COURTLAND – LEIGHTON

CULTURAL LANDSCAPE INVENTORY & ASSESSMENT

Prepared by the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation

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# Table of Contents

**Introduction** .................................................................................................................. 1
  Management Summary ........................................................................................................ 1
  Historical Overview ........................................................................................................... 1
  Scope and Methodology ..................................................................................................... 3
  Study Boundaries .............................................................................................................. 4
  Summary of Findings .......................................................................................................... 4

**Landscape Historical Context** ...................................................................................... 5
  1814-1823: Growth in the Tennessee River Valley .............................................................. 5
  1824-1836: Envisioning and Building the Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad .... 10
  1837-1838: The Trail of Tears .......................................................................................... 17
  1839-1865: The Rise of the Memphis & Charleston Railroad & Its Destruction During the Civil War ................................................................. 26

**Contributing Features & Existing Conditions** ............................................................... 30
  Spatial Organization of the Courtland-Leighton Corridor ................................................. 30
  Vegetation .......................................................................................................................... 31
  Buildings & Structures ..................................................................................................... 33

**Analysis and Recommendations** .................................................................................. 48

**Endnotes** ......................................................................................................................... 51

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Table of Contents
INTRODUCTION

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

In 2017, the Center for Historic Preservation (CHP) at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) and the National Trails Intermountain Region (NTIR) of the National Park Service (NPS) entered into an agreement for the completion of a cultural landscape inventory and assessment for the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail segment from Courtland to Leighton in Alabama. This study identifies characteristics, features, and associations that make Courtland and the linear corridor defined by the tracks and right-of-way of the historic Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad (from Courtland through Town Creek to Leighton) a historically significant landscape of the Trail of Tears (according to National Register criteria). The report also documents the landscape history, existing conditions, and integrity analysis within the study area.

In 1836, a detachment of Creek traveled through the Courtland-to-Leighton corridor on their forced removal to Indian Territory. Two years later, three detachments of Cherokee families, enslaved people, and a small number of Creek primarily traveled by way of a water route on the Trail of Tears, traversed Courtland, Town Creek, and Leighton via the Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad for a leg of their journey, after low water levels and the treacherous Muscle Shoals on the Tennessee River forced them to land. This report focuses on the linear corridor, defined by the tracks of the rail line from Courtland to Leighton, within the broader context of Courtland’s character-defining elements that date to the time of the Cherokee removal. Prior relevant documents concerning the planning and historical significance of this Trail of Tears landscape that inform this study include the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail Comprehensive Management and Use Plan created in 1992 and the exhaustive report North Alabama’s Tuscumbia, Courtland, and Decatur Railroad and Its Role During Cherokee Emigration/Removal Beginning in 1837, written by several members of the Alabama Chapter of the Trail of Tears Association and funded by the NPS Challenge Cost Share Program in 2009. Most recently, Amy Kostine’s 2015 Reconnaissance, Documentation, and Assessments of Historic Buildings/Structures Associated with the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail provides identification and analysis of buildings and structures that witnessed the forced migrations and comprised the viewshed of migrants.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The present-day sites of Courtland, Town Creek, and Leighton, Alabama, were part of a Chickasaw land cession mandated by the 1814 Treaty of Fort Jackson at the end of the first Creek War and the Turkey Town Treaty of 1816, as well as Cherokee land required by the Treaty of Chickasaw Council House in 1816. The Treaty of Fort Jackson demanded more than 21 million acres of Creek land as well, opening much of present-day Alabama to settlement. The result was an enormous population boom. Emigrants and the people they enslaved poured into the territory, especially attracted to the fertile river bottoms of the Tennessee River Valley and encouraged by high cotton prices. By 1820, nonnatives numbered 127,000 people, an increase of over 1000 percent over the previous decade.

First called Ebenezer, Courtland’s growing population justified incorporation in 1819, when a federal court and land office were located in the town, followed by a post office in 1825. As the market economy, especially the cultivation of cotton, spread westward, so did the transportation corridors that supported it. Completed in 1832, the Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad...
Figure 1. Map shows the Courtland-Leighton study corridor. The blue line indicates the location of the Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad, which was used by three detachments of Cherokee in 1838. Basemap courtesy of ESRI.
Company was one of the first railroad lines built in the South, constructed to provide a rapid and reliable mode of transportation around the treacherous Muscle Shoals on the Tennessee River, which often hindered steamboat travel.

The railroad passes through the towns of Town Creek and Leighton before reaching Tuscumbia. Town Creek, originally named Jonesboro after settler William Jones, developed as a railway town. The layout of Town Creek speaks to the centrality of the railroad, with the commercial buildings lined perpendicular to the tracks, as opposed to the traditional town square plan found in Courtland.

Westward of Town Creek, the railroad enters Leighton, formerly known as Crossroads because of its siting at the intersection of a road that ran from the Tennessee River to Tuscaloosa and one that ran from Huntsville to Tuscumbia. After the arrival of the railroad, Leighton became a shipping center for cotton.

The Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad was reportedly the only railroad used to remove Southeastern Indian nations on the Trail of Tears. The Ridge Party (Pro-Treaty Party) led by General Nathaniel Smith, the Deas detachment led by Lt. Edward Deas, and the Whitely detachment boarded train cars at different times in 1837 and 1838 in order to reach Tuscumbia and continue west to Indian Territory. From Decatur, the rail line passed nearby Pond Spring (the plantation of Joseph Wheeler), followed by the towns of Courtland, Town Creek, and Leighton, before reaching Tuscumbia.

The Memphis & Charleston Railroad bought the line in 1850. After the majority of the line was destroyed during the Civil War, it was rebuilt throughout the late 1860s. The line became part of the Southern Railway System in 1894 and is now controlled by Norfolk Southern (created by the merging of Norfolk & Western and the Southern in 1982).

Present-day U.S. Highway 72 bypasses Courtland, enabling the area to retain a strong sense of integrity from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. The town’s National Register-listed historic district correctly notes that “despite gradual encroachment of mobile home and apartment construction, and some newer permanent domestic construction, Courtland’s overall character is still predominantly that of a small 19th- and early 20th-century local trade center rooted in the surrounding plantation economy.”

**SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY**

This cultural landscape report grew out of previous partnerships between the National Trails Intermountain Region (NTIR) of the National Park Service (NPS) and the Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), namely the *Reconnaissance, Documentation, and Assessments of Historic Buildings/Structure Associated with the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail* published in 2015. That report inventories all pre-1838 buildings/structures within two blocks of the designated trail in urban areas and all pre-1838 buildings within sightline of the designated trail in rural areas. Though the report includes a discussion of various routes taken by the different detachments on the Trail of Tears (as understood in 2015), the water route, on which migrants detoured to avoid Muscle Shoals and boarded the Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad and passed from Decatur through Courtland to Tuscumbia at a distance of approximately 45 miles, was not thoroughly investigated. This report intends to fill that gap by identifying character, features, and associations in Courtland and the linear railroad corridor through Leighton to help provide a broader understanding of Trail of Tears routes and history.
Using the above-mentioned report, the 2009 report of the Alabama Chapter of the Trail of Tears Association, and the primary and secondary sources they identify as points of departure, fieldwork commenced in August 2018.

Fieldwork was conducted in order to assess the town of Courtland and the linear railroad corridor that runs from Courtland to Leighton in order to provide a thorough investigation of the landscape. Whenever possible, efforts were made to drive alongside the railroad to understand the viewshed and built environment encountered by the Cherokee on the Trail of Tears, how historic or modern developments have affected the landscape, and the integrity of components of this particular landscape. Of the approximate 16 miles of railroad corridor located between Courtland and Leighton, approximately 7.9 miles were surveyed due to road access and viewsheds from public right of ways. Photographic documentation of features such as swales, historic tree lines, and the relationships between town design and the railroad tracks provide the basis for describing and assessing the condition and integrity of the landscape. Although extensive efforts were made to identify all landscape components in the study area, foliage could have obstructed resources.

**STUDY BOUNDARIES**

Courtland is located in north-central Lawrence County and lies in the Tennessee River Valley area of the Highland Rim. The study area in Courtland includes Tennessee and Water streets, from the junction of Jefferson Street and Tennessee Street (eastern boundary) to the junction of the railroad tracks and Jefferson Street (western boundary). The additional assessed area is the approximately 16-mile linear corridor defined by the tracks and right-of-way of the historic Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad (later the Memphis & Charleston Railroad) from Courtland through Town Creek and ending in Leighton located in eastern Colbert County. (Though the survey did not include the town of Tuscumbia, located 13 miles west of Leighton, once the detachments reached the Tuscumbia, they continued on their water journey from Tuscumbia Landing.)

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

As one may suspect, the destruction of the Civil War and decades of development have impacted the study areas of Courtland and the railroad corridor that runs from the town to Leighton. Swales that define sections of the railroad corridor, Courtland’s town plan and square, slave auction blocks in Courtland, locations of train depots, dwellings in Courtland that pre-date 1838 (inventoried in the Courtland Historic District nomination to the National Register of Historic places in 1991), historic tree lines, and the southwestern section of the Courtland Cemetery are character-defining elements of the cultural landscape within the study area that date to the era of Cherokee Removal.
LANDSCAPE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1814-1823: Growth in the Tennessee River Valley

The land within the Courtland-Leighton corridor in present-day Lawrence and Colbert counties was formed out of land ceded by the Chickasaw in the Treaty of Fort Jackson in 1814 and the Turkey Town Treaty of 1816, as well as by the Cherokee in the Treaty of Chickasaw Council House in 1816. The river bottoms of the Tennessee River Valley in this newly ceded land were highly coveted by cotton planters for its rich, fertile soil. While settlers had already established homesteads and farms before the lands were ceded to the United States, they poured into the area after 1816 to cultivate the newly opened lands, often with the assistance of enslaved African Americans, and to capitalize on the high price of cotton. Small communities, such as Leighton, Town Creek, and Courtland, formed across the valley, anchored by the shipping and transportation centers of Tuscumbia to the west and Decatur to the east, all playing their part to help drive the region’s new economic engine of cotton.

