



# WALTON

## RELATIONS & HISTORY

Volume 10, Issue 4

Walton County Heritage Association

April 2019

### Walton County Boundaries

By Sam Carnley

Following are the boundaries of Walton County as they began on the County's creation in 1824 and evolved over time to what they are now according to a historical sketch of the County written by the WPA in 1936:

Section one of the Act creating Walton County redefines Escambia County, particularly the eastern boundary as a line beginning at the east end of Santa Rosa Island and running due north to the Alabama line. Using this as the western boundary of Walton County, section two of the same Act further defines the boundaries: "That there be, and hereby is established a county to be comprehended within the following boundary lines, beginning on the boundary line at the north east corner of Escambia County, running east along the boundary line of said Territory to a point on the said line, whence a line running south east will strike the south east side of Hickory Hill, thence a direct line to Wood's ferry on Bear Creek, thence down said creek to St. Andrew's Bay, thence through the middle of said bay to the Gulf of Mexico, thence along the shores of the Gulf to the beginning, to be called Walton County."

From 1824 to 1915 the boundaries of Walton County have a history of their own. In 1846 a southeastern portion of the county is used to help form Washington County while two years later a northeastern part is used for a similar purpose in the case of Holmes County. In 1851 and 1853, after the creation of Santa Rosa County, small changes were made in the western boundary of Walton County, one adding to and the other subtracting from its territory. In 1913 when Bay County was created out of Calhoun and Washington Counties Walton County regained

part of the territory yielded to Washington County in 1846. Finally, in 1915, Okaloosa County was formed from eastern portions of Santa Rosa and western parts of Walton, leaving the latter defined today by Section 11, Article I, Chapter II of the Revised General Statutes of Florida, 1920: "Walton county shall be comprehended with the following boundaries-- beginning on the Alabama State line where it is intersected by the line dividing centrally range eighteen west; thence south along the section lines to the line dividing townships two and three, north, in range eighteen, west; thence east to the Choctawhatchee river; thence down the main channel of the Choctawhatchee river to a point where said Choctawhatchee river intersects the range line dividing ranges seventeen and eighteen, west; thence south along said range line to the Gulf of Mexico; thence in a westwardly direction following the meanderings of said Gulf to the range line dividing ranges twenty-one and twenty-two, west; thence north up said line to the dividing line between Florida and Alabama; thence easterly along said State line to the place of beginning."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> State Library of Florida, WPA - Historical Records Survey, County Histories, Walton County, <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/321166?id=2>; <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/321166?id=3>

#### Walton County Heritage Museum

Open Tuesday – Saturday, 1:00 – 4:00 PM  
1140 Circle Drive, De Funiak Springs, FL 32435  
850-951-2127

<http://www.waltoncountyheritage.org/>

# The Walton County Indian War

By Sam Carnley and Bruce Cosson

## Part I

After decades of atrocities each committed against the other, it should have come as a surprise to no one when European and Native Americans finally came to a parting of ways. The separation led to tragedy for a few whites, but a catastrophe for most south-eastern Native Americans who were dispossessed of their lands when the U. S. Government led by President Andrew Jackson passed the Indian Removal Act of 1830.<sup>1</sup> The act provided for negotiations between the parties whereby the tribes would relinquish claims to their ancestral lands in exchange for new land west of the Mississippi in what became known as Indian Territory and later, Oklahoma. The land vacated by the Indians could then be put up for sale to white settlers already encroaching upon it in overwhelming numbers. After consenting to removal by treaty, the Cherokees and one or two other tribes went reluctantly but without much resistance, and to their grief, suffered the infamous “Trail of Tears,” in which thousands of their members starved, froze to death or succumbed to exhaustion and disease on the months-long forced march to their destination.<sup>2</sup>

The primary event leading to the Creeks’ trail of tears was the 1832 Treaty of Cusseta.<sup>3</sup> Not entered into voluntarily by the Indians, it was imposed on them by agents of the U. S. Government at their village of Cusseta on the Chattahoochee River in today’s Chattahoochee County south of Columbus, Georgia. It was the last in a succession of several treaties between them and U. S. Government in which they ceded land to the United States. By this treaty, the Creeks relinquished the last of their lands in Alabama. In exchange, they were given allotments of land in their former Alabama territory on which they could either live or sell as they chose. If they sold their land, the terms of the treaty required that they migrate to Indian Territory west of the Mississippi River. Those who sold however, were shamelessly cheated in the prices they received from the buyers who typically were speculators or white settlers. Furthermore, the property rights of those who remained were disrespected by the Alabama State Government, as well as white settlers who ignored the Indians’ legal ownership of the land and defiantly squatted on it intending to claim it as their own. In ensuing conflicts over ownership, the State invariably sided with the settlers, evicting the legal owners. The Creeks tolerated the injustice briefly, but finally came to realize that their removal was the only outcome acceptable to the whites and they would go to any lengths to bring it about. Determined to resist those efforts by the only means they knew, the Creeks resorted to attacks against white settlers in retribution.

In May of 1836 several hundred of them launched a predawn attack on the little town of Roanoke, on the east side of the Chattahoochee River near Lumpkin, in Stewart County, Georgia. Alerted to the attack in advance most residents of the town fled and were not harmed. The aftermath however, presented a few dead residents who did not escape and fell victim to the attackers and a town reduced to ashes.<sup>4</sup> It was never rebuilt and the site was inundated when Lake Eufaula was impounded behind the Walter F. George Dam built on the Chattahoochee River in 1963.<sup>5</sup> Following the attack the Creeks crossed back over the River to Alabama, from where they had initiated the assault. This incident and others so aroused local settlers that they pressured Alabama Governor Clay to call out the State Militia to deal with the increasingly hostile Creeks and return a semblance of order to the region.

---

<sup>1</sup> Indian Removal Act of 1830, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian\\_Removal\\_Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Removal_Act)

<sup>2</sup> Trail of Tears, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trail\\_of\\_Tears](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trail_of_Tears)

<sup>3</sup> Treaty of Cusseta of 1832, Encyclopedia of Alabama, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-3083>, and Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty\\_of\\_Cusseta](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Cusseta)

<sup>4</sup> Roanoke, Georgia, burned by Creeks, 1836, The History Engine, <https://historyengine.richmond.edu/episodes/view/448>

<sup>5</sup> Lake Eufaula (Walter F. George Lake), Eufaula, Alabama, Wikipedia, <http://www.lakeeufaula.info/>

The disturbances in Alabama and Georgia driven by hostile Creeks resisting removal and the ultimately successful militia operations against them in 1836 and 1837 created conditions ensuring the strife would spill over into adjacent Walton County which presented the greatest exposure to the areas of unrest. The population of the County in 1830 was 1,207 according to that year's census and it probably had not grown to substantially more than that by the time of the troubles with the Creeks in 1837. It was 70 miles wide and 40 miles deep, and totaled 2,800 square miles in area, most of which was unpopulated wilderness. The renegade Creeks did not think of it in those mathematical terms but knew from their many travels through it on trading trips to Pensacola that it was an immense place where they thought they could lose themselves to avoid removal and live in their traditional ways unmolested. As the militia pressure they faced, especially in Alabama, threatened to overwhelm them, the imagined Walton County haven became an irresistible beacon in their minds, and was inevitably where they were drawn.

This view was expressed by Benjamin Drake Wright, editor of the Pensacola Gazette in an article published on 11 March 1837 based on a letter from Indian Agent, Archibald Smith to Wright dated the previous March 4<sup>th</sup>.

**THE CREEKS.**---- The Pensacola Gazette, of the 11<sup>th</sup> instant, publishes the annexed letter.

The Gazette describes the country to which the Indians are supposed to be making their way for refuge, as a desert region, extending about seventy miles along the Gulf from the Choctawhatchee river, with a depth of about forty miles. It is unbroken by any uncivilized settlements except a few families at Alaqua and some about twelve or fifteen miles from that place [Eucheeanna]. It is familiar with the Creeks, who used to traverse it when they traveled with [to] Pensacola. They undoubtedly seek concealment, but, being destitute, must be driven to prey upon the whites for subsistence.

