

## Places, Trails, and Roads

### Seven Islands

Seven Islands is not a point on a map, but rather an area of about three-quarters of a mile on the Ocmulgee River. It lies about 5 miles downriver from Lloyd Shoals, the site of the Jackson Lake Dam. English traders from Charles Towne in South Carolina wrote in their journals of trading with the Creeks at Seven Islands as they traveled along the Oakfuskee Path in 1672.

William Bartram, the New England naturalist, wrote of spending several idyllic weeks with the Creeks at Seven Islands about 1720 as he studied their farming and fishing methods. Bartram was quite impressed with their methods, and he estimated their population along the river between Seven Islands and Lloyd Shoals to be about fourteen hundred.

Seven Islands is historically significant. From the site of Lamar's Ferry to the site of Smith's Ferry (formerly Roaches):

- The Seven Islands Stage crossed.
- The Oakfuskee Path crossed.
- The right wing of Sherman's Union Army crossed.
- The manufacturing centers of Smith Mills (formerly Roaches Mills) and Planters Factory/Ocmulgee Mills were located on the Jasper County and Butts County sides respectively. It is estimated that, at the time of the Union Army presence there were about four hundred people living at one or the other of the manufacturing centers.
- After the 1825 Treaty, the land office, which administered the distribution of the 4,700,000 acres of newly acquired land, was located at Seven Islands, Georgia, as were retail stores, lawyers, a doctor, and a post office.
- William Barrett Travis (of Alamo fame in Texas) married a local lady (Miss Kendrick) and worked in a law office at Seven Islands for just over two years during his migration from South Carolina to Alabama and on to Texas.

### The Oakfuskee Path

The origin of the Oakfuskee Path is unknown, but more logically product of the Creeks than of earlier civilizations. This early footpath connected falls on the Savannah River (now Augusta) to the large Creek city of Oakfuskee at the first falls on the Chattahoochee River (now LaGrange). The Oakfuskee Path served all the communities of the Upper Creeks, and so had to branch out in many directions from the main "trunk" to reach all of them.

A section of it crossed the Oconee River into Putnam County, then through Jasper County passing near New Hope Church, crossing the Ocmulgee near Wise Creek, headed north through Seven Islands, turned west to just south of Flovilla, on to Indian Springs, to Mount Vernon Road, and exited Butts County at the present intersection of GA 16 and 1-75 by way of Mount Vernon Road and High Falls Road.

This path (and the other roads that overlay it at Indian Springs) passes immediately adjacent to the Indian Springs Hotel. This proximity to the stagecoach

road is the reason for the hotel's location. Note: The Hotel was built in the early 1820's by Joel Bailey and General William McIntosh to answer the needs of stagecoach travelers and visitors wishing to sample the wonders of the "healing waters" of the spring. Although McIntosh maintained a room in the hotel, he never actually lived there.

After the final treaty and as the Creeks gradually moved back, it was natural that the settlers and traders took possession, cleared and improved the Oakfuskee Path, and introduced wagon and stagecoach usage. Hard evidence of stagecoach usage is evident just east of Griffin as one of the "Double Cabins Inns" still stands.

#### The McIntosh Trail

William McIntosh was a wealthy man. He was half Creek (royalty on his mother's side hence the flow of property in the matriarchal society) and half Scottish. It is said that he embraced aspects of both societies and became an astute businessman, wily politician, and generally knew how to function in both the Creek and European settlers' worlds. He was well known in Washington, and rose to the rank of Brigadier General in the War of 1812.

He had extensive farming operations on the Ocmulgee River in southern Butts County as well as three separate plantations near Carrollton and Newnan on the Chattahoochee River. These plantations were overseen by three wives-- two Creeks, and one of European descent. As such, he was required to make frequent trips between his holdings.

The McIntosh Trail began at his farm in southern Butts County and proceeded almost due north until it joined the Oakfuskee Path on the southern edge of Flovilla. It then proceeded to just past the remaining Double Cabin Inn east-of Griffin where it splits and heads to Carroll County. The path through Spalding County is known as McIntosh Road. There is good evidence that this road became an important wagon and stagecoach route.

#### The Seven Islands Stagecoach Road

Prior to the 1805 Treaty, the huge area between the Oconee River and the Flint Rivers was not a part of either the state of Georgia nor the United States. This so-called "unlocated territory" and the mountains of North Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee formed a formidable obstacle to travel between West Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana and the rest of the eastern states.

In 1790 President George Washington invited the principal chiefs of the so-called Eastern Civilized Tribes of the Native Americans to New York City (then the capital of the United States) primarily to negotiate safe passage of stagecoach traffic through these "unlocated territories". The Upper Creeks agreed to allow stage traffic to cross the Oconee River at Greensboro, cross the Ocmulgee at Seven Islands, join the Oakfuskee Path to cross the Flint River at Flat Shoals, proceed to the Chattahoochee, and on to Montgomery, Alabama. This made the Seven Islands Road the earliest of the stagecoach routes in the county.

There are sections of this road in Jasper County that are virtually unspoiled and that still bear the name.