Leighton, Town Creek, and Courtland were among the earliest communities settled by European Americans in the Tennessee River Valley. Euro-American settlers first arrived in the area now known as Leighton as early as 1813. The community was initially known as “Crossroads” for its location at the intersection of two stage roads: Byler Road (present-day County Line Road), which connected Bainbridge Landing on the Tennessee River to Tuscaloosa, and the Mail Stage Road connecting Huntsville to Tuscumbia. The small agricultural community saw a boom in its population in 1826 when twenty families from Wake County, North Carolina, emigrated to the Leighton area to farm its rich soil. The community was renamed “Leighton” in the 1820s in honor of the town’s first postmaster, the Reverend William Leigh (b: October 4, 1790; d: July 31, 1873), and developed into a cotton-shipping center in the 1830s.

early 1830s helped define the spatial layout of the town. When Town Creek was incorporated on March 8, 1875, the depot was used as a focal point to define the city limits, which were to “extend one-half mile east, and one-half mile in every other direction from where the railroad depot now stands.” The only possible remnants of Town Creek’s early-nineteenth-century built environment are an old inn and general store, once operated by James P. Hall (b: May 4, 1844; d: January 26, 1911), and the extant foundation of the historic depot.

Figure 3. The yellow boxes indicate the parcels of land in sections 20 and 29 of Township 4, Range 8 West, purchased by Charles Matthews. Present-day Town Creek is predominately located within sections 19 and 20. Source: U.S., Indexed Early Land Ownership and Township Plats, 1785-1898, www.ancestry.com.

On September 10, 1818, the land on which the small plantation community of Courtland is now situated was purchased by a group of men, consisting of William H. Whitaker, James M. Camp, William F. Broadnax, John M. Tifford, Benjamin Thomas, and Bernard McKiernan, known as the Courtland Land Company or Courtland Company (see Figures 5-9). Originally known as Ebenezer, the community was incorporated by the territorial legislature on December 14, 1819.\(^8\) Just five years after incorporation, the town was home to lawyers, doctors, successful merchants, and several prominent individuals involved in the cotton industry, including planter Benjamin Sherrod, merchant and cotton broker John Trotter, and cotton factor John McMahon.\(^9\)

![Figure 5](image1.png)

**Figure 5.** The yellow boxes indicate the parcels of land in Township 4, Range 7 West, purchased by the Courtland Land Company. Present-day Courtland is predominately located within section 30. 

![Figure 6](image2.png)

**Figure 6.** Certificate No. 886 for the purchase of 81.62 acres of land in Township 4, Range 7 West, Section 30, by the Courtland Land Company. 
The town was laid out in a grid pattern with 56 blocks, divided into nearly 300 lots. Hoping the town would become a county seat, just south of Courtland’s center, a large tract of land was set aside as a public square. While Courtland did serve as a temporary seat of government for Lawrence County when the first lots of the town were available for sale, the town of Moulton was later chosen as the permanent county seat. Despite an early-twentieth-century phase of rebuilding, the town’s original, early-nineteenth-century design remains largely unchanged today, and a number of its early-nineteenth-century resources continue to define the community and its role in the history of the Tennessee River Valley’s cotton industry.


1824-1835: Envisioning and Building the Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad

Figure 10. 1885 map of the Muscle Shoals area of the Tennessee River where the elevation fell over 130' in 34 miles. Between 1830 and 1890, a series of canals were constructed to help improve navigation through this dangerous area. Source: Tennessee River Valley Association: Tennessee-Cumberland Waterways Council, https://www.trva-twc.org/muscle-shoals-canal/.

The formation of the first railroad located west of the Appalachian Mountains was born out of the economic need to bring goods efficiently into the local economy and to transport cotton and other commodities year-round from Alabama to lucrative markets, such as New Orleans, by avoiding the dangerous Muscle Shoals area of the Tennessee River (see Figure 10). In the early nineteenth century, the most efficient way to move cotton and other goods across the area to other markets was by the Tennessee River. The only problem was that it was not efficient at all.

During the early 1800s, transporting goods and supplies across Alabama via the Tennessee River was a seasonal operation, at best. From Decatur to Florence, some sixty islands riddled the waterway, along with low lying shoals of jagged rocks. Intense rapids caused by a 130’ drop in the river’s elevation over 34 miles made the journey even more dangerous. By contrast, the Tennessee River above Decatur dropped just 80’ along the 166 miles of the river between Chattanooga and Decatur. These hazards, in combination with low water levels for most of the year, made the area impassable and halted economic activity on the river on average for 9-10 months of the year. Given the Tennessee River’s growing economic importance, finding a solution to this problem was not just a local issue, but a national one, as well.
On April 30, 1824, the United States Congress passed the General Survey Act, which authorized the president to have surveys made of nationally significant transportation routes. The Army Corps of Engineers was tasked with this assignment, and Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, under whose authority the Corps of Engineers operated, proclaimed that a canal around Muscle Shoals was one of 96 projects identified as having “great national importance.”\textsuperscript{12} In order to help move the project forward, Congress appropriated 400,000 acres of public lands in Alabama, which were to be sold with the proceeds applied toward the creation of a canal on the north side of the Tennessee River to circumvent the dangerous Muscle Shoals. Construction on the 14.25-mile canal began in 1831 and lasted six years. Unfortunately, the canal was not long enough to bypass all of the dangerous shoals, and all attempts to gain additional funding or appropriations to extend its length failed. Thus, the ineffective canal was abandoned, and the problem of navigating the shoals remained. An alternative solution had to be found.

The idea of a railroad to move goods in Alabama was first conceived to solve an issue in the booming town of Tuscumbia. Seeing an opportunity to economically benefit from the increasing amount of steamboat travel on the Tennessee River from New Orleans in the 1820s, Tuscumbia merchants built large warehouses and a landing at the confluence of Spring Creek into the Tennessee River, which became known as Tuscumbia Landing.\textsuperscript{13} This location presented a major problem, though, as the city of Tuscumbia was located two miles from this new landing, and goods, in large quantities, needed to be transported from the city to the landing on a regular basis and in a timely manner.

On January 16, 1830, the Tuscumbia Railway Company was incorporated with capital of $20,000 to build a railroad from the town of Tuscumbia to the Tennessee River (see Figure 11). On May 1, 1830, thirteen prominent men from Tuscumbia and the surrounding area were elected to the Board of Directors.\textsuperscript{14} Work on the two-mile railroad started in June 1831 and was completed.

\textbf{Figure 11.} Detail of the railroad route through Tuscumbia. Source: John La Tourette, map, 1838, David Rumsey Map Collection, davidrumsey.com.
around June 1, 1832, at a cost of $4,523.85 per mile. In an 1834 letter to the American Railroad Journal, David Deshler, chief engineer and member of the board of directors for the Tuscumbia Railway Company, described the railroad as follows:

A good portion of the line is curved, and some of the curves are on radii of 400 feet. The maximum inclination in the grade is 20 feet per mile. The construction is of cedar sleepers laid transversely of the road, 5 feet from centre to centre. Oak string pieces, 5 by 7 inches; capped with an iron rail, 2 inches by ½ an inch; width of track, 4 feet 9 ¼ inches, between the inner edges of the iron rails. One truss bridge 274 feet long, 36 feet high, (over a ravine), and several embankments of 15 feet in height, had to be built.

While the rail cars were horse drawn and not powered by steam locomotives, the railroad proved a success and discussions were already underway, even before its completion, to expand the railroad’s length to serve as an alternative transportation route around the dangerous Muscle Shoals.

In January 1832, a charter for the Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad was granted by the state legislature with a capital of $1,000,000 for a 43-mile expansion of the railroad from Tuscumbia through the communities of Leighton (Crossroads), Jonesboro (Town Creek), Courtland, Pond Spring Plantation, Hillsborough, and Fennel’s Turnout (Trinity), before concluding in Decatur. Soon after, the Tuscumbia Railway was absorbed into the Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad, allowing for the coveted rights to access Tuscumbia Landing. The railroad expansion provided a solution around the most dangerous part of the Tennessee River and would greatly benefit the local cotton-planting industry, which was producing between 80,000 and 90,000 bales of cotton among the river valley’s seven counties (Franklin, Lauderdale, Lawrence, Morgan, Limestone, Madison, and Jackson).

On March 1, 1832, stockholders for the Tuscumbia, Courtland, and Decatur Railroad met in Courtland and elected a board of directors (see Figure 12). Courtland resident...
Benjamin Sherrod was chosen as president, and once again, David Deshler served as chief engineer. Sherrod was born on January 16, 1777, in Halifax County, NC. He served in the War of 1812 as a contractor for the army in the commissary office and moved to Lawrence County, Alabama, sometime between 1818 and 1821. Four miles north of Courtland, he established a plantation he named Cotton Garden. He also co-owned Pond Spring Plantation (now known as Wheeler Plantation) with another prominent planter in the area, John Hickman. Sherrod was one of the most prosperous planters in the Tennessee Valley, owning thousands of acres and hundreds of enslaved African Americans before his death in 1847. With so much of his wealth tied to the cotton industry, Sherrod had a vested interest in the completion and success of the Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad. The railroad’s success would have only helped spur his own economic endeavors, and it is no surprise that its route passed by or near his own plantations.

