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From Mussels to Motorboats: Dittos Landing Place in History By Drew Graham

War, famine, drought, and any number of other circumstances can drive people away from a given location. Over a long period of time, the odds grow quite high that at least one of these circumstances might arise and drive off the resident population. However, sometimes a location maintains its importance through the years. At least one such place exists in Madison County, Alabama. The name of this place changed over the course of time, but today locals know this spot along the Tennessee River as Ditto's Landing. Few people know of its long history of use and its centrality to the area's early history. In fact, TVA archeological digs showed the use of the area reaches back thousands of years.¹ People have used this piece of land along the river as a place to live, a source of livelihood, or just a place to live it up. The area known as Ditto's Landing once existed as a place populated by piles of rocks and shells and soon people will transform it into a land of zip lines and rental cabins.

The earliest signs of life around Ditto's Landing lay along the modern-day Whitesburg Bridge, the mouth of the Flint River, and Hobbs Island. The Whitesburg Bridge site, consisted mostly of shell middens.² Shell middens are layers

¹ Francis Roberts Thesis, "Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County," (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Alabama at Huntsville), 7.

² W. Webb and D. DeJarnette, "The Whitesburg Bridge Site M_A^V 10," *Alabama Museum of Natural History*, Museum Paper 24 (1948), 14.

of shells in the ground left behind by people who ate mussels and tossed the shells into a pile long ago. Cultural material here pointed to a very early form of North American civilization.³ Some of these signs included fire pits, fired clay hearths, and burials.⁴ Archeologists also found tools like spatulas, arrowheads, hoes, fish hooks, and an assortment of other small pieces.⁵ The Whitesburg Bridge site and the Flint River site showed a lot of similarity.⁶ The Flint River site also featured a number of shell middens and many of the same landmarks and tools.⁷ The author of the archeological study found it easier to list what the Flint River site uncovered different from the Whitesburg Bridge site, and the most notable object was a set of pearl beads.⁸ One of the floods this site saw chased away one settlement and it took time before a new one established itself.⁹ This demonstrates that the location showed a great deal of value to the shell midden people. Though not very large, a number of sites existed on Hobbs Island. Many of the artifacts found on Hobbs Island lined up with those found in the Whitesburg Bridge and Flint River sites.¹⁰ Some of the sites revealed signs of a different, later culture but most of them

³ Ibid., 16.

⁴ Ibid., 18.

⁵ Ibid., 22-25, 31, 37.

⁶ Ibid., 25.

⁷ W. Webb and D. DeJarnette, "The Flint River Site M_A⁰48," *Alabama Museum of Natural History*, Museum Paper 23 (1948), 29-30.

⁸ Ibid., 44.

⁹ Ibid., 85.

¹⁰ W. Webb, "An Archeological Survey of Wheeler Basin on the Tennessee River in Northern Alabama," *Bureau of American Ethnology*, Bulletin 122 (1939), 89-90.

demonstrated some cultural continuity.¹¹ All of these locations demonstrated that the people of this time period along the Tennessee River, and by extension Ditto's Landing, shared a similar culture.¹²

Through some of the artifacts they left behind, archeologists managed to piece together some of their culture. Some discoveries revealed their everyday lives. We know they cooked some of their food using very hot, smooth river pebbles and likely hunted with the assistance of an atlatl.¹³ Archeologists inferred a few cultural beliefs as well. They likely believed that their canine companions vital to their lifestyle, as they received a proper burial. However, they probably thought themselves above their animals because they buried them separately from people.¹⁴ The shell midden people likely believed in the importance of receiving a proper burial. They practiced a very specific burial pattern that utilized their bowls as a kind of death mask.¹⁵ Archeologists also discovered evidence connecting these people to a wider pre-Colombian, Southeastern North American culture. Some common symbolism helped make this link. For example, on Hobbs Island archeologists discovered a pyramid mound and a four-world-quarter cross

¹¹ Webb, "An Archeological Survey of Wheeler Basin on the Tennessee River in Northern Alabama," 187.

¹² Webb and DeJarnette, "The Flint River Site M_A^O48," 12.

¹³ Webb and DeJarnette, "The Whitesburg Bridge Site M_A^V10," 18, 27; Webb and DeJarnette, "The Flint River Site M_A^O48," 48-49.

¹⁴ Webb and DeJarnette, "The Whitesburg Bridge Site M_A^V10," 18; Webb and DeJarnette, "The Flint River Site M_A^O48," 35.

