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THE DAILY HOME

3A

Gravesite sheds light on early settler, Indian relationships in area

By **DARON HARRIS**
Special to The Daily Home

Visitors to Cheaha State Park know the name of Chinnabee as a familiar campsite, lake and hiking trail, but during his lifetime, Chief Selocta Chinnabee was a well-known figure in the early days of Talladega and a bonafide hero, having aided Andrew Jackson in his fight against the hostile "red-sticks" of the Creek War of 1813-1814.

Jackon himself awarded Selocta a field rank of Brigadier General in command of friendly Creek forces and later referred to him as "the bravest man I have ever seen." According to Rev. Joseph Camp's memoir, "An Insight Into an Insane Asylum," Chief Selocta and two others became the heroes of the Battle of Talladega during night escape through enemy lines surrounding Fort Leslie. Disguising themselves as rooting hogs, they escaped north to warn Jackson of the fort's impending peril. Selocta then guided Jackson and his army back to the site of present day Talladega for a major victory, much to the relief of the besieged fort occupants.

Unlike the fate of many fellow Creek Indians following the war, Chief Chinnabee and his family as "friendly Indians" were allowed to live out their days in their home at Chinnabee Town, now known as McElderry Station, near Munford at the intersection of McElderry Road and Twin Churches Road on the edge of Cheaha State Park.

For generations of people entering or exiting the state park via McElderry Road, Chief Chinnabee, or more precisely, his grave monument, has either greeted them "welcome" or "goodbye," respectively. Since the chief died in 1835, he has rested in the exact spot now marked by a handsome grave monument consisting of a concrete slab, large triangular fieldstone boulder and a bronze bas-relief portrait of the chief marked simply as "Chinnabee Selocta Indian Chief."

On a recent storm-threatening afternoon, I visited the gravesite along with local artist and fellow Native American history enthusiast Tommy Moorehead. Tommy, now retired, served for over two decades as the Artist-In-

Residence for Talladega and head of Talladega's Heritage Hall Museum and Art Center.

He is particularly passionate when it comes to talking about history surrounding the Creek War and has recently produced several regional art exhibitions showcasing his work using these historical events as subject matter. We had been discussing such a visit for some time with the hope of being able to take charcoal rubbings directly from the monument's sculpture.

In talking, the two of us realized just how huge the legend of Chief Chinnabee still loomed and how many colorful and conflicting stories are floating about regarding his life and death. We also realized that the grave monument itself also held its own secrets.

Despite darkening skies and with increasing thunder closing in, the clouds stayed at bay for the duration of our visit to Chinnabee's grave, and the raindrops only began to fall a few moments after we had removed our paper from the chief's face.

So what are some of the most prevalent mysteries surrounding Chief Selocta's life and death? Debate persists about whether or not he was the actual hero to warn Jackson of the peril at Fort Leslie and whether the "hog skin disguise" story is in fact hog wash.

Suffice it to say, I set about addressing this with some of the state and nation's acknowledged academic authorities pertaining to the Creek War, but the work of Rev. Joseph Camp is the best source, as he gave first-hand accounts of these tales as both a friend of Chief Selocta and the nephew of the picket guard at Jackson's camp the night Selocta, Jim Fife, and a third companion came in to warn the general, fresh from their escape from Fort Leslie. Interestingly enough, it was beanskin that was used to simulate hog skin during the famous hog-rooting escape.

The monument is a bit of a mystery since it possesses neither a date or any maker's mark. I have painstakingly pored over the archival and genealogical collections in both the

Talladega and Anniston libraries in order to piece together a timeline of its origins. There is no definitive source as to the exact date for its creation, and a good hunch that the Daughters of the American Revolution (Andrew Jackson Chapter) had something to do with its creation did not pan out.

The marker's image is no mystery; as it is taken from Charles Bird King's well known 1825 painted portrait of Selocta done in Washington, D.C., when the chief visited the capital. The Smithsonian Institute in its 1993 "S.O.S." survey of Alabama outdoor sculptures and monuments estimated the marker's origin to be around 1900, but it was unable to determine the sculptor's identity.

Nevertheless, it is a DAR member, Ms. Ada Camp Dowling, who served with him under Andrew Jackson. Landmarks of Talladega County, which outlines the marker's origins. Much of her work was based on first-hand interviews of Minnie McElderry (1851-1950) who was daugh-



Tommy Moorehead poses with a rubbing of the Chief Chinnabee bronze plaque.

ter of Colonel Thomas McElderry (1790 - 1883), a friend of Selocta who served with him under Andrew Jackson.

After the Creek War, Col. McElderry settled in Chinnabee Town and purchased much of Chief Chinnabee's land, allowing him to live in his log hut home that stood on the present-day site of the monument. The McElderry family plantation big house still stands atop the hill along with the McElderry family cemetery overlooking McElderry Station.

According to custom, Chief Chinnabee's family buried him and two other deceased family members in the floor of their log home. Upon removal to the Indian Nation of the west, Chinnabee's granddaughter asked the McElderrys to protect the graves, and indeed, old Colonel McElderry had to fire his shotgun more than once at would-be grave robbers seeking rumored Indian treasure or trea-

sure maps buried with the chief. After the remnants of the log hut finally rotted away, Miss Minnie's younger brother, Hugh McElderry (1859 - 1931), poured the monument's concrete base to protect the graves, and he erected the plaque-faced stone. While we don't have a precise date from Miss Minnie's oral account, it seems reasonable to assume that this would have happened sometime after 1880 when Hugh would have been old enough to take responsibility for such an undertaking, one that would have required a considerable amount of expense, time and materials. The educated guess of a date seems to be in fair keeping with the Smithsonian's 1900 estimate.

Amidst the sad backdrop of one of America's most shameful chapters surrounding the Trail of Tears, there is a bright spot seen in the apparent lifelong friendship and respect shared between Chief Chinnabee and Thomas McElderry and family.



Chief Selocta Chinnabee's grave marker is at McElderry Station.

Toddler fights salmonella after family dogs ate contaminated dog food

By **MICHAEL GORDON**
McClintock Tribune

CHARLOTTE, N.C. - It took years for Brian and Elizabeth Hall to have their first baby.

It will take years more for their daughter to get well. Amy Hall turned 2 last month, battling a debilitating form of salmonella that, according to her parents, surfaces every two to three weeks and is expected to plague her for years to come.

She got it from her family's dogs. The pets, Amy's parents later learned, became infected in 2012 from eating

her homecoming from a Charlotte hospital, Brian and Elizabeth's newborn daughter returned. This time, the infant was rushed to the emergency room.

The Halls, who married in 2006, had been trying for several years to have a baby when Elizabeth became pregnant in fall 2011.

In late February, four months before Amy's birth, the couple needed food for their first "children": Bailey, a Shetland sheepdog, and Abby, a greyhound. They bought their standard brand, Apex, which is produced in Gaston, a small town in suburban Columbia where the Missouri-based Diamond has one of its production facilities.

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