On receiving the Intelligence below, the inhabitants of Pensacola held a public meeting, Judge Cameron in the chair, and determined to raise a force for the defense of the frontier. Commodore Dallas agreed to send boats and men to guard the provision, which might be placed at Black Water Bay, and on the 8<sup>th</sup>, a company of horse repaired to that place. The forces raised are to be under the command of Col. Morton. A depot has also been formed at East River, about thirty-five miles east of Pensacola.

The editor of the Gazette adds that the information contained in the agent's letter, of supplies being furnished to the Indians at Black Water, turns out on inquiry, to be erroneous.

Cedar Bluff, the principal point through which the travel between this place and Augusta, on the lower route, passes, is on the Choctawhatchee River mentioned.

Extract of a letter from Archibald Smith, Jr. Esq., Indian Agent, to the editor, dated Black Water Bay, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1837:

Some time since, I was informed that the Creek Indians were in the habit of coming down here and obtaining supplies of ammunition from a small band of Indians and some two or three old Spaniards, residents, near the mouth of Black Water Bay [Escribano Point]. Believing my information to be correct, I made it known to the War Department, whence I was ordered to proceed forthwith, with an interpreter of my own selection, and ascertain all the information in my power. I set out Monday last from Mount Vernon [present day Chattahoochee] with my interpreter. We lay at Pitman's Ferry, on Choctawhatchie, on Tuesday night last, when a body of Indians passed down the river in canoes, &c. murdering and plundering as they went, and stealing every canoe they could find. They killed the family of Mr. Alberson, two miles above the ferry on this side of the river. Two or three other families were missing on Wednesday morning as we passed, supposed to be murdered also. I was requested to rush forward and give eh alarm on Pea River and Yellow river, and arrived here at dark last night. These Creeks have been victorious in three several engagements near the head of Cowagee Creek, in Barbour county [Alabama]. Col. Wellbourne, of Irwinton, and several others, have lately fallen in an engagement with them. It appears they are aiming for this neighborhood; reports say 300 in number. One gang of 125 came down Clay Bank Creek [Dale County, Alabama] last Friday, in

open day time. They were counted by a gentleman on his plantation, making their way towards the mouth of Pea River. Another gang was seen on Saturday last, at the Double Bridge in the same neighborhood, all traveling south. As you are my only acquaintance in Pensacola, I request you will endeavor to prohibit the sale of ammunition to any Indians, or white persons who may be suspected of trading with the Indians.

These Indians are not disposed to emigrate to Arkansas – hence their women have murdered their own small children and fight as the men. The coast from here to Choctawhatchee should be immediately secured and the militia kept in readiness.<sup>6</sup>

On March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1837, a militia from Irwinton (now Eufaula) under the command of General William Wellborn engaged a number of Creeks, said to be 900 in one account, but somewhat fewer in another, in a battle near Hobdy's Bridge on Pea River between Barbour and Pike Counties in south Alabama. The leaders of the Creeks were Jim Henry and Neamathla. The latter was a former principal chief of the Seminoles deposed in 1824 by Governor William Duvall of Florida for refusing to comply with terms of a treaty he had signed. Neamathla was born a Creek and after removal as chief of the Seminoles he returned to the tribe of his birth. He and Jim Henry were also credited as leaders of the attack on Roanoke, Georgia the previous year. At the time Wellborn caught up with the Creeks on Pea River they were en route to Walton County via that river and the Choctawhatchee of which the Pea is a tributary. Wellborn's militia defeated them, intending to detain and send them to Mobile Point, Alabama, where others of their tribe were being held in preparation for removal to the west. But his plans for their capture failed and breaking up into small bands, they escaped into the river swamp, to continue on their way to Walton County.<sup>7</sup>

A few weeks after their route at Hobdy's Bridge, the Creeks made their presence felt in Walton County where they attacked a party of the County's residents searching for their free range cattle near Shoal River. The three known accounts of the incident differ in several respects. That of John L. McKinnon gives the year as fall, 1835 as opposed to 23 April 1837 given by Brian Rucker. The third account is from the Pensacola Gazette in an article dated May 1, 1837, but the date of the attack is not stated. McKinnon gives three as the number killed in contrast to Rucker who states that it was five, while the Pensacola Gazette only names 3 in the May 1, 1837 article. The year of 1837 seems correct because it was the year the conflict first touched Walton County directly. Due to space and time limitations of this article, no attempt was made to determine the reason for the differences in the number killed. The differences in the three accounts are noted to alert readers to their existence only. The attackers very possibly were one of the small bands who escaped after Hobdy's. The whites from the settlement where the slain men lived quickly struck back putting an end to that particular band's killing spree. The place of the engagement was a small tributary on the south side of Shoal River which became known as Battle Branch and is the name by which it appears on maps of the county.<sup>8</sup>

When the invasion of Walton County by the renegade Creeks from Alabama began in 1837 of which the foregoing attack was among the earliest, the Pensacola Gazette whose editor and owner was Benjamin Drake

---

<sup>6</sup> E. W. Carswell, *Holmsteading*, (Rose Printing Company, Tallahassee, Florida, © E. W. Carswell, 1986), 31-32

<sup>7</sup> Battle of Hobdy's Bridge, March 24, 1837: Last Significant Indian Battle in Alabama, <https://digitalalabama.com/alabama-battlefields-and-forts/battle-of-hobdys-bridge/6705/>; Uchee Valley letter, May 1, 1837, Transcripts of Pensacola Gazette Articles, May 13, 1837, (attached)

<sup>8</sup> John L. McKinnon, *History of Walton County*, (Palmetto Books, Gainesville, Florida, 1968), 109-117; Uchee Valley letter, May 1, 1837, Transcripts of Pensacola Gazette Articles, May 13, 1837 (attached); Brian R. Rucker, *West Florida's Creek Indian Crisis of 1837* (The Florida Historical Quarterly, Vol. 69, No. 3 (Jan., 1991), pp. 315-334, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30147524>; Section 6, Township 3, north, Range 21, west, General Highway Map of Walton County, Florida, prepared by the Surveying and Mapping Office, State of Florida Department of Transportation in cooperation with the U. S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, November 2006, [https://fdotwww.blob.core.windows.net/sitefinity/docs/default-source/countymaps/color/walt-c.pdf?sfvrsn=c51fd2aa\\_4](https://fdotwww.blob.core.windows.net/sitefinity/docs/default-source/countymaps/color/walt-c.pdf?sfvrsn=c51fd2aa_4)

Wright began running a series of articles about the war in the county. A collection of the transcribed articles is attached and speak for themselves in telling the story of the Walton County Indian War.

**EXCERPTS FROM ISSUES OF THE PENSACOLA GAZETTE  
COVERING THE WALTON COUNTY INDIAN WAR OF 1837<sup>9</sup>**

[Transcribed by Sam Carnley, April 15-19, 2019]

**Pensacola Gazette – May 13, 1837**

It will be seen by the subjoined extract of a letter from the county joining this [Walton] that some alarm is still felt and there concerning the fugitive Indians known to be lurking in that neighborhood.

Governor Call was early informed of the state of things existing there, and he adopted the only measure which seemed at all likely to effect the object of getting up a military force sufficient to subdue the Indians or drive them away. The militia of Jackson County have, we understand, been ordered out, and full powers were given to Colonel Jackson Morton, of this county [Escambia], to raise such force here, and in Walton and Washington Counties, as he might deem necessary for the service. Such is, however, the total want of organization in the militia that we fear that little can be done, even by Colonel M [Morton], who could do more toward organizing such a force than any other man in the county. We regret to say that his health is such as precludes the possibility of his heading any force which might be raised.