¹⁵ Webb and DeJarnette, "The Whitesburg Bridge Site M_A^V10," 20, 25-27; Flint site 35

symbol which can both be found at the Moundville site near Tuscaloosa.¹⁶ Fluted projectile points found on site pointed to a Clovis culture connection.¹⁷ The Tennessee River, and by extension Ditto's Landing, possibly started a couple cultural trends as well. The Woodland culture emerged around this area and proceeded to spread outward.¹⁸ At the Flint River site archeologists discovered a deer-antler headdress made from the top of a deer's skull with the antlers still attached. Archeologists have uncovered precious few artifacts of this sort and this old, if any. This headdress might represent the beginning of a religious ceremony or belief that provided the cultural background for Adens and Ohio Hopewell cultures. The Ohio Hopewell culture once made similar headdresses with copper and came into existence many years after these shell midden people at Ditto's Landing.¹⁹ These cultural trends demonstrated that Ditto's Landing represented both a long used tract of land and an important place in the cultural history of the region. However, they found something else at one of these sites, on Hobbs Island: evidence of the later Muskogean peoples.²⁰

The term "Muskogean" referred to a Southeastern language family that included Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw.²¹ These people lived in

¹⁶ Webb, "An Archeological Survey of Wheeler Basin on the Tennessee River in Northern Alabama," 85, 185-186.

¹⁷ Mark Cole, "Clovis." Email. 4/3/2015.

¹⁸ Webb and DeJarnette, "The Flint River Site M_A^O48," 21.

¹⁹ Ibid., 64-65.

²⁰ Webb, "An Archeological Survey of Wheeler Basin on the Tennessee River in Northern Alabama," 186-187.

²¹ J. Scancerelli and H. Hardy, "Native Languages of the Southeastern United States," *University of Nebraska Press*,

the areas surrounding Ditto's Landing as the seventeenth century rolled around. At first these tribes shared the land around Ditto's Landing for hunting and gathering purposes.²² However, during this time two important, unsettling events occurred: the arrival of the Shawnee and the arrival of the Europeans.²³ Prior to the arrival of the Shawnee, Ditto's Landing the general region around it went largely unoccupied as tribes shared it as a hunting ground. As the Shawnee arrived, they pushed South into and past Nashville.²⁴ These actions upset the balance of power in the area, and as such the Shawnee crossed both the Chickasaw and the Cherokee simultaneously. The combined might of the Chickasaw and Cherokee proved too much for the Shawnee and they abandoned the area. This left the Chickasaw and Cherokee with an interesting situation, as they each felt they owned the rights to the recently abandoned land.²⁵

The arrival of the Europeans also greatly unsettled the Native American power balance around Ditto's Landing. The arrival of the Spanish put the Chickasaw on edge, as the Chickasaw mistrusted them.²⁶ The English managed to place themselves on the bad side of the Cherokee. The Iroquois Confederacy placed a claim on the already contested Tennessee Valley, and Ditto's Landing by

<http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/product/Native-Languages-of-the-Southeastern-United-States,671806.aspx>

²² Roberts, "Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County," 39.

²³ Webb, "An Archeological Survey of Wheeler Basin on the Tennessee River in Northern Alabama," 167-181.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 167.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 171.

extension, and the British recognized this claim.²⁷ On top of all this, Europeans settling in the Southeast began to push the Cherokee and Chickasaw into closer quarters.²⁸ All of these conditions combined to create a violent situation. The Cherokee fought wars with the Iroquois Confederation and the Chickasaw. The Cherokee war with the Iroquois Confederation rose over the British acknowledgement of the Iroquois land claim in the Tennessee Valley. The Cherokee tended to doggedly protect land they saw as theirs and the Tennessee Valley was no different.²⁹ The Cherokee fought the Iroquois long enough to where the Iroquois no longer thought the land was worth it.³⁰ The Cherokee and Chickasaw war resulted more from European land pressure. The Chickasaw constantly found themselves bogged down in some kind of hostilities and as such tended to live tightly packed together for safety purposes.³¹ However, some moved away from this, likely because they hoped to find some peace. Those Chickasaw settled around the mouth of the Flint River and on Hobbs Island. However, back then and for a long time thereafter those areas were named Old Chickasaw Fields and Chickasaw Island respectively.³² This settlement lasted from four to seven years, but their

²⁷ Roberts, "Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County," 40.

²⁸ Webb, "An Archeological Survey of Wheeler Basin on the Tennessee River in Northern Alabama," 171.

²⁹ Roberts, "Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County," 40-44.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

³¹ Webb, "An Archeological Survey of Wheeler Basin on the Tennessee River in Northern Alabama," 171.

³² Roberts, "Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County," 46.

very presence in that land irritated the Cherokee since they claimed the land. The Cherokee and Chickasaw fought a war that went poorly for both sides. Ultimately the Chickasaw won the war, but such a pyrrhic victory led the Chickasaw outpost to abandon Ditto's Landing.³³ Thus the land went back to a shared hunting arrangement. This left both sides uneasy about the deal and paved the way for general conflict in the area during much of the eighteenth century.³⁴ Both the Chickasaw and the Cherokee maintained their claims to the land. This eventually caused headaches for the British and United States governments, because in order to force land concessions they had to strike a deal with both tribes.³⁵ Both governments preferred to expand peacefully, but the incessant stream of settlers to this very fertile land made avoiding conflict with the natives rather unlikely.³⁶

The incredible fertility of the land in North Alabama attracted numerous settlers to the area, even before doing so became technically legal. Ditto's Landing fell into that category, and the use of this land would soon change permanently. Following the American Revolution a man and his family slowly made their way South. They moved from Pennsylvania, to Maryland, and then to North Carolina.³⁷ In North Carolina, his Tory past caught up to him somewhat and he applied for a pardon in

³³ Webb, "An Archeological Survey of Wheeler Basin on the Tennessee River in Northern Alabama," 172-173.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

³⁵ Roberts, "Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County," 49.

