

The Rapalje Family Notebook

The Rapalje Family Notebook belonged to a member of a British loyalist family who moved to western Mississippi in the 1780s when the region was ruled by Spain. Written between 1788 and 1796, the entries include personal observations, geographic information, a ledger, and a Choctaw vocabulary.

Objectives

Using an eighteenth century personal journal, students will learn about the inhabitants of West Florida in general and the Natchez District in particular, how they interacted, and how their lives differ from our own. Students will put the Rapalje family in context with what was going on in the country and the world during the time that they lived in Mississippi.

The *Rapalje Family Notebook* lesson and handouts are adaptable for grades 6-8.

Mississippi Department of Education Curricular Connections		
Common Core Mathematics	Grade 6	RP 1, 3d, NS 1
Common Core Language Arts	Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Grades 6-8	RH 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10
Social Studies	Sixth Grade World Geography and Citizenship	4, 6e, 7b
	Eighth Grade United States History from Exploration Through Reconstruction	2a, 2b, 2c, 3a, 3b, 4a, 5a

Activity One: Translate the Geographic Description

Objective:

Understand the past by translating eighteenth century writing into twenty-first century language.

Materials: *Background of the Rapalje Notebook and Early Mississippi History*; *Rapalje Family Notebook Resources*; notebook paper.

Procedures may be adaptable for several grade levels and specific subject matter:

1. Read *Background of the Rapalje Notebook and Early Mississippi History* with your class.
2. Distribute the journal pages and transcriptions included in the *Rapalje Family Notebook Resources*.
3. Have students rewrite the geographic descriptions (all descriptions or a selection) with correct (modern) spelling and punctuation.
4. Read the transcription of page ten and examine the document. Locate the “X” and discuss what a mark is. Why would someone need to sign with a mark? What does this say about the education level of William Harkins and education in the eighteenth century?
5. Discuss why it was important for the writer to have a description of the region.

Activity Two: The Rapalje Brothers and Their Distances

Objective:

Promote critical thinking skills by using geographic clues within the notebook to determine where the Rapaljes lived and worked. Also gain an understanding of the distance separating them in West Florida and how this might affect their interaction with each other.

Materials: *Rapalje Family Notebook Resources*; *Rapalje’s Mississippi Worksheet*; modern road map of Mississippi and Alabama; measuring string or ruler.

Procedures:

1. Distribute all materials. Using the materials provided, have students complete *Rapalje’s Mississippi Worksheet*.
2. In terms of travel, discuss how these distances may have affected the lives of the Rapalje brothers. Consider why they might have needed to travel to other towns and what means they may have used to get to their destination.

Extension Activities

- View the complete Rapalje Family Notebook in MDAH's Digital Archives at http://www.mdah.ms.gov/arrec/digital_archives/series/rapalji.
- Access the *Early Trading and Talking with Choctaws* lesson plan, adaptable for grades 4-9, on the MDAH website at <http://www.mdah.ms.gov/new/learn/classroom-materials/lesson-plans-and-teaching-units/>. Using the Rapalje Notebook, students will learn about the relationship between the family of British traders and their Choctaw clients, be introduced to some basic Choctaw words, and practice their own trading skills.
- Using the Rapalje Notebook as an example, discuss the merits and challenges of using a primary resource.
- Research the Seven Years War and discuss how this world event impacted the Rapalje family.
- Gather information from three sources (print, digital, interview) to determine how ledgers are used today. Include an example if possible. Compare and contrast the importance and role of a ledger during different time periods.

Activity One: *Background of the Rapalje Notebook and Early Mississippi History*

The French and Indian War in North America was part of Europe's Seven Years War that pitted Great Britain against France and Spain. Beginning in 1756, the war stemmed from arguments over colonization and trading opportunities. Before the war ended in 1763 with the Treaty of Paris between Great Britain and France/Spain, the war had spread to colonies around the globe. As a result, the landscape of North America changed, with the winner, Great Britain, gaining the bulk of New France and Spanish Florida.

