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- The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent*  
*Interpreting a Continent: Voices from Colonial America* (with John DuVal)  
*Independence Lost: Lives on the Edge of the American Revolution*

# Independence LOST

*Lives on the Edge of the American Revolution*

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### *Seboy and Lachlan's Son*

Like most Creek boys, the son of Seboy and Lachlan was born into the fur trade business, but having Lachlan as a father meant that he was also born into a world of European merchants. Growing up in the rolling hills of the Coosa River Valley, young Alexander joined men on the hunt and in helping the women in the fields at planting and harvest time. Creek men were some of the best hunters in the southeast, and Lachlan exported hides from their hunt and imported European goods through his trading post on the Coosa River. Alexander's maternal uncles may have groomed the young man to be a Creek leader, modeling for him the ways of Creek speechmaking and governance as well as hunting and warfare, while his father taught him the intricacies of international trade.<sup>10</sup>

During the Seven Years' War, when Alexander was six, his father took him and his ten-year-old sister, Sophia, to Georgia from Creek Country. The children were accustomed to their father as a sporadic presence, coming for months at a time for business or diplomacy. Now they settled into his plantation and trading post just north of Augusta, an important crossroads in the global fur trade, near the paths that led to the Cherokees in one direction and the Creeks in another. At Lachlan's post, his son talked with visiting Creek and Scottish relatives. McGillivray learned the life of a white master as his father acquired more land and slaves, who worked the fields, processed cornmeal in the mill, and served as boatmen and skin dressers in the fur trade. Lachlan put two of his plantations in Alexander's name, so now the young man was a landed planter himself.<sup>10</sup>

Alexander McGillivray also spent time in Charleston, living with

Lachlan's brother and his family to improve his writing and math and to learn to read Latin and Greek. By 1765, he moved with his father to a new plantation, Vale Royal, just outside Savannah on the road to Augusta. There, dozens of slaves grew rice and raised horses. At Vale Royal and in Savannah, as an apprentice to the merchants Inglis and Hall, Alexander McGillivray learned the shipping side of the fur trade business.<sup>11</sup>

Alexander McGillivray could write and keep accounts like a colonial British businessman, yet he was born to be a Creek leader. His knowledge of multiple languages and his connections across the southeast would make him valuable to both Creeks and Europeans. His birth as a prominent Creek man coupled with his colonial education and business training placed him in an unusual position—powerful in his own right and a valuable leader and contact for Creeks and Europeans.

### *Dealing with the British*

At the same time that McGillivray came of age in two societies, the Creeks dealt increasingly with settler incursion in their territories. In the 1750s and 1760s, many a Creek band hunting to the east came across a settlement that had not been there the last time through, and Creek warriors repeatedly drove settlers back into Augusta or Savannah. As among the Chickasaws, Creek opinions varied about the Seven Years' War and the Cherokee-British War of 1760–1761. Many Creeks rallied to fight alongside the French and Cherokees against British incursions, especially in Georgia. But most Creeks interpreted the lessons of the previous decades as an argument against fighting Europeans. The pre-1715 era of war had done great damage, while Brims's policy of neutrality had brought prosperity. In 1759, Creeks recalled Brims as advising "hold fast all three, English, French, & Spanish" and "take care and never quarrel with any of them." Some Creeks also extended the philosophy to include Indian nations and, like Payamataha, began to make peace with Choctaws and Cherokees in the 1750s.<sup>12</sup>

When news reached them that the French had lost the Seven Years' War, Creeks realized Brims's strategy would be useless if the British had the power to dominate everyone else. The French had surrendered without consulting their Indian allies and were leaving North America entirely, and the Spanish were giving Pensacola and St. Augustine to the British. Rumors circulated that British troops intended "to kill your men, enslave your women and children, and settle your lands without leave." The French evacuation of Fort Toulouse left the Creeks without an official European trading post in Creek country and therefore without a dependable local source of trade and diplomatic gifts.<sup>13</sup>

Alexander McGillivray was still a teenager when Creek representatives assembled in Augusta in 1763 with Chickasaws (including Payamataha), Cherokees, Catawbas, Georgians, Carolinians, and Virginians to agree on boundary lines between British settlements and Indian lands. Creeks had never needed clear borders to ensure their sovereignty against the sparse Spanish and French settlements, but they knew that the British had thousands more people who wanted Indian land for their farms. At Augusta as well as in meetings at Mobile and Pensacola, Creeks explicitly and repeatedly instructed the British that West Florida settlements could extend no farther than three hundred yards from the coast, a boundary that barely included the forts of Mobile and Pensacola. Creeks enforced their border by killing uninvited people and cattle found inland.<sup>14</sup>

Creeks were savvy about power dynamics in the region. The few British troops stationed in the region could not counter the Creeks' thousands of warriors. British negotiator Major Robert Farmar spoke paternalistically of the king's "love and affection" while standing in front of Mobile's fort, which was in such a "ruinous condition" that its very gate was off its hinges.<sup>15</sup> Any Creeks looking in Farmar's direction could have noticed the discrepancy between rhetoric and reality. The British were, as the governor of West Florida admitted, "incapable of protecting the country against such powerful tribes, being hardly sufficient to defend the pitiful fortresses if attacked."<sup>16</sup> For their part, the Creeks "firmly believe they are now more powerful than any nation that might be tempted to invade them."<sup>17</sup>

