

**Willis Simmons:
Georgia to the
Mississippi Territory
1809 – 1810**

By
Adrienne F. Criminger

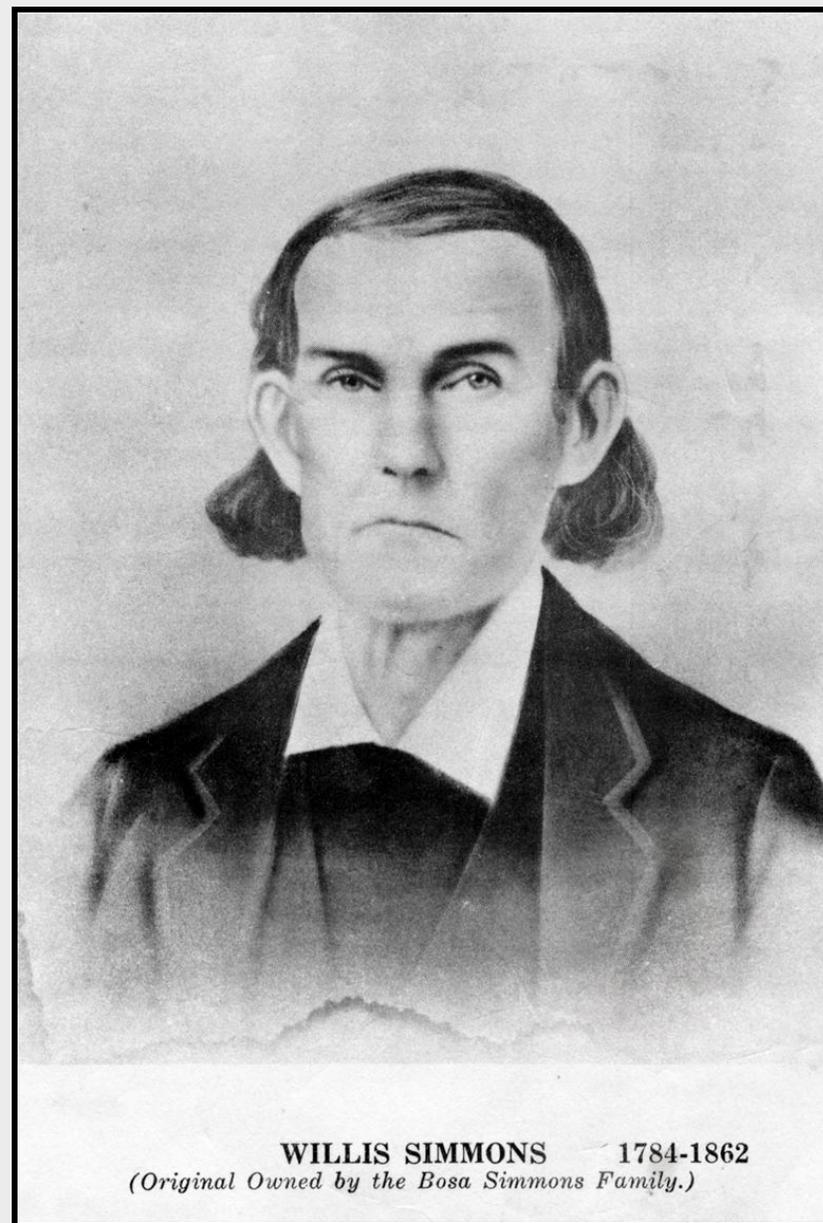


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Quite a bit has been written about Willis Simmons and his wife, Jane Goslin. This document will look only at events surrounding their move from Georgia to the Mississippi Territory.

With access to more historical records than ever before, new information about the Simmons and Goslin families is slowly coming to light. This is particularly true for the period not long after the Revolutionary War. As we begin to connect some newly discovered records, we are being lead to believe that a few of the stories written by our Great Aunt Edna Simmons Campbell may not be based on ideas that hold up under scrutiny. After 50 years, it will be difficult to change what has become ingrained as irrefutable fact in the world of genealogy; but when conflicting data comes to light, we should include these findings to help tell a more accurate story. The largest changes appear to be within the Goslin family history. When we have exhausted all the resources that can be located, that story will be shared on this blog.

In the meantime, let's take a look at the process involved in the Willis Simmons family's becoming pioneer settlers of the Mississippi Territory.



Very few actual documents of Willis's time in Georgia have been found, which is not uncommon for a young adult living in the early 1800s. For example, several online sources state that Willis was on the 1807 Baldwin County tax list. I find it is important to view the original records as you never know what else might prove important. The records also need context and occasional problem solving. I felt it would be valuable for others interested in Willis to see the actual records; consequently, what you will see in this document are original records, not transcriptions of them someone else has made. Enjoy!

On the tax list below, Willis is seen with a list of men paying a poll tax. This means he is over 21 but owned no land; otherwise, the land would be listed and the taxes would be higher. The poll tax guaranteed his right to vote. From this list, there is no way to know exactly where he was living. We do know that he and Jane had already started their family. He could have been in the Jones County location from where he would leave to go to the Mississippi Territory, or he could have been in Putnam County where his father owned land. There is no way to tell. Why do they show up in Baldwin County? Jones and Putnam Counties were not formed until December of 1807 by the division of Baldwin. Until the new county governments could be set up, the original county, Baldwin, collected the taxes.

1807 Baldwin County, Georgia Tax List

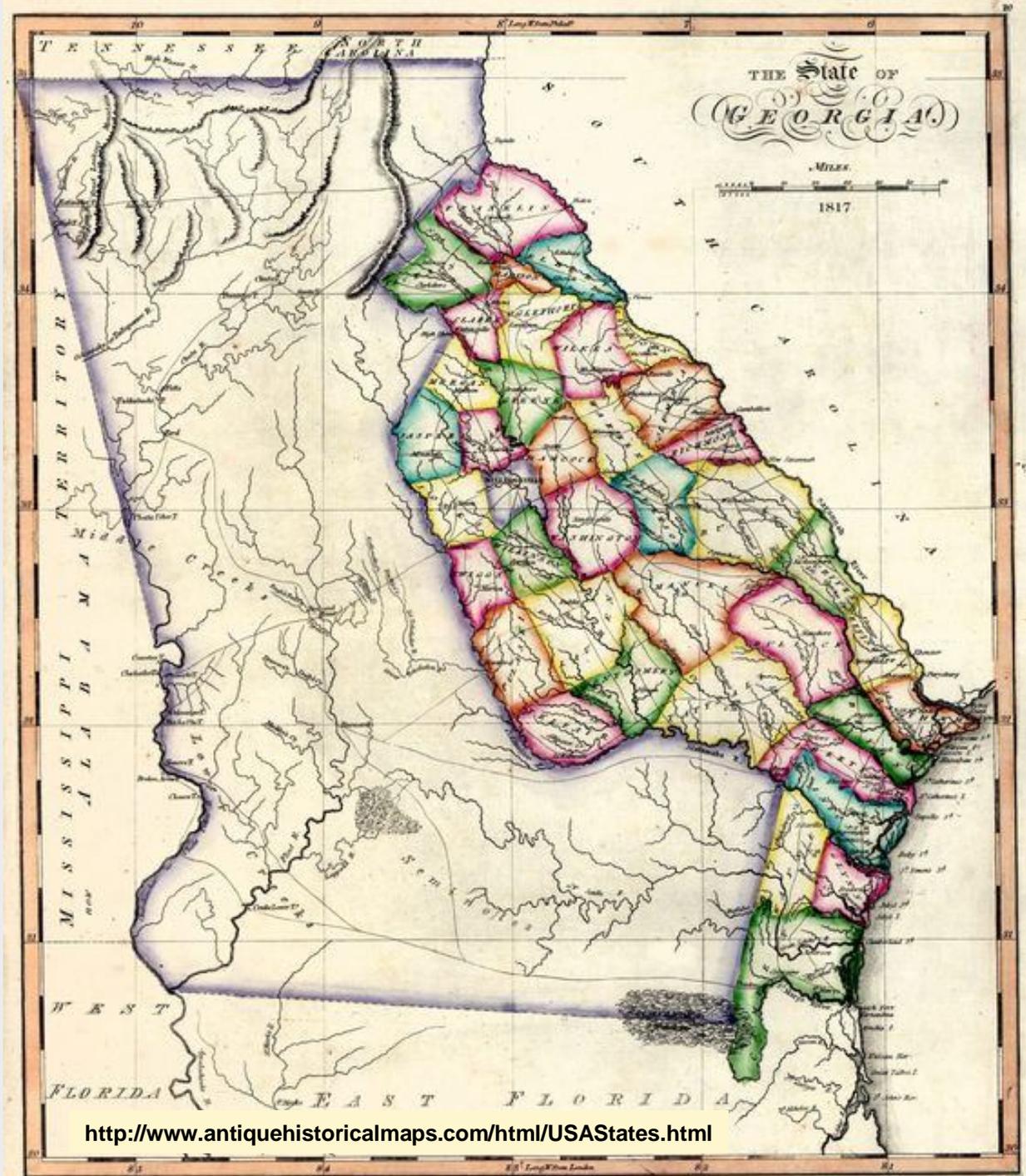
What is particularly interesting on this tax list is the third name above Willis's. Green Mullins was the very first person to sign as a character witness for his passport request to travel through the Creek Nation (as seen on a later document).

William Lerane	3	1	2/2
Green Mullins	3	1	2/2
James Smith	3	1	2/2
William Calloway	3	1	2/2
Willis Simmons	3	1	2/2
Luke Williams	3	1	2/2
Nathaniel Williams	3	1	2/2
Abraham Beard	3	1	2/2
Benj Wells	6	2	5
	15	0	0 0

Photo of tax record by Teresa Fortenberry at the Baldwin County Courthouse, Milledgeville, Georgia.

Map of Georgia published in 1817

This map was published only 34 years after the signing of the Treaty of Paris ending the Revolutionary War! When this map was drawn, the entire state of Georgia was comprised of the counties outlined in color. The remainder of what would become the state of Georgia still belonged to the Cherokees, Creeks, and Seminoles. The area west of where Willis lived belonged to the Creek Nation. In fact, the land where he lived in 1809 had only been relinquished by the Creeks four years before!



Who were the Creeks?

The Creeks were a part of the Muscogee Confederacy which also included the Seminoles. Due to a constant trade imbalance caused by a drop in the number of deer hides collected by the Creeks for trade and their reliance on trade goods such as guns, ammunition, cloth, and iron, they were often in debt.¹ The state of Georgia thought it would be a great idea to have the Creeks cede land to the state in payment for their debts. Consequently, over the years progressive chunks of Creek land was ceded to the state.



<http://www.lostworlds.org/creek-indian-caitlan.jpg>

Typical Creek dress that would have been commonly seen by Willis and Jane Simmons.



Bowen, John T., Lithographer. *Se-loc-ta, a Creek chief*. 1836. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2001695449/>



