

Burnt Corn A Town of Mystery

As Conecuh County road 5 twists and winds it's way along the Conecuh-Monroe County line, travelers must wonder where, if anywhere, this road leads. The light gray surface and the faded yellow centerline indicates that the road has surely seen its day, but the traffic nowadays is scarce and houses are few and far between.

Among the towns scattered along the road is Burnt Corn, a town at the intersection of County Road 5 and 15 that seems typical of rural towns in Alabama. But, Burnt Corn has a colorful history that is far from typical.

It is actually an unincorporated community with approximately 200 residents, although that figure is debatable. Traffic is mostly restricted to locals because it is one of those towns that travelers do not stumble upon by accident. In order to find Burnt Corn, you have to looking for it.

There was a time, however, when nearly all roads passed through Burnt Corn because the same County Road 5 was the old "Stage Road" or Federal Road. It was an early 1800s version of nearby Interstate 65.

The road is quiet now, but it was not so long ago, a mere tick of the historical clock, when war cries of the Creek Indians and footsteps of the American Militiamen echoed through the woods around Burnt Corn.

Among the soldiers who once traveled the road was General Andrew Jackson, who marched through town in 1814 on his way to earn fame at the Battle of New Orleans.

County Road 5 runs along the exact ridge where the old Federal Road was located and is still the Main street through downtown Burnt Corn as it was in 1818. Burnt Corn was once a major stop along the Federal Road that ran from Montgomery to Stockton in Baldwin County, which was a main artery for soldiers of the Creek War, the War of 1812 and the Civil War.

The Creek Indian War of 1813-1814 actually began with the Battle of Burnt Corn on July 27, 1813, when a group of American soldiers attacked a group of Creek Indians who were returning from Pensacola with war supplies purchased from the British. The battle took place near Burnt Corn Creek when the Americans ambushed the Indians, forcing them to scatter into the woods. The angry Indians regrouped and defeated the soldiers

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THE BATTLE OF BURNT CORN

(Kindly contributed by William C. Bell)

From the letter of General James Wilkinson, we learn that more than three hundred hostile Creeks, under the Prophet Francis, were camped, on the 25th of June, at the Holy Ground. General Wilkinson writes: "The last information received of their doings was on Wednesday [the 23d of June], by Ward's wife, who has been forced from him with her children. She reported that the party, thus encamped, were about to move down the river to break up the half-breed settlements, and those of the citizens in the fork of the rivers." While this was, no doubt, the real and ultimate design of the hostile Creeks, it was first necessary to put themselves on a thorough war footing by procuring supplies of arms and ammunition from Pensacola. With this object in view, at some period in the early part of July, a party of Creeks, comprising a portion, if not all, of the hostile camp at the Holy Ground, with many pack-horses, took up the line of march for Pensacola. This party was under the command of Peter McQueen, at the head of the Tallassee warriors, with Jim Boy, as principal war chief, commanding the Atossees,* and Josiah Francis, commanding the Alibamos. Pickett gives the entire force as amounting to three hundred and fifty warriors; Colonel Carson, in a letter to General Claiborne, estimates them at three hundred; but General Woodward, in his Reminiscences, simply states that their numbers have been greatly overrated. "On their way," writes Pickett, "they beat and drove off every Indian that would not take the war-talk. "On their arrival at Burnt Corn Spring, situated at the crossing of the Federal and the Pensacola roads, they burned the house and corncrib of James Cornells, seized his wife and carried her with them to Pensacola, where she was sold to Madame Baronne, a French lady, for a blanket. A man, named Marlowe, living with Cornells, was also carried prisoner to Pensacola. Cornells, it seems, was absent from home, at the time of this outrage. We hear of him, soon afterwards, at Jackson, on the Tombigbee, "mounted on a fast-flying gray horse," bringing to the settlers the tidings of Creek hostilities.

*Pickett in his narrative has here evidently made a slip writing Autaugas for Atossees. H. S. H.

The perilous condition of the southern frontier at this period, the early part of July, is well portrayed in the following passages from Pickett: "The inhabitants of the Tombigbee and the Tensaw had constantly petitioned the Governor for an army to repel the Creeks, whose attacks they hourly expected. But General Flournoy, who had succeeded Wilkinson in command, refused to send away of the regular or volunteer troops. The British fleet was seen off the coast, from which supplies, arms, ammunition, and Indian emissaries, were sent to Pensacola and other Spanish ports in Florida. Everything foreboded the extermination of the Americans in Alabama, who were the most isolated and defenseless people imaginable." When Colonel Joseph Carson, commanding at Fort Stoddart, was informed that the above-mentioned force of Creek warriors had gone to Pensacola, he dispatched David Tate and William Pierce to the town to ascertain the intentions of the Creeks and whether Governor Manique would grant them a supply of ammunition. The information gained by these spies and reported on their respective returns, all summed up, was that the Creeks, on their arrival

in Pensacola, had called upon the Governor and presented him a letter from a British general in Canada. This letter had been given to Little Warrior when he was in Canada and at his death was saved by his nephew and afterwards given to Josiah Francis, The Creeks, whether right or wrong, supposed that this letter requested or authorized the Governor to supply them with ammunition. The Governor, in reply, assured them that it was merely a letter of recommendation, and at first refused to comply with their demands. He, however, appointed another meeting for them, and the Creeks, in the meanwhile, made every exertion to procure powder and lead by private purchase. According to Tate's information, which he received from some of the prisoners whom the Creeks had brought down with them, their language breathed out vengeance against the white people and they dropped some hints of attacking the Tensaw settlers on their return. The Creeks finally succeeded in their negotiation with the Governor, who issued an order supplying them with three hundred pounds of powder and a proportionate quantity of lead. To obtain this large supply, McQueen handed the Governor a list of the towns ready to take up arms, making four thousand eight hundred warriors. Even this large amount of ammunition was not satisfactory to the Creeks; they demanded more, but it seems that Manique yielded no further to their demands. The Creeks now openly declared that they were going to war against the Americans; that on their return to the nation they would be joined by seven hundred warriors at the Whet Stone Hill,* where they would distribute their ammunition and then return against the Tombigbee settlers. They now held their war dance, an action equivalent to a formal declaration of war.

