

# 476

# The Ray House

Wilsons Creek Battlefield National Park

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C. The Ray House and the Butterfield Overland Mail Route.

A popular local story is that the Ray House was a stop on the Butterfield Overland Mail. A study of the primary source materials dealing with the Butterfield Overland Route would lead one to discredit this as a legend. Aboard the first Butterfield Stage to make the run from Tipton, Missouri, to San Francisco was Waterman L. Ormsby, a correspondent for the New York Herald. The big Concord Stage rolled out of Springfield at 4 p.m., September 17, 1858. He reported that at the post office they took on a "small through mail for San Francisco, and also the postmaster and another citizen, who wished to have it to say that they had ridden in the first coach from Springfield containing the overland mail." He wrote:

We kept travelling all day and night, our way during Friday afternoon and evening being through an extremely dusty, hilly, and stony road, as it will appear when I state the fact that the first fourteen miles took two hours; the next twenty, three hours; the next fifteen, two hours and forty-five minutes; the next seventeen, three hours; and the next eighteen, three hours; and the next eighteen, three hours and twenty minutes.

Ormsby identified the first four stops after leaving Springfield as: Ashmore's, Smith's, Couch's, and Hardin's. No mention is made by the correspondent of a stop at the Ray House.<sup>9</sup>

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9. Waterman L. Ormsby, The Butterfield Overland Mail, edited by Lyle H. Wright and Josephine M. Bynum (San Marino, 1942), 18.

Roscoe and Margaret Conkling in the 1940's made an exhaustive study of the Butterfield Route. They found that from the Springfield public square the route led out of town along today's College Avenue and Campbell Street. It then curved southwest for ten and one-half miles across Campbell, Wilson, and Brookline townships to the Wilson Creek crossing, near where the route left Greene County and entered Christian County. About a mile farther on the road crossed Terrell Creek, and then on southwest for another mile to Ashmore's--the next station--13 miles southwest of Springfield.

For the most part this section of the Telegraph road has been abandoned, but good country roads parallel it. The present iron bridge spanning Wilson Creek is near where the Butterfield stage crossed, and the old ford on Terrell Creek is still in use.

Ashmore's station on the Butterfield Overland Route was at the home of John C. Ashmore, and it was located in the northwest corner of Christian County in Township 27, Range 23 West, Section 11. The station and home which were destroyed by fire and of which nothing remains but a few scattered foundation stones, was a double log house according to the recollections of the oldest inhabitants.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the Conklings, like Waterman, identify the first stop on the Butterfield stage beyond Springfield as

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10. Roscoe and Margaret Conkling, The Butterfield Overland Mail, 1857-1869, (3 vols., Glendale, 1947), Vol. 1, 184-185.

Ashmore's. Once again, no mention is made of the Ray house as a stop on the Butterfield Route.

Dick O'Connor, a local historian, disagrees with the Conklings on one point. He reports that the Telegraph road, which the Butterfield stages followed from Springfield to Fort Smith, left the square by South Avenue, then angled toward the back of today's Elfindale Lake and across the grounds of the Federal Medical Center.<sup>11</sup>

The Ray house does not appear on any of the documents published by the Butterfield Company listing stops on the route. But during the period November 27, 1859, to March 31, 1860, the Wilson Creek Post Office and other post offices on Route No. 10626 between Springfield and Fayetteville became temporary mail stops on the Butterfield Overland Mail Route. J. H. Hobbs & Co. had precipitated this situation by renegeing on its contract. On April 18, 1860, Postmaster General Joseph Holt recognized the services of the Overland Mail Company in carrying the mails once a week over this route "at the rate of \$2,626 per annum." On April 1, 1860, J. H. Hobbs & Co. had resumed operations.<sup>12</sup>

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11. Upton, Springfield News & Leader, June 10, 1956.

12. "Mail Routes, Ark., Calif., . . . 1858-1862," Library P. O. D., pp. 122-124 (National Archives, NNR /68-724).

Thus, for two and one-half years, the Concord Stages of the Butterfield Overland Mail were a part of the historic scene, and as they rumbled by the Ray house on the way to and from California the children regularly turned out to exchange good-natured greetings with the drivers and passengers. The feelings of the Rays on September 17, 1858, were undoubtedly similar to those of the people of Springfield, when the first westbound overland mail stage for California passed through their town. As the driver came bounding into the square, seated atop the Concord Stage the crowd that had assembled waved their hats and cheered. That night the event was celebrated by "letting off skyrockets, throwing fire-balls, reducing dry goods boxes to ashes, hurraing, and violating the prime obligations of the Good Templers!"<sup>13</sup>

The first eastbound stage passed the Ray house October 8, and for the next two and one-half years, the Butterfield Stages, two each way per week, continued to pass the Ray house. Even before the firing on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, some members of Congress wanted the route changed, either by congressional action or by the contractors themselves. Representative Francis P. Blair, Jr., of Missouri, and Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts were most active in advocating selection by the contractors.<sup>14</sup> Senators David C. Broderick and William Gwin, and Representative Milton S. Lathan of California, Senator John P. Hale of New

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13. History of Greene County . . . (St. Louis, 1883), 255.

