

INDIANS OF THE OZARK PLATEAU

a result of early frontier marriages between the white settlers and these Cherokees many inhabitants of the White River country can trace their ancestral lineage back to a great, great Cherokee grandmother.

Until the end of 1838 the Texas Cherokees, who had departed from their Arkansas Territory, lived a happy and prosperous life under the leadership of Chief Bowles and the protection of Sam Houston, first President of Texas. During this time their remaining kinsmen in Northern Arkansas and Northeastern Oklahoma were experiencing difficulties with the encroachment of an increasing number of frontiersmen on their domain, the unsatisfactory policies of the Federal government, and the vanishing wildlife of the forests and prairies.

But even so their plight was not equal to the acute problems of their kinsmen east of the Mississippi. In the years of 1829-30 the Georgia legislature passed laws designed to dispossess the Cherokees of their land and property and harass them into leaving the state. The U.S. Congress passed the Indian Removal Act in 1830, which required all Indians living east of the Mississippi to remove to lands well west of the big river.

As a result, more of the Eastern Cherokees started their journey to the west. Some bands of 300 or more passed leisurely through the upper White River country. They reportedly stopped from time to time for several days to care for their herds of cattle and other livestock. They were friendly and comfortable in their camps, according to early settlers who talked with them. One of their camps in July, 1833, was located near White River, a few miles north of Berryville, Arkansas.¹⁹

During the first half of the 1830's, all efforts by the federal government and the State of Georgia had failed to move more than a small part of the eastern Cherokees. By this time however, the eastern Cherokees had become divided. John Ross, leader of the overwhelming majority of the tribesmen, favored retention of their old domain. The minority group under the leadership of Major John Ridge felt the best interest of the Cherokees lay in removal.

In time John Ross, supported by many church leaders, had obtained a favorable ruling by the United States Supreme Court, which gave the Cherokees hope of remaining on land

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given to them, as they said, by the Great Spirit. But Governor Forsyth of Georgia and Andrew Jackson, President of the United States, defied the orders of the Supreme Court and proceeded post-haste to move the home loving, peaceful Cherokees.

In order to promote the removal scheme after many failures and to prevent the intervention of John Ross, a detachment of the Georgia State Guard marched into Tennessee and seized Ross. He was escorted across the state line into Georgia and held captive for twelve days without charges of any kind being made against him. At the appointed time for signing the proposed treaty of removal, only three hundred to five hundred Cherokees, including men, women and children appeared. Probably no more than one hundred bonafide signatures were obtained. J.F. Schermerhorn, government agent, reported the treaty approved and submitted it to Washington.

Despite petitions bearing nearly 15,000 Cherokee signatures to the contrary, the Senate ratified it by a majority of one vote. Presidents Jackson and Van Buren enforced the fraudulent treaty on the poor Cherokees.

The first party to be removed under the new treaty consisted of followers of Major Ridge and Stand Watie. It no doubt included most of the treaty signers. The 466 persons making up the party left Ross's landing on March 3, 1837. They traveled by rail and water to reach their destination near Fort Smith, Arkansas, on March 28th.

As the deadline for removal drew near another emigrant party of 365 Cherokees under the supervision of B. B. Cannon were preparing for an 800 mile overland trip to their destination. This group followed in general the same route taken by the first overland settlers of Greene County and the northern portion of the upper White River watershed. Many of these early settlers were from Bledsoe and Jackson Counties, east of Nashville, Tennessee. They traveled to their new homes over the old Green's Ferry road and the White River trace which was an indirect way but the best known route available at that time.

The Cannon party left the Cherokee Agency in Southeast Tennessee on October 14, 1837. They crossed the Tennessee River and the Cumberland Mountains to reach Nashville. From Nashville they took the main road to

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Hopkinsville, Kentucky, and on to Berry's Ferry on the Ohio River adjacent to Golconda, Illinois, where they crossed the river. Their course then turned west across Southern Illinois to Green's Ferry on the Mississippi River near Cape Girardeau, Missouri. One month had passed by the time they arrived on the west bank of the Mississippi.²⁰

From Green's Ferry, or Willard's Landing, the party continued along the route of the early overland settlers of the White River country, passing through Jackson, Farmington and New Caledonia to a point near present day Rolla where they intercepted the age old Indian trace that ran from St. Louis via the Kickapoo Prairie (Springfield region) to the Three Forks of the Arkansas River. From their junction with the Indian Trace near Rolla they followed that portion of it known as the White River Trace²¹ to Springfield.

