THE IDEA OF INDIAN REMOVAL as a government obligation first reared its head in 1802 when officials of the state of Georgia made an agreement with federal government officials. In the Georgia Compact, the state of Georgia gave up its claims to territorial lands west of that state in exchange for $1,250,000 and a promise that the federal government would abolish Indian title to Georgia lands as soon as possible. How seriously the government took its obligation to Georgia at the time of the agreement is unknown. The following year, however, the Louisiana Purchase was made, and almost immediately, the trans-Mississippi area was seen by some as the answer to “The Indian Problem.” Not everyone agreed. Some congressmen argued that removal to the West was impractical because of land-hungry whites who could not be restrained from crossing the mighty river to obtain land. Although their conclusion was correct, it was probably made more in opposition to President Jefferson than from any real concern about the Indians or about practicality. Although some offers were made by government officials to officials of various tribes, little was done about removing the southeastern tribes before the War of 1812. During that war several Indian tribes supported the British. After the war ended, many whites demanded that tribal lands be confiscated by
the government as punishment for Indians’ treasonous activities. Many Americans included all tribes in their confiscation demands, evidently feeling that all Indians were guilty, despite the fact that many tribes did not participate in the war. In fact, among the southeastern tribes, the only people who supported the British were the Red Sticks, a militant faction of the Creeks. When Andrew Jackson was sent to quell the Red Sticks, loyal Creeks and Choctaws assisted him as volunteers.

John C. Calhoun, Secretary of War, was the primary creator of Indian Removal as the answer to the Indian Problem. He advocated education before removal. He believed that if Indians were educated according to white ways, they would realize that removal was the best thing for them, especially as they became more “civilized.”

Educational programs were put into effect supported by the churches, the government, and the tribes. The Choctaws made such swift progress that Calhoun decided to focus his attention on them for removal.

TREATY OF DOAK’S STAND. Beginning in 1818, for three consecutive years, Indian commissioners (white men appointed to handle government business with the Indians) met annually with Choctaw leaders to discuss removal. In 1820, they met at Doak’s Stand, Mississippi, to discuss a treaty in which Choctaws would cede five million acres, about one-third of their land in the East, in exchange for thirteen million western acres, financial and technical assistance with moving, and annual payments to the tribe (annuities).

Andrew Jackson, at that time one of the Indian commissioners, repeatedly warned the Indians that if they did not move, they would certainly perish in the East, and that if they did not accept the treaty, they would jeopardize friendly relations with the United States. Chief Pushmataha and a few others knew that Jackson spoke the truth. They persuaded others. On October 18, 1820, the Choctaw leaders and the Indian commissioners signed the Treaty of Doak’s Stand.

Most white people who knew about the treaty felt that it was fair to everyone. The Choctaws were doubtful. They had dealt with whites for more than two centuries and with the United States for half a century. They had heard promises before. Their doubts were verified when Arkansas settlers protested the treaty. The government had promised land to the Choctaws which was already settled by whites — more than 3,000 of them. The Choctaws refused to keep the agreement. Their suspicions had been justified. They were now less confident than ever that the govern-
ment would keep its word.

For the next eight years, negotiations were held and several shaky agreements were made, none of which was carried out. In each case, either Congress refused to ratify the treaty or some incident occurred, such as with the Treaty of Doak’s Stand, which caused the already-suspicious Choctaws to change their minds. Until 1828, removal remained voluntary.

**INDIAN REMOVAL ACT.** When Andrew Jackson was elected President, removal efforts intensified. Jackson was devoted to removal, and he was determined to do everything in his power to see that it came about. In response to the President’s statements to Congress in December, 1829, the state of Mississippi passed laws canceling special privileges enjoyed by the Choctaws and restricting tribal functions. In May, 1830, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act. This act, although calling for land exchanges with the Indians, did not authorize a forced removal. It did, however, give Jackson the power to push for removal, and many Indians saw the **inevitability** of it.
**CHOCTAW REACTIONS.** The tribe was divided. Leaders were removed from office and new leaders elected. Few Choctaws actually wanted to leave their homelands, but many felt that without removal, the tribe would not survive. Others felt that somehow the government could be made to honor its past agreements and give the tribe the protection it had been promised. Jackson took advantage of the divisions. Through the commissioners, he made personal offers to Indian leaders — tracts of land and annuities were promised. Some gave in to temptation and agreed to push for removal. Others, already convinced that removal was *inevitable*, accepted the gifts and felt that they had “put one over” on the government.

