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BOOK REVIEWS

Pintlala's Cold Murder Case: The Death of Thomas Meredith in 1812

GARY BURTON

Buried not far from the banks of Pinchona Creek in southwest Montgomery County and very near the site of Sam Moniac's tavern on the Old Federal Road are the remains of Thomas Meredith. His murder in late March 1812 by militant Creek Indians inflicted a trauma on Meredith's westward-traveling family, a trauma for which they were unprepared. Exactly what happened to Meredith along the banks of the Pinchona, a stream punctuated by cypress knees and garrisoned by trees laden with Spanish moss, is cloistered in mystery.

What is clear is that the killing of Thomas Meredith quickly became a high-profile case, claiming the attention and energy of federal officials. Accounts of the incident vary, and even the number of people in Meredith's party is uncertain. The Meredith murder became even more significant because of two other incendiary acts of violence that occurred soon after: Arthur (or William) Lott, a former Georgia legislator, was killed in Macon County, and members of the Manley and Crawley families were killed or captured on the Duck River in Tennessee. This trio of incidents became flashpoints that eventually ignited the Red Stick War in 1813.

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Today, nearly two hundred years after the Meredith murder, two issues related to the event need resolution. First, clarification related to the location of the crime is called for, and second, and more important, Sam Moniac's contention that the killing was accidental when an eyewitness contended otherwise needs to be examined.

On April 6, 1812, William Eustis, the Secretary of War, received a report announcing that Thomas Meredith Sr. had been murdered by militant Creeks. The official reporting of the murder came from Col. Benjamin Hawkins, who had been appointed by President George Washington in 1796 as General Superintendent of Indian Affairs and who served in his post with prominence and distinction. Hawkins had lived among the Creek Indians, was especially familiar with the Creeks who lived in the Mississippi Territory, and was well traveled in the area that became central and south Alabama. During the presidency of Thomas Jefferson, Hawkins received federal support for implementing a plan to "civilize" the Indians, particularly encouraging their adoption of European agricultural methods.[1]

In his 1812 report, Hawkins described the sixty-two-year-old Meredith as a "respectable old man."[2] Other details, however, are not found in the official correspondence from Hawkins, who left much unsaid about the man murdered on the banks of the Pinchona. What he did write was:

> On the 26th ult. Thomas Meredith, Sen. a respectable old man, travelling with his family to the Mississippi territory, was murdered on the post road, at Kittome, a creek 150 miles from this. Sam Macnac [*sic*] a half breed of large property, who keeps entertainment on the road, at whose house Meredith is buried, calls it an accident. Thomas Meredith, son of the deceased, was an eye witness, says, "there was murder committed on the body of Thomas Meredith, Sen. at Kittome

[1]H. Thomas Foster, ed., *The Collected Works of Benjamin Hawkins, 1789–1810* (Tuscaloosa, 2003), 9–10; Florette Henri, *The Southern Indians and Benjamin Hawkins, 1796–1816* (Norman, Okla., 1986), 209, 239–40.

[2]Meredith's birth year was most likely 1750.

> creek, by Maumouth and others, who appeared to be in liquor; that is, Maumouth himself, but none of the others. The company were all on the other side of the creek, except my father and an old man. They fell on him without interruption, and killed him dead as he was trying to make his escape in a canoe, and sorely wounded the other, with knives and sticks, so much so, that I fear we shall have to bury him on the way." The Speaker of the nation and some of his Executive council were with me, returning home, at the time I received the communication, which I read to them, and directed, on their return, to convene their chiefs, and cause justice to be done without delay. Maumouth is an old chief, known to all of us. Several travelers have passed and repassed since, and I hear of no further interruption.[3]

On the fateful Thursday, March 26, 1812, Meredith and his family were passing through Creek Nation territory, located in the district of Alabama. Having safely traveled from the Fairfield District of South Carolina, where they had lived for two decades, the large Meredith family, like hundreds of others, was caught up in the euphoria of a new life in the Mississippi Territory. The compelling lure of land and the opportunity to start life anew held a powerful magnetism. For most of the journey these families traversed the newly improved Federal Road or post road. The one-time horse path now accommodated wheeled vehicles and was heavily used. Hawkins reported that "between October 1811 and March of the next year, 233 vehicles and 3,716 people had passed his Indian agency on the Flint River, heading west."[4]

[3]*American State Papers*: *Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States . . . Indian Affairs* (Washington, D.C., 1832), 1:809, also available online at http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsplink.html. Sam Moniac's name has various spellings in documents of the era, including Manacs, Macnac, and Manack.

[4]Henry deLeon Southerland and Jerry Elijah Brown, *The Federal Road through Georgia, the Creek Nation, and Alabama, 1806–1836* (Tuscaloosa, 1989), 39.

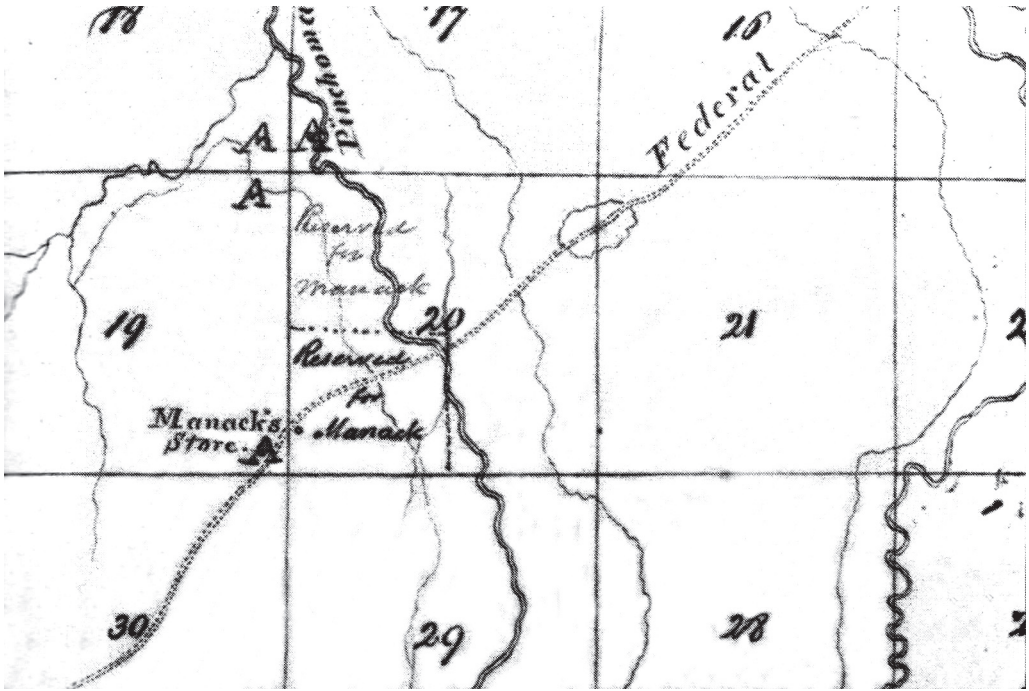
How many family members comprised the Meredith party is unclear. Meredith and his wife Abigail, and most, if not all, of their children and their spouses, along with slaves, made the trip. Eventually the family settled in Amite County, Mississippi Territory, although a few Merediths migrated on to Louisiana. Tragically, they would do so without their patriarch.

