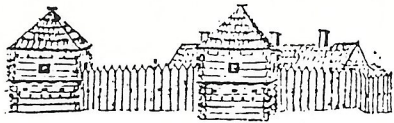


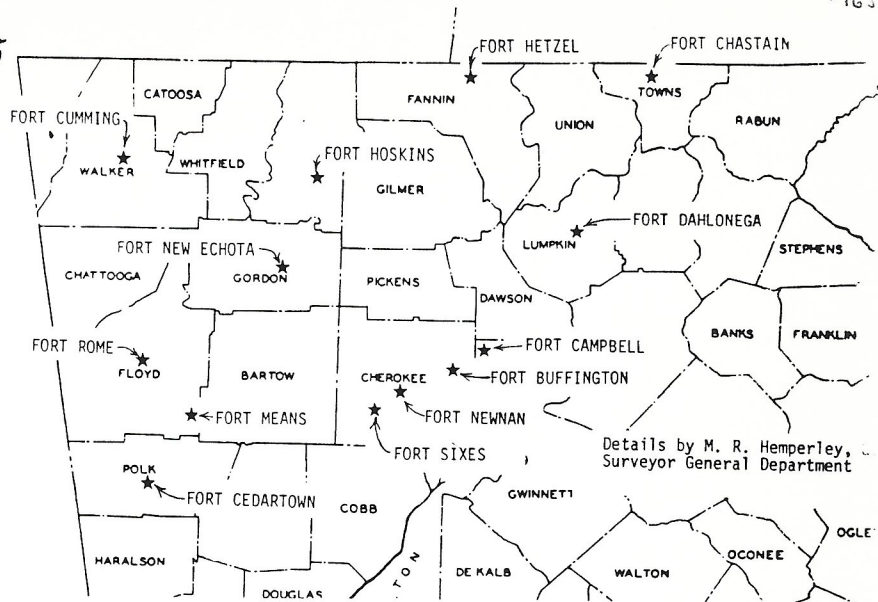
GEORGIA FORTS



The Cherokee Removal Forts

Twenty-third of a Series

By FORTS COMMITTEE
DEPARTMENT OF
ARCHIVES AND HISTORY



SKETCH OF NORTHWEST GEORGIA showing the Cherokee Indian Removal forts of 1838.

LITTLE noticed today by the inhabitants of a forward moving Georgia is the chain of fortifications built between 1830-1838 in northern Georgia for the purpose of concentrating and safeguarding the Cherokee Indians prior to their removal to Oklahoma. Of the many instances of forced Indian removal, none is more brutal, tragic and regrettable than that of the Cherokees. This Indian Nation possessed the most advanced of the Indian cultures in America. They had an alphabet, a newspaper, and a high degree of literacy in their own population. They were adopting the laws, the living patterns, and technology of the white man.

Although the origin of the Cherokee is shrouded with uncertainty, tribal legend points to the Iroquois Indian stock as their probable origin. According to tradition the Cherokees held the mountainous region of the southern Appalachians consisting of southern Virginia, western North and South Carolina, eastern Tennessee, northern Georgia and the north-eastern portion of Alabama. They controlled at one time over 40,000 square miles.¹

Hernando DeSoto, the Spanish Conquistador, in 1540, was the first white man to enter the domain of the Cherokees. To DeSoto's amazement the Cherokees were not warriors or huntsmen. They followed farming as their main pursuit. Their homes were rectangular lodges, cabins and wigwams constructed for permanent use.²

With the rivalry of the French and English settlements, the Cherokees became virtual pawns in the hands of the white conquerors. As the 19th Century opened, the Capitol of the Cherokees was at the mouth of the Conasauga River in the settlement called New Echota, in present day Gordon County.³

A crisis soon developed when gold was discovered by whites on Cherokee land in 1828 near present day Dahlonega. The rush was on and gold hungry settlers began pouring into Cherokee land illegally.⁴ The situation was stated as follows:

The civil authority will be entirely inadequate to stem the torrent of the greedy settlers which will deluge the land & oppress the Indians. Whatever of protection the U.S. shall promise the friends of the treaty & the Indians who will be moving from the State under it, should not be falsified by the acts of the Georgia citizens. Legislation on this subject will be necessary to maintain the faith of gov. promises & to subserve the cause of humanity to the Indians.⁵

The Georgia Legislature supported her citizens who settled on the land belonging to the Cherokees, canceled the Cherokees' ownership of their land and extended the laws of Georgia into the area. The legislative act which brought this about was passed on December 19, 1829, and went into effect on June 1, 1830.⁶ Leaders of the Cherokee Nation appealed

to the United States Supreme Court to protect their land, and in the decision "Worcester versus Georgia," 1832, Chief Justice John Marshall supported the Appeal made by the Cherokees. Both the state of Georgia and the President, Andrew Jackson, refused to abide by the decision made by the highest court in the land.⁷