³⁶ Webb, "An Archeological Survey of Wheeler Basin on the Tennessee River in Northern Alabama," 174.

³⁷ "Ditto's Landing Research." Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives, Box 2, File 8, 3-5.

1782.³⁸ Afterward, he moved down to South Carolina, where he found legal trouble.³⁹ He eventually moved his family out to the promising lands to the West and in 1802 James “John” Ditto, his wife, and six of his seven children became the first white settlers in what eventually became Madison County, Alabama. Ditto and his family first settled at Big Spring, which would eventually become the centerpiece of Huntsville. A couple of years later Ditto moved his family from Big Spring out to the place on the Tennessee River that came to bear his name.⁴⁰

After setting up his family’s new home, Ditto started trading with the local Native American tribes. He settled along an old Native American trail and set up his trading post on Chickasaw (Hobbs) Island. Next Ditto established a ferry, a dock, and a dockyard finishing in approximately 1807. Ditto’s Landing became the only stop on the Tennessee River between the perilous Muscle Shoals and Chattanooga. Ditto used this to his advantage and built flat-bottomed boats designed to make it across Muscle Shoals.⁴¹ Soon others joined the Ditto family in moving to North Alabama. The Madison County census taken prior to the 1809 land sales revealed 2,545 people now lived in Madison

³⁸ “Ditto’s Landing Research.” Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives, Box 2, File 1.

³⁹ “Ditto’s Landing Research.” Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives, Box 2, File 6.

⁴⁰ “Ditto’s Landing Research.” Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives, Box2, File 7.

⁴¹ “Ditto.” Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives, Vertical Files.

County.⁴² Much of this growth occurred in nearby Huntsville, and Huntsville came to see Ditto's Landing as essential to its livelihood.

Unfortunately for James "John" Ditto and his family, he failed to find much success in the business world and possessed very little. Even the land he called home fell outside of his ownership. The Ditto family settled the land of their own volition and without the consent, or payment to, the federal government. This made them squatters. So Leroy Pope stayed well within his right when he purchased the land in 1812.⁴³ Still, Pope allowed the Ditto family to continue living on and working the land they settled. Unknowingly, this set Ditto, and his landing, up for a role in a major national event.

In 1812 war broke out between the United States and the British and Native American tribes played key roles in the conflict. The Creeks claimed and lived in lands that compose part of Alabama for a long time. In fact, the Muskhogean people who settled Hobbs Island were likely Creek ancestors.⁴⁴ The Creeks, long pressured for their lands by white settlers, split into two factions: Lower Creeks and Upper Creeks. Lower Creeks accommodated the growing white presence in the area and began assimilating into that culture. Upper Creeks, called Red Sticks because of their bright red war clubs, wanted to remain separate from white people, resented their encroachment, and believed

⁴² N. Shapiro, "Ditto's Landing," Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society, *A History of Early Settlement: Madison County Before Statehood 1808-1819* (2008), 77.

⁴³ "Ditto's Landing Research." Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives, Box2, File 6, 5-6.

⁴⁴ Shapiro, "Ditto's Landing," 80.

their people should stick to the traditional ways. This division birthed the Creek Civil War, which happened to embed itself into the War of 1812. The Upper Creek sided with England while the Lower Creek joined the United States. The United States sent General Andrew Jackson, the eventual President, to squash the Upper Creek uprising and equipped him with a mixed force of Tennessee troops and Native American tribes. Jackson would eventually win, but he first needed to move his forces across the Tennessee River to get to the Upper Creeks.⁴⁵ Jackson identified Ditto's Landing as the ideal place to cross the Tennessee River. Ditto wrote a letter to Jackson and attempted to work out terms of both pay and labor. In the letter Ditto demonstrated the capability to read and write, but showed he lacked much formal education.⁴⁶ Before the entire force crossed Jackson sent ahead a scouting unit, some picked from the famed Tennessee Volunteers made famous today by the University of Tennessee football team. Davy Crockett went on this scouting trip as one of those selected from the Tennessee Volunteers. This scouting unit took the path the larger force eventually took: using the ferry at Ditto's Landing.⁴⁷ Not long after followed Jackson's main force, and one of his subordinates, Coffee, set up

⁴⁵ "Using Primary Sources in the Classroom: Creek Indian War, 1813-1814 Introduction," *Alabama Department of Archives and History*, 3/3/2010, <http://www.archives.state.al.us/teacher/creekwar/creek.htm>

⁴⁶ "Ditto's Landing Research." Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives, Box2, File 4.

