

Jackson County Historical Society News

VOLUME SIXTEEN, NUMBER ONE

OCTOBER 2008

The Oconee War

Georgia's Push into the Hunting Lands of the Creeks

The Jackson County Historical Society will meet at the Commerce Cultural Center on October 19 at 2:30 p.m. The program will be presented by Anthropologist, Steven Scurry, on "The Oconee War - Georgia's Push into the Hunting Lands of the Creeks". He has spent his years since graduating from the University of Georgia studying the Oconee Valley and it's inhabitants.



For information call Tina at 706-757-3750.

Directions:

From I-85, take Exit 147, (Highway 98, Commerce/Maysville) Travel into Commerce, take a left on Highway 326 (State Street), turn right on Cherry Street. The Arts Center is on the corner of Bowden Street.

Newsletter

The Jackson County Historical Society News is published quarterly and mailed before the next meeting. Back issues can be obtained for \$3.00 each plus postage. Some of the past newsletters can be viewed online at: rootsweb.com/~gajackso/

The Historical Society's collection of books, files and research materials are housed in the Heritage Room of the Commerce Public Library.

Queries will be published in the next issue. Please send by December 15, 2008.

Dues for 2008–2009 year

The dues year runs from July to July. Checks can be mailed to:

Jackson County Historical Society
P. O. Box 1234, Commerce, GA 30529:

Individual –\$15
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Introduction biography by Steven Scurry

Steven Scurry

Family lore and outdoor adventures ignited a lifelong interest in southern homelands.

On graduating from a boarding school in the Georgia mountains, I set out across the country to find what remains of Native America. I found far more than I expected and the places and people encountered in this youthful pilgrimage made a lifelong impression on me. I spent two years attending Western Carolina College gloriously tucked into a deep Blue Ridge Mountain fold, holding a weekend job on the Cherokee reservation exploiting tourists. The brief time there, fortified a notion that Native American narratives are deeply woven into the ground, some plowed, some buried and largely unseen. One could easily defer to the notion of a haunted country, especially here in Georgia, but that is too insubstantial. The narrative is in the curve of a river, the odor of a crushed leaf, the colors that surprise you in a found feather, the texture of rock, in the pensive mutterings of Bluejay, it's in the tattered wings of a dragonfly patrolling my front yard on a brief "Indian Summer" day. It seems that these narratives are only perceivable when your orientation is just so---like turning a dull stone in the sun, when light suddenly pops off like a camera flash.

This is what I brought with me when I transferred to the University of Georgia. I stuck with my interest in Anthropology through to a degree, but the land remained my principal study. I spent "off time" getting lost in Oglethorpe County, leaving the worn paths in Oconee National Forest using innumerable streams as pathways into new country. Slowly, a narrative began to emerge from this wanderings. But it was in the letters of a great uncle (7 generations removed) that I began to trace the outlines of a tragic struggle over the future of the Oconee Valley. The conflict found its way into the archives of Spain, France, Great Britain, the United States, as well as Georgia and the Creek nation. Even today its embedded in the place-names scattered throughout the basin: Sparta, Fort Creek, Clarke County, Jack's Creek, Shoulderbone, Tallasse Shoals, Troublesome Creek, Cherokee Corner and elsewhere. A rich oral history lingers among the local elders still among us.

The war narrative emerged from a more organized study, and led me to an earlier era in Creek/Georgia relations about which one Creek leader then characterized

as a tree and vine growing up together. This apt analogy makes the story of the Oconee War all the more poignant. What happened to that tree and vine? What happened to this Beloved Land?

Characters from the Oconee War

excerpt from The New Georgia Encyclopedia, Carol Ebel, Armstrong Atlantic State University

George Mathews (1739-1812)

George Mathews, a veteran of the Continental army, migrated to Wilkes County from Virginia between 1783 and 1784. He quickly rose to service as a state legislator, governor, and member of the U.S. Congress.

Early Life and Career

Mathews was born in 1739 to Ann Archer and John Mathews, Ulster immigrants, and spent his formative years in Augusta County, Virginia. His family diligently sought recognition as members of the western Virginia gentry, and Mathews exerted his efforts in economic, civil, and military affairs. He joined his elder brother, Sampson, in a business partnership that included land speculation, property leasing, agricultural, and mercantile operations. The brothers' enterprise extended from Staunton, Virginia, to the Greenbriar district of western Virginia and grew to include an extensive Atlantic trade network. Mathews used his circles of influence to obtain appointment to the Augusta Parish vestry, as a county magistrate, and as high sheriff.