*The hill on which the present town of Lownson is situated.

Such was the information brought by the spies from Pensacola, and their evidence clearly shows that the disaffected section of the Creek Confederacy was now committed to open war against the Americans. No other construction can be placed upon the words and actions of the agents or representatives of this disaffected section,--the hostile party in Pensacola. We may conjecture that this party left Pensacola about the twenty-fourth of July, but, as will be noticed hereafter, it seems that it was only a part of the force, mainly under the command of Jim Boy that took up the line of march, while the greater party, from some cause, tarried a while longer in Pensacola.

A slight incident here, perhaps, is worthy of being placed on record to the credit of Jim Boy. While in Pensacola the Creeks met with Zachariah McGirth a man well known in the Creek nation. Some of the Creeks wished to kill him. But Jim Boy interposed and said that the man or men that harmed McGirth should be put to death

In the meanwhile, the inhabitants of the Tombigbee and the Tensaw were in a state of great alarm. Many had abandoned their farms and taken refuge in the forts situated along the Tombigbee and the Alabama. Judge Toulmin, writing from Fort Stoddart, the twenty-third of July, says, "The people have been fleeing all night." This brief sentence clearly reveals the alarm and anxiety pervading the Alabama frontier at this period.

Upon the report of the spies from Pensacola relative to the action of Governor Manique and the Creeks, Colonel James Caller, of Washington County, the senior militia officer on the frontier, forthwith ordered out the militia. A force was soon embodied and enrolled under his command. Colonel Caller resolved to intercept the Creeks on their return and capture their

ammunition. His command, at first, consisted of three small companies, two from St. Stephens, commanded respectively by Captains Baily Heard and Benjamin Smoot, and one company from Washington County, commanded by Captain David Cartwright. With this force Colonel Caller crossed the Tombigbee at St. Stephens, Sunday, July 25th; thence passing through the town of Jackson, he marched to Fort Glass, where he made a short halt. At this place he was reinforced by accompany under Captain Sam Dale, with Lieutenant Walter G. Creagh as second in command. Another force had also joined him in the expedition commanded by William McGrew, Robert Callier, and William Bradberry. The whole party was well mounted and carried their own rifles and shotguns, of every size and description. Captain Dale carried a double barrel shot gun--an unusual weapon in that day. An eyewitness has described Colonel Caller at Fort Glass as wearing a calico hunting shirt, a high bell-crowned hat and top boots and riding a large fine bay horse. Leaving Fort Glass, the party bivouacked the ensuing night at Sizemore's ferry, on the west bank of the Alabama River. The next morning they crossed the river, the horses swimming by the side of the canoes. This occupied several hours. They now marched in a southeastern direction to the cow pens of David Tate, where a halt was made. Here Colonel Caller received another reinforcement, a company from Tensaw and Little River, commanded by the brave half-breed, Captain Dixon Bailey. The whole force, composed of white men, half-breeds and friendly Indians, now numbered one hundred and eighty men, rank and file, in six small companies. From the cow-pens they marched to the intersection of the Wolf-trail and the Pensacola road, at or near the site of the present village of Belleville, in Conecuh County, where they camped for the night. The next morning, the twenty seventh of July the command was reorganized. William McGrew was chosen Lieutenant Colonel, and Zachariah Phillips, McFarlan, Wood, and Jourdan were elected to the rank of Major. It is stated that this unusual number of field officers was made to satisfy military aspirations. The command now took up the line of march down the Pensacola road, which here ran, and still runs, parallel with Burnt Corn Creek. About eleven o'clock the spies returned at a rapid rate and reported that they had found the enemy encamped near Burnt Corn Creek, a few miles in their advance, and that they were busily engaged in cooking and eating. A consultation of the officers immediately took place, and it was decided to take the Creeks by surprise. The troops were thrown into three divisions, Captain Smoot in front of the right, Captain Bailey in front of the center, and Captain Dale in front of the left.

As the descriptions of the Burnt Corn battleground given by Meek and Pickett are somewhat vague and inaccurate, a more correct account of the topography, gained from personal observation, is here given to the reader. Burnt Corn Creek, near which the battle was fought, runs southward for several hundred yards, then making an abrupt bend, runs southeastward for half a mile or more. Right at the elbow of the bend is the crossing of the old Pensacola road. The low pine barren enclosed in this bend--not a peninsula as called by Pickett--is enveloped by a semicircular range of hills, which extends from the creek bank on the south some half a mile below the crossing, and terminates on the west at the bank, some three hundred yards above the crossing. This western terminus is now locally known as the Bluff Landing. The Pensacola road from the crossing runs northward some two hundred yards, then turning runs eastward half a mile, making a continuous and gradual ascent up the slope of the hills, and then again turns northward. The spring, now known as Cooper's Spring, is situated about half a mile nearly east of the crossing, and about one hundred and fifty yards

south of the road. It gushes forth at the base of a steep hill and is the fountainhead of a small reed-brake branch, which empties into the creek about two hundred yards below the crossing. The hill, at the base of which the spring is situated, is about the center of the semicircular range of hills, which envelops the pine barren. About sixty yards northwest of the spring, between the spring and the road, is a comparatively level spot of land, about an acre in extent. This spot, we conjecture, was the Creek camp, or at least where the main body was encamped, as it is the only place immediately near the spring suitable for a camp. The hill here rises steep and abruptly to the northeast, and a hostile force could well approach and charge down this hill within close gunshot of the camp before being seen. This locality famed as the battleground of Burnt Corn is in Escambia County, one-half a mile from the line of Conecuh County, on the north.

As reported by the scouts, the Creek camp was near the spring, and their packhorses were grazing around them. No rumor of the foe's advance had reached their ears; all were careless, off their guard and enjoying themselves, for good cheer was in the Muscogee camp. Their martial spirits, as we may well imagine, were not now stirred by thoughts of war and bloodshed, but were concentrated on the more peaceful delights of cooking and feasting, the pleasures of the pot, the kettle, and the bowl.