⁴⁷ "Ditto's Landing Research." Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives, Box2, File 12.

camp on the bank opposite of Ditto's Landing.⁴⁸ By crossing at Ditto's Landing, Jackson's forces avoided an added seventy miles through dense woods to the next crossing, something the soldiers certainly appreciated!⁴⁹

Hosting Andrew Jackson and Davy Crockett thrust Ditto's Landing into national importance. While this was the last time Ditto's Landing commanded national attention, regionally Ditto's Landing maintained its importance and continued to develop. For the people who lived in the area, life went on. In 1815 Joseph and Susannah Anderson divorced. This divorce showed two aspects worth noting. First, Susannah Anderson's maiden name was Ditto. Second, and more interestingly, the divorce required an act of the Territorial Government to go through.⁵⁰ This shows the Territorial Government possessed a wide range of powers and certainly could influence someone's daily life. As Huntsville grew, Ditto's Landing grew in importance. A great deal of the goods and supplies from the North came through Ditto's Landing, as well as the cotton headed south.⁵¹ So much of the goods for Huntsville came through Ditto's Landing that the Territorial Government

⁴⁸ Roberts, "Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County," 256.

⁴⁹ S. Doyle, "During War of 1812, Ditto Landing namesake ferried Andrew Jackson, Davy Crockett across Tennessee River," *AL.com*, 3/9/2015, http://www.al.com/news/huntsville/index.ssf/2015/03/who_knew_during_war_of_1812_di.html#incart_river

⁵⁰ "Ditto's Landing Research." Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives, Box 1, letters.

⁵¹ Shapiro, "Ditto's Landing," 76; Roberts, "Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County," 438.

passed a law in 1816 that provided a flour inspector. The inspector marked the barrels of flour based on their quality and charged six and one-fourth cents for the inspection, all of which the law specified.⁵² Realistically though, this Flour inspector checked most goods that came through and not just flour.⁵³ Leroy Pope, who owned the land, decided he wanted to cash out on this particular investment. Pope sold the land to John Brahan, of Brahan Springs Park in Huntsville, who finished paying for the land and received the deed in 1817.⁵⁴

Brahan likely saw this as a fantastic investment based on how much Huntsville grew and how much business Ditto's Landing received. Then 1819 rolled around and spoiled the plans of many people. In Madison County this year made itself synonymous with an economic crash. Cotton prices plummeted and banks instituted deflationary policies. People tied their money up with land and everyone owed everyone else within the community. People started to call in their debts so they could pay off other debts. The economy fell apart around these people and many lost their land holdings, selling off land to pay off debtors.⁵⁵ Brahan possibly found himself caught up in this unfortunate situation. While nothing seemed to explicitly state this, some signs presented themselves. For months Brahan placed ads in the *Alabama Republican*, a local paper, calling for

⁵² "Ditto's Landing Research." Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives, Box 1, Trade and Commerce.

⁵³ Shapiro, "Ditto's Landing," 76.

⁵⁴ "Ditto's Landing Research." Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives, Box2, File 3.

⁵⁵ D. Dupre, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier, Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 50-55.

anyone who owed him money to come by and settle the account. He placed at least two separate ads dated January 30th and April 24th in 1819.⁵⁶ This sets well with one of the running themes of Madison County during the Panic of calling in debts. Brahan also sold off at least one piece of land in 1819: Ditto's Landing.⁵⁷ In the midst of this panic Brahan sold Ditto's Landing to Colonel James White.⁵⁸

White's ability to purchase Ditto's Landing demonstrates that, while the Panic of 1819 was rough, many still maintained the ability to profit and thrive. In the ruins of the Panic of 1819, White managed to profit through the entire country. People knew him as the "salt king," as he ran the salt works at Saltville, Virginia.⁵⁹ The wealth he earned here allowed him to venture into markets all over the nation.⁶⁰ One of White's associates, John Hardie, handled the salt business in Ditto's Landing for White. Hardie arrived in Huntsville as a Scottish immigrant and his first job was just a clerk for White. Despite his occasionally pessimistic attitude toward the economy, Hardie made a good living off of Ditto's Landing and advanced quickly. Hardie earned enough to where he could buy a plantation out in Talladega County and become a

⁵⁶ Brahan and Atwood, "Brahan & Atwood," *Alabama Republican* (Huntsville, AL), 4/17/1819; Brahan and Atwood, "Again We Give This Notice," *Alabama Republican* (Huntsville, AL), 4/24/1819.

⁵⁷ Roberts, "Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County," 436.

⁵⁸ "Ditto's Landing Research." Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives, Box2, File 3.

⁵⁹ Roberts, "Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County," 436.

