The Destruction of Muskogee Autonomy Before the Creek War

by Adam Oliver

By the early 1800s, factionalism within the Creek Nation and a deep dependence on European goods, particularly gunpowder, had already weakened the Muskogee way of life beyond rectification. Although construction of the invasive Federal Road can be viewed as the end of Creek Nation's autonomy outside of white dominance, the European trade tether was an earlier, more powerful tool of control. The loose confederate ties that allowed it to volley conflicting white powers (England, U.S., France, and Spain) off of each other destroyed the possibility of an autonomous Creek Nation outside of the United States. The internal weakness of the Muskogees perhaps began long before a U.S. presence on the eastern seaboard. Instead of a road, we can look to the gun. The gun did not necessarily change the war style or discipline of the Creeks. However, because of gunpowder, this powerful Nation was unable to rely on its own goods and products such as furs, to support trade. Guns, bullets, and gunpowder were domestic tools that rapidly changed the social and political structure of Creek society. These goods destroyed the Muskogee way of life more effectively and far earlier than any road cut through the Old Southwest. These tools were not produced by the Muskogee but could not be abandoned, either. The buckskin trade of the Southeast had expanded so much that the men in villages were forced to travel farther from their traditional hunting grounds in order to bring in greater quantities to trade for gunpowder, munitions, and rum. So great was the Creek dependence on European trade that by the American Revolution, Muskogee support could be swayed by the availability of gunpowder. In fact, the Creek Nation remained officially neutral throughout the war. Despite unofficial national alliances, most Creek sentiment swayed according to the Panton, Leslie, and Company traders of Pensacola. The factors contributing to the degradation of the Muskogee way of life present one with a blueprint for the destruction of autonomy.

By the sixteenth century, the Creek Confederacy stood at the forefront of politics in North America. Praised for their warriors and courted by the Spanish, French, and English empires, the Muskogees were treated as prominent allies, key for the control of Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and Louisiana. The word Nation may imply solidarity of a people. Although the Muskogees certainly were a distinct people with their own language, customs, and government, they were not isolated in North America and were certainly not exclusionists or without internal struggles. It is important to understand the complexities of this culture in order to appreciate the dynamics that brought about the destruction of their autonomy.

The Muskogee Way, or Nene Muskogee, balances on the principle of a duality of nature. For the Creeks, the universe is divided into the opposing forces of order and chaos, represented by female and male, respectively. These two poles could not exist alone. In the middle is life, as we know it. Within life, duality is just as prominent as in the universe. The Muskogees were divided into the Upper Creeks along the Tallapoosa River and Lower Creeks along the Chattaoochee River. Within these regions were autonomous towns and within those towns were matrilineal clans. These towns were either white, "peace," or red, "war" towns. Some of these towns sent delegates to National Councils in

prominent towns of either region. Clans comprised towns and were the source of internal factionalism. Emotional ties and fear of retaliation kept rival factions that would inevitably clash, at bay. The individual did not act alone or speak alone, rather the weight of responsibility fell upon his or her clan. Isolation from the clan could be a penalty causing great distress.1

While the Creeks were a powerful nation, their loose confederation allowed for the acceptance of many outside groups such as the Natchez, the Savannah, the Apalachicolas, and even the English. This inclusion was not obsequious for the Creeks, instead, it was a common display of military and political superiority with a framework of rituals for acceptance. The Muskogee, while sometimes Balkanized, were also unified by the Busk (this is an English corruption of the word poskita 2). This ceremony is a fast four times a year that lasted four to eight days each time. Feasts followed these fasts. Each Busk represents a different stage in the food cycle of the year--planting, growing, harvesting, and hunting--and is used to reinforce the Muskogee way.

