

By
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This year- 2017- marks the 200th anniversary of Mississippi's statehood. On December 10, 1817, President James Monroe signed the resolution that admitted Mississippi as the twentieth state. Throughout the year, various activities are planned across the state to celebrate the bicentennial. We encourage you to contact the Mississippi Department of Archives and History for further information regarding these events.

In recognition of the State's bicentennial, the Greene County Museum and Historical Society has chosen as it's annual goal to provide the public some aspects of the history of Greene County as it paralleled the development of the State of Mississippi.

HISTORY OF GREENE COUNTY Part I

On April 7, 1798, Congress created the Mississippi Territory from lands previously claimed by Georgia. Georgia had created the County of Bourbon in 1785, which ultimately became the Mississippi Territory. Prior to Georgia's control, the region had been variously claimed by France, Spain, and England.

This new Territory, originally Bourbon County Georgia, consisted of all lands from the Mississippi River on the west to the Chattahoochee River on the east; the 31st parallel on the south; and the point at which the Yazoo River emptied into the Mississippi River (or the 32nd parallel, 28 minutes) on the north. While the Mississippi Territory would expand to include lands

to the north and south of these boundaries, the original boundaries would include land that would eventually become Greene County.

Migration to the Mississippi Territory occurred in two distinct waves- the first between 1798 and 1812, and the second following the conclusion of the Creek War in 1814. What was originally major Indian trails evolved into such roads as the “Three-Chopped Way,” connecting Fort Stephens on the Tombigbee River and Fort Stoddert on the Mobile River with Natchez on the Mississippi. Another branch of this road connected Mobile to Natchez and would be referred to locally as the “Mobile-Natchez Road.”

Running east from Fort Stoddert, through the Creek Indian Nation, to Fort Wilkinson outside of Milledgeville, Georgia; was what became known as the Federal Road. Originally built as a post road to connect Washington City (Washington, D.C.) with New Orleans following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the Federal Road incorporated much of the Three-Chopped Way through the Mississippi Territory as well as what would become Greene County. The Federal Road, begun in 1806, was widened to 16 feet by the United States Military by November 1811. An ever-increasing stream of settlers migrated west into the Mississippi Territory.

Washington County was the first county to be organized in the Mississippi Territory in 1800, and encapsulated all of the Territory except lands west of the Pearl River. Western Washington County to the Tombigbee River was also largely inhabited by Choctaw Indians. According to Bettersworth’s *MISSISSIPPI: A HISTORY*, the Choctaw represented the largest, single group of Indians in what would become the boundaries of the State. While perhaps the largest group, they numbered only

somewhere between 5,000 and 10,000 by 1700, or before the largest migration of “pale-face” settlers took place. The Choctaw ceded this land to the Mississippi Territory in what became the First Choctaw Cession by the Treaty of Mount Dexter in 1804 or 1805, depending on the reference you choose.

In 1809, the counties of Amite, Baldwin, Franklin and Wayne were formed in the Mississippi Territory. Amite and Franklin were west of the Pearl River with Wayne County on the east, subsequently carving out a portion of Washington County. Wayne County’s eastern boundary closely approximated the current border of Mississippi and Alabama.

On December 9, 1811, the counties of Marion and Greene were formed from Amite, Franklin and Wayne counties. Greene County was bounded on the north by Wayne County; the east by Baldwin and Washington counties; the west by Marion County; and the south by Spanish West Florida (until 1812).

Greene County’s boundaries changed over the ensuing years due to the establishment of new counties in the Mississippi Territory. What began as a county of 2,300 square miles in 1811 was reduced to 864 by 1820. In 1812 the United States added Spanish West Florida to the Mississippi Territory with the counties of Hancock and Jackson formed. Jackson County became the southern boundary of Greene. In 1820 Perry County was formed from Greene County and became its western boundary. In that same year, part of Baldwin County west of the Tombigbee River was added to Mobile and Washington counties and became the eastern border of Greene County. In 1910 George County was established from Greene and Jackson counties and became the present day southern boundary of Greene.

Twenty-nine years after the original formation of Greene County, the county had been reduced in size by the formation of other counties. Settlement of Greene County was fairly stable between the years 1840 and 1855. The county population in 1830 was reported to be 1,854 and had only increased to 2,018 by 1850. There was an abundance of land to be settled/purchased. During that period, land prices seemed high to the settlers with parcels ranging from \$0.05 to \$2.00 an acre.

Greene County was named for Nathaniel Green, a Revolutionary War general. The first county seat was established at Boise Bluff (“bois” is the French word for “wood”). Boise Bluff was located on the Leaf River between Atkinson’s Creek and Courthouse Creek. The post office was the Greene Courthouse, which was reportedly a one-room, log structure. The county seat was moved to Leakesville around 1827, as it was more centrally located following the county’s boundary changes (particularly, the establishment of Perry County). Leakesville was named in honor of Walter Leake, who served as governor of Mississippi from 1822 to 1825.

In an article entitled, “Trip Through the Piney Woods,” published in the Natchez Free Trader and Gazette on November 30, 1841 by J.F.H. Claiborne: “July 16 (1840)- Left Augusta for Mr. Breland’s, a very comfortable house of entertainment some sixteen miles distant.” He proceeded to describe Leakesville as, “There is no town here. The courthouse and jail stand on a lot perhaps deeded to the county, but all the property around belongs to John D. McInnis, Esq. who resides at the place and entertains the court, the bar and all that attend.” Claiborne goes on to describe Leakesville as a pretty place, well improved and situated in view of the Chickasawhay River. The Chickasawhay was suitable for steamboat navigation as far north as

Winchester in Wayne County and the Leaf River was navigable to Augusta in Perry County at the time of Claiborne's visit.

Settlers of the southwest portion of the Mississippi Territory were self-sufficient, raising or manufacturing almost all their needs. A.W. Ramsey, state senator from Harrison, Perry, Greene and Jackson counties, was said by his contemporaries to be the best-dressed man in the Senate. All of his clothing, except his shirt, was made by his wife on a hand loom.

The economy of Greene County depended largely on herds of cattle and hogs, which ranged freely over the county, as well as an abundance of deer, turkey and fish. All of these found a ready market in Mobile, the closest commercial settlement. Chickens were also raised for market in Mobile. Many items were used to barter for salt and other items, which could not be made locally.

Some of the early settlements of Greene County were Adamsville, Avera, Buck Creek, Kittrell, Leaf, Leakesville, Stateline, and Vernal. More about these settlements and their inhabitants will be presented in future articles.

A number of resources/references were used to generate this first segment of Greene County history. Several of them are available in the Greene County Museum. We cordially invite the public to visit the Museum to access published resources pertaining to the settlement of Greene County as well as to view many artifacts of its earliest settlers.

(End of Part I)