

Locating the Meigs-Freeman Line in Swain County Don Casada, 28 Sep 2023 (updated 16 May 2025)

Introduction

In the Introduction to *Terra Incognita – An Annotated Bibliography of the Great Smoky Mountains, 1544-1934*, the splendid work of Anne Bridges, Russell Clement, and Ken Wise, a passage is cited from Horace Kephart's *Our Southern Highlanders* in which Kephart claimed:

“The most diligent research failed to discover so much as a magazine article, written within this generation, that described the land and its people.....it was *terra incognita*.”

Bridges, Clement and Wise were far more lenient than this native highlander would have been:

“When Horace Kephart admitted his failed attempt to discover any useable information about the Great Smoky Mountains prior to his first stay there in 1904, he was perhaps indulging in literary hyperbole. As this bibliography well demonstrates, there was, in Kephart's time, a wealth of widely-published material about the Smokies region.”

A century before Kephart's arrival, Return Jonathan Meigs had noted¹ “*The best woodsman or Indians could give us but little information for neither had ever explored the great Iron Mountains anywhere near that part where the direction of our line would carry us.*” In 1802, the Smoky Mountain crest was, indeed, terra incognita – unknown territory.

Four treaties between the United States and the Cherokee Nation, which took place between 1791 and 1835, resulted in the land that is now embraced by Swain County's borders passing from the Cherokee Nation to the United States and North Carolina. The map of Swain County in Figure 1 illustrates the sequence of cessions and the affected lands as the boundary moved south and west over time. The named cession lines are for Benjamin Hawkins, Andrew Pickens, Return Jonathan Meigs and Thomas Freeman. All but Freeman served in the Revolutionary War; Freeman was a civil engineer/surveyor who immigrated to the U.S. from Ireland after the war.

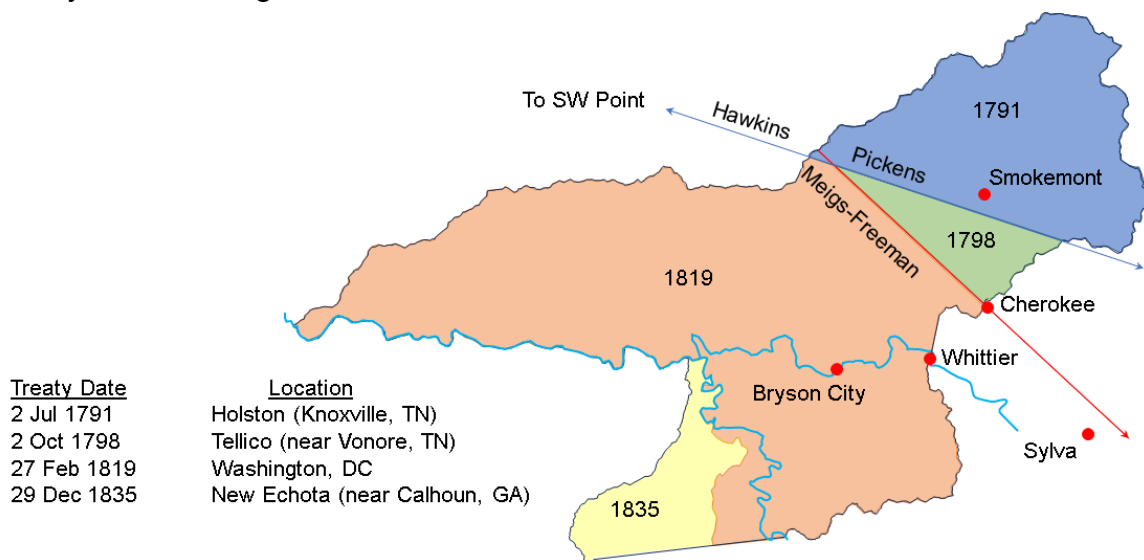


Figure 1. Cherokee cession boundaries: Swain County (larger more detailed version is [HERE](#))

The focus herein will be on the second treaty – the [1798 Treaty of Tellico](#) – with emphasis on the course of the Meigs-Freeman Line boundary. First, a bit of background on an earlier treaty, the [1791 Treaty of Holston](#), and a general sense of the location of the associated boundaries, is in order.

¹ Letter from R.J. Meigs to Secretary of War, Henry Dearborn, 20 Oct. 1802.

1. Treaty of Holston and the Hawkins Line

The first section of land in what would become Swain County eight decades later was ceded by a treaty signed on July 2, 1791 at [James White's Fort](#), located in what is now the southeastern section of downtown Knoxville, Tennessee. It wasn't made official until the following year – on February 17, 1792, when it was “Proclaimed.” Today, the accepted beginning point for the Tennessee River is at the junction of the Holston and French Broad Rivers at the eastern city limits of Knoxville. But in late 18th century and even in mid-19th century maps, that was not the case. As shown below in Figure 2, it was still the Holston River which passed alongside Knoxville on a southwesterly course, and met the northward-flowing Tennessee River, which left the state of North Carolina about 28 miles to the southeast. That nomenclature – referring to the Little Tennessee River as the Tennessee – was a common practice which persisted well into the 20th century. Many Swain County deeds along the river prior to Fontana Dam's construction referred to “Tennessee River.” A church situated near the mouth of Chesquaw Branch was still called [Tennessee River Baptist Church](#) when the property was taken by TVA for Fontana Dam.

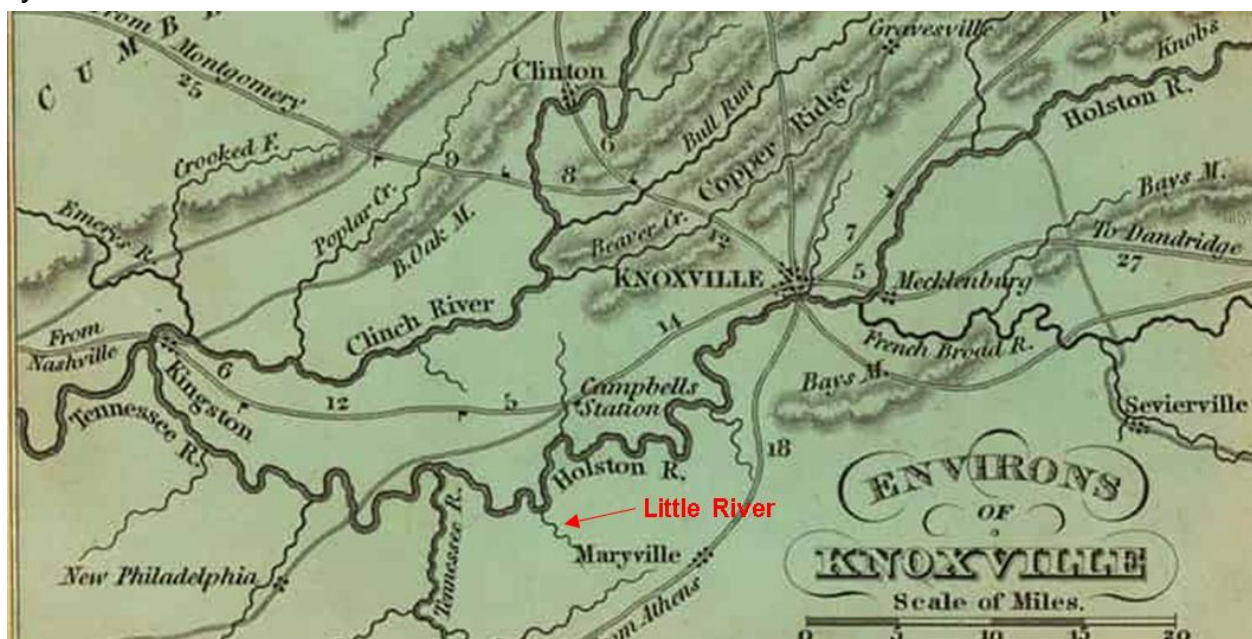


Figure 2. Snippet from 1836 H.S. Tanner map of Tennessee (Source: [Mapgeeks.org](#))

The [Treaty of Holston](#) language used to define the portion of the boundary line which ran through western North Carolina and east Tennessee was extremely vague:

“The boundary between the citizens of the United States and the Cherokee nation is, and shall be as follows: Beginning at the top of the Currahee mountain, where the Creek line passes it: thence a direct line to Tugelo river; thence northeast to the Occunna mountain, and over the same, along the South Carolina Indian boundary, to the North Carolina boundary; thence north, to a point from which a line is to be extended to the river Clinch, that shall pass the Holston at the ridge which divides the waters running into Little river from those running into the Tennessee; thence, up the river Clinch, to Campbell's line, and along the same to the top of Cumberland mountain; thence a direct line to the Cumberland river, where the Kentucky road crosses it; thence, down the Cumberland river, to a point from which a southwest line will strike the ridge which divides the waters of Cumberland from those of Duck river, forty miles above Nashville; thence, down the said ridge, to a point from whence a southwest line will strike the mouth of Duck river.”²

² American State Papers, Indian Affairs, Vol. 1. 1789-1814, pp. 124-125

The ridge in question was thus somewhere in the section between the mouths of the Little River and the (Little) Tennessee River. Today, the Little Tennessee River empties into Watts Bar Lake near Lenoir City and the Little River empties into Fort Loudon Lake north of the Knoxville Airport.

In the 17 miles between the mouths of those two major feeders to the Tennessee River, a number of minor streams, including Cloyd, Gallagher, Poland, and Lackey Creeks as well as the delightfully named Polecat Branch all flow north and west into the Fort Loudon Lake. Given that there were therefore multiple ridges dividing those streams between the mouths of the Little and Little Tennessee Rivers, the course that the boundary line, the other end of which was over 100 miles to the southeast at the pre-existing North Carolina-Cherokee Nation boundary, was inherently undefinable. As a consequence, there were intense disagreements between whites and Cherokees over the route.

As noted in his seminal work³ on the Cherokee treaties, Charles C. Royce concluded that the boundary line started about 1000 yards north of Southwest Point (Kingston, TN) and followed a bearing of S76°E. It is marked as the Hawkins Line in Tennessee and the Pickens Line in North Carolina on Figure 3a (next page). The colored sections in that figure correspond to Royce's estimates of the geographical boundaries associated with several cession treaties.

War Department records, including those related to the Treaty of Holston were lost in a fire in November, 1800, so Royce relied heavily on Benjamin Hawkins's journal entries. His line of S76°E "beginning at a point about 1,000 yards above South West Point" was based on a map Royce discovered in the Office of Indian Affairs. The line in Tennessee was surveyed to about 10 miles from the Smoky crest, around the foot of Meigs Mountain (west side). Hawkins insisted that the line be run according to the terms of the treaty, as ambiguous as they were. It was found that a number of white settlers had intruded on Cherokee land (little surprise there; it was part of a broader pattern). State of Tennessee officials, notably Governor John Sevier, were unhappy⁴ with the insistence of Hawkins that the line be run impartially. As noted in a letter from James Byers⁵ to Edward Price, both local U.S. agents:

"...to manifest their disapprobation of the justice of government forcing them from their plundered possessions – The immaculate government of Tennessee, dissatisfied with the line established by the late commissioners have had it again run by a holy pack of insurgents who report the lines imperfect – and Col. Hawkins a liar – a set of brutes as they are, to endeavour (sic) to smudge the reputation of a man, who has more sense, honor and honesty, than the whole state of Tennessee put together."

Royce, a Bureau of Ethnology employee, would have used the best available maps at the time. At the macroscopic level, with respect to the geographical relationship of towns, the map is well done for the era. However, the shapes and geometrical relations of streams is poor. In terms of the cession boundaries, there is a fairly significant error in a principal point of interest – the purportedly common intersection point of the Hawkins, Pickens, and Meigs Lines. That error will be discussed herein.

A portion of the area shown in Figure 3a is provided in Figure 3b, with the S76 E course overlaid onto the U.S. Geological Survey National Map. The beginning point for the Figure 3b line is the same as Royce – 1,000 yards up the Clinch River above South West Point.

³ Charles C. Royce. [*The Cherokee Nation of Indians: A Narrative of Their Official Relations with the Colonial and Federal Governments, Fifth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology, 1887*](#) (Hereafter *Cherokee Nation*).

⁴ Merritt Bloodworth Pound. "COLONEL BENJAMIN HAWKINS—NORTH CAROLINIAN—BENEFACTOR OF THE SOUTHERN INDIANS: PART I." *The North Carolina Historical Review*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1942, pp. 1–21.

⁵ James Byers was likely the conduit through which a letter from William Blount to James Carey which comprised the principal evidence leading to the expulsion of William Blount from the U.S. Senate in 1797 came into the hands of President John Adams. See [HERE](#).

10^A: Treaty of Hopewell (1785)
 11: Treaty of Holston (1791)
 12,13,14: Treaty of Tellico (1798)
 29: Treaty of Washington (1819)
 Green section at lower left was ceded in 1835 – the fraudulent New Echota treaty

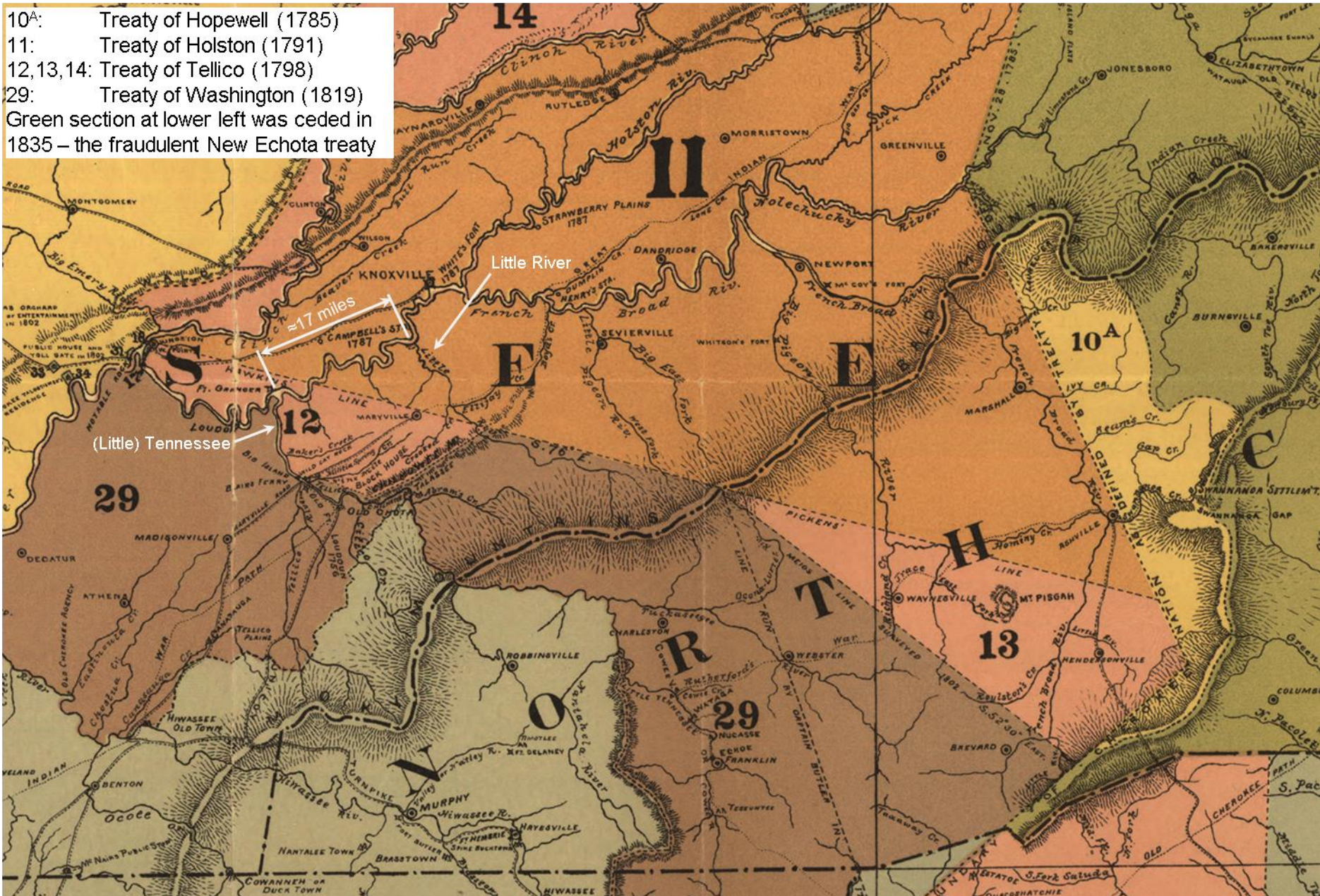


Figure 3a. Charles C. Royce estimates of cession boundaries in East Tennessee and Western North Carolina. The full map with an index of all Cherokee cessions is available for download from the [Library of Congress](#).

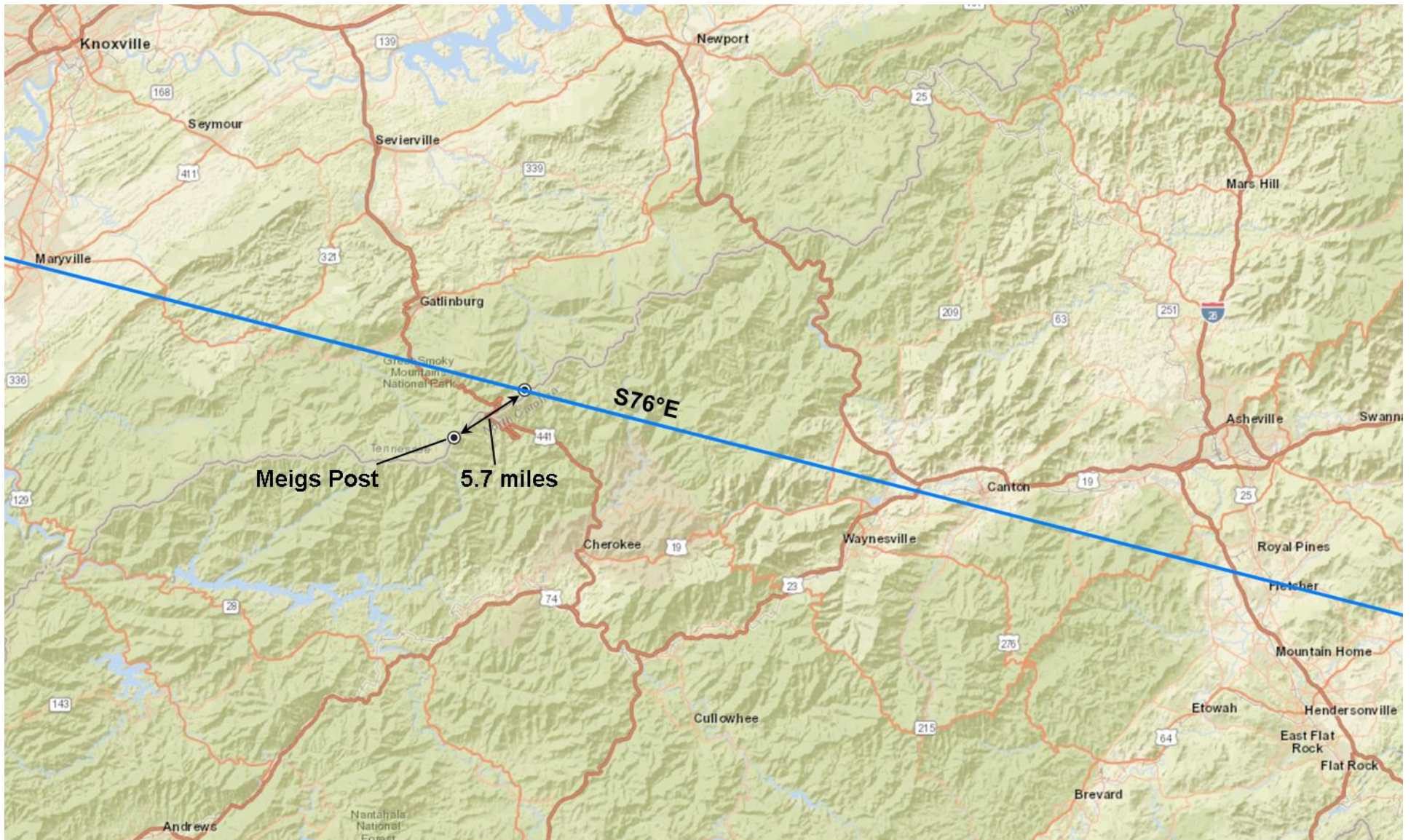


Figure 3b. The S76 E course shown here begins at a point 1000 yards up the Clinch River from [Fort Southwest Point](#).

Meigs Post is atop Mt. Collins, a peak whose crest is quite level, varying by only three ft in elevation over a 200-ft span. The marked location is at the acme or zenith of Mt. Collins, per the [USGS National Map](#), source of this image. It is also about 100 feet northeast of a 1950's era concrete marker placed by John Morrell, a Park Service employee from Tennessee. Earlier survey-based data suggest some doubt about the certainty of the precision Morrell suggested for the marker location. See discussion in Appendix A.

The zoomed view of Figure 3c shows the intersection occurring near the headwaters of the East Fork of the Little Pigeon River, in the area of Mt. Kephart. An even more zoomed USGS National Map view (Figure 3d), shows where the S76 E course crosses the Smokies, just north of Mt. Kephart.

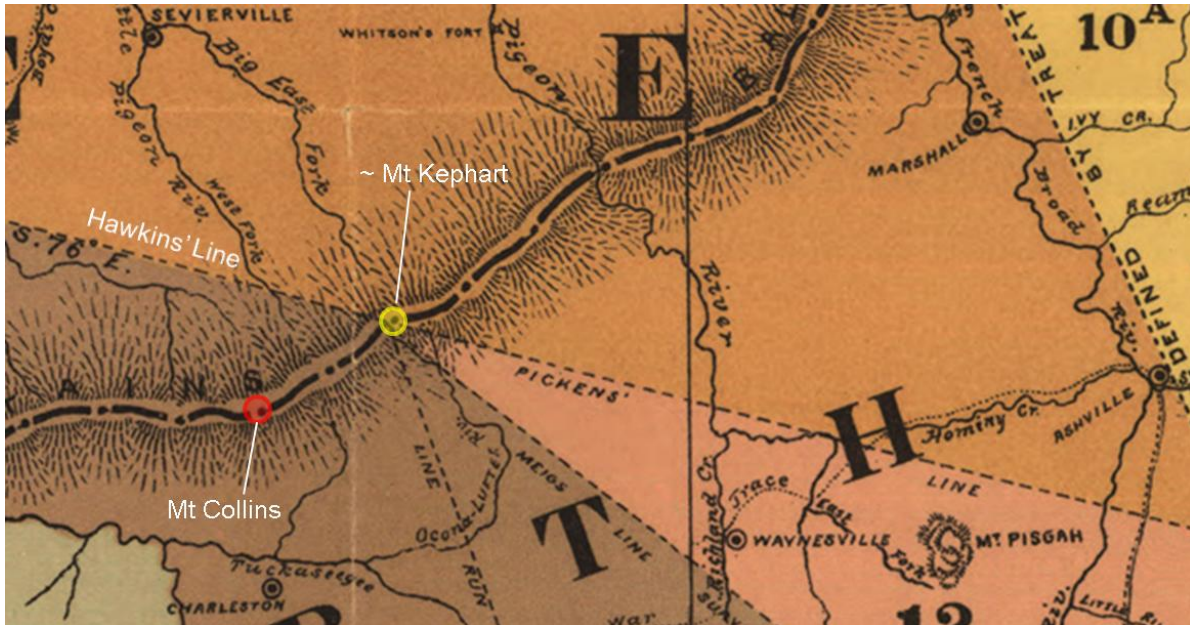


Figure 3c. Zoomed view of part of Figure 3a.

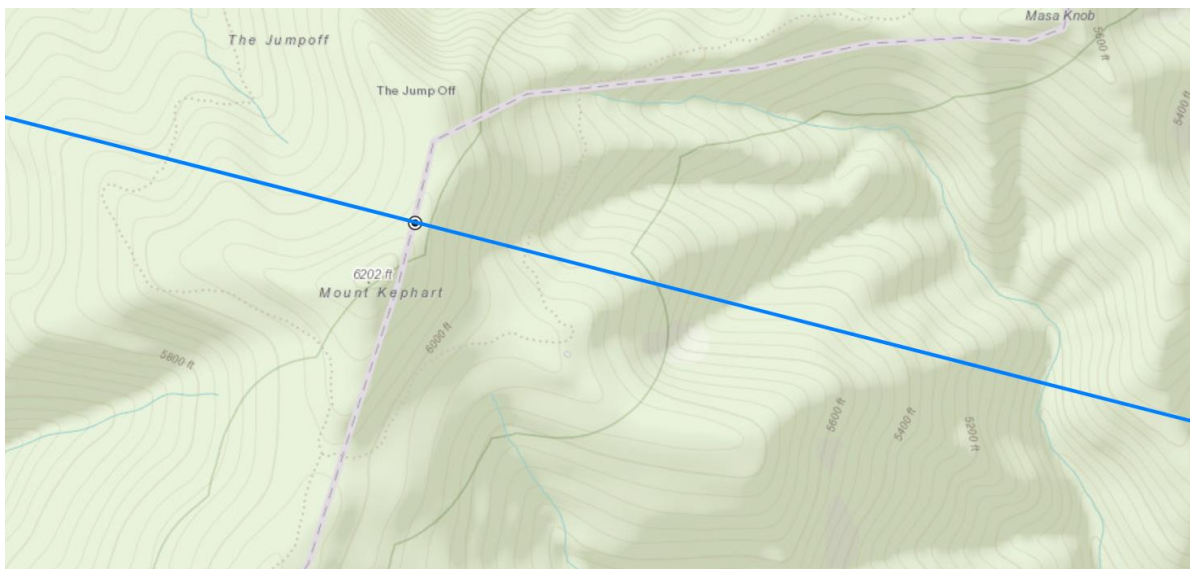


Figure 3d. USGS National Map view of where the S76°E bearing crosses the Smokies crest.