One can only speculate about what provoked this confrontation between the militant Creeks and Meredith that culminated in his murder and left his unnamed traveling companion with life-threatening injuries. Contributing to the provocation, most likely, was the Federal Road itself. Traveling was arduous for those early migrants. Crossing creeks and rivers was challenging. Primitive bridges and causeways had been quickly and crudely constructed. According to historians of the road, "timbers would be placed across the road and dirt packed between these logs to complete the causeways and keep horses from bogging to their bellies in the swamps."[5] Improvements to the Federal Road allowed for easier travel and thus enabled the encroachment of white settlers, who threatened the territory, traditions, and heritage of the Indians. Every inch of progress in road construction was salt in the wounds of those who despised such sweeping changes.

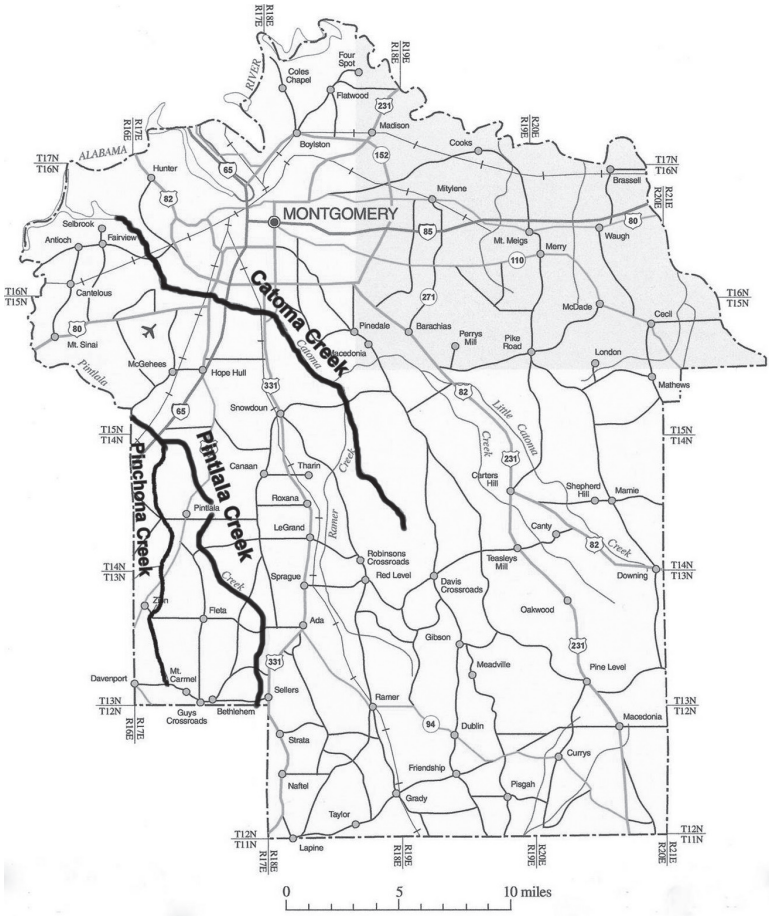
Compounding the agitation over the road was Sam Moniac, who was at that time one of the wealthiest mixed-blood Creeks in the area. He owned vast amounts of property and cattle and was the proprietor of a "house of entertainment" (a tavern or inn) on the Federal Road. Moniac had been a supporter of the federal government. In 1790 he accompanied Creek chief Alexander McGillivray, along with twenty-two other warriors and chiefs, to New York and signed a controversial treaty selling land that belonged to all of the Creeks.[6] Moniac's dealings with the federal government, along with the financial success his dealings brought, caused much resentment among the traditionalist Creeks, who distrusted the wealthy mixed-blood Indian because of his alliance with the intrusive whites. They opposed the changes to their culture introduced by Creeks seeking accommodation with

[5]Ibid., 23.

[6]*American State Papers . . . Indian Affairs*, 1:809; Henri, *Southern Indians and Benjamin Hawkins*, 12.



Map showing the location of Moniac's store or tavern on the Federal Road and Pinchona Creek. U.S. Land Office, Cahaba Land District, Plat Book Two, 1821–1827, 85. Map courtesy of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery.



Locations of Catoma, Pintlala, and Pinchona creeks. Map courtesy of Alabama Maps, the Cartographic Research Laboratory, University of Alabama, http://alabamamaps.ua.edu/index.html.

white settlers and the federal government. On March 26, 1812, their culture and that of the white settlers clashed at Pinchona Creek, resulting in the killing of Thomas Meredith.[7]

That day, most members of Meredith's party crossed to the west side of Pinchona Creek near present-day Pintlala. Lagging behind the larger party, having not yet crossed the Pinchona, were Meredith, his young son, and another man. These three met a group led by an old Creek chief, Maumouth, whom Hawkins reported "appeared to be in liquor." The existing antagonism between the whites and the militant Creeks apparently provoked the intoxicated chief to commit the crime, but there may be more to this story. If all but three in the Meredith party had crossed the creek earlier with all their gear and possessions, leaving the three men to cross in a canoe, then it may have been that Maumouth and his followers saw an opportune moment for harassment and taunting. Because much rain had fallen in the late winter and spring of 1812, perhaps Maumouth saw an opportunity to extort a high price from the Meredith clan by offering to assist them in the crossing of the Pinchona. While it is speculative, the possibility of resistance by the Merediths may have ignited the fuse of the Creeks' anger. After all, the Meredith family had accumulated considerable experience in crossing creeks since leaving South Carolina, and had negotiated the Catoma and Pintlala creeks before arriving at the Pinchona.

The experience of Margaret Ervin Austill the previous year is instructive and enlightening when examining the Meredith murder. In 1811, as a young child, Austill traveled with her family from Washington County, Georgia, toward Louisiana. She recorded her memories of that trip, noting:

> Then the rain set in, not a day without rain until we crossed the Alabama; there were no roads, and mud and water large creeks to cross with slender bridges made by the Indians, which they demanded toll at a

[7]Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733–1816* (New York, 1999), 260.