“Uchee [sic] Valley, May 1, 1837

We have gloomy times in this neighborhood. We are literally surrounded by Indians, their spies have been discovered in different parts of this neighborhood. An Indian was seen yesterday at McLean’s Mill, another was seen yesterday at Peter K. McDonald’s. Our scouts, by their exertions, have discovered fresh signs on Sandy Creek yesterday morning, and from the appearance of the trail which they made they suppose there must be a great number of them. We found three of the bodies of the men the Indians murdered on Gum Creek. The day before we found them, we had an engagement with the Indians on Gum creek about a mile and a half from where the murders were committed. We killed one and took two prisoners. One of the prisoners was a squaw. John L. McKinnon was along – he took the squaw in charge and carried her home with him, and two days later she got away from him. She is able to give the Indians much information concerning the situation of our settlement, she having passed directly through it, will be to the Indians and efficient guide.

I think it will require an army and a summer campaign to get the Indians out of Walton County. I conversed last Saturday with a gentleman who was with Welburn [General Wellborn] in the great fight with the Indians on Pea River [near Hobdy’s Bridge]. He says there were 300 of them who made their escape and in being pursued only 15 were overtaken on their way to Florida. I have not the least doubt that, from every information worthy of credit, there are four or five hundred Indians in and upon the borders of the county. The bodies of John Anderson, Michael Vaughan and old Nelson were massacred in a manner too shocking to describe. They were shot through at various places and each one of them scalped. I fear that, unless we get aid in this county, that the situation of the people will be truly dangerous.

Since the foregoing was in type we have heard that the Jackson County militia were to march on the 5<sup>th</sup> and to be at Mallet’s [sic] Landing [near Lagrange Bayou] on the 8<sup>th</sup>. Governor Call has ordered from this place 20,000 rations and large camp equipage, etc., for the troops that may assemble there.

---

<sup>9</sup> Special Archives Publication No. 149, Misc. Documents Fla. Military History Part I, Florida Department of Military Affairs, <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00047638/00001/37j> Downloaded 4-15-2019 by Sam Carnley.

In the meantime, we would remark that there is not the slightest reason to apprehend any danger to those who may have occasion to travel through the country upon the mail route. It must always be borne in mind that the Indians are fugitives, flying from the face of the white man wherever found. The only danger is that in attempting to kill the cattle or seize the provisions of the white settlers he may be involved in conflicts which end in blood. We say this, not because we are not fully impressed with the necessity of driving the Indians away, but in order to quiet the groundless apprehensions of persons abroad.

The mail boat which arrived yesterday brought intelligence from Mallet's [sic] Landing that the Alabama troops had an engagement on Gum Creek with the fugitives on Sunday last, about ten miles from the place where Anderson and Vaughan were killed. This is about twenty miles from Alaqua. Sixteen of the Indians were killed and two made prisoners. The number of Indians is ascertained from the prisoners to be 157. The Jackson County troops had not arrived at Mallet's Landing when the boat left, but were later expected. A depot of provisions has been established there.

**ANOTHER WHITE MAN'S MURDER:** We learn by the mail boat from Mallet's [sic] Landing that on the 11<sup>th</sup> instant [May] a friendly Indian named Jim, who has been known by the inhabitants there for twelve years past, was most barbariously [sic] murdered by a party of lawless whites. These "heroes" are supposed to have been drunk when they perpetrated [sic] this outrage – they are the very last persons to go out with their neighbors against the hostile Indians and expend their heroism upon those who are inoffensive and friendly. It is high time that these unprincipled wretches should be made to pay with their lives the penalty of thus violating the laws of the land and shedding human blood. The Indian, when friendly and peaceable, is as much entitled to the protection of our laws as the best man in the community. We understand that Jim had always been of great service to the whites as a guide, interpreter, etc.

#### **Pensacola Gazette – May 20, 1837**

The following is a letter from Governor Call to a friend [unidentified] in this city [Pensacola], written in answer to a communication announcing to Governor C. [Call] the outrages committed in Walton County by the fugitive Creeks. The letter is dated:

“Tallahassee 11<sup>th</sup> May 1837 [sic]

I have received your letter of the 26<sup>th</sup> informing me of the distressed condition of West Florida. I had previously received the same intelligence and of even more recent and disastrous occurrences, the indiscriminate murder of a whole family [of Joseph Hart], the father, mother and eight children. I immediately ordered 100 men to march from Jackson Count and adopted other measures of which I advised you by the last mail. On the 7<sup>th</sup> instant [May] I informed General Jessup [sic] by an express boat of the recent murders in Walton County but I have no hope whatever of receiving any assistance from him, as you may conceive form the following extract of a letter I received from him dated 18<sup>th</sup> April. In speaking of a message which he had received from the chief of the Micusuky [sic] Band, promising to restrain his warriors and join Micanopy at Tampa, he says ‘How far he is to be trusted is doubtful [sic]. My own opinion is, if our forces are diminished, they will give themselves no further trouble to execute the engagements. I shall be obliged to select healthy positions for the troops during the summer if such positions can be found in Florida. I am extremely doubtful whether the emigration can be effected. The chiefs are sincere but they cannot control their people. [The Governor is referring to the war with the Seminoles, with whom U. S. Army General Thomas S. Jesup had his hands full in peninsular Florida and could not spare any Federal troops to aid Walton County]

I have another letter from him, dated on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, in which he says but little on the subject, but the officer by whom it was sent informed me that when he left Tampa, including men, women, children and negroes, there were only about 160 of the Seminoles enrolled for emigration. There were 20 vessels waiting for the emigrants – others had left there because they could not be employed. In the state of

things, we cannot hope for assistance from General Jessup [sic]. Before the letter mentioned above left Tampa, Captain \_\_\_\_\_ had arrived and made known our situation and this officer (Lt. Lockwood), the bearer of the letter of the 26 ult. [April], was on his way to Fort Mitchell [Alabama, a U. S. Army post a few miles south of Columbus, Georgia] to inquire into the situation of the Indians.

You will thus perceive we are left to rely on our own resources. Every effort in my power shall be made to meet the emergency and if our citizens stand to their arms I have no doubt of our success. I have offered Col. Morton [Jackson Morton, a business man from east Escambia County which later became Santa Rosa County] command of the district west of Jackson County. If he accepts, of which I am to be informed tonight, I shall have my confidence in his efficiency, but, if necessary, I shall repair in person to the scene of the danger.

The militia of your county should be immediately organized and I will promptly commission such officers as the may elect.

### **Pensacola Gazette – May 27, 1837**

The following is a letter to the editor.

“La Grange [south of present day Freeport], May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1837

Dear Sir: On the day before yesterday, 53 of the citizens of this county under the command of Captain McKinnon [Lauchlin L. (1797-1872),<sup>10</sup> brother of John L.] met a body of Indians on Black Creek [known as the “Battle of Cowpens”<sup>11</sup>], about 16 miles from this place, and after a fight of a few minutes the Indians fled, leaving five of their number dead and one prisoner, a child six or eight years old. The whites escaped unhurt, with the exception of Mr. Enos Evans, who was dangerously wounded though hopes are entertained of his recovery. The skirmish took place in a swamp but seven of our men had an opportunity to fire, five of which took effect, which is pretty conclusive evidence that our Walton boys understand the use of the rifle.<sup>12</sup>

It is with deep regret that I have to add that yesterday morning Mrs. Lawrence was killed at the Cowford [vicinity of today’s State Hwy 20 Bridge over Choctawhatchee River] by the Indians. A party of our men left here this morning for the purpose of burying her.

Very Respectfully, etc.

