

# TRAIL OF TEARS



**TRAIL OF TEARS**  
ROBERT LINDNEUX  
WOOLAROC MUSEUM

**W**hen an entire people are forced to abandon their native homeland, it is their ultimate tragedy. It far surpasses war or famine. It is particularly tragic when there is a spiritual link between the people and the land. The soil is not simply earth beneath their feet. To Indians, their homeland was holy ground, sanctified as the resting place of the bones of their ancestors and the natural shrine of their religion. Removals devastated a proud people and deprived them of the roots that sustained them. It denied them all hope of **redress**.

Before the coming of whites, Indians enjoyed a kind of freedom that thrived on immense regions of fields and forests. Other than raids and battles between tribes, it was an idyllic existence.

With the coming of white people, European immigrants and their descendants seized the land for colonies and then states, forcing Indians to withdraw westward into the wilderness.

Instead of withdrawing, the Five Civilized Tribes adapted to the ways of their white neighbors and began a hopeless struggle for acceptance.

The whites' insatiable (never satisfied) appetite for land urged them westward. Pioneer settlements surged over the Appalachian mountain barrier and overran the Native Americans. Violence and bloodshed accompanied the pioneer as he pushed westward, but centuries of experience with war and his superior arms prevailed. It was the beginning of the end for the Indians' world.

In 1830, after long and deliberate consideration, the government of the United States decreed the *exile* of all surviving eastern Indians to the plains of the Far West. The unchangeable order came at the end of a period in which many Indians had made the most earnest efforts to conform to the wishes of their white conquerors, especially among the **civilized** tribes of the Southeast.

The northern Indians moved west across the Great Lakes with little difficulty. It was an entirely different story in the South where the Five Civilized Tribes held large portions of land in Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi.

Most tribes in those states had adopted the ways and manners of their white neighbors. They had become farmers instead of hunters. Some had even developed prosperous plantations and owned slaves. They educated their children and dreamed of equal opportunities and peaceful coexistence. This dawning hope was crushed by the removal decree requiring them to abandon all that they had accomplished and to start over, forced to endure unrelenting hardship in the barren Far West.

When it became evident that the removals would take place, whites swarmed Indian lands. The Indians were victims of illegal land seizures and had no redress in the courts. Some states had laws forbidding them to come into court, even in self-defense.

**THE CHOCTAWS.** The Choctaws were the first to move. In the fall of 1831, approximately 13,000 Choctaws undertook the dreaded journey. After tribal members had visited the western lands and had returned with good reports, **numerous** Choctaws traveled overland to settlements near Fort Towson in southeastern Indian Territory. Conditions for those left in Mississippi worsened quickly. Thousands joined the early **contingent** at Vicksburg, wearing summer clothing and carrying few provisions for a journey across rivers, swamps, and forests to an unknown land.

There were more than 20,000 Choctaws to be moved. President Andrew Jackson, who favored removal, gave the army the responsibility of supervising and organizing the exodus. Wagons pulled by oxen provided transportation for the old, the sick, the very young, and those unable to walk, as well as for some personal property. Anyone who had horses could ride them, but all others had to walk.

They came by the hundreds, often on their own, to Vicksburg. Some crossed the Mississippi on ferries and continued over swampland to Indian Territory. Some were taken aboard steamboats and transported up the Arkansas River to Fort Smith. Others were taken south to the mouth of the Red River and then traveled up the Ouachita to Fabri's Cliffs. Then they proceeded overland 160 miles to Fort Towson. Thus, the routes and methods of travel for the Choctaws were numerous, but the expeditions had one feature in common. The Indian families, whose members might range in age from infants to senior citizens, suffered incredible hardships.