Ever since they had left Tennessee, the Cannon party had been stalked with illness which delayed them from time to time. They encountered numerous difficulties including sickness, births, breakdowns, food shortages, extreme cold weather and, occasionally, drunkenness.

They passed through Waynesville on December 9th, crossed the Gasconade River on the 10th, and reached the James-Fork of White River on the 14th. They passed through Springfield on the 16th and headed southwest along the route later known as the Old Wire Road which led them near their destination. For a more vivid description trials and tribulation let us examine an excerpt from a journal kept in association with the trip:

"December 15, 1837 - James Starr's wife had a child last night. Waggoners having horses shod until late at night, encamped and issued fodder and beef. They passed through Springfield, Missouri, on the 16th and buried Elleges wife and Chas. Timberlake's son (Smoker). It was now snowing, much colder, and sickness was increasing. Buried Dreadful Waters this evening. They remained in camp at Dye's several days to attend the ill and wait for medicine to be brought from Springfield. On the 21st they reached Locke's on Flat Creek. The next day buried Goddard's grandchild. On the 23rd, buried Rainfrog's daughter, (Lucy Redstick's child) an; halted at Reddixs. Three days later they camped at James Coulter's on Cane Hill, Arkansas, and the next day buried Aley Timberlake daughter of Charles

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Timberlake.²²

The next day, December 28th, the party crossed the line into their new territory and refused to go any farther. The journey had taken seventy-seven days and a number of lives.

Prior to the deadline of May 23, 1838, the federal government had sent General John Ellis Wool and some troops into the Cherokee nation to disarm the Indians to prevent a possible uprising. Stockades also had been constructed to hold the Indians while they were being rounded up and made ready for the impending removal by force.

All sorts of schemes had been devised by the white inhabitants of Georgia, and perhaps others to a lesser extent, to seize, steal, cheat, defraud and swindle the possessions of the Indians. These acts were often sanctioned by public officials. The Cherokees could expect no protection from the laws of the land.

When the deadline arrived for their forced removal, General Winfield Scott, at the direction of President Jackson, moved with 7,000 federal and state troops to force the Cherokees from their land to new territory 800 miles to the west.

In order to prevent escape the soldiers surrounded and surprised the Cherokee farmers in their peaceful agricultural pursuits. They were routed from their homes, often at the point of bayonets, without having time to salvage any great amount of their possessions. Soon many of the peaceful hard working people who had harmed no one found themselves in the government's concentration camps, stripped of their worldly goods. Apparently their only crime had been that they wanted to live on land that had been theirs for many generations.

By the middle of June General Scott had nearly 15,000 Cherokees in his stockades with two or three advance groups already on their way west. During the round-up a few of the Cherokees escaped to the mountains and were never captured.

The approach of the cholera season caused General Scott to discontinue removal until fall which gave time for the organization of the Indians into thirteen groups of about a thousand each. Each group was assigned a conductor and an assistant. Under the supervision of John Ross the Indians were largely allowed to remove themselves in the presence of

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the Army. Actually General Scott and General Wool both sympathized with the Indians, much to the displeasure of President Jackson. If General Scott had refused to cooperate with John Ross the suffering and loss of life would have been much greater.

It was October 1, 1838, when the first of the thirteen columns started their long, never-to-be-forgotten journey, across the Ozarks to Indian Territory. One person described it as being like the march of the army. Group after Group went by with their wagons in the middle and officers attending the line.