Another letter dated:

---

<sup>10</sup> Lauchlin Love McKinnon, Find A Grave Memorial #21815442, Red Bay Cemetery, Walton County, Florida, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/21815442/lauchlin-love-mckinnon>

<sup>11</sup> The Muskogee Nation of Florida, p. 16, <http://www.mnoffl.com/history.html>

<sup>12</sup> John L. McKinnon, *History of Walton County*, (Palmetto Books, Gainesville, Florida, 1968), 118-120. McKinnon’s account of the incident differs on several points from the Pensacola Gazette article. He states that Colonel John L. McKinnon was the ranking military officer in that part of the state, which was incorrect. Col. Jackson Morton was appointed to that position by Governor Call per the Pensacola Gazette article dated May 20, 1837. No evidence of record has been found showing John L. McKinnon was a commissioned military officer of any rank. Militia muster rolls of the war indicate his highest rank was that of a private. McKinnon gives the location of the battle, the biggest fought in the county, as “south of the cow-pens,” then Antioch [cemetery], “around Battle Bay.” These are landmarks on Black Creek, the site per the Gazette. McKinnon writes that Col. John L. McKinnon bore the wounded Enos Evans, the only white casualty of the skirmish, out of the swamp on his shoulders. This likely was Captain Lochlin McKinnon, as, according to the Gazette, he commanded the militia in the skirmish.

Col. Brown [Leven Brown, commander, Jackson County Militia] had an affair with the Indians this morning on Alaqu Creek about 5 miles from this place in which 12 Indians were killed and ten taken prisoners. The whites received no injury. We have further information on the subject. It is reported that the Indians killed all, or nearly all, were prisoners. That there was but one man among the slain – the rest were women and children. We would fain hope that this is not true.

That command of the forces now assembled against the fugitive Indians has been assigned by Governor Call to Leaven [sic] Brown of Jackson County. He called for two companies to be supplied by this county. We learn from Black Water [today's Milton] that one company has been raised and that it is to be headed by Col. Jackson Morton. They will march on the 3d of June. Will not this part of the county complete the requisition of Colonel Brown? The force is to be employed fifteen days only.

### **Pensacola Gazette – June 10, 1837**

The fugitive Creeks in our neighborhood are, like the Seminoles, 'Slowly swarming in.' This phrase, used in this sense on this subject, conveys more meaning than would be usually attached to it. It embraces whole volumes of wrong and outrage and tragedy which the Indian has suffered and which the white man has inflicted insomuch that the wretched Indian knows not who may be trusted or where to fly.

It will be recalled that in our last we mentioned that Lt. Reynolds [U. S. Marine Lt. John G. Reynolds, probably from a Pensacola military post] had gone among the fugitives and that much hope was entertained that they might all be induced by him to come in. The following is a letter from Lt. Reynolds to his friend here dated Lagrange, 24 \_\_\_\_\_ 1837. It confirms the worst suspicions as to the manner in which the twelve women and children spoken of came to their death [La Grange letter, May 23d]:

I have just returned from a two – day scout west of this place and could discover no recent signs of Indians being within thirty miles in that direction for the last nine or ten days. The Indians whom I have with me were under the impression, from the direction the trail took, it was their intention to make for Escrivan's [sic] Point, where doubtless they are at this time. I have to request you to do me the favor to send word to the old fellow to retain all who may come in at his place, feeding them well, etc. He shall be remunerated for his trouble. It is my intention to visit Escrivan's [sic] so soon as my duties shall have been finished in this vicinity.<sup>13</sup>

Your surmise in relation to the murder of the 12 women and children proves to be correct. On my route westward I was necessarily obliged to pass the place where the murderous scene was enacted. The spot was not more than fifteen feet in diameter. I minutely examined the place and I am firmly of the opinion that the poor devils were penned up and slaughtered like cattle and such was the opinion of the friendly Indians in company. The shrieks of the poor children were distinctly heard at a house, distant, I should think, one-quarter of a mile. Several were scalped, and all who had earrings had their ear slit with knives in order to possess themselves of the silver. I do think this one of the most outrageous acts civilised [sic] men could be guilty of. Had the officers in command deemed proper to destroy them before their surrender there would perhaps have been no inhumanity in it, but after a surrender, and passing a swamp all but impassable as prisoners, to be murdered in cold blood in the manner the scene indicates is worse than my imagination could conceive.

---

<sup>13</sup> E. W. Carswell, *Holmsteading*, (Rose Printing Company, Tallahassee, Florida, © E. W. Carswell, 1986), 32. It was rumored that 300 renegade Creeks intended to join a small encampment of Black Water Indians located on Escrivano Point halfway between today's Bagdad and Navarre on the eastern shore of East Bay in Santa Rosa County. They were not hostile and Lt. Reynolds hoped to gain their assistance in persuading the renegades, if they showed up there, to turn them selves in to be sent west.

I am about setting out for the head of the bay where I am told there are many Indians. I trust there are. It is my purpose to visit every camp and you may be assured every Indian within my reach will accompany me to Mobile Point.

Mr. Reynolds returned to this place on Wednesday last and has gone with his runners to Escrivan's Point, where he is to take the woods and endeavor to find the lurking place of the Indians. Nothing can now be done with them except in the way proposed by Lieutenant R. They are so frightened by this worse than severe cruelty and tragedy which they have met with from the whites that they will be sure either to fight or flee whenever they are approached by the whites in numbers.

In addition to the foregoing, we have been permitted to make the following extract of an official communication from Lieutenant R. dated Lagrange, 4<sup>th</sup> June, 1837. After reading it, who shall say that the whites are not more savage than the Indians.

Last night a plot was formed by a man named Lawrence in conjunction with a number of men who have been mustered into service to MURDER MY PARTY. This Lawrence is the man who lost his wife [Mrs. Lawrence, previously reported as murdered] by the supposed violence of the Indians. I was informed of his and his party's intention at a late hour by a worthy old man named Bush, who cautioned me to be on my guard; that an attempt would be made to destroy my party.

I was located on the old steamboat lying beside the wharf – I had my Indians abaft the wheelhouse. Bush kept watch on the forecastle and I at the cabin door, determined to resist with life any attempt of a hostile nature. Lawrence, by some means, found out about my watchfulness and relinquished his design. I made an official call upon the commanding officer for the arrest of all concerned with Lawrence and requested that a civil action might be instituted against the latter.

#### **Pensacola Gazette – July 1, 1837**

We publish the following letter because it is always right to hear both sides. We would again hope that the surmise of Lt. Reynolds' informant as to the designs of Lawrence and others was incorrect. There would have been, in the attempt which is supposed to have been meditated on the lives of Mr. Reynolds' party, a degree of treachery scarcely ever heard of.

“Lagrange, 20 June 1837

To the Editor of the Gazette

Sirs:

I notice in the Pensacola Gazette of the 10th instant an extract of an official communication from Lieutenant Reynolds dated 4 June 1837 in the words following, vis:

Last night a plot was formed by a man named Lawrence in conjunction with a number of men who have been mustered into service to MURDER MY PARTY. This Lawrence is the man who lost his wife [Mrs. Lawrence, previously reported as murdered] by the supposed violence of the Indians. I was informed of his and his party's intention at a late hour by a worthy old man named Bush, who cautioned me to be on my guard; that an attempt would be made to destroy my party.

I was located on the old steamboat lying beside the wharf – I had my Indians abaft the wheelhouse. Bush kept watch on the forecastle and I at the cabin door, determined to resist with life any attempt of a hostile nature. Lawrence, by some means, found out

about my watchfulness and relinquished his design. I made an official call upon the commanding officer for the arrest of all concerned with Lawrence and requested that a civil action might be instituted against the latter.

Late in the evening of the same day on which the above extract was dated, I received a communication from Lt. Reynolds of the same tenor with the above extract. I immediately went to the “worthy old man Bush” and requested him to give me all such information on the subject as would enable me to proceed in the case as requested by Lieutenant R; but the “worthy old man” seemed surprised beyond measure at my interrogation, declaring that he had never told Lieutenant Reynolds that a “conspiracy was formed to destroy his party and perhaps his own life.

