

THE WAR OF 1812 IN CLAY COUNTY, ALABAMA

By

Don C. East

BACKGROUND

The War of 1812 is often referred to as the “Forgotten War.” This conflict was overshadowed by the grand scale of the American Revolutionary War before it and the American Civil War afterwards.

We Americans fought two wars with England: the American Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. Put simply, the first of these was a war for our political freedom, while the second was a war for our economic freedom. However, it was a bit more complex than that. In 1812, the British were still smarting from the defeat of their forces and the loss of their colonies to the upstart Americans. Beyond that, the major causes of the war of 1812 were the illegal impressments of our ships’ crewmen on the high seas by the British Navy, Great Britain’s interference with our trade and other trade issues, and the British incitement of the Native Americans to hostilities against the Americans along the western and southeast American frontiers.

Another, often overlooked cause of this war was it provided America a timely excuse to eliminate American Indian tribes on their frontiers so that further westward expansion could occur. This was especially true in the case of the Creek Nation in Alabama so that expansion of the American colonies/states could move westward into the Mississippi Territories in the wake of the elimination of the French influence there with the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, and the Spanish influence, with the Pinckney Treaty of 1796. Now the British and the Creek Nation were the only ones standing in the way of America’s destiny of moving the country westward into the Mississippi Territories.

For all these reason, the United States declared war on Great Britain on June 18, 1812. The war would last until December 24, 1814, when the peace treaty was signed in Ghent, Belgium.

Most Americans do not understand that the Creek Indian War of 1813-14 was simply a campaign or a theatre subset of the War of 1812. Most associate the War of 1812 with battles that took place in New England , the northern Atlantic, and eastern Canada. Even more surprising is the fact that few Alabamians, and specifically residents of east central Alabama, do not appreciate the fact that the Creek Indian War of 1813-14 was a turning point in the War of 1812. Finally, most Clay Countians do not realize that a large portion of the action in the Creek Indian War of 1813-14 took place here in our beloved county of Clay. This short analysis brings all these facts to light and illustrates the routes of march, battles, and notable men of American history associated with the War of 1812, that in part, took place in Clay County, Alabama.

Specific information on the Creek Indian War of 1813-14 routes of march and engagements on present-day Clay County soil is indeed sparse. Therefore, some of the information herein is based on time/distance calculations and estimates and will be labeled as such. Although the east Alabama counties and towns referenced in this analysis did not exist at the time of the Creek

Indian War of 1813-14, they are nevertheless used throughout the text as handy points of geographic reference for the reader.

During the Creek Indian War of 1813-14, Major General Andrew Jackson was assigned as the field commander, with troops under his command led by Major General William Cocke of the East Tennessee Volunteer Militia, along with Brigadier Generals Ferdinand Claiborne of the Mississippi Territory Militia, and John Floyd of the Georgia Militia. Also attached to these various armies were hundreds of allied Indians of the Cherokee, Choctaw, and White Stick or Upper Creek tribes. General Jackson reported to Major General Thomas Pinckney of the Fifth U.S. Military District, headquartered in Milledgeville, Georgia. During the later phases of the war, the U.S. regular Army 39th Infantry Brigade and a contingent of volunteers from the Carolinas also joined in under Jackson's command.

The opposing warring faction, the Red Stick or Upper Creeks, were led by several influential Creek Indians such as Menewa, William Weatherford, and Peter McQueen. Jackson's forces were well armed with cannon, muskets/rifles, pistols, bayonets, swords, and knives. On the other hand only about 25 percent of the hostile Red Stick Creeks had muskets/rifles or pistols, and the remainder fought with bow and arrow, spears, knives, and clubs. In addition, Jackson's forces far outnumbered the Red Stick Creeks in most all engagements. Because of these inequities, the Creek Indian War of 1813-14 only lasted for five months, from November of 1813 until March of 1814, with the final decisive battle being fought at Horseshoe Bend on the Tallapoosa River in what is now Tallapoosa County.