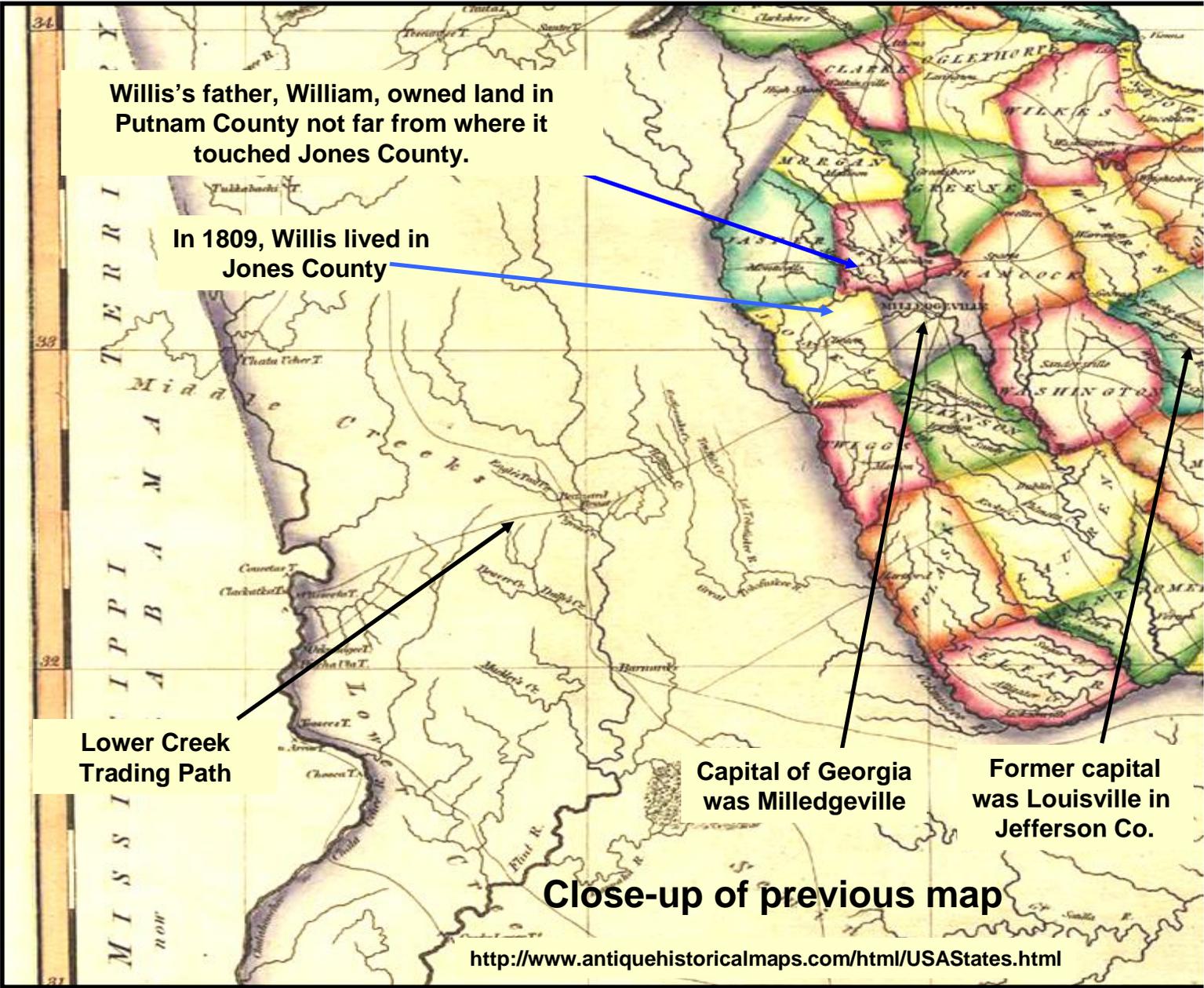
Ocmulgee Mounds today

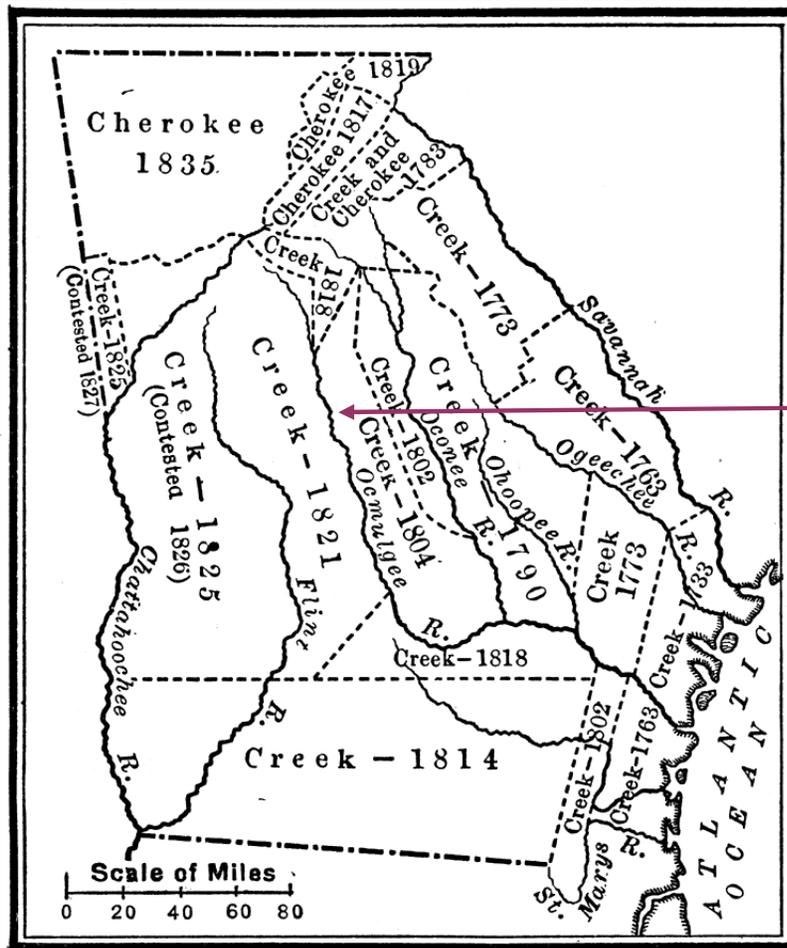
By Judson McCranie, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=50589866>

Creek ancestors, known today as the Mississippian Culture, built the Ocmulgee Mound complex that is now a US National Monument in Macon, Georgia not far from where Willis lived. The Creeks considered the area as sacred grounds. As part of the 1805 Treaty of Washington, when the remaining land between the Oconee and Ocmulgee Rivers was ceded to the United States, the Creeks were able to keep a 3 by 5 mile section within this land on the east bank of the Ocmulgee River that included these mounds.² They would later lose even this small, but important part of their heritage with their removal to Oklahoma in the 1830s.³

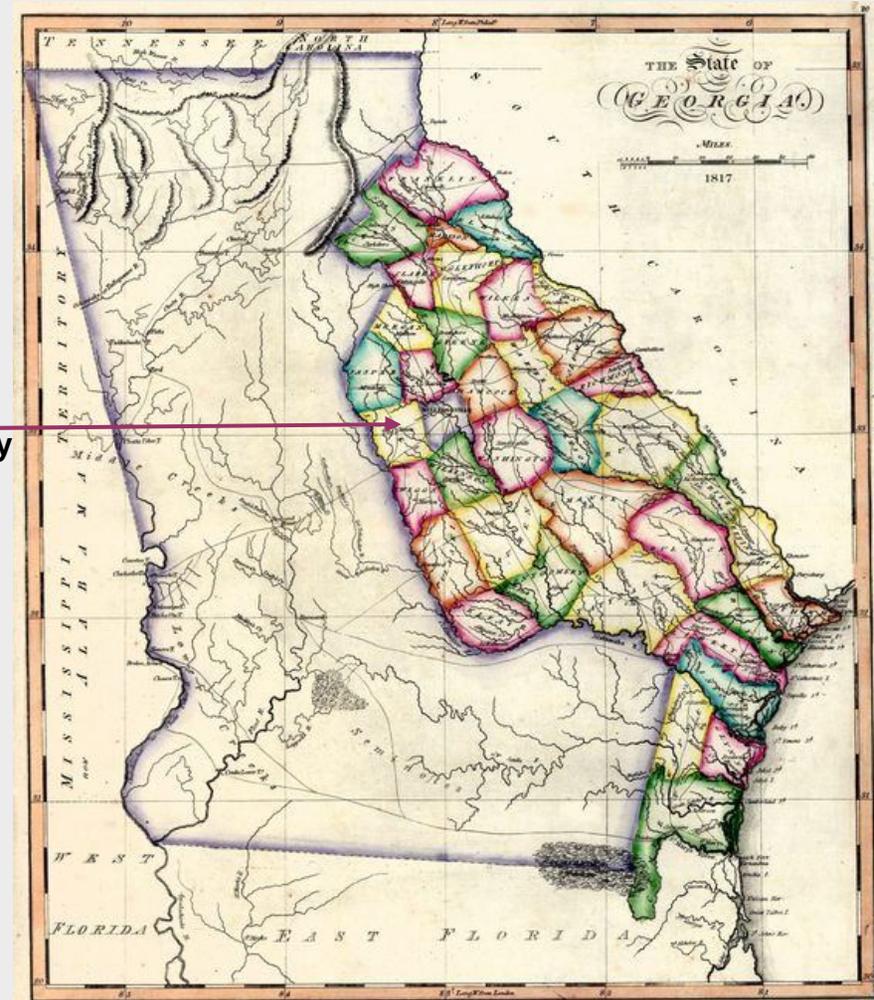
Willis was a true pioneer, living on the very edges of settled land.

Milledgeville was the fourth capital of Georgia. In 1804, the Georgia legislature, then meeting in its current capital of Louisville, decided to move the seat of government to a more central location relative to future growth. By 1807, enough of the building was completed to allow wagons to begin moving the state treasury and documents.⁴





<http://etc.usf.edu/maps/pages/9800/9861/9861.htm>



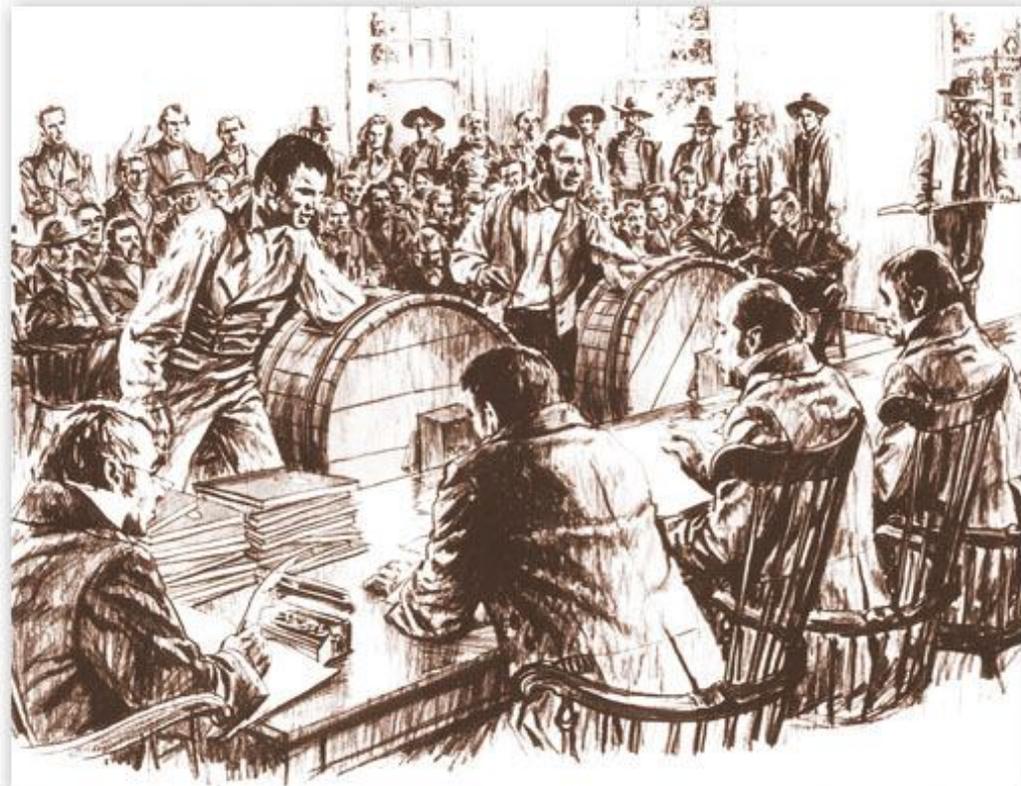
Jones
County

<http://www.antiquehistoricalmaps.com/html/USStates.html>

When comparing the county map of Georgia and the progression of the acquisition of Creek land, it becomes obvious that Willis was living in an area recently added to the state. The area marked on the left map as 1802 lies just west of the Oconee River and was acquired in the 1802 Treaty of Fort Wilkinson. The land ceded by the Creeks in 1802 was raffled off to settlers in the Land Lottery of 1805. The land marked as 1804 was actually acquired through the 1805 Treaty of Washington. This land was dispersed in the 1807 Land Lottery.⁵

What was a land lottery?

Between 1805 and 1833, Georgia had eight land lotteries. After acquiring a section of land from the Native Americans, the Georgia government would want to “claim and tame” the land. To do this, they needed settlers to occupy the land as quickly as possible.