There was no other person pointed out by Lieutenant Reynolds from whom I could receive any information on the subject. When, however, the thing was published, I again called upon Mr. Bush, who, in the presence of several gentlemen of high respectability, declared that, from the fact of his having seen two men whispering, to each other, he “surmised” that their intention was to destroy Lieutenant Reynolds’ party of Indians.

Now, Mr. Editor, I know it to be the wish of every citizen of this country that hostile Indians were removed from among them, for they are still progressing with their nefarious deeds. Many of them are nearly ruined by them. After toiling in the wilderness to make themselves comfortable homes, they have been compelled to fly these homes with their families and fly to some place of safety. Many of those men are in the service, their families live in small shanties hastily erected, suffering every inconvenience incident to such situations, and while they are thus circumstanced the Indians plunder and burn their dwellings. Is it then reasonable to suppose that men thus circumstanced would raise their hands against any gentleman and his party who came for the purpose of relieving them of the hostile Indians? There is something extraordinary in the publication of Lt. Reynolds on this subject and the concessions of Mr. Bush. The one says he was credibly informed by Mr. Bush that a conspiracy was formed by a company of men mustered into service, headed by a man named Lawrence, to murder the party of Indian. Many of the men then at Lagrange were in the service and are men of high standing, but there seems to have been no distinction made, they are all implicated with this foul charge, upon no other grounds than because a “worthy old man” sees two men whispering and consequently surmises that they intend to murder Lt. Reynolds and party of Indians.

ALEXANDER CAMPBELL”

[Alex Campbell was Commanding Officer of the 8th Regt. 1st Brigade of the Walton Florida Militia. He was a LT. then promoted to the rank of Capt.]

(In the same column, just ahead of the above, mentioning Col. Brown’s general order for election of field officers’ in the militia of Escambia, the following appears.)

On one side of us, then, we have 3,000 Creeks within two days’ travel [number of Creeks held at Mobile Point awaiting removal]. These people are supposed to be friendly, but who shall confide in the friendliness of the Indians. They are cooped up at Mobile Point in a way by no means satisfactory to them. On the other side of us, we have the fugitive Creeks, in what number is left to conjecture but in such numbers, at least, as to keep nearly the whole population of the county joining ours in a state of constant apprehension.

“Lagrange, June 21, 1837

## REGIMENTAL ORDERS

An election of field officers for the First Regiment of Florida Militia will be held on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of July next at the usual place of holding elections in said county and will be superintended by the judges of elections who officiated at the respective precincts at the last election of delegates to Congress. The judges will make returns of the election immediately to the executive of the Territory. The present embarrassing and distressing situation of the country is such as to require every regiment to be completely organized, and the colonel commanding the district flatters himself that his fellow citizens of Escambia will not delay in the performance of this important duty.

Leven Brown  
Colonel Commanding

July 1, 1837 – 17 – 1t.

### **PENSACOLA GAZETTE – July 8, 1837**

#### REPORT OF COLONEL BROWN

Lagrange, West Florida  
24<sup>th</sup> May 1837

TO HIS EXCELLENCY, R. K. CALL

Sir:

I have the honor of reporting to you the movements of the army in West Florida.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of May, I mustered into the service of the United States 73 drafted militia from Jackson County and took up the line of March for Campbellton, to remain until I could obtain a sufficient supply of provisions and forage to march with. Provisions being scarce in that section of the country and people being unwilling to take certificates on Government for their property, I was obliged to make myself responsible in several instances.

Having procured a swell supply, I took up my line of March on the 11<sup>th</sup> instant for Pittman's Ferry on the Choctawhatchee River (where I was reported to by Mr. R. B. Turner and was happy to receive him as a quartermaster under me). I arrived at Pittman's Ferry on the 12<sup>th</sup> and remained there until the 13<sup>th</sup>, when I distributed the small quantity of provisions still remaining among my command and sent the wagons back to Campbellton with Mr. Turner to get fresh supplies, with instructions to return to the ferry as soon as possible. I crossed the river on the 13<sup>th</sup> instant and scouted through the country in several different directions but, we seeing no Indian signs, I returned to Pittman's Ferry to meet the wagons, which I did. Then, taking the wagons across the river, I marched on the 17<sup>th</sup> for Walton Courthouse [uncertain whether this was at Eucheeanna or Alaqua as there was a courthouse at both places]; where I arrived on the 19<sup>th</sup> instant and received information that Captain McKinnon had had a fight with a body of the Indians on the Choctawhatchee River near Cowford and had one man seriously wounded [the battle on black Creek, aka Battle of Cowpens, reported in the Lagrange letter of May 21, 1837]. It was my intention to proceed to his battle ground that night, but as I could not obtain a guide to conduct me to the place, I did not go. On the 21<sup>st</sup>, I received information from Mr. J. J. Harrison, on the Alaqua River, that a body of Indians had been at his house and had taken a quantity of meal, meat, and cooking utensils. He stated that he was sure their camp was not far from his house and

that if I would come with my command to his house he had a boat which could convey us across the river and that there was a friendly Indian at his house by the name of Billy, who said he would go over the river that day and find their camps and conduct us to them at any anytime whenever we might come.

After receiving this intelligence, I determined to go there. Accordingly, on the 22 instant, I started for Mr. Harrison's, a distance of about 15 miles; at one o'clock, being within four miles of the house, I ordered a halt as I did not wish to approach it until night for fear of being discovered by the Indians, if there should be any about. At sunset I started and marched within half a mile of the house' again stopping and securing the horses, I left a guard of 8 men over them and, wishing to approach the house undiscovered, went as silently as possible until within about to [sic] hundred yards of the house when Captain Irwin, with the Guards and Walton Troops, was sent on the right and Captain Pittman on the left to get entirely around the building, which was done. Myself, with Captain Daniel's company, marched up in front and when within thirty or forty paces of the house, the dogs gave the alarm and Captain Daniel's company advanced. Mr. Harrison met us at the door and stated that the house was then full of Indians, who, finding they were surrounded, extinguished the fire and presented a rifle to us but did not discharge it. They were then told that the must surrender and deliver up their arms, which they did. The prisoners taken in the house consisted of 4 warriors and 13 women and children.

I was informed by Billy, the friendly Indian, that there were to [sic] camps on the opposite side of the Alaqua River, one about half a mile distant from the house and the other about two miles. Having left a guard of 20 men under Lt. Col. McNeeley with the prisoners, I proceeded to cross the river with the balance of my command in a small boat in order to surprise the camps. Captain Irwin's company crossed first and marched in advance through the swamp, which was almost impassable, for nearly half a mile. Captains Daniel and Pitman marched in the rear. Billy, the friendly Indian, acted as our guide. As soon as we left the swamp and approached the pine woods we discovered the fires in the camp. The companies were then formed into line and after marching about 200 yards we arrived at camp and surrounded it, taking ten prisoners, consisting of one warrior and nine women and children. The man was given in charge to Captain Daniels and tied securely with the rest of the prisoners. Captain Irwin was ordered to take the friendly Indian and proceed to the other camp, said to be 2 miles further up the river; but, after proceeding some distance without discovering the second camp, we came to a large swamp which we were unable to cross. The Indian prisoner in the rear, seeing our difficulty, stated to Captain Daniel that he could conduct us a nearer way to the other camp. As the friendly Indian had evidently lost his way, I concluded to follow the prisoner, telling him, at the same time, that if he deceived me he should die. We followed him for some distance through swamps, hammocks and lakes until daylight when, finding he had no idea of conducting us to the camp, I ordered the command to turn back and go to where we had left the other prisoners. We returned to the river about one hour after sunrise. Captain Daniel's company having charge of the prisoners in the rear, when Captain Daniel and nearly all his companions fired on the Indian prisoner who had led us through so many difficulties during the night. The women and children, taking fright at this, started to run, when they were all shot down and left on the ground. I then crossed the river and found on my return that one of the Indian prisoners had poisoned himself and died. I then marched for this place [Lagrange] with the remainder of the prisoners to obtain supplies.