When the British created the province of West Florida the majority of settlers lived in either Mobile or the provincial capital of Pensacola. They were newcomers to a land long inhabited by various Native American cultures including the Natchez, Choctaw, and Chickasaw Nations. At first British Governor Peter Chester had to provide incentives to British settlers to move to the Natchez District at the western edge of the province. Soon, the eastern bank of the Mississippi River had a growing population of settlers (primarily British loyalists) and their slaves.

The Rapaljes were one of the loyalist families that moved to the Natchez District. Garrett Rapalje, an influential merchant from Brooklyn, New York, and his associates received a land grant from Governor Chester for 25,000 acres in 1773. Later, Garrett's son George, in association with Lewis Charbena, received a land grant of 1,100 acres along the Mississippi River from the Spanish government. Other sons of Garrett, including Garrett, Jr., Jacques, and Isaac, immigrated to the area between 1788 and 1791.

The American Revolution caused unrest in the Natchez District and the old southwest. Spain, who controlled New Orleans and was sympathetic to the American cause, declared war on England in June of 1779. After the war, the 1783 Treaty of Paris between Britain and America officially returned the province of Florida to Spain and set the border between the new country and the Spanish colonies. While the border was in dispute for several years, by 1795 its location at the 31st parallel was agreed upon. It wasn't until three years later that the Spanish military vacated the forts and the region became a territory of the United States in 1798.

A small notebook, attributed to George Rapalje, is in the collection of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Primarily a ledger relating to Rapalje's trading business, the notebook also contains geographic descriptions, personal observations, and a Choctaw vocabulary. Entries date from 1788 through 1796, placing its creation in the second Spanish colonial period.

Activity One: *Translate the Geographic Description* **Answer Key**

Loose Page

Part of this land will very good rice as part will overflow. The sides of the river are covered with large canes so thick that they are almost impenetrable. (sic) There is plenty of large ridge white cedar, cypress, elms, and ash. Several people have settled on this river who find the soil to answer beyond expectation

On the east side of the river Mobile, towards the river Alabama is one entire extended rich cane country.

Page 2

The river Mobile is divided into two principal branches about forty miles above the town. One, which is called the Tansas, falls into the east part of the bay. The other empties itself close by the town.

There is also a river called the Spanish river that joins the Mobile river about two leagues above the town. Two or three leagues above the Tansa branch the Alabama river falls into the Mobile river aftering the N.E. a course of about thirteen miles that is from the

Page 3

Alabama (?) fort situated at the confluence of the Cousa and Talpouse. Both are very considerable rivers on which lie the branches of the chief settlements of the upper Creek Indians.

The Tombecbe river on the west side of it is about ninety-six leagues above the town of Mobile. The source of this river is reckoned to be about forty leagues higher up in the country of the Chickasaws (?) The fort of Tombecbe was abandoned in 1767 – the river is navigable for sloops and schooners about thirty-five leagues above the town of Mobile. The French fort Alabama was evacuated in 1763.

Activity Two: *Rapalje's Mississippi Worksheet*

Use the *Rapalje Notebook Resources* to answer the questions below. Mark all information and locations on the copy of the historic map.

1. List the Rapalje family members mentioned. Where did they settle? When did they live there?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

2. What is Walnut Hills and what is its present day equivalent?

3. What is "Big black" and what is its present day equivalent?

4. What other settlements, towns or forts are mentioned on these pages?

5. What rivers are mentioned on these pages?

Activity Two: *Rapalje's Mississippi Worksheet Answer Key*

Use the *Rapalje Notebook Resources* to answer the questions below. Mark all information and locations on the copy of the historic map.

1. Identify the Rapalje family members written about, where they settled and when they lived there.

- a. Jacques Rapalje, 1789 , inhabitant on the Big black
- b. Isaac Rapalje, 1791 , inhabitant on the Big black
- c. Garret Rapalje, 1791, inhabitant on the Big black

2. What is Walnut Hills and what is its present day equivalent?

The Walnut Hills settlement was just below where the Yazoo River joins the Mississippi River; it is now known as Vicksburg.