As Virginia supported the growing rebellion against Great Britain, Mathews eagerly sought a military command. Revolutionary leaders of the colony applauded his persuasive and skillful leadership as a militia captain during the 1774 Battle of Point Pleasant, and by 1777 Mathews obtained appointment as colonel of the Ninth Virginia Regiment. His troops were assigned to Continental service under General George Washington, but during the Battle of Germantown in Pennsylvania, the entire regiment was either killed or captured. Mathews remained a prisoner of war until December 1781.

Settling in Georgia

Shortly after his release Mathews rejoined the Continental army in Georgia and South Carolina. His sojourn

there provided an opportunity to view the rich lands of the Georgia upcountry. By January 1783, Mathews worked with several Virginians, including Colonel George Rootes, Francis Willis, and John Marks, to petition the state legislature for a block grant of 200,000 acres in the Georgia backcountry on which to settle 30 to 100 Virginia families. But assembly members rejected the creation of such an extensive tract. Mathews opted to purchase property in the Goose Pond region of Wilkes County, Georgia, near the Broad River, and obtained additional state lands for his revolutionary service. He returned to Virginia and encouraged family, friends, and former compatriots to settle in Wilkes County.

Mathews eliminated most of his mercantile connections upon his move to Georgia. He lived in a log cabin with his wife, Anne Polly Paul, and their eight children, John, Charles Lewis, George, William, Ann, Jane, Margaret, and Rebecca. As in Virginia, Mathews sought to create an image of a member of the slaveholding planter elite. He sought entrance into the public and political life of the Georgia backcountry and employed a strong network of wartime associates, friends, family, and economic contacts to achieve his goals. Mathews quickly obtained appointment as a Wilkes County justice and as a commissioner for the new town of Washington, and he successfully stood as a candidate to the Georgia Assembly in 1787. Legislators took advantage of his reputation as an aggressive military leader and Continental officer and elected Mathews as governor for 1787-88.

The Georgia Governorship and the Yazoo Land Fraud

As the new chief executive Mathews chafed at the restrictions placed upon the independence of the governor by the Georgia Constitution of 1777, which prevented his quick response to border conflicts with the Spanish and Creek Indians. His term in office prompted an advocacy for stronger state and national government, and Mathews served as a member of the 1787 state convention to ratify the new federal constitution. The following year western residents elected Mathews as a member to the House of Representatives. In spite of a lackluster term, defeat in 1791 by a land speculation faction called the Combined Society, and failure to win a federal senatorial seat in 1792, Mathews rebuilt political support and maneuvered legislative election as governor in 1793.

During Mathews's second administration Georgia

faced renewed Creek raids along the frontier. A lack of assembly and federal military funding frustrated his defense plans for a chain of blockhouses along Georgia's frontier, as did the actions of a fellow Wilkes County resident, Elijah Clarke, who posed as a French agent and established an illegal settlement in Creek lands called the Trans-Oconee Republic. Mathews, conscious of maintaining strong political support, may have turned to the use of land grants as a means of retaining popularity. He continued to practice a policy of his predecessors, known historically as the Pine Barren Speculation, and granted extensive tracts—some as large as 40,000 acres—in Glynn, McIntosh, Montgomery, Washington, Effingham, Franklin, and Liberty counties.

In 1795 private land companies revived a failed 1789 effort to purchase the state's western land claims extending to the Mississippi River. At first Mathews stood firm against signing the Yazoo land bill, but earlier activities as a land speculator and his desire to maintain public approval may have prompted Mathews's acceptance. His approval of the Yazoo sale catapulted him into political disgrace. Opponents, led by a former U.S. senator, James Jackson, accused Mathews of identification with the self-interest of speculation and of failing to exhibit Republican independence. Since most of the anti-Yazooists followed the principles of the rising Jeffersonian-Republican faction, Mathews' identification with the Federalists intensified those accusations.

