

How The Sutallee Trace Got Its Name

By Brian Paley

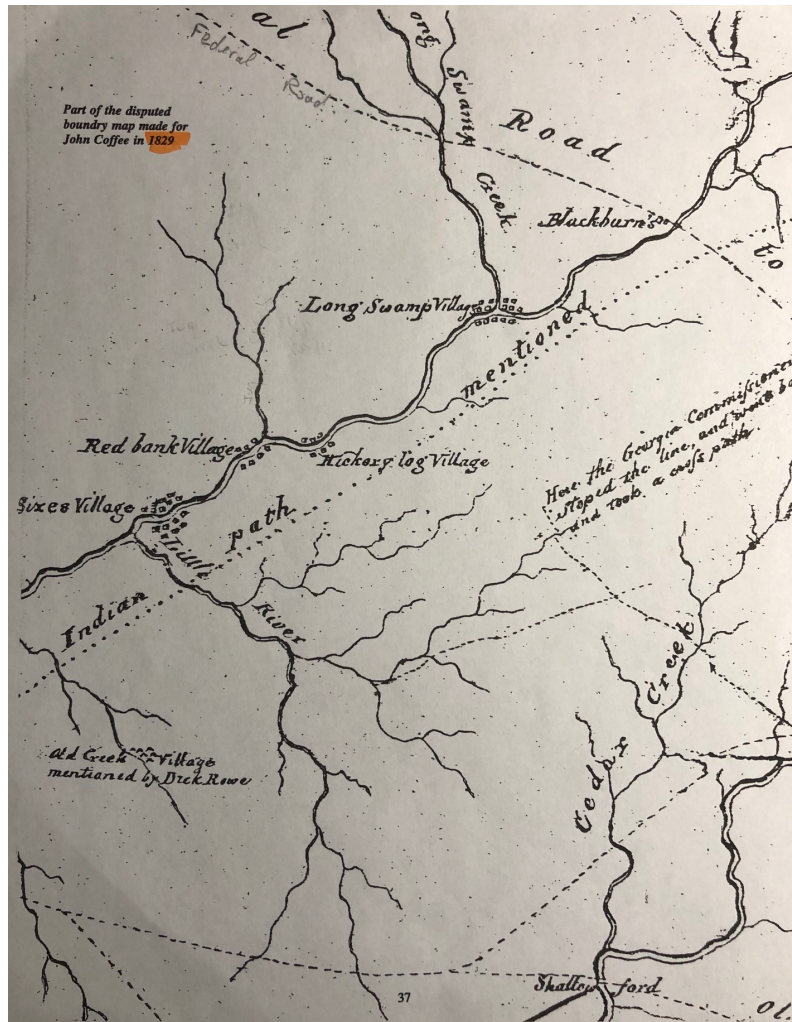
The largely undeveloped woodland extending west from Boling Park along the Etowah River for approximately four miles to the National Veterans Cemetery is referred to as the Sutallee Trace Greenspace Corridor. This article describes the history of this area near Canton, GA with a focus on the origins of the name.

Today, Sutallee is a community located about two miles northwest of Lake Allatoona in Cherokee County, GA at the junction of Knox Bridge Hwy 20 and Waleska Hwy 108. It marks the location of one of the oldest white settlements founded in this region 30 years before Cherokee County was created in 1831.

To describe the historical significance, we need to go back to when Georgia was established as a colony in 1732. Its land stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River. Thomas Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase in 1803 added a huge tract of land west of the Mississippi. Jefferson wanted some of Georgia's land to form two new states (Mississippi and Louisiana), so he offered to "give" Georgia land to their northwest up to the Tennessee border. Georgia recognized a pig in a poke when they saw one, since that wilderness area was sovereign land belonging to the Cherokee Nation. The governor of Georgia agreed to the deal only if Jefferson promised to remove the Cherokee from the area.

