

The Treaty of New York of 1790

The subject of my discussion today is:

George Washington, the Alabama Boys and the Secret Treaty of 1790 which Opened the West

In the early summer months of the year 1813 a historical meeting took place in the Western Lands of America which forever changed the history and settlement of the United States.

Geographically, the West of 1813 is located a mere 21 miles from the City of Montgomery, Alabama on a small tributary feeding into the Alabama River known as Tallawassee Creek then located in Montgomery County but now located in present day Lowndes County.

The Alabama Boys are gathered for serious debate around a noon day meal and the partaking of a concoction known as “black drink”. The group is made up of Creek metis, micos, warriors, and two holy men known as Josiah Frances, the Alabama Prophet and Seekaboo, the Shawnee Prophet.

Among the principal leaders of the Alabama Boys gathered on the creek bank were Billy Lane, also known as Yellow Billy or William Weatherford, Sam Moniac, Peter McQueen, High-Head Jim, and Far-Off Warrior.

They are sizing up one another in regards to the possibility of an upcoming Creek Civil War trying to determine where each one will stand in the conflict.

Weatherford and Moniac approach the group from horseback and dismount. They are both returning from a recent cattle drive in Choctaw country.

After several hours of discussion and drinking Weatherford and Moniac are threatened with death if they do not join the political faction assembled on the creek bank.

Moniac will snatch a war-club and hit Francis, the Alabama Prophet in the face causing him to release the reigns of Sam’s horse and Moniac to escape with his life under a hail of gunfire! Weatherford will remain seated and will make no attempt to save his brother-in-law.

He is very much intoxicated by the “black drink” and still lamenting the recent death of his wife who died in childbirth a month earlier.

These few men will eventually divide the entire Creek Nation and lead them into the death and destruction of their own people in a civil war.

Today, Nashville, Tennessee is known as the “home of country music” but in much earlier times it was known by another name called the “Big Lick”.

The Licks of Middle Tennessee and Kentucky are the primary locations of the great exposed salt and mineral flats of the Eastern United States that for centuries had attracted the large herds of bison and buffalo from the far West.

These large herds crossed the Mississippi River from the south at Natchez, MS. heading on a 440 mile northeastwardly pilgrimage toward the Middle Tennessee Valley and into northern Kentucky

just south of Louisville for the need of salt, potassium, iron and other minerals, primary requirements for sustaining life.

The migratory routes and patterns and the assembly of the huge herds of bison and buffalo at the salt and mineral flats also attracted a unique assortment of tribes of American Indians who were originally of the Mississippian Culture and came to be known as the "Five Civilized Tribes".

They were the Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws and the Creek Confederation. The Creeks also included the Seminoles of the Florida Territory and a unique culture of Black Seminoles of mixed races known as Marroons.

These tribes and expressly the Creeks, Seminoles, and Black Seminoles posed a major problem for America and for our newly elected President, George Washington and his cabinet assembled in New York in 1789.

Washington was dealing with several unique problems one of which was "Manifest Destiny" and the need of an expanding population to seek and obtain land from Indians. The other problem was the stealing of slaves by the Creeks and Seminoles from Georgia settlers.

It was not a question among any of our colonial leaders regarding the Five Civilized Tribes eventually losing ownership of large tracts of their land, but more a question if the Five Civilized tribes could assimilate into the existing European Culture of Colonial America.

The idea was to change the social structure of the tribes and the Creek Confederation and allow for interbreeding of the races.

The Matrilineal Society of the Creeks dictated the names of the male descendants rest with the maternal side of the family as well as property rights and inheritance of accumulated individual wealth.

It was the Creek Women who normally operated the plantations, raised and cultivated the crops, owned the cattle and livestock and took their products to market to be sold for trade goods and income for the family. Creek men were the hunters requiring large tracts of land. They were also formed the institution of government among the Muscogee Nation.

President Washington and Secretary of War Henry Knox devised a plan of action know as the "Plan of Civilization". This would be the great experiment to reverse the roles of Creek men and women and head off possible disaster which might have devastating effects both for the Five Civilized Tribes and fledgling America!

Estimates regarding the actual cost to America for a domestic war with the Five Civilized Tribes or the Creeks and Seminoles are figured to cost generally a sum of 15 million dollars and that expenditure alone would bankrupt the fledgling nation.

We now know this western push of settlers between the years of 1790 and 1825 will increase the population of Georgia, alone by six fold. The figure will rise from a total population of just over 82,000 to well over a half million people by the 1820's.

George Washington and Secretary of War, Henry Knox both realize the domestic situation with the Five Civilized Tribes to be a grave one regarding land issues and the protection of American citizens regarding property rights.