At the Busk in April, all differences and wrongs are forgiven. This skeleton of basic customs was followed differently for each town and ethnic group within the Muskoghean tribes. Different ethnic groups and alliances through marriage comprised the nation which the Europeans encountered east of the Mississippi and south of the Appalachian Mountains. The English came to call them the Creeks, after the swampy character of the rivers that impeded much East-West travel. The Muskogees were the most prominent and powerful within these alliances. Their customs were used by the other groups in the confederacy. Many of these other groups came into the Creek Nation after losing in battle to the Muskogees or as refugees from other regions around the present-day Southeast. Through these primarily military alliances, the Creek Nation grew and spread east. The origin story of the Muskogees is a flexible oral document but there is a primary theme. The Muskogees arose from the West and for one reason or another, fled to the East. Milfort, the eighteenth century French traveler and later, Creek leader under McGillivray, describes:

Montezuma was at that time in Mexico; seeing that it was impossible for him to stop the progress of the Spaniards, called to his aid the neighboring peoples. The nation of the Moskoquis, now known by the name of the Creeks, which formed a separate republic in the northwestern Mexico ... offered him aid ... The courage of this war-like people served only to bring about its prompt destruction ... [They] decide to give up [their] country ... They set their course for the north...3

Milfort goes on to describe the displacement and series of wars and submission the Muskogees inflicted upon neighboring tribes that they came into contact with. After defeating each group, they then acculturated each one into the growing Nation and continued moving East until settling along the hospitable rivers. While Milfort's description is obviously a European interpretation, it is not altogether inaccurate. Chekilli, a Cussetta headsman, told in 1735 about the migration from the west and encountering other Muskoghean groups--the Chickasaws, the Alabamas and the Abihkas. In the story, these groups shared a common religious experience and then headed farther

west. When they settled in the east, these groups encountered and assimilated the existing groups there, like the Coosas and the Apalachicolas.
Within the division of the Creek Nation into Upper and Lower, major towns appear in each area. In the Upper Creeks was the white town of Abihka and the different red town lineages of Coosa, Tallassee and Oakfuskee, and later, Tuckabatchee. The Lower Creek towns centered around the two very prominent towns on either side of the Chattahoochee River: Coweta, the red town, and Cusseta,[4] the white town. While these were seats of government, their prominence was not static. Chekilli gives the origin of these Lower Creek towns:

The invading Muskogees followed these two refugees south to Apalachicola. The Apalachicaolas welcomed the Muskogees, entertained them with black drink, a decoction brewed from the leaves of the tea-like Yaupon holly, and urged them to give up war and killing and develop a white (peaceful) heart. Some of the Cussetas agreed, but others were 'too bloody-minded' to take such advice. They moved across the river and became the Cowetas.[5]

As part of an oral tradition, this account is not any more historically verifiable than Chikilli's own interpretation. This story has partly to do with the acceptance of the cultures into the Creek Nation and the prominence of shared religious experiences between the Muskogees and their allies. As the Muskogee expansionism ebbed in the eighteenth century, their settlement into these areas became more prominent to the surrounding Nations. The Creeks became known for their acceptance of refugees and even their own war victims.[6] Inductee groups were given sections of land available to the Nation. Part of land allotment that would come into dispute with European settlers was the need for hunting grounds, which is how the males of a town lived and worked, primarily on whitetail deer. The white emphasis on large plantations and husbandry was counter to the Indian need for hunting ranges.
Within the townships, a strong sense of community existed. Outside of individual towns, this sense of alliance was de-emphasized. Certain villages and ethnic groups were connected more intimately, but most towns retained their autonomy within the extensive Creek Confederation. William Bartram, the U.S. agent for the Indians south of the Ohio, observed this relationship with one older, subdued group, the Uchee, from Georgia in the 1790s:

Their [the Uchee] own national language is radically different from the Creek or Muscolgee tongue and is called the Savanna tongue ... They are in confederacy with the Creeks, but do not mix with them, and, on account of their numbers and strength, are of importance enough to excite and draw upon them the jealousy of the whole Muscogulge confederacy, and are usually at variances, yet are wise enough to unite against a common enemy, to support the glory and interest of the general Creek confederacy.[7]

The sense of autonomy enjoyed, and understood within the Muskogee worldview of opposing but balanced factions in nature and politics, translated into a rather important but not huge army for the Nation. Each town would commit its own forces to an attack and each town within the Nation understood not to attack the other towns. While there was no central army to commit to an attack, any enemy of the Confederacy was a common one and official support could only come through the consent of all members of the National Council at a red town. White towns, being peace towns, did not rule over war and no one could be killed in those towns. During wars, the administration of the Nation was transferred to the red towns for the duration of the war and then transferred back to the white towns in peacetime.8

