut-off and arrived at Little Rock on February 14. The Creeks camped on the north bank of the river, opposite Little Rock, to await the overland party.

The remainder of the group traveled with the horses and ponies along the Little Rock-Memphis military road under the charge of William Beattie of the Sanford Emigrating Company. They joined the steamer party at Little Rock. Due to shallow water levels on the Arkansas River, they were forced to abandon the *Harry Hill* (AHPP, SRBM 2003a; Foreman 1932). Foreman (1932) states that the party arrived at Little Rock on December 24, 1834; others (AHPP, SRBM 2003a; AHPP, SRBM 2003c) say they arrived on February 24, 1835.

The two parties departed Little Rock together on March 1. They followed the Little Rock-Fort Gibson road, which at that time was in bad condition for traveling. This route would have led them along the still-surviving Cadron Segment of the military road. The party arrived at Fort Gibson on March 28, 1835 (AHPP, SRBM 2003a; AHPP, SRBM 2003c; Foreman 1932).

1835

On July 2, 1835, 2498 Creeks were captured in Alabama and marched overland to Montgomery. Their women and children followed in horse-drawn wagons. At Montgomery, the Creeks were put onto steamboats. They traveled south to New Orleans, then ascended the Mississippi and Arkansas rivers to Indian Territory on the *Lamplighter*, *Majestic*, and *Revenue* (Ehle 1988).

Benjamin Marshall was a half-blood Creek and an influential, slave-owning member of the tribe. In 1835, he organized a removal party that included his family of eight plus his 19 slaves. The party totaled 511 and was conducted by Lieutenant Edward Deas and William Beattie. They left their Alabama homes on December 6/7 and made their way first overland and then by steamer to the mouth of the Tennessee River (AHPP, SRBM 2003a; AHPP, SRBM 2003b; Litton 1941).

They arrived at Tuscumbia on December 22; here, the group divided. The horses and ponies were marched overland to Memphis, while the remainder of the party boarded a steamboat. Both arrived at Memphis on December 31, 1835, where they again divided into water and land parties (AHPP, SRBM 2003a; AHPP, SRBM 2003b; Litton 1941; Lemke 1957).

Water faction:

- Arrive at Memphis (a) (b) (f) December 31, 1835 (a) (b) (f).
- Descend the Mississippi River by steamer (a) (e) (f) December 31, 1835 (a) (e) or January 1, 1836 (f).
- Reach Montgomery's Point at the mouth of the White River; enter the Arkansas River through the White River cut-off (a) (e) (f); travel 40 miles above the mouth of the Arkansas River and camp for the night (f) January 2, 1836 (f).
- Travel 120 miles upriver, averaging 40 miles per day, January 3-5, 1836 (f).

- Travel 130 miles upriver, averaging about 43 miles per day (f) January 6–7, 1836; travel 90 miles (f).
- Arrive “near Little Rock” (a) (b); pass Little Rock and camp a few miles above (f) January 8, 1836 (a) (b) (f).
- Continue up the Arkansas River (f); travel 22–23 miles January 9, 1836 (f).
- Travel 30–40 miles January 10, 1836 (f).
- Travel 20–30 miles January 11, 1836 (f).
- Travel 40–50 miles January 12, 1836 (f).
- Travel 6 miles; become grounded on a sandbar and camp for the night; here the overland faction catches up with them, January 13, 1836 (f).
- Travel 40 miles January 14, 1836 (f).
- Travel 10 miles and hit a sandbar January 15, 1836 (f).
- Travel 25–30 miles January 16, 1836 (f).
- Travel 5–6 miles and hit a sandbar January 17, 1836 (f).
- Navigate the sandbar January 18, 1836 (f).
- Travel 20–30 miles and hit another sandbar January 19, 1836 (f).
- Navigate the sandbar January 20, 1836 (f).
- Arrive at Van Buren (f); travel 12 miles January 21, 1836 (f).
- Pass Fort Smith and proceed to Fort Gibson January 22, 1836 (f).

Land faction:

- Arrive at Memphis and cross the Mississippi River December 31, 1835 (a) (b) (e) (f).
- Travel west through the Mississippi Swamp (a) (b) (f) January 1, 1836 (b).
- Arrive at Little Rock January 9, 1836 (e).
- Catch up with the stranded steamer party, which has grounded on a sandbar on the Arkansas River January 13, 1836 (a) (b) (f).
- The steamer navigates the sandbar and the two parties proceed up the Arkansas River (a) (e).
- Arrive at Fort Smith (a) (b); stop at a point 2 miles above Fort Smith (e) January 22, 1836 (a) (b) (e).
- Arrive at Fort Gibson February 2, 1836 (e).