**TREATY OF DANCING RABBIT CREEK.** In September, 1830, negotiations re-opened between the government and the Choctaws. About 6,000 Indians gathered at the forks of Dancing Rabbit Creek in Noxubee County, Mississippi. Secretary of War John Eaton was present with John Coffee, the government representative. Also present were a number of gamblers and saloon-keepers who hoped to capitalize on the event. The missionaries who had worked with the Indians were denied attendance. “The conference was neither the time nor the place for missionary activities,” according to federal officials. In reality, the government feared the political influence of the missionaries who had cautioned the Indians against certain agreements in the past.

The Choctaws expressed dissatisfaction with the land they were offered in the West. Further, they asked for other *concessions*, such as permanent security guarantees. The commissioners threatened to close negotiations and reminded the Choctaws that they could remain in the East and be subject to the oppressive state laws.

The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek was signed on December 27, 1830, with the following provisions.

1. *Choctaws would surrender 10,423,130 acres in Mississippi.*
2. They would receive a similar amount of acreage in Indian Territory.
3. Removal would take place over a three-year period, removing approximately one-third of the tribe each year.
4. The government would pay all expenses of removal, furnish transportation and supplies, and provide *subsistence* in the new land for one year.
5. *Choctaw lands would be protected against intruders in Indian Territory.*
6. The government would provide a $20,000 *annuity* for 20 years, as well
as a continuation of all past annuities.

7. The government would provide funds to educate 40 Choctaw children per year for 20 years; $2,500 would be provided for the hiring of three teachers for Choctaw schools each year as well.

8. The government would make available $10,000 for the erection of necessary public buildings in Indian Territory.

9. Each Choctaw family would receive personal, domestic, and farm articles they would need for beginning a new life in the West.

10. Land gifts would be made to chiefs.

11. Choctaws who wished to remain in Mississippi would be given land allotments there and made citizens of the state.

The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek firmly established government policy on Indian removal. Jefferson had hoped for voluntary removal. Calhoun had hoped that education would show the Indians the desirability of it. Jackson, however, believed it was necessary and desirable and he forced the issue.

**REMOVAL BEGINS.** A small band of Choctaws left immediately for their new homes in the West. They were tired of the dissension in the tribe and of the intrusion by whites, and they were anxious to obtain choice lands in Indian Territory. For most of the tribe, however, the political dissension continued, clouded by further confusion and distress over the removal issues.

Land was selected and approved by the tribe. The government counted 18,635 Indians, whites married to Indians, and slaves belonging to the Indians to be removed.

Secretary of War John Eaton was replaced in 1831 by Lewis Cass, who knew little about removal procedures, and removal was delayed. The first party of 4,000 finally left for Indian Territory in October, 1831. Divided into three groups, the last of the party arrived at their destination in
March, 1832. Two hundred and fifty had died on the nightmarish trip.

SECOND REMOVAL. Another change took place in the government with the resignation of Secretary Cass. John Robb, Acting Secretary of War, declared that the cost of the first removal handled by civilian contractors had been too high. He ordered the army to carry out the second removal, which again was not ready until October because of the many governmental changes and delays.

The second party, aware of the more ample supplies and better planning which had been provided them, left their eastern homes hopeful of a smooth and uneventful trip. Travel was slow because the government had decided that everyone who was not sick or elderly would have to walk. Hope disappeared when a cholera epidemic struck the group. Routes of subgroups were changed in an attempt to avoid the epidemic, and large groups were divided. Still, the dreaded disease took its toll, along with all of the poor conditions suffered by the first group.

