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THE "GREAT PECUNIARY SACRIFICE"
Dr. Thomas Fearn and the Indian Creek Canal
by
David D. Gale, Jr.

In 1821 the economically ambitious citizens of Huntsville and Madison County turned to the construction of a canal in hopes of connecting their young and land-locked town to the Tennessee River.¹ The Indian Creek Canal was built during a national canal-building boom as a profit venture, as was true for earlier canals in other parts of the nation. This canal venture, however, also proved to be distinctively southern in that the personal honor of one man, Dr. Thomas Fearn, eclipsed the profit motive, and in order to complete the project he mixed the labor of slaves with free-wage labor.

Fearn proved to be the staunchest and steadiest supporter of the Indian Creek Navigation Project from its beginning to its end. He was one of many Huntsville citizens who supported the idea of building a water connection between the town and the Tennessee River to help alleviate transportation problems. His early support for the canal began with a belief that the project would bring profit to his investment and benefit the young town of Huntsville. Due to his enthusiasm and commitment to the project, he was named president of the venture. Fearn guided the project through its heady early days when it enjoyed financial support from a number of prominent townsmen. Fearn also stayed with the project through the later, leaner years when others became discouraged and, believing no profit could be made, withdrew their financial support. As other promoters backed out, Thomas Fearn became less concerned with profit and determined to finish the project in which he had staked his personal reputation. He, with the help of his brother, ended being the sole financiers of the canal's completion, and his motivation for supporting the canal changed over time from commercial considerations to issues of personal honor and reputation.

In 1805 John Hunt and his family trekked into the wilderness that is now Madison County, Alabama, searching for a new place to call home. Finding a spot to their liking, a bluff rising 50 to 60 feet above a gushing natural spring, the Hunt family built a cabin and home. Immediately before and following the War of 1812, high cotton prices and the reported fertility of the land in this area enticed settlers to follow the Hunts to the new territory in hopes of making their fortunes by planting the white gold. This influx of settlers gave the region its first great surge in population. By 1815, the small, burgeoning town of Huntsville stood on the bluff above the spring. Settlers came from Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Tennessee to the community of Huntsville and Madison County in search of land and opportunity, bringing with them their hopes, ambitions and possessions, including slaves, which by 1815 totaled 3,575 in the county.²

From its founding, however, the town of Huntsville faced complications in its hopes for a convenient transportation route for travel and commerce. Huntsville looked to the Tennessee River to be its great commercial highway, just as the

Ohio River served as a commercial route for the young northwestern towns of Cincinnati and Louisville. Two factors, however, complicated the Tennessee River's ability to fulfill this role for Huntsville. First, a distance of ten miles separated the river and the town. Second, downriver, the Tennessee's channel was impassable during most of the year due to a series of shallow rapids called the Muscle Shoals. Only in late fall when rain and melting snow raised the river level could small keelboats traverse the rapids. By spring, rains and snows subsided and the river waters fell again, leaving the shoals passable only for two or three months. In 1821, an article in Huntsville's sole newspaper, the *Huntsville Republican*, reported that supplies transported on the Tennessee River were "retarded 10 months in the year by the Muscle-Shoals."³

Before 1821 the citizens of Madison County tried to make the best of the Tennessee River's limited utility for transportation. Crude roads from Huntsville to the river accommodated wagons that hauled cotton and other goods to the river and back, the most important being the road that led to Ditto's Landing, later called Whitesburg. According to a newspaper account in 1821, merchants hauled 2,000 to 3,000 tons of cotton, salt, flour, lumber, whiskey, cider, apples, and other goods between town and Ditto's Landing at an annual cost of \$10,000 to \$12,000. To house the ginned cotton that accumulated during the year while Muscle Shoals remained impassable, merchants and shippers built warehouses at Ditto's Landing and other places along the river.⁴

Early on, Huntsville also turned to a number of alternative routes to bypass the Shoals and bring goods into town. Before 1816, a widely used route into Huntsville began with goods shipped from New York or Philadelphia to Savannah or Charleston, then transported to Augusta, Georgia, and from there carrying them by wagon or horse through Cherokee country over the Georgia Road to Ross's Landing on the Tennessee River where the city of Chattanooga now stands, then floating the goods down the river to Ditto's Landing, and finally hauling them by wagon to Huntsville. Another early route for goods, first used in 1816 by a merchant named Crump, was up the Alabama River from Mobile, to the Tombigbee, to the falls of the Black Warrior near Tuscaloosa, and then overland eight days by wagon to the Tennessee River above Muscle Shoals. Goods also came to Huntsville through the valleys of Virginia and eastern Tennessee by way of Knoxville. In the late 1810s and early 1820s the route coming down the Ohio River to the Cumberland River, up the *Cumberland* to Nashville, and overland from Nashville to Huntsville became one of the most heavily used. According to historian Thomas Abernethy, this route was used to ship flour, port, and whiskey from Kentucky and the northwest, as well as manufactures hauled overland from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh then down the Ohio River.⁵

Besides the time and complexity involved in these alternative transportation routes, the quality of the roads created additional difficulties. The *Republican* described Huntsville and Madison County as having "roads [that] are in the busy

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season almost impassable, and where land transportation is attended with the most extravagant expense to the public.”⁶

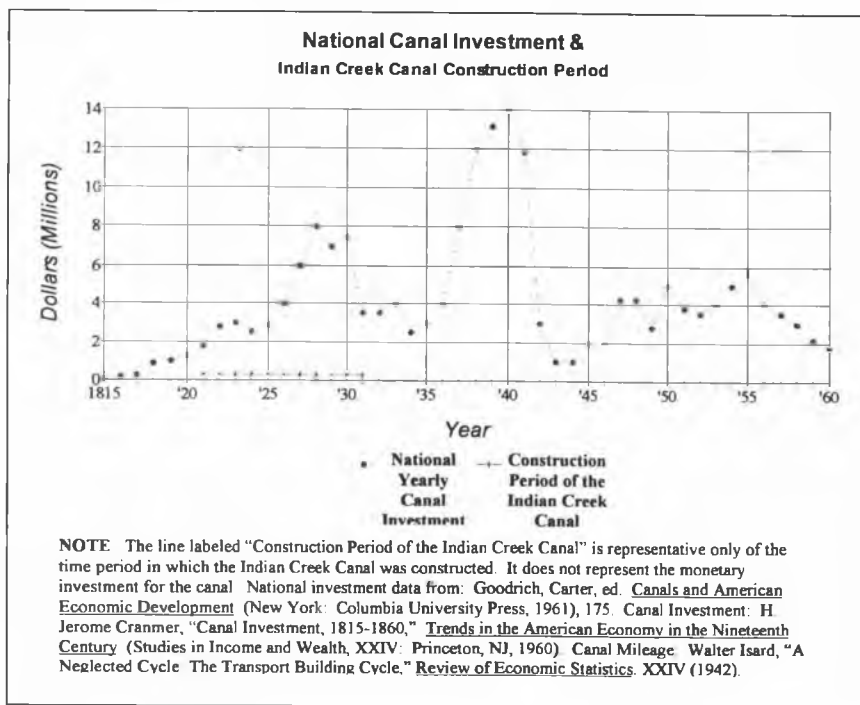
The time and difficulty in traveling any of the existing available routes left the promoters of the town feeling that commercial isolation was stunting Huntsville’s growth. The difficulty in transporting supplies caused limited availability and inflated the cost of manufactured goods. An article appearing in the *Republican* in 1821 stated that “the carriage on foreign supplies is the heaviest tax this country pays; on a vast many indispensable articles the transportation is more than the first cost.”⁷

In the late 1810s and early 1820s a sense of urgency gripped Dr. Fearn and the town’s other promoters over the transportation difficulties that Huntsville faced. An article in the *Republican* worried that “many towns are rising up on the Tennessee River with vastly superior natural advantages, and that although Huntsville may not decline, its unparalleled prosperity and pre-eminence must cease.” A new Huntsville newspaper established in 1825, the *Southern Advocate*, stated that compared to the prosperity of other cities on the western frontier, such as Nashville, Louisville, and Cincinnati, “languor and inactivity...prevails in all the towns dependent upon the Tennessee River.”⁸ The cotton grown in the region could not get to market fast enough to take advantage of prime prices, and the merchandise available in Huntsville was both slow in arriving and inflated in price. In the closing years of the 1810s, the town promoters did not ask whether Huntsville should be better connected to markets, but rather what methods and modes of transportation could both benefit the city and present relative ease in implementation. In 1820 the community placed its hopes for improving transportation on an effort to create a canal between Huntsville and the Tennessee River.