⁶⁰ Shapiro, "Ditto's Landing," 82.

planter.⁶¹ Alexander Gilbreath represents another merchant who managed to do well during this time by partnering with White.⁶² While White's presence certainly added some economic power to Ditto's Landing, Ditto's Landing held value through other ventures as well. The people of Madison County considered Ditto's Landing so important that a road to Ditto's Landing made a great selling point when selling land.⁶³ Most, if not all, of the cotton in Madison County ran through Ditto's Landing on its way to the market in New Orleans.⁶⁴ People built warehouses nearby to house the cotton until the Tennessee River's waters reached the correct depth to manage a boat on it. Some residents made a living guiding cotton down the river through the shoals downriver and walking back once they got past the "danger zone."⁶⁵ Groceries often came through Ditto's Landing on their way to Huntsville, including but not limited to sugar, bread, alcohol, and coffee.⁶⁶ Ditto's Landing transformed under the pressures of "modern" life and the market to become a major commercial hub in Madison County.

The 1820's brought four important changes to Ditto's Landing. The arrival of John Hobbs represents one of these changes. John Hobbs, son of a Revolutionary War veteran, purchased

⁶¹ Roberts, "Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County," 439-441.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 128.

⁶³ "Hardware & Cutlery...Also," *Alabama Republican* (Huntsville, AL), 6/12/1819.

⁶⁴ Roberts, "Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County," 439.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 438.

⁶⁶ Perry, Moore, Brown, "Groceries," *Alabama Republican* (Huntsville, AL), 7/3/1819.

Chickasaw Island in 1821, and received the ownership papers in 1822. Before long the island came to bear his name.⁶⁷ Second among these changes, in 1823 residents decided that Huntsville and Ditto's Landing needed a proper road running between the two. A road already existed running from Meridianville to Ditto's Landing through Huntsville, but some residents felt they needed a proper paved road. This need developed from the economic growth of both Huntsville and Ditto's Landing.⁶⁸ Like everything else at this time, the plan needed to go through the government first, but now it is the Alabama state government. An act passed that gave Rodah Horton and associates the job of building a paved road. The act presented a very clear set of rules about how the road was to be built and funded. It stated that they would build the road in thirds, and could start charging tolls as soon as they finished the first third. However, they could only charge tolls proportional to how much of the road they finished up to that point. If the road sustained damage the toll was removed. When the toll returned the act required them to put in ad in the paper notifying the residents of this. The act set rates for all possible travelers, providing different rates for different modes of travel. The builders could collect tolls for thirty five years. The act required Horton and associates to start the road within six months of the bills passing and finish within five years, or else the act voided. The act required them to keep the road in good repair and to post the rates on a sign so none of the residents got sticker shock as they tried to use the road. The Alabama state government limited the project's profits to twenty five percent of the total cost of the

⁶⁷ Shapiro, "Ditto's Landing," 80.

⁶⁸ Shapiro, "Ditto's Landing," 76.

road. Anything else went to improve this or other roads. An independent referee determined the value of any buildings in the way of the road's path, and if the owner disagreed they could take the case to court. The builders paid damages to anyone whose property they went through for fences, crops, or even rocks or gravel used to help build the road. The act required the toll be proportional to the amount travelled and that they charge no toll for those travelling on stints of road that ran through their property. Finally, if the builders neglected to fix damages to the road for ten days, courts could force the gates of the road open for all to travel.⁶⁹ This act demonstrated the Alabama government's distrust of big money speculators, likely fuelled by the Panic of 1819. The act boiled over with protections for the average resident against these speculators just in case they decided to abuse the situation somehow. Any neglect on their part meant a loss of revenue. The act set the rates, not the investors. Perhaps most telling, the act limited the profit that the builders earned from the project. The job originally went to the Madison Turnpike Company, founded by Horton and his associates. However, ten years later it came under new direction. The new leadership included John Hardie who made his money at Ditto's Landing. The road took a long time to finish; they dubbed it Whitesburg Pike, and remained a toll road for a while to come.⁷⁰ The Indian Creek Canal, built from Big Spring in Huntsville down to the river, challenged the usefulness of Whitesburg Pike, but the builders managed to convince the populace to

⁶⁹ "Ditto's Landing Research." Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives, Box 1, Turnpike Act 1823.

⁷⁰ Roberts, "Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County," 437-438.

use the road instead of the canal to transport products to Ditto's Landing.⁷¹

The name of the toll road, Whitesburg Pike, demonstrates the third important change: the incorporation of Whitesburg. Whitesburg became the official name of the Ditto's Landing area, honoring the very wealthy Colonel James White. In 1824 an act passed in Alabama that made Whitesburg a town officially. The act set the official borders. Only free, white males twenty one years old and up possessed the right to vote. Whitesburg retained the right to levy property taxes, but the act required that tax to be lower than the state property tax. The local government, a board of trustees, appointed police officers as they saw fit. The act even designated a day for elections. The election occurred on the second Monday of January, at White's Tavern, with James Wall, John Ballow, John Turner, and John Hardie presiding over the election.⁷² Naturally, and unfortunately, black people and women lacked the right to vote. The act also showed how far John Hardie came, and just how much influence he accumulated over the years working at Ditto's Landing. As Whitesburg grew, Alabama passed a new act changing the town. The act increased the size of Whitesburg, removed the power to appoint police, added an elected official of Town Constable, and allowed the trustees to elect a Board President and Justice of the Peace.⁷³ All signs pointed to a town growing and thriving by the river. Unsurprisingly Ditto's Landing remained central to the town. One way they derived value

⁷¹ Ibid., 444.