1836

In an effort to end the Creek War, Brigadier General Winfield Scott brought several thousand troops and volunteers to Alabama in 1836 (Savage 1976). More than 14,500 Creeks were captured. About 2500 Creeks were considered hostiles; they were put into chains and escorted overland to Indian Territory during the final months of 1836 and through the summer of 1837 (Agnew 1980; AHPP, SRBM 2003b; Green 1990; Savage 1976).

On July 14, 1836, 2498 Creeks boarded the steamers *Lewis Cass* and *Meridian* and descended the Alabama River under charge of Lieutenant J. Waller Barry (Foreman 1932). At New Orleans, the charge of the group was given to the J.W.A. Sanford Emigrating Company (OO; PP). From New Orleans, the Creeks embarked on the steamers *Lamplighter*, *Majestic*, and *Revenue*. On July 21, 1836 they started up the Mississippi River (Foreman 1832).

- Ascend the Mississippi River from New Orleans (b) (c) (e).
- Enter the White River (c).
- Arrive at Rock Roe; remain for 8 days (b) (e) July 29, 1836 (b); July 28–August 8, 1835 (c).
- Depart Rock Roe, traveling overland August 8, 1836 (b) (c) (e).
- Follow the Little Rock-Memphis Road (b) (c).
- Arrive at Little Rock on the opposite bank of the Arkansas River August, 1835 (c).
- Follow the Little Rock-Fort Gibson military road toward Fort Gibson (c).
- Arrive at Fort Gibson September 3, 1836 (b) (c) (d) (e).

The remainder of the “hostiles,” including women and children, were removed under the charge of Captain F. S. Belton. They left their homes on August 2, 1836 on the steamer *Lewis Cass*. They arrived at Mobile four days later where they transferred to another steamer, the *Mezeppa*. From there, the party traveled to Lake Pontchartrain and boarded a train bound for New Orleans. They stayed at the old barracks while awaiting transportation to Indian Territory. Finally they boarded the steamer *Mobile* (Foreman 1932).

- Ascend the Mississippi River from New Orleans on the *Mobile* (e).

- Pass Montgomery's Point (e).
- Ascend the Arkansas River (e).
- Arrive at Arkansas Post and disembark August 25, 1836 (e).
- Travel overland from Arkansas Post on a road in bad condition September 6, 1836 (e).
- Travel 15 miles; arrive at Robins (e).
- Arrive at Mrs. Black's (e).
- Arrive at the old home of Major William Lovely; cross the Illinois Bayou on the ferry below the site of old Dwight Mission (e); Captain Belton becomes ill and remains behind; his assistant, Dr. Jones, takes charge (e).
- Arrive at Indian Territory October 3, 1836 (e).

Lieutenant Deas conducted a group of 2320 Creeks from Alabama in the fall of 1836. The group arrived at Memphis and divided into water and overland parties. Deas appointed a conductor to lead the land contingent with the horses; most of the Creeks were afraid of the steamers and chose to go overland (AHPP, SRBM 2003a; AHPP, SRBM 2003b).

Water faction:

- Descend the Mississippi River (a) (b) (c) (e) with Lieutenant Deas (b) (c).
- Arrive at Rock Roe; wait 2 weeks for land party; only a few arrive (a) (b) (c).
- Deas travels east along the Little Rock-Memphis road toward Strong's; locates 300–400 Creeks, including some from Batman's and Screven's parties, brings them to Rock Roe where they join Deas' party (a) (b) (c).
- Depart Rock Roe and travel the Little Rock-Memphis road (b).
- Arrive opposite Little Rock and wait, November 27–December 9, 1836 (a) (b) (c).
- Travel 3 miles along military road to Fort Gibson and then wait till December 17 for other Creeks to catch up (a) (b) (c).
- Continue along the military road to Fort Gibson (c).
- Arrive at Fort Gibson January 23, 1837 (a) (b) (c).

Land faction:

- Cross the Mississippi River November 5, 1836 (a) (c) (e).
- Travel the Little Rock-Memphis road (a) (c).
- Only a few make it to Rock Roe; Deas comes back along the road and finds them and brings them to Rock Roe (a) (c).
- Arrive opposite Little Rock and wait, November 27–December 9, 1836 (a) (c).
- Move 3 miles along the Little Rock-Fort Gibson road and then wait till December 17, 1836 (a) (b) (c).
- Continue along the military road to Fort Gibson (c).
- Arrive at Fort Gibson January 23, 1837 (a) (b) (c).