I must inform you that Mr. R. B. Turner accompanied me the whole night and I feel greatly indebted to him. His high spirits contributed not a little to keeping up the cheerfulness of the officers and men.

I arrived here in the evening of the 23d and encamped in the pine woods. The Indians were secured, as I thought, by being placed on their backs, with each elbow tied to a stake driven in the ground, and a strong guard put over them. It appears, however, that about two o'clock in the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup>, the guard having fallen asleep from their fatigue of the previous night, the three prisoners

succeeded in getting loose and making their escape. The sentinels fired on them as they ran off, but without success.

Leven Brown  
Colonel Commanding

**PENSACOLA GAZETTE – July 8, 1837**

We understand at the recent election for field officers of this regiment of militia Jackson Morton was elected Colonel, James E. Norwood, Lieutenant Colonel, and David McDavid , Major.

---

Our only intelligence from Colonel Brown is contained in the following letter to the editor dated:

“La Grange, July 7, 18378

Dear Sir: An express arrived here today from Colonel Brown, dated this day at Alaqua old courthouse [built by Judge Brackenridge in 1830<sup>14</sup>], giving directions for the supplies, etc. He also writes that on the 4<sup>th</sup> instant, the troops under his command had a scrimmage with the Indians on Shoal River, about twelve miles from that place [old courthouse]. He succeeded in driving the Indians back. His loss was three wounded, one seriously. The loss of the enemy is not known, though a great deal of blood was seen on the trails where they fled. From the appearance of the trail, there were upwards of 100 Indians.

Very Res. etc.”

**PENSACOLA GAZETTE – July 15, 1837**

The following letter furnishes some additional particulars in relation to the affair of Col. Brown with the Indians at Shoal River mentioned in our last. The letter is from an officer of Colonel B’s command and dated:

Camp Independence, July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1837

TO THE EDITOR OF THE GAZETTE:

Sir: Colonel Brown met with a trail of Indians on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of July and after trailing them for six miles Colonel B and his men came up with them on Shoal or East River. The body of Indians amounted to 100 of 120 in number. A sharp contest immediately ensued, but the vigorous charge of Colonel B’s men soon compelled the enemy to retreat through the hammock and finally to cross the river. Colonel B had three men wounded, one of which [was] dangerously. The Indians lost eight or ten killed and several wounded. The exact number of Indians killed could not be ascertained, as the Indians immediately bore them off and threw many of them into the river as soon as they fell. Colonel B charged them with such rapidity that Indians were compelled to throw off their bags, which consisted of goods of various descriptions, amongst which was a gold watch and \$263.00 in cash, nearly all specie. During the contest many [many] shots passed at the distance of 15 or 20 yards. Colonel Brown’s men acted with great coolness and deliberation. They expect to trail them out of the swamp on the other side of the river and bring on another attack as soon as possible.

It is thought that this body of Indians is the principal one in West Florida. We would fain hope that the army will be successful in finding them. Major Neilson’s (Nelson’s) battalion of mounted

---

<sup>14</sup> Sam Carnley, Walton County, Florida , *Walton County Heritage Association Newsletter* , Vol. 10 (January 2019), 9 (Presently available only from Sam Carnley at [wsamulecarnley@gmail.com](mailto:wsamulecarnley@gmail.com))

volunteers had left for home a few days previous to the Indian skirmish. We would have been glad to have had him along at the discovery of this body of Indians, as we believe the Major to be an efficient officer, commanding a brave set of men.

Yours res, etc.

The names of the persons wounded were Alfred Lockey, of Jackson County, belonging to Captain Potter's company, Lieutenant McIver, of Walton County, belonging to Captain McKinnon's company, and Mr. Harrelson, of Walton County, belonging to Captain McKinnon's company.

**PENSACOLA GAZETTE – July 22, 1837**

We have been politely favored with the following extract:

“La Grange, 20<sup>th</sup> July 1837

The troops under command of Colonel Brown had an engagement with the Indians yesterday on Alaqua Creek, about seven miles below the old courthouse, and after an animated fight of twenty minutes the Indians gave way, leaving 5 of their number dead on the ground, the loss of the whites was one killed and five wounded. Captain Hawkins displaying great courage, led his men gallantly into the midst of the enemy. He received three wounds, though none are thought to be dangerous. Mr. Myers is also wounded. The individual killed was a Mr. Clark, one of the Franklin Volunteers. (The foregoing statement of the affair is from Mr. Jesse Evans, who arrived a few minutes after the firing ceased, and I believe, is substantially correct).

**PENSACOLA GAZETTE – July 29, 1837**

We have heard nothing further of interest from the command of Colonel Brown. Captain Hawkins and Lt. Myers, who were wounded in the fight of the 19<sup>th</sup>, were brought here for surgical aid on Wednesday last in the mail boat. They are both recovering.

**PENSACOLA GAZETTE – AUGUST 6, 1837**

The steamboat, Marion, from Lagrange arrived here on Wednesday last with fifteen or sixteen sick and wounded of the Franklin Volunteers and left for Saint Joseph on Friday evening.

**PENSACOLA GAZETTE – NOVEMBER 18, 1837**

The U. S. Superior Court for this District closes its session today. We understand that in consequence of the necessity which the people of Walton County have been under to be in the field against the fugitive Creeks during nearly the whole of the past summer and present fall, a desire has been expressed by the people there to have no court held in that county. It is the intention of Judge Cameron to comply with their wishes on the subject.

**END OF THESE RECEITPS**

As a postscript to the foregoing, the Walton County Courthouse in Eucheeanna during the Indian troubles of 1837 was made a public store and depot for the use of U. S. Troops. At the end of the war the structure was so damaged by the troops that it “was not fit for use until repaired.” To obtain funds for its repair, the Governor

and Legislative Council of the Territory of Florida adopted in 1839 a resolution to the U. S. Congress requesting the \$500.00 needed for the repairs.<sup>15</sup>

## Part II

Walton County's Indian troubles were substantially over by the end of 1837, but infrequent, isolated attacks by small groups continued in the panhandle as late as 1850.<sup>16</sup> Afterwards, those few Creeks remaining in the county ceased their hostilities and adopting the ways of the whites, including intermarriage, rendered themselves inconspicuous to anyone biased against Indians. Over time, the sad history of their ancestors was lost to memory, except that those of the inhumane "Trail of Tears," lingered to the present day. That event for the Creeks took place during 1834-1837, in which approximately 19,600 of them marched to Oklahoma. Losses along the way totaled some 3,500, with only a few hundred able to avoid removal and remain in or near their ancestral homes.<sup>17</sup> Among the latter were ancestors of members of the Muscogee Nation of Florida who make their home near Walton County's present day community of Bruce. Although coming to fruition only after many generations distant from the troubles of 1837, the Bruce Tribe of Creeks are now living the dream of their persecuted ancestors who were denied the haven they sought in the remote areas of the county where they could live in peace unmolested. Ann Tucker, chairwoman of the Tribal Council has graciously consented to the inclusion of the group's history in this article, which appears below:<sup>18</sup>

## The Muscogee Nation of Florida

The Muscogee Nation of Florida, also known as the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians, is a Tribe of Creek Indian people whose home is centered in Bruce, in Walton County, Florida. The Tribe was renamed in 2001 during a constitutional reorganization to better represent its traditional roots and identity. The Creek predecessors of Muscogee Nation of Florida signed 11 treaties with the United States between 1790 and 1833. By these agreements, the removal of the ancestors of the present day Muscogee Nation of Florida began from their traditional homelands in the states of Georgia, Alabama and Florida.

