

# The Trail of Tears – Not Just the Cherokee

## Introduction

*American History, A Survey* was initially published in 1961 and updated numerous times by several noted historians. The book was used in teaching American History in the high schools. The 1987 edition of this book states, “For thousands of centuries – centuries in which human races were evolving, forming communities, and building the beginnings of national civilizations in Africa, Asia, and Europe – the continents we know as the America’s stood empty of mankind and its works. The story of European’s in the New World is the story of the creation of a civilization where none existed.” No statement about the America’s can be any more wrong and do more damage to the knowledge base of what existed on the North and South American Continents than what is written in the above mentioned book. The truth is that a society of indigenous peoples in the millions lived and carried out a trade among themselves for thousands of years. Further, those societies of indigenous peoples were far more progressive in their life style that what could be found in many European cities. Although there was conflict among the various tribal and societal units, they nevertheless had a network of trails from coast to coast and north to south and traded among themselves. Artifacts found in various locations that came from a thousand miles away prove the existence of commerce among the indigenous people. Archaeological history shows the existence of these earlier indigenous societies and also shows the disappearance of some groups who ceased to exist. By the time Scandinavians, Columbus and Desoto arrived in the New World, conditions had changed and most indigenous peoples were scattered across the landscape in tribal units or clans. However, the connecting trails remained and continued to be used for trading, hunting and war.

The Indian Trails that existed for the most part were single file trails called “four foot trails” by some elders. Some of these trails were naturally widened by the animals that migrated along the trails looking for salt. By the early 1700’s, the traders began running wagons and mule trails to the Indians villages for commerce with the Indians. Once the traders took over, some of these trails were widened to six to eight to accommodate the larger pack trains and wagons.

Prior to 1770, the British Governors had treated with the Indians to remain east of the Appalachian Mountain Ranges. However, some Governors sent parties to look at what existed on the other side of the mountain range and liked what they saw. The British Governors held in check somewhat the settlers desires to migrate west. After the Revolutionary War, the frontier was opened to exploration and the masses of immigrants came. Existing trails were widened and in some case roads were constructed to help improve the migration of thousands. Some trails were used and some probably were abandoned. However, the settlers soon discovered that the best routes were the ones the Indians developed. Later in the late 1800’s, the railroads discovered the same thing.

With the masses of settlers coming west, the Indians continued to be pushed off their land. Gold discoveries further exacerbated this problem and soon the Indians had no choice but to Treaty with the whites and cede their land holdings. With each ceding of land, the Indians moved further west using the trails know to them. It is a fascinating study and somewhat an eye opener to what existed as a trails network in the 1700 and 1800's. By the time of the removal, military scouts had mapped out the existence of these trails and plotted ways to transport the Indians to territories west of the Mississippi.

### **The Removal Timeframe**

For many US citizens, their knowledge about Indian migration westward is limited to one period, the Cherokee Trail of Tears from August 1838 to March 1839. In particular, what is taught in our school systems today is mostly the Cherokee Removal and only that which occurred in 1838-1839. In fact, the Indians had been migrating westward since 1790 and continued to migrate voluntary up until the Trail of Tears when the last of the Cherokees were forcibly rounded up, put in stockades and forced to migrate west under military escort. However, the Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws and the Seminoles experienced just as much hardship as the Cherokees. The Indian removal period began in 1790 and continued until 1839 for the Five Civilized Tribes. However, some that remained under treaty provisions wherein they could become a US citizen and be giving a patent of property, chose to later migrate after 1840.

Grant Foreman wrote the first book of the removal of the Five Civilized Tribes as part of the centennial remembrance of this horrific period in our history. That book, *Indian Removal: The Emigration of the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians* was first published in 1935 and republished in 1974. This story follows up on that work plus looks at new information published since Foreman's book appeared.

# **The Cherokee Removal**

## **Part 1**

### **The Early Migration**

Probably, one of the least understood facts about Indian travels westward is the extensive trail system that existed west of the Appalachians. To the SE Indians, it was nothing to form a hunting or trading party and head west into TN, KY, OH and beyond for months at a time. They knew the trails and didn't need a lot of navigation to find their way. Some of these trails were marked by bent trees and other may have been marked using other methods.

So, when Indian groups decided they wanted to separate themselves from the encroachment of settlers, they loaded their belongings on wagons, horseback or walked headed west on the trails that existed.

One of the first migrations westward was the Cherokees who had to cede a large portion of their territory to the Continental US for supporting the British during the Revolutionary War. They contacted the Spanish Governor in 1788 and gained permission to settle west of the Mississippi. A group of Cherokees moved there in 1790. It is not known how many Cherokee settlements moved west at this time but it is known that Cherokee and Shawnee were frequent visitors to the area controlled by the Spanish. These Cherokees settled in the area of the St. Francis River in what is now Arkansas. Another group of Cherokees from the Chickamauga settlements moved west in 1794.

After the Louisiana Purchase was made by the United States, President Thomas Jefferson began encouraging the Congress to initiate efforts to remove all Indians west of the Mississippi. In 1808, the Secretary of War instructed their agent, Colonel Meigs, to use every inducement to get the Cherokees to exchange their land for land west of the Mississippi. The government offered an area of land between the Arkansas and White Rivers (present northern Arkansas) sufficient to support the hunting life which a delegation of Cherokees visited in 1809. The reports of this land were favorable and a large number of Cherokees agreed to move.

In 1810, Duwali (or The Bowl), Tsulawi (or Fox), and Talontuskee moved their villages west of the Mississippi. Duwali, a half-blood, was Chief of his town of Little Hiwassee (present western North Carolina). Talontuskee became the nominal leader of all the "Western" Cherokee. These and other groups moving west settled on the White and St Francis Rivers in present NE Arkansas while others settled on either side of the Arkansas River in present west-central Arkansas.

Because so many Cherokees had moved into the Arkansas territory which was under the control of the Osage, numerous conflicts occurred include some fierce battles between several of the tribes in the area. Finally, the eastern Cherokees, against their wishes, had to cede more lands to

allow the western Cherokees to gain ownership of hunting lands in Arkansas which occurred at the signing of the Turkeytown Treaty in 1817. That treaty took land away from the Osage and gave to the Cherokees land between the Arkansas and White Rivers. More Cherokees moved west based on these further cessions of Cherokee eastern land.

### **Migration from Late 1829- June 1838**

From the time of the Turkeytown Treaty in 1817 to the renegade band of Cherokees who signed away the remaining Cherokee territory at the treaty of New Echota in December 1835, there were many groups of Cherokees who choose to take themselves westward, some with escorts and some without. Congress passed the Indian Removal Act in 1830 and many Indians saw the handwriting on the wall and began removing their families westward

From late 1829 to early 1830, small parties of Cherokees departed for Indian Territory in Oklahoma. One group consisted of 113 white men and their Cherokee families, 237 Indian men and their families, and 122 slaves. They boarded 20 flatboats at Gunter's Landing, Alabama in January 1830. This and other Cherokee contingents traveled the Tennessee, Ohio, Mississippi, and Arkansas rivers to Indian Territory.