In embracing the new technology of canals to attempt to improve Huntsville’s transportation connections, Dr. Fearn and the town’s other promoters shared in a boom period of canal building that engaged many regions of the country. The United States experienced three distinct cycles of canal construction in the first half of the nineteenth century: from 1815 to 1834 (2,188 canal miles, \$56.6 million invested); from 1834 to 1844 (1,172 miles, \$72.2 million); from 1844 to 1860 (804 miles, \$57.4 million).⁹ In terms of its chronology, the construction period of the Indian Creek Canal fits squarely within the first cycle. While it proved to be very much part of the 1820s canal boom, Huntsville’s canal project was smaller and resembled the earlier pioneer canal projects undertaken in the 1790s.

The start of construction on the Erie Canal in 1815 is widely accepted as the beginning of the antebellum canal boom in the United States, especially in terms of transforming mere plans for internal improvements into operational realities. Even before completion of the Erie, supporters of Huntsville’s canal likened their project to New York’s great work. The *Huntsville Republican* wrote “Shall it be said that the State of New York alone is able to construct splendid canals.... We

content [sic] that this section of Alabama, within the space of 10 years more, will not suffer by comparison...."¹⁰



Although the same canal fever that ranged over much of the nation infected Dr. Fearn and other promoters of the Indian Creek Canal, their project differed significantly from the larger and more prominent northern and northwestern canal projects. Those projects were mostly huge in scale and were financed by state governments, such as the Erie and Champlain in New York, the Mainline of the Pennsylvania system, and the Ohio and Erie Canal (the eastern trunk line of the Ohio state network). Conversely, Huntsville's canal project was small, financed by a private company, incorporated by the state assembly, and dependent on selling public stock, resulting in it more closely resembling pioneer canals built in the 1790s. The "landed or commercial gentry of the time, with names distinguished for political leadership or social standing" led the pioneer canal companies of the 1790s. This description aptly fit the early prominent Huntsville supporters and leaders of the Indian Creek Navigation Company. Although their canals and companies were small, pioneer canal builders aimed for community improvement and progress through improved transportation. Dr. Fearn and Huntsville's other canal builders began the Indian Creek Canal in the same spirit of improvement and progress. Finally, the pioneer canals of the 1790s

were small, slow to be constructed, and financed by companies that were chronically short of funds, just as Huntsville's canal would prove to be.¹¹

Thomas Fearn was a public spirited physician and businessman who played a large role in the development of Huntsville and Madison County. In many respects, he was a typical frontier capitalist, with an interest in many ventures, but both in his quest for honor and repute and his utilization of slave labor in his profit-seeking ventures, he was more akin to southern progressives. The Code of Honor, according to Bertram Wyatt-Brown, was once a national republic value but was eclipsed by profit in the north during the nineteenth century. For Thomas Fearn, the profit motive proved important, but personal honor and repute far outweighed it.

Thomas Fearn, Jr. who came to Huntsville as a young man, developed his strong sense of honor and personal repute through his family and his father. Fearn was born on November 15, 1789, on the family's plantation near present-day Danville, Virginia. As one of the 12 Trustees designated in 1793 to establish the town of Danville, Thomas's father, Thomas Fearn Sr., was a founding father, leading citizen, and developer of the Virginia town during young Thomas's childhood.¹²

Thomas grew up on his father's plantation and received his early education there. Undoubtedly, in learning about his native state, Thomas heard about the remarkable success of the James River Canal, one of the nation's most successful canal ventures prior to the Erie Canal, which proved to be a source of pride for Virginians. Eager investors had oversubscribed the company's stock in Richmond soon after its first offering. By 1795, the company's first directors, George Washington and Edmund Randolph, built a series of canals bypassing the falls on the James River above Richmond, allowing for navigation about seven miles upstream from the city. In Richmond itself, a three-mile canal ended in the city's Great Basin where thirteen wooden locks lowered boats to the James River. By 1805, when Thomas was sixteen years old, the James River Canal Company showed a profit and rendered the river navigable nearly 220 miles above Richmond. Thanks largely to the intra-regional commerce allowed by the improvement of the James, by 1800 Richmond was not only the political center of Virginia, but also the state's center of commerce. Perhaps Thomas visited the Great Basin in Richmond on a trip with his father during his youth. Even more likely, Thomas saw part of the James River Canal on trips to Goochland County to visit his mother's family, the Burtons.¹³

In his formative years, Dr. Fearn's Development seems to have followed closely the typical upbringing of a southern plantation owner's son, including a college education. Additionally, Dr. Fearn's parents imbued him with the belief that he should live according to the dictates of Christianity, as evidenced through his practice of giving liberally to Christian organizations throughout his life, and later becoming a leader of Huntsville's temperance society. Also, as is evident through the meticulous record keeping in his account books for everything from major commercial investments to twelve cents paid for candy, Dr. Fearn was

careful with money. Finally, Dr. Fearn's parents endowed him with drive to succeed.¹⁴

In 1805 while Thomas was away at Washington College at Lexington in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, his father died, leaving his estate and fortune to his wife and sons. The following year Thomas left Virginia to attend the Old Medical College at Philadelphia. Four years later in 1810, Dr. Thomas Fearn graduated and in the same year decided to move to the southwestern frontier to pursue success and to practice medicine.¹⁵

Arriving in Huntsville, Dr. Fearn found the young town in the middle of an economic boom. He used a portion of his inheritance to purchase land, including some lots within the burgeoning town itself. In addition to his medical practice, Dr. Fearn and his younger brother, George, who moved to Huntsville with him, looked to cotton as a source of income--not as growers but as cotton merchants, and by 1820 they were considered among the most successful in the Tennessee Valley.¹⁶

As early as 1816 there is clear evidence that the economic elite of Huntsville recognized and accepted Dr. Fearn as a leading member of the commercial community. On December 11, 1816, the Mississippi Territorial Legislature incorporated the Planters' and Merchants' Bank of Huntsville, the first bank in Alabama. In the act the legislature named Dr. Fearn, LeRoy Pope, a leading citizen of the community, and seven other prosperous community leaders as directors, with Pope named as president.¹⁷

Despite the growing prestige and prosperity of the town from banking and increasing commerce, some of Huntsville's promoters voiced concern that the town's lack of transportation connections would limit its potential for further development as a center of commerce. Confidence, born of the booming economic times, led to some speculation that the problem could most easily be solved by improving Indian Creek which began at the gushing spring near which John Hunt had settled and which emptied into the Tennessee River ten miles away. A letter in 1815 from John Walker, a prominent citizen of Huntsville, to the Secretary of the U.S. Treasury, described Huntsville as

“...situated about ten miles from the Tennessee River, immediately round one of the finest springs in the world, issuing from a fine perpendicular cliff 50 feet high, in a semi-circle forming instantly a fine bold creek, which is now confidently believed can, at trivial expense, be rendered navigable for batteaux to the Tennessee.”¹⁸

The confidence expressed by Walker that Indian Creek would provide an easy solution to the town's transportation problem was shared by many developers.