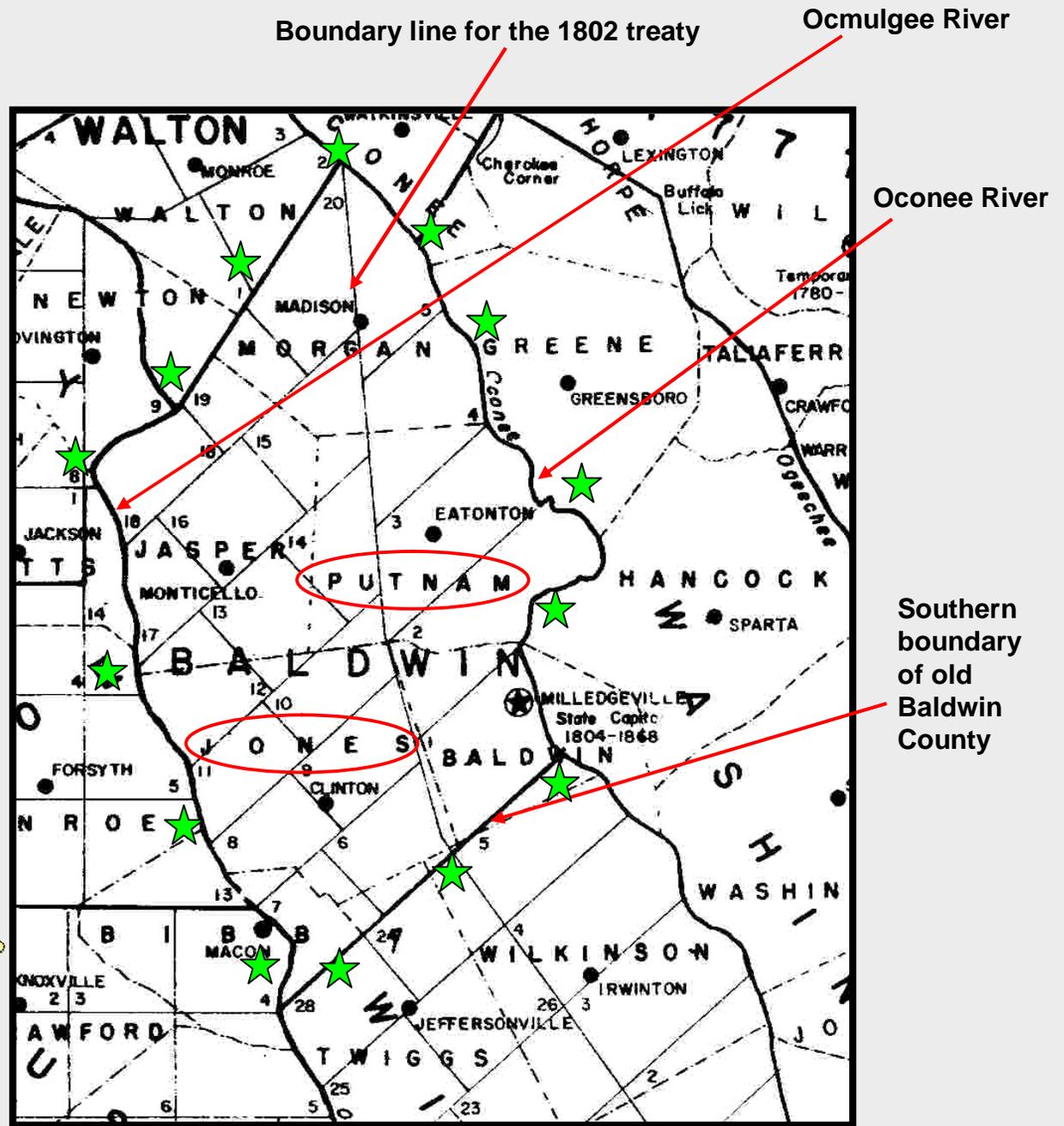


The Georgia Studies Book

<http://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/gastudiesimages/Land%20Lottery.htm>

First the land was divided into large counties, then into districts within each county. Next these districts would be surveyed into 202 ½ acre lots and numbered by the county, the district location, and the lot number. Each lot description was put on paper and added to the land barrel. Qualifying people would be able to have their names added to the other barrel. There were many rules about who could qualify. A land lot would be pulled from one barrel and a name from the other. That would determine who would get each land lot. If someone’s name was pulled with a land lot, it was called a “fortunate draw.” Not everyone had a fortunate draw, sometimes a name would be matched with a blank piece of paper and was called an “unfortunate draw.”⁶ If you would like to learn more about the Georgia Land Lottery, please visit this Georgia Archives site listed in the endnotes.

The Creek land acquired from both the 1802 and 1805 treaties was divided into two large counties, with the northernmost section named Baldwin County. I have added green stars to help follow the boundaries of the original Baldwin County. Several counties, including Jones and Putnam, were established from the original Baldwin County on December 10, 1807. If one looks carefully, the district divisions can be seen as numbers within smaller divisions of the counties.



We know from Willis Simmons's passport through the Creek Nation (see later pages) that he was living in Jones County, Georgia at the time of the move. Just recently, I have been able to determine an approximate location where he and Jane were living. This tax default notice in the Milledgeville paper, seen below, discloses some helpful information. By the time the tax office was looking to collect the taxes, Willis was already in the Mississippi Territory. A series of notifications concerning the past due taxes began appearing in *The Georgia Journal* on November 14, 1810 showing that the taxes on the 50 acres of land on Shoal Creek was in arrears for 38.5 cents. The land would be sold on December 29, 1810 to cover the taxes.

THE GEORGIA JOURNAL.

VOL. II.

MILLEDGEVILLE, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 1810.

No. 7.

Paper Dated December 12, 1810. Also appeared November 14, November 28, December 5, December 26. There were 26 other entries of defaulted taxes.

Collector's Sales.

WILL BE SOLD, on Saturday the 29th of Dec'r. next, in the town of Clinton between the usual hours, the following, TRACTS OF LAND; or so much thereof as will be sufficient to pay the tax due thereon, and cost.

73 1-2 Acres second quality Land on Glady creek in Jones county, granted to Land, given in by Elijah Baily, tax due, \$ 1 : 74 : 6 1-4.

50 Acres third quality Land on Shoal creek in Jones county, granted to Watson, given in by Willis Simmons, tax due, \$ 0 : 38 : 5.

101 1-4 Acres third quality Land on Beaverdam, Putnam county, granted to Bragg, given in by Stephen Horton, tax due, \$ 0 : 46 : 4 1-4.

Collector's Sales.

WILL BE SOLD, on Saturday the 29th of Dec'r. next, in the town of Clinton between the usual hours, the following, TRACTS OF LAND; or so much thereof as will be sufficient to pay the tax due thereon, and cost.

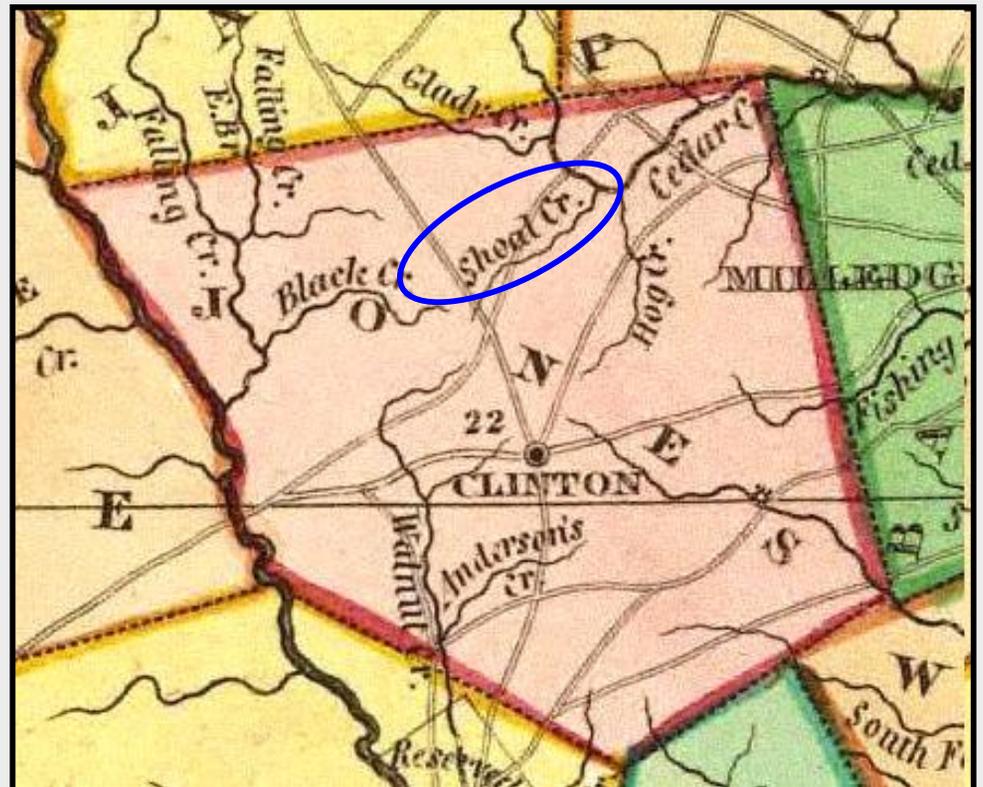
50 Acres third quality Land on Shoal creek in Jones county, granted to Watson, given in by Willis Simons, tax due, \$ 0 : 38 : 5.

Collector's Sale, *Georgia Journal*, 12 December 1810, page 4. Presented online by the Digital Library of Georgia.

The impending sale tells us several things:

1. The quality of the land is poor as it is rated 3rd quality.
2. The original land was granted (won) because of a "fortunate draw" in the 1807 lottery by a man named Watson, given name not listed.
3. Willis was responsible for taxes on 50 acres on Shoal Creek. That would be about $\frac{1}{4}$ of a 202.5 acre lottery lot.

As advertised, the land was to be sold on December 29, 1810 in the town of Clinton, Georgia. Clinton was established in 1808 and was the first county seat of Jones County.



Tanner, Henry S. *Georgia and Alabama 1823*. Scale 1:1.1E+06. "David Rumsey Map Collection"
<http://rumsey.georeferencer.com/map/Qi4EDjzS6NXqGWviWxr1tX/201306170559-LUJg3g/georeference> Web. 15 Feb. 2017.

The newspaper references state that the land was granted to someone named Watson. I used the following logic to locate the land:

1. Jones County was formed from Baldwin County in December of 1807 which was after the lottery had taken place. Since Jones was cut from Baldwin County, the land Willis lived on would have to have been granted to a man named Watson and be within a district of Baldwin that later became Jones County.
2. Any Watson granted land outside the future Jones County area would not be the correct person.
3. There were 21 Watsons who received fortunate draws in the 1807 lottery.⁷
4. Using a map of the Baldwin County districts, any Watson receiving land within districts 6, 8, 9, 11, and parts of 7, 10, 12, and 13 would be within the future Jones County.
5. Only two men of the 21 Watsons granted land in 1807 had grants within the correct area that would later be Jones County.
6. Both these grants and corresponding plats were located and examined.
7. Only the one for John Watson, Sr. had Shoal Creek on the plat. The other was on the southern end of the county miles from Shoal Creek.⁸

John Watson, Sr. of the Ninth district of Columbia County, Georgia was given 202 ½ acres in the Tenth District of Baldwin County. It was land lot 58 and granted to him on October 20, 1807. Online records indicate that John Watson, Sr. died in Columbia County, Georgia about 1827.⁹

STATE OF GEORGIA.

By his Excellency *Jared Innes* Governor
and commander in chief of the army and navy
of this state, and of the militia thereof.

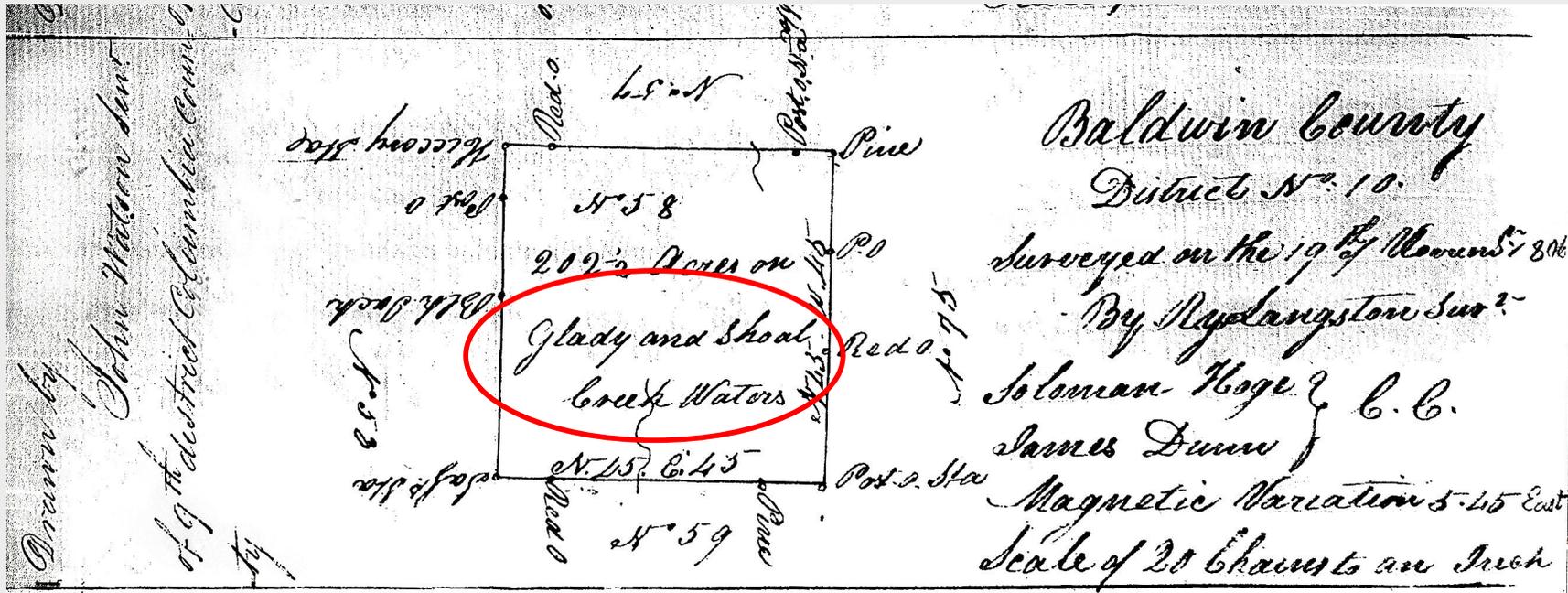
TO ALL TO WHOM THESE PRESENTS SHALL COME, GREETING:

KNOW YE, That in pursuance of an act
of the General Assembly of this state, passed on the twenty-sixth day of June,
eighteen hundred and six, for making distribution of the land in the counties of
WILKINSON and BALDWIN, I HAVE GIVEN AND GRANTED, and by these
presents in the name and behalf of this state, DO GIVE AND GRANT unto

John Watson Sr. of the Ninth district
Columbia County his heirs and assigns forever, all that
tract or lot of land containing two hundred two and an half acres, situate, lying,
and being in the *Tenth* district, BALDWIN
county, in the said state, which said tract or lot of land is known and distinguished
in the plan of said district by the Number *fifty eight*.