During the early part of 1832, a party of 170 Cherokees traveled by their own resources to Indian Territory by boat. Six hundred more Cherokees left in April 1832 by boat. One group of 380 Cherokees and their slaves left the Cherokee Agency at Calhoun, TN on April 10, 1832 under charge of removal agent Curry. These emigrants originated from Tennessee and Georgia and traveled in nine flatboats to Waterloo, Alabama where they transferred to the steamer.

In February 1834, Cherokees began to arrive at specially constructed barracks near Hiwassee. By March, 450–500 people were ready to depart. Removal of this group took place in two groups of 72 departing on the steamers *John Cox* and *Sliger* on March 13. The remaining Cherokees awaited an approaching band from the Valley Towns. They soon arrived, and their group left the next day aboard steamers. Along the way the party was joined by 67 more Cherokees.

With the signing of the Treaty of New Echota in 1835, the signers were under the threat of being killed by other Cherokees who were holding out from moving. Thus, in January 1837, Major Ridge himself emigrated along with 500–600 adherents of the Treaty of New Echota, without United States government assistance. They gathered at New Echota and set out overland with their slaves, horses, and oxen. There were no deaths en route. Major Ridge dropped out of the journey to attend the wedding of his daughter.

On March 13, 1837, about 466 Cherokees left Ross's Landing, near present-day Chattanooga, Tennessee. This party was the first to go with government assistance under the terms of the Treaty of New Echota. The group included Stand Waitie. Major Ridge and his wife joined this group after having dropped out of the January group

The Cherokees took 11 flatboats and were divided into three groups. Upon arriving at Decatur, they transferred to a train in order to avoid the Muscle Shoals rapids and rode to Tuscumbia where they boarded the steamer *Newark* for the remainder of the trip.

A party of 365 emigrants left the Cherokee Agency October 14, 1837, conducted by Lt. B. B. Cannon. This group was routed overland through Kentucky, Illinois, Missouri, and Arkansas. The party included the John Ridge and Elias Boudinot families. The Cherokees crossed the Tennessee River October 17, and then the Cumberland River at Nashville, Tennessee. They passed through Jonesboro, Illinois and camped at Clear Creek in the Mississippi River bottoms. The party crossed the Mississippi River into Missouri November 12–14 and traveled across Missouri, passing through Jackson, Waynesville, and Springfield on what was to become the Northern Route.

In early April, 1838, 250 Cherokees left the Agency for Waterloo, AL under the charge of Lieutenant Edward Deas. They departed Waterloo the next day aboard the steamer *Smelter* and descended the Tennessee, Ohio, Mississippi and Arkansas rivers.

### **The Trail of Tears Removal**

The Treaty of New Echota set dates for the forced removal of any Cherokees who did not voluntarily remove themselves at government expense. After that date passed, The US Army sent troops to round up the remaining Cherokees, who were collected and moved into “emigration depots”. One of the first groups to leave following the Water Route was under Lt. Deas. This party of 800 left on 16 June 1838 and took the steamer *George Guess* from Ross’s Landing to Decatur, and then took a train to Tuscumbia. Here they boarded the *Smelter* and traveled the remainder of the way.

Another group of 875 left the Cherokee Agency on June 13, 1838 on the steamer *George Guess*. They traveled under the charge of Lieutenant R.H.K. Whiteley. Like the previous group on the Water Route, they had to transfer to a train at Decatur, AL and then back on a steamer at Tuscumbia. The last group for the Water Route before the main Trail of tears began had to travel by foot due to low water in the Tennessee until they got to Waterloo where they boarded a steamer.

In the August to October time frame, the Land Route groups and one Water Route departed from Tennessee to Indian Territory. The Bell Group was made up of many of the Cherokees who had signed or supported the New Echota Treaty. They had to be kept away from the remaining land groups for fear that these Cherokees might be killed by the other Cherokees. The Bell Group is the only land route group that followed the southern route through Arkansas. This group of 650-700 Cherokees left Ross’s Landing on October 10, 1838. This group was anti-Chief Ross and had refused to travel under his supervision. The United States government treated this group well, shipping their baggage separately by boat up the Arkansas River.

The final 13 government-assisted Cherokee removal parties departed their homelands beginning in August 1838. Many of these groups followed the B. B Cannon route of 1837 across northern Missouri and then into Arkansas. One other followed the water route. The contingent of Cherokees traveling by water included John Ross and his wife Quatie. They were initially part of the Hildebrand overland party but Quatie got sick and then had to leave the overland route and join the water route group. After joining the water route, Quatie died and was buried near Little Rock, AR.

Another land group that followed a different route was the Benge group. The John Benge party departed Fort Payne, Alabama on October 1, 1838. Benge was accompanied by the assistant and second chief of the Cherokee Nation, George Lowrey. Their route crossed the Mississippi below where the Northern Route crossed and then traveled through the southeastern corner of Missouri into Arkansas where they followed the northern route through Arkansas.

### **The Trail Where They Cried**

When we all plan a major trip in our car, we gather our map books, in-car GPS Navigator, data on locations for fuel, food, lodging and more. Consider the selected leaders of each of the Trail of Tears land groups that spent a minimum of 3.5 months and a maximum of 6 months along a trail that was not well marked and could at times of bad weather become somewhat difficult to traverse. Their task of moving about 1,000 unwilling Cherokees along these routes in the worst of times and in the worst of conditions is surely daunting. No wonder the Cherokees refer to the Trail of Tear as the “Trail Where They Cried.”

Surely, the leaders had to be briefed on the route and what to expect. B.B Cannon, who led a group to Indian Territory in 1837, wrote a journal of his trip as others did also. Mr. Cannon’s journal showed he knew where to stop to buy food, what major towns they would go through, where the ferry crossing were located and other details of the journey. When trouble occurred, there was also means to dispatch a rider to get help along the way. B.B. Cannon’s journal account tells the horrors of the journey westward for the Cherokees. A few excerpts from his journal show the pain and loss of human lives on the journey:

“Nov 18 1837: Marched at 8 O’C A.M. Halted and encamped at Mr. Morand’s 5 O’C P.M. Issued corn & fodder, flour, & bacon. 16 miles today.

Dec 6 1837: Marched 9 O’C A.M. passed Massey’s Iron Works. Halted at Mr. Jones’ ½ past 3 O’C P.M. Encamped and issued corn and fodder. 12 miles today.