> high price for every soul that crossed a bridge, and often rather than pay, the men would make their negroes cut trees and make a bridge, which gave the Indians great anger, and they would threaten us with death.[8]

The attack on Meredith came just one year after Austill's experience, and a disagreement over paying tolls could have been a factor leading to the incident. Yet, regardless of the motivation, the end result is clear. Meredith's young son, Thomas Meredith Jr., who witnessed the death of his father, stated that the perpetrator had killed his father, indeed, had "killed him dead."

In addition to uncertainty with regard to motive, contradictory information about the exact location of the murder has added to the confusion about this incident. Some of that confusion originated from the official report submitted by Benjamin Hawkins. Although Hawkins had resided in the Creek towns of Tuckabatchee (now present-day Tallassee) and Coweta (near present-day Phenix City), he had moved the Creek Agency to the Flint River near what is now Roberta, Georgia.

Hawkins reported the incident even though he was far removed from the scene of the Meredith murder, a fact he acknowledged in his report. Perhaps because of this distance, he misplaced the scene of the crime to the post road at Kittome Creek.[9] Kittome was a variant spelling for Catoma. Sam Moniac, however, did not operate his place of entertainment on the Catoma. His business was located in present-day Pintlala, on the Federal Road near where it crosses Pinchona Creek. Many variant spellings and pronunciations exist for both creeks. For example, Catoma Creek was also known as Auke Thome, Catama, Catatma, and Kit-to-me. Alternative names for Pinchona Creek include Pinchoma, Pinchon, Pinchonee, Pinchorna, Pinchunc, and Pinchony.

[8]Margaret Ervin Austill, "Life of Margaret Ervin Austill," *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 6 (Spring 1944): 93.
[9]*American State Papers . . . Indian Affairs*, 1:809.

The problem with inconsistent spelling and variant names frustrated H. Thomas Foster when he assembled *The Collected Works of Benjamin Hawkins*. Foster chose to rely strictly on the phonetic spelling provided by Hawkins, conceding "There are multiple spellings for almost every proper name. . . . I prefer to leave the interpretation of place-name identification to the reader." In his records, Hawkins provided a list of creeks contingent to the post road in soon-to-be Alabama Territory; the list highlights the problem of variations in spelling. For example, the three major creeks in southwest Montgomery County are listed as Kit-to-me, Pilth-lau-le, and Pinchunc.[10] Given the heightened tension of the times and the prevalence of fear and paranoia among travelers on the Federal Road, the distortion of facts is easily understood. Without standardized spelling and pronunciation, misinformation would have easily been transmitted from the vicinity of Pinchona Creek, where the murder occurred, to the Creek Agency on the Flint River in Georgia, where Hawkins resided.

Confusion over the location of the murder was perpetuated by Luke Ward Conerly in his study of Pike County, Mississippi, the area in which some of Meredith's descendants eventually settled. Without the benefit of government documents, Conerly misplaced the site of the murder on the Georgia border. He wrote: 'John Hart married Martha Meredith from Fairfield District, South Carolina. Her father was killed while moving to Mississippi by an Indian at the Chattahoochie River, who threw a chunk at another man, striking him and killing him, which resulted in the Indian killing."[11] The erroneous identification of the crime scene that began with the official report made by Hawkins was also perpetuated by Albert James Pickett in his 1851 *History of Alabama*, and Gen. Thomas S. Woodward in his 1859 *Reminiscences of the Creek, or Muscogee Indians.*[12]

[10]Foster, *Collected Works of Benjamin Hawkins*, xi, 85s.

[11]Luke Ward Conerly, *Pike County, Mississippi, 1798–1876: Pioneer Families and Confederate Soldiers: Reconstruction and Redemption* (1909; repr., Madison, Ga., 2008), 95.

[12]Albert James Pickett, *The History of Alabama, and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi, from the Earliest Period* (1851; repr., Sheffield, Al., 1896), 516, 518; Thomas Simpson Woodward, *Woodward's Reminiscences of the Creek, or Muscogee Indians, Contained in Letters to Friends in Georgia and Alabama* (Montgomery, 1859).

These errors call for clarification. The points of crossing of the Federal Road by Catoma Creek and the point of the crossing of the Federal Road at Pinchona Creek are about ten miles apart, and the store or tavern operated by Sam Moniac was only a few yards from the Pinchona. Other sources about the incident clearly state that the murder occurred near Moniac's place of business: Henry Southerland and Jerry Brown note, "southwest of Colonel Wood's the next stop was Sam Manack's house, on Pinchony Creek"; Benjamin W. Griffith writes, "the incident occurred near Sam Moniac's inn, which he kept for the accommodation of travelers on the post road, and Meredith was buried on the inn grounds"; and Gregory A. Waselkov asserts, "Thomas Meredith was murdered near Sam Moniac's stand in late March." Waselkov also provides cartographical evidence that locates Moniac's Inn near the Pinchona.[13]

We learn much about Thomas Meredith from his last will and testament. After Meredith's death his family moved on to settle in the Mississippi Territory, but the last will and testament of Thomas Meredith Sr., dated September 15, 1808, was taken back to Fairfield County, South Carolina, and probated in Winnsboro on September 28, 1812. The will stipulated the payment of his debts and specified his slaves by name when designating the children who should acquire them. His bequests of real estate, livestock, feather beds, and furniture may have been typical of plantation owners of his day. An insight into Meredith's occupation is provided in the will as he noted that his three sons should have "my blacksmith tools that each one may do their work."[14]

The will provides a snapshot of the kind of life the Merediths had in South Carolina. They owned a modest estate with a plantation house complete with furniture; stock comprised of horses, a mare, cows, hogs, and calves; and cash in shillings and dollars. In his will,

[13]Southerland and Brown, *Federal Road through Georgia*, 94; Benjamin W. Griffith, *McIntosh and Weatherford, Creek Indian Leaders* (Tuscaloosa, 1988), 80; Gregory A. Waselkov, *A Conquering Spirit: Fort Mims and the Redstick War of 1813–1814* (Tuscaloosa, 2006), 88, 209.

[14]Meredith, Thomas of Fairfield District, Fairfield County Will Typescript (MSS Will: Fairfield District Estate Record Book D, vol. 6, 159; Estate Packet: file 25, PKG. 355), South Carolina Department of Archives and History (hereafter cited as Meredith Will, S.C.). The will may also be viewed online at http://www.archivesindex.sc.gov/onlinearchives.