On paper, the plan appeared simple, but hardly any preparation had been made for provisions. The removal decree had allotted one blanket for each family, but hardly anything else. Although the orders to move did not occur overnight, when the exodus began, there was hardly time to salvage more than the dearest possessions. Almost

everything was left behind for the scavengers. By the time they gathered at Vicksburg, hundreds were already hungry. Deliberate delays in furnishing food stripped the Indians of their money. They had to buy food at very high prices on the open market. Bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption delayed government funding for supplies. There were many instances when the exiles would have starved had it not been for compassionate white settlements and communities along the way. One Louisiana resident, a Mr. Joseph Kerr, wrote a letter of protest to the Secretary of War about the inadequate provisions in the treaty. He condemned the Secretary for his responsibility for the shoddy provisions of one blanket to each family of Indians.

Near Kerr's home, provisions were issued to the Indians and were to last over a distance of eighty miles, fifty of which were through overflowed swamp. Mr. Kerr wrote the Secretary about the meager provisions for such a distance and dangers there:

. . . in which distance are two large deep streams that must be crossed in a boat or on a raft, and one other nearly impassable in any way. This they had to perform or perish, there being no provision made for them on the way. This, too, was to be done in the worst time of weather I have ever seen in any country — a heavy sleet having broken and bowed down all the small and much of the larger timber. And this was to be performed under the pressure of hunger, by old women and young children, without any covering for their feet, legs or body except a cotton under dress generally. In passing, before they reached the place of getting rations here, I gave a party leave to enter a small field in which pumpkins were. They would not enter without leave (permission), though starving. These they ate raw with the greatest avidity (eagerness).

In his letter, Kerr urged the Secretary to provide adequate provisions of food and to provide a blanket

to each Indian instead of one to a family, and that they be given shoes or moccasins, stockings or skins from which they could make them.

Mr. Kerr was not the only outraged witness of the sufferings of the Indians. Another account told of several hundred Choctaws on the road to Memphis. These too were of all ages.

. . . many had nothing to shelter them from the storm by day or night. The weather was excessively cold, and yet a neighbor remarked to me a few days ago, that he noticed particularly, and in his opinion not one in ten of the women had even a moccasin on their feet and the great majority of them were walking..One party came to us and begged for an ear of corn apiece, to relieve for a season, their sufferings. Another party camped in the woods near us about three weeks ago, and that night a storm of hail and sleet commenced, which was followed in a day or two with a heavy fall of snow. For more than two weeks there was continued freezing and colder weather than I have ever seen in this climate. During the whole time these suffering people were lying in their camp, without any shelter, and with very little provision.

The thousands who emigrated in 1832 fared no better. Packed like sardines on the riverboats, these later emigrants suffered the same cold weather, hunger, and hardships as those who had gone before, with one thing worse — cholera. "Scarce a boat landed without burying some person."

Their resistance to disease was lowered by their lack of strength and nourishment. They were even reduced to eating the flesh of animals found dead in the woods and on the wayside.

They were victims of disaster after disaster. The Arkansas flooded and destroyed the possessions and provisions of those camped on its banks. More sickness followed the flood. As a result, fatal illnesses ran wild through the camps, and the unlucky emigrants died by the hundreds. "The

mortality among these people since the beginning of fall, as far as ascertained (known), amounts to one-fifth of the whole number," reported the Cherokee Phoenix.

Several thousand Choctaws still remained in Mississippi. As word of hunger, sickness, and death among the early exiles drifted back to them, they refused to **emigrate**. In 1836, because of the Creek uprisings, the people of Alabama and Mississippi demanded that the Choctaws be moved before violence erupted. However, so many were in such a demoralized, poor state that efforts to remove them were largely unsuccessful. Periodic removals continued until mid-century. Even then, there were still nearly 2,000 members of the tribe in Mississippi. It was not until land was allotted to enrolled tribesmen in Indian Territory near the end of the **century** that those tribesmen moved to Indian Territory. There they accepted land that was to be theirs "as long as the grass grows and the water flows."

