

## **Fort Jackson during the War of 1812**

Built in 1814 at the confluence of the Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers in present day Alabama, Fort Jackson was a significant frontier outpost during the Creek War (1813-1814). The fort stood on what had been the site of Fort Toulouse, a stockade and trading post that the French built in 1717 to protect the eastern boundary of their claims in the Mississippi Valley. At the time, there was a great deal of activity in the region as Fort Toulouse also stood near a significant Creek village and holy site that they called Hickory Ground. Weather and river floods forced the French to rebuild Fort Toulouse twice between 1717 and 1763, but with the end of the French and Indian War the French abandoned the area, and the fort quickly fell into disrepair. The British claimed the region until the end of the American Revolution, at which time it became part of the United States.

Divisions within the Creek tribe and the outbreak of the War of 1812 eventually led the Americans to build Fort Jackson. As more and more whites came into the region that the Creeks occupied, the tribe split. The Upper Creeks, called "Red Sticks" because of their colorful war clubs, vowed to resist the white advance while most of the Lower Creeks favored peace. As the War of 1812 began, the British supported the Red Sticks and encouraged violence against the Americans on the frontier. On August 30, 1813, Red Stick Creeks killed or captured more than 500 Americans at Fort Mims, about forty miles north of present day Mobile, Alabama, sending settlers in the region into a panic. In response, the United States sent Andrew Jackson to fight the Red Sticks at the head of a force made up primarily of militia from Tennessee, Georgia and the Mississippi Territory. The climactic battle of Jackson's war against the Red Sticks was the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, on the Coosa River near the eastern border of the Mississippi Territory (now in Alabama). Jackson crushed the Creeks and afterwards, as a further show of force, ordered the construction of a large fort on the site of old Fort Toulouse, in the heart of Creek territory. The fort included formidable earthworks, wooden stockades and a blockhouse, and was named for the future president. The Battle of Horseshoe Bend ended Red Stick resistance, and on August 9, 1814, the Americans forced the Creeks to sign the Treaty of Fort Jackson ceding to the United States government more than 22 million acres of Creek land in Georgia and much of Alabama.

With the end of the War of 1812, the southwestern frontier of the United States was secured, and as a result the government decommissioned Fort Jackson in 1817. For a short time local authorities used part of the fort as a jail, but the structure was eventually abandoned. In 1960 Fort Jackson was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, and eleven years later the Alabama Historical Commission purchased the site. The commission created the Fort Toulouse-Fort Jackson Park which operates today as a living history center featuring partial reconstructions of the old forts that once occupied the site.

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FURTHER READING:

O'Brien, Sean Michael. *In Bitterness and in Tears: Andrew Jackson's Destruction of the Creeks and Seminoles*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003.

Parker, James W. "Fort Jackson after the War of 1812," *Alabama Review* 38 (April 1985): 119-30.