

# Residents back Trail o

By David Hente  
Staff Writer

CAPE GIRARDEAU—Federal and state officials said they were surprised and pleased with the large turnout of participants at a public workshop on a feasibility study of the Cherokee Trail of Tears as a nine-state national historic trail.

The workshop was held Tuesday at the SEMO University Center in cooperation with the Southeast Region of the National Park Service, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, and SEMO University.

In this area, attention was focused on the nearby Trail of Tears State Park, located north of Cape Girardeau. The park area was reportedly used by the Cherokees as a winter campground after making a treacherous and difficult crossing of the Mississippi River.

Trail of Tears State Park was established in Cape County in 1956 after county citizens voted to purchase the land and donate it to the state for a park to commemorate the forced march of the Cherokees.

About 15,000 Cherokees were forced march 1,200 miles from their homes near Murphy, N.C. to a reservation near Tahlequah, Ok., in the northeastern part of the state. About one-fourth of those who started out on the long journey died along the trail, which gave it the name, "Trail of Tears."

"This was the best meeting we've had so far," remarked Charles M.

Schuler of the National Park Service's Southeast Region Office in Atlanta, Ga., at the Cape gathering.

Schuler said he was impressed with the number of persons who attended the local meeting, and with the enthusiasm that was displayed in favor of the proposed historic trail designation.

Schuler said in March of 1983, Congress authorized the park service to conduct a feasibility study on the Trail of Tears. A major part of this study has been a series of public meetings or workshops to report on the progress of the study, to determine if there is sufficient interest in having the Trail of Tears designated a historic trail, and to locate information and research the forced march.

If the study determines the Trail of Tears qualifies as a national historic trail, a final report will be sent to the president and Congress for their approval. Deadline for completion of the study is January of 1986.

Schuler explained public support and pressure will be important when and if the study reaches the president and the Congress. "That's going to be the time to contact your congressman or senator and tell him that you support the project," he said.

One positive development which came from Tuesday's meeting was the designation of the University's Regional History Center to act as a coordinator for gathering information and research data on the march through Southeast Missouri from

local residents.

The designation came after Professor Bob White of the Regional History Center volunteered his services and those of the center to assist in collecting data on the Cherokee march.

White said anyone who has old records, eyewitness accounts, or stories concerning the march of the Cherokees and the Trail of Tears through this area should contact him or the Regional History Center at SEMO University, 430 N. Pacific St., Cape Girardeau, Mo., 63701. The telephone number is 1-314-651-2555.

Commenting on the offer of research assistance from the history center and local residents, Schuler said he was so impressed with the idea that he may go back into some of the other states where meetings have been held to see if the idea would also work there.

"Usually people want money for everything they do so it's really great that you here in Cape Girardeau have some volunteers who are willing to help us," said Schuler. "I certainly wasn't expecting this."

Schuler's comments came after several participants indicated they did not want to leave the meeting without have something positive started, and asked if there was some place they send their information.

Schuler said if the project is eventually approved and funded, money would be used to construct interpretive displays and prepare literature as well as erecting highway road

## Long-awaited visitor center few yea

By David Hente  
Staff Writer

CAPE GIRARDEAU—The long-planned and delayed Visitor's Center at Trail of Tears State Park, near Cape Girardeau, is still at least one to two years away from completion, according to Ken Cole with the Division of Parks and Historic Preservation.

Cole briefly mentioned the visitor center during Tuesday night's public meeting on a National Park Service study to see if the Trail of Tears qualifies as a historical trail.

After the meeting, Cole talked about the current status of the building.

He noted the project was first suggested in 1967, but immediately ran into financial difficulties, and was put on the shelf for a number of years.

Cole said the original building was designed

only as a small interpretive center with exhibits.

"Since then, the concept has been changed to that of a visitor center, a multipurpose type of building, similar to what the National Park Service uses in their park system," he stated.

"We now have a basic building design for the visitor center completed, but that's really all I can say at this time. It is a handsome building and I believe everyone will like it. We feel we have a building that will serve our purposes at the park and as a visitor center."

Cole said the basic design calls for a one-story building to be located near the park entrance.

It will include offices for the park ranger and his assistant, and the park staff, the interpretive center, restrooms, a gift and souvenir shop where visitors can purchase booklets or obtain information, and an audio visual room.

"This is the same concept that's being used by the National Park Service," Cole commented.

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# Trail of Tears designation

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signs along the route of the trail.  
To provide an anchor to the Trail  
of Tears in each of the nine states,  
Schuler envisioned at least one or  
two interpretive centers in each  
state so that persons traveling along  
the Trail of Tears could stop along  
the way.

He also pointed out if the project is  
approved, the support of states, local  
government, outdoor groups, and  
citizens will be important.

"Probably, the park service will  
coordinate the trail with each state  
responsible for the upkeep and actual  
operation of sites along the trail  
route except for those located on  
park service lands," Schuler  
explained.

When asked why the study was  
authorized, Schuler said there's  
been a growing awareness in Con-  
gress that something needs to be  
done to recognize the event.

"Actually, there's been a lot of  
mis-information presented to the  
public as to what actually occurred  
during the forced march of the Cherokees," he continued. "There were  
actually five civilized tribes that  
were forced off their homelands by  
the white man."

Schuler said the Cherokee and the  
other tribes were evicted from their  
homes and land because the white  
man at that time felt the Indians  
were "under utilizing" the land.

"They (the indians) were not min-  
ing the gold, and were not planting  
as intensively as the white man  
wanted," he added.

## few years away

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With the basic floor plan completed, Cole said  
the next step is to come up with a design for the  
exhibit areas. After that, the project will be put  
up for bid, and funds then requested to actually  
construct the center.

Cole said the exhibits will focus on the Chero-  
kee Indians and the Trail of Tears, and the  
natural history of the park area.

"We won't be just displaying some artifacts,"  
he continued. "We want to tell a visual story of  
the natural history of the park, the river bluffs  
and hills, and also the story of the Cherokees  
march from North Carolina to Oklahoma.

"We may use artifacts which will enhance the  
telling of the story," Cole continued. "For exam-  
ple, we may display what kind of clothing the  
Cherokees wore on the trail. We also plan to use  
paintings and murals to tell the story."

Cole pointed out the Cherokees were one of  
several civilized tribes who lived in the Southeast  
United States.

He noted the Cherokee had its own language,  
alphabet and published a tribal newspaper.



**STRONG SUPPORT WAS** voiced Tuesday night by area resi-  
dents to designate the Cherokee Trail of Tears as a historic trail  
through a nine-state region, including Southeast Missouri. Here,  
Charles M. Schuler of the National Park Service's Southeast Region  
Office explains the timetable of the study during a public workshop  
held in Cape Cape Girardeau.