After the board of directors was elected in March 1832, work progressed swiftly on the railroad. In May 1832, grading for the section of railroad between Tuscumbia and Leighton was placed under contract and construction began a couple months later in July. Three months later, the grading and construction for the railroad between Leighton and Courtland was also placed under contract, and by January 1834, the grading and construction for the last section of railroad between Courtland and Decatur was under contract. Chief Engineer David Deshler described the construction of the railroad:

The construction is in all respects the same as the Tuscumbia Railroad, excepting that the sleepers on this are only 4 feet apart from centre to centre, and that about one-third of the distance is, and will be, lined with cedar, (instead of oak,) string pieces. The cost of this road will average a little under $4,000 per mile. The whole length of the railroad, between its termini upon the Tennessee river, (inclusive of the Tuscumbia section,) will be…single track, with turn-outs and side-lines about every two miles.

On August 20, 1833, the track from Tuscumbia to Leighton was completed and opened. The following year, on July 4, 1834, the railroad track to Courtland was opened. Before the end of the year, the entire 43-mile section of railroad between Tuscumbia and Decatur was completed and ready for use with depots located in Tuscumbia, Leighton (Crossroads), Jonesborough (Town Creek), Courtland, Hillsborough, and Fennell’s Turnout (Trinity) (see Figure 13). In addition to the depots, the railroad built a number of other supportive structures along the route. In Leighton, a well, a warehouse, and a 40' x 24' storehouse, built of brick or frame was constructed. A 20' x 40' shed and 20' square warehouse was constructed in Town Creek.

While the grading and construction of the railroad seemed to move forward without much incident, acquiring efficient train engines to move goods along the new railroad proved to be a difficult task. In anticipation of the opening of the completed railroad, merchandise and goods were temporarily stored in Courtland. In Deshler’s words, “[U]nfortunately for the Community as well as the Company we had been disappointed in the receipt of Cars as well as Locomotives.

Initially, two locomotive engines were ordered. One, purchased second-hand from the Philadelphia, Germantown, & Norristown Railroad Company for $5,880.37 and named the “Pennsylvania,” arrived in February 1835 “without tender-car or tank.” Both were later furnished by the Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad at its own expense. When the engine was finally placed on the tracks for the first time, Deshler noted that it was “found not to answer the purpose, being
Figure 13. Detail of the Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad. Source: John La Tourette, map, 1838, David Rumsey Map Collection.
deficient in almost every important respect.” The other engine, named the “Comet,” was ordered from the West Point Foundry in New York and cost $7,959.82.

This engine was the first recorded iron-frame, American-made locomotive that was ever constructed, and it “performed well” during its first few weeks on the tracks, but a defect in the cylinder castings and “a bad arrangement in the slides that carry the crossheads” caused one of the cylinders to burst, rendering the engine useless. Deshler immediately contacted the manager of the West Point Foundry, requesting that new cylinders and slides be sent to him. The manager promised to do this for Deshler, but months went by and no parts arrived. Giving up hope, Deshler reported that “we set to work at our own shops and accomplished the job, so that said Engine has been in service since sometime in January last, and answers a good purpose.”

In addition to the problems acquiring sufficient engines, their rail car supply was only a fraction of what was needed. As a result, the Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad was left with horse power to move train cars of goods and people while the Comet awaited repairs. Deshler reported on this less-than-ideal situation in August 1836:

[The Railroad having been just completed as the winter set in, and the horse path [that parallels the tracks] not being graveled, the path very soon became almost impassable for horses. In consequence, it was entirely beyond our means to perform the transportation that was offered to us during the winter of 1834 and ’35, and a large portion of the business had to seek another channel…The community who has been disposed to patronize us from the first, not aware of the true causes producing the inability of the Company to perform what had so confidently been expected from them, became soured in the feelings towards the Railroad, and determined not to encourage the Company any further until it should prove itself fully adequate to the transportation of all the freights that should be offered.]

In order to address the dire situation, additional cars and two more locomotive engines were ordered. The “Triumph” was made by W.M. Baldwin of Philadelphia and cost $7,091.66. Upon its arrival, it was placed on the tracks and operated without issue. The other locomotive engine, the “Fulton,” was made by Edward Bury of Liverpool and cost $4,915.04, but took longer than expected to arrive as a result of a backlog of orders. In August 1836, however, Deshler optimistically reported:

It is however, a gratifying fact to state, that since about the 1st of July, 1835, we have had the capacity to accomplish the business that was offered, although at an immense expense, owing to the mixture of motive power used upon the road. From the period last above mentioned, up to this date, I presume about one third to one half of the business was done by horses, and the remainder by locomotives, viz: one small engine, the “Fulton,” the “Comet,” since January last, and the “Triumph,” since about the 1st of June. Since the latter engine was placed on the road, no horse power has been used in transportation between Tuscumbia and Decatur…we feel perfectly assured, that although the business the ensuing year is expected to be fully double what it was the last 12 months, yet we shall be enabled without difficulty to give it dispatch.
The Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad was finally achieving its goal as an economic driver and a much safer and more efficient transportation route than traversing the dangerous hazards of the Muscle Shoals. A few years after opening, the new railroad would play a role in the removal of the Cherokee.
1836-1838: The Trail of Tears

Before three detachments of Cherokee traveled via rail for a portion of their forced removal to Indian Territory, the Courtland-Leighton corridor saw the removal of approximately 2,000 Creek in 1836, who traveled via road through the area. Between the First Creek War in 1814 and the early 1830s, the Creek’s land holdings were reduced by millions of acres by a series of treaties. Facing constant white encroachment, and outraged after receiving little-to-no help from the state and federal governments in evicting squatters and defrauders from Creek land, what later became known as the Second Creek War broke out in the spring of 1836. Lower Creek from the towns of Chiehaw, Yuchi Hitchiti, and others launched a violent campaign to drive out illegal white settlers on Creek land in present-day Chambers, Macon, Pike, Lee, Russell, and Barbour counties in Alabama. President Andrew Jackson sent fourteen companies of Army regulars, including 400 Marines, and five armed U.S. Navy steamboats to successfully assist the Georgia and Alabama state militias in quelling the fighting, and used the war as an excuse to justify the removal of the remaining Creek in Alabama.

The Creek warriors who participated in the fighting were captured, imprisoned, shackled by the ankles, and marched to Montgomery. Following them in wagons were related women and children. Some of the warriors made last-minute efforts to escape, while others committed suicide. Those who arrived in Montgomery boarded steamboats for the first leg of their forced removal to Indian Territory. The remaining Creek were ordered to be rounded up, divided into five detachments, and forcibly marched to Indian Territory in August and September of 1836, a process that happened quickly and likely blindsided many Creek, particularly those Upper Creek who had not participated in the fighting. A sixth detachment consisting of warriors, who had stayed to fight alongside federal troops against the Seminoles, and their families departed for Indian Territory in October 1837.

The fifth of these six detachments of forcibly removed Creek consisted of approximately 2,000 individuals from the Coweta and Cusseta towns, including the remaining Lower Creeks, forty-five wagons, and five hundred ponies. The detachment was conducted by Felix G. Gibson and Charles Abercrombie on behalf of the Alabama Emigrating Company, with U.S. Marine Corps Lieutenant John Sprague joining the party as military oversight. Lieutenant Sprague arrived in the Coweta and Cusseta towns on August 10, 1836, to explain the arrangements of the removal. He summarized the meeting as follows:

I had an interview with the principal chief, Tuck-e-batch-e-hadjo, and urged upon him the necessity of taking immediate measures to prepare his people for emigration. To this, after using [sic] every argument against it, he reluctantly consented. His principal reasons were that his peoples crops were not gathered—their cattle were not sold, and that the time specified for their departure was earlier than he anticipated. The following day, I assembled all the chiefs, and explained to them the necessary arrangements to embody their towns, in order to transfer them to the charge of the Alabama Emigrating Company...They gave no other than a silent acquiescence to my wishes, but expressed among themselves strong feelings of dissatisfaction.

Sprague saw the need for a timely departure, which he deemed especially necessary after witnessing white settlers harassing the Creek with fraudulent claims of demands.
Figure 14. Route of the 5th forced removal detachment. Source: Christopher D. Haveman, ed. Bending Their Way Backward: Creek Indian Removal in Documents (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 364, cartography by Sarah Mattics and Kiersten Fish.

and “robbing them of their horses and cattle” and even clothing, which only enhanced tensions.\(^{40}\)

The detachment departed on September 5, 1836, with a large herd of cattle driven ahead of them in order to provide the Creek with fresh beef on their journey, and traveled northwest. With such a large group, Lieutenant Sprague later admitted that it took four or five days “with many embarrassing circumstances” to get the detachment organized.\(^{41}\) Poor roads, mountainous terrain, and lack of water made the journey particularly difficult at times. Nearly twenty days after departing, the detachment passed through the town of Courtland and continued towards Town Creek, where they encamped for the night. Sprague noted the day’s travel in his journal:

Saturday 24\(^{th}\). Started at 7A.M. roads good country much better; farms large and highly cultivated, passed through a small town called Courtland. This is a village of about one thousand inhabitants, houses principally brick and has the appearance of being a place of some considerable business. Every effort was made to prevent the sale of Whiskey to the Indians, but they got it and the larger portion of them were intoxicated before night. Camped at Town Creek—distance travelled to day 16 Miles.\(^{42}\)

Upon the detachment’s arrival in Town Creek, Sprague noted “the fatigued state of the Indians, their sickness, [and] the weakness of the ponies.” With only one day of rest on the journey thus far, Sprague insisted that the detachment stay another night in Town Creek to rest. Sprague noted:

I waited on the contractors and requested them to halt the party the following day. To this they expressed
their unqualified disapprobation and denied my authority to exercise such a power. Their expenses they said were from six to seven hundred dollars per day, and if such authority was given or implied in the contract their hopes of making anything were gone. I assured them, that from the condition of the Indians, the common calls of humanity required it, and that one of the stipulations of the contract was, that they should treat the Indians with humanity and forbearance.

