

HISTORY OF FORT BUTLER AND THE TRIAL OF TEARS

BY Joe E. Ray

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While man was making the first historic step on the moon, a persevering Methodist preacher was making history in walking a million steps along the Indian "Trail of Tears".

Rev. Billy Richardson, 50, a 270 lb. white haired preacher, who stands head and shoulders above the ordinary man, is making this walk.

Dressed in a light weight linen suit, with iron soled Vietnam boots, and an Australian wide brimmed hat, and pack on his back he makes a colorful figure as he walks against the speeding traffic.

His walk started at Murphy, North Carolina on July 4th and will cross Tennessee, Kentucky, and Illinois and he was scheduled to arrive in Cape Girardeau, Missouri August 8.

The 500 mile journey takes him through Ducktown, Cleveland, Dayton, Pikeville, Spencer, McMinnville, Woodbury, Murfreesboro, Nashville, Springfield in Tennessee, and Guthrie, Hopkinsville, Princeton, Marion in Ky. and Golconda, Dixon Springs, Vienna, and Anna, Ill. Then crossing the Miss. River to Cape Girardeau, MO.

He plans to walk the other part of the trail to Talequah, Okla. next year.

The July weather has been extremely hot but he kept his schedule

to Guthrie, Ky. on July 27. The trail has been lonesome in many places. He spent one day climbing Waldens Ridge through Fraleys Gap from Dayton to Pikeville. The next 25 miles to Spencer was a lonesome trek through sparsely settled country. He had seen the birds fly to their nests and wild animals scamper to their dens.

He talked and walked with all levels of society along the way. He was graciously received in many places while others were coolly and at times rudely indifferent. On an extremely hot day he arrived at the home of a pastor of his own denomination. He was not offered a place to rest or a cup of water.

The Montgomery County Historical Society, learning his schedule, arranged in advance to entertain him at Stage Coach Inn for Sunday dinner. Stage Coach Inn is possibly the only standing Inn which was on the trail 130 years ago--legend has it that the Indians rested there.

Then the group of 15 moved on to Mr. and Mrs. Robert H. Alley's home at Port Royal to visit with him more. We were impressed with his great sense of humor, his abounding enthusiasm, and his deep sincerity.

We brought him to Clarksville where he preached to a splendid group in fellowship hall of Madison Street Methodist Church Sunday night. His preaching attire was a highly decorated Indian Costume, which was made from six deer skins by an Indian friend in his home church at Crawford, Nebraska.

Why This Walk?

I am using his words:

First: I love to preach. This way I will be taking the church

to where the people are. I will be in places and preaching to people who seldom if ever go to church.

Second: I think the church is always looking for ^{new} forms and new thrust...by using such forms as this walking along the Trail of Tears...preaching and riding along the old Pony Express Trail and Buffalo Gap Crawford Cattle Drive, I can interest youth especially in the ever present excitement and radiance of preaching!

Third: Calling attention to the plight of the American Indians.. our first citizens!! Your preacher Billy thinks other minorities have been helped much in the last years... but the Indians still are most neglected by the whites in real Christian concern. I will be using the funds collect by preaching to help two or three Indian students go to college.

So this is why I walk...this is why I rode to Baltimore... 1300 miles in the winter of 1966 and why I rode and preached along the old Pony Express Trail from St. Joseph, Mo. to Casper, Wyoming, drive from South Dakota to Nebraska...to be with that ple and witness to what Christ has done for me! I feel I am in a great tradition..the Apostle Paul said he would be all things to all men in order to win some to Christ!!

The Space Age Circuit Riders Assn. Inc. at Lincoln, Neb. handles all funds from the free will offerings.

When he finishes this part of the trail he will have taken more than one million steps to glamorize the greatest thing in the World.

What Was Trail of Tears?

This was the route travelled by the Cherokee Indians in their forced emigration from their homes in Eastern Tennessee, Western North Carolina, and Northern Georgia in 1838.

