



Old Jefferson

Native American History Is Everyone's Heritage

As you enter the East Fork Recreation Area at the Forks of the Stones River, there are signs marking this as part of the Trail of Tears route taken in 1838 by the Cherokees on their long trip to Oklahoma. But there is more here than just that sad story. At the beginning of the walking trail across from the picnic shelter, there is a line of daffodils to the right of a tall tree. It is evidence that there may have been a house there once. And indeed, there was. William Davis, brother to Sam Davis maintained a fine house here. As you continue on the trail up the hill you enter the vicinity of Fairmont, the home of Judge Bromfield Ridley during the Civil War. A blackened tree stands in what would have been the front door as reminder of when the house was burned by Union troops during the Battle of Stones River. A short segment of dry stack stone wall near a fence post bears mute witness the presence of slave labor supporting the grand plantation homes of the area.

The closer you get to Old Jefferson proper, the daffodils in the woods reminds you that two hundred years ago you would have been walking past a multitude of houses with tidy yards and prospering citizens. The road itself was paved using the latest technology. Macadam subsurface still remains in many places as you make your way along the road to Old Jefferson.

At the center of Old Jefferson the north-south road to the square is still evident to your left as broad path flanked by trees. Often there is some



Not far from the main square of Old Jefferson was a busy wharf on the East Fork of the Stones River.



marking tape hanging from a small tree on the right as a slight monument to the center of town. Also on the right there remains a fragment of the trail to what was once a very busy wharf shipping goods like timber and furs to the rest of the world and receiving cloth, foodstuffs and other sundries necessary for the thriving town.

Imagine that main street during late October or early November in 1838, as wagons drawn by mules,



The forks of the Stones River as seen from where the wharf was near Old Jefferson.

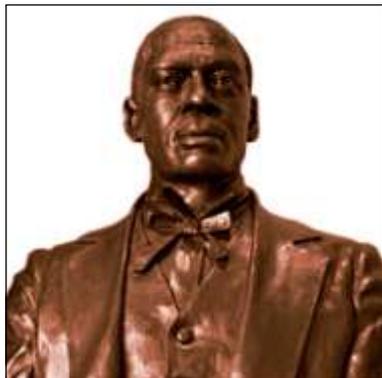


oxen and horses poured through town accompanied by nearly four thousand people of all ages. This procession which would take a few days at a time was repeated throughout that year. Did the Cherokees stop and make purchases at the grocery? Did people turn and look at them as they passed? How many curtains were drawn to see the

spectacle or closed to shelter the inhabitants of a house?

The court house in Old Jefferson saw plenty of action. Andrew Jackson, Sam Davis, Judge Bromfield Ridley and many other notables argued or heard cases there. Once the county seat moved to Murfreesboro, the court house was no longer used for legal matters and it served as a boys' seminary for a number of years.

As you leave Old Jefferson, the Keeble plantation stretches away to the left. Tennessee's first African American senator, Samson Wesley Keeble was born here in 1833. He was six years old when



the Cherokees passed through town and 28 when the Civil War erupted. Following the war, he emerged as a leader in the African-American community. He was elected to state legislator in 1872 and served one term. He was next elected as a magistrate in Davidson County and served in that capacity until 1882. He later moved to Texas and his family lost track of him. His daughter had her gravestone marked with his name and dates so that he would not be forgotten.

All the buildings in Old Jefferson were either demolished or moved by 1968 when the Army Corps of Engineers built the Stones River Dam. The road through Old Jefferson was torn up as much as possible in anticipation of waters which never came. Today, we can enjoy the horse trail and walking paths through Old Jefferson where there are many fragments of its diverse history waiting to be redis-

The Lady of Cofitachequi

In 1539 Hernando De Soto's army landed on the Gulf Coast of Florida looking for riches, beginning an assault on southeastern Indians. Upon seizing a trader from the chiefdom of Cofitachequi, an Indian boy they called Perico, the Spanish learned that Cofitachequi was ruled by a woman who collected tribute, sometimes paid in gold. De Soto made plans for the army to head that way.

By spring of 1540, De Soto had plundered his way out of Florida, through present day Georgia, and was near Cofitachequi. The army arrived on May 1 at one of the major towns, located on the Wateree River. They met a delegation of the ruling class and, with Perico as interpreter, De Soto told them he came in peace and wanted to meet the chief.

