

TRACKS
Across
BUTTS COUNTY

Preface

My Mother was born and raised two miles from Seven Islands on the Ocmulgee River, and my grandfather lived there for all his life. From the time that I was five years old until access was denied, we camped, hunted, and explored the Butts County side of the river and the river itself from the Jackson Dam to Dames Ferry. I was amazed at the Lamar's Mill installation and wondered about the ruins adjacent to it.

I have explored the Jasper County side of the river back when you had to have a good four-wheel drive or a trail bike to go from Ga. 16 to Ga. 83. We were very much aware of the old rock house that seemed so out of place and the rock "ditch" beside the road.

As a youngster I knew Indian Springs as a great place to have class picnics and go swimming at Hoard's casino and pool. I was aware of the big old two-story house across the road from the swimming pool. I thought that it was where William McIntosh lived and was killed.

The absolute first time that I ever heard of Seven Islands was an article in the county paper (sometime after 2000) indicating that someone wanted to test the interest of the public in forming a Seven Islands. Society.

I don't believe the society ever got off the ground but it sure got my interest up! Over the past two years I have read, interviewed, and "stomped" through the woods in an attempt to find out as much as I can about the history of the area in which we live. The more I discovered the more I realized that I had missed.

This booklet is the result of what I believe took...pl~It is, however, a work-in-progress. As better information becomes available Tam-open to change.

Thank you for your support of the Butts County Historical Society through the purchase of this booklet. I sincerely hope that you enjoy it, and that you will pass it on to the next generations in the hope that the memory of our unique and colorful past will remain alive.

AI Thrasher

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History of Inhabitation

The Woodland People

The Woodland People were rather small of stature. They were the descendants of Ice-Age hunters and gatherers. There is some evidence of their use of rather primitive fish traps. The consensus is that they built no structures for shelter, but used poles and skins as crude houses. Although they formed small bands to facilitate hunting, they had no known system of government. Their origin is a matter of speculation, but there is carbon-dated evidence that confirms their presence here more than eleven thousand years ago.

During much of their presence, bison, elk, and bear roamed freely in this area as well as the wildlife species, which are familiar today. Whether the Woodland people simply died out or were assimilated into the Mississippian culture is unknown. Of the examples of stone tools, arrow points, spear points, etc., available, those made by the Woodland People are truly exquisite! Their work is distinguished by items that are extremely thin and having delicate detail. The pottery attributed to these people is best described as crude. There is no evidence that this civilization cultivated crops. Nothing is known about their beliefs and worship practices.

The Mississippians

The Mississippians were a race of master farmers, fishermen, and mound builders. Their presence is verified from about 1000 BC until the mid-1500's AD. They had a strong central government as well as local government in satellite communities which "radiated" from the primary settlement much as the spokes of a wheel. Their mounds were both extensive and small. They were constructed as burial sites for the honored dead as well as bases for the wooden and bark structures built for shelter, storage, and religious purposes. Although the origin of the race is unknown, the Mississippians in central Georgia were the result of migration from the central Mississippi River valley.

Principal crops were corn, beans, and squash. These people settled on the flat river bottoms. Their early methods of cultivation consisted of burning the area and sticking a hole in the ground for a single seed. Later cultivation left traces of row crops. They were fishermen. Carbon dated evidence from remnants of existing fish traps in the rivers and large creeks predates the Creeks. The Mississippians were traders. There are artifacts indicating trade from the seacoast to the Great Lakes region. The Mississippians were both basket makers and accomplished potters. It is said that they had all the traits of great societies of the time except written language.

DeSoto described these people and their cities, but observed that the entire civilization was in a state of decline. In 1540 he observed only one city that was intact. These people were religious and paid tribute to spirits of the hunt and agriculture. It is thought that their primary tributes were to heavenly bodies such as the sun, moon, and stars. They were astronomers. Their structure, which housed the governing council meetings, incorporated an opening skyward that caused a shaft of sunlight to highlight the seat of the principal chief only on the days of the

summer and winter solstice. The reasons for their decline and extinction are not documented. There is little evidence that they had the warrior mind-set. Their principal settlements incorporated walls, moats, etc.. It is believed that they were principally defensive in nature and lacked the resolve and weapons to withstand an assault from a stronger, more aggressive race such as the Creeks.

MuscogeanCreeks

The Mississippians were succeeded by the Muscogean Creeks. Muscogee is a Creek designation for those that live in the lower land. Little is documented about this transition or the origin of these people, but Native American tradition is that they moved from the far south to escape drought, In the writings of William Bartram they are described as, "A proud and haughty and arrogant race of men: they are brave and valiant in war, ambitious of conquest, restless and perpetually exercising their arms, yet magnanimous and merciful to a vanquished enemy, when he submits and seeks their friendship and protection ... " Bartram described the stature of the Creeks as ..• "Women who were short, but surprisingly well proportioned with regular features and dark eyes". The men were described as ... "quite tall, many over six feet, with coloring much darker than the Cherokees and other tribes" ... that he had visited.