While there are differences in the high precision maps of today and that available to Royce, it is clear that the actual boundary was not S76°E. Plotted in two-dimensional map space, the bearing which would arrive at Meigs Post from Royce's starting point is S71.9°E, a 4.1° difference.

In 1821, William Davenport surveyed the North Carolina-Tennessee state line from Davenport Gap to the Georgia line. When he passed what has long been known as Indian Gap, he recorded "*Beach (sic) 29th mile Indian path at the head of deep cr.*" Continuing on his southwesterly course, he recorded "*Meiges (?) post*" 2.5 miles beyond.⁶

Meigs Post was erected almost two decades before the Davenport survey. Although many of the details are sketchy, a [few journal notes](#) survive from the survey conducted under the direction of

⁶ William Davenport Survey notes (transcribed), GRSM13455, Great Smoky Mountains National Park Archives.

Return Jonathan Meigs, U.S. Agent to the Cherokees. The log entry for August 17, 1802 records that they erected a 6-ft high, 15-in diameter spruce pine (hemlock) post which was surrounded by “*about 2 tons of stone, which with difficulty we collected having no tools for digging.*” That post was the end point of the Hawkins Line and the purported starting point for the survey of another cession boundary line – the Meigs-Freeman Line which was associated with the Treaty of Tellico. As will be shown in the following section, Meigs Post was not the starting point (or, perhaps, ending point) for that line.

Meigs Post is referenced in both North Carolina and Tennessee land grants and deeds up into the 20th century, including the deed⁷ from Champion Fibre Company to the State of North Carolina in 1931 which was made as a part of the North Carolina Park Commission’s acquisition of land for the Park. Whether or not it was the work of “*a holy pack of insurgents*” and “*a set of brutes,*” as indicated in Figure 4, the ultimate course was obviously not a straight line.

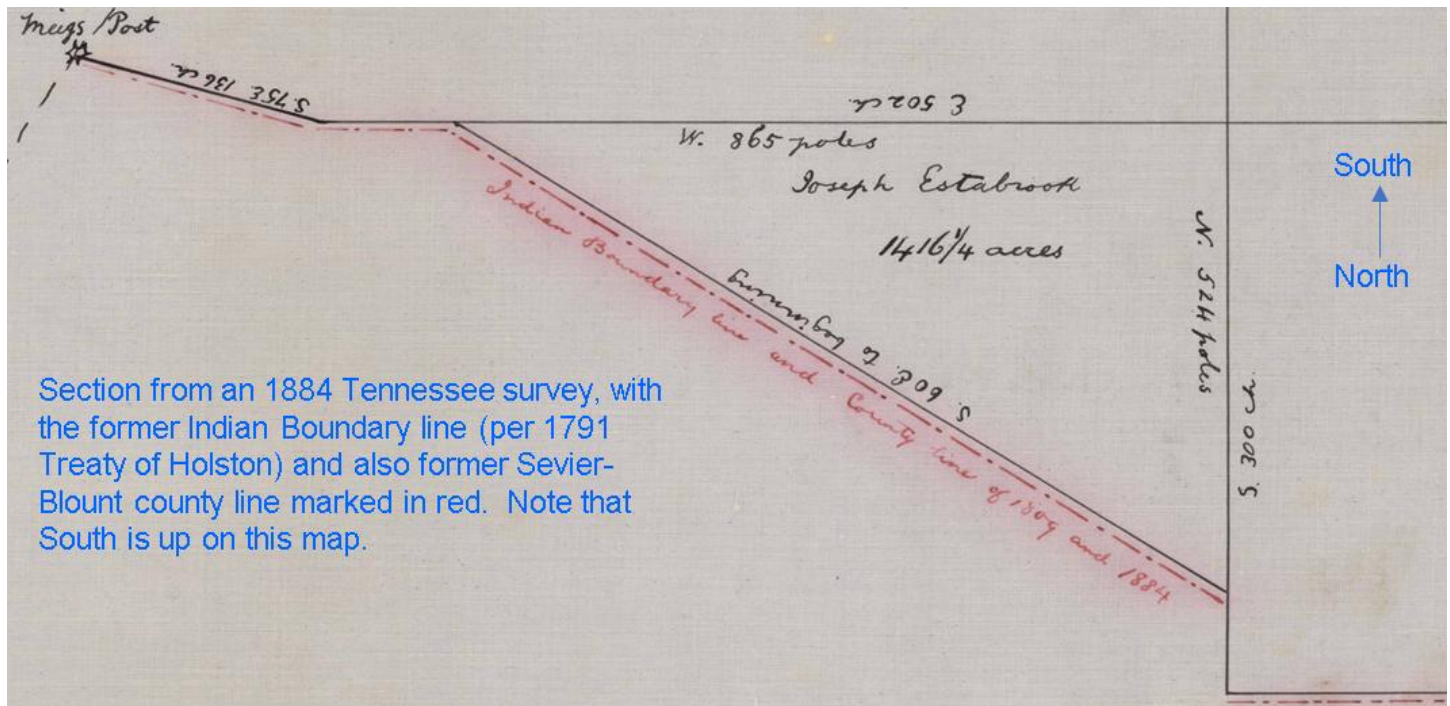


Figure 4. Section from an 1884 survey, courtesy of Mike Aday, Great Smoky Mountains National Park Archivist. Record ID = GRSM19752_2. For a larger, north up orientation, see [here](#).

That Meigs Post was atop Mt. Collins was a matter of consensus on both sides of the state line (although there are doubts about the precise location; see Appendix A). Consensus notwithstanding, there were lawsuits and reportedly fist fights⁸ in Tennessee, concerning the location.

While the disputes were perhaps more civil in North Carolina (no reports of fist fights), there were significant legal scuffles and economic consequences related to the boundary lines, including nullification of ownership of hundreds of thousands of acres of property acquired by land grant which lay west of the Meigs-Freeman Lines. Legal wrangling included litigation which rose to the venue of the U.S. Supreme Court once and thrice to the North Carolina Supreme Courts. See [A Muddled Mess in the Mountains: Late 18th and Early 19th Century Land Speculation in Western North Carolina](#).

The focus of the above discussion has largely been with respect to the course of the Hawkins Line and the location of Meigs Post. Before moving on to the primary focus of this paper, the Treaty of

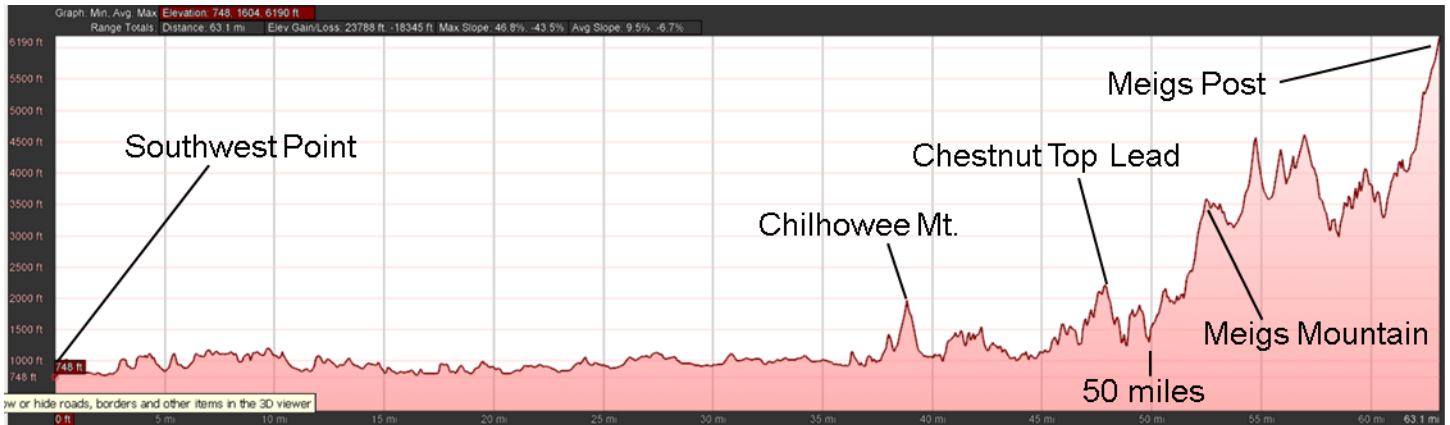
⁷ Swain County Registry, [deed book 60, pp 1-23](#). The mention of Meigs Post is on page 9.

⁸ Ken Wise, *Hiking Trails of the Great Smoky Mountains*, 2nd Edition, p. 244, University of Tennessee Press, 2014.

Tellico's Meigs-Freeman Line, there are elements related to the Treaty of Holston which should be noted.

First, as noted, Hawkins' survey crew did not complete the survey all the way to the crest of the Smokies. Based on Hawkins' own words,⁹ the survey was discontinued after 50 miles of travel from Southwest Point. This put them at the northwestern base of Meigs Mountain.

The Meigs Mountain lead is over 1200 feet higher than the previous high point, on the Chestnut Top Lead, south of Townsend. Had they continued on the course towards Mt Collins, the straight-line ascent up Meigs Mountain would've involved an elevation gain of 0.2 miles in 0.44 miles of lateral travel. In comparison with all of the territory they'd seen to that point, it was as if they'd run into a wall, as is illustrated by this Google Earth elevation profile on a straight-line course from Southwest Point to Meigs Post:



Hawkins wrote to General James Winchester:

“After I parted with you the general and I progressed, in all, 50 miles, and there from the concurring testimony of our experience, that of the white hunters and the Indian commissioners, we found ourselves under the necessity to halt the line. The weather was too dry and warm to move without the aid of pack horses, and the mountains were impassable for them.”

Independent validation of stopping prior to the ascent of Meigs Mountain is found a journal of Surveyors Joseph Whitner and J.C. Kilpatrick¹⁰ in which they recorded:

“This line terminates at the 30th mile from Holston¹¹ in the midst of mountains which cannot be passed by horses and is extremely difficult for foot men.”

The 30 miles from the Holston River is consistent with Hawkins' 50 miles from Southwest Point, and as seen in the elevation profile, is where the ascent to Meigs Mountain would have begun.

Conceptually, the Pickens Line would have followed the same course on North Carolina side, and is so shown in maps used by Charles Royce, others, as well as herein, but it was never actually run. This had legal ramifications which will be discussed later.

⁹ *Letters of Benjamin Hawkins, 1796-1806*, Collection of the Georgia Historical Society Vol. IX. 1916. p. 196. [Digital copy available free at archive.org](#). Other correspondence during the summer of 1797 included in that source makes it clear that Hawkins himself did not go along on the survey, although he was likely on hand in determining the starting point. He would've been derelict in his numerous other obligations as Indian Agent to all tribes south of the Ohio had he done so.

¹⁰ Hawkins Line Survey Journal, Great Smoky Mountains National Park Archives, GRSM 15656, Meigs Post Papers.

¹¹ Hawkins' point of reference was Southwest Point. It is 20 miles from there to the Holston (Tennessee) River, so Hawkins' "50th mile" was the same as Whitner's and Kilpatrick's "30th" mile.

2. Treaty of Tellico and the Meigs-Freeman Line

The [Treaty of Tellico](#) was concluded on October 2, 1798 at the Cherokee Council House near Tellico. One would think that with the change of venue and lessons learned from the difficulties resulting from the Holston Treaty's poor geographical definition would lead to improved specificity. If anything, the geographical ambiguity worsened and the wording of the new boundary line which affected the North Carolina territory proved to be even more confusing. From the termination point of the Hawkins Line (which as noted, had never been completed), the revised boundary was "to be continued in a southeastwardly course to where the most southwardly branch of Little River crosses the divisional line to Tuggaloe River"

Treaty signatories of note

Among those signing the Tellico Treaty on behalf of the Cherokees was Yonah Equah, or Big Bear,* as shown below. This is the same Big Bear who acquired a [640-acre reserve tract](#) in conjunction with an 1819 cession treaty. His tract, which was variously referred to as Bear's Town and Big Bear's Farm, occupied most of what is today Bryson City. It seems doubtful that the Charley** who signed this treaty would be the Tsali (Charley) who was executed four decades later. But the Sawanookeh*** name is suggestive; it would not be surprising if he was a forebear of Chief Osley Bird Saunooke, Chief of the Eastern Band from 1951 to 1955 and again from 1959 to 1963.

IN WITNESS of all and every thing herein determined between the United States of America, and the whole Cherokee nation, the parties hereunto set their hands and seals, in the Council-House, near Tellico, on Cherokee ground, and within the United States, this second day of October, in the year one thousand seven hundred and ninety-eight, and in the twenty-third year of the Independence and Sovereignty of the United States.

**THOS. BUTLER,
GEO. WALTON.**

Ne-ne-tu-ah, or Bloody Fellow,
Ostaiah,
Jaunne, or John,
Oortlokecteh,
Chokonnistaller, or Stallion,
Noot-hoietah,
Kunnateetah, or Rising Fawn,
Utturah, or Skin Worm,
Wee-lee, or Will,
Oolasoteh,
Tlorene,
Jonnurteekee, or Little John,
Oonatakoteehee,
Kanowsurkee, or Broom,
Yonah Olah, Bear at Home,
Tunksalenee, or Thick Legs,
Oorkullaukee
Kumamah, or Butterfly
Chattakuteehee
Kænitta, or Little Turkey

Kettegiskie
Tauquotihee, or the Glass
Chuquilatague
Salleekookoo-olah
Tallo tuskee
Chellokee
Tuskeegatee, or Long Fellow
Neeka-anneah, or Woman Holder
Kulsateehee
Keetakeuskah, or Prince
** Charley
Akooh
*** Sawanookeh
* Yonah Equah, or Big Bear
Keenahkunnah
Ka-wee-soola-skee
Teekakalohenah
Ookousetech, or John Taylor
Chochu Chee

(Image source: [Statutes at Large, Vol. 7, Indian Treaties, p. 64](#))

Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Butler, who was in charge of an infantry regiment stationed at Fort Southwest Point, was one of the U.S. Commissioners at the Tellico Treaty. Butler ran an initial boundary line, following his interpretation of the treaty directions. The course he followed, which passed through Ela near the mouth of the Oconaluftee, would have resulted in a large number of Cherokees being left to the east of the line – outside of the Cherokee boundary, including folks living in the section from the Nick Bottoms – Bird Town to Qualla and the overwhelming majority of the Tuckasegee River drainage above Whittier of today. The Butler Line was untenable although less than two decades later, it plus most of the Little Tennessee drainage was ceded.

In 1802, Return Jonathan Meigs oversaw the running of a less aggressive line, with respected surveyor Thomas Freeman conducting the survey. The new line was specified to run on a course of S52.5°E, and became known as the Meigs-Freeman Line (referred to hereafter as M-F). Meigs noted that no white settlement was cut off by M-F, and that only five Indian families were living on the east side of the line. That S52.5°E bearing is validated by calls of early deeds in the Oconaluftee region along the Indian boundary. On April 25, 1803, less than a year after the running of the Meigs-Freeman Line, Felix Walker deeded 640 acres of land to Abram Wiggins for \$250 ([Haywood deed book A, page 143](#)):

Beginning at a forked white oak, Holland's corner on the west side of the river, thence west two hundred and eighty poles to a chestnut on the Indian line, thence with said Indian line South fifty-two and a half east to a point on the said Indian line....

But three-quarters of a century later, a survey in the same area gave a bearing of S50°E. That 2.5° change in course points toward a critical element needed in consideration of historical property boundary lines, [Magnetic Declination](#). The declination at the turn of the 19th century was just under 5°; by 1875, it was 2.6 .

The lands within the embrace of Swain County which lay along M-F are now entirely in either the Great Smoky Mountains National Park or the Qualla Boundary of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. All of the Swain County boundaries, such as the Walker to Wiggins deed mentioned above, have long since been absorbed and vanished. But there are literally miles of land in neighboring Jackson County where property boundaries of today are defined by M-F, arguably the most important surveyed line not just in Jackson County's history, as a [Sylva Herald and Ruralite article](#) indicated, but all of Western North Carolina's history.

M-F is immediately evident visually on the [Jackson County property map](#) interface after zooming in one notch on that Jackson interface (Figure 5). Using nothing more complex than a screen capture and elementary trigonometry (Figure 6), the bearing of M-F in Jackson County of today can be readily determined, even though the county maps aren't intended for that purpose. There are also multiple deeds and surveys of various vintages and quality in the Jackson County Deed Registry which refer to a range of bearings along M-F. A review of nine deeds and five plats, some with multiple sections along M-F, recorded bearings ranging from S43.27°E to S47.04°E. As seen in Figure 6, the visually-constructed, property map-based course is S47.1°.

The Jackson County mapping work is done strictly for tax purposes, and the web page primary interface includes a specific caution to that effect. That the individual plot boundaries are not drawn with extreme care can be quickly verified by comparing the bearings recorded by a professional surveyor with those drawn on the Jackson County property map. Further, as noted above the bearings do vary from tract to tract (and for the same tract, over time). However, the fact that there are so many boundaries which are on M-F allows the net course to be estimated with relatively good accuracy.

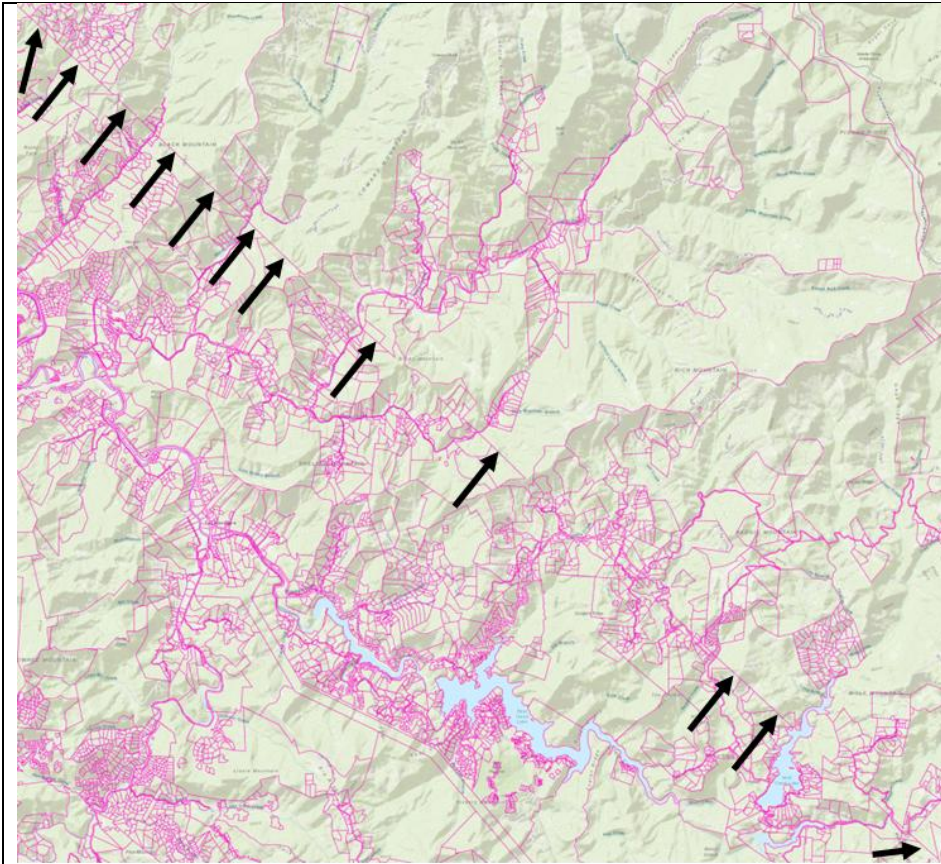


Figure 5. The Meigs-Freeman Line is immediately evident in the Jackson County property maps.

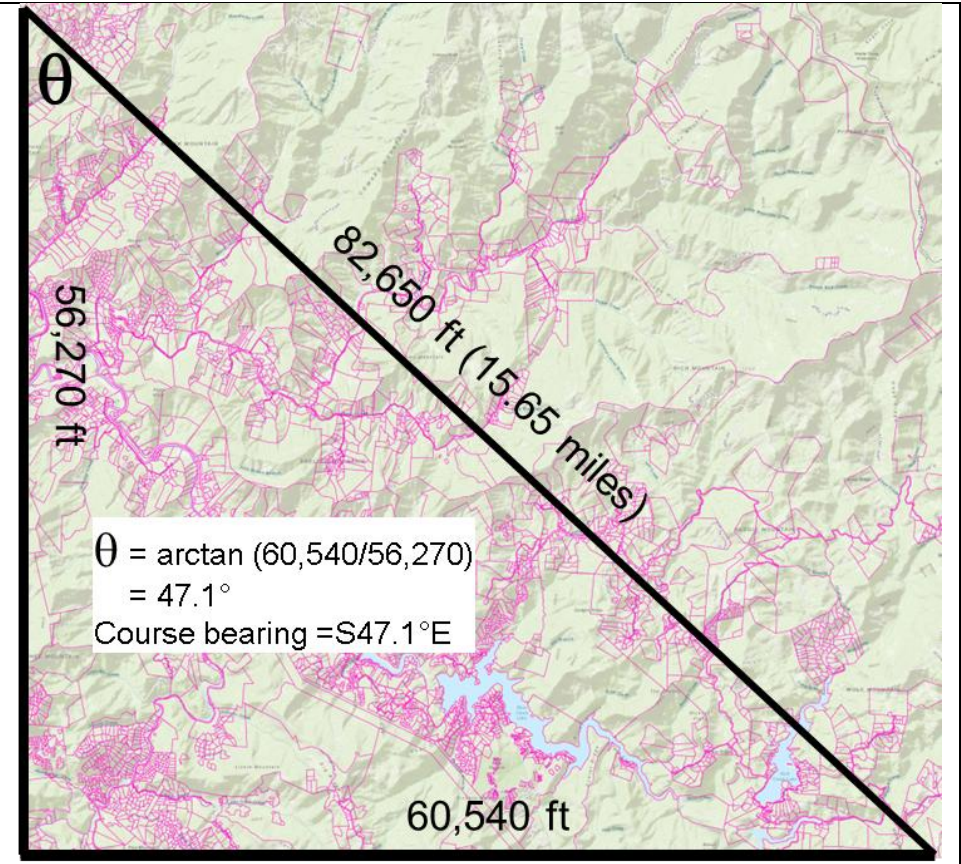


Figure 6. The overall boundary orientation is calculated with basic trigonometry

To some extent, the variations in survey bearing across Jackson County are likely attributable to a range of survey qualities. In addition, selection of convenient boundary markers, and thus the boundary reference points likely changed over time. Today, much of the extant line is a U.S. Forest Service boundary, which traces to acquisition of large cutover tracts of timber.

But there is little doubt that the bulk of the difference between the S52.5 E bearing indicated in early deeds and other records is because M-F was strictly compass-based, with no adjustment for magnetic declination.

The line location has very practical implications in modern Jackson County. Even though that is not the case for Swain today, its beginning point, on the crest of the Smoky Mountains, is of considerable historical interest.

Charles Royce noted in *Cherokee Nation*: “There is much difficulty in ascertaining the exact point of departure of ‘Meigs Line’ from Great Iron Mountains...A map of the survey of Qualla Boundary, by M.S. Temple, in 1876, shows a portion of the continuation of ‘Meigs Line’ as passing about 1½ miles east of Quallatown. Surveyor Temple mentions it as running ‘S.50°E. (formerly S52½°E.’”

Royce referenced the survey field notes, so would have been aware of Meigs Post. His words above demonstrate that he understood Meigs Post was not necessarily the starting point for M-F, yet his map (see Figs. 3a and 3c) is obviously based on starting from the same point where the Hawkins and Pickens Lines intersected at the crest of the Smokies. He also recognized that more modern surveys reflected a different bearing. But apparently, he was not aware of magnetic declination, and therefore didn't grasp the implications. As a result, the boundary lines on his map are markedly off.

The multiple sections of M-F seen in the Jackson County property map (Fig 5) can be used to not only estimate the overall bearing of M-F within the county, as is done in Figure 6, but also can be used to extrapolate to the crest of the Smokies to estimate the M-F starting point.