14. Congressional Globe, 35th Congress, 2 Sess., pp. 1198, 1312-1313, 1408, 1499.

Hampshire, and Representative Schuyler Colfax of Indiana introduced bills calling for a central route, either from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Placerville, California, or from St. Louis via Salt Lake City to San Francisco, but no changes were made.<sup>15</sup>

With the secession of the Lower South, there was much interference with the mail service through Texas. As a result, Congress enacted legislation for a subsidized mail service on the central route and authorizing the postmaster general to discontinue the Butterfield Overland Mail Service on or before July 1, 1861. The Company was to be given an opportunity to accept a modification of the contract and to receive pay both while transferring from the southern route, and, in addition, two months' pay of the existing contract to cover costs of the change over. Mail service should be provided over the central route six times a week, and the entire mails delivered tri-weekly to Denver City and Great Salt Lake City, at a compensation of \$1,000,000 per year. The new contract provided that the mail was to be carried from St. Joseph, Missouri, or Atchison, Kansas, to Placerville. Service was to begin July 1, 1861,

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15. Ibid., 35th Congress, 2nd Sess., pp. 1503, 1510; Ibid., 36th Congress, 1st Sess., pp. 1628, 2338-2339, 2460; Ibid., 36th Congress, 2nd Sess., pp. 547, 1128.

and end July 1, 1864. All provisions of the law were included in the contract, except that only one month's pay (\$50,000) was allowed in terminating the previous contract.<sup>16</sup>

The transfer to the central route began about April 1. It took about three months to move the stock and equipment, and to build new stations, located from 12 to 18 miles apart. Colonel Alvord, Company Agent, selected St. Joseph as the eastern terminus of the new mail route.<sup>17</sup>

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16. Ibid., 36th Congress, 2nd Sess., p. 1356; Leroy H. Hafen, The Overland Mail, 1849-1869, Promoter of Settlement, Precursor of Railroads, (Cleveland, 1926), 213.

17. Virginia L. Rebbing, "Some Aspects of the Southern Overland Mail, 1857-1861," Missouri Historical Review, Vol. 40, No. 4, 481-502.

D. The Ray House and the Telegraph Road.

The Bolivar or Boonville road followed the old Osage Trace. The early settlers knew this road as the "old road" or the "military road." It extended from Palmyra on the Mississippi River through Boonville, Springfield, the Delaware Town, and Fayetteville, Arkansas, to Fort Smith. Beyond Springfield it was known as the Delaware Trace. It was regularly located and cut out to the legal width in accordance with an order issued at the first term of the Greene County Court. This road was declared to be a "public highway in Greene County to the State line."<sup>18</sup>

At its June 22, 1836, meeting the Greene County Court proceeded to lay off road districts on the State road passing through the county. District No. 1 was to extend from the courthouse in Springfield to Wilson Creek "on the State Road in the direction to the Arkansas line, including all the settlements east of the old road and Delaware Town and south of the court house." William Dye was named overseer of District No. 1.

The State Road from Wilson Creek to the Barry County line would constitute District No. 2, "including all hands liable to work on public roads, including and from Archibald Vaines, down the James, including the Delaware town." Robert Forbes was named overseer of this district.<sup>19</sup>

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18. Fairbanks and Tuck, Past and Present of Greene County, 1, 145.

19. Greene County Court Record, 1836, p. 219.



Thus for a number of years during the late 1830s and into the 1840s there were two roads leading southwestward from Springfield to the Arkansas line. The oldest of these, the Delaware Trace, led southward from Springfield and crossed James River in Section 27, Township 28, Range 22 West. The road that was to become known as the Telegraph road, which was opened in accordance with the order of the County Court in 1836, crossed Wilson Creek in Section 25, Township 28, Range 23 West. By 1861 few, if any, travelers en route from Springfield to northwestern Arkansas would have taken the Delaware Trace.<sup>20</sup>

Private Eugene F. Ware of Company E, 1st Iowa Infantry recalled that the Telegraph road was "rocky and full of flints," while the "clay of the road was red and washed." It was the main thoroughfare "southwest from Springfield," he continued, through Cassville and Keetsville, to Fort Smith, Arkansas. A telegraph wire had been strung along it "among the trees on the roadside, for it went through [a] forest most of the way."<sup>21</sup>

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20. Fairbanks and Tuck, Past and Present of Greene County, 1, 145.

