

REWRITING THE FRONTIER: MAKING HISTORY IN TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

by

THOMAS CHASE HAGOOD

(Under the Direction of Allan Kulikoff)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the dynamics of white settlement at Tuscaloosa, Alabama and the role of settlers' written words in mythologizing the nineteenth-century, American frontier. The lived experiences of settlers, captured in individuals' letters, diaries, deeds, wills, poems and books, tell how they transformed a frontier into the Old South. Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, generations of migrants, storytellers and local writers also blended historical accounts, memories, Native legends and fiction, thereby contributing to the creation of the myths of the American frontier and the early formations of southern identity.

INDEX WORDS: White settlement, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, American frontier, Old South, southern identity.

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B.A., The University of North Alabama, 2004

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2011

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May 2011

DEDICATION

My parents, Thomas and Linda Hagood, have stood by me my whole life. Because of their unfailing love and unwavering support, this work is dedicated to them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project's maturation and my evolution as an historian who takes seriously the people of the past has left me deeply indebted to countless individuals I have encountered over the past seven years. Colleagues like Christina L. Davis, Catherine Holmes, and Daleah Goodwin have inspired and encouraged me more than I will ever be able to repay. Members of my dissertation committee—Allan Kulikoff, Claudio Saunt, Kathleen Clark, Stephen Mihm, and Michael Kwass—were all readily available with insightful analysis flavored with supportive advice. Individuals like Jessica Lacher-Feldman at the W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library and Norwood Kerr at ADAH shared both their expertise and the joy of my utilizing their collections of Alabama materials. Grants from the UGA Department of History, the UGA Graduate School, and the Friends of the Alabama Archives made travel and acquisition of necessary materials possible.

My partner, Lori Prince, has seen me through the research and writing of this dissertation as well as the trials of graduate life and university teaching. She is my refuge and I am thankful every day for her presence in my life. My Scottish terrier, Andy Jackson, has been a faithful companion through my entire graduate experience. For his steadfast patience, he deserves to be acknowledged here. I owe many thanks to Jim Norton for always being available when I needed a break from this project.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADAH	Alabama Department of Archives and History. Montgomery, Alabama.
DU-DC	Duke University Digital Collections. library.duke.edu/digitalcollections
DU-SC	Duke University Special Collections Library. Durham, North Carolina.
HL-VU	Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Vanderbilt University. Nashville, Tennessee.
HSC-UA	W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama. Tuscaloosa, Alabama.
SCL	South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. Columbia, South Carolina.
SHC-UNC	Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina. Chapel Hill, North Carolina.
SUSC	Samford University Special Collections. Birmingham, Alabama.
TCR	Tuscaloosa County Courthouse Records Room. Tuscaloosa, Alabama.
UGA-ML	University of Georgia Main Library. Athens, Georgia.
VHSL	Virginia Historical Society Library. Richmond, Virginia.

PROLOGUE

WHITHER THE FRONTIER SOUTH?

“To ignore the frontier,” Wilbur J. Cash wrote in his now-classic evaluation of the South, “is to abandon reality.” Unlike generations of southern historians, Cash knew that to understand “the South” one had to confront its frontier history. Naturally, the South’s history, prior to the 1840s, possessed stories, processes, and events that shaped the region’s cultural, political, and economic developments. As Cash put it, “the history of this South ...is mainly the history of the roll of frontier upon frontier—and on to the frontier beyond.” It is as imperative today as it was for Cash to come to grips with how the South “remained more or less fully in the frontier stage for a great part—maybe the greater part—of its antebellum history.”¹ “Rewriting the Frontier: Making History in Tuscaloosa, Alabama” not only illuminates unexplored aspects of the South’s history but compels us to engage anew the significance of the southern frontier for America’s past and present.

I began this dissertation in search of the frontier South. At the time, my questions about the frontier South only scratched the surface of the multiple layers of this project, but I knew I would have to confront both the historical and historiographical angles if I was to understand this elusive period of southern history. Doing so led me straight into the field that has most

¹ W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1941), 4 and 11. Perhaps it was because Cash was more of a social commentator than historian that permitted him to at least acknowledge the frontier’s powerful presence in the early national and antebellum South. For whatever reason, his remarks on the frontier were keenly perceptive. Cash’s historical investigation left a notable mark on southern history. Despite his heavy-handed, monolithic “mind of the South,” Cash’s persuasive and widely-read interpretation dominated Americans’ perceptions of the South and southern history for much of later twentieth century. For more on Cash and his influence see James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

rigorously debated the frontier: western history. Unsurprisingly, the southern frontier was nowhere to be found in western historians' contentious arguments of the past twenty-five years. Instead, a century's worth of "western" scholarship from Frederick Jackson Turner to Patricia Limerick monopolized the energy and consideration of the American frontier scholars. As every other geographic and chronological space in American history basked in their historians' interest (including countless places in New England, the Chesapeake, the Great Lakes, and Trans-Mississippi West), I found the Deep South awaiting a researcher to take seriously its narratives of frontier settlement and early developments. What has developed, however, is quite unlike previous frontier histories.

Throughout this project, I knowingly use the term "frontier." I use it to explain the liminal space that can be manifested physically or psychologically in evolving communities where and when white men and women contested notions of identity, values, and worth. In such times and places, individuals with power (be it economic, cultural, intellectual, or other) used their position to further their hegemony and set the terms of social order.² Tying these strands of frontier development and their expressions in the American South together was a phenomenon I

² I arrived at my understanding of frontier communities under the influence of the following: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006, revised edition); *Understanding Life in the Borderlands: Boundaries in Depth and in Motion* William Zartman, ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010); "Community Study," "The Village South," and "Myths, Moralities, and Megatheories: The Case of the Antebellum American South" in Darret B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman, *Small Worlds, Large Questions: Explorations in Early American Social History, 1600-1850* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994); Jean B. Lee, *The Price of Nationhood: The American Revolution in Charles County* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994); John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Durwood Dunn, *Cade's Cove: The Life and Death of A Southern Appalachian Community, 1818-1937* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988); Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Peter Moore, "The Mysterious Death of William Richardson: Kinship, Female Vulnerability, and the Myth of Supernaturalism in the Southern Backcountry." *North Carolina Historical Review* (July 2003), 279-296; Kevin T. Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin: America's First Secession* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008); David E. Paterson, "Slavery, Slaves, and Cash in a Georgia Village, 1825-65," *Journal of Southern History* (November 2009), 879-930.

call “rewriting the frontier.”³ The practices of rewriting allowed white southerners to exalt and ignore portions of their society and culture that did not lend themselves to a positive take on their region and their lives—significantly avoided in the making of the southern history with the frontier would be slavery and violence among other unsavory aspects of the human experience. The continual rewriting that the earliest settlers engaged in is not something that ended with the removal of Native Americans or even the South’s defeat in the Civil War. Indeed, since the settling of the frontier, the South’s intellectuals and later generations of historians like W.J. Cash have all participated in this rewriting—they have all purported new interpretations of the South’s origins in southern history and assigned either more, but usually less, significance to its frontier experiences. For nineteenth-century settlers and for their twenty-first century historians, the southern frontier presented several similarities with other American frontiers. As in Maine, Missouri, and even Florida, the Deep South’s frontier evolutions confronted waves of immigrants looking to find success in the American hinterlands, variations of commitment to market involvement, and individual settlers directly participating in shaping (and contesting) the structures of social order—from state and local governments to religious and other civic organizations. However, as they wrote about their history and their lives, southerners (often aided by northerners) created a unique place in the American narrative by forgetting and remembering the particulars of their frontier stories.

Since Frederick Jackson Turner delivered his now famous thesis in 1893, historians have grappled with understanding the cultural and social consequences of the American frontier. Cultural history, still underutilized, allows innovative explorations of the intricacies of the

³ “Rewriting” as a conceptual framework has been highly influenced by Greg Denning, *The Death of William Gooch: A History’s Anthropology* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995) and Edward E. Baptist, *Creating an Old South: Middle Florida’s Plantation Frontier Before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

frontier phenomena. “Rewriting the Frontier: Making History in Tuscaloosa, Alabama” examines the creation of American frontier mythology through such an approach. As nineteenth-century white migrants moved to the “new country” of Alabama, people reconceptualized family, communication, relationships, as well as the utility of literature, land, and even memories. Nineteenth-century frontier life in Tuscaloosa allowed settlers to structure new society, communities, and environments in what they perceived to be a totally new place. It now presents historians the opportunity to view how individuals processed the immense challenges and chances that welcomed migrants to the Deep South. Pressing more deeply into individualized experiences, we gain a deeper understanding of what motivated these early Americans’ frontier perceptions and myth-making practices.

Moments of contact and conflict from the “discovery” of North America through the era of the American Revolution have served to frame the origins of the American story. These encounters resulted in cultural adaptations and social reconfiguring among cohabitating peoples hailing from a variety of economic and political circumstances.⁴ Tuscaloosa builds on our knowledge of frontiers. Yet, its story does more than simply add another study to the burgeoning field of southern history.⁵ Tuscaloosans shaped their social and material spaces through writing

⁴ See Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), William Cooper’s *Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1995), and *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (New York: Random House, 2006).

⁵ I must acknowledge the impressive work of Stephen Aron. My understanding of the American frontier and my examination of it here are benefactors of his research and fearless pursuit to refresh American historians’ conversations about the frontier, the West, and borderlands. Articles: Stephen Aron and Jeremy Adelman, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History.” *American Historical Review* (June 1999), 814-840; Stephen Aron and Jeremy

and, therein, grappled with geography, land, class, and race in a new (to them), southern environment. By locating white settlers, planters, lawyers, poets and playwrights within the culture that they created, we can observe the nuances and complexities of this American frontier and how it was made southern.⁶

To date, no historical examination takes seriously the frontier experiences of the Deep South and its early inhabitants. This neglect has profoundly influenced our perceptions of the South and its historical development. Roughly 1780 to 1830 is virtually a no-man's-land of southern history in terms of tracking migration of people and ideas to what became the Old Southwest. Despite the vast literature on the early national era, most early historians of the U.S. South prefer to focus on the colonial, revolutionary, or late antebellum period, rarely dealing with the developments of the early southwest. It is in this space of time where one can detect the first expressions of southern exceptionalism best articulated within the myth of the southern frontier. There, southerners worked to perfect their perceived characteristics—inherited from their colonial predecessors⁷—that became nationally recognized as “southern,” other, and different. Traits of rugged and agrarian individualism, as well as faith-filled, honor-obsessed, and a ferocious commitment to the common man and one's home—the same qualities that

Adelman, “Of Lively Exchanges and Larger Perspectives.” *American Historical Review* (October 1999), 1235-1239; Stephen Aron, “Lessons in Conquest: Towards a Greater Western History.” *Pacific Historical Review* (May 1994), 125-147. Books: Stephen Aron, *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) and *American Confluence: The Missouri Frontier from Borderland to Border State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

⁶ Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007); Ramón Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Steven W. Hackel, *Children of Coyote, Missionaries of Saint Francis: Indian-Spanish Relations in Colonial California, 1769-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

⁷ Allan Kulikoff, “The Colonial Chesapeake: Seedbed of Antebellum Southern Culture?” *The Journal of Southern History* 45. 4. (Nov, 1979), 513-540.

individuals felt frontier survival necessitated influenced the evolution of southern distinctiveness and, more importantly, profoundly impacted individuals' lives in what became the heart of cotton country, slavery, and, eventually, the Confederacy. These concepts connection to the frontier South has yet to be explored as deeply as is historically warranted or possible.

During the 1810s and 1820s, Tuscaloosa developed as a border district in frontier Alabama, a terrain in early statehood that connected the yeoman upcountry and planter-dominated black belt to the south. This made frontier Tuscaloosa a place rife with conflict, as the worlds of small farmers and big planters collided in a village that housed the state's government and flagship university. With its land speculators, Indian fighters, and amateur poets, by the late 1830s, Tuscaloosa had evolved from a cross-path village to a thriving state capital and economic hub of the Black Warrior River valley. Individualized encounters with the frontier—from David Crockett's adventures to the settlement of the Snow brothers of Massachusetts and the land business ventures of Connecticut-born William Ely—created and reflected the cultures an emerging South. The creations emanating from this frontier settlement present windows into the evolving world of the South prior to the Civil War. Participation in the making of frontier history was a collective, but disconnected endeavor captured in the images presented in migration tales, the descriptive literature of poet-historians like A.B. Meek, and other cultural objects like white settlers' correspondences and diaries. Many of these items have never been examined in tandem before.

"Rewriting the Frontier" shapes a new understanding of the frontier, one accessed via cultural expressions. Here, I use the "rewriting" to signify a complex process in which thousands of individuals if not millions have shared. Actors in this study include migrants in the early nineteenth century who rewrote their lives on the frontier. These people wrote letters, diaries,

deeds, wills, certificates of sale, transacted business and purchased land. With every signature on countless documents, they rewrote the frontier as well. Day by day, letter by letter, the frontier constantly evolved as frontierspersons lived their settlement experience. In doing so, they watched the frontier fade away, sometimes quickly and other times slowly.

My examination of the contingencies of the frontier and settlers' rewriting of life, culture, and society breaks new ground as "rewriting" takes on both a literal as well as metaphorical meaning. As individuals packed up and moved westward from the eastern seaboard into the Mississippi and Ohio River Valleys and virtually everywhere in between, they had a host of new experiences—the experiences of William Ely selling lands to cut-throat, uncouth, and ill-informed purchases far from his Connecticut home is but one example of how foreign the southern frontier seemed to many of its early visitors. Living in the backcountry of South Carolina may have prepared some individuals for life in frontier Alabama, but this assumption needs to be deconstructed. Not all frontiers or backcountry hamlets were the same; the sheer distance between family members who moved to Tuscaloosa and those who stayed behind in places like Litchfield, Massachusetts or Raleigh, North Carolina influenced perspectives about frontier living. One example of how migration to frontiers stretched but did not break family connections was that of Massachusetts native, Charles Snow who migrated to Tuscaloosa in the early 1820s but maintained a faithful and detailed correspondence with the mother he left behind.

Interestingly, when men and women chose to repeat the process of frontier relocation, and many of them did by seeking out places further west in Arkansas or Texas, they again participated in the rewriting of their frontier experiences while also revising the story of the American frontier. Rewriting upon relocation was something captured in the literature of the period by southwestern humorists like Johnston Jones Hooper and John Gorman Barr who

fictionalized such frontier movements and by A.B. Meek who offered both historical as well as poetic accounts of the processes. In this sense, the experiences of Tuscaloosa's white settlers became a part of the continual frontier rewriting that structured their own worlds and those of nineteenth-century America.

The five chapters of this dissertation tell many of Tuscaloosa's unheard stories. Through them, we also read the stories of the frontier South. The South that emerged by the middle of the nineteenth century was a distinct and exceptional place. Not divorced from its predecessors in the American narrative, Tuscaloosa's journey was part of the broader evolution of the American frontier. Nonetheless, central to the South's identity was the myth of the southern frontier. Uniquely, this idea found its fullest expression through individualized, cultural encounters and was shaped by the southern experiences of both northern and southern whites.

Each of this project's five chapters encompasses a fragment of Tuscaloosa's creative past. Collectively, these cultural pieces illustrate how the frontier in the American South—though not all that different from frontiers in the Northeast/Maine and Midwest—*became* southern. Concurrently, they elucidate how southerners (in Tuscaloosa and elsewhere) created a mythic South that barely resembled what went on on the ground. Their creative memories airbrushed out the peculiar southern and frontier aspects of the region (violence, insubordination, slavery, Indian-hating) and created a new, imaginary South. As place, process, and powerful concept, much of their South still exists today.

Chapter one introduces Tuscaloosa's history, its geographic location, and early happenings. The stories and statistics it utilizes calls on individuals inside Tuscaloosa as well as those far removed from the South to consider how events in early Tuscaloosa symbolized the southern frontier. By accessing reported events from Tuscaloosa's historic existence, we can

juxtapose the constructions that city and county residents chose to create in their personal imaginings of the frontier. This opening chapter incorporates a collection of traditional datasets that reflect the realities in which Tuscaloosans' rewriting projects of later chapters transpired. Chapter two follows migrants to Tuscaloosa via their correspondence and settlement narratives. Migrations to the Deep South took shape concurrently with the massive wave of individuals traveling to small, cross-paths villages like Tuscaloosa, Alabama. In evaluating their stories of settlement, we are drawn into a measuring of the frontier, that is, tracing the personal observations of individuals in the frontier environment. What did migration look like, what concerns did early migrants' have, and did relocating to the frontier South force people to immediately reconsider their ideas on freedom and slavery, class relations, success, or even healthiness? Additionally, the chapter confronts the supposed disconnectedness of early settlers by gauging the levels of remoteness and connectivity they endured.

Chapter three shifts from these stories of settlement towards the surveying and land business of William Ely, a Connecticut entrepreneur who bought and sold land in Tuscaloosa on behalf of the Connecticut Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb. Ely spent months in frontier Alabama, keeping a detailed correspondence with family and business associates. William Ely's speculation in frontier Alabama bridges the gap between individualized frontier experiences and their pursuit of land and success once they settled in Tuscaloosa. Success was on the mind of most individuals—from yeoman farmers to middling planters and rising merchants—who relocated to the Old Southwest. Usually, success was measured in how well someone fared in purchasing the frontier's abundant "goods lands." As chapter three reveals, the rewriting of Tuscaloosa was greatly impacted by the evolution of the land office business and the land

surveying that made successful purchasing possible in a world that was almost wholly obsessed with land.

Chapter four examines one of Tuscaloosa's most accomplished early citizens, Alexander B. Meek, through a lifetime of letters, poems, speeches, and histories to illustrate the influence of the frontier had on one of the antebellum South's forgotten intellectuals. According to Meek, the South's absence (circa 1839) from American history and literature was due to an inattention to the region. As he put it, "The whole history of the Southwest remains to be written." This chapter takes the life and labors of Meek to flesh out the complexities of writing *on* the southwestern frontier. The literary approach that Meek influenced, cherished, and defended through a lifetime of writing and politics allows this forgotten personality to perform as an example of the intricacies of the frontier South's early literary developments and its close relationship with the shaping of the frontier's southernness.

Chapter five closes the dissertation by drawing us into the memories of white Tuscaloosans and their expressions of appropriate and official history during the one-hundred year anniversary celebration of the white settlement of Tuscaloosa. Herein, I investigate how individuals have used their imagining of the frontier to distort Native Americans' presence and ignore completely African Americans' history, subtly crafting a local and self-gratifying version of southern history. Cultural artifacts used here draw from pioneer memoirs and reminiscences, local histories, and the 1916 play, "The Pageant of Tuscaloosa." Collectively, they offer a panorama of one hundred years of Tuscaloosa's "official" history. The chapter grapples with how individual and collective remembering *and* forgetting shaped Tuscaloosa's own pageant of memories. More than exploring the disparate nature of individualized memories, this final chapter examines the highly political and engaging construction of history and memories that

have fashioned, since Tuscaloosa's founding, the image that its citizens have tried to convey to onlookers; these onlookers have certainly included fellow Tuscaloosans, other southerners, potential outsiders (northerners, midwesterners, etc.) and, by the end of the nineteenth century, potential investors for Tuscaloosa's industries.

As I write in 2011, I do so not to hold Tuscaloosa hostage to its past but to explore the depths and complexities of a place in the American South. The invented narratives that we explore relay the significance and power of ideas in the shaping of the social and cultural dynamics of the Deep South prior to the reign of the so-called "King Cotton." Equally relevant were processes of migration, settlement and writing enmeshed within the lives of ordinary, individual Americans during the nineteenth century. Although unconnected and often unconscious of their work, these individuals' collective story is essential to understanding the depths and power of America's frontier myth.

No doubt, the myth of the frontier has evolved over the course of American history, but its general components have remained quite static: the lone pioneer striking out into the American woods to tame the wilderness and its inhabitants while simultaneously testing his own individualism, self-sufficiency and determination. The illusions of settling frontiers that shaped European colonial experiences did not fade with the full-scale white settlement by the late 1820s, the momentous Civil War, Reconstruction, so-called "Redemption," or the rise Jim Crow. In fact, they sank deeper roots into American ideal over the course of the nineteenth century. This dissertation is a compilation of experiences of the American people living at one place—Tuscaloosa, Alabama—during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Tuscaloosa residents' cultural works, with those of other Americans', served to tighten the bonds between the perceptions of the self-sufficient, independent individual and the successful, model citizen of

the republic. In time, these concepts, like the frontier itself, would become intricately associated with the word “American.”

I examine that journey by zeroing in on Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Here, the manufacturing of these concepts can be observed in the cultural productions generated during the first half of the nineteenth century. Its images and politics, letters and pamphlets all existed as part of the broader American frontier conversation that matured in the decades after the American Revolution, in some ways, continues to evolve. And yet, Tuscaloosa’s and the South’s story in this conversation have remained undisturbed since the initial telling. The pages that follow are occupied by the life stories of individual migrants, settlers, displaced persons, and forced travelers whose participation in settling, making, shaping and remembering Tuscaloosa made the frontier. Just as their thoughts and dreams, pens and letters aided them in settling the southern frontier, so they can now allow historians to assess the significance of these southern frontier adventures and their two centuries worth of consequences.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING TUSCALOOSA

In honor of Tuscaloosa, Alabama's one hundred-seventy-fifth year, Community Communications along with the West Alabama Chamber of Commerce produced *Tuscaloosa: The Tradition, The Spirit, The Vision* (1994). Johnnie R. Aycock, a local businessman and Chamber executive labored to portray the "rich fabric" and "healthy pulse" of the Tuscaloosa County community as well as "the warmth and friendliness of our people...our traditions and heritage, and...the opportunities for a prosperous future." Since white settlement in 1816, city partisans have sought to showcase "the heart and soul of Tuscaloosa and the spirit of [its] people."¹ *Tuscaloosa* represents the most recent production in this long history of commemorative storytelling.

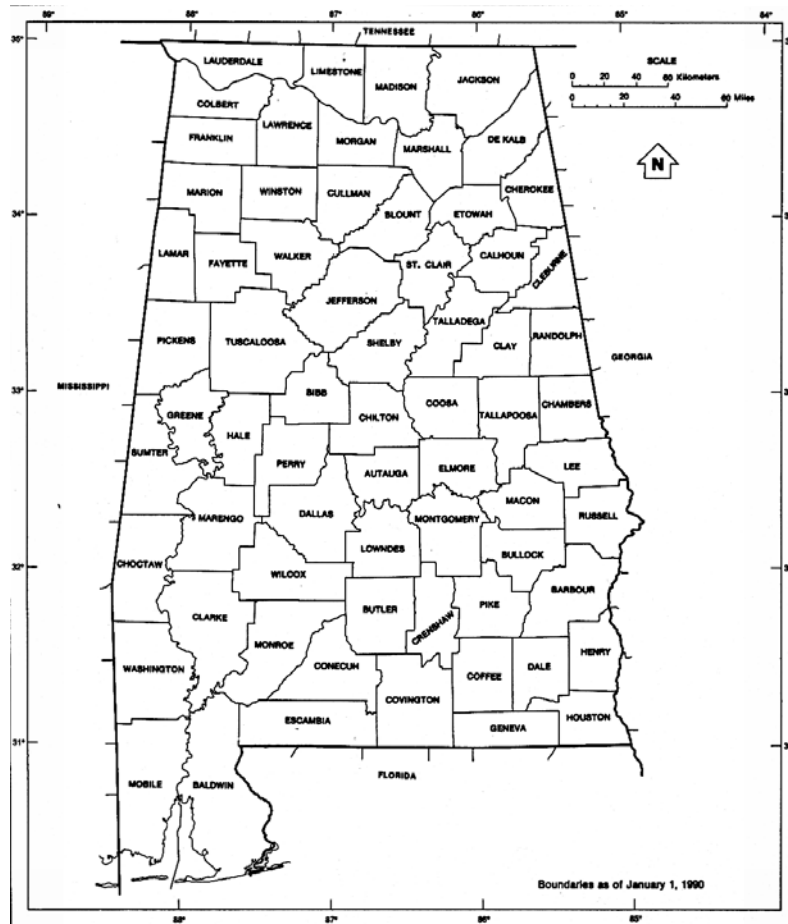
Whether in 1870, 1916, or 1994, pamphlets and books about Tuscaloosa often simplify the past to look ahead to a bright future. The history of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, however, has much more to tell us than offered by these business-oriented, commemorative works. The chapters that follow interpret and penetrate this patina of image-making, compelling us to recognize the strange careers of rewritten histories. The present essay offers several historical contexts; contexts in which many of these revised histories first transpired. With this foundation piece in place, I launch into analyses of the cultural productions of the frontier that white Tuscaloosans—southerners and northerners, men and women—created during the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

¹ Johnnie R. Aycock, *Tuscaloosa: The Tradition, The Spirit, The Vision* (U.S.: Community Communications, 1994), 9.

To understand the interplay between a twentieth-century commemorative play and early migrants' tales of settlement or the propaganda of speculative land salesmen with, it is essential to lay out the historical foundation on which individuals customized these stories and tales. The first section, "The Raw Frontier" examines various aspects of life in the early American backcountry. By exploring migrants' interactions in their new, "wild" geography as they sought to construct order through print media, taverns and general stores. The second section, "The Indian Menace," draws on a traditional theme of frontier studies in its exploration of white-Native encounters. It does so with the express purpose of understanding two central elements of the southern frontier: first, what led white Americans to conclude that southern Indian tribes were nothing more than a menace to their desired order and, second, what lengths would white settlers go to physically and psychologically displace Native Americans from the South?

The third section, "Boosterism and its Impact" adopts an angle that has been traditionally reserved (at least in southern historiography) for post-Reconstruction historians explaining "the rise of the 'New South.'" Amid the hubbub of migration and removal, white Tuscaloosans worked to secure their personal interests in opposition to threats to order from resistant Natives and rebellious slaves. Boosterism, or the championing of Tuscaloosa's geography, resources and internal developments, reached deep within the village and county's collective psyche to make spectacles of violence (particularly those across the color line) seem appropriate. For individuals engulfed in this rapidly evolving frontier society, the hyperactivity of steamboats, coal mining and the ascendance of a slave-based, cotton industry shaped lives. This new, southern place made its way "Toward a Cotton and Slave South," the subject of the fourth section. Finally, the last segment, "A Southern Middle Ground," argues that by the antebellum period, Tuscaloosa had developed into a geographical and ideological middle ground. Both county and city

negotiated the political, cultural and economic terrains between the yeoman-dominated upcountry of north Alabama and the planter-ruled world of the Cotton Belt.²



Map 1.1: “Alabama (outline map). County boundaries and names. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990.”

Accessed at:

<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/stat es/alabama.gif>

² This essay relies on numerical data from fifty years of U.S. Census materials and other sources to explain Tuscaloosa’s demographics and economy, as well as the middle ground that Tuscaloosa quickly came to occupy in early Alabama. That middle position, I argue, permitted the county and village to take advantage of physical resources and play into the power struggles of winning the state capital and state university, two prizes that placed the ten-year-old city on a unique trajectory. This quantitative approach permits a comparative look at Tuscaloosa County in relation to two other counties representative of two regions in the state of Alabama; namely, Lawrence County in the yeoman-dominated Tennessee River Valley in the northwestern part of the state and Dallas County in the heart of the planter-dominated, cotton-rich plains of central Alabama.

The Raw Frontier

Local legends abound in the stories of Tuscaloosa's initial settlement by white Americans. Disentangling facts from fictional accounts masquerading as facts often confounds the production of accurate community history. One example of this difficulty arises when Tuscaloosa's historians seek to determine the first white settlers' identity. Although some disagreement persists, Jonathon (or Thomas) York's family seem to be the likely first group on the scene, arriving in April 1816.³ Because there was no census of this vastly rural, unsettled area until 1820, historian William Wyman used interviews and print sources to estimate a population of about two hundred individuals in 1817. By 1818, the territorial legislature marked Tuscaloosa County's population at 3,138.⁴ Migrants settled on a clearing conveniently bordered by forests on the south, east and west, and bounded by the Black Warrior River to the north. Wedged between the Cumberland Plateau and the East Gulf Coastal Plain, Tuscaloosa's abundant resources and convenient location attracted settlers from throughout the eastern United States. Tuscaloosa sat at the southern point on the Huntsville Road that connected it to the burgeoning cotton and corn markets of northern Alabama. The navigable waters of the Black Warrior River made the town the epicenter for southward flowing commerce and northbound travelers.

The land must have appeared rough and muddy to its earliest settlers. They lived in log cabins with stick chimneys and clustered around the intersection of two main streets that aspired

³ See Morris Raymond Boucher, "Factors in the History of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1816-1846." (Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Alabama, 1947), 9-10 and Willis Brewer, *Alabama: Her History, Resources, War Record, and Public Men. From 1540 to 1872* (Montgomery, Alabama: Barrett & Brown, Steam Printers and Book Binders, 1872), 550.

⁴ William Wyman, "History of Tuscaloosa," *Tuscaloosa Times* (October 28, 1896). See also, *The Territorial Papers of the United States, Volume XVIII: The Territory of Alabama, 1817-1819*. Clarence Edwin Carter, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1952), 462.

in name to the greatness of Philadelphia—Broad and Market. Within its first decades, residents constructed public houses of worship and included Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian and Catholic denominations. Settlers also built taverns and a hotel out of trees that surrounded the abandoned Choctaw settlement.⁵ Tuscaloosa County’s resources sustained forty years of uninterrupted population growth: 8,229 inhabitants in 1820; 16,583 in 1840; and over 23,000 by 1860.⁶ Movement to Tuscaloosa was part of the first great shift of the American population inland from the eastern seaboard. Allan Kulikoff demonstrated that some 609,000 whites born in Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas relocated to the Southwest by 1850.

Map 1.2: Excerpt from Map 1.1 (above). Note that Tuscaloosa County sits in the middle, western portion of the state—one county removed from the Alabama-Mississippi state line.



Equally significant, “at least 835,000 slaves were forced to migrate from the upper South to the lower South between 1790 and 1860.”⁷ The rapid influx of diverse peoples profoundly impacted the new places emerging throughout the southwest. In Alabama alone, total population

⁵ Early tales of migration and exploration into Tuscaloosa and surrounding areas made their way into national media market. See for example stories in: *The Hornet, or Republican Advocate* [Fredericktown, Maryland] (October 17, 1810); “To the Editors of the Orleans Gazette.” *The National Intelligencer* [Washington, D.C.] (October 5, 1810); *The Washingtonian* [Leesburg, Virginia] (October 16, 1810); “By a Gentleman Just from Mobile Country.” *The Berkshire Reporter* [Pittsfield, Massachusetts] (November 7, 1810); *Boston Daily Advertiser* (January 21, 1819); “Extract of a Letter from a Mercantile Friend of Our’s in Mobile, Date June 8, 1822.” *The Watch-Tower* [Cooperstown, New York] (July 29, 1822).

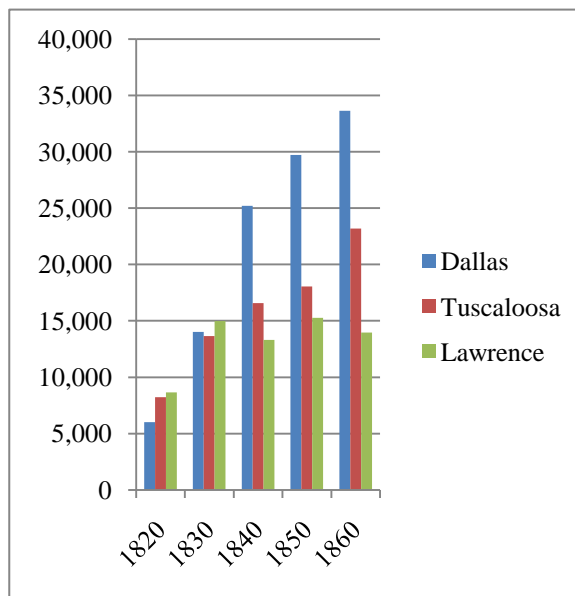
⁶ For data used in this essay’s tables, see the incredibly streamlined and informative database compiled by the University of Virginia at: <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/php/county.php>.

⁷ Allan Kulikoff, “The Colonial Chesapeake: Seedbed of Antebellum Southern Culture.” *The Journal of Southern History* XLV.4. (November 1979), 539.

grew exponentially. Congress cut the Alabama territory out of the eastern half of the Mississippi territory on March 3, 1817. That year, residents bombarded territorial representatives at St. Stephens with petition became a state in under two years.

By that time, the white and enslaved population had increased sixteen fold: from 9,046 in 1810 to over 144,000 by 1820. This dramatic increase was only a glimmer of things to come.⁸ Once settled, whites' vivid descriptions of the natural beauty of the Alabama wilderness filled the pages of their

**Table 1.1:
Total Population Data (1820-1860)**



correspondence and diaries. Filled with oaks and hickories, Tuscaloosa acquired various nicknames that reflected its scenic and natural appeal. Indeed, as the following chapters illustrate, an ever-present sense of displaying picturesque images of this “City of the Druid Oaks” permeates Tuscaloosa’s historical existence. This quality, among many others, makes Tuscaloosa a fascinating place for historical study.⁹

⁸ The earlier statistic combines the population totals from Baldwin, Madison, and Washington counties from their census of 1810 to represent the state and is also cited in Thomas Perkins Abernethy, *The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990 reprint), 179. The latter figure from 1820 is confirmed in the U.S. Census data. See: <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/php/county.php>.

⁹ An example of the constant revising of something as benign as Tuscaloosa’s natural surroundings can be observed in William Stanley Hoole’s 1979 poem, “Ode to A Druid Oak: A Tale of Tuscaloosa and The University of Alabama.” The then-dean of Tuscaloosa historians, Hoole had served as the Director of the University of Alabama libraries from 1944-1971. His place in the pantheon of Alabama historians was secured when administrators named the special collections library at the University in his honor.

Tuscaloosans' experiences, however, were not all colorful oak leaves and sparkling river waves. Early Tuscaloosa proved to be a society rife with incredibly unlucky run-ins with Mother Nature and political and social turmoil. Outside newspapers presented these trials of human ability to readers. News of gale winds that wreaked "considerable damage" on the local corn crop splashed onto the pages of New York's *Commercial Advertiser* three years after the earliest white settlers arrived in Tuscaloosa. Extreme weather and natural disorders continued as major news stories. Reports of six inches of snow "more intense than had ever before been experienced there" in 1820; intense cold weather that "destroy[ed] all tender vegetables, particularly cotton" in April 1821; an abundance of flies "very fatal amongst the cattle, hogs, sheep, dogs, and even men...the size between the large green and that of the common house fly" in September 1828; a child frozen in the unseasonably cold and snowy weather in February 1829; destructive hail storms "destroying every thing before it" in June 1829; a smallpox epidemic from which "a large proportion of the population" died in November 1830; and in April 1842, a "destructive tornado" that demolished buildings, damaged the state house, blocked the Black Warrior bridge, and left one resident dead and several others injured—the totality of such events surely amazed readers that anyone could survive in such a turbulent place¹⁰

Fires also impacted the developing village of Tuscaloosa. In early 1836, a fire consumed eight or ten houses in the city; luckily, property owners had insured "a portion of the goods [the buildings] contained." Insurance businesses thrived in such a risky and speculative environment. Still, no amount of preparation and precaution could guard one from the rough and tumble of an

¹⁰ See respectively: *New-York Commercial Advertiser* (August 11, 1819) XXII. 60; *Connecticut Gazette* (February 9, 1820); *The New-York Evening Post* (May 28, 1821); *Providence Patriot & Columbian Phenix* [Rhode Island] (October 29, 1828); *The Rhode-Island American and Providence Gazette* (March 24, 1829); *New-Hampshire Gazette* (June 2, 1829); *Salem Gazette* [Massachusetts] (November 26, 1830); *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* (April 7, 1842). The Tuscaloosa press provided detailed coverage of the tornado that wiped out the one-time rival of Tuscaloosa: "Destructive Tornado!" *Independent Monitor* [Tuscaloosa, Alabama] (March 9, 1842) V.44.

often violent frontier. Personal disasters and disappointments sank the dreams of countless migrants intent on establishing a new, successful life in Tuscaloosa.

And yet, several businessmen thrived in early Tuscaloosa and contributed to its bustling social life. The Alabama territorial legislature observed these advances and established Tuscaloosa County in 1818. In December 1819, one day before the state of Alabama entered the Union, the State Legislature incorporated the city of Tuscaloosa.¹¹ William R. Colgin constructed the first framed dwelling (1821); Joshua Halbert established the first hotel (1817); South Carolinian Samuel Mills Meek labored as the first physician (1819); Levin Powell migrated from Virginia to serve as the first justice of the peace and postmaster (by 1816); John Click kept a general store (1817); and Major Hardin Perking established the city's first cotton gin (1818).¹²

In the 1820s and 1830s, increasing numbers of migrants swarmed Tuscaloosa and the development of social institutions marked a rapidly evolving, functioning frontier society. By 1821, the city held a county jail, a county courthouse and a Masonic Lodge. During this period, numerous religious groups took root on the banks of the Black Warrior. Reverends Thomas Baines and Nathan Roberts first laid claim to Tuscaloosa's souls when they arrived in 1818 and established Ebenezer Baptist church. The two assisted in the formation of the regional Baptist conference known as the Cahawba Association. The Reverend Ebenezer Hearn planted a Methodist church in 1818. Two years later, South Carolinian Andrew Brown gathered a Presbyterian congregation, and by 1828, Episcopalian Robert G. Paris founded Christ Church.

¹¹ Some of the earliest Tuscaloosa newspapers include advertisements from these diverse business interests: "Notice. The Attorneys & Connellers", "Jewelry for Sale", "Law Partnership. Hiram Shortridge of Greene county & Robert E. B. Baylor of Tuscaloosa", "Eagle Hotel. George Davis" in *American Mirror* [Tuscaloosa, Alabama] (December 8, 1821).

¹² Archibald Bruce McEachin, *The History of Tuscaloosa, 1816-1880* eds., W. Stanley Hoole and Addie S. Hoole (Tuscaloosa: Confederate Publishing Company, 1977).

Protestants did not enjoy complete dominance; a small number of Catholics met in Tuscaloosa by 1819, but did not construct a meeting place until 1846.¹³

An active print culture simultaneously supported and frustrated the morality of early Tuscaloosans. It supplied the information that fueled competition among various Protestant denominations and reported on residents' successes (in farming, commerce and slavery) and abundance of entertainments (from cock-fighting to the sprawling tavern scene). Taverns and other liquor-serving establishments were chief among the city's burgeoning businesses.

Apparently, the frictions of constructing society at Tuscaloosa required the lubrication of alcohol. Liquor probably contributed to the constant conflict that plagued the city. From 1818 to 1832, the county sold about twenty-three tavern licenses for establishments across Tuscaloosa County. The fee for licensing fluctuated from year to year and varied according to location. In 1830, it cost \$2.50 to establish a tavern in the county and four times that amount in the city. A year later, those rates had increased to \$3 and \$12, respectively.¹⁴

The sale of alcohol and other goods demonstrate the emergence of a sustained consumer culture by the end of the first decade of Tuscaloosa's incorporation. Businessmen bought an annual average of 18.5 licenses for a variety of industries including taverns, hotels, clothing

¹³ Matthew William Clinton, *Tuscaloosa, Alabama: Its Early Days, 1816-1865* (Tuscaloosa: The Zonta Club, 1958), 32-42. News of the aspirations of religionists migrating to the Deep South, and in particular Tuscaloosa, did reach a national audience during the 1820s: "Extracts from the Report of the Rev. T.C. Stuart, A Missionary Employed by the Presbytery." *The Southern Evangelical Intelligencer* [Charleston, South Carolina] (May 13, 1820); "State of Religion in Alabama." *Concord Observer* [New Hampshire] (May 29, 1820); "From the Christian Herald: Young Men's Missionary Society of N.Y." *The Southern Evangelical Intelligencer* [Charleston, South Carolina] (June 17, 1820); "Extract of a letter from a clergyman of North Carolina, to the editors of the Evangelical Intelligencer." *Essex Patriot* [Massachusetts] (February 3, 1821); "Deaths." *Salem Gazette* [Massachusetts] (September 11, 1829). On religion and reform see John W. Quist, *Restless Visionaries: The Social Roots of Antebellum Reform in Alabama and Michigan* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998) and William Warren Rogers, Ward, Atkins, and Flynt *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994) 124-128.

¹⁴ *Docket of Tavern License 1818*. TCR.

stores, slave auction houses and general retail shops. The arrival of the state capital and university in the late 1820s sparked Tuscaloosa's greatest commercial growth. At the peak of the its economic boom in the 1830s, the county sold or renewed a total of 229 licenses. In the 1840s, license sales dropped twenty percent, and, by 1860, they declined another ten percent.¹⁵

Newspapers reported business activity, social developments, sensationalized news and political dramas. Thomas Grantland's *Alabama Sentinel* challenged Thomas Davenport's early monopoly in 1825. Given the brutal nature of nineteenth-century American newspaper printing, Davenport proved quite adept, undercutting his competitors by merging his *American Mirror* with lesser papers to produce the *Tuscaloosa Chronicle*.¹⁶ Outside editors picked up stories from these papers to reach audiences far and wide. These reports shaped Americans' perceptions of the frontier South through the window of Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

Both the state capital and university added to the diverse population. Alabama's state government moved from its temporary seat in Huntsville to the Black Belt village of Cahawba in the early 1820s. The oft-rising waters of the Alabama River forced the capital's relocation to Tuscaloosa by 1826. In 1831, the University of Alabama opened its doors to students in the young frontier town.¹⁷ Professors, students and lawmakers joined migrants from across the state, the eastern United States and from Europe and shaped the character of Tuscaloosa. By 1840, Tuscaloosans had surveyed, settled and ordered their frontier.

¹⁵ *General License Record: 1827 to 1860*. TCR.

¹⁶ *Tuscaloosa Chronicle* [Tuscaloosa, Alabama] (January 31, 1827).

¹⁷ On floods in Cahawba and the capital's eventual move to Tuscaloosa see related articles in *New-Bedford Mercury* [Massachusetts] (January 1, 1819); *Daily National Intelligencer* [Washington, D.C.] (April 21, 1820); *The American* [New York] (April 24, 1820); *Camden Gazette* [South Carolina] (May 11, 1820); *The Pittsfield Sun* [Massachusetts] (April 27, 1826); *Rhode Island American, Statesman and Providence Gazette* (August 28, 1829). Also, William H. Brantley, *Three Capitals: A Book About the First Three Capitals of Alabama, St. Stephens, Huntsville, and Cahawba, 1818-1826* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976).

The Indian Menace

Numerous pleas for assistance with the village's infant infrastructure—from military organization of proper defenses to civil service appointees—reached the governor during the late 1810s.¹⁸ Collectively, they reveal the immediate danger to white settlers who lived in frontier Tuscaloosa. With the constant threat of Indian raids, Tuscaloosa never suffered from a shortage of scandal and intrigue, but only a handful of skirmishes with local Choctaw and Creek Indians survive in the historical record. These encounters had a very real impact on the lives of early settlers. For sure, Tuscaloosa's status as an uncontested space emerged only after several violent raids by U.S. military forces in the early 1810s—raids that future generations of white settlers were all too happy to dismiss from their historical consciousness. David Crockett and his Tennessee volunteers, for example, did their extermination work quite well, both physically and psychologically. Descriptions of Native-White conflicts arrived at the territorial governor's desk from several Tuscaloosans who observed these limited interactions.¹⁹

¹⁸ *The Territorial Papers of the United States, Volume XVIII: The Territory of Alabama, 1817-1819*. Clarence Edwin Carter, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1952), 429-431 and 452. For other examples see letters from Thomas C. Hunter (286 and 313), Josiah Foster (442-443), James Rather (452), and James O. Crump (386) in the same volume. News stories proliferated throughout the United States when migrants were besieged by "Indian Hostilities"—See the following explosion of the story: "Indian Hostilities." *New York Daily Advertiser* (October 19, 1818); "Indian Hostilities." *New York Spectator* (October 20, 1818); "Indian Hostilities." *The American Beacon and Norfolk & Portsmouth Daily Advertiser* [Norfolk, Virginia] (October 21, 1818); *Boston Daily Advertiser* (October 21, 1818); "Indian Hostilities." *Farmer's Repository* [Charlestown, West Virginia] (October 21, 1818); "Indian Hostilities." *Boston Weekly Messenger* (October 22, 1818); "Indian Hostilities." *Westchester Herald* [Mount Pleasant, New York] (October 27, 1818); "Copy of a Letter from Mc. John McNeill to the War Department." *The Alexandria Herald* [Virginia] (October 30, 1818); *The American Beacon and Norfolk & Portsmouth Daily Advertiser* [Norfolk, Virginia] (November 2, 1818); "The Seminoles." *Alexandria Gazette & Daily Advertiser* [Virginia] (November 5, 1818). Much of this nationalized outrage would latter buttress a collective consciousness in support of Indian Removal: "The Cherokees. Copy of a letter from one of the Editors of this paper, dated Tuscaloosa, July 5." *Connecticut Mirror* (August 28, 1826); *Ithaca Journal* [New York] (January 19, 1831); *Salem Gazette* [Massachusetts] (October 15, 1833); *Richmond Enquirer* (October 22, 1833); *Connecticut Courant* (March 14, 1836); "Removal of the Creek Indians." *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* (November 14, 1836).

The most famous of early visitors (and raiders) to the site of Tuscaloosa was *the* American frontier legend, David Crockett. It was Crockett's participation with John Coffee's and Andrew Jackson's military excursions throughout Alabama that brought him to what they "called the Black Warrior's town." Crockett's 1813 description of his arrival at the "Indian town" is both a rare and atrocious account of the white invasion of Tuscaloosa.²⁰ Therein, Crockett noted that Tuscaloosa thrived as a large town from which "the Indians had all left." Crockett marveled at the large fields of corn and great reserve of dried beans as if he discovered a woodland paradise. "Without delay," he boasted, "we secured them" and passively proceeded to "burn the town to ashes." Crockett's respect for Native agricultural ingenuity and the brutality of razing their village coexisted in close proximity. Even while leaving the town, he calmly recalled how "we saw plenty of Indian tracks," no doubt left by those "scared off by our arrival."²¹ White imperialism had triumphed, and a Native presence would never again present a serious threat to Tuscaloosa's "civilized" settlers.

The lack of compunction for human suffering resounded throughout Crockett's account of white expansion in the southeast. Crossing the Tennessee River in 1816, Crockett returned to "Creek Country" where one member of his party fell victim to a "very poisonous snake" after which Crockett, with little recorded remorse, "left him and went on." While camping north of

¹⁹ *The Territorial Papers of the United States, Volume XVIII: The Territory of Alabama, 1817-1819*. Clarence Edwin Carter, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1952).

²⁰ For biographies of Crockett see John S.C. Abbott, *David Crockett: His Life and Adventures* (London: Echo Library, 2006); Buddy Levy, *American Legend: The Real-Life Adventures of David Crockett* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 2005); James Atkins Shckford, John B. Shackford and Michael Lofaro, *David Crockett: The Man and the Legend* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986 reprint); Michael A. Lofaro, *Davy Crockett: The Man, the Legend, the Legacy, 1786-1986* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985). David Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee* (Philadelphia: E.L. Carey and A. Hart, 1834), 83-84. Although the validity of Crockett's authorship has been called into serious question since its first publication, it still offers useful and relevant details from his encounters with frontier Tuscaloosa.

²¹ Crockett, *Narrative*, 83-84.

Tuscaloosa, “as there were no inhabitants,” his group awoke to the sounds of their horses reversing the path they had taken to Tuscaloosa. Hoping to recover the horses, Crockett traveled fifty miles—perhaps a generous embellishment given Crockett’s proclivity for exaggeration—“wading creek and swamps, and climbing mountains” but was unable to catch up to the animals. Once he gave up the hunt, Crockett was so “sore, and fatigued” that he could barely walk. After being discovered by “some Indians” in a “perfect wilderness,” Crockett was impressed both by the Natives’ attempts to revive him with their “ripe melons” and the abilities of his Indian escort. Although Crockett felt at one point that the “jig was mighty nigh up with me,” he recovered and returned home to the “utter astonishment” of his wife who had believed rumors of his death.