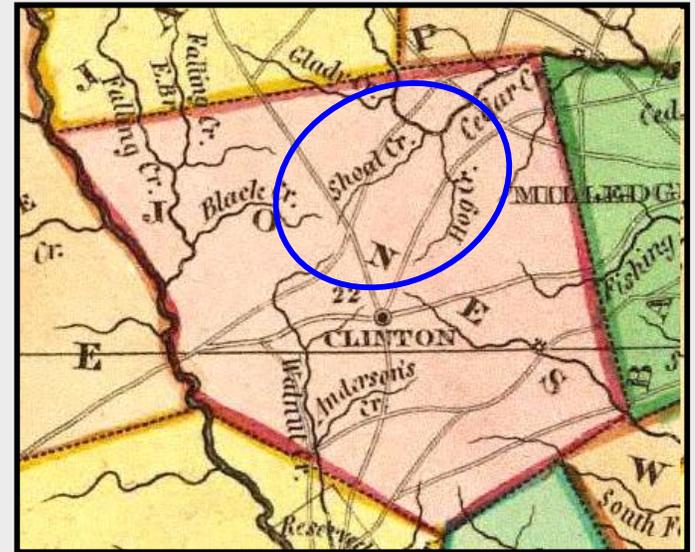
Georgia Secretary of State, Surveyor General Land Grants, 1807 Land
Lottery, Baldwin County, Districts 10, 11, and 12. Microfilm 53-17, page 8.

Plat of lot 58 of the 10th District of Baldwin County



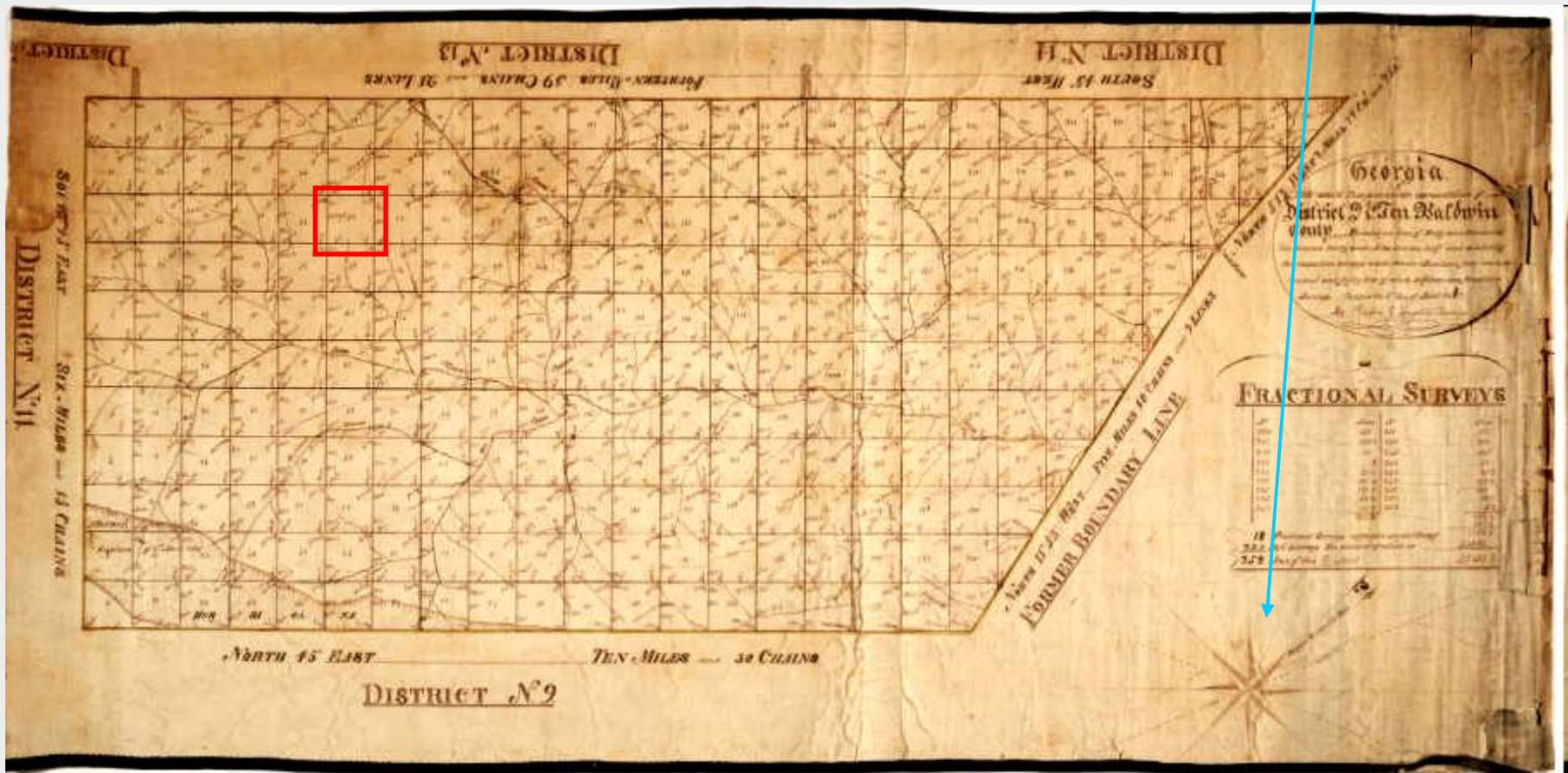
Georgia Secretary of State, Surveyor General Plats, 1806-1807 Book NN, Baldwin County, Districts 15, 10, 8, 18, 1807 Land Lottery. Microfilm 51-37, page 100.

This is the ONLY lot drawn by a Watson that included land on Shoal Creek. The plat above also mentions Gladly Creek. One immediately understands why the land was rated as 3rd quality. According to the two squiggly lines indicating watercourses, very little water was available. By looking at the previous map of Jones County, seen again here, it becomes obvious that the creek along the bottom of the above plat is Shoal Creek and the top, very small indication of a creek, is Gladly Creek as it is always to the north of Shoal Creek. The land would have to be somewhere not too far from the northern boundary of Jones County. So the question arises, where do branches of these two creeks come close enough together to be within a 202.5 acre square?



Tanner, Henry S. *Georgia and Alabama 1823*. Scale 1:1.1E+06. "David Rumsey Map Collection." Web. 15 Feb. 2017.

The map below shows the land lots awarded to fortunate draws, 1807 Land Lottery District 10 Baldwin County, later Jones County, Georgia. The location of lot 58 is outlined in red. Important to notice: The compass rose shows that this district map is not drawn with north being at the top of the map.

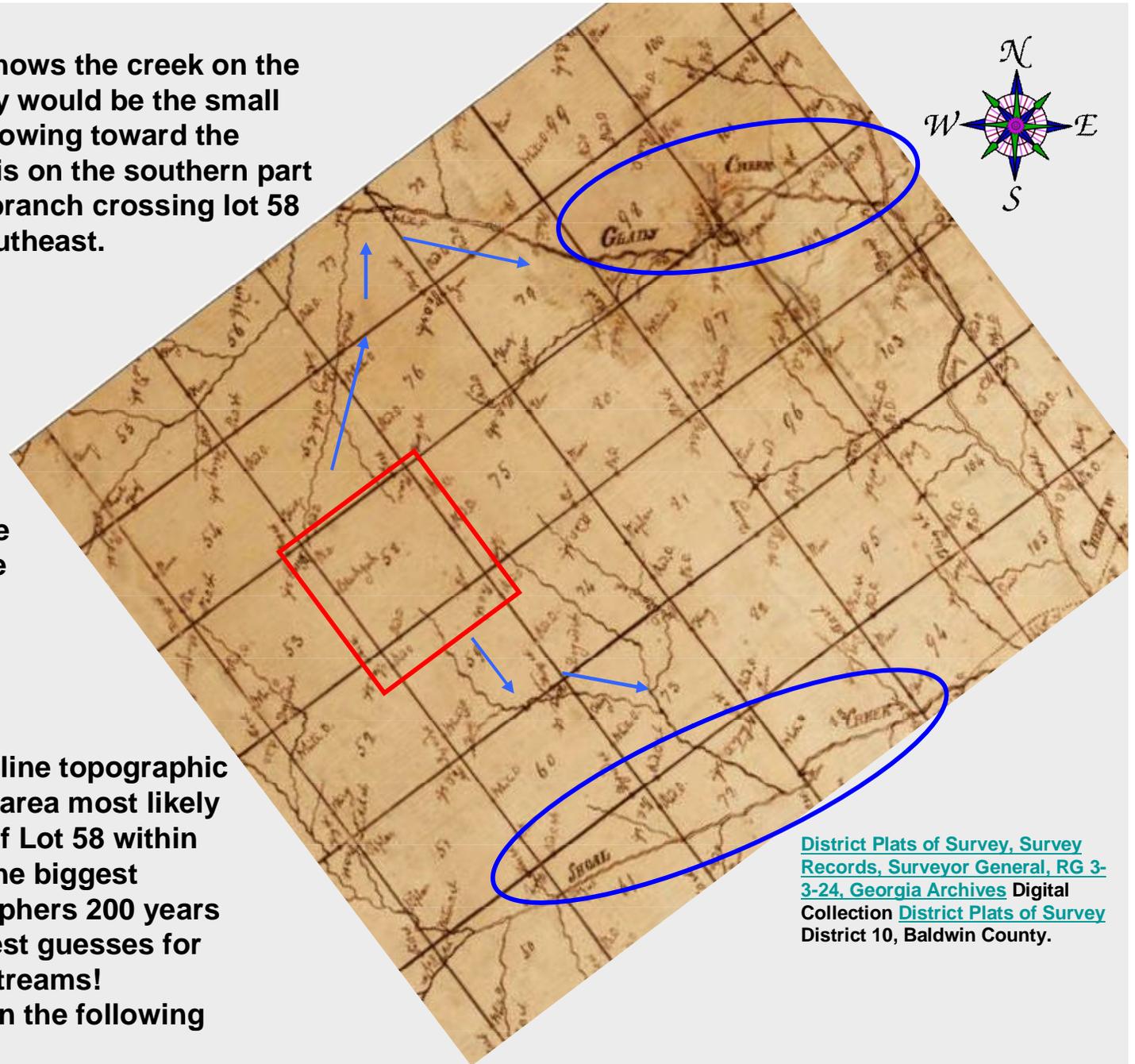


[District Plats of Survey, Survey Records, Surveyor General, RG 3-3-24, Georgia Archives Digital Collection](#) [District Plats of Survey](#) District 10, Baldwin County.

A closer view of lot 58 shows the creek on the north end of the property would be the small branch of Glady Creek flowing toward the northeast. Shoal Creek is on the southern part of the property and the branch crossing lot 58 is flowing toward the southeast.

The opposing directions of the water flow would indicate that the land between them would be an area higher than the creek beds. Looking at the water flow across the area, there appears to be a slight elevation gain through the centers of lots 58, 75, 80, and 97.

By looking at today's online topographic maps, I have located an area most likely to be near the location of Lot 58 within District 10. Of course, the biggest problem is that cartographers 200 years ago sometimes made best guesses for shapes and lengths of streams! Possible locations are on the following page.

