



Several generations before the birth of William Weatherford, in the days of his great-grandmother the first Sehoy, Princess of the Wind Clan, life for Weatherford's people the Creeks was uncomplicated and carefree. The tribe had decided to quit their wandering and settle in the beautiful region along the banks of the Alabama, Coosa, and Tallapoosa Rivers. They were a happy, easy going people. An abundance of wild game and vegetation surrounded them on every side. The Great Spirit had blessed their land with magnificent rivers that abounded in fish; with delicious cool springs and rich lands that produced without cultivation. They thronged the banks of the rivers, planting their fields in the spring and hunting in the winter months. Warriors advanced themselves through their hunting skills and by their defeats with neighboring tribes. The coming of the white man, however, would change their lives forever. When the Spanish came and took possession of West Florida, they immediately set up a brisk trade with the red man. The French soon followed, settling in Biloxi in 1699 and in Mobile in 1702. The Indians were at first friendly to these strange newcomers, showing them their healing plants, while many of the medicine men treated both white and red alike. All of the colonists subsisted on the products of the Indians' agriculture. Freely, they shared their corn, beans, squash, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, tobacco, gourds, and other crops. It was from the red man that the whites learned to erect their barrier settlements. By the time the European settlers came into the lower South, the Creeks were already past the primitive stages of civilization, and were living in permanent homes and farming their lands. Indian trade and loyalty became a vital factor in conquering the area, but the Creek were playing a losing game with each successive treaty that was signed with the whites. Many of the Europeans were traders and quickly saw, in the Indians' use of skins for clothing, a splendid way to develop a trading enterprise. They began to trade in the Indian villages for food crops, to survive on as most were not accustomed, or willing, to clear new grounds and work the land. Of all the white men with whom the Creeks had dealings, they preferred the French who treated them like brothers - not slaves. They recognized the red man's pride and prejudices, and won his confidence by respecting his institutions and sharing his ceremonies. Under the French, the Indians were kept in constant warfare with each other, or with their other white neighbors. They therefore hunted less and did little trade with the French. Consequently, French settlements never prospered. The Creeks could have easily driven the French from their land, but chose to welcome them, pledging their friendship, and thereby opening the door for the whites to settle in the area. Accordingly, an influx of whites into the "Tombechee Country" soon populated the colony of Louisiana which began to flourish. The English were, on the whole, always hostile toward the red man. Few chose to marry among the Indians as the French and Spanish had done. To them, the Indian was an obstacle to their way of securing that which they wanted from the red man. English traders had penetrated the area before 1700, even before the arrival of the French, colonizing South Carolina in 1672. Traders from Virginia and the Carolinas immediately began trading with the Creeks. Before the French had gained a foothold in the Gulf region, English traders from Charleston were buying deerskins in exchange for Indian goods. They explored the country, carrying their wares to all parts of it. They called the inhabitants "Creeks" because of the many beautiful creeks and rivers that meandered through the domain of the Muscogee people. The first, however, to live among the Creeks, speak their language, and marry their daughters were the "coureurs de bois." Many