An arguably better alternative exists, however. Several recorded surveys in Jackson County note a boundary which lies on the Meigs-Freeman Line, such as the Wayehutta Creek survey shown in the Figure 7 snippet, which was extracted from a plat prepared by Professional Land Surveyor James Watkins on January 3, 2023 (red markings are mine).

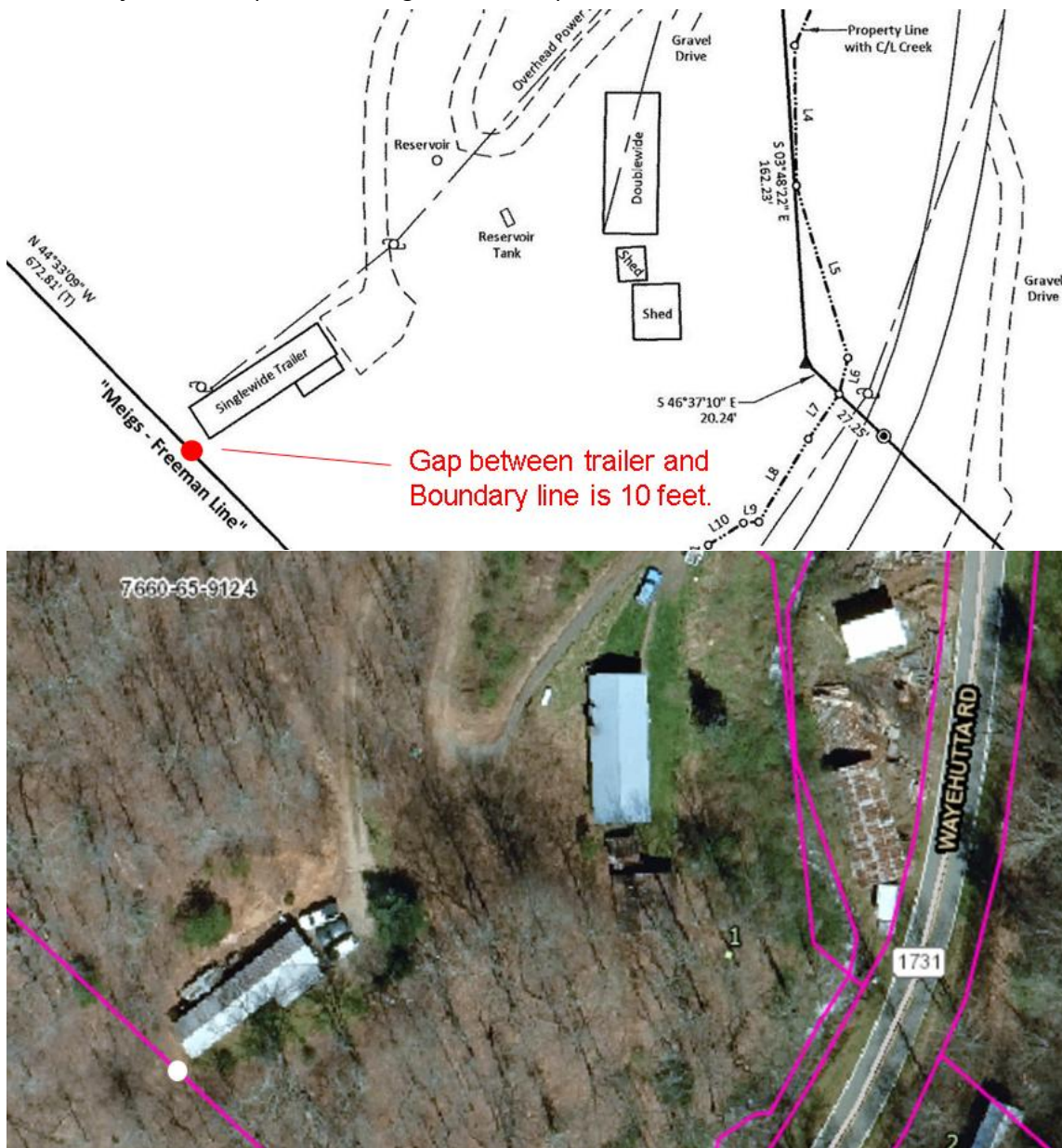


Figure 7. Snippet of a Wayehutta Creek survey (Jackson County Cabinet 25 Plat 936) and a screen capture from [Jackson County property map](#) interface for roughly the equivalent area.

The coordinates of the spot marked by the red and white dots just southwest of the trailer on Fig. 7 are 35.34175° latitude, -83.13571° longitude. That specific point was selected because of its proximity to a visible feature – the singlewide trailer – which was also shown in the Watkins survey. Using the survey scaling (not shown) and measurement tools of the web interface, the gap between the trailer and the boundary line for the survey and the Jackson map were consistent: 10 feet.

This was one of the three points selected. The other two (Figure 8) were also chosen because there are features near them which are easily identifiable in satellite imagery (structures, road) and are relatively modern. One of the other points selected was at the mouth of Kitchen Branch, next to Skyland Drive, where M-F runs right beside Lee Bumgarner Road. The third is along Canada Road near Sols Creek, where the M-F boundary is a few feet from the end of a shop building.

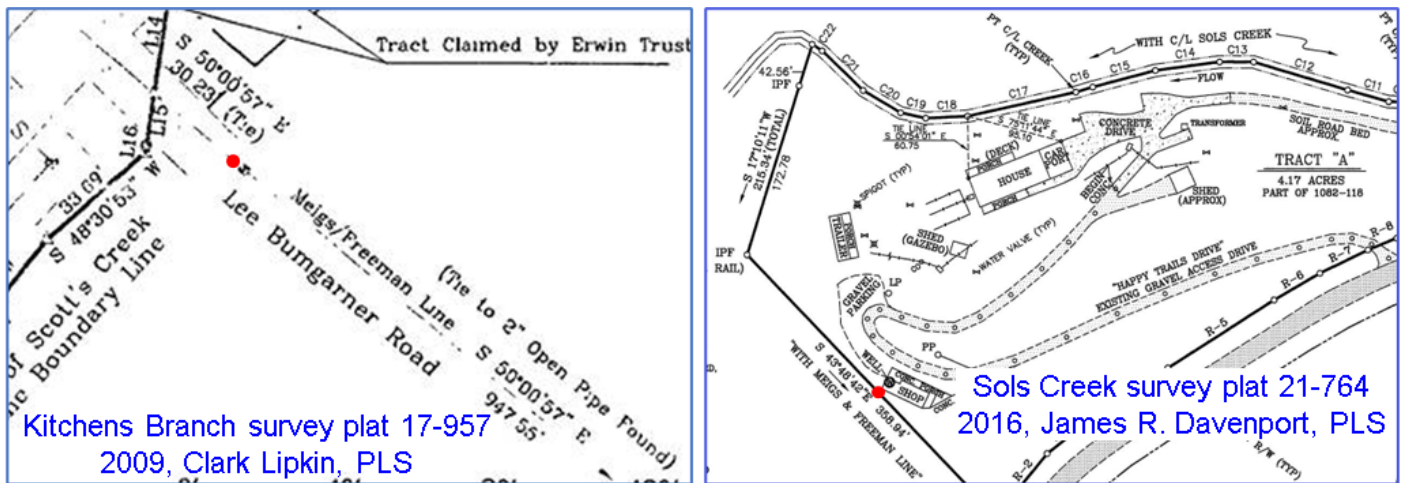


Figure 8. Snippets from surveys with M-F boundary near identifiable features (road, trailer)

In Figure 9, a single line of extrapolation is marked from the NC-TN border to the NC-SC border, using the Sols Creek – Kitchen Branch pair to define the course. All three selected survey-based points are designated on the map, as are their coordinates.¹²

The slope of the line was calculated to have a course of S47.0°E – one-tenth of a degree different than that calculate based on strictly on a visually-based drawn line of Figure 6. While it is not surprising that the two different methods were in such close agreement, it is interesting to note that the bearings listed on both recorded surveys as well as deeds (including those where there was no accompanying survey plat) indicated bearings which varied by several degrees, as noted previously.

In Figure 9, Jackson County is outlined in black. The red line is indexed to the Kitchen Branch and Sols Creek locations. Coordinates of the two locations can be interactively retrieved from map sources, including the USGS [National Map Viewer](#), [Jackson County property map](#), [North Carolina Val Map Finder](#) and [Google Earth](#). With those coordinates, course or bearing and distance can be estimated with spherical¹³ trigonometry. A Wikipedia page on the [Haversine formula](#) explains the methodology, and includes the relevant equations. For my own purposes, I embedded the equations into an Excel spreadsheet, but there are on-line calculators, such as those at [Movable Type Scripts](#) and a [Federal Communications Commission](#) pages.

¹² All coordinates listed in this paper are WGS 84 datum based.

¹³ The spherical trigonometric methodology assumes the earth is a perfect sphere, which it isn't; it's equatorial circumference (0° latitude) is a bit greater than its polar circumference. This was recognized in theory by Isaac Newton in the 17th century as a consequence of the earth's rotation. Today, the WGS 84 datum uses an equatorial radius of 6378137 meters (3963 miles) and polar radius of 6356752 meters (3950 miles), a difference of about 0.33%. I'm highly confident that there are folks who have worked through the math to deal with this, but I'm even more confident that I'm not about to give it a go! The slightly aspherical effect on the work here is minute in relation to the overall uncertainties.

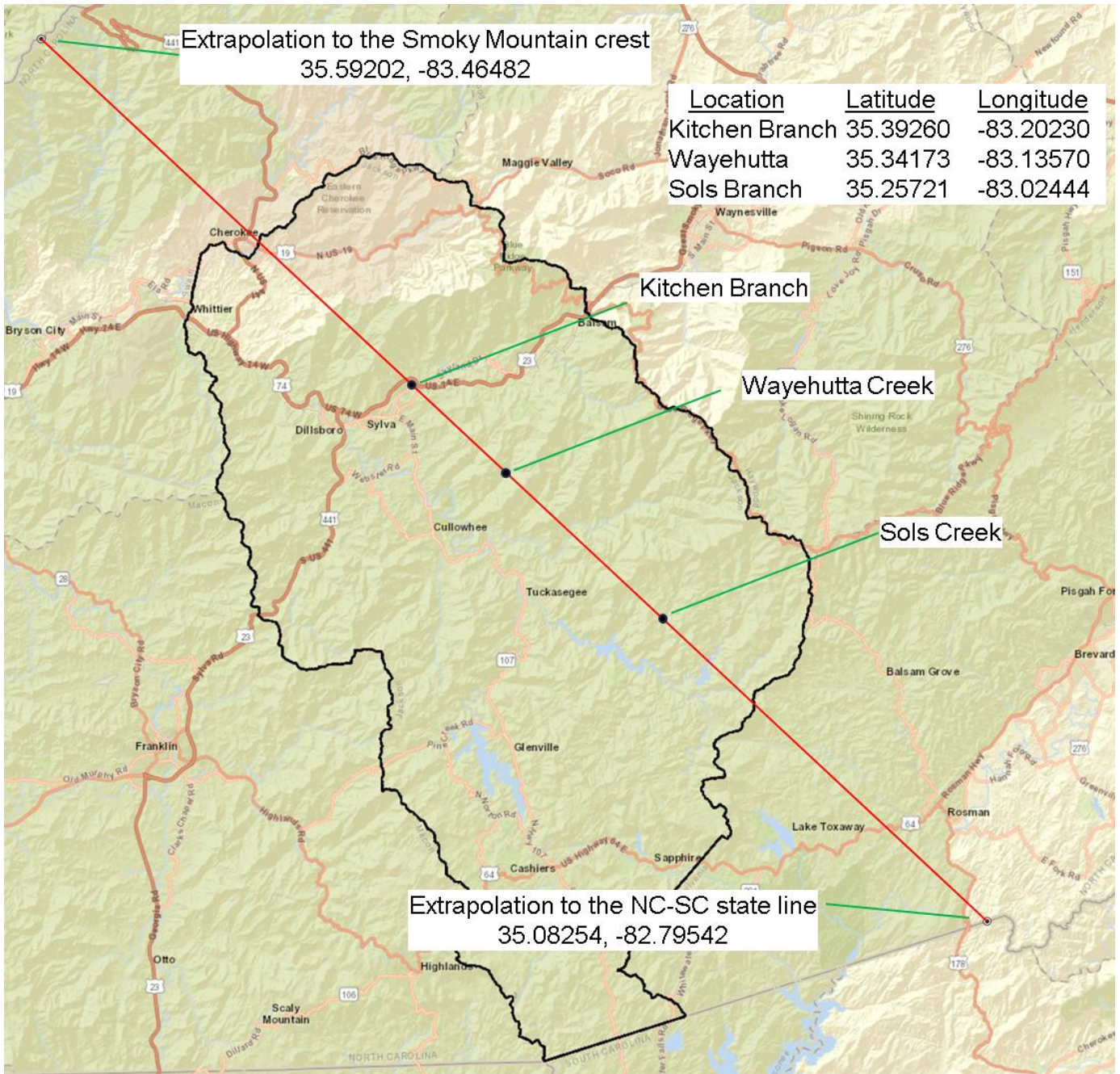


Figure 9. Extrapolation of M-F from marked Jackson County survey points to the North Carolina-Tennessee state line at the crest of the Smokies and the North Carolina- South Carolina line south of Rosman, NC. Image source: [Jackson County Maps](#) (my annotations).

The calculated survey bearing, based on the averages of both coming and going¹⁴ between the Kitchen Branch and Sols Creek locations is S47.0°E (or N47.0°W), and the distance is 13.73 miles. While it appears that the line also goes through the Wayehutta Creek in Figure 9, it actually misses it by 51 feet, as indicated in Figure 10.

In Figure 11, three dots at the Smoky Mountain crest reflect the extensions of each of the three pairs of points (i.e., Sols Creek-Wayehutta Creek, Sols Creek-Kitchen Branch, and Wayehutta Creek-Kitchen Branch).

¹⁴ The azimuth bearing from point A to point B is not the precise opposite of B to A. The azimuth pairs can be assembled to establish the ground-based survey bearing.



Figure 10. Offset in Wayehutta Creek marker using the Kitchen Branch-Sols Creek pair

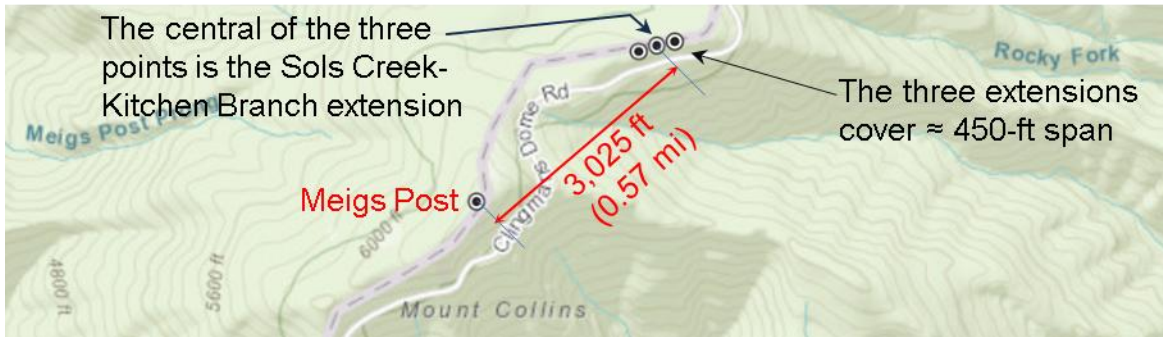


Figure 11. Extensions of the three Meigs-Freeman Line pairs and Meigs Post

The span on the crest of the Smokies between the extremes of the line extrapolations is \approx 450 ft, with the extremes being equally spaced on either side of the Sols Creek – Kitchen Branch extension. That central Sols Creek – Kitchen Branch extrapolation was selected as the base reference because those two points are the furthest apart, which should provide the best definition (all else being equal).

The inferred Meigs-Freeman Line beginning point on top of Old Smoky is well-removed from Meigs Post, which is 0.57 miles from the baseline Sols Creek – Kitchen Branch extension. Meigs Post was clearly not the terminating endpoint of the Meigs-Freeman Line.

Means of improving the extrapolation

As in virtually all fields, more data offers the potential to improve both accuracy and precision. In this situation, if a dozen or more sets of points lying on the Meigs-Freeman line could be established, it would become possible to attack this in an entirely different manner by linear regression – i.e., developing a course which best fits the overall data. Beyond offering the potential for a more faithful representation of the starting point of the Meigs-Freeman Line, it would have the added benefit of much more accurately quantifying the scatter and offer a sense of the inherent uncertainty.

But even with the limited data and the two fundamentally different approaches, it has been shown here that the Meigs-Freeman Line unquestionably started over one-half mile northeast of Meigs Post; the closest of the three extrapolations is over half a mile from Meigs Post, clearly demonstrating that the actually run Meigs-Freeman boundary line of 1802 did NOT intersect the Smokies at Meigs Post.

Two independent confirmations of the calculated line

A portion of the [Surveyor Temple map](#) referenced by Royce shown in Figure 13a. The red-dashed line (author's) along the Meigs & Freeman line of the Temple map intersects both Soco Creek and the Oconaluftee at locations which closely match the Jackson boundary extrapolation in the [National Map](#) section of M-F shown Figure 13b. Also shown in Figure 13b is a line drawn on a course of S52.5°E from Meigs Post, illustrating that by the time the lines reached the Cherokee area, there was already a gap of over 0.6 miles between the actual Meigs-Freeman line (based on modern Jackson County boundaries) and that purported S52.5°E course. Growth in that gap with distance

will be addressed after covering the second independent confirmation means in the triplet of Figure 14 maps.

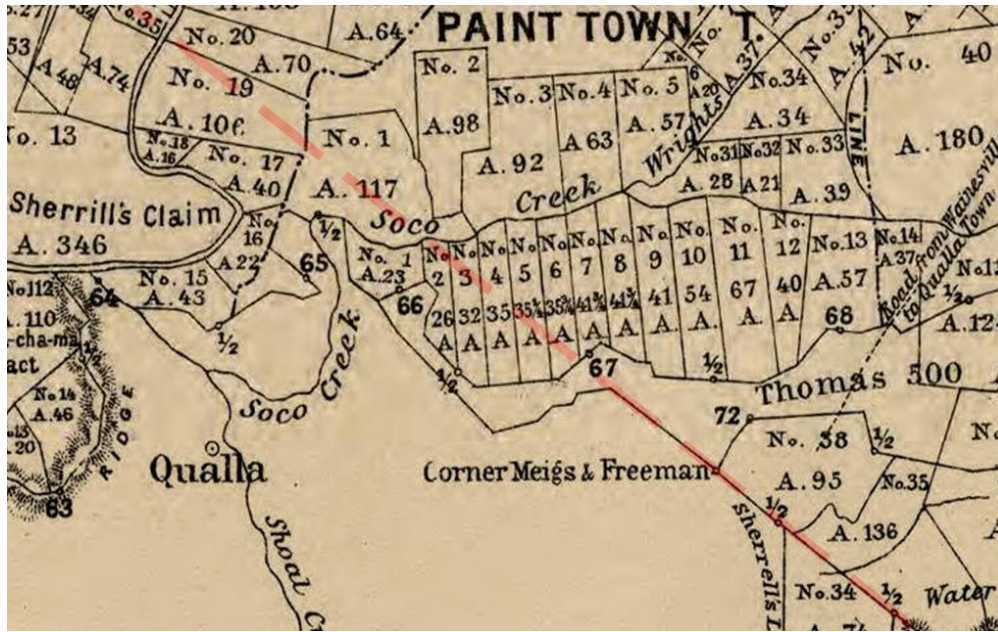


Figure 13a. Meigs-Freeman Line on [Temple map of Qualla area](#) and USGS National Map.

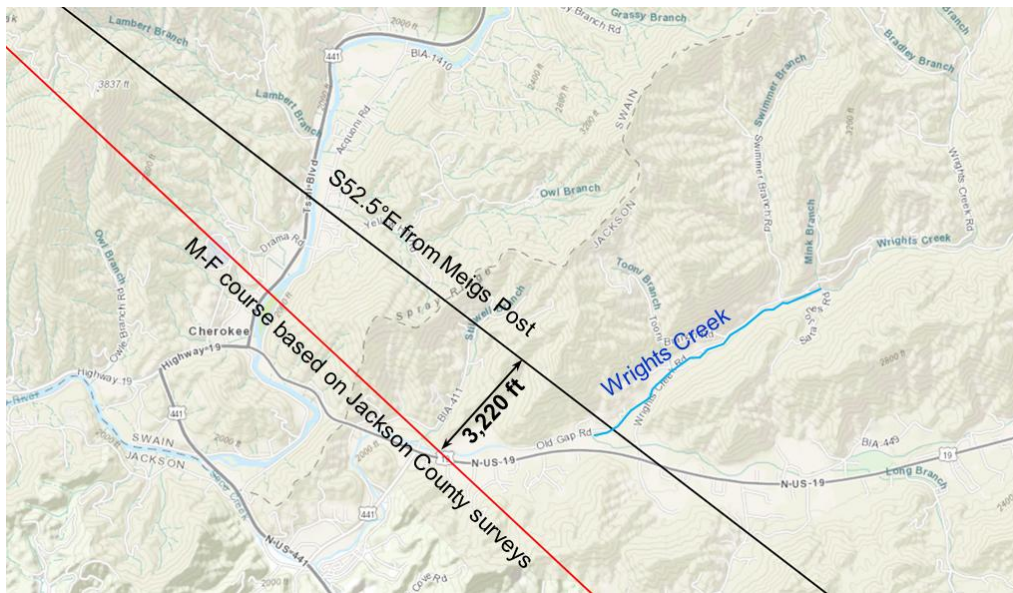


Figure 13b. Calculated M-F Line and a course of S52.5°E from Meigs Post in Paint Town area

In Figure 14a, a section USGS Whittier quadrangle onto which Haywood County Land Grants 38, 126, and 133 (all issued to Nathan Hyatt between 1825 and 1829) had been previously overlaid. I had done this for other, unrelated purposes. The dimensions for the three land grant tracts shown in Figure 14a were based on the survey calls in those grants.

In Figure 14b, a small section from the [1820 Robert Love Survey](#) is shown. The map was generated with north being down, so it has been rotated to show north up here. It was also rotated 5° clockwise to account for magnetic declination, which has been previously noted (the boundary calls for the land grants of Figure 14a were similarly rotated prior to mapping). In the Love survey maps, the Meigs-Freeman line was denoted by a pair of the pair of lines which the label denotes.

In Figure 14c, a partially transparent version of the Love survey map is overlaid onto that of Figure 14a (both larger in size, obviously). A careful examination will show that the match isn't perfect, but it

is very close – within the sort of tolerance that would be expected on a large-scale map like the Love survey (the “North” section from LG which this snippet was extracted, covered over 200 square miles).

