

A Snapshot of Cherokee Life

A portrait of Dirt Town in the 1830s depicted the lifestyle of the majority of Cherokee communities. People led the life of subsistence farmers with simple log cabins, small cornfields and fruit orchards, and ranged livestock. Their lives contrasted with those of wealthy Cherokee planters, a small minority who owned regal homes, extensive plantations, slaves, and ferries.

When federal agents inventoried Cherokee property improvements in 1836, the estate of Dirt Town resident Eskalo totaled \$296.75, typical for most Cherokee families. Only 15 miles upstream from Dirt Town, Treaty Party leader Major Ridge had vast plantations and other properties worth more than \$81,000.

When a wealthy minority signed a fraudulent treaty that ceded eastern Cherokee lands, life changed forever for

the Cherokee Nation. The people of Dirt Town, like the bulk of Cherokee citizens, vehemently opposed the treaty. Their voices were not heard.

Peaceful resistance did not stop the unwarranted arrests and deportation of Cherokee by the US Army and Georgia militia in May and June 1838. The Cherokee Nation, rich and poor, was driven from their eastern homelands in a bitter exodus to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma.

The poorer people, like Dirt Town's residents, suffered the most in detention and relocation. Their journey over the Trail of Tears was marked by high mortality as they marched through one of the coldest winters of the 19th century.

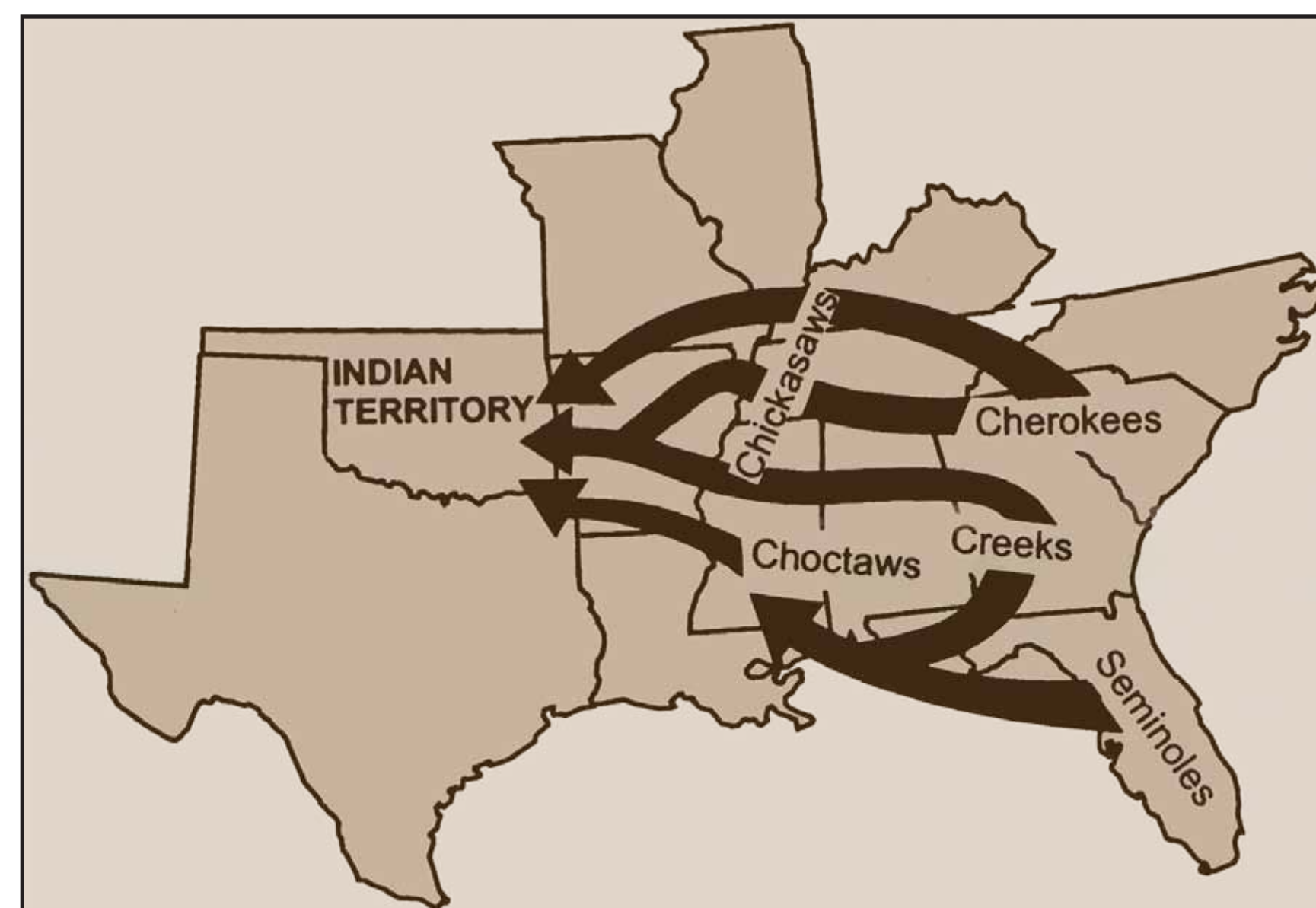


Couey House is representative of the rough hewn log homes built in Dirt Town

Forced to Move

Federal Indian removal policy aroused fierce and bitter debate. Supporters of the policy claimed it was a benevolent action to save the tribes east of the Mississippi River from being overwhelmed and lost in an expanding American population. Opponents decried its inhumanity and the tragic consequences it had for the Indian peoples. One thing was certain; removal freed millions of acres of desired Indian lands for use by white settlers.

