

Lawyer wants Russellville as Cherokee heritage site

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WASHINGTON — As one of its final acts of 1987, Congress designated the Trail of Tears as part of the National Trails System.

It was along the Trail of Tears in 1837-38 that thousands of Cherokee Indians were forcibly removed from their ancestral homelands to what is now Oklahoma.

Language added to the bill at the request of Rep. John Paul Hammerschmidt, R-Ark., encourages the establishment of an interpretive facility at Fort Smith.

Marcus Hollabaugh, a Washington lawyer and native Ar-

kansan, thinks the interpretive facility should be established at Russellville, however, to commemorate what was known as Dwight Mission. The site of that mission is now under the waters of Lake Dardanelle.

"Dwight Mission was a haven of mercy for the Cherokee long before the Trail of Tears," said Hollabaugh, who was born in Marshall and has devoted thousands of hours to studying the state's history.

"Much has been said and written about how poorly the Cherokee were treated. In many states, they were dying like flies, and the people of those states were doing nothing to help them. Dwight Mis-

sion did help them, though, and it is high time that fact be recognized."

"The Arkansas Cherokee have a great heritage, but it never has been fully studied or appreciated," Hollabaugh said. "If the government would establish an interpretive site as near as possible to the old Dwight Mission, we might be able to educate the public. At least, it's worth the effort to try."

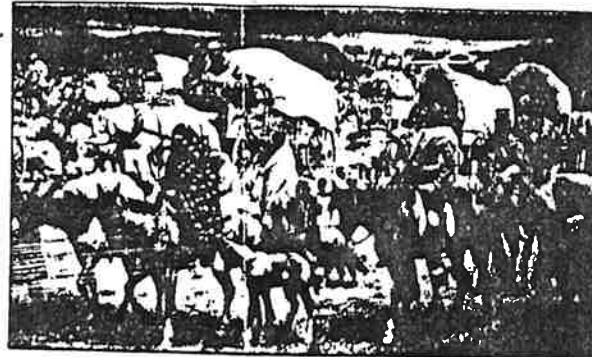
Dwight Mission, located in what is now Pope County, was at one time the largest enterprise in the upper Arkansas River Valley.

"Here was the first blacksmith shop, gristmill,

sawmill, post office, ferry, school, church and doctor's clinic in the region," G.R. Turrintine, a longtime professor and dean at Arkansas Tech University, wrote in 1962. "Here was the first boarding school, the first Christian marriage ceremony and the first Christian burial. This was the destination of the first steamboat to ascend the Arkansas River above Arkansas Post."

Cephas Washburn, an ordained minister of the Congregational Church from Vermont, founded Dwight Mission in 1822.

"When the Cherokee learned that Washburn was See TEARS, Page 5C



ON THE TRAIL — This painting by Robert Lindneux of Indians on the Trail of Tears is exhibited in the Woularoc Museum in Bartlesville, Okla.

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from the same mission board that had established the mission in their old home in Georgia and that he had come at the invitation of the beloved chief Tahlonuskee, he was welcomed and given permission to select any site desired and use as much land as needed," Turrintine wrote.

The site selected was on the Illinois Bayou, four miles above its mouth. Over the next several years, cabins were built, land was cleared and new missionaries arrived.

Historians described Washburn as a strict Puritan, interested in the welfare of the In-

dians and in their salvation according to his theology.

In 1828, a young Boston native named Hiram Whittington visited Dwight Mission and wrote to his brother in Massachusetts about the settlement.

"There are eight families attached to the mission, all from New England," he said. "All Yankees. There is one old lady from Boston, Miss Stutson, who has charge of the female scholars. She seemed glad to see me, merely because I was Boston born. She is very severe with her scholars, many of whom are women grown and as handsome as any women I ever saw, notwithstanding they are squaws."

Whittington wrote that there were about 40 Cherokee boys and 40 girls in the school.

According to Hollabaugh, it is important for Arkansans to realize that it was the "Eastern Cherokee" and not the "Arkansas Cherokee" who followed the Trail of Tears.

"There was a significant Cherokee population in the state long before the 1830s," he said.

A 1792 incident known as the Muscogee Shoals Massacre caused many of the Cherokee to flee to Arkansas, with most settling along the lower White River and the lower St. Francis River because fishing was good and game was plentiful. By 1802, there were about 60 families of Cherokee along the St. Francis. A government report in 1806 estimated there to be 600 Cherokee in the area.

In 1812, the U.S. government

removed the Cherokee from the White and St. Francis rivers to the north side of the Arkansas River.

An 1817 treaty gave the Cherokee as much land between the Arkansas and White Rivers as they would surrender in their native homelands in the Southeast. The treaty also provided for transportation and 12 months of subsistence. Many more Cherokee came to Arkansas during the next three years. The Arkansas Cherokee were estimated to make up almost a third of the entire tribe by the time of the Trail of Tears.

An 1828 treaty moved many of the Arkansas Cherokee into Oklahoma, where they were joined in 1838 by the remainder of the tribe.