The Burnt Corn battlefield was in the unorganized part of Mississippi Territory (in the Indian country proper) in the year 1818. Monroe County organized in 1815, included Burnt Corn. In 1818 the same locality was in Conecuh County established that year. Now it seems, it is in Escambia county, established in 1868 although Brewer, writing in 1872 still places the battle ground of Burnt Corn in Conecuh. (The following cut will give some idea of the locality).

Colonel Callers troops, as we may conjecture, must have turned to the left, off the road, perhaps near the Red Hollow, about a mile distant from the spring, and thence approached the Creek camp from the northeast and east, as from the nature of the country this was the only route they could have taken so as to surprise the Red Stick camp.* The troops moved cautiously and silently onward until they reached the rear of the hill that overlooked the Creek camp. Here, Pickett says, they dismounted; but Meek says the main body dismounted; yet neither Pickett nor Meek makes any statement as to the disposition of their horses--whether they were tied or were consigned to the care of a guard, or whether each trooper, as he dismounted, left his horse to shift for himself. From the fact that many of the horses fell into the hands of the enemy, one is led to the conjecture that no regular system was employed, but that every man did that which was right in his own eyes. After dismounting, the troops moved silently to the crest of the hill, whence they made a rapid charge down its slope and opened fire upon the Creek camp, as the red warriors stood, sat, or reclined in scattered groups over the ground. The Creeks, though startled by this sudden and unexpected onset, quickly sprang to arms, returned the fire, and for several minutes bravely withstood the charge of the whites, then gave way and retreated in wild confusion to the creek. Early in the fight a Creek woman and a Negro man were slain. It is stated that the latter, who was busily engaged in cooking, had ample time to make his escape, but being a slave and non-combatant he doubtless apprehended no danger from the whites. A portion of the troops pursued the Indians to the creek--Meek says they even drove them across the creek into a reed-brake beyond--but we think this latter statement exceedingly doubtful. While these were performing this soldierly duty, the more numerous party devoted their energies to capturing

and leading off the packhorses. This led to a disastrous reverse. The Creeks in the cane and reed-brakes soon saw the demoralization of the greater part of the whites and the fewness of the assailants confronting them. They rallied, and, with guns, tomahawks and war clubs, rushed forth from the swamp, and with the fiercest cries of vengeance charged upon their foes and drove them headlong before them. Colonel Caller acted bravely, but unable to restore order, he commanded the troops to fall back to the hill so as to secure a stronger position and there to renew the battle. The plundering party, misconstruing this order, and seeing the fighting portion of the troops falling back before the enemy, were now seized with a panic, and fled in wild confusion, still, however, notwithstanding their terror, driving their horses before them, some even mounting their prizes so as to more quickly escape from the fatal field. In vain did Colonel Caller, Captain Bailey and other officers endeavor to rally them and persuade them to make a stand against the foe. Terror and avarice proved more potent than pride and patriotism, and the panic-stricken throng surged to the rear. Only about eighty fighting men now remained, and these had taken a stand in the open woods at the foot of the hill. Commanded by Captains Dale, Bailey, and Smoot, they fought with laudable courage for an hour or more under the fire poured upon them by McQueen's warriors from the cover of the thick and sheltering reeds. The battle may now be briefly described as "a series of charges and retreats, irregular skirmishes and frequent close and violent encounters of individuals and scattered squads." It was noticed that the Creek marksmanship was inferior to that of the Americans. It was in the fight at the foot of the hill that Captain Dale was wounded by a rifle ball, which struck him in the left side, glanced around and lodged near his backbone. The captain continued to fight as long as his strength permitted, and then threw aside his double barrel into the top of a fallen tree. This gun, we may here state, Dale recovered after the war from an Indian, at Fort Barrancas. About the same time that Dale was wounded, Elijah Glass, a twin brother of David Glass, was slain. He was standing behind another soldier, who was in a stooping position, when a rifle ball struck him fatally in the upper part of the breast.

The hostile Creeks were often called Red Sticks because their war-clubs were invariably painted red. "Red Stick" was considered an honorable appellation, and as such it will occasionally be used in this work. "Red Stick War" is the name by which the War of 1813 is still known among the Creeks of the Indian Territory. H. S. H.

The battle now at last began to bear hard upon the Americans. Two-thirds of the command was in full retreat, and no alternative lay before the fighting portion but to abandon the field, which they did in the greatest disorder. Many of them had lost their horses, some of which had been appropriated by the fugitives, and others, in some manner, had fallen into the hands of the enemy, among these, the horses belonging to Colonel Caller and Major Wood. The troops now fled in all directions. Some succeeded in reaching and mounting their own horses; others mounted the first horses they came to; in some cases, in their eagerness to escape, two mounting the same horse; while others actually ran off afoot. It was a disgraceful rout.

"After all these had left the field," writes Pickett, "three young men were found, still fighting by themselves on one side of the peninsula, [bend,] and keeping at bay some savages who were concealed in the cane. They were Lieutenant Patrick May, a private named Ambrose Miles, and Lieutenant Girard W. Creagh. A warrior presented his tall form. May and the

savage discharged their guns at each other. The Indian fell dead in the cane; his fire, however, had shattered the Lieutenant's piece near the lock. Resolving, also to retreat, these intrepid men made a rapid rush for their horses, when Creagh, brought to the ground by the effects of a wound which he received in the hip, cried out "Save me, Lieutenant, or I am gone". May instantly raised him up, bore him off on his back, and placed him in the saddle, while Miles held the bridle reins. A rapid retreat saved their lives. Reaching the top of the hill, they saw Lieutenant Bradberry, bleeding with his wounds, and endeavoring to rally some of his men." This was the last effort made to stem the tide of disaster.

