

The Creeks and Cherokees

One of the most tragic events in Georgia's history was the removal of the Creek and Cherokee tribes from the state, culminating with the Trail of Tears, where over 4000 Cherokee died on a forced march from Georgia to Oklahoma.

The Creek Nation was actually a confederation of several southeastern tribes. The Creeks were the most populous tribe in the state and held the largest amount of land. In the colonial period of Georgia, the Creek Nation became a major trading partner with the colony. Many white Georgians intermarried with the Creek and became members of the tribe. Due to these economic and social ties, Georgians initially hoped that the Creek would become members of the plantation economy. While some did, many chose to continue their traditional life style. Their interactions with runaway slaves also led many Creek to oppose the institution of slavery.

Earlier in Georgia's history, the Creek chose to side with the English during the Revolution; thus, causing an antagonistic relationship with many Georgians. Once the deer trade ended, due to a decrease in animal's population, many White Georgians coveted Creek land and pushed state and federal leaders for their removal. Due to this pressure, there were several major Creek land cessions after the Revolution including the Treaty of New York in 1790, which stipulated that the Creeks ceded most of land east of the Ocmulgee river to the United States.

In 1813, a civil war broke out between the Creek Indians. This war called the Red Stick War, was named after the faction of Creeks who wanted to fight the White settlers who were encroaching on their land (those that did not want to fight were called White Sticks). The war ended in a Creek defeat by future President Andrew Jackson at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, in present day Alabama. Following this war, the Creek lost 22 million acres of land. In 1825, under the Treaty of Indian Springs, a Creek Chief named William McIntosh signed away the remainder of Creek land in Georgia after taking a bribe from an Indian agent. McIntosh was later killed by the Creek Indians for his actions.

The Cherokee lived in the mountains of North Georgia long before Spanish exploration. After the English settled South Carolina and Georgia, they became an important trading partner with England. While the Creek traded with both the French and the English, the Cherokee were exclusively loyal to the English; this loyalty caused much conflict between themselves and the Creek. During the Revolution, the Cherokee continued to support the British and fought the Americans even after the war officially ended. The hostilities continued until 1793.

Once peace was established, the Cherokee made several treaties with the United States government, including one that led to the Federal Road being built through their land. During this time period, the Cherokee began to believe that their best hope for maintaining their land would be to transform their society to resemble that of the United States. In the 1820s, the Cherokee developed a written language, a written constitution, and a newspaper. They invited Monrovia missionaries to set up schools and adopted an agricultural system that included the use of slavery. However, none of these changes stopped the whites in Georgia from demanding their removal. Once gold was discovered in 1828, the push for Cherokee removal west of the Mississippi River became greater.

In 1832, the Cherokee won the Supreme Court case Worcester v. Georgia. This decision should have protected the tribe from removal as it maintained that the Cherokee were an independent nation and were not subject to Georgia law. However, in 1835, a small group of Cherokees signed the Treaty of New Echota without permission from the Cherokee government. Upon receiving it, Andrew Jackson signed the treaty and Congress approved it. In 1838, most of the Cherokee were forcefully removed from the state and suffered on the Trail of Tears to Oklahoma.