

Restoration Of Ft. Butler Would Be
Last Chapter In Long Cherokee Tale

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MURPHY - The Treaty of New Echota, signed on Dec. 29, 1835, extinguished Cherokee claim to all lands east of the Mississippi and wrested from the Cherokees thousands of square miles of land. In return the Indians were granted land in the Indian Territory west of the Mississippi and were paid six and one-half million dollars by the Federal Government.

According to the treaty, the Indians were given until May 23, 1838 to relocate to their new home.

Some 18,000 of the Cherokee Nation began the trek west, but it became obvious to observers in Cherokee County that the great mass of Indians would not be west of the river by the deadline. Thus came one of the greatest blots on American history and "The Trail of Tears".

On April 6, 1838, huge, irascible old General Winfield Scott was given orders to take command of a military force, sent to Fort Butler in North Carolina to force the fulfillment of the Treaty of New Echota.

Scott was a national hero for his bravery in the War of 1812, but he quarreled with many. One was Andrew Jackson, who called him a "hectoring bully," but sent him to North Carolina to move the Cherokees west. Some resented his strictness; they called him "Old Fuss and Feathers". But he had a genuine interest in his soldiers. During that sad and terrible time he issued two proclamations, one to his soldiers saying, "Be as gentle and humane as you can, but get them out," and the other to the Indians, saying, "You have to go; no use to struggle."

Twenty-three military posts were established. One of these was Fort Butler, named after Secretary of war; Benjamin F. Butler. This fort was headquarters of the Eastern District.

John Ross went to Washington to plead that his people be allowed to keep their homes. He hired lawyer William Wirz of Philadelphia, to plead. It all came to nothing. They had to move west anyhow.

When, in the early part of July, 1838, Chief Ross returned to the Cherokee headmen and common Indians alike penned up in camps like cattle. The majority of the captives were sick, discouraged, and grief stricken. But the picture was not all black. The gloom and despair that in June had

hung over Camp Butler was partially lifted by the Rev. John Wickliffe (Kaneeda) and O-ga-na-ya.

These native Baptist ministers had somehow gained the commanding officer's permission to erect a rude church adjacent to the fort on Hiawassee River. In this arbor - like sanctuary Wickliffe and O-ga-na-ya preached nights and mornings to Cherokee captives. When received into the church, captives were baptized under guard in the near-by Hiawassee River, then at the point of bayonets, marched back to their disease-infested prisons to seek solace in prayer.

Letters and reports from the field agree that the fort was "opposite the Konacheta on the south bend of the Hiawassee." These statements are in accord with the location of Ft. Butler shown on the pages from the surveyors' field book compiled in 1837 and 1838 during the survey of portions of the Cherokees Territory under the direction of Captain W. L. Williams.

On two pages where the area surveyed included the site of the fort, the fort proper is represented symbolically. The nearest representation to what the fort looked like is represented by a sketch included in survey notes titled "Fort Butler". The unknown artist shows several low gabled structures and one distinctive building which appeared to be a block-house.

This sketch, the book pages and a portion of the map of Cherokee County correlated with parts of the 1861 highway map of Cherokee County.

Scott's reference to 1600 Indians "brought in or reported" at Ft. Butler would indicate that there were several substantial buildings on the post as borne out in the 1838 sketch. In addition to the Indians who passed through these forts, many thousand soldiers were stationed there. War records give that two companies of Tennessee Volunteers were stationed at Fort Butler from July to October 1837. A company of the 4th United States Artillery was stationed at Fort Butler in November of 1838.

After the removal, the first courthouse of Cherokee County was established in one of the houses of Ft. Butler with the provision by law that "Any of the buildings put up by the Army at Ft. Butler shall be for the use of the Courts of Cherokee until a court house and jail shall be built in said county."

In 1925, the Tarheel Investment Co., which had holdings in the area of the Fort Butler site, donated a piece of property to the Town of Murphy and a historical marker was erected.

In 1965 the Cherokee Historical Society with the support of Mary Faye Brumby, then Cherokee County representative to the General Assembly, prevailed up the Legislature to appropriate \$6,500 for research and a feasibility study.

The site of Ft. Butler is on top of a hill about a half-mile west of the center of the Town of Murphy and within the city limits.

The Cherokee Historical Society, the Archibald D. Murphy Chapter of DAR and the town of Murphy, with the support of other patriotic and civic organizations are vitally interested in the restoration of Ft. Butler.

or reconstruction.

The Fort Butler site possess sufficient Historical importance to justify preservation and appropriate development. It is hoped that the State would take the initiative in the development of the site, with the Department of Archives and History assisting as needed in the planning.