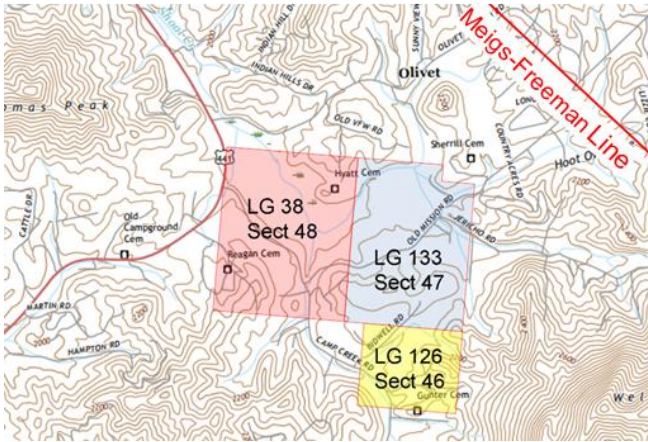


Figure 14a. Original Nathan Hyatt land grants, overlaid onto modern topo

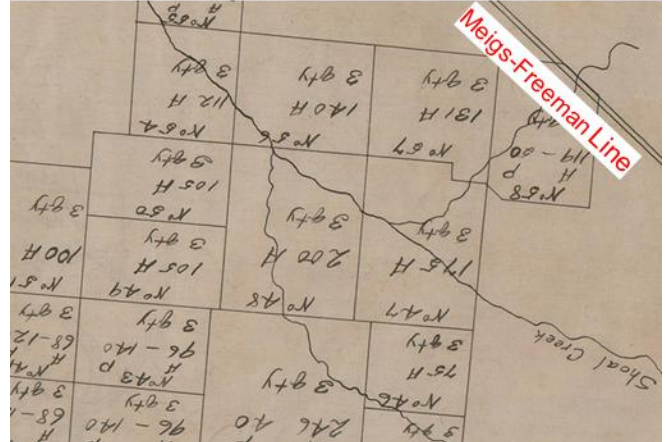


Figure 14b. Snippet from Robert Love Survey of 1820, rotated for magnetic declination

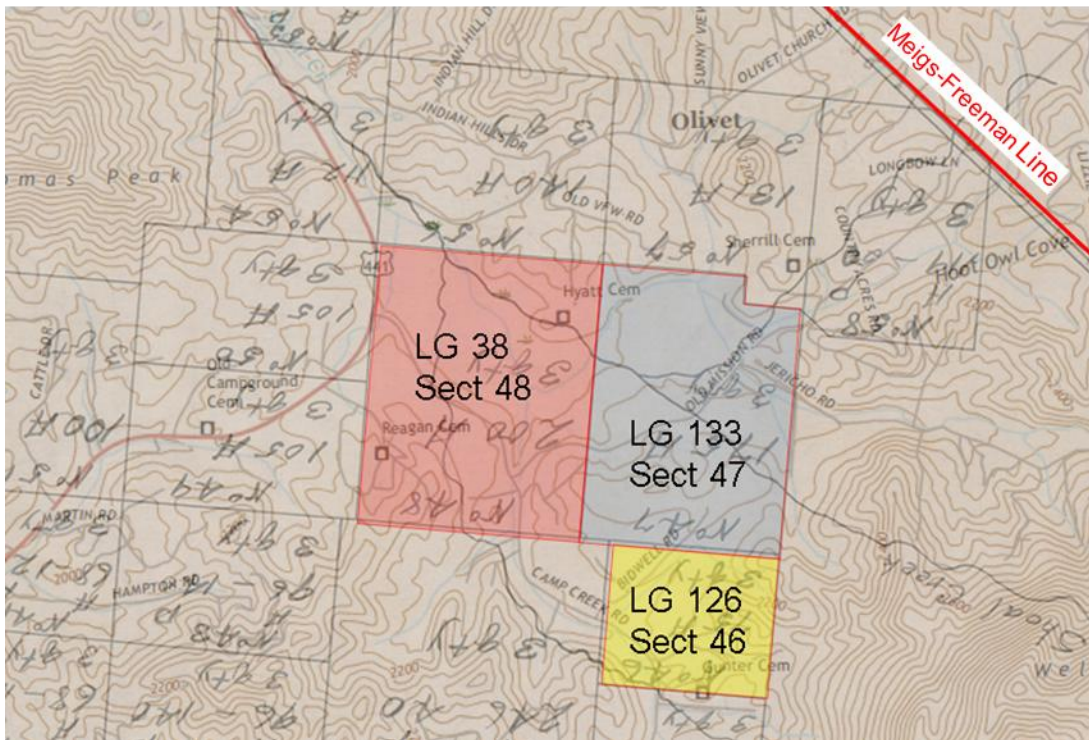


Figure 14c. Overlay of partially transparent Figure 14b onto Figure 14a.

Consequences of the difference between purported and actual Meigs-Freeman courses

Figure 13b showed the Meigs-Freeman Line and a S52.5°E course from Meigs Post – the course cited by Royce and others. By the time the two lines reach Soco Creek, they’re over ½ mile apart. As the courses continue southeastward, the gap widens. Wrights Creek is highlighted in Figure 13b to emphasize its relationship to M-F and the relative proportionality seen in Figure 13a.

As shown in Figure 15, the true Meigs-Freeman line intersects the S52.5°E version from Meigs Point at about 5.85 miles from the crest of the Smokies. From that point on, the gap widens by a mile every 10.43 miles of line travel. The 2.3 mile gap at Hawkins Knob is noted to illustrate a point which will be discussed in Appendix B.

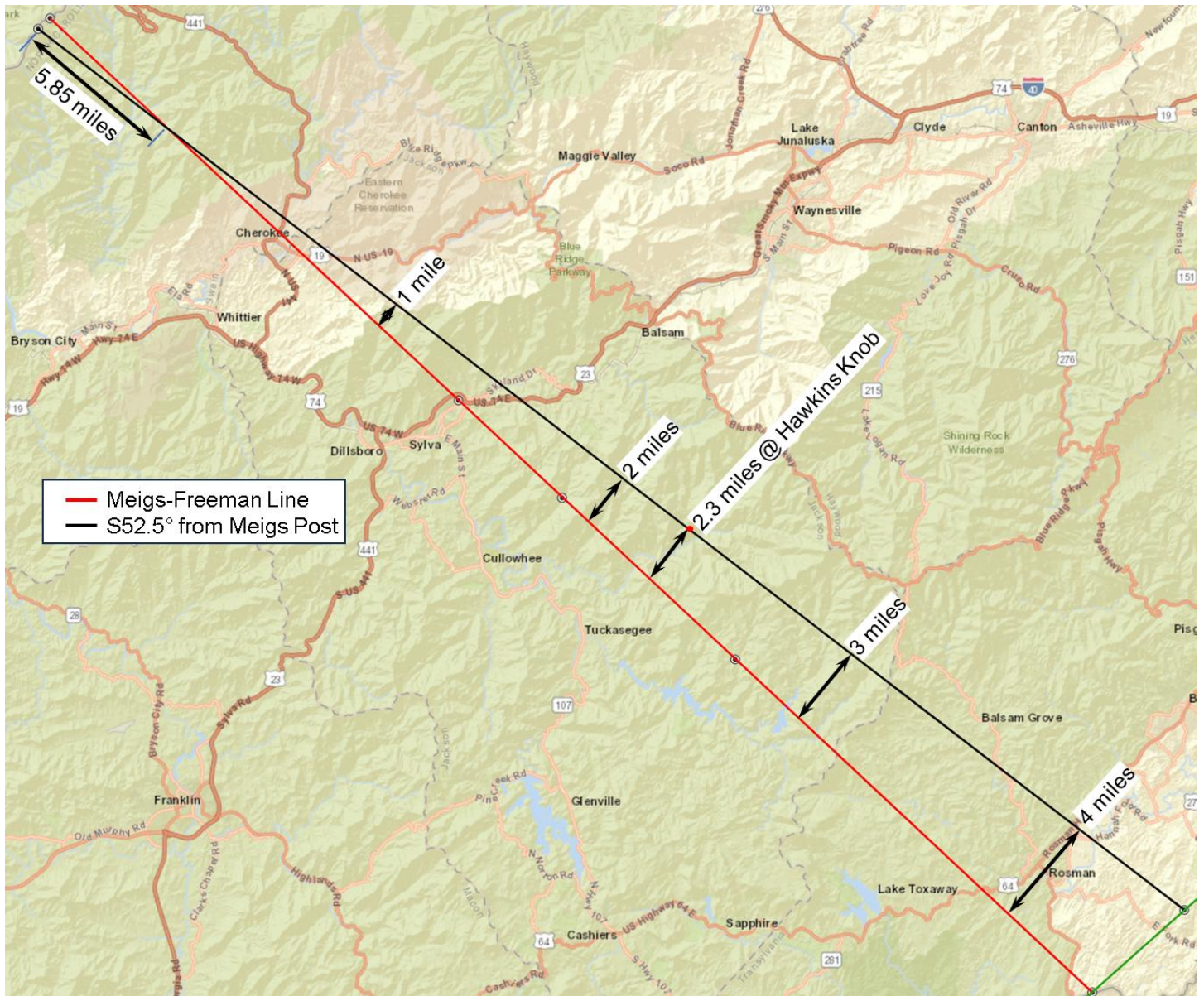


Figure 15. Meigs-Freeman and S52.5° from Meigs Post.

Visualizing locations where the Meigs-Freeman Line passes in Swain and Jackson Counties

Using satellite imagery or mapping available on the [North Carolina Val Map Finder](#), a couple of present-day M-F locations are shown in Figures 16 and 17.

Figure 16 shows the line crossing at the Cherokee Hospital, across the upper end of the Oconaluftee Island Park. It continues its southeastward course, crossing into Jackson County (the dashed line is the Swain-Jackson boundary) and bisecting the Harrah’s Casino parking deck.

In Figure 17, the line is shown where it crosses US-23 Business northeast of CJ Harris Hospital, near the Cope Creek Road intersection and Exit 85 of US-74. The location of NC Highway Historical Marker Q-32, Indian Boundary is denoted.



Figure 16. Location of the Meigs-Freeman Line in Cherokee. [NCDOT Val Map Finder](#)



Figure 17. Meigs-Freeman Line northeast of CJ Harris Hospital. [NCDOT Val Map Finder](#)

Bill Crawford poses at the “Indian Boundary” sign which was erected by the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources’ Highway Historical Marker Program. in Figure 18. The essay which accompanies it is available [HERE](#). The essay has its geography considerably confused, claiming that the line ran “southwest from the North Carolina - South Carolina border in Transylvania County to Mount Collins in Cherokee County.” It, of course, should be that it ran from the NC/SC border **northwest** to Mount Collins in **Swain** County. Links in the references for the marker essay are broken.

E.H. Stillwell, professor of history at what was then Western Carolina Teacher's College in Cullowhee, remarked in his [Notes on the History of Western North Carolina](#) that "The coming of the whites across Balsam from Haywood and Buncombe dates back to the establishment of the Foster trading station on the right bank of Scott's Creek near where the small stream from the present Hester Kitchen place flows into the former (Scott's Creek)."

It seems likely that the Foster Trading Station was in the area so-designated by the USGS, located about a mile to the northeast. The name of the small stream Stillwell referred to is presumably Kitchen Branch, the mouth of which noted in Figure 17. The road today is named Skyland Drive, but it was formerly NC 10, then US 19A-23 until that route was re-routed to go past CJ Harris Hospital.

Editor Dan Tompkins noted in the [July 27, 1923 edition of Jackson County Journal](#) (snippet below) that partial remains of a chimney from the old Foster's Trading Station still stood where the line crossed Scotts Creek, and opined that a permanent monument ought to be placed there to note the historic line. One was, in fact, placed there later (1942) by the NC Historical Marker program, but was apparently replaced by a new one at its present location (Fig. 17) after NC 19A-23 was re-routed.



Figure 18. Bill Crawford stands about 500 feet west of the estimated M-F boundary

SHOULD PLACE MARKER

An indestructible monument marking the place where the Meggs and Freeman line crosses the Old Hickory Highway, between Sylva and Beta, should be placed at the side of the road, and should bear suitable inscriptions. That this historic line, the last treaty line between the state and the federal government and the Cherokees, is not marked is regrettable. Few of the younger generation even know where the line crosses Scott's Creek or the highway, or that in the little bottom, beside the highway, where the Meggs and Freeman line crosses the road, stands part of the old chimney of Foster's Trading Station, once the outpost of civilization, or if they do know it they know little of the significance of these landmarks of local and state history.

The line and the location of Foster's Trading Station should be marked for the benefit of our young people and of tourists. Local history should be taught and impressed upon every school child.

Some other locations in central and southeastern Jackson County where M-F crosses roads near road intersections are shown in Figure 19. The marked locations shown in those images should be quite close, to within +/- 50 feet, of the actual line.



Figure 19. Locations in central and eastern Jackson County where M-F (blue line) crosses near road intersections. Top left – Wayehutta Road, just above Black Mountain Baptist Church; Top right – East Cope Creek Road; Bottom left – Argura community; Bottom Right – Sols Creek Baptist Church and Cemetery. All images from [NC Val Map Finder](#).

An intriguing view on the survey process

In 2018, William R. Thomas published a thoughtful, wonderfully well-researched and written book, [*Boundaries – The Meigs-Freeman Line and the Carolinas Blue Ridge Boundary*](#).

Thomas assembled a survey time line, based on a combination of the surviving survey journal entries and War Department payment records. According to his nicely summarized sequence of events (pp 33-34), the survey had its beginnings on August 17, 1802, and was finished by October 1, a total of forty-six days.

In *Boundaries*, he offered an interesting conjecture (p. 33) based on a map reproduced by the U.S. Forest Service, found in Pack Memorial Library (Asheville), “Indian Treaty Lines in North and South Carolina, East Tennessee and S.W. Virginia.” Although the map (seen Figure 20 snippet) lists the course of M-F as S52.5°E, it also denotes the end point at the South Carolina state line as “Point from whence Meigs and Freeman Ran.” Thomas suggests the possibility that Meigs and Freeman ran a conditional southeasterly line but then actually ran the survey in the opposite direction.

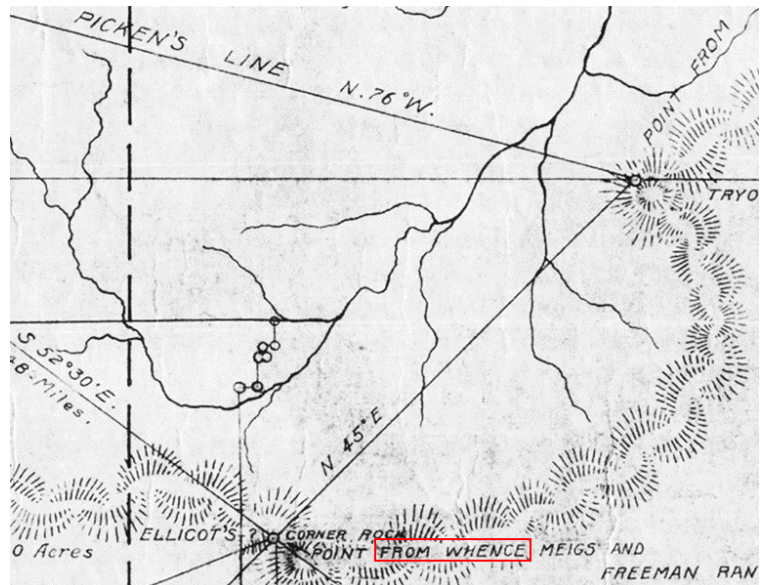


Figure 20. Map snippet [Buncombe County Special Collections](#) (ID = Map706.5)

A point which Thomas makes in support of the idea is a letter was sent by Meigs from Scotts Creek to Secretary of War Henry Dearborn on September 21. This was about 20 miles from the Smokies and over 31 miles from the SC state line. The implication is that Meigs had made his way back as far as Scotts Creek on the return, survey portion, of the journey.

Thomas also noted the existence of M-F in extant Jackson County properties (pp. 77 and 78). At the time, he lived in the Cedar Mountain area of Transylvania County, which is about 10 miles northeast of the M-F termination point on the South Carolina Line. The other boundary on which Thomas focused was the NC-SC line (which was settled in 1815), and made no attempt to extend the line back to the Smokies for obvious reasons.

Thomas’s conjecture regarding the actual survey having taken place on the trip back to the Smokies is well-reasoned, and one which frankly had not occurred to me. Absent other data, there is no way to either validate or refute his idea. But in addition to his reference to the September 20 Meigs letter from Scotts Creek, the fact that the beginning (or ending, if you will) point of the Meigs-Freeman Line at the crest of the Smokies is well away from Meigs Post lends support to his thesis. There would have been essentially zero concern on the part of the Meigs survey team, including the Cherokees who were along, about the exact intersection point in the Smokies or, for that matter, the final eight or so miles. The line passes almost one and three-quarter miles northeast of the [Bryson Place](#) and almost a mile northeast of the uppermost home place on Indian Creek, that of [Sherrill Wiggins on Georges Branch](#). There are no records that anyone ever made a permanent home in this remote, rugged territory.

Meigs-Freeman Line in Swain County

The [surviving bit of the journal](#) only covers the portion of the survey which began at the crest of the Smokies over the period of August 17 to 25. In order to get a sense of where they were during that time, a first order of business is to consider the overall travel distance and time.

The boundary length, from Smokies crest to the SC state line, is 51.6 miles. As noted above, Bill Thomas concluded that the duration, from the start on top of Old Smoky until fait accompli, was 46 days. There would certainly have been days where weather slowed progress, and it is likely that breaks were taken one day per week for rest – and perhaps to pause for a little refreshment¹⁵ imbibing. We also know that on the first day of the survey, August 17, they only traveled 45 chains – 2,970 feet, or about 0.6 miles. That leaves a one-way remaining distance of 51 miles. If it is assumed that they took one day of rest per week (a total of 6 days), the number of days for actual surveying of the remaining 51 miles was 39 days. If the survey was a one-way affair, that translates into 1.3 miles per day. If there was a conditional line run on a southeasterly course and the actual survey was to the northwest, it's 2.6 miles per day. With that in mind, the early Swain County portion, can be considered in some detail.

As previously noted, the Meigs-Freeman Line (M-F) location is of no practical import in Swain County of today, since all the county lands through which it crossed are now either a part of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park or the Qualla Boundary. But for those interested in the area's history, the location is of great interest.

Following are relevant elements of the 1802 journal entries in sequence:

Aug 17: *“Ordered the Pack horses to meet us on the line in the Indian Country by going up the waters of French Broad. Supposed to require about eight days.....From this monument we commenced our line between the Cherokees & North Carolina & descend the Mountain 45 Chains & Encamped on its side – Laurel being very thick.”* The monument referred to is the 6-ft high, 15-inch diameter post that had been erected after they had walked three miles (carrying provisions on their backs). They'd also collected about two tons of rocks to make a mound around the post. This would have taken a good part of the day, and – along with the laurel – explains the short distance of travel.

Aug. 18: *“Continued the line down the mountain passing spurs of the mountain thro very thick Laurel & Briars & encamped on the Waters of the Tennessee.”*

Aug. 19: *“Continued our Course as yesterday over Spurs of the mountain thro, exceeding thick Laurel & Briars & encamped on a Ridge.”*

Aug. 20: *“Our provisions being nearly out Sent our Interpreter & two Indians to the Bears Town to purchase provisions delivering him Ten dollars & 10 cents – continued our Survey on a ridge & on Over a turn of it descending the side of a steep declivity over a stream 50 links wide ascending & descending a high mountain to a fine stream of water & encamped on the West side of it—Killing two rattle snakes on the route which makes 5 killed since commencing the Survey.”*

M-F closely follows the course of Fork Ridge, with the Fork Ridge Trail crossing the line at seven locations (Figure 21). It crosses Deep Creek about 800 feet below the mouth of Beetree Creek. The straight-line distance from the beginning until reaching Deep Creek is 3.9 miles.

The entire sequence, particularly including the description of first arrival at a stream perfectly matches the approach to Deep Creek where Fork Ridge itself makes a dogleg right turn just before

¹⁵ Thomas included a partial list of supplies in *Boundaries*. The most expensive item was 500 pounds of bacon, costing \$62.50. The next most significant outlay recorded was 51 gallons of whiskey, purchased in two batches for a total of \$47. That doesn't include four gallons purchased in the Lufty area from “Thomas” (James) Holland.

reaching the right, or main, fork of Deep Creek. That steep descent begins west of the mouth of Beetre Creek, as seen in Figure 21. That final descent to Deep Creek from Fork Ridge while following M-F would certainly fit the “steep declivity” description. There’s an elevation drop of 907 feet in 1640 lateral feet of travel. The 50 link (33 feet) stream width is also well-matched with the size of Deep Creek at this point.

There is no way to know what the vegetation on Fork Ridge was like at the time, but today there are sections, particularly beginning in the section from Keg Drive Branch on southeast which would conform to the “very thick” and “exceeding thick” descriptions. Of course the trail of today is maintained, so the impressions the laurel and greenbrier hells of that time left on Meigs et al don’t generally register with us.

The fact that they sent to Bears Town for supplies on August 20 is also consistent with being on Deep Creek. As W.G. Williams noted¹⁶ in his report concerning Cherokee trails: “Most of the creeks whose banks are not too steep to forbid it, have trails along them, and many trails cross the country in several directions, which as yet have not been explored.” None of the early maps marked such trails along the streams, but there were undoubtedly trails¹⁷ throughout and across the Deep Creek drainage, including some of the maintained trails of today.

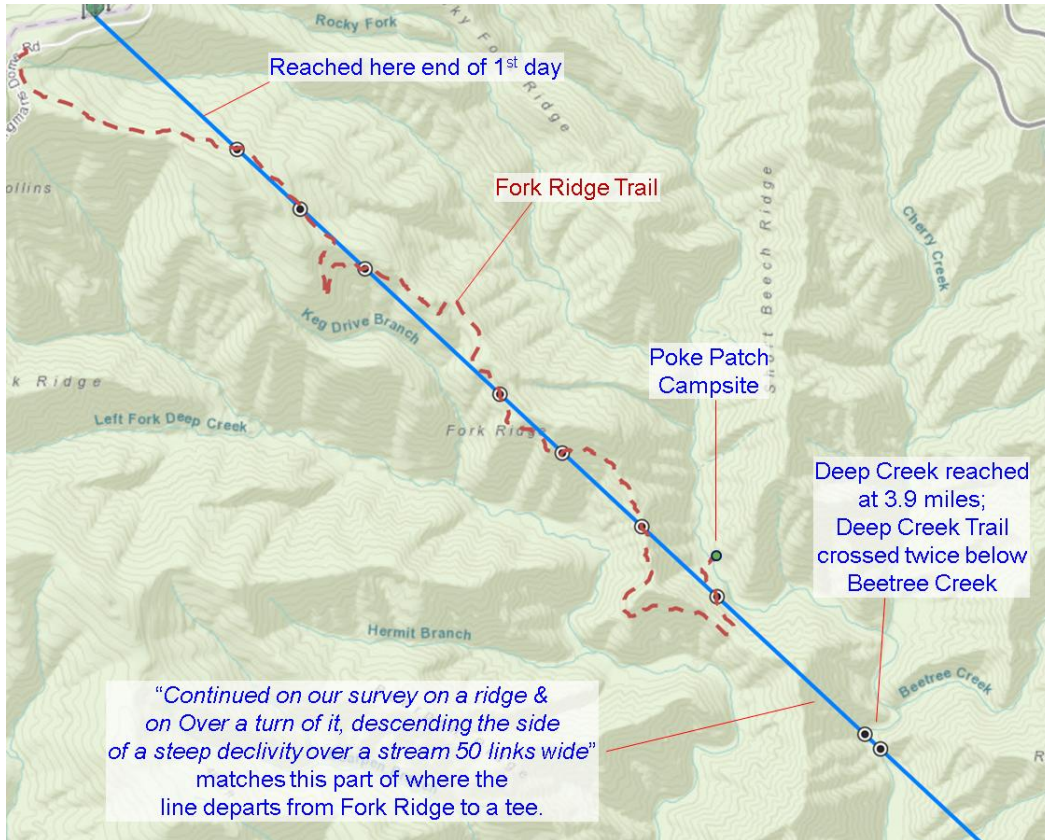


Figure 21. Beginning section of the Meigs-Freeman line

¹⁶ Report from Capt. W.G. Williams to Col. T.T. Hubert, 8 Feb 1838, in preparation for Cherokee removal. “Military Intelligence Report on N.C. Cherokees in 1838.” *Journal of Cherokee Studies*, Vol. IV, No. 4, Fall, 1979, p. 205.

¹⁷ Among those on Deep Creek which almost certainly pre-dated white settler arrival are the trail which connects Indian Creek with Cooper Creek through Deeplow Gap and Indian Creek and Deep Creek through Martin Gap. Another personal favorite which unfortunately has not been maintained is the Pullback Trail which marched straight up Bumgarner Branch, across the heads of McCracken and Nicks Nest Branches and on down to the Bryson Place. In my estimation, the latter would’ve been part of the route followed by the men who went to Bear’s Town to reprovision supplies.

The Figure 22 map section shows M-F with distance markers over the course of the Swain County travel. The numbers indicate miles along the line. Twelve miles is reached just across the Jackson County line.