Dec 15 1837: Joseph Starr’s wife had a child last night. Marcher at 8 ½ O’C A.M. Halted at Mr. Danford’s 2 O’C P.M. Waggoners having horses shod until late at night. Encamped & issued corn, & fodder & beef. 10 ½ miles today.

Dec 17 1837: Snowed last night. Buried Ellege's wife and Chas Timberlake's son (Smoker). Marched at 9 O'C A.M. Halted at Mr. Dye's 3 O'C P.M. Extremely cold weather, sickness prevailing to a considerable extent. All very much fatigued, encamped and issued corn & fodder & beef. 10 miles today."

Ralph Jenkins from Temple University summarized the reported data from the Cherokee Trail of Tears in 1996. There were thirteen detachments of Cherokees that left the Cherokee Territory in 1838. The recorded number of Cherokees that left on the Trail of Tears was 13,149 people and the number of arrivals in Oklahoma was recorded as 11,504. There were recorded 447 deaths and 71 births although four of the detachments did not report the number of deaths. The remaining unaccounted 1,269 people were most likely desertions or unreported deaths. Some Cherokees were thought to have dropped off the trail and remained in the area where they quit the trail. Others may have returned to their homelands. There are also numerous reports of Cherokees who upon arriving in Oklahoma did not like what they saw and walked back to their homelands on the east coast.

The Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma reports different numbers in their summary of the Trail of Tears. They reported that 17,000 Cherokees made the trip to Oklahoma and 4,000 died on the trip. The difference in numbers may be related to the 17,000 number including all the removal parties beginning in 1830.



# The Choctaw Removal

## Part 2

After the enactment of the Indian Removal Act in 1830, the Five Civilized Tribes were removed from their territory from 1831 to 1838 with the Choctaws being the first tribe to be removed. They ceded their lands under the provisions of the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit on September 27, 1830. The Choctaws occupied the lands in southern Mississippi having previously ceded their lands on the eastern part of Mississippi and western Alabama. In the treaty, the Choctaws agreed to begin their removal under government support in the fall of 1831 and subsequently two other parties in 1832 and 1833.

When one study's the historical documentation of the removal of the Indians from east of the Mississippi to Oklahoma, little, if anything, positive can be said concerning the planning and execution of the removal by government forces. Many chosen to lead these efforts had little experience in handling such a complex task and even under the best of conditions, would have met with disastrous consequences in carrying out the removal. In the case of the Choctaws, the worst weather conditions imaginable were experienced along with major equipment breakdowns and medical epidemics, some of which occurred even before departing. The result of the government's ineptitude was the loss of two thousand dead out of the approximate 8,000 removed from Mississippi or twenty-five percent of the Choctaws.

The government planned to remove one-third of the Choctaws in each of 1831, 1832, and 1833. The Choctaws were allowed to gather in their crops in early October and then they were removed to the embarkation ports of Memphis and Vicksburg on the Mississippi River to await their transportation to Oklahoma. They were told to leave their livestock which would be replaced when they got to Oklahoma.

The principal plan for transporting the Choctaws was ferrying them across the Mississippi and using wagons to transport the ill and small children with every able-bodied person walking the trip. Before starting on the 1831 trip, the newly formed Bureau of Indian Affairs decided to offer any Choctaw who could walk without government support, a stipend of \$10 gold, a rifle and ammunition, food for their trip and a supposedly skilled guide to lead them to their new territory. Three hundred agreed to these terms and were ferried across the Mississippi to begin their trek. As with the other government planning, this looked like a good idea; however, the guide was unfamiliar with Arkansas and had no idea of the best route to take. The government had improved a route north of Memphis known as the Military Route which was used to remove some of the Indians in later years but the guide did not know about it. He led the 300 Choctaws on a southwesterly route which was swampy and they soon got bogged down and had to be rescued by the group of Choctaws heading west out of Vicksburg. Many lost their life in these swamps.

## **And the Rains Came**

The anticipated start of the first Choctaw removal was 1 November, 1832. The weather however changed that date and changed the plan for the removal to one of steamboat in lieu of wagons and walking which was now impossible due to the flooded and impassible roads.

The fall and winter weather of 1831-32 in Arkansas was probably one of the worse since records were recorded. By early November the rains began and flooded all the rivers and low lands. The terrain of eastern Arkansas is essential flat with no place for the water to run off. Thus, eastern Arkansas is a swamp. Today, eastern Arkansas is one of the largest rice producing areas in the US because of its flat, swampy terrain which can be flooded for producing rice crops. Following the rain came the snow and ice. Six inches of snow fell on Little Rock on 8 December, 1831. It was so cold, the Arkansas River was frozen 20 miles below Little Rock and the White River was frozen as far north as Batesville. More snow and ice came in February and the conditions for moving the Choctaws were miserable.

## **The Removal in the Winter of 1831-32**

George Gaines was appointed by the Secretary of War to be in charge of the removal of the Choctaws from Mississippi to Oklahoma. His plan never considered the weather the removal might encounter and thus, in early November, 1831 he was faced with a situation of not having a contingency plan to transport the Choctaws. Further, his dwindling food supplies made it difficult to feed the thousands of Choctaws waited at the embarkation points to head west. There were approximately 2,000 Choctaws awaiting transportation in Memphis and another approximate 3,000 at Vicksburg.

Gaines finally procured the use of five steamboats to transport the Indians but one of the boats caught fire and could not be used. With four boats, Gaines loaded the Choctaws at Memphis and headed down the Mississippi River and up the Arkansas to Arkansas Post, a sixty mile distance up the Arkansas River from the Mississippi River. At Arkansas Post, the conditions of the trip west deteriorated. The Army at the port site commandeered the boats for other transportation needs and unloaded all the Choctaws in the port. Scantly clothed for the weather conditions, soaked from the rain and with the temperature hovering in the freezing mark, many Choctaws suffered from multiple medical conditions, malnutrition and died. The Army Post at Arkansas Post was not prepared to support several thousand Choctaws and it took eight days to bring wagons and supplies to the port to begin again the removal to Oklahoma.

As the crow flies, the distance from Arkansas Port to Fort Towson, OK, the final destination of the Choctaws was approximately 225 miles due west. However, in 1831, there were no roads/trails in a due westerly direction in the southern part of Arkansas. The wagons therefore transported the Choctaws northwest to Little Rock. They headed mostly NNW likely followed the Old Post Road which had been built to support the Army Post at Arkansas Post. This road which can be found on the US Public Survey System Township maps went NNW and connected

with the newly constructed Military Road from Memphis to Little Rock. The Choctaws followed the Military Road to Little Rock and crossed over the Arkansas River at Crittenden's Ferry. They camped at Camp Pope about three miles south of Crittenden's Ferry to allow all of the Choctaws time to cross over the ferry location. From Camp Pope they followed an old road which later became a stagecoach road. This road headed SSW to Washington, AR and then turned west to head to Fort Townson on the Red River, their final destination. Their travel distance was probably around 300 miles from Arkansas Port.