In March, 1818, a group of Huntsville citizens took the first step toward attempting to render Indian creek navigable. In what the *Alabama Republican* described as a “small town meeting,” the meeting's participants pledged the huge

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sum of \$7,200 toward clearing Indian Creek. The *Republican* lauded “this noble effort” and expressed confidence that the project would “meet with general encouragement and support.” Anne Newport Royall, a traveling journalist from Virginia, was so positive of the success of the improvement plan that she wrote in 1818 as if the creek was already cleared. She recorded,

“The Huntsville Spring is a great natural curiosity. This you, as well as myself, heard before. But I had no conception of it. It flows from under the Bluff mentioned and forms a stream large enough for the purposes of navigation, and empties into Indian Creek, also navigable.”

In July of the same year, the *Republican* reported that Huntsville had a sent a memorial to Congress asking for help in the work. The enthusiasm expressed for the improvement apparently did not match the actual contributions toward the project, for little or no work was done on clearing the creek for another several years.¹⁹

In 1818 Dr. Fearn relinquished his directorship of the Planters’ and merchants’ Bank and decided to travel to Europe to further his medical studies. he studied abroad for two years before returning to Huntsville, attending St. Thomas in Paris and the Royal College of Surgeons in London.²⁰ While Dr. Fearn studied in Europe, Huntsville’s economic boom, based on high cotton prices, readily available credit for land purchases, and the expanded issue of banknotes, ended. In 1818 the Bank of the United States implemented a deflationary policy that aimed at raising its own specie reserves, thus limiting the note issue of state banks. The resulting decrease in the money supply led to drastic price drops, especially in exports like cotton. Also in 1818 land sales based on credit, easily attainable due to the expectation of quick and large profits from cotton production, were at their zenith. The following year cotton prices in New York fell from 34 cents per pound to 24 cents. In local markets the drop in cotton price was even more dramatic as prices fell from 25 cents a pound in the winter of 1818-19 to 12 and 14 cents in late June. As a result of the Panic of 1819, citizens of the Tennessee Valley owed the national government over \$6 million in land debt at the end of 1820.²¹

As Huntsville’s economy began to sag during 1820, Dr. Fearn returned and took a leading role in support of re-intensifying efforts to render Indian Creek navigable. On December 21, 1820, the Alabama Legislature chartered the Indian Creek Navigation Company, naming Thomas Fearn as one of five commissioners to open books for subscription to stock in the new corporation. The act also granted the corporation the power of eminent domain, saying “the said corporation should have power and authority to open and improve the navigation of Indian Creek, in Madison County, from the spring at Huntsville to the town of Triana, at the mouth of said creek by removing the obstructions therein, opening

a canal or canals, or such other mode or way as they may deem expedient.” The act also granted the company the right to charge tolls, stating,

“whenever said creek should be rendered navigable for boats drawing ten inches of water, and so long as said creek shall be left thus navigable, it shall be lawful for said corporation to demand and receive toll on all boats navigating the same between the towns of Huntsville and Triana, at the following rates: Two dollars for every ton of freight which said boat carries, provided that toll shall not be collected on boats running between Prout’s Mill and Triana.”²²

The legislation did not authorize any capital for the company, but it granted the company the right to issue stock at \$50 per share. The act also provided that “as soon as the sum of \$10,000 shall have been subscribed, notice thereof shall be given by the commissioners.” On March 30, 1821, the company announced it would sell stock for three days beginning April 23. Eager investors quickly met the \$10,000 subscription level, and elected officers for the company. Shareholders elected the same directors who were appointed by the legislature as the company’s directors, and elected Dr. Fearn president.²³

Evidence of community support for Dr. Fearn and the other canal developers also came from other sources. Two local surveyors “volunteered their services to superintend the leveling and surveying” of the canal route. The result of their survey, suggesting the canal would be an easy and quickly completed project, greatly encouraged the hopes of the canal’s promoters and supporters. Local cotton merchants also readily supported the canal, eagerly anticipating that “the opening of the Indian Creek Canal would produce a clear saving of at least 5 or 6000 dollars per annum,” from the \$10,000 to \$12,000 the town’s merchants paid for hauling cotton over the roads. Additionally, the *Republican* reported that people owning land along the canal route were all “liberally disposed” to the project and willing to make “arrangement with the company that may be deemed fair and equitable.” Land speculators, who had earlier bought stock in the Triana Land Company, also enthusiastically supported the canal, which they believed would increase the value of their Triana property.

With the community behind Dr. Fearn and the enterprise, work on the Indian Creek Canal began in April, 1821. The initial work in clearing the creek started where the navigable section of the Huntsville Spring Branch of Indian Creek began, somewhere between Lanier’s Landing and the confluence of the Huntsville Spring Branch and the creek originating from Byrd Spring, located roughly halfway between the spring pool in Huntsville and the Tennessee River at the mouth of Indian Creek. (See map.)²⁵

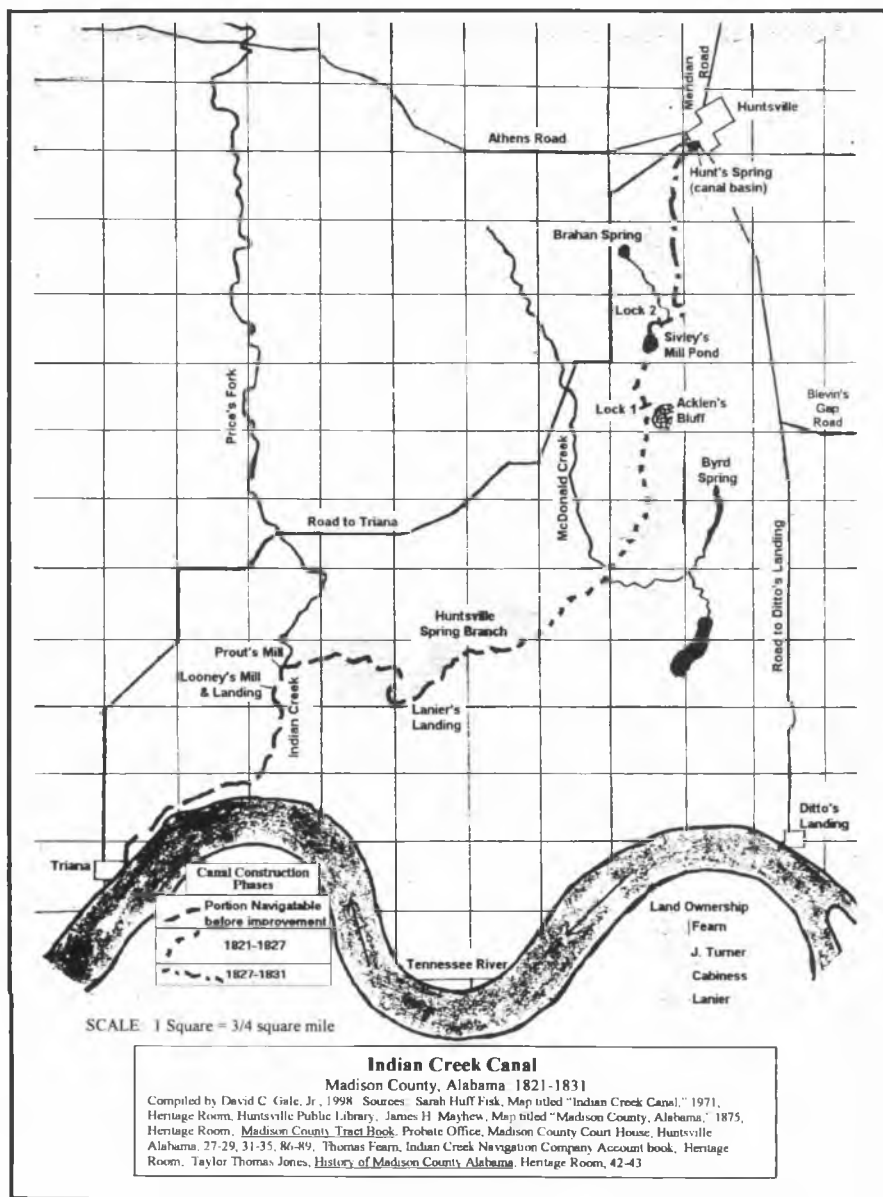
The success and progress achieved by Dr. Fearn and the canal company in the first few months of work encouraged canal promoters to believe that their support would soon bring returns of profit and easy access to the Tennessee River. In