Those who formed our modern nation followed the Choctawhatchee River south into the State of Florida from Dale County, Alabama as early as 1837 to escape the federal government's removal policies. That year federal officers had noted that some 200 Creeks lived at a village near Daleville.

By the 1850s, the Creek people had begun the process of forced adaptation to survive. Migration into Florida required the re-establishment of traditional grounds, communities, lifestyles, and governance. In 1852, the General Assembly of the State of Florida passed its own stringent racially discriminating laws: "It shall be unlawful for any Indian or Indians to remain within the limits of this State, and any Indian or Indians that may remain, or may be found within the limits of this State, shall be captured and sent west of the Mississippi; provided that Indians and half-breeds residing among the whites shall not be included in this section."

This Act removed any possibility of Creek people openly living traditional lifestyles, much less identifying themselves – or being identified – as members of a Tribe of Indians. The law did not prevent the Creek people that formed Muscogee Nation of Florida from creating settlements that were separate

---

<sup>15</sup> 1839 Laws of Florida 17<sup>th</sup> Session

<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00073405/00003/62j?search=1839+%3dlaws+%3dflorida+%3dterritory+%3d17th+%3dsession>

<sup>16</sup> Brian R. Rucker, *West Florida's Creek Indian Crisis of 1837* (The Florida Historical Quarterly, Vol. 69, No. 3 (Jan., 1991), 333, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30147524>

<sup>17</sup> Trail of Tears, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trail\\_of\\_Tears](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trail_of_Tears)

<sup>18</sup> The Muscogee Nation of Florida, <http://www.mnoffl.com/history.html>

and distinct from white or black communities. However, the laws of the State of Florida required the public suppression of identifiable Creek self-governance, traditional ceremonies, racial identification, practices and lifestyles under the direct threat of removal or death. Today, this policy is described as Ethnic Cleansing.

The miscegenation or Jim Crow laws of the South became the determinant for racial identity. In the State of Florida, a non-reservation Indian living in Northwest Florida after 1852 was classified as white, negro, or mulatto. There were no allowances made in the State for Indian people who were not Seminoles, did not live in the Everglades, and had been forced to choose a migration into Florida or adhere to Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal policies. The Creeks of North West Florida were legislated to disappear into the fabric of an emerging white or black population. The 1852 law of the General Assembly represented the first Act of Extermination by the State of Florida and remained part of the State statutes until the federal Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964.

When the categorization of "Indian" as a race disappeared, the legal impact was a documentary void in the Tribe's history of recognition by external sources. There are no documents written by observers from outside Muscogee Nation of Florida to list the Nation as an Indian community. No anthropologists visited the remote community of Bruce, which was best located by following the Choctawhatchee River or poor logging roads. Outsiders were not welcomed to stay in the area. Logging camps had to remain away from the Tribal Community. In essence, Muscogee Nation of Florida was a closed community system. While Muscogee Nation can easily document 6 of 7 mandatory criteria for federal recognition, it cannot meet the current interpretation of 25 CFR Part 8~1. 7 (a) which requires "identification by an external sources" until after the Civil Rights Act was passed.

At this time, in-house interpretation and regulatory application made by personnel of the Office of Federal Acknowledgment requires documentation marked 'Indian' for every decade from 1900 to current day with no consideration for state laws that prevent the criteria from being met. Consequently, the only Creek Tribe to be federally recognized under these regulations was achieved only by Senatorial intervention in 1983.

Historic documents generated inside the community itself provide ample evidence for the continuity of Muscogee Nation from 1890 to the present. Even though the Tribe was forced to acknowledge the new policies of the State of Florida and try to survive them, Muscogee Nation of Florida continued to function. It maintained its traditional form of leadership, subsistence type of living, and shared economics. Second cousin exchange marriage became a way to protect Indian bloodlines in the remote areas of the community.

Records of two institutions, the Muscogee Nation of Florida's school and its church, provide written evidence that the Creeks in and around Bruce survived throughout the twentieth century. Pine Level School was established in 1890. The name itself is historical, located in old Creek territory, and was brought to the Tribe's new settlement at the base of the Choctawhatchee River, as was Antioch, the Tribal Cemetery<sup>19</sup> and Tribal Ceremonial Grounds. Antioch is the site of the Battle of Cowpens, the most violent battle fought in Walton County, Florida during the Creek Wars. Pine Level School served primarily Indian students who were taught almost exclusively by Indian teachers. The school was renamed Bruce School during the hardest years of the Jim Crow laws.

---

<sup>19</sup> Antioch Cemetery, Bruce, Walton County, Florida, USA, [https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/search?cemetery-name=antioch+cemetery&cemetery-loc=Walton+County%2C+Florida%2C+United+States+of+America&only-with-cemeteries=cemOnly&locationId=county\\_381](https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/search?cemetery-name=antioch+cemetery&cemetery-loc=Walton+County%2C+Florida%2C+United+States+of+America&only-with-cemeteries=cemOnly&locationId=county_381)

A board of Creek Indian men administered the school with an elected liaison to the county education system. The school closed in 1954 because of a decreased population of Indian children in the area. During its years of operation, it afforded the community a place for social and political activities. The women met regularly to quilt, play bingo, and trade feed sacks to make clothing for the children in the community. The annual records of the school document the community of the Muscogee Nation of Florida for over 60 years. The school building became the property of the Bruce Women's Club, an organization of Creek Indian women that still exists today.

The Bruce Women's Club proudly returned this building to the Tribal Government for the Muscogee Nation of Florida.

For the past 150 years, Muscogee Nation of Florida has continued to maintain ceremonial and traditional practices. During the late 1800s, the community made a move to incorporate some sort of organized religion into the community through the work of outside missionaries and circuit riders. The institution of the Church was another example of the community's efforts to co-exist with a dominant, dangerous and encroaching white society.

Although the old ceremonies continued, the establishing of an acceptable church was used as a method to ensure the protection and survival of the Indian community. Handwritten church records document the names of community members who formed the church, the births and deaths of members, and the continued participation of Creeks in this institution from 1912 to present day. The records are still maintained in the same format. It is noted that the Alabama-Florida Conference of the Methodist Church recognizes the Bruce Methodist Church, established in 1912, as a Native American Church. The original Church rolls listed from 1912 to 1917 from the baseline document for membership in the Muscogee Nation of Florida.

Muscogee Nation of Florida maintained a traditional practice of leadership vested in a central male or female passed down from one tribal member to another or, in later years, elected by the tribal membership. Leadership was based on the ability to serve as a liaison between the tribal people and the non-Indian communities because of bilingual abilities and literacy. These qualities were vital to the survival of Muscogee Nation for the protection from further erosion of Creek identity and culture.

The leader maintained a precarious balance serving as a representative, a mediator, a negotiator, and an advocate for the rights and protection of the community. The Ward family provided the succession of leaders within Muscogee Nation of Florida throughout the twentieth century. The names of these leaders and their order of succession are well remembered by community members.

The communities and people of the Muscogee Nation continued to practice traditional form of government with its customs, medicine, language, hunting and fishing, and cooperative labor. During the early 20th century, the Tribe saw an increase in its membership. Men often maintained multiple households and households supported each other in a communal type living. By the late 1930s, the economics began to shift, which affected the Tribe's indigenous area. Turpentine industries declined, as did logging. The Tribal community was faced with developing new methods to ensure economic survival. Liquor production filled this desperately needed void of revenue utilizing farming abilities and enabling the communities to locally produce crops for its creation such as corn, rice, and sugar cane.

This was a tribally sanctioned enterprise with most of the community members involved in either its manufacturing or its delivery.

In 1947, the Bureau of Indian Affairs made an announcement for a Land Claim Settlement that would affect the historic Creek Nation. The people of the Muscogee Nation of Florida were participants in this litigation through a supportive agreement with Creek Nation East of the Mississippi. Ultimately, the litigations required a suit be filed against Creek Nation of Oklahoma to prove the continuance of

Southeastern Creek people. Designated representatives from this Tribe's leaders were present in the halls of Congress when a determination was made in favor of Creek people.

