

A SILVER HEADBAND: *One clue to the tale beyond the Trail of Tears*

BY JOHN E. PHILLIPS
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Solid silver—beaten thin as cloth, with silver coins arrayed along it. It was a headband, an old Indian headband.

It was a gray October day when Jeff White of Leeds scooped the treasure up out of the plowed earth on the knoll overlooking the Coosa River. He had discovered the burial site of an Indian family which apparently had been able to stay behind after the great Indian exodus of 1836.

The discovery may help shine a little light on what has become almost a lost period for Indians.

They were Alabama's first people. They stalked deer through virgin forests, lived, loved and died generations before white men had even heard the mellifluous word "Alabama." And far from being "primitives," they formed many great nations, including those of the Cherokee and the Creek.

But as the white man pushed westward, he came into conflict with the Indians. Following a brutal war with excesses on both sides, Gen. Andrew Jackson marched through Alabama, breaking the back of Indian resistance at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1814.

As more and more whites poured into "The Old Southwest," the Indians were squeezed out. In 1832, what had been happening naturally became official policy with the Indian Removal Act. The Indians were transported from Alabama and other Eastern states to Oklahoma. Four years later the Indians were gone from Alabama.

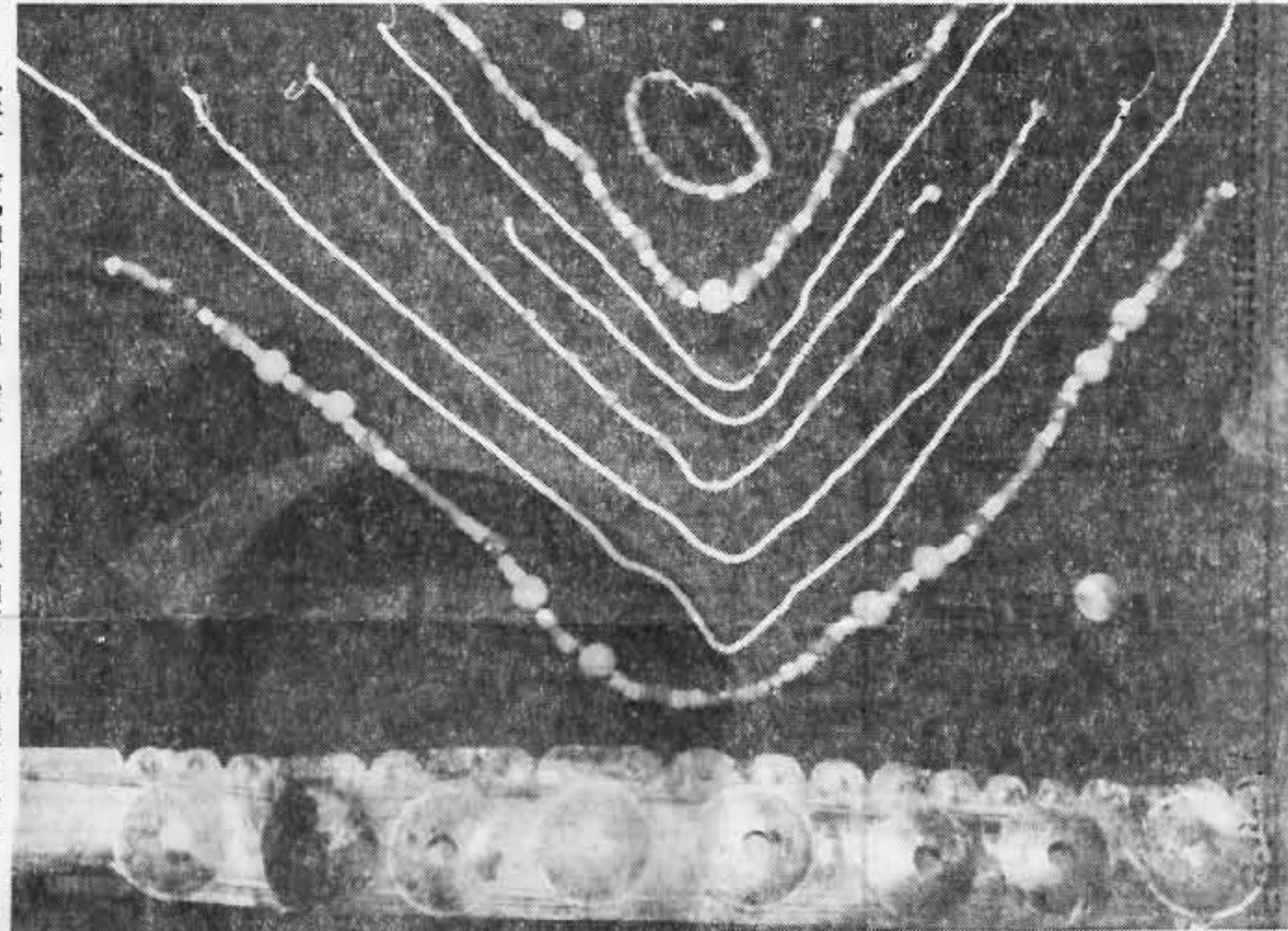
BUT A FEW remained behind. Some fled into the woods to hide. Others had accumulated enough money to buy the right to remain.

The family burial ground discovered by Jeff White near Talladega apparently belongs to those Creeks who stayed.

White, a member of the Warrior Basin Treasure Hunters, and his family were not expecting to make a major find as they worked with their metal detector on the grassy knoll.

"I thought my metal detector might pick up minie balls or other relics from the Andrew Jackson era," said White. "I knew that the Indians who had lived on this spot had traded because of the old broken rum bottles and other debris we had found on earlier trips."

There also were reports of a find the



BEADS AND A SILVER HEADBAND BEATEN INTO THIN STRIP AMONG THE FINDS
... Eight cone-shaped discs made of stamped half-dimes

year before of Indian trade beads and other relics. But the reports were sketchy.

The October afternoon, White was working his way up the knoll when he began getting solid readings on his detector.

They began digging. Instead of minie balls, White and his family came upon square nails, horsehoes and other implements.

Working farther up the knoll, they got more readings. This time they found three horses' bits stacked one on top of another and a silver-plated spur. And they dug, small, white glass beads — trade beads — rolled from the tossed-up earth back into the hole.

"I was convinced then that I was onto something," said White. "After running my detector over that area again and getting another reading, we started going down and uncovered hun-

dreds of beads. Eventually, we got to the metal reported by the detector. There was the silver crown."

THE CROWN was silver beaten into a thin strip. Attached to it were eight cone-shaped discs made of stamped half-dimes. The artisan was skilled to have beaten the silver so thin. And the dimes had been pressed out, still retaining details, rather than being hammered out.

Also found was a large copper brooch.

In later digs, White and his brother, Rod, uncovered more beads, two silver rings, a silver bracelet and a few silver beads. The brothers decided they needed help and called in archaeologists.

White's find stirred archaeologists' interest. But it also aroused the Creek Indian nation in Alabama, which is headquartered not far from Mobile at Poarch.

When the Creeks learned of the burial site — surprisingly far north for a Creek find — an honor guard was sent to keep watch.

The Indians stood guard day and night.

The Indians kept their vigil as archaeologists worked through December, under the direction of Jack Bergstresser of the Red Mountain Museum and in association with Dr. Roger Nance of UAB.

At first there was hope this would be a major burial ground for the Creek Nation.

Preliminary indications are that the gravesite might not be a burial ground, but rather the plot of a wealthy Indian family.

The Creek Nation hopes to build a museum at Poarch. When it's completed, the items from Talladega will be displayed there.

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