Free whites owning slaves in Georgia are in arms in 1789 and pressuring the new Washington Administration to resolve the domestic issue of Indians stealing their property.

Additionally, the extensive farm and plantation lands in Georgia are beginning to simply wear out and become non-productive for crop production.

However, of utmost concern to the United States is gaining access through Creek Indian Lands to establish a series of roads to be developed from existing buffalo and Indian paths for defense and for rapid military deployment of US forces across the Mississippi Territory.

Experts have previously warned Washington and calculated the needed for a road system in lieu of the possibility of a future invasion by England, Spain or France from Southern waters and Southern ports.

The stage is set for the United States to conduct its first major treaty with an outside power or nation and it will be directed toward a formidable and highly organized force, the Upper, Middle and Lower Creek Indian Nation and its formidable and educated leader, Alexander McGillivary.

The first attempt at a Treaty with the Creek Indian Nation was at “The Rock Landing Conference” in Georgia in 1789 with the Creek Chiefs and Alexander McGillivary, the leader of the Creek Confederation. The attempt ends in immediate disaster.

The image of the original Washington Peace Medal of 1789 given to Efa Hadjo at the Rock Landing Conference is one of the most valuable artifacts displayed by the Alabama State Archives Museum and owned by the People of Alabama.

McGillivary is underestimated regarding his talents and abilities to negotiate treaties and his terms are not met. Failure was the quick and ultimate outcome!

Therefore, a second and more careful approach is made in 1790 to restart America’s first major treaty with an increased respect paid to McGillivary’s talents, his intelligence and his personal wishes.

Secretary of War, Henry Knox directed Colonel Marnius Willet an officer whom had served during the French and Indian War and the American Revolution to act as an envoy for the United States and to meet with Alexander McGillivary to discuss terms and articles for a peace treaty.

Willet would later become the Sheriff of New York City, the Mayor of New York from 1807-1808, and a Brigadier General in 1792. He was successful as directed by Henry Knox in his negotiations with the Creek leader and plans were put forth to set a treaty to be agreed and signed in New York City in 1790.

The Upper and Middle Nations of the Creek Indian Confederation had favored the British throughout the Revolutionary War while the Lower Nation of the Confederacy was more cordial and favored the Americans side.

Alexander McGillivary was born December 15, 1750, in the Coushatta Village of “Little Tallassee” located on the Coosa River not far from Montgomery, Alabama.

He was known to be a Metis and a member of the privilege hierarchy of the more prestigious clans of the Muscogee people.

He was a half-breed whose father was Lachlan McGillivary, a well to do Scottish Trader who built trading posts among the Upper Towns of the Creek or Muscogee Confederacy.

His mother was Sehoy Marchland, a daughter of Jean Baptiste Louis Decourtel Marchland, a French Officer at Ft. Toulouse and Sehoy, a woman of mixed blood of the prestigious and powerful Wind Clan.

Alexander’s Muscogee name was Hoboi-Hili-Miko translated into English to mean the “Good Child King”

He was raised in Augusta on several large plantations as a child and sent to Charleston, SC for his proper education. He was well educated and fluent in Greek and Latin and apprenticed as a young man as a bookkeeper in Savannah, GA.

He returned to “Little Tallassee” in 1777 and became principal Chief of the Upper Creek Towns after his predecessor, Chief E-mistago died in the Summer of 1782 leading a war party to relieve the British Garrison at Savannah.

McGillivary obtained the rank of Colonel in the British Army during the Revolutionary War, and brokered a British-Muscogee Alliance during that period of time. He was an inept military strategist who rarely participated in battle but was cunning and skillful as a diplomat.

He was a man of remarkable ability from the skill with which he maintained his control and influence over the Creeks while he kept the United States and Spain paying for his influence at the very same time.

Thus, Alexander McGillivary, principal leader of the Creek Nation along with 29 Creek chiefs and leaders will group together just outside of Montgomery County where they will be placed in wagons to begin the long journey to New York City escorted by Colonel Willet.

They will be warmly received at every juncture along the journey and upon their arrival in New York City literally thousands of people will turn out to greet them. They will shake the hands of Henry Knox, Washington and the like and the President will present and honor each of them with the George Washington Peace Medal which they will wear around their neck as a sign of loyalty and peace given them personally by the Great Father, George Washington.

They will return home believing their efforts have avoided war at all cost and have preserved their land, their dignity and their way of life.
And they will all be wrong!

Prior to leaving for New York City McGillivary will ask a local and renowned man from Montgomery to take the place of his father and assist as language translator for the Creek Chiefs.

His name was Samuel Moniac, born the second son of Jacob Moniac and his second wife Polly Colbert of the Tuskegee Tribe. Polly's father was the Chickasaw Chief, William Colbert, a son of the Scotsman James Colbert. The elder Colbert was a trader and also a leader of the Chickasaw Indians in northwest Alabama.