A group of 2000 Creeks and their 500 ponies left Tallassee on September 5, 1836 under the charge of Lieutenant J. T. Sprague (AHPP, SRBM 2003a; Foreman 1932). They arrived at Memphis on October 7, 1836. Gibson and Gilman joined the party as assistants to Sprague (Foreman 1932).

The contingents of Lieutenant Screven and Captain Batman also were at Memphis waiting to cross the Mississippi River (AHPP, SRBM 2003a). The three groups totaled about 13,000 Creeks (Foreman 1932).

Sprague's party divided into water and land contingents (Foreman 1932). The women and children, numbering 1300, boarded the *John Nelson* and started down the Mississippi River. The remaining 600 Creeks drove their horses overland through the Mississippi Swamp (AHPP, SRBM 2003a; AHPP, SRBM 2003b; AHPP, SRBM 2003c). The land party traveled under the charge of Freeman (Foreman 1932). Screven's and Batman's overland factions followed Sprague's group on the military road to Rock Roe.

Water faction:

- Descend the Mississippi River on the steamer *John Nelson* (a) (b) (c) (e) October 11, 1836 (e).
- Ascend the Arkansas River; arrive at Little Rock November 3, 1836 (e).
- Joined by the overland contingent November 4, 1836 (e).
- Follow the Little Rock-Fort Gibson military road (c).
- Camp at Pott's near Lewisburg (e); arrive at Kirkbride Pott's at Pottsville (c).
- Camp near the river Spadra (e); the original water party boards a steamer that arrives from Fort Gibson; the original land party continues overland with the horses November 24, 1836 (e).
- The steamer becomes grounded due to low water levels on the Arkansas River; the passengers disembark and walk the rest of the way (e).

- Arrive at Fort Gibson (a) (b) (c) (e) December 10, 1836 (e); November 27, 1836 (a); November 7, 1836 (b) (c).

Land faction:

- Cross the Mississippi River at Memphis (a) (b) (c) (e) October 11, 1836 (e).
- Drive the horses through the Mississippi Swamp (a) (b) (c) (e); follow the Little Rock-Memphis road (a) (b) (c); some emigrants remain in the swamp to hunt bear; Sprague sends Lieutenant Deas, who was at Rock Roe with his own group, to find them; Deas rescues 300–400 and takes them to Little Rock with the rest of his party (a) (b).
- Arrive opposite Little Rock; rejoin the water party (a) (c) November 4, 1836 (a) (b) (c).
- Depart Little Rock together (a) (c); follow the Little Rock-Fort Gibson road (b) (c).
- Camp at Potts, near Lewisburg, Arkansas (e); arrive at Kirkbride Pott's place at Pottsville (c); here the water party boards a steamer and departs upriver (e).
- Arrive at Fort Gibson December 7, 1836 (b) (c).

On August 1, 1836 a removal faction of “friendly” Creeks and their ponies were led from their homes by their chief Opothleyaholo (Foreman 1932). They were conducted by Lieutenant M. W. Batman, who brought them to Memphis. Here they met Sprague's and Screven's parties. Some of the Creeks boarded the steamer and descended the Mississippi River; the rest departed overland following Sprague's and Batman's contingents (AHPP, SRBM 2003a; Foreman 1932).

Water faction:

- Depart Memphis on the steamer *Farmer* with 1200–1300 people (c) (e) October 13, 1836 (c).
- Arrive at Rock Roe 4 days later (c) (e).
- Travel overland from Rock Roe (c) (e).
- Arrive at the crossroads at Irwin's supply depot, 20 miles north of Little Rock November 8, 1836 (c) (e).
- Join the military road at Cadron (c).
- Arrive at Fort Gibson December 7, 1836 (c) (e).

Land faction:

- Depart Memphis (a) (e); travel overland via the Memphis-Little Rock road (a).
- Become lost along the way and begin to starve; Lieutenant Deas returns from Rock Roe to near Strong's and rescues 300–400 Creeks, who join the rest of Deas's party (a).
- Arrive at Little Rock December 9, 1836 (a).
- Travel with Deas' party 3 miles beyond Little Rock; hear of another large group a few days behind; remain in camp until December 17 to await them (a).
- Depart camp December 17, 1836 (a).
- Arrive at Fort Gibson with Deas's party January 23, 1837 (a).