From an economic standpoint, however, when the second removal was
completed in February, it was more successful than the first removal had been. More Indians had been moved for less money. However, human suffering had been worse, and the death toll was higher.

**THIRD REMOVAL.** Preparations were made for the third removal, but news of the suffering of the first two parties had reached the Choctaws in Mississippi. Many refused to go, fearing for their lives. In October, 1833, only about 900 Choctaws reported for removal, and their trip was no better than the first two had been. A boiler explosion aboard a riverboat killed several so that some two-thirds of the group refused to board another boat. Instead, they walked overland through heavy rains without adequate supplies. Disease and exposure again took their toll. Despite these tragedies, the third group traveled more quickly than the first two. They arrived in Indian Territory in December, just before Christmas.

Although thousands of Choctaws remained in the East, the official government removal was over, as the treaty had provided only for a three-year endeavor. William Ward was the agent in charge of registering those who wished to remain in Mississippi. He shuffled and reshuffled papers so that only a few were ever actually registered, and removals continued unofficially. Pressure from whites succeeded in sending small groups westward periodically until the Civil War.

**PROTESTS OF INHUMANE TREATMENT.** Many whites who witnessed the suffering experienced by the Choctaws on the “Trail of Tears” wrote to officials in Washington protesting the inhumane conditions of the removal. One farmer wrote of giving a group of starving Indians permission to enter his pumpkin field. “These [pumpkins] they ate raw with the greatest avidity [eagerness],” he said, pointing out that, even though
the Choctaws were starving, they refused to enter the field without his permission.

In Washington, Elbert Herring, head of the War Department’s new Bureau of Indian Affairs, said, “The humane policy . . . adopted by the government with respect to the Indian tribes . . . is now in operation . . .” The government chose to close its eyes to the cruel treatment and neglect of the Choctaws and other removing tribes. It also closed its eyes to the treatment of those who chose to remain in the East, who eventually lost most of their land.

In the West, the survivors of the removal were stunned and grief-stricken. The divisions that had rocked the tribe in the East were still taking their toll, and confusion reigned for a time. Soon, however, these people, who had been pushed out of their homeland and deposited in a country about which they knew very little, rallied and reorganized. They adopted a new constitution based on the Constitution of the United States. They elected officials and started new lives. They built homes and schools and churches. They raised crops and opened businesses. They made their own laws and successfully governed themselves, despite white interference, for three-quarters of a century — until the white man’s hunger for land once again surrounded them.

**DISSENSION AMONG THE CREEKS.** The Creek tribe also experienced many problems. In fact, their internal strife was even greater than that of the Choctaws. The Creeks were divided into two distinct factions. The Lower Creeks were mixed-bloods who were led by the McIntosh family. The Upper Creeks were full-bloods who were led by Opothleyahola. In 1811, the Creek Council passed a measure imposing the death penalty on anyone who signed agreements ceding Creek lands without approval of the Council. The tribe had already lost a great deal of its land through several treaties signed since 1802.

The Lower Creeks, who resided in Georgia, found themselves subject to government pressure, as the Choctaws had been, following the signing of the Georgia Compact. The Upper Creeks in Alabama were having similar problems. Everywhere, the Creeks were surrounded by white settlements.

**TECUMSEH.** In 1811, Tecumseh, a Shawnee chief from the North, visited the Creeks and encouraged a tribal **alliance** and Indian Confederacy. By uniting, Tecumseh believed the Indians could stop the continual
encroachment of the whites onto their lands. The Creek Council refused to support the confederacy, but Tecumseh's visit further divided the tribe. Those who supported the Shawnee chief's views and who would make war on the whites to protect their lands and possibly to regain lost acres were called "conservatives." Those who opposed Tecumseh's views and who approved of the white way of life and would sell Creek lands became known as "progressives."