During the sixteen month war, MGen Jackson and one of his subordinates, BGen White, led their forces on three separate forays across Clay County soil to engage the Red Stick Creeks. Each of these engagements will be discussed in some details in the following sections.

WHITE'S CAMPAIGN ALONG THE WESTERN SIDE OF THE TALLAPOOSA RIVER

MGen Jackson soundly defeated the Red Stick Creeks at the Battle of Talladega on November 9, 1813. Around 60 to 70 of the Red Stick warriors wounded in this battle were taken back to the Hillabee mother town in southern Clay County for their recovery. Hillabee (Swift or Rapid) was the mother town for four Red Stick satellite villages and was located at the confluence of Harbuck and Little Hillabee Creeks just north of Pinckneyville. The four satellite villages were Lanudshi Apala (Meaning "Village Over the Little Mountain," located on Little Hillabee Creek at Millerville); Enitachopko (Meaning "Long Thicket," located at the confluence of Sweetwater and Enitachopko Creeks at Bluff Springs); Echoise Ligua (Meaning "Where Fawns are Found," located at the confluence of Broken Arrow and Little Hillabee Creeks north of Hackneyville); and Oktassasi (Meaning "Sandy Place," located at the confluence of Oktassasi and Big Hillabee Creeks just north of the Alexander City waterworks). These five towns/villages were collectively known as "The Hillabees."

After the battle of Talladega, the influential Scot trader, rancher and factory owner, Robert Grierson, with a contingent of Creek Chiefs in tow, went to Talladega to seek an agreement with Andrew Jackson. Grierson's robust facility was co-located with the Hillabee Mother Town in southern Clay County near Pinckneyville. Grierson, a shrewd businessman, knew if the war came to the Hillabees, he would stand to lose everything. The agreement offered by Grierson and the Creek chiefs would guarantee that the Hillabee towns (the mother town and four satellite villages) would not participate in further hostilities against Jackson if he would steer clear of the

Hillabee Towns for the remainder of the war. General Jackson agreed to this offer and the Hillabee contingent returned home thinking the war was over for them.

Jackson supposedly then sent a dispatch to MGen William Cocke informing him of this deal. However, either Cocke did not receive this dispatch in time, or he choose to ignore it. Cocke and Jackson were bitter rivals. Jackson had already secured two major victories in the conflict, Tallasseehatchee and Talladega, while Cocke had yet to have a significant engagement with the enemy. In any case, General Cocke dispatched BGen White on an excursion down the western side of the Tallapoosa River to eliminate any Red Stick warriors and villages in his path, which included the Hillabees.

General White departed Fort Armstrong on November 12, 1813 with a force of approximately 1,000, including a mounted infantry under Colonel Samuel Bunch, a cavalry unit under J.J. Porter, and a group of mounted Cherokee Indian allies under Colonel Gideon Morgan. Sequoyah, who later formulated the 86-character Cherokee alphabet, was in this group. As a fast-moving mounted unit, White's force took provisions for only three days. As a mounted force, White's average rate of march was approximately 15-20 miles per day. Based on this rate of march and some mentions of dates and locations in post-battle reports, his route of march and the locations of some Red Stick Creek villages could be determined with a high degree of certainty.

White probably camped near Coloma in Cherokee County on the night of the 12th. He then continued to the south and camped in the Fruithurst area of Cleburne County on the night of the 13th. On the 14th, he reported entering the Red Stick Creek village of (Little) Oakfuskee on the Big Tallapoosa River near Hollis Cross Roads in Cleburne County. He reported capturing five Red Stick Creek scouts and burning thirty houses. After camping nearby for the night of the 14th, White's forces then continued to the south along the west bank of the Tallapoosa, probably now following the Etowah Trail. They then entered Randolph County on 15 November where they burned ninety-three abandoned Red Stick Creek houses in the village of Atchinalgi, near Christiana. The army then camped for the night, probably near Christiana, and then continued southward and entering Clay County on the 16th. The force camped for the night of the 16th in the vicinity of Mellow Valley. On the 17th, White's forces continued to the south and entered the deserted Red Stick Town of Enitachopko, near Bluff Springs. Deciding not to burn the twenty-five houses there because they might be of future use during the war, he continued to the south and camped about 8 miles north of the Hillabee Mother town on the night of the 17th.