⁷² "Ditto's Landing Research." Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives, Box 1, Act incorporating Whitesburg.

⁷³ "Ditto's Landing Research." Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives, Box 1, Act growing Whitesburg.

from Ditto's Landing, a one dollar charge to dock, really sparked some controversy. The argument for largely consisted of boosting the city. The argument against revealed a little about the thought patterns of some residents. One said, "The rivers appear to have been intended by nature for the purpose of carrying on trade between the inhabitants..."⁷⁴ At least some residents believed the Earth existed just to serve mankind, which represented an interesting belief for someone living in North Alabama with all of its tornadoes. Another argument tied freely moving products up and down the river to the principles of the American Revolution and 1812, claiming all of these focused on freedom.⁷⁵ Apparently Alabamians already appealed to Founding Fathers' authority. Regardless of Whitesburg's growth and development, locals continued to call the area Ditto's Landing.⁷⁶

Mostly symbolic, the fourth major change directly changed rather little. In 1828 James "John" Ditto died. Ditto failed to accumulate any real wealth. He never owned the land he settled, though he made many payments. Eventually his son, Michael, made the last payment and owned the land, meaning Ditto's children made it better than he ever managed. When he died he left behind very little: a bed, two books, two trunks, one oven, and a tin can worth \$5.75 altogether.⁷⁷ With so little

⁷⁴ "Ditto's Landing Research." Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives, Box2, File 3.

⁷⁵ "Ditto's Landing Research." Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives, Box2, File 3.

⁷⁶ Roberts, "Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County," 437.

⁷⁷ "Ditto's Landing Research." Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives, Box2, File 6.

wealth, Ditto's death made little direct impact. 1828 also saw the first steamboat to stop at Ditto's Landing, the *Atlas*.⁷⁸ These two things are technically unrelated. However, symbolically they seemed to convey a meaning. Ditto's death seemed to usher out a time when most people living around Ditto's Landing lived off of the land, and the arrival of the Steamboat seemed to usher in a time where most residents used the land for commercial purposes. The arrival and life of James "John" Ditto acted almost as a transition between the two. As the steamboat brought modernity with it the residents likely welcomed the technological wonder. Steam power ultimately spelled the end for this prosperous time in Whitesburg/Ditto's Landing history, because the railroads killed Whitesburg. Steam power gave rise to railroads, and railroads made river travel less important and therefore less common. Less river travel meant less commerce for Ditto's Landing and Whitesburg. People started to move out, and the Whitesburg post office closed its doors for good in 1905.⁷⁹

The Great Depression came to Ditto's Landing just like anywhere else, but without as many people there to feel the effects. Ditto's Landing saw effects of the Depression even without much of a population, because with the Great Depression came the New Deal. Two major New Deal agencies, the WPA and the TVA, targeted Ditto's Landing for improvements and use. The WPA recognized a pair of needs and created a project to serve both of them. Residents needed

⁷⁸ Shapiro, "Ditto's Landing," 75; "Ditto's Landing Research." Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives, Box 2, File 17.

⁷⁹ "Ditto's Landing Research." Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives, Box2, File 1.

jobs and a way across the Tennessee River. Even with the death of Whitesburg the ferry at Ditto's Landing still carried people across the river. A bridge offered much quicker travel. So in 1929 the WPA started work on the C. C. Clay Bridge named after a prominent Huntsvillian. After two years of work and \$400,000 the toll bridge opened in 1931 and quickly developed into the state's third most profitable bridge. The WPA made the bridge of steel and concrete. The bridge travelled 1,566 feet and featured a very narrow two lanes. People remembered the bridge for how terrifying crossing the bridge could be because of its narrowness. While an important and needed improvement to the area, it essentially played the death knell for the ferry at Ditto's Landing, as residents now used the bridge to get across the river.⁸⁰

The TVA managed a couple of projects in the area as well. One such program leased farm land along the Tennessee River.⁸¹ Ditto's Landing, while less populated, certainly contained very fertile soil. The TVA also built hydroelectric dams, like the one in Guntersville. The TVA knew these dams would likely flood Ditto's Landing and saw the wisdom in conducting archeological digs prior to the completion of these dams. These TVA digs uncovered an undisclosed number of sites, only seven are public knowledge, and these sites revealed much about the shell midden people and their lives. The earlier dig, for the Wheeler Dam, on Hobbs Island collaborated with the CWA as well as major university like the

⁸⁰ Robert Reeves, "And Then There Was One – Demise of the C. C. Bridge," *The Huntsville Historical Review*, Summer-Fall (2006), 37-41.

⁸¹ "TVA to Lease Farms Again," *Huntsville Times* (Huntsville, AL), 10/2/1939.

