

## THE THIRD BATTLE OF CABIN CREEK

“Greenbriar Joe” Martin’s plantation home at Cabin Creek crossing had been a destination for travelers on the Texas Road since the 1840s. The Martin residence, along with nearly 100 slaves, included a blacksmith shop and other amenities available to resupply weary Texas bound immigrants and stage coach passengers. Joe managed a ranch from this site said to exceed 100,000 acres. But now, the crossing had taken on a new significance, one of military importance that would see Joe and his son Richard, both Confederates, participate in the battles that would destroy their home and way of life.

When Cherokee scouts for the Union Army raced back to Major Henry Hopkins camp at Horse Creek about 15 miles east, they reported sighting Confederate pickets near the crossing. Everything indicated that southern troops might be there in force, waiting to attack the Union wagon train bound for Fort Gibson. But this time the Confederates were not there “in force,” half of the troops expected for the battle had not arrived, nor would they. General William Cabell’s Arkansas Brigade was delayed at Lynch’s Prairie on the other side of the flood swollen Grand River. Thus, when Union and Confederate forces did clash on July 1, 1863, a swift ending resulted and Colonel Stand Watie and his Indian troops fled. So, the First Battle of Cabin Creek ended in a Union victory that was far overshadowed by other more prominent ones that same day, at Gettysburg and along the Mississippi River at Vicksburg.

But the Second Battle of Cabin Creek, a little more than a year later on September 4, 1864, had a different conclusion and a different impact. That battle did not begin until 300 Union supply wagons were across the creek and aligned in a meadow west of the rugged terrain. There, General Stand Watie’s Indian troops accompanied by General Richard Gano’s Texans defeated the Federals and captured the wagon train and its contents, more than a million dollars worth of supplies. The result of this Confederate victory provided renewed vigor for the southern cause which appeared hopelessly mired down in Petersburg and Atlanta as Sherman was rampaging through Georgia.

These battles at Cabin Creek crossing, fought in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, are part of our history and heritage, and now in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, a third, two phased battle, is being waged involving this hallowed site. The first phase involves land acquisition. Historians believe the two clashes combined included approximately 100 acres, located on both sides of the creek. In 1961, the Daughters of the Confederacy purchased 10 acres of the battle site and donated that land to the Oklahoma Historical Society. Recently, within the past year, the owners of the remaining 90 acres made known a desire to sell their property. Quickly reacting to that announcement, the Civil War Trust, a Washington based organization, acting in cooperation with the Oklahoma Historical Society, contracted to acquire the additional land. The Trust purchases battlefield land involving Civil War sites that are in danger of being sold or developed, in order to insure their security as a historic site. The Trust then seeks donors to compensate for their investment and, at this time, contacts with major donors are underway. Thus, the first phase of the Third Battle of Cabin Creek, securing the site, is being engaged.

Phase two of this “Third Battle,” the actual development of the site, looms in the near future. While the battle ground should include typical accoutrements such as interpretive trails and other displays just as any historic site, two additional aspects should also be promoted. The first is to identify and recognize the singular contributions of Indian veterans who fought in these battles. The American Civil War has often been described as a war of brother against brother and this circumstance was particularly evident here regarding the divided loyalties of tribesmen, both concerning the issue of slavery as well as long standing strife within the tribes and between tribesmen. The Cabin Creek site provides an ideal setting to honor these veterans and describe their perspectives and contributions.

Second, there has been scant description of the depredations during and following this war in Indian Territory. Approximately 65,000 citizens, nearly all of whom were members of the Five Civilized Tribes, comprised the region. During the conflict, in addition to the desolation and starvation that occurred, marauding soldiers and gangs of bushwackers created unbelievable terror for helpless women and children. The post war period was equally tragic, as criminals of all kinds sought refuge here, the result of conflicting provisions for law enforcement. What could be a more appropriate setting to tell their story than the site of “Greenbriar Joe’s” former plantation at Cabin Creek. Possibly the most affluent citizen in the territory, Martin lost everything because of his convictions and died impoverished. So, in addition to typical amenities, the battlefield could also depict the totality of this regional conflict through the development of a Center for Indian Civil War Studies. Displays, personal anecdotes, a complete archive of the impact on the pioneers of this era, all should be acquired for study and enlightenment.. Ancestors of citizens living in northeastern Oklahoma fought, suffered or died for their principles during this conflict, they could do no more, we should do no less than tell their whole story.