

## ECHOS FROM THE PAST

[www.grandriver.com](http://www.grandriver.com)

### CABIN CREEK, A SITE WORTH SAVING

Most of the articles for “Echos” dwell on the history of northeastern Oklahoma events and people, but occasionally it’s necessary to point out a 21<sup>st</sup> century issue. So it is with Cabin Creek, site of two Civil War battles and several skirmishes. Although most of the battles fought west of the Mississippi were not of the magnitude of those in the east the battles at Cabin Creek were very significant.

The Military Road from Fort Scott, Kansas was a vital lifeline for federal troops to get supplies to Fort Gibson throughout the war because for the most part the rebels owned the countryside in northeastern Oklahoma. But, a crossing at Cabin Creek on Greenbrier Joe Martin’s ranch took on particular significance in June of 1864 after Stand Watie and his troops had ambushed and sunk the J.R. Williams, a steamboat carrying supplies up the Arkansas River from Fort Smith. It was well known that the crossing at Cabin Creek was a good spot to harass and ambush northern wagon trains. And, of course the confederate objective was not only to prevent wagon trains from reaching Fort Gibson, but to confiscate the supplies for themselves.

Confederate sympathizers west of the Mississippi were no different than their eastern counterparts. The south had initiated the war in April of 1861 at Fort Sumter, South Carolina based on emotions that had festered for years rather than on reason. The logistics for war favored the north which was more heavily populated, 20 million compared to 9 million, contained most of the industry required to conduct a war, and was far more interconnected by rail service which enabled them to move supplies and troops quickly. The south gambled that the need for cotton in Europe would gain allies, but for various reasons that never happened. So the south quickly fell behind in efforts to supply their army. As the war ground on Confederate troops were increasingly ill fed and ill equipped, many without shoes or appropriate weapons and still wearing the same clothes they wore when the conflict started. The fact that the south fought for four years out manned and out gunned is a remarkable feat in itself. Probably the only reason the conflict lasted that long was best summed up by a confederate captive. When asked, “Why are you fighting so hard?” the soldier answered, “Because you’re down here.”

Similarly, Confederate General Stand Watie’s troops were in desperate need of supplies and had failed to obtain them in a battle at the same site in July of 1863. But in September of 1864 they succeeded in winning not only the battle but in a military sense the lottery as well, more than a million dollars worth of supplies. If that same victory had occurred in the east what would the history books have reflected? One can only speculate that at a time Grant was threatening to take Richmond and the fall of Atlanta occurred, Cabin Creek would have received considerable press in the south.....and the north. Without a doubt it would have boosted southern morale and resolve and might even have affected the outcome of the presidential election in the north. Lincoln’s critics weren’t happy with the slow progress of the war and any negative publicity may have given his opponents the impetus they needed to promote compromise with the south and win the election.

However, this article isn’t about the battles and skirmishes at Cabin Creek or its possible influence on the war, those details will be reviewed another time. This is about

**2010, and the inadequate recognition the site is given today. Only ten acres, probably 1/10<sup>th</sup> of the battle site has been set aside with some descriptive monuments. And, unless the visitor is a student of the battle the monuments are at best only evidence that something of importance happened and at least the explanations they offer are confusing. Only those who have carefully studied the battle could unravel the sequence of events. In addition to the minimal recognition of the battle itself, locating the site is a challenge. To say the least, signage on highways 28 and 69 are confusing and even when directions are given to the site it is somewhat akin to participating in a snipe hunt.**

**It is quite obvious that today's society requires instant gratification and we are obsessed about obtaining our rights, but not so quick to recognize our responsibilities. Developing Cabin Creek as a full fledged interpretive battle site that honors our citizen soldiers is our responsibility. They deserve no less.**