University of Alabama, the University of Tennessee, the University of Kentucky, and the University of Michigan.⁸² The TVA targeted the Flint River and Whitesburg Bridge sites prior to the construction of the Guntersville Dam.⁸³ The author of the Whitesburg Bridge site felt it important to note the interesting labor situation for the dig. The author noted the use of both black and female labor for the dig. About the use of black labor, the author noted that the mixed crew worked very well. He treated this as if it were another of the discoveries made as part of the dig. As for the use of women, the author noted the WPA enforced a separate set of rules for female laborers and required the digs to change their excavation techniques.⁸⁴ The author provided a reminder that even those considered liberal at the time might not measure up to modern standards. The author demonstrated how deeply racism rooted itself in Southern culture prior to the Civil Rights Movement, even in educated elite. WPA demonstrated some workplace sexism common prior to widespread feminism. After archeologists completed the digs at Ditto's Landing and finished the dams, the flood waters arrived. Ditto's Landing grew rather important for the TVA, as they designated the area for retaining flood waters as part of their program to tame the Tennessee River.⁸⁵ By funneling flood waters into

⁸² Webb, "An Archeological Survey of Wheeler Basin on the Tennessee River in Northern Alabama," 1.

⁸³ Webb and DeJarnette, "The Flint River Site M_A^O 48," 9; Webb and DeJarnette, "The Whitesburg Bridge Site M_A^V 10," 9.

⁸⁴ Webb and DeJarnette, "The Whitesburg Bridge Site M_A^V 10," 9-10.

⁸⁵ Nick Werner and Eddie Wallace (work at Ditto's Landing) in discussion with the author, April 2015.

Ditto's Landing, the TVA used the area to save some \$500 million of property damage by 1965.⁸⁶ Ditto's Landing still played a key role for people living along the Tennessee River.

Few things happened at Ditto's Landing during the 1940's through the 1960's. River flooding meant people largely abandoned living on Hobbs Island. A new bridge allowed the narrow C. C. Clay Bridge to become northbound only.⁸⁷ Land formerly in Whitesburg hosted Huntsville's first ever drive-in movie theatre, simply named the Whitesburg Drive-In Theatre. The theatre certainly drew in patrons, as they expanded in 1954. The times caught up to the theatre and it closed in 1979.⁸⁸ However, the 1970's seemed like an odd time to close down, because the 1970's revived Ditto's Landing.

Federal and State grants revived Ditto's Landing from its largely neglected state. In 1974 work began on the operation still there today. The construction team took a long time to build because the swampy land needed to be drained first. However, four years later Ditto's Landing opened as a marina, harbor, and dry docking. Since Ditto's Landing lost its status as incorporated it needed someone to run the operation. A board of directors ran, and still runs, Ditto's Landing, with two members from Huntsville, two representing

⁸⁶ "Upstream Reservoirs Save Millions in Flood Control," *Huntsville Times* (Huntsville, AL), 4/4/1965.

⁸⁷ Nick Werner and Eddie Wallace (work at Ditto's Landing) in discussion with the author, April 2015.

⁸⁸ B. Gathany, "Memories of Whitesburg Drive-In Theatre 1949-1980 – Photo Flashback," *AL.com*, 5/15/2014.
http://www.al.com/living/index.ssf/2014/05/memories_of_whitesburg_drive-i.html

Madison County as a whole, and one member elected by the other four members. The small business only handled two boats on the docks at any one time and went rarely used throughout the 1970's, but in the 1980's Ditto's Landing went through a boom period.⁸⁹

The rise of Whitesburg ushered out a time when Ditto's Landing represented a way to live and replaced it with a time when Ditto's Landing represented a way to make a living. The 1980's represented a similar shift: from making a living to living it up. The 1970's set the stage, and the 1980's completed the transformation. Ditto's Landing grew and started to offer a number of different attractions and amenities to visitors. Starting in 1980 and running through 1986 Ditto's Landing underwent a number of improvement projects. The grounds grew as Ditto's Landing purchased land and grew to its current size of roughly 660 acres. It added a campground and a pavilion for general use. The harbor and dry docks grew to accommodate more boats. The TVA added an artificial lake to drain flood waters with, but they left an island in the middle. The weeds and snakes flourished on this little island, so the people running Ditto's Landing schemed up a way to address the issue: goats. Goats found themselves on a little island, colloquially known as Goat Island, to take care of the grass and snake issue. The plan worked, but unintended consequences popped up. When the flood waters entered the lake the island sometimes disappeared. On those days someone went out to retrieve the goats until the water receded. These goat herders soon found out goats dislike water. One time the boat they used capsized and the goats

⁸⁹ Nick Werner and Eddie Wallace (work at Ditto's Landing) in discussion with the author, April 2015.

nearly drowned their rescuer. The goats flailed in the water and their hooves hit the man, Robert, every time he tried to come up for air. He survived the ordeal, but the goats made life harder, not easier.⁹⁰

