

A Creek Indian Chief Petitions President Andrew Jackson for Redress of Grievances (1830)

As defined by treaty in 1821, the domain of the Creek Nation comprised some ten million acres in Georgia and Alabama. In 1825 chief William McIntosh (1775-1825), who had commanded Creek allies in Jackson's Creek and Seminole campaigns of 1814 and 1818, signed the Treaty of Indian Springs, which exchanged most of the Creek country for new land in the West. The Creek National Council repudiated the treaty as a fraud and put McIntosh to death for violating its ban on unauthorized cessions. The Treaty of Washington, signed in 1826, voided and superseded that of Indian Springs. Under it and a follow-up agreement in 1827, the Creeks agreed to cede all their Georgia lands in return for various payments. The treaty also provided for the McIntosh faction's removal westward within twenty-four months at federal expense. In 1828 more than a thousand McIntosh Creeks emigrated to the Verdigris River near Fort Gibson in present-day Oklahoma. In 1829 the emigrant Creeks complained to Jackson of the government's neglect and mistreatment. Later, Roley McIntosh (c1790-1863), half-brother of William, and Benjamin Hawkins (d. 1836), a Princeton-educated lawyer and son of a U.S. senator and a Creek woman, came east to present their grievances in person. Part of their letter and petition to Jackson, written on February 25, 1830 from Gadsby's National Hotel, is included below.

Our Great Father Andrew Jackson President of the United States,

We have seen you and delivered to you the talk which your Red children the chiefs of the Arkansas Nation of Creek Indians in Council directed us to deliver. It is to our Great Father alone, that we can look for protection, and for the justice which is due to his Red Children beyond the Great River.

Father listen to us, and we will speak the words which our Brothers the chiefs of our Nation commanded us to speak—

Father when we assembled around the Council fire of our Fathers, we were a Great Nation. We had houses, and, land, stock, and Game and we were happy—But when our white Brothers were grown Great and spread like the yellow leaf when scattered by the whirlwinds blast, our Father the President advised us to seek a home beyond the great River. He told us we could not live in the land of our Fathers, and be prosperous, and happy, and that if we would leave the land of our Fathers and seek a new home we should land enough for our people and their children while the grass grows and the water runs—We listened to the talk of our Father the President, and left the lands where the bones of our Fathers lie, and have moved to a distant and strange land—

Father listen to our talk—The land which our Father the President gave us is too little for our people—Many of our Brothers in the old nation wish to move to our Country—Our Father the President and our white Brothers want all to move: but if our Father the President does not give us more land, we cannot invite them to move. Part of the land on which our Brothers walked who first went into the woods over the great River to find our new home, has been since given by our Father the President to the Cherokee Indians If our Brothers of the old Nation move to our Country all will perish unless our Father gives us more land....

Father by various Treaties made between the United States and the Creek Indian Nation, the United States promised to pay the said Nation various annuities....

Father, we have received no part of the annuities thus promised by the United States since the murder of our Great Chief Genl. William McIntosh, nor of the two Sums one of [\$247,600] and the other of [\$42,491] promised...to the Said Nation for the cession of their lands.

Father, we are entitled to a full share of all the annuities to which the Creek Nation are entitled or have been entitled from the death of Genl. William McIntosh as well as a full share of the two last mentioned sums of money; in the proportion which our numbers bear to the whole number of the Creek Indians, including our people with the people of the old nation, because by the Fifth article of the Treaty Made at Washington City in Eighteen hundred and twenty six it is provided that we “shall be admitted to all our privelages as members of the Creek Nation.”

Father, listen to us. By the ninth article of the Treaty of Washington City made in [1826], the United States promised to present to us as the friends and followers of Genl William McIntosh the sum of one hundred thousand dollars in consideration of our exertions to procure a cession in 1825 at the Indian Springs & c, and of our past difficulties and our then contemplated removal, if our party should amount to three thousand persons, and in that proportion for a smaller number—We have received but Fifteen thousand of the last mentioned sum....

Father by the provisions of the last mentioned act our people were entitled to one Rifle Gun and ammunition, a Butcher Knife one Blanket one Brass Kettle and one Beaver Trap to each warrior, our people have not yet received all these things—The same act provides that the United States will pay to all such emigrants the actual value of all the improvements left by them and which were of a nature to add real value to the Land....

Father, it is not the fault of our people that this act has not been complied with and we hope our Father the President will cause justice to be done to us—By the Eighth article of the

Treaty of Washington made in 1826 the United States promised to furnish our people with an Agent or Sub Agent and Interpreter to reside with them and also a Blacksmith and a Wheelwright—Father Give to us an agent to live with us who will speak to us and for us, with a straight Tongue; and to protect us against the evils of having the Brothers, Friends or Favorites of our Agent settled among us as traders contrary to our wishes. Make it necessary for the Agent to obtain the consent of a Council of our Chiefs before he can license any person to trade among us....

Father, listen to us. We are anxious to reconcile all our differences with all our Red Brothers of the old Nation and for them to settle with us in our New Country, and if our Father will let us choose an agent to live with us who has never had any thing to do with either party in the old Nation we will do every thing in our power to reconcile the two parties and to induce our Red Brothers of the old Nation to live with us, and we believe it can be done

But if our Father leaves it to a majority of all the Creek people to choose an agent then we will be gain involved in all the evils which surrounded us in the old Nation

Father, our Red Brothers of the other party are stronger than we are, and if our Father will not give us our agent, let us live a lone and in peace....

Father we want to go home, and we beg our Father to enable us to shew to our People on our return to them, that they have not looked in vain to their Great Father the President of the United States for justice

We beg our Father to give us an Agent, to live with us, and who will protect our rights, and Interests, and act for us in all things—We do not wish to leave our home, or ever come here again—

Roley McIntosh his X mark
Benjamin Hawkins

Source: Daniel Feller et al., *The Papers of Andrew Jackson Volume 8 1830* (University of Tennessee Press, 2010) 98-104.