Sprague was resolute in his determination for a day of rest, and so he “ordered the Indians to halt, and told the contractors they could act their own pleasure; either go on with empty waggons or remain.” Thus, the detachment stayed an extra night and departed Town Creek on September 26, continuing westward to Tuscumbia and northward into Tennessee, traveling through Purdy, Bolivar, Somerville, and Memphis. Just before reaching Purdy, Sprague clashed again with agents Felix G. Gibson and Charles Abercrombie:

Knowing that our yesterdays march was a very arduous one I concluded to make a close examination into the state of the party. I knew that from the roughness of the roads, the scarcity of water and the distance, many would be unable to proceed to day on foot, and that many would be found sick. At ½ past 9 A.M. I found in the Camp about one fourth of the party, and all the waggons belonging to the party gone; they were two miles on the road. One wagggon that had been broken down the day before came up, I requested the driver to stop and take in a lame man which I had seated by the side of the road; he declined doing it and drove off. In the Camp I collected the blind, lame, and the sick who were totally unable to go on, and I also found families whose baggage had been thrown out by the wagggoners without any means whatever of getting on. I endeavoured to find one of the agents or some of their assistants and found they, all of them, were four miles upon the road. Relying with confidence upon that paragraph of the Contract which says, “any pecuniary Expenditure for the Comfort and convenience of the Indians may be made” &c I succeeded in finding a wagggon sufficiently large to transport those who had no horses or any means of Conveyance.

Sprague hired additional wagons to transport the remaining blind and sick who had been left behind by the agents. Upon arriving at the camp, the agents refused to pay for the wagons, and Sprague declared that he could no longer endure their “disregard to the comfortable conveyance of the Indians.” Near Memphis, Sprague reached his breaking point with detachment agents Gibson and Abercrombie, arguing that “they had violated both the letter and spirit of the contract.” Sprague refused to allow the detachment to continue across the Mississippi River under the charge of Gibson and Abercrombie, and offered to undertake the responsibility of leading the detachment himself, if necessary. Abercrombie quit and was replaced by a Mr. Gilman. From this point forward, Sprague had few issues with the agents.

From Memphis, the detachment continued by land and water routes to Fort Gibson in present-day Oklahoma. Before reaching Fort Gibson on December 10, 1836, the Creek suffered greatly from inclement weather and inadequate clothing and supplies. Sprague described their state:

With nothing more than a cotton garment thrown over them, their feet bare, they were compelled to encounter cold sleeting storms and to travel over hard frozen ground. Frequent appeals were made to me to clothe their nakedness and to
protect their lacerated feet. To these I could do no more than what came within the provisions of the contract.\textsuperscript{45}

After arriving at Fort Gibson, the Creek received blankets and continued 35 miles to their assigned land. The detachment suffered the loss of 29 reported deaths, mostly of children and elderly, by journey’s end.

The Cherokee were facing their own removal crisis when Sprague was leading the detachment of Creek to Indian Territory. In December 1835, a small faction of Cherokee, led by Major Ridge, John Ridge, Elias Boudinot and others, acting on their own and without the consent of Principal Chief John Ross and the Cherokee government, signed the Treaty of New Echota. The treaty set the conditions for the removal of the Cherokee people: The tribe would receive five million dollars but would need to relocate to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma. The great majority of the Cherokee people vigorously protested the treaty, considering it to be fraudulent. Federal officials ignored their protests, though, and the treaty was ratified by a single vote in the United States Senate.

The Cherokee were given until May 23, 1838, to remove voluntarily, but only about 1,700 left before the deadline.\textsuperscript{46} Among those who voluntarily left was a group of 466 individuals who were predominately supporters of the Treaty of New Echota. Included in this group was Major Ridge, a main instigator of the treaty, and his family. On February 28, 1837, the group departed from present-day Charleston, Tennessee, under the charge of General Nathaniel Smith, and reached Ross’s Landing on March 2, 1837.\textsuperscript{47} The following day, the detachment departed from Ross’s Landing (present-day Chattanooga, Tennessee) in eleven flatboats stocked with provisions of cornmeal, flour, and bacon.\textsuperscript{48} Supporting the detachment were four assistant conductors, four interpreters, two nurses, three physicians, a muster clerk, an enrolling agent, a contractor, and an individual in charge of services.\textsuperscript{49}

On March 6, 1837, the detachment arrived at Gunter’s Landing (present-day Guntersville, Alabama). The next morning, the steamboat Knoxville was tasked with towing the flatboats to Decatur. The trip from Gunter’s Landing to Decatur was marred with rain, and the rain continued after the Cherokee arrived in Decatur around 6:30 p.m.\textsuperscript{50} In Decatur, Dr. John S. Young rendezvoused with the detachment. Young would relieve Smith as detachment conductor when the Cherokee reached Tuscumbia. The rain finally ceased by the time the detachment began boarding the first of two trains in Decatur the following morning. The Morgan Observer described the scene:

\begin{quote}
To the numerous spectators that thronged either side of the railroad, among whom were to be seen a goodly number of ladies, this aboriginal group presented a truly interesting spectacle. But their appearance, in connection with the locomotive and its train, was not more attractive to the spectators, then did the engine and cars seem to be to the Indians. Many of them could be seen examining, with their peculiar inquisitive silence and gravity, this great enigma to them, while others, apparently uninterested and thoughtless, amused themselves with an old fiddle or sat motionless, gazing at those around.\textsuperscript{51}
\end{quote}

Unfortunately, this next leg of the journey did not go as planned. About half of the detachment boarded the first train to Tuscumbia around 8:00 a.m. and began their journey. The second locomotive was scheduled to arrive around 1:00 p.m. In preparation for this, the remaining Cherokee waited in the train cars for the locomotive to arrive. By sunset, the locomotive still had not
arrived and the Cherokee were becoming increasingly cold and uncomfortable. As a result, their departure was postponed until the following morning. One of the detachment’s physicians, Dr. Clark Lillybridge, noted the subsequent events:

The Indians were immediately and anxiously engaged in selecting their bedding for the night; before they accomplished this darkness closed in upon them. The Physician was not a little surprised to find that no one had made it his business to aid and direct the Indians, where they could lie for the night. It appears that no order or direction had been given in this particular, except that they would lodge in the Ware house. The train of Carrs from the West were momentarily expected, and the Indians were afraid to lie down for fear of being run over. No lights were furnished them, and they were grouping in the dark, in a pitiful manner. Not an Agent could be found at the Warehouse. The Physician, at this time took the responsibility upon himself, to request the R.R. Agent, to furnish lights, which was forthwith done. He also went around and directed where the Indians could make their Beds. Mrs. Archilla smith, whose family and effects were sent on in the morning Carrs, came to the Physician for aid. She pointed to three or four other females, in the same conditions as it respected their bedding. She also pointed to two or three cars that had been conveyed to the Engine House, and in broken English, gave him to understand that an old Woman was there.

The Physician repaired thither & found an old woman, nearly blind & but just able to stand from infirmity, standing in a puddle of water, into which she had step’d on descending from the Carr, and was unable to direct herself out. The Physician then went to the Rail Road Agent, and requested him to furnish a comfortable room for these females to lodge in for the night. He went a short distance from the Warehouse and showed a large & comfortable room, which he said was at our service and added, it would have saved us much inconvenience had it been earlier requested. To this room were conducted all of those who were without Bedding, and a number of others, that could not find comfortable places to lie. The Physician then left them for the night, with the hope of finding them all comfortable in the morning.52

The next morning, Dr. Lillybridge checked on the ill and made sure everyone had a warm cup of coffee in preparation for the train ride to Tuscumbia. With the exception of a small number of sick left behind, the detachment boarded the train cars and departed at 9:00 a.m., passing through the towns of Courtland, Town Creek, and Leighton, before reaching Tuscumbia. On March 10, the remaining Cherokee who were left behind the day before, traveled with Dr. Lillybridge, leaving Decatur at 9:00 a.m. and arriving in Tuscumbia at 8:30 p.m.53

The detachment remained encamped in Tuscumbia until March 14, when they departed via two keel boats pulled by the steamboat Newark for the next leg of their journey, continuing on the Tennessee River, and then traveling the Ohio, Mississippi, White, and Arkansas rivers to Fort Coffee in present-day Oklahoma.54 The entire trip lasted a total of twenty-five days, and no deaths were reported en route.

After the May 23, 1838, deadline for the Cherokee to remove voluntary to Indian Territory expired, 7,000 federal troops and state militia, under the command of General Winfield Scott, forcibly gathered the Cherokee from their homes and marched them to one of three main emigrating depots in Tennessee and Alabama, where they were divided into detachments for their journey. The first two detachments, consisting of approximately 1,475 Cherokee,
On June 6th, the detachment boarded the steamboat George Guess and its six accompanying flatboats at Ross’s Landing, Tennessee, and traveled down the Tennessee River to Decatur, Alabama, for the first leg of its journey. The Reverend Daniel S. Butrick, who had been a Christian missionary to the Cherokee since 1818 under the auspices of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, witnessed the detachment embark. Distraught over what he had seen, Butrick remarked:

*The first company sent down the river, including those dear trembling doves who spent a night at our house, were, it appears, literally crammed into the boat... Who would think of crowding men, women, and children, sick and well, into a boat together, with little, if any more room or accommodations than would be allowed to swine taken to market?*

As a result of dangerously low water levels from an extreme drought, and in an effort to avoid the hazardous Muscle Shoals, the detachment traveled via rail for the next leg of its journey to Tusculum, Alabama. The Cherokee arrived in Decatur on June 9th and boarded approximately thirty-two rail cars hauled by two separate trains the following morning. There was no relief from the congested quarters, though. Deas noted the train cars were “necessarily crowded” and

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including a small number of Creek, departed from the Ross’s Landing emigrating depot in present-day Chattanooga, Tennessee, via boats, on June 6th and June 12th respectively and traveled via the Tuscumbia, Courtland & Decatur Railroad in Alabama for a leg of their journey, passing through the towns of Courtland, Town Creek, and Leighton.

