

Staging the Question:

Understanding Historical Markers

GEORGIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Staging the Question: Understanding Historical Markers

Purpose: Understand the different parts of a historical marker and form a historical context for exploring the question, *how did Georgia change during westward expansion from 1789-1840?*

What is a historical marker? Have you ever seen a roadside historical marker? With thousands of markers across Georgia, you probably have! There might even be one in your hometown! In Georgia, historical markers have been erected over the past seventy years.

Here are some basic characteristics of historical markers:

- The text is usually 130 words or less.
- They mark a specific geographic location.
- They tell the stories of people, places, and events that helped shape Georgia's history.
- They are secondary sources—something written later by someone who usually did not experience first-hand or participate in the event.

Student Instructions: Follow the steps to conduct a close reading of the [Fort Wilkinson](#) historical marker.

Step 1. Read for Source Information: Look at the image of the historical marker or its corresponding webpage and locate the source information, or the title, date, creator, and location of the marker. Note that the date is when the marker was erected, not the date of the historical event discussed in the text. Source information can help you understand who created the item and why they created it—it gives you “context clues” for understanding the marker’s message.

- Title:
- Date:
- Creator:
- Location:

Tip: Check out this blog, “[Beyond the Text: Using Historical Markers to Explore Georgia History](#),” from the Georgia Historical Society, for assistance with locating source information on historical markers.

Step 2. Read for Key Terms and Dates: Underline, write down, or otherwise identify key terms, names, dates, events, or places mentioned in the marker text. These terms can include names of people, places, and events, and when and where an event occurred.

- Names of people:
- Names of places:
- Names of events:
- Dates/Years:

Step 3. Read for Misunderstandings: Circle, write down, or otherwise identify words or phrases that you don't know or understand. Clarifying words or phrases by looking up the definition or discussing it with others helps readers better understand the full story of the marker text.

- Words or phrases I don't understand:
- Definitions or explanations of words I don't understand:

Step 4. Read for Understanding: Read the full marker text. Highlight, write down, or otherwise identify the main idea of the marker text. What is the marker telling the reader? Is there evidence or information that proves the main point of the marker? For example, does any information from the first two steps in this close reading help to understand the main point? What other information might the reader need to understand the story of the marker better?

- Main idea of the marker text:
- Evidence or information that supports the main idea:
- Missing information or other information the reader may need to know to understand the marker:

Step 5. Find Out More Information: Historical markers are secondary sources. They are created after the time period of the historical topic the marker is telling the reader about. The information in a marker relies on primary sources or "eye-witnesses" to history in order to understand what happened during the time period. Explore these additional primary and secondary sources to learn more about Fort Wilkinson's history and events that happened there. Make sure to look for the source information included with each document.

- How does the "Land Grant with a Map Plot" primary source relate to the Fort Wilkinson historical marker?
- How does the "History of Wilkinson County" secondary source article relate to the Fort Wilkinson historical marker?

Sources:

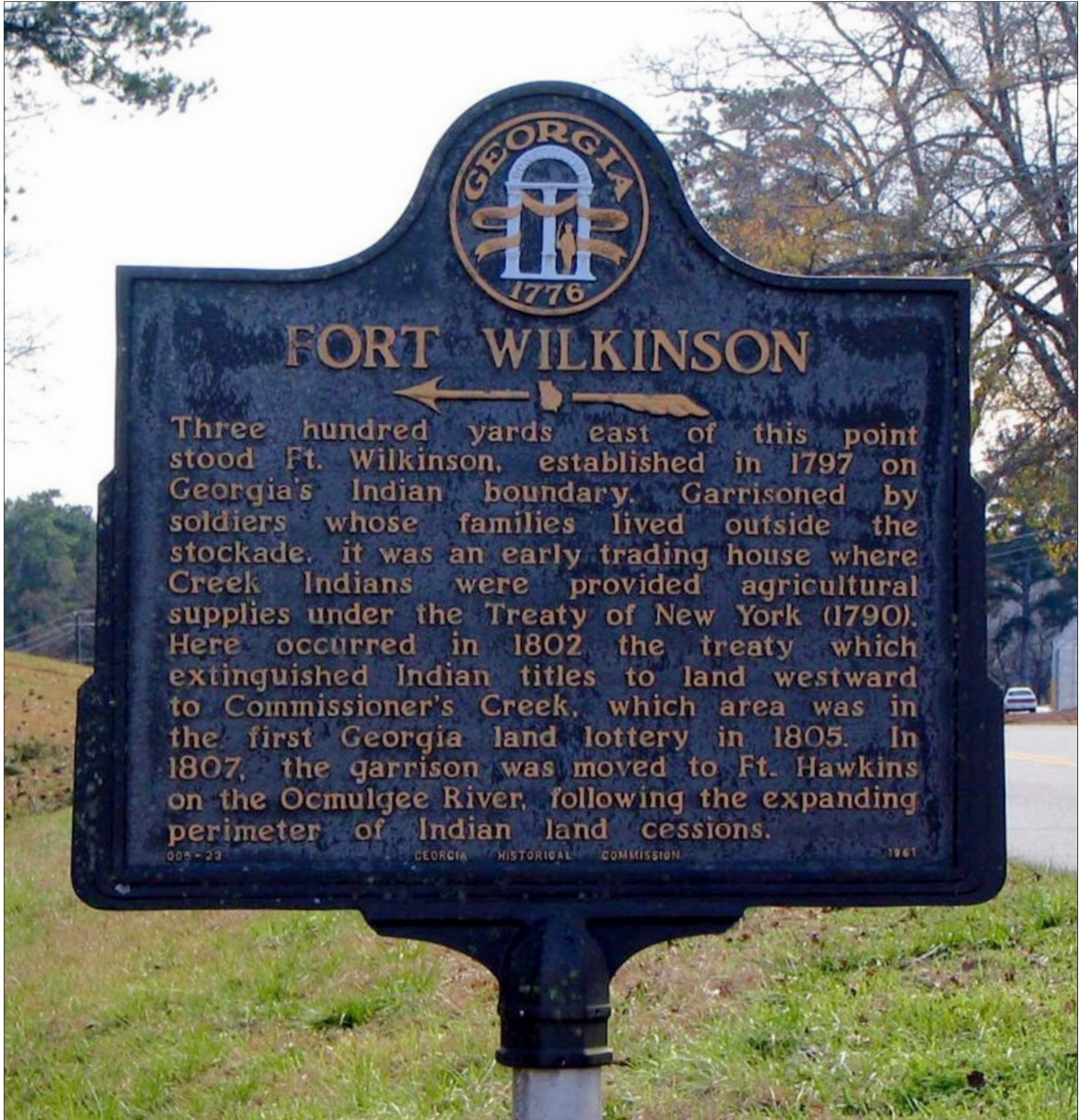
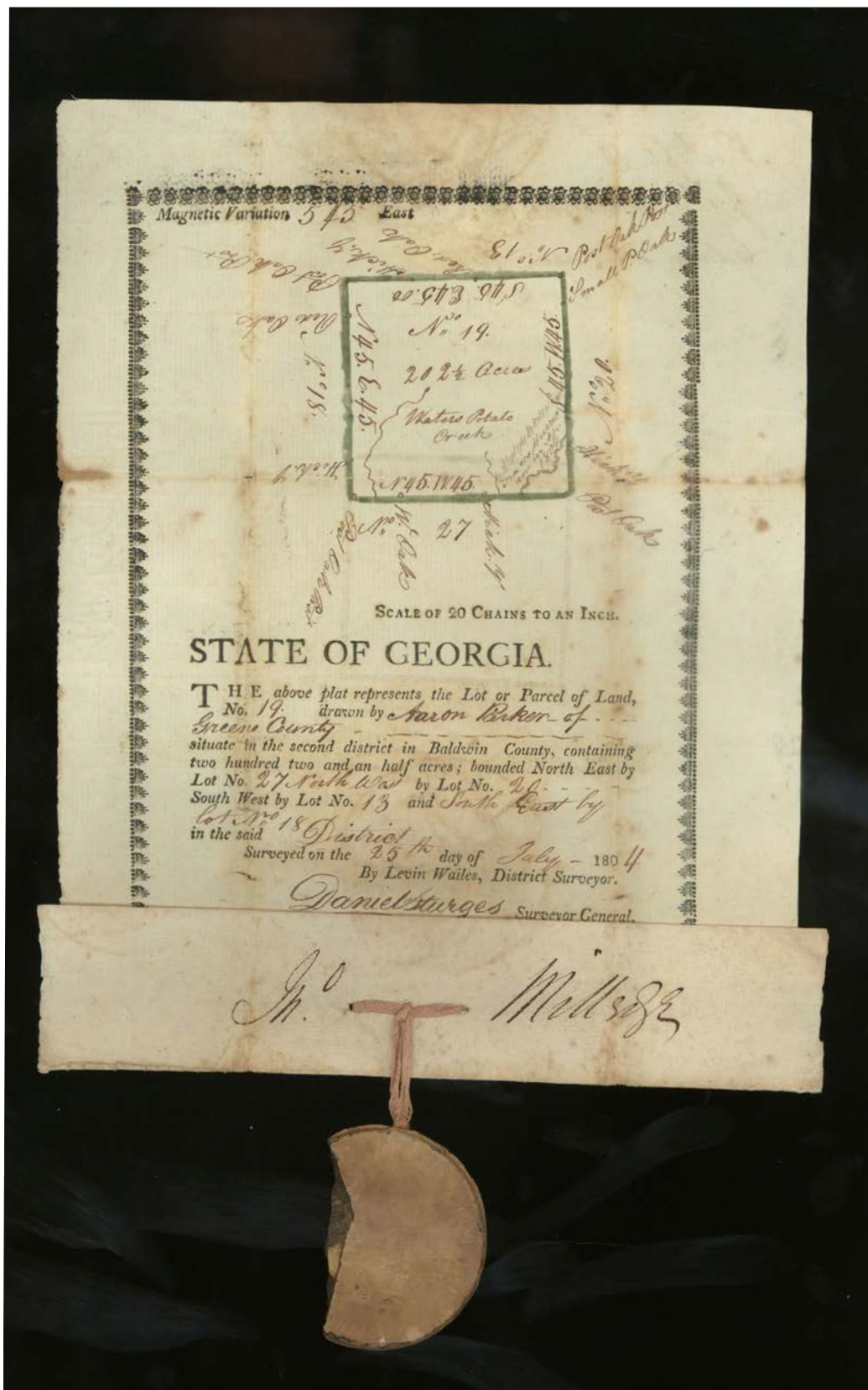


