TPR AND THE TRAIL OF TEARS

by
Elizabeth Holloman

Theodore Pease Russell came to the easternmost Ozarks in 1838 when he was 18, settling with his parents and seven other children in the Arcadia Valley of the St. Francois range after a lengthy voyage from Connecticut. Theodore fed the family as appointed hunter, became a farmer, fought in the Civil War, was a justice of the peace, and in 1885 began to set his memories down in a weekly column for the *Iron County Register*.

Before he died in 1899, TPR had written of hunting, fishing, social affairs, regional history, geography and many other things Arcadian. He was 19 years old when the Cherokee Trail of Tears touched his life as Indians were driven from their towns in the Southeast United States to Indian Territory; a half-century later he remembered it wistfully for his readers in one of the *Register* columns.

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The government removed the Cherokee Indians from Georgia to the Indian Reservation in 1839. I remember February of that year; a division of the Ross party came through this valley and camped on Knob Creek, a camp extending from the Half-Way House along the west bank of the creek at the foot of Shepherd Mountain for nearly a mile. It was a muddy time.

There were about 2,000 Indians in this division. All the others had gone by way of Farmington, but the roads were so bad that this last division had to come this way along the Fredricktown and such a road at that time! A few days before the Indians came a man arrived to find suitable camping spots and supplies such as corn, oats, and fodder for their teams. There were so few people in the Arcadia Valley then there was only one man who had much to spare. But Abram Buford had a large crib of old corn, oats and fodder which were to be delivered at the place now owned by Judge Emerson. Mr. Buford hired father to send me with a team to haul oats and fodder, while his team hauled corn.

As the Indians came in they were furnished rations by lodges, each lodge to receive so much corn, oats and fodder, after which they camped at the place assigned them. They received no other rations; the hunters supplied meat out of the woods. Each morning when the Indians broke camp they were told how far they had to go and in what direction. The hunters spread out like a fan and started through the woods toward the next camping place, about ten miles ahead, and swept everything before them in the way of game. During the day deer could be seen running as if Old Scratch was after them across fields and roads.

About four o'clock I had finished hauling, so the Commissary Agent asked me if I did not want to go see the Indians in camp; he told me to let one of the boys take my team home, and he would show me how Indians lived. When we reached camp we found the first lodge close by what was to be Half-Way House. As each lodge came in to camp it went on beyond earlier arrivals until the last arrival was furthest in advance and so the first to move on in the morning.

As we came to each lodge, the commissary officer would explain everything. I saw families cooking supper, and noticed at each lodge a large tree had been felled by the body of which they had built their fire. On the butts of the logs I saw square holes that would hold about four quarts.

"Do you know what that hole is for?" the officer asked. "That is their grist mill; they shell corn into the hole, take that big pounder you see there, and pound the corn until it is fine enough, then they sift it and make bread."

We went along until we came to a squaw pounding corn. She soon dipped out the grain into a sieve, sifted out the finest of the meal, then put the rest back to be pounded again. It did not take long to make enough meal for bread for all the lodge.

The officer called my attention to girls dressed in silks and satins, their ears loaded with jewelry, their hair done up. I said "Surely these are not Indians; these are white ladies."

"These are Indians," said the officer. "Those negroes doing the cooking are their slaves."

The Cherokee girls were just as handsome as any girls and had fine forms, straight as an arrow.

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As we walked on, we saw hunters coming from every direction, ded down with game; some used guns but the most that I saw had ys and arrows. We met one Indian with a string of fox squirrels, ry one of them with a hole through its neck made by an arrow. Some nters had deer, some turkeys or small game. The officer asked an In- n to let me see his bow and arrows. I would have liked to buy them him, but I did not feel that I cared to talk to him much.

I saw groups of boys at play, but do not know what some of their mes were. Some were pitching arrows, while some of the larger were ooting at a target on a tree with their bows; it was surprising how ose they shot. I was shown how they make their bows, how they shioned arrows to the shafts, and how the points were fastened on.

I saw a group of girls playing at a sort of battledore. When I heard the laughter of the boys and girls, I could hardly realize I was in an In- dian camp, among people who had been called savages. But I also noticed that many of the old men and women did wear a savage look and seemed as though their hearts were full of hate toward the white race, and they would be glad to take your scalp if it were in their power to do so.

After strolling the length of the camp, with all the lodges up and it being after dark, we loitered back on a return trip. It was the duty of the officer to see to all the camp affairs just like a policeman in the city; for the Cherokee were under regulation as strict as if they were white. Some of the families were at supper, and their tables were set with just as nice dishes; the food looked as good and smelt as good as any white folks. I felt I would like to sit down to one of their tables and be an In- dian.

Back at our starting point the officer took my hand and said, "Now you have seen the Indians in camp, if you would like to be one, or join them, we will take you along and you can marry one of these girls; they will make a chief of you for Indian girls think it an honor to have a white husband. What do you say? Will you go?"

I finally told him I would go home and *ask my ma*, and see what she said. And as it was against the rules for anyone who did not belong to the company to be found inside the camp after 9 o'clock, I bade my conductor goodby and started for home through the mud and darkness, tired, hungry and sleepy.

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Theodore Russell's writings were excavated from Time's debris by Elizabeth Holloman, who lives in the Arcadia Valley and meditates upon the same hills across which the author roamed: Old Buford, Pilot Knob, Shepherd's Mountain, Taum Sauk, Buck Mountain. The north- eastern Ozarks were the first to know white men; Ste. Genevieve of that region celebrated its village bicentennial nearly 50 years before the United States did. The Arcadia Valley, one of the loveliest vales on this continent, has been settled for two centuries, and is still pleasantly old- rural country, though it was the first tourist center of the Ozarks when St. Louisians 70 miles north began to travel there in 1869 on the new Iron Mountain and Southern railroad.