

HISTORICAL NOTES ON  
EARLY COUNTY AND BLAKELY, GEORGIA

\*\*\*\*\*

(1)

Little known is the fact that EARLY COUNTY or, for that matter, the whole Southwest Georgia were not included in the original Charter creating the Colony of Georgia and, at one time or other, over it have flown the flags of Spain, France, England, The Confederate States of America and the United States. Also, in reality, there were two EARLY COUNTIES: the first, created in 1818 included a large part of Southwest Georgia bordering on Florida; the second, the present small county some thirty-five to thirty-eight miles wide lying along the eastern bank of the Chattahoochee River for approximately thirty-five miles.

The Creek Indians, who inhabited the middle and southern portions of Georgia, were hostile to the Americans and assisted the British in the War of 1812. They committed many atrocities among the settlements in middle, lower Georgia, and Alabama, the most distressing of which the massacre of men, women, and children when they captured Fort Mims in Alabama. Aroused by the fate of the people at Fort Mims, the government sent several expeditions against the Creeks, one of which was under the command of Major General Andrew Jackson. General Jackson conquered the Creeks and obtained a treaty with them in 1814, by which the Creeks ceded a large body of land in southern Georgia bordering on Florida which included the then unknown EARLY COUNTY.

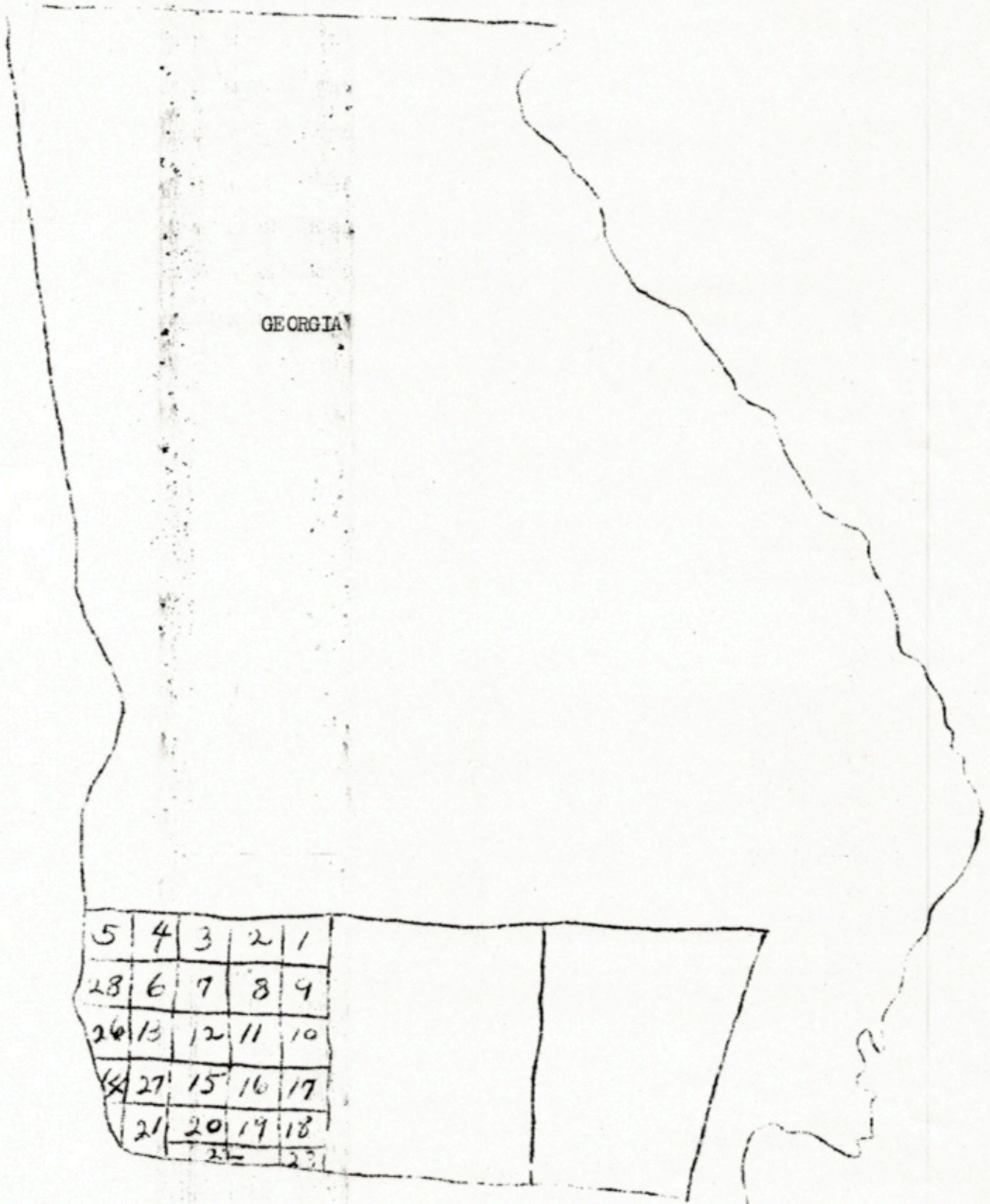
Under the Treaty at Fort Jackson in Alabama on August 9, 1814, the Creek Indians ceded to Georgia the lands between the Chattahoochee River and the western line of what then constituted Wayne County, bounded on the south by the Florida line, and on the north by a line starting from the Chattahoochee River north of Fort Gaines, and running due east to a point northeast of Isabella and thence forty-five degrees northeast to the Ocumulgee River, and thence following the Ocumulgee to the Altamaha River near Jesup, where it intersects the western boundary of Wayne County.