Photo credit: David Seibert. Fort Wilkinson Historical Marker. Georgia Historical Commission. 1961. Baldwin County.



Land Grant with Map of Plot in Baldwin County. Keith Read, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries, presented in the Digital Library of Georgia.



WILKINSON COUNTY

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Wilkinson County, in central Georgia east of Macon was one of the original counties, the twenty-ninth created. Its territory was acquired by cessions from the Creek Indians in 1802 and 1805. The county was created in 1803 and named for General James Wilkinson, an officer of the Revolutionary War and native of Maryland. He had been a party to the Treaty of Fort Wilkinson, which ceded part of the territory for this county. The county seat, Irwinton, was named for Governor Jared Irwin. The town was built on the same site of an English trading post dating to 1715.

Allentown in the southern most tip of the county is on the site of an Indian village, which was abandoned about 1600, according to tribal lore, after being destroyed by a terrible storm.

In the northern part of the county was once Fort Advance, a place of refuge for settlers during the Indian troubles of 1814.

A wing of union General Sherman's army, advancing through Georgia toward Savannah, passed through Wilkinson County in 1864. At the little town of Gordon in the northwestern portion of Wilkinson County they encountered one of the Confederacy's most stubborn fighters, eighteen year old Rufus Kelly. Kelly was home convalescing from the amputation of a leg, the result of a wound sustained in a Virginia battle. When he learned that the Home Guard (consisting of about seven hundred boys and some paroled convicts) was retreating from the Union advance and leaving the town undefended, he vowed "I will defend the women and children of Gordon alone." One man stayed to help him.

Kelly charged out to meet the union army and killed one man. The advance halted and troops were deployed around the town anticipating a fight. There was only Kelly by then, who was captured when his horse fell. He later escaped from a prison wagon while crossing the Ogeechee Swamp and reportedly lived for many years after the Civil War and is buried in Twiggs County near Myrick's Mill, the Liberty Hill Church Cemetery.

Kaolin mining and processing is the principal industry in Wilkinson County. The valuable white clay is used in many manufacturing products including paper, paint, rubber, make-up and medicines.

"Wilkinson County History." Wilkinson County Historical Society. <https://wilkinsoncounty.net/index.php/history/>