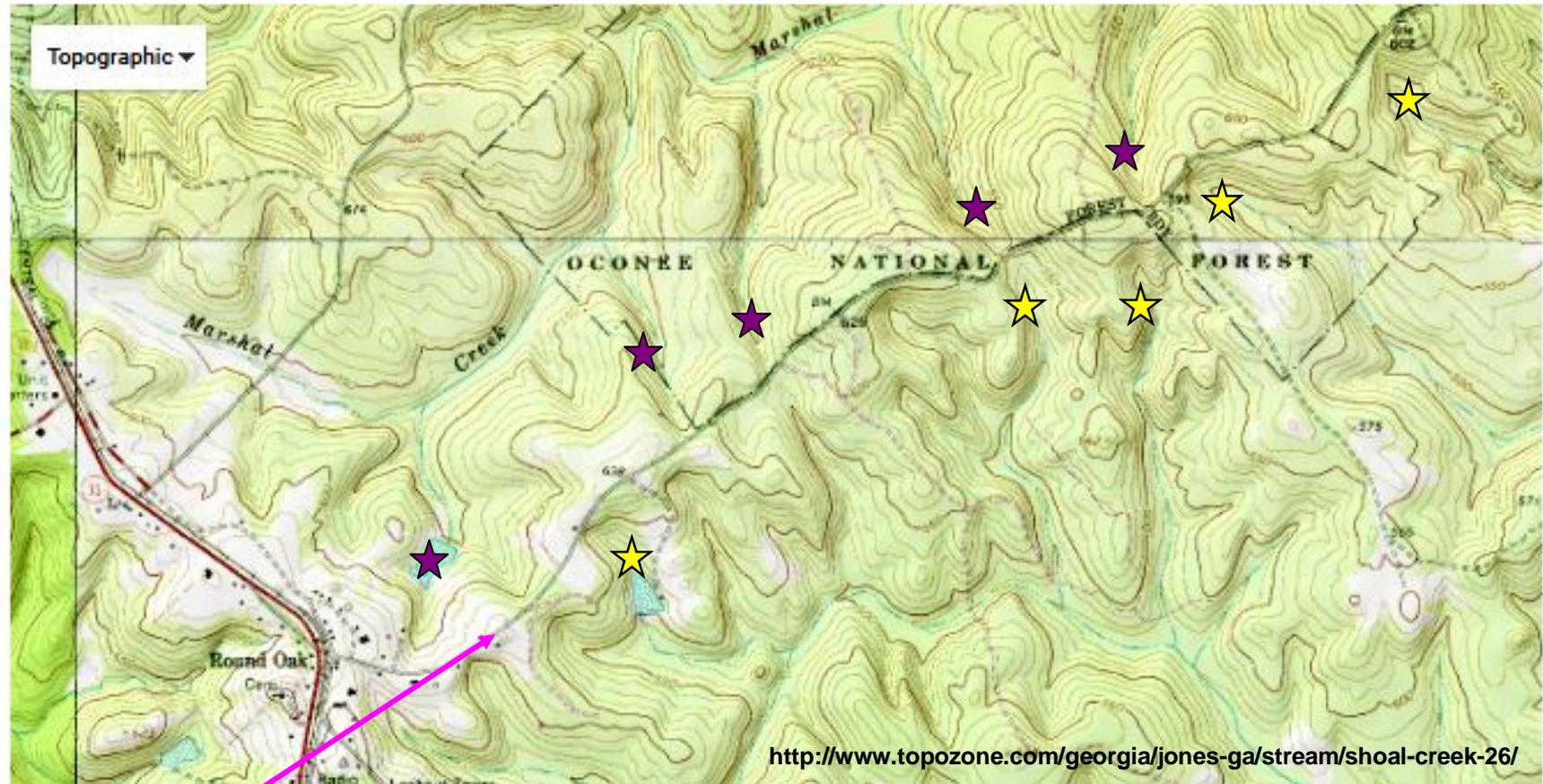


[District Plats of Survey, Survey Records, Surveyor General, RG 3-3-24, Georgia Archives Digital Collection](#) [District Plats of Survey District 10, Baldwin County.](#)

The area today is within the Oconee National Forest, northeast of Round Oak, Georgia.

Home / Georgia / Jones / Streams / Shoal Creek

Shoal Creek Topo Map in Jones County GA



Shoal Creek Road seems to run along the previously described low ridge between Shoal Creek and Glady Creek. Note: By the 1820 tax list of Jones County, several families with this exact spelling of Marshal were living in the area indicating a renaming of part of Glady Creek.

- ★ Southern points along Glady/Marshal Creek
- ★ Northern points along Shoal Creek

To me, the most likely location based upon comparisons on maps may be the area near the word "National." In any case, it is more than we have ever known before!

As the Creeks experienced the chipping away of their native lands, their anxiety understandably grew. A division within the Creek nation began to form. This division within the Creek people would later directly affect Willis Simmons! It is a very complicated story and very difficult to explain in detail here. Basically, the Creek Nation was composed of loosely connected villages, each with its own independent leader (headman). There was never a single leader who could sign a treaty for all the Creek villages.¹⁰ The Creeks who were involved in signing treaties had no right to give or sell land belonging to another village. Georgia and the Federal government probably knew this but chose to ignore it in order to get what they wanted from the Creeks. Consequently, the treaties with the Creeks were likely fraudulent. There were several leaders among the Creeks who wanted close ties with the Americans in order to individually profit from them. One of these was a man named William McIntosh who signed many of the Creek treaties. He was half Creek and half Scottish.¹¹ He became extremely wealthy but would, in the end, pay the ultimate price! When taking 8th grade Georgia History, my generation was taught that he was a “good Indian,” most likely because he sided with the Georgia Government and not the “traditionalist” Creeks!

So why did Willis need a Passport?

Most of the Creeks were upset with the results of an 1805 Treaty of Washington and the fact that a few headmen had given the US government travelers the right to cross the entire Creek land. They would NOW have to contend with squatters taking their land, their people being blamed for every stolen cow or robbed traveler, and they must allow travelers to cross their land. In an attempt to keep undesirable people from entering their territory, Georgia began to screen the people allowed to travel through the Creek Nation by using passports.¹² To get a passport, men had to get recommendations from local citizens confirming they were law abiding and should be allowed to cross through the Creek land. Next, the references would be read by the executive council, and if agreed, the petitioners would receive a passport containing their names, a state seal, and the governor's signature.



William
McIntosh

Character references for Willis Simmons, John Mathews, and John Bond.

**“Georgia Jones County
We the undersiners
recommend John Matthews
Willis Simmons & John
Bond as good honest
upright citizens and that
they wish to obtain a
pasport from this County
and State to the Mississippi
Territory as they are About
to remove there to –
October the 6th 1809”**

Below are the names of the 22 character witnesses. There looks to be only a few different handwritings. Within the passport documents at the Georgia Archives, only one other contained as many witnesses. Most requests have fewer than five.

Georgia } We the undersiners recommend John
Jones County } Matthews Willis Simmons & John Bond
as good honest upright citizens and that
they wish to obtain a pasport from this County and State
to the Mississippi Territory as they are About to remove
there to. — October the 6th 1809. Luthberth Reese

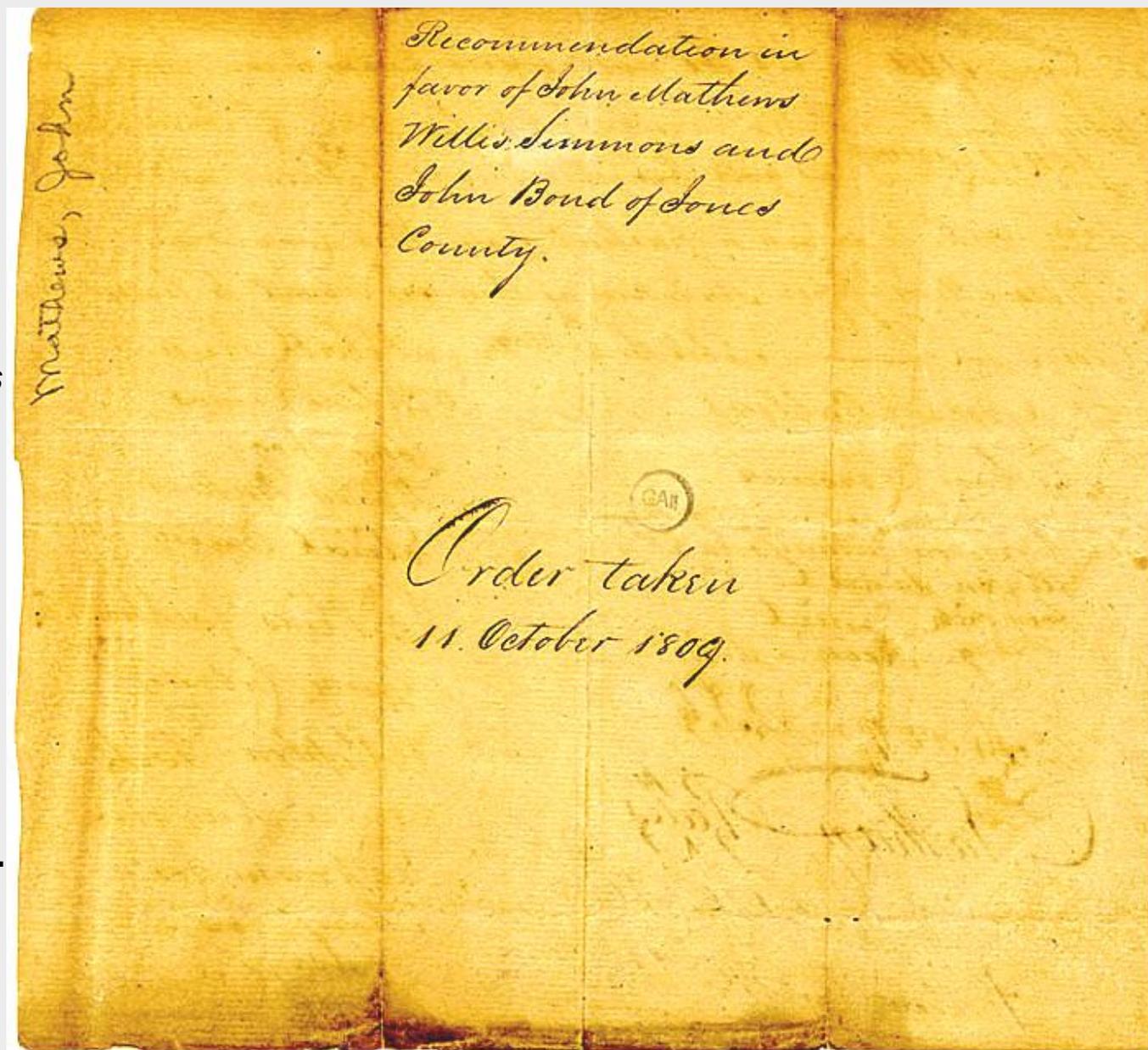
Green Mullins	Wetton Amos
Sion Thrown	John Hogg
Harrison Labaniff Capt.	Hardy Bullock
denton daniel	Elijah Bailey
fred rich Daniel	Wilkins Jackson J. B.
Dwuy Reed - J. P.	George Labaniff
A. Garrison J. P.	Stephen Hook
Nathan Steeles	Israel Huggin
Wm Ratcliff Capt	Ephraim Cox
Richard Ratcliff Capt	Moses Cox
	Asa Cox

Back of Character references

“Recommendation in favor of John Mathews Willis Simmons and John Bond of Jones County.”

“Order taken 11 October 1809”

Within 5 days, the process was complete.



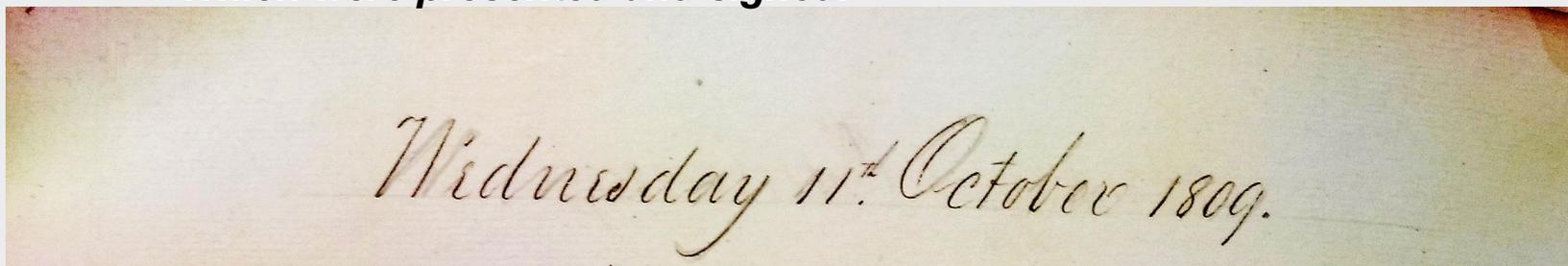
On Wednesday 11th October 1809, the Governor's office ordered that a passport be issued to Willis Simmons. Below is the top of page 498 showing the date and the bottom of the same page showing the order.

"On recommendation of several respectable citizens of the county of Jones.