Historical records indicate that Jefferson had a high regard for the Cherokee. He preferred to assimilate the natives rather than evict them. Because they had been burned (out of their villages) by white settlers in Tennessee, the Cherokee had a restricted immigration policy for white settlers. However, Jefferson encouraged them to admit missionaries who would teach them traditional European customs. The Moravians established two missions. One, called Spring Place, was near Chief Joseph Vann's house (today's Chatsworth) and the other, called Mt. Carmel was near today's Sutallee. By the time surveyors arrived to carve up the Cherokee Nation in 1829, they found a significant white settlement there.

Jefferson also assigned Indian Agents to manage the relationship with the natives. These agents sold goods, such as knives, guns, trinkets, and alcohol to the natives with the objective of taking their land as collateral or offering annual payments for ceding portions of their land to the U.S. government.



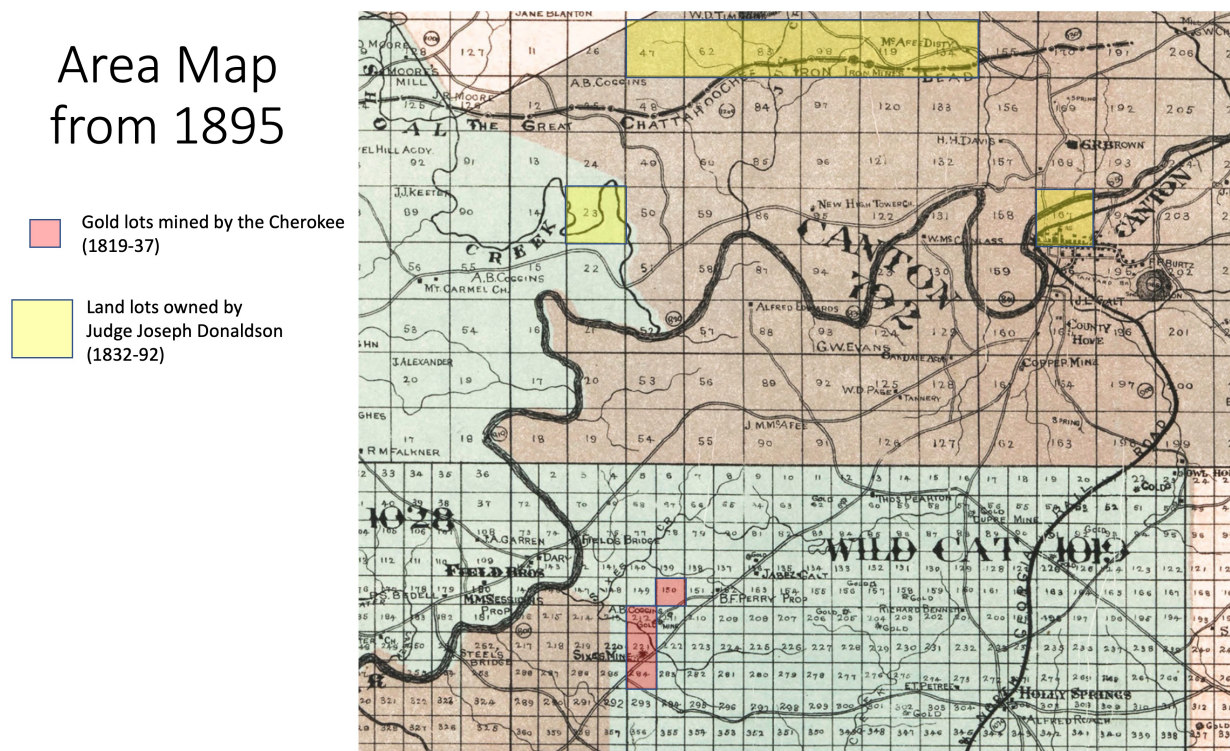
The Cherokee were very enterprising. They started to mine for gold in order to pay for these goods. By 1819, they operated six gold mines just east of where Little River flows into the Etowah, and called their largest village Sutali, which is the Cherokee word for six. Notice the surveyor's map from 1829 calls this Sixes Village. Also notice the lack of roads. The paths shown fit the definition of traces: roads made by the passage of animals, people, or vehicles often through wooded areas.