United States Army Lieutenant Edward Deas led the first detachment, which consisted of approximately 600-800 individuals. In addition to Abraham Cox, J.N. Reeves, A.S. Harbin, and D.S. Walker, who served as Deas’s assistant conductors, two physicians (Barzallai Cottle and Clark C. Lillybridge), two nurses (Catharine Choate and Elizabeth Downing), three interpreters (James Bigby, Jr., Jesse Hicks, and William Reese), a contractor (Williamson Smith), and twenty-three armed guards assisted Deas with the detachment.

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**Figure 15.** The southernmost line in purple indicates the route of the Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad used by the Ridge detachment in 1837 and the Deas and Whitely detachments in 1838. *Source: National Park Service.*
that no other train cars could be obtained for “want of power in the Locomotive Engines.”\textsuperscript{60} As a result, Deas decided not to take his twenty-three man guard on the trains.

The detachment passed through the towns of Courtland, Town Creek, and Leighton before reaching Tuscumbia. The first train arrived around three o’clock in the afternoon. Those arriving on this train boarded the steamboat Smelter. Unfortunately, the steamboat departed for Waterloo before the second train arrived between four and five o’clock in the afternoon. Thus, the other half of the detachment was temporarily left behind at Tuscumbia Landing and remained encamped there for the night. On June 11\textsuperscript{th}, Deas reported, “As might be expected there was much drunkenness in camp last night and over one hundred of the Indians deserted.”\textsuperscript{61} That day, the remaining Cherokee were transported to Waterloo via boat and were reunited with the rest of the detachment, continuing down the Tennessee River on the steamboat Smelter and two keel boats. The following day, Deas reported that there were only 489 individuals remaining in the detachment, down significantly from the estimated 600-800 the detachment started with.

From the Tennessee River, the detachment proceeded down portions of the Ohio, Mississippi, White, and Arkansas rivers, stopping at Paducah, sending a small boat ashore in Memphis as there was no landing, and stopping again at Little Rock to resupply. On June 19\textsuperscript{th}, the detachment reached Fort Coffee, Oklahoma “just before sunset.”\textsuperscript{62} Instead of continuing to Fort Gibson as initially planned, the detachment was disbanded the following day at Fort Coffee. Deas gave the following explanation:

\begin{center}
Much pleasure at reaching their country in safety and meeting some of their friends and acquaintances here, and finding that others of them are living not far off, they prefer remaining here to proceeding to Fort Gibson. I should have preferred to deliver them at the latter place, as there is water enough for the Boat to go up, at present; but at the same time considered it proper to consult their wishes.

After counseling together and with their friends from the vicinity they decided in favor of proceeding no further.\textsuperscript{63}
\end{center}

Of the seventeen detachments that were part of the forced removal, Deas’s detachment made it to Indian Territory in the shortest amount of time, less than weeks. While no deaths were reported en route, there was a considerable amount of desertions, a problem that also beset the next two detachments.

United States Army Lieutenant Robert H. K. Whiteley led the second detachment of Cherokees forcibly removed from the Chattanooga area via boat and followed a route similar to that of the Deas detachment. In addition to Col. John A. Hooke, E.S. Curry, P.H. Price, George Stubblefield, and Thomas Jones, who served as Whiteley’s assistant conductors, two physicians (Dr. Robert Hodsden and George D. Morrow), four interpreters (James Brown, Robert Benge, and Betsy Woodward and her son), and hospital attendant Betsy McDaniel assisted Whiteley with the detachment.

According to Whiteley’s journal, the detachment left from a camp “five miles distant from the town of Chattanooga” on June 12\textsuperscript{th} and proceeded downriver to Brown’s Ferry.\textsuperscript{64} Here, the detachment encamped and waited for others to join them, as Whiteley was hoping to increase the number of individuals in the detachment to one thousand. It is unclear exactly how many individuals were initially part of the detachment, since the Cherokees were uncooperative with Whiteley’s efforts to
enumerate them. Whiteley noted, “Clothing was purchased & brought aboard; but [the Cherokee] would not be persuaded upon to take the articles, neither would they be mustered, as all attempts to obtain their names were without success.” Despite his best efforts, Whiteley estimated that there were approximately 875 individuals in the detachment.

The detachment left Brown’s Ferry on June 16th in eight flat boats pulled by the steamboat George Guess. The following afternoon, the group faced a three-hour delay as repairs were needed on the steamboat’s engine. Once the engine was repaired, the detachment continued on their journey towards Decatur. Unlike the Deas detachment, the Whiteley detachment encamped along the riverside nightly, so “as to give the Indians sufficient time to cook in the evenings & mornings the provision for the day.” Provisions were rationed and typically consisted of flour, corn meal, bacon, and occasionally fresh meat.

On June 21st, the detachment reached Decatur and boarded two trains for Tusculumbia. The train ride was not without incident, though. One mile from Tusculumbia, Whiteley reported that a Cherokee man named Chicken, who was on the second train, “had been drinking lost his hat jumped off the car to obtain it. He was crushed to pieces.” His death was not the first among the detachment. Whiteley recorded a death of a child on June 18th and of an older woman at Decatur on the 21st. In addition to the deaths, Whiteley noted that 25 Cherokee deserted between Ross’s Landing and Decatur.

Tragedy and setbacks continued to plague the detachment. While encamped at Tusculumbia, the Cherokee were overcome with sickness. The detachment’s physicians believed that it was due to the fresh beef issued to them. Whiteley noted that four more children succumbed to death during this time. The detachment began moving again on June 27th. Between June 27th and the 30th, Whiteley noted the deaths of another three children and the desertion of another 118 Cherokee. Following the same course as the Deas detachment, the Whiteley detachment traveled portions of the Tennessee, Ohio, Mississippi, White, and Arkansas rivers, stopping at Paducah, Memphis, and Little Rock. The detachment reached Bentley’s Bar, located four miles below the town of “Lewis Berg,” Arkansas on July 13th, where it became necessary for them to travel via wagons for the last leg of their journey.

The detachment’s situation was becoming dire. On July 22nd, Whiteley noted that water was scant and the weather was particularly warm. Two days later, Whiteley reported that there were between three and four deaths a day and by July 28th an estimated 200-300 individuals were ill. By August 1st, up to six or seven Cherokee were dying a day, and due to lack of provisions at Fort Gibson, the detachment would have to cross Boston Mountain and continue on to the Flint Settlement. They did so and arrived at the head of Lee’s Creek in the Flint Settlement on August 1st. By journey’s end, a reported seventy individuals had lost their lives.

The third forcibly removed detachment to leave the Ross’s Landing emigrating depot was led by Captain Gustavus S. Drane and consisted of approximately 1,071 individuals. Due to the extreme drought, the detachment traveled on foot to Waterloo, Alabama, instead of by boat and train. From Waterloo, the detachment boarded boats and traveled down the Tennessee, Ohio, Mississippi, White, and Arkansas rivers. Upon reaching Lewisburg, Arkansas, the detachment had to abandon the boats due to low water levels and continue overland for the remainder of their journey, disbanding at Mrs. Webber’s in present-day Stillwell, Oklahoma, on September 5, 1838. Much like the Whiteley detachment, the Drane detachment suffered much loss. A total of 146 deaths and 293 desertions were reported.
News of the high numbers of desertions, sickness, and fatalities suffered by most of the water detachments quickly reached the Cherokee government. On July 23rd, the Cherokee Council petitioned the United States government to postpone removal until fall when the weather was more conducive to long-distance travel and to allow the Cherokee to control the remainder of their removal. Permission for both was granted, provided that the Cherokee stay encamped near the emigrating depots until travel resumed in late-August.

The remaining Cherokee were divided into fourteen detachments. Eleven of these detachments, consisting of approximately 10,725 Cherokee, left from the emigrating depots in Tennessee intermittently from August through October, and traveled through Tennessee, western Kentucky, southern Illinois, southern Missouri, and northwestern Arkansas before disbanding in eastern Oklahoma. This route later became known as the Northern Route. Two other detachments, those led by John Benge and John Bell, took two other alternative overland routes, while the last detachment, consisting of just 231 Cherokee, left via boat from the Fort Cass emigrating depot in present-day Charleston. The last detachments arrived in Indian Territory at the end of March 1839 and began the process of successfully rebuilding their homes and communities.
1839-1865: The Rise of the Memphis & Charleston Railroad & Its Destruction During the Civil War

In the years after the Cherokee traveled on the Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad en route to Indian Territory, the railroad faced a serious financial crisis. By the mid-1840s, the railroad was in debt over $300,000 and had been plagued with constant track problems. The state of Alabama demanded repayment of a bond issue. In response, Benjamin Sherrod offered some of his own personal money to help save the fledgling railroad, but it was not enough.

The United States district court foreclosed on a mortgage executed by the railroad company, and the railroad, rolling stock, shops, machinery, and franchises were sold on September 22, 1847, to a group of investors headed by none other than David Deshler, who had served as the engineer for the Tuscumbia Railway Company. On February 10, 1848, Deshler and his associates were incorporated under the name of the “Tennessee Valley Railroad Company,” but their ownership of the railway would not last long.

In 1851, the Memphis & Charleston Railroad Company purchased the Tennessee Valley Railroad and all of its property, including the depots. The Memphis & Charleston Railroad grew out of an economic desire to connect Memphis on the Mississippi River to Charleston on the Atlantic coast via a railway from Memphis to Stevenson, Alabama, where it would link to the Nashville & Chattanooga Railroad to reach the coast. Acquiring the railway between Tuscumbia and Decatur was a major step in making that idea a reality.

