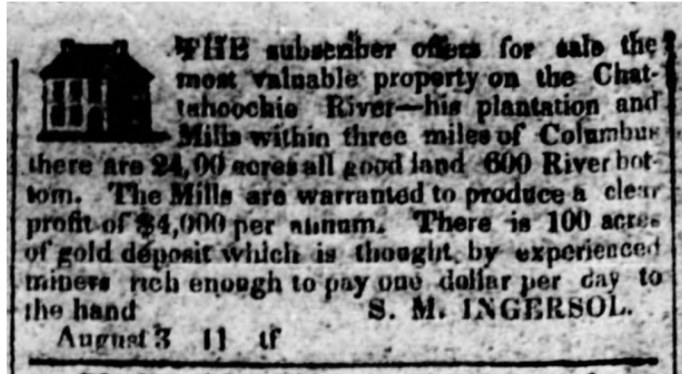


Today in Columbus history, October 5, 1833, in the *Columbus Enquirer*, Dr. Stephen M. Ingersoll advertised to sell his plantation, mills, and land in Russell County.

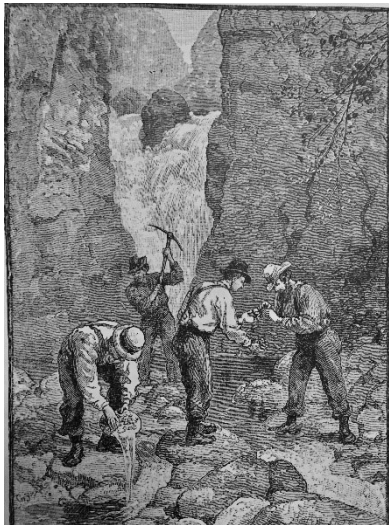
*The subscriber offers for sale the most valuable property on the Chattahoochie River – his plantation and Mills within three miles of Columbus are 2400 acres all good land 600 River bottom. The Mills are warranted to produce a clear profit of \$4,000 per annum. There is 100 acres of gold deposit which is thought, by experienced miners rich enough to pay one dollar per day to the hand. S.M. Ingersol [sic]*



1. *Columbus Enquirer*, October 5, 1833, 4.

Dr. Ingersoll's interesting personality and life deserve a lot more attention than can be given here, but what caught my eye is that he claims there was a one-hundred-acre deposit of gold on his land. Could that be true?

Stephen J. Ingersoll (1792-1872), "a New York adventurer-physician," built a trading post on the Alabama side of the river at the Dillingham Street Hill around 1828. "He came to the Georgia goldfields before establishing an Indian store on the Alabama side."<sup>1</sup> Apparently, he'd already had experience with gold prospecting before he arrived in Columbus, and he enlisted "experienced miners" to verify the riches on his property.



2. Gold mining went on for some time in Georgia. "Gold-Mining in Georgia" *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (June to November 1879), 519.

John H. Martin, writing in 1875, says that gold had been discovered in 1830 on the bank of the Chattahoochee (but doesn't say by whom), but notes that because it had not been found since then, that that bit had probably "washed down with the sands from above in some freshet."<sup>2</sup> Gold had been discovered in north Georgia in 1829, and around the same time in North and South Carolina, so the trickle-down theory is certainly possible.<sup>3</sup>

Later, Martin notes that in 1838, "Dr. S. M. Ingersoll obtained from Council the privilege of washing the loose sands of the Chattahoochee for gold; but the locality being so far from the gold region, no remunerative results are reported."<sup>4</sup> The fact that Ingersoll went to the trouble to get permission makes one think that he may have encountered it a few times down by the riverside.

Stephen M. Ingersoll founded some of the earliest industries on the Alabama side of the Chattahoochee: a trading post, a sawmill and more. He and Seaborn Jones established a ferry and he became embroiled in a lawsuit, originally against John H. Howard and Josephus Echols, which became a landmark Supreme Court ruling that established Georgia's right of ownership of the Chattahoochee River over Alabama. Several stories

<sup>1</sup> Alabama Historical Commission, *National Park Service National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form* for Phenix City Multiple Resource Area, September 26, 1983 [Draft?], pp. 10-13 (PDF pages numbers): [https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/NRHP/64000017\\_text](https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/NRHP/64000017_text), accessed Aug. 13, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> John H. Martin, *Columbus, Geo., from its Selection as a 'Trading Town' in 1827, to its Partial Destruction by Wilson's Raid, in 1865: History - Incident - Personality*, 1874, 23-24: [https://archive.org/details/bub\\_gb\\_YPQxQAQAAAJ](https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_YPQxQAQAAAJ), accessed Aug. 13, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> "The Georgia Gold Rush," THE DLG B, Blog of the Digital Library of Georgia, <https://blog.dlg.galileo.usg.edu/?p=2498>; "Georgia Gold Rush," [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgia\\_Gold\\_Rush](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgia_Gold_Rush); *Columbus Democrat*, April 02, 1831, 1; *Columbus Enquirer*, December 13, 1834.