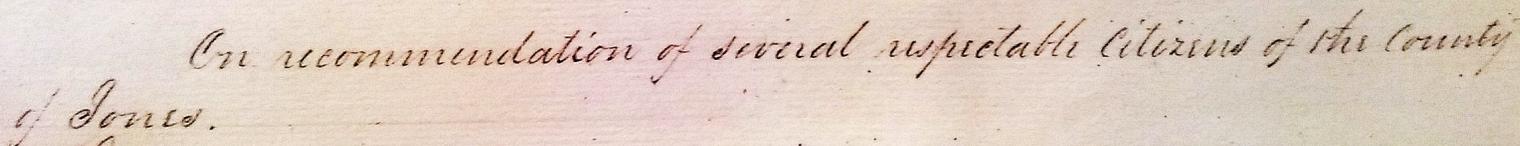
Ordered,

That Passports through the Creek Nation be prepared as Aftermentioned _ To wit, One for David Boyd, and one for John Mathews Willis Simmons, and John Bond, the two former with their families.

Which were presented and signed."



Wednesday 11th October 1809.



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Ordered,

That Passports through the Creek Nation be prepared as aftermentioned - To wit, One for David Boyd, and one for John Mathews Willis Simmons, and John Bond, the two former with their families.

Which were presented and signed.

Clarification of the wording for the passport orders

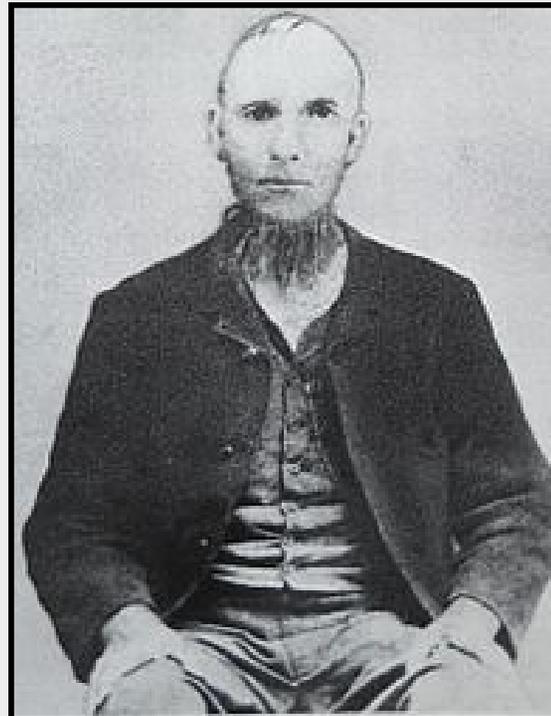
*Ordered,
That Passports through the Creek Nation be prepared as
aforesaid - To wit, One for David Boyd, and one for John Mathews
Willis Simmons, and John Bond, the two former with their families.
Which were presented and signed.*

Executive Minutes, February 19, 1808 – November 9, 1809, page 498, Executive Department Minutes, Georgia Governor's Office, R6 1-1-3, Georgia Archives.

This document can be somewhat confusing.

1. There are two passports being issued by the governor's office at the same time. That does not mean they all traveled together.
2. The first passport was issued to David Boyd. His passport had no connection to the second passport.
3. The second passport was issued to three men planning to travel together: John Mathews, Willis Simmons, and John Bond. They had one passport for the three of them.
4. "...the two former with their families." This statement is in reference to the three men traveling together and does not include David Boyd. This means that Mathews and Simmons were traveling with their families, but John Bond was not.

John Bond, Jr. 1770-1862



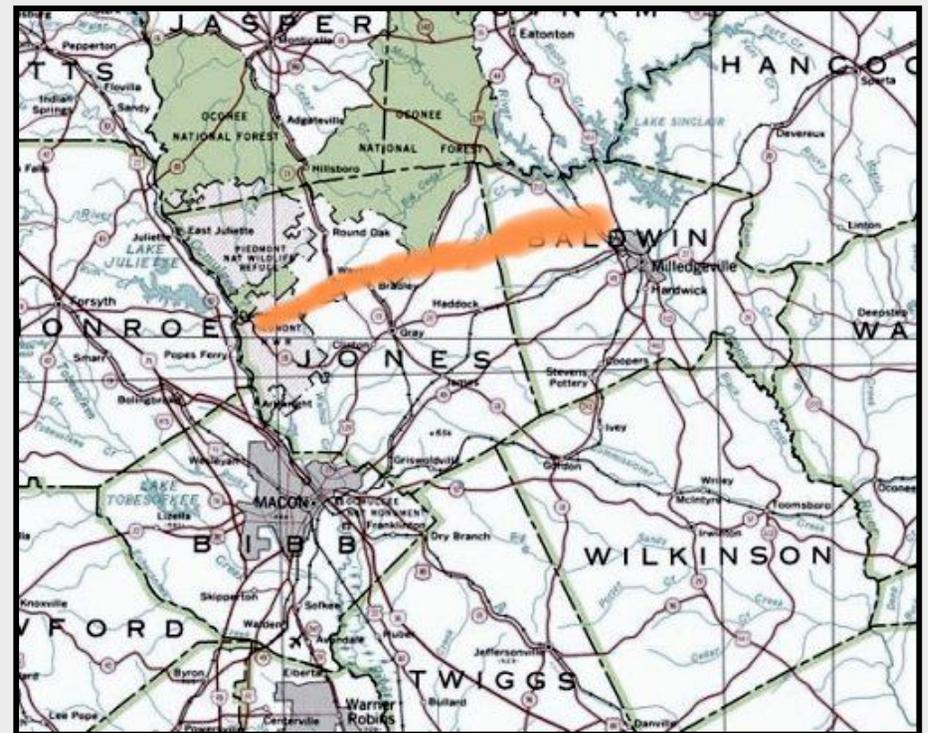
According to Bond family stories, John Bond, listed on the passport, most likely was escorting Willis Simmons and John Mathews across the Creek land to the Mississippi Territory.¹³

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Bond,_Jr.

One wonders what events or pressures led Willis Simmons to make a decision to move from one place to another. Historians refer to this phenomenon as push-pull factors. What factors made Willis want to leave Georgia? What made him want to go to the Mississippi Territory? When looking at the time and place where Willis was living in 1809, two interesting meteorological events occurred that would make someone tied to agriculture consider a change.

Records show that by 1807, Georgia began experiencing an extended period of drought.¹⁴ If one remembers the scanty water resources on the land Willis owned in 1809, it becomes obvious that water would have been a huge issue. A drought would have made it difficult to grow enough food much less a productive income crop. This would have been the case across the entire region.

On April 5, 1804, an even more disturbing event occurred. The residents of the area called it the Great Hurricane, and it affected part of middle Georgia. At the time, people did not understand the difference between a hurricane and a tornado and assumed it was a hurricane but all indications point to a massive tornado.¹⁵ How do we know it occurred? Amazingly enough, the maps drawn for the 1807 land lottery indicated where damage could still be seen. Therefore, accurate mapping of the tornado's route can be plotted by looking at the district maps done three years after the destruction. As it turns out, it passed not too far from the area near where Willis and his father most likely were living. A blog called "Georgia Weather History" by Steve Engerrand has two very interesting posts about this event. For more information see the link to his blog in the endnotes. He even shows one of the land lots where the tornado obviously first touched down!



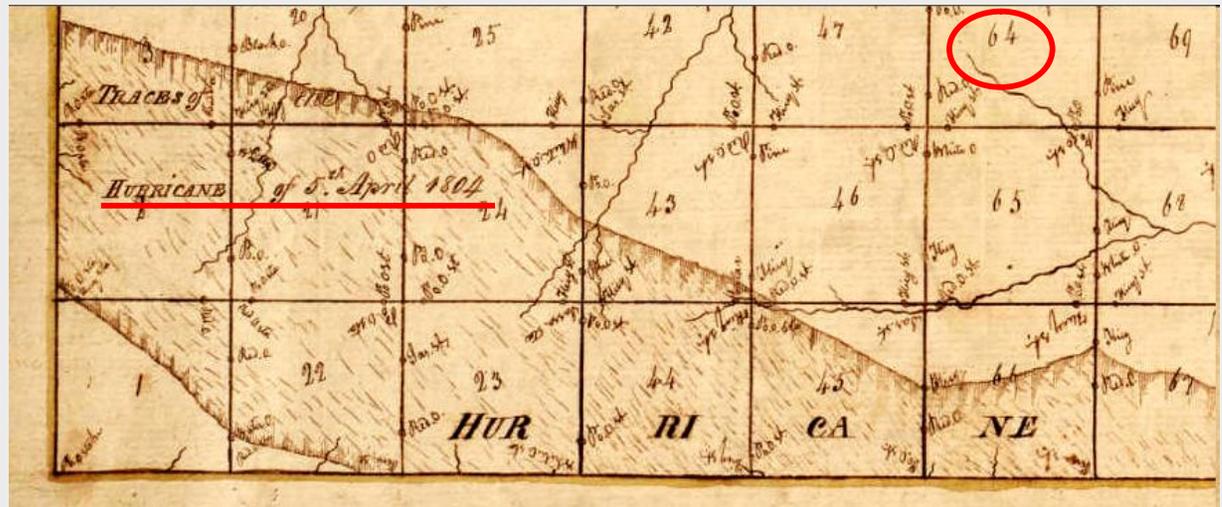
<https://i2.wp.com/georgiaweatherhistory.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/path-on-modern-map.jpg?w=578>

The above map was done by Steve Engerrand for his blog and shows the route he abstracted from the District maps of 1807 on a present day map.

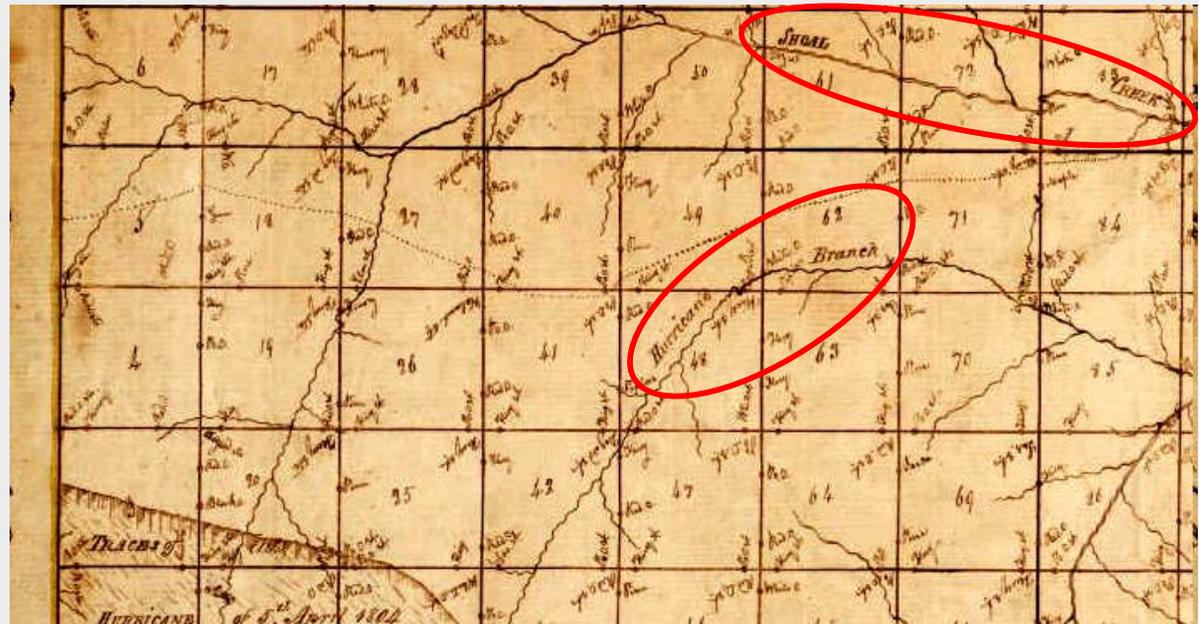
Evidence of the 1804 tornado

Information seems to indicate that the tornado was so massive that it could only have come from a supercell storm and was at least a mile wide.¹⁶ Dark, foreboding clouds in the spring probably scared everyone for years to come! As mentioned before, by 1809, Willis was living on land lot 58 of District 10. These two maps show parts of that district. Notice the surveyor's indication of the storm's path. (My underlining.) The land where Willis would later be living in 1809 was 6 squares above 64 on the top map.

The second map shows the area just above the first map. Notice that Shoal Creek is near the top of the map. The tornado damage was still evident throughout the area when Willis was living on land lot 58 in 1809. Even more telling is that the creek below Shoal Creek was named Hurricane Branch after the storm!



Both - [District Plats of Survey, Survey Records, Surveyor General, RG 3-3-24, Georgia Archives](#) Digital Collection [District Plats of Survey](#) District 10, Baldwin County.



Most likely there were quite a few reasons Willis would have wanted to leave Georgia. Some of them would have fallen under the concept of “pull.” What would pull Willis toward the Mississippi Territory?