Following the trek of the Memphis Choctaws, the steamboats from Vicksburg followed a similar path with some boats making it almost to Little Rock while others offloaded at Arkansas Port with an overland trek following the same route of the previous Choctaws.

Before removal of the Choctaws from Memphis and Vicksburg, some Choctaws decided to remove themselves to get to the new territory to pick out the better places to establish their new homesteads. They followed the Military Road from Memphis to Little Rock and then the Military Road to Fort Smith and on into the Choctaw territory. The removal in 1831-32 ended in late February with the Choctaws arriving in their new territory in Oklahoma. By April 1, 1832, the count of Choctaws still alive in Oklahoma was 4,285 so about 2,000 died on the first removal. Two more years of removal were left to go.

### **The Removal in the Winter of 1832-33**

From February until October 1832, the government agents for the removal had ample time to better plan for the second removal of the Choctaws based on the experience of the first removal. In fact, they did plan better routes to eliminate bottle-necks, secure boats and wagons for the transporting the people and stockpiling supplies at waypoints along the planned routes to feed the thousands of Indians. They eliminated Memphis as an embarkation point to concentrate their resources at one port, Vicksburg. But like 1831-32, the removal in 1832-33 was fraught with problems due to lack of contingency plans to accommodate unexpected weather conditions, equipment problems and most importantly, medical epidemics.

The first group of Choctaws to be removed in the second removal were gathered in October 1832 and herded toward Vicksburg to be loaded on boats for their trip. When they arrived in Vicksburg, the town was vacant. An epidemic of cholera had struck the town in late October 1832. The New York Evening Post in July 1832 reported about the cholera epidemic in New York City saying "The roads, in all directions, were lined with well-filled stagecoaches, livery coaches, private vehicles and equestrians, all panic-struck, fleeing the city, as we may suppose the inhabitants of Pompeii fled when the red lava showered down upon their house." They further reported that, "The epidemic left 3,515 dead out of a population of 250,000." The disease also spread throughout the Mississippi river system killing over 4,500 in St. Louis and over 3,000 in New Orleans. That same epidemic struck Vicksburg in October.

The Choctaws believed the death of the citizens was related to the boats and refused to board them. Also, the crews had abandoned the boats for fear of getting the disease and dying. Thus, 2,000 Choctaws were now stuck in Vicksburg trying to avoid the sickness and having insufficient food supplies to feed them while they waited for removal. Then the rains came as they did in 1831 and the land flooded in Arkansas.

It took days for the government agents to round up enough crew to man one of two boats for the transportation to Arkansas Port and on further to Rock Roe on the White River. They finally got underway but upon arrival at Arkansas Port, the land was so flooded the Choctaws could not be unloaded. The boat steamed up the White River and landed at one of the high places in SE Arkansas where the Choctaws were unloaded. However, now they did not have the wagons and food supplies to support the 2,000 Indians. Len Green, in his article, *Choctaw Removal Was Really a "Trail of Tears"* wrote, "The Choctaws were told they would have to walk to Little Rock getting by on what rations they could carry on their persons." The distance to Little Rock was 70 miles, half of which was flooded and swampy. At times, the Choctaws were walking in cold icy water three feet deep. Needless to say, by the time they got to Little Rock many had died and more died after arriving at Camp Hope.

While the first group of Choctaws was suffering their fate on the second removal, a second group of 1,000 Choctaws were gathered and were being moving toward Vicksburg. Fortunately, this group was under the leadership of Francis Armstrong, who had heard about the cholera outbreak in Vicksburg and diverted his group to Memphis. Because Memphis had not been planned to be used on the second removal, there were no boats planned for the transportation. However, Armstrong found a boat, Archimedes, and got it converted to be used for transporting the 1,000 Choctaws. The Archimedes sailed to Arkansas Port and luckily there were wagons and supplies to take the Choctaws overland to Little Rock.

In Little Rock, those Choctaws still alive from the first part of their trip, broke into two groups with those going to Fort Towson following the Military Trace to the Red River and the other group following the Military Road to Fort Smith and on the Choctaws territory in Oklahoma. There are no reports on how many Choctaws died on the second removal but it was probably a significant number considering the hardship they endured and the cholera disease spreading among them.

### **The Removal in the Winter of 1833-34**

Whereas the previous two removals of Choctaws were fraught with problems, the third removal went smoothly with little problems. However, in the first two removals, the numbers were in the 3,000 to 5,000 range, only about 1,000 Choctaws showed up for removal in fall of 1833. Perhaps they had heard the stories of the other removals and decided to stay in Mississippi. The Choctaws left the port of Vicksburg on boats and sailed to Arkansas Port of Rock Roe where

they transferred to wagons or walked to Little Rock. From there they headed either to Fort Towson or Fort Smith.

The census of the Choctaw population before removal has been reported as being a total of 19,554 Indians. Green's article reports that George Gaines, the government agent in charge of the removal, stated he had moved 6,000 Choctaws to Oklahoma but that is obviously wrong considering the numbers moved on each of the three periods of removal. His numbers should show at least 8,000 were transported to Oklahoma and possibly as many as 9,000 although that number should be reduced by the number who had died on the trail. Others migrated without government assistance and the total number of those that migrated may be as high as 12,500. That would leave over 7,000 Choctaws who did not go to Oklahoma but other reports state that 5,000 to 6,000 remained in Mississippi. Whatever the correct number, there were a large group of Choctaws who remained east of the Mississippi and today they are the federally recognized Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians.

The term "Trail of Tears" is often believed to have been associated with the Cherokee Removal of 1838-9. It, in fact, began being used with the Choctaw Removal. In an interview with a Choctaw Chief who had just arrived at the Little Rock site by an *Arkansas Gazette* reporter, the chief proclaimed that this removal action was, "the trail of tears and death." This quotation by the chief and reported in the *Arkansas Gazette* was picked up by the press across the nation and became the term used to describe all of the removals, not just the Cherokee.