Meredith expressed his hope that his three sons (James, Thomas, and John) would direct the operation of the plantation, while parceling out the "things of this world" to his wife, sons, and daughters. The property distribution included five slaves: Jack, Isaac, Jacob, Jinney, and Marcus (affectionately referred to as "Old Marcus"). Intentions were expressed to keep the slaves together as long as circumstances permitted such an allowance.[15]

Land grants provide further insight into the life of Meredith and his family. The family's collective decision to pull up roots and transplant themselves to the territorial environment of the Old Southwest surely had been a difficult one. Meredith sacrificed a good deal. In leaving South Carolina, he left behind at least 300 acres on Horse Branch in Camden District (now Fairfield County). In addition, he turned his back on 365 acres on the waters of Dutchman's Creek, also in Camden. The magnetism of a new life in the Mississippi Territory was strong enough to compel him and his family to forfeit the land and make the difficult journey that would cost him his life.[16]

Identifying the source of these land grants provides further information about Meredith. In all likelihood the land grants were a reward for his service in the Revolutionary War. On July 10, 1784, Meredith presented a claim for payment to Thomas Baker, justice of the peace. The claim was certified on the same day by General Thomas Sumter, under whom Meredith had served as a foot soldier for almost four months of militia duty in 1781–1782 in Orangeburg, South Carolina. Additionally, Meredith served thirty-one days as a lieutenant under Col. William Harden at the Battle of Four Holes (April 7 and 15, 1781).[17]

In addition to the will and land grants, Fairfield County court records also give insight into Meredith's life and involvements. The U.S.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Plats for land grants, April 10, 1786, series S213190, vol. 0018, page 00277, and January 31, 1787, series S213190, vol. 0018, page 00163, South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

[17]At Four Holes, seventy mounted men led by Maj. George Cooper stormed the loyalist post, taking twenty-six men captive. The British commander lost three men and was wounded himself. Americans sustained the loss of one man, and two were wounded. Annie Walker Burns, *Abstract of Pensions of South Carolina Soldiers of the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, and Indian Wars* (Washington, D.C., 1960).

Constitution was yet to be adopted when the minutes of the court in Fairfield County, South Carolina, introduced the name Thomas Meredith. The county court began functioning in 1785, and the next year Meredith appeared and continued to appear, indicating that he was in the center of much litigious activity.[18]

On January 25, 1786, Meredith was the plaintiff in a lawsuit in which he brought charges of slander against William Graves, James Graves, and Hugh Means. The thorny and complicated matter also included a charge against Meredith by Isaac Love. Unfortunately, no record exists concerning the nature of the charges. Resolution to the charges and countercharges did not occur until May when, over a four-day period, the court issued its ruling regarding each person involved.[19]

On May 9, petit jurors were seated with John McKinney as foreman. In the case Meredith vs. William Graves, the jury found in favor of Graves. The next day James Graves was dismissed from Meredith's suit, and Meredith was compelled to pay the court costs. The third day brought an interesting approach on the part of Meredith and his attorney. When the court was asked to rule on the matter of slander by Hugh Means (mistakenly spelled Minor in the court record), Meredith challenged McKinney's role as foreman. For whatever reason, McKinney was replaced by Richard Gladney, and the jury was impaneled. This time the jury ruled in Meredith's favor and awarded him one pound sterling. The defense attorney quickly sought an arrest of judgment, which was granted. The court then required that both the defense and prosecuting attorneys resume their arguments the next day.[20]

If there was drama to any degree in the back-and-forth litigation, it was not present the next day when the court referred the case to mediators John King and Ralph Jones. The court determined that the judgment of these two mediators was to be final, and their decision

[18]Brent Holcomb, *Fairfield County, South Carolina, Minutes of the County Court, 1785–1799* (Easley, S.C., 1981), 10–21, 65, 82–89, 92–94.
[19]Ibid., 11.
[20]Ibid., 17, 18, 21.

must have been agreeable to Meredith, for two of his children would soon marry Jones's children.[21]

Subsequent years found Meredith performing his civic duty as a juror for the Fairfield County Court. The tenor of the times can be seen in two judgments rendered by the juries on which Meredith served. On June 14, 1793, William Hollis and others were brought to trial, having been indicted for hog stealing. Those indicted other than Hollis were exonerated, but Hollis was found guilty and ordered to pay fifteen pounds by the next Tuesday at 1:00 p.m. If not paid, he would receive "25 lashes on his bare back at the public whipping post." The next day, Meredith participated in rendering a verdict against John McBride, who had been indicted for larceny. He was found guilty and given jail time until July 8, at which time he was to receive "ten lashes on his bare back" and was expected to pay the entire costs of the sum stolen.[22]

On a side note, in all the times Meredith appeared as plaintiff, defendant, or juror, he was in a courtroom presided over by members of the Winn family, whose most prominent member was Richard Winn. Fitz McMaster, in his *History of Fairfield County,* noted General Winn's valor in battle. While commanding a regiment of militia during the Revolutionary War, the firing became intense, and Winn turned to General John Davis, exclaiming, "Is not that glorious?" For Winn, the glory of the battlefield was later exchanged for life of public service, and the village of Winnsboro, named for his family, became the county seat.[23]

While court records from South Carolina provide some information about Meredith, early nineteenth-century Baptist documents offer even more clues. Minutes from the Charleston Baptist Association reveal that five months before Meredith was killed he attended their meeting, which was held in Columbia. When representatives from twenty-seven churches convened on Saturday, November 2, 1811,

[21]Ibid., 23.
[22]Ibid., 84, 85, 93.
[23]Fitz Hugh McMaster, *History of Fairfield County, South Carolina, from "Before the White Man Came" to 1942* (Columbia, S.C., 1946), 200.

Meredith was present as a messenger from the Wateree Creek Baptist Church, along with fellow messenger James Hart. The church's pastor, the Rev. Ralph Jones, was absent from the meeting, most likely because of poor health.[24]

The Wateree Creek Church typified many of that area and era. While the church had existed for many years—the first meeting house was built in 1770—it had relocated from its original site to a site about five and a half miles south of Winnsboro. The church was identified as a branch of the Congaree Church until 1803, when it was accepted as a member of the Charleston Baptist Association with the name Wateree Creek Baptist Church. This request for membership was made by Jones as early as 1799, and because Jones had spent much of his life as pastor of the church, many referred to the church as the Ralph Jones Meeting House. According to tabular records, the church had an average of between fifty and sixty members during the first decade of the 1800s. It often contributed financially to the Baptist missionary fund and, less often, to the association's education fund.[25]

The association records indicate that Thomas Meredith represented the Wateree Creek Church for first time as a messenger in 1803, and he attended the meeting every year from 1807 to 1811, with the exception of 1808. The summary record of churches consistently indicates that Meredith was a layperson in the Wateree Creek Church. He is never listed as a minister, and ministers were specifically designated in the associational records.