#### The Alabama Road

Established in the late 1820's, the Alabama Road was a part of the most direct route of travel and transport of mail from New York to New Orleans. The Alabama Road entered Butts County from Covington, Georgia. With stops at Worthville and Stark, it followed the old route of what was formerly Higgins Road to just north of Flovilla. Much of this old road is abandoned and the remaining portion is now known as Bob Thomas Road. Joining Highway 42, it proceeded to the front of the Indian Springs Hotel where it joined the Oakfuskee Path to just short of High Falls Road where it swung south to High Falls to a ford above the falls. The Alabama Road continued on High Falls Road until it joined highway 36 through Barnesville to near Thomaston where it bore north of town and crossed the Flint River at Dripping Rocks. Much of the Road in Upson and Meriwether counties is still named the Old Alabama Road.

It is noted in the Butts County History" ... several famous statesmen are known to have traveled the Old Alabama Road. Among them were the famed Revolutionary War ally the Marquis de LaFayette, General Elijah Clark, Henry Clay, Robert Toombs, Alexander H. Stephens, Jefferson Davis, and Presidents Martin Van Buren, James K. Polk, and Andrew Jackson."

#### The Covington to Macon Stage Line

The exact date for the establishment of this stage line is unclear, but history records a cash settlement for an accident that occurred in 1835. This route followed the route of the Alabama Road to the Indian Springs Hotel, Instead of joining the Oakfuskee Path there it proceeded south on the route of the present highway 42 through Forsyth and on to Macon.

#### Stagecoaches

##### Early Stagecoach Travel

Jonathan Wardwell of Boston owned the first stagecoach in the American colonies. His coach first made the trip from Boston to Providence, RI in 1718. The first long-distance stagecoach travel is credited to Levi Pease when he established service between Boston and New York in 1784. Early stagecoaches were merely Conestoga type wagons that had been (rather crudely) converted to seat passengers.

#### Conestoga Wagons and Stagecoaches

The Conestoga type wagons were described in their day as follows: "These wagons had a boat-shaped body with a curved bottom, which fitted them specially for mountain use, for in them freight remained firmly in place at whatever angle the body might be. The rear end (tail gate) could be lifted from the sockets; on it hung the feed trough for the horses. On the side of the body was a small tool chest with a slanting lid. This held hammer, wrench, hatchet, pincers, and other simple tools. Under the rear axletree were suspended a tar bucket and water pail. The wheels

had (steel) tires sometimes a foot broad. The wagon bodies were arched over with six or eight bows, of which the middle ones were the lowest. These were covered with a strong, pure white hempen cover corded down strongly at the sides and ends. Four to six tons was the usual load for such a vehicle".

Although normal loads were pulled by four or six horses, ten horse teams were observed hauling extra heavy loads during the war of 1812.

Elsewhere the Conestoga wagons converted for passenger service were described as: "long machines with (seats) hung on leather braces (straps), with three seats across, of a sufficient length to accommodate three persons each, who all sit with their faces toward the horses. The driver sits under cover, without any division between him and the passengers; and thence is room for a person to sit each side of him. The mail is placed in a box below the seat. There is (normally) no guard. The passengers' luggage is put behind the seats, or tied on behind the stage. They put nothing on top, and they take no outside passengers. The stages (tops) are slightly built, and the roof suspended on pillars; with a curtain to be let down or folded up at pleasure".

Another description of these stages is as follows: " ... the American stagecoach, which is of like construction throughout the country, is calculated to hold twelve persons, who sit on benches placed across with their faces toward the horses. The front seat holds three, one of whom is the driver. There are no doors at the sides, the passengers get in over the front wheels. The first get the seat behind the rest, the most esteemed seat because you can rest your shaken frame against the back part of the wagon. Women are generally indulged with it; and it is laughable to see them crawling to this seat. If they are late, they have to straddle over the men seated in front of them".

Another reference states that this was typical for stagecoaches until the introduction of the Concord stagecoach in 1827.

#### The Concord Stagecoach

The Concord stagecoach was invented and manufactured by the Abbot-Downing company of Concord, MA. beginning in 1827. More than 3000 vehicles were manufactured by 1928, and they were shipped to Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as becoming the standard throughout America--both east and west.

Modeled after the private coaches of the aristocracy in England and France, The Concord was beautiful, durable, and featured innovation well ahead of its time. Characterized by its "bathtub shape" with ornate decorative moldings, and bright paint schemes including custom paintings of landscapes, the Concord was truly distinctive. The leather "thorough brace" supported the entire 2,700 lb. vehicle plus its load on massive leather straps. The resulting ride was described by Mark Twain as a "ride in a baby carriage". Another passenger of the time considered the

Concord the "only perfect" method of transportation built up to that time.

The standard coach was designed to carry nine passengers (two were in fold-down "jump seats") inside the coach on upholstered seats. There were, however, some twelve-passenger coaches built, and at least one twenty passenger Concord is known to have been produced. Doors were provided on either side, and leather curtains rolled down for protection from the weather. The driver (and guard when used) rode uncovered on a perch mid-height in the front. Under the driver's feet was a "boot" where mail and other valuables were carried. There was also a "boot" on the rear for luggage. The top was rigid and strong enough for more luggage and some freight. A metal rail around the perimeter of the roof retained baggage and allow overflow or "economy class" passengers to ride on top.

The coming of the railroads signaled the demise of stagecoach travel in central Georgia.