Crockett considered himself the successor to Andrew Jackson—both had made careers in Tennessee, neither were intellectual men, and both had proven their manly prowess fighting southern Natives. His writings evoke the test of wills that the frontier necessitated. Assuredly, much of its hyperbolic writing succeeded in guaranteeing him a place in Americans’ imagining of frontier life; however, his realities of life in early Tennessee and his escapades in frontier Alabama illustrate the dense nature of the physical environment. They also point to the keen, personal survival techniques necessitated by backcountry living and the prevailing white attitudes toward Native Americans. In the mid-1810s, friendly persons were thinly



Image 1.1: “Portrait of David Crockett” by John Gadsby Chapman. Held at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

disbursed in the backcountry of the southwest, and if one was able to locate a settler's homestead (as Crockett did with Indian guidance), medical assistance would have been primitive at best. Even more significant were Crockett's first encounters with the Indian village at the headwaters of the Black Warrior River. He made sure to note soil fertility and possible city planting, and these points of emphasis did not fade with intensified white exploration of Tuscaloosa.

Roughly five years after Crockett's first Tuscaloosa visit, Native Americans remained an annoyance for white settlers. In October 1818, Edmund Jones informed Governor William Wyatt Bibb of the "great distress" caused by "large parties of Hostile Indians passing Thro' our Country." The Indians had, he reported, killed three children, one black woman and a "considerable Quantity of stock." Presently, Tuscaloosans beseeched the governor to "send us such aid in men & as many arms as may be in your power...to prevent our families from falling sacrifice" and to "prevent any more parties from again entering our Territory." Later that same year, Samuel Taylor offered a more detailed interpretation of these same events. Taylor reported that a group of fifty to one hundred Indians "attack'd a citizen—rob'd him of his gun & ammunition" and taunted him. The white man escaped, and a posse of Tuscaloosans "pursued & overtook the Indians" only to release them. The Natives hid in "the most secret & unfrequented part of the forests" and later murdered a local family. Taylor wrote the governor to present the information concerning the "recent murders, insults & robberies" as well as to receive the executive's "approbation" for Taylor's unauthorized counterattacks.

By November 1818, Thomas Hunter wrote to assure the governor that "nothing of importance has transpired" and that the "country is again placed in apparent security." Yet, his letter noted the potential for future conflict with the Creek Indians who remained on the frontier. As Hunter explained, numerous Creeks still resided in the upper portions of the country.

Although these previously hostile Indians “now profess peace,” Hunter wanted the governor’s opinion on those individuals who had assisted “bad Indians.” Rangers had ordered them to disband, but the Creeks “refuse[d] to obey.” Strikingly different than whites’ memories of removed and, thus “civilized” Indians, many of the earliest letters to the governor of the territory pressed the executive to aide Tuscaloosa’s settlers in fending off the very real and resistant Indian populations.

Boosterism and its Impact

In less than twenty years, Tuscaloosa evolved from frontier settlement to thriving backcountry village. The importance of its close proximity to the Black Warrior River contributed to a heightened sense of commercial standing. Strategically placed at the headwaters of the “Nile of the Western Country,” Tuscaloosa quickly rose as the trade and business hub of the surrounding agrarian districts.²² As early as 1818, Hallett & Butler, a New York-based merchant firm, advertised the “extensive Warehouses” in both Mobile and Tuscaloosa. The firm had agents stationed throughout the northeast, and in Baltimore, Maryland as well as Savannah and Augusta, Georgia. These cities’ storehouses boasted: “ready for the reception of any Goods that may be forwarded to any part of the Territory, or Produce to any part of the United States or foreign ports.”²³

The ability to transport goods to and from Tuscaloosa proved equally important as warehouses for New York investors and potential South-bound merchants. News of the arrival of the steamboat, *Tensa* to Tuscaloosa splashed onto the pages of the *The New York Columbian* in

²² See article on Tuscaloosa in the *Niles Register* (February 28, 1818) cited in a 1981 speech, “A Brief History of Tuscaloosa, Alabama” by Marvin L. Harper, President of the Tuscaloosa County Preservation Society. Harper’s talk can be found in *Pioneers of Tuscaloosa County, Alabama Prior to 1830* (Tuscaloosa: Tuscaloosa Genealogical Society, 1981), 1.

²³ *Mercantile Advertiser* [New York, New York] (August 12, 1818). See also *New York Daily Advertiser* (August 12, 1818) and *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser* (September 14, 1818).

May 1820 and undoubtedly calmed merchants' apprehensions. *Tensa's* arrival produced a "delightful" response from frontier folk who witnessed "such a novel spectacle in this woody world." "Extatic" Tuscaloosans marveled over the physical survival of the *Tensa*: "She was in excellent order having fortunately received no damage in ascending the long, serpentine, and (by boats of her class) hitherto unexplored Black Warrior." Her arrival in nineteen days from the downstream Blakeley, Alabama, demonstrated the "successful navigating of this river by steam-boats" as well as the "incalculable" "advantage of Tuscaloosa, and the country around and above."²⁴ "The Nile of the Western Country" finally opened for business.

In the not-so-distant future, the successful navigation of the Black Warrior supplied one of many jewels in King Cotton's crown. Before cotton solidified its hold on the Deep South (by the late 1820s), a variety of alternate business ventures vied to fill the niches of early Tuscaloosa commerce. In December of 1820, for example, Tuscaloosa and its surrounding counties traded in wolf scalps at a five dollar premium established by the state legislature. The *Tuscaloosa Republican* ran the story, subsequently picked up by papers in Massachusetts and New York. These newspapers condemned the state's attempt at animal control as more scalps had been collected in one county than "the *whole taxes of the county will pay for!*" Its editors suggested that the Legislature should be paid in scalps until they repealed the law.²⁵

Although the industry came to full fruition in Tuscaloosa as well as in Birmingham, Alabama's "New South" city, after the Civil War, coal mining developed quite early. In late 1822, the *Mobile Register* described "a specimen of coal, dug up near the falls and town of

²⁴ *The New York Columbian* (May 26, 1820).

²⁵ *The American* [New York, New York] (December 21, 1820).

Tuscaloosa” as “superior to the Virginia coal, and fully equal to that generally imported from Liverpool.”²⁶ Alongside coal, agricultural enterprises also thrived including livestock like cattle, sheep, and swine as well as foodstuffs such as corn and grain. Although central to the city’s physical and financial survival, these areas of production seldom made the news unless river floods brought “immense losses”—i.e. two hundred sheep swept downriver—as they had in 1827 and

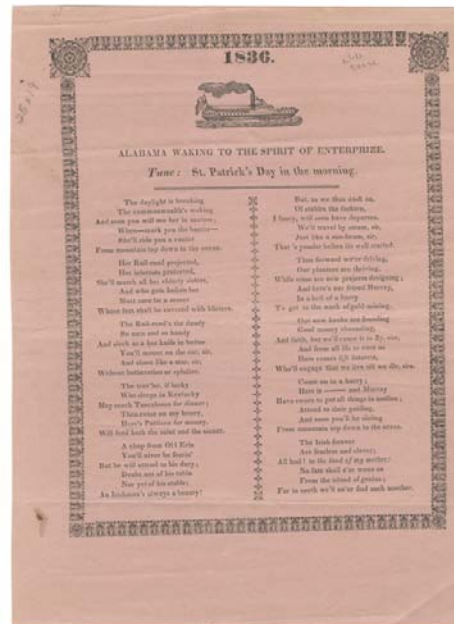


Image 1.2: “Alabama Waking to the Spirit of Enterprize.” Duke University Libraries, Digital Collections, American Song Sheets.

1828.²⁷ The Black Warrior could bring great loss; it could equally bring tremendous success. “Alabama Waking to the Spirit of Enterprize” recognized and celebrated such potential. In June 1836, with the tune of “St. Patrick’s Day in the Morning,” the songwriter equated Alabama’s success with Tuscaloosa’s rising stature as the crucial link between river traffic and land-locked farms and plantations. The locale permitted “railroads,” “planters,” and “new designs” to coalesce to make Tuscaloosa—not Mobile, Huntsville, or Montgomery—the Deep South’s emblematic flourishing village.²⁸ If the unknown author lived to see the 1850s, he was undoubtedly pleased with his predictions on

²⁶ *Baltimore Patriot* (January 20, 1823).

²⁷ See respectively *The Pittsfield Sun* [Massachusetts] (March 29, 1827) and *Providence Patriot & Columbian Phenix* [Rhode Island] (April 2, 1828).

²⁸ “Alabama Waking to the Spirit of Enterprize.” (1836). DU-DC. http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/songsheets_bsvg200703/

Tuscaloosa's success (see Tables 1.2 and 1.3). By 1860, Tuscaloosa stood solidly as the hub of Alabama businesses linking agriculture, commerce, and manufacturing.

Table 1.2: Manufacturing Data (1860)

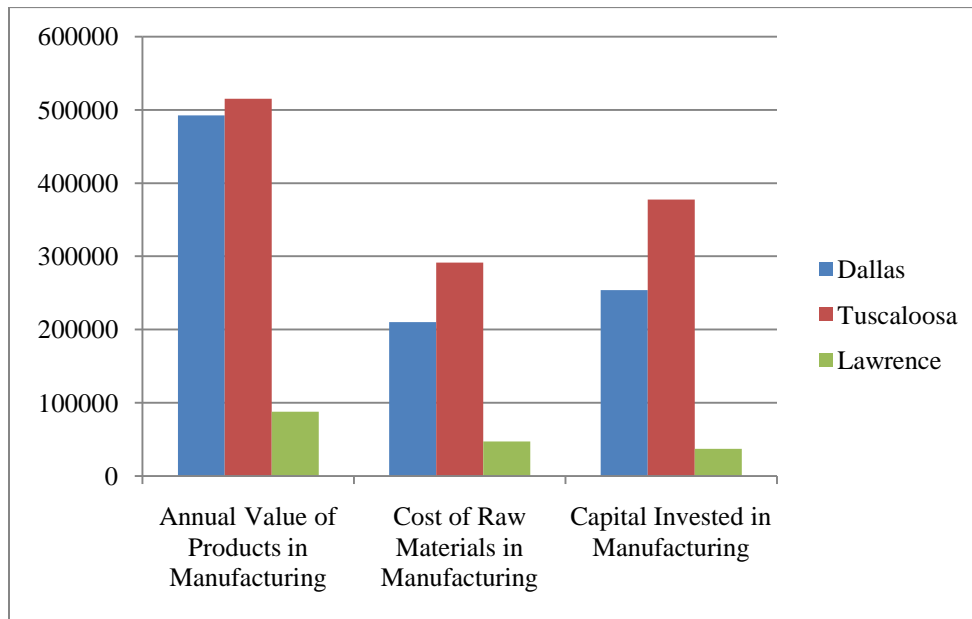
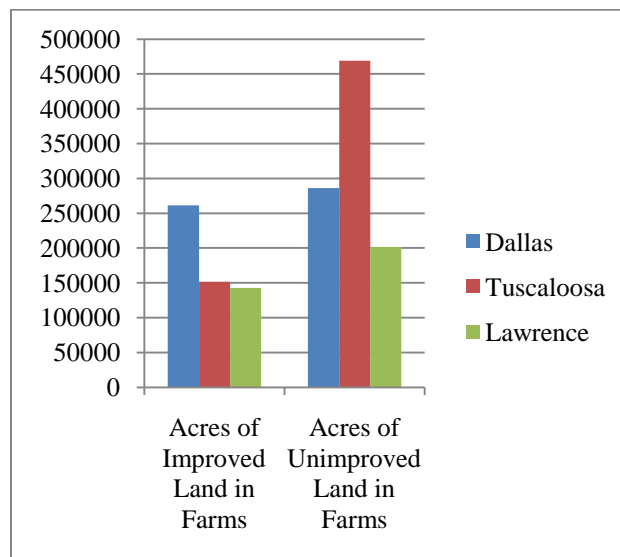


Table 1.3: Farm Data (1860)



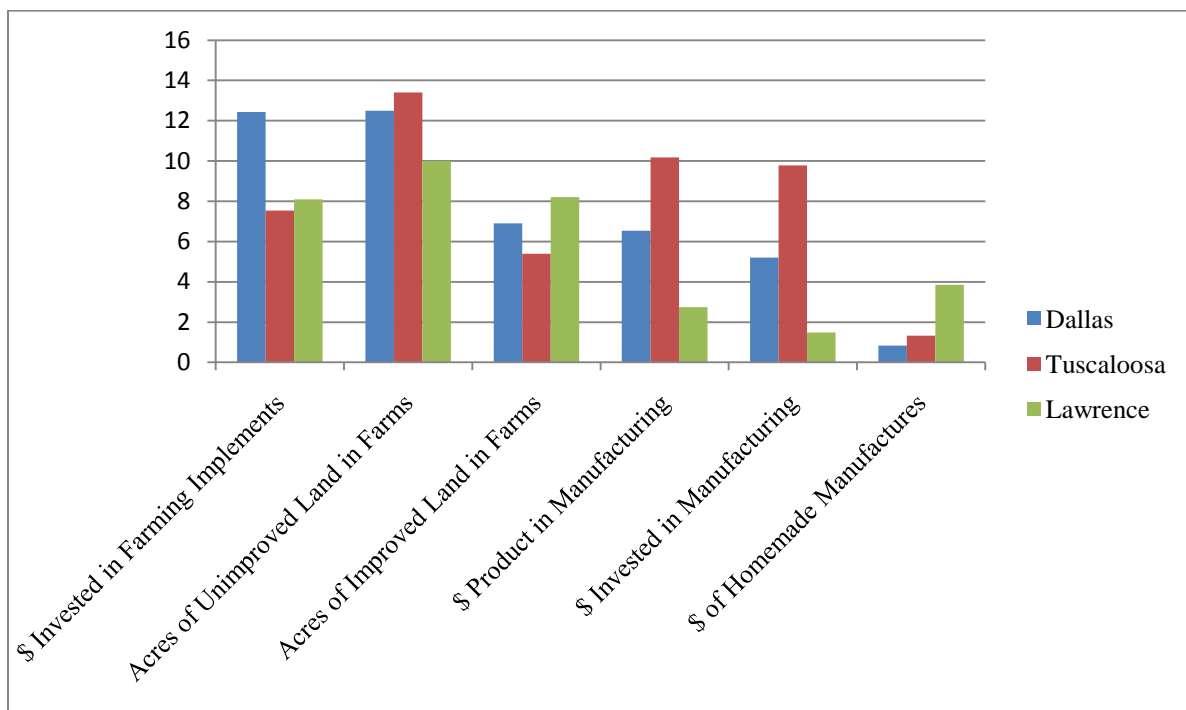
As the nineteenth century rolled on, cotton and its subsidiaries increasingly attracted outsiders' attention. Southern cotton and slaves ultimately dictated the discussions of southern industry for much of the 1830s and 1840s. In a sense, these conversations marked a clear shift in commercial reporting from one on agricultural *and* industry to one centered wholly on cotton. Abundant examples, both benign and inhuman, demonstrate cotton's centrality within Americans' perceptions of the emerging South. For example, an 1831 report from Cooperstown, New York, discussed the demise of Tuscaloosa's cotton crop and the most "offensive smell" the "rot" created. A year later, the Maryland *Republican Star* conveyed the sale of ninety enslaved humans or "common field hands...in the neighborhood of Tuscaloosa, Alabama...[for] the sum of forty-one thousand and thirty one dollars and fifty cents...a price not exceeding their valuation."²⁹ Both the smells produced and bodies controlled by southern cotton could be observed far beyond the storehouses and auctions of Tuscaloosa.

By the late 1830s, cotton agriculture occupied much of Tuscaloosa's economic center stage. Good soil, good weather and slave labor made Tuscaloosa County ripe for cotton production. Nonetheless, cotton farmers' annual success remained unpredictable, especially in the early 1830s. Frauds proliferated throughout the Alabama cotton belt, particularly when growers took their crop to market to be weighed. The practice of gaming agricultural weights were certainly not new to the South, but they were new to this new South. By 1845, Tuscaloosans relied on their knowledge of these eighteenth-century practices when scammers falsely weighted tobacco with stones or trash as they constructed the proper regulations and prosecutions necessary to counteract the several cases of frauds "detected at that place." "One or two prosecutions," the merchants hoped, would "put an end to the practice." Tuscaloosa

²⁹ *The Watch-Tower* [Cooperstown, New York] (October 17, 1831) and *Republican Star and General Advertiser* [Maryland] (February 21, 1832).

merchants “entered into an agreement to prosecute, in every instance, where fraud is discovered...in packing cotton.”³⁰ Fraud continued longer than Tuscaloosa merchants preferred, but declined after Tuscaloosa established its own regulated cotton scales. Tuscaloosa’s seeming lag in cotton production when compared to northern Alabama counties like Madison, Lauderdale and Morgan, can be explained by Tuscaloosa’s economic diversity. Its recognition of cotton (via regulation) occurred later than in older districts; however, this diversity of economic interests had positive long-range effects on investments (see Tables 1.4 and 1.5).³¹

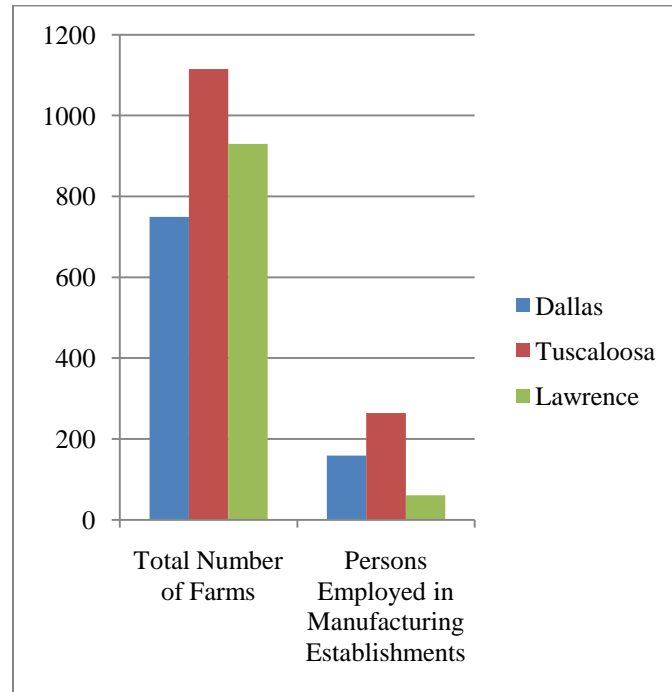
Table 1.4: Per Capita Economic Production Data (1850)



³⁰ *Baltimore Patriot* (September 4, 1830).

³¹ See *Berkshire County Whig* [Massachusetts] (July 31, 1845); *The Hudson River Chronicle* [New York] (March 31, 1846); *Berkshire County Whig* [Massachusetts] (December 21, 1848). Industries tangentially related to the production of cotton also struggled with setbacks from natural disasters, robbery, and malfeasance. For example, the Tuscaloosa Manufacturing Company’s dam broke in 1836, killing inspectors and bystanders—see *The Pittsfield Sun* [Massachusetts] (November 10, 1836). For the robbery of the government’s sub-treasury at Tuscaloosa, see the *New-Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* (December 10, 1846).

Table 1.5: Farm and Manufacturing Data (1850)



Tuscaloosa’s residents contained traits of both the yeoman and planter approach to economic functioning. As John Mitchell Allman’s research demonstrated, by 1850, Tuscaloosa was one of only three counties in the state that included significant areas of what he labeled, “planter dominated,” “planter oriented” and “yeoman dominated” districts.³² Tuscaloosa’s residents on the 1830 Federal Census confirm Allman’s assessment. The group also displays several significant features of the village’s early population.³³

Of the 1715 enteries, 1673 in the 1830 census were male and only 42 were females. Those who found their way into the census as property-holding widow (perhaps a smaller number than might be expected given the relative youth of this settling generation). The majority

³² John Mitchell Allman II, “Yeoman Regions in the Antebellum Deep South: Settlement and Economy in Northern Alabama, 1815-1860” (University of Maryland, unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, 1979), 67.

³³ My analysis is based on data collected in *Pioneers of Tuscaloosa County, Alabama Prior to 1830* (Tuscaloosa: Tuscaloosa Genealogical Society, 1981), 12-266.

of migrants who arrived before 1830 were between 30 and 40 years of age; the second highest age category was 20 to 30. An overwhelming majority were married (some more than once). Only 279 “lived alone.” The average household size, including slaves, stood at 5.79 persons.

Data from 260 personal profiles from the Tuscaloosa Genealogical Society supplies useful insights into the lives of these early residents of Tuscaloosa. The average age of the 252 males and 8 females included had an average age of 34 years. The majority, 209 individuals, were or had been married once; 48 had been married twice or more; and four individuals do not have an identifiable marital status. This group offers glimpses of information that could go unnoticed in the broader strokes of synthesis history. Property records (wills and probate court documents) illustrate where a number of early Tuscaloosa migrants originated and burial records tell where they moved if they left Tuscaloosa. Forty-three percent migrated from South Carolina. The second largest group, almost seventeen percent, hailed from North Carolina. Georgia came in a close third with 34 individuals followed by Virginia with 28, Tennessee with 11 and Pennsylvania with three. American-born immigrants made up almost eighty-nine percent of our group; three people had been born in Ireland and two named England as their place of origin.

Tuscaloosa’s statistics on the permanency of settlers easily shifts historians’ thinking on early national and antebellum migrations. The standard narrative of nineteenth-century southern migrations describes the Old Southwest as a place of excessive mobility, that is, of settlement, exhaustive agriculture and then—prodded by cheap and abundant land further west—re-migration. In this traditional scenario, streams of migrations become linear tales with easy points of departure [perhaps Virginia], a first settlement [maybe Georgia], a second settling experiment

[Alabama or Mississippi] and a final homestead [Arkansas or east Texas].³⁴ No doubt, this was the life experience of many Americans and many southerners in the first half of the nineteenth century. The life stories of migrants that arrived in Tuscaloosa prior to 1830, however, belie the stereotype. The 260-member subset used in this study lends support for the remigration trend as eventual burial sites for these individuals included three other states: Mississippi, Texas and Arkansas. Fifty-seven percent of individuals within the sample, however, did not migrate further west and, in fact, died and were buried in Tuscaloosa. Furthermore, eleven percent left Tuscaloosa but remained in Alabama.

Further research into similar burial patterns of other districts of Alabama and perhaps their higher remigration rates, I believe, would confirm that Tuscaloosa had higher rates of permanent settlement than Alabama counties to the north or south. If this is this case, then the boosterism of Tuscaloosa's earliest generation proved successful not only in championing financial investment and diversifying economic interests, but also in sustaining the locals' loyalty to the village on the Black Warrior. Brick by brick, bale by bale, generation after generation of Tuscaloosa's most avid defenders claimed linkage to the earliest settlers. Migrants relayed in letters and personal conversations their experiences on the raw frontier; how they were harassed by the looming Native presence; how they benefitted from the town's boosterist elements; and, how they saw *their* frontier village transform into a city in the often violent, slave and cotton South.³⁵

³⁴ See James David Miller, *South by Southwest: Planter Emigration and Identity in the Slave South* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002) and Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

³⁵ On migration and persistence see Peter R. Knights, *Yankee Destinies: The Lives of Ordinary Nineteenth-Century Bostonians* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

Toward a Slave and Cotton South

As commerce thrived, so too did instances of violence in early Tuscaloosa. They attracted national attention. Reports of violence apparently did little to dissuade potential new settlers lured by cheap land and the promise of individual success. An assortment of eastern newspapers chronicled the volatility of early Tuscaloosa society. In the June 7, 1823, New Jerseyans read about deadly fight between William Binion Jr. and Colding Williams witnessed by an assembly of men, several miles from Tuscaloosa. In an unevenly matched showdown—Williams carried a gun and Binion, a stick—Williams killed the stick-wielding Binion. Binion’s brother immediately sought retribution. After shooting Williams at the residence where his brother lay dying, brother Binion fled Tuscaloosa.

In the same edition of the *Trenton Federalist*, under the title “Murder again,” the paper’s editors marveled that “a planter of some wealth” living in Tuscaloosa’s neighboring Greene County, “murdered one of his negro men in a most cruel manner.” The reaction of his community is equally revealing: “The indignation of his neighbourhood is said to be highly excited and great exertions were making to apprehend the culprit, but he has...eluded his pursuers.”³⁶ The “excited nature” and the community’s unsuccessful search probably had more to do with preventing a slave uprising than it did with retribution or meting out justice for the murder of a black man. A month later, a decrease in violence in Tuscaloosa allowed a sardonic Cahawba, Alabama, paper to remark how “society is fast improving in Tuscaloosa...*only one murder* having been committed there during the first week in June; whereas there were three murders committed the week before.” Readers in places like New Bedford, Massachusetts, no doubt wondered at such unrest and progress.³⁷

³⁶ *Trenton Federalist* (July 7, 1823). See a similar report in *Saratoga Sentinel* (July 8, 1823).

Early violent encounters in Tuscaloosa were not reserved to middling- or lower-class whites. In June 1824, for example, the *Baltimore Patriot* reported that a Tuscaloosa lawyer named Colonel John Murphy was “waylaid and shot near Sugsville.” Murphy was the head of the John Quincy Adams faction in Alabama and a candidate for elector for President. Murphy would, the *Patriot* lamented, “have been elected the next Governor of this state” if he had not “struck” Dr. Mason H. Rivers. “In a rage, [Rivers] ran to the distance of a mile, returned, with a double barreled gun, and discharged it at Mr. M.” The “twelve buckshot...lodged in various parts of his body” made “recovery...possible, but not probable.”³⁸ Death at the hands of one’s neighbors over politics and theft tarnished the reputation of early Tuscaloosa, particularly among outsiders.

Media outlets also noticed racialized violence in Tuscaloosa. White and black southerners from Tuscaloosa and its nearby surroundings often resorted to assault and murder. One such case ended with the execution of “Negro *Bob*” of Tuscaloosa “for the murder of his master.” Swiftly executed, Bob met his “fate with so much indifference” that white Tuscaloosans feared his rescue “by his brother slaves” who had “surrounded his prison, swearing that he should not be hung.” Circulating rumors about slaves’ plans to burn houses to expedite Bob’s escape prompted panicked whites to organize a constant patrol of Tuscaloosa’s streets.³⁹

The brutality of Bob’s death-by-hanging paled in comparison to the “Horrid Occurrence” of June 30, 1827 that appalled readers of several northern newspapers. A planter named McNeily who had lost “some clothing or some other property, of no great value” accused a slave from a

³⁷ *New-Bedford Mercury* [Massachusetts] (July 11, 1823).

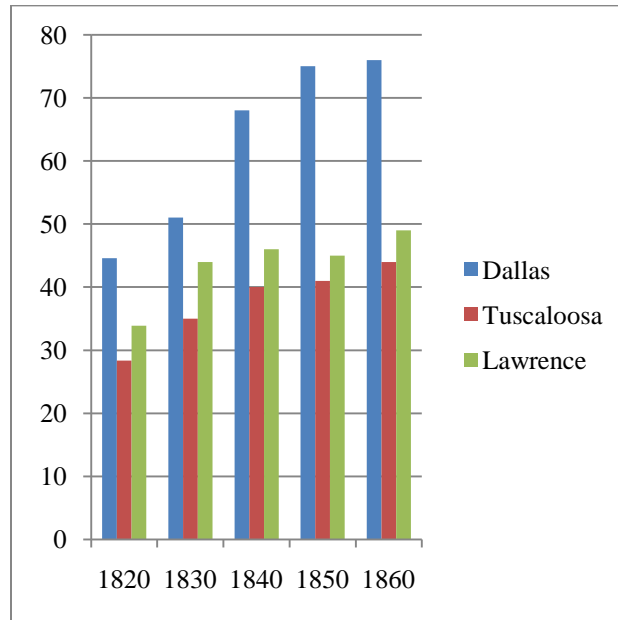
³⁸ *Baltimore Patriot* (July 12, 1824). See the concurrent story in the *New-Bedford Mercury* (July 16, 1824).

³⁹ *New-Hampshire Patriot & State Gazette* (May 28, 1827). [Emphasis added].

neighboring plantation with theft. When McNeily and his brother, “found the negro driving his master’s wagon...they seized him, and either did, or were about to chastise him, when the negro stabbed McNeily, so that he died in an hour.” The Justice of the Peace held his “deliberation” in his home surrounded by a mob of approximately eighty local whites. Bowing to physical and ideological pressures, the Justice “acted as president of the mob, and...decided [the slave] should be immediately executed by being *burnt to death*.” Once members of the mob strapped the slave to a tree, they placed “a large quantity of pine knots...around him” and “the fatal torch was applied to the pile, even against the remonstrances of several gentlemen who were present.” The grotesque lynching of this “miserable being” took only moments as he was “in a short time burnt to ashes.” The reporters from the Rhode Island *Providence Patriot* added that an investigation of the “barbarous act” was underway but they could not report its findings. Regardless, they hoped that the investigation would bring reform to Tuscaloosa’s neighboring Perry County, Alabama, as “This is the second negro who has been thus put to death without Judge or Jury in that county.”⁴⁰

⁴⁰ *Providence Patriot & Columbian Phenix* [Rhode Island] (July 28, 1827). See also *Salem Gazette* [Massachusetts] (July 31, 1827).

Table 1.6: Percent of Population Enslaved (1820-1860)



Slavery undergirded the violence that pervaded the lives of white and black Tuscaloosans. Unlike white northerners, white southerners proved adept at wielding racial stereotypes to defend white power and slavery. For example, in February 1835, the *Richmond Enquirer* reported on “The Late Murderers” and lamented that a slave who killed his master “died in jail a few days” before his pending execution. His death short of the gallows apparently deprived white society the chance to assert order over someone whose “crime was of a most enormous character.” Two weeks later, the *Enquirer* updated their prior report. “We have since learned that [the slave] murdered 5 persons.” The revision also supplied the following rejoinder: “He first killed his Master, then wounded his Mistress, of which wound she has since died. He then murdered a negro woman; he then set fire to the house, and in the conflagration, the infant child of Mr. Trussels and a small Negro were destroyed.” To stoke full discontentment among white Virginian readers, it posited that “this infuriated demon was concerned in the Southampton

insurrection, two years ago.”⁴¹ White Tuscaloosans easily related causation for slaves’ violent acts to other rebellions, even in the northern press.⁴²

A Southern Middle Ground

By the 1830s, Alabama’s upcountry and planter districts had politically aligned, finding themselves far more committed to a southern variant of Jacksonian democracy.⁴³ In several ways, what emerged was the proverbial ‘playing both ends against the middle.’ This maelstrom of consensus-building (on topics like support for several of Jackson’s economic policies, in particular his Bank War) isolated Tuscaloosa both geographically and ideologically. With fewer slaves than either their northern or southern neighbors by the 1840s, Tuscaloosans maintained less of a commitment to the slave system and a greater devotion to the commercial interests championed earlier by men like John Quincy Adams and, in the 1840s, by Whig politicians.

Tuscaloosa County existed as a middle ground between upcountry yeomen and plantation-belt farmers as Alabama’s border zone for much of its pre-Civil War history. Indeed, as the frontier began to physically fade by the 1830s due to increased in-migration and seizure

⁴¹ *Richmond Enquirer* (March 17, 1835).

⁴² Other sensational, violent news from the frontier South ranged from one individual cutting off his tongue in a biblically-inspired, alcohol-induced fit to doctors, generals, and even a former governor dueling in the streets. For these and other news stories see: *Boston Commercial Gazette* (February 27, 1826). Similar accounts appeared in Portsmouth, New Hampshire’s *New-Hampshire Gazette* (March 7, 1826) and Cooperstown, New York’s *Watch-Tower* (March 13, 1826). Numerous deaths-by-intoxication cases in Tuscaloosa, like Arthur Forbis’ 1829 horse accident, played into the growing religiously-inspired national temperance movement. However, it did not appeal to outsiders as his death seemed far more common and did less to depict the frontier South as an exotic land of intoxication, see: “A Warning.” *Alabama Sentinel* [Tuscaloosa, Alabama] (July 11, 1829). *New Hampshire Sentinel* (May 4, 1837); *The Pittsfield Sun* [Massachusetts] (February 2, 1839); *Newport Mercury* [Rhode Island] (July 25, 1840).

⁴³ On this alignment and its place in the national political debates see Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2005) and Thomas Perkins Abernathy, *The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1965).

from the Creeks of Indian lands in the east-central portion of the state.⁴⁴ Situated between the politics, cultures and economies that divided Alabama's yeoman north and planter south, Tuscaloosa evolved in very unique ways.

The arenas of politics and slavery best portray Tuscaloosa's existence as a borderland. In an 1819 legislative vote on the establishment of local branches of the State Bank, Tuscaloosa's representatives voted with counties north and south against such banks. Yet, more demonstrative of the Tuscaloosa's boundary status was Alabama's participation in national elections. In such contests, Tuscaloosa's delegations' behavior would often be far less predictable than those from other regions of the state.⁴⁵ The state's Senators supported Andrew Jackson's first bid for the presidency in 1824. Tuscaloosa and the Black Belt voted against Jackson while the northern and southern extremities sided with him. By the 1828 election, Tuscaloosa's House members stood alone with neighboring Greene County's representatives in voting against Jackson's reelection. Amid these political battles, Tuscaloosa often became adept at seeking the middle way, often making allies as well as enemies.

In terms of slavery, antebellum Tuscaloosa's black population fell behind its northern and southern counterparts; thus, both the yeoman and planter districts held larger percentages of enslaved persons than Tuscaloosa. In 1818, twenty to thirty percent of the population was enslaved—a greater proportion than in northern counties like Lauderdale and Franklin but smaller than those in the future cotton belt counties of Marengo, Dallas and Montgomery. By 1824, Tuscaloosa's slave population had risen to thirty to forty percent, lower than the

⁴⁴ John T. Ellisor, *The Second Creek War: Interethnic Conflict and Collusion on a Collapsing Frontier* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010).

⁴⁵ During the state legislature's 1822 selection of U.S. Senator, Tuscaloosa's representatives sided with the plantation belt delegates and cast their support to William Kelly while northern and coastal counties sided with John McKinley. By 1824, however, Tuscaloosa locked its votes in a tie while Kelly kept the middle of the state and McKinley took the northern and southern extremes of the state.

percentages to the south as well as those in northern districts. By 1830, Tuscaloosa had fallen even further behind (maintaining a thirty to forty percent average) the rise of slave population percentages in the northern counties (forty to fifty percent) and the fifty percent increase in the heart of the Black Belt (Dallas, Wilcox, Autauga, Montgomery Counties). Equally significant for analyzing Tuscaloosa County's stance on slavery was an 1826 vote on a bill that prohibited the importation of slaves for sale. Tuscaloosa, along with most northern counties voted for the bill whereas southern counties in the plantation belt and coastal plain, the epicenter of Alabama's slave economy, voted against it.⁴⁶

J. Mills Thornton's interpretation of the late 1840s supports the view of Tuscaloosa as a contested, political borderland. Thornton found Black Belt counties functioned as "extension[s] of national and international trade," and in the upcountry counties, "where subsistence farming was the rule[,]. . . single sets of ideals came to be widely accepted in every stratum of society."⁴⁷ Places like Tuscaloosa saw "voting statistics hint at an urban basis for Whig allegiance." Nearby Jefferson County saw its most urban community, Elyton, exist as a Whig bastion while the surrounding inhabitants voted Democratic. Tuscaloosa shared this internally-divided characteristic: "the city voted Whig while a number of the rural beats returned Democratic polls."⁴⁸ Neither geographical or economic causalities prompted these patterns as, Thornton surmised, they were "based neither on class nor on crop nor on wealth." Instead, he averred, the

⁴⁶ See Thomas Perkins Abernathy, *The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1965).

⁴⁷ J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978). On the southern middle class, see Jonathan Daniel Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class, 1800-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

⁴⁸ J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society*, 41-42.

differences resulted from institutions—from county party conventions to impromptu meetings in individual beats—that reflected communities’ political style.⁴⁹

Although Thornton hoped to dissuade his readers from championing class-based determinism, his mapping of legislative districts and their election cycles visually exhibited how centers of economic wealth saw the highest percentages of re-elections—a sign of the entanglements of class and politics. Re-election rates of sixty to sixty-nine percent and sixty-nine to one-hundred percent in their districts—namely within the plantation belt, east-central Alabama, and in the counties surrounding Mobile—highlighted political expressions of domination and socio-economic standing. It allowed individuals to consolidate and defend their power in antebellum Alabama. Tuscaloosa remained an outlier in this consolidation of political power—a status best illuminated by its 1846 loss of the state capital to Montgomery. Although the accuracy of Thornton’s appraisal of systemic hegemony or, as he put it, how “the reinforcement of consensus, grew into orthodoxy” now seems somewhat questionable given the great work done on the growth of the southern middle class, it was in his assessment of the border counties—those on the southern edges of hill country and northern extremes of the plantation belt—that Thornton was most prescient.

Tuscaloosa’s status as a boundary zone becomes even more apparent when we take a meticulous look at data presented in the five federal censuses between 1820 and 1860. Comparing Tuscaloosa’s data with two other counties—one from the yeoman north (Lawrence County) and the other from the heart of the plantation belt (Dallas County)—contextualizes the County’s early development. Tuscaloosa sat in the middle of the total population rankings and remained there until 1860. In 1820, Tuscaloosa maintained an interesting position in terms of agriculture *and* manufacturing. In the first, Tuscaloosa held a middle position between Lawrence

⁴⁹ J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society*, 151-156.

and Dallas Counties; in manufacturing, Tuscaloosa lagged behind the northern and southern representatives.

By 1830, Tuscaloosa fell below northern and southern districts in terms of total population (See Table 1.1). 1830 would be the last year that Tuscaloosa's total slave population remained below both Lawrence and Dallas; in terms of percent-of-population-enslaved, however, Tuscaloosa never surpassed either of the other counties (See Table 1.6).

The 1850 Census includes additional categories detailing the inner-dynamics of America's mid-century communities. This was certainly the case with Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Condensed into Table 1.4, readers can find data fields illustrating that Tuscaloosa was caught between two different economic worlds. Taking note of the areas where Tuscaloosa led the three counties (Unimproved Land in Farms, Dollars of Products from Manufacturing Establishments and Dollars Invested in Manufacturing Establishments) and in the category that it lagged farthest behind both Dallas and Lawrence (Acres of Improved Lands in Farms), we can arrive at several interesting conclusions.

First, recall that these are the same categories we noted for the Census of 1820. In the span of thirty years, Tuscaloosa had clearly reversed its fortunes. By concentrating on developing a commercial base, the city emerged as an island of business (including printing, retail stores, and cotton ginning) in a sea of cotton agriculture. Two remaining findings from 1850 demonstrate Tuscaloosa's development (See Table 1.4). While the dominance of small farms in Tuscaloosa County outpaced even those in the Lawrence County and those of the larger holdings in Dallas County, strikingly, Tuscaloosa could also outpace these two in terms of manufacturing employment. By 1850, Tuscaloosa city's manufacturing and commercial trades

had found a way to successfully coexist with the agricultural pursuits of Tuscaloosa County making it far more economically versatile and diverse than its sister villages, north or south.

Some of Tuscaloosa's city partisans lamented the departure of the state capital in 1846 as the death knell for their city while others celebrated the city's rapid development much like Aycock in *Tuscaloosa: The Tradition, The Spirit and The Vision*.⁵⁰ Nineteenth-century boosters prophesied of the greatness awaiting Tuscaloosa post-1846. The city would survive and thrive, they predicted, by using its resources to attract industries like papers mills that could turn Tuscaloosa into the "Lowell of the South." Others boasted the natural resources and fine location, Tuscaloosa's water power, navigable rivers, its cotton and wool, cattle and coal and diverse economic productive capacities would all coalesce to make, as one writer hoped, "one of the first and most prosperous business places in the south."⁵¹

The chapters that follow explore the individuals who lived in this Tuscaloosa. Each imagined their personal and communal realities and possibilities differently. Their multiple vantage points—from settlement narratives to surveying documents, treatises on government, literature and songs, as well as commemorative theatrical plays—provides a fresh look at one southern expression of the American frontier. Their individual endeavors reflect a culture that at

⁵⁰ "Improving the City." *Independent Monitor* [Tuscaloosa, Alabama] (October 2, 1844) 8.24; "Tuscaloosa Improvements." *Independent Monitor* (April 30, 1845) 9.2; "On the Removal of the Seat of Government." *Independent Monitor* (May 15, 1845) 9.4; "Question of Removal." *Independent Monitor* (May 21, 1845) 9.5; "The State Capitol on Wheels" and "Removal and Taxation!" *Independent Monitor* (July 25, 1845) 9.10; "The State House Solid." *Independent Monitor* (July 7, 1845) 9.12; "Condition of the Capitol." *Independent Monitor* (October 8, 1845) 9.25; "Removal." *Independent Monitor* (November 19, 1845) 9.31.

⁵¹ "Paper Factory." *Independent Monitor* [Tuscaloosa, Alabama] (March 11, 1846) 9.48; *Independent Monitor* (March 18, 1846) 9.49; *Independent Monitor* (September 29, 1846) 10.25. For other articles engaged in this resistant strand of championing Tuscaloosa see: "The True Interest of Alabama." *Independent Monitor* (May 6, 1846) 10.4; "Prospects of Tuskaloosa." *Independent Monitor* (May 20, 1846) 10.6; "Prosperity of Tuskaloosa." *Independent Monitor* (October 6, 1846) 10.26; *Independent Monitor* (December 15, 1846) 10.36.

times embraced commemorative histories informed by lived experiences. Other times, they depict a frantic society trembling at the prospects of having to create, and later defend, myths better left forgotten. In rewriting the frontier, these southerners confronted the challenges of rewriting the South as well as themselves.

CHAPTER 2

“I LOOK UPON THE LONG JOURNEY, THROUGH THE WILDERNESS, WITH MUCH PLEASURE”: EXPERIENCING THE EARLY REPUBLIC’S SOUTHERN FRONTIER

Gideon Lincecum’s early life was one of constant movement. By 1815, Gideon was twenty-two years old, recently married, and had inherited his father’s love of “a border life” and “naturally ...restless disposition.” On the eve of his exploration into the “Alabama country,” Gideon’s young life had already been molded by the practicalities of the do-it-yourself nature of frontier living. He could boast of a pool of talents garnered from a frontier life: surveyor, store clerk, tax collector, farmer and doctor.

Gideon’s 1815 cotton crop was ready for harvest at an estimated 31¢ per pound when he “became restless” and decided to leave the cotton at his Georgia homestead standing in the fields to set out for new lands. Desirous of “a home in the wilderness,”

Gideon, his father, and their families settled first on the Ocmulgee River but were on the move again a year later. In explaining this

hunger to uproot his family, Gideon surmised: “I had been reared to a belief and faith in the pleasure of frequent change of country, and I look upon the long journey, through the wilderness, with much pleasure.” By the spring of 1818, the Lincecum caravan arrived in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, which by Gideon’s observation was “at that time a small log cabin village; but... in the

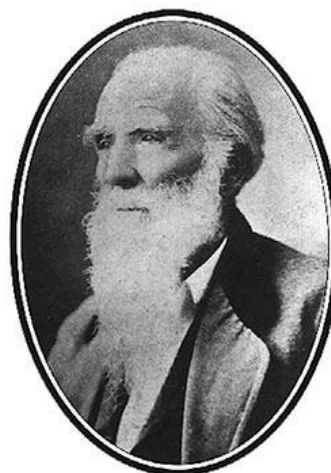


Image 2.1: “Portrait of Gideon Lincecum, 1874.” Held at The Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

course of that year it grew to be a considerable town.” They stayed only a year before heading to Columbus, Mississippi.¹ This sense of constant movement, relocation and engaging the “wilderness” came to symbolize the Old Southwest migrations and the imagery of the pre-antebellum South.

Captured within the Lincecum’s story is the mythic character of America’s frontiers that has long fascinated historians as well as everyday Americans. This image of a natural world, untouched by the civilizing, Euro-American presence has been an enduring notion that proved central to both the opening decades of the nineteenth century and to the first full century of the United States’ nationhood. The taming of both nature and its “savage” inhabitants combined to offer eastern Americans the promise of personal success in easy land acquisitions that had opened with the Revolution and the Louisiana Purchase.²

Since E.G. Ravenstein’s “The Laws of Migration,” historians and cultural geographers have grappled with understanding the migration of people. Spanning generations and geographies, scholars like David Hackett Fischer tracked the movement of humans, with their cultural frameworks en tow, to explain all sorts of cultural developments entangled within North

¹ For excerpts of Lincecum’s travel journal see Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 200-202.

² To begin one’s journey through the “frontier” of American frontier historiography one must start with Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1996 reprint). From there, see David S. Brown, *Beyond the Frontier: The Midwestern Voice in American Historical Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Robert E. May, “Multiplying Frontiers.” *Reviews in American History* 37.2. (June 2009), 198-204; Andro Linklater, *The Fabric of America: How Our Borders and Boundaries Shaped the Country and Forged Our National Identity* (New York: Walker & Company, 2007), 250-260; John Mack Faragher, *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner “The Significance of the Frontier in American History and Other Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Michael Steiner, “From Frontier to Region: Frederick Jackson Turner and the New Western History.” *The Pacific Historical Review* 64.4. (November, 1995), 479-501; Richard White, “Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill” found at <http://www.studythepast.com/his378/turnerandbuffalobill.pdf> (1994); William Cronon, “Revisiting the Vanishing Frontier: The Legacy of Frederick Jackson Turner.” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 18.2. (April, 1987), 157-176. For the power of purchasing land in early America see Andro Linklater, *The Fabric of America: How Our Borders and Boundaries Shaped the Country and Forged our National Identity* (New York: Walker & Company, 2007).

American British colonialism while others like Alfred W. Crosby used migration to readjust our understandings of the spread of diseases, crops, animals, and their collective ecological impacts.³

The current essay is concerned primarily with considering the processes and experiences of waves of individuals migrating to small, cross-paths villages like Tuscaloosa, Alabama. In evaluating these individuals' stories of settlement, we are drawn into a measuring the frontier, one that follows individuals' perceptions and fantasies of frontier environments. What I seek to sort out is the personalized, cultural encounter. How did relocating to the frontier South present white settlers with the opportunity to create on the pages of letters and diaries their own frontiers? The mythic construction of a place in Americans' South and consciousness began as early as migrants set out for this "new country"—and, at times, even without leaving home.⁴

By entering the frontier through the adventures of the Lincecums and their compatriots, the broader implications of Southwestern migration and settlement can be pulled down to a localized and personal scale, where the work of encountering and making the frontier took place. There, we get the benefit of viewing both individuals as well as kin groups bringing a variety of experiences with them to the frontier. Some, like the Lincecums, were quite familiar with the rugged life of backcountry living. While some individuals were taken aback by the strenuous nature of the journey and the challenges that greeted them when making their way to villages that barely existed upon their arrival, others' adventures took them on to various places in the

³ Ernest George Ravenstein, "The Laws of Migration." *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 48.2. (June 1885), 167-235 and "The Laws of Migration." *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 52.2. (June 1889), 241-305; David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1972) and *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁴ Andro Linklater, *Measuring America: How an Untamed Wilderness Shaped the United States and Fulfilled the Promise of Democracy* (New York: Walker Publishing Company, 2002) and *The Fabric of America: How Our Borders and Boundaries Shaped the Country and Forged our National Identity* (New York: Walker & Company, 2007).

emergent backcountry. Other individuals ended up retracing the journey to head back from whence they came.⁵

Besides travel narratives, letters of correspondence showcase the firm attachments that Tuscaloosa immigrants sustained with family and friends they left behind in places like Fitchburg, Massachusetts, Laco, Maine, Louisburg, North Carolina and Salem, South Carolina. The letter writers expected to acquire the best agricultural lands in the nineteenth-century South as well as keeping a keen watch on commodity prices or, like one of our frontier correspondents, working non-stop in the ever-essential frontier trading firms. Of equal importance to these settlers was good physical health: concerns over frontier health filled these correspondences.⁶

In the shadows of the hundreds of thousands of migrants flowing on to the southern frontier engaging in what one North Carolinian called the “Alabama Fever,” what I hope to do here is direct our gaze at the individual stories that get lost in the enormity of the migration of

⁵ See Edward E. Baptist *Creating an Old South: Middle Florida’s Plantation Frontier Before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); James David Miller *South By Southwest: Planter Emigration and Identity in the Slave South* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002); Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁶ On the private nature of letter writing see Michael Warner *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) as well as his *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005) and Sarah M.S. Pearsall, *Atlantic Families: Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). And on public encounters and community formation see Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006, reprint from 1983) and Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1989, reprint of 1962 German edition). See also: Carolyn Earle Billingsley *Communities of Kinship: Antebellum Families and the Settlement of the Cotton Frontier* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004). Some of the earliest developments of the this business mentalite and its part in the eighteenth-century cultural exchanges between native peoples and Euro-Americans is discussed by Claudio Saunt in his *The New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) as well as in Andrew R.L. Cayton and Fredrika J. Teute, eds, *Contact Points: American Frontiers from the Mohawk Valley to Mississippi, 1750-1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1998). Conevery Bolton Valenčius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (Cambridge: Basic Books, 2002).

thousands upon thousands of persons pushing down the Federal Road out of the Carolinas and Georgia or shipping their lives down the Ohio and then Tennessee or Mississippi Rivers. In so doing, we can catch a glimpse of how the southern frontier as a place and concept developed in the early nineteenth century. Six vignettes explored in two sections serve as our guides through the wilderness. Collectively, they demonstrate several key points about moving through the southern frontier. First, the environment, filled with rugged terrain, rapid rivers, the possibility of hostile Indians, and thick foliage, presented challenges almost unimaginable; second, despite all the complications of moving through the frontier, individuals remained vigilant to take notice of “good lands” and the region’s future, agricultural potential; and third, that American market activities, as early as the 1810s, had penetrated the not-so-deep corners of the South’s frontier, building on earlier trading routes used by English and French colonials.⁷

Clearing a Way Through the Thickets

As part of the early nineteenth century’s Great Migration, the “Alabama Fever” carried off a host of families, friends, slaves, and occasionally, whole communities, not to mention animals, as well as ideological persuasions. One North Carolina planter of the Tidewater district characterized the excitement with some angst: “The Alabama Feaver rages here with great violence and has carried off a vast number of our Citizens.” This North Carolinian admitted his “apprehensive” attitude, fearing that “if it continues to spread as it has done, it will almost depopulate the country.” Yet, deeper within his remarks an anxiety percolated over seeing men “returned from the Alabama” only to spread the “contagious feaver.” This farmer did not fear

⁷ James Graham to Thomas Ruffin, Nov 9, 1817, in *The Papers of Thomas Ruffin*, ed J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton (4 volumes, Raleigh: 1918-20), I: 198. Cited in Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 196. One of the most enlightening historiographical discussions of the evolution and confirming the importance of southern backcountry studies can be found in “Editor’s Welcome” *Journal of Backcountry Studies* 1.1. (Spring, 2006), <http://libjournal.uncg.edu/ojs/index.php/jbc/article/view/6>

depopulation of the eastern states as much as he did the destruction of class-based social order: “Some of our oldest and most wealthy men are offering their possessions for sale and desirous of removing to the new country.” Alabama offered a “new country” for middling-class migrants and men on the make; it simultaneously threatened to undermine the power relations for those left behind in the upper South.