The signing of this treaty with the Creek Nation settled all adverse claims to the South Georgia Territory. It was now in shape to make into new counties for settlement and development. Accordingly, out of the acquired territory, the Georgia Legislature by an act on



December 15, 1818, created three counties beginning from the Chatta-  
hochee River eastward to the boundary of the then Wayne County, in  
order named, EARLY, IRWIN, AND APPLING. EARLY COUNTY was not organized  
until the lapse of another year. An official organization Act was  
passed on December 21, 1819.

Early County was laid off into districts of twelve miles and  
forty chains square, as near as convenience admitted, by running  
lines parallel with the dividing lines between EARLY and the County  
of Irwin and others crossing them at right angles. The districts  
were numbered from one to twenty-eight, inclusive, except 24 and 25,



and were divided into squares of fifty chains containing 250 acres by  
lines parallel with district lines and others crossing them at right  
angles.



EARLY COUNTY was named in honor of Governor Peter Early who was born in Virginia in 1773, and when a young man came to Georgia to practice law in Wilkes County. In 1802, he was elected to Congress, and was a leading member of that body. In 1807, he was appointed Judge of the Superior Court in the Ocmulgee Circuit. In 1813, he was elected Governor of Georgia and served until 1815, during the critical period of the War of 1812 with England. Governor Early was strong in will, prompt in action, and began vigorous measures for carrying on the war. An officer of the United States asked him for a loan of \$80,000, and pledged the faith of the general government for its payment. The request was granted and a warrant drawn upon the treasury of the State for that amount. Someone suggested to Governor Early that the Union might dissolve during the war and the money be lost. To this he replied: "I hope no such disruption will ever come, but if it should, I have no wish that Georgia should survive the general wreck". He died August, 1817.

EARLY COUNTY began to be settled in 1817, by a limited number, and in 1818 quite a number of persons took up their residence on Harrod's Creek (now known as the Old Factory Creek) on the Chattahoochee River about eight miles northwest of what is now Blakely. Among the first settlers were: Isham and Arthur Sheffield, James Bush, John Hays, Joseph Grimsley, Richard Grimsley, Richard Spann, Frederick Porter, Joseph Boles, John Roe, Abner Jones, Nathaniel Weaver, James Jones, John Dill, James Carr, Alexander Watson, John Tilley, Solomon V. Wilson, John Floyd, Andrew Burch, Benjamin Collier, A. Hays, and James Brantley. Some of these resided in the neighborhood of Fort Gaines, a part of the county which is now embraced within the limits of Clay County.

No provision was made for the election of county officers until the session of the Legislature of 1819. The place appointed for holding the election was the house of Richard Grimsley which was also used as a temporary courthouse. The first court was held on March 27, 1820. The election of county officers and sessions of the Inferior Court continued to be held here until Blakely was made the county seat in 1825.