Polly Colbert previously had another offspring by a previous union whose name was Billy Powell, He was also known as "Black Drink" or the infamous, Osceola, leader of the Seminoles during the Second Seminole War.

Originally, Jacob Moniac's position was as the main interpreter or translator for Alexander McGillivary. Jacob died on April 4, 1787 at "Little Tallassee".

Samuel was also brother-in-law to William Weatherford, known as "Red Eagle" the man who led the Red Sticks to War at the Battle of Horse Shoe Bend against Gen Andrew Jackson.

Samuel Moniac, also known as "Tot-kis Had-Jo" the English translation meaning, the "Mad Fire Maker" was revered in Montgomery by both free-whites and Indians. Whenever there was a local conflict he was the man who settled issues for both races.

From 1802 to 1820 Sam and Becky Weatherford, his wife owned an inn and other property on the Old Federal Road by Pinchong Creek near Pintlala. The Inn was noted for its hospitality and fine food. He also owned a plantation adjacent to the Alabama River near Burkeville, Alabama just off the Old Selma Road west of Montgomery.

His tavern and inn was in operation as early as the year 1805 according to the writings of the renowned Methodist Preacher of the Mississippi Territory, Lorenzo Dow. We know from those early writings Sam Moniac had converted over to Christianity by that early date.

Even the name Pintlala is derived from Moniac's Tavern and Inn.
It is a Creek Slang word meaning "pint of la la" or "pint of whisky".

In Fact, it was at Sam Moniac's Inn located in Pintlala, Alabama on the Old Federal Road that Aaron Burr, former Vice-President of the United States was held as a guarded prisoner over night by Captain Edmund Gaines on their trip back through the Alabama Territory in 1807.

Sam Moniac accepted the offer from Alexander McGillivary and was a major player, translator and signer of the Peace Treaty of New York of 1790. He personally met Washington who presented him the Washington Peace Medal which he proudly wore the remainder of his life.

His personal pledge to support the United States cost him all his personal wealth, his son's life and his own life as an exile dying of an unknown illness in Pass Christian, Mississippi on the Trail of Tears after having fought his own people as a member of the United States Army.

The enactment of the Peace Treaty of New York of 1790 will only last two years when in 1792 McGillivary will repudiate the treaty with the United States and negotiate another treaty with Spanish Officials in Louisiana who promise to respect Muscogee or Creek sovereignty.

McGillivray will then relocate to Pensacola and a member of the Masonic Order. He will die in 1793. Two of his nephews, William Weatherford and William McIntosh will become the most important Creek leaders of the 19th century, fighting on opposing sides of the Creek Indian War.

Among the Content of the Treaty of New York are 14 specific articles outlining the elements for peace and friendship between the federal government and the Creeks and Seminoles living within the boundaries of the United States.

The Creeks would give up some land belonging to the allied Oconee Indians which had been a contentious issue and survey procedures would be specified. For their part the Creeks were granted an annual payment.

The Muskogee Confederacy would also agree to return all slave property being held by Creeks and Seminoles within the Indian Nation back to US authorities settling the domestic problem of Georgia Settler

However, what is most interesting regarding the Treaty of New York of 1790 is the six separate articles of a secret treaty under separate cover which were personally signed by George Washington and Alexander McGillivray and unknown to the other Creek Chiefs and leaders who publically signed the original 14 articles in New York.

The secret articles were not discovered and made public until the year 1848 when Alabama historian Albert James Pickett discovered the Creek's original text of the secret articles and paraphrased them, sometimes ambiguously in his book, "The History of Alabama and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi from the Earliest Period".

The first article laid out the structure of future commerce between the U.S. and the Creek Nation, including shifting traffic in trade goods through American Ports and away from Spanish Territory and ports of entry.

The US also agreed to pay select Creek chiefs a \$100.00 yearly stipend and to commission Alexander McGillivray as a Brigadier General of the US Army with an annual pay of \$1200.00.

The fifth secret article was likely the most significant. It stated "the US agrees to educate and cloth such Creek youth as shall be agreed upon, not exceeding four in number at any one time. Educated Native Americans would and did, readily adopt and help promote mainstream American culture within the Creek Indian Nation.

David Tate, McGillivray's nephew was the first Creek student selected for federally subsidized education, and he was soon followed by other of McGillivray's kinsmen. Tate's nephew and Alexander McGillivray's grand nephew, David Tate Moniac was the last to benefit from the fifth secret article.

David Tate Moniac, the oldest son of Samuel Moniac of Montgomery, Alabama was transported from Montgomery to Washington and then to New York as a child and educated in the finest schools of the period.

