We have listened to your talk. You say the officer of the United States wishes us to go to the West. We are sorry to hear this talk. Our minds are troubled. We do not want to go to the West, unless the Cherokees go there too.”

—The Creeks residing in the Cherokee Nation to John Ross, Principal Chief, August 12, 1837

The Cherokee were not the only native people who faced removal from Red Clay. In 1836, approximately 2,000–3,000 Creek refugees from Georgia and Alabama fled to the Cherokee Nation to avoid removal with the Creek Nation. The U.S. military removed most of the Creek refugees from Cherokee lands in the spring and summer of 1837, including about 122 Creeks who lived at or near the Red Clay Council Ground. One elderly Creek man who lived near Red Clay died from a shot fired by an army soldier. In August 1837, Creek headmen asked the Cherokee General Council for asylum, and the council granted it. The remaining Creeks stayed with their Cherokee hosts until fall 1838 when both tribes were removed to the west.

“Chiefs of the Creek Nation, & A Georgian Squatter” by Captain Basil Hall, c. 1828.

Courtesy of Alabama Department of Archives and History.
The Cherokee owned land collectively as a tribe. Individual families owned their improvements to the land, such as buildings, fences, and fruit trees. After the U.S. Senate ratified the Treaty of New Echota in 1836, the federal government sent appraisers into the Cherokee Nation to evaluate the Cherokees’ improvements. Rarely did the federal appraisers give full value to what the Cherokee owned. At the Red Clay Council Ground area, the appraisers counted 91 log buildings, including those owned by Cherokee families who lived and farmed here. Most of the buildings, however, were used for council gatherings and events.

According to the Moravian missionary Heinrich Gottlieb Clauder, who visited the 1837 council meeting, “The camps were all new & almost in a line, in the rear was a small stream flowing silently along. The Council house & stand for public speakers were on a high hill in front of the public cooking establishments. Dry goods shanties were also erected, in some of which, the violin, in the hands of merry players drew many listeners & spectators.”

This portrait, *International Indian Council* by John Mix Stanley, depicts a council meeting held at Tahlequah, Indian Territory, in 1843. The reconstructed Council House here at Red Clay is based on this portrait and firsthand accounts of the council meetings. 

*Courtesy of Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the Misses Henry.*