

ROAMING THE MOUNTAINS - "AND TAKE OFF BY FORCE" Published in Asheville Citizen, July 28, 1955. By-John Parris, Sylva, N. C.

TYPED by FRANCES W. RAY, (Mrs. Joe E. Ray) January 12, 1968.

MURPHY-FORT BUTLER, JULY 27, 1955.

Much of the untold story of America lies in old attics, among faded and long-forgotten letters.

Now, and then, some of these letters come to light to provide a footnote to history that lives AND BREATHES WITH THE DRAMA THAT only those who were there can write.

We are about to look over the shoulder of a man long dead and read one of these letters, written in the twilight of a June day 117 years ago when the Red Man was being uprooted from his mountain home.

There now are only some weathered old bricks as a reminder that here on a pine-covered hillside just west of Murphy once stood a fort that figured in one of the blackest chapters of American history.

Sitting in the fading light of his tent, flung up on the bank of Valley River a mile from the Fort, (Fort Butler, named for B. F. Butler, Secretary of War), Captain Lucian Bonaparte Webster was lonesome and troubled in mind as he wrote to his wife in far-off Florida.

Through the open flaps of the tent he could look out across the rolling fields and see cabins of the Cherokee Indians he had been assigned to round up and move to new lands in the West.

Hundreds already had been herded into the Fort, jammed into the stockade like cattle, to await the long march across the nation along a route of death and heartbreak that history would remember as the "Trail of Tears."

"We are said to be in the thickest settled portion of the Cherokee Country, and the least civilized," Captain Webster wrote. "There are about six thousand in our neighborhood."

Their houses are quite thick about us, and they all remain quietly at home at work on their little farms as though no evil was intended them.

"They sell us very cheap anything they have to spare, and look upon the regular troops as their friends."

"My man has just returned with four fine chickens for which he only paid fifty cents. Eggs are about a shilling a dozen and butter the same per pound."

"These are the innocent and simple people, into whose houses we are to obtrude ourselves, and take off by force."

"They have no idea of fighting, but submit quietly to be tied and led away."

"If there is anything that goes against my conscience it is this work, and I would not do it, whatever might be the consequences, did I not know that there are thousands that would, and probably with much less feeling towards the poor creatures."

This was the ninth of June, and Captain Webster added:

"Orders are out to begin operations on the 12th instant, and I expect to see many affecting scenes before the business is over.

"Those that were in Georgia have already been collected, and sent to the principal depots, from whence they are sending to the West (Oklahoma Territory) as fast as possible.

"All the First Artillery is here excepting one company, and the whole of the Fourth in camp about two miles from us.

"I find I shall get your letters sooner if directed to me at Calhoun, Tennessee, then if directed to this place. . . We have an express from there most every day - and besides when the Indians are collected I probably shall go there with a detachment of them . . .

"In the present state of affairs here I can not apply with propriety for a leave of absence, but shall do so as soon as it can be done with any decency. But do not let us build our hopes too high upon it, or we may be again disappointed.

"Captain Tripler desires his love to be presented to Anna Cummetts, and begs to be considered as engaged to her, (from her nephew) and will marry her the first opportunity provided she has no objection. I can recommend him. Lieutenant Casey will explain. Let me know how you do?"

A few days later, Captain Webster received orders from Brig. General Eustis to escort a party of Cherokees to Calhoun and then return to his post here.

Then on July 2 came orders from Gen. Winfield Scott, who had been assigned the task of seeing that the Cherokees were rounded up from their homes and sent on the forced march.

Captain Webster was told of his duties in relation to the Cherokee which had been assembled in the camps about Fort Butler.

"In addition to these, the orders read, "a close observation of the road leading out by your camp, to the end that no Indian may effect their escape and turning them back by mild means if they should attempt it, is all to which your attention is at present required."

With the removal of the Cherokee affected, although many of the Cherokee escaped into the mountains and hid out, including Taali, who killed an American soldier. Captain Webster was transferred to Florida where the Seminole War had broke out.

When Osceola, the Seminole Chief, was captured he was placed in charge of Captain Webster with whom he became friends and presented to the young officer his valued belt of wampum.

Captain Webster's letter together with original orders from General Winfield Scott, came to light recently when a grandson, Norman Danner of York, Pa. Made a special trip to Cherokee to present the documents to the Cherokee Historical Association through its Chairman Harry E. Buchanan.

In addition, Danner also presented a list of one of the parties of Cherokee that Captain Webster removed from the mountains.

There are more than 300 names on the list including "Charlie", "Charley", and "Charle," which has led to the speculation that one of these might have been Taali, the Cherokee martyr, who was known to the whites as "Old Charley."

Others on the list included such names as Crying Wolf, Jack Cold Weather, Horse Fly, Dirt Ivy, Young Turkey, Washed Face, Window, Cance, Young Chick, Tobacco, Poor Bear, Shoster.

The documents were placed in Cherokee Museum at the Cherokee Indian Reservation. They were presented by Captain Webster's Grandchildren and his sisters, and Captain Webster was a military career man, and a graduate of West Point and spent time in St. Augustine and Marion. A picture attached to this article states: Norman Danner of York, Pa., and Harry E. Buchanan, Cherokee Historical Association Chairman, look over a document Danner Presented the association recently. Danner is a grandson of Captain Lucian B. Webster, assigned the task of moving the Cherokee Indians to new lands in the West.