Two young men were slain in the battle, _____ Ballard and Elijah Glass, both it is believed, being members of Dale's company. Ballard had fought with great bravery. Just before the final retreat, he was wounded in the hip. He was able to walk, but not fast enough to reach his horse, which in the meantime, had been appropriated by one of the fugitives. A few of the soldiers returned and successively made efforts to mount Ballard behind them on their horses, but the Indians pressed them so closely that this could not be done. Ballard told them to leave him to his fate and not to risk their own lives in attempting to save him. At last the Indians reached him, and for some moments, he held them at bay, fighting desperately with the butt of his musket, but he was soon overpowered and slain. Several Indians now sprang forward, scalped him and began to beat him with their war clubs. Two of the retreating soldiers, David Glass and Lenoir, saw this. Glass was afoot, Lenoir mounted. "Is your gun loaded," asked Glass of Lenoir. "Yes," was the reply. "Then shoot those Indians that are beating that man yonder." Lenoir hesitating, Glass quickly spoke, "Then lend me your gun." Exchanging guns, Glass then advanced a few paces and fired at two or three of the Indians whose heads happened to be in a line, and at the discharge one of them fell, as Glass supposed, slain or wounded. This was the last shot fired in the battle of Burnt Corn, which had lasted from about midday until about three o'clock in the afternoon.

The Creeks pursued the whites nearly a mile in the open woods and nothing but their inability to overtake them saved the fugitives from a general slaughter. Pickett writes: "The retreat continued all night in the most irregular manner, and the trail was lined from one end to the other with small squads, and sometimes one man by himself. The wounded traveled slowly, and often stopped to rest." Such was the result of the battle of Burnt Corn, the first engagement in the long and bloody Creek War. Most of the Creek pack-horses, about two hundred pounds of powder and some lead was all the success the Americans could claim from this engagement. Their loss was two men killed, Ballard and Glass. Fifteen were wounded, Captain Sam. Dale, Lieutenant G. W. Creagh, Lieutenant William Bradberry, shot in the calf of the leg; Armstrong, wounded in the thigh; Jack Henry, wounded in the knee; Robert Lewis, Alexander Hollinger, William Baldwin, and seven others whose names have not been preserved.

The Creek loss is not positively known. Colonel Carson, in a letter to General Claiborne, written a few days after the battle, states that from the best information it was ten or twelve killed and eight or nine wounded.

As to the numbers engaged at Burnt Corn, we know that the American force numbered one hundred and eighty. General Woodward, in his Reminiscences, states, on the authority of Jim

Boy, that the Creek force was two-thirds less. He writes. "Jim Boy said that the war had not fairly broke out, and that they never thought of being attacked; that he did not start [from Pensacola] with a hundred men, and all of those he did start with were not in the fight. I have heard Jim tell it often that if the whites had not stopped to gather up the packhorses, and had pursued the Indians a little further, they, the Indians, would have quit and gone off. But the Indians discovered the very great confusion the whites were in searching for plunder, and they fired a few guns from the creek swamp, and a general stampede was the result. McGirth always corroborated Jim Boy's statement as to the number of Indians in the Burnt Corn battle."

The above, perhaps, may be regarded, in some measure, as the Creek version of Burnt Corn.

If possession of the battlefield is considered a claim to victory, then Burnt Corn may well be regarded a Creek victory.

After the battle, a part of the Red Sticks retraced their steps to Pensacola for more military supplies, and a part returned to the nation. Their antagonists, Colonel Caller's troopers, were never reorganized after the battle. They returned home, in scattered bands, by various routes, and each man mustered himself out of service. About seventy of them on the retreat collected together at Sizemore's Ferry, where, for a while, they had much difficulty in making their horses swim the river. David Glass finally plunged into the stream and managed to turn the horses' heads towards the other shore. After the horses had all landed on the further bank, the men crossed over in canoes.

Colonel Caller and Major Wood, as we have related, both lost their horses at Burnt Corn. As the fugitives shifted, every man for himself, these two officers were left in the rear. They soon became bewildered and lost their way in the forest, and as they did not return with the other soldiers, their friends became very apprehensive as to their safety. "When General Claiborne arrived in the country, he wrote to Bailey, Tate, and Moniac, urging them to hunt for these unfortunate men. They were afterwards found, starved almost to death, and bereft of their senses." When found, Colonel Caller had on nothing but his shirt and drawers. After the war, the Colonel, with some difficulty, recovered his fine horse from the Creeks. But Major Wood was not so fortunate.

Colonel J. F. H. Claiborne, in his "Life of Sam Dale," writes: "Colonel Caller was long a conspicuous man in the politics of Mississippi Territory, often representing Washington County in the legislature. No one who knew Caller and Wood intimately doubted their courage; but the disaster of Burnt Corn brought down on them much scurrility. Major Wood, who was as sensitive as brave, had not the fortitude to despise the scorn of the world, and sought forgetfulness, as too many men often do, in habitual intemperance."

The battle of Burnt Corn, on the whole, was damaging to the prestige of American prowess. For many years its participants had to endure the ridicule of their neighbors and friends; for it was not considered creditable to any one to claim that he had been a soldier in the Burnt Corn battle.

It should here be stated that at the time of its occurrence many of the citizens of Washington County censured Colonel Caller severely for this expedition and believed that he acted too hastily in the matter. They believed that, while putting themselves on a war footing, it would have been better to have made use of conciliatory measures towards the Creeks; that they thereby might have overruled them and perhaps averted hostilities. But this attack by Colonel Caller maddened them and converted numbers of hesitating and neutral warriors into deadly foes, and the massacre at Fort Mims was the result.

NOTES.

In writing the history of the Burnt Corn expedition, the writer has drawn his materials from the following sources: Pickett's History of Alabama, Meek's Romantic Passages of Southwestern History, General Thomas Woodward's Reminiscences of the Creek or Muskogee Indians, letters of Judge Toulmin and Colonel Carson, addressed to General Claiborne, published in the Alabama Historical Reporter of June, 1880, and a letter from Colonel Carson to General Claiborne, published in Claiborne's "Life of Sam Dale."

In addition to the above sources must be added conversations with the late Rev. Josiah Allen, of Jasper County, Mississippi, who, perhaps, was the last survivor of Capt. Sam Dale's company. Mr. Allen was not in the Burnt Corn expedition, but was intimately associated with many of the participants in the battle, from whom he derived a number of incidents and other minor facts, which have been incorporated in this narrative

The description of the battleground, as has been stated, is the result of personal observation.
H. S. H.