August, 1821, four months after construction began, the *Republican* enthusiastically reported that the canal ‘is rapidly progressing’ and “there is a fair prospect of so far completing the work, as to render it of essential service for the transportation of Cotton the ensuing season.” Shareholders of the Triana Land Company also anticipated quick profits from the sale of lots in Triana. On September 28, 1821, an announcement advertising the sale of Triana lots proudly proclaimed that “the town will derive an enhanced value from its continuity to Indian Creek...[and the] trade which must center in Triana from the Canal now constructing.” Additionally, promoters of another river improvement project to build a larger canal to bypass the Muscle Shoals in the Tennessee River saw the seemingly sure success of the Indian Creek Canal as the impetus for rallying the region behind their project. Promoters of both the Indian Creek Canal and the Muscle Shoals Canal, including Dr. Fearn, argued that “the ease and cheapness of this [the Indian Creek Canal] construction, compared with its public utility, will operate as a powerful stimulus upon the minds of our citizens to effect much more extensive and important works of the same description.”²⁶

At the height of the community’s support for the canal, the people of Madison County elected the president of the Indian Creek Navigation Company, Dr. Fearn, as a representative to the state legislature. While tirelessly promoting, financially backing, and arguing for both the Indian Creek Canal and Muscle Shoals Canal, Dr. Fearn served in the state legislature from 1822 to 1829.²⁷

Soon, however, the expectations concerning the simplicity of clearing the creek evaporated and the ease of the initial clearing work proved deceptive, compared to the difficulty the canal developers faced in rendering the rest of the creek navigable. The early work consisted merely of removing trees and logs and clearing minor impediments in the natural channel of the creek. In that stretch, the tributaries of the Huntsville Spring Branch fed enough water into the existing natural channel to accommodate boats. Above the point at which the waters of McDonald Creek and the Byrd Spring joined the main stream, however, the natural channel and water level could not accommodate boats. From that point to Huntsville, laborers would have to dig to deepen and straighten the channel, as well as construct two locks, before the goal of creating a navigable water connection between Huntsville and the Tennessee River could be achieved.²⁸

Completion of this more difficult part of the canal far exceeded the expense and time initially estimated; surveys of the canal route made by the volunteer surveyors grossly underestimated the complications and obstacles the canal project would encounter. In the Indian Creek Canal project, as well as in many canal projects throughout the nation, the surveyors who surveyed a section of canal line and estimated a period of time required for construction could rarely anticipate the problems that would arise once diggers delved into the subsoil structure. Based on the observations of the volunteer surveyors for this project, the *Republican* optimistically reported that the canal route was “more favorable” than the community’s “most sanguine wishes could have anticipated.” “No deep digging nor high embankment” was necessary according to the surveyors in



1821, and “a canal of three feet will not require an average exceeding three feet digging.” In contradiction to the early optimism, the Indian Creek Canal faced the same problems that canals being built all across the nation faced. Typical problems encountered included how to take an accurate level with only the equipment of a county surveyor; how to dig a canal channel and remove the earth most efficiently; the most expedient way to cut through tree roots; how to design lock gates, to make valves for the gradual release of water; and how to create locks and gates that could be operated easily by hand power. Once digging started, fortunate builders might strike a soft, water repellent clay, but frequently, canal diggers encountered hardpan, porous sands, or solid rock, making digging difficult, slow, and expensive. Given the diversity of soil and rock outcroppings in Madison County, the builders of the Indian Creek Canal likely faced similar difficulties. Time was also often lost and costs increased by inadequate supplies of hewn stone, timber, and labor, especially on those canal lines cut through the lightly populated and economically underdeveloped frontier regions such as Madison County.²⁰ The Indian Creek Canal project encountered all of these obstacles in the effort to build Huntsville’s “easy water connection” to the Tennessee River.

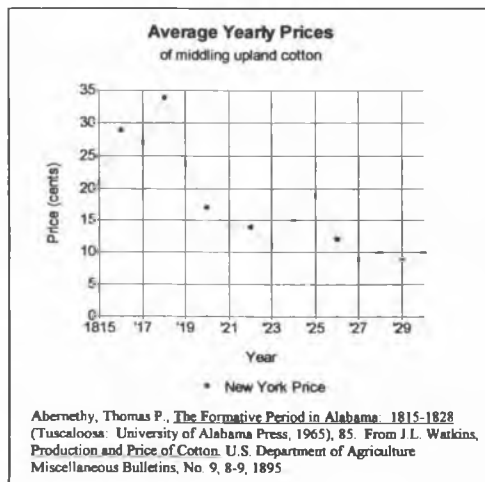
As the progress of the canal slowed due to the increased difficulty in construction, investors began to question the potential for profit in the venture, and financial support for the project began to wane. In early 1822 the *Republican* ran articles to counter the growing concern over the difficulties encountered in the canal construction. These articles referred to major canal projects under way in other parts of the nation, especially the Erie and Champlain canals in New York and other projects in Illinois and Ohio. In the articles, a clear message is made that other parts of the nation, especially the two northwestern frontier states, continued to press on in constructing their canals, which could only result in increased commerce and prosperity of those areas. If Huntsville wished to share in that prosperity, the message implied, the Indian Creek Canal project must also press forward.³⁰ Nevertheless, progress on the canal slowed and the company’s operating funds began to decline.

Before the capital evaporated completely, Dr. Fearn decided to fix the cost of constructing the next leg of the canal by hiring a contractor rather than continuing to pay the costs of the work crew hired directly by the company. On April 26, 1822, Dr. Fearn ran an ad in the *Republican* calling for proposals for “completing the portion of canal and river improvements on the part of the creek lying below Sively’s Mill.”³¹ There is no record of any contractor ever signing on to complete that stretch of the canal, so it seems reasonable to assume that either the company did not receive proposals for the job or did not receive any proposals it could afford to pay.

As the community’s confidence in the project continued to decline and the company’s coffers continued to shrink, Dr. Fearn turned to the organization of a lottery to attempt to finance the completion of the canal. In early 1824 ads in the *Republican* and a new Huntsville newspaper, the *Democrat*, announced the

organization of a lottery to help finance the canal project, described as of “incalculable importance” to Huntsville and Madison County. The plan called for the sale of 4060 tickets to be sold at \$6 each, prizes totaling \$20,300 to be awarded by a drawing, and \$4060 (\$1 from each ticket) to go to the company’s operating funds. The company hoped to have all the tickets sold by early June, and scheduled the drawing for June 10.³²

A combination of continuing doubt concerning the canal’s profitability and worsening economic conditions in north Alabama prevented the lottery from being as successful as hoped. Since the Panic of 1819, the average price of cotton in New York had fallen from 34 cents in 1818, to 24 cents in 1819, to 17 cents in 1820, to 14 cents in 1821, and bottomed out at 11 cents per pound in 1823. By the time of the lottery sales, north Alabama’s cotton farmers were feeling the worst effects of the economic decline that had begun six years earlier. Many farmers of the region found themselves deeply in debt from the credit on which they had purchased land and the unexpected drop in cotton prices. In addition to low cotton prices, the *Democrat* reported in April, 1824, that north Alabama for several years “has been exposed to all the inconveniences incident to a depreciated and unsettled currency.” As a consequence, lottery ticket sales were far below the expected level as the date of the drawing approached. The manager of the lottery announced on the day before the scheduled drawing that he needed a “short time” to sell the remaining tickets, and the drawing was postponed. Unwilling to set a firm new date for the drawing, the manager stated, “The public may rest assured...the day for the drawing will be fixed and announced soon.” Despite an increased effort to sell the remaining tickets, by the end of August the company had sold only half of the total number of tickets available.³³ It is doubtful that any large number of the remaining tickets were sold by the day of the drawing on the first Monday of January, 1825.