In this period of turmoil and confusion with the Cherokees, a series of illegal forts, stockades and camps were constructed for the express purpose of housing the Indians prior to their removal. They were: Fort Buffington, Fort Campbell, Fort Cedartown, Fort Chastain, Fort Cumming, Fort Dahlonga, Camp Gilmer, Fort Hetzel, Fort Hoskins, Fort Means, New Echota Station, Fort Newman, Fort Red Clay, Fort Rome, and Camp Hinar Sixes.⁸

Statement from Camp Sixes in September, 1830 as follows:

Sir: I give you my report of proceeding thus far at this station and also at Phillips' on the morning of the 25th I caused to be destroyed all the Mining Machinery at the Sixes and burnt the buildings along the whole line of Branch in number nineteen.⁹

The following is a description of the construction of Fort Cumming near LaFayette:

The stockade was a large enclosure of upright logs; the trenches where the logs were placed can still be plainly seen. There was a rifle tower in each corner after the manner of frontier forts, port holes were formed by sawing flared notches in the logs before they were put in the building. On the inside of the tower the port holes were eight or ten inches across, thus allowing room for changing the course of the rifle fire.¹⁰

The United States Government and the State of Georgia finally won their fight to remove the Cherokees from their land in the treaty signed in December, 1835 at New Echota, which provided that the Cherokees would be given monetary compensation for their land and move to Oklahoma.¹¹ Right up to the last moment, however, the Cherokees hoped that their leaders could get the treaty modified to allow them to remain on their ancestral land.

The Cherokees did make some last minute appeals to the President:

Should the Cherokee Nation agree to cede to the United States for the use of Georgia a portion of its territory, will the President agree to have the laws and treaties executed and enforced for the effectual protection of the Cherokee Nation on the remainder of their territory?¹²

Andrew Jackson replies:

The delegation from these Indians lately here were well advised before they returned. They were repeatedly told that there had been no change in my opinion

respecting their relations to the state & Federal Government, and that no alternative was left then but submission to the laws of the state or removal to the West.¹²

While a delegation of Cherokee Chiefs led by John Ross and others tarried in Washington working toward this end, preliminary planning was begun by Governor Gilmer of Georgia and Joel Poinsett, Secretary of War, to provide the military machinery to effect the removal of the Indians.¹³

In Georgia, the state with the greatest number of Indians, the first step was to organize the state militia in the Cherokee Counties. Governor Gilmer felt that the United States troops under Colonel William Lindsay were inadequate to protect the citizens of the state in case there was a general uprising and Colonel Lindsay objected to raising troops from within the Cherokee Counties since some of them did not have the resources to support a company of mounted infantry. Governor Gilmer's main concern was that only with a body of troops stationed in each county could the confidence of the citizens be achieved. Planning was complicated by fear of a general uprising by the Cherokees and by the natural fortresses of the mountains of North Georgia which sheltered them.¹⁴

The plan finally arrived at was to station federal troops near the largest masses of Indians with other forces within marching distance (some not over three or four hours away) of the potential trouble spots. Some areas were to be left unprotected except for a small body of state militia because the white settlers vastly outnumbered the Indians. A tabular chart drawn up by Colonel Lindsay showed the relative population in Georgia and where through sheer numbers, the Indians were most likely to cause trouble.

Counties	POPULATION ¹⁵	
	Indians	Whites
Murray -----	2,000 -----	1,500 -----
Cass -----	1,500 -----	3,000 -----
Gilmer -----	3,000 -----	800 -----
Cherokee -----	1,200 -----	2,500 -----
Cobb -----	65 -----	2,000 -----
Paulding -----	200 -----	750 -----
Floyd -----	500 -----	1,800 -----
Walker -----	700 -----	4,000 -----
	9,165 -----	16,350 -----

At the last moment Tennessee troops were stationed at Dahlonega (later replaced by Georgia troops) and Georgia troops at Cedartown at the urgent request of Governor Gilmer. The Federal Roads through the countryside were the key to additional troop support from Tennessee and Alabama and the Tennessee River was designated as a base of operations in case of an uprising.¹⁷

In all, a little more than 4,000 militia from Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Alabama were to be called up for federal service along with 2,500 regulars from Florida, a number that General Scott, who arrived on the scene May 2, 1838, felt would be sufficient to protect all of the settlements against possible emergency.¹⁸

Colonel Lindsay reported on the establishment of posts and forts in a letter written from a point near the corner of Cherokee, Lumpkin & Forsyth Counties, and dated March 21st, 1838:

I have reached this place with a view to establish a military post in this vicinity, in conformity with the principle which has been deemed correct, both by your Excellency and myself, Vix., that the troops should be posted near the large masses of Indians. Accordingly I shall establish a post at Coosawattie, one at Sander's and one probably here, all on the Federal road, and so located as that I can concentrate in thirty hours at furthest [Sic.], one thousand men on the plateau formed by the Counties of Gilmer, Murray and Union. . . .¹⁹

Finally everything was ready for the removal campaign and negotiations were broken off with the Cherokee leaders in Washington. Meanwhile, the state militia numbering some ten companies completed being mustered into Federal service

at New Echota near Calhoun. Final supplies of arms and ammunition were deposited in the chain of posts extending from Fort Butler near the North Carolina line through Union and Gilmer Counties by Coosawattie to the neighborhood of the town of Canton. Then on May 24, 1838, the roundup began, and from the fields and forests the Indians were forced into stockades at the various forts and posts. One Georgia officer assigned to the staff of General Scott reported to Governor Gilmer on June 2, 1838:

Having just arrived from the scene of operations in the Cherokee County, I avail myself of the honor of communicating to your Excellency the movements of my chief, General Scott, within the limits of Georgia. Upon the 24th Ult. he placed the Georgia volunteers under General Floyd in position, and on the 25th commenced operations. Gen'l Floyd in person, commanded the first detachment that operated.

The number of prisoners on Tuesday last was about three thousand; and by this time, I do not think there is a wandering Indian in the Cherokee County, within the limits of Georgia.

The captures were made with the utmost kindness and humanity, and free from every strain of violence.²⁰

With a great deal of relief that the rounding up portion of the campaign was proceeding successfully, Governor Gilmer wrote to General Floyd:

Your successful progress in removing the Cherokees from the State is exceedingly gratifying, especially since the Administration of the General Government has endeavored to shift the responsibility of the measure from itself upon the authority of this State.²¹

By early June, 1838, the major part of the roundup had been completed and the life of these concentration forts and posts had come to an end. The hardships which befell the Indians on their trek west were severe — more than 4,000 of the Cherokees died en route to their new homes.²²

The story of the removal of the Cherokees is not a pretty story. In fact, it is one of greed, corruption, and an example of man's inhumanity to man, with power and force of arms winning over justice and human decency. It did set the stage for Westward expansion, and numerous other questionable government deals with the Indians. Only the buried remnants of these Removal forts remain as evidence of a tragic episode in United States History.

1. Grace S. Woodward, *The Cherokees*, University of Georgia Press, p. 18.
2. John Parris, *Cherokee Story*, Stephens Press, pages 1-6.
3. *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Volume 42 (1958), p. 321.
4. *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Volume 44 (1960), p. 338.
5. John Ridge to Wilson Lumpkin, 1835. Manuscript File, Georgia Department of Archives and History. (All manuscripts hereafter cited are located at the Georgia Department of Archives and History except where noted).
6. *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Volume 39 (1955), pages 401-402.
7. Robert P. Brooks, *History of Georgia*, pages 201-202.
8. List from map in article.
9. Op Cit, p. 408.
10. *Walker County Messenger*, November 5, 1915.
11. *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Volume 46 (1962), p. 344.
12. John Ross to Andrew Jackson, March 12, 1834.
13. Andrew Jackson to Wilson Lumpkin, April 30, 1833.
14. Governor George Gilmer to John Ross, March 9, 1838, Governor's Letter Book, 1837-38. (Governor's Letter Book will be cited hereafter as GLB).
15. Governor Gilmer to Colonel William Lindsay, January 16, 1838; Colonel William Lindsay to Governor Gilmer, January 20, 1838; Governor Gilmer to Colonel William Lindsay, January 31, 1838; Governor Gilmer to Colonel John Story, February 3, 1838. GLB, 1837-1838.
16. Colonel William Lindsay to Governor Gilmer, December 25, 1837, GLB, 1837-38.
17. Colonel William Lindsay to Governor Gilmer, March 1, 1838; Colonel William Lindsay to Governor Gilmer, April 29, 1838. GLB, 1837-1838.
18. General Winfield Scott to Governor Gilmer, May 3, 1838; General Winfield Scott to Governor Gilmer, April 25, 1838. GLB, 1827-1838.
19. Colonel William Lindsay to Governor Gilmer, March 21, 1838, GLB, 1837-1838.
20. General Orders, April 19, 1838 to the Colonels commanding the regiments in Georgia; Colonel William Lindsay to Governor Gilmer, March 1, 1838; Aide de Camp A. H. Kenan to Governor Gilmer, June 2, 1838. GLB, 1837-38.
21. Governor Gilmer to General Charles Floyd, June 18, 1838. GLB, 1837-38.
22. Franklin M. Garrett, *Atlanta and Its Environs*, Lewis Publishing Company, p. 162.