As settlers began to come in and settle in different parts of EARLY COUNTY, it was found necessary for the convenience of the new settlers to create new counties for the administration of law and



order. Consequently, EARLY COUNTY did not retain its original boundaries for very long. The following counties in order named, therefore, have been created from the original EARLY COUNTY:

Decatur, in 1823  
 Baker, in 1825  
 Thomas, from Decatur and Irwin, in 1825  
 Dougherty, from Baker, in 1853  
 Calhoun, from Early and Baker, in 1854  
 Clay, from Early and Randolph, in 1854  
 Miller, from Early and Baker, in 1856  
 Mitchell, in 1857  
 Colquitt, from Thomas and Lowndes, in 1856  
 Grady, from Thomas and Decatur, in 1905  
 Seminole, from Decatur, in 1920

When the County of Baker was formed out of the territory belonging to EARLY COUNTY in 1825, it necessitated a change in the location of the public buildings (courthouse and jail). A commission of five was appointed to select the new location. In the discharge of that duty they selected the present City of Blakely, giving it that name in honor of Captain Johnson Blakely, U. S. Navy, who on September, 1814, with his ship, the U. S. Sloop, "WASP", and entire crew disappeared at sea. The disappearance of which remains today a complete mystery of the sea as when it occurred one hundred and thirty-eight years ago.

Benjamin Collier, a member of the commission appointed to select a new site for the location of the public buildings in 1826, gave twenty-five acres of land to the town of Blakely, a part of these twenty-five acres today is the Public Square on which the EARLY COUNTY COURTHOUSE now stands.

The original EARLY COUNTY contained approximately 3,750 square miles as compared with its relative small size today of 514.32 square miles. The 1950 census lists the population of EARLY COUNTY as 17,392 as compared with the 1940 census of 18,679, a decline of 1,287.

Blakely was incorporated the Town of Blakely in 1871. In 1900 an amendment to the charter created and incorporated the City of Blakely, the municipal authority consisting of a Mayor and four Councilmen who together are known as the City Council. The altitude of Blakely above sea level is 270 feet. The 1950 census list the population within the city limits as 3,325, and of the suburban area of 512, giving the population of Greater Blakely as 3,837.

Blakely is situated fourteen miles east of the Chattahoochee



River on U. S. Highway No. 27, eighty-five miles south of Columbus, Georgia, eighty-three miles north of Tallahassee, Florida, and on State Highway No. 62, thirty-two miles east of Dothan, Alabama, and fifty-two miles west of Albany, Georgia. It is served by the Central of Georgia Railroad, Trailways Bus Line, the Great Southern Trucking Company, Cooper Motor Lines, the Bay Line Trucking Line and other transportation companies with convenient schedules together which permits easy flow of passengers and freight. The average Summer (June, July, August) temperature is 78-80 degrees, Winter (December, January, February) 42-47 degrees with an average annual rainfall of 56.6 inches. It is classified as a City and is a good trading and agricultural community. EARLY COUNTY is the greatest peanut producing county of the Nation. In addition to peanuts, other agricultural products grown are cotton and corn which, together with a rapid-expanding cattle raising industry, produces a yearly revenue estimated in excess of \$6,000,000.00. Blakely has two large Peanut Processing Plants, a Farm Machinery Manufacturing Plant, a small Hosiery Mill, a modern Machine and Welding Shop and a Woodworking Plant.

Of historical interest is the Confederate Flag Pole standing on the Public Square which was erected in 1861. No other county or section in the Southern States today can boast of one of these emblems of liberty. It is said there is no other extant in the Old South, if there was one ever erected.

Another historical interest is the Kolomoki Indian Mounds. This group of mounds is the most important and contains the largest Indian Temple Mound east of the Mississippi River together with several burial mounds. To protect and preserve this interesting and famed mounds for posterity, as well as for public use and enjoyment, the citizens of Blakely and EARLY COUNTY in 1938 acquired the Indian Mound site and surrounding property to the extent of 1,283.88 acres and deeded this entire acreage to the State of Georgia to be developed into a state park. The money required to secure this property was raised by public subscription. This beautiful park now has an attractive museum which contains many interesting Indian relics unearthed from the burial mounds, a large lake for swimming, fishing and boating, and also picnic areas. Situated about seven miles northwest of Blakely, clearly marked



roads lead from U. S. Highway 27 into the park, some two and six miles, respectively, north of Blakely.