3. What is “Big black” and what is its present day equivalent?

The “Big black” is the same as the Big Black River that runs through Mississippi and empties into the Mississippi River near Grand Gulf.

4. What other settlements, towns and forts are mentioned on these pages?

Creek Settlement, Chickasaw Settlement, Mobile Town, Fort Alabama, and Fort Tombecbe.

5. What rivers are mentioned on these pages?

Mobile River, Tansas River, Spanish River, Alabama River, Cousa River, Tombecbe River and Talpouse River.

Chart the locations on the historical map and calculate the distances using the following excerpts from the Rapalje Notebook.

6. Using the conversion of 3 miles equals 1 league, convert miles into leagues from the following excerpt: “The river Mobile is divided into two principal branches about forty miles above the town.”

$$40 \text{ Leagues} / 3 = 13.3 \text{ leagues}$$

7. Using the conversion of 3 miles equals 1 league, convert leagues into miles to determine the distance of the source of the Tombecbe River from the town of Mobile using the following excerpt: “The Tombecbe river on the west side of it is about ninety-six leagues from the town of Mobile. The source of the river is reckoned to be about forty leagues higher up in the country of the Chickasaws.”

$$96 \text{ leagues} \times 3 \text{ miles} = 288 \text{ miles}$$

$$40 \text{ league} \times 3 \text{ miles} = 120 \text{ miles}$$

$$288 + 120 = 408 \text{ miles from Tombecbe River source to Mobile}$$

8. Using a modern highway map, calculate the driving distance in miles and leagues.
a. Between Vicksburg (Walnut Hills) and Mobile.

approx. 230 miles or 76 leagues (answers vary depending on route taken)

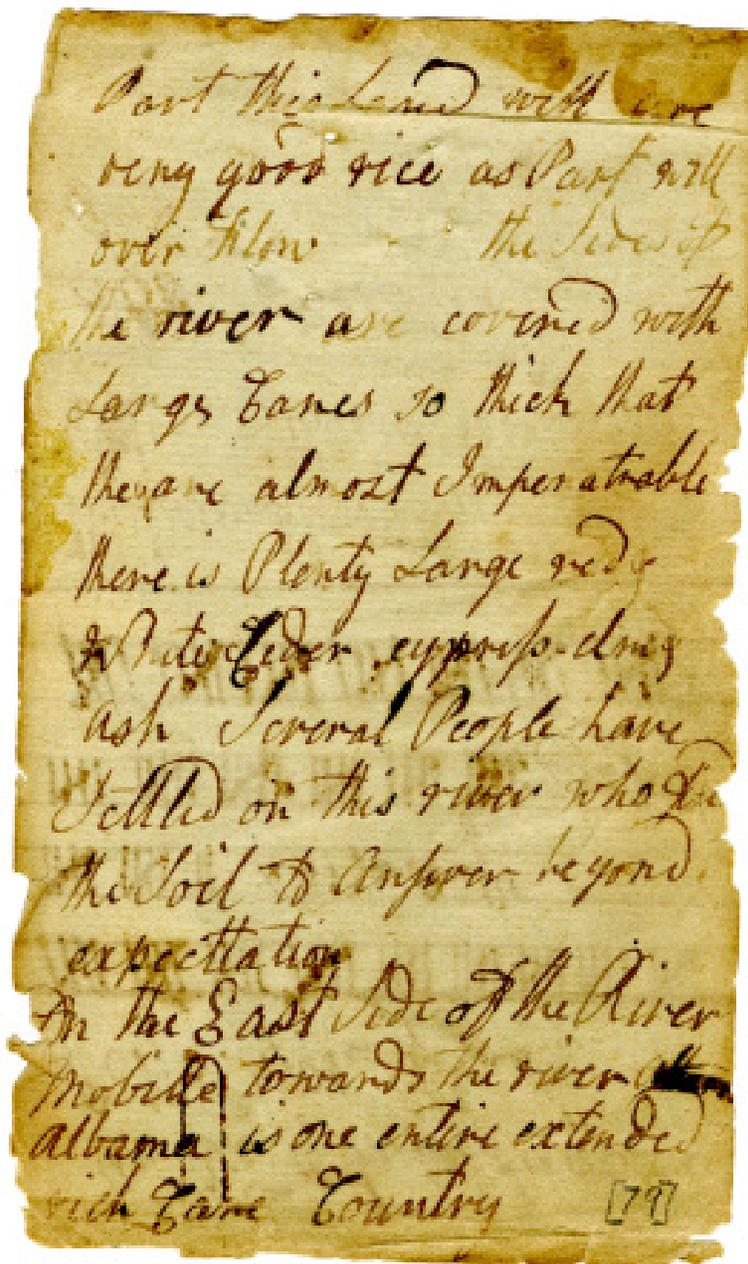
- b. Between Vicksburg (Walnut Hills) and Pensacola.