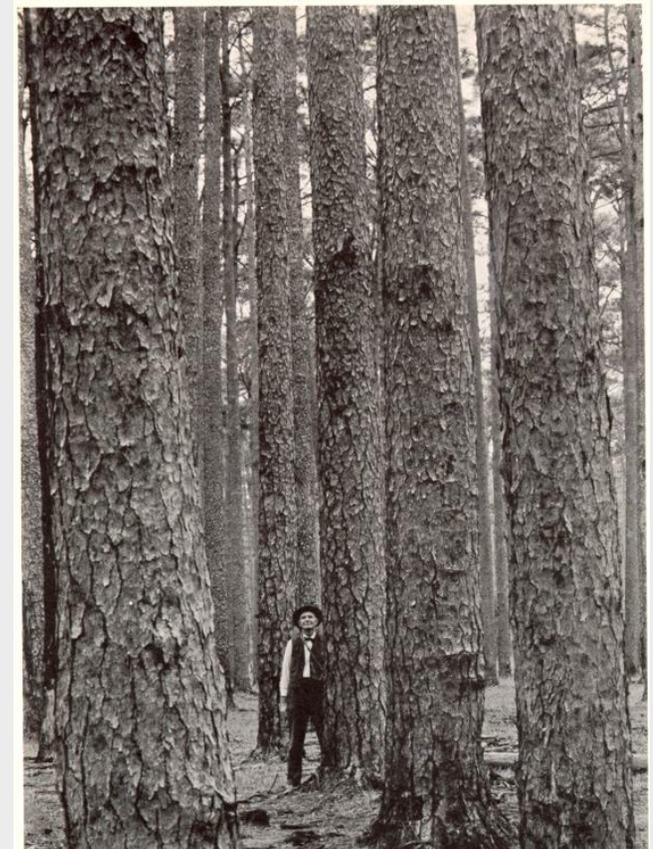
During this time period, Americans were noted for their restlessness and wanderlust. Many were searching for independence and a better life, and the Mississippi Territory presented itself as the prime place for many Southerners to go. The majority of the settlers came from the bordering states of Georgia and Tennessee followed by a large influx from the Carolinas. Another draw was that the Mississippi Territory’s climate and soil was similar to the other southern states, giving the farmers an immediate understanding of how to proceed with planting and harvesting crops. Finally, kinship or friendship with others already in the territory made the transition that much easier.¹⁷ And good, reasonably priced land was definitely a pull.

For the pioneer settlers, the vast acres of virgin forests found on arrival were a hindrance to developing farms. But there would be many who would later be glad they held onto their forested land. As demand for lumber increased during the 1840s and continued into the 20th century, many farmers, in times of need, used their trees as a cash crop. The lumber industry also generated lots of jobs – lumberjacks, sawmill workers, jobs connected to the construction and running of small, local railroads to move timber, and many supporting businesses. The most prized of the timber was the long leaf yellow pine.¹⁸



<http://www.carolinanature.com/trees/pipa8188.jpg>

The interesting photograph to the right is of an original stand of long leaf yellow pines and was taken just south of Pike County, Mississippi in Washington Parish, Louisiana.



<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~mclendon/Bogalusa/Bogalusa%20Story/BogalusaStory-with-photos.html>

Development of Routes through the Mississippi Territory

With the purchase of the Louisiana Territory in 1803, Thomas Jefferson immediately realized that the government needed a faster way to communicate with our newly acquired and important port at New Orleans. The problem was that New Orleans presented a prime target for invasion from the English coming in by water and the Spanish by land from their holdings in west Florida.²¹ At the time of the purchase, the route between Washington City and New Orleans traveled inland to Nashville, Tennessee and then down the Natchez Trace, which could take at least two months one way.²² By the time word could reach Washington City, a takeover could be complete.

On March 3, 1805, Congress passed an act to establish a Federal Horse Path (sometimes called the Federal Post Path) between Washington, by way of Athens, Georgia, through the Mississippi Territory to New Orleans.²³ The path would shorten the time for mail and military personnel that needed to flow to and from New Orleans.

One minor detail - The government had to find a way to get the Creeks to allow a Federal path through their land. On November 14, 1805, a delegation of Creeks met in Washington City with Thomas Jefferson and signed the Treaty of Washington which included an article to do just that!²⁴

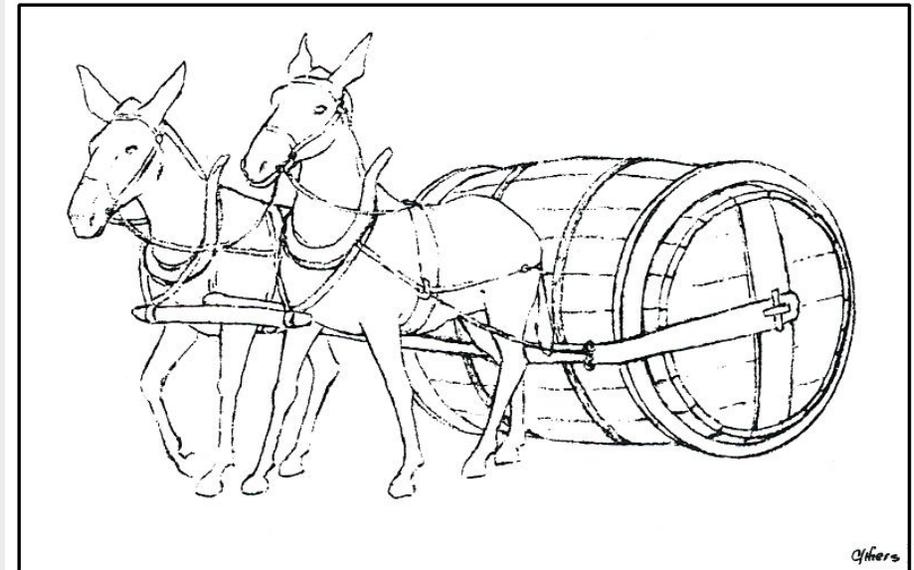
Article 1 of this treaty stipulated that the Creeks would cede all the remaining land between the Ocmulgee and Oconee Rivers not already ceded under the 1802 Treaty of Wilkinson with the pretext that an identifiable boundary (i.e. the banks of the Ocmulgee River) was needed so the US government could stem the flow of settlers entering the Creek territory and taking possession of "empty land."²⁵ The Creeks valued this land but due once again to the trade debts were forced to give it up. It is likely that everyone involved knew a river boundary would not stop settlers if they wanted the land on the other side!



http://faculty.montgomerycollege.edu/gyouth/FP_examples/student_examples/truc_huynh/images/5-presidency/louisiana2.jpg

Article 2 of the 1805 Treaty of Washington required that the Creeks allow the United States to construct a horse path from the Ocmulgee River to the Mobile River to shorten the communication time between Washington City and New Orleans. (Note: The government did not need permission for the rest of the horse path since it was already American property.) The treaty stipulated that the horse path be 4 to 6 feet wide with logs cut and placed across the waterways. Americans were to be guaranteed the right to travel along this route unmolested.²⁶

This path was opened in 1806.²⁷ Within four years, Willis and his family would use this route to cross the land of the Creek Nation. It has to have been a very difficult venture, one none of us today could even imagine. Descriptions of travel across the route during this period indicate that it was very unlikely the Simmons family traveled in wagons as they would have been too wide and bulky to navigate across the narrow path. They most likely carried their possessions on a few pack animals. We know they traveled with at least two children. Mason, their oldest son was born March 5, 1805 and would have been under 5 on the trip. William, born December 31, 1807 would have been a two year old toddler. The 1810 Amite County, Mississippi Census, taken several months after Willis and Jane arrived in Mississippi indicated a third son. Their third son who made it to adulthood (Willis) was born December 17, 1810 after the census was taken. This leads one to believe they must have lost a young boy soon after arriving in Mississippi. Nothing is known about him.²⁸

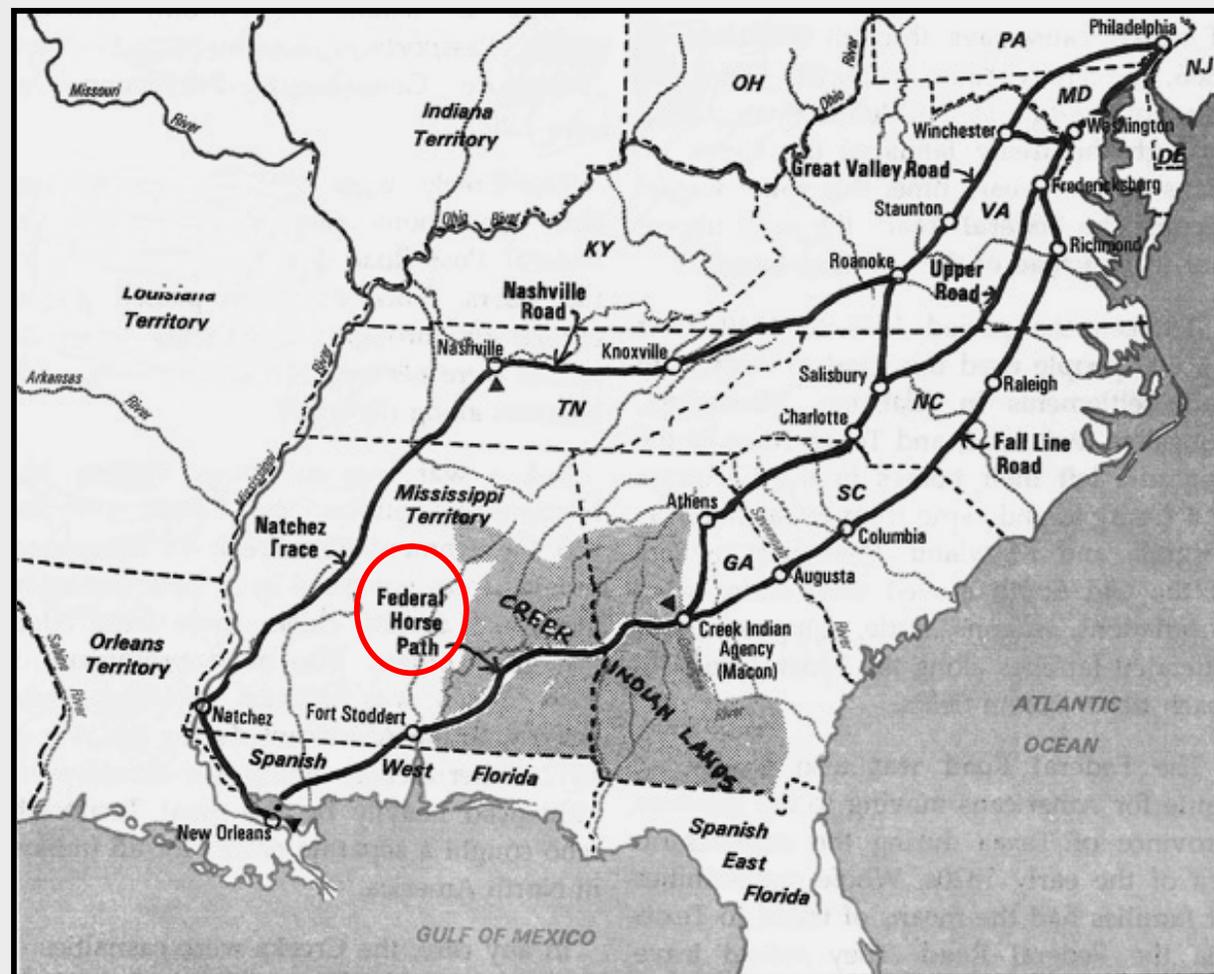


<http://www.mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/images/333t.jpg>

Drawn by Charles J. Hiers

According to the Mississippi Historical Society, this unusual contraption, called a rolling hogshead, was sometimes used by settlers unable to afford or use a better means of transporting possessions. The barrel would be attached so it would roll behind the horse, oxen, or even the people pulling it.²⁹

Notice that the Horse Path did not travel to the town of Mobile but went to Fort Stoddert which was located on the Mobile River as specified in the treaty. This fort was established in 1799 and provided travelers a place to rest and purchase provisions.³⁰



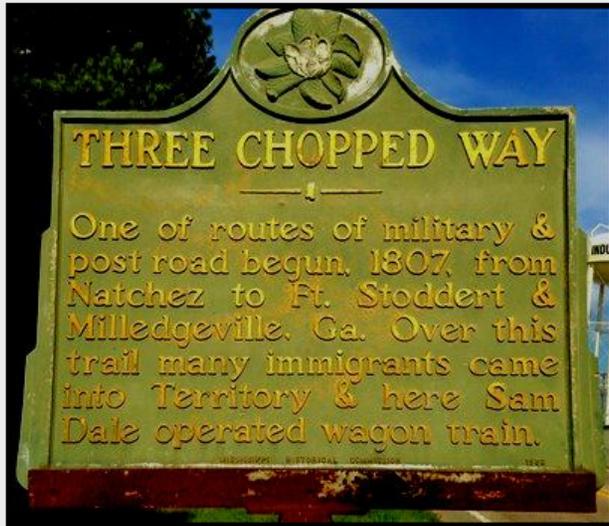
In 1809/10, when Willis traveled from Georgia to Mississippi, he did not travel on the Federal Road as many people have written. The Federal Road was not constructed until 1811. By that time, Willis had already been in the Mississippi Territory over a year. Instead, he definitely traveled over the horse path.