Later Life and Career

Mathews sought a new life in Mississippi Territory, where he married a propertied widow, Mary Carpenter. His efforts to revive his political career included an 1812 commission by U.S. President James Madison to encourage an East Florida rebellion against the Spanish government and annexation of that territory to the United States. The revolt took place, and Mathews began to organize an attack on St. Augustine, Florida. But he worked too successfully. Members of the federal government felt it politically inexpedient to acquire Florida at that time, and the president issued a recall to Mathews. Mathews took the rejection of his Florida efforts personally. He started to travel to Washington, D.C., to confront the president but fell ill while passing through Augusta. There he died and was buried in the cemetery of the St. Paul Episcopal Church.

excerpt from The New Georgia Encyclopedia

Alexander McGillivray (ca. 1750-1793)

A controversial Creek Indian leader in the 1780s and 1790s, Alexander McGillivray was one of many Southeastern Indians with a Native American mother and European father. He played off European powers to protect Creek interests, initiated nationalist reforms within Creek society, and used trade to increase his own position on the southern frontier.

McGillivray was born probably in 1750 in Little Tallassee near present-day Montgomery, Alabama. The son of Scottish trader Lachlan McGillivray and a Creek woman named Sehoy, McGillivray grew up in matrilineal Creek society as a full member of his mother's Wind Clan. In addition to learning the unwritten rules and expectations of Native American society, McGillivray also became comfortable in the colonial society of his father. Before returning to Creek society in 1777, he had lived in Augusta, received a European-style education in Charleston and held a business apprenticeship in Savannah.

At the start of the American Revolution, McGillivray permanently returned to Little Tallassee and Creek society when the revolutionaries confiscated his Tory father's property in South Carolina. Upon his return to the Creeks McGillivray discovered that his linguistic ability and understanding of Creek and colonial societies allowed him to take on increasingly important roles. During the war he held a commission as a colonel in the British army, worked for British Superintendent of Indian Affairs John Stuart, as well as Stuart's successor, Thomas Brown, and orchestrated alliances between Creek and British forces. McGillivray embodied many of the wider cultural and economic changes within Southeastern Indian society. He participated in the deerskin trade, owned African slaves, herded cattle, embraced literacy, and ran a plantation. At the same time he participated in busk rituals (ceremonial activities of the new year and the change of seasons), followed the obligations of his matrilineal clan, and as the Creek custom, had multiple wives.

After the Revolution, McGillivray used his growing influence within Creek society to resist Georgia's attempt to confiscate three million acres of land and to otherwise protect what he viewed as the sovereign rights of the Creek people. He persuasively argued that Creeks had legitimate claims to their land. To these ends, in 1784 he negotiated the Treaty of Pensacola with Spain, which

protected Creek rights in Florida and guaranteed access to the British trading firm of Panton, Leslie, and Company. Afterward he relied on his alliance with Spain to help convince officials of Georgia and the United States to respect Creek boundaries.

McGillivray also used his influence to shape Creek domestic policy. The political decentralization of Creek society, which allowed villages to sign treaties as autonomous entities, threatened his ability to protect Creek sovereignty. As a result, McGillivray tried to create mechanisms of centralized power within the Creek Nation. This deviation from traditional village autonomy faced many threats from within Creek society. McGillivray used his connections as the nephew of Red Shoes, the Koasati leader, and his control of trade goods to weaken his opposition. The Yazoo land grants by Georgia and the federal government's desire to take control of Indian affairs led to President George Washington's signing of the 1790 Treaty of New York, in which the United States promised to defend Creek territorial rights. This treaty created a formal relationship between the United States and the Creek Nation and affirmed McGillivray's position as a legitimate national leader.

McGillivray died in Florida, February 13, 1793.



Alexander McGillivray or Tallassee Mico?
by John Trumbull, 1790

excerpt by Roger Collins

Hopothle Mico

Before any English settlers set foot on this land, Tallassee King walked and hunted upon what is now Kenney Ridge. He was one of fourteen Creek Indian chiefs who signed The Treaty of Augusta of 1783 which gave the State of Georgia the land from which Franklin County (and later Jackson, Clarke and other counties) were created. And today Tallassee Shoals and Tallassee Road bear his name.

When the English first came, the Muscogee Indian tribes lived in this part of Georgia. The Cherokees lived just to the north and west. Because the Muscogee villages were usually along creeks and other streams where they hunted and grew corn and squash, the English came to call these tribes "Creeks." The Creek Indians did not have a centralized government, but they did have chiefs among them, and the young Tallassee King was one. His Muscogee name was Hopothle Mico (literally "Tame King").

He lived very near here. Local history notes that he lived midway between Prospect Church and Gum Corner (the corner of John Collier Road). From there the land which is now Kenney Ridge lay out his front door.

