

REVEREND BUTRICK'S JOURNAL, CHEROKEE CHAOS

Once the perfect storm of retribution against the Cherokees erupted, only the horrors that followed along the Trail of Tears exceeded the chaos that preceded it. When military rule was invoked by the United States government in 1838, troops herded more than 16,000 Cherokees into holding camps, stockades which were 200 by 500 feet with sixteen foot high walls and no shelter or provisions for sanitation. The occupants remained much longer than intended. Although the plan was to begin removal immediately and while some were removed, Cherokee leaders convinced General Scott that more tribesmen would survive if they waited until fall.

One of the most poignant accounts of their suffering during and after imprisonment was documented in the journal of a Baptist missionary, the Reverend Daniel S. Butrick. Unlike most of his fellow missionaries who had migrated to western Arkansas in 1836, Butrick determined to stay with his parishioners. He had been assigned to the Brainard Mission, now Chattanooga, in 1818, served in several others and, by 1838, was fully integrated into Cherokee society. Unlike most accounts of this tragedy which have been developed after-the-fact, Butrick's daily observations regarding the chaos, capture events as they occurred. He continually attempted to intercede on behalf of tribesmen, but most of his efforts were refused. Following are a few excerpts from May until September regarding their capture and confinement before the journey west began.

May 26 – “As the soldiers advanced towards a house, two little children fled in fright to the woods. The woman pleaded for permission to seek them, or wait until they came in.....but all entreaties were in vain....it was not till a day or two later after that, she would get permission for one of her friends to go back after the lost children.”

“A man, deaf and dumb, being surprised at the approach of armed men, attempted to make his escape, and because he did not hear and obey the command of his pursuers, was shot dead on the spot.”

“Women absent from their families on visits, or for other purposes, were seized, and men, far from their wives and children, were not allowed to return, and also children being forced from home, were dragged off among strangers.”

“And, it is said that the white inhabitants around, stood with open arms to seize whatever property they could put their hands on.”

“Those taken to the fort at New Echota, were confined day and night in the open air, with but little clothing to cover them, when lying on the naked ground.”

May 31 – “Astoundingly, a little before sunset, a company of about 200 Cherokees were driven into our lane. The day had been rainy, and of course all men, women and children were dripping wet with no change of clothing, and scarcely a blanket fit to cover them. As some of the women, taken from their houses, had on their poorest dress, this of course was the amount of clothing for a journey of about 800 miles.”

June 11 – “The weather being extremely warm and dry, many of the Cherokees are sick, especially at Calhoun, where we understand that from four to ten die in a day.”

July 18 – At Cassville, it is said, some poor Cherokees were enticed to drink, and when drunk, one of the women was taken out into the public street, and her clothes pulled up, and tied over her head, and thus she was left to the gaze of the multitudes passing by.”

July 23 – (Regarding Property sold by agents) “It is very evident that a mere trifle of what was left was ever given to owners. Thus, a horse said to be worth \$100 sold for \$12. Twenty or thirty ducks sold for twenty five cents, and these cents go to pay the cost.”

July 26 – “They were not allowed to stop or rest on account of sickness. They were driven on as long as they could walk, and then thrown into wagons. When some were perceived to be in the agonies of death, the wagon master ordered them to drive on!”.....”When it was known that one was dead, the lifeless body was left to the care of some stranger.”

August 20 – “ We also learned that when the last company was taken over the river at Ross’s Landing, a woman, in the pains of childbirth, stood and walked as long as possible, and then fell on the bank of the river. A soldier coming up, stabbed her with his bayonet, which, together with other pains, soon caused her death.”

These graphic excerpts do not include Butrick’s comments of absolute disbelief regarding the inhumane treatment and the immoral conduct condoned by the United States government. He continues entries to his journal as he and his wife accompany a contingent of Cherokees on their “Trail of Tears” during the following winter.

Next week: Reverend Butrick’s Journal...The Terrible Trail