<sup>4</sup> Martin, *Trading Town*, 95.

reaching almost mythic proportions expand his reputation further. Besides the legend of the gold, there is a most intriguing story that begins with his use of a telegraph-like device to communicate with his overseer out in the fields supervising Ingersoll's enslaved workers. According to several sources, the idea was stolen by Samuel F. B. Morse and perfected into the telegraph.<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Ingersoll was a brilliant man, and it is difficult to tell from the evidence I have what was really going on with the gold deposit that he claimed was on his property. His story deserves a good researcher's full attention and I hope someday it finds it. —Rachel Dobson

**JOHN H. HOWARD, PLAINTIFF IN ERROR, v. STEPHEN M. INGERSOLL; JOHN H. HOWARD AND JOSEPHUS ECKOLLS, PLAINTIFFS IN ERROR, v. STEPHEN M. INGERSOLL.**

In 1802, when Georgia ceded her back lands to the United States, she had jurisdiction over the whole of the Chattahoochee River, from its source to the thirty-first degree of north latitude.

The rule is that, where a power possesses a river, and, cedes the territory on the other side of it, making the river the boundary, that power retains the river, unless there is an express stipulation for the relinquishment of the rights of soil and jurisdiction over the bed of such river.

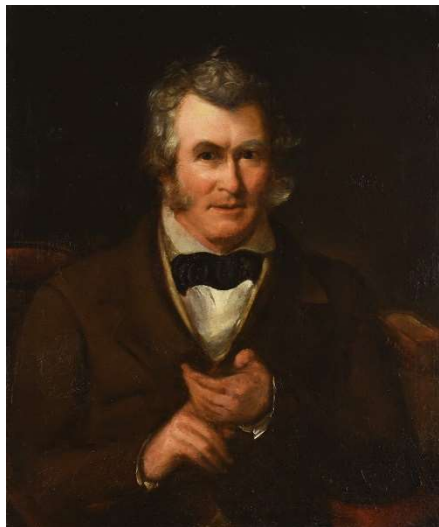
When Georgia ceded to the United States all the land situated on the west of a line running along the western bank of the Chattahoochee River, she retained the bed of the river and all the land to the east of the line above mentioned.

The river flows in a channel, between two banks, from fifteen to twenty feet high, between the bottom of which and the water, when the river is at a low stage, there are shelving shores, from thirty to sixty yards each in width.

The boundary-line runs along the top of this high western bank, leaving the bed of the river and the western shelving shore within the jurisdiction of Georgia.

3. *Supreme Court Ruling: Howard et al. v. Ingersoll, 54 U.S. (13 How.) 381 (1852)* <https://www.loc.gov/item/usrep054381/>

*Our weekly snippets of Columbus history are usually based on a few days of searching through the most popular sources for Muscogee County history. Meant to inspire readers to explore more about Columbus history, they are not exhaustive dissertations on the topic and may contain mistakes. If you have corrections or additional information, feel free to share them with the group.*



4. John Maier, *Dr. Stephen Ingersoll*, 1847, oil on canvas, Columbus Museum, museum purchase G.1995.11. <https://columbusmuseum.pastperfectonline.com/webobject/261850B5-8E66-4380-BB28-238820353983>

#### FURTHER SOURCES

Lynn Willoughby, *Flowing Through Time – A History of the Lower Chattahoochee River* (Tuscaloosa: UAP, 1999), 60.

Jesse Buddy Williams, "The Island Mystery," *Muscogiana* Vol. 20(2), Fall 2009, 3, <https://csuepress.columbusstate.edu/muscogiana/43>

Georgia Historic Newspapers, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/search/advanced/>

<sup>5</sup> *Memorial Record of Alabama: A Concise Account of the State's Political, Military, Professional and Industrial Progress, Together with the Personal Memoirs of Many of Its People, Volume II* (Madison, Wis.: Brant & Fuller, 1893), 392.