A replaying of this “mania” in the Carolinas captured the attention of Tuscaloosans in the 1830s. Even though “symptoms are somewhat different from 1817 and 1818,” individuals seemed ready to bolt for places like Demopolis, Alabama looking for good lands even as local newspapermen, clergy, and politicians tried to persuade them to stay, given their probable failure.⁸

Observing the magnitude of this exodus in the 1810s must have been quite distressing. Individuals clearly feared that depopulation might disrupt community and family networks as well as social order in the older South. And yet, through personal messages as well personal contact with pioneer men returning home to lobby family and friends to return with him to his new lands, families stayed informed of events on the frontier as well as those back home. As with cases of chain migration common in America since the 17th century, we are unable to investigate migrants’ conversations. Thus, their letters allow us to take note of two important points: one, family networks did not cease to function when individuals migrated south and westward—in fact, they functioned ably via a constant torrent of deeply personal messages; two, community and family networks buoyed the migratory spirit as information about land sales, climate, and economic opportunities continually flowed back to migrants’ associates.

⁸ James Graham to Thomas Ruffin, Nov 9, 1817, in *The Papers of Thomas Ruffin*, ed J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton (4 volumes, Raleigh: 1918-20), I: 198. Cited in Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 196. On Tuscaloosa depopulation, see “Land Mania—From the Carolinas.” *Alabama Intelligencer & State Rights Expositor* [Tuscaloosa, Alabama] (August 22, 1835).

Born in Person County, North Carolina in 1786, John Owen packed up his family in Great Bridge, Virginia and set out for Tuscaloosa, Alabama. There he purchased land and added to the family's slave holdings. Later, Owen became a physician as well as State Bank agent and Director, and one-time mayor of Tuscaloosa. He died in Tuscaloosa in 1848, but his migration narrative lives on offering insight as to how families suffered setbacks and dangers when traveling to the southern frontier.

Only eight days into the voyage, the Owen crew camped at Black Water Bridge in Virginia where the patriarch protector "set up all night apprehensive of Robbers." A day later, on 29 October 1818, Owen reported that his party could "get no corn or fodder" but that his horses had stood the test rather well. Meanwhile, Owen battled rheumatism understandably exacerbated by the strenuousness of the trip. The illnesses of the road next struck Owen's mother-in-law. Even as she "was on the mend" quickly, the journey's hardships had all "in the dumps" by 7 November. Repeated overturned carts, intolerable roads, low spirits and "anxiety of mind" as well as "the limestone fever" plagued the Owens and had John wishing he "was dead or that fate had bloted [sic] the day in which I was born out of the calendar & left a perfect Blank." After facing down more poor roads and bad weather, John Owen assessed the evening that he and his family spent in Knoxville, Tennessee: the crew spent the night "pestered with travelers & negro drivers." His experience on the Tennessee frontier was such that on departure, Owen remarked that Knoxville was "a poor Contemptible looking place." By mid-December, the group was unable to acquire foodstuffs for themselves or their horses, but Owen avowed: "our trust is yet in God whose mercy is over us and we yet think he will send us deliverance in some way." Christmas day saw "roads little better...corn high...people Shuffling [sic]" and the day after, the

Owens made their way into “Tuscaloosa...[feeling] thankful to Heaven that after 9 weeks traveling & exposd to Every danger that we arrivd safe and in good health.”⁹

For pioneer Richard Breckenridge, the journey through America’s backcountry was as trying as that of the Owen clan. Breckenridge’s diary is replete with moments of solace, intrigue, and excitement. Breckenridge, born in 1781 in Screven County, Georgia, took part in a relocation venture similar to thousands of others on the eastern extremes of the southern frontier. Leaving Tennessee for the Mississippi Territory, Breckenridge’s diary follows a portion of his trek through what would become northern Alabama as he made his way toward Mississippi. During parts of his journey, Breckenridge encountered the frontier with other explorers. At other times, his was a solitary experience. What becomes clear from his diary is that making one’s way through the southern backcountry during the late 1810s was not for the faint-hearted. Such a journey required stamina and determination on the part of early settlers if they were to successfully navigate the terrain of an “unsettled” South. In participating in this social construction of frontier survival, Breckenridge, as much as the Owen family, proved his ability to negotiate relationships with local Native Americans and embellish his tale in ways that reflected his manly prowess through frontier adventures.

On August 10, 1816, Breckenridge found himself in northern Alabama, south of present-day Huntsville, but intended to continue from “Ditto’s Landing to the Falls, if these water courses do run into the Black Warrior, otherwise, to strike that river.” Four days later, Breckenridge’s trek to Tuscaloosa encountered the variety of Alabama’s diverse geographic features:

I have been obliged to keep considerably to the east this day on account of some very high bluffs and have just crossed a large creek that runs a little to the west of

⁹ John Owen, “John Owen’s Journal of His Removal from Virginia to Alabama in 1818” in *Southern History Association Publications* (April 1897), 91-97.

south. There is some good land in the bottom which appear tolerably extensive in some places. I came down it some distance, but saw no chance for water; but the creek is also confined by very high bluffs. I was obliged to rest several times in coming up. I also got some falls. It is very tedious traveling here.

Wilderness surrounded Breckenridge. The next day he “saw no good land nor spring of any sort” and could not cross the river due to its excessive width of two hundred yards and rocky bottom. On August 16 he saw more briars and cane along the river bottom; however, Breckenridge expressed the joy of seeing the land in the river bottom which, “when there is any of consequence, is very rich.” But despair returned as Breckenridge ended his journal entry for the day: “I will be under the disagreeable necessity of keeping up the river until I can either find inhabitants or a path that crosses. I am heartily tired of this side of the Black Warrior. I saw no good land ... nor any springs...the river in the water—had a disagreeable taste... it is also very warm.”

By 20 August, Breckenridge admitted that, like many early woodsmen in American history, his wanderings through the thickets of Alabama could be characterized as frustrated driftings: “I have got very much deceived in my expectations, for the path has led me almost a south course, and as I do not like to take the woods again, I mean to follow it, if I can...” Interestingly, however, this deceptive path led the wayward adventurer to the doorsteps of several Indian cabins at the “north fork of the Black Warrior.” Although the site appeared to have been deserted for five years, Breckenridge complimented the district as one that was “handsome.”¹⁰ Several Indian towns, including one with a “fine peach orchard,” entertained Breckenridge as he plunged further south and, by the end of the day, delightfully admired the location as suitable for “wheat in preference to any land that I ever saw.” He added on the future

¹⁰ “Diary of Richard Breckenridge, 1816.” Introduced and annotated by Henry S. Halbert. *Transactions of the Alabama Historical Society* 3 (1898-1899), 144-149.

location of Tuscaloosa: “There is as handsome a situation for a town as I ever saw. Within half a mile of the river, springs are plenty and excellent.”¹¹

Owen’s and Breckenridge’s exploration narratives tell us of the overwhelming importance of land in the evolution of southern history. Not only were individuals willing to risk life and limb to push southwestward in their desire to see and “settle” new places but they were economically inspired to acquire new lands for cheaper prices than they might back east.¹² Of equal importance, they evoke an awareness to the fact that there existed a large cadre of peoples already in the frontier South prior to the American shift westward. Readers observe the necessities of being able to safely navigate the physical layout of the frontier’s rivers and valleys and, intriguingly, planting homesteads in relation to local Natives. They do *not* show the earliest migrations as part of religious missions or as oriented for large groups. Sometimes they appeared in groups of three or four. Larger assemblages were often a part of military expeditions designed to clear the way for larger family groups that filled vacuous spaces on the frontier, virtually unhindered by displaced Indian populations. Finally, these documents produce an image of the frontier as a place of wilderness needing to be tamed by white settlement. Although it was treacherous, these pioneers’ escapades demonstrated that with enough determination and insensitivity, whites could expand the new Republic south and westward.¹³

¹¹ “Diary of Richard Breckenridge, 1816,” 151.

¹² This estimation of cheaper prices is estimated on price of actual land purchases. Certainly, individuals equally had to consider opportunity costs, the costs of relocation, as well as building and the costs of credit to set up a new homestead on the frontier.

¹³ On the importance of land in frontier southern history see Stephen Aron, *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Rachel N. Klein, *Unification of A Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760-1808* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1990); J. Mills Thornton, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Mary E. Young, *Redskins, Ruffleshirts and Rednecks: Indian Land Allotments in Alabama and Mississippi, 1830-1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002 reprint).

Frontier(ed) and Yet Still Connected

A strong connection bound families together whether they migrated as a unit or spatially distanced themselves from their loved ones, placing hundreds of miles in between. Not only were these connections strong, but they involved men *and* women and highlighted both the intimate dynamics that structured family life in the early American republic and the extreme emotionality that male adventurers displayed in their letters home. As individuals migrated, they cherished the knowledge they received concerning upcoming weddings, financial successes and failures, unforeseen reunions, divorces, and, quite consistently, the health of their loved ones.¹⁴

Despite the frontier setting, family life and connections with those individuals left behind could prove annoying and frightfully close. Such was the case for the subjects of our third and fourth vignettes. Writing to her son, John Bird in Tuscaloosa in May of 1822, Winafred Bird of Salem, South Carolina illustrates the emotive power and weight contained within the art of letter writing for nineteenth-century contemporaries as well as the fact that guilt could and was wielded to press children into action, no matter their age or distance from home. Bird offered her thankfulness for her son's "expectations of making out well," having "taking a companion," she prayed, would prove to be "a comfort" for her son's "advance through life."

Bird bemoaned, however, an earlier insinuation that her son would never "visit this quarter of the world again;" for even he must have realized, Bird sentimentalized, "I should be happy to see you once again." Regardless of the "certainly long distance," Bird felt her offspring could "spare that much time as to come and see your aged mother." Her next lines are as

¹⁴ Joan E. Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 4-7. On this emotionality, see Sarah Knott, "The Patient's Case: Sentimental Empiricism and Knowledge in the Early American Republic." *William and Mary Quarterly* LXVII.4. (October 2010), 645-676 and *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). Nicole Eustace, *Passion Is the Gale: Emotion, Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

revealing today as they were when she first scrawled them, stretching out from Salem to Tuscaloosa binding distraught mother to reluctant son:

My circumstances are such that if you would come, I most undoubtedly would return with you, as I cannot make out here, everything, for the sustenance of life is very scarce and dear , and I am afraid many families this year will suffer... if it is possible for you to leave home, I should think it would be paying part of the great debt, that a child owes its parents...to assist its parent in their decline of life, and try and smooth the thorny and riggid [sic] path that leads to the common end of all mankind.¹⁵

Perhaps Bird wished to move to Tuscaloosa because she was destitute. She could have equally heard of the promises of the unique frontier community from friends or neighbors as the news of Tuscaloosa's potential was a topic often contained in inhabitants' letters. One example of such positivist language came from Choctaw Indian agent, John McKee. On arrival, McKee wrote to his friend and lawyer, Samuel Bidgood of Jackson, Mississippi. McKee spoke of a "tedious journey" made "more disagreeable in consequence of having no other company than that of my servant." Surviving the journey, McKee delightfully found Tuscaloosa to be the "land of promise" confessing to "Friend Sam" that he was "better pleased with this country than I anticipated." Although the town's appearance left him "indifferent," McKee fawned over its "very respectable inhabitants" and that it experienced "more retail trade than St. Stephens & Jackson put together." With trade and cotton agriculture, McKee predicted Tuscaloosa had a bright future ahead of it. "Upon the whole," he summarized, "this section of the country promises to be very agreeable & is as healthy as any part of the Territory."¹⁶ Such individual boosterism often hid distress and certainly hid problems as individuals like McKee aimed at getting more people (especially friends and kin) to migrate.

¹⁵ Winifred Bird letter to John Goodson, May 5, 1822. HSC-UA.

¹⁶ John McKee letter to Samuel Bidgood, September 12, 1818. ADAH.

Family ties, as often as they were stretched by resettlement, could also serve to reunite family members on the frontier. Such was the case with the Snow brothers. A brotherly connection brought Charles Snow to Tuscaloosa in 1826. Born in Fitchburg, Massachusetts around 1803, Charles followed elder brothers Henry Adams Snow and Zabdial Boylston Snow to the village at the Falls of the Black Warrior. Shortly after his arrival in Tuscaloosa, Charles took up his pen to begin correspondence with his mother, Elizabeth Snow who resided in the family's second home in Laco, Maine.¹⁷

Throughout his letters, Snow presented a wide-ranging commentary on early society, health, weather, the state of southern slavery, his brothers' "Old Bachelor habits" as well as his own prospects among the female population in Alabama. In 1826, Snow conveyed his apologies to his mother for the delay in his writing her as most of his time was "taken up with business." Although he was "pleasantly situated and think when I get acquainted I shall like living here as well as in Fitchburg. In addition to the weather, Charles had found a pair of "real Yankees" to befriend while having a difficult time avoiding the numerous hogs as "we can hardly step into the street without running over one." This overabundance of mobile pork, nonetheless, did not fully turn Charles off on Tuscaloosa for he admitted to loving "sweet potatoes" as well as the "superb peaches" even as there were "no Irish potatoes...and no apples" to be had. By the end of his first year in residence, he was "satisfied with the living" in Tuscaloosa.¹⁸

In one letter in 1828, Charles pinned Tuscaloosa's progress to that of his brothers' success. Men on the make, Boylston had been chosen a city alderman and Henry had been re-elected to the State Bank's Board of Directors who had just overseen the completion of a State

¹⁷ *Pioneers of Tuscaloosa County, Alabama Prior to 1830* (Tuscaloosa Genealogical Society, 1981), 453-454.

¹⁸ Charles Snow letter to Elizabeth Snow, November 6, 1826 in the Richard James Hook Papers. SHC-UNC.

banking house. Always inclined to confirm for his mother that he was adjusting to life in Tuscaloosa, Charles bragged of his good health. He had not “a sick day since I left home” and “The people are very hospitable to us.” It was perhaps during one of those hospitable visits that Charles sought information on the women of Tuscaloosa to pass along to his mother. A topic he took “much pleasure in,” Snow relayed in November 1826 that the society of men at Tuscaloosa seemed as “good or better than at home,” but that he knew little about the female population “having yet but little acquaintance” with them. Indeed, Snow felt adamant about his marital status. He would either remain in “single blessedness” or “go home for a wife.”¹⁹

Given Snow’s increasing familiarity with life in the frontier South, much of his writing also granted his mother a chance to compare their native New England with the evolving slave society of Tuscaloosa. On the topic of slavery, Snow drew stark differences between “free & slave-holding states” presenting his mother with southern slavery in the following manner:

The kind of lives the planters lead I am yet unacquainted not having visited any of them. The appearance of the planters in Virginia however struck me forcibly. The rich live in fine houses. They are generally at some considerable distance from the road from a quarter of a mile to 8 or 10 times that distance surrounded with ancient trees, with small house back for the negroes, and around them... an appearance... that made me think of the old feudal times of which we read. They live like Lords that...but too often lead dissipated lives. There is not magnificence here [in Alabama]. The country is new and the great mass of planters live in log houses.²⁰

Offering a multilayered representation of what the rising slave South looked like, he described for his mother southern slavery as a well-ordered system with a strict spatial dimension that reflected class order as well as division. The classic mental portrait no doubt remains seared

¹⁹ Charles Snow letter to Elizabeth Snow, August 25, 1829 in the Charles Snow Letters. SHC-UNC. Charles Snow letter to Elizabeth Snow, November 6, 1826 in the Richard James Hook Papers. SHC-UNC.

²⁰ Charles Snow letter to Elizabeth Snow, November 6, 1826 in the Richard James Hook Papers. SHC-UNC.

in the minds of most historians of the nineteenth-century South. And so it should, or would had Charles not set early Tuscaloosa against the backdrop of slave Virginia. It was in Virginia that Snow observed a world of slavery that reminded him of “the old feudal times” of Europe. Charles may have observed the landed estates of the well-established southern aristocracy and all they represented. Had he observed the Lee’s Stratford Hall or the Byrds’ Westover, James Madison’s Montpelier, George Mason’s Gunston Hall, Charles’ could easily merge his imagining of Old World social relations with those playing out on these Virginia estates. Such connections he juxtaposed with life in frontier Tuscaloosa as it was a “new” country where planters, great and small, lived in log houses. This strange world of the South to which the Snows had moved was exotic in part due to slavery. With time, however, the Snows came to claim the frontier South as their home.

If there was a direct correlation with joining the ranks of frontier slaveholders and loss of reputation back home, that relationship did not seem to dissuade the Snows from becoming slaveowners. Knowing the details would “excite...interest,” Charles described he and his brothers’ slave as a fifteen year old of a similar size as himself. Bob’s work included “brush[ing] our boots & cloathes, mak[ing] our beds, clean[ing] our rooms, besides our store work.” Tellingly, Charles uncomfortably revealed his new mantle as slaveholder: “I have as conscientious scruples in becoming a slave holder... I believe I should make a tolerably good master/ and I suppose every one believes that of himself/ I believe I do a good deed as I think I may benefit the condition of the slave.” Furthermore, for a mother who had not seen southern slavery, Charles wished to convey the impossibility of finding a “faithful servant” in a “slave country” without “own[ing] one.”²¹

²¹ Charles Snow letter, February 10, 1828 in the Charles Snow Letters. SHC-UNC.

As early as 1828, new southerners like the Snows were unable to resist the influences of their frontier environment and thus, they participated in the development of the rhetorical apparition of a beneficent slaveholder who only reluctantly purchased human laborers as they could not manage without them. Such difficult decisions were made easier, they consoled themselves, by the fact that *their* ownership, unlike that of native southern whites', was a charitable act for slaves who could not advance in a civilized world outside slavery. Sadly, no letter of response remains from Charles's mother to relay her reactions to her sons' transmutation into slaveholders after only six years of life in the slave South.²²

Charles Snow's fellow store clerk, James Neal arrived in Tuscaloosa in early January, 1822. Like Snow, Neal carried on exhaustive letter conversations with relatives he left behind. Neal's letters connected him with his brother Aaron Neal of Louisburg, North Carolina while he worked for the firm of Case and Hogan as a "mercantile clerk." Like Snow, Neal's laborers left him "well pleased" as they permitted him leisure time to "deliberate a little on other matters." From his torrid of correspondence, Neal relayed all sorts of information allowing his family to experience his frontier adventures from afar. Although frequently commenting on the elevation of cotton agriculture and land sales, it would be Neal's deliberations on the "daughters of Alabama" and marriage that sustained his constant dialogue.

Upon arrival, Neal could not help but take stock of Tuscaloosa's women. The village's total population, Neal estimated, stood at "about one thousand or from that to fifteen hundred." Within that small number, he found only unattractive "girls" too "awkward" and "unparalleled

²² For the construction of this grand benevolence embraced and espoused by southern slaveholders and pro-slavery ideologues as the nineteenth century wore on see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese's *The Mind of the Master Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and *Slavery in White and Black* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[sic]” for his tastes.²³ His opinion of these frontier women had not improved by December 1821, by which time Neal had sworn off marriage altogether as he “associated [it] with poverty...which I think sometimes tend to increase the miseries of mankind.”²⁴

As he settled in for his first year in residence in Tuscaloosa, Neal could only apologize to his brother for the dullness of his frontier existence. Seemingly, he believed he should be able to offer something exciting in his letters and felt somewhat dejected that they did little to spark immediate replies from his brother. In one 1822 letter, he lamented his contribution to the brotherly conversation as his “drained the fountain of epistolary communication.” Neal’s life in Tuscaloosa may not have inspired the most exciting news to write home about. When the frontier failed him, Neal could make up his own tales like the description he gave of Tuscaloosa inhabitants: “some curious looking fellow citizens in this country...half Alligators half horse and a little touched with the snapping turtles.” If his letters did not evoke a readiness to reply, Neal could prove quite good at scolding his correspondent for not recognizing his dire need for connection. The Tuscaloosa Neal needed information from back home and wanted to share and have acknowledged his experiences with those closest to him. When that feeling of affirmation lagged, Neal did not hesitate to ridicule his brother: “what are the times...you will not employ your time better?”

If James Neal felt his letters lacked luster, the fact that they offered his brother snapshots of the frontier and a variety of information may have soothed his writing spirit. Like others, he often reassured his relative of his “very good health” and that he expected to see appropriate success as the frontier life hardened its inhabitants—a kind of true test of wills. He and his fellow

²³ James Neal letter to Aaron Neal, January 29, 1822 in the Neal Family Papers. SHC-UNC.

²⁴ James Neal letter to Aaron Neal, December 18, 1822 in the Neal Family Papers. SHC-UNC.

frontier inhabitants were never “easily dejected by adversity nor elevated by prosperity.”²⁵

Reports on their mother, who by 1823 wished to return to North Carolina as it was a “more healthy place than she supposes this to be,” also reappear in their letters. Brushing aside their mother’s complaints, James Neal always defended his new home’s healthy climate: “I have not been sick or much unwell since I saw you. I am sure my health could not have been better in any part of the union.”²⁶

Frustrated in the course of his early letters to his brother, Neal encouraged his sibling to remain faithful in writing, as it was their only outlet of connection. Whether there was recent news to exchange was unimportant to James Neal. By January 1824, he bluntly affirmed this reasoning: “I now write again not that I have any thing [sic] new important to communicate but rather to keep up a constant correspondence.” When news and events failed to add flavor to his letters, Neal could and did default to discussions on marriage, an institution about which he was highly cynical. Again, his cynicism heightened in frontier Alabama where he found few women he would take for a wife. Responding to his brother Aaron’s question as to whether their friend should marry before moving to Alabama, James retorted that “if he is disposed to marry, particularly if his affections are placed on any girl in No Carolina he had better lay siege to her & bring her with him.”²⁷

By his last surviving letter from Tuscaloosa, James Neal had informed him of their friend James Wiggins’s “marrying the widow, before he did well consider,” James counseled his brother concerning the idea of marriage. On the topic of a friend’s recent engagement, James

²⁵James Neal letter to Aaron Neal, June 1, 1822 in the Neal Family Papers. SHC-UNC.

²⁶ James Neal letter to Aaron Neal, May 6, 1823 and August 2, 1823 in the Neal Family Papers. SHC-UNC.

²⁷ James Neal letter to Aaron Neal, January 12, 1824 in the Neal Family Papers. SHC-UNC.

offered the following: “observe some of the motive by which the different sexes are induced to enter into this compact... enumerate Beauty, virtue, a well improved mind which qualities are supposed to produce love, and also money which is said to be lovely in its self.” To these motivations, James added “a sense of propriety...having lived single long enough...hoping to enjoy themselves better in a good old age.” James was solidly indifferent and outright opposed to such unions when individuals were financially unstable. Perhaps, his experiences in the whirlwind of frontier panics and frequent marriages seared Neal’s conscience: “with considerate minds poverty has been and ought to be a serious objection to matrimony by all at least who are not disposed to entail misery to posterity.” To justify his stance, James referenced the countless divorcees and “graf widows” surrounding him in Tuscaloosa. The “absurdity of chastely connescions [sic]” wrought on the southern frontier played havoc with Neal’s conception of companionate marriage and he felt obligated to share his informed opinions with a brother whom he hoped could avoid such debacles.²⁸

From traversing through the “new country” to debating the prospects of frontier marriage, when pulled together, these experiences produce the image of a physically expanding U.S. that permitted the rapid development of a newer, deeper South. For migrants caught up in the general territorial movements west that occurred throughout the backwaters of what was previously British North America—from Maine to Ohio to Kentucky and Alabama—frontier life was a complex blend of both newness and similarity. Certainly, as historical geographer D.W. Meinig has argued, the largess of the this geographic movement of people was not a “broad sweep westward” but rather an “uneven advance along several pathways, the direction and volume

²⁸ James Neal letter to Aaron Neal, May 12, 1824 in the Neal Family Papers. SHC-UNC.

responding to Indian cessions, land qualities and accessibilities, speculative promotions and popular fervors, resulting in a continuous reshaping of the outer edge of the frontier.”²⁹

The numerics of social history have been quite enlightening and foundational to the pursuits of cultural history; however, the individual and cultural dynamics at work in this movement of peoples remain, for the most part, unnoticed. A few questions demonstrate this essay’s call to action. How does one come to grips with the perceived newness confronted when arriving at a place where virtually no similar migrants had settled, or perhaps, even seen before? What of the cultural norms and traits that were shed, sustained, or altered to fit the project of recreating social order on a frontier? Indeed, what arises from the letters and documents of the earliest migrants to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, is the sense that they coped with the difficulties and stresses of migration and distance from loved ones by creating the mantle of the frontier. Through vivid detail they commented on soil types, water provisions, and the ever-present notion that one day the wild and rugged frontier they were taming would be conquered. Consciously, they wrote of their journeys and almost never second-guessed their abilities to survive and, in fact, thrive in this new country of the Old Southwest.

Indeed, for travelers like Lincecum, Owen, and Breckenridge as well as settlers like the Birds, Snows, and Neals, frontier Tuscaloosa was a place of adventure, opportunity, and imagination. Simultaneously, it offered intrigue, violence, and chance. Nowhere could any migrant find a guarantee of personal success and in an America that faced economic panics around every corner, migrating to a new place must have been exciting and terrifying for many of the same reasons. It is exactly that enthusiasm and anticipation that has survived in many of the letters and narratives that infused the cultural production of the frontier that makes

²⁹ D.W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History, Volume 2: Continental America, 1800-1867* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 224 and 235.

Tuscaloosa's story so important. Coming to grips with how these productions relied on processes of rewriting within the diaries, journals, and correspondences of migrants and settlers presses us deep into the forests of the Deep South's unexplored mythic frontier—with all its intensity and risk, the expedition is long overdue.

CHAPTER THREE

“BUT ENOUGH OF ALABAMA, WHICH I AM SOON TO QUIT FOREVER”: DESCRIBING, SELLING, AND BUYING THE SOUTHWESTERN FRONTIER

As one of the most attractive yet risky frontier businesses, land speculation in the frontier South required an awareness of one's salesmanship, unseen products, and incredulous consumers. In early Alabama, this business activity demonstrated the interplay between individualized frontier experiences and the American acquisition of the southwest in the antebellum period—an era in which the simultaneous development of the federal land system constantly influenced this dynamic. Central to this interaction was the concept that an individual could sell and purchase success. Indeed, how well one traded in frontier land served as one avenue through which an individual could rewrite a locale on the United States' southern frontier. The role land played in this process of rewriting is accessible via a multitude of sources and rests at the core of this chapter. Collectively, Tuscaloosa County's original survey notes, early land deeds, and the experiences of land surveyors serve as conduits into a world almost wholly obsessed with the finding, describing, buying, and trading of land. These processes all contributed to the rewriting of the frontier within southern history and illustrate that southern purchasers *and* northern land dealers and creditors shaped the image of what the frontier South was and how it differed from frontiers encountered elsewhere in America.¹

¹ For other locales see John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) and Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990) and *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).

One of the most revealing cases of Tuscaloosa land dealing was that of William Ely. Ely visited the newly formed state of Alabama between February 1820 and June of 1821 as a land agent, commissioner, and attorney for the Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction for the Deaf and Dumb, also known as the American Institute. As its agent, he was charged with the mission of locating and selling public lands donated by the United States government to the Asylum. This mission placed Ely in the midst of the early land rushes to the new country of Alabama and in a position to observe the early white settlement of Tuscaloosa, Alabama.²

Born in Guilford, Connecticut in 1767 and graduated from Yale College in 1787, William Ely's early life beamed with financial success. Leaving an early career in medicine, Ely shifted interests to the shipping business; he purchased a boat, and personally conducted trade in the East Indies and Holland becoming quite proficient in the Dutch language and navigation. Able to retire from active business pursuits at an early age, he married Clarissa May Davis of Boston, Massachusetts in 1811 and dedicated his talents to charities and internal improvement projects.³

Ely's Alabama experiences are compelling for a number of reasons. His collected letters offer a rich and colorful imagining of what early Tuscaloosa looked like from various settlers' encounters. Ely tasted the delights of personal success—an idea firmly attached to land ownership in the early nineteenth century—and the bitterness of the frontier's solitude. Perhaps most provocatively, Ely's endeavors illustrate the nature of speculative land dealings shaping the

² Ely was officially recognized as agent and attorney of the Institute empowered by the same to act with "power of attorney from the President and directors of the Connecticut Asylum" on 22 May 1820 and was witnessed by Henry T. Anthony, Clerk of the County Court for the County of Tuscaloosa and State of Alabama. *Tuscaloosa County Deed Record: Book One, 1818-1823*, 45-46. TCR. For similar cases to Ely's see Paul Wallace Gates, *History of Public Land Law Development* (Washington, D.C.: Zenger Publishing Co., 1968).

³ W. Stanley Hoole, ed. "Elyton, Alabama, and The Connecticut Asylum: The Letters of William H. Ely, 1820-1821." *The Alabama Review* 3.1. (January 1950), 36-69. Charles William Darling, *Memorial to My Honored Kindred* (Utica, NY, 1888), 77-78.

frontier South prior to federal and state governments' bureaucratization of the system. In what could prove a dangerous business, Ely engaged the fast-paced land markets for, what he repeatedly called the success of the "interesting Institute." The "Describing the Frontier" section of this chapter explores the world that Ely discovered on his mission to turn profits for the Connecticut Asylum. The individuals who purchased his land were quite different from Ely in that they were not philanthropic do-gooders temporarily stationed in the South. Thus, many of them possessed a wholly different conception of what southwestern frontier lands were all about.⁴ These differences shaped their interactions as both Ely and his buyers navigated the waters of dealing in frontier lands.

How men like Ely pursued their trade and the personal stakes they invested is examined in the second section, "Selling the Frontier." Expanding our investigation, the third section, "Buying the Frontier" probes the demand-side of the frontier land business. Here, I underscore how buyers understood Ely's and others' products and argue that it was this tangible process of buying land in which Tuscaloosa's spatial dimensions evolved. Individual purchases set the boundaries of Tuscaloosa County, Alabama; therefore, understanding how individuals—from speculators to purchasers—converted unbounded spaces into a place with distinct outer edges and boundaries becomes central to the making of Tuscaloosa and the rewriting of its frontier

⁴ For a more detailed understanding of the Connecticut Asylum's history see John Warner Barber, *Connecticut Historical Collections: Containing a General Collection of Interesting Facts, Traditions, Biographical Sketches, Anecdotes, & c. Relating to the History and Antiquities of Every Town in Connecticut, with Geographical Descriptions* (New Haven: B.L. Hamlen, 1836), 33-36; *A Brief History of the American Asylum, At Hartford, For the Education and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb* (1893) accessed at www.disabilitymuseum.org/lib/docs/1371.htm?page=print; John Vickery Van Cleve and Barry A. Crouch, *A Place of Their Own: Creating the Deaf Community in America* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1989); Barry A. Crouch, "Lessons Learned from the Connecticut Asylum" in *The Deaf Way: Perspectives from the International Conference on Deaf Culture* (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1994), 226-230; David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009 reprint).

existence.⁵ Additionally, Ely's story and that of Tuscaloosa are but a microcosm of America's first grand land rush and how speculation gave way to the federal government's greater regulation of land distribution.⁶ His story, alongside those of his Tuscaloosa purchasers', illustrates what claiming the frontier looked like for many nineteenth-century Americans.

Describing the Frontier

William Ely's passage to frontier Alabama was anything but a smooth one. Writing to his wife from Huntsville in February 1820, Ely complained of feeling "considerably fatigued from riding seven days successively on horseback on very bad roads." Arriving after a completely "unpleasant journey," Ely initiated his complaint and sorrow-ridden commentary on the southern frontier. Of Huntsville's lodgings, he was "disgusted with the noise, filth, dissipation and want of every accommodation even at the *best Hotel* in the place."⁷

Ely journeyed throughout early Alabama, often on unmaintained roads, Native American trails, and river bottoms. Some estimate of the distances he traveled can be deduced based on travel guides of his era. As town-to-town travel paths advertised only a decade after Ely's sojourn demonstrate, moving about in early Alabama was not for the faint-hearted. From Huntsville to Tuscaloosa, Ely would have either traveled one hundred fifty-seven miles via Somerville or one hundred fifty-three miles via Blountsville. Traveling the distance from Huntsville to Florence, where U.S. land agent John Coffee resided, Ely would have anticipated a

⁵ For the context of land sales in the Appalachian Mountains and the South see Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *The Land Office Business: The Settlement and Administration of American Public Lands, 1789-1837* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1990 reprint).

⁶ For a general sketch of late eighteenth/early nineteenth century land surveying took shape in Alabama (as part of the Mississippi Territory, then as the Alabama Territory, and finally as a state within the Union) see J.M. Faircloth, "Land Surveying in Alabama" at www.bels.state.al.us/pdfs/Faircloth%20Pamphlet.pdf.

⁷ William Ely to Clarissa Ely (February 20, 1820). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA.

journey of seventy miles. For a man in his fifties to be traveling three times the daily mileage that most Alabamians traveled on their roads, Ely had reasonable cause to dislike his surroundings.⁸

Despite the filth, prolonged journeys, and his crankiness, Ely would write obsessively on his health and well-being, mentioning it at least once in every note to his wife. Furthermore, his letters' emotional character appear tethered to Ely's opinion of his physical surroundings. He could encourage his wife to "write me the Conversations for the *only joy* I have in this Country is derived from reading your tenderly affectionate Letters." In fact, Ely often suggested that if he could abandon the mission of speculation for the Asylum, he would "*immediately* quit this profligate Country & fly to the Bosom of my dear family" as he was "as homesick as a Boarding-School Girl."⁹ Later the same month, upon admitting to being "weary with traveling over Mountains, thro Swamps & Mud & living in the middle of Piles of Logs with no other windows than the large spaces between them," Ely wrote of his longing "to return to my dear family & to a civilized and moral World."¹⁰ But his commitment to the Asylum and its future funding would keep him in what he judged an amoral and uncivilized Alabama. In his mind, the Alabama mission was ordained of God and therefore, he felt obliged to persevere: "Heaven appears to have ordered & directed this Business & hitherto to have smiled propitiously on my endeavours...let us trust that the same Power will continue to shield and preserve us all & permit us again to unite our hearts dilated with gratitude for its many mercies to us all."¹¹

⁸ See *An Accompaniment to Mitchell's Reference and Distance Map of the United States* (Philadelphia: Mitchell and Hinman, 1835), 281.

⁹ William Ely to Clarissa Ely (April 4, 1820). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA.

¹⁰ William Ely to Clarissa Ely (April 20, 1820). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA.

¹¹ William Ely to Clarissa Ely (May 13, 1820). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA.



Image 3.1: Portrait of William Ely. The only remaining image of Ely (1767-1847) was posted by a descendant on ancestry.com.

The power of letters and the connection wrought could mitigate the negative aspects of the frontier experience. Upon receiving a bundle of six letters from his wife, Ely confessed that he had “read them again & again...very often

did my Bosom heave with the fond Sigh of Affection & my eyes fill with the pearly drops of Tenderness ...my heart throbs at the recollection of the many tender pathetic & affectionate expressions they contain.”¹² Ely’s emotional outpouring could turn to exasperation and despair as it did in June of 1820: “Be assured the hours & days roll heavily on. Days are becoming weeks. Weeks Months & Months years, while separated from you. My Situation is anxious & joyless.”¹³

The depth of Ely’s correspondence reveals the minutiae that frontier visitors relayed to their correspondents. It was, however, his commentary on society that offers glimpses into the life of a frontier businessman and those of his customers. During his final letter from Tuscaloosa, Ely offered some information that might “amuse” them. Here were Ely’s thoughts on Tuscaloosa, “its Inhabitants,” and the “People of this State” unleashed. Tuscaloosa was “pleasantly situated on tolerably high, handsome, & generally pretty level rich land.” Its inhabitants would not garner such high praise.

¹² William Ely to Clarissa Ely (May 27, 1820). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA.

¹³ William Ely to Clarissa Ely (June 20, 1820). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA.

It was only “4 or 5 Years since the *first* white Family settled” yet, “not one...have any title to the Land they live on,” a distinction that made Ely’s mission a particularly unpopular one given that Ely’s grants redistributed lands already claimed by squatters. What such individuals “call their *houses*,” he went on, “are either the most despicable rough dirty & uncomfortable rolling log Cabins, or less durable & more mean buildings.” Unimpressed, Ely would even note that no building utilized “a single Pane of Glass” or “furniture as of Glass or Iron.” Such cabins, contained earthen floors of “rough boards” under which “Hogs, dogs, Cats & fowls...retreat[ed] from bad Weather.” Such roaming and noisy animals often disturbed Ely when he sought reprieve from his surroundings.

Even though Ely found accommodations highly inadequate, he recognized Major Lewen’s Hotel in Tuscaloosa as: “the best tavern in this Place.” Here, he lamented, the roof allowed “the Rains at times [to] pour, *literally*, in *Streams*.”¹⁴ From his room, Ely could see a “delightful Yard, which at times is half knee deep with filth.” “My Window opens,” he continued, “to delight with the Prospect, & regale with its Perfume, my Senses.” Ely shared his quarters with horses and cattle who, to “increase the Sociability of my Situation...frequently favour me with a familiar Call by running their heads into the Window, to say *how’d*e, & look.”¹⁵ Like land agents and capitalist pioneers scattered out on the American frontier, Ely confronted a rough, raw, and muddy new world that he described with fervor and disdain.¹⁶

For Tuscaloosa village, Ely seemingly refused to leave any topic unnoticed or without sardonic remark— reasons for which we will explore below. When Ely wrote home in the

¹⁴ William Ely to Clarissa Ely (June 2, 1821). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA.

¹⁵ William Ely to Clarissa Ely (June 2, 1821). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA.

¹⁶ A comparison to the mid-West’s most iconic frontier village and its similar environment can be had from William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991).

summer of 1821, he estimated that Tuscaloosa had “20 Stores & little Groceries, or Hucksters Shops.” As far as class and education, Ely noted “few of the Inhabitants” who possessed “considerable Wealth & intelligence” as many had coaches “more from ostentation, than for use of convenience, as the roads absolutely forbid any comfort to those who ride in them.” Despite the numerous ladies who dressed “fashionably & with tolerable Taste,” there were those who Ely found “without the least taste” and, as if unaware of the expensive nature of their wares, were “most careless of their Cloathes.” In fact, he avowed that the “neatness & propriety in Dress of both sexes are, generally, grossly inattentive.” On housing, Ely spared little feelings as well: “They all live in dirty, small, Sod & mud Cabins, or in those of a more mean construction, & are generally almost destitute of all the Comforts & conveniences of Life.” Ely was struck by these oddities as they did not resemble the patterns of the rising, northern middle class to which he was accustomed. Diet, too, was a shameful topic: “Bacon, corn bread, or greasy hot half baked biscuits, about as often without vegetatles, with Water, Buttermilk & sour milk, constitute, with Tea & Coffee, for those that buy them, their general Diet.”¹⁷

Religion and personal morality fared much worse under Ely’s critical eye. As there was “little serious attention...paid to Religion,” there was also a “lamentable want of qualified religious Instructors.” Those who “pretend to preach & teach...can neither write their Names or read their Bible or any other book.” “Excessive profanity,” Ely remarked, swirled in the Tuscaloosa breeze spewed mostly by “Preachers Magistrates & other peace officers.” Ely found the overall population, particularly the women, uneducated and uninteresting. Of the state, Ely wrote how:

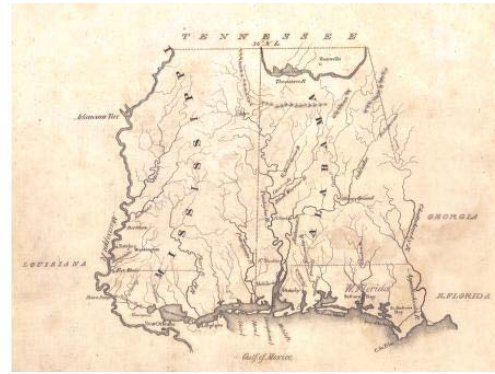
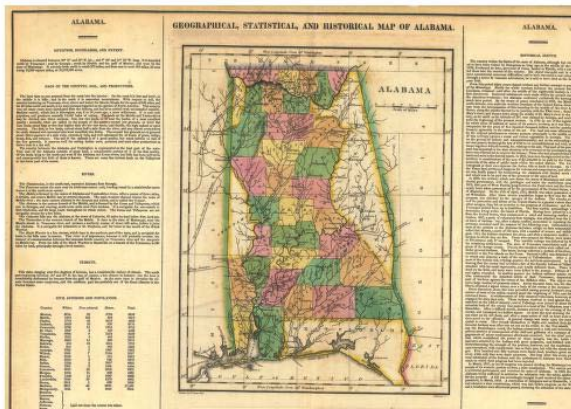
much of the white Population of the State are extremely indolent, either too proud, or too lazy to work, or even think, dissipate their time & money, & would

¹⁷ On the habits of the rising northern middle class, see Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992).

their morals if they had any, without enjoyment, in lounging about Taverns, Stores, tipling and gambling houses, or in making & attending horse races, Cockfights, called here *Chicken* fights, shooting at a Mark, hunting or fighting. Notwithstanding such are their habits I think them a very avaricious People. *Money* is their God, & *Cotton* the *Idol* of their devotions.

It was not the laziness, their avariciousness, nor the cockfights that inspired Ely's crescendo of condemnation. Rather, it was their "Mobocratic" tendencies. Ely detested the fact that "Judges & boatmen, Senators & Waggoners, Generals & soldiers, Mechanicks, day Laborers, & Vagabonds, all mix promiscuously" without regard to their "dirty & shabby appearance." That they did so without "reserve or embarrassment" was almost too much for the Yale-educated Ely to bare. Ely pinned this vile class mixing on the institution of slavery: "Slavery that greatest of curses to the enslaved is also the greatest curse to those who hold the wretched Africans." "The *effects* of Slavery," Ely reasoned, "are *interwoven with all their habits of feeling thinking & acting, pollute* their Joys & abortively *incapacitate* them for all refined intellectual & religious enjoyment." By the end of his tenure, Ely ecstatically proclaimed that he had had "enough of Alabama, which I am soon to quit forever."¹⁸ His separation from family was only compounded with encounters with unkept locals, uninformed buyers, and uncooperative government officials.

¹⁸ William Ely to Clarissa Ely (June 2, 1821). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA. In fact, Ely was not alone in his assessment and disorder. British naturalist, Philip Henry Gosse visited the frontier state of Alabama in 1838 venturing northward from Mobile for eight months before he left America for good in January of 1839. His observations confirm many of those of Ely. See Gosse's account in William T. Going, *Essays on Alabama Literature* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1975), 169.



Among other national maps, migrants and speculators like Ely could have had access to these two of Alabama from the early 1820s. **Map 3.1** (left): “Geographic, Statistical, and Historical Map of Alabama.” Designed by Fielding Lucas and dated 1822. Held in W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama. **Map 3.2** (right): Untitled map of Alabama and Mississippi from *A Geography for Schools*. Designed by Luke Orury and dated, 1822. Held in Birmingham Public Library Cartography Collection, Birmingham, Alabama.

Selling the Frontier

For historian Henry Adams writing at the dawn of the twentieth century, the United States’ trans-Appalachian expansion, circa 1800, seemed amazingly static. “Even after two centuries of struggle the land was still untamed,” Adams observed, and furthermore, “forests covered every portion, except here and there...more than two thirds of the people clung to the seaboard within fifty miles of tide-water, where alone the wants of civilized life could be supplied.”¹⁹ The waves of migrants into the backcountry in the wake of the War of 1812 took with them all sorts of individuals, especially men like William Ely. This great movement onto the frontier required immediate organization and development of a land business and a supporting cast of industries, including banking and surveying. These entities emerged *with* the

¹⁹ Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America* (9 Volumes, New York, 1891-1898), 1:1. Quoted in Malcolm J. Rohrbough *The Land Office Business: The Settlement and Administration of American Public Lands, 1789-1837* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1990), 3-4.

great land rushes of the late 1810s as veterans of the recent wars as well as farmers and speculators headed both northwest and southwest looking to use land to turn immediate profits or sustain several generations of farmers.²⁰

This drive to the West necessitated a national approach to distributing land, one that encompassed its organization, division, and sale. Other structural points also arose including: who would oversee revenues from public land sales? Would prices be set to accommodate small purchasers by holding back large planters and venture capitalists? Should squatters be removed or allowed to purchase the lands they claimed? Squatters, settlers, speculators, Senators, and Representatives all debated these issues for decades, beginning in Jefferson's first administration. Colonial experiences in land dealings gave some interested parties a variety of approaches to land distribution from which to draw.²¹ Yet, the conflicting styles of New England versus the Chesapeake left Jeffersonian-era bureaucrats at odds when debating how to secure a land-based, yeoman republic.²²

²⁰ For a deeper understanding of the complexity of the frontier South's agricultural and land development alongside cotton and other crops like rice, hemp, grain, and livestock see chapter seven of John Solomon Otto, *The Southern Frontiers, 1607-1860: The Agricultural Evolution of the Colonial and Antebellum South* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989).

²¹ Malcolm J. Rohrbough *The Land Office Business: The Settlement and Administration of American Public Lands, 1789-1837* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1990), chapters one through four.

²² See Mark Rifkin, *Manifesting America: The Imperial Construction of U.S. National Space* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) and Andro Linklater's most recent book, *The Fabric of America: How Our Borders and Boundaries Shaped the Country and Forged Our National Identity* (New York: Walker & Company, 2007). Linklater refutes Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis of America's frontier and its boundlessness serving to form a national identity by suggesting that it was parameters and lines of demarcation between properties that was central to early American identity. See also Martin Brückner, *The Geographic Revolution in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006) in which the author details how cultures of measuring—exhibited in the rise of decorative wall maps, property plats, atlases, and even needlework—shaped language, literature, and the developing Anglo-American identity.