approx. 289 miles or 95 leagues (answers vary depending on route taken)

9. Why was it important to describe where the rivers were located?

Not only were the rivers a source of food and raw materials, they were also the highways by which white settlers, their black slaves, the Native Americans, and news traveled. The Rapalje's lived in a time when there were few roads and poor road conditions, thus a water route may have been quicker when traveling to Mobile and Pensacola. Water routes may also have been safer than traveling overland where travelers were subject to hostile Native Americans, highway robbers, and wild animals.

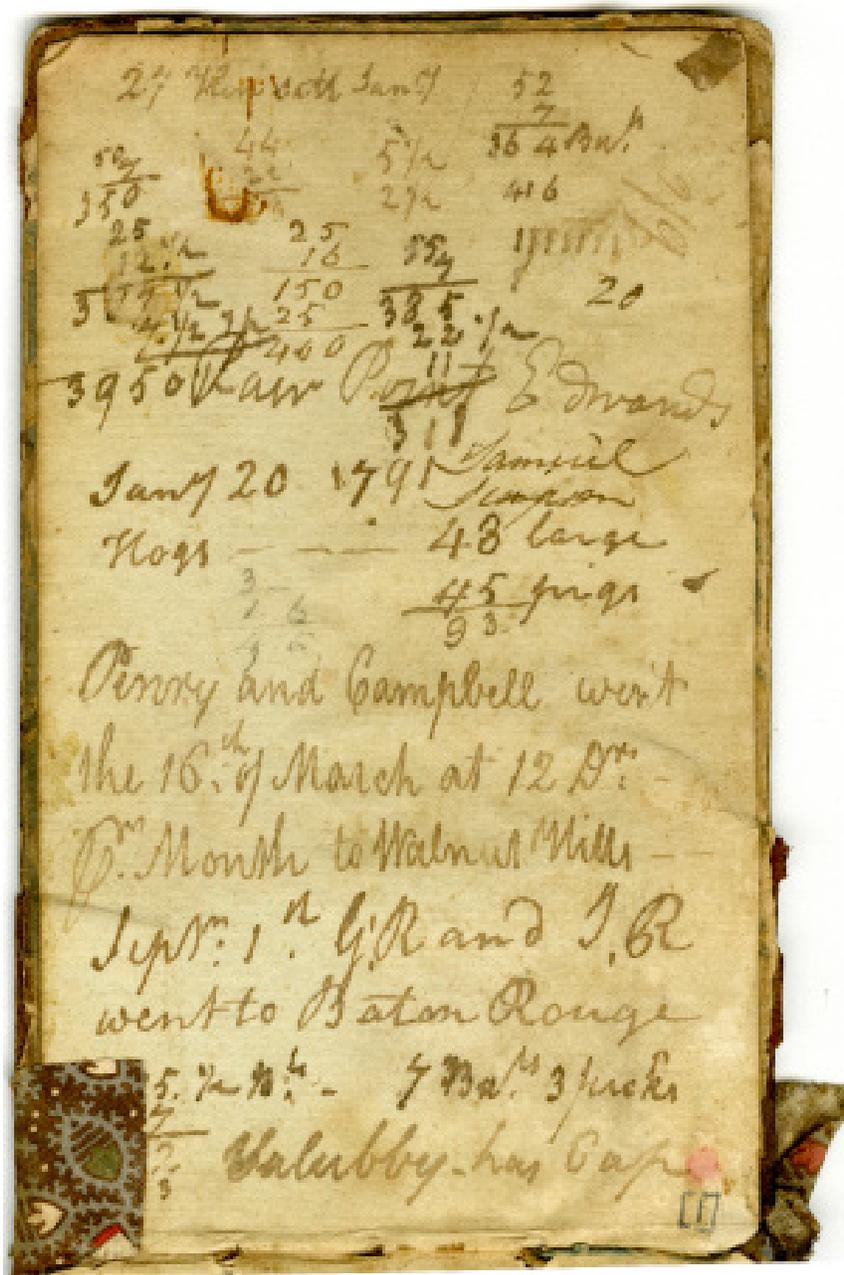
Rapalje Family Notebook Resources



Part this land will
very good rice as Part will
over flow the sides of
the river are covered with
large Canes so thick that
they are almost Imperatrable
there is Plenty Large ridge
White Cedar cypress elms
ash Several People have
Settled on this river who find
the Soil to answer beyond
expectation
On the East Side of the River
Mobile towards the river
Alabama is one entire extended
rich Cane Country 77