**THE CHICKASAWS.** The Chickasaws were the aristocrats among the Indian tribesmen. They were shrewd bargainers and would gain every possible advantage in treaties, including control over their own affairs and a good price for their lands.

The Chickasaws were kinsmen of the Choctaws. They lived in northern Mississippi and had reached a high level of civilization. They were well-known for their fine cattle and horses. They were a peace-loving people and were strongly attached spiritually to their beautiful homeland.

Reluctantly, they agreed to **cede** their homeland to the United States if a satisfactory location could be found in the Territory. For two years, their leaders sought to find comparable land. Meanwhile, the government was exerting pressure upon the chiefs to settle in the Choctaw Nation.

Efforts to settle them with the Choctaws delayed removal for more than five years. In the fall of 1836, a delegation of Chickasaws traveled

to Indian Territory to meet with the delegates from the Choctaw Nation. At Doaksville, near Fort Towson, delegates of both tribes signed the Treaty of Doaksville, providing that the Chickasaws would purchase a large portion of land on the western part of the Choctaw Nation. They also agreed that members of both tribes were to have the right to settle in any part of the Choctaw Nation and that their governments would be combined.

There were plains of native grass for cattle and horses, tree-covered hills and valleys for homes, and abundant running streams as well as the Arbuckle Mountains. It was a land where they could prosper.

Although the exodus ended in hardship and tragedy, they began their **migration** in comfort, well-supplied with equipment, food, and money. However, relative prosperity became one of the major causes of their undoing. They were overcharged for transportation and for each and every necessity of life they had to purchase along the way. They were exposed to smallpox, and the disease reached **epidemic** proportions after their arrival. They were just as ravaged by the journey as their less prosperous neighboring tribes had been. They arrived too late to get in a crop the first year of their arrival, and they were soon just as hungry as their poorer Choctaw kinsmen.

Although the exodus of the Chickasaws was also a hard one with many infants and elderly dying along the way, they still fared far better than other tribes. The tribe's size was less than half the number of Choctaws, and their homeland was hundreds of miles closer to Indian Territory. The trail they trod was a tragic one, but it was not nearly so long as that of the others, particularly the Cherokees and the Seminoles. Medical aid for the migrating Indians was inadequate, and epidemic sickness, especially cholera, struck with terrible speed, killing large numbers and leaving survivors weak and unfit for travel or work.

Most of the tribe had moved into new homes by the early 1840s. They settled on the eastern portion

of their lands near the Choctaws, using the rolling plains as a western wall of protection from the Plains Indians. There, they prospered, finding only one thing they disliked: They wanted their own government separate from the Choctaws.

The Chickasaws believed in patient, peaceful negotiations. After several years of preparation and negotiation, an agreement was reached in 1855 for permanent separation of the Chickasaw and Choctaw governments. Each nation elected officers under its own separate constitution and body of laws.

**THE CREEKS.** When the removal decree came in 1831, violence and bloodshed were already brewing in Alabama. In April of that year, the Principal Chiefs of the Creeks wrote to the Secretary of War:

Murders have taken place, both by the reds and whites. We have caused the red men to be brought to justice, and the whites go unpunished. We are weak and our words and oaths go for naught (nothing); justice we don't expect, nor can we get. We may expect murders to be more frequent... They bring spirits (alcohol) among us for the purpose of practicing frauds; they daily rob us of our property; they bring white officers among us, and take our property from us for debts that we never contracted...We are made subject to laws we have no means of comprehending; we never know when we are doing right.

They also told the Secretary that they would not agree to remove to the West because, "Our aged fathers and mothers beseech (beg) us to remain upon the land that gave us birth, where the bones of their kindred are buried, so that when they die, they may mingle their ashes together."

The Creek refusal to remove was also influenced by stories of death and disease on the trail by the Choctaws who were removed earlier. In addition, they heard tales that the Territory was an unhealthy place for Indians to live.