HOW BURNT CORN GOT ITS NAME

The naming of Burnt Corn is an interesting tale. The truth is, no one really knows how Burnt Corn got its name, but there are different accounts on how it is believed to have gotten its name.

Belief #1

Some believe when white settlers moved into to the area of Burnt Corn Creek now known as Burnt Corn, they burned the Creek Indians (then known as red sticks) corn fields to clear land to homestead.

Belief #2

Others believe that the Creek Indians burned the white settlers corncrubs in an effort to drive them away from their land.

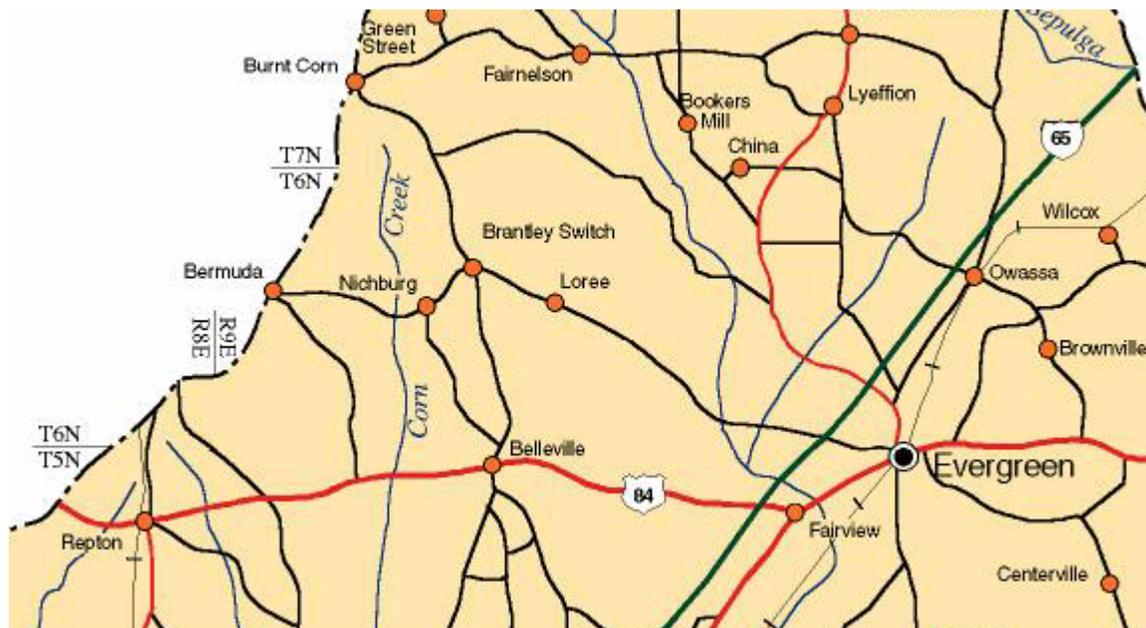
Belief #3

Reported by Samuel A. Rumore, Jr and appeared in the January 1997 issue of the *Alabama Lawyer* that the main path from Pensacola to the Upper Creek Nation passed by a spring (Burnt Corn Creek). A group of Indians traveling on the path were forced to leave an ailing companion there. They provided him with a supply of corn. When he recovered, he had no way to carry the leftover corn so it stayed on the ground and eventually burned in his campfire. Other travelers came along the trail and noted that they camped at a spring where the "corn had burnt." The name Burnt Corn has remained there ever since.

Belief #4

A party of Indians on their way to Pensacola, stopped at James Cornells' trading house, burned his corncrubs, took his new wife, and brought her to Pensacola where she was traded for an Indian blanket, The creek where Cornells settled took the name "Burnt Corn" because of the destruction of Cornells' barn and his supply of corn.

What we do know about the [History of Burnt Corn](#) is that for over a hundred years Whites and Indians, and Blacks and Indians lived in peace and harmony and intermarried in Burnt Corn until July 1813 when the [Battle of Burnt Corn](#) occurred that led to the [Creek War of 1813 and 1814](#).



BURNT CORN Travelers & Traders

Burnt Corn, Alabama settlement started sometimes after the Revolutionary War. Burnt Corn is located at two old trails known then as "Three Notch Trail" and "Old Wolf Path." On April 7, 1798, the United States had formed the Mississippi Territory, which included what are now the states of Alabama and Mississippi. The Creek Indians Nation also covered the same territory. The Creek Indian Nation controlled access in and out of the nation, which required passes to travel into the Creek nation land. There were some traders allowed in and some even intermarried in the Creek Tribe and was allowed to stay and build homes. The traders made trading posts at their homestead for the Indians and travelers that were passing on their way westward. They were Burnt Corn, Conecuh and Monroe counties first residents. The area was known as Burnt Corn Springs.

When the United States purchased the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803, they needed a land route between New Orleans and Washington. In 1805, the U.S. Government got the Creek Nation to give permission for a "horse path" through the Creek Nation. This "horse path" followed two well-known Indian trails, the "Chiaha Alibamo Trail" (near present day, Montgomery, Alabama) and the famous "Old Wolf Trail" that led to Pensacola. Burnt Corn is situated on the "Old Wolf Trail." and was known for many natural springs making the area a good stopping place for travelers and settlers.

The Old Horse Path developed into the "Federal Road". The Federal Road is attributed to the growth and development of Monroe and Conecuh counties. The Federal Road passed directly through the heart of Burnt Corn; it is Main Street for Burnt Corn. In 1805, the United States Congress established a post road from Georgia to New Orleans. In 1818, the Post Roads Act was in full effect establishing Post Roads from Fort Mitchell, by Fort Bainbridge, Fort Jackson, Burnt Corn Springs, Fort Claiborne, and the Town of Jackson to St Stephens. The post riders followed the Chiaha Alibamo and Old Wolf Path trails and passed through Burnt Corn Creek. As the road improved and more white settlers were looking for land and encroached in Creek Territories helped contributed to the Creek Indian Wars. Burnt Corn play an important part in the Creek Wars. It is said that the "Battle of Burnt Corn" was the beginning of the Creek Wars. This battle was considered a victory for the Creek Indians, which was also known as "Red Sticks."