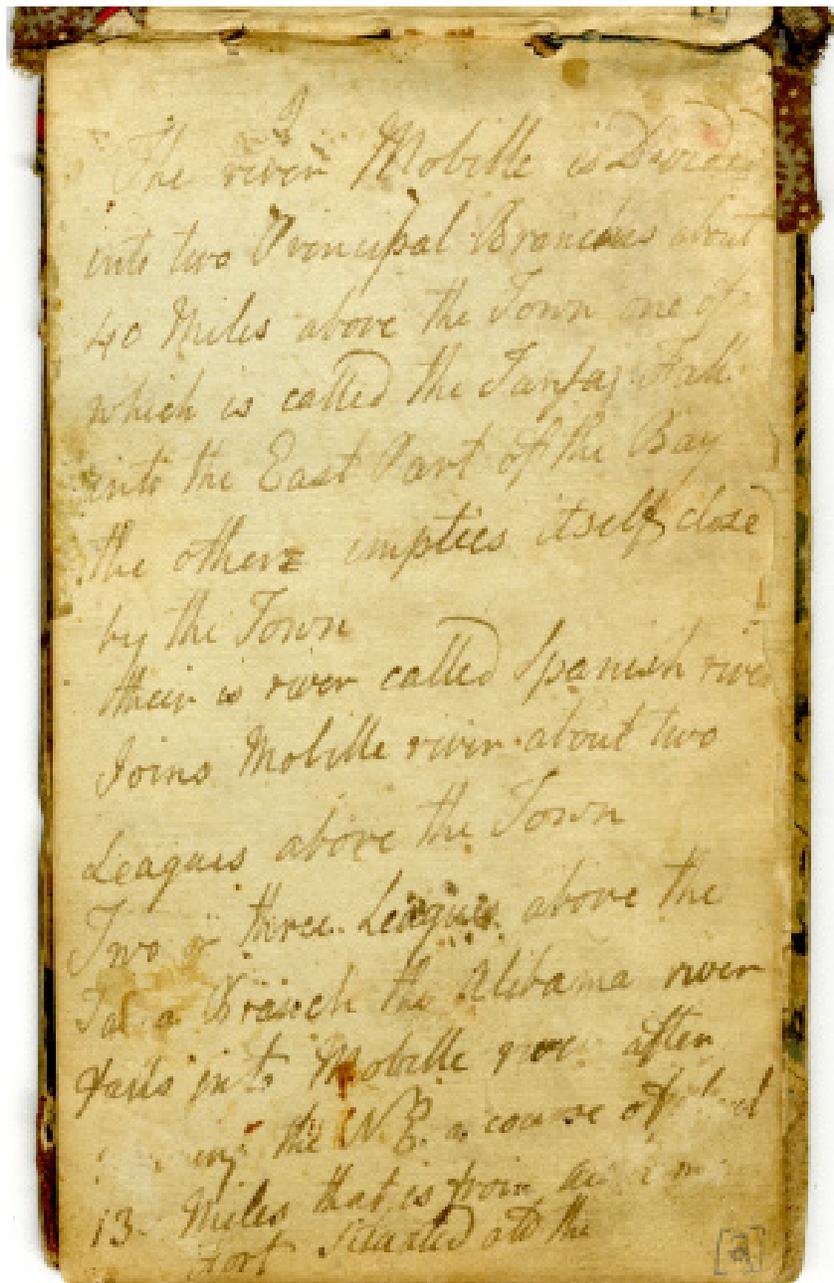
TRANSCRIPT: Loose Page

Part of this land will very good rice as Part will
Over Flow. the sides of the river are covered with large
Canes so thick that they are almost Impenetrable (sic)
there is Plenty Large ridge White Cedar cypress elms ash
Several People have Settled on this river who find the soil
to answer beyond expectation