Time after time, they petitioned the federal government for help, but their pleas fell on deaf ears. They learned that the government could not prevent oppression by Alabama laws and that their only hope was to emigrate.

Squatters began to move onto the Creek lands. Hoping for legal redress, Chief Eneah Micco sent a list of 1,000 illegal residents in Creek territory, many of them known to be horse thieves and other criminals. White men began staking out land claims and threatening the Creeks with prosecution if they tried to do anything about it.

Micco sent a delegation to Washington to request help from the President or Congress. They were sent to the Secretary of War, who had the responsibility of the removals. While in Washington, the delegation reluctantly signed a treaty with provisions that the Creeks thought would give them both time and protection. That they would have to remove to the Territory was now certain, as they saw it. But they wanted to avoid the disasters experienced by the Choctaws, if at all possible. Therefore, in return for ceding their lands to the United States, the Creeks asked for a period of five years to dispose of their Alabama holdings in an orderly fashion. In return, the government promised to rid the Creek territory of the white intruders. Again the government promised one blanket for each family and money and provisions for the removal.

Instead of ridding the territory of the white intruders, the government did nothing. Whites poured into the area in even greater numbers when they learned that the Creeks had agreed to remove. Frequently, Indians were driven from their own homes. When United States marshals did attempt to help by moving some of the intruders out, the marshals' backs were hardly turned when the whites returned and threatened the Creeks with trespassing charges filed in Alabama courts. They knew full well that the Creeks had no recourse in Alabama courts of law. They could not go into court and give evidence since Alabama law forbade an

Indian's word from being entered into court against the word of a white man.

All kinds of schemes were used to defraud the Creek land owners. One group of enterprising citizens from nearby Columbus, Georgia, enlisted the aid of a former Creek agent and a half-breed in a scheme to steal land. They would gain the confidence of an unsuspecting Creek male. Then they would coach him to give his name as that of a legitimate land-holding Creek. They taught him to memorize the land description and then to sell the land for practically nothing. The Creek pretending to be the land owner received a small amount of money for his performance. The fraudulent whites got the land. The true land owner got nothing — and he had no recourse to regain his stolen property.

State and federal governments had come to the conclusion that the Creeks had to go. People of Georgia and Alabama feared an uprising and voiced their concern to state officials. Those officials issued warnings of imminent (ready to occur) Creek uprising. This once proud, warlike people would strike out one last time for freedom. When the long-predicted “war” did come, the first shots were fired by Georgia militia upon a party of Creek **refugees** seeking sanctuary among the Georgia Cherokees.

In retaliation, several small bands of Creeks began killing white settlers and attacking travelers on the roads west of Columbus, Georgia. The alarm spread rapidly among the white settlements. For a short while, the Indian refugees on the road were replaced by streams of white refugees.

The uprising quickly failed. The Montgomery Advertiser called it “a base and diabolical scheme,” devised by interested men, to keep an ignorant race of people from maintaining their just rights. But to government officials, it was an excellent opportunity to solve the Creek problem. Secretary of War Cass ordered General Thomas Jesup to use the federal army to suppress the rebellion and remove them forthwith to the West.

Jesup's army converged upon the forests and

swamps where thousands of terrified Creek refugees had hidden. Sixteen hundred Creeks were captured. The men were manacled and linked together with chains and then marched westward. Their women and children trailed behind. Another 900 from an adjoining village were herded along with them.

Other military units forcibly gathered other Creeks and drove them to assembly points in groups of two and three thousand and marched them westward under military escort. By mid-winter, 15,000 Creek exiles stretched from border to border in Arkansas. They had been herded from the forests and from their homes and fields like cattle, with no provisions or possessions to reduce their misery along the way. They lacked food, shelter, clothing, blankets, and medicine. They were completely dispirited and demoralized. They had been robbed of their homes and possessions, but more importantly, they were robbed of their pride as a nation and their identity as human beings. The sick were left untended and the dead unburied. The passage of the exiles could be distinguished from afar by the howling of trailing wolf packs and the circling of flocks of buzzards.