21. E. F. Ware, The Lyon Campaign in Missouri, Being a History of the 1st Iowa Infantry . . . (Kansas City, 1907), 271.

E. The Ray House and the Telegraph.

The telegraph reached Springfield in the spring of 1860. On April 30, 1860, the first message was sent over the line connecting Springfield with Jefferson City by way of Bolivar. From Springfield the line was extended that summer to Fort Smith, Arkansas. The telegraph between Springfield and Fort Smith paralleled the route used by the Butterfield Overland Mail, and by the summer of 1861 this road was known locally as the Telegraph or Wire road. The telegraph passed in front of the Ray house.

At the close of the Civil War, the telegraph line connecting Springfield and Fort Smith by way of the Telegraph road was discontinued.<sup>22</sup>

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22. Fairbanks and Tuck, Past and Present of Greene County, 1, 200.

F. The Ray House and the Missouri Pacific.

In 1902 the Missouri Pacific extended a line from Carthage in Jasper County, Missouri, to a junction with the Iron Mountain & Southern Railroad, in northeastern Arkansas. Business interests in Springfield pushed for a connection with this line, and by 1905 sufficient inducement was offered the Missouri Pacific to get it to agree to build a 35-mile branch line from Crane, in Stone County, to Springfield.<sup>23</sup>

John McConnell, who owned the property on which the Ray house was located at that time, sold on September 9, 1905, to the Springfield Railway Company, a right-of-way 100 feet wide across his land. The land in question was to extend 50 feet on each side of the center line of the proposed railroad as "currently staked out across his property."<sup>24</sup>

Land owned by McConnell which the railroad crossed included the northwest quarter of the northeast quarter; the northeast quarter of the northwest quarter; and the north one-half of the north one-half of the southeast quarter of the northwest quarter of Section 25, Township 28 North, Range 23 West.

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23. Ibid., 193.

24. Greene County Deed Book 229, p. 184.

#### IV. THE RAY HOUSE AND THE "TRAIL OF TEARS."

##### A. The Cherokee Removal

The story of the Cherokee removal in 1838-1839 may exceed in grief and pathos any other trek in American history. The Cherokee leaders were understandably chagrined when the United States Senate, by a single vote, ratified the Treaty of New Echota, and President Andrew Jackson, on May 23, 1836, proclaimed its validity. By its action the Senate established the deadline for the final removal of over 15,000 Cherokees from their homes in the southern Appalachians to the trans-Mississippi for May 23, 1838. Secretary of State John Forsyth immediately notified John Ross, the Cherokee leader, that the "President had ceased to recognize any existing government among the eastern Cherokee."<sup>1</sup>

About January 1, 1837, 600 aristocratic members of the Treaty Party availed themselves of the provisions of the New Echota treaty authorizing Cherokees to emigrate themselves. Accompanied by Negro slaves, saddle horses, and droves of cattle, these Cherokees traveled overland through Kentucky, Illinois, Missouri, and Arkansas to their new homes, reaching their destination in time to plant their spring crops. White residents of the region through which these emigrants traveled recalled that they journeyed in the manner of white aristocrats--being well mounted, well-dressed, and well fed.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Grant Foreman, Indian Removal: The Emigration of the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians (Norman, 1953), 269.

2. Grace S. Woodward, The Cherokees (Norman, 1963), 195.

The first Treaty-Party Cherokees to be emigrated by the government under the recent treaty did not fare so well as the self-emigrants. From Ross' Landing a party of 466 persons on March 3, 1837, embarked for the west in a fleet of 11 flatboats. Following the water route, they traveled via the Tennessee, Ohio, and Mississippi rivers to Montgomery's Landing, where they waited until a pilot could be located to navigate their boats up the Arkansas River. The ascent of the Arkansas achieved, Major Ridge and his party disembarked two miles above Fort Smith to move overland to their lands on Honey Creek, near the Missouri line. The remaining emigrants landed at Fort Coffee and from there traveled overland to Fort Gibson.<sup>3</sup>

The second party of Cherokees to emigrate under government supervision, numbering about 365, took the overland route through Kentucky, Illinois, and Missouri. Leaving the Cherokee agency near Calhoun, Tennessee, on October 14, 1837, this group reached their new home about December 30, saddened by sickness and the death of 15 of their number, 11 of whom were children.<sup>4</sup>

In accordance with orders from Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott, troops had moved into the land of the Cherokees. Stockaded forts were erected for assembling and holding the Indians preparatory to their removal. From

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3. Ibid., 195-196.