It is also believed that other famous people in history passed through Burnt Corn. Andrew Jackson moved his troops through Burnt Corn in 1814 to aid against the British. Troops were moved through Burnt Corn during the Mexican War enroute to New Orleans to board ships to Mexico.

Confederate Troops followed this road through Burnt Corn on the way to the battlefields of Virginia. It is reported the Francis Scott Key traveled the Federal Road through Burnt Corn in a government wagon while on his mission to Alabama. William Bertram, the naturalist, traveled the road collecting specimens. Lorenza Dow, the Methodist circuit rider, supposedly visited Burn Corn on his way to St Stephan in 1804. Aaron Burr passed

through Burnt Corn in 1807, while under arrest for treason. James Stuart records his journey in a journal which states that his coach turned over eight times coming from Georgia.

Long before the defeat of the Creek Nation, Burnt Corn had become the site of earliest settlement in Monroe County. Native American and White settlers were living in harmony and intermarrying along the crossroads of the Great Pensacola Trading Path (Old Wolf Path) and the Federal Road which is main street Burnt Corn as it sits even today.

Coker's Tavern, owned and operated by Nathan Coker shows up on early Alabama maps of the vicinity of Burnt Corn. Also, Garrett Longmire shows up as well as having a tavern in north Burnt Corn. The Creek Nation and the U.S. Government agreement of 1805 to establish a "horse path" also give the U. S. Government the right to establish "...houses of entertainment at suitable places for the accommodation of travelers..." These tavern owners acquired patents from the government to lands along the Federal Roads in 1819 for such purposes.

After the Creek Wars in 1814, and the Treaty of Fort Jackson, Native Americans begin losing their land. More settlers moved in the area of Burnt Corn and in 1815, Governor Holmes of the Mississippi Territory created Monroe County (which embraced two thirds of the State of Alabama). In a desperate attempt to save their land the Indians formed raiding parties and attacked lone settlers. As a result, Colonel Richard Warren constructed a fort he called "Fort Warren" (sometimes referred to as Fort Burnt Corn) approximately 6 miles north of Burnt Corn near Pine Orchard.

After 1816, Burnt Corn saw a rapid growth and development; thousand of acres of land were sold to settlers from South Carolina, Virginia, and Georgia. James Grace, reputedly the first "white settler" came to Burnt Corn in 1816. Captain Hayes purchased a thousand acres of land around Burnt Corn. Dr. John Watkins moved into Burnt Corn during the same time period. Dr. Watkins was the only doctor in the area from Montgomery to New Orleans. Other families such as Jeremiah Austill and his wife Martha moved into the area. John Green started the first school in Burnt Corn called the "Students Retreat" in 1820. Postal Service began in 1817. The first public road was built and cut from what now known as Beatrice through Burnt Corn to Belleville. The Bethany Baptist Church was organized officially in 1821 and constructed their first building. Major Walker opened a store in Burnt Corn in 1822.

Along with these new people into the territory, came African American Slaves. They tilled the land and planted and harvested the crops, took care of children, cooked, sewed, built homes and barns. Today descendents still live in Burnt Corn, bearing the names of Coker, Grace, Rankins, Lett, Watson, and Salter.

North of the stores in Burnt Corn was Mr. Robinson's blacksmith shop with a gristmill across the street.

By the turn of the century, Burnt Corn was in a "boom period". The Kyser-Betts Gin Mill was operating none stop during cotton season. The Mosely Hariston Store was sitting at the site of the present day Lowery Store. Many homes were being built on main street Burnt Corn. James and Cora Betts Kyser built their Victorian home next to the Burnt Corn Methodist Church they also built. The Masonic Lodge #849 had been organized in 1890 and met upstairs in the store known today as the JFB Lowery Store. The Burnt Corn Methodist Church also met there until the construction was finished in 1908. A.O. Brantley also opened a store on Main Street in Burnt Corn during that era.

The Legacy of Burnt Corn

The end of the Revolutionary War brought the beginnings of the settlement at Burnt Corn. Native Americans and early Scottish, Irish and English had traversed the ole trails that met at Burnt corn, know as Three Notch Trail and the Old Wolf Trail.

The settlement of the territorial claims of Great Britain and the United State of America were reached on November 30, 1782. The southern boundary of the U.S. was to be the 31st parallel north. Great Britain would retain possession of Florida. Spain had won possession of Florida by military conquest on May 9, 1781, and Great Britain would cede both east and west Florida to Spain. Spain claimed the northern boundary to be 32 degrees 28 minutes north latitude.

Because of the conflicts of claims between the United States and Spain over this territory, few white people had ventured into it to make their homes. The only settlements of any importance were located along the Tombigbee River and Alabama River on land ceded to the English by the Chickasaw Indians in 1765.

The Creek Indian Nation was another matter. The Nation had not ceded any territories to the United States government in this region. On June 4, 1800, Governor Winthrop Sargent, of the Mississippi Territory, consolidated all the territorial lands into one country, which he called Washington.

The land in question on the Alabama River actually belonged to the Creek Indian Nation. The Creek Indians controlled access in and out of the nation, requiring passes to travel through their land. Those allowed into the Nation to settle were traders, most of whom had married into the Creek Tribe. These men were allowed to stay and build homes; many of these homes became trading posts to the Indians and to travelers on their way westward. It was these individuals who first saw the pristine territories of what we now call Monroe and Conecuh counties. These were the counties' first settlers in the area known as Burnt Corn Springs.

When the United State purchased the Louisiana Territory from France on December 20, 1803, it was expedient for the United Staes to establish a land route between Washington and New Orleans, the capital of the Louisiana Territory, for the movement of troops and supplies, if necessary, Britain and the United States were still sparing; Americans wanted landlines to the coast.