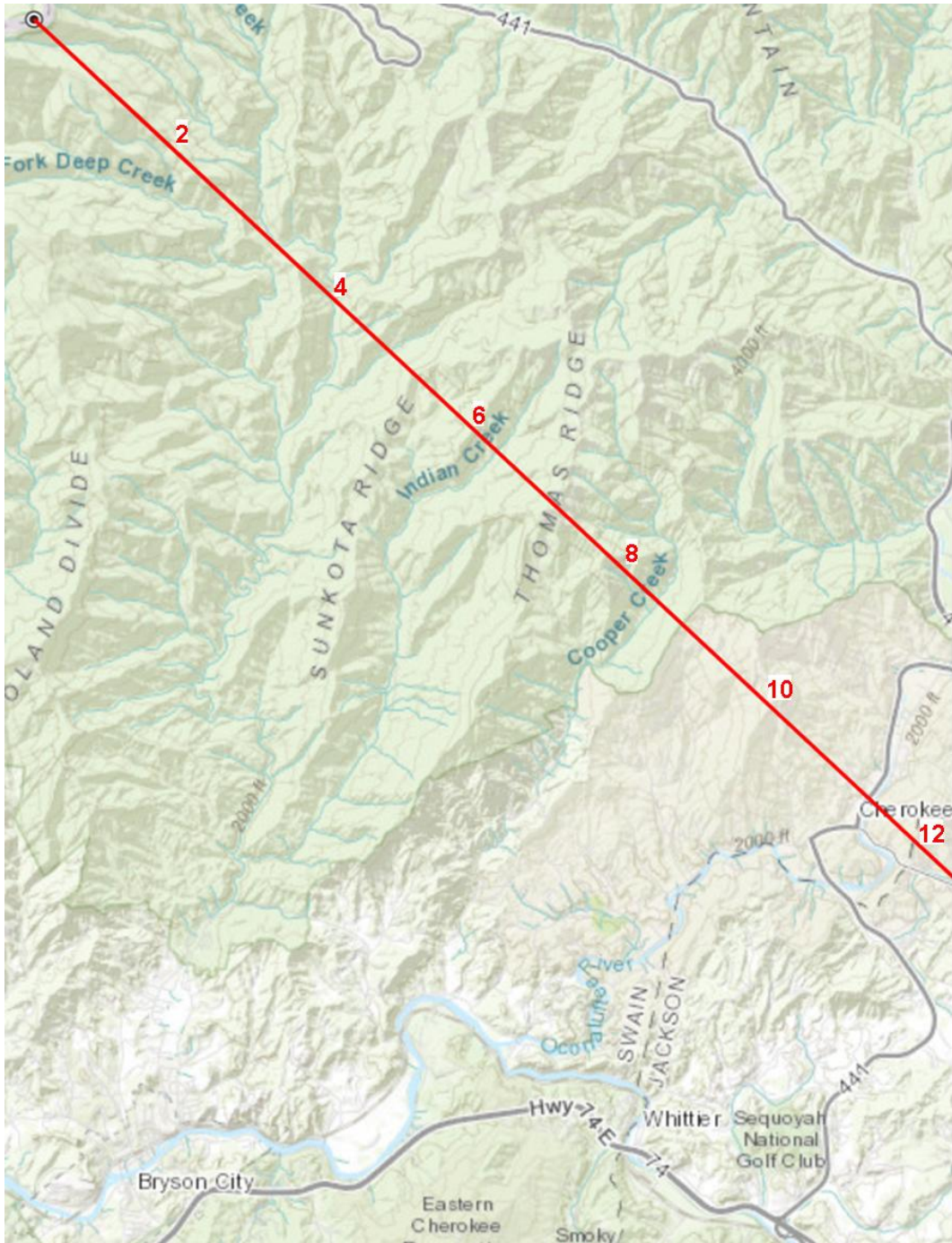


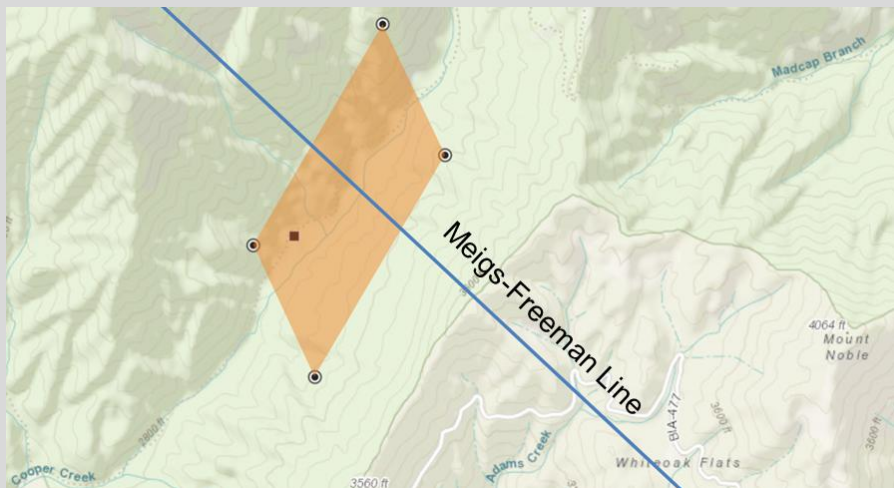
Figure 22. Swain County portion of traverse with mileage markers

If that first stream mentioned was, in fact, Deep Creek, the subsequent “ascending & descending a high mountain to a fine stream of water” would refer to Sunkota and Thomas Ridges, with Cooper Creek being the fine stream of water (which it is; see [this article on Cooper Creek](#)). After the original descent to Deep Creek, Thomas Ridge was, in fact, the highest point over the remainder of the trip, so again, the descriptive terms seem to fit the locale.

The Meigs-Freeman Line on Cooper Creek

If it was Cooper Creek upon which they encamped and killed two rattlesnakes, the “fine stream of water” is an apt description. M-F crosses through property which Tom and Julette Hyde Wiggins purchased from the owners of [Land Grant 587](#) in 1881, paying \$175 for 87.5 acres - \$2/acre.

The Wiggins had likely moved here and erected a home shortly after selling their land on Toms Branch of Deep Creek (named for Tom Wiggins) to Tom’s sister, Jane Kitchens, in 1879. The boundary description in the deed to Wiggins began: “Beginning on a chestnut near the branch above his house...” This sort of thing – where the purchaser was already living on the land at the time of purchase – was not uncommon at the time, especially with respect to newly acquired land by land grant. Tom and Julette sold the land in 1885 for \$650 – 3.7 times what they had paid. After passing through several hands, in December of 1903, Will and Larcena Furr Springer purchased the property. Their tract boundary and home site (marked by dot) are shown below.



Meigs-Freeman line crossing through a tract of land later made into a home place, first by Tom and Julette Wiggins, and later by Will & Larcena Springer

The Springers came to the mountains from their native Stanley County, east of Charlotte. What brought them here is unknown, but after a time on Oconaluftee, they purchased the place from another Lufty resident, For the next quarter century, the Springers made this lovely section of the creek their home. Photos of the Springer place can be seen [HERE](#) and [HERE](#).

It is 8.4 miles from the crest of the Smokies to Cooper Creek. That total distance matches well with the 2.6 miles per day from the starting point (0.6 miles from the Smoky Crest). It also means they’d have traveled about 4.5 miles on August 20. While the journal entries for August 17-19 refer to progressively worsening vegetative obstacles, none of the subsequent entries refer to vegetative obstruction. From personal experience, when I have fought my way through a serious laurel hell (such as on lower Bumgarner Branch, for example), my step noticeably quickens as soon as I’m clear of the hell. It’s sort of a “free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty I’m free at last” sort of sensation.

August 21 journal entry: “*this day passed in sight of Several Indian Towns.*” The most logical – in fact the ONLY location along the entire route where that could have occurred – would have been in the area along the lead which runs south from Mount Noble, dividing Adams Creek from Lambert and Owl Branches. The towns referred to aren’t specified, and the extent to which area locations were

occupied at the time is unclear, but visible from the area of today's Mt. Noble fire tower are parts or all of Kituwah, Bird Town, and Tuckaleechee (or Big Bear's Town) as well as the areas immediately around the present town of Cherokee, including Ravensford, Nununyi, Yellow Hill (Cherokee), and Qualla. In Figure 23, lines point toward these locations from the present Mt. Noble Fire Tower, which is less than 300 yards from the Meigs-Freeman Line.

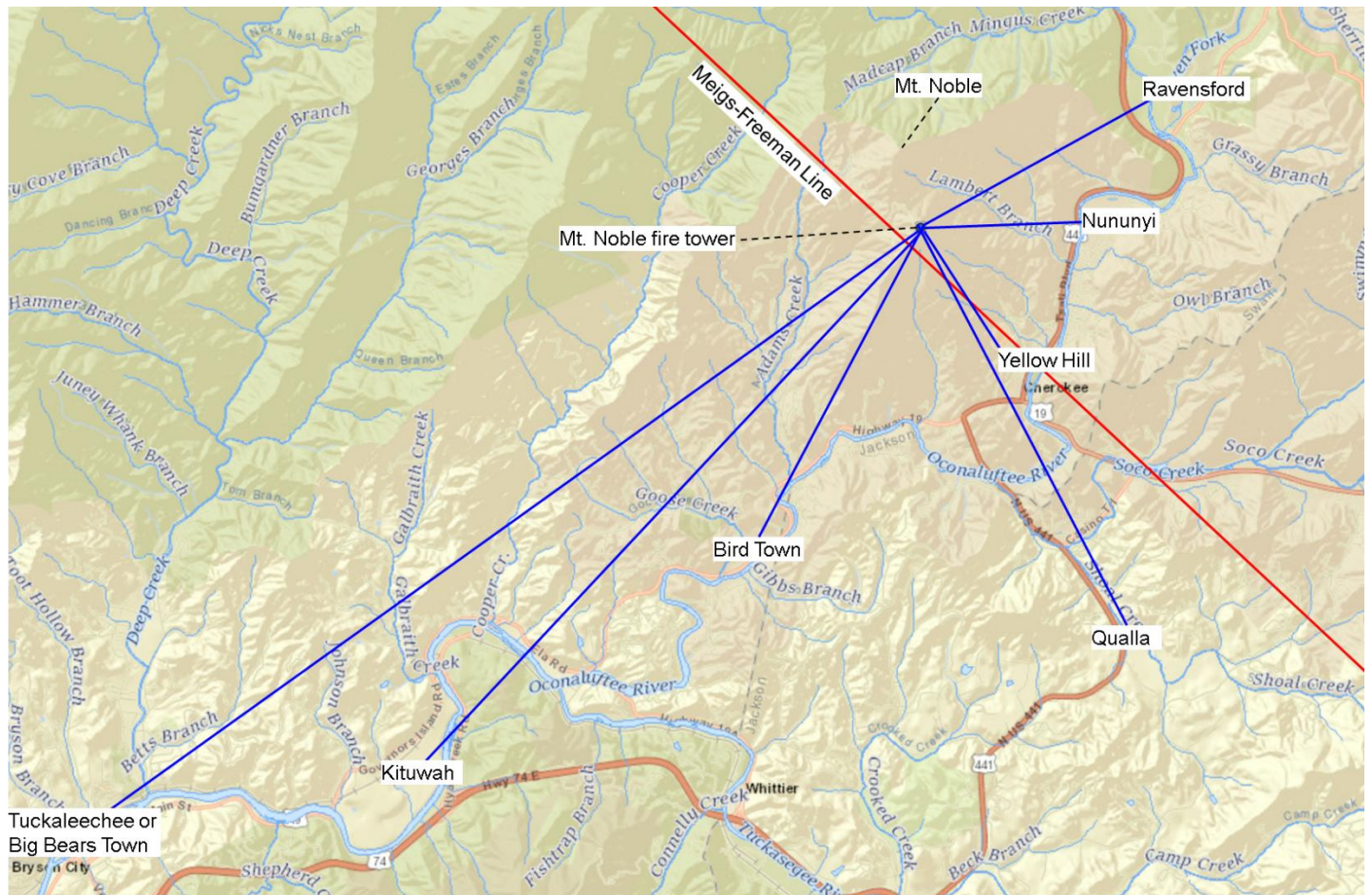


Figure 23. “Towns” potentially viewed from the Mt. Noble fire tower area of today

The “viewpoint in Figure 23 is the location of today’s Mt. Noble fire tower. Mt. Noble itself is a bit north of the tower location. Photos of Mt. Noble from Tuckaleechee, Kituwah, Bird Town and Qualla are shown [HERE](#).

August 22 entry: “Continued on line varying a little to find the position of ? Town and encamped near that place.” Since the view of several towns had occurred on the 21st, it seems likely that they reached the Oconaluftee on this day since the distance from the Mt Noble ridge to the river, traveling along the line, is about a mile and a third.

August 23: The journal recorded that they “continued the line to Johns Town where five Chiefs & a number of Indians were assembled who seem much concerned at the running of the line.” Following the average daily travel estimate, they would have reached to within 200 yards of the Oconaluftee River on that day. On the following day, August 24, they “Met the Bear and 4 other Chiefs to renew the conversation respecting the line with which they were apprehensive would leave their Settlements on the Carolina side.”

It seems likely that they lingered at Johns Town not only for the meeting on the 24th, but also on August 25, the final day of the surviving journal entries.

There is no way to be sure that the locations which have been suggested here to correspond with the surviving survey journal notes, but there are multiple matches between the locations and the notes. There is, of course, no way to validate the conjectures offered here, but all of the pieces fit, from stream size to town sightings to dense vegetation (anyone who has ventured away any distance from Fork Ridge Trail, such as down into Left Fork, will readily vouch for the “exceedingly thick laurel”).

Where was Johns Town?

Based on an eclectic combination of sources, including the journal entries, earlier maps of Cherokee Towns, maps of the Oconaluftee area from two decades after the survey, a survey of the Qualla boundary made in 1875-76, the locations of reserve tracts allocated to Cherokees less than two decades later, and an expenses report in military records, a circumstantial evidence-based deduction about the location of Johns Town is offered here.

Some background behind that speculation about the location is offered in these four pieces:

- [*The Nantahala John Fork of the Oconaluftee*](#),
- [*The Meigs-Freeman Line and its connection to the proposed location of Johns Town*](#)
- [*Example payment & expense reimbursements associated with the Meigs-Freeman survey*](#)
- [*Felix Walker's Land Grant Woes*](#)

Taken together, based on inferences from the combination of circumstantial evidence and inferences, my conjectures are:

1. The survey crew arrived on Oconaluftee on August 22 and camped there that night.
2. On the following day, a contingent of the survey team – likely Meigs, Freeman, and Eskridge, took lodging at Hollands. They stayed there at least one night, and probably two. Given that there were six breakfasts and six suppers supplied, if those three stayed, they were there for two nights (Aug. 23 and 24)
3. The Holland residence was chosen for lodging because of its close proximity to Johns Town. The bulk of the survey crew remained near the area where the line crossed Lufty – which happens to also be in the immediate vicinity of the Arneeche Ford – near today's Oconaluftee Island Park.
4. The horses, which had been sent around by “the waters of the French Broad” arrived sometime during the day of August 28 and resumed their pack duty on the 29th. This is based on the fact that the men were paid double wages while carrying their provisions, and the 28th was the last day for that.

Back to the question of “exactly where was Johns Town?” There's no way to say with anything approaching confidence, but as indicated in the second background link above, all things considered, the greater Enloe-Floyd Bottoms area seems as likely as any. However, all of the evidence supports the idea that Johns Town was somewhere in the broader area of today's Cherokee, including Ravensford, Yellow Hill, Bird Town, Soco (Paint Town), or Qualla.

During the period covered by the journal, from August 17 to 25, the survey party was in Swain County and perhaps extreme northwestern Jackson. It seems not out of the question that the survey would have continued while discussions were going on, proceeding at least to Soco Creek.

While there is nothing other than geographical logic to support the idea, it would have been logical for them to have planned to rendezvous on Soco Creek with those leading the horses. The reason for that is the route which, based on some knowledge of extant trails would have been along this line:

1. Starting from the Tuckaleechee area, travel eastward in Tennessee following a route similar to that of today's US 321/TN 73.
2. Turn south into North Carolina, following the same ancient Cataloochee Trail (later Turnpike) route about which Bishop Francis Asbury wrote concerning his travels there eight years later, on November 30, 1810:

*"Friday our troubles began at the foaming, roaring stream, which hid the rocks. At Catahouche, I walked over a log. But oh the mountain – height after height and 5 miles over! After crossing other streams and losing ourselves in the woods, we came in at about nine o'clock at night to Vater Shuck's. What an awful day!"*¹⁸

3. After reaching the Jonathan Creek area by the Cataloochee Trail, they would have almost certainly come across Soco Gap and on down Soco Creek, following the approximate route of today's US 19. At the time, it was but a foot trail. It gained "packway" status at the Buncombe County October 1805 Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions when a jury of nine men, several of whom were early Lufty settlers (John Hyde, Robert Reed and Abraham Wiggins) reported to the Court that they had "viewed said way & think a tolerable packway can be made with a moderate share of labour."¹⁹

There is no way to verify this or any of the other conjectures. Critique and criticisms are both solicited and encouraged.

The area between the Pickens and Meigs-Freeman Lines

An element of particular historical note regarding the Meigs-Freeman Line is that according to Meigs, no white families were found west of the line, but five Cherokee families were to the its east were displaced. The area between the Meigs-Freeman and putative Pickens lines where those families might have been in Swain or northern Jackson is shown in Figure 24 and include:

- Today's Enloe-Floyd Bottoms (the area I conjectured above as Johns Town)
- Ravensford area, which is immediately adjacent
- The area from just below the Park line – from the Saunooke Mill area south along Acquoni Road (Nununyi section) down to the Drama Road bridge
- On the west side of Lufty, from the northern tip of the Oconaluftee Island Park south to US 19.
- Virtually all of Soco Valley.

The Pickens line, extended, however, passed through the west end of Hazelwood and on to Hendersonville, so there were numerous highly desirable locations in today's Jackson, Haywood, Transylvania and Henderson which also lay in between the Meigs-Freeman and Pickens lines, including areas well to the east of the line. It's almost 25 miles as the crow flies from where the Meigs-Freeman line intersects the South Carolina boundary to the Pickens line in Hendersonville. See Figure 25. That there were only five families displaced is remarkable, and also indicative of the fact that the vast majority of Cherokees had already moved well back from the Pickens boundary line. (See [this letter from R.J. Meigs to Secretary of War Henry Dearborn](#)).

¹⁸ [Journal of Rev. Francis Asbury, Volume III](#), 1852, Lane & Scott. p. 352 (Princeton Theological Seminary Collection)

¹⁹ Buncombe County Deed Registry, Book CMD1 page 333. In that same Court session, John Hyde, [among the earliest of the Lufty settlers](#), was appointed overseer of the road from Soco Creek to Oconaluftee.

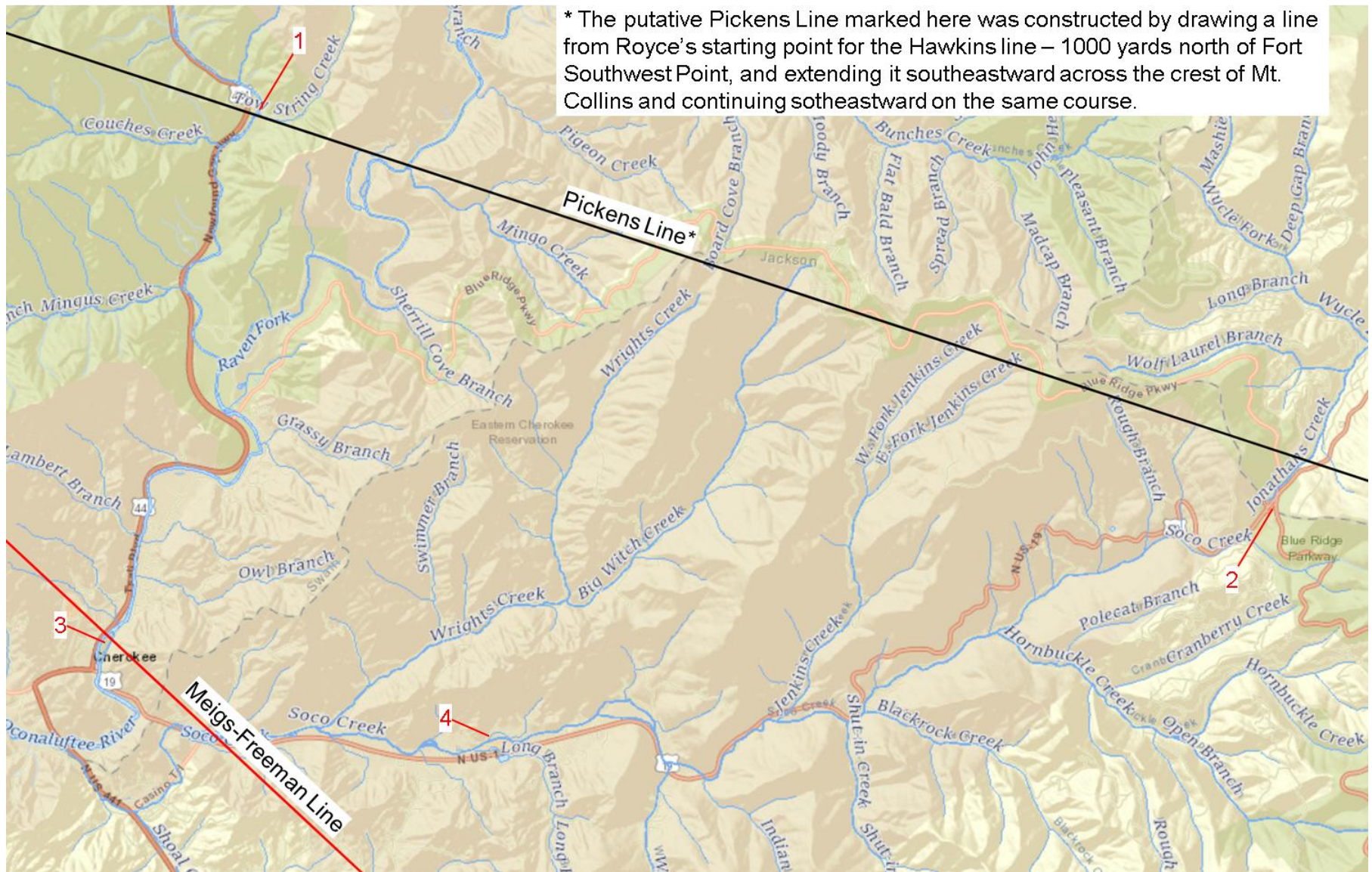


Figure 24. Section of Swain and Jackson County between the Meigs-Freeman and Pickens Lines.

The suggested Pickens Line shown here (see note at top for description of its basis) crosses Oconaluftee River just below the mouth of Tow String Creek (1), and the Balsam range a bit north of Soco Gap (2). It seems likely that some of the five Cherokee families who R.J. Meigs indicated were placed east of M-F might have lived along the fine bottomland along the Oconaluftee from Tow String down to the area around today's Island Park (3), just north of the US 19 bridge in Cherokee as well as all along Soco Creek (4).

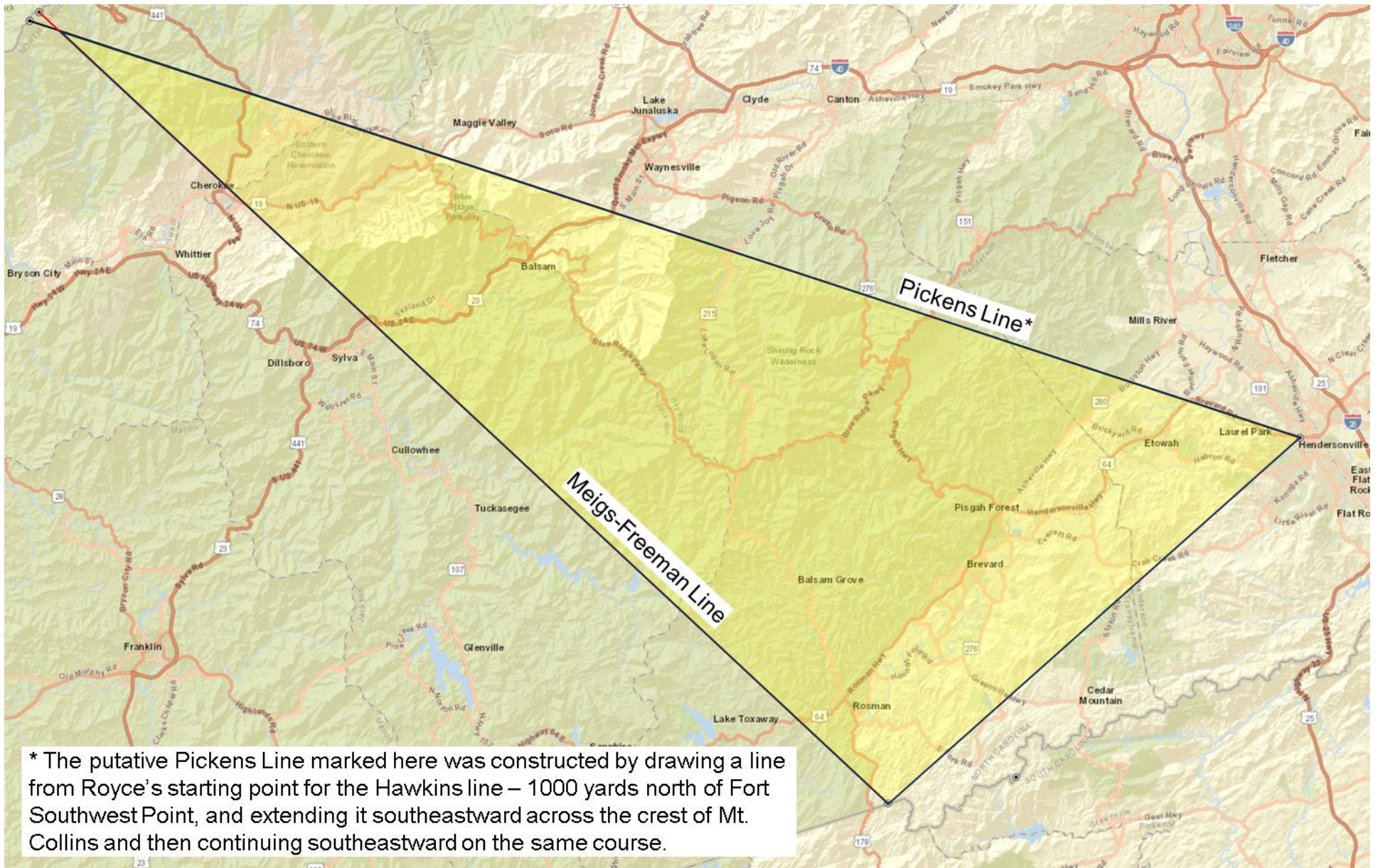


Figure 25. The Meigs-Freeman and presumed Pickens Lines.