4. Ibid., 196. This group was led by B. B. Cannon, so it was known as the Cannon party.

these posts, patrols moved out to search the area and bring in any Indians who might attempt to hide. Men were seized in their fields or traveling along the roads, women were taken from their wheels, and children from their play.

When nearly 17,000 Cherokees had been concentrated in the stockades the work of removal commenced in earnest. Early in June 1838, several parties, numbering about 5,000 men, women, and children, were concentrated by the soldiers at Calhoun. The first contingent to be emigrated forcibly by General Scott, numbering about 800, left Ross' Landing on June 6. Transported on ten double-decker keelboats, measuring 130 feet in length and 20 in width, and a 100-ton steamboat, this group of "unhappy, scantily clad Cherokees" traveled to their new homes via the water route. In mid-June another party was started from Ross' Landing by water. A third, and larger group of 1,071 persons, left Ross' Landing in wagons and afoot for Waterloo, where they boarded boats chartered by the government.<sup>5</sup>

This removal in the hottest season of the year was attended with so much sickness and such a high rate of mortality that, by resolution of the Cherokee National Council, John Ross and the other chiefs submitted to General Scott a proposition that the Cherokees be allowed to remove

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5. Ibid., 205-208; James Mooney, Myths of the Cherokees, Nineteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, Part 1 (Washington, 1900), 130-133; Charles C. Royce, The Cherokee Nation of Indians, Fifth Annual Report . . . (Washington, 1837), 292.

themselves in the fall, after the "sickly season." This was granted on condition that all should be on their way by October 20, except the sick and aged who might, because of their condition, be unable to keep up. Accordingly, officers were named by the Cherokee Council to take charge of the emigration. The Indians were organized into detachments averaging 1,000 each, with two leaders in charge of each, and a number of wagons and horses. In this manner the remainder, about 13,000 (counting their Negro slaves), started on the long overland trek.

Those who chose to emigrate under the management of their own leaders assembled at Rattlesnake Springs, about two miles south of the Hiwassee River, near today's Charleston, Tennessee. Here a final council was held, at which it was determined to continue to abide by the old constitution and laws in the new home. Then in October 1838 the march commenced. A few went by water; the rest, nearly 13,000, went overland. Crossing to the north side of the Hiwassee they took the trace paralleling the river. The sick, the elderly, and the smaller children, with the blankets, cooking pots, and other personal property were in wagons, the remainder afoot or on horseback.<sup>6</sup>

The migration resembled the march of an army, detachment after detachment, the wagons in the center, the officers along the line, and the horsemen on the flanks and in the rear. The Tennessee River was crossed at

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6. Woodward, The Cherokees, 209; Mooney, Myths of the Cherokees, 130-133.

Tucker's Ferry. From there the route led across the rugged Cumberland Plateau to the south of Pikeville, through McMinnville, and on to Nashville, where the Cumberland was crossed. Then on to Hopkinsville, Kentucky, where the chief Whitepath, in charge of a detachment, sickened and died. The Ohio, in which ice was floating, was crossed at a ferry near the mouth of the Cumberland, and on they pressed across southern Illinois by way of Golconda and Jonesboro.<sup>7</sup>

Winter had closed in, and when the Cherokees reached the Mississippi, opposite Cape Girardeau, Missouri, they found the river choked with massive ice floes. These floes were such a hazard that a number of the detachments were compelled to camp on the eastern shore and wait for the channel to clear. When James Mooney, the noted ethnologist, questioned survivors 50 years later at Tahlequah, he found that the years had not sufficed to erase the memory of the miseries of that "halt beside the frozen river, with hundreds of sick and dying penned up in wagons or stretched upon the ground, with only a blanket overhead to ward off the January blasts."<sup>8</sup>

After crossing the Mississippi at Green's and Willard's Landing, the Cherokee detachments (except two which swung south from Jackson, Missouri, and into Arkansas) followed the route across Missouri pioneered by the

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7. Emmet Starr, History of the Cherokee Indians and Their Legends and Folklore (Oklahoma City, 1921), 103-104; Mooney, Myths of the Cherokees, 130-133.