While Ely performed his divinely-inspired speculation, his contemporaries in the Midwest had arrived at what one historian has called “the land business.” And a business it had become by the mid-1820s in the Ohio Valley. In practice, however, the business aspects of surveying and distributing America’s public lands fell to a Treasury Department that struggled to survive the War of 1812, the financial crisis of 1819, and the highly-politicized leadership of Georgian, William H. Crawford. It would be Crawford’s surveyor John Coffee and his inattention that left Ely grumbling, “enough of Alabama.”²³

The growth of the business was indeed a quick and startlingly one for many involved in land speculation and purchasing during the first three decades of the nineteenth century. From Thomas Hutchins’ (the first U.S. Geographer) surveys during the early days of the republic to Jefferson’s purchase of Louisiana from the French and the War of 1812, the continued distribution of land to servicemen and veterans must have seemed a harbinger of increasing demand as more and more Americans looked for available land. As historian Malcolm Rohrbough observed, by the end of John Quincy Adams’s presidency, “the service to the government and public had long since been forgotten in favor of the vested interests that bowed neither to public welfare nor to the wishes of fellow citizens. The land office business had become very businesslike indeed.”²⁴

²³ Coffee’s appointment, like many federally-appointed surveyors was secured through political connections. His was through his good friend Andrew Jackson. Both had land investments in the district of northern Alabama, the jurisdiction Coffee surveyed. On Coffee’s role in the southern land business/surveys see Rohrbough, *The Land Office Business*, 81-82.

²⁴ Rohrbough, 159. The rise of this land business in relation to Tuscaloosa can be observed through almost constant reporting of lands for sale in the national print media beginning in the late 1810s. The following is a partial list representing the awareness of Tuscaloosa land on the market for individuals outside the state of Alabama: *Daily National Intelligencer* [Washington, D.C.] (July 30, 1819) 7.2043; “Sales of Public Lands.” *Daily National Intelligencer* [Washington, D.C.] (August 6, 1819) 7.2049; “From the Tuscaloosa (A.T.) Repub July 1.” *Columbian Centinel* [Boston, Massachusetts] (August 11, 1819) 3687; “Letter II.” *Winyaw Intelligencer* [Georgetown, South Carolina] (October 6, 1819) II.208; “An Act to establish additional Land Offices in the states of Alabama and Illinois.” *Daily National*

This transition toward a federal business approach to land distribution set the parameters in which Ely functioned.²⁵ Much of his exasperation, therefore, was rooted in a general anxiety of living through this transformation of the American land business. For someone who internalized the mission of his employer, the ineptitude and graft of the land business continually tested his commitment. His various letters, particularly those written to board members at the Connecticut Asylum, reveal a frontier environment that produced difficult challenges that even his best efforts were unable to counter. This helplessness often bled through Ely's letters as he found himself removed from any assistance the Asylum administrators might offer. Ely confessed his restraints: "accomplishment...is dependant on so many Contingencies." Attempts to contact administrators in Hartford for instruction was often delayed and he found contacting local land officials as well as the Secretary of the Treasury, William Crawford, highly difficult, thus complicating the closures of many of his land dealings.²⁶ These alone were enough to agitate this successful entrepreneur bent on doing good. Ely frequently teetered on the edge of complete annoyance and despair.²⁷

Intelligencer [Washington, D.C.] (May 15, 1820) 8.2290; "TUSCALOOSA! Public Auction of LOTS." *Kentucky Reporter* [Lexington, Kentucky] (December 11, 1820) XIII. 50; *Providence Patriot* [Rhode Island] (May 5, 1821) 3.35; "Tuscaloosa, Alab. July 21." *Baltimore Patriot* (August 15, 1821) XVIII.37; "Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Saturday." *Boston Commercial Gazette* (August 21, 1821) 58.14; *Providence Patriot* [Rhode Island] (June 19, 1824) 6.49; "Value of Land." *Connecticut Courant* [Hartford, Connecticut] (April 20, 1835) LXXI. 3665.

²⁵ For example, see the original federal documents regarding the Asylum: U.S. House Bill at <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llhb&fileName=002/llhb002.db&recNum=216>; U.S. House communication on the Deaf and Dumb Asylum of Connecticut (1819) <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsp&fileName=038/llsp038.db&recNum=558>; and the U.S. Senate version of the Application of Connecticut for a Grant of Land for the Purpose of Education (1821) <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsp&fileName=030/llsp030.db&recNum=457>.

²⁶ In a letter to his wife in March 1820, Ely remarked on the delay of the mails between Hartford and Huntsville in north Alabama; the delay was roughly a month from his wife's dating the letter to his reception of the same in Huntsville.

²⁷ William Ely to Clarissa Ely (April, 4, 1820). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA.

Atop Ely's list of necessary, yet troublesome, contacts sat John Coffee. Ely wrote to his wife in February of 1820 that he was "under the necessity of seeing Genl. Coffee the Surveyor Genl. of the State who resides at Florence, a distance of 73 Miles from here." After meeting with Coffee, Ely wrote that he had scouted lands in middle Alabama with the surveyor general and awaited a surveyor "whom I expect to engage to assist me in exploring the Country & making my Selections." Ely also acquired the assistance of a third individual "to assist me...immediately on an exploring tour thro' the Country."²⁸

Ely's impression of this collection of men was anything but positive. By the time he sat down to write Daniel Wadsworth, the vice president of the Asylum, he was "disappointed of the assistance of the Gentlemen I had engaged to aide me in exploring and making Selections." Ely's dismayed comments pull back the layers on a dedicated soul engaged in a highly competitive and fast-paced line of work. He became particularly aggravated when one of the surveyor's "Business being unexpectedly so situated, that \$100 *Dr* would not tempt him to assist me only 4 days." Clearly, Ely felt his generous offer should have inspired his assistant's cooperation.

In time, Ely's growing exasperation with his coworkers took its toll on his ability as land salesman: "The more I see of this State the more convinced I am that the proportion of *good land* in it, is *very small*." Having used terms like "broken, poor & barren" when writing to Wadsworth, Ely maintained a cooler style when writing the commissioners: "I am still convinced that this is the best Section of Country to locate our Grant in." No matter the disappointments or challenges of acquiring Tuscaloosa lands, Ely's longsuffering nature remained intact:

But to do it advantageously will necessarily be attended with unexpected delay & Expense, & what new obstacles may arise to prevent its complete accomplishment this Summer, it is impossible to foresee, but be assured my utmost exertions will be made to obviate or overcome them.

²⁸ William Ely to Clarissa Ely (March 1, 1820). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA.

As his stay in the South drew on, Ely learned the most efficient ways to maximize profits on the government's land grants to the Asylum. When dealing with lots near Jones's Valley (situated between present-day Tuscaloosa and Birmingham), he confronted falling land prices—lots “may not sell for more than \$1.25 pr Acre.” Ely shrewdly compromised selling smaller pieces of sections to make good on his investments and thus, earning the Asylum roughly five dollars an acre—a price that would bring in much more than the \$1.25 federal minimum.

Ostensibly, Ely's troubles were not with personal ineptitude, health, or even assistance with surveying lands. Rather, it was with the delay he experienced with U.S. Treasury Secretary, William Crawford. Ely explained the problems to Wadsworth in 1820 concerning another purchase in Jones's Valley. Confirming that he would send “by the first mail...a description of the land” selected to the Secretary and therein request “Patent or Patents for them,” Ely reasoned that he could not “receive any Money for Sales which I may make, and it requires six weeks to write to Washington & to receive an answer, even by the next Mail.” Given that he had also had to forward a description to Crawford before receiving the patent, one can understand Ely's complaint that “*this part of business...I find very difficult.*”²⁹

Ely's complaints to his wife about Crawford were far less diplomatic. Apologetic for being unable to confirm the “precise day when I may leave,” Ely confessed his agitation as to a schedule dictated by the Secretary's negligence.³⁰ Twelve days later, Ely described his disposition as one of “extreme impatience at the delay necessarily occasioned by, what appears to be, the inattention of the Scretary [sic] of the Treasury to the Interests of the Asylum.”³¹ Ely made few excuses for Crawford despite the “800 Miles” distance between them, as he assumed

²⁹ William Ely to Daniel Wadsworth (April 4, 1820). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA.

³⁰ William Ely to Clarissa Ely (June 8, 1820). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA.

³¹ William Ely to Clarissa Ely (June 20, 1820). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA.

the Secretary had taken up residence in Washington, D.C., leaving his home in Oglethorpe County, Georgia. The Secretary, Ely growled: “has not yet paid the least attention to any of the Letters which I have written him...and knows the wants of the Institution as well I do, & especially after having raised an expectation that I should probably be able to bring a considerable sum of money with me.”³² Ely needed Crawford’s immediate action, but Crawford apparently did not share Ely’s fervor for promptness.

Even without the immediate aide of Crawford, by 1821, Ely’s fortunes improved. His letter of February 1821 was made short as he “busily engaged in selling some Lands & [was] surrounded by a number of People who are impatiently waiting for me to attend to their business.”³³ Twenty three days later, Ely reported that he had made “Progress in my Business here” but admitted that it was “very heavy & troublesome being surrounded with applicants to buy who are neither able nor willing to give what I consider the value of the Land.”³⁴

Unfortunately, any formal response from Secretary Crawford to Ely directing sales has been lost.³⁵ Nonetheless, hints of what the sales looked like in comparison to the federal sales (in Milledgeville, Georgia and Huntsville, Alabama only a few years prior) occasionally shine through Ely’s criticisms of backcountry land dealers. In the same correspondence that touted his progress, Ely noted the locals’ “cabaling & laying all the Plans they can devise, to get the advantage of me in my Bargains.” Whether from paranoia or a guilty conscience, Ely found “it necessary to be wide awake & guarded at all Points & not only to be shrewd & watchfull but to

³² William Ely to Clarissa Ely (June 8, 1820). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA.

³³ William Ely to Clarissa Ely (February 3, 1821). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA.

³⁴ William Ely to Clarissa Ely (February 26, 1821). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA.

³⁵ No such letter has yet been uncovered either in the Ely collection, Crawford’s papers, or in the much broader Secretary of the Treasury papers housed at the National Archives.

walk *uprightly & circumspectly*.” Never doubtful of his ability to defend the Asylum’s interests from these would-be thieves, Ely boasted: “I feel confident they think they have their full match to deal with; & I am sure they will not be able to circumvent, & take me in, as they do *Uncle Sam*, or the U.S. at the public Sales.”³⁶

Ely’s obsession with success and his self-professed talent in outwitting the locales permeated reports to the Asylum’s Board of Directors. Although “disappointed of realizing the Prices I had hoped,” Ely deduced that after selling off “several Quarter Sections...I think I have reason to be well satisfied with the sales I have made.”³⁷ But, as Ely made abundantly clear, the sales did not come without considerable effort and sacrifice on his part: “I have had to exert myself constantly, & use all the Circumspection & precaution in my power, to guard myself, & the Interests of the Institution, against the passions, conflicting interests, Cabals & machinations of the Inhabitants, who are either in the occupancy of the Land, or in their vicinity, & wishing to purchase, or rent them.” Indeed, the situation devolved to the point that Ely hired bodyguards to “guard myself & the Money, Bonds & Mortgages.”³⁸

Short-lived was the mood that had accorded Ely in January 1821 the “Pleasure” of writing to his wife of the “respectful and friendly manner” of local friends who had incorporated the town of Elyton in Jefferson County.³⁹ By the following March and April, Ely took up his pen to warn his administrators of the constant danger emanating from enemies in the land

³⁶ William Ely to Clarissa Ely (February 26, 1821). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA. The sort of deviants that Ely confronted were no doubt comparable to one of Alabama’s most notorious speculators: Andrew Dexter. On Dexter, see Jane Kamensky, *The Exchange Artist: A Tale of High-Flying Speculation and America’s First Banking Collapse* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008).

³⁷ William Ely to Ward Woodbridge (February 26, 1821). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA.

³⁸ William Ely to Ward Woodbridge (February 26, 1821). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA.

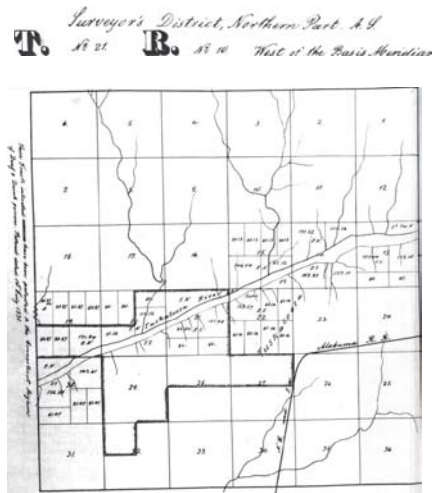
³⁹ William Ely to Clarissa Ely (January 6, 1821). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA.

business. Within a financial statement, Ely notified the Asylum treasurer that he had arrived at Huntsville, “with a guard of two men, whom I was obliged to hire to accompany me from Elyton...(it being considered very imprudent & unsafe for me to come up without them,) and brought with me, Money, Bonds, Mortgages, & Contracts to the Amt. of about \$25,000 D.”⁴⁰ Ely confirmed that he had left the remainder of funds in Tuscaloosa in a “locked Trunk, inclosed in a very large Iron Chest.” When contemplating his return to Tuscaloosa, Ely admitted, he felt “anxious to be seen...least unpopular, & a general opinion prevailing, that I have much money about me, it is now considered necessary for me to have a guard, wherever I travel in this State, whether I have money or not.”⁴¹ A month later, Ely’s associated his decline in health and attention to business to the “constant care & anxiety I experience.” These conditions were, in his words, “on account of my Business, & the hazard to myself & the Property in my Custody among such a barbarous People.” To guard against the “many of whom are incensed against me,” Ely found “confinement” and “never going out here unarmed” necessary concessions despite how the measures “pray severely on my health & spirits & render me quite unhappy.”⁴² Given the fears that drove him to hire personal guards, carry a weapon, and spend hours “confined” to his residence, one can begin to understand his readiness to “quit forever” frontier Alabama.

⁴⁰ William Ely to James H. Wells (March 29, 1821). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA.

⁴¹ William Ely to James H. Wells (March 29, 1821). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA.

⁴² William Ely to James H. Wells (April 20, 1821). William Ely Letters. HSC-UA.



Map 3.3: Map of Land Grants to Connecticut Asylum (circa 1820). The rail lines were superimposed on the older map in 1853. The original of this map was held by E.L. Hendrix of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, in 1947. It is duplicated from a copy in Morris Raymond Boucher, “Factors in the History of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1816-1846.” (Master’s Thesis, University of Alabama, 1947).

Buying the Frontier

Ely’s stint as speculator demonstrates both the complexity and significance of the land business in the frontier South. The duality of “surveying” is inherent in Ely’s records. Repeatedly, he used the term “surveyed” in his letters to mean “looked at.” Alternatively, he employed the term to evoke its modern connotation, implying the land had been demarcated and was ready for sale—in federally-mandated quarter sections (see Map 3.3) on provisional and extended credit or in exchange for cotton. The complicated nature of all of this land business encouraged dishonest men to benefit from theft and all sorts of underhanded bargaining. Concurrently, land speculators often had to confront land-hungry people who had rushed to claim lands by squatting on them prior to official surveys. Indeed, Ely believed Tuscaloosans’ disdain for him stemmed from his business necessitating an orderly survey of lands, unseating many squatters from lands they had not purchased. For these settlers, the argument that they were unable to purchase un-surveyed lands may have been a reasonable one, but it fell on deaf ears. They would either purchase the land under their feet or be removed by the new deed-

holding land owners. Whether squatters' recognized the federal grant to Ely's Asylum mattered little, for once the lands were privately held, Ely held the power to negotiate the sale price of his institution's holdings. Furthermore, Ely's experiences represent the nature of America's land surveying/purchasing system that developed as a kind of work-in-progress. This evolution seemed to both annoy dealers like Ely and delay surveying, triggering a host of difficulties that had been unforeseen and often overlooked amid the rush to settle the lands of the Deep South.

As Malcolm Rohrbough found in his work, *The Land Office Business*, the notes of early frontier surveyors conveyed the rough environment in which they worked. In more ways than one, the actual field notes taken during the survey of Tuscaloosa County illustrate what confronting the wilderness of the southern frontier looked like from the eyes of its surveyor and potential buyers. Intricately detailed but often unreadable, these sketches reveal actual processes of frontier settlement. With few to no permanent structures to "mark" or denote boundary lines, common objects like large rocks as well as a wide variety of trees from cedars to oaks served as reference points for surveying Tuscaloosa County.⁴³

The vastness of the record need not be displayed here beyond Coffee's precise estimations as these demonstrate that the unknown frontier atmosphere both hindered and necessitated the ordering only a surveyor could deliver. Of the "Southern Boundary Line" for "Township 21 R10 W," the township and range in which the city of Tuscaloosa would be erected, surveyor Coffee descriptively scrawled: "Beginning at the S.E. corner then W. land hilly and Red Oak, Hickory, Pine and Pops." The western boundary line must have looked quite

⁴³ Undoubtedly, the art of surveying lands in Alabama continued to be the inexact science that Sarah S. Hughes described in early Virginia (see Hughes, *Surveyors and Statesmen: Land Measuring in Colonial Virginia* (Virginia Surveyors Foundation : Virginia Association of Surveyors, 1979). For the Midwestern experience, see John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

similar: “Beginning at the N. West line then S. ward its having Oak, hickory, Pines, hilly--”⁴⁴

Coffee spent an additional thirty pages utilizing nature’s features as his defining markers for the “sectional lines” inside the twenty-first township. He produced very similar remarks throughout his six-hundred-sixty-two page survey notes for Tuscaloosa County—the County in which the majority of Ely’s lands were situated.

Coffee’s work laid the foundation for the settlement of Tuscaloosa, Alabama. His physical labors made possible the connections between land surveying, purchasing and the eventual placemaking of Tuscaloosa. What resulted from those connections can be evaluated in two ways: a quantitative analysis of public land records and a qualitative investigation of Ely’s private land sale documents.⁴⁵

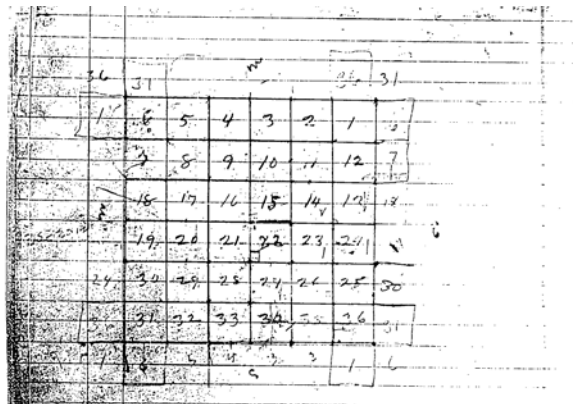
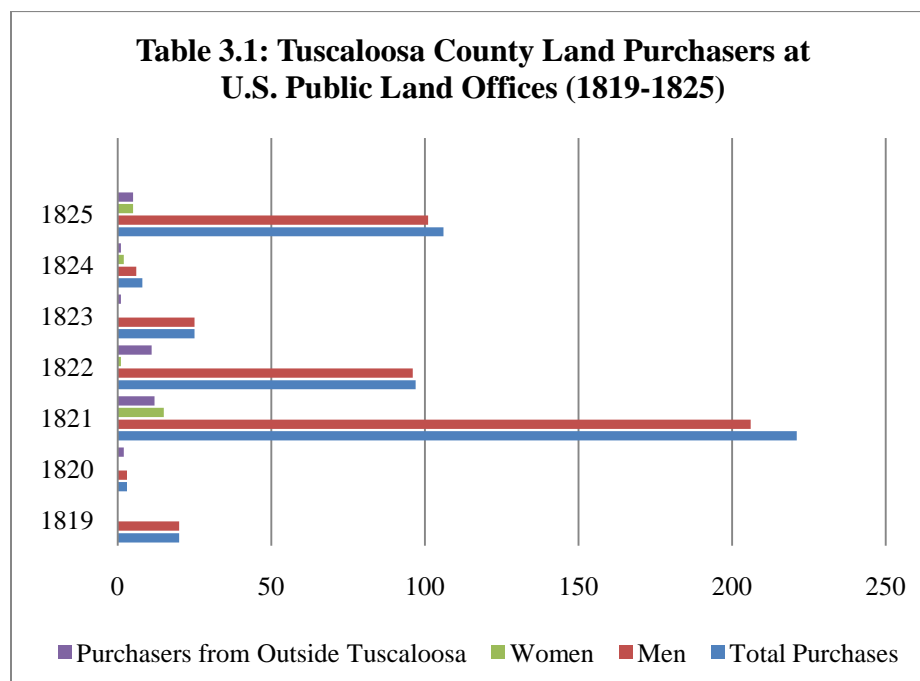


Image 3.2: Original Tuscaloosa township and range sketch. The sketch is included in the 1820 *Tuscaloosa County Field Notes* held in the Tuscaloosa County Courthouse, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

⁴⁴ *Tuscaloosa County Field Notes*, 461 and 462. TCR

⁴⁵ On “place-making” and the modes of self-identification via land in early American see Mark Rifkin, *Manifesting America: The Imperial Construction of U.S. National Space* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5 and 23.

As represented in Table 3.1, a total of four hundred-sixty-nine individuals bought land from the U.S. public land offices at Huntsville, Alabama and (after 1820) at Tuscaloosa. Not surprisingly, a downturn in purchasing followed on the heels of the Panic of 1819 but recovered and skyrocketed to their highest mark in 1821. The registrars for early purchases were John McKee and William P. Gould, men allied with the John Coffee and Andrew Jackson speculation crowd, early professionals in the emerging southern land markets. Most purchasers at the public offices claimed residency in Tuscaloosa County at the time of their registration. Only 3.62%, or seventeen out of four hundred-sixty-nine, purchasers declared prior residency in a county or city outside the state of Alabama. States from which this slim percentage of Tuscaloosa buyers called home included South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky and Mississippi. Interestingly, migrants from within Alabama amounted to almost three times this amount making up 9.6% of newcomers to Tuscaloosa County during this period.



In October of 1821, the cream of county society lined up to purchase Tuscaloosa town lots on which they constructed homes, businesses, a Masonic Lodge, churches, and schools. Although the standardized forms on which many of these individuals either signed or made their mark when purchasing lots exist, they present only a shadow of the buyers' circumstances. To grasp the situational aspects of buying frontier lands, William Ely's work can again be of assistance. What remains of Ely's land contracts and official deeds demonstrate three key elements that shaped frontier land dealings: first, the sheer size of capital invested in frontier lands, even in this localized market, was staggering and thus buyers relied heavily on credit extended from northern financial firms. The fact that lands held by the U.S. government now required payments-in-full would open the door to private markets in which credit could be utilized. Second, the intricacies of legally acquiring land benefited speculators' commodification of land more than buyers' dreams of owning land. And third, like earlier migrations in North America's history, the personal risks inherent in land speculation were mitigated by developing small-scale purchasing groups, thus minimizing the perils of buying alone.

As early as January 1821, Ely reported to the Asylum's board that a sum of "Thirty Thousand five hundred and Seventy-Six Dollars & Thirty Seven cents" had been "received to our full satisfaction." Selling lands granted outright from the federal government, Ely's revenue was not received from some lone purchaser; instead, he listed ten individuals including two partnerships: G&G Saltonstall and B&G Cox & Peter A. Remsen. With a precise description of township, range, section and lot numbers, Ely included the following formulaic statement within the certified deed:

To have and to hold the above promised premises with the opportunities thereof thereof unto them the above named granting & within him and assigning forever to them their own proper use and behalf. And also we the said Asylum do for ourselves & our successors covenant with the said Granting this heirs assigns that

at & untill unscaling of these present we are will seized of the Premises as a good & undisplatable Estate in fee simple & have good sight to bargain and sell the same in manner and form as is above written & that the same is free of all incumbrance whatsoever.⁴⁶

This was not the last time Ely would use legal language to assure buyers that the Asylum relinquished title while equally convincing his superiors of the Tuscaloosa men's intent to pay for their new land assets.

In the first of two deeds written in February 1821, Ely confirmed that “fifteen thousand and twenty six dollars and fifty-five cents” had been “received to our full satisfaction of the Connecticut Asylum.” The primary purchaser of lands in both Tuscaloosa and Greene Counties was the partnership of Witherspoon and Stephenson who, like the previous buyers, contracted themselves and “our heirs forever to warrant and defend the herein before granted and bargained premises to the Aforesaid Asylum.” In the deed submitted to county clerk Henry T. Anthony, Witherspoon and Stephenson had signed bonds with a firm from New York amounting to:

nine thousand nine hundred and thirty nine dollars and eighteen cents with interest from the date one of which said notes or bonds will be due & payable on the first day of May AD eighteen hundred and twenty two one other will be due and payable on the first day of May AD eighteen hundred and twenty three, the other on the first day of May AD eighteen hundred and twenty four (the interest on each of which notes or bonds is to be deducted proved the principle sum shall be paid punctually when due and not otherwise).⁴⁷

By May 1821, Ely's clientele included a variety of joint-holders in the speculative business of buying southern lands. A list of eleven individuals including both Gilbert and Gusdon Saltonstall as well as Benjamin and George Cox (previously, B&G Cox) as well as Peter Remson, James Pitcher, Charles Lewin and William M. Marr and others had discovered the “mutual advantage and benefit” of combining their interests and “associated themselves in a

⁴⁶ *Tuscaloosa County: Deed Book One*, 60-61. TCR.

⁴⁷ *Tuscaloosa County: Deed Book One*, 65-66. TCR.

Company.” Ely, although happy to have these men as customers, made sure to author iron-clad contractual agreements that protected the Asylum from payment defaults. In that vein, Ely composed the following contract template:

Therefore, in Consideration of all the premises and for Divers other good Causes and Considerations not herein mentioned, Each of the persons aforesaid Hereby mutually and Reciprocally covenant and agree with another and all with each separately that if Either of them the person aforesaid should die or depart this life at any time anterior to the Disolution of the company aforesaid then and in that case the whole of the right title and interest in and to the said Town and the lands reserved as appendant thereto of the person or persons deceased Shall survive and accrue to the surviving partners and members of the Company aforesaid to be disposed of according to their Joint direction and not descend or go to the heirs at law of the person or persons deceased according to the law regulating descents of real estate.⁴⁸

Given his experiences in Alabama, Ely’s use of standard legal contractual language served a dual purpose. It applied the accepted legal framework for land transactions and permitted Ely to ensure speedy and regular payments. Cutting off inheritance and thereby forcing original investors to take on the deceased’s debt as well as pay for his heirs’ legal representation if court proceedings became necessary, Ely moved to safeguard the Asylum from its own customers. Although the township and range coordinates were included in the deeds, strangely, no purchase price appeared in the finalized documents.

In a second contract with this large purchasing group, a total of “thirty three hundred & eleven dollars” had been “received to our full satisfaction.” The amount, as Ely succinctly affirmed, “remised, released, & quitclaimed” the grantees and their heirs.⁴⁹ This was not the last Ely wrote of this group of buyers however. Indeed, they would occupy at least two more entries that required Ely’s seal in Tuscaloosa County’s deed book. Two deeds processed by the county

⁴⁸ *Tuscaloosa County: Deed Book One*, 109-111. TCR.

⁴⁹ *Tuscaloosa County: Deed Book One*, 85. TCR.

clerk on the twenty-ninth day of May 1821 included more than twenty sectional titles in townships scattered throughout Tuscaloosa county and procured for the Asylum a total of “forty three thousand hundred and fourteen dollars & sixty five cents” in the first transaction and “twenty eight thousand seven hundred forty three dollars” in the second.⁵⁰

In the hopes of comprehending more fully how the processes of describing, selling, and buying influenced the larger project of rewriting the frontier, this chapter has explored the day-to-day physicalities of William Ely’s speculative ventures on behalf of the Connecticut Asylum. Ely’s work and the individuals he encountered the economic possibilities *and* limitations enveloping the land dealings on the early southern frontier. Ely’s tenure compels us to see the speedy revenue that the commodification of land could offer early American capitalists who had no interest in relocating to the southern frontier. The world their sales would help shape relied significantly on the order wrought by surveyors’ pens and plats as well as attorneys and traders. Equally important were the public land officials who traveled the southeast’s vast backcountry to put lands on the market and invite whites to “settle” America’s newest South.

The buyers who purchased land in the forests of America’s southern backcountry came to embrace their boundaries as legal demarcations, defensible in a court of law. As many lot sales within the city of Tuscaloosa were acquired during the boom year of 1821, the interplay of these landed interested groups seemingly culminated with the U.S. Congress’s relinquishing remaining claims to the “Corporation of the town of Tuscaloosa” in 1824.⁵¹ The city of Tuscaloosa, in less than ten years, had been transformed from frontier village into a thriving corporation in the eyes of the nation’s legislature and its inhabitants. Its journey was both aided and complicated by those persons who measured, sold, and bought land in and around the village.

⁵⁰ *Tuscaloosa County: Deed Book One*, 92-97. TCR.

⁵¹ See *Journal of the Senate of the United States of America, 1789-1873*, (Thursday, May 27, 1824), 498.

CHAPTER FOUR

“LITERATURE TO HIM WAS A RECREATION”: WRITING ON THE SOUTHWESTERN FRONTIER

On December 7, 1839, Alexander Beaufort Meek appeared before the gentlemen of the Erosophic Society of the University of Alabama to offer an oration entitled “The Southwest: Its History, Character and Prospects.” A “bright-eyed, fair-headed...and lean” young man, Meek returned to the “intellectual home of [his] boyhood,” to speak to fellow “Lovers of Wisdom.” Meek’s message to the congregation examined their mutual support of “intellectual and moral improvement...which are to be the bones and sinews of mental manhood.” This manhood would involve an understanding of subjects such as agriculture, climate, and health, all of which littered Meek’s address. Its central theme, however, was the inadequate attention paid to southern history by contemporary writers.

Questioning how Spanish, French, and English colonial interactions gave way to Americans’ encounters with “a race so diverse from their own, in manners, customs, and institutions,” Meek thundered: “the people of the United States have silently assented to the behests of their historians, and have permitted these things to be forgotten.” Meek pinned the South’s historical uncertainty on historians’ inaction: “The whole history of the Southwest



Image 4.1: Portrait of Alexander B. Meek, circa 1840. Held at W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, The University of Alabama.

remains to be written.” This chapter takes seriously Meek’s challenge as it still possesses great relevance. Herein, the phrase “on the southwestern frontier” is used for two purposes. The first is intended to conjure up the frontier as literary obsession for whites during America’s early nineteenth century. The second is meant to suggest the actual geographic place of habitation where the personal nature of writing intermingled with the act of living on the frontier. Understanding this duality and Meek’s negotiation of the two is key to understanding the genre of southern literature he influenced, cherished, and defended through a lifetime of writing. By exploring the very complexities of writing on the southwestern frontier that affected the life of Alexander Meek, we are able to access the literal rewriting that his publications inspired as well as how the frontier that he intimately embraced both shaped his perceptions of the distinctiveness of the South *and* was created, in part, by the efforts of men like this little-known southern literary figure.¹

Alexander Beaufort Meek, or A.B. Meek as he was known to his friends, was among the cadre of literary personalities who began their careers in early Tuscaloosa.² Throughout Meek’s

¹ A.B. Meek, *Romantic Passages in Southwestern History Including Orations, Sketches, and Essays* (New York: S.H. Goetzel & Co., 1857), 14-22. For physical description see William Russell Smith, *Reminiscences of a Long Life: Historical, Political, Personal and Literary* (Washington, D.C.: William Russell Smith, 1889), 315. Other references to Meek’s impressive physical features include that of Herman Clarence Nixon, *Alexander Beaufort Meek, Poet, Orator, Journalist, Historian, Statesman* (Auburn: Alabama Polytechnic Institute Historical Studies, 1910). Upon interviewing several of Meek’s contemporaries (more on these in footnote 30) and from the oil painting that is now housed at the Hoole Special Collections Library at the University of Alabama, Nixon developed a distinct composite of Meek’s appearance and manner.

² The fact that Tuscaloosa was becoming Alabama’s center of intellectual, political, and cultural life has been noted most concisely in Albert B. Head, “The Rise and Fall of the Tuscaloosa Bards: A Case Study of the Culture Shift in the Nineteenth-Century South.” (MA Thesis, Auburn University at Montgomery, 1993). Of the situation, Head found: “The small town was experiencing a relative boom due to an influx of settlers to the Black Belt, the burgeoning of the state’s new capital, and the establishment of the University of Alabama. One of the results of this confluence of diverse individuals was pointed out by Thomas McAdory Owen in his *History of Alabama* when he proclaimed this site was ‘the center of intellectual activity and furnished the nucleus of a literary coterie...’ (888). A unique group of personalities assembled in the form of professors, students, journalists, attorneys, legislators, and

life, he interacted with a wide variety of people: fellow university students, writers, editors, politicians, and professors. Through their relationships we can peer into the rich literary variations that thrived as Tuscaloosans formed representations of themselves as southern intellectuals while championing their region's reputation in the young American republic. The expressions proffered by these Tuscaloosans relied heavily on situating their new southern space in an evolving American landscape—in doing so, many of them relied the themes of nature, Native American life, male-female courtships, frontier exploration, and history.³ Though these themes mirrored those of their transcendentalist cousins, Meek and other southern writers' direct interactions with slavery, Native Americans, and their incessant discussions of living out frontier settlement gave their interpretation of the American frontier scenario a uniquely southern flavor. As we will see, for the most prolific of his Tuscaloosa peer group, A.B. Meek would seek to establish the South as a destination of rich literary potential. For his accomplishments, he would be admired across the antebellum South but fade from memory after the Civil War.⁴ What survived was the South that his writings on the frontier helped create.

clergymen and comprised what could, in retrospect, be acknowledged as a cultural cornerstone in nineteenth-century Alabama history.” (8)

³ A few note-worthy ones will suffice: Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, *Georgia Scenes, Characters, Incidents, Etc. in the First Half Century of the Republic* (1835); Johnson Jones Hooper, *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs* (1845), and *A Ride with Old Kit Kuncker, and Other Sketches, and Scenes of Alabama* (1849); Joseph Glover Baldwin, *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi: A Series of Sketches* (1853), *Party Leaders: Sketches of Thomas Jefferson, Alex'r Hamilton, Andrew Jackson, Henry Clay, John Randolph, of Roanoke, Including Notices of Many Other Distinguished American Statesmen* (1855); William Gilmore Simms, *Martin Faber: The Story of a Criminal* (1833), *The Yemassee: A Romance of Carolina* (1835), *Richard Hurdis: A Tale of Alabama* (1838), *The History of South Carolina From Its First European Discovery to its Erection into a Republic* (1840), *Beauchampe: or, The Kentucky Tragedy: A Tale of Passion* (1842), *The Wigwam and the Cabin* (1845); Caroline Lee Hentz, *Aunt Patty's Scrap Bag* (1846), *Linda, or, The Young Pilot of Belle Creole: A Tale of Southern Life* (1850), *The Planter's Northern Bride: A Novel* (1854); and Octavia Walton Le Vert, *Souvenirs of Travel* (1857).

⁴ Indeed, William Gilmore Simms, among others, commended Meek's works in several reviews while the upper echelon of literary circles in the South, Octavia Walton Le Vert's Mobile club, read his works aloud, and the President of the Republic of Texas, Mirabeau B. Lamar (a.k.a., “The Poet Laureate of the

That Tuscaloosan writers labored so doggedly to present their interpretations of the nineteenth-century southern frontier demonstrates several key points examined throughout this chapter. First, though separated by several hundred miles, the desire to participate in a burgeoning American literary culture survived transportations to the frontier South. Second, the publishing careers explored here illustrate the processes that literally permitted white frontier peoples to write their existence into the annals of American frontier experiences. Third, part of the non-attraction to people like Meek may be explained by the generous distraction supplied by contemporary northern literary lights like James Fenimore Cooper, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and others.⁵ Even while southern writers often focused on similar themes as these literary giants they did so in ways illustrative of an evolving and different southern culture, region, and worldview. The New England narrative that has come to shape how we see early nineteenth-century American literature compels an examination in the hopes of capturing the significance of the early national period as it evolved in the South. After all, it was this period that housed the beginnings of a southern literary tradition while also recording the evolution of the South from a perceived wilderness to the “Old Southwest.”⁶

Southwest”), made known his appreciation of Meek’s poem, *The Red Eagle*. See Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese’s profile of Meek in *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders’ Worldview* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 761.

⁵ For how this diverted attention resulted in the heavy emphasis on the “Southern Renaissance” for the region’s literary productions—and their political ramifications—during the opening decades of the twentieth century, see Michael Kreyling, *Inventing Southern Literature* (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), ix-xvii and 167-182. Also, one of the best collections of notable contributions to southern literary culture is that of Edward Francisco, Robert Vaughn, and Linda Francisco, eds., *The South In Perspective: An Anthology of Southern Literature* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 2001). Additionally, the obsession of historians with the northeastern and mid-Atlantic colonies then states and its impact on American history writ large has been intricately mapped and assessed in Claudio Saunt, “Go West: Mapping Early American Historiography,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* (Oct. 2008), 745-778. Additionally, on the absence of southern writers, in Alabama in particular, see Thomas Owen, *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography* (1921), 888.

By the 1830s, southern newspaper commentators, poets, and self-styled historians increasingly integrated a distinctive look at southern history when commenting on their present. They claimed their communities held qualities quite different from other places in the American republic—from a rapid transition from the frontier’s wilderness to civilized settlements as well as an allegiance to the Jeffersonian agrarian dream and a diverse, but powerful religious fervor that found homes in southern ports and backcountry hamlets. The environment in which Meek and other Tuscaloosa men like William Russell Smith and R.A. Eaton advanced their careers presented them with a constant stream of stimulants each with their own unique entertainments: state capital, state university, the occasional religious revival, reform-minded community groups, and the regular arrival of new migrants. Amid all this commotion, Tuscaloosa’s climb to “literary capital” status reached its peak by the 1840s. By the end of that decade, Meek and his

⁶ Other researchers have shared in this mission with comparable efforts: Philip D. Beidler, *First Books: The Printed Word and Cultural Formation in Early America* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999) and Bertram Wyatt Brown, *Hearts of Darkness: Wellsprings of a Southern Literary Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003). Resuscitating early southern literature in the shadow of twentieth century luminaries like Faulkner, Welty, Capote, Lee, and O’Conner presents several challenges. As James C. Cobb has described, this problem is hindered by “the South’s” location in a resistant national narrative. See James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 35-38. Cobb’s refusal to accept the staid arguments and implications for the modern South—best articulated by W.J. Cash and H. L. Mencken—see Mencken’s “The Sahara of the Bozart” in *Prejudices, Second Series* (1920) or Cash’s *The Mind of the South* (1941)—has as an antebellum compatriot in the work of Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders’ Worldview* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) as well as the scholarship of Michael O’Brien, from *Rethinking the South: Essays in Intellectual History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993) to *Placing the South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007) and *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860*, 2 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). Also informative in the conceptualization of this chapter were essays included in Christopher Morris and Steven G. Reinhardt, eds., *Southern Writers and their Worlds* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996). How divisions and conflicts between American regional identities shaped and were shaped by American writers has become an obsession of sorts among southern literary scholars. See Richard Gray, “Inventing Communities, Imagining Places: Some Thoughts on Southern Self-Fashioning” Foreword for *South to a New Place: Region, Literature, Culture* eds. Suzanne W. Jones and Sharon Monteith (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), as well as his *Writing the South: Ideas of an American Region* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and *A Web of Words: The Great Dialogue of Southern Literature* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007). For the frontier’s role in the revisioning of southern literature see also, Robert H. Brinkmeyer Jr., *Remapping Southern Literature: Contemporary Southern Writers and the West* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 107-108.

contemporaries—those who had experienced frontier living—left Tuscaloosa, but remained connected to their former home via their literary and political endeavors.

Born in Columbia, South Carolina on July 17, 1814, Meek migrated with his family to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, in 1819. Like other inhabitants of the early Deep South, Meek moved back and forth between older and newer southern locales. Meek return eastward—attending the University of Georgia in 1829 at the age of fifteen—only to retrace his westward migration to Tuscaloosa when the University of Alabama opened its doors in 1831.⁷ After five years at the University of Alabama, Meek settled into an active public life among Tuscaloosa society engaging in an emerging print culture, the legal profession, as well as collaborating with recent graduates as they formed a variety of public intellectual clubs. In 1835, Meek gained admittance to the Tuscaloosa bar, but his contributions to print culture had already begun with editorial work with the local Jacksonian-Democratic newspaper, *The Flag of the Union*. Four years later, after an exciting military expedition into Florida during the Seminole War, Meek established *The Southron*, a magazine where Meek's defense of a southern literary tradition received its earliest public enunciations.

At the same time, Meek actively published his poems in other southern literary newspapers. In the 1850s, he gained critical acclaim and national recognition with *The Red Eagle: A Poem of the South* (1855) which preceded his two popular 1857 collections: *Romantic Passages in Southwestern History* and *Songs and Poems of the South*. Meek left Tuscaloosa by 1846 for Mobile to serve as Federal Attorney for the Southern District of Alabama where his knowledge of Alabama blossomed into political success. He was twice elected to the Alabama legislature, serving a term as Speaker of the State Assembly. Meek died in 1865 in Columbus,

⁷ See Margaret Gillis Figh, "Alexander Beaufort Meek, Pioneer Man of Letters," *Alabama Historical Quarterly* (Summer, 1940), 128.

Mississippi leaving his magnum opus, a history of Alabama from European contact to the creation of the Mississippi Territory, unfinished and unpublished.⁸

Despite Meek's primary focus on southern life and environs, his literary compositions were quite vast. This chapter follows the variations of Meek's career: from his early days as an activist orator to journal editor, poet politician, and with his death, an esteemed intellectual.

Diving into Meek's fifty years of prose, we gain a first-hand view of the incredible influence the frontier had on one individual's public life. Meek relied on his perceptions to rewrite the South's history in his own day while advocating for a defensive southern literary tradition that heralded both a dedication to intellectual advancement and an appreciation for nature's aesthetics.

Activist Orator

Before the Ciceronian Club, a group committed to oratory and debate on local, state, and national issues, and "other Citizen of Tuscaloosa, Alabama," Meek delivered what appears to be one of the first of a lifetime of public talks on July 4, 1838. This talk, with its eruditions on the political philosophy of American independence, championed a number of points, but, significantly, it expressed the first enunciation of Meek's juxtaposition of American and southern literary stylings.⁹ Offering "lofty and patriotic sentiments," Meek left the Club's members with "much pleasure" and "in their bosoms, a warm response." In written format, Meek's work issued

⁸ Nixon, Herman Clarence. *Alexander Beaufort Meek: Poet, Orator, Journalist, Historian, Statesman*. (Auburn: Alabama Polytechnic Institute, 1910); Beidler, Philip D. "A. B. Meek's Great American Epic Poem of 1855, or, The Curious Career of *The Red Eagle*." *Mississippi Quarterly* 51.2 (1998): 275-290. Figh, Margaret Gillis. "Alexander Beaufort Meek, Pioneer Man of Letters." *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 2 (1940): 127-151. Benjamin Buford Williams, "Alexander Beaufort Meek, Poet and Historian" in *A Literary History of Alabama: The Nineteenth Century* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1979), 39-57. Williams, Benjamin Buford, "Alexander B. Meek" in *The Encyclopedia of Alabama*. 2008. Alabama Humanities Foundation and Auburn University. www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-1127

⁹ A.B. Meek, "Poem, Pronounced before the Ciceronian Club, and Other Citizens of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, July 4, 1838." (Tuscaloosa: Hale & Eaton Printers for the Ciceronian Club, 1838), Prefatory. ADAH.

a promise to readers: “I [am] therefore the more willingly submit it to your Club, and to its fate—with the assurance to those few, who take an interest in the author, that it is the last of his ‘sinnings in rhyme.’” It would be an offer Meek could not possibly keep.

Meek’s address found traction among the members of the Ciceronian Club. His rising popularity followed as one of his biographers described due to a personality that “absolutely glittered.” Herman Clarence Nixon’s conversations with friends of Meek allowed him to construct an impressive physical description: “His smile was the broadest, his laugh the loudest, though never boisterous. His resources for merriment and glee seemed inexhaustible. His conversation was brightened by grace and tempered by dignity, and back of it all, was a character for scholarship and talent that denied it the name of frivolity.”¹⁰ Further, his oratorical skills and physical appearance gained him the undivided attention of any crowd before whom he appeared.¹¹ And yet, his 1838 Independence Day poem issued a call that virtually consumed the remainder of Meek’s public life: defending the wonders of the southern region. Caught between South Carolina’s nullification crisis and that “great event” of America’s nineteenth century, Meek’s avowed regionalism appears quite different than that of later southerners’ divisive politics that refuted so-called “northern aggression.” Indeed, Meek’s desire to “love alike all portions of our land!” was only the point of embarkation for his tempered, yet knowledgeable description of the defined regionalisms at play in the United States.

Proposing a “lesson, we, this day, should learn,” Meek blamed the “human heart...full of selfishness” that determined individuals’ allegiances to regions instead of to the Republic. Meek

¹⁰ Herman Clarence Nixon, *Alexander Beaufort Meek: Poet, Orator, Journalist, Statesman* (Auburn: Alabama Polytechnic Institute Historical Studies, Fourth Series, 1910), 25.

¹¹ For more on Meek’s public notoriety, see Benjamin Buford Williams, “Alexander Beaufort Meek, Poet and Historian” in *A Literary History of Alabama: The Nineteenth Century* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1979), 54-55.

understood devotion to one's home region at the same time that he warned "we should never let contracted selfishness, our feelings, sway." Loyalty to nation and southland could coexist as long as one's priorities were in order. Combining the two, a proud Meek could herald "the Star of a young empire glistens in the South." In the shadow of South Carolina's nullification crisis, this southerner countered any disunion sentiment, arguing that "the reflecting mind can, over all, associations find, to make it love alike each part" for "One common cause is ours!" For a passionate description of that "common cause," Meek devoted several lines:

The same remembrances and gratitude,—
One common hope, —one undivided love!—
The same sweet tongue our mutual fathers spoke,—
Its graceful literature, its rising lore!—
The same blood leaping through our veins,—and, oh,—
Emblem of this, and more than this, —one love,—
One common worship for this festal day!¹²

For those in search of this common hope, Meek advised, "Go to New England!" and there the "trophied mount...Bunker Hill!" or Lexington or "yonder field fought Stark of Bennington!" or "Charlestown's ruins!—and every where the eye is turned, it rests on rich, historic ground!" Then to the "West—th' interminable West!" where with the failure of a British southern campaign had folded "triumphantly aloft, and wove another garland for Columbia's fame!" It was the common bond Revolution that Meek naturally drew upon to bolster the unity of Americans on July 4, 1838. Looking ahead, however, he called on "the patriotic heart" that held "each spot, endear, of his paternal land!" Staking out his footing as an early southern Unionist, Meek confirmed that no cause should "separate the constellated Union of the Free!"¹³

¹² A.B. Meek, "Poem, Pronounced before the Ciceronian Club, and Other Citizens of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, July 4, 1838," 27-28.

¹³ A.B. Meek, "Poem, Pronounced before the Ciceronian Club, and Other Citizens of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, July 4, 1838," 29.

Despite the emotional and honest expression of nationalism, Meek could be counted on as someone faithful to the “Land of the South!” The mountains, fields, skies, rivers, streams, and women—“thy rosy girls”— of Meek’s “native home” all received the admiration of Meek when writing of the “Sweet, sunny South!” Tellingly, Meek’s glorified perceptions of “the South” were geared toward benefitting its white inhabitants:

And thou hast prouder glories too,—
Than nature ever gave,—
Peace sheds o’er thee, her genial dew,
And Freedom’s pinions wave,—
Fair science flings her pearls around,
Religion lifts her dome,—
These, these endear thee, to my heart,—
My own, loved native home!¹⁴

By 1844, Meek had moved beyond national commemorations to arrive at a more developed thesis on literature’s contributions to society. He delivered this theory before the Phi Kappa and Demosthenian societies at the University of Georgia in August of that year. Meek’s captivating phrase—“Americanism in Literature”—embodied his vision of America’s peculiar situation and the written word’s impact on the “mental development...[and] the physical, social, and political characteristics of our country.” Meek struggled through a probing thought process, highly reflective of a religious up-bringing. At the core of his investigation was the question of what lay beneath American literature and intellectualism, or even more broadly: “For what did God make man, and place him on this revolving globe?”