The territory in between the Meigs-Freeman and Pickens Lines was opened for white settlement by the Treaty of Tellico. The area inside the highlighted triangle is almost 400,000 acres.

Meigs-Freeman line in the Cherokee area, in more detail

The Meigs-Freeman Line also crossed in the immediate vicinity of an area which has several features of historic interest. Mt. Zion Church, the earliest recorded church in the area that is now Swain County, and also of the Tennessee River Baptist Church Association, was located in the general area shown in Figure 26.

The precise location of the church itself is not known, but John L. Dillard, who acquired a 50-acre by North Carolina Land Grant 356, issued Dec 20, 1841 which adjoined Section 21 of District 1 of the 1820 Love Survey. Dillard sold to William H. Thomas in 1848. The land grant indicated that it included the Mount Zion Meeting House. In the Dillard to Thomas deed, it was noted that it was on the west side of Section 21, and also that Cherokee man named Arneche Oohsowih lived just east of the property – presumably on that Section 21 land, which lay along the west side of Oconaluftee in the area of the island. The tract marked as A.74 in the upper left portion of Figure 13a is in the same shape as that Section 21 tract, which had presumably remained intact, likely also purchased by Will Thomas.

The Land Grant to Dillard also mentions either Association Land or Association Island; this is apparently for the Tennessee River Baptist Association, of which Mount Zion was the first church formed. In *Tennessee River Baptist Association of North Carolina*, John Sadoc Smiley noted:

“First Baptist efforts in the territory now included in Tennessee River Baptist Association began with the year 1829 which is noted as the time in which Mount Zion Baptist Church was formed a few hundred yards from the Arneechee ford of Oconaluftee, on the northwest side of the river.”

It seems likely that the Arneechee ford of which Smiley wrote was located there in the vicinity of the island, and that the ford took its name for Arneche Oohsowih.

Another writer, Florence Cope Bush, in *Oconaluftee Baptist – Pioneer Church of the Smokies 1836-1939*, wrote: “Mt. Zion Baptist Church supposedly occupied the same location as the present-day Lufty Baptist Church.” I suspect she intended to say the present-day Cherokee Baptist Church, since her subsequent discussion is consistent with that idea (not to mention that such is the case).

The area through which the line passed became a very active one in the latter part of the century, when the Quaker-organized school complex was established (Figure 27). It was later operated by the Federal Government. There are some still living, like Tommy Haigler of Cherokee, who remember attending the government-run school. Kelly Bennett took quite a few photos of the school and adjacent fairgrounds. Some can be seen in [this album](#).

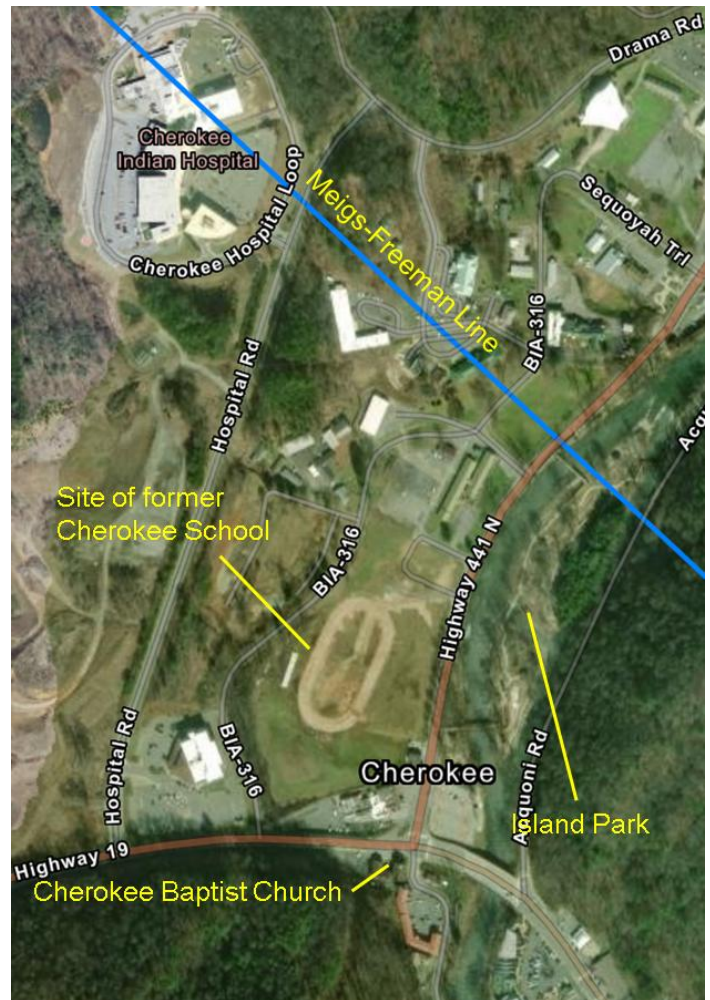


Figure 26. Closer view of M-F in Cherokee.

Map source: [NC Val Map Finder](#)



New York Engraving & Printing Co.

“Eastern Cherokee Training School” and “Mt. Noble.” From “Spray Ridge” and U. S. Indian Agency.

Figure 27. Cherokee Training School photo from the 1890 census.

The fence line, seen on the left (south) side of the main campus building, appears to be quite near (probably a bit north, of) and on about the same course as the Meigs-Freeman Line. The island in the river extends across about 80% of the photo. Today the Qualla Youth Health Center is at about the same location as the large main campus building (beyond the flag).

Quaker management of the school ended around the time of this photo (for the 1890 census). A federal government school replaced it.

After Meigs-Freeman

When R.J. Meigs [reported on the running of the line](#) to Secretary of War Henry Dearborn, he noted that there were no white settlements within a mile and a half of the line and that five Cherokee families were put on the North Carolina side of the line. While Meigs likely didn't intend to be deceptive in that description, the fact is that even in the Cherokee area of today, white settlers could have been living (illegally) well to the southwest of the Pickens Line and still more than 1.5 miles away from the Meigs-Freeman Line. The Ravensford and Enloe-Floyd Bottoms area of today, for example, were both more than two miles beyond the Pickens Line but still over 1.5 miles northeast of the Meigs-Freeman Line. By any standard, those were highly desirable and coveted sections.

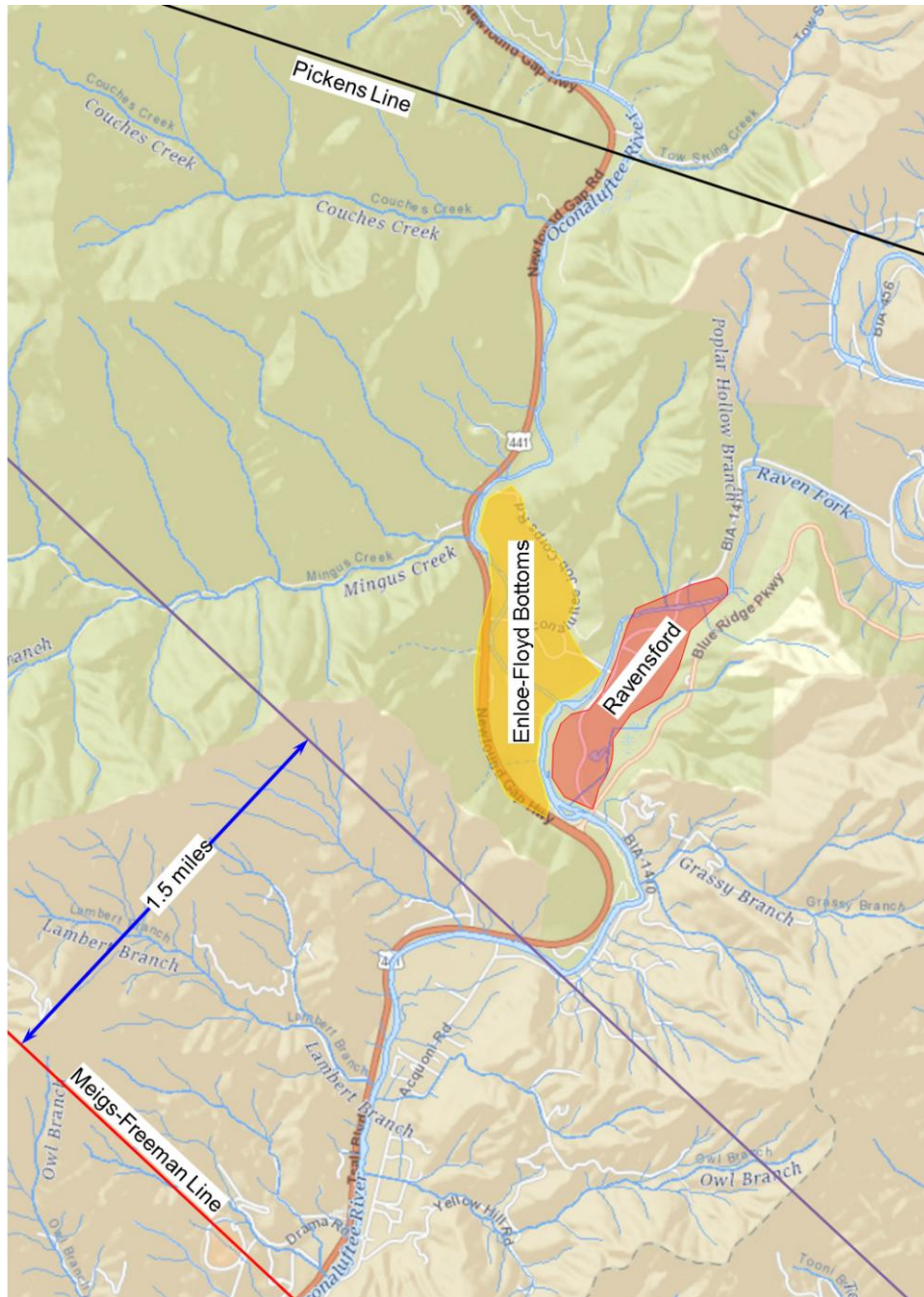


Figure 28. Meigs-Freeman Line in Cherokee area, with a 1.5 mile buffer indicated

The Meigs-Freeman Line proved even more porous than the Pickens Line had been. Meigs may or may not have been correct in his assertion at the time of the survey (regarding no white settlements within 1.5 miles of M-F), but in subsequent years, there were significant encroachments. In *The History of Jackson County*,²⁰ H. Tyler Blethen and Curtis W. Wood identify a number of individuals who had settled southwest of the Meigs-Freeman Line in today's Jackson County and were occupying the land in 1820 when the Robert Love Survey of the newly opened lands (per the 1819 cession treaty) was conducted.

The illegally occupied lands in Jackson County cited by Blethen and Wood may have gone without Cherokee protest. That was clearly not the case for land that is now a part of Swain County. Return Jonathan Meigs, a man whose compassion and sense of right was generally admirable, clearly failed to secure the Meigs-Freeman Line in today's Swain County area, as evidenced by and in spite of [protests from Yona Equa and other Cherokees](#), dispatched from Kituwah and Tuckeyletch (Bryson City). Missionary [Humphrey Posey independently confirmed](#) presence of "whites in the bounds of Big-Bear's town on Tuckasiegy."

Worth remembering: An invisible line and related implications

As has been noted, both a commemorating historical marker and miles of property boundary lines testify to that important boundary in Jackson County today. But in Swain County, that historic line has vanished within the folds of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Qualla Boundary. In like fashion, its role in the development of the area that is now Swain County has vaporized into faded memory's ether.

There are still vestiges of old home sites in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park which speak to those being places where folks made a home and a life for themselves and their family. A rocked-in spring, fallen chimney pile, stone walls across the hollow for erosion control, non-native vegetation such as boxwoods, yellowbells (forsythia) and jonquils are witnesses offering their silent testimony. Over the years that I've been wandering the back country, those vestiges have gradually diminished in many cases. Almost four decades have passed since Commodore Casada took his seven- or eight-year old grandson Joshua "a country mile" up Juney Whank Branch to show him where he had lived when he was a boy, the plum trees he recalled from seven decades earlier were still in bloom. I've not seen them in over two decades. Eventually, the other vestiges – even those of stone – will be covered by the cumulative effect of decades and centuries of the earth's annual cycle of renewal and death. Yet the sweat of the brow, tears of joy and of sorrow linger; when visual vestiges have vanished, they remain - a perpetual part of the place's DNA.

There are no visual evidences of the Meigs-Freeman Line in Swain County today, but its effects will always linger; it is a fundamental part of times past, which, in turn, are part of who we are.

That invisible line defined the sections of today's Swain, Jackson and Transylvania Counties where the first legal white settlements took place. In Swain, it was on the Oconaluftee drainage above today's town of Cherokee – a land which transitioned from Cherokee territory to Buncombe County in 1792,²¹ Haywood in 1808, Jackson in 1851 before Swain's birth in 1871. If that land was

²⁰ H. Tyler Blethen and Curtis W. Wood. "The Pioneer Experience to 1851." In *The History of Jackson County*, edited by Max R. Williams. Jackson County Historical Association.

²¹ Buncombe County was formed in 1791, but until the land was ceded per the Treaty of Holston, it was not part of Buncombe County. The county's border, as defined by Chapter 52 of the Laws of North Carolina, 1791, ran "...down the (Nollichucky, sic), to the extreme height of the Iron mountain and cession line, then along said cession line to the southern boundary....." Although the Treaty of Holston was completed on July 2, 1791, its Proclamation in affirmation wasn't until Feb. 7, 1792

not available, families like those of the Beck, Bradley, Collins, Conner, Dillard, Enloe, Hughes, Hyatt, Hyde, Mingus, Reed, Sherrill, Shuler, Stillwell, Swearingen, Turner, Welch, Wiggins and others might have gone elsewhere; the entire course of the area's history could have changed.

It also defined what was an ever-shrinking boundary for the Cherokee nation.

Parts or all of several individual land grants of tens of thousands of acres issued in the late 1790s and early 1800s were nullified because they lay southwest of the Meigs-Freeman Line; see notable examples in [this map](#). Essentially all of those large land grants were to individuals living well outside of the area. [Dr. William Cathcart](#), a Philadelphia surgeon who was a Revolutionary War veteran, acquired the three tracts shown on the map, as well as other lands. His brother-in-law, [George Latimer](#), also a Revolutionary War veteran from Philadelphia, acquired another sizable tract. All of these passed to heirs of George Latimer. Then there was Land Grant 279 to Holdiman²² and Eshleman, which occupied over 200,000 acres of today's Swain, Macon and Jackson Counties. It was entirely voided. Had that single grant been valid, the nature of the area's land history would have been substantially different; that includes all of Bryson City and Franklin, county seats of Swain and Macon Counties.

Meigs-Freeman Line and our connection to the land

For many of us who have grown up here, we think – and converse – in geographic terms, for example: “She lives on East Alarka.” “I grew up on Toot Hollow.” “We lived for a few years up on Conley Creek, but moved to the right side of lower Deep Creek when I was five.” Far more often than not, we relate to places which are themselves natural geographical features.

Connection to place is, in my view, particularly strong in these mountains. For many, there is a sense of belonging to the land, not unlike that to one's own family. See [this discussion of connection to place](#).

Unlike drainage boundaries and many sections of mountain county boundary lines, the Meigs-Freeman Line ran a straight course, crossing streams and ridges alike. So at least to me, it is difficult to relate to it in the same way that I naturally relate to geographical and topographical features.

In spite of that difficulty, and even though it lacks any sort of legal stature or physical presence in today's Swain County, M-F is a key element of our area's history. We'd do well to remember that line, surveyed seven decades before Swain County was born; be aware of where it passed and reflect on how it defined the changes in the area.

But it also behooves us to recall that two centuries ago, an agency of the United States government, charged with protecting a remote border from illegal intrusions, ignored appeals from those for whom it was legally bound to protect. The United States government failed its charge. That failure was part of a process which continued, with invaders pressing the natives on every side. It ultimately led to the divestiture and removal of a people from the home place they had long loved.

Today there is another border which an agency of the U.S. government is once again failing its legal obligation to secure. Appeals to those who are responsible to follow the law and secure a latter day boundary go unheeded, just as were [Yona Equa's letters](#) over 200 years ago.

Another Trail of Tears, of an altogether different sort, is already well underway.

²² I have not confirmed it, but it appears that Holdiman and Eshleman were Pennsylvania residents.

Appendix A. Meigs Post

Early Great Smoky Mountains Park employee John Morrell made a special effort to locate and mark the location of the historic Meigs Post during his years working for the Park Service, which began in 1936 and ran through 1968. An attorney by training, he was also a registered surveyor. In an April 10, 1972 letter from Morrell (then retired) to Paul Mathis, District Ranger for the GSMNP, Morrell recalled:

“Along about 1915 the Little River Lumber Company brought suit against the Appalachian Lumber Co. et al in which the location of Meigs Post was again the key issue. In that case, the L.R.L. Company produced two witnesses who swore that Ben E. Parton (who kept up the possession cabins of L.R.L. Co.) had shown them Meigs post ‘where Miry Ridge butts into the main Smoky Mountain.’ This location put the lands of the Appalachian Lumber Co. et al so far westward down the State line as to remove them from the lands claimed by Little River Co.

Significantly, neither party to this suit put Ben Parton on the witness stand, and the general opinion of the mountain people was that Ben Parton had moved Meigs Post 7 miles to the West at the instigation of Col. W.B. Townsend, President and owner of the L.R.L. Co. Neither Parton nor Townsend ever admitted this, but a fist-fight ensued every time a fellow-worker accused Parton to his face with having moved the post.

In view of all of this it is significant that the Lumber Company tacitly admitted its fraud by returning Meigs Post to its proper location when conveying its lands to the State of Tennessee in 1925.”

A note in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP) archives states “Meigs Post replaced by a concrete post bearing a brass button inscribed ‘Meigs Post,’ in March 1954. Replacement by Ranger John O. Morrell and fire control aid George Lamon.”

That post, located immediately adjacent to the Appalachian Trail, has long since lost its brass button, likely purloined. Most of the concrete has disintegrated, leaving exposed rebar, as shown in Figure A-1.

Mt. Collins is a quite flat-topped peak. The rebar marker is a bit over 100 feet southwest of the true peak point of Mt. Collins, although there’s only about 3 ft elevation difference. In a 1972 letter to Paul Mathis, North District Ranger for the Park, Morrell opined that, based on balsam pointers, “I feel certain that the present ‘Meigs Post’ is within a radius of 1-1/2 feet from the original post.” I’m afraid I don’t share Morrell’s confidence in that level of precision for two reasons:

- 1) As noted, while Mt. Collins crest is quite flat, one doesn’t need a level to sense that the marker is southwest of the true peak. Of course, it didn’t have to be on the true peak, but that would be the logical location.
- 2) When Champion Fibre’s tract of land on the North Carolina side of the Park was surveyed by W.N. Sloan



Figure A-1. Concrete marker remains

in 1928, Sloan (see the biographical sketch on Sloan at the end of this appendix) recorded 80 sections between the crest of Clingmans Dome and Meigs Post.. These are noted in the deed from Champion Fibre to the State of North Carolina in [Swain County deed book 60, pages 1-23](#) (the relevant section begins on the fifth line of page 9). Then there are another 79 sections from Meigs Post to “a point at head of Deep Creek-Ocona Lufty Divide (head of Thomas Ridge). Both sets of bearings and distances suggest that Sloan’s Meigs Post was at the crest of Mt. Collins, about 100 feet northeast of Morrell’s formerly concrete and brass (now just rebar and moss) marker. In the larger scheme of things, that’s not significant, but it does raise obvious doubts regarding Morrell’s expressed precision of location.

In 2011, a dead balsam (or I presume it was a balsam) near the marker remains showed indications of bearing tree markings; these were presumably one that Morrell referred to. None of the survey records which I’ve located include a reference to a bearing tree, but there are clearly axe slashes, as Susan Casada points out in Figure A-2.

Note the depth of the axe cuts – the upper one in particular. Also keep in mind that the Meigs Post was erected 209 years before this photo was taken. I am very much a layman in such matters, but the idea that a balsam, with the blaze marks cut several inches deep and about 18 inches apart, could have survived for over two centuries is one which is difficult to accept. I’d certainly welcome persuasive evidence from experienced hands in such matters.



Figure A-2. Susan Casada points to purported witness tree markings (Photo: Sep 11, 2011)

Whether one goes along with Morrell marker location or the peak’s crest (per Neville Sloan) as the specific location of Meigs Post, the evidence of Mt. Collins being the correct location for Meigs Post is overwhelming.

But equally overwhelming is the evidence that the Meigs-Freeman line, as extrapolated from Jackson County where it is very much in evidence today, did not begin at Meigs Post. Was the survey starting point moved to accommodate Cherokee interests? Or did it end there because the actual survey, per Bill Thomas’s conjecture, and the return survey had just drifted that far from Meigs Post on the way back to Old Smoky?

We’ll likely never know the why, but the evidence, very much extant in Jackson County today, clearly speaks to the Meigs-Freeman Line either beginning or ending on the Smoky crest almost six-tenths of a mile from Meigs Post.

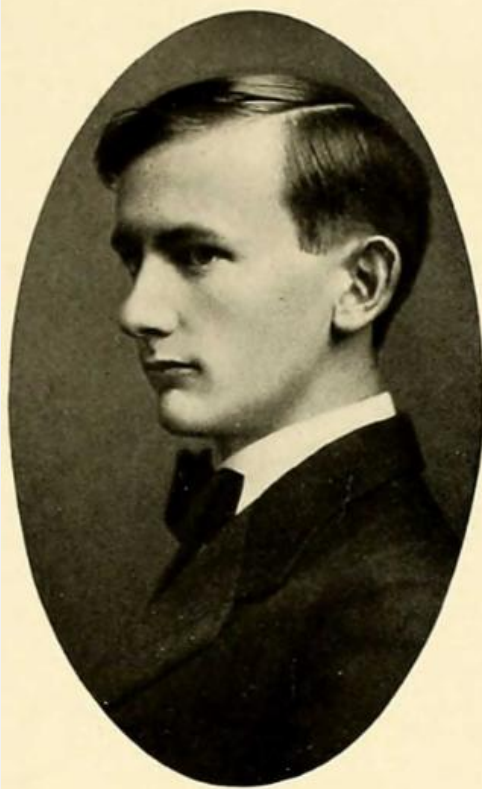
William Neville Sloan and his connection to the Smoky Mountains

William Neville Sloan, was a native of Franklin and civil engineering graduate of the North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts (now NC State University) in 1909. Clearly an extremely bright, well-rounded man (editor of the school newspaper and annual, president of a school literary society and a math and hydraulics whiz, he was given the nickname “Nubbin” – no doubt because of his stature (5 ft 8 inches tall, 130 pounds his senior year in college). That size and physique – remarkably similar to that of Mark Cathey – no doubt served him well when he surveyed the rugged areas of the Smokies in his late 30s. Every single North Carolina Park Commission property tract map, from Deals Gap in southwestern Swain to Davenport Gap near I-40 and the Pigeon River Gorge is marked as having been surveyed by W.N. Sloan. With respect to Meigs Post, Sloan’s observations preceded those of Morrell by over a quarter of a century, and actually referenced the Post itself in his survey, vs. deducing the location from tree blazes.

W.N. Sloan was a great-grandson of the first owner and namesake of Silers Bald, Jesse Richardson Siler. The Silers included several connections to Swain County’s namesake, David Lowry Swain (1801-1868). Two of Swain’s older sisters, Matilda (1797-1858) and Althea (1798-1846) married brothers of J.R. Siler, Jacob and William.

A copy of Sloan’s sketch in the 1909 Agromeck (school annual) is shown below.

WILLIAM NEVILLE SLOAN.....Franklin, N. C.



Nubbin

Civil Engineering

*A book of Math. my close companion be,
No other book I ever ought to see.*

Editor-in-Chief *Red and White*, '08-'09; Vice-President Senior Class, '08-'09; Editor *AGROMECK*, '08-'09; Second Lieutenant Company A, '08-'09; Sergeant Company D, '07-'08; President Leazar Literary Society, '09; Secretary L. L. S., '07; Secretary Inter-Society Debate, '08; Marshal Inter-Society Debate, '07; Manager Class Baseball Team, '08; Tennis Club, '08-'09; Honors in Scholarship, '07-'08; Y. M. C. A.; President Ringers, '08-'09; Age, 20 years; Height, 5 ft. 8 in.; Weight, 130 pounds.

“Nubbin” is the most appropriate nickname that could be found for the young genius. Though in size like a nubbin, he is a wonder when it comes to Math. We wonder how his friends “Chink,” “Pete,” “Julius,” and “Dock” would get along without him when it comes to Calculus and Hydraulics. Sloan never lacks bootblacks, water boys, or janitors when Calculus or Hydraulics is the reward.

W.N. Sloan, image from subscription service [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com)

Appendix B. Books and other writing about the Meigs-Freeman Line

Introduction

The work of William Thomas in *Boundaries – The Meigs-Freeman Line and the Carolinas Blue Ridge Boundary* is referenced several times in the main body of this lengthy article. My admiration for his work is quite evident.