When the Memphis & Charleston Railroad took over ownership of the former Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad, it embarked on a lengthy project to refit and improve the railway, fixing many of the track problems that hindered the railway from its construction. A June 1852 article in the American Railroad Journal explained the need for this upgrade:

After a very short experience in the use and working of the road, it was discovered that the superstructure, and particularly the iron, was entirely too light and flimsy… There was very little done towards the refitting and improvement of the old road, and it was worked in its dilapidated condition. In the early part of 1851 however, an agreement was entered into between the Memphs and Charleston railroad company, and the Tennessee Valley railroad company, by, and under which the latter was to become a link in the great road, and was to be relaid with heavy iron, and refitted in its machinery, etc., as soon as the company should be prepared to commence work. And now, in compliance with such arrangement, the Memphis and Charleston company have taken possession of the road, as first above stated, and have commenced relaying the track at Tuscumbia landing, with a T rail weighing 59lbs to the yard lineal, upon heavy oak sleepers, 2 ½ feet apart from centre to centre.

The iron for the whole length of the road, about 4,000 tons, is either here (at the Tuscumbia Landing) or in transit from New Orleans; and the expectation and promise is, that the whole 45 miles will be completed, with the needful motive power and machinery, by the first day of November next, at farthest.

Just five years later in May 1857, the entire 272-mile railway line from Stevenson to Memphis was offering regular service as the only rail connection between the eastern and western parts of the South (see Figures 16-17).
Figure 16. Detail depicting the sections of the Memphis & Charleston Railroad in operation and under construction, Henry Varnum Poor, *Map of all the Railroads in the United States in Operation and Progress* (New York: H.V. Poor, 1854), David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.
Figure 17. Detail of the railroad network connecting Memphis to Charleston, J.H. Goldthwait, Goldthwait’s Map of the United States, British Provinces, Mexico, Central America, W. India Is.&.: Exhibiting the Railroads with their Distances, Single, and Double Tracks & Width of Gauge (New York: D. Chester, 1861), David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.
Because of this, control over the railroad was of utmost importance during the Civil War. When the Civil War broke out in 1861, the Memphis & Charleston Railroad remained isolated and exposed to threat of seizure by Union forces. Nicknamed the "Vertebrae of the Confederacy," the railroad was essential in moving troops efficiently to the east and west. In preparation for the Battle of Shiloh in April 1862, for example, the Memphis & Charleston Railroad transported thousands of men and an immeasurable amount of supplies. The Confederacy only enjoyed the control of the railroad for a brief time during the war, though. Days after the Battle of Shiloh, Union forces under the command of General Ormsby MacKnight Mitchell invaded Huntsville and captured the Memphis & Charleston Railroad facilities there, including eighteen locomotives, one hundred freight cars, and six passenger cars.

An iron shortage throughout the war led to the decimation of a number of railways, including the Memphis & Charleston Railroad. Historian Wayne Cline explains: "Whenever a section of track was in danger of falling under enemy control, the rails were ripped up to deny their use to the other side. This strategy visited complete ruin on the Memphis & Charleston Railroad, since it was frequently raided by both sides during the course of the war." By war's end, 140 miles out of 155 miles of the Memphis & Charleston Railroad in Alabama were demolished. The M&C wasted no time in rebuilding the line. By November 1865, the entire railway was passable with the exception of the bridge crossing the Tennessee River in Decatur, which was rebuilt and opened the following year.

The M&C retained ownership of the railway between Tuscumbia and Decatur until the line was acquired by the Southern Railway, which was organized by banker J.P. Morgan, in 1894. The railroad remained part of the Southern Railway System until its merger with the Norfolk & Western in 1982 to create the Norfolk Southern. The railway continues to be part of the Norfolk Southern today.
Contribution Features & Existing Conditions

Spatial Organization of the Courtland-Leighton Corridor

Figure 18. Courtland was originally laid out in a grid pattern and has changed little over the years. The blue dashed line indicates the location of the Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad (formerly Main Street), the yellow box numbered 1 is the town square, and the yellow box numbered 2 is the cemetery.

The Courtland town plan and the alignment of the railroad from Courtland to Leighton are still spatially situated and aligned the way they were during the period of significance, thus continuing to convey their historic relationship to one another.

Courtland

In 1818, Courtland was laid out in a grid pattern consisting of seven streets from east to west (Madison, Jefferson, Hamilton, Tennessee, Water, and Academy streets with the railroad replacing the thoroughfare of Main Street) and six streets from north to south (Clinton, Alabama, College, Jackson, Monroe, and Van Buren streets), each originally proposed to be 66’ wide. Just south of Courtland’s center, a large tract of land was set aside as a public square, which is presently bounded by Tennessee, College, and Alabama streets to the north, east, and west, and the railroad to the south. In addition to setting aside land for a public square, the Courtland Land Company also set aside land for a burial ground, which became known as Courtland Cemetery. Older graves are mostly located in the southern part of the cemetery, including those of some of the area’s earliest settlers and three Revolutionary War veterans. After the Civil War, an African American burial ground was established to the east of the main cemetery. The National Register nomination for the town’s historic district correctly notes that “despite gradual encroachment of mobile home and
apartment construction, and some newer permanent domestic construction, Courtland's overall character is still predominantly that of a small 19th- and early 20th-century local trade center rooted in the surrounding plantation economy.

RAILROAD ALIGNMENT
While the original materials used to construct the railway were replaced numerous times over the years, most notably in 1852 when the Memphis & Charleston Railroad tore up and rebuilt the railway and after the Civil War when it was heavily damaged and rendered impassable, its orientation remained little changed. As documented in the report North Alabama’s Tuscumbia, Courtland, and Decatur Railroad and Its Role During Cherokee Emigration/Removal Beginning in 1837, the original alignment of the Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad remains unchanged today, with the exception of one deviation to the north at Norala Junction located east of Tuscumbia.

Much of the terrain located between the towns of Courtland, Town Creek, and Leighton is flat agricultural land with intermittent wooded areas. There are two bridges located between Courtland and Town Creek. The bridge closest to Courtland carries two lanes directly west over the railroad as the tracks head northward. The second bridge carries the divided four-lane US 72-ALT over the tracks as they continue to the northwest.

Vegetation
Elements of the vegetation in the Courtland-Leighton corridor are an integral component of the landscape that contribute to the historic setting of this region.

AGRICULTURAL FIELDS & WOODLANDS
While there are non-contributing intrusions along the railroad in the study area, mostly confined to the sections within the towns of Courtland, Town Creek, and Leighton, the setting between these towns remains largely free of modern development and retains its historic setting of agricultural fields and woodlands (see Figures 19-21). In the early nineteenth century, cotton was the major crop grown in the area. Today, cotton retains its place, alongside wheat, soybeans, and corn, as one of the region’s major crops. One of the largest cotton gins in the Southeast, Servico, is located one-mile north of Courtland, serving as another reminder of the area’s deep, long-standing roots in the cotton industry.

CEDAR TREES
Cedar trees have long been a defining element of Courtland’s landscape. A historical marker in the town notes, “The tall red cedars seen throughout Courtland and along the streets radiating from the square have been a feature of the landscape since early days.” Robert A. Moore, a Confederate soldier, even remarked in his diary on Courtland’s “beautiful cedar groves” when he passed.

Figure 19. Intersection with Gnat Pond Road, Leighton, facing west.
Figure 20. Intersection with College Street in Leighton, facing east.
through town on June 12, 1861.88 While a number of the cedar trees have been removed over the last fifty years, rows of cedars still exist on Van Buren, Madison, Hamilton, and Ussery streets. Isolated cedar trees can be seen along many of the other streets throughout town, as lone reminders of the rows of cedars that once extended along those roads (see Figures 22-25).

**Buildings & Structures**

**COURTLAND**
While the majority of Courtland’s earliest buildings (c.1819-1830) are no longer extant, a number still remain from that date to the period of significance and are contributing features not just to Courtland’s National Register-listed historic district, but also to the Courtland-Leighton cultural landscape (see Figures 25). When Courtland’s earliest residents arrived, they were inspired by the building traditions of the places from which they emigrated. At first, many of Courtland’s residents used the trees that needed to be cleared from the surrounding lands for agricultural production to make sturdy hand-hewn log homes. Eventually, these log homes...
Figure 25. Map of resources in Courtland.
gave way to finely crafted Federal-style homes, either by incorporating existing log homes into their design or building anew. The National Register nomination for the Courtland historic district notes, “Woodwork from a handful of the oldest houses ranks among the finest specimens of Federal-period cabinetwork in the state. The architecture of these and other structures also suggest the strong link between Courtland and the building traditions of the upper South (Virginia, upper North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky) from which came the majority of the town’s first settlers.”

Courtland’s nearly intact spatial design, along with its remaining early-nineteenth-century resources, make it one of the two remaining towns in the Tennessee River Valley to continue to convey a sense of the area’s nineteenth-century plantation communities.

**John McMahon House; Trotter House, c.1830-1831**

Located on the southeast corner of Jefferson and Van Buren streets, this two-story, c.1830 Federal-style brick home was reportedly built for merchant and cotton broker John Trotter (see Figure 26). When Trotter moved to Louisiana in 1838, another cotton broker, John McMahon, and his wife, Harriet Shackelford McMahon, lived there and are the first documented owners of the house. The McMahon descendants conveyed the property to the Alabama Historical Commission in the late 1980s.

The house originally faced south toward Hamilton Street but was oriented to the north during a late-nineteenth-century alteration. Other alterations include the addition of a one-story brick ell shortly after the home’s construction, a c.1880 frame kitchen wing, and c.1945 porch.

Despite moderate historic alterations, the original façade retains its tall, symmetrical shape with interior end chimneys. The house appears well maintained. The expansive lawn to the south (the original front lawn of the house) remains open and manicured with interspersed cedar trees. The property’s western border, created by Van Buren Street, is lined with cedars. There is a historical marker placed to the north of the house.