Meek set out to reply only after heightening the stakes: “Reason, revelation, only let us know that man is an immortal, ethical being, and that the great law of his nature is incessant progress. Ever onward, never attaining! All things, when aright, move upward unceasingly, by a great spiral revolution, to the unattainable throne of God!” What then, should his learned

¹⁴ A.B. Meek, “Poem, Pronounced before the Ciceronian Club, and Other Citizens of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, July 4, 1838,” 30-31.

audience make of this dichotomous relationship between Creator and created? Meek, ever the pleasant speaker but strongly committed to the social contributions of literature, headed for a soft middle ground: “The two must go together. God is all intellect, as well as love! Literature, in its purity, no less than religion, is a scion of his beneficence...All human institutions, whether intellectual or political, should contribute to this great law of progress.”

For an audience of influential southern listeners, Meek used much of his address to uphold the connection between government, literature, and human contentment. “Bad governments and bad literatures tend ever to the demoralization of the human family,” Meek asserted. He advanced further by calling on a classical training that permitted cataloging his perceptions of the Grecian, Roman, and Persian literary traditions. His conclusion: “old tyrannies and their intellectual systems, were manifestations and promoters, not of civilization but of barbarism. Radically wrong in their whole philosophies of man and life, they led upward to no glorious zenith...This, in main part, is why man, in the sixty centuries, has risen so little above his primeval condition.”¹⁵

For Meek, America had found its exceptional place in world history situated on the precipice of greatness. How did this southerner arrive at such a conviction? To Meek the venture began by questioning “whether this American government, this American literature of ours, in what they are now, and are destined to be, correspond with the principles and designs of Providence, in the creation of man: that is, are they in faith with the great law of intellectual and social progression?” “In my judgement,” Meek replied,

there has never been a social organism in which the two greatest motive powers of elevation, government and literature,—were more happily accommodated, or gave ‘fairer promise of a good morrow,’ from their reciprocal operations, than this young twenty-six headed giant of the West...this Americanism of ours, with all

¹⁵ Alexander B. Meek, “Americanism in Literature: An Oration Before the Phi Kappa & Demosthenian Societies of the University of Georgia at Athens, August 8, 1844” (Tuscaloosa: R.A. Eaton, 1844), 5-6.

its physical, historical and political aspects, is destined to be, as it already has been, a powerful influence on man.¹⁶

The qualities that Meek pinned to this influence of American literature on the history of humanity would place the southern literary style he wished to establish on equal footing with the work of New England's transcendentalists. To do so, Meek dedicated himself to a life of literature, publishing, and politics—one that placed at its core the defense of the southern frontier as a topic worthy of literary composition and historic writing.¹⁷

As an orator, Meek drew on impressive rhetorical abilities, a theologically-based but classically-informed worldview, and a charismatic personality to buttress his ever-growing defense of a cause to which he committed his life. Throughout his speeches, Meek presupposed the notion that the benefits of literature and of education had already had profound impacts on American life and literature. When this acknowledgement and even praise of general progress met his regional outlook, Meek felt frustrated by the South's lagging behind the Northeast. Looking out over the South's majestic beauty and its complex historical character only made its status as literary backwater all the more exasperating for A.B. Meek. This annoyance coalesced with Meek's determination to make changes in southern intellectual life, prompting his development of a journal featuring southern scholarship.

Journal Editor

Many of the themes Meek concentrated on in public talks had earlier found expression through a variety of voices that he chose to include in *The Southron: A Monthly Magazine and*

¹⁶ Alexander B. Meek, "Americanism in Literature," 6.

¹⁷ Interestingly, Meek's critique of American literature and regionalism may have been influenced by another Tuscaloosa orator, B.F. Cochran, whose speeches of the 1840s "The Love of Fame," "The Incentives to Intellectual Culture in the United States" and "The Utility of Literary and Scientific Associations in the State of Alabama" are now held at HSC-UA. Connections between the two have been proven elusive.

Review, a short-lived literary journal he founded. The fact that the journal only lasted six months had little to do with a lack of vision on Meek's part. To the "gentle reader," Meek pitched *The Southron* as "a Pioneer in a region hitherto but rarely trodden." Its mission was simple: "promoting the Literature of the South." In launching the journal, Meek made no apologies: "The other sections of the Union have made rapid advances in the cause of letters while our own—possessing natural and political advances superior to them all,—has progressed but slowly in these intellectual attainments which are the chief ornament of a country, and which spread over a whole community the gracious spirit of a primitive humanity." The cause, as Meek elaborated in his "Jack-Cadeism and the Fine Arts" could be found in the "*utilitarian*" pursuits that, though they "caused a wilderness to bloom and flourish...converted the forest haunts of the miserable savage into the flourishing homes of wealth and civilization...have done but little to promote the progress of literature...as *the South is the natural home of literature*."¹⁸ For Meek, past ineptness did not require repetition.

Realizing the significance of his journal and the interest potential subscribers as well as contributors, Meek made the case for the South as a place of literary genesis. To do so, he chose to take aim at none other than James Fenimore Cooper. Cooper, Meek charged, had reflected the notion that "the United States are destitute of the materials for a lofty and refined literature." Indeed, he cited Cooper's own words from the Preface of *Home as Found* (1838): "this country, in its ordinary aspects, presents as barren a field to the writer of fiction, and the dramatist, as any other on earth." Meek scoffed, "This we do not believe." If the northern Cooper thought so lowly of his section of the country, Meek seemed obliged to allow it; but, he would not permit the South to be drug into any such "barren field" typology. From the very beginning, according to

¹⁸ A.B. Meek "Introduction Salutatory: Southern Literature" in *The Southron: A Monthly Magazine and Review*. 1.1. (January 1839), 1-2. SUSC.

Meek, “the discovery and settlement of the South” presented “many interesting and romantic details” including “many of the proudest incidents of the American Revolution.” It was, however, “The character and adventures of the pioneers and earliest emigrants to the South-Western States” that “were of the most interesting kind.” These peoples had “penetrated a boundless wilderness; endured hardships and perils which would sink the hearts of the effeminate ‘dwellers of cities;’ battled with savages and relentless foes; and laid the foundations of great and flourishing communities.” From the “Aboriginal [sic] proprietors of our country” to the “humble, but contented and happy African” and a wide swath of previously seaboard-hugging Euro-Americans, Meek found the South to be a great meeting place of diverse cultures and the greatest untapped reservoir for American literature.¹⁹

Here, Meek’s early work on placing the South in the broader contexts of American literature gained their fullest expression. To Meek, the South and its diverse population of residents (from white settlement to his contemporary times) presented a unique environment that made the South the South. Nowhere else in the United States, Meek believed, could such circumstances be found and this made the southern frontier a place that necessitated his and others attention if the greater whole of the American experience were to be understood.

Into the firmament of southern (and American) literary conversations, Meek catapulted *The Southron* to sit beside the *Southern Review*, *Southern Literary Messenger*, and *Literary Journal*. Having given “an exposition of the capabilities of our section of the Union for literary enterprises,” Meek pledged to secure “the best talents of our country...in the work” and “if it

¹⁹ A.B. Meek “Introduction Salutatory: Southern Literature” in *The Southron: A Monthly Magazine and Review* 1.1. (January 1839), 5-6. S USC. Meek’s elongated discussion of slavery here sits comfortably beside other white southerners of the era as he considered the presence of African and African American slaves only in their abilities to labor so that their white oppressors could be freed to pursue the fine arts. Of the institution of slavery on moral grounds, Meek refused to tread as it was “of divine appointment...naturally, morally and politically right.”

should fail,” Meek presaged “it will add another stigma to the character of our people, and we can only say to them, as the Spanish Archbishop did to Gil Blas,--‘we wish you, in future, all manner of prosperity, with a little more taste.’”²⁰ Softening his language, Meek “cherished however better anticipations” and offered readers the subscription for “\$5, in advance.”

Throughout the first three issues, Meek delivered on his promise to bring out “the best talents” to see *The Southron* and its work succeed. Tuscaloosa locals including Meek, Henry Hilliard, William Russell Smith, A.A. Muller, and A.P. Barnard and regional lights like Caroline Lee Hentz and the occasional “unknown” author filled *The Southron*’s first two hundred pages with short stories and poems on beauty of southern culture and locales as well as offering reviews of southern books. By the end of its third edition, Meek happily greeted the reception his magazine had among readers. Indeed, Meek proudly included a note from an anonymous subscriber who unabashedly endorsed the magazine’s editor, publisher, contributors and its overall mission. To the reader, it was the “spirit of its contents, the racy originality of many of its sentiments and opinions” that “fully establish the propriety of your attempt in getting up the work.” Furthermore, the commenter firmly agreed with Meek on the uniqueness of the South as it was “the true region of imagination, and the only reason why it has not brought forth more mature fruits, is that its very abundance leads, as in all other cases, to a depreciation of its value among ourselves, and to the deficiency of that care and cultivation which is the inevitable result of such depreciation.” This deficiency cried out for Meek’s journal and his investment in southern literary developments.²¹

²⁰ A.B. Meek “Introduction Salutatory: Southern Literature” in *The Southron: A Monthly Magazine and Review* 1.1. (January 1839), 7-8. S USC.

²¹ Unknown author, “Southern Literature” in *The Southron: A Monthly Magazine and Review* 1.3. (March 1839), 192. S USC.

Although Meek and his publisher R.A. Eaton relished enthusiasts wherever they could find them, the two may have sensed rising disappointment in the length of their first three issues. Meek sought to preempt such complaints by following the anonymous author with a note “To Patrons, Contributors, & c.” Therein, he admitted his third issue “is not as varied in its contents, as we could desire” but hoped that the pieces’ “interesting characters will cause the reader to overlook their length.” Looking to the future, Meek offered two remarks, one on content and the other on payments. Insofar as materials, Meek promised: “we shall endeavor to have our papers of such a length, as to enable us to present not only a greater number, but a greater variety of articles.” For subscribers who might doubt the permanence of his project and thus feel disinclined to hazard a prepayment for the newly-minted *The Southron*, Meek advised: “This work is now established permanently, and we hope that subscribers will no longer delay sending us the amounts of their subscription. We shall, after the present number, send to no one, who has not paid in advance.”²² Interestingly, at this midlife of *The Southron*, Meek could count forty-seven rather influential prepaid subscribers from as far away as Charlottesville, Virginia and Washington, D.C.

The subscription numbers climbed to sixty-five individuals and extended further north to New York City by Meek’s fourth issue released in April 1839. As the reading body expanded, so too did their admiration for Meek’s work. N.L. Farris, a Tuscaloosan who subtitled his piece, “By a Stranger,” was no stranger to *The Southron* for which he composed an earlier piece entitled, “Apostrophe.” With the sort of southernized language that has come to characterize the Civil War era, and still exists in some corners of the South today, Farris supported Meek’s young work and desired to see it reach its highest potential:

²² A.B. Meek, “To Patrons, Contributors, & c.” in *The Southron: A Monthly Magazine and Review* 1.3. (March 1839), 193. SUSC.

As thou hast begun, go on!
 Vindicate thy native soil!
 Spread thy banner to sun!
 Reap the harvest of thy toil!...
 Greet thy sisters of the North,
 With a confidence assured;
 And compete thy rising worth
 With an offspring more matured,...
 And the SOUTH with joy will hail
 Thee as her peculiar claim;
 Whilst no faction *dare* assail
 One that boasts thy peerless NAME!²³

Having achieved a sense of vindication, Meek used his “Reviews and Criticisms” section to speak on the southern commitment to the fine arts. Referencing a *New York Review* article investigating the arts and the South, Meek outlined the field of southern literary journals. As “companions in this walk,” Meek viewed these journals as projects’ whose collective purpose was to “beautify, while they benefit, society, and spread over the harsher features of community, the gracious spirit of intellectual refinement.” From the *Mobile Literary Gazette* to the *Augusta Mirror*, *The Collegian* at the University of Virginia, the *Baltimore Literary Monument*, *American Museum*, and, begrudgingly it seems, *The Southern Literary Messenger*, Meek confidently observed “the faintest dawn of that good promise” as his fellow aspirants all labored in the intellectual advancement of the South. With these entities working in concert, Meek boasted “the South, at no distant period, is to become the fruitful and beneficent parent, as well as patron, of every species of literature.”²⁴

Even with its regional mission, Meek’s *The Southron* did attempt a range of literary genres. His fourth issue, for instance, included a continuation of Meek’s southern themed short-

²³ N.L.F., “Apostrophe to the Southron: By a Stranger” in *The Southron: A Monthly Magazine and Review* 1.4. (April 1839), 229. SUSC.

²⁴ A.B. Meek, “Southern Literary Periodicals” in *The Southron: A Monthly Magazine and Review* 1.4. (April 1839), 253. SUSC.

story “Florence Lincoln” (an event-filled romance set on a Louisiana riverboat and complicated by arranged marriages as well as rogue Indians), his poem “The Fated City” (chronicling the history of Pompeii), and a favorable review of Cooper’s *The History of the Navy of the United States*. However, Meek’s notice to patrons in this penultimate issue signaled that the editor realized his dream of a crafting the premier southern literary journal was in jeopardy. Deadlines looming, perhaps unsurprising given Meek’s renowned tardiness, his distress bled into print: “The number for June is now under way, and will be issued in a few days. By the 20th of July, we expect to be up with our dates.” Distributing blame all around, Meek chastised readers for not complying with *The Southron*’s policy: “terms require *payment in advance*, invariably they will know our motive, and will no doubt be convinced that we have stronger grounds of complaint than they have.” Although readers had a reason to question the sustainability of *The Southron*, an angry entrepreneur at the helm certainly did not help the situation. Meek let the sins of previous subscribers condemn future clients: “For the same reason we are compelled to refuse sending our periodical to many new subscribers, since the last number.”²⁵

Only three pages after a reprinting of “the plan of work,” *The Southron* publisher R.A. Eaton, not its editor, issued the following statement:

Various causes beyond the control of the publisher have delayed the publication of this number. The subscribers are respectfully informed that the world has been transferred to the Editor of the “Literary Gazette,” a valuable and interesting literary paper, published in the City of Mobile, which will be received by the subscribers to the “SOUTHRON” for the balance of the year. The price of the two publications is the same, and I sincerely hope that the subscribers of the Southron will be satisfied with the transfer. It was my intention to have fully made known the causes of the discontinuance of the “SOUTHRON,” but upon mature deliberation I have thought it best to let it die as quietly as possible, and bear the whole blame of its failure myself. Those subscribers who promptly paid their subscription and evinced a generous desire for the prosperity of the work will

²⁵ A.B. Meek, “To Patrons and Correspondents” in *The Southron: A Monthly Magazine and Review* 1.5. (May 1839), 321. SUSC.

please accept my most grateful acknowledgments, and since good wishes for their happiness.²⁶

Eaton, who held the contract with the State of Alabama for publishing official documents and acts of the government, bore the burden of Meek's failed journal. Again, signaling, in the May issue, one possible explanation as to its expiration: missed deadlines. In fact, the June issue in which Eaton posted the above notice did not go to press until sometime after October 1, 1839, the date Eaton signed his guarded and "mature" remarks.

Unlike in previous issues, Meek's voice fell almost silent, replaced by individuals like Francis Scott Key, his friend William Gilmore Simms, and J.K. Mitchell. Meek included only his poem, "To a Painter" in the last issue of his journal. An ode to an artist who could not live up to his craft, "In vain thy art—in vain thy will!," Meek paired the defeat of his project with his painter's frustrations:

Then painter fling thy tablet by,
And from the enchantress fly, oh fly
Ere round they heart the spell is woven,
That long ago, my own, hath caught,
Or ere, like me you've haply proven,
Her charms are with destruction fraught!

Further, Meek could speak to the painter's disappointments set off by his uncooperative muse. Meek knew too well the disillusionment of unrequited dedication; for it, he offered a commiserating spirit: "For, painter, I have found, and own/Her heart is hard and cold as stone!"²⁷ With that terse and defensive line, Meek ended his efforts as editor of what he had envisioned to be one of the intellectual standard-bearers for a regional literary school he craved to cultivate.

²⁶ R.A. Eaton, "Note" in *The Southron: A Monthly Magazine and Review* 1.6. (June 1839), prefatory matter. SUSC.

²⁷ A.B. Meek, "To a Painter" in *The Southron: A Monthly Magazine and Review* 1.6. (June 1839), 335-336. SUSC.

Poet Politician

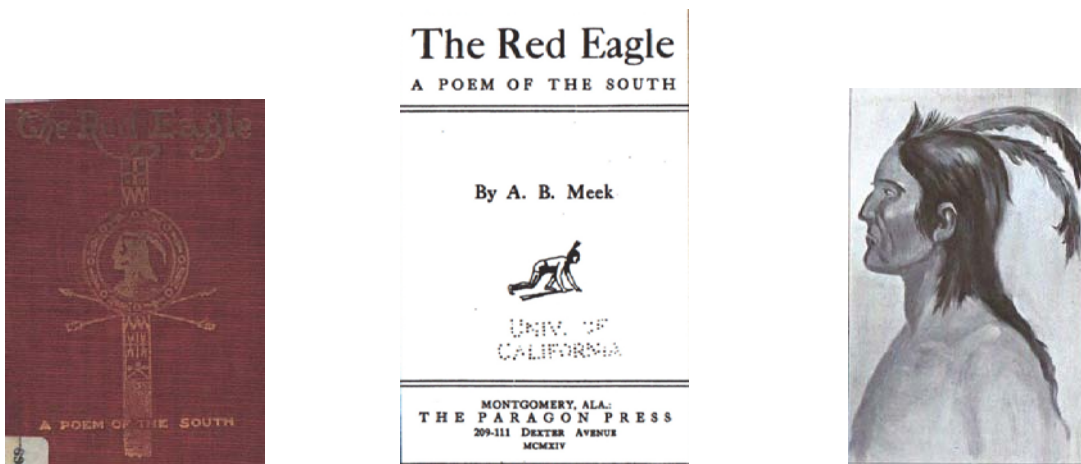
The leap into politics from the status as southern social and intellectual critic seemed a logical one for Meek and several of his contemporaries. For Meek, the mid-1840s saw his work as author sharing time with a burgeoning political career. Like W.R. Smith, Meek's adventures in politics would take him in and out of Tuscaloosa with service in James K. Polk's Treasury Department and, later, a relocation to Mobile when appointed federal attorney in 1845. When his post expired in 1848, Meek fell back on a career in publishing, becoming the editor of the *Mobile Register* until 1853. Demonstrating his ability to oscillate successfully between editor and politico, Meek won a seat in the Alabama legislature. From his post as Mobile's representative, Meek strongly supported the establishment of the state's public education system in 1854.²⁸ Returning to Mobile but failing to win election as probate judge of Mobile County, Meek again stoked the writing fires and by 1855 saw the culmination of his pursuits in southern fiction writing.

Destined to become Meek's most recognized work, *The Red Eagle: A Poem of the South*, was published while its author participated in the hubbub of local and national politics. As Philip D. Beidler argued, Meek's *Red Eagle* presents a valuable work for an investigating nineteenth-century American literature's engagement of "very real questions of social ideology...most pointedly, the complex cultural politics of class and race in the antebellum frontier South."²⁹ Meek's *Red Eagle* combined elements of praise for the southern wilderness and an imagined pre-contact Native utopia disrupted by white invaders and valiant, even if red, resisters.

²⁸ For two pamphlets describing the specifics of the 1854 education bill and advocating its passage see: <http://archives.alabama.gov/timeline/1800/school1a.html> and <http://archives.alabama.gov/timeline/1800/school2a.html>.

²⁹ Phillip D. Beidler, *First Books*, 77. Amidst Beidler's talented appraisal of literary techniques and stylistic comparisons of Meek's meter and characters, situating Meek's work in a career of engaging the southern frontier through writing impedes his examination. See page 86 of *First Books*.

Influences on Meek's approach to writing a southern epic incorporated his frontier experiences while living in South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama. From oral histories to backcountry travels to personal romantic encounters, Meek drew as much on his own life as he wrote of the South's natural splendors, perceptions of heroism and savagery, war and dignified peace. No doubt, in choosing the Native American persona of William Weatherford as the focal point around whom his poem revolved, Meek's own "Indian fighting" with Florida Seminoles in 1836 loomed large in his characterizations and stereotypes that shaped much of his work.³⁰



Images 4.2-4.4 (From left to right): Cover of *The Red Eagle*, Title Page of *The Red Eagle*, and Etching of William Weatherford in *The Red Eagle*. All designed for Paragon Press's re-release of Meek's work in 1914. Accessed via books.google.com.

Dedicating his "Poem of the South" to a friend and fellow southern writer, William Gilmore Simms, Meek had high hopes for his Native American tale.³¹ Having it duly published

³⁰ John, K. Mahon, "The Journal of A.B. Meek and the Second Seminole War, 1836," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 38.4. (April 1960), 302-318. According to Margaret Gillis Figh, Meek's inspiration for *Red Eagle* came almost solely from his excursion in the Seminole War. The claim seems somewhat shortsighted as Meek gathered from various locations (reading histories, conversations, etc.) the material and motivation for his *Red Eagle*. See Figh, "Alexander Beaufort Meek, Pioneer Man of Letters," *Alabama Historical Quarterly* (Summer, 1940), 130.

in New York and Mobile, Meek's poem offered a story based on the life of William Weatherford, "or the Red Eagle, as he was called by his countrymen." Caught within the War of 1812 between the United States and Great Britain, the Creek Indians of the southeast engaged the Euro-Americans in a variety of settings, most notably for Meek, at Fort Mims on the Alabama River. This most acclaimed of Meek's historical fiction—which delved as heavily into themes of romantic love and nature as did his nonfiction—was chiefly motivated by the "general way" historians had written of the white-Native interactions during the 1810s. Strangely for Meek, however, "all its minor incidents, its local and personal features and characteristics—in which reside its vitality and chief attractiveness—have been suffered to pass unnoticed, and to lapse into perishing tradition." "To rescue these...from oblivion, and to preserve them in those hues of poetry to which they seem so eminently adapted," Meek affirmed, "has been the object of the author of the present work." Thus, within the pages of Meek's "true poetic creation," history was being served by presenting "the love-life of Weatherford,--here truthfully narrated,--his dauntless gallantry, his marvelous personal adventures and hairbreadth escapes, and chief of all, his wonderful eloquence, which eventually saved his life."³²

With a romantic flare comparable to *The Song of Hiawatha*, Meek set out in three "Cantos" to deliver a complex tale of Native American life rife with physical beauty, personal tragedy, nation-state conflict, and a complicated angle on love that climaxed with the poem's abrupt ending. Launching the narrative, Meek described "Alabama's forest Land" as a prelapsarian wonderland: "the streams of and groves of Palestine!" and "this wilderness of

³¹ William Gilmore Simms, perhaps as a nod to the dedication and their growing friendship, positively promoted the poem a decade prior to its release in *Southern and Western Magazine and Review* (July 1845), 119-120. It also gained positive review upon publication in *The Southern Literary Messenger* 1 (1856), 107-109.

³² A.B. Meek, *The Red Eagle: A Poem of the South* (New York: D.Appleton & Company, 1855), 8-9.

woods and flowers.”³³ Meek gloried in the frontier encounters of Natives: “the tameless Arabs of the West” with Euro-Americans: “the dauntless pioneers.” With such meetings however, the clash of cultures symbolized by woodland homes, sounding axe and young commerce contrasted by Natives’ “fierce war-cry,” Meek tapped into a dynamic and powerful polarity of savage and civilized, the reliable justification for much of America’s expansive ventures. However, as the savages and civilizers mingled, conflict seemed ever on the horizon; thus, Meek’s plot enveloped an intricate love story that carries the larger historically-based saga of the Creek War of 1813 with all its incidents: Burnt Corn Creek, Fort Mims, Horseshoe Bend, and Fort Jackson.

The love affair between Woodland Flower (daughter of a Native chief named White Wolf who allies himself with the Americans) and William Weatherford, the mixed-blood Indian who led the Creek resistance is the foundation on which Meek built his historical poem. The relationship that Meek constructed between these Indian lovers often swirled about the issue of race. Although Meek never mentioned Weatherford’s mestizo status (more on this below), Woodland Flower’s race and gender are featured throughout Canto First as Meek explored the connections between this woman of “the best blood of Indian line” and her warrior lover.

Throughout, Woodland Flower and Weatherford disagree about whether the slaying of her father, White Wolf, should take place as part of Weatherford’s retribution for the massacre at Burnt Corn Creek. Although sympathetic for Weatherford’s anti-American mission but duly defensive of her father’s life, Woodland Flower never shed her “wildness” and “forest-born race”; instead, Meek added, “the impress of Eve” as another descriptive layer for this Native American woman. In doing so, Meek saddled Woodland Flower with nineteenth-century Euro-American perceptions of womanhood and the centuries of sin that men had ascribed to women—her Native American ethnicity would not excuse her status as a woman. Caught in a web of race,

³³ Meek, *The Red Eagle*, 16.

womanhood, and pseudo-national allegiances, Woodland Flower served as Meek's bridge between Native Americans who refused greater white incursion and those who aligned with the Americans.

As for Weatherford, Meek relied on the stale stereotypes of the male Native persona referring to him as "this red Herod of the wild!" and "wild Weatherford." Meek's Weatherford was the epitome of fierce, yet savage Native warrior. The best example was "grim Weatherford" designing the "blood-dripping fight" on Fort Mims where "The war-club falls with plunging sound:/The tomahawk and scalping knife/Hew down the woodman and his wife;--/The infant's brains are scattered 'round!"³⁴ By Canto Third, Meek situated the "Brave" opposite the "Conqueror" Andrew Jackson and his compatriots, foils of Weatherford's savagery.

By the poem's conclusion, Meek placed Weatherford at Jackson's signing of the Treaty of Fort Jackson— where both men behaved heroically. The respectable Indian had stopped resisting and, thus, a generous Jackson allowed him to live. At that meeting, readers learn that White Wolf had not fallen at the hand of Weatherford's forces during the Creek War. Weatherford, in Meek's reconstruction, would not keep Woodland Flower from her father, a sign that the Euro-American triumph over his "savage" will was complete. Prior to this resolution, Meek used his Canto Second to argue for the frontier settlement by white Americans while acknowledging the destruction it wrought on Native peoples.

Reimagining the call of "frontiers, far and wide" and "hardy Pioneers" speeding along "their westward motion with the sun," Meek spoke the language of frontier a full half-century before Frederick Jackson Turner ever contemplated his thesis. For Meek, American frontiers had been envisioned by individuals as a place of opportunity and newness. A place where time seemed suspended to draw white Americans into the area to begin civilization:

³⁴ Meek, *The Red Eagle*, 40-41.

From immemorial time, o'erhead,
Their dreamy solitudes, they trace,
In lines that ne'er shall pass away,
The first foundations of a race,
Whose steeped empires there shall rise,
In civic splendor to the smiling skies!³⁵

In reflecting on this “foundations of a race,” Meek would not neglect Native Americans. In fact, it was in reaction to their “cold barbarity” that whites had migrated. Hand to ear in Meek’s imagination, white migrants internalized the shock that Native American inhabitants seemingly refused to be civilized:

But hark!—what cry is that which sound
In terror through the frontier-bounds?
“The wild Muscogee’s bloody hand
Hath struck the settlers of the land,
At far Fort Mimms: five hundred lie
Butchered in cold barbarity!...

From here, Meek, appalled that whites’ civilizing efforts were so strongly rebuffed, reasoned that whites needed to “lay the fiendish murderers low!”³⁶ In an almost disgusting vein of excuse making, Meek’s racial-based argument found the blame for Native American deaths among Indians themselves:

They field of fame, death’s solitude!
And though full-well deserved the doom,
On Alabama’s children brought,
Yet who but weeps the woe and gloom,
Demon! thy twenty battles wrought!³⁷

Meek’s work served as a commentary on the functions of race, buttressed by “real” historical incidents, even as it evaded southern slavery. Meek’s constant references to “race” messaged to readers that their fellow southerner knew how to read historical events and present

³⁵ Meek, *The Red Eagle*, 46.

³⁶ Meek, *The Red Eagle*, 47.

³⁷ Meek, *The Red Eagle*, 50.

them when writing fiction. Referring to Native Americans as “Arabs” and the “children of Ishmael” or as “the Simple race” easily signaled to readers that Meek had the proper view of Indians, freeing him to romanticize their “savagery.” Undergirded by the rising tide of racism gripping southern society by 1855, Meek played a complex hand in the most self-serving ways for ardent defenders of white, paternalist power.³⁸ In divesting



Native Americans of any sort of equality with whites, Meek smoothly and simultaneously praised their “cheiftan’s” bravery, lauded the legitimacy of white expansion via cut-throat frontier policies of

Images 4.5 and 4.6: Artwork in the 1914 edition of *The Red Eagle*. The simple black on white coloring as well as the subjects of “primitive” transportation and hunting implored readers to see the breadth of white civilization’s benefits for Native people’s advancement.

a band of American heroes like Andrew Jackson and John Coffee, and pressed readers to see the glories of romanticism—laced with the victories of white power in celebration of gallantry and bravery. It is worth noting that the displacement of Native Americans conferred on Meek the ability to focus on their displacement (physical and racial) by whites. In so doing, displacing African Americans and their racial “otherness” mattered little in defending white superiority in the Southwest as the land and its history was never theirs.

Ostensibly, someone as well-connected as Meek to the print culture of his day knew the on-going buttressing of white racial hegemony. However, to Meek, his sheer silence on African Americans in “An Epic Poem of the South” demonstrates how unworthy he found blacks’ role in southern history. The celebration of the South’s past, as he saw it, shuffled between Native

³⁸ For the best example of the normalcy of white privilege and black subordination see the 1858 legal treatise of Thomas R.R. Cobb, *An Inquiry into the Law of Negro Slavery in the United States of America*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009 reprint).

American predecessors and Euro-American inheritors. Nowhere in his narrative did African Americans rightly belong. They arrived in America as European appendages and their place in the racial hierarchy was so deeply ensconced that it required no defense.³⁹

On the heels of *The Red Eagle*, 1859 saw Mobilians re-electing Meek to the state legislature where his colleagues made him the Speaker of the House. Between the publication of *The Red Eagle* and his Speakership, Meek released two collections of previously released poems, essays, songs, and orations. He gave the two 1857 volumes titles that thinly veiled his love affair with his subject matter: *Romantic Passages in Southwestern History* and *Songs and Poems of the South*.⁴⁰

In these last publications, Meek assembled a variety of works that would appeal to readers who, like himself, deeply felt the intrigue of the South. More radical pieces like his “Jack-Cadeism and the Fine Arts” would be comparable with his oration on “Americanism in Literature.” If “Americanism” observed the sinews of literary expressiveness in the United States, Meek’s “Jack-Cadeism” would let loose a direct condemnation on the blight that stood ready to infect American literary advancement. The disease: “accumulation of property.” As Meek detailed before the literary societies of LaGrange College (in northern Alabama) his

³⁹ As Tena L. Helton elucidates in “Indians” in *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motives* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 369-371, the role of Native Americans within southern literature and their usefulness for white dramatic renderings has often been quite political. See also James Axtell, *The Indians’ New South: Cultural Change in the Colonial Southeast* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997); Howard C. Horsford, “Faulkner’s (Mostly) Unreal Indians in Early Mississippi History,” *American Literature* 64.2. (1992), 311-330; Joel W. Martin, “‘My Grandmother Was a Cherokee Princess’: Representations of Indians in Southern History,” in *Dressing in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture*, ed. S. Elizabeth Bird (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996). On race and southern intellectuals, particularly Meek’s and others’ assumption “that Africa had no history” see Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class*, 188 (footnote 36) and 191-192 and their *Slavery in Black and White*, 219, for Meek’s explicit belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority allied with revival Protestantism.

⁴⁰ For more on the Mobile career see Figh, “Alexander Beaufort Meek, Pioneer Man of Letters,” 131-132.

patriotism and love of what the nation “might and ought to be, than for what she is,” would inspire an upending of Americans’ increasing capitalist tendencies.

Hoping to “advocate...the cause of literature”—Meek reasoned, “What subject is worthier of our thinking men; of patriots; of our philanthropists?”—he realized such advocacy for learning and intellectual advancement for American society would be tragically difficult for most citizens to hear over “the frog-like croaking of the great marsh of society, above the buzz of the cotton-gin, the rattle of the bacon-waggon, and all the sounds of the workshop, the hammer and the yard-stick...to raise the low, sweet music of philosophy, is encountering a species of voluntary martyrdom.” Meek spun the remainder of his printed oration interweaving the history of ancient republics, the German university, and praise for his good friend, William Gilmore Simms of South Carolina—by Meek’s estimation, the South’s most accomplished, if unrecognized, author.

Meek stood, at the pinnacle of a writing career in 1857 and could look back over a vast array of poems and songs he had composed to demonstrate his devotion to a host of southern themes. Meek’s titles divulge his interests: “Girl of the Sunny South,” “The Land That We Live In,” “Magnolia Grove,” “The Rose of Alabama,” “Choctaw Melodies,” “The Homes of Alabama,” “The Mothers of the South,” “The Stone Mountain,” “The Death of Jackson,” “To A Fair Virginian,” and “Bird of the South” to name only a few. And yet, the collection’s author notably leapt outside the edges of southern topics by writing pieces not necessarily inspired by his southern homeland such as “The Fields of Mexico,” “The Mexican Sea,” “Ireland,” and his most famous non-southern poem, “Balaklava” about the Crimean War.⁴¹

⁴¹ For more on Meek’s “Balaklava,” see Herman Clarence Nixon, *Alexander Beaufort Meek: Poet, Orator, Journalist, Historian, Statesman* (Auburn: Alabama Polytechnic Institute Historical Studies, 1910), 21.

Overall, Meek's selections for *Songs and Poems of the South* invited readers into the vivid imagination and deep devotion of this southern writer. Meek's "Come to the South" served as the work's opening salvo. Its message was echoed in the collection's closing piece, "Land of the South." In both, he conveyed his hope for the volume to inspire a thorough celebration of the South as he experienced it. In "Come to the South," Meek expressed sentiments that many southerners could appreciate. Why "come to the South," via Meek's anthology? For Meek, the answer was simple: "'Tis the clime of the heart, 'tis the shrine of the sun." Here, "the best gifts of Eden, unshadowed, remain." Wooing readers, like lovers, Meek promised, "come to the South, and I'll build thee a home" where there would be "no trouble to vex us, no sorrows to grieve." Truly enraptured by his homeland, Meek spoke amorously of the South's summers "felt in the soul" and how that here "life passes away like some delicate dream [where] each wish of thy heart should realised be." Dotingly evoking the purest nature of his South, Meek advertised in closing, the possibilities of falling in love with his homeland: "this beautiful land seem an Eden to thee."⁴²

From 1857 until his death in 1865, Meek's writing career seems to have faded into the dark days of declining health and the rising sectional fevers that eventually gave way to America's Civil War. The era marked decreased publications, personal tragedy, and death—Meek would release only two new poems in the *Mobile Register* before dying of heart failure. A pro-Union southerner at the outset complicated by an anti-abolitionist stance on slavery, he approached the secession crisis with "gloomy reluctance" according to one biographer, serving as delegate to the 1860 Charleston Democratic Convention. Later, Meek labored as wartime University of Alabama Trustee (while the university functioned as a military academy) until the

⁴² A.B. Meek, "Come to the South" in *Songs and Poems of the South* (Mobile: S.H. Goetzel & Co, 1857), 1-2.

death of his first wife, Emma Donaldson Slatter in 1863. Two years later, after relocating to Columbus, Mississippi and marrying Eliza Jane Cannon, his brother's mother-in-law, Meek died on November 1, 1865.

Esteemed Intellectual

To a defeated South, Meek's life's work of describing, honoring, and challenging his homeland proved a convenient and comforting place of retreat even if they later forgot the author whose framework they so naturally adopted. His writings, public service, as well as personality and "natural genius" received the commendations of his contemporaries upon his death, suggesting that his influence, even if restricted to southern whites, was strongly felt.

Eulogizing the loss of the "illustrious dead," "one of the brightest lights in our circle," and "one of the noblest hearts," Phillip P. Neely delivered the funeral address at the Hon. Alexander B. Meek's 1865 burial. Neely, a well-known pastor and elder within the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, began his address by cataloging Meek's illustrious public career. However, it was in the personal estimations that Neely took full and glowing stride. "In the death of Judge Meek," he surmised, "we and the whole country, has sustained a lost not easily repaired"—it was in short, "a public calamity." As his audience could attest, Neely waxed tearfully about Meek's charity, kindness, and his commitment to improving the historic awareness of the southern body politic. All of these attributes influenced the following assessment: "The prominent charm of our friend as to be found in his rare social qualities. No one could know Judge Meek, and be intimately associated with him, without loving him. Take him, all in all, socially, he was the most loveable man I ever knew."⁴³

⁴³ "Address Delivered at the Funeral of Hon. Alexander B. Meek, by the Rev. Phillip P. Neely, D.D. and Obituary Notices." (Columbus, Miss: Sentinel Job Office, 1866), 2-3. SHC-UNC.

As with most deaths in the Civil War era⁴⁴, Meek's mourners sought to remember everything Meek had written or spoken as successful, whether or not they had actually read his works. And yet, even Neely admitted Meek "had his faults," he advised brushing them aside: "Let us consign them to oblivion, and, remembering only his virtues, let us strive to emulate them." With a full-throated celebration, Neely rejoiced in the survival of many of Meek's compositions: "something was saved, and that 'although dead,' he will yet continue to 'speak' to us by means of his preserved thoughts." Otherwise, Neely cautioned, the fullness of Meek's persona might have been "consigned to oblivion."⁴⁵

Perhaps the most telling of Neely's observations at the close of Meek's life had little to do with personal attributes or Neely's own self-serving religious pronouncements. His brief mention of literature placed upon Meek and his labors a description he might have found painfully flattering. Neely's assessment perhaps best encapsulated what writing meant to A.B. Meek:

He loved literature, as a lover his mistress, and needed only the spur of necessity to have given him a world-wide reputation. As it was, he only wrote from impulse—the fountain of thought and feeling *would* sometimes overflow; and it is to this unrestrained ebullency that we owe our gratitude for those "Songs of the South," which have so often gladdened our hearts and homes, and which were a prophecy of what he *might* have done, had necessity compelled him to write. Literature to him was a recreation. It was his holiday work, and what he did in this department was the product of his mind in its leisure moments. It was among his

⁴⁴ Drew Gilpin Faust's research on death associated with the Civil War battlefronts and homefronts, both North and South, have greatly influenced my interpretation of Meek's passing and Neely's eulogy. See Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

⁴⁵ "Address Delivered at the Funeral of Hon. Alexander B. Meek, by the Rev. Phillip P. Neely, D.D. and Obituary Notices." (Columbus, Miss: Sentinel Job Office, 1866), 2 and 6. SHC-UNC. Only three years later, Phillip P. Neely would be dead himself and this same sentiment would be used in the preface to his collected sermons, see *Sermons by the Rev. Phil. P. Neely, Late of the Alabama Conference* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1884), 8.

greatest regrets that he did not, from his youth, devote himself to this great field, to which he was so eminently adapted.⁴⁶

As Philip Beidler suggests, Meek's ability to write around racial tensions inherent in the oppression that southern slavery rested on would not be overlooked by late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century southern intellectuals. In fact, Meek's work on the South as a place of natural beauty and carefully structured red-white racial interaction would enjoy a renaissance at the turn of the 20th century. The close of Meek's life did little to hamper his participation in the literary construction of the South. The enduring continuity of "the South" is a historical battle that continues to fuel the field of southern studies within the American historical profession—one this very dissertation seeks to engage.

As far as the longevity of Meek's literary contributions are concerned, a 1914 reprinting of *The Red Eagle* by Paragon Press in Montgomery, Alabama—from which the images included here originated—suited historians of Alabama as they worked to revive interests in the state's early history. The best way to accomplish the feat: reemphasize Native, not-African-American, history. This highly-directed historical excavation (one that occurred through various iterations in America, i.e. the Dunning interpretation of slavery) detached African Americans from the past leaving them out of, and without a meaningful place in, southern and American history. Locally, this interest in Alabama's past received the dedicated attention of members of the new Alabama Historical Society and the talented, if sometimes misguided, attention of individuals like state historian, Albert B. Moore and Thomas Owen and Marie Bankhead Owen—pioneers in the establishment of the Alabama Department of Archives and History. Meek's works proved the right sort of rewritings of the past that Alabama "historians" needed. The distribution of the *The*

⁴⁶ "Address Delivered at the Funeral of Hon. Alexander B. Meek, by the Rev. Phillip P. Neely, D.D. and Obituary Notices." (Columbus, Miss: Sentinel Job Office, 1866), 3. SHC-UNC.

Red Eagle to classrooms and universities across the state made sure Meek's version was *the* story of frontier "history" young Alabamans imbibed.⁴⁷

This chapter has sought to situate Alexander B. Meek, a frontier intellectual and multi-talented antebellum public figure, within his own historical context. In doing so, we have observed his early days in frontier Tuscaloosa and how these life experiences influenced his perceptions of the South in which he lived. From his speeches, poetry, journal editing, articles and histories, we have seen the transition from frontier to settled Tuscaloosa alongside Meek as well as how the developments influenced his attempts to capture such events with his pen. Certainly, Meek's own prejudices, gendered biases and tactical racisms shaped both his worldview and his literary compositions and, more broadly, his career choices. The multilayered Meek who praised the South in "Come to South" could equally condemn its inhabitants for their unwillingness or inattention to educational progress motivating his successful efforts to enact progressive legislation on education during the early 1850s. The same Meek who spoke measured heroism onto William Weatherford had little to no toleration for African Americans inside his version of southern literature or history.

Meek's engagement with the frontier determined the kind of rewriting project that his life's works sought to secure. No African American made sizable contributions in Meek's South, and no Native American, no matter how lovely or respectable, could match the stature of men like Andrew Jackson or the average frontiersmen that Meek believed drove the engines of history. Stunningly, however, Meek's contortions of southern history, like those of Simms and others, buttressed later rewritings of the South by those who hoped to defend their so-called heritage and "way of life" with favorable renderings, denoting their region's worthiness for all Americans.

⁴⁷ See Beidler, *First Books*, 84.

Late nineteenth-century southerners followed the path laid out by Meek, for he too did not simply write for southerners, although they were his primary audience. He also wrote for fellow romanticists in New England with whom Meek had to have felt a tortured connection. By the end of his life, his body of work stood as a testament of his intellectual ambitions. The fact that his name and more importantly his mission have been erased from the historical consciousness of the frontier South speaks to the great irony of the rewriting of history. Nineteenth-century scholars have zeroed in on the late antebellum period to the extent that nothing seems to have occurred in the southeast between the American Revolution and the two decades before the Civil War. The danger in this writing of the South (one completely obsessed with cotton and slaves, plantations and sectional politics) becomes clear when we realize that Meek and the frontier lives and pursuits of his pre-1840 companions have been re- or perhaps un-written so that the narrative of southern history seems almost too neat, too orderly, too undisturbed. Hopefully, this chapter will ignite a new rewriting of early southern history.

The commemoration that Reverend Neely offered for Meek's friends and family during his eulogy displayed a type of memory work that could so drastically, immediately, and often, politically rewrite someone's or some peoples' lives during the course of the nineteenth century. Just how powerfully memory enabled the rewriting of the frontier South is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

“THE PAGEANT OF TUSCALOOSA”: TUSCALOOSA HISTORY AND REMEMBERING THE SOUTHERN FRONTIER

Flooded by parents, alumni, and friends of graduates, Tuscaloosa, like most college towns during the week of commencement exercises, teemed with excitement during the last days of May, 1916. On Tuesday afternoon, 30 May, these visitors and Tuscaloosa's residents were invited to the Guild Woods recreation area to view a new drama, “The Pageant of Tuscaloosa.” As part of city's centennial, this pageant fell in the midst of a three-day celebration that had begun the day before with a “Monster Parade” and would conclude with fireworks and a “centennial ball” the following evening.¹ The playwrights, Theodore A. Viehman and Howard F. Smith, sought to commemorate “the arrival of the first white settlers on the site of Tuscaloosa” and its ensuing one-hundred year history. This anniversary play, authored as a celebration of Tuscaloosa's past, now permits an excavation into memory and narrative constructions on America's southern frontier.

Whites who settled in Tuscaloosa in 1816 began, from those earliest moments, to shape Tuscaloosa's recorded history at they wrote letters, diaries, and memoires and reminiscences, local histories, and the 1916 play. Together they offer a panorama of one hundred years of Tuscaloosa's “official” history. How and why they did so are the driving questions behind this chapter. To achieve their desired image, Tuscaloosans found they could rely on memory, remembering, and purposeful forgetting. Throughout these processes, how the community chose to remember its village's past and thereon build a local history was reliant on the malleability

¹ “Tuscaloosa's Centennial” *The Crimson & White* XXIII.25. (May 27, 1916). HSC-UA.

that memory allows.² This bending of history, gave white Tuscaloosans a safe way to stay within the bounds of a presentable, attractive narrative that city partisans could safely celebrate. At the same time, the pageant gave it opportunity to plunge into what has evolved into a web of overlapping remembrances; a web that enabled Tuscaloosans who wrote of their experiences during frontier days to commune with their historians at opposite end of the nineteenth century; all played a part in assembling Tuscaloosa's historical image.³ As with other southern locales, family stories, community and oral histories combined and collided as storytellers shaped their hometown and community legends.⁴

² For the historiographical landscape of memory see the following: Jackson Lears, "Power, Culture, and Memory," *The Journal of American History* 75.1. (June, 1988), 137-140; David Thelen, "Memory and American History Memory and American History," *The Journal of American History* 75.4. (March, 1989), 1117-1129; Diane F. Britton, "Public History and Public Memory," *The Public Historian* 19.3. (Summer, 1997), 11-23; Jeffrey Andrew Barash, "The Sources of Memory," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58.4, (October, 1997), 707-717; Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," *The American Historical Review* 102.5. (December, 1997), 1386-1403; Susan A. Crane, "Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum," *History and Theory*, 36.4. *Producing the Past: Making Histories Inside and Outside the Academy* (December, 1997), 44-63; Elizabeth F. Loftus, "Illusions of Memory," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 142.1. (March, 1998), 60-73; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "Open Secrets: Memory, Imagination, and the Refashioning of Southern Identity," *American Quarterly* 50.1. (March, 1998), 109-124; Alfred F. Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); Patrick Hutton, "Recent Scholarship on Memory and History," *The History Teacher* 33.4. (August, 2000), 533-548; Wulf Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies," *History and Theory* 41.2. (May, 2002), 179-197; Jennifer Ritterhouse, "Reading, Intimacy, and the Role of Uncle Remus in White Southern Social Memory," *The Journal of Southern History* 69.3. (August, 2003), 585-622; Michael Eugene Harkin, "Feeling and Thinking in Memory and Forgetting: Toward an Ethnohistory of the Emotions," *Ethnohistory* 50.2. (Spring, 2003), 261-284; David Berliner, "Social Thought & Commentary: The Abuses of Memory: Reflections on the Memory Boom in Anthropology," *Anthropological Quarterly* 78. 1. (Winter, 2005), 197-211; Leon Fink, "When Community Comes Home to Roost: The Southern Milltown as Lost Cause," *Journal of Social History* 40.1. (Autumn, 2006), 119-145.

³ James F. Doster, "Tuscaloosa Historians" *Alabama Review* (April 1974), 85-100.

⁴ For the intricacies of southern memory and the politics of remaking history see chapter nine of Edward E. Baptist, *Creating an Old South: Middle Florida's Plantation Frontier Before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2002). For a superb book that deals with southern literature analogous to the treatment of memory in this chapter, that is with the idea of a protracted dialogue arching several decades long, see Richard Gray, *A Web of Words: The Great Dialogue of Southern Literature* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007).

This chapter traces two storylines. The first centers on the commemoration of Tuscaloosa as a Native American village. Tuscaloosa, according to local legends and varied historical accounts, takes the name of the Indian chief who met the Spanish explorer, Hernando de Soto in 1540. The almost cultish commitment to this name parallels the careful dismissal of Native Americans' presence when presenting Tuscaloosa's history after Anglo-European settlement. The second storyline conceals African Americans' contributions to the making of Tuscaloosa. Although African Americans appear on the earliest census records for the county in 1820 and in the city census in 1840, white Tuscaloosa silenced their history. These two stories may be explained in several interlinked ways: one, bending memory to celebrate a settlement heritage by co-opting natives' past and excluding blacks' altogether could be attributed to racial politics of the time, be it 1816, 1846, 1876 or 1916; two, by engaging in this selective memorialization of Tuscaloosa, participants hoped to create a "best image" of their village rooted in regional and even national racial politics; and three, in making Tuscaloosa a place of ancient Indian history in which no African American made any recordable impact, architects of the myth of a conflict-less neutral ground, particularly by the late nineteenth century, could attract wealthy white migrants to this southern river town.