served as scouts for LaSalle and Bienville. The background of these men varied. Some were English and Spanish traders, mingled with Yankee frontiersmen, and considered themselves "stateless", many of these Indian countrymen were the first English speaking people to enter what is now known as Alabama. They acknowledged and practiced the customs of the Creeks. The chiefs gave them plots of land to cultivate, and upon taking Creek wives, they became a part of the local community. Such men were Lachlan and Alexander McGillivray. Another was Charles Weatherford, the father of William Weatherford (later to be known as Red Eagle). Many of the self-sufficient men banded together before the state of Georgia was formed in 1722, and began making great fortunes by trading with the red man. As the white population around them slowly grew, the Muscogee people began receiving more tribes into their confederacy. They were eager to gain all the strength they could to ward off encroachments by the English from South Carolina. They could see that competing colonial powers, as well as individual fortune seekers, were attracted by their country and the French outpost in Fort Toulouse. Each group of white settlers wooed the red man's favor, but each was still too busy trying to oust the other to worry about expelling the Indians. When Georgia was made a colony, the Creek Confederacy was bound on the west by the Mobile River and by the ridge that separated the waters of the Tombigbee from those of the Alabama; on the north by the Cherokees; on the northeast by the Spaniards; and on every other border by the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. The centers of her population were on the Tallapoosa and Coosa Rivers where twenty five towns were located. On the Chattahoochee were twelve more principal towns, while smaller villages were located on the creeks and streams. The Creeks and the Georgians had never fought up to this point. A treaty, signed when Georgia was colonized, relinquished to the British government the lands between the Savannah and Altamaha; it stipulated that English traders be allowed to establish themselves in any part of the Creek Nation. Immediately, Augusta became a mecca for Indian traders. Annually, about 2,000 packhorse loads of peltry were purchased. The English began to despise the red man as their power grew and their hunger for land increased. The Upper Creek towns on the Alabama, Coosa, and Tallapoosa Rivers were under the influence of the French, later seeking protection under the Spanish. The Lower towns accepted the English. Thus the greater body of the Upper Creeks were bitter enemies of the Georgians. The Muscogee, however, remained friendly with the British and the French, hoping to spare their nation undue hardships. As time passed, this strong hatred of the Muscogee for the British colonist became an inherited trait; it increased and was fostered wholeheartedly by the French. Still, the connections that had been formed with the Creeks by such marriages as that of Lachlan McGillivray to the Princess Sehoy did not allow the French ever completely to alienate the Creeks from the British colonists. The Creeks had looked favorably on the white traders before the "mercenary empirics" began to corrupt them. But all of this changed when general license was tolerated. Their land began to swarm with undesirable white people, and corruption of morals crept in. These "idle white savages" hurt the honest traders by filling the Indians with rum and liquor. The Indians succumbed easily to the taste for rum, and legitimate merchants found this an easy way to beat down prices. The red man's way of life changed in many ways through contact with the white man. Bow and arrow gave way to the gun. Gradually he learned to use tools and utensils which he could purchase instead of making. It was becoming more and more apparent that the white man was here to stay. Therefore, the Creeks and Cherokees started to strengthen their central government and update their way of life, enabling them to deal with the white man. When the French and the Spanish relinquished their posts and left the area, it was Lachlan and other fellow clansmen who took over the vast commercial empire which the French had maintained. The English had never been able to establish a tightly controlled trade with the Indians who, in turn, did not trust the whites. This period of English rule, however, brought about much change. Anglo-Saxon institutions were introduced, the population's increased, and material progress was made but tensions were created. The British cut out a road connecting Pensacola and Mobile. "Congresses" with the Indians were held, hoping to keep the Creeks from allying with Spain; Tories began to flock into the area from the Carolinas; and the presence of the British on the Gulf Coast created tension among the Indian tribes. The Creeks could no longer cope with the Europeans rivalry. Their whole nation was surrounded: English settlements on the east; Cherokees on the northeast; Choctaws on the west; Chickasaws on the north and northwest; and east and West Florida on the south. The Creeks became jealous of the

growing numbers of settlers and the increasing power of the English colony. They did not like them to cultivate their neighboring lands, and before long, they began to store up powder and ball. They knew that it would be impossible to preserve peace. The English, on the other hand, encouraged settlers to come from North and South Carolina, Virginia, and Georgia-and the newly ceded territory became rapidly settled. The Creeks attacked-for a short time only, however, for they loathed the spilling of blood. But now settlers poured in from West Florida, mainly Tory refugees when land grants were offered. They flocked through the dense forests to settle on the shores of the Tombigbee and Mobile Bay. When the Revolution broke out, the Creeks took an active side in the war against the Americans. At that time, the nation had about 3,500 armed warriors, and their towns and villages now numbered fifty. They believed themselves more powerful than all other nations who might invade. For thirty years they had endured encroachments on their lands by the white man. Other Indian nations had been fast declining because of wars, liquor abuse, and infectious diseases. The Creeks had learned from the traders to prevent the spread of small pox by means of quarantine. Therefore, they doubled in number in thirty years. At the outbreak of the Revolution there were no white settlements in Alabama, Mississippi, or in West Florida, except the towns of Mobile, Natchez, and Pensacola. During the wars, however, refugees from Georgia and the Carolina located in the Alabama-Tombigbee basin, and settle in the present Clarke, Baldwin, and Washington counties. This river region continued to attract Tories from the Carolinas as long as Spanish rule remained. Other settlements began to spring up on the Tensaw River and up the Tombigbee. Despite so many reverses, however, the English botanist, William Bartram, observed that the Creeks "appear as blithe and free as the birds of the air, and like them as volatile and active, tuneful and vociferous...joy, contentment, love and friendship, without guile of affection seem inherent in them, or predominant in their vital principle, for it leaves them but with the last breath of life." When Bartram visited the Creek Confederation (1773-1778), the practice of torturing male captives was no longer common. Even the oldest trader in the nation had never seen an instance of such barbarity. They did scalp the enemy, but did not kill women or children. When Spain entered the war, the British ceded to her all of West Florida. The fall of Mobile in 1780, the year of William Weatherford's birth, ended English rule in Alabama for all practical purposes. The events that followed would push his people into a corner. Their natural instinct would cause them to fight rather than face destruction and humiliation, and their unquieted anger would cause Weatherford to lead his people in the bloodiest massacre ever committed on American soil by the red man.

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