Creek spokesmen begged for an advance of promised federal annual payments to keep the nation alive and unmolested. General Jesup offered to comply with the request if Creek warriors would **volunteer** to fight their kinsmen, the Seminoles. Some 800 volunteered, believing the promises that their families would be cared for and protected until the warriors returned.

The warriors fought and many died, but the federal troops did little or nothing as the remaining Creeks were driven from their homes and robbed of their horses, cattle, and food. Their boys and old men were confined to compounds and their women assaulted. The federal troops finally moved them to a concentration camp near Mobile Bay, where hundreds died from malnutrition and epidemics.

When the Creek survivors of the Seminole campaign returned, they found that they had been

betrayed. These embittered warriors were a part of the last party of Creeks to **emigrate**. They were weakened by the fighting in the Florida swamps and dispirited because of their families held in the concentration camps. This last contingent of Creeks were marched through New Orleans, which was undergoing a siege of Yellow Fever, and were taken aboard steamboats to travel up the Mississippi River to points of embarkation to Indian Territory. One steamboat foundered, and 311 of the 611 Creeks were lost in the murky waters of the Mississippi River.

By the time the Creeks completed the removal of their tribe to Indian Territory, 40 percent of them had perished.

**THE CHEROKEES.** The most advanced of the Five Civilized Tribes was the Cherokee tribe, but the fate of the Cherokees became certain when Georgia passed an act in December 1829 incorporating the Cherokee lands into the state of Georgia. This made the Cherokees subject to Georgia law. In addition, the law contained sections directed toward depriving the Cherokees of their rights and holdings. The law made it a prison offense for one Cherokee to influence another not to emigrate west. It also provided that no Indian or his descendant residing in Creek or Cherokee territory could be considered a competent witness in any court of the state of Georgia to which a white person was a party.

When gold was found on the Cherokee lands, the state claimed the gold and demanded that the federal government remove the Indians.

Some of the tribe had voluntarily emigrated west and had settled in Arkansas. Small parties would leave Georgia and North Carolina from time to time to join their friends and relatives in the West, but the numbers were relatively few. The vast majority of the Cherokees could not bear the thought of leaving the land of their fathers. They looked to the leadership of their chief, John Ross, to save them from the looming catastrophe.