# The Creek Removal

## Part 3

### Introduction

For many years, little could be found about the Creek Removal other than reports of the final removal in 1836 after their brief skirmishes with the Georgia settlers mostly along the Chattahoochee River. As a result of that uprising, the government sent troops into Alabama and rounded up the remaining Creeks and marched them to Oklahoma, some in chains. Recently, two major research studies were completed that have shed light on the Creek Removal. *The North Little Rock Site on the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail: Historical Contexts Report* was written by Amanda L. Paige, Fuller L. Bumpers, and Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr. and published in June 2003 for the National Park Service documenting the many removal parties that passed through the Little Rock site including the Creek Indians. Christopher D. Haveman published his Doctoral Dissertation, *The Removal of the Creek Indians from the Southeast, 1825-1838* from Auburn University in August 2009 which is the most comprehensive study of the Creek Removal and provided extensive information about the last decade of the Creeks in Alabama before they were removed. These two documents provided a lot of knowledge about the Creeks not seen previously in published reports. This part of the removal stories of the Five Civilized Tribes summarizes some of what is known about the Creek Removal and their situation in the Southeast;

The removal of the Creek Nation is very similar to that of the Cherokee Nation. Like the Cherokees, a renegade band of Creek Indians under the leadership of William McIntosh without the authority of the majority and defying the Creek National Council, ceded in the Treaty of Indian Springs in 1825 almost all of the remaining lands in Georgia to the US Government. The Creek National Council had agreed in 1824 with William McIntosh signing the agreement that no further ceding of Creek lands would be done unless the entire Creek Nation agreed to the terms. One year later, William McIntosh and 50 of his family, friends and business partners who were members of the Creek Nation signed away all the Creek lands from the Flint to the Chattahoochee Rivers. Major Ridge and his fellow leaders of the Cherokee Treaty signing party were able to escape to Oklahoma before the Cherokees caught up with them and killed them for their traitorous act of signing away the Cherokee lands. William McIntosh and some of his close relatives were not as lucky as they were killed shortly after signing the treaty. They had expected to receive significant compensation for their signing the treaty. In fact, most of their possessions were confiscated by the Creeks and they had to flee into Georgia to be protected by their white friends. Some of the signers pleaded with the National Council for forgiveness which was given but they were told to leave the Creek lands before the Council changed their minds.

The Creek leaders intended to not cede anymore lands after ceding the land between the Ocmulgee and Flint Rivers in the 1821 Treaty. They, like all the other southeastern tribes, were going to stay in the homelands and not be removed to west of the Mississippi. McIntosh caused their plans to change with regard to their Georgia lands in that he ceded the land between the Flint and Chattahoochee River in 1825. The leaders met with government officials in Washington and got that treaty nullified but still had to cede those lands under better terms in 1826. Then, at the insistence and demands of Governor Troup of Georgia, they had to cede the sliver of land between the Chattahoochee River and the GA-AL boundary. By 1827, all Creek Indians were located in the small remaining territory of the Creeks in east central Alabama. The census of the Creek Indians in Alabama in 1832 after several groups had already emigrated to Oklahoma was 21,762 Indians and 902 slaves.

8,065 of the 21,697 were Lower Creeks who has suffered far greater than the Upper Creeks. From the time General Oglethorpe arrived in Georgia in February 1733 until the Creeks ceded their final lands in Georgia in 1827, less than one hundred years later, the Lower Creeks who occupied GA had to continuously move westward. For the first 57 years of this period, they remained in the majority of GA. But with the signing of the Treaty of New York in 1790, they gave up all their remaining lands in 37 years in the treaties of 1805, 1814, 1818, 1821, 1826, and 1827. When the Lower Creeks arrived in Alabama, they had few resources and for the most part were destitute. It was common for the Creeks to band together to help each other in hard times but that was not the case for the Lower Creeks who were starving. Claudio Saunt who wrote *Black, White, and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family* published in 2003 stated in the book, “Moreover, in 1828, Creek warriors attacked and beat a group of starving Creeks who had stolen food. Among them was an elderly Creek woman who was reduced to a perfect skeleton beaten till her bowels might be seen and whipped to the hollow for taking some corn.” The Lower Creeks had two choices: starve or emigrate to Oklahoma. However, the second choice was taken off the table by the Upper Creeks who in the National Council decreed that any Creek who signed up to be emigrated would be killed.

To acerbate the problems of the remaining Creeks in Alabama, the Alabama legislature passed laws giving them legal jurisdiction over the Creek lands in for which they had no authority to do and secondly passed a law prohibited the Creeks from hunting, trapping, or fishing where the state extended its jurisdiction. The Creek lands were officially ceded to the State of Alabama and the US Government in 1832 in the Treaty of Cusseta. Article 12 of that treaty stated, “The United States he United States **are desirous that the Creeks should remove to the country west of the Mississippi, and join their countrymen there; and for this purpose it is agreed, that as fast as the Creeks are prepared to emigrate,** they shall be removed at the expense of the United States, and shall receive subsistence while upon the journey, and for one year after their arrival at their new homes—Provided however, that this article shall not be construed so as to compel any Creek Indian to emigrate, **but they shall be free to go or stay, as they please.**” Article 2-4 further states that if a Creek choses to become a US citizen, they will be given a plot

of land which will be theirs at the end of five years. Thus, many decided to stay and based on the language of the treaty did not leave.

The final undoing of the Creek Nation occurred in 1836 when a band of Lower Creeks who had suffered from starvation and had their land patents from the 1832 treaty stolen decided to attack the white settlements in Georgia to get back what that believed was their rightful territory. The outcome of this action was the dispatch of federal troops to Alabama who rounded up all Creek Indians and marched them to Oklahoma, some in chains. Thus ended the Creek Nation's existence in the Eastern US.

### **McIntosh Emigration 1827-1828**

The Treaty of Washington in 1826 which nullified the Treaty of Indian Springs in 1825 provided for the removal of the McIntosh followers to safety in Oklahoma after members of this group has chosen a site for the new Creek homelands. Article 7 of the 1826 Treaty stated that, "The emigrating party shall remove within twenty four months and the expense of their removal shall be defrayed by the United States. And such subsistence shall also be furnished them, for a term not exceeding twelve months after their arrival at their new residence, as, in the opinion of the President, their numbers and circumstances may require." Some reports provide amplifying information that the numbers of this group were to be around 3,000. That number was more likely the wishes of the US Government who want to break the back of the Creek's resolve to stay in Alabama. In fact, the numbers reported by Haveman were much less. He stated that, "When they left the Creek Nation for the west in November 1827, only about seven hundred Creeks and their slaves chose to emigrate."

One provision of the Treaty of Washington was to allow the Creeks who were going to emigrate to Oklahoma to travel to the territory, explore it and chose a location to which they would settle.. The exploring party returned to the Creek Nation in Alabama in July and were asked to report their findings to the National Council even though the rest of the Creeks were not intending to emigrate. The explorers reported that the land was good and encouraged other to join them.