On the East Side of the River Mobile, towards the river
Alabama is one entire extended rich Cane Country



TRANSCRIPT: Page 1

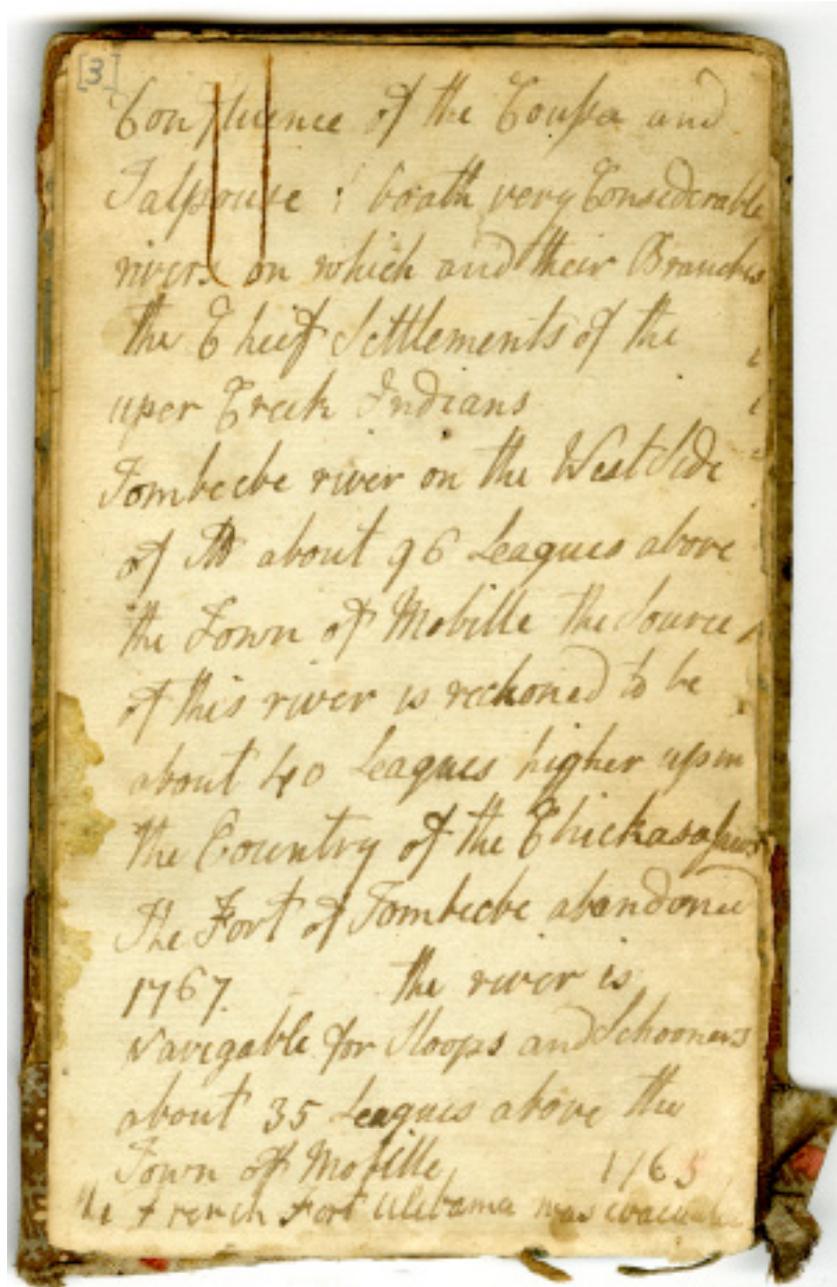
Perry (Perry ?) and Campbell went the 16th of March at
 12 Drs. Pr. Month to Walnut Hills - - Septr. 1st G. R. and
 T. R. went to Baton Rouge - 7 buls. 3 pecks. Yalubby has
 cap.