Patterns of colonialism for the different European empires each influenced different factions within the Confederacy. First, geographic familiarity within the colonies produced different loyalties. The Spanish, French, and English all approached the Creek Nation from different sides. Spanish missionaries came up from Florida while France entered from the West and the British approached through Georgia and the Carolinas on the Eastern seaboard. The different villages in these areas became more familiar with the different empires. The English were more familiar with the Lower Creeks by way of Savannah and Charles Town (Charleston). Each of these British frontiers had its own separate characteristics. While Carolina continued to send shoddy traders into the Creek towns, Creeks became increasingly upset with white trade though the fickle trade continued. In order to compete with the English, the Spanish established the Fort San Marcos de Apalachee, on the St. Marks River in Florida and maintained their contacts and trade in St. Augustine, on the St. John's River. The French built Ft. Toulouse on the Talapoosa and maintained the port of Mobile.

The decimation inflicted on Charleston by the Yamassee War in 1715 would be a primary concern during the establishment of Georgia in 1733. Until that time, starting in 1670, Creek trade had rested exclusively in Charleston, so much so that the Lower Creek towns had moved from the Chattahoochee River to the more eastward Ogeechee, Ocmulgee, and Oconee Rivers. The poor traders sent into the Creek towns caused resentment and eventually the Yamassee War. This event had huge implications for the towns of Mobile and St. Augustine. The Lower Creeks moved back to trading with the Spanish at St. Augustine, while the Upper Creeks mended their relationship with French Mobile. Forts Toulouse and San Marcos were then built in 1716 and 1718, respectively. The memory of the Yamassee War still lingered on the wary tongues of English traders and settlers in 1733, when James Oglethorpe moved to establish the colony of Georgia. An alliance with the Creeks was necessary for expansion into the territory, or protection interest in those areas. While the English pushed for more and more land into the Nation, the Spanish preferred to use Florida as a largely uninhabited buffer zone against the English. The French agenda was to expand trade, not necessarily land. After the Yamassee War, the courting of Creek interests through gift giving made the Creeks rich, but also more dependent on white goods. The Coweta headsman until 1730, Brims, maintained a stance of neutrality, which frustrated the Europeans. When three different powers divided loyalty in the National Council, no consensus could be reached. In 1733, when Oglethorpe was ready to establish the colony of Georgia, he was anxious to prevent another Yamassee War and so asked permission of the Creeks to establish his colony on

the eastern seaboard. Like the refugees that had been accepted before, the Lower Creeks granted land on the Savannah River, at arms length from the head towns. The availability of English goods that would be sold was a primary goal in the establishment of Georgia, but away from the unscrupulous Charleston traders. On April 3, 1735, the Creeks and the English crown wrote up the trade agreements to establish regulated, open trade.The Carolinians, however, became jealous of Georgia and denounced their laws and soon, the laws were obsolete.

The Treaty of Coweta, 1739, established the dominion of the Creeks as:

all the Dominions, Territories and Lands from the River Savannah to the River Saint John's and all the Islands Between the said Rivers and from the River St.John's to the Bay of Apalachee within which is all the Apalachee old fields, and from the said Bay of Apalachee to the Mountains.9

Although Oglethorpe weakly attempted to regulate it, Georgian expansion was inevitable and almost immediate. The Georgians, or Ecunnaunuxulgee eyed the Uchee lands west of Savannah10 for the town of Augusta. Even Oglethorpe recognized problems of this expansion. Not only would breaking the Treaty of Coweta drive the Creek to the Spanish, but also:

because Indian land is not planted therefore there is no Hurt in taking it from them. [T]he Indian Nations have as much right to their Woods as an English Gentleman has to a Forest or Chace, and they are more necessary to them since the Venison is the Flesh that chiefly feeds them, and the Skins of the Deer is what enables them to pay the English for their Goods.11

This is an important point that Oglethorpe brings up: the Creek trade with the colonies was vital to the survival of Georgia and South Carolina. Even though the British presence had come after the Spanish in Florida, the invasive English settlement was apparent before Georgia was established. Milfort quotes one Muskogee speaker when denying the English permission to build a fort west of Augusta, giving deference to the French:

The French were the first Europeans who made friends with us; we consider them our fathers and protectors,12 because they have never broken faith with us, nor taken advantage of the ease of their communications with the nation. You Englishmen, on the contrary, while giving us many gifts, demand, in return, each day further cessions of our lands, so that these gifts are very dearly bought. When they give us something ... they demand no remuneration; therefore, they will build forts as long as they wish, and we shall be pleased with them, because we consider them as means of defense for us. As for you, we request you to speak no more about them. You are already too close to us, and you are like the fires we light every year in our forests in order to destroy the weeds; if

we were not there to stop their progress, they would soon destroy everything. You would likewise overrun a great part of our land, or you would force us to drive you away entirely. We advise you to be satisfied with what we have given you, and not to demand anything further.

Mendoza had centered Spanish settlement in St. Augustine around 1565. Before Mendoza, de Soto and then Luna had attempted to subjugate the Creek Nations but turned back when no gold was found. In later expeditions, the Spanish brought the Franciscan missionaries to convert the natives. The Franciscans set up missions along the eastern seaboard and in the interior of Florida's panhandle, promoting conversions first, and then regulated trade. This trade was limited, but an important source of exotic luxuries. The archaeological finds by Vernon James Knight, Jr. in the old Tukabatchee town of the Upper Creeks, show that the earliest European goods during the Atasi period were a few domestic items such as hoes and hatchets, but mostly luxury items, such as bells and beads and a few precious metals. Food stuffs, such as the peach seed were also traded as domestic luxury items. The Atasi period is defined by the pre-fur trade era but post-exploration by European empires. This period lasted until the Yamassee War and is marked by the prominence of Spanish trade in the pre-Charleston years. Although domestic goods were traded in this era, Verner notes that they were not widespread and were probably seen as luxury items. These trade alliances were endorsed by the Franciscans to promote religious conversions and alliances for Spanish protection.13
The importance of luxury goods as signs of high social status had been a practice since pre-Columbian times. With the Spanish and then the French and English, the flood of new, exotic luxury goods quickly replaced the usage of traditional luxuries. European domestic goods such as foodstuffs and tools did not replace traditional domestic goods as quickly. The great number of these luxuries, especially beads, and then metals, were viewed as power symbols. This change in luxury commodities, with a decimated population due to disease, seems to have upset the power structure of the seventeenth century Creek nation. Luxury items in the Creek villages marked the importance of that clan, such as McGillivray's clan, the Wind clan. Verner makes a point that the adoption of European luxury items does not mark a savagery or childlike quality in the Creeks but is, instead a "[display] of worldly knowledge and exotic lore."14 Upon encountering the different villages, European traders were of course unaware of the social customs of bestowing gifts to defer importance to an individual's clan. The widespread distribution of luxuries inadvertently caused turmoil in the Creek social stratification as clans other than the leading clans also received gifts, signifying control over social relations. This flood of European goods and confusion also coincided with the first Indian contact with European diseases. Indian immune systems could not stand up to diseases like small pox or the bubonic plague. These epidemics decimated the populations of the Americas, leaving huge population gaps and power voids.
After the Atasi period, Verner marks the Tallapoosa period of the Upper Creeks as the Colonial period following the Yamassee War. English trade had begun 1670 out of Charles Town, but the Yamassee War marked the beginning of English trade regulations that would promote established posts in the Creek interior, as already noted. The British Empire, unlike the French or Spanish, was not intent on conversions or incorporation of

the “savage red man.” Instead, the Georgia and South Carolina colonies established trading posts within Muskogee towns in order to promote friendly trade relations through gift giving. The localities of these posts were attractive as were the lack of missionaries. English and French traders also tended to marry into the clans, thus promoting harmony between the Europeans and the Creeks. The slave and pelt trade with the Muskogees grew during the English and French colonial period. Here, the gun becomes the tool that would destroy Creek autonomy within the Southeast.

