

The Matt Gardner Homestead Museum Is Now Located On A National Historic Trail

On March 30 of this year, President Barack Obama signed into law the **Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009** which included legislation that expanded the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail by 2,845 miles, more than doubling it in size. This expansion included two Cherokee removal routes that came through Giles County known as the Benge Route and the Bell Route. Elkton (and the Matt Gardner Homestead) sits on the Benge Route which followed along an old turnpike and an old stage road that came through the center and north of town. The old stage road is a well-preserved but abandoned roadbed that is over 1.5 miles long and ten to twelve feet wide with four to five foot high embankments. Along this roadbed are the remains of the Early Benson House which was built around 1820 and served as a stagecoach stop. This section of the stage road was abandoned in the early 20th century and is now private property. The Benge Route is named for the conductor of the detachment, John Benge. This was the only group to follow this route. The detachment of about 1200 Cherokee departed Ft Payne, Alabama, October 1, 1838, and disbanded in Indian Territory, January 11 1839. The Trail of Tears National Historic Trail is part of a network of 30 historic and scenic trails which make up the National Trails System. One more addition to the long list of items telling the whole story of the property that would become Matt Gardner's home. (Read about Giles County's Trail of Tears history at www.trailoftearsapulaski.com.)



This painting depicts the Cherokee Indians crossing the Elk River in the fall of 1838 on the infamous Trail of Tears. The bridge in the background is the current old iron bridge and would not have been there at the time of the removal. Their crossing would have utilized a ferry system that was in operation in 1838. It is not known if a bridge was there in 1838, however, there have been several bridges at this location during Elkton's 200 year history.

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Did You Know? The Cherokee language has no curse words or obscenities.

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**Our New Opening
Date is June 26, 2010**

**Matt Gardner
Homestead Museum**

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