The Cherokees had produced many men of

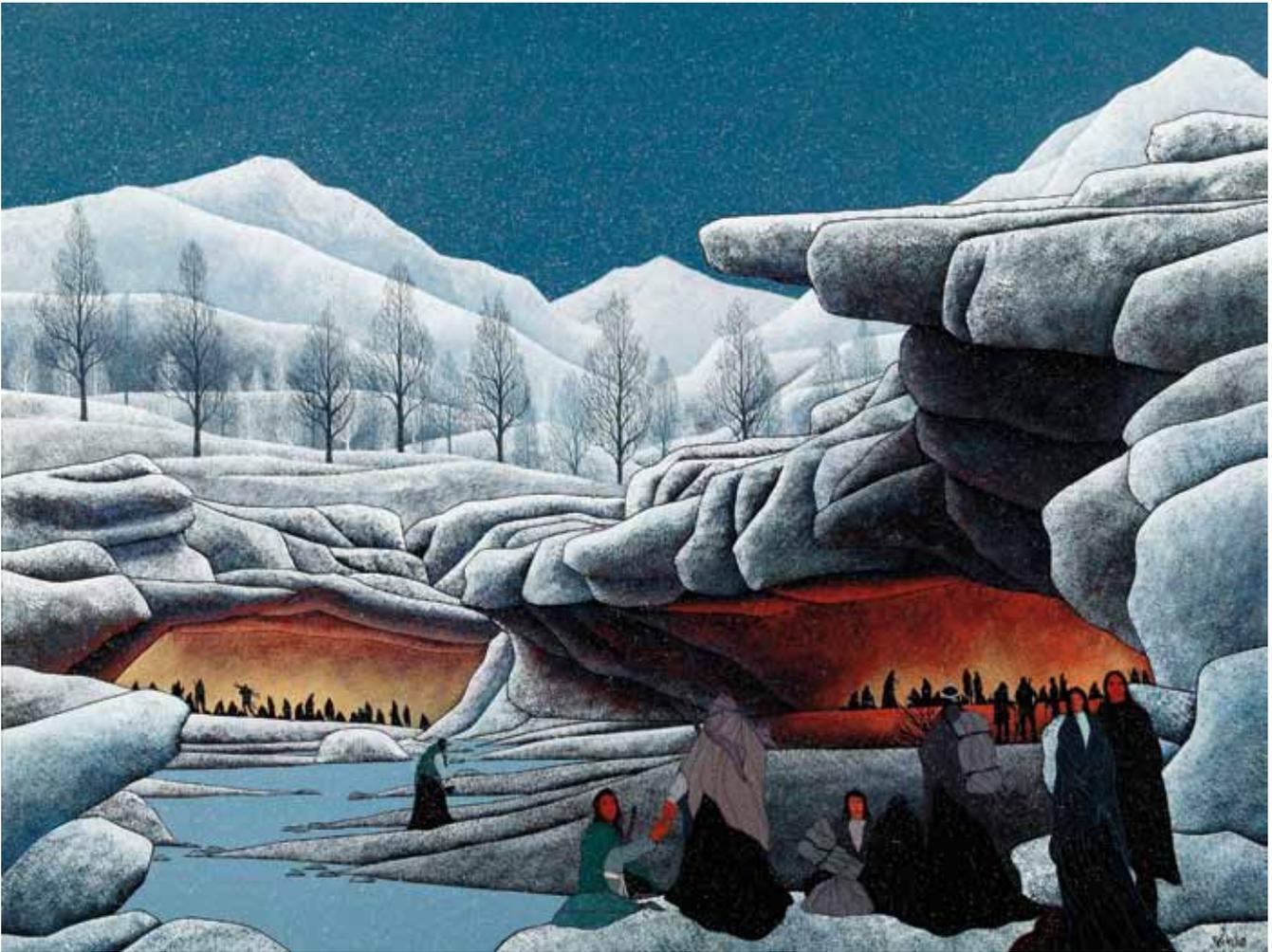
great ability. The names of Sequoyah and Stand Watie evoke (cause or lead to) **profound** respect and admiration, but John Ross was the Cherokee leader with the greatest amount of support from his tribesmen during the time of the removals. The respected historian Edward Everett Dale declared that the Cherokee Nation had never produced a man of greater ability than John Ross.

Ross had amassed for himself a comfortable lifestyle on his Georgia **plantation** and was generous to those less fortunate. His friends were whites, mixed-bloods, and full-bloods. He stubbornly refused to remove and spent much of his time in Washington appealing for **redress** for the Cherokee Nation.

When the editor of the *Cherokee Advocate*, Elias Boudinot (Stand Watie's brother), and his cousin, John Ridge, came to Washington to support a treaty for removal, Ross offered to sell the Cherokee lands for \$25 million. Secretary of War Lewis Cass refused. Ross had hoped that, if he were forced to make a treaty, the price fixed for the land would be sufficient to enable him to lead the Cherokees outside the territorial limits of the United States and purchase outright a huge tract of land from Mexico. Ridge and Boudinot opposed the plan.

The United States Government offered the Cherokees \$5 million. Ross, Boudinot, and Ridge returned to Georgia to present the offer and the terms of the treaty to the Cherokee people in council. The Cherokees rejected the offer, but they approved a committee of twenty leaders with authority to go to Washington to **negotiate** a treaty.