The Creeks' (again, according to Bartam in the early 1700's) ... "houses are constructed of a kind of frame. In the first place, strong corner pillars are fixed in the ground, with others somewhat less, ranging on a line between them; these are strengthened by cross pieces of timber, and the whole with the roof is covered with ... bark".... Bartram spent several weeks visiting the Creeks in around 1720 to study their farming and fishing methods. Bartram estimated the Creek population living between Seven Islands and Herds Creek near Lloyd Shoals to be about fourteen hundred.

The Creeks were accomplished farmers, hunters, fishermen, and traders. The Creeks constructed fish traps at every feasible location on the Ocmulgee River. Evidence of these traps remains at several locations including the base of the "Big Island" at Seven Islands and under Jackson Lake. It is well documented that the trap under Jackson Lake was used by the Mississippians, the Creeks, and the Europeans.

Note: There was a cooperative arrangement between the Butts County residents and the Jasper County residents to share use of the trap on alternate weeks. This arrangement continued until the gates at the Lloyd Shoals Dam were closed to form the lake. There is a record of a 164-pound sturgeon that was speared from this trap.

The Creeks had strong central and satellite governments. There was a chief of each town (there were 56 towns at time of the McIntosh treaty, but only 8 towns signed the treaty) who was called the *Mico*. There were area Chiefs as well as an overall chief, sub chief, and war chief. These positions were held by males, not for life as was previously thought, but until an election was called. Often the Mico was succeeded by a nephew. Property was inherited through the females, as was membership in a specific clan. Politically, the women held more power than the men, and of course, spoke in council.

The Creeks, as many of the Native American nations, had an effective method of debating an issue in council. Depending on the local custom, either a rock or stick or feather was used to designate the recognized speaker. When holding the speaker's symbol you would not be interrupted. When you had passed the speaker's symbol, you would not speak again on the issue.

The Creeks believed in a singular superior being. To the Creeks, this deity was associated with fire and was called the Master of Breath or the One Above. The Creeks honored and paid tribute to other spirits as well. When an animal or bird was killed, it was required that a prayer be made to its spirit. There were also the spirits of the land, water, and sky.

The first account of activity between the Creeks and the Europeans is detailed in the journals of traders from the settlement of Charles Towne in South Carolina. As early as 1672 these traders traveled the Oakfuskee Path to the Seven Islands (and beyond) to barter for deerskins and slaves captured in battle.

The Europeans

The Europeans first walked these lands in the mid 1500's. Records locate a string of Spanish Missions along the Altamaha River and up the Ocmulgee to around Hawkinsville. It is not believed that the Spanish had any sort of permanent presence as far north as the Seven Islands, but there is evidence of the passage of exploratory missions.

The English colonists (traders from the new settlement of Charles Towne in South Carolina) discovered the existing trading path between the first faUs on the Savannah River (Augusta) and the first falls on the Chattahoochee River (Lagrange). The English wrote of traveling on the Oakfuskee Path to trade with the Creeks at the Seven Islands and the creek town of Oakfuskee as early as 1672.

The English became the recipients of this area as result of two major treaties:

- ◆ The treaty of 1805 ceded the lands between the Oconee River and the Ocmulgee River. This sale did not include the Ocmulgee River.
- ◆ The 1825 treaty purchased almost all the lands from the east bank of the Ocmulgee River to the Flint River. Within this treaty are the provisions for perpetual public access to the "magic spring" (now known as Indian Springs), as well as a square mile of land that McIntosh reserved around the spring and another square mile on the west bank of the Ocmulgee in what is now Butts County.

The Africans

It is unclear when people of African descent first made tracks across Butts County. It is known that the Dutch were trafficking in African slaves at the new settlement of Charles Towne shortly after its founding in 1670. Not only were they selling slaves, but were also trading Africans for Native American slaves that had been obtained from the Creeks. The Dutch transported the Native American slaves to the Dutch islands in the Caribbean.

Some of the more prosperous Creek farmers (including William McIntosh) were known to own Muricin slaves in Butts County prior to the 1825 treaty.

The first census of Butts County in 1830 lists a total population of 4912 of which 1680 were slaves of African descent. There were an additional 7 African descendants who were listed *ss free*. One third of the county's population was of African descent. The 1860 census of Butts County reported that one of every two residents were of African descent.

It should be noted that conclusive evidence exists confirming the presence of each of the above named and described peoples. There is little evidence that documents the transitions (except the Creeks-to-the-Europeans). It is suggested that anyone interested in these transitions read the first few chapters of Edward Rutherford's novel of England "Sarum". It is easy to imagine a parallel. There is also evidence of intermarriage producing offspring with characteristics of both races. Indeed, among present day locals, it is quite easy to talk to those who trace their ancestry back to the Creeks as well as to the Europeans and Africans.