This book reports excavations conducted by the author on the Chieftains site from 1969 to 1971. Chieftains was the home of Major Ridge, who was the leader of the Removal faction among the Cherokees. Ridge’s home is still standing, and is located in Rome, Georgia. The excavations were undertaken first as a testing effort in 1969, and then as full-scale excavations during the summers of 1970 and 1971. A major goal of the investigations was to locate George Lavender’s Store, which was known to have been present on Ridge’s property. Excavations were undertaken in what was the original northern side yard of Ridge’s home, and in a field across from his home. Oral history from a former resident led to the excavations in the field, as the oral informant recalled that a building had stood there that was believed to have been the store. The excavations in the field yielded sparse evidence of a residence, while a rich midden, a stone lined cellar, and numerous features were found in the side yard.

The funds for the excavation from 1969 to 1971 covered the field phases, but no funding was available at that time for analysis and reporting. The ceramics from the site were analyzed by Garrow in 1974 and a partial report was prepared, but no further work on the collections was conducted. The collections were originally stored in a secure location within the house museum that included Ridge’s home, but in time those collections were moved to the attic of a garage on the property. The roof of the garage eventually failed, and the majority of the excavation paperwork and much of the artifact provenience data were lost.

Chieftains Museum received a grant from the Trail of Tears Commission of the National Park Service and the long delayed analyses of the collections were begun in 2009. The analyses were conducted by museum staff under the direction of Garrow, and the current volume was produced as a result of that work.

The analyses clearly indicated that George Lavender’s Store had been located in the north side yard of Major Ridge’s home, and had stood over the stone lined cellar found during the excavations. Additional historical research conducted during preparation of the project report indicated that Lavender’s Store operated from 1817 to 1837, dates that were substantiated by the archaeological evidence. Lavender took in skins, venison, hams, small slugs of silver, and medicinal plants in exchange from manufactured goods he acquired from the Augusta factors. Most of the goods he sold at the store were apparently perishable and were not reflected in the archaeological record, but the analyses documented large quantities of English ceramics that were broken in transit to his store and discarded mainly in the backyard of the store.

This volume provides interesting insights into trade within the Cherokee Nation during the two decades prior to Removal. It also illustrates the level of information that can be recovered from old collections where documentation of the excavations is incomplete or absent.