On November 14, 1805 the Creek Nation met in Washington with representatives of the U.S. Government to give permission for a 'horse path' to be established. In the Creeks own words: "It is hereby stipulated and agreed, on the part of the Creek Nation, that the United States shall have a horse path, through the Creek Country, from the Ocmulgee to the Mobile, in such direction as shall, by the President of the United States, be considered convenient, and to clear out the same, and lay logs over the creeks, and the citizens of said States, shall at all time shall

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have a right to pass peaceable on the said path, under such regulations and restrictions, as the government of the United States shall from time to time direct, and the Creek Chief will have boats kept at the several rivers for the convenience of men and horses and houses of entertainment will be established at suitable places on said path for the accommodations of travelers, and the respective ferriage and prices of entertainment for men and horses shall be regulated by the present agent, Colonel Hawkins, or by his successor in office, or as is usual among white people”

With this permission given to the United States government, the Creek Indian Nation would change forever. As travelers followed the ‘horse path’ through the fertile and lush lands of the Creek, many coveted the Indian Territory.

This path followed two well-known Indian trails, the Chiaha Alibamo Trail that that led from Chiaha on the Chattahoochee River, west to the Alibamo towns near the present day Montgomery, and the great Pensacola Trading Path [Old Wolf Trail] that led from the Alibamo towns to Pensacola. Burnt Corn was to be situated on this trail. Burnt Corn has many natural springs making the area a good stopping point on the two trails.

The horse path developed into the Federal Road. But for the Federal Road with its forts, there would have been no Alabama, as we know it. The road was paramount to the growth and settlement of Monroe and Conecuh counties.

The Federal Road was improved by an Act of Congress of April 21, 1806, as follows: “That the President of the United States be and hereby is authorized to cause to be opened a road from the frontier of Georgia, on the route from Athens to New Orleans.... provided he shall not spend more than six thousand dollars in opening the same.”

On March 3, 1905, before the convention in Washington, the United States Congress established a post road, from Washington City, by Athens in Georgia, to New Orleans. The post riders followed the Indian trails and passed through Burnt Corn Creek.

With improvement of the Federal Road came more and more white Americans looking for land. The increase of these settlers and their encroachment in Creek Territories helped bring about the Creek Indian War, which forever ended the Creek Indian Nation domination of the areas now known as Monroe and Conecuh counties.

Burnt Corn would play a role in that war with the Battle of Burnt Corn, which many of the participants later called a “skirmish” and some were ashamed to admit being at the so-called battle, which was considered a victory of the warring faction of the Creek Nations, the Red Sticks.

The town would watch Andrew Jackson’s troops in 1814 move through to Ft. Bowyer to aid in its defense against the British. In the Mexican War, this road saw a movement of troops

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from the Atlantic states to New Orleans to board ships to Mexico. Confederate troops followed this road through Burnt Corn on the way to the battlefields of Virginia.

Burnt Corn had become the site of the earliest settlement in Monroe County. Even before the defeat of the Creek Nation, settlers of both Native American and white descent were living at the crossroads of the Great Pensacola Trading Path and the Federal Road, which formed the Main Street of Burnt Corn as it still does today.

The Creek and United States Convention of 1805 specified that taverns be established along the road. They were usually located about eighteen miles apart, considered a day's journey by stagecoach. Coker's Tavern is shown on early maps of Alabama and is generally shown to be in the vicinity of Burnt Corn. Nathan Coker received a patent from the government to lands along the Federal Road in 1819. Garrett Longmire shows up on early maps with a tavern located approximately three miles north of Burnt Corn.

On June 29, 1815, Governor Holmes of the Mississippi Territory created Monroe County, which at that time embraced almost two-thirds of the State of Alabama. It extended from the Florida line to the mountains of Blount and from the Tombigbee to the Chattahoochee.

Native Americans watched as their former lands were burned, cleared and tilled for crops. They would form bands of raiding parties and attack lone settlers who risked their own lives to settle here. Colonel Richard Warren constructed Fort Warren near Pine Orchard [approximately 6 miles north of Burnt Corn] for protection of settlers and travelers. Settlements naturally grew up along the Federal Road or Post Road.

Many people traveled the "Post Road." Francis Scott Key reputedly traveled the Federal Road in a government wagon while on his mission to Alabama. William Bartram, the naturalist, traveled the road collecting specimens. Lorenzo Dow, the Methodist circuit rider, supposedly visited Burnt Corn on his way to St. Stephens in 1804. Aaron Burr passed through in 1807, while under arrest for treason. James Stuart records his journey in a journal which states that his coach turned over eight times coming from Milledgeville, Georgia. He sold his vehicle in Montgomery and finished his journey on horseback.

From 1816 and on, Burnt Corn saw rapid development. Thousands of acres were sold to families coming from Georgia, South Carolina and Virginia. Log houses were built, stores opened and postal service began in 1817.

James Grace, reputed to be the first 'white settler' came in 1816, then Captain Hayes who bought a thousand acres of land around Burnt Corn. James Green started the first school "Students Retreat" probably in the 1820s. In 1822 the first public road was built from what is now Beatrice through Burnt Corn to Belleville.

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Major Walker opened a store in Burnt Corn in 1822 and the Bethany Baptist Church was busy constructing their first building, having organized officially in 1821. By the 1840s Burnt Corn was enjoying flush times, as was the rest of Alabama.

North of the stores was Mr. Robinson's blacksmith shop with a gristmill across the street. Homes and farms fanned out around the town and Burnt Corn was a rail stop on the Alabama-Florida Railroad in 1862. This railroad was operational throughout the Civil War.

By the turn of the century, Burnt Corn was in a "boom period" having recovered from the War Between the States and Reconstruction. The Kyser-Betts Gin Mill was working continuously through cotton season with wagonloads of cotton being brought from many areas in Monroe and Conecuh counties.

The Mosley Hariston Store was sitting at the site of the Lowery Store today and many new homes were being built on the main street of Burnt Corn. James and Cora Betts Kyser build their Victorian home next to the Methodist Church, which they also built. The Masonic Lodge # 849 had been organized December 3, 1890, and eventually met upstairs in the store known today as Lowery Store. The parishioners of the Methodist Faith also met there until the Methodist Church was finished in 1908.

During the late twenties and early thirties the Depression hit hard in rural Alabama. Farming was no longer profitable and many families who had been in Burnt Corn for a hundred years lost their land to the banks and lending institutions. They left Burnt Corn to move to the more largely populated towns such as Monroeville and Evergreen.