The McIntosh party gathered at Harpersville, AL in September 1827 which is far from the general Creek population to avoid any troubles. It was not until November 9, 1827 when the party got underway heading for Tuscumbia, AL on their first leg of the journey. As with other emigration accounts of Indian tribes, the Creek suffered badly in rains and cold weather and a number of the people got sick. When the got to Tuscumbia, the local population took pity on the Indians and provide medicine and other provisions to help them. Haveman reported that the government leader had intended that all the Creeks would walk or ride to Oklahoma but finding the road to Memphis in such bad shape, he decided to break the group up into one group that would travel by boat and the rest who had horses or wagon would travel by land. Both groups rejoined in Memphis.

Because of the rains, the conditions in Memphis were no better than at Tusculumbia. The part of Creeks on the boats continued their trip down the Mississippi and then up the Arkansas where they finally arrived in January at the Creek territory known as Cantonment Gibson later to become Fort Gibson. The land party was not as lucky in their trek across Arkansas, The rains had flooded the roads and streams and the group could not cross some of the rivers. At the White River, they were stuck for weeks until they could find a way to cross over it. Many got sick and the land party got stretched out along the trail due to some not being able to travel. The land party began to arrive in in February and continued to straggle in until April 1828.

The McIntosh party under extensive government subsistence made their trip probably better than most other emigration parties. They had ample provisions although at times they ran low when trapped by rising water and had wagons, horses and boats to get them to their destination. Learning how they fared, other Creek volunteer parties against the wishes of the National Council followed the first party to Oklahoma.

In order for the Creeks to reside in the Oklahoma territory, that land had to be first ceded by the Osage Indians. In the Treaty of Osage, 1825, the Osage Indians reluctantly ceded their lands west of the Arkansas and Missouri Territory. However they needed help in fending off the Comanche and Pawnee so the Creeks were greeted openly on their arrival. The *Arkansas Gazette* reported on 13 February 1828 that, “Nearly 250 Osage Indians greeted the water party as they arrived.”

### **Emigrating Parties of 1828-1829**

The situation in Alabama continued to deteriorate for the Creek Indians after the first emigrating parties left. Many were living on government subsistence which barely kept them alive. Emigration to Oklahoma was looking better every day; however, the Creek National Council increased its efforts to stop emigration by harassing and even threatened to kill those who were considering emigration. The US government was encouraging Creek families to emigrate and assigned emigrating party leaders to gather Creeks at the chosen embarkation point. The second emigration party was to gather at Fort Strother on the Coosa River. Fort Strother, located near present day Ohatchee, AL, was originally built in 1813 to support General Jackson in fighting the Creeks in the War of 1813-14. The fort remained open and was used as the second emigration starting point. By the summer, several hundred Creeks had gathered at the fort and registered to emigrate. However, Creek leaders confronted them and brandished weapons telling them they would be killed if they continued to stay. Many left the fort and unregistered themselves to emigrate. Some Creeks even burned the government storehouses for emigration supplies.

Even though many of the Creeks were harassed and many dropped out of the second emigrating party, Haveman reported that, “the second emigrating party left Fort Strother on October 8, 1828 with only between four and five hundred emigrants and their slaves. They party traveled with thirty loaded wagons and approximately one hundred horses” The *Cherokee Phoenix* reported in

its newspaper on 5 November 1828 that the members of the second emigrating party were not full blood Creeks but rather, “ most of the party being white men, half breeds, and mulattoes.”

Haveman reported that the second emigrating party followed a slightly different route than the first part in that they when to Gunter’s Landing, AL and there,” the second emigrating party was split into two where approximately two hundred women, children, and elderly, boarded flatboats to descend the Tennessee River. The balance traveled by land.” The water party traveled the Tennessee, Ohio, Mississippi, and Arkansas Rivers and arrived at Fort Smith, AR in late December 1828 having suffered no bad weather as previous groups had encountered. The land group also was blessed with good weather and they made the trip to Fort Smith a month earlier than the water party arriving there on November 28, 1828. Both groups departed Fort Smith in AR and arrived at Fort Gibson in the Oklahoma territory where they were provisioned and settled on the land.

A third emigrating party of Creek Indians gathered at two locations in southeastern AL in 1829. These were Fort Bainbridge which is west of Fort Mitchell and the Creek Agency in now Russell County, AL and in Pike County near Monticello, AL. While still being harassed, many Creeks braved the potential of being killed and registered to emigrate to Oklahoma. Haveman reported that this group began their trek in June 1829 with nine hundred Creeks from the Fort Bainbridge area and another five hundred from Pike County area. The emigrating party marched north to pick up supplies for the journey and then to Gunter’s Landing where they split up into a thousand in the water party and an 405 on the overland party.

The water party made it to Memphis with some of those on board getting sick, but the second part of their journey was much worse. They traveled down the Mississippi to the the White River where they boarded the steamboat *Virginia*. Soon after heading up the Arkansas River which was low, the steamboat went aground and all passengers had to be unloaded losing much of their personal possessions. Keel boats had to be procured and the party traveled up the Arkansas stopping briefly in Little Rock and then heading to Fort Gibson where they arrived in September 1829. The land party traveled through wet and muddy road conditions and many suffered with sickness. A number of the travelers died along the route. Others were so sick they had to drop out until they were able to travel again and straggled into Fort Gibson after the main parties had arrived. Haveman reported that, “The Creeks of the third voluntary emigrating party suffered much during their journey. They were sick, hungry, and fatigued.” This was probably due to the fact the government cut the cost in half for this removal party as compared to the first; thus, reducing the food and equipment available to support the Emigrating Creek Indians.

### **Emigrating Parties of 1833-1836**

Andrew Jackson was elected president in late 1828 and the Indians thought now they would have someone in the government that would step forward to help them. They were sadly wrong. Jackson not only did not help them, he advocated for the removal of all Indians and got the

Removal Act approved by Congress in 1830. To force the Creek Nation into submission, he stopped funding the voluntary removal of Creeks which forced many Creeks into further starvation since they had not planted crops assuming they could be removed in 1830 and beyond. Further, the US government and the State of Alabama were not enforcing the treaties with the Creek Nation and many whites were moving onto Creek lands and forcing the Creek to leave. The Creeks finally agreed to the terms of the Treaty of Washington in 1832 which they considered would solve their situation and allow them to remain in Alabama. Under the treaty, each Creek family or headman were given the rights to a land grant with the remaining lands being opened for settlement by white families. The treaty provisions included forcing white families off of Creek lands awarded to them under the treaty. As with all treaties, the terms were broken before the ink was dry and much of the Creek lands were either encroached upon by settlers or fraudulently stolen by greedy land speculators. By 1833, the Creek situation was worse than it had ever been. Neah Micco, Cusseta headman said in 1832 "Instead of our situation, being relieved, as was anticipated, we are distressed in a ten-fold manner."