When the committee traveled to Washington, the President and the Secretary of War refused to see them. Some of the committee turned back. John Ridge, Major Ridge, and Elias Boudinot met with the government representatives at New Echota, Georgia, and signed a treaty of removal almost identical to the one rejected by the Cherokee council. John Ridge declared later that in signing it, he was signing his own death warrant, for



*When the Children Cried* by Cherokee artist Bill Rabbit

Cherokee law decreed death for anyone deeding away Cherokee lands. Much later, the Ridges and Boudinot were assassinated for their action. The Treaty of New Echota was quickly ratified by the United States Senate.

The intense anger of the whole nation fell upon those who signed the treaty. The Cherokees denounced and denied the treaty. John Ross expended his total efforts to prevent the **enforcement** of it, but all of his efforts were in vain. The Cherokees would have to go, and nothing the Indians or their friends could say would prevent it, not even the eloquence of the great speaker from the South, Senator Henry Clay. Nothing they could do would alter that determination.

The tribe had two years to prepare for their

long journey west. Despairing and yet hopeful, they made no preparations and lingered until General Winfield Scott and his troops forced them to remove. In a moving but firm address to the Cherokee people, General Scott wrote:

The full moon of May is already on the wane [ending], and before another shall have passed away, every Cherokee man, woman, and child... must be in motion to join their brethren in the Far West...Chiefs, head men, and warriors — will you then, by resistance, compel us to resort to arms? God forbid. Or will you, by flight, seek to hide yourselves in mountains or forests, and thus oblige us to hunt you down? Remember that, in pursuit, it may be impossible to avoid conflicts. The blood of the white man or the blood of the

red man, may be spilt, and if spilt, however accidentally, it may be impossible for the discreet and humane among us, to prevent a general war and carnage. Think of this, my Cherokee brethren, I am an old warrior, and have been present at many a scene of slaughter, but spare me, I beseech you, the horror of witnessing the destruction of the Cherokees.

All hope had fled. The seizure of the Cherokees was much like that of the Creeks. Men were seized while going along a road or working in their fields. Families were startled at dinner by the gleam of bayonets in the doorway. In many cases, on turning to take one last look at their homes, they saw the houses in flames, and they could see looters and pillagers carrying away their goods. Later, a Georgia veteran of the War Between the States said, "I fought through the Civil War and have seen men shot to pieces and slaughtered by the thousands, but the Cherokee removal was the cruelest work I ever knew."

Seventeen thousand Cherokees were herded and crowded into makeshift stockades in just a few days. Hundreds fell sick. Many lost the will to live.

The **exodus** began when several hundred moved out in the early summer. Instead of the incredible cold experienced by the Choctaws, these early **emigrants** were debilitated by the extreme heat of a hot, dry summer. Ross heard of their troubles and begged General Scott to postpone the major migration until autumn. He also worked out an agreement with the general whereby the Cherokees would cease their passive resistance if Ross himself could lead the exiles when the weather was more favorable. Scott agreed.

In retirement back in Tennessee, Andrew Jackson wrote a letter of protest to President Martin Van Buren: "What madness and folly to have anything to do with Ross, when the agent was proceeding well with the removal."

Ross gave total effort to preparing for the removal. He divided the remaining 13,000

Cherokees into bands of 1,000 each under a Cherokee commander. The first group left Georgia the first day of October in 1838. The last group began their journey a month later.

Their wait for better weather was a losing gamble. While the early summer migration had occurred in intense heat and drought, these later exiles encountered deluges of rain, floods, and excessive cold. Their route was like an arc across Tennessee and Kentucky, across the Ohio River, through southern Illinois to the Mississippi River, through Missouri, and on to Indian Territory. The exiles died by tens and twenties every day of the journey. The dead were left unburied or were carried by loved ones until camp was made at the end of each day. Mothers often carried dead infants in their arms until the travelers stopped in the evenings — the only time that burials were allowed. The bodies of the unburied dead lay scattered along the wayside. Rivers were covered with ice. By the time they reached Indian Territory, it is estimated that 4,000 Cherokees had died during the removal. The Cherokees called their journey to Indian territory the "Trail of Tears."