Other authors have written about the Meigs-Freeman Line, ranging from only a brief mention of the line to it being a central focus of their work. The works range from well-researched and thoughtfully-considered, like that of Thomas, to seriously flawed. In this appendix, observations and critiques are offered, in order of publication.

Background: Historical Mischaracterizations and Management of local affairs from Tennessee

Eight decades ago, Judge Felix Eugene Alley (1873-1957) wrote:¹

Horace Kephart, the author of 'Our Southern Highlanders', who lived for about eighteen years in Swain County, and Miss Margaret Morley, of Boston, the author of 'The Carolina Mountains', who spent sufficient time here—ten or twelve years—to enable her to visit most of our mountains, have written by far the best books that have been written about our mountain section.

Both of them tell us more about the mountains, their altitude, their fauna and flora, and especially their trees and shrubs and flowers than our own people ever knew from any other sources. Both of them testify to the inherent integrity, honesty, and fine rugged character of our mountaineers, but they, like all other writers about our people, assert repeatedly that we are still living in the early days of the eighteenth century; that we know nothing of the great world beyond the rim of the mountains, and both of them describe conditions among those whom they are pleased to designate as the typical, average mountaineer – the masses –which I know of my own knowledge never did exist, except perhaps in rare isolated instances, or in the overwrought imaginations of the writers themselves.

They, like all other writers about our people, write to be interesting and not to tell the truth; their primary object, with respect to what they say about our mountaineers being, to write books that would sell in the North; because they knew that if they had written the truth about our people they would have written the same story that would be true of the people of any other rural section in the United States, although it is my belief that they could with propriety and truth have said that the average of our citizenship is above the average in rural sections anywhere else.

Alley, a Jackson County native who spent his life in the mountains, was decades ahead of the scholarly community in calling out the stereotypes. That was something that some of our very own folks, notably Lillian Thomasson,² failed to do, nodding to Morley and Kephart as authorities. Zell Miller, former Governor of Georgia and U.S. Senator from that state and a native of Young Harris, went even further astray, calling Kephart “the expert of mountain experts.”³ One has to wonder if Miller’s account was substantially ghost-written or if he had actually read *Our Southern Highlanders*.

¹ Judge Felix E. Alley, *Random Thoughts and the Musings of a Mountaineer*. 1941. Rowan Printing Company. pp. 215-216

² Lillian Thomasson, *Swain County...Early History and Educational Development*. Miller Printing Co., Asheville. 1965.

³ Zell Miller, *Purt Nigh Gone*. Stroud & Hall Publishers, Macon, GA. 2009, p. 91

Alley's views from eight decades ago regarding the stereotyping of these authors have, in recent times, become acknowledged by latter day students and scholars of Appalachia. As br'er Jim Casada has poetically noted with a turn of the Biblical paradigm "in the world, but not of it," Morley and Kephart were "in the mountains, but not of them."

Not only has a great deal of our history been written by outsiders, in the macroscopic sense, actual history of our region has been dominated from afar. An early example is the 1761 punitive Grant "expedition." From the accounts of Grant himself as well as Captain William French, we have the first recorded descriptions of parts of what is now Swain County. Came across into Swain County of today through the Leatherman Gap, on through Big Laurel and down Connelly Creek. After a short detour to Stekoa (Thomas Valley), they followed the Tuckasegee to Kituwah (Governor's Island) and then Tuckaleechee (Bryson City), on to Tessentee in the area of today's four lane Alarka exchange, and finally to the Needmore section. Cherokee homes, towns, and crops were destroyed all along the way.⁴

As Cherokee cession treaties started opening lands in the area for white settlement, multiple individual land grants for tens of thousands of acres of land grant tracts were acquired in the 1790s by men living hundreds of miles away – from John Gray Blount in far eastern North Carolina to the Cathcart and Latimer family of Philadelphia.

During those transitional years in which the land which is now Swain County was acquired from the Cherokees, starting with the 1791 Treaty of Holston and culminating with the fraudulent New Echota cession of 1835, Indian Agents were charged with managing relations with the Cherokees. The agents – such as Return Jonathan Meigs – were stationed in Tennessee. As noted in the main body of this work, Meigs appears to have been fair and equitable in his overall dealings, and his tasks were formidable. But from his remote headquarters in Tennessee, [his management of affairs in North Carolina was less than stellar](#).

In the middle part of the 19th century, some of the larger area land acquisitions were by less remote – but still removed – individuals. The most notable of the grants of that era was the 50,000-acre Love/Battle/Welch Land Grant 587. The LG 587 grantees were all from the Waynesville area. Jesse Richardson Siler, Joab Lawrence Moore and John T. Foster of Franklin all acquired thousands of acres by land grant in the Smokies – on Noland and Forney Creeks primarily, but also some (Siler) on Hazel Creek. Like the LG 587 owners, they were Western North Carolinians. It is possible that Siler, in particular, made some use of the land, but, by and large, they were strictly speculators. Much of the land that they acquired was, in turn, sold to northern speculators – and later, timber companies.

Shortly after the turn of the 20th century, the timber barons arrived, "tortured the timber and stripped all the land."⁵ They were all from outside the state:

- Kitchens Lumber (Twentymile Creek) – Pennsylvania
- Montvale Lumber (Eagle Creek) – South Carolina
- Ritter Lumber (Hazel Creek) – Ohio
- Norwood Lumber (Forney Creek) – West Virginia
- Champion Fibre (Lufty, primarily) – Ohio
- Whitmer-Parsons Pulp & Lumber – West Virginia, Delaware

⁴ The Rutherford campaign in 1776 might have also reached into today's Swain (others seem confident that it did, I'm personally unsure).

⁵ John Prine, [Paradise](#).

While the work provided the first ever cash-paying employment for some locals, the timber companies were modern day manifestations of Julius Caesar's "veni, vidi, vici"...and then vamoose. They came, they took, they destroyed. Hastily departing, they left, as Seymour Calhoun recalled regarding Ritter's use of overhead skidders, "a destruction of it" in their wake. According to Jack Cobun, most of the companies lost money: "All these companies wrote finis at the close of their books in red ink with heavy monetary losses."⁶. Cobun said that Norwood Lumber (Forney Creek) was the only company in Swain or Graham Counties which made a profit.

Almost immediately after their departure (and, in part, to hasten their departure), almost the entire top of Swain County's anvil shape was taken for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Like Return Jonathan Meigs, Indian Agent of more than a century earlier, the local U.S. Agent in charge was stationed in Tennessee. Things change...and things remain the same.

These hills and their hollows and streams are family. Places are like cousins, and [we call them by name](#). Some of those names were also changed by outsiders. A prime example is Woody Branch, the feeder of Forney Creek where John Quincy Adams Woody and his wife, Manerva Bradshaw settled in the 1860s and raised a family, including their oldest son, William Thomas "Tom" Woody. On October 29, 1929, with eminent domain taking looming, 79-year old Tom Woody and his second wife, Victoria DeHart, [signed over their 230 acres of land to the North Carolina Park Commission for \\$3,350](#). Surveyor W.N. Sloan listed it as Woody Branch both in his survey description as well as on the [plat for Tract 174](#). The Woody property lay on both sides of their namesake branch for well over four-fifths of a mile. Tom Woody died less than six months later, in April, 1930.

After his death, the North Carolina Park Nomenclature Committee decided that acquiring the land wasn't enough – the name of the stream the Woody land lay along had to go as well. The bizarre rationale was that there was also a Woody Branch in Cataloochee of Haywood County. They replaced it with Gray Wolf Creek, discarding a cultural and familial namesake.

The North Carolina Nomenclature Committee was composed of Verne Rhoades of Asheville, J.W. Harrelson of Raleigh, D. Hiden Ramsey of Asheville and Horace Kephart of Bryson City. George Masa of Asheville was an ex-officio member. Not a single member of that committee was born within 250 miles of the stream they renamed. None had familial ties to the Smokies.

The Meigs pattern of treating the North Carolina side as a stepchild was resurrected under the Tennessee side management of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. This was recognized from the early days of the Park and gained considerable momentum with the Tennessee Valley Authority's condemnatory taking of lands for Fontana Dam, followed by decades of unfulfilled legal obligations of the National Park Service. Fontana Dam itself generates power from waters of Swain, Jackson, Macon, and Graham Counties. None of Fontana Dam's electrical energy is returned to those counties which provided the hydraulic energy; high voltage transmission lines carry every watt-hour across the state border into Tennessee.

Some of what follows, particularly with regard to outright fabrications – from Tennessee Rangers, no less – may seem peevish and fractious.

Well, I reckon it is.

⁶ Interview with Jack Cobun which appeared in the September 16, 1934 issue of the Asheville Citizen.

The History of Land Titles in Western North Carolina, George Henry Smathers, Attorney-at-Law, 1938. The Miller Printing Company, Asheville, NC.

According to the autobiographical sketch which Smathers included with his book, he was born in the little community of Turnpike, located in extreme western Buncombe County, less than a quarter mile east of the Haywood County line. His folks were well to do and Smathers attended private schools in Buncombe County, although his sketch indicates all of his formal education was received before he turned 15. He attended law school in 1880 and was licensed to practice law in 1881. In 1899 he was appointed Special Assistant U.S. Attorney to oversee a pair of suits, *The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians vs. William H. Thomas* and *The United States vs. William H. Thomas*. In that work, which took fourteen years, the land titles to 77,000 acres of the Qualla Boundary was “perfected.” He also worked with Bryson City attorneys Thad Bryson and Stanley Black, who the Cherokees had engaged as attorney. Bryson, Black and Smathers successfully defended 5,000 acres of Cherokee against a lawsuit.

His land-related activity so dominated his work load that he chose to specialize in title work. He worked on a host of large-scale timber tracts throughout Western North Carolina. His largest and likely most daunting work was as corporate attorney for Champion Fibre. In that capacity, he cleared titles for around 100,000 acres of land acquired by Champion in the area that is now the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. As a part of the settlement agreement between Champion and the Park Commissions of North Carolina and Tennessee, the burden of litigating several hundred adverse claims against Champion had to be dealt with.

The nature of his career well-suited him to the subject that was the title of his book. He was clearly an authority on the subject and from both a technical standpoint and personal experience, he was in a league of his own.

A personal mea culpa is in order before what comes next. I’m a retired engineer, and recognize that my own communication skills are badly wanting. My principal reviewer (wife Susan) regularly and rightly flags wordy flatulence. So the following commentary comes from one who has considerable expertise in the matter at hand.

If there was a contest for who could cram the most words into a single sentence, Smathers would give the best of them a run for their money. On perhaps the most significant element of his text, he assembled a [single sentence of 745 words](#). It occupied a full page of his text plus parts of two others (pp 67-69). In that one sentence (which was also a single paragraph), he dealt with five land grants, a visit to the U.S. Supreme Court and three visits to the N.C. Supreme Court, all intermingled with seven acts of the North Carolina Legislature and spanning 69 years. After pausing for but an instant to catch his breath, like Chaucer’s Nicholas, Smathers let flee with another; his second thunderbolt of a wind breaker was a mere 224 words.

Smathers’ writing style is worse than legalese, which is by itself is often bad enough. Excepting scientific discussions on subjects about which I have absolutely no knowledge, Smathers’ work is, hands down, the most difficult reading for comprehension of modern English language material that I’ve encountered.

Interestingly, a landmark cited by Smathers was one in which he was a participant, not in his role as attorney, but a co-defendant in a case brought in Transylvania County, and heard by Judge T.D. Bryson of Bryson City: *Brown et al v. Smathers et al*.

In Smathers' defense, there was a complex evolution which involved all of those elements he mentioned in that 745-word paragraph. The upshot, as best as I can infer, from the combined complexity of law and Smathers' narrative, as regarding land now in Swain County is that:

- A) Grants to land which lay west of the Meigs-Freeman Line which were issued prior to 1819 (date of the next cession treaty) were void.
- B) In cases where a large land grant straddled the Meigs-Freeman Line, the portion on the east was valid, but that on the west was void.
- C) Because the Pickens Line was never run, the Meigs-Freeman Line also became the default boundary line which applied after the fact, even to those land grants issued during the interim between the Treaty of Holston (1791, put into effect in 1792) and the 1798 Treaty of Tellico. Thus, [the portions of Land Grants 225, 226 and 230 which lay east of Meigs-Freeman](#) were held valid, in spite of the fact that they were all issued in the summer of 1796, well before the Treaty of Tellico which opened up those former Cherokee territories.

Notwithstanding the challenge of reading Smathers with understanding, *History of Land Titles* is a comprehensive compilation of state statutes and court cases which weigh upon the Meigs-Freeman Line and the other Indian Boundaries. If you seek to get from A to B, Smathers will lead you there, but it'll only be after you stop and visit with H, Q, M, R, E and Z along the way.

“Two Early Boundary Lines with the Cherokee Nation.” Ron Petersen. *Journal of Cherokee Studies*, Vol. VI, No. 1, Spring, 1981, pp 14-33.

Ron Petersen was “a member of the Botany Department, the University of Tennessee, Knoxville” at the time this article was written. The article is heavily referenced (60 citations), suggesting considerable research work on the author’s part. I’m anything but a stickler in terms of following style, as is apparent from my own footnotes and references. I’m not sure whether the responsibility lies with Petersen or *Journal of Cherokee Studies*, but the list of footnotes is a tangled mess.

Petersen includes three map sketches (Fig. 2, p. 19, Fig. 3, p. 24 and Fig. 4, p. 28), presumably of his own making, which purport to his versions of the “true course” of both the Hawkins and Meigs-Freeman Lines. His explanations for how he arrived at any of the lines range from sketchy to non-existent.

For example, in Figs. 2 and 3, Petersen’s “Approximate true course of the Hawkins line” terminates around a mile and a quarter northeast of Mt. Collins, intersecting the Smoky Mountain spine between the heads of Rocky Fork and Sahlee Creek of Deep Creek (closer to Sahlee). The text of the article has no reference to the map, and the basis for that course is unclear from the rambling discussion. That course is also extremely dubious, given the fact that the Indian Boundary was marked in the Tennessee side survey as ending at Meigs Post on Mt. Collins (see Figure 4 of the main body of this article).

Petersen disputed a previous claim by Paul Fink that the first use of Smoky in reference to the mountain range now known as the Great Smokies was in the 1798 Holston Treaty, and noted an earlier (1791) reference by then Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson concerning the Southwest Territory. The Southwest Territory existed because the State of North Carolina had ceded it to the United States. That transfer was initiated in 1789, when the North Carolina General Assembly passed an act⁷ authorizing the state’s representatives in the U.S. Congress to execute a deed to the United States for all its lands west of a line from “the Painted Rock on French Broad River, thence along the highest ridge of the said mountain, to the place where it is called the Great Iron or Smoaky Mountain, thence along the extreme height of said mountain.....” That is the first known (to me) written reference which refers to our Smoky Mountains.

Petersen’s Fig. 4 (p. 28), showing the “True course of Meigs & Freeman Line” is apparently based on running a line from Meigs Post through The Pinnacle and on to the South Carolina state line. The word apparently is emphasized because, as noted above, connection between maps and their legends and the text of the article ranges from unclear to non-existent. He claims that M-F “*passes virtually through Beta, and a short distance east of the present town of Qualla.*”

First, there is no “present town of Qualla.” *Quallatown* has been shown on 19th and early 20th century maps, with its label location ranging from north of Soco Creek (1891 USGS Cowee) to well east of today’s Olivet area in the 1940 Whittier quadrangle. At the time of publication of the article, the most recent USGS map was the 1967 Whittier quadrangle, which doesn’t list Quallatown at all. A Jackson County Qualla census district had existed since 1870, and it covers a very broad area, including miles to the west and east of the Meigs-Freeman Line.

The apparent reason for the mention of the “present town of Qualla” is in regards to the Temple survey, which is noted in the main body of this paper (see Figure 13a). But if one traces a line from Meigs Post to the termination point indicated in Petersen’s Figure 4 “*True course of Meigs and*

⁷ Laws of North Carolina [1789]. *An Act or the Purpose of Ceding to the United States of America, certain Western Lands therein described.* Chapter 3

Freeman Line (see (see text).” [sic] in the Qualla area, his line is offset from that of Temple by almost 0.4 miles. His extrapolation to South Carolina is fully 1.6 miles northeast of the Jackson County property-based extrapolation.

Petersen references *History of Land Titles in Western North Carolina* and even notes a map which accompanies Smathers’ work, and claims the line shown on that map is consistent with his. But it isn’t; his line terminates well to the east of the Smathers map.

Given the fact that editors and reviewers of journal articles may not be cartophiles (which this reviewer obviously is), perhaps it is understandable that what are to me significant errors weren’t caught. But there’s another note offered by Petersen which it is both surprising and disappointing that the editors of *Journal of Cherokee Studies* failed to catch. Petersen summarized several entries from what he called *Freeman’s journal*,⁸ sourced to the National Archives. One of them read:

20 Aug. Within one day’s ride of “the Bears town [a settlement under the leadership of Big Bear, a Cherokee Chief, located at what is now known as “Gateway”, the junction of routes 19A and 441, on the Tuckaseegee River] Proceeded to a “stream 50 links wide” [the Tuckaseegee River or Scott’s Creek?].

[Big Bear \(Yona Equa\) made his home](#) in the area that is now Bryson City, over 7.5 miles away from Gateway even by today’s straightened-out roads.

In conjunction with the 1819 cession treaty, Big Bear took out a 640-acre (one square mile) reserve which included the majority of the town limits of today. While there have been local historical mischaracterizations of exactly where the boundary was located, it has long been known that Big Bear’s Town (also known as Big Bear’s Farm) was in today’s Bryson City area. The survey records for Big Bear’s tract date to 1820. On the local level, the connection to Yonah or Big Bear has long been recognized, both formally and informally. The lower bridge in Bryson City, opened in 1969, was name “Bear Ford Bridge” in recognition of the fact that the ford location just below it had long been know as Bear Ford (or Bear’s Ford). A subdivision of land between the north side of the railroad tracks and the base of Black Hill which dated to early in the second decade of the twentieth century was called Yonah Springs.

Finally, even raising the question as to whether the Tuckaseegee might be the 50-link wide stream suggests that Petersen had no feet on the ground (or in the river) knowledge. Fifty links is 33 feet. While that’s certainly in the ballpark for Dicks Creek, even in its very narrowest sections above the mouth of the West Fork of the Tuckaseegee, the river is twice that wide. What is more, *the Meigs-Freeman Line never crosses the Tuckaseegee*. It’s closest point to the Tuckaseegee is in extreme southeastern Jackson County, where it is over a mile and a third away.

It appears that Petersen invested considerable time in the research of this piece, and deserves praise for that. Unfortunately, any insights offered are difficult to extract, and the maps, in particular, are not only confusing, but problematic, and he clearly has no sense of place on the North Carolina side of Smokies.

⁸ In the archives of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the journal fragments are attributed to Agent Meigs, not Surveyor Freeman. I’m unclear as to the original source of the Park materials. The only specific reference offered by Petersen is microfilm roll 1, “Records of the Cherokee Agent, Tennessee, 1801-1802.” The nature of the entries do not strike me at all as having come from a surveyor, so the Park archives attribution to Meigs seems more sensible. Petersen could be correct

Meigs Line, Dwight McCarter and Joe Kelley, 2014. Grateful Steps, Asheville NC.

Meigs Line was written by a pair of retired Great Smoky Mountains National Park Rangers, both from Tennessee. The Preface begins with a story about recently-retired Park Service employee John Morrell and Joe Kelley (who, at the time, had worked for the Park Service for a few years) going to look for the concrete marker which Morrell had set in the 1950s (discussed in Appendix A). The third paragraph of the Preface has Morrell spotting “a large moss-covered axe blaze mark on a large balsam tree on the east side of the trail, which he recognized as one of the historic witness trees he had seen before.” The next, one-sentence paragraph reads:

“John soon spotted six additional witness trees, referenced in Return Jonathan Meigs’ 1802 journal.”

That is the first indication of a problem which threads its way throughout the entire book. There is, in fact, no mention whatsoever of witness trees in the [surviving bits of the journal](#).

The preface concludes with this paragraph:

“The points and references of the surveys listed in this work are real. Every event experienced by the characters Vinn and Dwight in this work are based on real happenings during the careers of Rangers Dwight McCarter and Joe Kelley. They represent smiles, tears pains and joys experienced by both. People’s names and timing of events were modified occasionally to enhance readability.”

The sharing of actual experiences of the rangers offers a light, human touch to their tale, and the need to change names and event timings is, of course, understandable. The first bit – the claim that the survey points reported – presumably refers to an earlier mention that Dwight McCarter had walked the Hawkins, Pickens, Butler and Meigs-Freeman Lines in 1970s as he “rediscovered evidence of the original surveys, using compass and camera.”

The book clearly seeks to entertain, and at least to this reader, it is marginally successful in that regard. Inasmuch as it claims that “The points and references of the surveys listed in this work are real” it also purports to not just entertain, but inform. On that count, it fails abysmally.

It is so chockful of demonstrable errors of fact of a variety of types that it becomes clear that one shouldn’t rely on anything of a factual nature which is proffered without independently verifying it. A few (and only a few) examples are discussed below.

The Introduction chapter begins:

“High atop the Great Smokies, on Mount Collins, there is a point known as Meigs Post, Smokies, the most important survey point used in the establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

The story of Meigs Post begins when our nation was brand new. Our country had obtained her freedom from the British and was searching for her boundaries. This post marks the spot that was once the common corner between the states of Tennessee, North Carolina and the Cherokee Nation as agreed upon in the Treaty of Holston, ratified by Congress on July 2, 1791. Both parties – the treaty commissioners and Cherokee involved—agreed to the location of elevation 6003 feet on the North Carolina State Line as one endpoint, and the other, where the Clinch joins the Tennessee River. This treaty line, to be surveyed in 1792, was to begin at Fort Southwest Point, now Kingston, Tennessee, and extend on a compass course S76°E.”

Seen from the Tennessee side, a case can certainly be made that Meigs Post was a particularly important survey point, and of course *Meigs Line* was written by a pair of Tennesseans. On the North

Carolina side, Meigs Post was just one of literally thousands of points along W.N. Sloan's way as he surveyed the Champion Fibre boundary for the NC Park Commission. It was also just one point along the way for William Davenport when he first surveyed the North Carolina – Tennessee state line boundary in 1821. When the Love heirs (including Will Thomas) sold the 50,000-acre Land Grant 587 to Clarke Whittier in 1886, the portion of boundary description which ran along the state line from east of Laurel Top to Silers Bald mentioned Clingmans Dome, but completely ignored Meigs Post (Swain County deed book 7, pp. 434-481; the relevant section is at the bottom of p. 438).

Had Meigs Post actually been the beginning point of the Meigs-Freeman Line, or had the Pickens Line turned out to be of legal consequence, folks on the North Carolina side might go along with the claims of it being "the most important survey point" in Park establishment. But as has been shown in the main body of this article, it was neither.

In that second paragraph of the *Meigs Line* Introduction, the claim is made that the Treaty of Holston was ratified by Congress on July 2, 1791. This is incorrect. That was the date of treaty signing on the banks of the Holston River (now Knoxville, Tennessee, and the river is the Tennessee). It wasn't until February 7, 1792 when it was proclaimed in Philadelphia.

That perhaps qualifies as a minor quibble, but what comes immediately afterwards is unmitigated hooey. As was discussed in the body of this paper, the treaty language regarding the boundary was ambiguous, and a great deal of time was spent just trying to determine the starting point in 1797. Further, as was also noted in the main body of this paper (p. 8), the line was terminated more than ten miles from crest of the Smokies. The idea that a specific endpoint on top of Old Smoky at an elevation of 6003 feet was preselected as an endpoint is laughable on multiple counts. It wasn't until over a half century later that the elevations of Smoky Mountain peaks were first measured by Arnold Guyot. The crest of Mount Collins, site of Meigs Post, was measured by Guyot to be 6,188 feet. It is still officially that today, according to the USGS (although the USGS National Map elevation indexing tool shows the crest to be 6,191 feet). The treaty made no mention of elevation, endpoint or bearing.

Later in the *Meigs Line* Introduction, there are three back-to-back paragraphs which are almost exclusively filled with factual errors. Following is a dissection of each paragraph individually. There are two purposes in this exercise:

1) provide substantive evidence for the basis of this warning: *Avoid relying on the accuracy of anything written in Meigs Line without independently verifying its accuracy*; and

2) offer some refuting factual data which itself points to element of intrigue and insight which have gone untapped by writers. I did not include such materials in my own work in the main body because my primary focus was in locating the lines (and more particularly, the Meigs-Freeman Line). For example, there is duplicity and perhaps treasonous behavior on the part of one of the named U.S. Commissioners on the one hand. On the other hand, there is an utter lack of intrigue, up-front honesty, and desire for amicable relations on the part of the Cherokees. Independently, there is substantial indication that the Cherokees put great faith in their former war-time opponent, Andrew Pickens.

Two principle sources will be used in the refutations which follow. They are:

Charles C. Royce, "Cherokee Nation of Indians." Fifth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1883-'84. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1887. p. 165 (cited as *Royce* below).