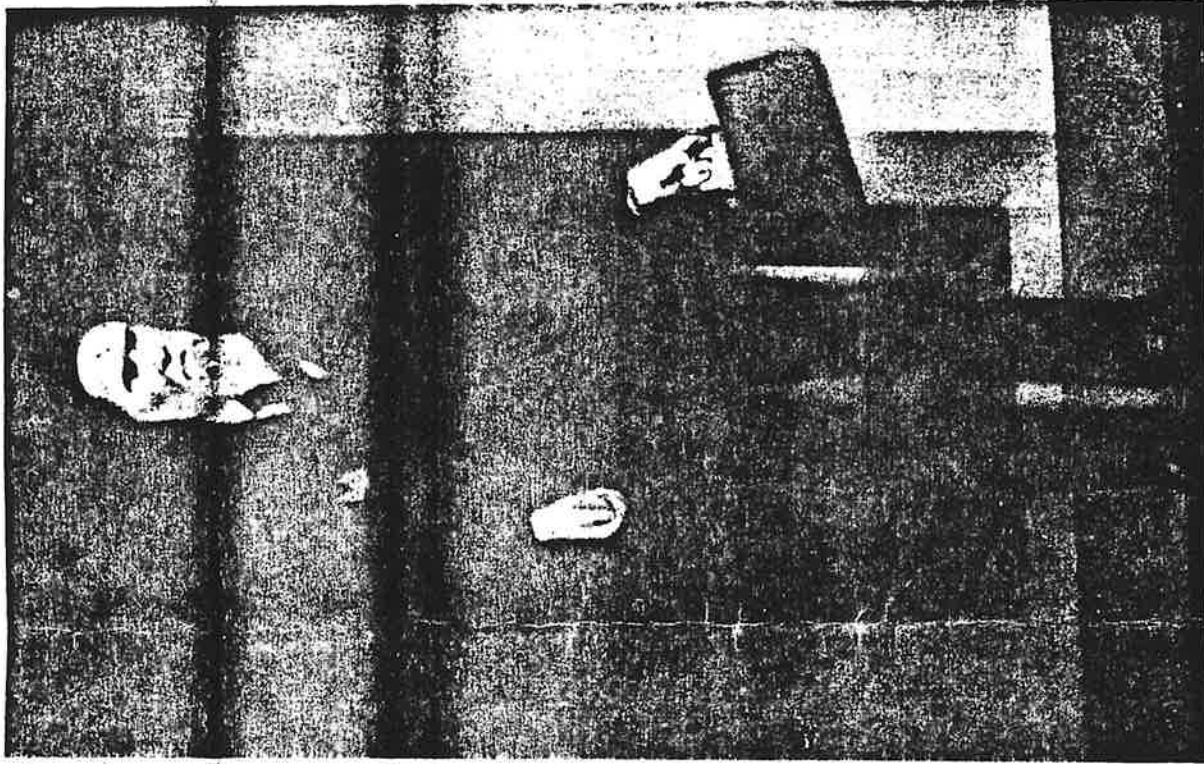
The march of the thirteen columns followed much the same route as the party conducted by B. B. Cannon and the early white settlers. It ran via Nashville, to the mouth of the Cumberland River where they ferried the Ohio River, thence across Southern Illinois to Green's Ferry where they crossed the Mississippi. From Green's Ferry they traveled to Jackson where two columns swung south into Arkansas^{2,3} with the remaining 11 columns completing the trip via the White River trace and the Old Wire Road.

Perhaps it was these two columns that reached their destination through the present Northwest Arkansas counties bordering the Missouri state line. At least one group of the Cherokees, after experiencing considerable sickness, reached White River two or three miles above Cotter, Arkansas. The crossing of the swollen stream resulted in the loss of life and property. From there their trail ran west passing near the present site of Burlington, Arkansas, on present day U.S. Highway 65 to Denver, Arkansas, on Long Creek. From Denver they passed north of Green Forest and Berryville to King's River near Grandview. They made a safe crossing of White River at Blue Spring and reached their destination by way of Bentonville, Arkansas.^{2,4}

The other group of Cherokees may have intercepted the Fallen Ash Military Road being opened to Fort Smith about this time by the Federal government. It was an overland route passing up the north side of White River from Jacksonport to Fort Smith via Batesville, Yellville, Carrollton, Osage, Huntsville and Fayetteville. Some burials were made along the way. These Indians asked the white settlers living near by not to disturb their graves.^{2,5}

The route over which the major portion of the latter

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Courtesy of Dorothy Stacey Cummings

Dr. Silas Scruggs Stacey the Cherokee Doctor of the Upper White River Valley.

