

# Ocmulgee Mounds

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of Interior

Ocmulgee Mounds NHP



## The Ancient Creeks



### GOVERNMENT

When the early English explorers and traders first encountered the native people that are now called Creek Indians, they were living in the valley of the Ocmulgee River. In those times, the river was known as the Ochese Creek to the English and the natives living in the area were called “Ochese Creek Indians.” Through time the name was shortened to be simply “Creek Indians.” However, this was the European name for these people, while they called themselves “Muscogee.”

The basic tribal unit of the Creeks centered on the idalwa or town, which comprised a central settlement and surrounding villages. At a time prior to European contact a confederacy of towns was formed. The Creeks incorporated into their alliance such small tribes as the Alabama, Hitchiti, Yuchi, some Shawnee and others. By the middle of the 18th Century, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation consisted of about 60 towns.

The town government consisted of a principal micco or chief, a second subordinate micco, and a council. The micco was elected for life by the town council, which he chaired. Government for the entire nation centered in the General Council, which decided matters of peace and war. In form it resembled the town councils. It was made up of the head men of each town and served as the single unifying institution of the Creeks.

The government was not as centralized as it might appear to an outsider. The towns retained their autonomy and often acted without the direction of the Nation’s General Council.

### SETTLEMENT PATTERN

Each town was arranged around a public square on which stood three structures. The Chokofa, or rotunda, was a large round building in which the town council conducted its winter meetings. The square ground, or Paskofa, consisted of four structures arranged in a square fashion around an open space. The open area of the square was used for dancing, rituals, and the summer assemblies of the town council. Nearby was the Chunkey yard, a long ball field surrounded by a ridge of earth for seating spectators on three sides. Surrounding the public structures were the dwellings of the families. Each family had

its own lot on which as many as four houses stood, according to the size and wealth of the family.



(VIEW OF A MUSCOGEE CREEK VILLAGE)

### RELIGION

Religion was very important and central to the life of the Creeks. It was something to be lived rather than something to be spoken of. Esaugeta Emissiee (the Master of Breath) was a kind of Great Spirit who

watched over the Creeks. Many lesser spirits surrounded him. Medicine ways dominated the Muscogee culture. Charms, omens, and mythical creatures occupied niches in the thinking of all Creeks.

RELIGION  
(CONTINUED)

Much of their religion revolved around various festivals. The most important ritual was the Boosketah or Busk, which culminated in the Green Corn Dance. The festival lasted four days or sometimes

more at the end of July or the beginning of August. It was a symbolic spiritual renewal and the beginning of a new year that was signaled by the ripening of the corn crop.

SUBSISTENCE

The economy was primarily agricultural supplemented by hunting, fishing, and gathering of wild fruit and nuts. Each town had its own collective fields in addition to small individual garden plots near each house. The Creeks raised corn, beans, squash, pumpkins, and tobacco.



(ANCIENT CREEK AGRICULTURE)

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Among the Creeks, the family was the basic social unit. Families were divided into powerful clans, some of which occupied privileged positions in the Nation. The same clans were found in almost all the towns. Totems identified most clans. Marriage within a clan was viewed as incest

and therefore was not allowed. These clans traced their lineage through the women. When a man married, he would move from the household of his mother to that of his wife's mother. This, however, would constitute a physical move and not a change in family allegiance.

EUROPEAN INFLUENCES

The first European contacts with the Creeks were by the early Spanish explorers. These were followed by long years of occasional interactions with Spanish settlers and missionaries. However, the contact that radically altered Creek lifestyle was the English trade, which began about

1675. This brought varied manufactured goods to the Creeks and introduced them to capitalism. Their desire for these trade goods created industries in deerskin trade and Indian slave trade for the Caribbean sugar plantations. The ancient Creek way of life was changed forever.



(MUSCOGEE CREEK COUNTRY AROUND 1745)