The case was resolved in 1957 and the Southeastern Creeks were determined eligible to share, in this settlement. Payment letters from the Department of the Interior were not issued until 1971, years after the death of community leader J.J. Ward, who had worked for almost 25 years on behalf of the Creek people in Florida. The Docket 21 Letters provided legal documentation that finally reaffirmed the existence of Creek Indian people in Northwest Florida. But, it was a minority that the State of Florida was unprepared to deal with.

In 1974, the State of Florida created the Northwest Florida Creek Indian Council under Florida Statute 285 to deal with Creek Indian issues. Members of the leadership family of Muscogee Nation of Florida served on this Council, including: Mazie Rossell, Zera P. Denson, Donald Sharon, and Ann Denson Tucker. The State appointed council assisted the Creek people with elections to the formal structure of the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians in 1978, now known as the Muscogee Nation of Florida.

In 1986 the Senate and the House of Representatives for the State of Florida passed concurrent Resolutions that recognized the Florida Tribe of Eastern Creek Indians as the governing agent for Creeks in the State of Florida. During this same time, the Tribal government had cooperative agreements for repatriation in place with the Air Force, Navy, and the State of Florida. This agreement stayed in effect until NAGPRA prevented repatriation by non-federal Tribes. In other words, the Tribe no longer has the right to re-bury our dead.

A petition for federal acknowledgment was turned into the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1978, but was returned the same year because of major changes to 25 CFR Part 83. During the period of 1978 to 1995, the Tribe wrote 3 separate petitions for recognition. The first two petitions were not submitted, primarily because of changing BAR policies and rulings on other Creek petitions, including the Senate Administrative recognition of Poarch Band of Creeks in Alabama. Muscogee Nation of Florida submitted its petition to the BIA/BAR in June of 1995. In 1996, the Tribe received its Technical Assistance letter from the BAR (now OFA). The Tribe finalized its response to this letter in 2002. It was placed on the "Ready, Waiting for Active Consideration" list in January, 2003. However, at that time, the Tribal government was notified that federal regulations had once again changed and that it needed to convert 120,000 documents into a computer database for the Office of Federal Acknowledgement – 63 banker boxes of information – and all that data must be organized and separated on a criteria basis. In other words, if one document is required for all 7 criteria, it has to be copied 7 times. In the case of Muscogee Nation of Florida, an amount in excess of 840,000 sheets of paper could be required. The Tribe cannot bear this financial burden. While the Tribal government continues to try to meet new regulations with no mechanism for being 'grand-fathered in', our elders die without federal recognition.

A written Constitution was set up in 1978 with the assistance of the Northwest Florida Creek Indian Council. Tribal codes were completed and adopted by 1990. The Tribe has an acceptable accounting system in place with regular audits for state and federal contracts. The Tribe runs a congregate meal site inside its Council House for the local community and is now establishing a volunteer fire department with the help of local Hub Zone personnel. The Tribal Government maintains good working relationships with local communities, participates in many community sponsored events, and has numerous resolutions of support from state officials and local governments, including the Walton County Board of County Commissioners.

A generation has been born and a generation has passed away while Muscogee Nation of Florida continues to make enough petition changes that an ineffective and unfair process can be satisfied. The problems encountered by Muscogee Nation of Florida is uniquely the case of a Southeastern Tribe, who

must respond to a set of regulations that deliberately ignore the violent policies, history, and impact of Jim Crow laws on its one hundred – year past (the only time period that the Office of Federal Acknowledgement currently considers). The Tribe cannot be recognized by an external entity as an Indian Tribe when its people were not allowed to be Indian.

Muscogee Nation of Florida has 408 members who have met stringent membership criteria. Tribal members have provided vital records demonstrating their ancestry from persons whose names Margi Gatti, Storyteller are recorded on the church register from 1912 to 1917, a direct relationship to the Parsons-Abbott Creek Census of 1832 in historic Creek Nation, and must maintain active ties to the Bruce community. More than one-half of Muscogee Nation members live within a 10-mile radius of the Tribe's Council House. More than 80 per cent live within a 30-mile radius. Almost all Tribal members live within 50 miles of Bruce, Florida.

Members of the Muscogee Nation of Florida are not members of any other federally recognized Tribes. The Tribe has a 7 -acre land base in Bruce and has 13 acres of 4000- year-old shell mounds that it keeps in protective trust for the benefit of all people. The County Commissioners of Walton County Florida gave the mounds to the Tribe. There are limited services provided to the Tribe's membership.

Muscogee Nation of Florida has never been a part of another Tribe except through the cooperative effort of early Tribal leaders in the Land Claim Settlements of the 1950s. Tribal members still live on original Florida homesteads that date back to the mid-19th century. The people of Muscogee Nation of Florida have lived together, labored together, worshiped together, and stayed together as a Tribe despite the adversities created by U.S. government Removal Policies and by a state government that attempted to legislate the Tribe out of existence through categorical removal and forced assimilation.

The Muscogee Nation of Florida now seeks a restoration of its relationship with the United States, which was established by treaties, disrupted by removal, and suppressed by racist laws. The Muscogee Nation of Florida Tribal Council calls upon the United States to rectify injustices of the past, reaffirm treaty relations, and restore recognition of the Tribe's sovereign rights.

Following is the most recent update as of 4/24/2019 from Ann Tucker:

We have now been documented as early in Spanish records as 1787 living with the Euchee people in our homeland . We drove cattle between Charleston and Natchez Mississippi. We are the last of our kind and I am so pleased with the hard work and commitment that has gone into this report. We have always known 'who' we were. But, making the U.S, Government accept this - and understand the impact of Jim Crow Law on Indian people - has been a 5 generation struggle.

© 2019 Walton County Heritage Association, Inc. ~ [www.WaltonCountyHeritage.org](http://www.WaltonCountyHeritage.org)  
*Walton Relations & History* is a publication of the Walton County Heritage Association, Inc.,  
Sam Carnley, editor. Distribution is encouraged! For more information or to submit an article,  
please email its editor at [wsamuelcarnley@gmail.com](mailto:wsamuelcarnley@gmail.com) or phone at 850-209-3778.



# Walton County Heritage Association

Membership in the Walton County Heritage Association includes  
Membership in the Museum and Genealogy Society

**2019**

**PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM as we are updating our records**

## **Membership Benefits:**

### **The Museum Research Center:**

Members get free copies of documents and use of the Genealogy Society computer when Museum is open to the public.

### **The Museum Gift Shop:**

Members receive 10% discounts on books, special publications, postcards, photographs, CDs, DVD's Videos and Gift items.

*Membership is on a calendar year basis. Those paying in November or December will be members during those months as well as the next calendar year.*

**Walton County Heritage Association annual dues:** Single - \$25.00 Family - \$40

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **State** \_\_\_\_\_

**Zip:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is my tax-deductible gift to the Walton County Heritage Association:

		Individual, Family	
_____ \$ _____	Dues	\$25.00    \$40.00	
_____ \$ _____	Other Cash Donations		Total Enclosed \$ _____

- I would like to volunteer at the Walton County Heritage Museum
- I have genealogy information I would like to share with the Genealogy Society
- I would like to talk with someone about how to get started researching my family tree
- I have artifacts or photographs I wish to donate or loan to the Museum

**Please mail your check and this form to  
Walton County Heritage Association  
1140 Circle Drive  
De Funiak Springs, FL 32435**

Thank You!

**All membership dues are tax deductible.**

The Walton County Heritage Association, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) organization as defined by the Internal Revenue Code. Gifts may be tax deductible as defined by the Federal Income Tax Regulations. To request a receipt for your tax deductible membership in the WCHA please contact us.