From 1816 to 1916, Tuscaloosa inspired a diverse assortment of white men and women to write about the township. They included local big-wigs and boosters as well as visitors like David Crockett and politicians like William Russell Smith, who wrote of the promises of Tuscaloosa-living and of the intricacies of life in a southern river town. Southwestern humorists like John Gorman Barr and Johnston Jones Hooper penned fictionalized accounts of Tuscaloosa frontier life while memorist Virginia Clay-Clopton wrote of her years from the perspective of a "southern belle." Each commentator helped construct Tuscaloosa's historical persona. Although

the journey began long before European exploration on the southern borderlands of the sixteenth century, our story begins there. Our conduit is the grandest creation of Tuscaloosa remembering, the 1916 play, “The Pageant of Tuscaloosa.”⁵

“The Pageant of Tuscaloosa,” In brief

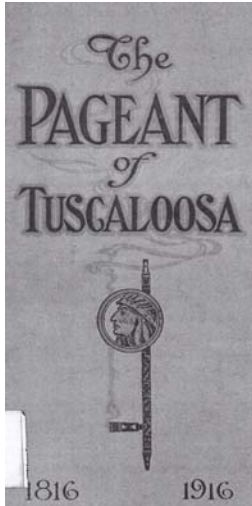


Image 5.1: Front art for “The Pageant of Tuscaloosa, 1816-1916.” Held at W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama,

In six episodes, the Pageant’s authors reflected their image of Tuscaloosa’s past, assorting significant moments of a long history into a linear narrative with a definite beginning and end. The play commenced with the sixteenth-century journeys of Hernando de Soto throughout the southeast and his 1540 meeting with “Chief Tush-ka-lusa.” Soto rode into the southeast among Natives who sensed his arrival. While Tush-ka-lusa’s advisers spoke of the strange men from the East, Soto sent emissaries into their camps with gifts that pleased the powerful regional chief. The death of Tush-ka-lusa’s son at the hand of a Spaniard pressed Soto and his forces to relocate to a neighboring camp during the

burial ceremonies. Meanwhile, Tush-ka-lusa’s advisors decried, “We have tasted of their death smoke...They have begun to spin the death-web.” Set two-hundred seventy years later, Episode

⁵ Other records commemorating celebrations of Tuscaloosa’s historicized past exist like “Alabama’s Centenary” a 1919 program at the dedication of a boulder to mark the site of the state’s second capital; “University of Alabama: Centennial Celebration, Afternoon of May 11, 1931”; and “Centennial Pageant: University of Alabama” written and directed by Theodore Viehman. Programs for the events are housed in the W.S. Hoole Special Collections, University of Alabama; unfortunately, I have yet to discover scripts of the performances akin to that of “The Pageant of Tuscaloosa.” Also, a program entitled *The Pageant Book* compiled for Alabama’s Historical Festival and Pageant: “The Spirit of the South” exists as yet another celebration of white state heritage that occurred in Montgomery, Alabama during “Alabama’s Home Coming Week, May 5-6, 1926.” Therein, a similar melodrama’s outline is included as well as advertisements for political candidates and stories from Alabama’s illustrious past. A shortened but comparable settlement narrative to that presented in our “The Pageant” can be found in “Tuskaloosa, Alabama: Our 150th Year: Tuskaloosa Sesquicentennial, April 19-April 26, 1969, Souvenir Program.” HSC-UA. This program touts “The Black Warrior Saga” but does not include the production’s script; however, episode summations appear quite similar to those of “The Pageant.”

Two explored American expansion and Native conflict on the Black Warrior River. As the scene opened, Creek Indians unloaded their Tepees and materials; during their “settling,” the audience met the white female captive named Mrs. Crawley. This segment swirled around Crawley who bravely repelled a young Native’s assault, murdering him with his own knife. As the Natives gathered to consider Crawley’s fate, a canoe arrived bearing the heroic Tandy “Friend” Walker to speak with his Native “brothers!” Two events followed Walker’s arrival: Crawley’s escape and a Choctaw attack. During the confusion, Walker and Crawley fled while the Choctaw razed the Creek settlement.

Episode Three, “The Settling,” opened in 1816 with a trapper arriving at the edge of the Tuscaloosa woods to deliver a package of goods to settler Thomas Yorke. Monitored by Natives now on the periphery of the village, Yorke’s bartering was interrupted by the arrival of a “small caravan” including in its number Yorke’s son Jonathan. Thomas Yorke welcomed the newcomers: “This post is a might lonesome place, and it will do my heart good to see cabins go up nearby; so unhitch your beasts and get settled.” While the white settlers “got settled,” Episode Four flashed forward to 1835 as the “Departure of the Last of the Indians” became necessary for both their continued existence and white expansion. Offering a blistering condemnation of whites’ settlement practices a Creek Chief appeared at a joint session of the Alabama Legislature defending Natives’ land rights to no avail. White politicians succeeded in rationalizing the emotional, but crucial expulsion of American Indians.

A shorter Episode Five saw the departure of Tuscaloosa’s white men in 1861 to defend the southland’s honor and glory like ancient Grecian and Roman warriors. Finally, Episode Six offered an “end of history” for Tuscaloosa’s golden anniversary Pageant in depicting a proud but defeated citizenry, and a scorched Tuscaloosa by April 1865. On the fateful day of Croxton’s

invasion of Tuscaloosa, the Leach family prepared for their daughter's wedding confronting shortages of food and linens. The episode, and Pageant, climaxed at the reception as Yankee soldiers invade Tuscaloosa confiscating private property and burning buildings. A Masque followed the six episodes in which the figures Cotton, Boll-Weevil, Education, Coal and Fire, War, Prosperity, Fame, and Ku-Klux-Klansmen considered Tuscaloosa's path forward out of the "Raven Days" of Reconstruction and into the dawn of the twentieth century.

Episode One offers much for historians and cultural anthropologists interested in interpretations of Euro-Native contact. Only recently, with the work of Charles Hudson, can we visualize the trek of Soto's expedition. Although a meeting between the Spanish explorer and Chief Tascalusa occurred, it was far more bloody than our playwrights have it. The dramatic adaptation of this meeting portrayed Indian baubles exchanged and Spanish horses performing tricks for Natives; yet, Hudson's telling is far more graphic than the Pageant's. After Soto's meeting the "king-like" chief, he arrested him and forced him and four hundred burden-bearers with one hundred women to march in his cavalcade. Having planned a surprise attack, Tascalusa and his group directed the expedition to the Indian village of Mabila, an undiscovered site Hudson estimates on the lower Alabama River.⁶ There, more lives than Tascalusa's son (as depicted in the play) were lost. Estimates of twenty Spaniards and between 2,500 and 5,000 Natives lost their lives including, possibly, Tascalusa himself.⁷ This, Hudson avowed, was the turning point for Soto's southeastern exploration.

⁶ For the debate on the location of Mabila see essays in *The Search for Mabila: The Decisive Battle between Hernando de Soto and Chief Tascalusa*, Vernon James Knight, Jr., ed. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009).

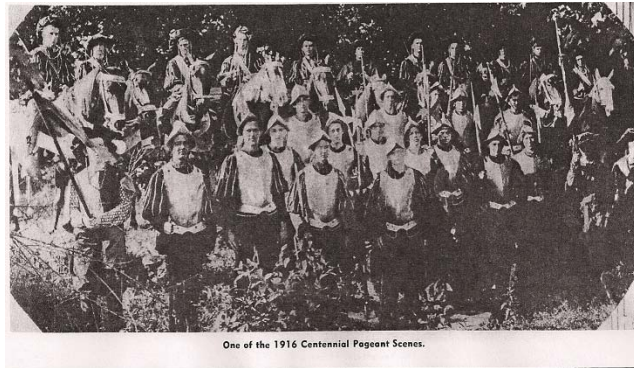
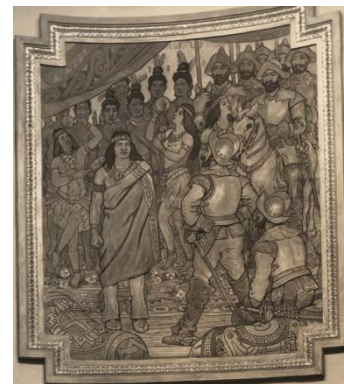


Image 5.2: Photograph of Episode I, “Pageant of Tuscaloosa.” In “Tuskaloosa, Alabama: Our 150th Year, 1819-1969 Tuskaloosa Sesquicentennial, April 19-April 26, 1969, Souvenir Program,” 51. Held at W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa.

Image 5.3 : “Meeting of Desoto and Chief Tuscaloosa” by Nathan H. Glick. The image is the upper left panel of six panels adorning bronze doors in the Milo B. Howard, Jr., Auditorium at the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL. Accessed at: <http://www.archives.alabama.gov/brnzdrs/1.html>



Image 5.4: “The Meeting of Hernando DeSoto and Chief Tuscaloosa” by Roderick D. MacKenzie and photographed by Stanley Paulger of Montgomery, AL. The mural is in the dome of the Capitol in Montgomery, AL. Accessed at Alabama Department of Archives and History website.



This meeting proved seminal to white Tuscaloosans in the nineteenth century when they named their village.⁸ Prior to white habitation, the village itself was most often referred to as

⁷ Charles Hudson, *The Southeastern Indians* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 112-114. For a second, but much less recent account see Captain William T. Ward, *Tuscaloosa and De Soto* (U.S.A.: Press of W.W.Waldo, 1933).

“Black Warrior’s Town” or “the village at the Falls of the Black Warrior.”⁹ Not until white Americans arrived and the city incorporated in 1819, was the name “Tuskaloosa” attached to the land and not the body of water that they renamed the Black Warrior River. One local historian’s notes on the meaning of Tuskaloosa are particularly interesting: “Tuskaloosa is derived from two Choctaw words—*tusca*, warrior, and *loosa*, black—hence the anglicized name of the river, Black Warrior, which was formerly called the Tuskaloosa.”¹⁰ Whether his etymological analysis was correct, Tuscaloosans adopted the concept.¹¹ The meaning of “Tuskaloosa” is not of primary importance here. Instead, consider why white settlers chose “Tuskaloosa”—the name of a resistant Indian chief—instead of the Anglicized translation, “Black Warrior’s Town,” for their settlement and continue to claim the tenuous connection.¹²

⁸ The significance of this meeting has also been claimed by individuals with Alabama’s state historical interests. As one of artist Nathan H. Glick’s eight bronze panels produced for the ADAH in 1940, this scene of Tuskaloosa and Soto is presented as the first “milestone” in the state’s history. For a summary of Glick’s commissioned work for the ADAH see: <http://www.archives.alabama.gov/brnzdrs/about.html>.

⁹ Matthew William Clinton, *Tuscaloosa, Alabama: Its Early Days, 1816-1865* (Tuscaloosa: The Zonta Club, 1958); Archibald Bruce McEachin, *The History of Tuscaloosa, 1816-1880* W. Stanley Hoole and Addie S. Hoole, eds (University, Alabama: Confederate Publishing Company, 1977).

¹⁰ McEachin, *The History of Tuscaloosa, 1816-1880* W. Stanley Hoole and Addie S. Hoole, eds (University, Alabama: Confederate Publishing Company, 1977), 11.

¹¹ See Thomas Chalmers McCorvey, *Introduction to the History of Tuscaloosa, Alabama* (Tuscaloosa: Weatherford Printing Company, 1925) and his numerous references to William Stokes Wyman who “gathered all that could be learned” of Tuscaloosa. Much of the work on this period in Alabama history, Soto’s expedition, and Euro-Native interaction has been influenced by both A.B. Meek’s historical writings on the topic from his 1839 sketch republished as “The Pilgrimage of De Soto” in *Romantic Passages in Southwestern History Including Orations, Sketches, and Essays* (New York & Mobile: S.H. Goetzel & Co., 1857), 213-234 and a corroborating chapter by Albert James Pickett, “De Soto in Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi” in his *History of Alabama, and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi, From the Earliest Period* (Charleston: Walker and James, 1851), 1-53.

¹² For more on the political and cultural cooption of Native Americans and their histories by white Americans see Gordon M. Sayre, *The Indian Chief as Tragic Hero: Native Resistance and the Literatures of America, From Moctezuma to Tecumseh* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).



Image 5.5: “Tushkalusa: Indian Chieftain” is a rock monument located in front of the Tuscaloosa County Courthouse in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. The stonework celebrates Tushaklusa and marks his death at “Mauvila, Oct. 18. 1540.” The bottom portion of the stone reads: “He was the suzerain of many territories and of a numerous people, equally feared by his vassals and the neighboring nations.” Image and information accessed at: <http://www.druidcityonline.com>

If white settlers in early Tuscaloosa wished to adopt either Tuskaloosa or Black Warrior’s Town (both had been used on the river through the 1810s) it appears they chose the less referenced of the two so that they might re-appropriate its meanings. This co-opting of “Tuskaloosa” permitted white Tuscaloosans to put “Black Warriors” safely in the past or at least on the river. With Indians removed, whites were free to take the land, steal Tascalusa’s name, but shed his history and children somewhere in the exchange. The plan appears even more ingenious when we include Charles Hudson’s insight that the location of Mabila—the meeting site of Tascalusa and Soto—is unidentifiable. Chief Tascalusa may never have resided near modern-day Tuskaloosa. Episode One captured for viewers the very earliest Euro-Native interactions that Tuscaloosa’s inhabitants used to culturally claim the village via naming practices; the process itself suggests that white settlers, from the village’s inception consciously chose “Tuskaloosa” as the settlement’s name and in a way became native. Tascalusa became Tuskaloosa and lost any connection to the violence that might have befallen Spanish explorers or Native Americans in the sixteenth century. Whites could choose his name as their village moniker ironically because it allowed them to displace Indian heritage at the same time they adopted it. Natives automatically became a *once*-powerful people that reigned in the area long before white settlement, so long

before, that the village was then called by the river's name.¹³ For a visual analysis of the Black Warrior River's own rewritten journey as captured on maps of the period, see *Appendix A* at the end of this dissertation. Additionally, this psychological cooption of Native history remains in use in present-day Tuscaloosa and Alabama (see images 5.6 through 5.11 below).



(From left to right)

Image 5.6: Tuscaloosa Police Department Insignia

(<http://www.ci.tuscaloosa.al.us/index.aspx?NID=503>).

Image 5.7: West Alabama Boy Scout Badge. The Troop office is based in Tuscaloosa.

(http://griesmyer.com/csp_west_alabama_black_warrior_council.aspx).

Image 5.8: Tuscaloosa County Commission Seal:

<http://www.tuscaloosacharacter.com/Government-Community.html>

Image 5.9: Tuscaloosa County Seal. As of 2011, this image was used in the Tuscaloosa County Probate Office as well as the Tax Assessor's Office and as an insignia on departmental vehicles.

Image 5.10: Black Warrior Riverkeeper Seal. Seal of a non-profit, citizen-based group that is "dedicated to improving water quality, habitat, recreation, and public health throughout...the Black Warrior River watershed." <http://blackwarriorriver.org/index.php>

Image 5.11: Alabama Desoto Trail Highway Route Emblem. Though not directly related to Tuscaloosa County or city, this placard of Soto and Black Warrior has been adopted by the state of Alabama after a 1985 commission was charged with marking Soto's route through Alabama. Signs can be found throughout eastern and central portions of the state—State Highway 21 in Oxford, AL is but one location. Note the careful combination of Soto superimposed by a tall, muscular, bow-wielding Tascalusa.

¹³ A relatively connected rehearsal of the historiography of the argument for defending the historical spelling of Tuscaloosa with a "k" is offered by Thomas Maxwell, "Tuskaloosa: The Origin of its Name, Its History, Etc." A paper read before the Alabama Historical Society on July 1, 1876," 82-85. In bound collection of pamphlets entitled *Tuskaloosa History* (Samford University Special Collections, Birmingham, AL). The distinctions between usages of the names "Tuscaloosa" and "Tascalusa" or "Black Warrior's Town" or "Little Warrior's Town" is noted in Amos J. Wright, *Historic Indian Towns in Alabama, 1514-1838* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003). Of Black Warrior Town, Wright denotes it an Upper Creek village and believes the site was likely "located at the mouth of the Sipsey Fork where it joins the Mulberry Fork near present-day Empire in Walker County." This is the Town that Wright believes, based on Coffee's 1813 report, was burned to the ground even as Crockett, in 1834, claimed was located near the present day Tuscaloosa. Like Crockett, University of Alabama Professor, William Stokes Wyman and Director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Thomas Owens (via letter correspondence in 1903) appear to agree with Crockett. (See *Historic Indian Towns in Alabama*, 19-20).

Episode Two presented the audience with a staple in the writing of Tuscaloosa's history. The "Rescue of Mrs. Crawley by Tandy Walker" was retold as *the* earliest event in Tuscaloosa's American history marking the height of conflict over exploration and settlement on the Black Warrior River. As the scene opened, southeastern Natives unpacked historically inaccurate Tepees and abused a white captive who would soon be rescued by a heroic frontiersman. Representative of the delicate relationship between Native peoples of the southeast and white American settlers as well as delicate womanhood, Crawley's story needs to be situated in its own historical context.

No doubt, many individuals who watched the Pageant's inaugural performance were familiar with Tandy Walker's rescue of Crawley as George Strother Gaines' features had appeared in the *Mobile Register* in the 1870s. The playwrights' attention to detail suggests that they too had become familiar with Gaines' memoirs. Gaines spoke of Tandy Walker residing at St. Stephens, the territorial capital, in 1811. There, Gaines met Walker while serving at the Choctaw Trading House. As Gaines described Walker, he had spent considerable time in the Creek nation as a 'Public Blacksmith' and had learned the Creek language making him "a favorite of the Indians" and a bridge in the American/Indian trade economy.

When Walker arrived at Gaines' home in the fall of 1812, the two knew each other quite well. Hearing of Walker's story of "a white woman [who] had been brought from Tennessee as a prisoner to Tuscaloosa (falls of the Black Warrior) by a party of Creek Indians," Gaines' wife charged Walker with rescuing the woman even "at the risk of his life." Being a "brave, generous-hearted man," Walker agreed with Mrs. Gaines that Crawley should be rescued. Two weeks later, as Gaines recalled, Walker returned with the woman, "in bad health, her mind a good deal impaired by her suffering; her limbs and feet were still in a wounded condition, caused by the

brush, briars, etc.” Upon her arrival, Gaines’ wife “took charge” and nursed her back to health.

Gaines relayed Crawley’s story:

Her name was Crawley. She resided in a new settlement, near the mouth of the Tennessee river. One day, during the absences of her husband, a party of Creek Indians came to her house, murdered two of her children who were playing the yard; and she had barely time to shut and bolt the door, hastily raising a ‘puncheon’ over a small potato cellar and place her two youngest children there, before the Indians broke down the door, dragged her out of the house and compelled her to keep up with them in their retreat.

Gaines added that as several other families were “massacred” at the same time that Crawley was taken, she alone journeyed with the Creeks as their cook. Used as a domestic servant, Gaines understood the Natives “offered her no other violence.” One might read this detail, given the relationship Crawley had developed with the Gaineses, as suggestive of an experience that was without physical or sexual abuse at the hands of the Creeks. Yet, Gaines’ own interpretative limitations emerged deeper in his retelling: “She thought she would die after reaching the village, and doubtless she would have died but for Mr. Walker’s kindness and humanity in rescuing her and bringing her down to St. Stephens.”

Gaines’ reading of Crawley’s experiences encapsulated white perceptions of Native-White relations on the southeastern frontier, processing them through a worldview delimited by nineteenth-century white patriarchy. Captive to the confines of masculinity, Gaines could not grasp the brutality Crawley suffered. Given the gender dynamics of this period in American history, one wonders if Crawley, too, would have not preferred to conceal from the Gaineses any “other violence,” sexual or otherwise, that might have befallen her during her captivity. After recuperation, Crawley readied to return home. On her departure, Gaines saw her off with gentlemen escorts headed through the “wilderness of Tennessee.” He and two other men

purchased Crawley a horse, saddle, and bridle and Mrs. Gaines gave her “suitable clothing...to render her journey comfortable.”

Two significant points capped Gaines’ account of Crawley’s capture. First, when the reclaimed Crawley returned home, she “delighted” to find her husband and two children awaiting her. Again, the matrix of the nineteenth century’s proper gender relations played out in Gaines’ narrative of the southwest’s wilderness.¹⁴

Embracing nineteenth-century gender

conceptions, Gaines painted Crawley as naturally glad to return to home and hearth and resume her place as wife and mother. On her return voyage, the Tennessee Legislature acknowledged not Crawley’s survival skills, but instead Walker’s “noble agency” and granted him a monetary award. Second, as to prove a point of local struggles not fully realized by federal powers, Gaines reported Crawley’s experiences to the War Department hoping to demystify Jefferson’s and Madison’s Indian policies as they were “so humane as to overlook their faults in the hope and expectation of their ultimate civilization.”¹⁵

The same William Russell Smith that A.B. Meek knew as a young adult commented on the Walker episode in his 1896 *Reminiscences of a Long Life*. The last of Smith’s publications on Alabama politics and society, this blending of history and memoir is perhaps the most detailed



Image 5.12: Portrait of George S. Gaines. Held at Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

¹⁴ The nature of the colonial through nineteenth-century white female held captive by Native peoples in America of which Crawley’s story is somewhat comparable has been thoughtfully examined in June Namias, *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

¹⁵ James P. Pate, ed. *The Reminiscences of George Strother Gaines: Pioneer and Statesman of Early Alabama and Mississippi, 1805-1843* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 53.

survey of local Tuscaloosa history and personalities.¹⁶ Of the Crawley rescue, Smith relied directly on the *Mobile Register*'s publication of Gaines' reminiscences, illustrating the layering of memories and recollections that local writers depended on when composing their contributions to Tuscaloosa's expanding historical dialogue. After relaying Gaines' account verbatim, Smith's widely-read work offered his own interpretative insight. "From this paragraph we learn," Smith began,

that there was an Indian village at the falls in 1812; second that the inhabitants at that time were natives only; third that the first white person of whose presence we have any knowledge on the banks of the Warrior, at the falls, was a female prisoner, and her name was Crawley; and that the first white man yet known to have visited the Indian village of Tuscaloosa, at the falls of the Black Warrior, was Tandy Walker.

Smith also paid homage to Gaines' commentary and therein illustrated that historical memory and remembering was critical to the overarching and authoritative histories that have emerged concerning Tuscaloosa from its initial white settlement through the end of the nineteenth century. Smith nicely summarized this process in his estimation of the value of Gaines' work: "The recollection of such a man as George S. Gaines touching important events must be sufficiently accurate to stamp his statements with such authenticity as to *make them historical* [emphasis added]." Thus, Smith asked readers to trust Gaines' retelling as well as his own—the two were connected across roughly fifty years in telling the story of Tuscaloosa via memory. Smith heralded Walker's rescue of Crawley as so "significant" that it opened the

¹⁶ Smith and other literary figures of early Alabama and Tuscaloosa receive meticulous and informative coverage in chapter 4 of Philip D. Beidler, *First Books: The Printed Word and Cultural Formation in Early Alabama* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999).

floodgates “between the years 1812 and 1816...[to] a rush of bold pioneers in the direction of the ‘falls of the Black Warrior River.’”¹⁷

This “rush of bold pioneers” received its glorified fictionalization in the Pageant’s Episode Three. “The Settling,” prompted by the 1816 arrival of white migrants, left local Natives looking on “wonderingly.” The foreshadowing captured in the following characters’ dialogue may have informed the aspirations of early white settlers.

Sally Yorke—Do you think, Jonathan, what Mr. Wilson said will be true—that this will be a city?

Jonathan—Why, of course, dear, it will be a big city!

Sally—Why do you think so?

Jonathan—Because this country is bound to grow, and there are many things to bring people here. People will farm—they will grow corn, wheat, and perhaps cotton, as they are doing in Carolina. Then, there might be minerals here—coal, iron, or even gold.

Sally—Oh, Jonathan! Do you suppose we could find any?

Jonathan—I don’t know; the Spaniards didn’t, they say, but there will be plenty to do after the hunting is gone, for there is a river to take the produce away.¹⁸

¹⁷ William R. Smith, *Reminiscences of a Long Life: Historical, Political, Personal, and Literary* (Washington D.C.: Press of Rufus H. Darby, 1889), 13-16.

¹⁸ Viehman and Smith, *Pageant of Tuscaloosa*, 27.

Image 5.13: Photograph of Episode III, “Pageant of Tuscaloosa.” In “Tuskaloosa, Alabama: Our 150th Year, 1819-1969 Tuskaloosa Sesquicentennial, April 19-April 26, 1969, Souvenir Program,” 50. Held at W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa. Note the original caption reports that “settlers bargained with Chief Tuskalusa for land on the Warrior River near his Indian Village and burial ground.” This caption’s re-telling of The Pageant’s retelling, adds yet another layer to Tuscaloosa’s memory as settlers in 1816 could not have encountered Chief Tuskaloosa as by then he had been dead almost three centuries. Additionally, notice the anachronistic covered wagons in the background. Such vehicles were used in migrations to the trans-Mississippi West later in the century, not during those to the Old Southwest.



Historical records for individuals dramatized in this episode of the Pageant do not exist; however, a number of early settlers’ recollections have survived to shed light on both the actual settling experience fictionalized here and the historical conversation into which its authors leapt with this portion of their production. North Carolinian John Owen (see chapter 2) was one such individual. His journey ended with more than an implied hope to settle near Tuscaloosa. Owen’s 1818 relocation to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, included his wife, children, mother-in-law and slaves; like other migrants’ experiences, it also involved a prolonged and arduous journey that Owen narrated as the leader of his family venture.

The Owen story speaks to both the excitement of migrating to a new place as well as the troubles families faced when relocating. Reliance on one’s faith to provide deliverance was something that the Owens, like many Americans, drew near to in a nation freshly reawakened to

Christianity.¹⁹ Yet, the silence concerning the impact of the trek upon John Owen's slaves is deafening—an example of how African Americans' roles, even in migration, went unrecorded in the white narrative. Their existence in Tuscaloosa remained silenced for the village's first one hundred years. As we will see, memories called on, or should we say *bent*, concerning black Tuscaloosans worked for the precise purposes of those doing the remembering.

William Russell Smith's reminiscences included a variety of settlement tales that later historians of Tuscaloosa have utilized when writing of early Tuscaloosa. One anecdote involved Major James Childress's efforts to capture a local band of counterfeiter and how extra-legal authorities meted out frontier justice. Apprehending the gang at their waterfall hideout, Childress's posse oversaw the hanging of the group's leader, John Davis. When one of the men received a stay of execution by supplying evidence, Smith speaks of "great...disappointment and disgust when his reprieve was made known to the crowd."²⁰ The violent nature of frontier law as producer of public spectacle and entertainment²¹ did not escape Smith as he outlined how "Randall was not allowed to escape 'scott free.'":

A mob gathered about the jail, and when the convict had been discharged by the sheriff, as he came forth out of the jail with his little wallet on his shoulder, and was about to go on his way rejoicing, the mob seized him, and taking him off into the woods, tied him to a stump, and inflicted upon him a terrific whipping with cowhides; whereupon he was ordered to leave, and never again show himself in that community. Judge Lynch was more lenient then than he is in these latter days. Randall disappeared with universal execrations howling after him.²²

¹⁹ Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

²⁰ William Russell Smith, *Reminiscences of A Long Life: Historical, Political, Personal and Literary*. (Washington, D.C.: William Russell Smith, 1889), 49.

²¹ Although descriptive of an earlier time and place, the now classic and revealing interpretation of legalized justice and its public entertainment value found in Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Verso, 1991) is descriptive of similar sorts of socio-cultural dynamics at play in frontier Tuscaloosa.

Emphasizing the utility of crowd action, Smith connected the image it presented to on-looking Indians and how it impressed upon them the civilizing nature of law and order. His conclusions may appear odd to twenty-first century readers, but their broader implications should not be missed. The previous excerpt displayed Smith's appreciation of the discipline he thought necessary for frontier order. However, it was oddly accompanied by Smith's pondering where the South's Natives had disappeared to: "The crowd on this occasion was a vast one, for that day. Amongst the spectators was a gang of Indians, men, and squaws with babies tied upon their shoulders, agape with curiosity at this development of the new civilization. These Indians have gone to their hunting-grounds; and that vast assemblage, where are they?" They were nowhere to be found on the pages of Tuscaloosa history that Smith had participated in writing.

For Episode Four, the playwrights reveled in the very "Departure of the Last of the Indians" that puzzled Smith by the end of the nineteenth century. Arriving at the State House in Tuscaloosa, Creek chief Apoth-le-oholo, "the last of the Creeks," addressed legislators who "are interested...[and] anxious to hear a few words." Apoth-le-oholo wished to discover if the "white man is trying to oppress my people" as "he drives them from their homes." Symbolic of the conflicts across the southwestern frontier, the Speaker of the House and the Creek chief sparred over Indian removal. For the Speaker, white Alabamians believed the Creeks would be happier in a land with fewer whites and there "be freer to hunt." Apoth-le-oholo countered, "That is not the reason." Willing to drop the façade, the Speaker reasoned, "well, to be frank, my friend, you have caused the State much trouble in the past, so we are moving your people away."²³ The paternally-inclined Speaker reiterated how Alabama wished to maintain peace with its Indian peoples. Evoking a sense of uncivilized innocence and naïvete, Apoth-le-oholo inquired, "I hunt

²² Smith, *Reminiscences of a Long Life*, 43-44.

²³ Viehman and Smith, *The Pageant of Tuscaloosa*, 28-29.

no more with my people?” With the Speaker’s response that if the Chief stayed, he would live “behind the white man’s stone walls.” To that, Apoth-le-oholo offered the following:

My friends, I am an old man—an old man bent with many winters; an old man broken by the hand of the Great Spirit. Once I was a boy, and I was budding fresh with strength—life was then in the moon of strawberries. I saw the white man then. My father said the white man was my enemy, and he fashioned me a bow. My mother sang to me when the crickets chirped that the white man was my enemy. Yet I could not shoot him like a bear or a deer. I could not shoot him, for he fought in strange ways, and had many powerful sachems beyond the Big Sea Water. When I grew older I saw the white man with clearer eyes, for he came upon our people; he took our horses and fields; he maltreated our women and children; he told us to depart from our lands...Our camp-fires have burned out. There are only ashes. The Indian has gone.²⁴

Chief Apoth-le-oholo, or Opothleyahola, did exist and was a prominent Creek Chief.²⁵

However, no evidence of such a speech to the Alabama legislature survives. But, as one Indian chief could easily suffice for another in Viehman’s and Smith’s interpretative narrative, a similar speech of Chief Yoholo-Micco of Eufaula Town probably served as their historical source. A historical marker in Eufaula, Alabama contains his words:

I come here, brothers, to see the great house of Alabama and the men who make laws to say farewell in brotherly kindness before I go to the far west, where my people are now going. In time gone by I have thought that the white man wanted to bring burden and ache of heart among my people in driving them from their homes and yoking them with laws they do not understand...I see that the Indian fires are going out. Soon they will be cold. New fires are lightening in the west for us, they say, and we will go there, I do not believe our great Father means to harm his red children, but that he wishes us well. We leave behind our good will

²⁴ Viehman and Smith, *The Pageant of Tuscaloosa*, 29-30. An address by “Apothleohola” was memorialized as well in Thomas Maxwell’s *The King Bee’s Dream: A Metrical Address Delivered Before The Druid City Literary Club of the City of Tuskaloosa, Alabama, May 12, 1875* (Tuskaloosa: George A. Searcy and Company, 1875), 70-72. In the accompanying footnote, Maxwell claims that this “Creek of great distinction, being prophet and chief...never concealed the fact that he only removed from imperious necessity, and while here declared that he felt that he was no longer chief.” Maxwell confirms the widely remembered account that he purchased Apothleohola’s “wampum war-belt” in 1838 for \$25 and “sent it to a friend in England who now has it in his cabinet of curiosities.”

²⁵ See <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/O/OP003.html> or Thomas L. McKenney and James Hall, *History of the Indian Tribes of North America* (Book Sales, 2007), 280-294 for brief sketches of Opothleyahola.

to the people of Alabama who build the great houses and to the men who make the laws. That is all I have to say.²⁶



Image 5.14 (Left): Painting of “Opothle Yoholo” by Charles Bird King and dated 1837. Published in Thomas L. McKenney and James Hall, *The History of the Indian Tribes of North America*. **Image 5.15** (Right): Painting of “Yoholo-Micco” by Charles Bird King and dated 1837-1844. Held in Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Winston-Salem, NC.

As remembered peoples, Native peoples had been tamed by civilization yet still had to be removed from the region to make space for white migrants. As with historian Paige Raibmon’s examination of Native peoples and Euro-Americans in the Pacific Northwest, both whites and Natives appear as interacting agents that, though unequal, worked to promote the notions of authenticity while both confirming and conforming to both white legitimacy and racial superiority.²⁷ With removal, whites could easily empathize with the heroics of such stoic Indian chiefs while they hurried them and their people out of the South.

One individual whose family observed first-hand this Indian removal was Virginia Clay-Clopton. In her memoirs, Virginia Clay-Clopton or “Mrs. Clay, of Alabama” waxed poetic about

²⁶ Dozier C. Cade, *Mama Was My Teacher: Growing Up In A Small Southern Town* (iUniverse, 2004), 47-48.

²⁷ Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth Century Northwest Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

the very topic of removal that she watched in 1830s Tuscaloosa. Clay-Clopton moved to Tuscaloosa sometime in 1831 when she was six years old and lived under the care of her uncle, Henry W. Collier, later the Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court and Governor.²⁸ Although her “pilgrimage” to Tuscaloosa offers much to corroborate the difficulties experienced by the Owenes, it was in the home of another uncle, Alfred Battle, that Clay-Clopton’s “recollections of that early Alabama life centre[d].” There she and her cousins played in the moonlight and she received a female’s training: “my uncle’s wife... taught me to sew and knit and to make a buttonhole, and I made progress in books under the guidance of a visiting teacher.”²⁹ It was also in Tuscaloosa that Clay-Clopton met her husband, “the rising young statesman, Clement C. Clay, Jr.”³⁰



Image 5.16: Frontpiece Portrait of Virginia Clay-Clopton. In *A Belle of the Fifties: Memoirs of Mrs. Clay, of Alabama* (1905).

During Clement C. Clay Jr.’s tenure as the U.S. Senator (1853-1861), he and Virginia Clay-Clopton resided in Washington, D.C. socializing with key figures from the Pierce and Buchanan administrations, foreign dignitaries and ambassadors. In this setting of relations,

²⁸ Virginia Clay-Clopton, *A Belle of the Fifties: Memoirs of Mrs. Clay, of Alabama, covering Social and Political Life in Washington and the South, 1853-66 Put into narrative form by Ada Sterling* (London: Wm. Heinemann, 1905), 4.

²⁹ Virginia Clay-Clopton, *A Belle of the Fifties*, 6.

³⁰ Virginia Clay-Clopton, *A Belle of the Fifties*, 16-17.

Virginia Clay-Clopton recalled her encounter with Indian removal. Within her memoirs, which read as a kind of stream of consciousness collection of life events, Clay-Clopton recalled how Buchanan's administration hosted a "delegation of redmen" where she was reunited with some of the Native peoples who had been removed from the southeast.

Clay-Clopton provided a vivid description of the "delegations" of Natives that arrived in Washington, D.C. during the winters of 1854 through 1858. These "several hundred...camped in a square of Barracks, where, with almost naked bodies, scalps at belt and tomahawks in hand, they were viewed daily by crowds of curious folk as they beat their monotonous drums, danced, or threw their tomahawks dexterously in the air." She went on, "To see the copper-hued sons of the Far West, clad in buckskin and moccasins, paint and feathers, stalking about the East Room of the White House at any time was a spectacle not easily to be forgotten." Conversations progressed smoothly until "the dusky form of a younger redskin sprang from the floor." The physical description Clay-Clopton included revealed an eye schooled in Native imagery: "He was lithe and graceful as Longfellow's dream of Hiawatha. The muscles of his upper body, bare all drapery, glistened like burnished metal. His gesticulations were fierce and imperative, his voice strangely thrilling."³¹

If Alan Trachtenburg is correct, this kind of noblized savage was only a portion of the Americanizing of Native Americans that has served to safely meld Natives' history into a national narrative with few negative repercussions for the predominantly white storytellers or story consumers.³² Furthermore, the sexual innuendo that permeates Clay-Clopton's description adds to the highly gendered nature of this encounter as many of her fellow women left the room,

³¹ Virginia Clay-Clopton, *A Belle of the Fifties*, 107-108.

³² Alan Trachtenburg, *Shades of Hiawatha: Staging Indians, Making Americans, 1880-1930* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005).

unable to remain among the Indian visitors. One wonders if Clay-Clopton's reputation suffered in viewing such violent, exotic peoples. Regardless, one "conspicuous member of the delegation of '54-55" that Clay-Clopton took specific interest in was Chief Apothleohola.

Traveling from "the West," Apothleohola came to Washington as a "patriarch of his tribe, eighty years of age...erect and powerful still." Clay-Clopton's depiction of the chief evoked the positive impact that removal or westerwarding had had on Native Americans. Two instances serve as illustrations of this point. First, Clay-Clopton noted that "his accumulated wealth was said to be \$80,000." Second, she reported that his Western farm "was worked entirely by negroes." The movement to "the West" had secured financial success for this Native American; thus, Clay-Clopton accepted his experience as *the* standard for removed Indians. Additionally, she mentioned how Apothleohola's farm functioned as a re-plantation of the southern agricultural system in the west as a productive, viable establishment dependent on chattel slavery. In Clay-Clopton's mind, the civilization programs and removal had worked to give Natives successful lives in the West.

With that belief, in meeting Apothleohola, she noticed he sported "gay attire" of brilliant reds and "gaudy" paint, but "there was about him an air of weariness and even sadness."³³ In gauging his sadness, Clay-Clopton summoned up her memories of an earlier Chief Apothleohola and the removal of his people:

When I was still a child I had seen this now aged warrior. At that time, five thousand Cherokees and Choctaws, passing west to their new reservations beyond the Mississippi, had rested in Tuscaloosa, where they camped for several weeks. The occasion was a notable one. All the city turned out to see the Indian youths dash through the streets on their ponies. They were superb horsemen and their animals were as remarkable...Along the river banks, too, carriages stood, crowded with sight-seers watching the squaws as they tossed their young children into the stream that they might learn to swim.

³³ Virginia Clay-Clopton, *A Belle of the Fifties*, 108-109.

Not all was gaiety and spectacle. Clay-Clopton recalled how during this encampment “a redman was set upon by some quarrelsome rowdies,” who sank the Indian’s corpse in the river fearing his compatriots. Missing their companion, the Natives appealed to then Governor C.C. Clay, Clay-Clopton’s father-in-law. Governor Clay’s recovery of the body garnered the “accredit[ation] of historians...[and] won the good will of the savages, among whom was the great warrior Apothleohola.” Meeting the Chief in the mid-1850s, Clay-Clopton questioned Apothleohola as her “father wished to know... if the brave Apothleohola was happy in his western home?” “His sadness deepened as he answered, slowly,” Clay-Clopton recalled, ““Me happy, some!”” Closing their initial meeting, Apothleohola’s interpreter, Mr. Garrett, implored Clay-Clopton to “talk Indian to his charge” as “you must know some!...having been brought up in Indian country!” After Clay-Clopton spoke her “three or four words,” the Chief pointed and “with a half-smile” stated: “She talk Creek!”

To negate the “sadness” she realized during their first encounter, Clay-Clopton made sure to include in her memoirs a second meeting that could buttress the affirmative repercussions of Indian removal:

A few days after this memorable call, I happened into the house of Harper and Mitchell, then a famous dry-goods emporium in the capital, just as the old warrior was beginning to bargain, and I had the pleasure and entertainment of assisting him to select two crêpe shawls which he purchased for his daughters at one hundred dollars apiece!³⁴

Episode Four ended with the cleansing of Tuscaloosa’s past by washing away the physical presence of Native Americans. The remaining two segments examined the more recent and emotional occurrence when the “flower of the City’s manhood...[were] called by the drums of war.” This dramatic line as well as the climactic finish with Episodes Five and Six exhibit the

³⁴ Virginia Clay-Clopton, *A Belle of the Fifties*, 109-110. If Clay-Clopton’s estimate is correct, the Chief was clearly cheated by Harper and Mitchell, paying roughly \$2500 in 2010 American currency for the shawls.

recurring phenomenon of writing and remembering southern history best encapsulated in historian Edward E. Baptist's line: "the Civil War comes right on time."³⁵

Strikingly short, Episode Five attempted to capture the auras of villages scattered across the Old South as communities bid farewell to their sons clad in grey. In an eerie goodbye, Tuscaloosa's men stepped off to war. Men of all ages littered the stage, one "soldier in grey, with an aged woman hanging on one arm and a pretty young one clinging to the other," as well as "an old man hobbles along in the rear, leading two children." With the words "Fall in!" the soldiers left the embrace of their families and friends to form two lines. Flanked by a military band, a male citizen and a young woman dressed in white and carrying an unfurled flag prepared the southern soldiers for departure. From the front of the line, the citizen heralded his fellow Confederates: "The clarion call to arms is heard throughout our Southland. The bugle sounds the assembly, and the men respond, though it breaks the red heart of Dixie to give them up... 'Go forth and defend the honor and glory of your country!' ...you will stand when the history of this conflict shall have been written."

Not missing the opportunity to lunge backwards and attach the mission of the South with those of the ancients Viehman and Smith offered the following historical reference:

The courage of the Grecian soldier will pale, and the valor of the Roman of old will seem small compared with the courage and valor of Tuscaloosa's sons under the folds of this banner, which I am commissioned to present to you by the women of this City. Yes, the women! Your wives, your sisters, your sweethearts, made this flag, and on every field will it wave to you their love and hope... Take it, protect it, and let it waft an inspiration from woman to you of love that will compel you to bring it back a victorious flag, though it be torn to shreds by bullets of the foe. Desert it not; protect it ever. Men of the South, good-bye! In woman's name, take this your insignia and bear it aloft as free from stain as the lives of those who made it and who now give it. Take it. It is yours. Good-bye [sic].³⁶

³⁵ Edward E. Baptist, *Creating an Old South: Middle Florida's Plantation Frontier Before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2002), 5.

A burst of cheers and musical accompaniment began the Warrior Guard's journey into the Civil War. As the band's music became faint, the crowd drew back "silently shaking their heads" as they departed into "tearful, anxious groups."³⁷

Evident from this dramatized moment in Tuscaloosa's history is the grand sense of communal commitment being celebrated, even lauded, by Viehman and Smith. In terms of memory, the factuality of any sort of village send-off transpiring or speeches being presented bare reduced significance. This is especially true when we consider that in 1916 Tuscaloosans were looking back roughly fifty years to the Civil War while American soldiers briefly contributed to the battles of World War I. Indeed, one wonders what the survivors of this conflict made of the Pageant's interpretative spin on their failed mission. As historian Drew Gilpin Faust has convincingly argued, these one-time Confederate southerners' vision of their nationalist efforts were highly conscious and purposeful in their creation.

During the Civil War, southern nationalism rapidly evolved as centrally designed to defend the Confederacy's existence as both a slave society grounded in Protestant moralities and an adherence to their Revolutionary forefathers' commitments to independence and individual human value. However, as Faust has demonstrated, when the Confederacy began to implode, so too did the defense of its nationalist agenda namely because "evangelicalism and republicanism thus made...deceptively weak ideological foundations."³⁸ Thus, we would be remiss in not seeing that these trends to solidify white dominance through a racist *and* nationalist ideology established the very parameters in which the Old South formed, functioned, and would be

³⁶ Viehman and Smith, *The Pageant of Tuscaloosa*, 32-33.

³⁷ Viehman and Smith, *Pageant of Tuscaloosa*, 33.

³⁸ Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1988), 83-84.

remembered. And, as Faust and others have made clear, remembering the Old South and the purposes of the Confederacy began long before Grant and Lee arrived at Appomattox.

Episode Six pulled these strands together setting its final scene on 3 April 1865. The events of the day served our playwrights as sacraments of a suffering village that endured the “invasion” of Croxton’s raiders. The invasion presented the pivotal moment in Tuscaloosa’s historical record. For the episode, Viehman and Smith chose an “Interrupted Wedding” that, for us, demonstrates both the narrow and stereotyped presence of African Americans in Tuscaloosa’s “official” history.



Image 5.17: Photograph of Episode VI, “Pageant of Tuscaloosa.” In “Tuskaloosa, Alabama: Our 150th Year, 1819-1969 Tuscaloosa Sesquicentennial, April 19-April 26, 1969, Souvenir Program,” 50. Held at W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa. Notice the connections the caption’s author made to living Tuscaloosans and thereby bringing the past into the present.

The scene opened at the plantation of Dr. and Mrs. Leach where the two parents of the bride busied over last minute preparations with their slaves, Betsy and Alfred. Table cloths and champagne, plates and chicken dominate conversations as well as Betsy’s desire to “make everything lubly fo’ Miss Emily.” Greeting their future son-in-law, the Leaches apologized for the wedding’s appearance: “it won’t be quite like it would have been before the war, but we all

have done our best.”³⁹ Side conversations among the Leach slaves played on this theme as well. Sylvie posited, “This here sho’ goin’ to be some weddin,’” and Mammy Agnes, “dat dere weddin’ gown yo’ done make am a dream.” A loyal and proud Mammy Agnes continued, “Yas, ah ‘spects dere ain’t never been no weddin’ gownd es good as dat since de war began. But Miss Emily, she jes’ so purty, ah jes’ had to do my bestest.”

As the wedding began, the slaves “all start and fall over each other in trying to get down the steps.” The ceremony concluded with a processional of the wedding party, a square dance and singing the Bonnie Blue Flag by the white attendees while the slaves distributed food. As the bride sliced into the cake, a shot was heard from across the river and a boy entered proclaiming, “The Yankees are coming! The Yankee soldiers! The Yankees!” Champagne was hidden, jewelry shoved into the women’s clothes, silver plates buried and amid the “much confusion...the men prepared to resist the attack.”

The following moments reveal much about how the authors sought to portray southern masculinity and femininity during the waning days of the Civil War, particularly during the invasion of one’s hometown at such a personal moment as a wedding. As the Yankee soldiers entered the Leach garden, the best man refused to surrender, shouting: “Your Union be damned!” At this, one Federal soldier raised his rifle to shoot but Mrs. Leach knocked it aside and demanded, “Don’t you shoot that man!” After confiscating Dr. Leach’s watch, the Union troops marched on with “shouts and laughs,” forcing the young men to go with them. Suddenly, Mrs. Leach exclaimed that the red glare in the sky must mean that they are burning the University. The men rushed off while the women went “sadly into the house.”⁴⁰

³⁹ Viehman and Smith, *The Pageant of Tuscaloosa*, 36.

⁴⁰ Viehman and Smith, *Pageant of Tuscaloosa*, 36-38. Much of this dramatized version matches the brief but historical look at the Leach wedding event and the Union presence in Tuscaloosa presented in

As historian David W. Blight has argued, white Americans (South and North) became increasingly concerned with national reunion by the late 1880s and 1890s; this, of course, came at the expense of fulfilling the aspirations of African Americans' new hope of freedom promised by emancipation. In the end, as Blight contended, "this is a story of how the forces of reconciliation overwhelmed the emancipationist vision in the national culture, how the inexorable drive for reunion both used and trumped race."⁴¹ One can surmise that this domination of national scene by a conversation of reunion negligent of the issue of race occurred at the local level as well; and, as we see from Episode Six, the remembering of why Tuscaloosans, Alabamians, and southerners fought the Civil War, where African Americans fit within that story, and what their eventual freedom might look like became suppressed by the image of the noble and heroic white men and women of the South committed to a cause that by April 1865 seemed assuredly lost. The cause may have been lost, but it was not entirely slain as Tuscaloosans among millions of white southerners, as both Blight and Faust have elucidated, were keenly involved in the production of national rememberings that would sacrifice the Civil War on the altar of historical memory.