![Figure 26. John McMahon House; Trotter House.](image-url)
**Shackelford House; Harris-Simpson House, c. 1820-1830**

Located on the southwest corner of Hamilton and Clinton streets, this Federal-style frame home was reportedly built for an “Irishman” between 1820 and 1830, making it one of the oldest extant buildings in the area. The early 1900s saw the one-story ell and porch addition and, later, a c.1930 door surround and brick terrace. The c.1895 cook’s quarters structure stands to the rear of the house.

The house has undergone a sympathetic restoration that preserved its historic character and integrity and appears to be well maintained. The façade of the house runs perpendicular to Clinton Street on the east and faces the c.1912 Bynum House to the north, from which it is separated by the former Tuscumbia Road (now a private, unpaved drive that serves the Bynum House). Pasture and dispersed trees, some old and some newer growth, surround the house to its south and west. The Alabama Preservation Alliance placed an easement on the home in 2001. There is a historical marker placed to the north of the house.

**Pippen/Wells House, c.1830**

This two-story frame house with rear ell was built c.1830 at the southeast corner of Hamilton and Clinton streets, to the east of the Shackelford House (see Figure 28). According to local oral tradition, the downstairs portion of the home served as a tavern. In 1904, carpenter W.L. Hall remodeled the home for E.V. Chardavoyne. The porches and battered brick piers are early-twentieth-century additions.

Despite the porch additions, the house maintains its 3-bay, symmetrical façade with exterior end chimneys and appears to be well maintained. A metal fence with swing gate entrance to the front of the house encloses the house, midcentury outbuildings to the southeast, and manicured yard surrounding the buildings. The fence also encompasses a narrow but deep manicured yard to the east. Mature trees are scattered throughout the property and the façade porch is fronted by large bushes that obscure much of the bottom half of the façade.

**Tweedy House, c.1825**

Located at the southeast corner of Jackson and Water streets, this two-story Federal-style brick house has a c.1910 ell addition and 1988 shed across the rear (see Figure 29). The house appears to be well maintained. A late-twentieth-century house is situated to the west across Jackson Street. A manicured lawn surrounds the north and south, with medium-sized trees and
Figure 28. Pippen/Wells House.
Figure 29. Tweedy House.
landscaping immediately surrounding the house. A mixture of mid-to-late-twentieth-century housing is located to the east, separated from the property by vinyl fencing.

**Peter Torian House, c.1830**
This one-and-one-half-story frame building with gabled roof and end chimneys sits to the north of Water and east of Van Buren streets (see Figure 30). Beneath the house is a brick cellar. The family of Peter Torian lived in this Federal-style cottage during the mid-nineteenth century. The surrounding yard is manicured with scattered trees ranging from new to older growth. The property is bound on the north by the Southern Norfolk Railroad (formerly the Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad).

**Blythe House; Hubbard House, c.1825 core**
This brick house was originally a single-pile one-and-one-half-story Federal-style cottage before a major unsympathetic alteration in 1919, which resulted in a stucco exterior and the addition of a full second story (see Figure 31). There is a c. 1825 frame gable roofed outbuilding located to the east of the house (“Blythe House Outbuilding” below). Two modern outbuildings stand adjacent. The Courtland Historic District National Register nomination mentions a single grave on the property but not the location of said grave.

According to local oral tradition, nineteenth-century politician David Hubbard and his family lived in the house before moving to the “Kinlock” plantation in the southwest part of the county. Hubbard apparently moved to the Courtland area to buy and sell land formerly belonging to the Chickasaws through his Chickasaw Company, a group of eastern investors. He was also one of the original trustees of the Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad and the house still stands within the viewshed of the railroad track.

The house appears to be well maintained. Several mature trees surround the house in the manicured yard and an eroded terrace separates the front yard from Hamilton Street. The property is sited on its own block, completely bounded by Tennessee, Van Buren, Hamilton, and Ussery streets. Directly north across Hamilton Street are mid-twentieth-century houses.
**Blythe House Outbuilding, c.1825**
This one-story frame building with two rooms divided by a central chimney sits to the southeast of the c.1830 Blythe House (above). The outbuilding likely served as a kitchen, storage area, and/or dwelling space for enslaved people before the Civil War (see Figure 32). Two modern outbuildings sit adjacent. The physical state of the outbuilding is undetermined.

**George Gilchrist House, c.1830 core, 1912**
Located on the northeast corner of Monroe and Hamilton streets, this home evolved from a c.1830 two-story, hand-hewn log home (see Figure 33). It was extensively altered in the Greek Revival-style around 1912 for George Gilchrist, former president of the Bank of Courtland.

The house appears to be well maintained and is located on a block of mostly mid-twentieth-century homes. A narrow row of bushes runs parallel to Hamilton Street, dividing the front yard from the street. A manicured lawn with scattered mature trees surrounds the house. Across Hamilton and directly west sits the c.1859 Courtland Presbyterian Church building.

**Courtland Depot**
Courtland has a train depot located immediately south of the tracks. It is a modern with vinyl veneer. It is possible the stone and brick foundation of this building dates to the 1830s.

**Mounting Blocks/Slave Auction Blocks**
The National Register Nomination for the Courtland Historic District notes the presence of three limestone mounting blocks on the sidewalks near the northeast corner of the town square (see Figures 34-35). The nomination continues, “In each case, three narrow stone steps are hewn out of a single monolith, now badly weathered.” Two of the mounting stones are located on the north side of the square in front a commercial building on the northwest corner of Tennessee and College streets. The stones are situated parallel to Tennessee Street. The third stone is located on the east side of the square in front of a commercial building at the southeast corner of Tennessee and College streets. This stone is also situated parallel to Tennessee Street. All three stones are anchored into the sidewalk.
Figure 35. Locations of the Mounting Blocks/Slave Auction Blocks in Courtland.

Such mounting stones are not uncommon and continue to spark debate about their original use either as auction blocks on which enslaved people stood or blocks that helped people mount and unmount carriages. The nomination notes them as a “novel relic of the pre-automobile age.” It, too, mentions the possibility of the blocks being used at auctions of enslaved people. While definitively knowing the original purpose of the stones is certainly desirable, the very possibility of the stones being used for slave auctions forces an audience to confront the very large role slavery played in “settling” frontiers and developing them into thriving municipalities before, during, and after the removal of Indian nations from their lands in the East.

Courtland Cemetery, est. 1819
The historic Courtland Cemetery is located to the northeast of the town square on a slight elevation (see Figures 36-39). The northern portion of Van Buren Street serves as the entrance to the cemetery and also divides the white graves on the west side and the black graves on the east side. The cemetery has a distinguishable early section, at the southwestern end near the entrance, that dates from c.1820 with early-nineteenth-century slab markers and box tombs. To the northwest, later interments are marked with granite obelisks, ornate Victorian-era grave markers, and twentieth-century upright monuments. Some family plots are enclosed by cast iron fences. Old-growth cedars are scattered throughout the western side of the cemetery and the open spaces are manicured. A chain link fence encompasses the western portion of the cemetery, separating it from Van Buren Street and private property to the west and the black cemetery to the east. A historical marker sits to the west side of Van Buren Street before the entrance.

A gravel path peels east off of Van Buren Street immediately before the entrance into the white cemetery to the west, creating the entrance to the African American cemetery to the east, which is marked by two square cement posts. This cemetery was created after the Civil War. Monuments range from early-twentieth-century slab markers to more modern, upright monuments. Old-growth
Figure 36. Courtland Cemetery

Figure 37. Courtland Cemetery

Figure 38. Ornate cast iron fence encloses a family plot in the Courtland Cemetery.

Figure 39. Grave of Charles Pearson (b: 1793; d: October 16, 1828).
cedar trees are dispersed throughout the interments. The grounds appear to be maintained occasionally but do not appear as manicured as the white cemetery. A wire fence bounds the cemetery from pasture to the south and forest and brush to the east and north.

**Swales**
The railroad corridor has distinguishable swales and historic tree lines between the Jefferson and Tennessee street junction west to the junction with Van Buren Street. To the east of Courtland, Jefferson Street peels north and leaves Tennessee Street to run parallel to the corridor for about one half mile before Tennessee peels away north just past the Courtland High School campus to the right and Sibley Oil commercial buildings ahead to the left. The railroad is noticeably elevated and topped with gravel before leveling out and aligning with Tennessee Street. On the north side of this corridor from east to west (beginning with the fork between Tennessee and Jefferson streets) is a triangle-shaped, abandoned commercial lot with a mid-twentieth-century service station with its rear oriented to Tennessee Street and the railroad corridor, both of which are within the southward-looking sightline of the property.

Moving west, a private property with a single-family home faces Jefferson Street with bushes to the rear of the property that obscures the view of Tennessee Street and the railroad corridor. West of this lot is farmland, followed by two private lots that are served by Tennessee Street and face the railroad. Rows of trees and bushes on the southern border of these properties provides privacy from Tennessee Street and the railroad corridor. Continuing westward on the north side of the corridor, the Courtland High School campus sits within sightline of the tracks.

On the south side of this corridor from east to west (beginning with the fork between Tennessee and Jefferson streets), a fence and tree line separate the corridor from farmland to the south. The fence and tree line ends for several yards with commercial farm buildings and silos located immediately south of the corridor in clear view of the tracks. Moving eastward, a tree line again separates farmland from the railroad corridor before Water Street, served from Tennessee Street, traverses the corridor and leads to a house that faces the railroad corridor. This residential lot is narrow, deep, and heavily forested, which obscures its visibility from the railroad. From this drive, a separate road, Grove Street, veers west after

**Figure 40.** Swales, looking west into Courtland, from the area of Grove Street NW.

**Figure 41.** Swales, looking east (away from Courtland) from the intersection of Jackson Street and the railroad.

**Figure 42.** Swales, looking east from the intersection of the drive that serves St. James Missionary Baptist (Town Creek) and the railroad.
crossing the tracks and becomes parallel to the tracks for several yards before turning south into Water Street.