Each year during the annual gathering of church representatives Meredith found himself in the company of notable Baptist leaders, including the Rev. Dr. Richard Furman, pastor of First Baptist Church, Charleston, and founder of Furman University. Furman served as the association's moderator for many years. Other notable Baptists who made significant contributions and with whom Meredith rubbed shoulders were Dr. Jonathan Maxey, who had served as the second president of Brown University and who would be tapped to serve as

[24]Minutes of the Charleston Baptist Association, November 5, 1803, item 6, microform (hereafter cited as CBA minutes).
[25]Ibid.

president of the University of South Carolina, William B. Johnson, pastor of the Beaufort Church who served for twenty-seven years as president of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, and who in 1845 was elected as the first president of the Southern Baptist Convention, and Jesse Mercer, who was a prominent Baptist minister and founder of Mercer University.[26]

Meredith joined these and other Baptists in conducting business typical of early associational life: receiving and reading letters from corresponding associations, drafting circular letters, admitting new churches, hearing sermons, alerting churches to religious hucksters, and pronouncing moral judgments on social functions. Meredith surely heard Furman inform constituents about mission efforts among the Catawba Indians, including building a school. This work was led by the Rev. John Rooker. Furman shared with the messengers that funding for the school and mission work was tenuous, but he told them that he had approached the state's governor, Jared Irwin, who encouraged the association to ask for the state's financial assistance. Apparently progress was made at the school, for Rooker provided optimistic reports, including his 1810 report in which he produced "satisfactory specimens of pupils' writing."[27]

The 1811 meeting of the Charleston Baptist Association, the last Meredith attended, launched a study to assess the practicality of establishing a seminary, condemned the social practice of dancing schools and balls, and proclaimed the second Wednesday of March as a day of humiliation, fasting, and prayer among churches.[28] By mid-March of that year Meredith and his family would be well on their way, traveling the Federal Road into the heart of the Mississippi Territory, and by late March Meredith would be dead, murdered near Pinchona Creek.

Meredith's murder appears to be an open and shut case. There was a perpetrator, a victim, and an eyewitness. Those responsible for the crime were apprehended and executed. There was official documen-

[26]CBA minutes, October 31, 1807, item 4; November 5, 1808, item 4; November 4, 1809, items 3, 6; November 3, 1810, items 3, 4.
[27]CBA minutes, November 3, 1810, item 11.
[28]CBA minutes, November 2, 1811, items 9, 15, 19.

tation that brought closure to the crime. Yet, on an unofficial level, one unresolved matter remains.

In his correspondence to Secretary of War Eustis, Benjamin Hawkins reported that Sam Moniac called the killing an accident. Moniac's assertion was made in spite of the fact that Meredith's nine-year-old son gave an eyewitness account of the murder of his father by the Creek Indians.

The question then is why Moniac would declare the killing of Meredith to be accidental?[29] His rationale may have reflected a confluence of motives. First, on a practical and elemental level, Moniac knew that news of a murder near his tavern could possibly lead to rampant hysteria and adversely affect his business. Talk of the murder of a traveler in such close proximity to his place of "entertainment," where travelers found lodging, food, refreshment for horses, and other supplies, could potentially close his business down.

Second, Moniac's motives for asserting the killing was accidental may have been influenced by his own personal struggle with alcoholism. Ten years after the Meredith killing, in the aftermath of the Red Stick War and the defeat of the British, Moniac's alcoholism had accelerated to the point that it destroyed his life and left him destitute. While the loss of some of his property and possessions must be attributed to his loyalty to the federal government, which made him hugely unpopular in some Indian circles, Moniac's alcoholic behavior resulted in the loss of his remaining property. With impaired judgment, Moniac participated in a series of bad business deals until he was left penniless. Evidence of Moniac's behavior is documented in a letter from his relative, David Tate, to David Moniac, Sam's son who was serving as the first American Indian cadet at West Point.[30]

[29]Kathryn Braund postulates that "accident" was a euphemistic expression used by the Creeks. When Creek leaders said an accident or misfortune happened on the path, it meant that the incident was the action of an individual, not a premeditated act of war. This use of the words appears in other incidents involving Creeks. In 1767, Emistisiguo referred to the murder of a white man as an "unlucky accident." In 1766, the Oakchoy King used it in the same way: "as to accidents happening to white people in Regard to their Goods and other Mishaps." John T. Juricek, ed., *Early American Indian Documents: Treaties and Laws, 1607–1789, Volume 12: Georgia and Florida Treaties, 1763–1766* (Bethesda, Md., 2002), 27, 293.

[30]David Tate to David Moniac, SPR26, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery (hereafter cited as ADAH).

Emphasizing the urgency of the situation, Tate advised David Moniac to return home and salvage what was left of his father's possessions. Sam Moniac conceivably could have been involved in a personal struggle with alcohol, at least in the nascent stages, at the time of Meredith's death, and his alcoholism could have led him to be sympathetic to the behavior of Maumouth who was "in liquor" at the time of the incident.

Third, that Moniac's establishment was on the Federal Road near Pinchona Creek opens up the door to some interesting speculation. Perhaps Moniac felt some degree of responsibility for Meredith's death because Maumouth and his party had acquired their liquor from his tavern.

Finally, internal tensions within the Creek nation were already high at the time Meredith's death occurred. As a prominent mixed-blood Creek, Moniac knew that hostilities were rising against those who had expressed allegiance to the United States. Because of Moniac's support of the federal government and because of his full acculturation to the lifestyle and traits of the whites, militant Creeks viewed him as the epitome of everything that threatened their traditions and heritage. Harassment and agitation to resist any form of white influence was something to which Moniac was no stranger. He had every reason to suggest that the Meredith atrocity was accidental because he knew that an investigation of the incident, followed by friendly Creeks pursuing, apprehending, and executing other Creeks, would deepen the internal divisions and put him at risk. Ultimately, the labeling of the killing as a murder could result in the loss of everything Moniac had accumulated and could lead to the decrease in his standing within the Creek nation itself. Of course, Moniac's fears would eventually become reality.

Seventeen months after the murder, on August 2, 1813, a deposition was sworn by Moniac before Harry Toulmin. In summarizing the events of March 1812, Moniac stated, "being afraid of the consequences of a murder having been committed on the mail route, I had left my home on the road, and had gone down to my plantation on the river."[31]

[31]Sam Manac deposition sworn before Harry Toulmin, August 2, 1813, SPR26, ADAH, also available online at http://archives.state.al.us/teacher/creekwar/lesson1/doc6.html.

The experience of the Meredith party was not unique. The Rev. Lorenzo Dow and his wife Peggy shared the experience of traveling the Federal Road when tension and fear were almost palpable. Dow was from Connecticut and was probably the first Protestant minister to travel into the Mississippi Territory for religious purposes. Along with his wife, Dow had been to St. Stephens (in present-day Washington County) and they then traveled farther north on the Federal Road, stopping along the way at Fort Mims. This fort, which deeply impressed the Dows, was destroyed during the 1813 Red Stick War, thus helping us to date the travel of this couple in the years just before 1813.