The memories of black southerners, of course, would be estranged from whites' mainstreamed narrative of Tuscaloosa remembering. For the eighty-year old, Anna Baker, enslaved life in Tuscaloosa bequeathed her distinctive and complicated memories. Those of violence and painful separations coexisted with ones of solace offered by religion and resistance via truancy and the dangerous games of playing double agent. Baker's recollective piece for the WPA interviews illustrates a bargained peace that *she* made with her owner, William Morgan.

Clark E. Center Jr., "The Burning of the University of Alabama" *Alabama Heritage* 16 (Spring 1990), 30-45. Reprinted at <http://www.alabamaheritage.com/vault/UAburning.htm>.

⁴¹ David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 2.

As she recalled, Baker benefited by supplying her owner with information gathered “roun’ de old folks an’ make lak I was a-playin’. All de time I’d be a-listenin’. Den I’d go an’ tell Marster what I hear’d.” Unlike the ignorant tool her master took her for, Baker bragged to her interviewer how, “all de time I mus’ a-had a right smart mind, ‘cause I’d play ‘roun’ de white folks an’ hear what dey’d say an’ den go tell de Niggers.—Don’t guess de marster ever thought ‘bout me doin’ dat.”⁴²

Louis Thomas’s memory of his slave experience adds to the undivided history shared between white and black Tuscaloosa. Before utilizing a Union soldier’s abandoned pistol to escape post-war tenancy, Thomas had lived a difficult life of bondage. As an agricultural laborer owned by Levy Windom in Pickens County, Alabama, Thomas not only “plowed barefooted but naked as well... hooked to a double horse plow.” Growing cotton (he estimated five hundred bales a year), wheat, potatoes and other vegetables, Thomas’s productive labors connected him with his owner’s financial success. This connective bond shaped his perceptions of the Union assault on Tuscaloosa, many of which resurfaced seventy years later during his interview. “I remember well,” Thomas voiced, “I was in Tuscaloosa, Alabama and dere was a speech made dere by General Forest on a Sunday. He said, ‘dere ain’t no Yankee in 500 miles of Tuscaloosa, Alabama.; So de Rebs was so happy ‘bout dat, dey started early de very next morning putting de flooring back in de bridge dey done took out so de Yankees couldn’t cross and get to them.” Thomas placed himself somewhere between foolish white Southerners, a.k.a. “de Rebs,” and the ominously approaching white Northerners, “de Yankees” as a disassociated bystander or disinterested observer. Yet, his narration undercut such neutrality:

The following Tuesday night de very next day I mean, don’t you know, dem Yankees come in *our* town cross dat very bridge. That same night old Marse

⁴² “Anna Baker, Ex-slave, Monroe County,” in *Born In Slavery: Slave Narratives From the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936-1938. Mississippi Narratives*. IX. 11-17.

made us hitch up all his horses and git up all de flour, meat and everything *we* done raised, and carry it up Tom Bilby [Tombigbee] River. It was a swamp, to hide it from de Yankees. But, honey, dat didn't do a bit of good, dem Yankees got all *our* stuff and *us, too*, and destroyed everything *he had*. Us slaves was so mad at Old Marse, we helped 'em git rid of everything, den went on back home, we had no where else to go, and de war wasn't over and we hadn't nary a penny of money, child. No we didn't.⁴³

Thomas not only claimed Tuscaloosa as “our” town but also cited the fruits of his enslaved production to be “our stuff.” Admittedly, he appeared quite happy to help Union troops destroy his owner’s goods only to return back “home” as he lacked any money to make an escape. Sadly, that circumstance would land Thomas and thousands of ex-slaves in tenancy for decades to come. Adding deeper insult to the injuries of slavery, the reminiscences of enslaved people like Baker and Thomas would not prove useful to the post-War generations of white Tuscaloosans who monopolized the memory of Tuscaloosa redeeming it (by ignoring African Americans’ stories) to serve the interests of emerging southern capitalists.

Laying the foundation on which The Pageant’s redemptive interpretations could be played out, the 1880s and 1890s saw post-bellum boosters busying themselves as pitchmen for southern progress. By doing so, they surfaced as the South’s most capable advocates in avoiding the messiness of the Civil War and slavery by simply ignoring race and inviting their fellow white American businessmen to do the same in the rising “new” Dixie—a land of cotton, but also iron. The Reverend B.F. Riley, one of the state’s most influential Baptist ministers, authored an 1893 “guidebook to Alabama” entitled *Alabama As It Is: Or the, Immigrant’s & Capitalist’s Guidebook to Alabama*. Therein, Riley devoted a chapter to each of Alabama’s counties including Tuscaloosa. His work described each county’s history, its amenities, and untapped resources. Riley wrote of Tuscaloosa: “It is one of the most noted counties of the State, its

⁴³ “Slave Hitched to Plow. Louis, Thomas” in *Born In Slavery: Slave Narratives From the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936-1938. Missouri Narratives*. X. 348-352. [Emphasis added].

principal city having once been the capital of Alabama, and being now the seat of the State University, the Insane Asylum, as well as that of a number of female schools of distinction.”⁴⁴

Riley’s praise for Tuscaloosa did not end there as boosters’ historic Tuscaloosa had always offered immigrants “some of the most inviting farms in the State,” if not the entire South. On its lands “corn, oats, peas, rye, and sorghum, grow with great readiness. Grasses and clovers grow splendidly when cultivated...The forests are stocked with yellow or long-leaf pine... [as well as] beech, white, red, blackjack, and Spanish oaks, sweet gum, poplar, elm, hichory, bay, cherry, and cottonwood.” Immense forests and many saw-mills filled this land of promise along with rail lines that could transport an untapped mineral wealth including coal, manganese, and “flagging stone.” The water supply was “exhaustless” as were fruits and other crops, including cotton and its mill industry. Praising the city of Tuscaloosa, Riley reported it “has long been noted for its beauty, its broad streets, shaded by the native water-oak; its handsome churches, superb school buildings and attractive residences. In social culture, it is the peer of any Southern city. Its location is favorable to the planting of industrial enterprises.”⁴⁵

Riley’s effusions on the benefits of Tuscaloosa living were neither the first nor the last of their kind. By the closing days of Reconstruction, Tuscaloosa’s businessmen began advertising their city’s growing attractiveness. Published by the Tuscaloosa Board of Industries in 1876, *Reliable Information as to the City and County of Tuscaloosa, Alabama for Capitalists, Manufacturers, Miners, Agriculturalists, and All Other Classes Who Desire to Improve their Condition and Secure Healthful and Eligible Homes for Themselves and Their Families* presented the opening salvo at official memory making and socio-cultural reimagining only a few

⁴⁴ B.L. Riley, *Alabama As It Is: Or The Immigrants & Capitalists Guidebook to Alabama* (Montgomery: The Browning Printing Co., 1893), 119.

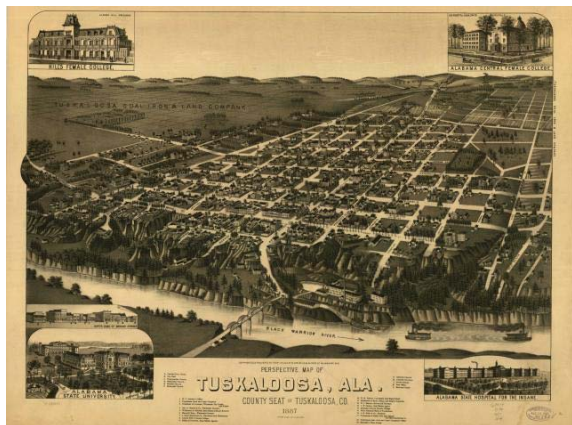
⁴⁵ B.L. Riley, *Alabama As It Is: Or The Immigrants & Capitalists Guidebook to Alabama*, 121 and 123.

years after the conclusion of the Civil War. Starting at settlement, the businessmen's writers chronicled how "Tuskaloosa" had always been "one of the most desirable places within our knowledge." This claim was, they asserted, based on the opinions of two generations of physicians who have "spent two-thirds of their lives on the spot."⁴⁶ Their recasting of history went further: "This has been a leading item, in the attractiveness of the place, since the day it was first settled. Men of means...settled here in numbers, because it was a healthy home for their families, as well as desirable in many other respects."

Healthiness amid the turmoil and death that had plagued the nation during the recent war dominated the rationale put forward by Tuscaloosa's boosters. "Tuskaloosa, being a healthy place," they asserted, "is a good place to get well in, and stay well in." Furthermore, "of epidemics, we need only say they have never lived here, nor have they been propagated when brought to the place." Tuscaloosa, too, had the health of the mind to offer as it had the "inestimable advantages" of a "seminary of learning of the highest grade, with a full corps of learned professors." Its citizenry possessed a "high tone of moral character, social habits, cultivation, intelligence, and refinement." In the social venue, the Tuscaloosa boosters, as much as Viehman and Smith, avoided race by accenting their perception of a positive: the absence of African Americans. "There have never been many slaves settled in it [the upcountry, in which they included Tuscaloosa], so that to-day it has mainly a white population." The absurdity of such an observation becomes all the more clear when we look back the census data. In 1850, just over two-fifths of Tuscaloosa County's population was enslaved and 3,500 of those slaves lived in the city of Tuscaloosa. But, with this false assurance, they subtly linked racial demographic

⁴⁶ *Reliable Information as to the City and County of Tuscaloosa, Alabama for Capitalists, Manufacturers, Miners, Agriculturalists, and All Other Classes Who Desire to Improve their Condition and Secure Healthful and Eligible Homes for Themselves and Their Families* (Tuskaloosa, "Gazette" Office: 1876), 3. In bound collection of pamphlets entitled *Tuskaloosa History*. SUSC.

dominance to political freedom. Thus, all whites living in Tuscaloosa were guaranteed “his own political opinions” and the ability to exercise them “in his own way.”



Map 5.1: “Perspective Map of Tuscaloosa, ALA: County Seat of Tuscaloosa, Co. 1887.” (Milwaukee: Henry, Wellge, and Company, 1887) Held at Alabama Department of Archives and History. As demonstrated by this drawing produced during the height of the boosters’ era, education and industry were of primary importance for city advertisers. Corner details display three higher education institutions and the state’s mental health facility. Lettered at the bottom of the map included the city’s premier civic and social organizations: Court House, City Hall, Public School, Post Office, Railroad Depot; the Catholic Church and Protestant denominations, as well as “Colored Churches.” Numbered were capitalized groups like the Tuscaloosa Land and Loan Company, and Friedman & Loveman Wholesale Dry Goods and Shoes, Maxwell Bros. Wholesale Grocers, Wilkerson & Caldwell Real Estate & Stock Brokers, J. Snow Hardware Co., J.H. Fitts & Co. Bankers, Tuscaloosa Coal, Iron, and Land Company, and Kennedy’s Ware House.

Map 5.2: “The Pittsburg of the South.”

Sponsored by Tuskaloosa Coal, Iron & Land Co., this 1887 map celebrates Tuscaloosa’s rising industry and institutions. As with Map 5.1, the boosters paid special attention of the University and State Asylum as well as its “Fine Schools, Pure Water, Healthful Location.” Held at W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa.



Tuscaloosa’s boosters acknowledged the need to diversify their economic base. They noted how “before the war all the capital of the South was invested in lands and negroes, such were the advantages of Tuscaloosa, that enterprising men embarked in the manufacture of plows and leather [yet]...the meager amount of manufactures of the city proper affords a sad commentary on the policy heretofore pursued by the people of the entire South.” Noting what they believed to be the greatest attributes of Tuscaloosa (cotton, a healthy environment, a mild climate, fertile soil, navigable rivers, iron ore and coal deposits), they confidently prophesied: “The barriers which have heretofore prevented this era of progress have been broken down, and it become our duty to let the world know of these advantages, and even our unfitness for using them.”⁴⁷

Declaring coal and iron Tuscaloosa’s new “Kings,” the boosters implored “persons...at the North, West, or elsewhere, who are possessed of the necessary capital, skill and enterprise, and who are seeking new homes in a milder climate, [to be] authoritatively advised of these

⁴⁷ *Reliable Information as to the City and County of Tuscaloosa*, 3-9.

advantages, and of the cordial welcome they will receive.” Expecting a massive in-migration of venture capitalists and their money, the city’s businessmen hyped: “those who come here first will reap the greatest advancement upon their investment.”⁴⁸

Not to be outflanked by the booster element of Tuscaloosa’s aficionados, historically-minded citizens like Thomas Maxwell, armed with facts and powerful memories, shared their own versions of Tuscaloosa’s narrative from ancient past through the Civil War to the dawn of the twentieth century. Maxwell’s work presented a glorious adventure evoking community pride and honor for its rememberers. Importantly, the memorial record to which Maxwell (and so many others we have observed) contributed was not fashioned from abstractions or solely fictionalized events. Of Tuscaloosa, Maxwell waxed historic:

She boasts of a name of euphous sound,
Which reminds her sons of that sacred ground,
Thermopylae’s shrine—the Red Man’s pride!
Where the black plumed chief like a hero died...
And spread rich blessings over South and North;
When these shall have birth, her treasures unfurled,
Her mission complete, *is to warm a world.*⁴⁹

We must notice the trade-offs made when bending and blending memories for the construction of useful depictions of the past void of racial or ethnic conflict, not to mention entire segments of populations. The sterilized versions of Tuscaloosa’s history undoubtedly sought to avoid the very realities of Native and African American lives, contributions, and historical presence. Such practices are disturbing to say the least; but they can and have produced powerful, memorial narratives of places like Tuscaloosa that in retrospect seem manufactured just shy of incredibility. Lack of credibility however matters little when the narrative proves

⁴⁸ *Reliable Information as to the City and County of Tuscaloosa*, 10.

⁴⁹ Thomas Maxwell, “Tuskaloosa: The Origin of its Name, Its History, Etc.” A paper read before the Alabama Historical Society on July 1, 1876,” 86. In bound collection of pamphlets entitled *Tuskaloosa History*. SUSC.

itself pleasing to its consumers. Indian removal was gently massaged as Tuscaloosans comforted themselves with the name of Tascalusa and the use of his image throughout their city. With no historical mention of slavery or slaves, boosters by the end of the nineteenth century thought it easy enough to report that hardly any African American had ever lived in Tuscaloosa. Thus, Tuscaloosans bore no responsibility for slavery or the Civil War.

This chapter has sought to uncover how memories exist on a kind of historical frontier, one where events and imagined realities become entangled, blurring the distinctions between fiction and nonfiction. On this borderland, ideological battles are waged for which ideas and facts are worthy of consideration in the constructions of “official” histories. The implications of such past contests are far-reaching and continue to shape our perceptions of the present and possibilities for the future. And yet, whether the accepted narratives of Tuscaloosa’s history were as Thomas Maxwell alleged, a mission “to warm a world,” remains for those who choose to remember *and* for those who have been purposefully forgotten to decide.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Thomas Maxwell, “Tuskaloosa: The Origin of its Name, Its History, Etc.” SUSC.

EPILOGUE

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE (SOUTHERN) FRONTIER IN AMERICAN HISTORY

*American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating the American character... In this advance, the frontier is the outer edge of the wave—the meeting point between savagery and civilization. Much has been written about the frontier from the point of view of border warfare and the chase, but as a field for the serious study of the economist and the historian it has been neglected.*¹

—Frederick Jackson Turner

In March 1926, Frederick Jackson Turner took a moment at his desk in Madison, Wisconsin to write a brief note to Herman Clarence Nixon, professor of History and Political Science at Vanderbilt University. Though Nixon would go on to become one of the “Twelve Southerners” made famous by the manifesto, *I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930), at the time he was a budding academic who had sent Turner a portion of his University of Chicago dissertation, “The Populist Movement in Iowa.” Turner replied to relay his interest “both in the subject and in the work.” Turner knew Nixon’s mentor William E. Dodd and recognized his influence on Nixon’s historical outlook. That relationship would also persuade Nixon to return to the South (he was born in rural Merrellton, Alabama) for a career spread across several southern universities.

¹ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Dover Publications, 1996 reprint), 2-3.

Turner confessed that Nixon's dissertation's "populistic analyses," and "recogni[tion] of the frontier influence...naturally attracted my attention and gave me comfort." Undercutting future generations of historians who would demolish Turner's contributions on "the frontier" as overly-confident, simple, and outright offensive, Turner remarked of Nixon's research: "I should not like to have been the only one of that period who recognized the moving frontier as a factor in politics and economics, for I should have feared that I had found something that hardly existed."²

In the fall of 2007, as a graduate teaching assistant for a modern U.S. History course at the University of Georgia, I unknowingly shared in Turner's anxiety. For the week on the American West, the assigned reading was Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History"—an essay that I had read probably once before receiving the teaching assignment.

The teaching assistants all gathered with the professor to discuss our approaches to common themes and connections we should be making to the course. At the time, a complete dismissal of Turner and his "offensive" notions of the American frontier—from the absences of Natives, African Americans, and women to the false notion of a "line" of settlement descending across the continent—were easy fodder for young and energetic graduate students encouraged by a professor who ably led the dismantling of the Turnerian frontier. Admittedly, at the time, I was at the front of the line, ready to set Turner and his "model" up as the greatest straw man of western, if not American, history—one that could easily be demolished in front of students who had read the assignment and blithely accepted Turner's descriptions at face value. The assault

² Letter from Frederick Jackson Turner to Herman Clarence Nixon (March 16, 1926). Herman Clarence Nixon Papers. HL-VU.

would be shared among the TAs, but it was not a difficult battle. In retrospect, it was an unfair fight and a pedagogical mistake.

It was during the discussion sessions that I came to realize the relevance of Turner's language as it resonated deeply with my mostly southern, affluent, and white eighteen-year-old students. Indeed, as those of who care to be cognizant of our students when teaching "survey courses" know, most of these students are not history majors and are simply in the class to pass some general education requirement. The conversations I had with my students about Frederick Jackson Turner that day changed the ways I perceived the American frontier. They changed the dissertation I was planning to write. And, they shifted my perception of what kind of historian I wanted to be.

This dissertation developed in the shadow of these life events and has tried to unseat the doggedly resistant inclusion of "the South" inside the parameters of acceptable historical inquiry for historians of the early republic, "the West" and antebellum southern history outside Virginia or South Carolina. In many ways, my findings directly challenge the transfixed nature of a concrete "West" that only seems to have begun historically with the rise of the mid-West's epicenter of Chicago and, historiographically, with its story as told by master-Western-historian William Cronon. This Western-history model has attempted to debunk any notion or semblance of importance for "the frontier" and has been championed by the work anti-Turnerian, Patricia Nelson Limerick. The research presented here presses against the accepted place and timing of "the West" particularly in these new western historians' terminologies.

Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and its early developments illustrate that *one* of the United States' early frontiers—as place *and* process *and* myth—was located in the Deep South. With a history equally long and intricate as those of colonial New England and the Chesapeake, the land areas

that became Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi with colonial cohabitants (i.e. various Native groups as well as competing European interests like the British, French, and Spanish) possessed frontier characteristic for as long as places like up-colony/state New York or New Mexico or Oregon country.

Tuscaloosa like Natchez, Mississippi or Milledgeville, Georgia have been neglected as a part of the narratives of America's early republic; instead, historians of the Deep South have generally found themselves interested and dedicated to either the colonial period filled with Native-Euro interactions or the antebellum period from 1840 onward and obsessed with themes connected to the coming great event of the nineteenth century and the apparent climactic event of all southern history: the Civil War. No doubt, their work on labor and gender relations, race, proslavery ideology and slave resistance, religion and reform all contribute to understanding southern society before and after the early republic. However, as Michael O'Brien's recent work reveals, understanding the books, poems, pamphlets and thoughts of southern intellectuals is imperative to understanding how they had "helped to invent, administer, and advance an imperial regime of ruthless ambition...enslaved millions, and seldom hesitated to shed others' blood for the sake of its own comfort." Like O'Brien, although I find the intellects of these white southerners central to the hegemonic order they established and defended, I am under no illusion of pity or sympathy for their cause or their mythic constructions.³

What "Rewriting the Frontier" demonstrates is that these previous historians' commitments and obsessions can no longer be allowed to overshadow the developments that followed the Revolution and precipitated, both chronologically and thematically, the mid-nineteenth century. Important questions have been raised within this unconventional hybrid of

³ Michael O'Brien, *Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2010), 335.

cultural, social, and intellectual history—some have been answered and others require further attention. Just how did the populations that oversaw America’s leading export by 1860 get to the Deep South? Why did they migrate and what did life look like when they arrived? What did their migration mean for their lifestyles? In addressing these significant questions, “Rewriting the Frontier” challenges the perception, often unstated but frequently implied, that history in the Deep South only really “matters” before 1800 and after 1840. Truly, the story of how the American South’s frontier became southern as well as how and why white southerners made their frontier myths presses us to come to grips with Turner’s fear that he had “found something that hardly existed.”

When faced with the written materials that emerged from Tuscaloosa’s corner of the South during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, “the frontier” as a concept may well be poised to enjoy a new era of its own rewriting. A new birth of the frontier will hopefully shed both Turner’s incompleteness and Western history’s Mountain West regionalism. Starting such a conversation within southern history will not only revitalize our quest to understand the multitude of forces that coalesced in making the South southern and energize scholars of the pre-antebellum South, but significantly reshape how historians perceive of that region’s place within the American story.

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APPENDIX A

The collection of maps that follows is a diverse assembling of privately and publicly held drawings that visually illustrate the shift from “Tuskaloosa”/”Tuscaloosa”/”Tascalusa” River to “Black Warrior River” over the course of roughly thirty years. This grouping contains regional and state maps, some of which were published in atlases and travel guides. Others, particularly the late-eighteenth century regional maps were likely privately held. Some remain so while others are maintained by public archives. My analysis of these maps owes much to my attendance at the “Mapping the Early South” workshop held at the Museum of Early Decorative Southern Arts, Winston-Salem, NC in October 2009 and particularly to spectacular presentations by Margaret Pritchard (Curator of maps at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation) and Henry G. Taliaferro.

The following sets usually include both a reduced image (map in entirety) as well as an extraction that depicts the river whose naming this Appendix is centrally concerned with. These maps can be found at: <http://alabamamaps.ua.edu/historicalmaps/index.html>. Throughout, commentary is included to guide viewers in reading the maps and the story they relay.



For a point of reference, the Alabama Great Seal (left) is provided as it nicely demonstrates the positions of Alabama’s river systems. Note that heading north from the Gulf of Mexico the Tombigbee River diverges roughly at mid-state and that the eastern branch is the Black Warrior River.

The state seal was accessed at: http://www.archives.state.al.us/kids_emblems/st_grseal.html



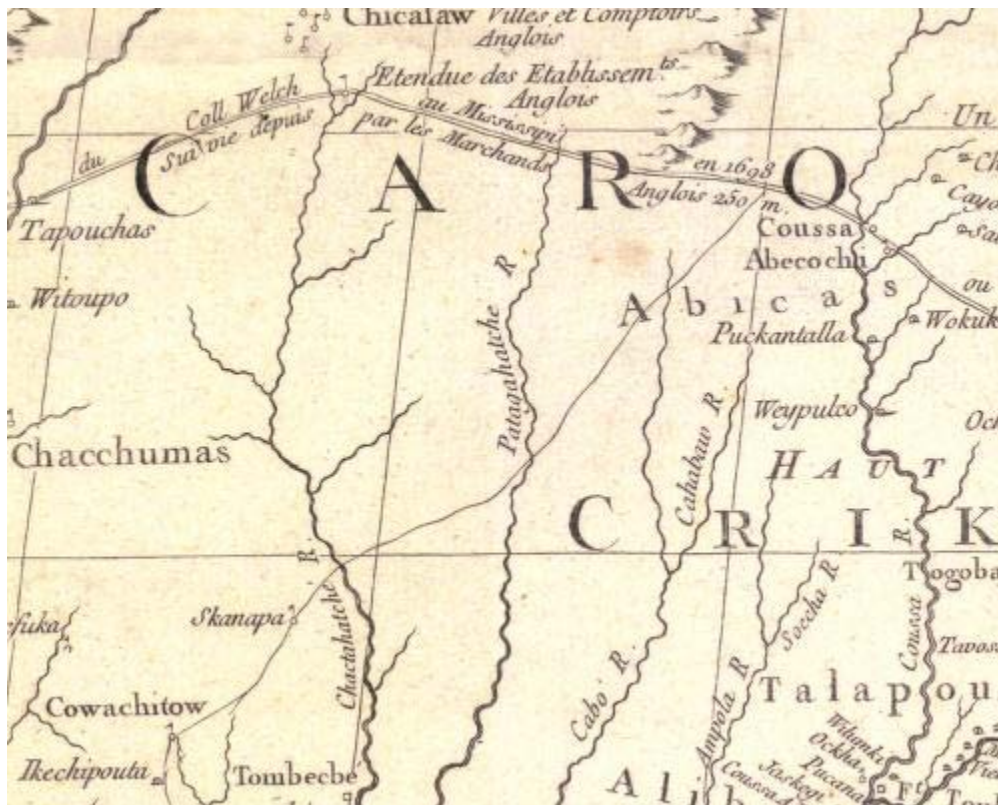
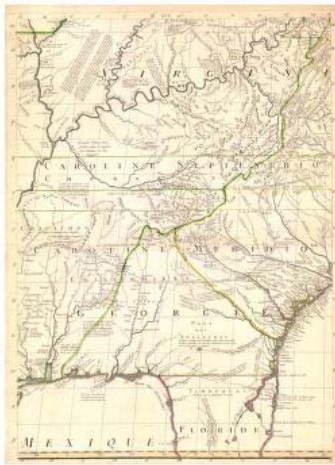
Appendix A, Image 1: Map by John Lodge. Entitled: “A General Map of North America from the latest observations.” Dated, 1776. Held in Birmingham Public Library Cartography Collection, Birmingham, AL.

* In this map from 1776, the Black Warrior River is missing although the “Alabama R.” and “Chikasaw R.,” later known as the Tombigbee River, are identified.



Appendix A, Image 2: Map by Erben Homann. Entitled: “America Septentrionalis.” Dated, 1777. Held in Birmingham Public Library Cartography Collection, Birmingham, AL.

* Published a year later in 1777, this French map labels a “Tascalousa R.” Although the river’s course is geographically unspecific, as rivers whose headwaters had been unexplored often were, placement and naming suggests this is the present-day Black Warrior.



Appendix A, Image 3: Map by John Mitchell. Entitled: “Amerique Septentrionale.” Dated, 1777. Held in Birmingham Public Library Cartography Collection, Birmingham, AL.

* This Spanish map dated the same as the previous French creation pins the title “Patagahatche R.” on the obviously unexplored Black Warrior.



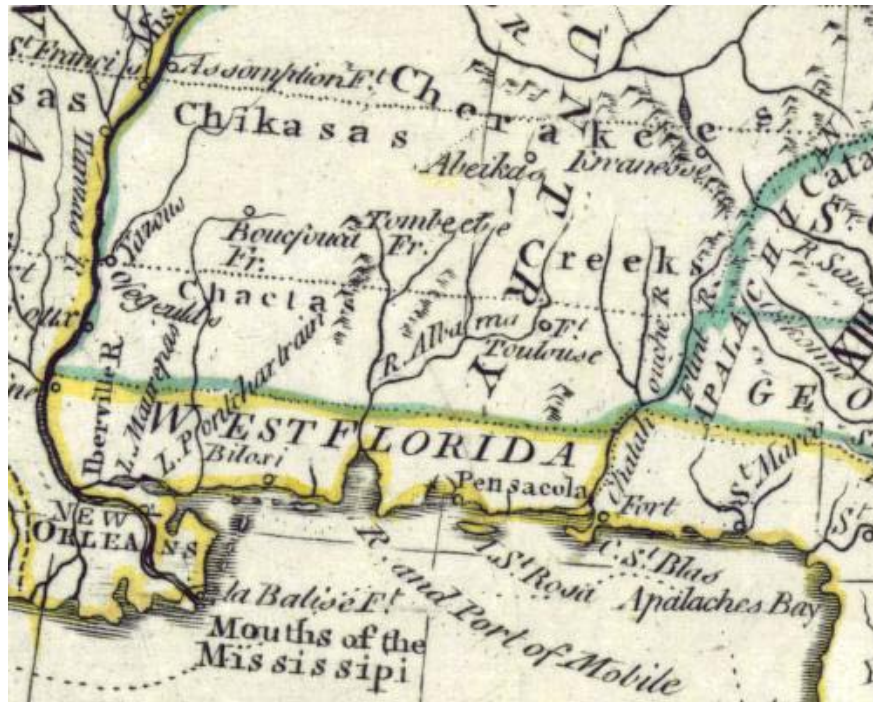
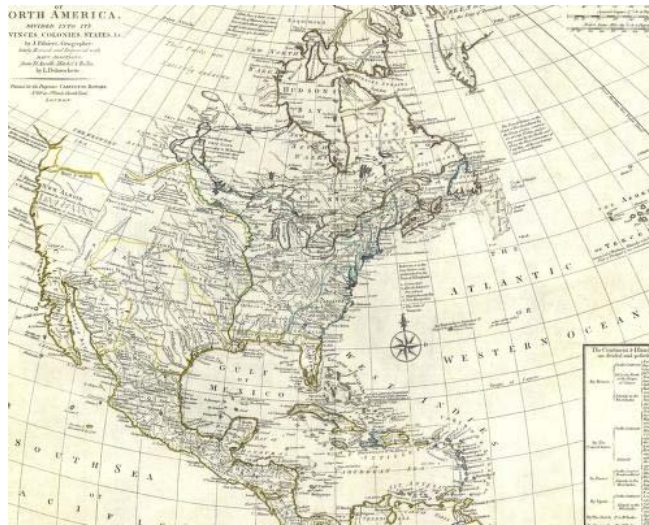
Appendix A, Image 4: Map by Thomas Conder. Entitled: “North America agreeable to the most approved maps and charts” in Moore’s *New and Complete Collection of Voyages and Travels*. Dated, 1780. Held in Birmingham Public Library Cartography Collection, Birmingham, AL.

* An English version dated in 1780 that completely omits both the French’s “Tascalousa R.” as well as the Alabama River. Instead of the Alabama River, a settlement of “Albama” is noted.



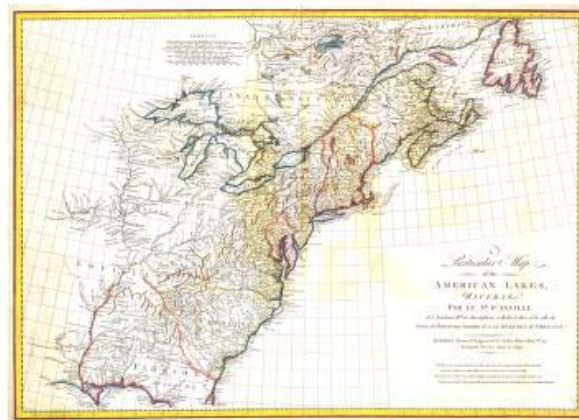
Appendix A, Image 6: Map by Guillaume de L’Isle. Entitled: “Carte du Mexique et des Etats Unis d’Amerique Partie Meridionale.” Dated, 1783. Held in W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa.

*The Black Warrior River is again missing from this Spanish depiction of the southwest. Also, note the inaccuracy of the Rio de la Mobil (present-day Tombigbee River) that may have relied on the preceding French map (Image 5).



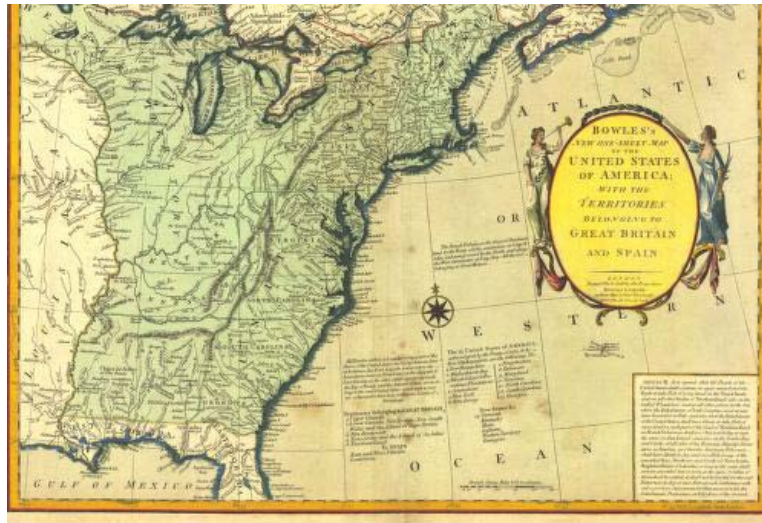
Appendix A, Image 7: Map by Jean Palairret. Entitled: “Bowles’s New Pocket Map of North America.” Dated, 1784. Held in Birmingham Public Library Cartography Collection, Birmingham, AL.

* Only a year later, this 1784 pocket edition map of North America includes French forts at Tombecbe and Toulouse and includes an unnamed branch that could be the Black Warrior River.



Appendix A, Image 8: Map by John Harrison. “A Particular Map of the American Lakes, Rivers, etc.” Dated, 1790. Held in W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa.

* Although lacking geographical accuracy, the “Tascaloussa R.” returned on this map in 1790.



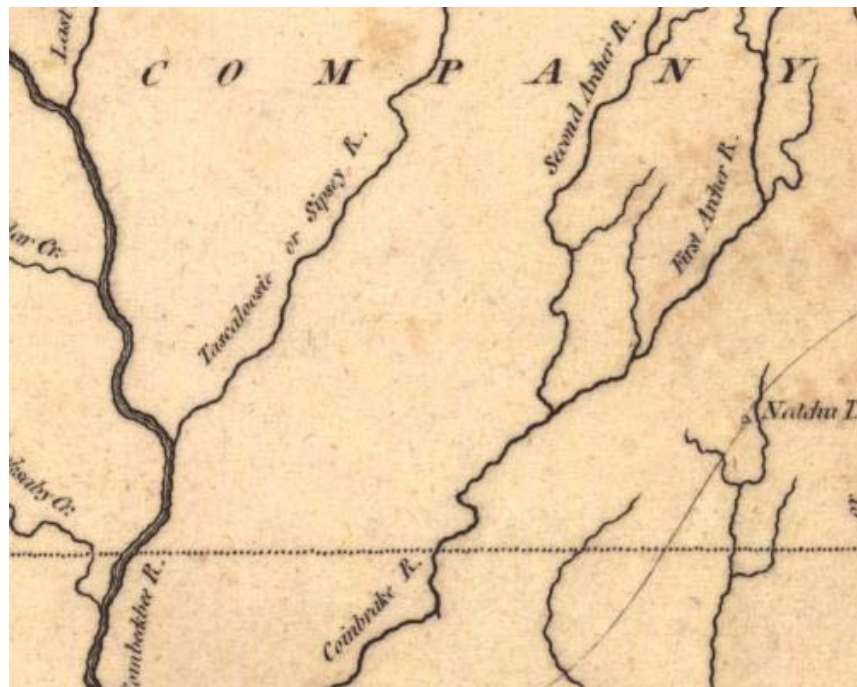
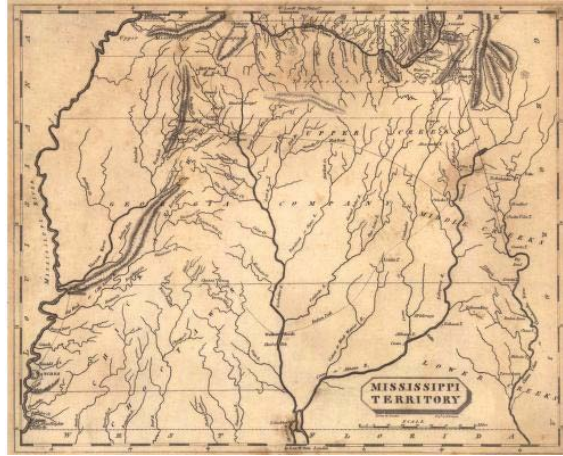
Appendix A, Image 9: Map by Carrington Bowles. Entitled: “Bowles’s New one-sheet map of the United States of America: with the territories belonging to Great Britain and Spain.” Dated, 1794. Held in W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa.

* Still lacking an accurate geographical definition, the “Taskalouse R.” is included on this map of 1794.



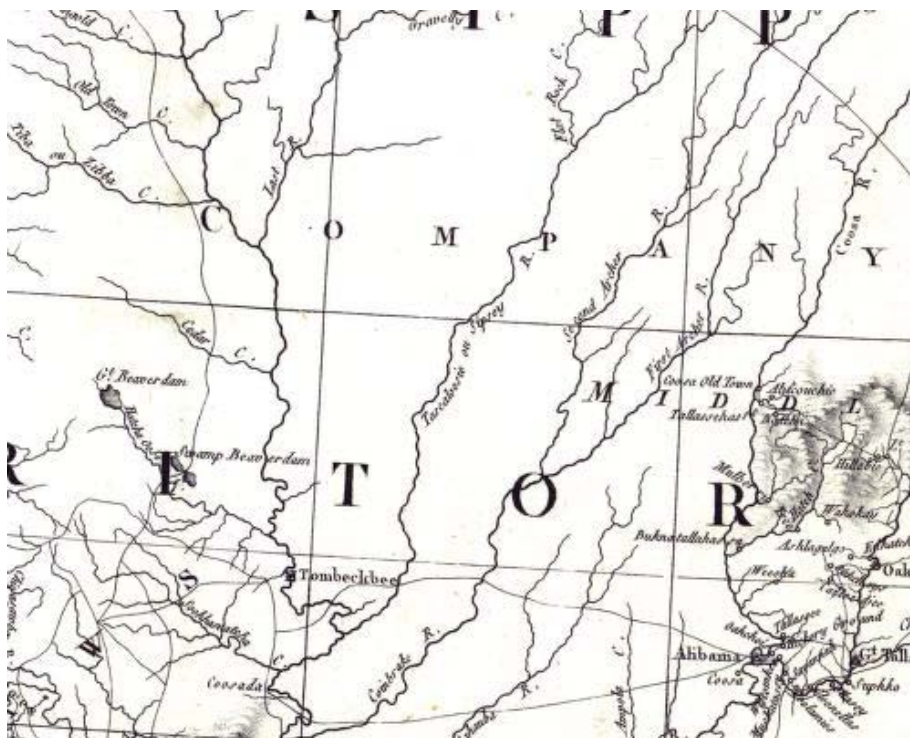
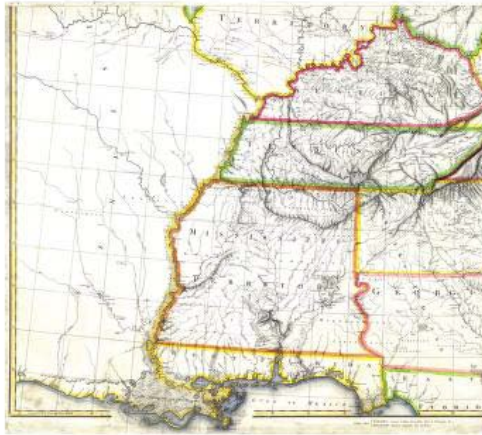
Appendix A, Image 10: Map by Sir Richard Phillips. Entitled: “Map of the United States, Canada, etc. intended to Illustrate the Travels of the Duke de la Rochefoucault Liancourt.” Dated, 1799. Held in the Birmingham Public Library Cartography Collection, Birmingham, AL.

* The Black Warrior River retreats to unnamed uncertainty wedged between the Alabama R. and Tombeckbe R. in this rendering of the southwestern United States in 1799.



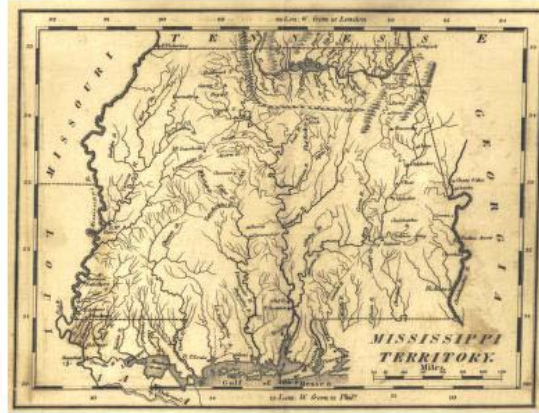
Appendix A, Image 11: Map by Samuel Lewis. Entitled: “Mississippi Territory.” Engraved by D. Fairman. Dated, 1804. Held in the W.S. Hoole Special Collection Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa.

* As can be seen in the following images, the organization of the Mississippi Territory (of which present-day Alabama was a part) garnered a more accurate drawing, though uncertain naming, of the “Tasaloosie or Sipsey R.”



Appendix A, Image 12: Map by Antoine Francois Tardieu. Entitled: “Carte des Etats-Unis de L’Amérique Septentrionale.” Dated, 1812. Held in the Birmingham Public Library Cartography Collection, Birmingham, AL.

* Drawing from American maps, French maps evolved as well, tracing the “Tascaloosie or Sipsey R.”



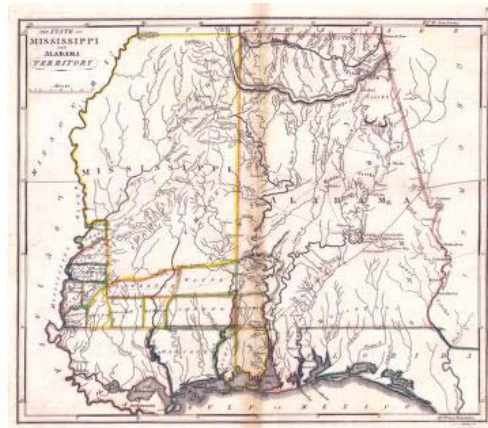
Appendix A, Image 13: Map by Matthew Carey. Entitled: “Mississippi Territory” Dated, 1813. Held in the W.S. Hoole Special Collection Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa.

*By 1813, increased white presence in the area had given cartographers enough information to distinguish between the “Tuscaloosa R.” and “Sipsie R.” as well several other tributaries and branches in the region.



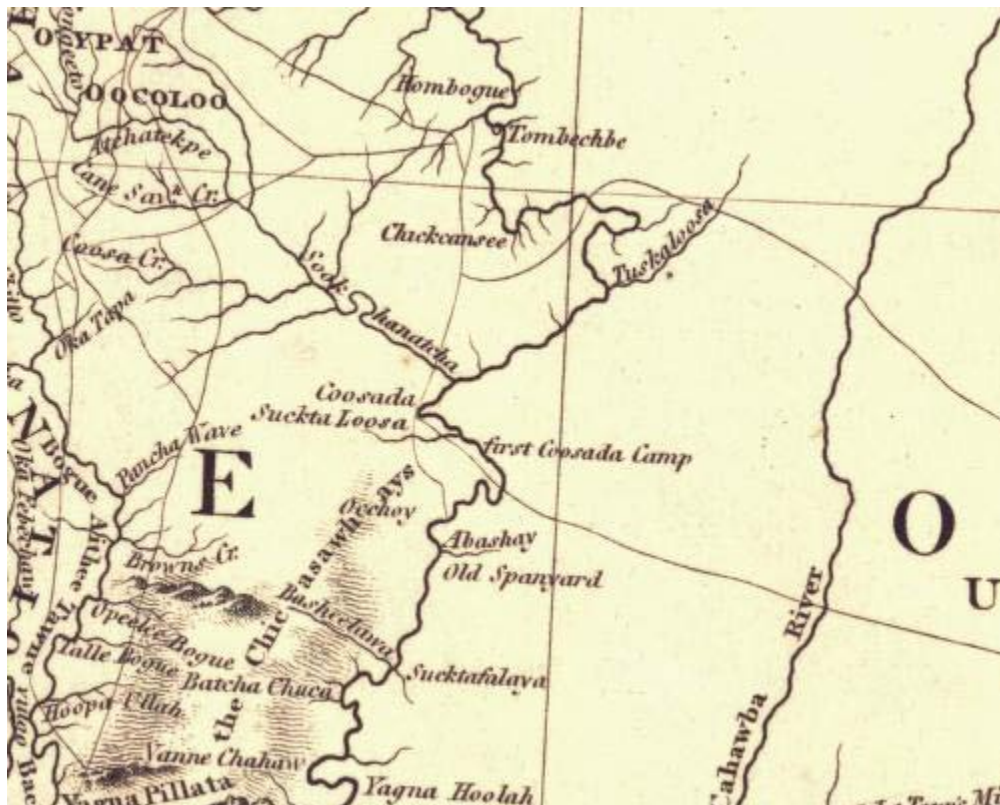
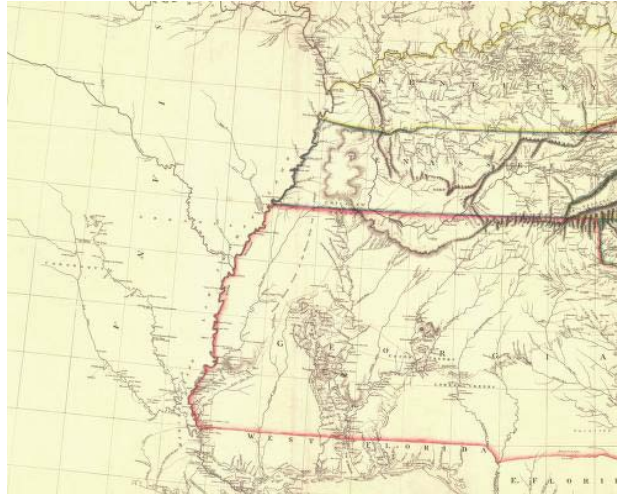
Appendix A, Image 14:: Map by Matthew Carey. Entitled: “Mississippi Territory.” Dated, 1814. Held in the W.S. Hoole Special Collection Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa.

* This 1814 image again utilized the label “Tascaloosa or Sipsie R.”



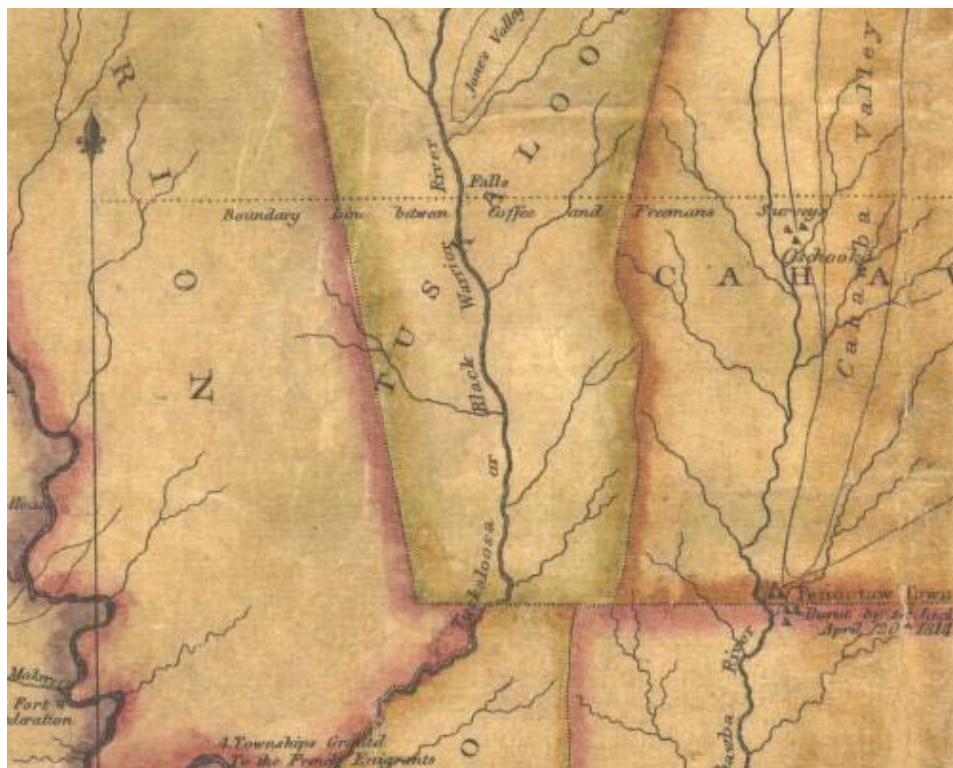
Appendix A, Image 15:: Map by Francis Shallus. Entitled: “The State of Mississippi and Alabama Territory.” Dated, 1817. Held in the W.S. Hoole Special Collection Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa.

*For this territory map dated 1817, after white settlement had already begun in earnest in the village of Tuscaloosa, the “Tascaloosa or Sipsie R.” moniker remained.