In the Muskogee worldview, a sense of balance within social order must be maintained. A duality to all aspects of life existed to maintain this balance. This is why there were several capitols. Central to this worldview was the balance of male and female interactions. Women were viewed as ordered order. They were domesticity and tend to the house and farming. Muskogee men, however, were chaos, in the sense that they were away from the home. Their role in the town is to bring in venison meat and deer hides for clothing and religious items. When not hunting, men had a role in warring administrating in civil law. Buckskin became an important commodity for trade as it became fashionable in Europe as would beaver pelts and then buffalo hides. Hunting grounds were important places for exercising manhood and earning one’s living. Hunting would take place in the woods as well as on clearings that had been burned out of the woods by the hunters. But what was important is having vast tracts of land aside for hunting. Before the European landings on the Americas, hunting had been conducted with bow and arrow while war was fought with the club. With the Europeans came the gun. This tool became widespread even though the club retained its symbolic purpose of calling for war by the tastanegy, or war chief, according to Milfort.[15] In order to use a gun, one needs gunpowder. Indians were not producing their own gunpowder and so the lucrative power of powder held sway over the Creeks. “Gunpowder, a necessity for both hunters and warriors, was the sine qua non. Without it, the Creek trading economy would collapse.”[16] Along with gunpowder, rum and, eventually, cotton and other European luxuries and domestic commodities were bartered for with deerskin and captured slaves. As the English plantations and farms continued to moved west, the hunting grounds were destroyed and the use of guns to hunt stressed the deer population into receding numbers. The men hunting these deer then journeyed for months at a time, hundreds of miles away from their towns. Domestically, this took the male influences away from the village life and women probably exercised more power in their absence.[17]

During this British period following the Treaty of Paris and the Proclamation of 1763, certain events seated in these old issues swiftly led to the explosive extinguishment of the Muskogee confederation in the Old Southwestern U.S. following the Creek War of 1813-1814. Beginning with the Augusta Conference in 1763 called by Georgia Governor James Wright and negotiated by John Stuart and the Creek headsmen, a series of land purchases began the policy of English land acquistion. Unlike the later American purchases, these land cessions were not to settle Creek debts, but rather to appeal to the Creeks whose lands had been illegally squatted on.

The prominence of certain Scotch traders that had come to Pensacola in the mid-1700s brought about the domination of Creek trade into the Creek War. These traders frequently married in with the local towns of the Lower Creeks who traded more often in Pensacola than other towns. The Panton, Leslie and Company of traders were the most powerful land speculators in that era. Based in Pensacola in 1785 and accustomed to the bartering

and gift giving of the Indian trade, the company grew steadily under William Panton, without much other competition. Even when Florida was given back to Spain, Panton held onto his posts, including the Fort San Marcos de Apalachee. This firm came to dominate the trade of the Southeastern Indians after other firms left due to hostilities with the Indians and Spanish and English. One of the prominent Scotch traders at the time was a man by the name of McGillivray, who married a woman of the prominent Wind clan. Their son, Alexander McGillivray, is considered an anomaly among the Creeks. While he was the son of prominent European man, he was also the son of a prominent Muskogee woman, thus giving him a power base in each culture. McGillivray's education and white background and land base gave him the clout to negotiate in white circles. As white encroachment became more and more aggressive, the Muskogees found themselves on the defensive. At the American Revolution, similar factions within the Nation divided Creek loyalty along white bloodlines and thus, no official position was taken. McGillivray led a pro-British faction, while the Tallassee King and the Fat King were in support of the Americans. At the opening of the war, the Virginian army charged into North Carolina and crushed the Cherokee Nation. The Georgians made similar threats on the Creeks. These factors contributed to the factionalism, which now weakened the Creeks. The National Council could not come to a consensus. 18

The emergence of the United States posed perhaps the most immediate threat to Creek autonomy. Thomas Jefferson's vision of westward expansion depended on a road between the port of New Orleans and the Eastern seaboard. The new mail road was proposed in 1805 and opened in 1811. It was to connect New Orleans with Athens, Georgia and thus Washington, D.C., slicing 726 miles off of the Natchez Trace route. In order for the road to be cut, the Creek Nation, which stood in the middle, from the Ocmulgee River to Mobile, had to be appeased, or moved.