Surprisingly, Creek relations with the British improved after the Seven Years' War. In an effort to control violence on the frontier, the British crown limited settlement west of the Appalachians. From his father, Alexander McGillivray could hear news of the "Proclamation Line" that the crown created in October 1763, beyond which settlement was restricted. When settlers violated the ban, the British government and the Creeks found themselves on the same side in seeking to contain settlement. At a congress in Pensacola in May 1765, Upper Creeks gave the British a more generous slice of land than they had two years earlier, from the coast to fifteen miles inland, but no more. In return, they received presents and guaranteed prices for trade. The Creek delegation explicitly retained the right to hunt in those lands. Their continued power is evident in a pledge the governor had to make that "if any white people settles beyond" the fifteen-mile zone, British officials "shall never enquire how they came to be killed."<sup>18</sup>

The British would not be the Creeks' only ally. Creeks had long traded at Spanish Pensacola and St. Augustine and even sent delegations to Havana and Mexico City. Making peace with other Indians would be harder. Some Creeks apparently blamed the Chickasaws and even the Cherokees and Choctaws for the British victory in the Seven Years' War. Payamataha's efforts at Augusta in 1763 paved the way for a Chickasaw-Creek peace, but a full-blown war broke out between the Creeks and Choctaws. Part of the reason was the desire of each for a monopoly over trade at Pensacola and Mobile.<sup>19</sup>

### *Lachlan's Loyalties*

When Lachlan McGillivray's Georgia neighbors began to protest British taxes and land policies, his allegiances were complicated. In 1765, British Parliament passed the Stamp Act, which required that colonists pay a tax (signified by a stamp) on all printed documents, including newspapers, pamphlets, wills, playing cards, and royal land grants. The Seven Years' War and Pontiac's War had been costly, and Parliament needed revenue to retire the war debt. Parliament had levied new taxes in England on stamps, windows, malt, and cider, pil-

ing new taxes on one of the most heavily taxed populations in the world. In contrast, Britons living in the colonies paid only import and export duties but no direct taxes to the empire. Surely they could share some of the pain—or so went the logic of Prime Minister George Grenville. But the Stamp Act of 1765 sparked dissent among colonists already unhappy about the Proclamation of 1763's restrictions on settlement west of the Appalachians. The ten thousand soldiers patrolling the line seemed an affront to all the reasons British colonists had fought the French in the Seven Years' War. In 1766, British subjects throughout the empire were relieved when Parliament repealed the Stamp Act and then were disgruntled again a year later when Parliament enacted duties on tea and several other imported goods. While many people found these import duties more palatable than the Stamp Act's direct tax, boycotts of the goods in question began in Boston, Philadelphia, New York, and more than a dozen other cities.

By the 1770s Lachlan McGillivray was an elected member of the Georgia legislature representing constituents who deplored both Parliament's taxes and the Proclamation Line. Lachlan opposed the taxes, but he had no interest in western lands. His plantation was safely near Georgia's border with South Carolina, and his fur trade and kin interests inclined him to support Creek land rights. Like many people who became loyalists, Lachlan supported the early tax protests but not rebellion and revolution. When shots were fired at Lexington and Concord in April 1775, Lachlan chaired a meeting to discuss Parliament's refusal to repeal the Coercive Acts, enacted to punish Massachusetts after the Boston Tea Party. The Georgia meeting passed resolutions that "the present acts of Parliament tending to raise a revenue in America are grievances" and that "we will do all that we legally and constitutionally may to obtain redress of those grievances." That fall, Lachlan's neighbors elected him to Georgia's provincial congress, an extralegal body called to decide whether to send representatives to the Continental Congress. Lachlan and his fellow delegates chose not to, so representatives from only twelve colonies met in Philadelphia as the Second Continental Congress and in 1775 created an army.<sup>20</sup>

Needing the empire for security and markets, Georgia could easily

have joined East and West Florida in staying out of the rebellion. But enough Georgians grew radical that Georgia moved toward revolution. Lachlan's support of protest by legal and constitutional means began to seem suspiciously pro-British. Indeed, his business interests depended on ties with Britain, and he had good friends among crown officials. He could see violence escalating around him. In July 1775, a mob dragged a man to Savannah's town square for supposedly drinking a toast damning the rebel cause. The mob poured hot tar on the man, covered him in feathers, and carted him through the streets for hours, forcing him repeatedly to toast American liberty. Lachlan soon became a target, too, for arguing against Georgia's participation in the boycotts and revolution. His neighbors seized his property and arrested him. When British ships entered Savannah's harbor in 1776, Lachlan escaped and boarded a British ship along with Georgia's royal governor.<sup>21</sup>

As their father sailed away, Alexander and Sophia McGillivray headed the other direction. Their father's slave, a man by the name of Charles, led them home. Leaving Savannah on a tributary path, they joined the Upper Trading Path as it came south from Augusta and Charleston. For a month, they rode through forests of fir and crossed the Ogeechee, the Oconee, and the Altamaha. The small party rested in the Lower Creek towns before continuing northwest to Little Tallassee.<sup>22</sup>

### *Toward the Revolution?*

By the time the Revolutionary War broke out, Alexander McGillivray's relatives in the Creek Wind clan and the Scottish McGillivray clan both had more reason to oppose the rebellious American colonists than to overthrow the empire that claimed them all. The empire could protect Creek independence against encroaching colonists and provide economic opportunities to ambitious Scotsmen in imperial trade. This child of Creek and Scottish ancestry would fight wholeheartedly for the British. After the war, he would promote Creek national independence and a confederation of Indian nations committed

to protecting their common territorial independence. He would become a leader who, like Payamataha, had a clear vision of who he was and what he wanted for his people. But in 1777, Alexander McGillivray was a young man eager to fight and motivated far more by anger at the rebels for the loss of his father's land and business than allegiance to the Creeks.<sup>23</sup>