By late 1824, though still advocating the need to improve Huntsville's transportation connections through internal improvements, the citizens of the community had withdrawn their financial support from the seemingly unprofitable canal project. Toward the end of 1824 evidence from newspapers suggests that Huntsville's promoters turned their attention toward the development of turnpike roads to connect their town to other markets. In September, the *Democrat* informed readers of a proposed turnpike from Nashville to Huntsville, and encouraged interested citizens of Huntsville to attend a meeting in Nashville on the subject. The *Democrat* speculated that "a good road between Nashville and this place...would ensure the transportation of a large portion of our cotton to the port of Nashville." In early November an article appeared that discussed the possibility of a national turnpike following a route through Huntsville. Succinctly stating the general mood of Huntsville's citizens, the article read in part, "At present we are denied the advantages of commerce, so happily enjoyed by most other places, and our *only* hope is in supplying the blessings by a resort to Turnpike roads. [emphasis added]"³⁴

In mid 1825 Dr. Fearn made his final attempt to gain the community's financial support for completing the canal. On September 23, 1825, he put an announcement in the *Republican* describing two resolutions that came out of what appears to have been the final meeting of the officers of the Indian Creek Navigation Company. The first stated that each shareholder should pay the company \$2 per share; the second called for a meeting on October 1st in order to elect new officers for the company. There is no evidence to suggest that the call for \$2 per share was heeded, nor is there any to suggest that the second resolution was ever acted upon.³⁵

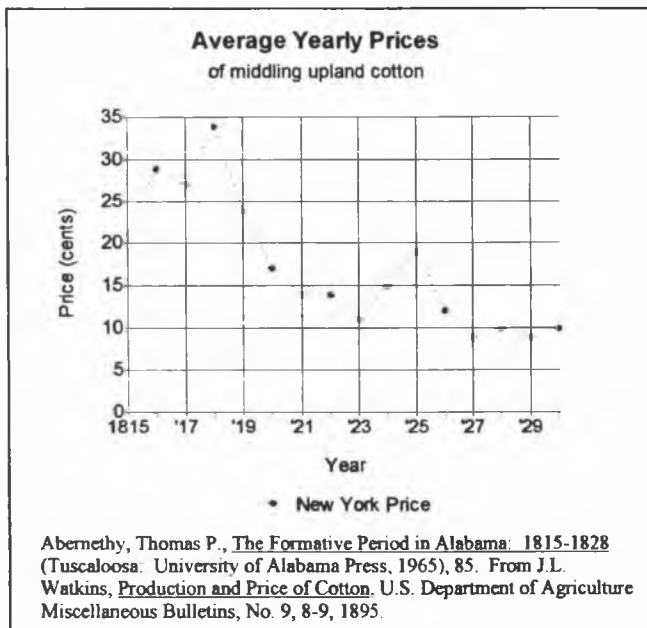
Despite the desertion of all other investors and the knowledge that the completion of the canal would be costly, time consuming and most likely unprofitable, Dr. Fearn decided to finance and oversee the completion of the project with his own funds. A number of facts suggest that a sense of commitment, personal honor and reputation overrode Dr. Fearn's economic motivation for completing the canal. First, Dr. Fearn would not have faced economic ruin if the canal failed or was abandoned. Like many of the other economic elite of the town, during his work on the canal, Dr. Fearn had a number of other profitable sources of income, including his medical practice, a profitable mercantile business (named Fearn & Erskine), and a sawmill. Second, Dr. Fearn, from his years as the company's president, was obviously aware of the expense and difficulty he would encounter in attempting to complete the project. Third the canal company achieved very little during the four years he had served as president. To walk away from the project at that point would have left a stain of failure on his record. Fourth, Dr. Fearn seems to have firmly believed that completion of the canal would benefit the commerce and growth of Huntsville--a town in which he was already considered a leading citizen.³⁶

The completion of the Erie Canal in October 1825 "struck the national consciousness" and the weeks of national celebration that followed resonated with

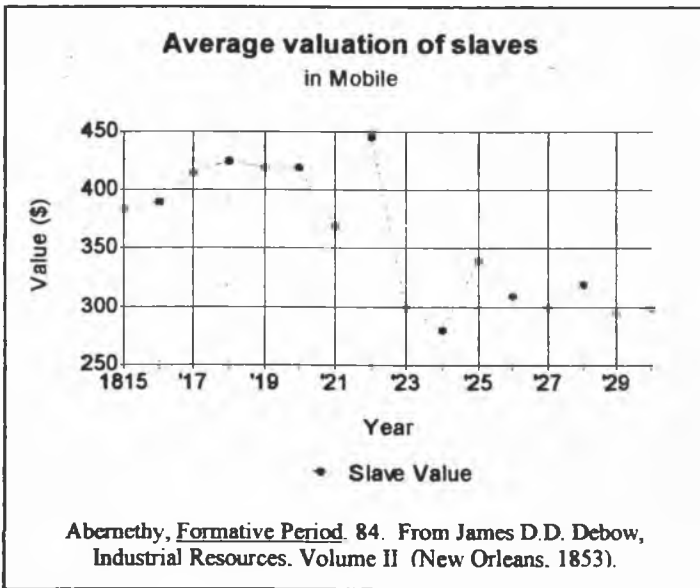
the rhetoric of nationalism and republicanism, all of which inspired Dr. Fearn to intensify construction activity on the Indian Creek Canal. In October of 1825 he leased six male slaves, Alex, Burton, William, Bird, Jim, and Sam.³⁷ Three of these slaves, Alex, William, and Bird, remained in Dr. Fearn's hire during the entire four years for which there are records. In November Dr. Fearn leased another male slave, and by the end of the year he had added at least three free-wage laborers on the canal payroll, including one overseer.³⁸

No record exists of the laborers used to work on the canal project before 1825, but for the period from June 1825 to December 1828, account books kept by Dr. Fearn which include expenditures on labor are extant. The mixing of free-wage labor with the labor of slaves proved to be the most distinctively southern aspect of the construction of the Indian Creek Canal. Yet, even though Dr. Fearn employed slave labor to build the canal, the means by which he acquired and the ways in which he employed that slave labor made his project a capitalist venture.

Two key factors must be present to constitute capitalism: the first is free-wage labor and the second is a separation of labor and capital.³⁹ Dr. Fearn's canal venture possessed both of these elements despite the use of slave labor, and thus can be classified as capitalist. In terms of the second condition, it is readily apparent that Dr. Fearn controlled the capital of the project, but he hired and did not own the slaves who labored to build the canal. To acquire the workers he needed to build his canal, Dr. Fearn was forced to shop the labor market, using free-wage labor and leasing slaves.