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Cherokees were forced to march became known as the "Trail of Tears." It is an appropriate name. The forceful removal of the peaceful, home loving Cherokees has no parallel in American history. But out of this epoch of the nation's past came one of the region's pioneer doctors. He was Silas Scruggs Stacey, an involuntary pioneer.

Dr. Stacey, the son of William and Rebecca Stacey, was born in Jackson County, Tennessee, January 20, 1828. He was no more than ten years old when his father and Cherokee mother started their long trek westward to the Indian Territory. They joined a westbound caravan at Hopkinsville, Kentucky, traveling with it to Springfield, Missouri, where by accident or design they departed from the group. They lived for a time in Smullen Cave, a spacious cavern on Finley Creek, near Ozark. They later moved to the head of Swan Creek, and then to Little Beaver Creek in the present limits of Douglas County, Missouri, where young Stacey grew to manhood. His political outlook on life was probably influenced by his childhood memories from the "Trail of Tears," for he had decided by the time he was voting age that the party of Jackson and Van Buren was not the one for him.²⁶

During the Civil War Silas was a Union soldier. Either before or during his period of service he received some training as a surgeon. He began the practice of medicine soon after the war at Isabella in Ozark County, Missouri.

Dr. Stacey looked the part of his Indian ancestry and was probably referred to as the Indian doctor. If so, it would have been an asset to him. For people at that time looked upon Indian remedies as possessing some magic power of healing and may have felt the same way about an Indian doctor. After enjoying a successful practice in Missouri, Dr. Stacey moved to Newton County, Arkansas, where he continued the practice of his profession and engaged in a number of business enterprises.

An historical marker near Pea Ridge, Arkansas, briefly but ably describes the latter groups of Cherokees, who were marched across the upper reaches of the White River valley to a strange land leaving behind them a trail of tears and graves:

"Here passed a part of 20,000 Cherokees, driven by the U.S. Army from their Tennessee-North Carolina-Georgia

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mountains to Indian Territory. One third died on the way.²⁷ 645 wagons hauled the infirm. 5,000 ponies ridden, thousands forced to walk."

As the decade of the 1840's dawned the last of the eastern Cherokees, except those who fled to the mountains deserted on the way, were planted on their new and strange land west of the Mississippi. The Arkansas Cherokees living along and south of White River, had joined their eastern kinsmen, save those who had married white settlers. And the Texas Cherokees, battered and abused by President Lamar's state troops, had been driven northward out of Texas into their new tribal lands in Indian Territory.²⁸

For the next two decades the Cherokee troubles were largely among themselves. The division between the Ross faction and the treaty group continued in their new land. A number of the Ross Extremists held a secret council and organized the "Knights of Death," for the avowed purpose of wiping out the leaders of the treaty party who had favored removal.

On June 22, 1839, a company of riders rode up to the home of John Ridge who was dragged from his bed and with twenty wounds in his body died on the ground in view of his wife and children. It was then that young John Rollin Ridge, son of John Ridge and grandson of Major Ridge, vowed vengeance ere he reached manhood.

On the same morning Elias Boudinot, another member of the treaty party and a famous scholar, was murdered. About 10 o'clock on the morning of the 22nd Major Ridge was shot from a bush on the road to Vineyard and died instantly. Stand Watie, another leader of the treaty party, was warned by a runner in time to escape the Knights of Death on that fateful day. Several later attempts were made on his life but somehow he was able to escape the vengeance of his enemies.

After the untimely death of John Ridge, his wife moved to Fayetteville, Arkansas. Young John Rollin Ridge, like his father, was sent to school in New England. After ten years of schooling away from home he returned to Fayetteville. But his education had in no way erased the memory of that terrible morning back in 1839.

Young Ridge was soon warned by friendly people that a