Tallassee King placed his "X" upon a number of treaties giving land first to the British and then to the State of Georgia and the United States. During the Revolutionary War, he sided with the United States. But the new nation continued to need more land, and in 1783, with the Treaty of Augusta, Tallassee King was one of the leading chiefs who signed away the very land upon which he lived. In 1786 settlers established The Tallassee Colony on this bend of the Middle Oconee River.

The Treaty of Augusta was immediately disputed, and in 1790 the United States negotiated The Treaty of New York. Tallassee King, who now lived in Alabama, was among the delegation of chiefs and warriors who traveled by wagon to New York. They were received with much pomp and ceremony, and met with President Washington and others to negotiate the new treaty. The painter John Trumbull, who was doing his portrait of Washington at the time, sketched several of the Creeks including Tallassee King.

Tallassee King participated in later treaties, ceding further lands to the United States government. But he was already becoming "contrary," resentful of the gov-

ernment's efforts to "civilize" his people, and opposed to giving up more land. The Creek nation became divided between the "peaceful" Lower Creeks and the now "hostile" Upper Creeks. In August, 1813, the Creek War erupted in Alabama with Tallassee King as one of the main chiefs of the "Redsticks." The Creek War ended in 1814, but Tallassee King was killed in November, 1813, in a battle at Calabe Creek, Alabama.

excerpt from the New Georgia Encyclopedia

Elijah Clarke (1742-1799)

Among the few heroes of the Revolutionary War from Georgia, Elijah Clarke (sometimes spelled "Clark") was born in 1742, the son of John Clarke of Anson County, North Carolina. He married Hannah Harrington around 1763. As an impoverished, illiterate frontiersman, he appeared in the ceded lands, on what was then the northwestern frontier of Georgia, in 1773.

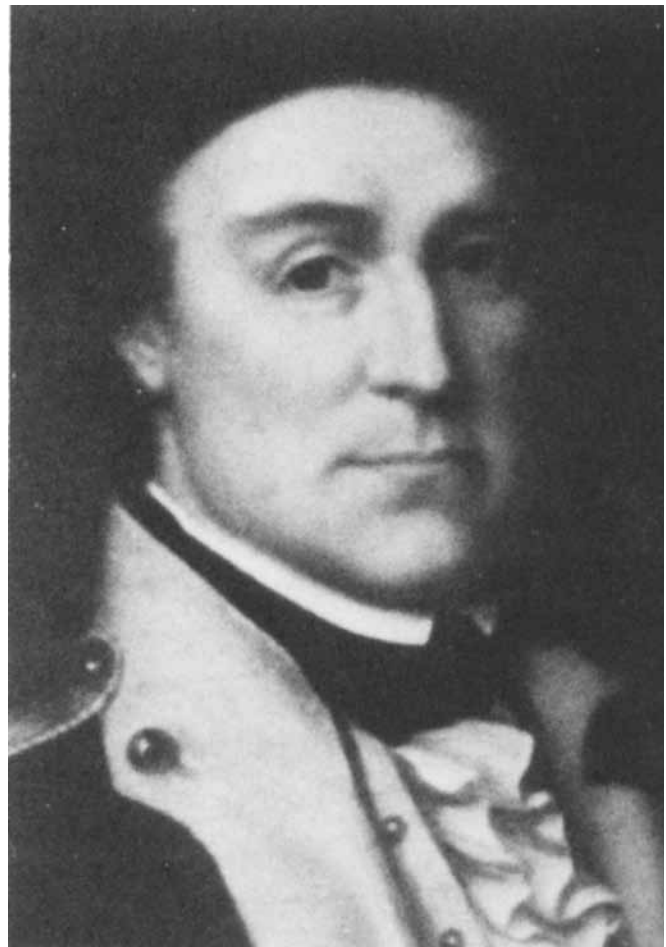
Clarke's name appears on a petition in support of the king's government in 1774. However, he subsequently joined the rebels and, as a militia captain, received a wound fighting the Cherokees in 1776. The following year, he commanded militia against Creek raiders. As a lieutenant colonel in the state minutemen, Clarke received another wound at the Battle of Alligator Bridge, Florida. Then on February 14, 1779, as a lieutenant colonel of militia, Clarke led a charge in the rebel victory at Kettle Creek, Georgia.

