

Quill and Ink

Heather Miller

Historical Fiction Author

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Americans overcome. I write their stories.

Tears at the Sarah Ridge House

Where Her Journey Ended

Last July, my husband and I took a research trip to Tahlequah, Oklahoma and Fayetteville, Arkansas. On the last day we met with Washington County Historical Society leader, DeeDee Lamb, at the Sarah Ridge House.

Originally, the home was a log, dog trot cabin. Yet with centuries of storms and renovations, it is still the oldest standing structure in the vicinity. Through research for *'Tho I Be Mute*, and my ongoing work in progress, its sequel, *Yellowbird's Song*, I knew the history of its most famous occupant before we crossed the state line.

After her husband's assassination, this was Sarah's refuge, where she raised and protected her children.

Standing now in the place, I couldn't hold back the tears.



Her suffering overcame me.



In the foyer, reproductions of two original portraits greeted me, one of Sarah's husband, John Ridge, and the other of Sarah's father-in-law, Major Ridge. Both were assassinated by a Cherokee War Party in June of 1839, both dying on the same day. While neither lived in this home, Sarah's memories remained present, and my empathy for her suffering overcame me.

Underneath the portraits, two glass cases held artifacts discovered on the grounds. Both contained cups and saucers, inkwells and earthenware. I could hold back my tears no longer once I examined them. Below, the picture on the left is from the Sarah Ridge Home, and the right, from the Chieftain's Museum in Georgia.



Sarah Ridge Home, Fayetteville, Arkansas

July, 2021



Chieftain's Museum, Major Ridge Home Rome, Georgia

September, 2019

Instantly, my imagination took three journeys.

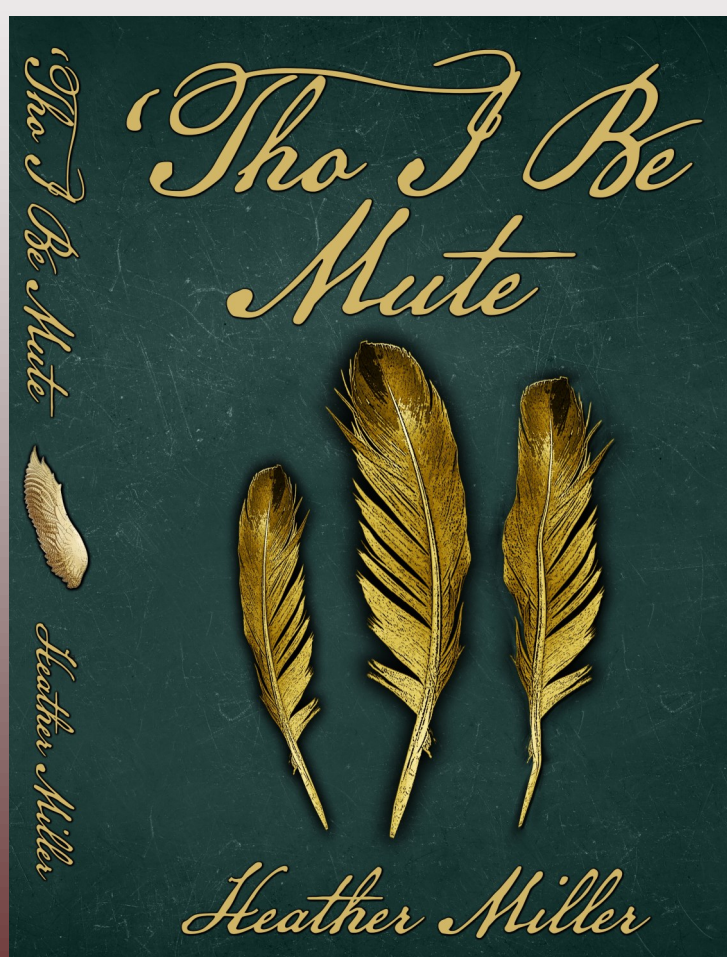
The first journey began nearly two centuries ago, in 1824, with an intercultural marriage for love, disputed by parents and communities alike. Together, on boats and stages, carriages and wagons from Connecticut to Cherokee Nation, Sarah and John built a marriage, a life together, with their seven children, parents and friends. Were these cups and plates a wedding gift? Bought in New England and carried to a new home?

In 1837, a second journey began, leaving behind everything the Ridge family built at their home, Running Waters. Another arduous journey commenced, this time to “an entire wilderness”—west, settling south of Honey Creek, Oklahoma (Wilkins 306). “Some of it was prairie land, less of a problem to turn to fields than the wooded ground, thick with oak, hickory, ash, persimmon, pine and cedar—or, along the bottoms, with cottonwood, maple, sycamore, willow, and sweet gum, as well as long lianas of wild grape...” (Wilkins 307). And here, Sarah unpacked the dishes again.

Sarah’s final journey ended in early July, 1839, in apprehension and grief. She fled for safety out of Cherokee Nation West, after the assassinations of the family’s patriarchs. “Mrs. Ridge has yet to speak a word, except to nod acquiesce or refusal. One would think that rough ride would have shaken something out of her...Henry drove like Satan, out of fear I suppose. Enough!” (Ingalls 208). Here, Sarah unboxed her blue and white china for the last time. Seeing the same plates, Sarah’s tears fell from my eyes.

Ingalls, Mary. *She Hath Done What She Could: The Story of Sophia Sawyer*. Edited by Joe Carnes Guinn, Fayetteville, Arkansas, Washington County Historical Society, pp. 206–208.

Wilkins, Thurman. *Cherokee Tragedy*. N.Y., Univ. Of Oklahoma, 1986.



*Read of John and
Sarah's First Journey*

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