**THE SEMINOLES.** The smallest and least advanced of the Five Civilized Tribes were the Seminoles. Kinsmen of the Creeks, this primitive, colorful tribe took advantage of the terrain and dangers of the Florida swamps to raid American settlers along the border and then flee back to the safety of the Spanish-held swampland in Florida. Andrew Jackson himself had fought the Seminoles earlier during his military career.

The Seminoles farmed, but their chief means of making a living was hunting and fishing.

When Florida became a possession of the United States, white settlers who had feared the war-like tribe urged removal.

The Seminoles agreed to send delegates to Indian Territory to explore the area and to see if the Creeks would be willing for them to move into the

Creek Nation. There the delegation unknowingly signed a removal treaty with the United States government. These delegates later told that they thought they were merely signing papers relating to their explorations.

The Creeks, who served under the able leadership of the great Seminole warrior, Osceola, retreated into the swamps, and the war of the Seminole removal began. It was a long, inglorious war of bloody conflict where neither side completely won or lost.

Under General Jesup, captured Seminoles were held in concentration camps until enough were assembled to make up a contingent for removal.

The wife of Osceola was captured and held among other Seminole captives. Three Seminole leaders — Osceola, Wild Cat, and Cloud — asked for a conference under a flag of truce. The United States commander violated the truce and took them prisoner. Cloud and Wild Cat escaped but were seized later at peace talks arranged by Cherokee Chief John Ross at Fort Mellon.

Ross protested vigorously, but the general refused to release them. Osceola died in prison, but the Seminoles fought on until nearly 1,500 of them lost their lives or were captured and removed. A few hundred moved into the most remote areas of the swamps and were left there. Descendants of those unconquered bands still live in Florida.

It was not until the 1840s that the removal of the Seminoles was complete, but the tribe members were far from happy with their new situation. Outnumbered badly by the Creeks, they had little voice in their own destinies and no chance of electing Seminoles to leadership positions. Finally, in 1856, the Seminoles were granted land between the North and South Canadian Rivers and founded their own government and elected their own leaders. Once the separation from the Creeks took place, word was carried back to Florida. Then more of the Seminoles joined their tribesmen in the West.

With the exodus of the Seminoles, the removal of

the Five Civilized Tribes was virtually complete. The story of their removals is not a pleasant one. Edward Everett Dale, a renowned historian, called it “one of the blackest and most sordid chapters in the history of our country.”

Certainly the sufferings of whole nations of people are without parallel. But it would not be true to history to leave the impression that another whole people looked on their sufferings with indifference without compassion or concern. Many white people vigorously protested the treatment of the Indians. Even those from Georgia, who had feared the warlike Creeks and had urged removal, protested their inhumane treatment.

Some Indian agents were corrupt. But others spent their own government salaries and personal savings to try to provide adequate provisions for survival. They were seldom repaid because their purchases were unauthorized.

Hundreds more tribesmen would have perished had it not been for the **generosity** of sympathetic white farmers and the compassion of white communities along the way. The steamboat captains, too, often expended more than the government had authorized and spent the rest of their lives trying to get reimbursement.

While there were military commanders like Jesup, there were also the Winfield Scotts, who risked military careers and courts martial to ease the plight of the exiles. Scott and Zachary Taylor brought more honorable conduct to a terrible task.

There were also government voices who cried out for justice. Unfortunately, they did not prevail. But they were there, and their voices became louder as the union of states moved toward civil war.

Yet, no one can look to the history of the removal with pride. The manner in which the removal was accomplished must forever remain a dark blot on the pages of American history. The Cherokees gave the removal its appropriate name. It was the “Trail Where They Cried” — the Trail of Tears.