On the morning of the 18th, after encircling the Hillabee town, White's troops made a swift surprise attack, killing all the sixty or so wounded Red Stick warriors recuperating there from the earlier battle of Talladega and capturing some 256 old men, women, and children. White had no casualties in the action.

Afterwards, this attack by White was known as "The Hillabee Massacre," and it steeled the Red Stick Creeks to fight with renewed determination during the remainder of the war. They felt Andrew Jackson had lied to them. In his post-action report, General White reported the ground (From Fort Armstrong to the Hillabee mother town) "was so rough and hilly as to render a passage very difficult." General White apparently returned to Fort Armstrong via a reverse route, arriving there around the 24th of November.

GENERAL ANDREW JACKSON'S EMUCKFAW AND ENITACHOPKO CAMPAIGN

After acquiring fresh troops and supplies in January of 1814, General Jackson departed Talladega on early morning of 18 January 1814 with a force of 930, along with Cherokees and

White Stick Creek allies numbering 200-300. Jackson had two objectives on this excursion. First he would proceed toward Horseshoe Bend on the Tallapoosa, and in doing so would push the hostile Creeks along the western bank of the Tallapoosa River toward General Floyd's Georgia militia, who were operating on the opposite bank of the river. This would put the Red Sticks in a pincer movement between the two American forces. Secondly he would attempt to locate and engage the large force of Red Sticks his scouts had reported to be in the area of Horseshoe Bend.

Traveling with cannon, infantry, and supply wagons, Jackson's rate of march was slower than that calculated for General White in the earlier campaign. Jackson's rate of march averaged between 8 and 12 miles per day. Jackson began his march to the southeast from Talladega on the McIntosh Trail until he reached the Upper Creek Trading Trail somewhere in the vicinity of Ashland. This location is somewhat validated by the finding of a six-pounder solid shot cannon ball in the Ashland area. The cannon ball was found in the vicinity of the Clay County Hospital, which would have been alongside the McIntosh Trail. It was routine operating procedure to fire one or two cannon rounds during encampments while enroute an engagement. This was done in order to maintain gun crew proficiency and to frighten away any nearby hostile Indians. The Creek feared Jackson's cannons and called them Tabochka Thlacco (big gun) in the Creek language. Assuming this cannon ball was located where it came to rest after being fired by Jackson's troops, there is no other logical explanation for this specific type of cannon ball being found in this specific location.

After leaving the Ashland area where he probably camped on the night of 18 January, Jackson's force then went southward on the Upper Creek Trading Trail until they reached the trail connecting the Hillabee villages of Lanudshi Apala at Millerville and Enitachopko at Bluff Springs. There they probably made encampment for the night of the 19th. Like all the other Hillabee towns on that date, the Red Stick Hillabee satellite village of Lanudshi Apala was apparently deserted, with the populations fleeing to the Horseshoe fortification or going north to hide among the Cherokees. Jackson reported leaving the (Little) Hillabee Creek area on 20 November, and continuing eastward, probably on the Hillabees interconnecting trail, toward the satellite village of Enitachopko. Arriving at the abandoned Red Stick Town of Enitachopko, Jackson camped for the night of the 20th, apparently using the twenty-five houses that General White has spared in November of 1813 for just such an occasion.

On the morning of 21 January, Jackson broke camp and marched south southeast toward The Horseshoe on the Tallapoosa. In the late afternoon, after his scouts reported a large Red Stick Creek force along their intended line of march, Jackson decided to make a fortified camp for the night. At six o'clock on the morning of the 22nd, Jackson was attacked by a Red Stick force of approximately 500 warriors. After a fierce struggle, Jackson's troops were able to beat off the Red Stick attack.