By 1811, it was obvious to the Federal Government that a wider, smoother road was required across Georgia and the Mississippi Territory. Large parts of the original Horse Path were used to make the new, improved route and renamed the Federal Road.³¹

<http://www.genealogyblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Roads-from-Philadelphia-to-New-Orleans-by-1806-Map-590pw.jpg>

Willis received his passport at the best possible time. As many early farmers had learned, winter was the most opportune time to relocate. This would allow time for harvesting the fall crops and arriving in time for the spring planting which would be essential to see the family through the first year after arrival. With this in mind, Willis and his family probably left Georgia some time between late October and December of 1809.

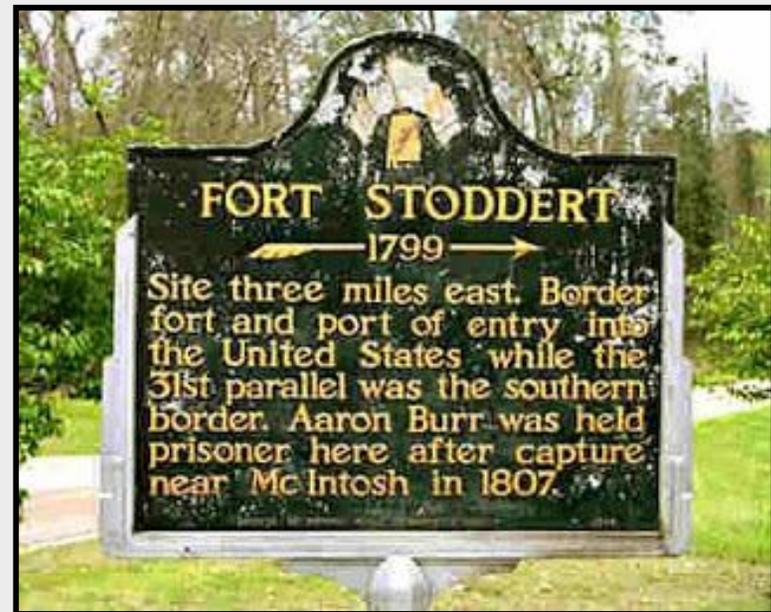
In researching books and records for this document, it was discovered that there are many differing opinions by authors about the actual routes of the trails used to get from the Federal Horse Path to what is today south Mississippi. There were two that were frequently mentioned.



<http://img.groundspeak.com/waymarking/display/d1e3675a-991d-42b8-91d2-ad24176139e9.jpg>

The most likely route available to Willis Simmons would have taken him further south before turning west. This trail branched off at Fort Stoddert on the western shore of the Mobile River.

One that ran north of the future Pike County was called the Three Chopped Way. This trail ran from an Indian village named Burnt Corn on the Federal Horse Path west toward Natchez.³² It followed an old Indian trail called the Natchez-Creek Trail.³³



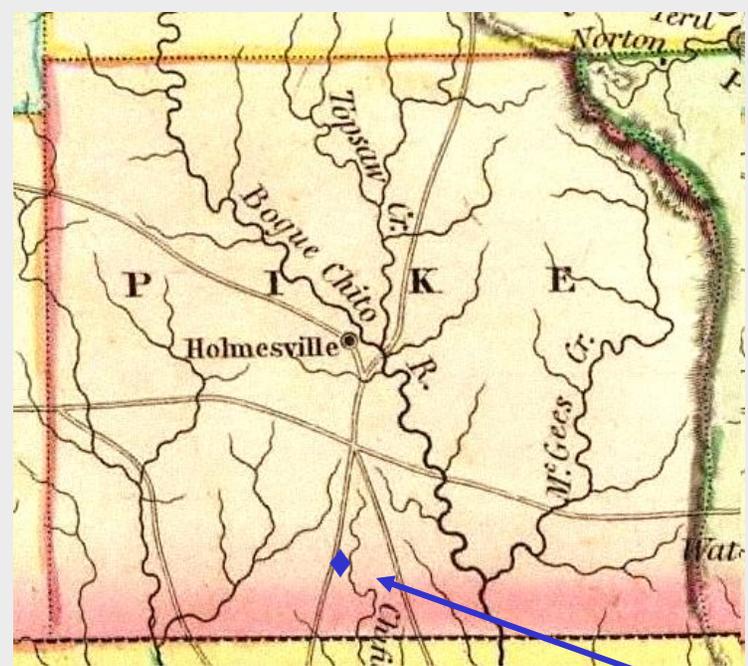
<http://www.alabamapioneers.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Ft-Stoddert-sign.jpg>

From Fort Stoddert it went west and actually for a time seems to have followed the trail blazed by Andrew Ellicott when he was surveying the 31st parallel. This trail, sometimes called the Natchez to Mobile Trace, can be seen on this section of an 1823 map of Mississippi and Louisiana. It traveled through what would later be the counties on the state's southern border including Amite, Pike, Walthall, and Marion Counties.³⁴



Both images: Tanner, Henry S. *Louisiana and Mississippi 1823*. Scale 1:1.1E+06. "David Rumsey Map Collection." Web. 14 April 2017.

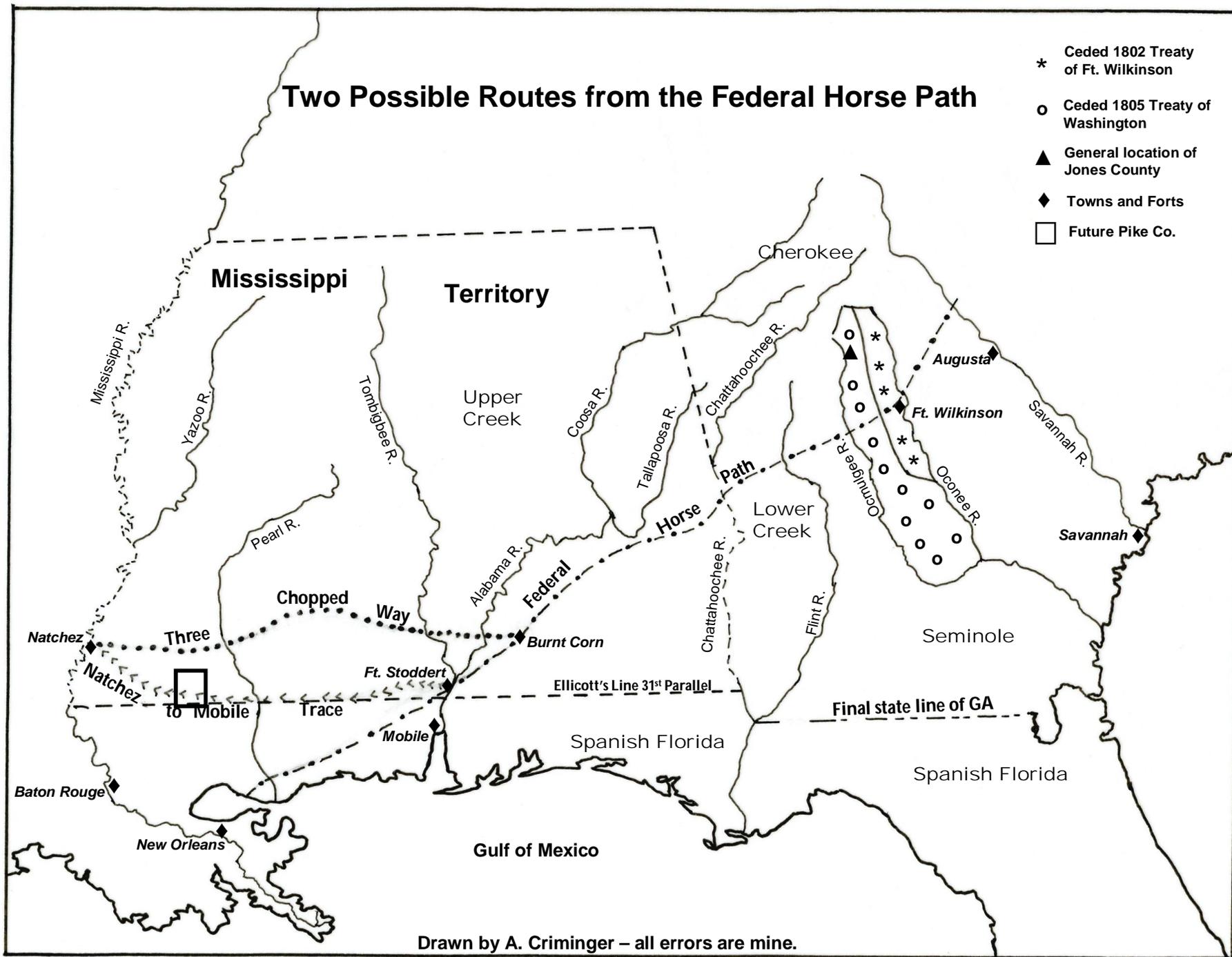
As can be seen on the enlarged map of Pike County, the trail went near the area where Willis and Jane would make their home. It would have been wonderful if they had kept some sort of record of their travels and experiences. But like the majority of people in their situation, they were more concerned with making it through each day safely. One can only imagine how hard it was for Willis to provide food and safety while Jane cared for the children and cooked meals with whatever was on hand. Exhaustion and uncertainty must have been their constant companion!



Location of Willis's land later known as Simmonsville.

Two Possible Routes from the Federal Horse Path

- * Ceded 1802 Treaty of Ft. Wilkinson
- Ceded 1805 Treaty of Washington
- ▲ General location of Jones County
- ◆ Towns and Forts
- Future Pike Co.



Drawn by A. Criminger – all errors are mine.

Here is one, final interesting side story that was uncovered while researching the Georgia Journal!



This list also appeared on Tuesday, April 14, 1818.

A List of Letters,
Remaining in the Post Office at Milledgeville, Ga. on the 1st of April, 1818.

Henry Stowell	S
Harberd Stephens	James Scott
Rev'd R. Stone 9	Jesse Simmons
Thomas Sharpless	Littleton Spivey
John G. Slappy	Francis Slaughter
John Stone	Jane G. Simmons
Thomas Storment 2	T. Strickland
William Shepherd	Sam'l Slaughter
	Thomas Stephens 2.

Jane and Willis Simmons had already been in Mississippi 8 years by the time this was posted in the Milledgeville paper. With the middle initial given, there is no mistaking who this letter was for – none other than our Jane Goslin Simmons. It would be wonderful to have a peek at this letter today.

Whichever path Willis and Jane took on their final leg to the Mississippi Territory, we know they made it safely, became upstanding citizens of Pike County, and today have many, many descendants.

There have always been two different Simmons families living the Pike County, Mississippi. One is referred to as the Bala Chitto Simmons family who descend from Richard Simmons. The other is the Silver Creek Simmons family who descend from Willis Simmons. Over many generations, these two completely unrelated Simmons families have formed many family bonds. In 1967, the memories of Robert L. Simmons (1847-1939) of the Bala Chitto family were published by his son, Hansford L. Simmons. This small volume contains an amazing account of his life and times. One hundred copies were printed and I am the proud owner of copy number 20. On the final page of the book, Robert Simmons mentions Uncle Willis. Though Robert himself was not directly related to Willis, his wife, Sarah Louisa Fortenberry was the granddaughter of Willis Simmons. Consequently, Robert and Sarah's descendants are related to both the Silver Creek and the Bala Chitto Simmons families!

Robert's final paragraph in his book reads:

" I remember Uncle Willis Simmons so well. He was a grand, good old man and used to visit in our home so often. He lived 7 miles from us and would ride out there and spend a day or two. He rode horseback, too, would ride anywhere he wished to go. I loved so much for him to come and hear him talk about old times. He was a great talker. He came from somewhere in the east where all other emigrants who settled here came from."³⁵

I have always wished that Robert Simmons had written one more page to his memories recounting a few of those stories!



www.findagrave.com Willis Simmons, Sr. Simmons Home Place Cemetery, Simmonsville, Pike County, Mississippi

Edna Simmons Campbell

1897- 1978



This document is dedicated to the memory of Aunt Edna. She became a teacher and rose through the ranks to become a leading educator, not just in Mississippi but nationally. In 1941, she married Doak Campbell. She helped her husband, who was president of Florida State College, transform it into the university it is today. Because of their love and support of athletics, the football stadium was named “Doak Campbell Stadium.” Aunt Edna was a charming lady who had a smile and kind words for everyone she met. She loved her family and was especially revered by her sister Mae’s six sons. Edna would be proud that her passion for family history has been passed down through two more generations!

Edna with nephew,
Jack Fortenberry,
son of Ferman and
Mae (Simmons)
Fortenberry.



I am bound to them,
Though I cannot look into their eyes
Or hear their voices.
I honor their history.
I cherish their lives.
I will tell their story.
I will remember them.

author unknown

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