Demand, local conditions, and the price of cotton determined the amount paid for the slaves that Dr. Fearn hired. The average price of a pound of cotton in New York rose from 11 cents in 1823 to 15 cents in 1824 and to 19 cents in 1825. When Dr. Fearn hired slaves in 1826, he paid \$790.50 for six slaves for one year, an average of \$131.75 per slave. During that year the price of cotton dropped from 19 cents to 12 cents. When Dr. Fearn hired slaves in 1827, the drop in the price of cotton during the prior year lowered the price he paid for slaves. In 1827 he was able to hire six slaves, including five of the six he had hired the year before, for \$600, an average of \$100 per slave.⁴⁰ During the years covered by Dr. Fearn's records, he hired between six and ten slaves annually at an average of \$100 per slave. Assuming that Dr. Fearn hired an average of eight slaves at \$100 per year during the years of work, it would appear that he spent over \$5,600 on the hiring of slaves between 1825 and 1831.



All of the slaves Dr. Fearn hired to work on the canal were black, but not all of the free-wage laborers he hired were white. One of them, a man named William Stoneham, is listed in the 1830 Alabama census as a 36-55 year old free colored person. The information available on Stoneham is limited to the records in the canal account book, but apparently Dr. Fearn did not consider race to be a factor affecting the value of a person's labor, for he paid Stoneham the same wages he paid white free-wage laborers, \$20 per month. For a short time in the last half of 1825, Dr. Fearn employed both Stoneham and slaves concurrently. No reference in the account book reveals how closely they worked together, but

Stoneham definitely worked on site at the canal. Unlike the black slaves, however, he was not restricted to staying at the canal site. In November 1825 Dr. Fearn recorded in his account book that he repaid Stoneham \$22.58 that the free black man had advanced him to purchase food and supplies for the canal work crew. Undoubtedly Stoneham left the canal site and traveled either to a nearby mill or perhaps even to town to purchase the supplies. The fact that Dr. Fearn would hire both slaves and a free black to work on the same project is unusual. No reason is given, but after December 1825 William Stoneham apparently left the employment of Dr. Fearn, as his name no longer appears on the account books for the canal project.⁴¹

Most of the slaves hired for the canal project worked, ate, and slept on the canal site. The work was slow and arduous, as is evident from the frequent account book entries of purchases of shovels, spades and saws to replace broken tools. Dr. Fearn spent a yearly average of \$219.96, or a monthly average of \$18.33, to feed the slaves laboring on his canal. Using the yearly average of eight slaves hired, Dr. Fearn spent an average of \$27.50 per slave per year for food, an amount consistent with historian Thomas Abernethy's claim that the approximate maintenance cost of a slave for one year was \$25. Their diet was similar to the regular diet of slaves across the south, consisting mostly of corn meal and pork, normally in the form of bacon and fatback. The slaves working on the canal consumed an average of four to six bushels of corn meal per month, which probably was made into a variety of products, such as hoecake or corn muffins, but undoubtedly most often cornbread.⁴² They also consumed an average of 100 to 150 pounds of pork per month.

Dr. Fearn paid the slaves directly for extra work and work done on Sundays. He also allowed the slaves to raise livestock and bought their surplus. On October 25, 1828, the record shows him paying cash to "our negroes for hogs (in part of \$17)." Dr. Fearn also supplied whiskey rations as an incentive to slaves when they had to work in cold creek water. Though alcohol consumption by slaves was generally prohibited except on holidays, at least one other incident of slaves receiving a regular whiskey ration exists. The owner of the Buffalo Forge Iron Works in Virginia supplied his slave dam builders with a daily whiskey ration as they worked in the cold, swift-running streams in the Valley of Virginia.⁴³ Dr. Fearn's patterns of whiskey purchases clearly show that the ration was not a regular luxury for the slaves, but was used as an incentive or compensation for working in cold water. With the exception of one whiskey purchase in late April of 1828, Dr. Fearn only purchased whiskey during months in the later fall, winter, and early spring, coinciding with the time of year when water in the creek would be frigid. During the sweltering summer months, when the creek water would be cool and refreshing, not a single entry for a whiskey purchase is recorded.

By early December, 1825, Dr. Fearn's new work crew drew close to finishing the job of clearing the creek of obstructions from Byrd Spring Creek to Sivley's Mill, a task which had dragged on for over three years. By mid-December, only

one place near Acklin's Bluff on that stretch of the creek remained impassable to boats. Confident that this last impediment would soon be overcome, Dr. Fearn reported to a new Huntsville newspaper, the *Southern Advocate*, that his canal would soon be able to accommodate bateaux boats transporting cotton from Sivley's Mill to points downstream.⁴⁴

Unfortunately, reality once again failed to meet expectations. The work crew had hoped that constructing a "jettie dam" just above the impassable section of the creek would funnel and concentrate enough water to allow boats to float over the impediment.⁴⁵ No reference is made to the exact nature of the impediment, but since limestone outcroppings are a common feature around the bluff, it stands to reason that the problem was either the creek passing over a small limestone shelf or a section of shallow rapids created by a solid limestone river bed. At any rate, the jetty failed to solve the problem, and Dr. Fearn was left with no alternative but to have his work crew construct a lock.

The work crew began the next year trying to construct the lock and complete the section of the canal. The lock structure was made of wood, and though no description or drawing of it has been located, the materials and people hired to build the structure suggest that it was similar to the wooden locks of the James River Canal which consisted of two parallel thick brick or stone walls which served as the sides of the lock, with the inside lined with planks of wood fitted together and nailed in place. During the construction of the lock, Dr. Fearn paid \$20.75 to "Keys for [the] hire of his stone mason {for} 12 days." The records show he bought two augurs and a handsaw, paid in a single purchase \$111.17 for planks and a boat, supplied wood from his own sawmill, and bought 66 pounds of nails during the construction period of the lock near Acklin's Bluff.⁴⁶

Finally, in mid January 1827, the work crew completed the lock, opening Indian Creek to navigation from Sivley's mill pond to the Tennessee River. On January 19, 1827, the *Advocate* urged its readers to travel to the lock and observe "boats heavily laden with cotton, pass through a lock, descending several feet, in as many minutes, without the least risk or danger." The article also hailed Dr. Fearn and his brother, who "at their own expense, persevered in the undertaking, through so many discouraging circumstances" and encouraged them to complete the canal with a connection to Huntsville.⁴⁷

Not every citizen of Madison County was as enthusiastic about the canal, however. A property owner along the canal route, John Turner, apparently did not approve. When he challenged Dr. Fearn and the canal company's right of eminent domain over the portion of the creek which ran through his property, they turned to a third party to settle the matter. In the end, Dr. Fearn's canal company was granted the right of eminent domain, but John Turner was awarded \$155 for the land the canal company needed, plus interest totaling \$8.26 compiled over eight months.⁴⁸

Work financed by Dr. Fearn to finish the canal continued for another four and a half years, but his account books for the canal project only extend to the year 1828, and no further newspaper stories about the canal work were written until

its completion. In 1828 surveying and digging of the canal through the tract of land owned by the Cabiness family began, and construction of the canal's second lock started. This second lock was located just above Sivley's mill pond and just below the point where water fed into the creek from Brahan Spring. The second lock was also wooden, as is evidenced from Dr. Fearn's purchase of 1663 feet of plank for \$166.37 during the early construction of the lock in the spring of 1827. Just above the second lock, the canal used the water from Brahan Spring to augment its water supply. Above this point, however, Huntsville Spring alone fed virtually all the water in the creek. The shallow natural channel through this part of the creek could not accommodate boats, thus this last stretch of canal had to cut and was truly an artificial waterway.⁴⁹ A later painting of part of this portion of the canal, lying just below the canal basin, showed a gently southward curving canal, with its channel walls constructed of stone masonry, and lined with evenly spaced trees, which would have been very difficult and expensive to build.