TRANSCRIPT: Page 2

The river Mobile is Divided into two Principal Branches about 40 Miles above the Town one of which is called the Tansas Falls into the East Part of the Bay the other empties itself close by the Town

there is river called Spanish river Joins Mobile river about two Leagues above the Town Two or three Leagues above the Ta..a Branch the Alibama river falls into Mobile river aftering the N.E. a course of about 13 Miles that is from



TRANSCRIPT: Page 3

Alibama (?) Fort situated at the Confluence of the Cousa and Talpouse, both very Considerable rivers on which and their Branches the Chief Settlements of the upper Creek Indians

Tombeche river on the West side of it about 96 Leagues above the Town of Mobile the Source of this river is reckoned to be about 40 Leagues higher up in the Country of the Chickasaws (?) The Fort of Tombeche abandoned 1767 – the river is Navigable for Sloops and Schooners about 35 Leagues above the Town of Mobile the French Fort Alibama was evacuated 1763

Received att Big Black
 Feb 28: 1791 of Garret
 Rapalje 124-5 in full
 for a Plow Shear & Cotton
 Corn Some Hogs and
 for Sundry Tubs Fowls
 & c^c
 124-5-0 John Estes
 Recd of Garret Rapalje
 Nine Dollars by order
 John Peters Feb 28 1791
 Wm + Harkins
 Mark

TRANSCRIPT: Page 10

Received att Big Black Feb. 28 1791 of Garret Rapalje

Dollrs.