A few hours later, the Red Sticks commenced a second attack. Following a vigorous struggle, Jackson's troops were finally able to push back the Red Stick force for a second time. Jackson lost four men killed in the two battles, including his Aid-de Camp, A. Donaldson, and an unspecified number of wounded. Forty-five Red Stick dead were found after the battle.

After burying his dead on the site, Jackson decided it best to abandon his planned march to the Horseshoe, make a fortified camp for the night, and begin a withdrawal to Fort Strother the next morning. At 1000 on the morning of the 23rd, he broke camp and headed back northward toward the abandoned village of Enitachopko, where he probably camped near what is now known as Jackson's Spring.

Breaking camp on the morning of the 24th, Jackson's army was attacked by a sizeable Red Stick force as his artillery was in the process of crossing Enitachopko Creek, heading westward. While the Jackson rear guard became disorganized in the melee and began a withdrawal, some of his troops pulled the six-pounder cannon out of the creek and up on a small hill. Having left the cannon limber in the creek, the gun crew improvised a picker and rammer with a rifle ramrod and a rifle barrel. Firing two grape shot rounds at the Red Stick force, Jackson's men were able to turn the tide of the battle and eventually the day for Jackson.

Jackson's total losses at the battles of Emuckfaw and Enitachopko were twenty killed and about seventy-five wounded. His new Aid-de-Camp had his horse shot out from under him at the latter battle. 189 dead Red Stick Creek were counted after the two battles. After burying his dead from the Enitachopko battle on the site, Jackson continued his withdrawal northwestward to Fort Strother on the Coosa.

On his return trip, he probably again followed the Hillabee interconnecting trail to Millerville. There, according to a persistent legend, he stopped for watering his troops and horses. It is said he rode up to a house and asked the residents to bring him a dipper of water. The only people remaining at the Millerville site after the Red Sticks abandoned the village of Lanudshi Apala most likely were the Holman Simmons family. It is estimated that Holman Simmons was probably a white trader with a facility adjacent to the Creek village of Lanudshi Apala. He would have remained there even after the Creeks abandoned the village. After leaving the Millerville area, Jackson probably then followed the Upper Creek Trading Trail northward, crossed over to the Socapatoy-Talladega Trail and then northward to join the McIntosh Trail. He then probably continued this route to Talladega and then northward on to Fort Strother near Ohatchee. Jackson and his troops exited Clay County on approximately the 26th.

After the Emuckfaw/Enitachopko campaign, the Red Stick Creek correctly boasted they had "Whipped Captain Jack and ran him back to the Coosa."

GENERAL ANDREW JACKSON'S HORSESHOE BEND CAMPAIGN

By March of 1814, General Jackson had acquired enough fresh troops and supplies to make a second attempt to force a major battle with the Red Stick Creeks, known to be at a fortified camp at the Horseshoe Bend on the Tallapoosa River. The scouting reports showed approximately 1,000 Red Stick warriors along with their women and children to be there from the Red Stick towns of Hillabees, New Yorka, Eufaula, Fish Ponds, Oakfuskee and Oakachoy. At this time, Jackson was operating out of Fort Williams on the Coosa River, west of Sylacauga.

Jackson sent his engineers ahead of the main van of his army to widen the narrow Indian trails over the 53-mile distance from Fort Williams to Horseshoe Bend. This work was necessary in order to maneuver his cannon and supply wagons over the route. By now, Jackson had a force of approximately 4,000, which included 500 Cherokees and 100 White Stick Creek allies, plus the regular U.S. Army 39 Infantry Brigade.