All of Georgia and most of South Carolina fell to the British in 1780. Elijah Clarke and thirty men passed through the Native American lands to continue the fight in the Carolinas. As a partisan, Clarke led frontier guerrillas in inflicting a heavy toll against the British and American Loyalists at Musgrove's Mill, Cedar Springs, Wofford's Iron Works, Augusta, Fishdam Ford, Long Cane, and Blackstocks. Although he was not present at the battles at King's Mountain and Cowpens, his campaigns were partially responsible for both of those major patriot victories. Besides receiving several battle wounds, Clarke also survived smallpox and the mumps during the Revolution. The state of Georgia rewarded his services with a plantation. He also obtained thousands of acres of land grants, some by questionable methods, and participated in the notorious Yazoo land fraud of the 1790s.

After the war Clarke served in the state assembly from

1781 to 1790, on the commission of confiscated estates, and in the state constitutional convention of 1789. He also acted as a commissioner for Georgia's treaties with Native American groups. As a general of militia, he led his men in defeating the Creeks at Jack's Creek, in present-day Walton County, on September 21, 1787. However, Clarke grew impatient with the failures of the national and state government to bring peace to the frontier and took matters into his own hands. He tried to form an independent republic, known today as the Trans-Oconee Republic, by seizing Creek lands on the Oconee frontier. At least twice, he became involved in plots to invade neighboring Spanish East Florida.

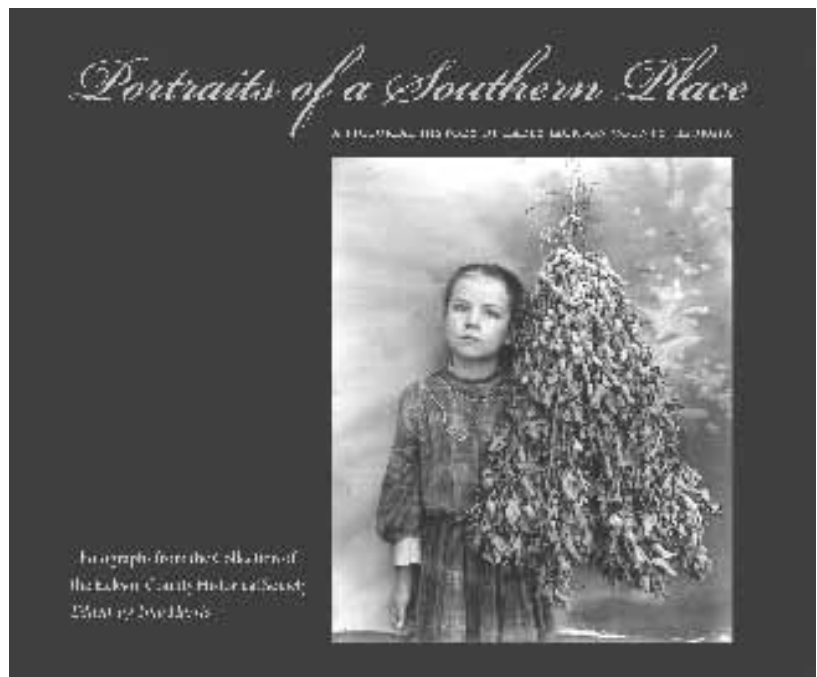
Disenchanted with a settled Georgia, discredited, and almost bankrupt, Elijah Clarke died in Augusta on December 5, 1799. Clarke County, on the former Oconee frontier, is named for him. Several of his descendants have been prominent in politics, including his son John Clark, governor of Georgia from 1819 to 1823.



Elijah Clarke, courtesy of the University of Georgia Library

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For more information call Tina Harris 706-757-3750 (tina313@mindspring.com)

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PARTNERING WITH HISTORIC PRESERVATION

As work begins on the restoration of the Jackson County Historic Courthouse, the Restoration Committee is urging all citizens, organizations, municipalities, and industry to participate. While the \$2 million set aside by the Board of Commissioners is a large sum, early estimates indicate the greater portion of that amount will be expended toward securing the outside (roof, clock tower, windows) of the building from further deterioration.

The Jackson County Historical Society executive board recommended to the membership at the July 2008 meeting that we donate \$10,000 (from our book sales) to the

restoration of the historic courthouse. This measure was unanimously approved. Discussion with executive board members and the restoration committee have been that this amount be designated for either or both the repair/restoration of the 1907 clock and archival equipment (such as compact shelving) for the research area that will be designated in the historic courthouse. Other specific needs will be identified as plans progress.

The Historical Society is also selling an architectural replica of the Jackson County Historic Courthouse with proceeds going to the restoration project. For more information call Charlotte Mealor at 706-757-2471 or cmealor@uga.edu.

Jackson County Historical Society

P.O. Box 1234 Commerce, Georgia 30529