Finally, in 1831, the canal was finished. In mid April, 1831, both the *Democrat* and the *Advocate* celebrated the opening of the canal with congratulatory articles. Symbolic of the personal stake which Dr. Fearn and his brother had invested in the project, the *Advocate* referred to the completed work not as the Indian Creek Canal, but as Fearn's Canal. Along with remarking on the "incalculable commercial advantage to the public" brought by the canal's completion, both papers showered accolades upon Dr. Fearn. The *Democrat* wrote that "the citizens of Huntsville and the country adjacent are indebted to the enterprise and perseverance of a single individual for the accomplishment."⁵⁰

Dr. Fearn willed the Indian Creek Canal into existence through steady determination and a refusal to risk shame and humiliation born of failure. Later it was written of Dr. Fearn that the canal, "his public enterprise with private means," left his "fortune somewhat impaired."⁵¹ Despite the cost to himself and the lack of potential for profit, Dr. Fearn's sense of personal honor and commitment to community development compelled him to finish the project.

Unfortunately, the utility of the canal was short lived and operated for less than a decade. The canal competed with roads for the transport of goods to and from the Tennessee River for about six years. At its opening, the price for shipping one ton of cotton down the canal was 27-1/2 cents, less than half the cost of hauling a ton of cotton by road to Ditto's Landing. By the end of 1831, Dr. Fearn set the freight prices on the canal at \$1.00 per ton for cotton, flour, salt, whiskey, and all unspecified items, 15 cents per 1/2 cord of bark and tanbark, 12-1/2 cents per 1/2 cord of firewood, and \$1.50 per 1,000 feet of plank. These prices were kept below the \$2 per ton allowed by the original act of incorporation of the Indian Creek Navigation Company due to the competition from roads. Little else is mentioned in the historical record about the canal, but according to a later newspaper article in 1837 "the construction of a turnpike to the river afforded a cheaper and shorter route and forced the abandonment of the canal."⁵²

The Indian Creek Canal was not the only contribution Dr. Fearn made as a leading citizen of Huntsville. In 1835 he and his brother purchased the city's waterworks for \$2,530.30, and constructed pumps that, within a year and a half, supplied the courthouse square with running water. Dr. Fearn served on the Board of State Medical Examiners from 1823 to 1829. Although he did not favor secession in 1861, he was selected by Alabama's Secession Convention as one of the state's nine deputies to a proposed convention of seceding states. Dr. Fearn was also elected to the First Confederate Congress, but relinquished the post after one month due to health reasons, and at this point he retired from public life.⁵³ On January 16, 1863, after a harrowing imprisonment at the hands of federal troops during the Civil War which exacerbated his illness, Dr. Fearn died in his home on Franklin Street.

Of all the achievements accomplished by Dr. Fearn during his lifetime, the single achievement most prominently mentioned in his obituary was the completion of the canal. It read in part, "He projected and carried to a successful issue, as a private enterprise, but at great pecuniary sacrifice to himself, a project for a canal from the celebrated Spring of our city, (to be fed for several miles solely by its waters) to the Tennessee River."⁵⁴

For Thomas Fearn the "great pecuniary sacrifice" was an acceptable price to pay for achieving success and maintaining personal honor and reputation. The canal came to be seen as a symbol of Huntsville's progress and affluence both before its construction and after its completion. During the actual construction of the canal, however, most of the citizens of the community lost faith in the promise of the project. The initial enthusiasm for the project was lost when the difficulties encountered, the nature of the physical labor required, and the unexpected time and expense needed became realities. Dr. Fearn began as one of many citizens who supported the building a water connection between the town and the Tennessee River, but he ended as being the sole financier of the completion of the canal. Though Fearn remained a steadfast supporter of the canal project for its duration, his motivation for supporting the canal changed over time. He began with a belief that the project would bring both profit to the *investors* and benefit to the young town of Huntsville. As other promoters backed out, however, Dr. Fearn became less concerned with profit and determined to finish the project as a matter of personal honor and reputation. Ultimately, through the eclipsing of one man's profit motive by his sense of personal honor and the utilization of a mixture of slave labor and free-wage labor to complete the project, the Indian Creek Canal became a distinctively southern capitalist venture.

Note from the author:

Through the course of researching this paper, numerous people expressed the hope that some part of the canal or one of its locks might still exist and be discovered by excavation. Unfortunately, a number of city improvement projects

in the 160 years since the time of the canal have altered the portion of the course of Huntsville Spring Branch on which the lock above Sivley's mill was located. The original course of the creek ran through the area around Leeman Ferry Road, an area of the city which has undergone much development and construction. If any portion of the lock remained at the time the land was filled in, perhaps it still lies buried under the rock and soil which was undoubtedly used as fill.

Also the portion of the creek which today runs truer to its original course, a stretch from near the old airport property to the boundary of Redstone Arsenal, has undergone numerous deepening, widening, and other channelization projects which have radically altered the original landscape. The other lock, which was located near Acklin's Bluff, originally sat somewhere along this stretch. Since the course of the creek is much wider and deeper than it was in the days of the canal, it is highly unlikely that any remnant of the Acklin's Bluff lock remains.

The last portion of the canal route upon which the only structures lining the canal were landings, such as Lanier's and Looney's, and mills, now lies under the waters of Wheeler Lake within the boundaries of Redstone Arsenal.

The possibility of any portion of the canal remaining intact seems very doubtful. It is possible, however, that the stone masonry and wood used to build the locks and line the upper portion of the canal were scavenged at some point after the canal was abandoned but before physical evidence of its existence disappeared. Perhaps pieces of the canal were used in the construction of buildings and other structures in Huntsville and Madison County in the mid and late 1800s. If this be the case, then Dr. Fearn's canal lives on, not just in the minds and hearts of Huntsville, but all around, unseen and unnoticed.

Endnotes

¹I would briefly like to thank Helen Gale, Elise Stephens, Dr. Johanna Shields, Ranee G. Pruitt (Archivist at the Huntsville/Madison County Public Library), Nancy Rohr, Marilyn Dabbs, Gary Douglas, the staff of the heritage Room at the Huntsville/Madison County Public Library, and the staff of the Madison County Probate Records Office for their assistance in this project.

²Thomas Perkins Abernethy, Formative Period in Alabama: 1815-1828 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1965), 83-84. Daniel Dupree, Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama: 1800-1840 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 18, 25; List of Taxable Property in Madison County, 1815, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama.

³Elise Stephens, Historic Huntsville: A City of New Beginnings. 27; Abernethy, Formative Period. 94; Huntsville Republican, August 31, 1821.

⁴Dupree, Transforming. 127; Republican, April 6, 1821; Abernethy, Formative Period. 94.

⁵Republican, August 31, 1821; Abernethy, Formative Period. 95; Stephens, Historic Huntsville. 26.

⁶Republican, August 31, 1821.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Republican, April 6, 1821; Southern Advocate, November 3, 1826.

⁹Harvey Segal, "Cycles of Canal Construction," Carter Goodrich, ed. Canals and American Economic Development (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 172.

¹⁰Daniel Feller, The Jacksonian Promise: America, 1815-1840 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 18; Goodrich, ed. Canals and Development, 176; Ronald Shaw, Canals for a Nation: The Canal Era in the United States: 1790-1860 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1990), 30-31; Republican, August 31, 1821.