The Dows continued their journey into what became central Alabama and entered Creek territory. Their encounters along the Federal Road and their brief stop at Moniac's tavern in present-day Pintlala illustrate the foreboding conditions of traveling on the recently cleared road. Peggy Dow wrote of their experiences:

> At last we came in sight of a camp, which would have made my heart glad, but I feared lest it was Indians; yet to my great satisfaction, when we came to it we found an old man and boy, with what little they possessed, going to the country that we had left behind, and had encamped in this place, and with their blankets had made a comfortable tent, and had a good fire. This was very refreshing to us, as we were much fatigued. We made some coffee, and dried our clothes a little, by this time it was day light, we then started on our way again. I thought my situation had been as trying as almost could be, but I found that there were others who were worse off than myself.
>
> We came across a family who were moving to the Mississippi, they had a number of small children; and although they had something to cover them like a tent, yet they suffered considerably from the rain

> the night before; and to add to that, the woman told me they had left an aged father at a man's house by the name of Manack, one or two days before, that she expected he was dead perhaps by that time. They were as black almost as the natives, and the woman seemed very much disturbed at their situation. I felt to pity her—I thought her burthen was really heavier than mine. We kept on, and about the middle of the day we got to the house where the poor man had been left with his wife, son and daughter. A few hours before we got there, he had closed his eyes in death; they had laid him out, and expected to bury him that evening; but they could not get any thing to make a coffin of, only split stuff to make a kind of a box, and so put him in the ground![32]

Peggy Dow's records on this incident were first printed in 1814, and her experiences obviously took place before the outbreak of the Red Stick War. The Dows certainly could have been in Moniac's tavern shortly after Meredith's murder, and her description of events involving a death at Moniac's seems to have occurred about the time of the Meredith incident. Is it possible that she was referring to the unnamed person who was injured when Meredith was killed?

The Dows, like most families that journeyed westward, often traveled with other family groups, and like most families during this period, fears about personal safety were part of that journey. For the entrepreneur Sam Moniac, reducing fears and conveying a sense of safety would have been in his best interest, for he had a business to protect. Thus, the hasty burial at Moniac's tavern may have been the result of his desire to dispose of the problem quickly and not simply because there was no wood available for a coffin. While that is only speculation, what we do know from Peggy Dow's account is that there were at least two burials at Moniac's "house of entertainment."

[32]Lorenzo Dow and Peggy Dow, *History of Cosmopolite: Or the Writings of Rev. Lorenzo Dow . . . to which is Added, the "Journey of Life" by Peggy Dow* (1814; repr., Wheeling, Va., 1848), 651.

The other known fact is that over a span of a few weeks two other murderous incidents provided enough combustible material to ignite momentous tensions and fears in the region. Other dangerous confrontations occurred between white travelers or settlers and militant Indians, but none of these confrontations rose to the same level of notoriety as did the massacre of the Manley family and the murder of Arthur Lott. News of these two other incidents merged with the story of Thomas Meredith's murder on Pinchona Creek, and together these stories swept like a rapidly spreading prairie fire, resulting in increased insecurity and paranoia among those who were migrating into the Southwest and those who had already homesteaded.

The Manley massacre took place about six weeks after the murder of Meredith. In mid-May 1812 on the Duck River in western Tennessee, five Indians invaded the home of Humphreys County resident Jesse Manley. The Indians murdered and scalped seven people, five of whom were children, and took Martha Crawley captive.

As if the Duck River crimes were not horrible enough, newspaper accounts reported the event with embellishment and sensationalism. The public was already smoldering with anger when the *Tennessee Herald* reported graphic details of the incident, calling it "the unequalled scene of hellish barbarity," and thus inflaming and enraging even the calmest of souls. According to the newspaper's account, Jesse Manley and John Crawley were away from home when the Indians saw one of the Manley children outside the house. The Indians approached the house, grabbed the child, "whom they tore to pieces with their dogs and scalped." The account continued:

> With savage fury they now forced the door, and commenced a scene of still greater barbarity. They snatched Mrs. Manley's child, only eight days old, from her mother, scalped it and threw it into the fire place, yelling at a horrid rate. An indiscriminate butchery of the children now took place before their mothers; five children were scalped and murdered, they keeping Mrs. Manly as the last victim of their cruelty. After shooting her, they scalped her, and

> committed unheard of cruelties on her body. They then left the house, taking Mrs. Crawley along as prisoner.[33]

Tennessee Governor Willie Blount, in a June 25 letter to Secretary of War Eustis, attempted to bring clarity to Mrs. Crawley's status. Blount had learned through an informant "that she has been severely whipped, exhibited naked in circles of warriors, who danced around her; and that at present she is at Tuckabatchee [Alabama], beating meal for the family to whom she belongs." Sometime in late June, Crawley escaped her captors, and in a subsequent deposition, she did not mention being severely whipped, stripped of her clothes, or made the object of dancing. She did indicate that she was tied to a tree on the first night of captivity and that, at one point, "she was ordered by one of them to stir a pot of hominy that was then on [the] fire."[34]

During this period politicians and military leaders, typified by Andrew Jackson, skillfully used incendiary rhetoric to advance their ambitions. Jackson was more than eager to invade the Creek Nation, as indicated in his letter to Governor Blount:

> the sooner the[y] can be attacked, the less will be their resistance, and the fewer will be the nations or tribes that we will have to war with. It is therefore necessary for the protection of the frontier that we march into the Creek nation, demand the perpetrators, at the Point of the Bayonet, if refused, that we make reprisals, and lay their Towns in ashes. . . . I only *want your orders*, the fire of the militia is up, they burn for revenge, and now is the time to give the Creeks the fatal blow, before the[y] expect it.[35]

[33]The date of the *Tennessee Herald* report is unknown. It was picked up by other publications across the country, including *The Lady's Miscellany, or The Weekly Visitor: For the Use and Amusement of Both Sexes* 15 (June 20, 1812): 140–41.
[34]*American State Papers . . . Indian Affairs*, 1:814.
[35]John Spencer Bassett and David Maydole Matteson, *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* (Washington, D.C., 1926–1933), 1:226.