With the signing of the Treaty of Washington in 1832, the government once again approved funding to support emigration with the stipulation they expected large number to emigrate before funding would be approved. That didn't happen. In fact, the groups that did migrate were small and suffered terribly from poor planning and insufficient funding to feed the people traveling.

### ***Chilly McIntosh Removal Party 1833***

Chilly McIntosh, son of William McIntosh and now Headman of the Western Creek Nation, received approval of the US government in late 1832 to register Creeks to be removed to Oklahoma in the summer of 1833. The government had some concerns about using a non-government leader to direct the removal and those concerns were soon realized. By May 1833, Chilly had only registered 300 people to be removed and the government held up funding concerned that the cost of the removal would be far more than previous removal parties. Headman stated that the Chilly removal party finally got underway in September with only sixty-two people of which twenty-one were slaves. The removal party arrived in the Creek territory forty-two days later practically starving. The Chilly removal party followed a land route used by previous removal groups. Eight people died on this removal party which is a higher percentage than previous removal groups.

### ***Removal of 1834***

The US government considered the Chilly Removal a disaster but pressed on to get the remaining Creeks removed in the subsequent years. Recognizing the Creek situation in Alabama continuing to deteriorate, the government thought they could get three thousand or more Creeks to register for removal in 1834. However, with the continued harassment by the Creek leaders and other factors influencing the remaining Creeks, few registered to be removed. Hoping for more Creeks to register for removal, the government leaders waited too long to start and finally

began on December 26, 1834. The removal party consisted of 530 individuals of which 115 were slaves. The removal party left Fort Mitchell and Centerville, AL traveled across Alabama and followed a land route northwest to Memphis, TN.

Traveling a land route in the dead of winter was probably the worst decision ever made by government removal leaders. Delays due to rain, snow, hail and freezing cold weather caused untold hardships on the removal party and some died along the way. When the removal party passed through Chickasaw territory, a number of those traveling left to remain with the Chickasaws as were there intention anyway.

The harsh weather conditions were particularly hard on the children and elders. When the party arrived in Memphis, they were broken up with all but seventy-two men left to take the horses on a land route and the remaining ones loaded onto boats to travel to Little Rock via the Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers. Traveling the rivers in winter is a poor choice due to ice flows and frozen rivers. The water party struggled to get to Little Rock suffering many delays awaiting the ice to clear or time to break the ice in the frozen river to head up stream. The land party suffered similarly having to cross frozen rivers and creeks and traveling through icy swamps which at time had frozen also. Both the land and the water party arrived in Little Rock in late February and were underway by land to Fort Gibson by early March. While traveling to Fort Gibson they encountered a terrible winter storm which made their journey all the more difficult. The party did not arrive at Fort Gibson until late March of 1835 completing their three month journey. Havemen reported that ten died along the journey and nineteen deserted the removal party.

### ***Removal of 1835-1836***

By 1835, the Creek Nation was no longer operating as one entity and the leadership no longer had significant control over the Creeks. Haveman dissertation discusses the unraveling of the Nation into three groups: one that wished to emigrate to the OK Creek territory, one that thought Texas looked better since they would not be under the control of the US government and a last group that was holding out to remain in Alabama. Further, the fraud of Creek lands from the 1832 treaty and the starvation of many had resulted in attacks on Georgia settlers as many Creeks looked for food and other needed supplies. The US government sensing it might be time to move thousands of Creeks to Oklahoma, once again began planning for another removal party; however, changing to a contractor to lead the removal party. The contractor, Stanford & Co., was managed by the same people who had led the land speculation efforts to steal the Creek lands so many Creeks refused to enroll to be removed. Further, one would think the government had learned a lesson not to remove the Creeks in the dead of winter, but they nevertheless enrolled Creeks for a departure in December 1835.

The removal group got underway on December 7, 1835 from Young's Ferry with 523 in the removal party. Their weather condition were better than 1834 and using a better route, they made it to Tusculumbia on the Tennessee by late December. There they were informed that the roads to

Memphis were unpassable so they had to purchase passage via boats to Memphis. The majority of the party was loaded and transported to Memphis via the Tennessee, Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. A small party with the horses struggled over the almost impassible roads to via a land route to Memphis. From Memphis, the water party continued down the Mississippi and then headed up the Arkansas River. The river was a low point so the boats kept going around and one of the boats sunk thus having to get transfer those on that boat to one of the other boats. The water party finally arrived at Fort Smith in mid-January. Because the Arkansas was so low, the boats could not go to Fort Gibson so the water party unloaded and were transported to Fort Gibson via a land route. The men leading the horses over land had struggled with terrible road condition but arrived about the same time at Fort Gibson in early February 1836.

By early 1836, only fifteen percent of the Creek Nation had emigrated to Oklahoma leaving a daunting task yet ahead to remove the remainder of the Creek Nation from Alabama.

### **The Second Creek War Resulting in the Forced Removals**

With the less than successful voluntary removal of Creeks in late 1835, the government pushed harder to get Creeks to enroll for removal. But they were having none of it. They did not trust the government contractor and further, some of those removed returned to Alabama to tell those that remained that the removal conditions was not what they were led to believe. Almost no Creeks were enrolling to be removed in early 1836. By May 1836, the level of frustration with their situation in Alabama had peaked for the Creeks, especially the Lower Creeks and they decided it was time to go to war to recover their territory and stolen possessions. The Upper Creeks, for the most part, wanted to remain neutral in this war but the Lower Creeks pressed their attack which was considered by the government to be an attack for all the Creeks. The Creeks began attacking white settlers both in Alabama and Georgia killing many. The white settlers fled to Georgia where they could be protected by militia forces. President Andrew Jackson saw this as his opportunity to forcibly remove the remaining Creek Indians so he ordered General Whitfield Scott and other army officers to Alabama to round up the Creeks and remove them to Oklahoma.

The government forces captured a number of Creeks and took them in chains and handcuffs from Fort Mitchell to Montgomery on the Alabama River. There they loaded the first group of 2,300 Creeks on boats in July 1836 and transported them to Mobile, then New Orleans and finally up the Mississippi to the White River and to Rock Roe, AR where they were offloaded. A second group of 210 people left in August following the same route. From Rock Roe, the groups followed a land route north of the Arkansas River and arrived in Fort Gibson in early September. A total of 339 Creek Indians or almost fourteen percent died on these two trips. Many Creeks saw the situation in Alabama becoming intolerable and left to live with the Seminoles and Cherokee.