- ¹¹Goodrich, ed. Canals and Development, 186; Republican April 6, 1821; Ronald E. Shaw, Canals for a Nation, 3.
- ¹²Elizabeth Fernyhough, The Farns of Virginia and Some Allied Families (Richmond: Expert Graphics, 1973), 27; Lynn Murray, "Dr. Thomas Fearn: Pioneer Builder of Huntsville," Historic HuntsvilleReview (1:1, January 1971), 4.
- ¹³Shaw, Canals for a Nation, 112; Lawrence Larsen, The Urban South (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1990) 27, The road from Danville to Goochland crossed the James River only a few miles above Richmond, and the James River borders the entire southern boundary of Goochland County.
- ¹⁴Evidence of Fearn's commitment to religion is found in his personal account books, available in the Archives in the Heritage Room of the Public Library in Huntsville, Alabama. In his accounts, Fearn recorded regular donations and payments to ministers and Christian organizations, such as the "Theological Seminary, Maryville." For Fearn's role in the temperance society, see Dupree, Transforming, 170; James Oakes, The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 69.
- ¹⁵Fernyhough, Farns of Virginia, 27; Murray, "Pioneer," 8.
- ¹⁶Dupree, Transforming, 9-10, 25-41; Abernethy, Formative Period, 84; Murray, "Pioneer," 8.
- ¹⁷Anne Newport Royall, Letters from Alabama: 1817-1822 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1969), 285n; Dupree, Transforming, 128.
- ¹⁸Letter from John W. Walker to W.H. Crawford, Secretary of the U.S. Treasury in "Huntsville Becomes a Town: From Wilderness Log Cabins to Sturdy Brick Buildings," Historic Huntsville Quarterly (Fall/winter 1988-89), 26-32.
- ¹⁹Republican, March 3, 1818; Ibid., March 24, 1818; Letter from Anne Newport Royall to "Matt," January 1, 1818, in Letters, 119-120; Republican, July 18, 1818; Dupree, Transforming, 128.
- ²⁰An announcement in the Republican, January 9, 1819, lists the names of the directors for the bank. This is the first such announcement in which Fearn's name is no longer listed; Murray, "Pioneer," 5. While Dr. Fearn was in London, the final phases of construction on the Regent's Canal were completed, connecting a branch of the Grand Union Canal with East London. With much pomp and circumstance, the Regent's Canal was opened in 1820. Ironically, just as the construction of the Indian Creek Canal would far exceed its estimated time and cost, the Regent's Canal which Dr. Fearn may have seen while in England cost twice its original cost estimate. Limehouse Canal Museum "Regents Canal History," <http://www.charitynet.org/~LcanalMus/lenregen.htm>.
- ²¹Dupree, Transforming, 50, 101; Abernethy, Formative Period, 84.
- ²²Edward Chambers Betts, Historic Huntsville, Heritage Room, Huntsville Public Library; Toulmin's Digest of Alabama Laws, edition 1823, 1823, 710; Republican, February 2, 1821.
- ²³Betts, Historic, 67; Republican, April 6, 1821; Ibid., April 27, 1821; Murray, "Pioneer," 9.
- ²⁴Republican, April 6, 1821. The newspaper article refers to the surveyors only as Sannoner and Weakley; Ibid., April 13, 1821.
- ²⁵Evidence from Thomas Fearn's Indian Creek Navigation Account Book and the chronology of the opening of sections as reported in the newspaper make clear that the improvements to the creek were made starting from this spot on the creek and working progressively back toward Huntsville. Dupree reports that the creek was navigable to within five miles of Huntsville, thus half way down the approximately ten mile long creek.
- ²⁶Republican, August 31, 1821; Ibid., September 28, 1821.
- ²⁷Murray, "Pioneer," 13.
- ²⁸Taylor Thomas Jones, History of Madison County Alabama, manuscript written in Huntsville from 1880-1886, transcribed in 1940, Heritage Room, Huntsville/Madison County Public Library, Huntsville, Alabama, 43.
- ²⁹Goodrich, ed. Canals and Development, 174; Republican, April 6, 1821; Shaw, Canals for a Nation.
- ³⁰Republican, November 16, 1821; Ibid., February 15, 1822; Ibid., February 22, 1822.
- ³¹Ibid., April 26, 1822.
- ³²Huntsville Democrat, February 24, 1824. The ad ran in the Democrat through July 13; Republican, March 17, 1824. The ad ran in the Republican through June 18.
- ³³Abernethy, Formative Period, 84; Dupree, Transforming, 49-71; Democrat, April 13, 1824; Republican, June 18, 1824; Ibid., August 27, 1824.
- ³⁴Democrat, September 21, 1824; Ibid., November 2, 1824.
- ³⁵Republican, September 23, 1825. The lack of any announcement of new officers in the newspapers or record in Fearn's account book for the company suggests the election never took place. The account

books from June 1825 to December 1828 that Dr. Fearn kept for the Indian Creek Navigation Company are available and show no record of any such funds being received.

³⁶Indian Creek Account Book, 19.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Feller, Jacksonian Promise, 18; Shaw, Canals for a Nation, 202-203; Indian Creek Account Book, 19-21.

³⁹Historian Douglas Egerton argues that slave labor in the South provided the foundation for a premodern, precapitalist society. Douglas Egerton, "Markets without a Market Revolution: Southern Planters and Capitalism," Journal of the Early Republic, 16 (Summer 1996), 207, 211. Eugene Genovese, the most prominent historian in the study of slavery and antebellum southern economy, argued that the antebellum south had a precapitalistic economy in his early work The World the Slaveholders Made. More recently, however, Genovese has backed away from evaluating the south as precapitalist and instead argues in The Slaveholder's Dilemma that the antebellum south's economy was distinct from and developing differently than the capitalistic north.

⁴⁰James Sellers, Slavery in Alabama (Birmingham: University of Alabama Press, 1950), 210; Abernethy, Formative Period, 85; Indian Creek Account Book, 25, 30.

⁴¹Ibid., 19, 20. Dr. Fearn repaid Stoneham \$18.38 on December 16 and the balance of \$4.20 on December 30, 1830. Alabama Census, Madison County, 104; Indian Creek Account Book, 19. Dr. Fearn's hiring of Stoneham is even more amazing when the concurrent prevailing attitudes that existed in the community toward free blacks is taken into consideration. According to historian Daniel Dupree, the Huntsville and Madison County community regarded the small number of free blacks living in the community as dangerous and undesirable. Dupree, Transforming, 217. After a city ordinance had been passed in 1828 regarding "Free Persons of Color," the Advocate referred to the free black population as "a serious evil to the slave population." Advocate, January 1, 1830. Yet, Dr. Fearn hired Stoneham at the same time he employed slave hirelings.

⁴²Abernethy, Formative Period, 85; Sam Hilliard, "Hog Meat and Compone: Food Habits in the Antebellum South." Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, 113:1 (February 1969), 1-13 as quoted in Nancy Rohr, transcription of "Indian Creek Navigation Company and Personal Accounts." I.

⁴³Charles Dew, Bond of Iron: Master and Slave at Buffalo Forge (New York: Norton & Company, 1994), 108-121; Indian Creek Account Book, 41; Dew, Iron, 31.

⁴⁴Southern Advocate, December 9, 1825.

⁴⁵Indian Creek Account Book, 20.

⁴⁶I. W. Richardson, "The First Alabama Canal," The Best from American Canals Number 1, (York, Pennsylvania: The American Canal and Transportation Center, 1983), 29, 42; Indian Creek Account Book, January -November 1826; Ibid., 29; Ibid., 23, 25, 27, 29. In November 1825, Fearn paid 75 cents for 150 feet of pine plank. The \$111.17 paid for "planks and a boat" in 1826 amounted to a very large amount of wood.

⁴⁷Advocate, January 19, 1827. The first recorded freight of cotton floated down the completed stretch of canal was Stephen Ewing's on March 16, 1827, at a charge of \$7.50.

⁴⁸Indian Creek Account Book, 38.

⁴⁹Ibid., 34; Richardson, "The First Alabama Canal," 42; Stephens, Historic Huntsville, cover.

⁵⁰Democrat, April 7, 1831; Advocate, April 16, 1831.

⁵¹Huntsville Confederate, February 4, 1863.

⁵²Advocate, April 16, 1831; Democrat, December 22, 1831; A History of Navigation on the Tennessee River Syste: An Interpretation of the Economic Influence of this River System on the Tennessee Valley (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1937), 121; Confederate, February 4, 1863.

⁵³Murray, "Pioneer," 11.

⁵⁴Confederate, February 4, 1863.