The final of the three notorious incidents in 1812 was the murder of Arthur Lott (who was later misidentified as William Lott). Lott departed from Montgomery County, Georgia, traveled via the Federal Road, and was murdered at Warrior's Stand in Macon County, Alabama. Having served several terms in the Georgia General Assembly, his influence in that state was pervasive to the point that the functions of the county court and jail were moved to his plantation in 1797.[36]

This trio of murders roused great fear and resulted in much rage among the white settlers. Although justice was exacted in all three events, bringing Creek Indians into subjection became a controlling obsession of white Americans. Yet looking at the context in which these murders took place provides additional insight. In early 1812, when all three incidents occurred, the United States was on the threshold of war with Great Britain, and the Indians were believed to be in alliance with the British. Since the Revolution, the tie between the British and Indians had been strong. For their part, the Indians resented the encroachment of westward-moving white settlers. And while many Indians attempted to maintain neutrality, British agents working with the Indians often agitated them toward war with the settlers. This alliance, along with the imminent British intrusion, added to the hysteria of the times.[37]

One last factor to be considered is the influence of Tecumseh, the Shawnee chief. In October 1811, six months before Meredith was murdered, Tecumseh traveled to Tuckabatchee. Having been immensely influenced by the British in Detroit and working with Indians in Canada and the Great Lakes region, Tecumseh, in tandem with his brother Tenskwatawa, moved southward attempting to build a pan-Indian Confederacy that would use military force to resist all expressions of white settlement and European influence. Inciting and agitating young Indian warriors, Tecumseh challenged the Creeks to throw off any vestige of military and cultural dominance of the white man. The civilization plan of Hawkins and the construction of the Federal Road epitomized that cultural dominance and white movement into Indian territories. By the time Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa

[36]Woodward, *Woodward's Reminiscences of the Creek*, 35.
[37]H. S. Halbert and T. H. Ball, *The Creek War of 1813 and 1814* (1895; repr., Tuscaloosa, 1995), 60, 64, 88.

arrived in Alabama, they had built a loose alliance of Indian tribes. Tenskwatawa, called the Prophet, brought tremendous spiritual fervor and fanaticism to the movement, and Tecumseh encouraged confrontation and militant assault on anyone and anything that proved a hindrance to a return to pre-European culture.[38]

The mounting hostility on the part of the Indians must be viewed in the larger, more compelling context of an imminent war with the British. Henri, while depending on the work of Edmunds, stated, "Tecumseh accepted gifts of arms and supplies from the British and was led to believe vague promises that, if he could form an anti-American confederacy of all the tribes, the British would synchronize an assault with an Indian uprising to drive out the common foe."[39]

Hawkins described a speech made by Tecumseh to five thousand Creeks convened at Tuckabatchee in the fall of 1811 thus:

> Tecumseh, in the square of Tuckabatchee, delivered their talk. . . . Kill the old chiefs, friends to peace; kill the cattle, the hogs, and fowls; do not work, destroy the wheels and looms, throw away your ploughs, and every thing used by the Americans. Sing 'the song of the Indians of the northern lakes, and dance their dance.' Shake your war clubs, shake yourselves; you will frighten the Americans, their arms will drop from their hands. . . . Has this proved? Go to the fields of Talledega, and New-yau-cau, and see them whitened with the bones of the Red Clubs.[40]

By the late spring of 1812, white travelers and settlers had a keen awareness of the danger posed by Tecumseh's leadership, and the hostility his words and actions aroused along with information about the three Creek murders, the anticipation of war with Britain, and the threat of further alliance between the Indians and British were the causes of great anxiety.

[38]Ibid., 62–67.
[39]Henri, *Southern Indians and Benjamin Hawkins*, 267.
[40]Ibid., 265.

Given the unrelenting fear caused by all these factors, white leaders such as Benjamin Hawkins moved quickly to administer justice following incidents of violence. In the immediate aftermath of Meredith's death, Hawkins charged friendly Creeks with the assignment of apprehending, punishing, or executing those responsible.

The United States government did not impose federal or state justice systems on the Creeks but instead recognized Creek authority over their people. Federal officials hoped this would build trust and create a continuance of autonomy for the Creek Nation. While there may have been earlier agreements between the government and the Creeks, the enabling authority for surrendering the administration of justice to the Creek Nation is found in the 1790 Treaty of New York.[41] That year, a contingent of Creek chiefs led by Alexander McGillivray made their way to the nation's capital. Among the chiefs was Sam Moniac, whose signature is found on the treaty. Brokered by Secretary of War Henry Knox, the treaty included Article 8, which spelled out the terms for indigenous justice:

> If any Creek Indian or Indians, or persons residing among them, or who shall take refuge in their nation, shall commit a robbery or murder or other capital crime, on any of the citizens or inhabitants of the United States, the Creek nation, or town, or tribe to which such offender or offenders may belong, shall be bound to deliver him or them up, to be punished according to the laws of the United States.[42]

In his April 6, 1812, letter to the Secretary of War, Hawkins noted that when he received word of the Meredith murder, the speaker of the Creek Nation was in his company, along with members of the speaker's executive council. Hawkins wrote that he immediately instructed them to convene a meeting of their chiefs as soon as they re-

[41]Kathryn Braund observes that there were earlier expressions of Creeks administering justice within agreements brokered by the United States.

[42]The Avalon Project, "Treaty with the Creeks, 1790," Yale Law School Lillian Goldman Law Library, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/cre1790.asp#art8 (accessed May 6, 2010).

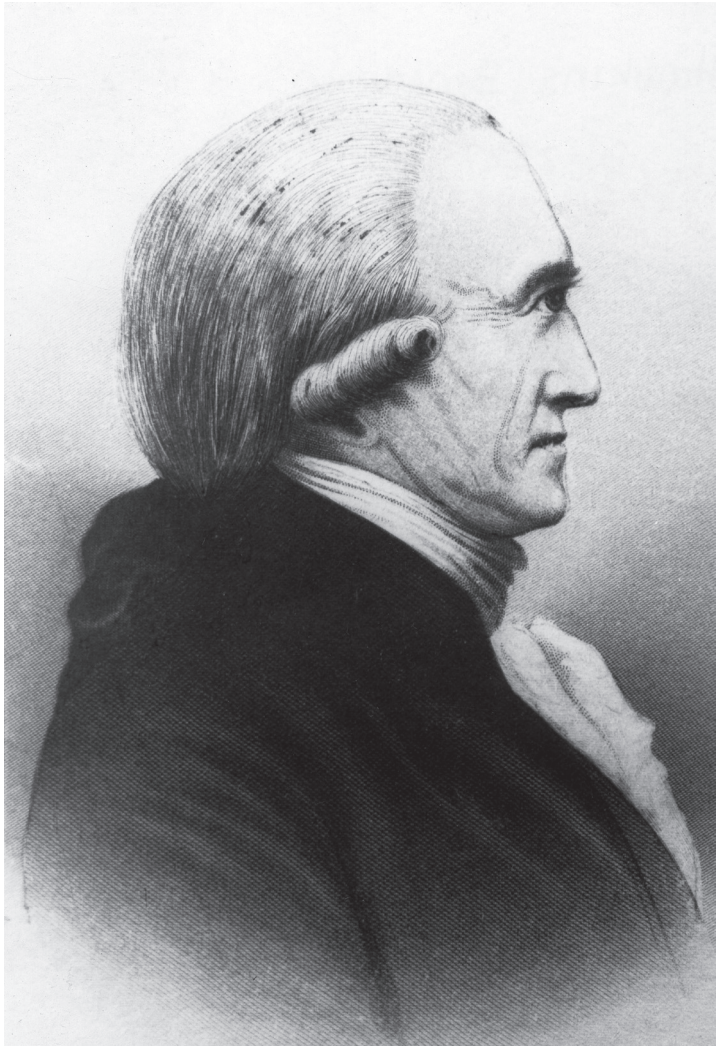
turned home, and he asked them to "cause justice to be done without delay." Then Hawkins added that Maumouth, the only one drunk in the party of perpetrators, was well known to members of the executive council and their chiefs and was a prime suspect in the crime. The demands for justice among white settlers intensified following the murder of Lott and the atrocities related to the Manleys and Mrs. Crawley. In both cases, Creeks were convened and authorized to administer justice.[43]