The Cherokee tried hard to fit the American's definition of civilized. They drew up a constitution similar to the U.S., with a Congress, Senate, and Supreme Court. Many adopted Christian beliefs. To dispel the label of illiteracy, the Cherokee developed a written form of their language and started printing a newspaper, called the *Cherokee Phoenix* in 1828. Each article appeared in both English and Cherokee languages.

Once word got around that there was gold in the area, it kicked off the first American gold rush. The Cherokee made it clear they were not interested in selling

their land or swapping it for land further west. To encourage them to emigrate to a new Indian Territory in Oklahoma, the Georgia legislature enacted a series of laws in 1829 that amounted to what we call “sanctions” today. They confiscated a large section of Cherokee-occupied land, banned further meetings of the Cherokee government, stopped publication of the Cherokee newspaper, terminated annual payments for past land cessions, and forbade the Cherokee from mining gold.

In 1832, Georgia held a land lottery, distributing lots to Georgia citizens for small fees. With the draw of cheap land and gold, over 10,000 white people flooded into the area, resulting in many conflicts with the natives. In 1838, President Martin Van Buren fulfilled Jefferson’s promise and sent 7000 federal troops to force the removal of all Cherokee who refused to emigrate.



One of the more prominent white settlers in the area was Judge Joseph Donaldson. The original lot he purchased (#167 on the Lot Map published in 1895) spanned the Etowah River. In order to establish Canton as the capital for the newly formed Cherokee County, he donated land for the townsite. Between his rich plantation and iron mines further north, his family became one of the richest in the county.

Clearly shown on this map is an unnamed road running from Waleska Road to Mt. Carmel Church. This is the route of what we call Sutallee Trace. The earliest mention of this road is in an article published in The Atlanta Constitution in 1875, entitled Cherokee County and the Marietta Narrow Gauge. Following is an

excerpt:

Just above Canton ... by far the finest location I have seen is that of Joseph Donaldson, Esq, just across the (Etowah) river. The river can hardly be improved and the farm nowhere surpassed in fertility. To the west from Judge Donaldson's stretches out an excellent road for buggy riding, with occasional glimpses here and there of the distant mountains, and running through a country striped with beds of iron ore. Ten miles distant is the cotton factory lately erected by Messrs. Atherton & Keith on Shoal Creek.

Donaldson operated iron mines in the area and needed some way to transport his ore west to the Etowah Iron Works in the 1850s. So, he probably had a hand in building this road. It started behind Donaldson's plantation home overlooking what is Heritage Park today and crossed Puckett Creek on the stone bridge whose footings are still visible. He had to build another bridge (which has since been destroyed by flood waters) across Shoal Creek and extend the road to where his wife's family, the Fields, were settled. The fascinating story of the Donaldson and Field families is told in a book entitled [*Southern Duty: A Story of Georgia Pioneers*](#) by this author, Brian Paley.

The U.S. government established the Suttalee post office in the Cherokee town of Sixes (Sutali) in 1834. It was moved to Cherokee Mills after the natives were removed. When the area was flooded to form Lake Allatoona (around 1946), the Suttalee post office was moved to its current location near the site of the old Mt. Carmel Church.

That's all very interesting, you say, but it still doesn't explain how that unnamed road came to be called the Suttalee Trace. To find that answer, we have to fast forward to the nation's bicentennial in 1976. Dan Owen, who was assistant scoutmaster for the local Troop 241, approached the Cherokee County Bicentennial Commission for permission to establish a nature and history trail along the historic roadway mentioned above. Dan coined the name Suttalee Trace because it connects Canton to Suttalee and it reminded the scouts of the Natchez Trace, another historic forest trail that follows the path of early settlers and traders connecting Nashville, TN to Natchez, MS.

Now you know the rest of the story.

Happy trails,

Suttalee Trace Steward, Brian Paley