In response to American aggression, McGillivray moved to centralize authority in the Nation so as to transform the Creek confederation into a powerful nation that would be able to dictate its own destiny. McGillivray's support came from the Upper Towns but he was undermined by the Lower Towns who had closer contact with Augusta and Charleston. The thought of central power was counter to the traditions of the Muskogee worldview and the thought of a single, central authority caused turmoil within the Nation. Meanwhile, the Georgians continued to squat farther and farther west. The Tallassee King and the Fat King made separate treaties with the Georgians, without the National Council consensus. Supported by Spanish gunpowder, the Creeks repelled the invading Georgians in 1786. The Spanish became frightened by the Creek power and withdrew their powder. By 1790, most of Georgia was under the control of the United States. In the Treaty of New York in 1790, McGillivray ceded the remainder of the territory to the U.S. and received titles in the U.S. Army. The remaining Creek towns outside of the U.S. were in the Florida and the Upper Creek towns. McGillivray died in 1793 at Pensacola.

During the same year, the U.S. suggested that it might want to put not for profit stores in the Backcountry. Because of the Treaty of San Lorenzo, the U.S. had assumed responsibility of the lands and Indians east of the Mississippi River, excluding Florida. William Panton, of Panton, Leslie and Co., decided that he would not be able to incur the losses that this new competition would bring. Exacerbating this situation was General William Augustus Bowles. In 1792, General Bowles, the Seminole raider, attacked St. Marks and Panton lost $14000 in goods and supplies. In 1796, Panton decided to begin to

collect on the debts of the Creeks. The stranglehold that Panton could hold on the Creek Nation through trade is evident later, when he is given Apalachicola as retribution in 1800 after Bowles attacks St. Marks, again.

When Panton began to collect the Indian debts, it marked a change in the trade system that had traditionally been used in the Creek Nation. Until this time, trade had been based on barter and gift giving. The new system the Panton and his younger partner, John Forbes began to use was exacting and compounded interest. The concept of interest enraged the Creeks, whose leaders and prominent figures had been allowed numerous purchases on credit. Forbes went to Nashville to collect from the Cherokee. John McKee, the Cherokee Indian agent, sent under the authority of the U. S. War Department traveled to Pensacola. McKee assured Panton of U.S. support to enforce a new policy which allows the Creeks to pay off their debts through land sales. In return, Panton was required to keep the Muskogee quiet during the transfer of Louisiana.19

At the time of Panton's death, Forbes took control of the company, renaming it Forbes and Co. Spain allowed Forbes to use the same "land for debt" policy in Florida. The trade that had allowed the Muskogees to rise to prominence among the eastern tribes now choked their vitality. As opposed to the barter trade that the Leslie, Panton and Co. had focused on, Forbes and Co. ushered in the transition to cotton trade in Pensacola and Mobile. With the invention of the cotton gin in 1793, the ability to grow cotton in the Mississippi territory became more viable. In 1798, the U.S. began a policy of active acquisition of the Mississippi territory through tribal alliances, making peace between the settlers and Indians, teaching farming, and then acquiring farmlands. There were not enough settlers at that time, however, to move into Mississippi and make a state. The Indians were to be assimilated. Benjamin Hawkins was made the Creek Indian agent in 1796 and used his influence in the Lower Creeks to try and remove their tribal culture and implement husbandry.20 In the acquisition of territories, the U.S. would also establish trading posts so as to regulate Indian trade. The trading posts were established primarily along the Federal Road, which had been enacted in 1806. Hawkins, along with Forbes, had the task of keeping Creek frustration in check to allow for safe passage along the road from Georgia to New Orleans. In the cession of the lands for the Federal road, Forbes hoped that the Creeks would be able to pay their debts off. 21

The growth of the cotton industry spelled the death of the deerskin trade.22 The land that had been used to hunt on now became part of the cotton farms and useless for hunting on the scale necessary to pay back debts, thus the Creeks continued to go further and further into debt, selling more and more land, as in the Treaty of Ft. Wilkinson in 1802. In order to hold onto their land, the Lower Creeks began to assimilate to white cultures and take up fanning of cotton and animal husbandry as dictated by Hawkins, relying on white tools such as the plow. The Upper Creeks, refusing to bend, became hostile to the U.S. An embargo imposed by the Federal government in 1809 drove the price of cotton down and only large plantations could survive the downturn.