Leaving Fort Williams on 24 March 1814, Jackson headed for the Horseshoe. The route he used to reach the Horseshoe was originally known as the Weogulfga-Cussetta Trail, and in years afterwards as the Chapman Road. Jackson's forces camped the night of the 24th in the vicinity of Sylacauga, and the night of the 25th in the vicinity of Hollins. The force now entered Clay County, where they camped the night of the 26th near Pinckneyville. While at this camp, his artillery crew apparently fired at least one six-pounder solid shot round for proficiency. A six-pounder solid cannon ball was found embedded in a large hardwood log at the author's

grandfather, Johnny Cleveland's peckerwood sawmill at that site in 1946. This find coincides with the explanation of the six-pounder cannon ball found in the Ashland area as discussed above. Continuing southeastward, Jackson's army reached the Horseshoe on the Tallapoosa at 1000 on the morning of the 27th.

Quickly engaging the Red Stick Indian position with his cannon, Jackson attempted to destroy the barricade before making a frontal assault. In the interim, BGen Coffee and a contingent of Creek and Cherokee allies moved around to the opposite end of the Horseshoe.

Without specific orders, the allied Indians swam the river and brought back several of the canoes the Red Sticks had left there for escape purposes. Using these canoes, a sizeable force of allied Indians crossed the river and attacked the rear of the Red Stick encampment where the women and children were located.

Detecting this allied Indian action, many of the Red Stick warriors along the barricade ran to the rear to protect the women and children. Jackson seized upon this opportunity to make a frontal assault over the log breastworks at 12:30. The battle then raged for several hours until around sunset, resulting in a major victory for Jackson's army.

A careful body count by Jackson forces indicated 557 Red Sticks were killed in the Horseshoe and as many as 250-300 more killed or drown in the river. This was the highest Indian war casualty toll in American history. In addition, 350 old men, women, and children were taken as prisoners. Jackson's army suffered twenty-six killed and 107 wounded; the Cherokees had eighteen killed and thirty-six wounded, while the White Stick Creeks had five killed and eleven wounded. The regular Army 39th Infantry Brigade suffered the most of Jackson's casualties with seventeen killed and fifty-five wounded.

Jackson's army camped the night of the 27th adjacent to the battle site and began their march back to Fort Williams on the morning of the 28th. The return march to Fort Williams was slowed somewhat with the many wounded soldiers being transported. The army camped for the night of the 28th probably in the vicinity of Cleveland's Cross Roads, the night of the 29th near Hollins, where they exited Clay County the next morning headed west. They then camped the night of the 30th near Sylacauga and probably arrived at Fort Williams on the 31st of March.

Many of the wounded from the battle at the Horseshoe died enroute or later at Fort Williams and are buried at the military cemetery at the fort site on the east bank of the Coosa River. One of these was the author's GGGGGG Uncle, Nicholas Nail, who was with Henry Newlin's Company of Colonel Phillip Papkin's First West Tennessee Militia.

The battle at Horseshoe Bend broke the back of the Red Stick uprising and ended the Creek Indian War of 1813-14. The treaty officially ending this conflict was signed at Fort Jackson on the Coosa River at Wetumpka on August 9, 1814. Meanwhile, the War of 1812 continued as the British forces burned the United States Capitol building in Washington, D.C. and most of the other government buildings on August 24, 1814.

In the treaty of Fort Jackson, the Creek Nation was forced to give up 22 million acres of their Alabama land to the United States, leaving them with only 5.2 million acres in east central Alabama. The surviving Creeks resided on this 5.2 million acres until the second Creek War of 1836 and their forced removal to Oklahoma Indian Territory in 1836-37. The removal of the Creeks and other eastern Indians was a result of then President Andrew Jackson's Removal legislation forced through Congress in 1830.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In summary, during the Creek Indian theatre of the War of 1812, United States MGen. Andrew Jackson and his forces made three forays across what is now Clay County, Alabama. These operations involved a total of 18 days and between 225 and 250 miles of travel within Clay County borders during the November 1813, January 1814, and March 1814 time frames.