[Letters of Benjamin Hawkins, 1796-1806](#), Collection of the Georgia Historical Society Vol. IX (referred to henceforth as *Hawkins Letters*). Aside from its use here, an interesting, standalone story about the nature of the times and people, could be developed from *Hawkins Letters*.

The three paragraphs from *Meigs Line* are in blue font below. Following are critiques of each, in red letters. For each critique, one or more supporting references is provided (note that the *Meigs Line* authors provide no sources for their claims).

Para. 1. *"In March 1797, President Adams commissioned Colonel Benjamin Hawkins, General Andrew Pickens and General James Winchester to survey the line. They were to meet with twenty Cherokee representatives at Tellico Blockhouse on the Little Tennessee River. Winchester never appeared at the meeting."*

A) John Adams was not yet President when Hawkins, Pickens and Winchester were appointed. George Washington was still in office, and the appointments were made not by the President, but by *"Instructions were issued by the Secretary of War on the 2d of February, 1797, appointing and directing Col. Benjamin Hawkins, General Andrew Pickens, and General James Winchester as commissioners on the part of the United States to establish and mark the lines between the latter and the Indian nations south of the Ohio."* Source: Royce, p. 165.

B) There is no record indicating instructions "to meet with twenty Cherokee representatives at Tellico Blockhouse." Royce indicated that Hawkins and Pickens traveled from Pickens' home at Hopewell, SC to Tellico, starting on March 23 and arriving on March 31. Royce went on to say that it was not until April 25 that a delegation of 147 Cherokee men were convened to select their own commissioners to participate in the running and marking of the line. Source: Royce, pp. 165-167. This is also covered in extensive detail in *Hawkins Letters*, beginning on p. 160.

Meigs Line authors are correct about one thing in that paragraph: Winchester never showed up; Royce addressed this (bottom of p. 165, top of p. 166) and it would've made fine fodder for discussion, particularly if they had looked into how Winchester's failure and duplicity was thoroughly understood by Hawkins et al (*Hawkins Letters*, p. 159, for example) to be a delaying tactic relative to land speculation activities of Winchester. Of course Winchester was not the only Tennessean involved in land speculation and duplicity which bordered on treason. More will be said about that in regards to Para. 2. Communications in *Hawkins Letters* also touch on that matter.

Para. 2. *"The survey was begun on April 5, 1797 with Hawkins, Pickens and Timothy Barnard. A close friend of Colonel Hawkins, Barnard was a trader and surveyor from the Flint River near Fort Fidius, South Carolina. He was on the survey team as the compass man. The survey started one thousand yards northeast of Fort Southwest Point at the blockhouse spring and was on azimuth S76°E."*

A) There is not only no evidence provided by the *Meigs Line* authors to support their assertion that Timothy Barnard participated in the survey; there is substantial evidence to the contrary in *Hawkins Letters*. On p. 177, in a June 1st entry, Hawkins records receiving a letter from Barnard. On p. 184, in a letter to Barnard from the Holston River on July 13, Hawkins acknowledged another letter from Barnard dated May 9.

Royce explicitly notes that surveyor Joseph Whitner and an escort of U.S. troops accompanied Hawkins and Pickens when they left Hopewell; they were joined by another

surveyor, John Clark Kilpatrick at Ocunna station, en route, and the group reached Tellico block house on March 31 (Royce, p.165). Barnard is not mentioned by Royce at all.

B) The survey did not start on April 5, as asserted in *Meigs Line*. On April 3, Hawkins, Pickens et al met with David Campbell, one of three men who had attempted, in 1792, to begin the boundary line (the others were Charles McClung and John McKee). On April 7, they met with a representative group of 13 Cherokee men who told the Commissioners that they “all rejoiced at the expectation of having their line closed.” The Cherokee men also said, regarding where the line was located between the Little and the (Little) Tennessee Rivers, to “Go see your people, hear what they have to say, and obtain all the information you can, but do not give them any opinion at all till you hear us.”

In the succeeding days, *Hawkins Letters* records actions of insubordination and threats of use of militia by Governor John Sevier against the purported threat he claimed regarding the Cherokees who assembled for the deliberations. The responses of Hawkins and Pickens rose above those of Sevier and others, and in a most diplomatic manner, completely shamed Sevier – and an insubordinate officer of the War Department. On April 27, Cherokee Commissioners were named to represent Cherokees in the running of the line, and were to be paid for their service. A signed agreement was struck between Benjamin Hawkins as Agent for Indian Affairs and Keanotah and Occunna for the Cherokees on April 28.

Although the date when the survey actually began cannot be stated with certainty, May 1, 1797 is most likely (*Hawkins Letters*, p. 165). But it must be kept in mind that there were two survey lines to run according to the treaty. In addition to the section which crossed the Smokies, the boundary was to run north and west of the Clinch River, including the crest of the Cumberland Mountains and along the Cumberland River and included a point forty miles above Nashville. See Article IV of the [Cession Treaty of 1791](#).

On May 3, *Hawkins Letters* recorded “Mr. Hawkins went to Knoxville on public business and General Pickens crossed the river and proceeded on for Clinch.” Multiple dispatches throughout the summer make it abundantly clear that Hawkins was not along on the survey at all. That is understandable; given that he had responsibilities for all Indian Affairs south of the Ohio. One of these letters was to John Rogers, sent from Knoxville on July 10, 1797. In it, Hawkins noted:

The Commissioners are now tracing the line from Kentucky trace on Cumberland and the Clinch; they will then descend and commence on the Clinch and proceed across the Holston to the South Carolina line.”

Obviously, the northwestern portion of the new boundary was first traced, and the line toward the Smokies was started sometime after July 10, more than two months after the *Meigs Line* assertion.

Among the letters sent by Hawkins was one to Secretary of War, James McHenry, sent from “On the dividing ridge between the waters of Duck River and Cumberland Rivers” (which is in the area where another part of the boundary line was run). Hawkins mentions an intercepted letter which he had forwarded to McHenry involving “exposure of those dirty intriguers and their villainous attempts to involve the government in difficulties and distress.” Although he isn’t named in the letter, one of those “dirty intriguers” was William Blount. It was the intercepted letter which led to his being evicted from the U.S. Senate. Source: *Hawkins Letters*, pp. 145 - 197.

Para. 3. *"It took eleven weeks to run the sixty miles of the Hawkins Line. Hawkins ended the survey at Mount Collins on July 1, 1797. The first survey marker at the 6003-foot site was most likely erected by Colonel Benjamin Hawkins in 1797."*

Para. 3 A) There is no firm data on when the survey stopped, but there are multiple sources which demonstrate that the surveyors stopped short of Meigs Mountain. As noted above, the most likely date for starting running the actual survey was May 1, but the line which was run southeasterly to the Smokies didn't commence until sometime after July 10. The *Meigs Line* claim of it concluding on July 1 is obviously wrong. As has previously been noted, the peak was not at 6003 feet, the survey never reached the crest of the Smokies, and even if it had, Hawkins wouldn't have been along.

The survey likely ended after August 18, when Hawkins penned a letter from Chilhowee Mountain and before September 14, when he was back at Fort Wilkinson, near Milledgeville, Georgia. It was from there that he wrote to Silas Dinsmoor on September 20 and noted the necessity to stop at the 50th mile (from Southwest Point).

In summary, in all but two aspects of those three paragraphs (the names of the commissioners and the fact that Winchester never showed), *Meigs Line* is wrong with respect to every single stated element.

All of this (and there is considerably more which is not addressed here) is in just the Introduction section of *Meigs Line*. Continuing with detailed, point-by-point discussion would, in effect, imply that there is something worth rescuing in *Meigs Line*; that is not the case. But two other egregious errors, one of which has unfortunately been relied upon elsewhere, warrant special mention.

Blazed tree claims

The authors claim to having found bearing trees along the Pickens Line in the Deep Creek drainage. That is notable, since it is a line which was never run, as is well-documented by the North Carolina Courts (see p. 66 in George Smathers' *History of Land Titles in Western North Carolina*, discussed previously).

But those imaginary finds pale in comparison to other tree blaze discoveries in central Jackson County. On page 162, *Meigs Line* reads:

"We returned to Hawkins Knob and soon found a marked tree with an axe blaze near Meigs Line, similar to axemarks found previously on the line and compatible with marks that are almost 200 years old."

The S52.5°E line, extended from Meigs Post line does, in fact, cross Hawkins Knob about 100 yards from its crest. But as was previously shown in Figure 15, that is 2.3 miles from where the actual Meigs-Freeman Line passes.

These "finds" of course raise serious doubts about all of the purportedly spotted tree blazes⁹ reported in *Meigs Line*.

Locations which *Meigs Line* mentions along the way – not just in the Hawkins Knob area, but along the entire length – demonstrate that the path followed was strictly based on laying down a S52.5°E line on a map and seeing where it crossed on that map, and that the author(s) clearly failed to take magnetic declination into account. It might be noted, however, that they also claim

⁹ The idea that "almost 200 years old" tree blazes would still exist struck me as extremely unlikely, so I asked a professional forester. His response was that it was very unlikely, with the possible exception of extremely slow-growing species like the western juniper.

to have spotted (p. 164) a blazed tree for the line on Charley Bald, which is almost a mile even further northeast of where the faux S52.5°E version of the line runs, and 3.6 miles northeast of the true Meigs-Freeman Line.

It's a good thing for Jackson County that those Tennessee Park Rangers weren't responsible for laying down the line. The tangled land grant mess covered by Smathers would've been considerably worsened.

Bear's Town

One last bone to pick (though there could be many more) involves the discussion of Bear's Town and stream sizes. On page 151, after the journal entry which referred to sending to Bears Town for supplies, the two characters engage in a conversation which goes:

"They went to Bear Town," I said. 'That's Sylva now, at Scotts Creek. The village was sometimes known as Johns Town also. The steep declivity would have been at Mount Noble. The lines on the topo map are pretty close together there.'

"Fifty links is 33 feet," Vinn said. 'The wide stream is probably the Oconaluftee River.'"

The *Meigs Line* authors are twice as far off on the location of Bear's Town as was Ron Petersen in the previously discussed *Two Early Boundary Lines with the Cherokee Nation*. Bear's Town was located at today's Bryson City. It wasn't at Gateway (Petersen), and it certainly wasn't at Sylva (McCarter & Kelley). It also wasn't sometimes known as John's Creek.

McCarter & Kelley make an even worse mess of local geography only four pages after the claim that Bear Town (sic) which they claimed was also known as Johns town was in Sylva, they decided to move it to Addie *"the town we believed to have once been Johns Town or Bears Town."* Addie is a small, undefined community with undefined boundaries over 4 miles as the crow flies from downtown Sylva and 2.5 miles from where the Meigs-Freeman line crosses.

The proposition that the 33-ft wide stream is Oconaluftee is almost as ridiculous as the *Two Early Boundary Lines* suggestion that it might be the Tuckasegee. If the Tennessee authors ever set foot in the Oconaluftee River – or even looked at it as they drove alongside it in the area where their version of the line crosses – they should've realized that it's two to three times that width.

Concluding thought

If the erroneous factual claims of the *Meigs Line* authors began on the first page of the book, ended on the last, and went no further it would be much less of a concern, and the time and space allocated for the above would have been replaced with more positively-directed energy.

But the fact is, these sorts of completely unsupported claims are insidious. They manage to find their way into the writings of others who have unknowingly, and logically assumed that former Park Rangers would know whereof they speak in such matters. For that very reason, there is no apology for the harshness of the foregoing criticism.

***Oconaluftee – The History of a Smoky Mountain Valley.* Elizabeth Giddens. The University of North Carolina Press. 2023.**

Earlier this year, *Oconaluftee – The History of a Smoky Mountain Valley* was published by The University of North Carolina Press. The back cover includes the statement: “*Elizabeth Giddens offers a deeply researched and elegantly written account of Oconaluftee and its people....*”

Beth Giddens is professor of English at Kennesaw State University. I agree with that back cover statement and would go a step further. Hers is the finest work of its class (about place and people of the Smoky Mountains and Southern Appalachia in general) that I know of. I’d like to think that I’m moderately knowledgeable with respect to sources about the area, but her references and bibliography included materials which were not only new to me, but will be helpful in my work.

Oconaluftee is both informative and enjoyable. Each chapter includes a bit of personal, feet on the ground, reflection on people, place, or time. I’d add the word “engaging” to go with the back cover’s “elegantly” in describing her style. In a review of the work, my brother, Jim, who is a truly gifted wordsmith himself with a host of published works, offered¹⁰ these words of praise:

“The book is a model of its genre—deeply and widely researched, beautifully organized, nicely illustrated (mostly with images from the Park archives), and written with the grace one would expect from an English professor. By any standard of measurement it is something of a landmark volume, with its overall quality and depth appreciably exceeding that of any previously published work.”

“Giddens does a fine job, amply supported by intensive research (for the serious student her bibliography is a pure joy)..... There is no finer, deeper record of a community anywhere in the Great Smokies than hers. It is a model of its kind, a joy to read, and a major contribution to the literature of the region. If you are a student of Swain County and the Smokies, it is a ‘must read.’”

It feels awkward for a rank amateur like me to say so, but Beth made a misstep with respect to the location of Bear’s Town. The familiar electrical metaphor of “getting the wires crossed” applies here. In her discussion of the running of the Meigs-Freeman Line, she followed the lead of the *Meigs Line* authors and referenced their placement of Bear’s Town near Sylva – even though she cited an article by George Ellison in *Mountain Passages* in which he rightly discusses Bear’s Town being in the Bryson City area. She also referenced the proposition of the *Meigs Line* authors that the Oconaluftee was the 33-ft wide stream.

That she would presume the authors of *Meigs Line* would be reliable on these sorts of matters is completely understandable; they are retired Park Rangers and one claims particular expertise in field observations. That might be true in Tennessee; in North Carolina, they apparently got plumb lost.

In a relative sense, the negative impact on Giddens’ *Oconaluftee* is minor. The specific location of Bear’s Town is something known to mostly locals, and not that many at that (which needs correcting). The same is certainly true with regards to the reference of Oconaluftee as a 33-ft wide stream.

Historically, there has been a pattern of error propagation with respect to writings about this place that I call home. Frankly, *Meigs Line* isn’t worth the effort that went into its critique. Had it not insinuated itself into *Oconaluftee*, which I obviously admire, this entire appendix likely wouldn’t exist.

It is a personal goal to bring considerably more attention to the Big Bear or Yona Equa portion of the historical equation for the area now occupied by the town of Bryson City in coming times.¹¹ Setting this particular part of the record straight is needed in support of that goal.

¹⁰ Smoky Mountain Times, June 1 and June 15, 2023.

¹¹ See [Big Bear – Yona\(h\) Equa, The man, his time and legacy: The place he called home.](#)

***BOUNDARIES – The Meigs-Freeman Line and the Carolinas Blue Ridge Boundary.* William R. Thomas. Old Growth Publishers, Cedar Mountain, NC. 2018.**

I don't recall how I tripped across *Boundaries*, but I remember ordering a copy right away, quickly reading it and being impressed. That reading was more for just general interest. However, as I set about on the work of determining where the Meigs-Freeman Line ran in Swain County, I retrieved it for a more careful study.

Maybe it was the combination of Bill Thomas's explicit discussion of magnetic declination and his inclusion of Jackson County maps which caused it, but there came a point where something clicked and I thought "this guy thinks like an engineer." I would say "thinks like me" but that might be taken as an insult by Bill!

Bill Thomas was, in fact, a chemical engineer by training and experience. His BS was from Princeton and PhD from the University of Wisconsin. He worked with the Dupont Photo Products Department, mostly related to the production of X-ray films at their Cedar Mountain, NC site. Bill retired from the plant (now closed), and led the "Friends of the Horsepasture" group which successfully got that river into the National Wild and Scenic River System. He also was involved in a number of wild lands protection efforts, including serving as Chairman of the NC Chapter of the Sierra Club after retiring. He is a man who has led an amazingly varied and productive life in multiple arenas.

Bill's area of engineering is one about which I know precious little, and I suspect that he might say the same thing about my areas of specialization. Engineers aren't a collective group of monolithic dittos. But I think it's fair to say that engineers certainly tend to be analytical in their thought processes (else they'd not have gotten past a few semesters of calculus and differential equations), and pursue primary sources with a will.

But beyond analytically-minded similarities, Bill's obvious affinity for preservation (and restoration) impresses me as something in which he takes particular pride; his clear connection to the earth strikes a harmonious chord with this engineer.

As a related aside, I suspect that most folks perceive engineers to be individuals whose work is generally focused on supporting modern elements of life, and that that would be where their non-work interests lie as well. There is truth to the first part of that. But that second part is not necessarily the case.

When I was doing a great deal of backcountry hiking and hunting for home sites in what is now the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, I'd sometimes spend an entire day and not see another soul more than a mile from the trailhead. In some cases, that was to be expected; I was well off-trail most of the day. But in other cases, I had moderately long (20-25 mile) day hikes, with all, or almost all, on trail. The number of folks encountered might range from zero to two dozen or more, depending on where the hike was. I recall a hike on a June day where I started at Clingmans Dome at around sunrise and ended up at Cades Cove at about suppertime. I may have strayed a bit off trail a time or two, but generally stayed on the trail. Probably 80% of that was on the heavily traveled Appalachian Trail. Between folks at shelters and others heading in the opposite direction, I suspect I encountered at least two dozen folks, and don't recall anything more than a nod in passing.

But normally, if I ran into someone 8 or 10 miles from the trailhead, I'd take a break and stop to talk – if the other party showed an interest, that is – and they almost always

did. The conversations typically revolved around where each was headed, where we were from, what we did and the like. I didn't keep any sort of record, but over time, was struck by just how many fellow engineers I encountered. It was, amazingly, about one out of every five persons – completely at odds with my expectations. I figured I was out there because that's how I was raised, having grown up in the mountains and with outdoor activities like hunting and fishing being a part of my raising. But I figured I was an outlier in that regard; I was clearly wrong.

I mentioned this to a friend and former colleague at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Daryl Cox. Unlike me, Daryl was from a city – Cincinnati, so I figured he'd be surprised as well. He had an instantaneous and strikingly insightful response: "Engineers appreciate a good design when they see one."

Boundaries includes copies and transcriptions of primary source materials, maps of his own making, photographs from the field, reviews of colonial era boundaries, quality issues with era surveying and an array of other relevant materials. Since Thomas's focus was not solely on the Meigs-Freeman Line but the settling of the North Carolina – South Carolina boundary area, his concentration was more on the southeastern portion of things, while I was more interested in the northwestern portion of the line..

Thomas is far more diplomatic in his comments regarding *Meigs Line* by McCarter and Kelley. He says "*In their tale the Line comes out at Quillen Mt. near Caesar's Head when they followed the S52.5°E bearing. They obviously used it as a true north-based bearing, as did Royce. (They would need to have used S54.5°E to hit Quillen Mtn., though).* [Underlined emphasis is mine].

In essence, Thomas lays out in two sentences the fact that McCarter and Kelley were clearly fooling themselves regarding the actual course (as did Royce with his map of both the Hawkins and Meigs-Freeman Lines), and that even then, the rangers' end point was a whopping two degrees off their putative course, which translates to about 0.9 miles. I may be wrong, but I read his "their tale" as quite revealing of his views of their work, particularly with the follow-up points made regarding course. I was reminded of the fact that the Cashiers Library has *Meigs Line* classified as adult fiction.

Thomas produced an insightful, well- and broadly-researched product which included an idea which had never occurred to me – that the actual survey was performed in a northwesterly direction (p. 33). As noted in the body of this report, there is nothing I've been able to locate in available data to either confirm or reject the idea, but it is a well-conceived conjecture.

We disagree slightly on the M-F bearing (based on U.S. Forest Service Lines, he arrived at S47.5°E, while as noted in the body of this paper, by strictly a visually-based extrapolation of the Jackson County tax map boundary, the bearing was S47.1°E (Figure 6, p. 11), while an arguably superior means – extrapolating from two well-defined points which modern surveys indicate the line to be – results in S47.0°E (Figure 9, p. 14).

On page 37 Thomas offers an insightful observation: "*Perhaps it is astonishing that the Meigs-Freeman line came out as well as it did.*" I completely agree. When one takes into account that, as is noted in the main body, individual survey boundaries in Jackson County, all of which purportedly follow M-F, vary by several degrees, it is astonishing, indeed. In spite of the fact that there has been plenty of wrangling within the legal system in which the Meigs-Freeman Line was involved, it is remarkable that there haven't been dozens or hundreds of boundary disputes.

Acknowledgments

Mike Aday, Librarian-Archivist with the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, has always been tremendously helpful, and that was certainly the case in this study. Although I often find issues with Park management that are not to my liking – such as the implementation of the parking fee earlier this year – there are many things that the Park Service does well. Mike Aday’s work is at the forefront of things it does well.

Jason Brady, librarian with Special Collections at Western Carolina University’s Hunter Library, was helpful, as always. He retrieved and scanned a map from the George Smathers work. Although I ended up creating my own version, having the Smathers map on hand provided independent verification of that effort. Jason, like Mike Aday, is a consummate professional, helpful in many ways. In fact, that is the case for the entire WCU Special Collections outfit.

This entire effort wouldn’t have been undertaken had it not been for the wonderful work that Jackson County Geographic Information Systems and the Land Records Departments have done. When I visited early in this study, they cautioned, as does the web interface, that the mapping was not survey quality work and was primarily intended for tax purposes. However, as has been shown herein, it is far better than “good enough for government work.” The interface allowed the overall track of the Meigs-Freeman Line throughout the length of Jackson County to be seen extrapolated. Further, the configuration which has been made to link their mapping and deed data was tremendously helpful. Finally, the relatively recent addition of older deed indexes and scanned imagery to the on-line deeds interface helped save many hours and gallons of gasoline. This is a great example of modern technology facilitating a new understanding of history. Well done, neighbor Jackson.

I always enjoy spending a time with another treasure of Jackson County, Bill Crawford. Bill rode around with me and shared personal memories of work he did as a youngster near the Meigs-Freeman Line along Scotts Creek a bit above the mouth of Kitchen Branch.

Finally, thanks to Bill Thomas for his wonderful work on *Boundaries*. His fine research and thoughtful ideas and perspectives were a tremendous help and guide.

Postscript: Revisiting Meigs Post October 2, 2023

We decided to take a Sunday afternoon ride and walk and went back to Mt. Collins to both see how things had changed in the decade since I'd been there as well as to see if my memory that the marker erected by John Morrell was a little way west of the apex of Mt. Collins.



James Burnett and Susan Casada at John Morrell's Meigs Post

It appeared to me that some of the timber detritus had been cleared away from the post, although it still doesn't jump out at you as you walk along the Appalachian Trail, which passes immediately south of it. In fact James, being in far better shape than me, had gone ahead and was standing next to the rebar post. I figured he had spotted it, but it turned out to have just been a coincidence. In the photo above, both James and Susan have walking sticks resting atop the moss-covered rebar post. Someone has placed survey flags on either side of the trail (note the one above and to the right of Susan's head). I took the photo from a location so that the camera was pointing in a northwesterly direction roughly back along the Hawkins Line. Note that trees behind them restrict the view to, at most, a hundred yards. It seems likely that the 1802 survey crew would've encountered the same issue. Did they clear trees, and/or climb trees to get a view back toward Blanket and Meigs Mountains? To my rear when taking the photo was the course the M-F Line was to follow. Within a few feet of where I was standing, the slope drops away so steeply that an attempt to descend it would've inevitably led to a seat of the britches slide – at best. There is a 290 foot drop to the Clingmans Dome Road in 580 feet of lateral distance.

We did confirm that the marker is roughly 60 feet southwest of geodetic marker N 25 1928, which is embedded in a boulder south of, and a little below the trail.



USGS Geodetic Marker N 25 1928

Several years ago, I ran across a listing of geodetic markers in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park area. Unfortunately, I didn't record where I found it, so can't provide a citation for the information provided below. The numbers at right in the table below are elevations, as of that late 1920s era.

<i>Indian Gap, 2.5 ml SW. or; 15 ft SE. of triangulation station on Mount Kephart; 20 ft SE. of trail; in top of boulder; standard tablet stamped "N. 25 1928"</i>	6188.14
<i>Reference mark; 15 ft NW. of tablet; in root of 15-in. spruce tree which is triangulation station; copper nail and washer</i>	6190.42

Based on modern LIDAR-based elevations reported on the USGS National Map interface, the Mt. Collins peak is 6191.0 ft within a radius of 5 feet of coordinates 35.58657 latitude and -83.47249 longitude. From feet on the ground, it was my perception that the crest was a little way – maybe 30 or so feet – northeast of the geodetic marker and on or right next to the trail. I would guess the Morrell Meigs Post is a couple feet lower in elevation than the trail in the vicinity of the above-noted triangulation station. If I'd been thinking, I would've taken along some clear vinyl tubing and dyed water to accurately assess the elevations and a tape measure to more measure the distances.

The purported "witness tree" on p. 38 has gone on into the great beyond.