**THE RED STICKS.** When the War of 1812 began, the Red Sticks began attacking white settlements. The Red Sticks were a group of conservative warriors who carried small, red-colored clubs which they believed were magic. When they attacked Fort Mims, Alabama, in 1813, Andrew Jackson was sent to stop them. Many loyal Creeks and others of the southeastern tribes fought with Jackson against the Red Sticks. Nevertheless, when the Red Sticks were defeated, the entire Creek tribe suffered. Signed in August, 1814, the Treaty of Fort Jackson required the tribe to **cede** much of its land in Alabama and southern Georgia.
EXECUTION OF WILLIAM McINTOSH. William McIntosh had helped pass the law in 1811 requiring the death of anyone who sold tribal lands. However, he became convinced that the only chance for the survival of the tribe was to sell their remaining lands and move west. Managing to have himself named sole tribal chief, McIntosh led his followers in signing the Treaty of Indian Springs on February 12, 1825. Although the Indian commissioners knew that the treaty did not represent the main body of the tribe, they presented it to the President, who sent it to Congress for ratification. The treaty called for the exchange of Creek lands in Georgia and Alabama for land in Indian Territory.

The Creek Council met and passed judgment against William McIntosh. On May 1, one hundred Creek warriors surrounded the McIntosh home and set fire to it. When the fire forced McIntosh outside, the death sentence was carried out. He was shot and killed in his own doorway.

A NEW TREATY. When President John Quincy Adams learned of the Creek hostility against the treaty, he invited tribal chiefs to Washington to draft another agreement. The Indian Springs Treaty was declared invalid. The new agreement called for ceding of Creek lands in Georgia and arranged for McIntosh’s followers to remove to the new land.

Pressure continued, and in March, 1832, Opothleyahola and six other chiefs signed a new agreement, ceding all their tribal lands east of the Mississippi River. They agreed to leave Alabama as soon as possible, and the government agreed to pay removal expense. The government further agreed that no Creeks would be forced to leave the state. Instead, they could select an allotment from former tribal lands and remain as state citizens.

FORCED REMOVAL. The next few years were chaotic. Division intensified as some groups prepared to move west while others were determined to stay in the East. Still others wanted to abandon Indian Territory and move into Texas. The government did not restrain whites from moving onto Creek lands, and there was fighting between the Indians and the settlers. The Seminoles were engaged in a war with the United States, and some groups of Creek warriors joined the Seminoles.

Brigadier General Winfield Scott was called upon to end the “Creek War,” and no one in the government was concerned with honoring the no-force clause of the treaty. Some 15,000 Creeks were rounded up and moved west, 2,500 of them in chains. When the first group reached
Montgomery, Alabama, in July, 1836, the *Advertiser* reported, “To see the remnant of a once mighty people, fettered and chained together — forced to depart from the land of their Fathers into a country unknown to them, is of itself sufficient to move the stoutest heart.”

Not only did the Creeks lose many of their people on the trip west, but also at Fort Gibson, in the spring of 1837, where some 3,500 of them died from exposure and disease because of the unpreparedness of western officials.

Furthermore, when the newcomers arrived in Indian Territory, the McIntosh group had already been there several years. At first, there was disagreement over leadership, but soon the eastern Creeks agreed to submit themselves to the leadership of the western group under Principal Chief Roley McIntosh. Old wounds were slow to heal, and members of the two factions seldom mixed socially, but the tribe managed to live peacefully for the remainder of its sovereign (having political power; self-governing) days.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What agreements were made by both signing parties in the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek?
2. Discuss the signing of the Treaty of Indian Springs and conclude with why the treaty was declared *invalid*.
3. What was the Georgia Compact and what was its effect upon the taking of Indian lands?
4. What effects did the election of Andrew Jackson have upon removal?
5. What was the major provision of the Indian Removal Act of 1830?
6. How did the Indian Removal Act affect the Indians?
7. How did the Choctaws react to removal proposals?
8. What was the major resolution passed by the Creek Council of 1811?
9. Who were the Red Sticks? Give a complete answer.