Even though many of the remaining Creeks had not participated the Second Creek War and had in fact helped the government capture the renegade Creeks, they were considered persona non

grata to remain in Alabama. The government quickly moved to forcibly remove them. Using government contractors and military, the Creeks were told to gather their belongings and report to various embarkation camps for removal. A total of five detachments were organized to remove the remaining 16,000 Creeks beginning in August 1836. The Creeks gathered their most sacred items, put out the council fires and mustered at the removal camps. Haveman reported that in the case of Fish Pond Creek town, two men who were responsible for the council fire brought with them burning embers to light the fires each night for cooking and to start the new council fire when they arrived in OK. The five removal detachments totaling 11,074 Creeks were:

- Tallassee 2,400
- Wetumpke 3,142
- Talladega 2,420
- Talladega 1,169 including 400 captured and returned from Cherokee villages: another 1,000 Creeks who also lived with the Cherokees joined the 4<sup>th</sup> detachment at Gunter's Landing
- Cusseta 1,943

From August 31 to September 17, 1836, the five detachments left Alabama with staggered departure dates so as not to be jammed up at ferry points. Each detachment followed a somewhat different land route but crossed the Tennessee River either at Gunter's Landing or at Tusculumbia. Detachment Three did not want to cross over the Tennessee River so it followed the south bank of the river. After either crossing the Tennessee or not, the detachments marched to Memphis to cross over the Mississippi. Even though they the detachments left on staggered dates, they still got jammed up at Memphis. Haveman stated that, "Subsequently, by early October all five detachments—approximately 12,800 Creeks—were lined up in a train that extended for over one hundred miles from Memphis."

After crossing the Mississippi River at Memphis, each of the five detachments broke up into a water route group and a land group which would take the horses and some of the wagons through the swamps. The water route group of detachment 1-4 traveled to Rock Roe, AR where they unloaded and then traveled by land to Little Rock. Detachment 5 water route group went all the way to Little Rock by boat. Haveman reported that some of the Creeks were afraid of the boats and refused to go aboard. Thus, they followed the land route through the swamps. As with all other removal groups that followed the land route, the roads were almost impassible, covered in icy water and have huge potholes in the roads. Travel with horses and wagons was very difficult and made all the worse due to five detachments of horses and wagon following each other along the route. In Little Rock, each detachment's water and land parties rejoined and proceeded mostly by the land route north of the Arkansas River to Fort Gibson. Some traveled by boat to Fort Smith but again the Creeks did not trust the boats for their transportation. The condition of the Creek Indians in the five detachment's can be summarized as was reported in the *Arkansas Gazette* on 3 January 1837:

“Thousands of Creeks are entirely destitute of shoes or covering of any kind for the feet; many of them are almost naked; and but few of them have anything more on their persons than a light dress, calculated only for the summer, or for a very warm climate; and the weather being warm when they left Alabama, many of them left their heavier articles of clothing, expecting them to be brought on in steam-boats; which has yet been only partially done. In this destitute condition, they are wading the cold mud, or are hurried on over the frozen road, as the case may be. Many of them have in this way had their feet frost-bitten; and being unable to travel, fall in the rear of the main party, and in this way are left on the road to await the ability or convenience of the contractors to assist them. Many of them, not being able to endure this unexampled state of human suffering, die, and it is said are thrown by the side of the road, and are covered only with brush, &c. where they remain, until devoured by the wolves.”

The five detachments arrived at Fort Gibson from November 1836 until January 1837. Over 188 Creeks died along the route and for the most part the bodies left unburied as the ground was frozen and a grave could not be dug. Some were buried in hollow trees.

### **The Remaining Creeks Removed in 1837**

After the forced removal detachments had left Alabama, there remained the Creeks who had fled to live with the Cherokees, Chickasaws and Seminoles and those who had joined the US government to help fight in the second Seminole War. There were others who hid out on the swampy areas of South Alabama whom were harder to find. The government sent military officers to the tribal villages of the Cherokee and Chickasaw to either encourage or forcibly removed the Creeks back to Alabama for removal to Oklahoma.

By May 1837, 543 Creek Indians had be gathered from the Cherokee village at Coosawattee in Georgia and Red Clay in Tennessee. Some were transported by water route from Ross Landing in Tennessee and others to Gunter’s Landing in Alabama. From there, they traveled all the way to Fort Gibson via boat following the water route. Of the 543 that left Gunter’s Landing, 80 either died along the route or deserted the removal party.

Another 500 Creek Indians were living with the Chickasaws and they were removed when the Chickasaws left Mississippi in 1837 to emigrate to Oklahoma. The Creeks marched behind the Chickasaws to remain as a separate tribe.

There were reportedly 600 to 1,000 Creek warriors helping the US government in the Second Seminole War. The government needing their service agreed to delay their removal and that of their families until the warriors could be released from service in the spring of 1837. While the warriors participated in the war, the government gathered the families at Fort Mitchell and in Mobile to protect them from the white settlers. Haveman reported the government had agreed to not begin removal of the families until the warriors returned but as always, the government never kept promises and began removal of the Fort Mitchell families in March 1837 before the

warriors returned. All 2,000 of the family members were gathered in Mobile in the summer of 1837 where they suffered badly from the hot, humid weather conditions and disease that took its toll on those encamped in Mobile. Because of the terrible conditions in Mobile, the group was moved in September to Pass Christian in Mississippi where conditions were better. The warriors joined their families by mid to late October and their numbers grew to well over 3,000 Creek Indians. Emigration of the warriors and their families began in early October 1837 and continued to late October following a water route via the Mississippi and White Rivers to Rock Roe, AR and then by land route to Fort Gibson. The group, known as Detachment 6, was relocated by government contractors whose concern for the welfare of the emigrants was less than that of herding cattle. Pushing the limits on safe travel, one of the steam boats traveling on the wrong side of the Mississippi River was cut in half and 311 Creek emigrants died from drowning. Haveman reported in his dissertation that the *New Orleans True American* opined on the tragedy that:

“The fearful responsibility for this vast sacrifice of human life, rests on the contractors for emigrating the Creek Indians. The avaricious disposition to increase the profits on the speculation, first induced the chartering of rotten, old, and unseaworthy boats because they were of a class to be procured cheaply; and then to make those increased profits still larger, the Indians were packed upon these crazy vessels in such crowds, that not the slightest regard seems to have been paid to their safety, comfort, or even decency. The crammed condition of the decks and cabins, was offensive to every sense and feeling, and kept the poor creatures in a state unfit for human beings.”

The Creek Indians unloaded from the boats at Rock Roe in November 1837 and then traveled to Fort Gibson via the road which was in terrible condition. They arrived at Fort Gibson by late December to early January 1838 ending the Creek Removal.

The removal of the Creek nation of almost 23,000 people resulted in many deaths and unimaginable suffering. For many of the Creeks, they arrived in Oklahoma with little worldly goods to restart their lives. Many despondent about their situation took their life by committing suicide. Haveman reported that approximately 3,500 Creeks, whose health was a low point, died of diseases after arriving in Oklahoma. The once proud and fierce Creek Nation was brought to its knees

