

THE OLD INDIAN STONE FORT

BY
DON C. EAST

When I was growing up in Elias, Alabama, my Great Grandfather James Ira Nail sometimes lived with my grandparents, Johnny and Ethyl Cleveland. Since I lived next door, I spent a lot of time with my Great Grandfather until I joined the Navy in 1957. He often told me old family stories in the tradition of Indian oral history. James Ira was five eighths Creek Indian. His Great Grandmother and his Mother were both Creek Indians. One story Great Grandpa Nail told me often was about an old Indian stone fort near where he was born, and close by where his Grandfather, Burrell Nail, lived in Randolph county. I was never taken to see the old stone fort because it was a long way from my home in Elias, and one had to take a ferry across the Tallapoosa River to get there. So, I never knew exactly where the site was located. However, I never forgot the story about the old Indian stone fort, and after I retired from the Navy in 1992, I began to do a little research to try and find it. Finally, in a 1978 book entitled "Alabama Tapestry of Historic Places," I found a reference to the site. The book said the old Indian stone fort was on upper Wedowee Creek at Barton's farm between Haywood and Napoleon. The book described the structure as an 18th. century circular stone structure used by the Creek Indians. It was described as 2-3 feet high with east and west entrances. There was also a line of stone pillars one mile long, 2 feet high and 100 yards apart, extending in a northeast direction. Using this data, I went to a Randolph County map and determined that the structure must be in Section 2 or 3 of Township 20 South, Range 12 East, between Napoleon on the north and Haywood on the south. Using this data, on September 25, 1993, my daughter Amy and I went on an outing to try and find the structure. By using the Randolph County map, we soon arrived in the general area of where the Indian stone fort was located. We saw a man on a tractor mowing hay in a field near the dirt road we were on. I went over to ask the man about the structure. He stopped his tractor and I introduced myself and told him what I was looking for. He told me his name was Jimmy (Jim) W. Brown, and had a trailer down by Wedowee Creek where he lived on weekends and when he was working on his farm, but his main residence was in Layfayette, Alabama. He then said that he knew of the old Indian stone fort, in fact it "used to be" on his property down by the creek, downstream from his trailer. When I asked what he meant by "used to be," he told me he had grown tired of trespassers going on his property to the old structure and digging for artifacts, so he took his bulldozer and pushed the structure up into a big pile of rocks! My daughter and I were shocked to hear that one of the last permanent structures left by the Creek Indian Civilization in Alabama was purposely destroyed, but since it was his property, we said nothing, except ask for a description of what it looked like. He said it was a circular wall of stones about 3 feet high and had an inside area of about 10 acres. He said there were Indian graves inside the structure, and that was why trespassers were always digging there. He said he had always heard that the structure was used for Indian ceremonies. He told me if I ever wanted to see what was left of the structure, to come to his trailer sometime and he would take me there. I was so disheartened from the story until I have not been back to take him up on his offer. To get to the site, go east toward woodland on

highway #48. Take a right on Randolph County Highway #56 at the caution light at New Hope. Go southerly down highway #56 until you get to Napoleon. Between the old store and the church in Napoleon, there is a dirt road that turns off to the right, heading southwest. Follow this dirt road to the first dirt road to the right after you cross a stream. Take a right on this road, and Jim Brown's trailer entrance road will be on your right just before you cross the next stream. The site of the old Indian stone fort is down this stream about a quarter of a mile. I have found no further references to the old Indian stone fort, nor have I found anyone in the history or archeology fields that can tell me any more about the site. From what I have found out, the structure was a ceremonial "sacred ground" and not a "fort" in a military sense. Based on its location, the structure would have belonged to the Upper Creeks or "Red Sticks" if it were constructed since the late 1500s, otherwise, it would have been a structure built by a pre-Creek Indian civilization, possibly the Natchez Indians. The Natchez Indians worshiped a "Sun God." If the stone pillars were pointing directly east rather than northeast, this would lend credence to the Natchez theory. Otherwise, if the structure were built much earlier, such as the Hopewell mound builder period, and the stone pillars in fact pointed to the northeast, it would lead the way to the Etowah mounds in northwest Georgia.