It was at this time that the face of Burnt Corn began to change. Samuel Anthony Lowery, as schoolteacher, had come to Burnt Corn in the 1870s to farm and raise jersey cows. In 1876 he married Martha Ann Betts, daughter of James and Cynthia Betts. This union would eventually bring their son, Jacob, to begin the Lowery dynasty in Burnt Corn.

Jacob was ambitious and continually acquired more land to add to the property that had been accumulated by his father and through his mother's family, the Betts. This included the cotton gin and main store of Burnt Corn.

His son, Sam, became the postmaster at Burnt Corn and continued to acquire land. During the forties the family possessed over thirteen thousand acres of farm and timberland, in and around Burnt Corn. Today Burnt Corn is almost entirely owned by the Lowery Trust, which is made up of many family members, none of whom live in Burnt Corn.

The surviving members of the congregation recently donated the Bethany Baptist Church at Burnt Corn to the Monroe County Heritage Museum. Two homes in Burnt Corn on the main street are still privately owned: the old Robinson Place and the Mosley/Culbreth home.

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later in that day. It is this battle that is said to have sparked the Fort Mims Massacre in Baldwin County a month later.

The Creek Indians, who once populated the area, are responsible for the town's unusual name. Legend has it that in the early 1800s a group of Creeks were traveling through the area when one of the Indians became ill. The group left him at a spring with some corn that was parched for him to eat. That pile of burnt corn marked a popular camping spot for travelers passing through the area. Those travelers appropriately named it Burnt Corn Springs. The town's name was later shortened to "Burnt Corn."

Some of the first settlers in the area included half-breed Indian Jim Cornell, James Salter, who was a Revolutionary War veteran and early State Legislator, and Dr. John Watkins, who is believed to be the only Doctor in that part of the Mississippi Territory at the time. Watkins built a house in 1812 in Burnt Corn that still stands today. The home is now owned by Postmaster Sam Lowery.

In 1812, the town was the trade center for the area. Elbert Barthlett owns a hunting lodge, Burnt Corn Lodge, in town and has explored the surrounding woods and found many abandoned home sites and old family cemeteries indicating that it was once a populated area. "We find old home sites back in the woods that you wouldn't believe would have been there," Barthlett says as he leaned back in his rocker on the Lodge front porch. Barthlett said that he also found a lot of Indian arrowheads and other artifacts in the area, but no one knows what all could be buried there. "Legend has it that a lot of their [Earlier settlers'] silver was buried during the Creek uprising," Barthlett said, which was done in order to keep the Indians from stealing the valuables during raids, "Much of that was never recovered.

The town thrived in the early years because of the Federal Road, but the traffic diminished over time. One of the reasons for the decline was the railroad era. Burnt Corn was bypassed by the railroads that routed the travelers away from town.

Today, traffic is light and life is slow in Burnt Corn. Quiet is the one word that best describes the town. It is so quiet that the silence is deafening to someone who may not be used to it. But, the silence is golden to Barthlett, who enjoys the relaxed lifestyle.

Barthlett, 51, lived in Mobile for the first 49 years of his life before deciding to open the hunting lodge and become a fulltime Burnt Corn resident. When asked how life is different in Burnt Corn, Barthlett laughs. "How is it not different would be easier to answer," he said. As Barthlett talked, a truck slowly drove by as the driver honked the horn, Barthlett smiled and waved, "Everyone waves in Burnt Corn." He said.

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“You have to be more self-sufficient. You have to know how to fix things you have never worked on before,” Barthlett said of the differences in the rural and city lifestyle, “and you don’t have the entertainment. Anybody who needs crowns around would need psychiatric help here.” “But I like it. I was ready for a change,” he said, “There is no vandalism, no theft, and no burglary, and this is nice.”

Downtown Burnt Corn consist of several buildings, most of them owned by Lowery, including Lowery’s Store which his father opened. It is an old fashioned general store with hardware, clothing, sporting goods and groceries. The only thing missing is a pickle barrel and checkerboard.

The town’s post office was established in 1871 and once served as a distribution point for area mail coming in from the Federal Road. The 28-box Post Office today is about 40 feet inside of the Monroe County line, although it has changed back and forth from Monroe to Conecuh County five times over the years.

The rural lifestyle that attracts some to the area is hard to get used to at first. Fannie McCarter grew up in Burnt Corn, moved to Detroit when she was young and came back in 1964 when here father died. “When I first got back, it was ok until the weekend, then there was nothing to do, but I’ve gotten use to it and it’s alright now,” she said.

Miss McCarter’s father, Joe McCarter, made a name for himself raising wild game. He sent gifts of pheasant, quail and turkeys to three presidents and his daughter still has a scrapbook with Thank You letter from the personal secretaries of Franklin Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower and John F Kennedy. The turkey McCarter sent to President Roosevelt was served for Thanksgiving dinner in 1943 in Cairo, Egypt, at a wartime meeting of guest, including Winston Churchill.

Miss McCarter learned to enjoy Burnt Corn after moving away, but Joe Watson did not have to leave to appreciate the town. “It’s the best place I’ve found to live,” said Watson, who owns the other store in town, but his is the only one that can legally sell beer because Watson’s Grocery is in wet Conecuh County. Across the street is Monroe County, which is dry.

Most of the people around Burnt Corn are involved in the timber business in one way or another, as it is the leading industry of the area. Barthlett picked Burnt Corn because of the hunting. “This area is sort of unique because it is one of the last places deer have migrated too,” Barthlett said, “Alabama has a nation-wide reputation for their hunting and a lot of people from other states come here to hunt.”

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“I’ve hunted most of Alabama and I would say this area is the best or one of the best.” He went on to say that hunters from as far away as Pennsylvania and Wisconsin have come to Burnt Corn Lodge.

As for the future of Burnt Corn, it looks like it will stay the same as it is now. There are not major roads, waterways or railroads in the area, so traffic stays at a minimum.

This will leave Burnt Corn a quiet and secluded community, which is the way the residents like it. .

This article was written by Scott Harrington, Press Register Reporter and printed on Page 6-C of the Mobile Press Register, Mobile, Ala, on Saturday, May 25, 1985.

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