

REVEREND BUTRICK'S JOURNAL, THE TERRIBLE TRAIL

Some have the perception that the Cherokee's Trail of Tears was undertaken from Georgia to Oklahoma and that all refugees followed one trail. In fact, during the heat of the summer after the first contingent of 5000 were divided and marched westward with disastrous results, an appeal was approved by General Scott to allow the remaining tribesmen to be evacuated in September. Agreement was also obtained to allow the Cherokee's to manage and control their own removal by dividing them into thirteen companies of approximately one thousand to include supply wagons and other contractors. Routes that these companies followed ranged as far north as Rolla, Missouri and were bounded on the south by a "water route" that followed the Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers. Reverend Butrick and his wife Elizabeth volunteered and were assigned to a detachment coordinated by Richard Taylor who followed the northern route from Brainard, Tennessee through Nashville, then to Hopkinsville, Kentucky, across the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, north near Rolla, Missouri, then on to Springfield and finally entered Indian Territory near today's Westville, Oklahoma. Taylor's Detachment of 1029 left on September 20, 1838 and journeyed for 186 days, arriving March 24, 1839 with 942 survivors.

Following are some of Reverend Butrick's observations about the journey. It would be redundant to repeat his numerous references to the 87 deaths and burials. The weather and illness took its toll.

October 5 – "Arrived at the camps, pitched our tent near those of Br. McPherson. The night however, was rendered particularly distressing by the almost constant yells of drunkards, passing and repassing to and from a whiskey shop set up by a white man to ensnare the poor Indians."

October 21 – "White men flock in from every quarter, some seeking to collect debts, some selling cabbages or other things, and some simply walk about, seeking whom they might devour, leading the unwary Indians down to death.

November 4 – "The drinking still continues. Last night was very rainy, so that we could scarcely keep dry in our little carryall, and many of the Cherokees, having no tents, were soaking wet, lying on the wet ground."

November 26 – "As the fires began to be kindled, an aged Cherokee, who had been sick all the way, lay down by the fire, when his clothes caught fire, and he sprang up, but before he could be relieved, was burnt near to death.....The poor old man who was burnt, was left at a house to be taken care of, but died in a few days.

December 15 – "As we were passing out of a slave state into a free, (Kentucky) we reflected on the pleasure of landing where all were in a measure equal and free. But we had scarcely landed when we were met with a volley of oaths from every quarter. I turned to one boat to make a few purchases, but heard such awful profaneness within, that I quickly turned away."

December 25 – (After crossing the Ohio River) "Thus far the citizens of Illinois appear more and more pitiable. They seem not only low in their manners, but ignorant, poor, and ill humored.....because they cannot have slaves, let their work go undone.

January 26 – “Through divine goodness, we were conveyed safely over the great (Mississippi) river.....Last night it commenced raining and the storm, snow and rain continues today. That will render it very unpleasant to our Cherokee friends to cross.”

March 8 – “On the way we suffered exceedingly with the cold and after passing through a long piece of woods, we arrived at a house which gave us great joy.....we hurried to the door, but on knocking, were told by an unseen voice that we could not warm by the fire, as the house was full, though I believe there were few persons by the fire.”

March 16 – “We are now drawing near the Arkansas, that land of spiritual darkness.”

Richard Taylor’s contingent and the Butricks arrived in Indian Territory on March 30, 1839. Later, adding to this stain on United States history, when a financial settlement was finally made, the federal government deducted over \$1.2 million from the \$5 million which was to be paid for Cherokee lands in Georgia, “for costs related to removal.”

Soon after their arrival, the Butricks joined the Fairfield Mission, then established their own, Mt. Zion, on Beatty’s Prairie west of Jay. Butrick’s factual account will forever stand as an objective witness to those hardy Cherokee pioneers who survived, then shaped northeastern Oklahoma.

Note: The complete transcript of Daniel Butricks Journal, published by the Oklahoma Chapter of the Trail of Tears Association, may be purchased at the Talbot Library and Museum, Colcord, Oklahoma.