8. Mooney, Myths of the Cherokees, 130-133.



Cannon party of 1837. This led them through Jackson, Farmington, Caledonia, Massey's Iron Works, and then to Springfield.<sup>9</sup>

The journey across Missouri in the winter was grim. The weather was very changeable. On the day following one in which two children died from the cold, the weather turned so warm that the weary travelers spoke of putting on their summer clothes. That night the weather changed again, and a diarist wrote:

Soon, however, the snow fell in flakes, and covered the ground about a mile deep. I kindled a fire, but the wind kept whirling in almost every direction so that I could scarcely stand by the fire without being enveloped in smoke. We soon found ourselves encountering a Northern winter and could not secure ourselves from the piercing cold. I told my dear wife that it seemed almost as if we must perish. We, however, succeeded in getting breakfast, and with the company of poor suffering Cherokees started on our journey.

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9. Arkansas Gazette, Dec. 26, 1838; Jackson, Mo., Southern Advocate, Dec. 1, 1838; B. B. Lightfoot, "The Cherokee Emigrants in Missouri, 1837-1839," Missouri Historical Review, Vol. 56, No. 2, pp. 156-167. The editor of the Southern Advocate observed, "During the present week 1900 of this tribe [the Cherokees] . . . passed through our town. Some of them have considerable wealth, and make a very respectable appearance; but most of them are poor and exceedingly dissipated."

B. The Route of the Cherokees Across Greene and Barry Counties.

In the period 1837-1839 there were two possible routes the Cherokees could take on leaving Springfield. One of these was the Delaware Trace, and the other was the road leading to the southwest ordered opened by the Greene County Court in 1836. This latter road was destined to become the Telegraph road, and it was the one alongside which John A. Ray built his house in 1852. A number of local historians have claimed that the Cherokees, while en route to their new homes in the Indian Territory, passed down the road opened in 1836. To determine which of these roads the Cherokees took, it has been necessary to examine a large number of primary and secondary sources. Apparently, only one document survives detailing the route followed by the emigrants between Springfield and the Arkansas line. This is the "Journal of Daniel Butrick, for October 4, 1838 and May 1839," which is on file at the Houghton Library.

Daniel Butrick, who was a missionary to the Cherokees, reported on March 14, 1839:

Passing through some large prairies, we arrived at Springfield, a pleasant village about noon.

Thursday. This forenoon about ten miles from Springfield, we crossed a stream called the St. James River.

Friday [the 15]. We travelled 11 miles over a barren desert, in general destitute of wood and water, but almost naked hills rose to view as far as the eye could reach. We camped in a beautiful place, on a small stream called sugar creek.

The information contained in the "Butrick Journal" proves that the Cherokees, on leaving Springfield, took the Delaware Trace, as they crossed the James River and not Wilson Creek. Therefore, the Cherokees did not pass the Ray house site on their trek to the Indian Territory.

The detachment with which the Butricks traveled reached Mr. Woodhall's in the Indian Territory on Saturday, March 23, 1839. This was the place where Richard Taylor, the commander of the detachment, was to report to the United States officers, who were to supply his people with provisions to last for one year. The next day, the 24th, the army officers arrived from Fort Gibson and relieved Taylor of his responsibility. Dr. Butrick was disappointed to learn on his arrival that the Cherokees had split into two factions--a pro-treaty and an anti-treaty party. Murders were frequent. Two weeks before a blacksmith had been gunned down by a Cherokee.

On April 1 Butrick and his wife visited Dwight Mission. Dr. Cephas Washburn inquired of them whether the Cherokees in Taylor's detachment had "come peaceably." Butrick replied that all that he had seen and heard on the trek convinced him that the anti-treaty Cherokees were disposed to peace. The Butricks were impressed with the beauty of the Cherokees' new home, which he described as "beautiful, almost beyond expression."<sup>10</sup>

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10. "Journal of Daniel Butrick, for October 4, 1838 and May 1839," MSS Collection, Houghton Library, Cambridge, Mass.

C. "The Trail of Tears"

It is difficult to estimate the number of Cherokees who died as a result of the removal. According to official figures those who removed under the direction of John Ross lost over 1,600. The proportionate mortality among those previously removed under military supervision was probably greater, as it was their suffering that led to the proposal of the Cherokee leaders to take charge of the emigration. Hundreds died in the stockades at the concentration camps, chiefly because the rations issued, which were of flour and other provisions to which they were unaccustomed and which they did not know how to prepare properly. Hundreds of others died soon after their arrival in the Indian Territory, from sickness and exposure on the journey. This great loss of life is attributed to malnutrition, exposure, cholera, and the extremes of age represented in the movement. The journey was truly, as the Cherokees call it, a "Trail of Tears."<sup>11</sup>

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11. Lightfoot, "The Cherokee Emigrants in Missouri," 166-167; Mooney, Myths of the Cherokees, 133.