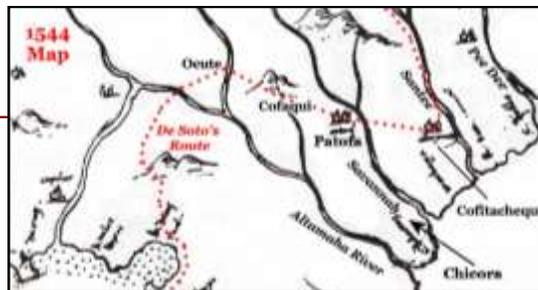
A little later a woman the Spanish writers call the Lady of Cofitachequi arrived on a litter covered with a white cloth. They described her as extremely beautiful. She welcomed De Soto with gifts of animal skins, cloth, and freshwater pearls. She set aside half the town for his use and gave him food, including turkey and venison.

De Soto asked about the precious metals and gemstones he thought would be found there. The Lady commanded the people of the town to bring all they had. They brought freshwater pearls, copper, and sheets of mica. This disappointed the Spanish who expected to be given gold and silver. Then De Soto's men looted over 200 pounds of freshwater pearls from the mortuary temples where the dead were laid to rest in wooden caskets.

De Soto had the Lady of Cofitachequi lead them to her town, Talimeco, about four miles away where he did the same, ransacking the mortuary places there.

Next De Soto sent foraging parties to find all the corn they could carry. Cofitachequi had been depopulated by disease two years earlier so the people really did not have all that much corn to be taken. De Soto stayed for 12 days while the army ate nearly all the food there. By now the people of Cofitachequi had had enough and threatened to take action against them.

De Soto made the Lady of Cofitachequi his hostage. He took her, with some attendants, as a guide and headed to a province called Coosa, which he heard was very rich and might have enough corn. Coosa was west of Cofitachequi, but the Lady led the army northwest, to the mountains. Once in the mountains, she escaped by saying she had to go relieve herself, taking one of her female slaves and a chest of pearls. De Soto never saw her again.





National Park Service Old Jefferson Site



0.4 0 0.19 0.4 Miles

Intermountain Geographic Resources Program – IMGIS, NPS, GDV

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THIS MAP IS NOT TO BE USED FOR NAVIGATION.

Legend

Yellow marks the Trail of Tears route.
 The hiking trail follows the red route and joins the yellow route.

Notes

The yellow line marks the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail route. The red line is the trail from East Fork Recreation Area to the Trail of Tears segment.

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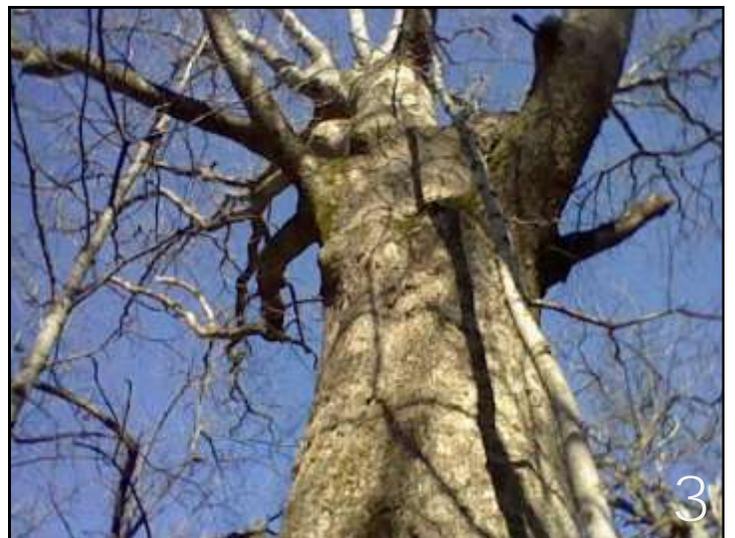
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_____ \$25 sponsors a free guided tour of Old Jefferson for 15-20 people

_____ \$60 sponsors 5 free lectures on the Trail of Tears through Old Jefferson in the Middle Tennessee area

_____ \$100 sponsors 6 months of online information about native history sites like Old Jefferson at **nativehistoryassociation.org**

All donations are tax deductible



1. The sign marking Old Jefferson as part of the original Trail of Tears route.
2. A 19th Century dry stacked stone wall stands near the old wharf.
3. A chestnut oak that stood in the front yard of Fairmont.