

Echoes From the Past

SAM HOUSTON SLEPT HERE

During the 1800's northeastern Oklahoma was host to a long line of celebrated individuals who made their mark on American history. Indian Territory, created by the Indian Removal Act of 1830, was a natural magnet for soldiers assigned to the military as well as for soldiers of fortune. Among the latter was one Sam Houston, recently resigned Governor of Tennessee and political protégé of President Andrew Jackson. The two had become acquainted during the Creek Wars of 1813 where Sam had fought long side the Cherokees. In 1818 Houston left the army and studied law for a few months then was appointed Adjutant General for the State of Tennessee. This led to his election as Congressman and in 1827 as Governor. On a political roll, Sam married Eliza Allen the 18 year old daughter of an influential businessman but for reasons never fully explained the marriage immediately floundered. The couple separated although they didn't divorce until 1833 and under political pressure, Sam resigned as Governor.

Reared by a widowed mother in Tennessee, Sam had run away from home and lived among the Cherokee Indians during his youth. There he had been adopted as a stepson by Chief John Jolly and probably for that reason and the circumstances in Nashville he headed west to the newly constituted Indian Territory where the Cherokees now lived. Traveling upstream on the Arkansas River Houston's arrival at Webber Falls was cause for a great celebration among the Cherokees and particularly Chief Jolly.

The Cherokees most familiar to Sam Houston were those who had volunteered to move west in 1818 long before the infamous Trail of Tears. These families were awarded removal funds by the federal government and included early Cherokee leaders such as John Jolly and John Rogers who had relocated in western Arkansas. However, the United States had placed them on the hunting grounds of the warlike Osage and Quapaw Tribes and the inevitable conflict ensued. This resulted in the Cherokees moving further west to what became Indian Territory. Houston's arrival reunited him with his good friends and the circumstance turned out to be good fortune for both. Almost immediately he saw the Tribe was being victimized by government agents because most Cherokees did not understand the English language, government regulations or the value of currency. Since he spoke both languages and years earlier had encouraged the Cherokees to move west Houston felt both a moral and legal obligation to become an advocate for the Tribe. Quickly settling in to life among his adopted Cherokee family he spent part of his time in Washington but a large amount in the "Three Forks" area of Indian Territory located at the confluence of the Arkansas, Verdigris and Grand Rivers.

Years before when he had lived with the tribe in Tennessee, Sam had become acquainted with Chief Jollys niece Tiana, then age 10. Now grown up Tiana only had eyes for Houston and they were married in a Cherokee ceremony in May, 1830. White society denounced the marriage claiming it wasn't legal because Sam and his first wife Eliza Allen were not divorced. However under Cherokee law the marriage was recognized as legitimate because Sam was no longer living with his former wife, they had "split the blanket." Sam and Tiana built a home in the Three Forks region which they called "The

Wigwam Neosho” located about three miles east of Fort Gibson near the junction of the Military and Texas Roads. Here the couple engaged in trading, entertaining friends and tending to their apple orchard. Sam’s life in our region was a success and profitable, but once again the excitement of a new venture in Texas lured him away.

Houston had first become interested in Texas as early as 1818 as a potential refuge for the Cherokee Nation outside of the United States. Now by 1832 and living in Indian Territory he was spending considerable time there intrigued by this “new frontier” and the arguments of Texans wanting to be independent from Mexico. Revolutionaries recognizing his leadership ability selected him as general of their army and after Texas obtained its freedom, he became the first president of the new republic. After Texas’ annexation to the United States he served as Senator and later as Governor of the new state. He still holds the distinction of being the only person in United States history to have been Governor of two different states. Sam Houston never returned to Oklahoma or Tiana. He remarried, settled down in Huntsville, Texas and died on July 26, 1863.