The Creek War marks the end of the Creek confederacy. The Creeks, especially the Upper Creeks became hostile. Many Creeks had become seasonal laborers and itinerant peddlers. Rumors of British aggression and the spiritual revivalists' uprising under Tecumseh spurned on the Upper Creeks, whose deep resentments of the Americans and Hawkins was ready to brew over. Tecumseh's followers were called the Red Sticks by whites. After the Red Sticks had attacked a group of Tennessee settlers, Hawkins ordered

their execution. In retaliation, the Red Sticks planned an uprising. But, in transporting gunpowder from Pensacola to the Tallapoosa in July 1813, the Red Sticks were raided by settlers. On August 30, 1813, the Red Sticks overran Ft. Mims, killing 250 men, women and children living there. This attack sparks the invasion of the Creek interior by four armies of militiamen and the Lower Creeks. Despite this attack, the Upper Creek towns evaded these armies for ten months. In the course of these ten months, the Upper Creeks followed a scorched earth policy, eventually starving themselves. Starving and displaced and terribly outnumbered, the remainder of the Muskogees were cornered into the Battle of Horseshoe Bend at the hands of Andrew Jackson. The Battle of Horseshoe Bend ended on August 9, 1814 with the Treaty of Ft. Jackson.

The events leading up to the end of Creek autonomy at the end of the Creek War in 1814 and introduction of the Federal Road in 1811 are deep seated in the past. These two events are chronologically, flashes of tender when seen in the light of the history of European-Creek trade. This trade, beginning with the Spanish in the sixteenth century, centered on the barter system trading goods for pelts and military alliances. Later, under the French and English, the pelt trade, along with the introduction of the gun created a colonial economy dependent on the trade of gunpowder and munitions for pelts and slaves. The growing dependence of the powerful Creek confederacy on European goods undermined their autonomy, as their reliance on European gunpowder was necessary to defend them from European encroachment. The attempt of Alexander McGillivray to unite the Creeks into a centralized force at the end of the eighteenth century was counter to the traditional government and worldview of the Creeks, or Muskogees. The attempt to form this government and thus, wield Creek power more effectively, fell through because of internal factionalism. This internal factionalism had always existed but now divided the autonomy of the Creek Nation. Although the Creek War was considered on of the bloodiest Indian wars in American history, its outcome was forgone. The way of life that the Upper Creeks strove to hold onto was destroyed by the onslaught of European trade. Secretary of War, John C. Calhoun best articulated the end of Creek autonomy, in 1818:

They have, in a great measure, ceased to be an object of terror, and have become that of commiseration ... The time seems to have arrived when our policy towards them should undergo an important change ... Our views of their interest, and not their own, ought to govern them.[23]

Notes

1Milfort. My Sojourn Into the Creek Nation. 1959.

2Green, Michael D. The Politics ofIndian Removal, 1982. p15.

3 Milfort. My Sorjourn in the Creek Nation. 1959.

4 Labeled as Kasihta by J.R. Swanton, Early History of the Creek Indians and Their Neighbors. 1998.

5 Green, p 13.

6 Green, p. 14.

7 Bartram. Travels of William Bartram , p 313. New York: Dover Pub., 1928.

8 Milfort, p. 105.

9 Green, p 25.

10 Creek term for the Georgians: “People greedily grasping after the lands of the red people.” Green, p. 26.

11 Green, p 26.

12 Milfort was also a French agent addressing Napoleon with this document. He is attempting to sway Napoleon’s support for the Muskogees as allies. Memoirs, p. 117.

13 Knight, Jr., Vernon James. Tukabatchee: Archaeological Investigations at an Historic Creek Town, Elmore Co., Alabama. 1985.

14 Vemer, p 182.

15 Milfort, p 105.

16 Green, p 31.

17Vemer, Tukabalchee.

18 Green, p 32.

19 Cottcrill, Robert S. “A Chapter of Panton, Leslie, and Co..” The Journal of Southern History. Vol. 10, no.3 (Aug, 1944). p275-292.

20 Hawkins, Benjamin. “Letter to James McHenry.” Letters. January 6, 1797.

21 Brown and Southerland. The Federal Road. 1989.

22 Usner, Jr., Daniel H. “The American Indian on the Cotton Frontier.” Ae Journal of American History. September, 1985. Vol. 72, no. 2, p. 297-317.

23 Green, p 32.

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