The growth of Ditto's Landing dovetailed nicely with increased use. The increased use attracted events, like the BMX bike show. A group of BMX bikers from the area started performing every Memorial Day starting in 1988. Increased use also led to at least one unfortunate event.⁹¹ The local company SCI used to offer their employees a day out on the river on the company dime. The company used a little paddlewheel boat given the ill-fated name "SCItanic." The SCItanic crew knew a storm brewed, and started making their way back to Ditto's Landing. A microburst hit the ship and capsized it. Rescue efforts began immediately, but seven adults and four children died inside the boat. The NOAA noted the incident occupied a place as one of the worst inland boat accidents in Alabama history.⁹²

During all of the growth and activity around Ditto's Landing, a group decided Ditto's Landing needed a historical marker. In 1985 the marker went up and provided a short account of Ditto's Landing and its history. It covered James "John" Ditto's arrival, Whitesburg's incorporation, cotton shipping, the railroad, and the death of Whitesburg. A women's group took the initiative to get the

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² "The 'SCItanic' Microburst Event – July 7, 1984," NOAA, http://www.srh.noaa.gov/hun/?n=hunsuold_july1984microbursts.

historical marker put up.⁹³ Women often played an important role in how people remember the past. In Charleston, South Carolina, women dominated historical interpretation in the 1920's and 1930's and focused on preserving the domestic sphere.⁹⁴ In Louisiana "Evangeline girls" played a big role in the attempt to preserve an Acadian identity.⁹⁵ Perhaps most famously, the Daughters of the Republic of Texas run and interpret the Alamo.⁹⁶ Women often directed how people remember a place, and Ditto's Landing fit into this national pattern.

The 1990's changed little at Ditto's Landing. One major event occurred though, the capture of Jeffrey Franklin. Jeffrey Franklin, as a teenager, chopped up his family using an axe and fled the scene. High as a kite, he stumbled into Ditto's Landing where a man who worked there, Eddie Wallace, found him. Eddie called the police who came and arrested him. Ditto's Landing maintained an informal atmosphere and it showed by what happened after the arrest. Nick Werner, who also worked at Ditto's Landing, knew some people who worked where the state imprisoned Jeffrey. They occasionally called collect from the prison to Eddie, who always refused the calls out of fear.⁹⁷

⁹³ "Ditto's Landing Research." Huntsville-Madison County Public Library Archives, Box2, File 1.

⁹⁴ F. Brundage, *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 231-232.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 278-279.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 299-300.

⁹⁷ Nick Werner and Eddie Wallace (work at Ditto's Landing) in discussion with the author, April 2015.

Around 1999 Ditto's Landing started to focus on improvements again. The TVA launched a program to prevent erosion along the river and started placing rocks on the river's banks. This project continued on into the 2000's. Ditto's Landing launched a number of projects to improve facilities. The BMX shows stopped, because the riders started to feel a bit too old to continue performing, but Ditto's Landing started offering free concerts by local artists and a Christmas event called "Deck the Docks."⁹⁸ A new bridge went up to replace the C. C. Clay Bridge, residents made nervous by its narrowness got a new much wider bridge. The old bridge literally blew up to make way for the new bridge.⁹⁹ The new bridge almost ended up worse than the old one though. The original contractor went bankrupt during the job, and someone else took over. The original contractor showed some ineptitude. When they started the project they built an entire concrete support pillar before they realized it sat six feet off center. Later, to blow up some rock, they set charges the day before they needed to use them. The next day they came back and the water level receded overnight. Their work barge sat beached partially on top of the charges. They figured the barge could handle the explosion, and detonated anyway. The barge failed to handle the explosion. Shrapnel from the barge flew everywhere and some hit the other bridge. So much force hit the other bridge that police shut it down while it stopped shaking and swaying. Once the new, professional, contractors took over the bridge finished without a problem, but the road still kept the crook from the

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Reeves, "And Then There Was One – Demise of the C. C. Bridge," 41.

off-center start.¹⁰⁰ These changes represented only the tip of the iceberg for the changes to come.

Ditto's Landing came a long way from shell middens to marina, with more changes coming. Upcoming changes for Ditto's Landing include boat rentals, expanded campgrounds, greenways, expanded marina, rental cabins, biking trails, zip lines, a general store, expanded pavilion, a riverside restaurant, and a four-lane access road.¹⁰¹ Ditto's Landing went from a source of survival to a source of income, and from there it developed into a source of entertainment. Regardless of the role played, Ditto's Landing remained important to the people living in the area. Ditto's Landing will change over the coming years, but its past suggests it will remain important to local residents.

¹⁰⁰ Nick Werner and Eddie Wallace (work at Ditto's Landing) in discussion with the author, April 2015.

¹⁰¹ S. Doyle, "Ambitious master plan could turn Ditto Landing into Huntsville recreation hotspot," *AL.com*, 4/15/2015, http://www.al.com/news/huntsville/index.ssf/2015/04/ambitious_master_plan_could_tu.html#incart_river