A party of more than 3000 Creeks departed their homes on August 6, 1836 under the charge of William McGillivrey (Foreman 1932) and Lieutenant R. B. Screven (AHPP, SRBM 2003a; Foreman 1932). More Creeks joined them along the way. The group arrived at Memphis in October (AHPP, SRBM 2003b; Foreman 1932). The party divided into water and land factions at Memphis; Screven's overland party followed those of Batman and Sprague.

Water faction:

- Depart Memphis by water (b) (c) (e).
- Arrive at Rock Roe (b) (c) (e).
- Leave overland for Little Rock (e).
- Arrive at Little Rock November 20, 1836 (e).
- Cross the Arkansas River (e).
- Arrive at Fort Gibson; from this party, only 2000 make it to Indian Territory (e).

Land faction:

- Depart Memphis traveling overland on the Memphis-Little Rock road (a) (b) (c).
- Several become lost on the road and in the swamps; Lieutenant Deas, who had already arrived at Rock Roe with his party, returns to near Strong's and finds 300–400 starving Creeks; he joins them with his own group of emigrants (a).
- Arrive opposite Little Rock November 20, 1836 (a) (b) (c).
- Move 3 miles beyond Little Rock toward Fort Gibson; after hearing about another large group still a few days behind, wait here until December (a).

- Arrive at Fort Gibson with Deas's party January 23, 1837 (a).

Another group of Creeks left their homes in the fall of 1836; they were led by John A. Campbell (AHPP, SRBM 2003a; AHPP, SRBM 2003b). This group numbered 1170. They arrived at Memphis in October of 1836. Here Campbell split the group into a water party and a land party (AHPP, SRBM 2003c).

Water faction:

- Travel the Mississippi and White rivers to Rock Roe November 5, 1836 (c).
- Take the “northern route” above Little Rock, passing through Crossroads; join the Little Rock-Fort Gibson military road at Cadron (c).
- Arrive at Fort Gibson early December, 1836 (c).

Land faction:

- Depart Memphis overland through the Mississippi Swamps November 5, 1836 (c).
- Take the “northern route” above Little Rock, passing through Crossroads; join the Little Rock-Fort Gibson military road at Cadron (c).
- Arrive at Fort Gibson (c) Early December, 1836 (c).

1837

A party of Creeks left their Alabama homes on May 16, 1832. They descended the Mississippi River on a steamboat, passed Memphis on May 27, and went through the White River cut-off the next day. The group traveled up the Arkansas River and passed Pine Bluff on May 30, Little Rock on May 31, and Fort Smith on June 2. They arrived at Fort Coffee on June 3, 1837 (Sequoyah Research Center, Native American Press Archives [1837]2005).

In April, 1837, Lieutenant Deas conducted 500 Creeks to New Orleans where they were quartered in the old barracks to await transportation. The next month, they boarded the steamer *Black Hawk* and ascended the Mississippi and Arkansas rivers, again using the White River cut-off. They arrived at Little Rock on June 2 and continued upriver to Fort Gibson.

Another group of Creeks left their homes on May 28, 1837. They ascended the Tennessee, Ohio, and Mississippi rivers to the Arkansas River, which was accessed through the White River cut-off. The party ascended the Arkansas River and on June 4 entered the mouth of the Verdigris River in Indian Territory (Foreman 1932).

The families of 776 Creek warriors, who had been recruited to fight Seminole Indians in Florida, were transported to Fort Gibson by the United States government. They arrived at New Orleans in October, 1837; from here, they ascended the Mississippi and White rivers by steamer to Rock Roe. The group started overland from Rock Roe, opting for the “northern route” in order to bypass Little Rock. This trek took them almost straight west through the Cross Roads and Cadron. (AHPP, SRBM 2003c).

Creek: Keyed Sources

(AHPP = Arkansas Historic Preservation Program)

(a) AHPP, State Review Board Meeting

2003 Memphis to Little Rock Road Segment – Henard Cemetery Road. 2 April:95.

(b) AHPP, State Review Board Meeting

2003 Memphis to Little Rock Road – Brownsville Segment. 6 August:15.

(c) AHPP, State Review Board Meeting

2003 Military Road – Cadron Segment. 3 December:145.

(d) Agnew, Brad

1980 *Fort Gibson: Terminal of the Trail of Tears*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.

(e) Foreman, Grant

1932 *Indian Removal: The Emigration of the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.

(f) Litton, Gaston

1941 The Journal of a Party of Emigrating Creek Indians, 1835–1836. *The Journal of Southern History* 7(2):225–242.