Although Hawkins was criticized for not acting swiftly and forcefully, he had sought the help of two dependable operatives, Billy McIntosh of Coweta and Little Prince of Broken Arrow, and he dispatched his assistant, Christian Limbaugh, to speak with McIntosh about the urgency of apprehending the murderers. Hawkins apparently chose wisely, for the persuasive powers of these men prevailed. Little Prince sent a mixed-blood chief, George Lovett, with Limbaugh and McIntosh to talk with Big Warrior of Tuckabatchee. Apparently the chain of influence was crucial in organizing a response among the Creek chiefs to the recent crimes.[44]

Correspondence between the chiefs and Hawkins indicated the resolve of the chiefs to deal with the murderers. On June 7, they wrote a letter stating:

> We the kings, Chiefs and Warriors have assembled in our Council House and taken into consideration the danger which threatens our land; we have unanimously agreed that satisfaction shall be given without delay for the murders committed in our land. We have appointed three parties, one party started last evening, the other two this morning, in pursuit of the murderers of Thomas Meredith and Arthur Lott, who were murdered on the post road. The parties have received their special orders not to stop until they have punished these murderers.[45]

[43]*American State Papers . . . Indian Affairs*, 1:809.
[44]Griffith, *McIntosh and Weatherford*, 82–83.
[45]Merritt B. Pound, *Benjamin Hawkins: Indian Agent* (Athens, Ga., 1951), 215.



Col. Benjamin Hawkins, General Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Image courtesy of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery.

Later, McIntosh traveled to Hopoithle Micco's town, which was where the "leader of the Banditti" who was responsible for Lott's murder had sought sanctuary. McIntosh invaded the town and shot and killed the criminal.[46]

Meredith's killer was also swiftly punished. Hawkins, in correspondence to William Eustis dated July 28, conveyed the news of imposed justice: "Being on the road, I have just time to inform you, that the Indian who murdered Meredith, at Kittome, was put to death on the 19th; making, in all, five executed on the demand for satisfaction."[47] Hawkins's report brought some relief to the mounting tension.

On August 24, Hawkins wrote triumphantly to the Secretary of War that others in the party who killed Meredith had been punished, noting that "the chiefs have had six murderers put to death for their crimes on the post road and to the northwest and seven cropped and whipped for thefts." Five days later, the Indian agent wrote again, reporting that a total of eight Indians had now been executed in connection with Meredith's murder. On September 7, Hawkins notified Governor David B. Mitchell of Georgia:

> The proof I have of the satisfaction taken for the murder of Meredith and Lott and the stabbing of one of Meredith's companions is such as is customary here. The Chiefs sent with armed parties to execute them, returned and reported to the Executive Council when and where they executed them; and this report is sent to me by the Big Warrior and Mr. Cornells. I have received three formal reports of the success of their efforts to fulfill their promises to me, the last of the 29th ult. They have executed up to that date eight, and have cropped and whipped seven. Hillaubee Haujo and three other were for murders at Duck river and Northwestwardly.[48]

[46]Griffith, *McIntosh and Weatherford*, 83.
[47]*American State Papers . . . Indian Affairs,* 1:812.
[48]C. L. Grant, *Letters, Journals, and Writings of Benjamin Hawkins: 1802–1816* (Savannah, Ga., 1980), 2:617.

Thomas Meredith, "a respectable old man," a veteran of the Revolutionary War, a Baptist churchman, a South Carolina plantation owner, and a blacksmith by trade, died on the banks of Pinchona Creek in 1812, nearly two hundred years ago. Beginning just a few weeks after his death at the hands of a group of militant Creeks, conflicting accounts of the murder surfaced. Today, two troublesome issues related to his murder have been identified and, I hope, resolution to those two issues has been offered. Since 1812 confusion has existed about the location of Meredith's death, and it has not been clear whether the killing was a murder or an accident. The question of misidentification of location is the most easily answered. Hawkins, unfamiliar with the area, simply made a mistake. The confusing names of creeks and their variant spellings contributed to this understandable error.

The second issue is more complex. Understanding why Sam Moniac would call Meredith's death an accident when Meredith's son, an eyewitness, claimed it was intentional is puzzling, but Moniac's response does provide insight into his personal struggles and also the tension of the times. What would become central Alabama was embroiled in a cultural clash between Creeks and white settlers, and fear of change was a daily part of the lives of both.

Official records help in understanding the context, but those records do not capture or communicate the grief and pathos of the Meredith family. Shocked by the sudden, violent death of their patriarch, the family faced starting a new life in a new place without his guidance. Surely the burden of loss colored every dynamic of their lives as they moved farther west and eventually homesteaded in Amite County, Mississippi Territory. His death perhaps can be seen, too, as a small harbinger of the great tragedies imposed on Native Americans, upon whom forced relocation brought about sweeping cultural changes.

In September 1812, the last will and testament of Thomas Meredith was probated in South Carolina. Representatives of the Meredith family returned to witness this legal proceeding and to sell Meredith's South Carolina property. They had journeyed along the Federal Road to South Carolina, knowing that hostilities were more intense, that

war was closer to a reality, and that Sam Moniac's "house of entertainment" now stood guard over the grave of Thomas Meredith. What must it have been like for them to return the way in which they had once before traveled? What must it have been like for them to pass by the place where their father had been senselessly murdered? The brief return of representatives of the Meredith family to their home in South Carolina in order to probate the will of their patriarch may have been done with the assurance that those accused of the murder had been executed.

Within a year's time of the probation of Meredith's will, the Red Sticks would lay waste to Moniac's property; he would never recover from the loss of 700 cattle, 200 hogs, 48 goats and sheep valued at $5,060, a cotton gin, 2,000 pounds of cotton, 36 slaves, and several houses.[49]

Giant oak trees still line Pinchona Creek, standing as silent sentinels guarding the unmarked grave of Thomas Meredith and bearing witness to the reality that everyone loses in such violent, cultural wars.

[49]Saunt, *New Order of Things*, 260.