

Tennessee Trail of Tears

June 2020 News Update

Dear TNTOTA friends:

I hope that this brief newsletter finds you well. Please stay safe. Thanks to Vicki Rozema and Cleata Townsend for providing updates on the Brown's Tavern and The Higginbotham Turnpike.

Long time TNTOTA member Glen Jones fell and broke a vertebra in his back. Get well soon, Glenn!

BROWN'S TAVERN, Vicki Rozema, National Director TOTA

In the last newsletter, Debbie reported that the TNTOTA board had voted to donate \$1,000 to the Brown's Tavern Project fund. Since the death of former owner Joan Franks who worked with the Trail of Tears Association and the National Park Service to obtain classification for the home as a certified site on the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail, the structure has been in danger of being destroyed or commercialized. Funds have been raised to purchase the home and it will be placed in the hands of the National Park Partners when the final sale closes, which is on track for the end of July.

John Brown, a mixed-blood Cherokee, was a ferry owner, river pilot, land speculator, mill-owner, slave owner, and veteran of the War of 1812. He and his Cherokee wife, Elizabeth Brown, and their family lived on Moccasin Bend in present-day Chattanooga where he farmed and operated a ferry across the Tennessee River that was used during the Trail of Tears and which also played a critical role in the Civil War Battle for Chattanooga. The Hixon family stole the ferry from Brown in 1830 and the Browns moved to Walker County, Georgia shortly thereafter. But like many Georgia Cherokees, the Browns were forced out of Georgia in 1835 and moved back across state lines to Tennessee. In 1838, he was living in his house, which is referred to as Brown's Tavern, when the Drane and Bell detachments crossed the Tennessee River on Brown's Ferry and when the Whitely detachment camped nearby at Brown's Ferry for 3 nights in June after departing Ross's Landing by water.

One of the myths about John Brown is that he and his family traveled to Oklahoma on the Trail of Tears and then received permission to move back to Chattanooga. There are no records to support the claim Brown was on the Trail of Tears. Brown does not appear on the few detachment lists that survive and he does not appear on 1842 spoliation claims of Cherokees who were forced to Oklahoma. On the contrary, 1839 and 1840 records found in the Ocoee District land records show that Brown remained in Hamilton County and continued his land speculation activities. John Brown died at Lookout Mountain on January 8 or 9, 1840. An 1842 deposition by John Ross said that he was encouraging Brown's widow Elizabeth to emigrate west. Exactly when she moved is not clear, but a military land bounty warrant dated 1851, indicates Elizabeth was living in the Skin Bayou District by then.



The Brown's Tavern is located at [703 Brown's Ferry Road, Chattanooga, TN 37419](https://www.google.com/maps/place/703+Brown's+Ferry+Road,+Chattanooga,+TN+37419). The tavern is presently not opened to the public. (2017 photo by Debbie Moore)

THE HIGGINBOTHAM TURNPIKE

Cleata Townsend was notified that the Higginbotham Turnpike's National Register of Historic Places nomination was approved and has been submitted for final review.

The following information was taken from the Higginbotham Turnpike's National Register form.

The nominated property is a 4.7 mile segment of a transportation route once known as Higginbotham Turnpike, which was used as part of the Northern Route of the Trail of Tears in 1838. The width of the segment is approximately 200 feet. The segment includes 114 acres. The eastern point of the segment begins at the Pleasant Hill Cemetery in present-day Van Buren County, Tennessee and extends roughly northwest, eventually crossing two improved roads, into present-day Warren County for approximately 0.75 miles. Remnants of the turnpike are evident periodically along the segment, but particularly at the eastern end near the cemetery where four separate dirt roadbeds run roughly parallel to each other.

Located nearby is the Rocky River Crossing and Road which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2006 for its importance as a segment of the Trail of Tears.



National Trail of Tears Director, Cleata Townsend is seen discussing the Rocky River Road crossing with TNOTA Treasurer Erin Medley. This portion of the trail is on private property. (Photo taken by Debbie Moore August 2019.)

The Trail of Tears segment is located by The Pleasant Hill Cemetery on Pleasant Hill Cemetery Road in Spencer, Tennessee. This portion of the trail is presently owned by the State of Tennessee. Plans are being made to open the segments to the public and add educational signage about the Trail of Tears.

UPCOMING EVENTS

June – Remember the Removal Bike Ride from New Echota to Tahlequah, OK—Cancelled

July-River Town Festival – Calhoun, TN – Cancelled

August 8 & 9- Cherokee Cultural Celebration, Red Clay State Park, Cleveland, TN
TNTOTA will have an educational booth.

September 12 – International Cow Pea Festival, Charleston Park, Charleston, TN
10am-8pm. TNTOTA will have an educational booth.

September 13—Commemorative Trail of Tears Walk in Woodbury, TN

September 21-23 – 25th Annual National Trail of Tears Conference & Symposium, Cherokee,
NC

October 24—3rd Annual Winchester Commemorative Trail of Tears Walk and Educational
Symposium

November – We are still working on having an Educational Symposium at Cleveland State Community College. The college has not confirmed, yet.