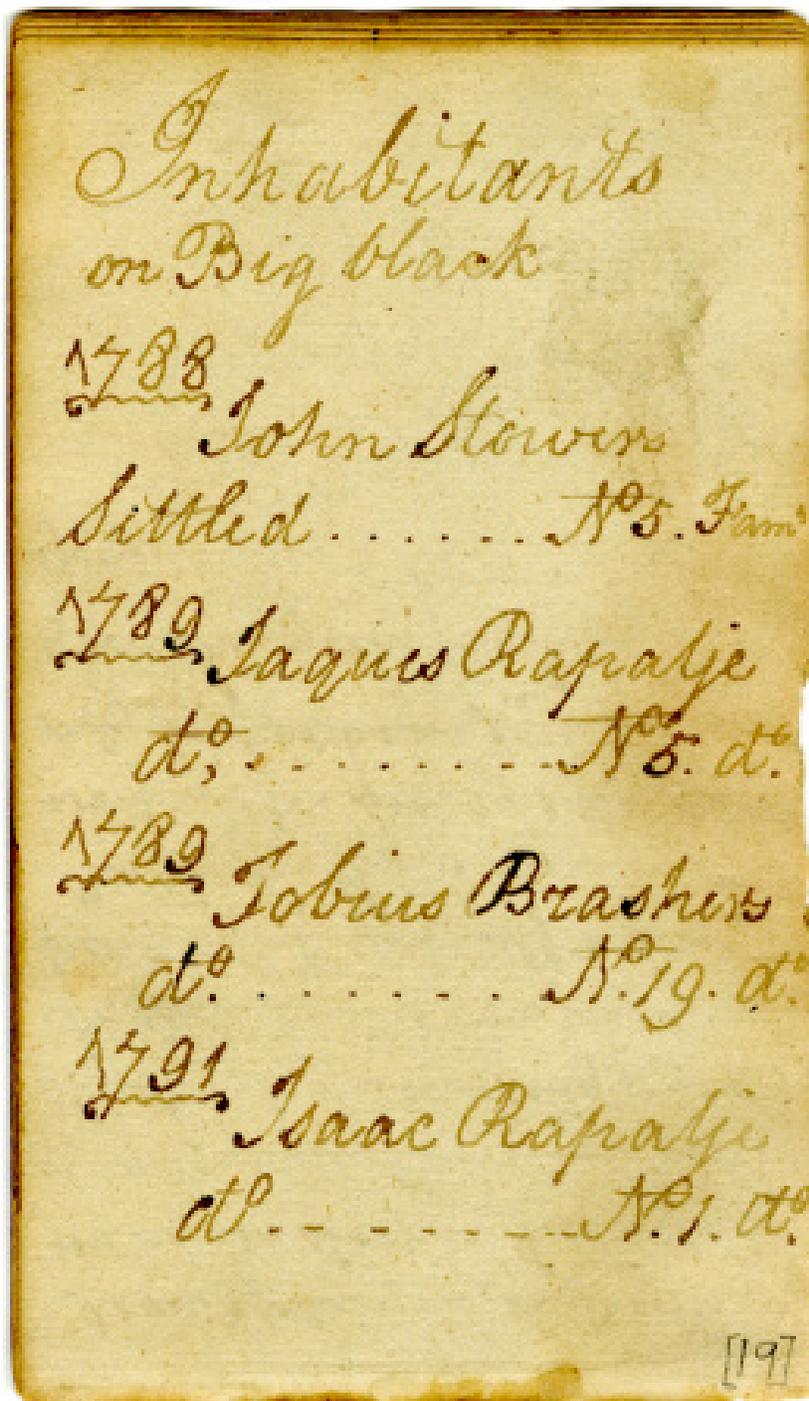
124-5 in full for a Plow Shear & Cotton Corn Some Hogs and
 For Sundry Tubs Fowls etc.

124-5-0 John Estes (?)

Recd. Of Garret Rapalje Nine Dollars by order John Peters
 Feb. 28, 1791

his

Wm. X Harkins
 Mark



TRANSCRIPT: Page 19
Inhabitants on Big black

1788	John Stowers Settled	No 5.	Famy.
1789	Jaques Rapalje Do.	No 5	Do.
1789	Tobius Brashers Do.	No.19	do.
1791	Isaac Rapalji do.	No. 1	do.



MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY LESSON PLANS

TEACHER EVALUATION

COMPLETE BOTH SIDES AND PLEASE MAIL OR FAX TO THE ADDRESS ON THE NEXT PAGE. THANK YOU!

TEACHER NAME _____

SCHOOL NAME & ADDRESS _____

EMAIL (OPTIONAL) _____

TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS _____ GRADE LEVEL _____

LESSON TITLE _____

1. In your opinion, did this unit elicit better than average student response; if so, how?
2. Which segments of the unit exceeded your students' attention span?
3. Will this unit be of assistance to you in developing future classroom activities; if so, how?
4. How did this unit add to your earlier teaching on the same subject?
5. Would this teaching unit be handier to use as a:
___ multi-day unit ___ multi-week unit ___ other
6. Were the activities and lessons appropriate for your students? How?

Please rate the following lesson materials and activities by circling the appropriate number.

4=excellent, 3=good, 2=average, 1=inadequate

<u>Directions and Notes</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Curricular Connections</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Student Worksheets</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Interactive Activities</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Historic Images</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>References and Resources</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>

<u>Activity One</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Activity Two</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Extension Activities</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Overall unit</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>

We would appreciate any additional comments on this teaching unit and any suggestions for improvement. Comments may be entered in the space below.

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