From microfilmed records sent to me by the Dept. of Indian Affairs, I find many interesting things among which were: "An estimate to move 1,000 Indians 800 miles in 80 days: 50 wagons and teams-20 persons to each wagon at a daily cost of \$3.50. Further--80,000 rations at 16 cents."

A later record dated August 2, 1838, reads--"We overlooked SOAP in our estimate. We propose 3 lbs. to every 100 rations at a cost of 15 cents per lb."

Much has been written of this Indian movement and some reports do not agree. A brief summary comes from Meachans History of Christian Co. Ky. which reads:

General Scott scattered his troops throughout the Cherokee country, built stockade forts and the Indians, like cattle were forced into these stockades preparatory to their removal. Men were seized in the fields at work, women at their homes and children while out at play were taken at the point of the bayonet and marched away from their homes. Often bands of lawless men followed and looted the homes of the Indians in search of pillage, and many an Indian in turning his head to take a farewell look at the dearest spot on earth saw his house being destroyed by flames.

The plan employed by the soldiers was to slip up on the Indians while in the houses and take them by surprise. But often in their cruel march many Indians escaped to the mountains, where those who did not die of starvation subsisted on roots of plants until the procession had gone forth.

After gathering about 17,000 Cherokees into the various stockades, about 5,000 of them were brought to Calhoun and Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Gunthersville, Alabama, placed on boats and sent by water to the West bank of the Mississippi River, and the journey continued by land to the Indian Territory. This removal took place during the hottest period of the year and as a consequence it was attended with much sickness and many deaths.

Carrying out the provisions of a resolution of the National Council, John Ross and few other Chiefs submitted a proposition to General Scott that the remainder of the Cherokees be permitted to remove themselves later in the year when the danger of sickness was not so great. General Scott granted the request, providing that by October 20th all of them would have started.

The Cherokee council appointed officers to attend to the removal and the Indians were collected into companies of 1,000 each, with two leaders to each party. Including the negro slaves, there were 13,000 Cherokees that enrolled.

The Indians who were to undertake their own migration met at Rattlesnake Springs, near Charleston, Tennessee. In October, 1838, the long expected journey was begun. A few choosing to go by water, and nearly 13,000 by land. The procession of exiles was as interesting as it was picturesque. There were six hundred and forty-five wagons in the middle of the procession, loaded with old men, women, and children, clinging to their blankets, cooking vessels and other personal property, while the monotony of the procession was broken by hundreds of Indians on foot marching in front and riding horseback and mounted officers riding along the line and in the rear of the procession.

The exiles crossed the Tennessee River, near the mouth

of the Hiwassee, and the procession passed on a little to the south of Pikeville, Tennessee, through McMinnville, crossing the Cumberland River at Nashville, and on through Hopkinsville, Kentucky. Here the noted Chief Whitepath was stricken with disease and died and his comrades buried him by the wayside, covering his grave with a simple box and poles bearing streamers around them, that those who followed might observe the spot and remember the faithful old chief.

"The mortality rate ran high, as many as 20 dying in a single day, and Chief John Ross suffered the misfortune of having to give up his beloved wife, and this added more grief to the chief of the Cherokee Nation. The train crossed the Ohio River near the mouth of the Cumberland and traveled through the southern part of Illinois, striking the Mississippi River just across from Cape Girardeau, Missouri, in the midst of a cold, raw winter.

"The river being full of ice, the procession was compelled to halt until a favorable time when it could be crossed. The suffering during this period of waiting was so terrible that sixty years was insufficient to soften the memory of old immigrants to the bitterness of the halt.

"Crossing the river at Cape Girardeau, the line of march went through Missouri to Indian territory, where they arrived in the month of March, 1839, after nearly 6 months of bitter experiences on the road. The loss of life from disease on the way was estimated at 4,000."

Hon. Jas. F. Buckner, who lived in Hopkinsville at the time, gave his personal recollections of the migration some 40 years later in an article published in a Louisville paper. Among the things he said: "They were divided into detachments of 1,200, together with their stock; all passed through Hopkinsville. The old and infirm were carried in wagons and on horseback. The able-bodied, with their slaves, of whom there were many hundreds, on foot.