As Tennessee Street veers north, the corridor becomes more distinct with a more consistent tree line and deeper swales as one approaches the vicinity of Van Buren Street. On the north side of this portion of the corridor (from the junction of Water Street and the corridor), sits Sibley Oil property and commercial buildings that front Tennessee Street and are separated from the corridor by a chain link fence. Moving eastward, the tree line is consistent and acts as a boundary between two residential lots whose houses face Tennessee Street. On the south side of this portion of the corridor (from the junction of Water Street and the corridor), four single-family residential properties back up to the corridor and face southward to front Water Street. An intermittent tree line defines the boundary between these properties and the corridor.

**Intrusions**

Intrusions that affect the viewshed from the corridor in Courtland include a water tower located just south of the train depot as well as the electrical lines that cross the tracks overhead at Courtland.

**TOWN CREEK**

From Courtland, the railroad travels approximately 5.7 miles northwest to Town Creek through flat agricultural land. The layout of the town indicates the centrality of the railroad in the use of space as Main Street runs across and perpendicular to the tracks with commercial buildings lining either side of the street. These commercial buildings are almost entirely early to mid-twentieth century, with the exception of one two-story brick building (possibly a lodge) that faces the railroad tracks and appears to be late-nineteenth century. The residential buildings of Town Creek are a mixture of late-nineteenth-century houses, twentieth-century bungalows and ranch houses, and twenty-first-century homes.

**Old Inn, c.1820**

Located on the east side of Church street near the southeast corner of Church and Railroad streets’ intersection, the property’s northern viewshed includes the current Town Creek Depot building (approximately 100 feet away) and portion of

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**Figure 43.** Swales, looking east from the intersection of Bradley Street (Town Creek) and the railroad.

**Figure 44.** Swales, looking east from the intersection of County Road 276 (Town Creek) and the railroad.

**Figure 45.** Swales, looking east from the intersection of College St. (Leighton) and the railroad.
1. Town Creek Depot (foundation)
2. Old Inn

Figure 46. Map of resources in Town Creek.
the railroad that runs behind it. The building was reportedly constructed first as a tavern (see Figure 47).

**Town Creek Depot Foundation, c.1833**
Located on the south side of the railroad tracks, between Main and Church streets, a modern building with vinyl veneer, wide eaves, and exposed rafters sits atop a stone foundation, the materials and footprint of which could possibly date to c.1833 (see Figure 48). Portions of the foundation appear to be modified by the replacement of stones and repointing of the mortar. A manicured lawn is located to the west and a paved parking lot is located immediately south of the building. The building is used as a community space.

**Intrusions**
Intrusions that affect the viewshed from the railroad corridor in Town Creek include electrical lines that cross the tracks overhead.

**LEIGHTON**
From Town Creek, the railroad continues 7.5 miles northwest into Colbert County where it passes through Leighton (see Figure 49). The landscape between Town Creek and Leighton is made up of flat agricultural land. Much of the corridor is lined with trees and there is one wood area through which the corridor passes. Some of the largest swales are located in this corridor along the tree-lined sections. Though no buildings dating to the era of Indian Removal remain, the layout of the commercial area downtown is similar to Town Creek's in that Main Street runs across and perpendicular to the tracks with commercial buildings lining either side of the street. This historic commercial area retains some of its late-nineteenth-century buildings with some twentieth-century additions and infill.

**Intrusions**
Intrusions that affect the viewshed from the railroad corridor in Leighton include the towers and powerlines seen in Figure 21. The towers are located north of the tracks (near Gnat Pond Rd), with the lines crossing overhead.
Figure 49. In this map of Leighton the blue dashed line indicates the location of the railroad/Trail of Tears route.
ANALYSIS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Courtland-Leighton railroad corridor is a unique and significant cultural resource associated with the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail. It meets the National Park Service (NPS) definition of a cultural landscape as "a geographic area, including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife or domestic animals therein, associated with a historic event, activity, or person or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values." In the NPS four general types of cultural landscapes, which are not mutually exclusive, the Courtland-Leighton railroad corridor is a mix of a historic site landscape and a historic vernacular landscape, in that two central features of the landscape are the engineer-designed railroad corridor and the designed town plans of the three towns that the corridor passes through.

This report has considered vegetation and topography, noting such key features as swales, open agricultural fields, and cedar trees; circulation features, such as roads and grid patterns of the towns; historic buildings and structures. The cultural landscape component that is integral to the significance of the resource is the linear corridor defined by the tracks and right-of-way of the historic Tuscumbia, Courtland, & Decatur Railroad (later the Memphis & Charleston Railroad and today the Norfolk & Southern Railroad).

With development of the railroad corridor, especially its expansion during the industrialization of the Muscle Shoals region in the 1910s and 1920s and the construction of the Tennessee Valley Authority in the 1930s, the region lost the general rural isolation that characterized its history from the centuries of Native American dominance to the early settlement and statehood eras in Alabama. Despite that fundamental shift in the region’s landscape, the corridor provides a visitor experience that evokes the earlier era. Along the two-lane road, attention must be given to wildlife from squirrels and skunks to small herds of deer. Unless a train rumbles past—and such traffic is consistent but relatively light until the yards outside of Tuscumbia—birds common to the region can be observed even heard, outside of the heavy automobile commuter hours of 6 to 8 am and 4 to 6 pm. In that quality the Courtland corridor is little different from much of the rural South where income earners who were once almost all farmers have to travel to the larger towns and cities for employment.

Due to the imprint of the Tennessee Valley Authority along the Tennessee River, together with the authority’s commitment to electrical power production, transmission power lines crisscross the corridor, lessening historic vistas. Yet considering the prevalence of agricultural fields and patches of woods the corridor retains a rural feel as it is free of rural suburban sprawl and development. At night, the corridor largely empties of traffic and a quiet darkness descends upon the corridor.

As a railroad corridor of more than 175 years in age, change has happened to the Courtland-Leighton cultural landscape. Having identified several character-defining features of the landscape, this report recommends that future historic defining features of the landscape, this report recommends that future historic preservation and public interpretation efforts be focused on the following.

1. The intact railroad corridor from Courtland to Leighton. In 1834 investors and railroad officials planned the initial route to be a single-track corridor, “with turn-outs and side-lines about every two miles.” While “turn-outs” every two miles have been eliminated for the industry-standard of every seven to eight miles (unknown when the change occurred but most likely after the Memphis & Charleston’s major rebuilding of the route in 1852), the
single-track corridor remains. Historic swales define the single-track route within the towns of Courtland and Leighton and as it passes through agricultural fields. Due to industry standards for the much heavier trains that now travel on the corridor, the track is high-strength steel, not iron as in the period of significance; has much heavier ballast; and thus is higher off the ground than it would have been in the period of significance of the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail. But the route remains a single track corridor with its original alignment intact except for one division at Norala Junction located east of Tuscumbia.

2. Extant vegetation and features. The swales and tree-lined route of the tracks through Courtland and Leighton convey a nineteenth-century railroad travel experience. Cedar trees planted at Courtland’s infancy, although greatly diminished since the National Register listing of the Courtland Historic District, still exist in adequate numbers to convey this key feature of the town’s antebellum appearance. The continued preservation of cedar-tree lined streets and the town cemetery in Courtland is a high priority. The preservation of open space and the presence of agricultural fields along the route is also recommended. Certainly, the crops and the nature of cultivation from the 1830s to 2018 has been transformed; the appearance of fields and open space cannot be the same as in 1840. But the open, rural nature of the landscape can be identified and planned for. If the route between Courtland, Town Creek, and Leighton becomes lined with warehouses, light industrial buildings, and other modern buildings, the corridor would no longer retain integrity.

3. Town plans. The different plans of the three towns—Courtland, Town Creek, and Leighton—included in this cultural landscape retain their historic design, appearance, and configuration. The incorporation of the railroad tracks into the southern boundary of the Courtland town square is a key feature; the later Memphis & Charleston Railroad incorporated that same town plan at Collierville, in Shelby County, Tennessee, and both towns held hopes to be the seat of their respective counties. Town Creek and Leighton represent the post-Civil War railroad plan defined as the T-town, where Railroad Avenue (and/or the tracks themselves) forms the top of the “T” and Main Street forms the stem of the “T.” On either side of Main Street are the primary commercial businesses of the town. The continued preservation of the historic town plans of Courtland, Town Creek, and Leighton will ensure that the cultural landscape conveys the period of significance.

4. Historic buildings, structures, and sites. The report has emphasized the historic buildings associated with the period of significance that are extant along the historic corridor. Courtland has the highest concentration and best extant examples of domestic architecture from c. 1820 to c. 1840. A National Register Historic District helps protect these resources. Easements and agreements with the Alabama Historical Commission (the Trotter-McMahon House) and the Alabama Preservation Alliance (Shackelford House) in Courtland add another layer of protection. This report also recommends that the Courtland cemeteries (both the white cemetery and the adjoining African American cemetery) be added to the Courtland Historic District. The mounting blocks/slave auction blocks around the Courtland square should be given special preservation consideration since they force audiences to consider the pivotal role of slavery in such first-generation “frontiers” as northern Alabama’s
Tennessee River Valley from 1820 to 1840.

Town Creek and Leighton, as secondary railroad trade towns on the corridor between Courtland and Tuscumbia, have fewer extant historic buildings, structures, or sites from the period of significance. The Old Inn in Town Creek should be evaluated for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.
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COURTLAND – LEIGHTON CULTURAL LANDSCAPE STUDY


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