David was enrolled as a military cadet and becomes the First American Indian and the First Alabamian in the United States to ever graduate from West Point Military Academy in the year 1822. Shortly after graduation from West Point he resigned his military commission.

Years later, he will volunteer to reenlist in the army and accept the rank of Major in organizing and leading a military force of 600 Creeks and Choctaws to include his father, Samuel Moniac against the Seminoles in the Second Seminole War.

David was killed leading a frontal suicidal assault of a US regiment in the Battle of Wahoo Swamp in Central Florida on November 21, 1836.

The Treaty of New York of 1790, crafted probably in large measure by Alexander McGillivray was ultimately valuable to our states creation.

It confirmed the federal government's exclusive authority under the US Constitution for all foreign relations, including treaties with Native American Sovereignities and thus made the disposition of the Creeks and other Native American lands inside the State of Georgia, a federal issue.

This move in turn led to the establishment of the territories and later the States of Mississippi and Alabama. This began in earnest in 1811 with the initial construction of the Old Federal Road which was built west to east connecting Fort Stoddert located at the Mount Vernon Landing on the Mobile River in Alabama to Fort Wilkerson located in Georgia.

The pressure placed upon the Creek Nation by Washington's Administration eventually divided the Creek people into two separate groups.

You may call them the "haves" and the "have nots" or you may simply call them the pure bloods of the clans believing in the old ways and the Master of Breath their spiritual leader and the metis or mix-bloods who embraced the use of modern technology and thinking of the times which they in turn exploited for individual wealth and prosperity.

The end result was the Creek Civil War of 1813 and 1814 when the Creek nation becomes vulnerable and divides to fight itself and its beliefs. The end result spelled disaster.

Beginning with Washington's attempt to resolve a permanent solution with the Creek Nation there were other peace treaties made between the Creeks and the US Government over the years. None of these documents guaranteed or produced lasting peace for the Creeks or the Seminoles.

Early in the year 1811 just before the advent of conflict between the Upper Creek Nation and the United States a large gathering or meeting was held in the Great Creek Town of Tuckabatchie in Alabama with many of the Chiefs and Elders in attendance.

They were there to hear the words of the Shawnee leader, Tecumseh who was advocating a Confederacy of all American Indian Tribes to wage war against the whites. The following words of Tecumseh were reported by General Samuel Dale who was present at the meeting.

He ended his oration with these words: I quote:

"Tecumseh will soon return to his country. My prophecies will tarry with you. They will stand between you and the bullets of your enemies. When white men approach you the yawning earth shall swallow them up. Soon you shall see my arm of fire stretched across the sky.

I will stamp my foot at Tippecanoe and the earth shall shake". Then you will know what I say is real!

On the afternoon of December 16, 1811 at about 2:15 am the first of three major earthquakes will hit the Eastern United States. They will be known as the great New Madrid Earthquakes and they will be felt from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico and eastward to Washington DC and New York City. The ground will have split open as many parts of the country experience violent shaking.

The New Madrid Earthquakes began as the platelets of the Reelfoot fault line shifted in earnest setting off three major earthquakes with strengths of a magnitude of 7.7 which began in Arkansas, the second shock occurred on January 23, 1812 and was centered at New Madrid in Missouri, and the third shock was experienced on February 7, 1812 just above Memphis, Tennessee which caused huge waves to form on the Mississippi River and resulted in portions of the river physically altering course and direction as its waters began to flow in a northern direction upstream.

In all over 83 smaller aftershocks were recorded over time after the three major quakes were experienced by all living in the Eastern United States.

Likewise, the heavens lit up as the Great Comet of 1811 flooded the night sky. It was clearly visible for all to see for a period of almost 260 consecutive days.

It was then the Red Sticks of the Upper Creek Nation led by William Weatherford, Peter McQueen, Josiah Frances, the Alabama Prophet and Seekaboo began in earnest to wage a campaign of open warfare resulting in the Creek Indian Wars of 1813 and 1814.

General Washington never saw the results of his Plan of Civilization which led to the Trail of Tears and the displacement of all American Indians into the Western Plains.

Here we see Washington's hand as a politician acting under the constraints of public opinion trying to resolve a problem which was unsolvable even for the Great Father of Our Nation.

THANK YOU!

For those who are interested in knowing more regarding this period and time in Alabama History I would like to recommend the book entitled "The Old American West known as Woodward's Remembrances" by General Thomas Woodward, "The History of Alabama" by James Albert Pickette, and "A Conquering Spirit" by Dr. Greg Waselkov, a Professor of History at the University of South Alabama

The speech was originally written and delivered by William Stone of the Alabama Society of the Sons of the American Revolution. Permission is given for anyone to use and recreate this speech for the Sons of the American Revolution