\*\*\*\*\*

These historical notes were compiled sometime in the 1950's by the late Mr. Dudley H. McDowell who was the Official Historian for Early County from late in the 1940's until early in the 1960's when he had to resign due to ill health.

Mr. McDowell was born in Blakely on December 16, 1884. He attended the public school here and graduated from what was then Blakely Academy. He attended the University of Georgia for two years and then entered the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland, Class of 1909. For eight years, he served as Third Lieutenant of the Philippine Constabulary. In 1916, he resigned as First Lieutenant of the Constabulary to become an executive of the Standard Oil Company of New York, operating in India, Burma and Ceylon.

During World War I, he served in the British Army in India and was decorated for his war service. He retired from overseas service and returned to the States in 1940. During World War II, Mr. McDowell served in a civilian capacity in the Pentagon, Washington, D. C., from 1941 until 1945. He then resigned from the Army and returned to Blakely to reside. He was cited for outstanding performance of duty by the War Department.

Mr. McDowell took an active part in the civic affairs of Blakely and Early County. It was while he was serving as the Official Historian that he compiled these notes as well as wrote a book, "THE LAST VETERAN", about the confederate flag pole that still stands on the court square in Blakely today. Mr. McDowell passed away June, 1965.

Mr. McDowell married the former Mrs. Lillian Park Nolen, in New York City on June 3, 1940. Mrs. McDowell still resides in Blakely and is active in many civic organizations. The McDowell's had no children.

\*\*\*\*\*

In the 1965 Official United States census, the population of Blakely was 5,190, today it is estimated at 6,000. The County population in 1965 was 13,151, is estimated today at 15,000.

Early County is still a leading producer of peanuts. This is evidenced today by the fact that there are three peanut processing plants in the county and a peanut processing machinery plant employing more than 225 people combined. Since the 1950's, the live-



stock industry has literally boomed. Pacemaking in this field are Angus, Hereford and Brahma breeds.

The largest single plant in Early County is the Great Northern Paper Company-Southern Division, a multi-million dollar operation, manufacturing kraft linerboard, employs over 800 people. Since the mill's expansion program completion in 1967, it has three paper machines in operation. Other industries in the County are Great Northern Plywood Corporation, Brew-Schneider Company, a subsidiary of Work-Wear Corporation; and Gulf Fibre Products. An 100 acre industrial park has been developed in the city limits of Blakely. The Merchants Refrigerating Company has constructed a new cooler storage warehouse in the new park. Also, located in the park is Robinette Frame Company.

Transportation is no problem in the County as there are three modes of travel--river, rail and highway. The County is served by the Central of Georgia Railroad, the Atlantic Coast Line, Seaboard Air Line and a new railroad, Chattahoochee Industrial Railroad which connects the Central of Georgia and the Atlantic Coast Line. The County is crisscrossed by U. S. Highways 27 and 84 and State Highways 62, 39, 200, 45, 363 and 273. The Columbia Lock and Dam is located on the western boundary of the county and the Bainbridge State Docks are only 40 miles away.

The Blakely Town and Country Club which offers a modern 9-hole golf course was completed in 1959. The new airport completed in 1968 features a 3,200-foot lighted runway and is within minutes of downtown Blakely. A new hospital (Early Memorial) was completed in 1964 and is equipped with 36-bed capacity.

As in the days that Mr. McDowell wrote of, the Kolomoki State Park is still enjoyed by many. Today there are several picnic shelters, grills for cook-outs, the lakes for boating and skiing, a new swimming pool that are used by visitors who come to enjoy the new campgrounds that are equipped with modern comfort stations with hot showers available. A miniature golf course was added the past summer. A group camp (Camp Hicita) has been added since the 1950's, accommodating up to 100 campers.

Today Blakely is served by two fine banking establishments, First State Bank and the Bank of Early, whose combined assets exceed \$14,000,000.

(Updated January, 1970)