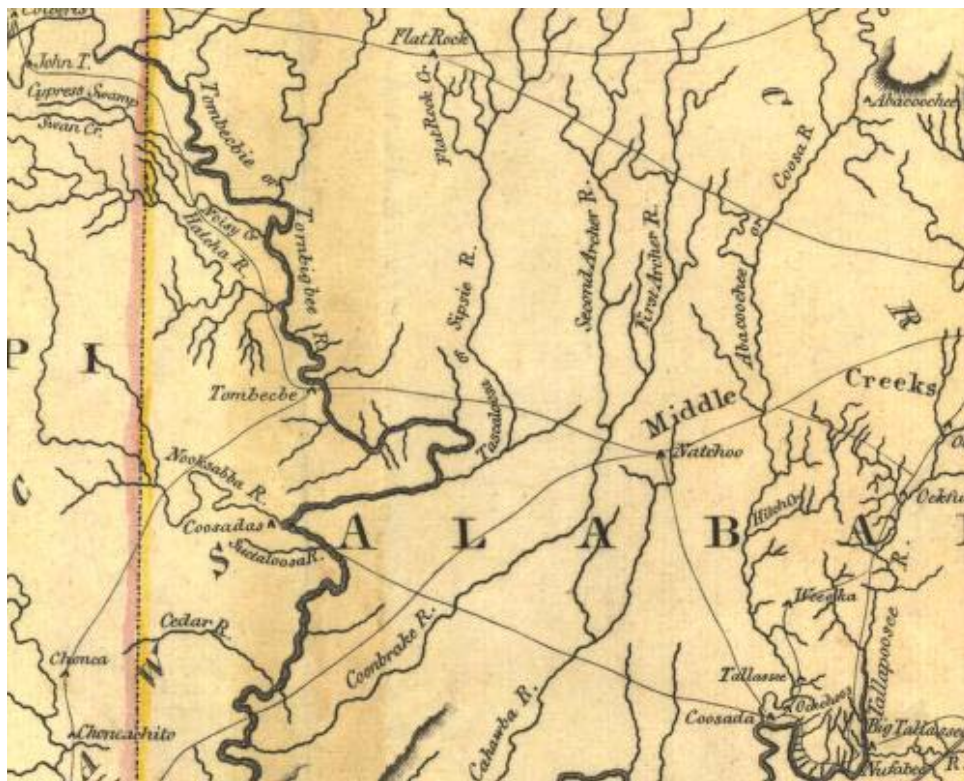
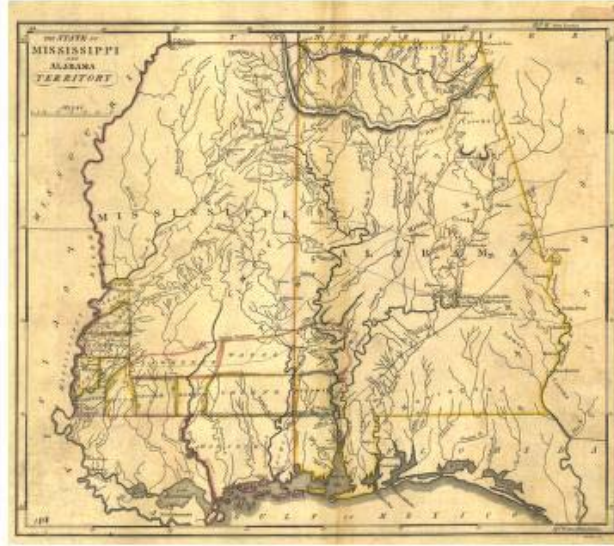
Appendix A, Image 16 :Map by Aaron Arrowsmith. Entitled: “A Map of the United States of North America.” Dated, 1817. Held in the Birmingham Public Library Cartography Collection, Birmingham, AL.

*In this southeastern portion of much larger scale map by Arrowsmith, viewers found the “Tuskaloosa.”



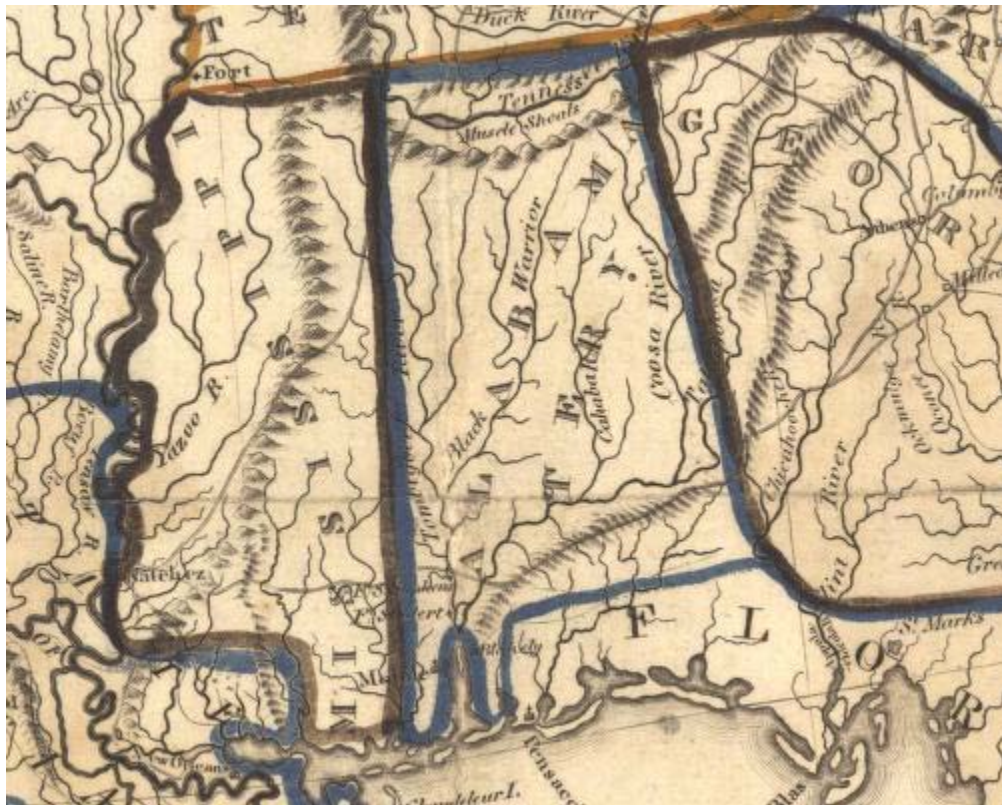
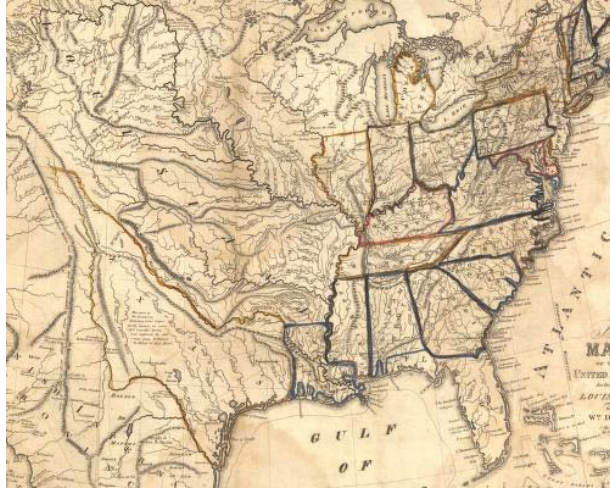
Appendix A, Image 17: Map by John Melish. Entitled: “Map of Alabama constructed from the surveys in the General Land Office and other documents.” Dated, 1818. Held in the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery.

*The first known singularized image of the state of Alabama, this 1818 map is the first to include the label: “Tuskaloosa or Black Warrior River.”



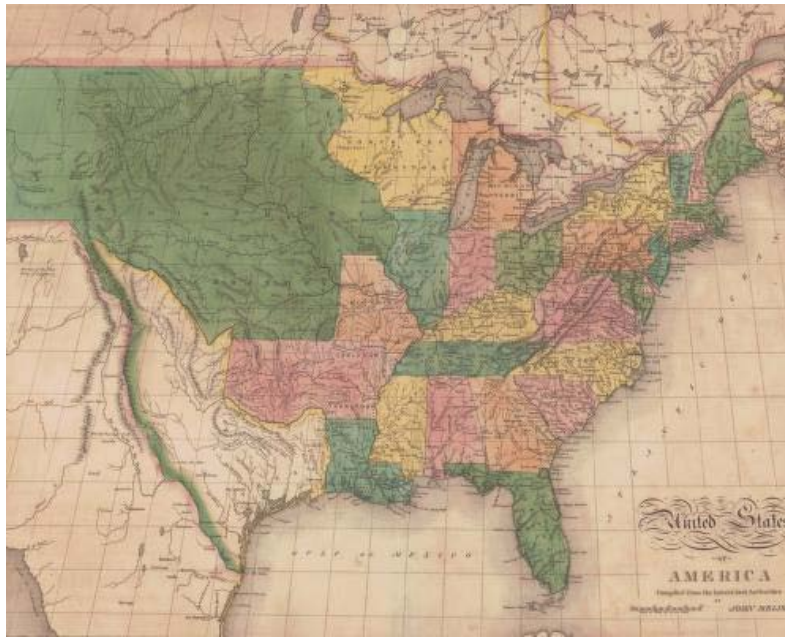
Appendix A, Image 18: Map by Francis Shallus. Entitled: “The State of Mississippi and Alabama Territory.” Dated, 1818. Held in Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery.

*This Mississippi and Alabama map of the same year as Image 17 maintained the “Tascalooza or Sipsie R.” label.



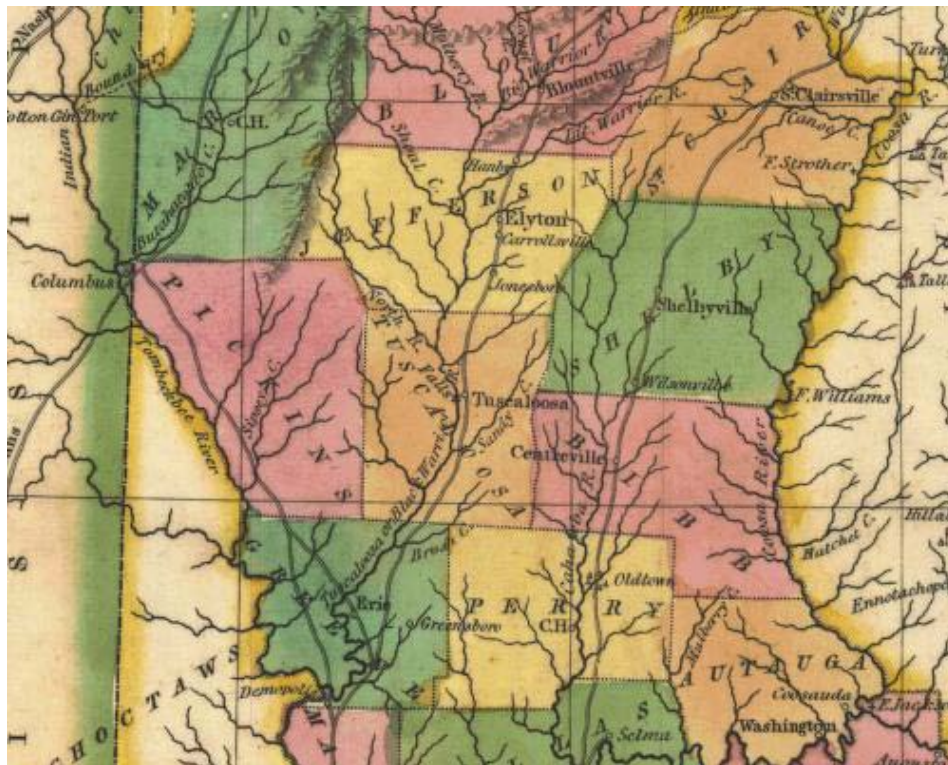
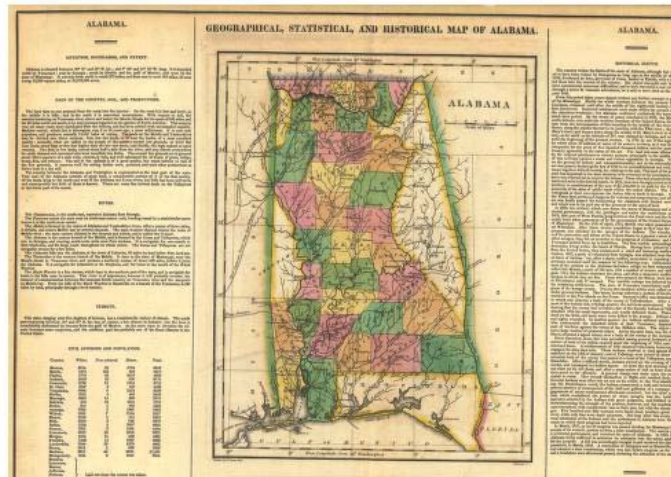
Appendix A, Image 19: Map by William Darby. Entitled: “A Map of the United States including Louisiana.” Dated, 1818. Held in W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa.

* For the first time, this map of the United States completely abandoned both “Tascaloosa/-ie” and “Sipsie.”



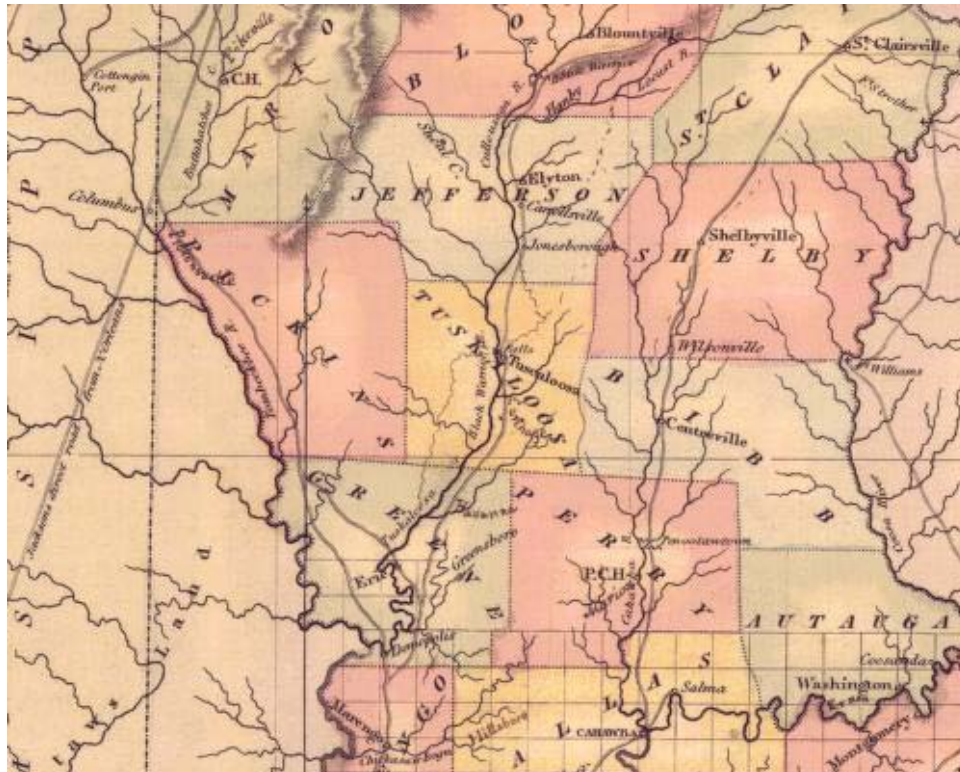
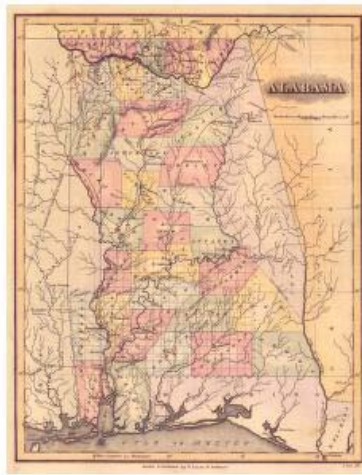
Appendix A, Image 20: Map by John Relish. Entitled: “United States of America Compiled from the Latest and Best Authorities.” Dated, 1820. Privately held by Whitney Telle of Northport, AL.

* Dropping “Tascaloosa/-ie” or “Sipsie” again appeared in this 1820 map of the United States.



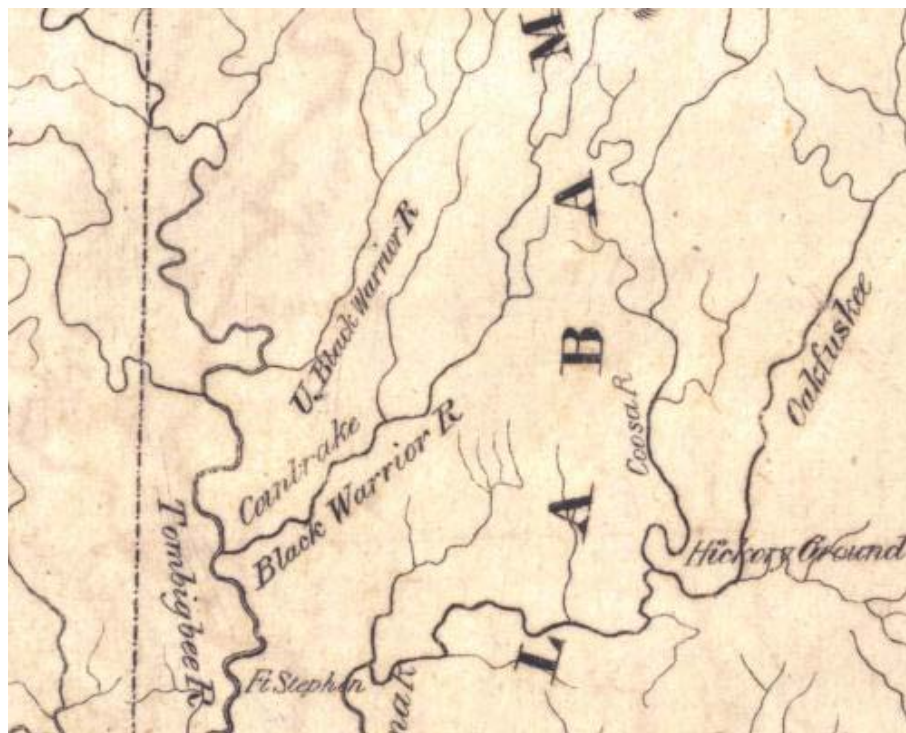
Appendix A, Image 21: Map by Fielding Lucas. Entitled: “Geographic, Statistical, and Historical Map of Alabama.” Dated, 1822. Held in W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa.

* Apparently, not every cartographer was on board with dropping “Tuscaloosa” as a possible identifier of the river as it appears beside “Black Warrior” in this 1822 map. Interestingly, this design was apparently included in an atlas form that had broad public dispersal. As we’ll see below, publishers also released both French and German versions.



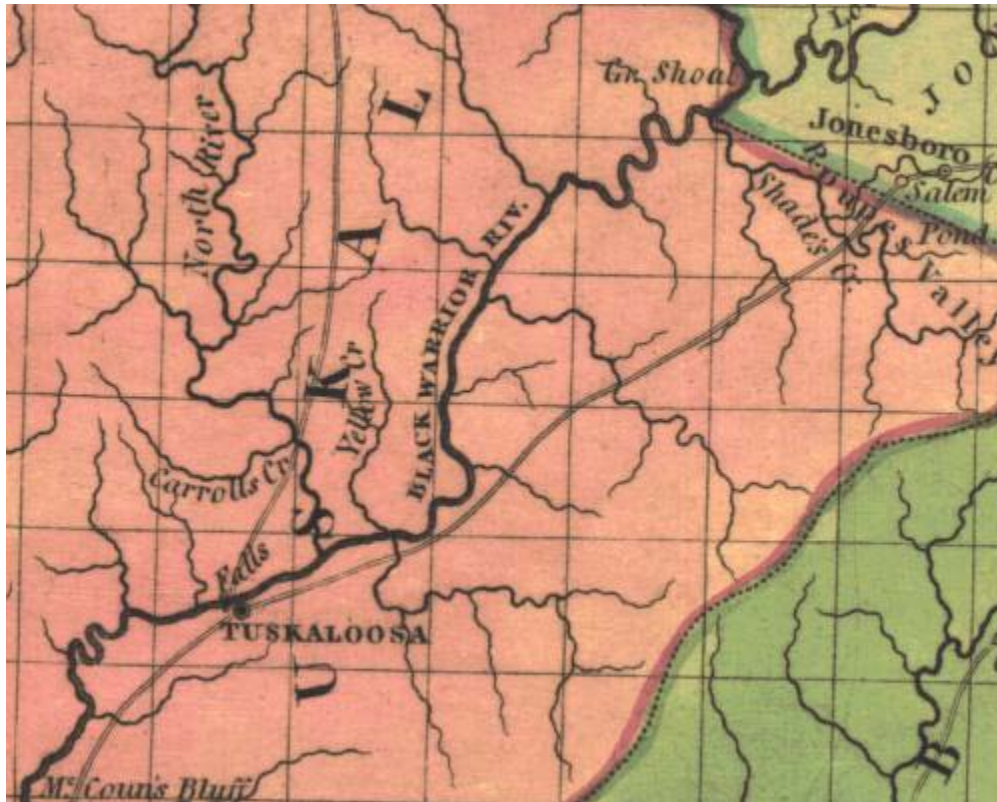
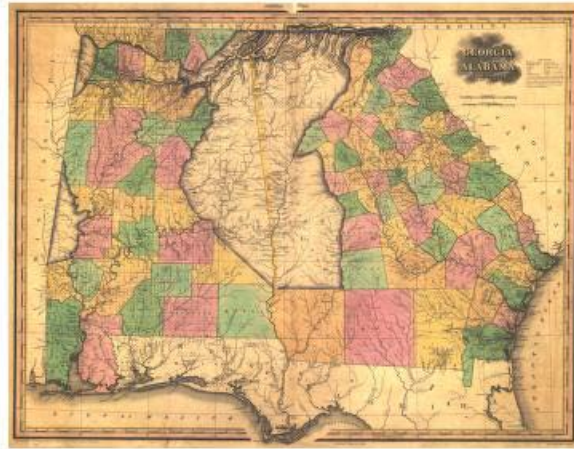
Appendix A, Image 22: Map by Fielding Lucas. Entitled: “Alabama.” Dated, 1822. Held in Birmingham Public Library Cartography Collection, Birmingham, AL.

* Also by Lucas, this 1822 map contains “Tuskaloosa or Black Warrior R.”



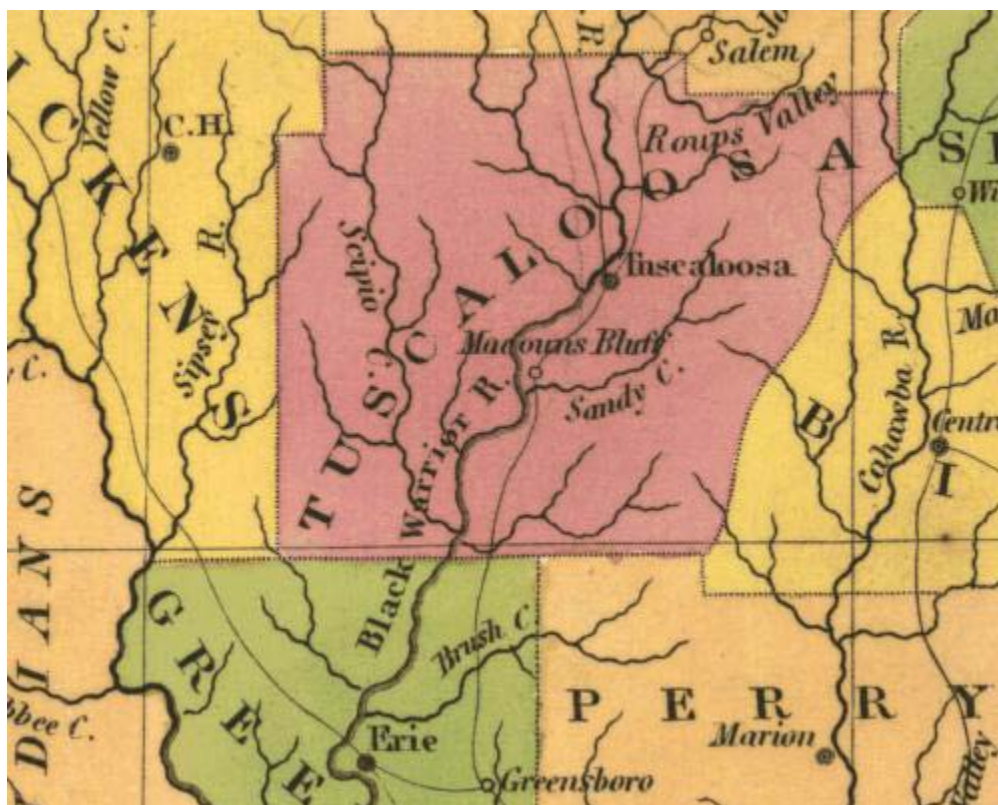
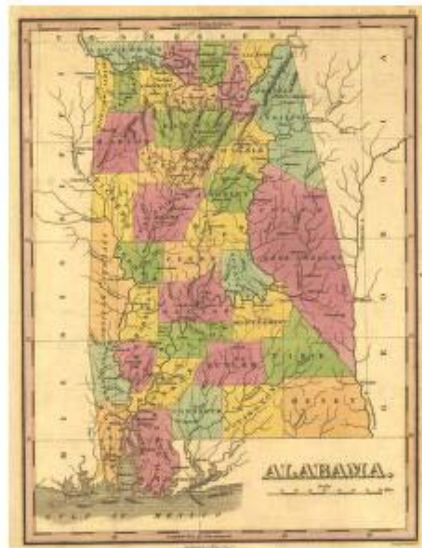
Appendix A, Image 23: Map by Luke Orury. Untitled map of Alabama and Mississippi from *A Geography for Schools* by Miller and Hutchins of Providence, R.I.. Dated, 1822. Held in Birmingham Public Library Cartography Collection, Birmingham, AL.

* Unlike Lucas, Orury did not use the dual label.

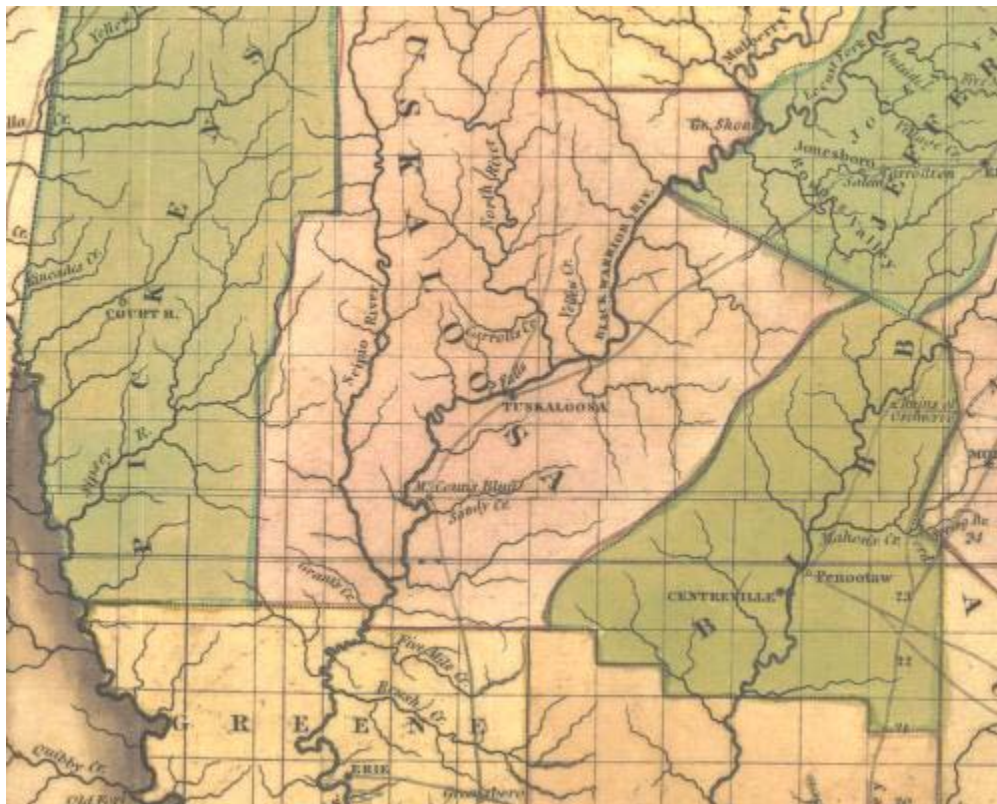
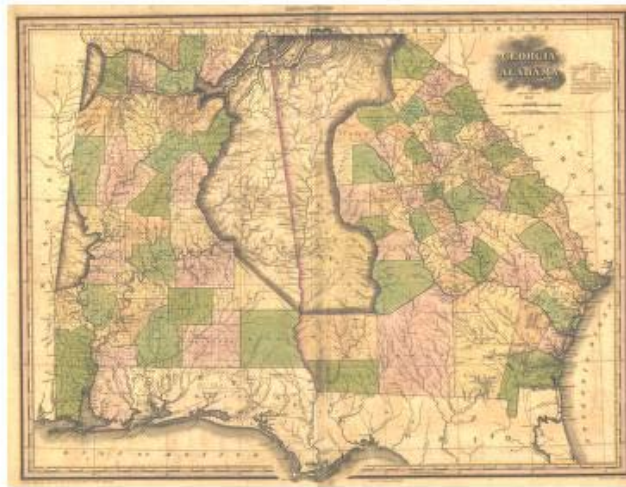


Appendix A, Image 24: Map by Henry Schenck Tanner. Entitled: “Georgia and Alabama.” Dated, 1823. Held in Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

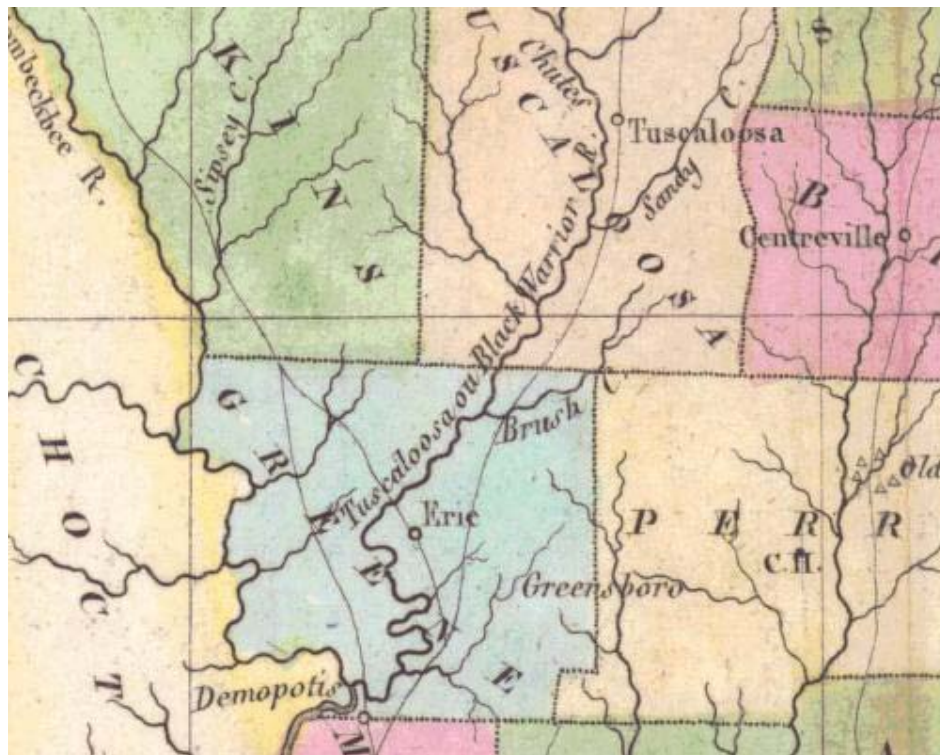
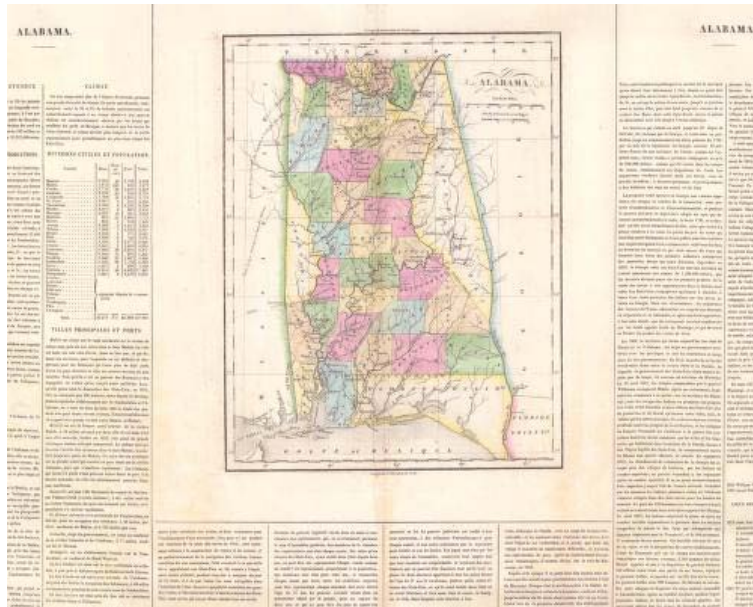
* From 1823 on, American released maps relied solely on “Black Warrior” to describe on which the town of Tuskaloosa was perched. See image sets 25-26 and 29-31.



Appendix A, Image 25: Map by Anthony Finley. Entitled: “Alabama.” Dated, 1824. Held in Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.

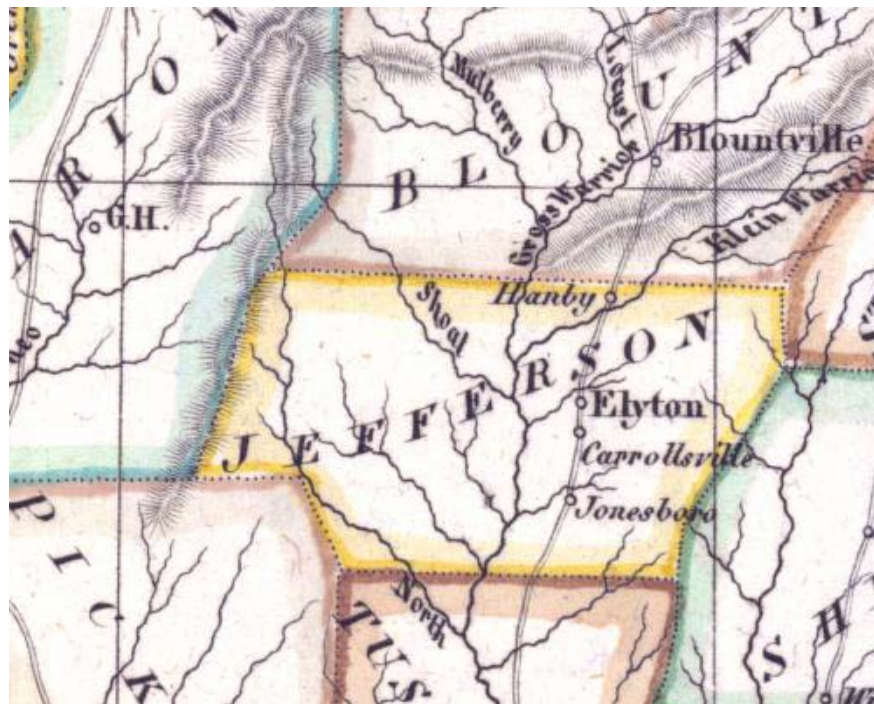
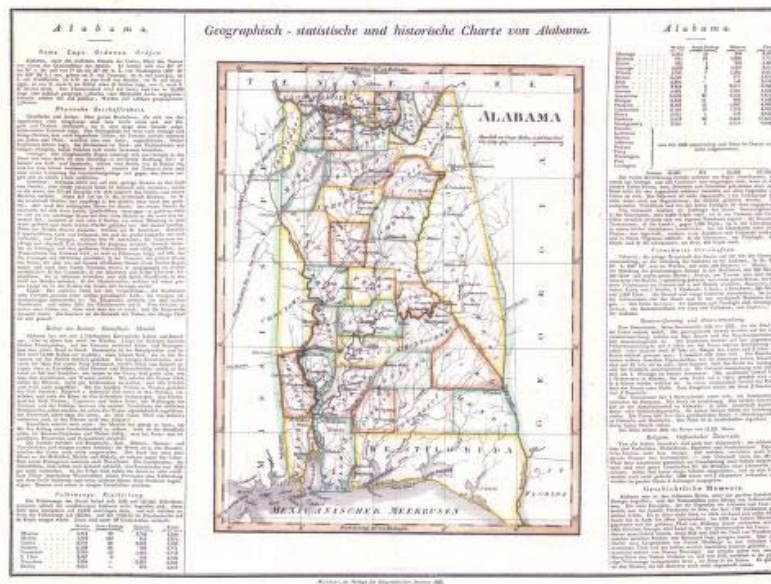


Appendix A, Image 26: Map by Henry Schenck Tanner. Entitled: “Georgia and Alabama: Improved to 1825.” Dated, 1825. Held in W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa.



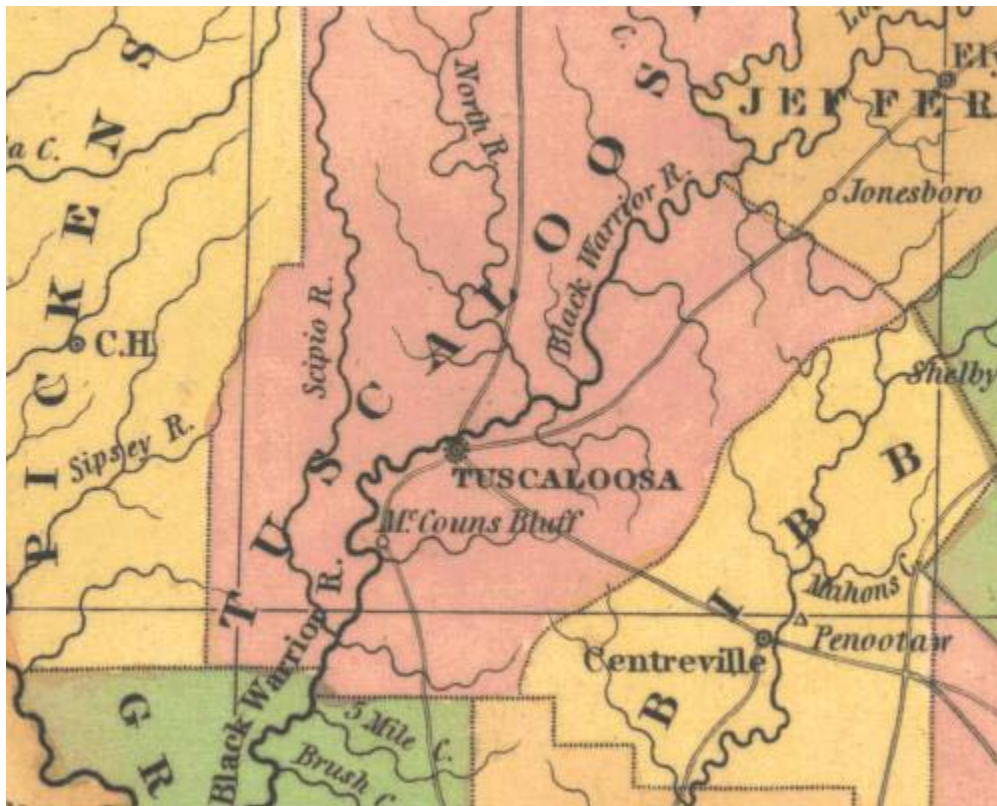
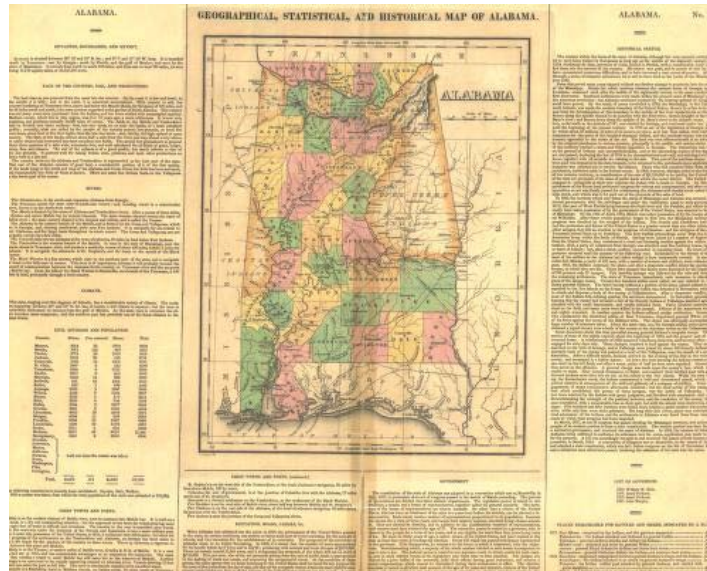
Appendix A, Image 27: Map by J. Drayton. Entitled: “Carte Géographique, Statistique, et Historique D’Alabama” in Carey & Lea’s *Atlas of 1822* (Paris). Dated, 1825. Held in Birmingham Public Library Cartography Collection, Birmingham, AL.

* Interestingly, as 1823 served as a watershed in American maps’ naming of the “Black Warrior” this French release supplied “Tuscaloosa ou Black Warrior R.” for its viewers.

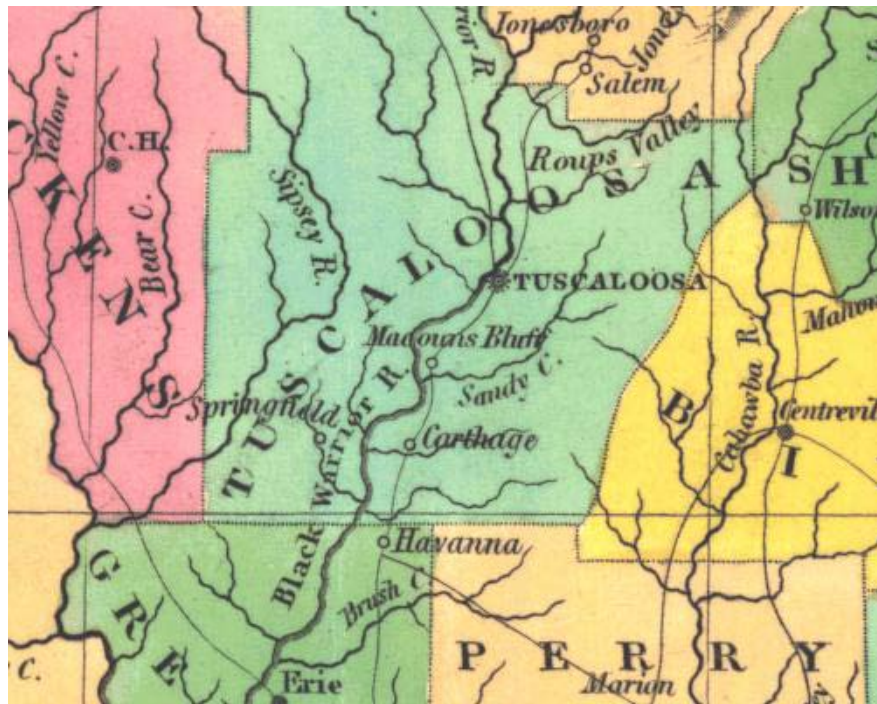
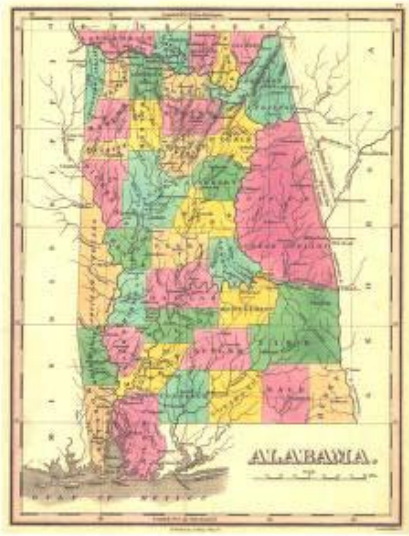


Appendix A, Image 28: Map by Carl Ferdinand Wieland. Entitled: “Geographisch-Statistische und hisorische Charte von Alabama” in Carey & Lea’s *Map of 1822* (Wiemar). Dated, 1825. Held in Birmingham Public Library Cartography Collection, Birmingham, AL.

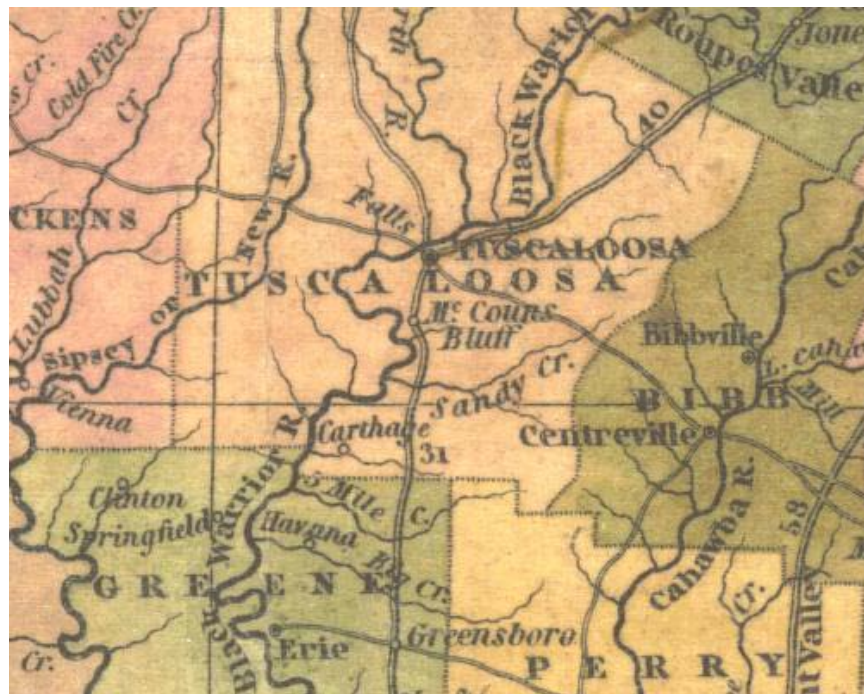
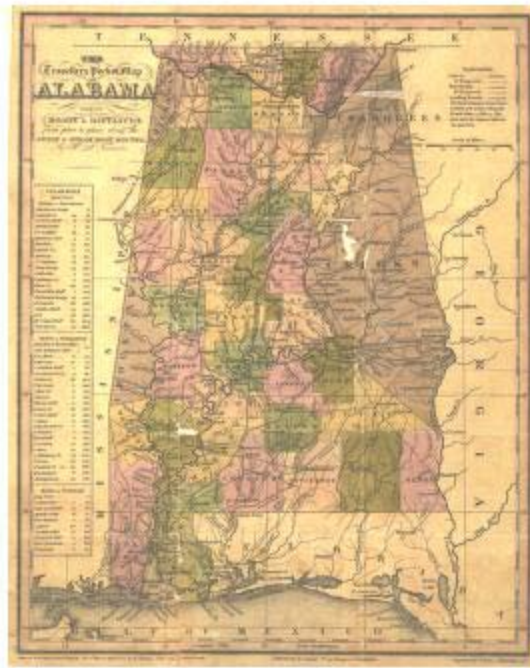
* This and the previous French release (Image 26) were both based off Fielding Lucas’s 1822 map (Image 21). Yet, unlike the French adaptation, the German publication adopted a different variation: “Gross [Large] Warrior” as opposed to the eastern, “Klein [Small] Warrior.”



Appendix A, Image 29: Map by James Drayton. Entitled: “Geographical, Statistical, and Historical Map of Alabama.” Dated, 1827. Held in W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa.



Appendix A, Image 30: Map by A. Finley. Entitled: “Alabama.” Dated, 1829. Held in the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.



Appendix A, Image 31: Map by Henry Schenck Tanner. Entitled: “The Traveler’s Pocket Map of Alabama.” Dated, 1830. Held in the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.