Several notable figures of Alabama and American history were involved in these three campaigns and left their foot prints in Clay County soil. Some of these were: Major General Andrew Jackson (hero of the War of 1812, Tennessee and national Senator, 7th President of the United States and for whom Jackson County, Alabama was named); Ensign Sam Houston (Hero of the battle of Horseshoe Bend, Governor of both Tennessee and Texas, hero of the defeat of the Mexican General Santa Ana in the battle of San Jacinto, and for whom Houston County, Alabama was named); Davy Crockett (famous frontiersman and scout, Senator from Tennessee and martyr at the siege of the Alamo); Major Lemuel P. Montgomery (killed at Horseshoe Bend and for whom Montgomery County, Alabama is named); Lieutenant Michael C. Moulton (killed at Horseshoe Bend, for whom Moulton, Alabama is named); Lieutenant Robert M. Sommerville (Killed at Horseshoe Bend and for whom Sommerville, Alabama is named); Brigadier General John Coffee (Served under Andrew Jackson in Creek War, for whom Coffee County, Alabama is named); Colonel Gilbert C. Russell (Officer in Creek War and for whom Russell County, Alabama was named); Major John Walker (Served in BGen White's unit in the Creek War and for whom Walker County, Alabama is named); Major William Russell (Officer in the Creek War and for whom Russellville, Alabama is named); Joseph M. Wilson (Officer in Creek War and for whom Wilson County, Alabama was named); William Butler (Officer in Creek War and for whom Butler County, Alabama was named); Colonel Gideon Morgan (Commanded a Cherokee Mounted Infantry unit under BGen White in Creek War, and for whom Morgan, Alabama was named); Sequoyah (Served under Colonel Morgan in the Creek War and was the inventor of the 86-character Cherokee alphabet); William Weatherford (Also Known as Red Eagle, famous leader of the Red Stick Creeks); Menawa (great war chief of the Red Stick Creeks); Peter McQueen (war leader of the Red Stick Creeks); Opothle Yahola (fought in the Horseshoe Bend battle as a Red Stick Creek youth and led the Creek Nation later in Oklahoma); Selocta Fixico (A son of Chief Chinabee, Selocta was General Jackson's favorite guide and translator); and William McIntosh (War leader of the White Stick Creeks fighting with Jackson and later assassinated by the Red Stick Creeks for his signing of the contentious Indian Springs Treaty of 1830). On both sides of the issue, these were truly men who shaped the times through which they past through.

The events during the Creek Indian War of 1813-14 in Alabama, and particularly those in Clay County, figured prominently in American history. Unfortunately, many of the facts relating to these actions have not been researched or put into print, and consequently some of this data has been lost in antiquity.

Although usually a sidebar in the War of 1812, the Creek Indian War of 1813-14 was in fact at least a crucial psychological turning point in that conflict. From a more practical military standpoint, the Creek Indian War eliminated the opposition on the American southern frontier of operation, gave Jackson and his army valuable training, and put them nearby in the southeastern geography at the time that a large force of British troops landed in south Louisiana on Christmas Day of 1814. His knowledge of the Creek Indian War operating area and the roads his army had constructed there allowed the general to be Johnny on the spot for the subsequent Battle of New Orleans on January 8, 1815.

In the Battle of New Orleans Jackson soundly defeated the war-hardened British troops under General Packenham and inflicted casualties of 700 killed, 1,400 wounded and 500 taken as prisoners. Jackson's motley crew of Tennessee and Kentucky mountain men, Indians, negroes, pirates, and a few regular U.S. troops, suffered only eight killed and thirteen wounded. Ironically, the war was already over before the start of this Battle of New Orleans. The peace treaty ending the War of 1812 was signed a couple of weeks earlier at Ghent, Belgium.

In closing, "yes Virginia, something of great American historical importance did in fact happen in Clay County, Alabama!"

For those desiring more information on the Creek Indians, the Creek Indian War of 1813-14, the Indian removals, and the early white settlement of southern Clay County, can read my book "A Historical Analysis of the Creek Indian Hillabee Towns." The book can be purchased in either the hard cover or soft cover versions at the Ashland or Lineville Public Libraries, or can be ordered on-line from Amazon, Books-a-Million, Barnes&Noble, or iuniverse.