The Indian Removal Act of 1830 resulted in the removal of thousands of American Indians from their ancestral lands for new homes in Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma). They traveled by existing roads and rivers. Many groups left in the fall, hoping to avoid the disease and heat of summer travel, and instead faced treacherous winter weather. Many died during the ordeal of the Trail of Tears.



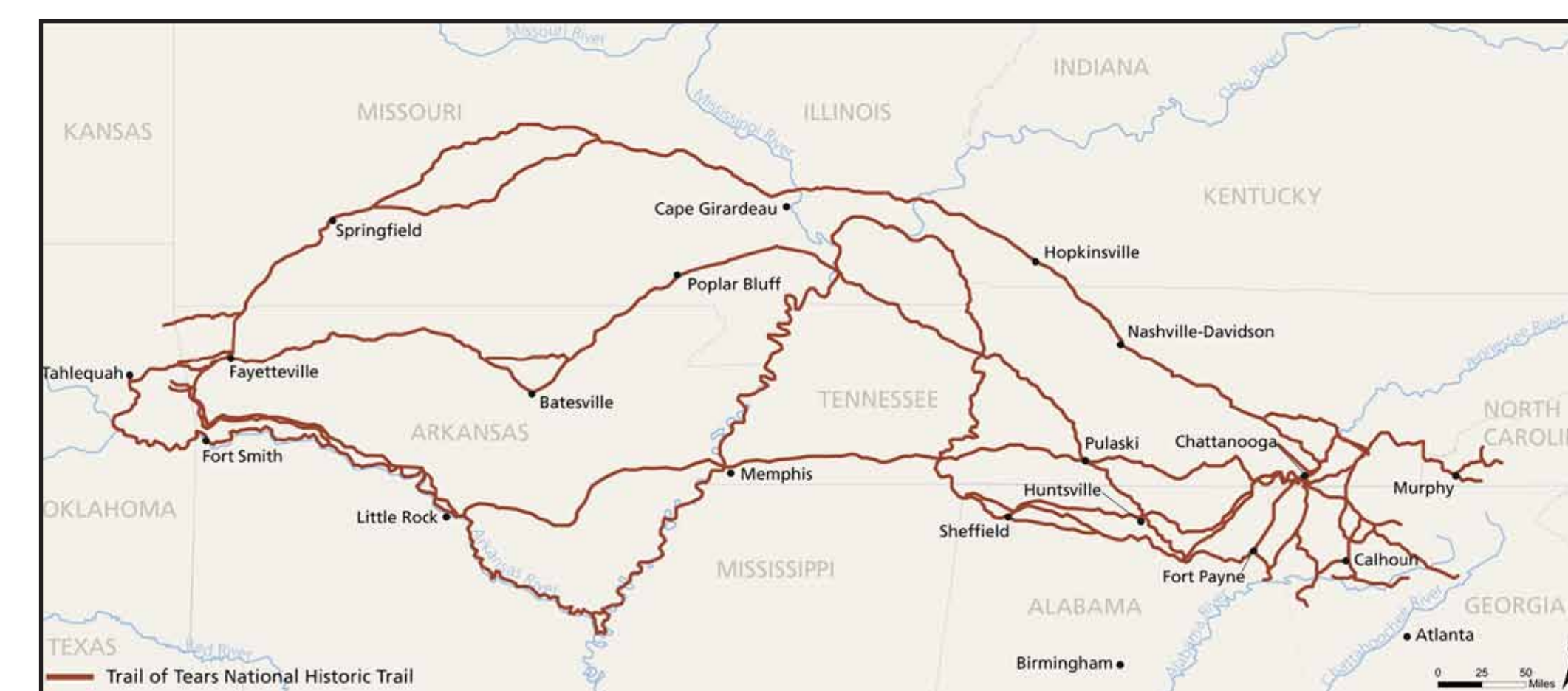
In the 1830s, the federal government forcibly removed approximately 16,000 Cherokee, 21,000 Muscogee (Creek), 9,000 Choctaw, 6,000 Chickasaw, and 4,000 Seminole from their ancestral homes in the southeastern United States.

New Nations

Despite the hardships of the journey, members of the five removed tribes established new lives in the West. They stand as successful sovereign nations, proudly preserving cultural traditions, while adapting to the challenges of the 21st century.

Cherokee who survived the Trail of Tears created a new sovereign nation in present-day Oklahoma. Some Cherokee remained in North Carolina and, due to a special exemption, formed the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

Trail of Tears National Historic Trail



You can visit sites along the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail. By helping to preserve historic sites and trail segments, and developing areas for public use, the story of the forced removal of the Cherokee people and other American Indian tribes is remembered and told by the National Park Service and its partners.

Learn more at www.nps.gov/trte