

Pulaski County's First Permanent Residents Were Northern Cherokees

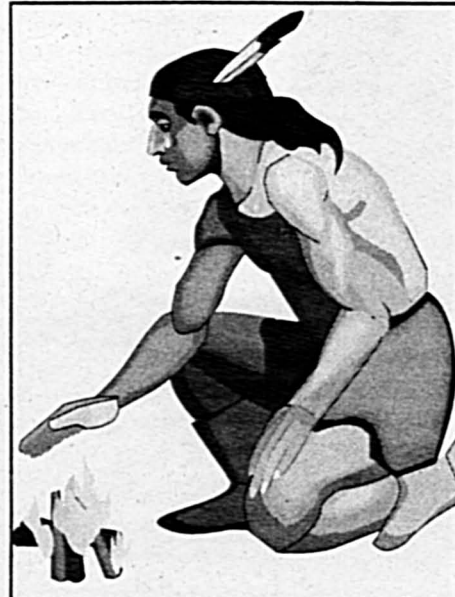
By Roy Clevenger, Director
Native American League of
Pulaski County

The Pulaski County area's first permanent residents were the Northern Cherokees, who moved into Piney and Roubidoux Creek areas from Eastern Upper Louisiana.

These Northern Cherokees were descendants of immigrants who crossed the Mississippi into present-day Missouri as early as 1721. Dangerous Man Smith led the first group of Cherokee settlers when he brought 600 families to the St. Francois River Valley. Dangerous Man and his followers were disenchanted with the white man's repeated violations of treaties and saw migration west of the great river as the only solution. And this largely unpopulated area with its abundant streams provided a striking similarity to their beloved Appalachian highlands.

Waves of additional Cherokee settlers, encouraged by the French and Spanish governments as a buffer between English encroachment, would arrive in the Ozarks during the next century. They would establish homes in very small villages on Ozark streams and rivers, which would allow them to continue their agricultural and entrepreneurial lifestyles. Settlement villages, instead of cities and towns, also allowed ample space for hunting, known to Cherokees as "The Chase".

A new wave of settlers, primarily Scotch-Irish, from the United States, began to filter into the area after the 1804 Louisiana Purchase. This latest group of immigrants would refer to the Cherokee settlements as "camps". The Osage tribal group had moved into Missouri prior to both the



Cherokee and white settlers but came to Pulaski County on hunting or war like expeditions. The Osage were a constant menace to any settler whether Indian or white. The Osage signed a treaty with the Americans in 1809 agreeing to leave the area. It was an easy Treaty for the Osage to sign as they were actually selling Cherokee lands.

It would be the equivalent of someone selling something in which the actual ownership was in doubt. The Cherokees had received land grants from the King of Spain with the signing of the Treaty of Nogales in 1795.

With Article VI of the Louisiana Purchase Treaty, the United States had promised a continuation of the French and Spanish contract with their Indian people throughout Old Louisiana. Article VI was violated.

Upper Louisiana became the Territory, and eventually, State of Missouri. Early anti-Indian laws began in Missouri in 1825 when the first act to restrain trade with Indians was passed.

It would now become necessary for Cherokees to conceal their identities. To hide their ethnicity, they would often say that they were Creole (American French or Spanish), Black Irish, Black Dutch, or even gypsies. Anti-Indian legislation in Missouri was not repealed until May 14, 1909.

The Trail of Tears came through Pulaski County. All but one of the Northern Route detachments, each with 40-60 wagons and 300-1000 people, passed through and camped in this area. Prominent encampments were at Arlington on the Little Piney, Hooker Ford on the Big Piney, and Waynesville and the Roubidoux. Cherokees, living in the area and dressed as whites, provided aid and comfort to their suffering brothers. It is

impossible to accurately estimate how many actually "jumped off the trail here. However, there are people living in the Devils Elbow area who claim to be descendants of these "trail jumpers".

Because their advanced life-style and adaptability, the Cherokees did the things necessary for their survival. The word which best describes the Cherokee people is "adaptability".

Today, Pulaski County area Native Americans and descendants hold regular cultural meetings in St. Robert. The Native American League meets the first week of each month (except July and December) at 7 p.m. at the St. Robert Community Center. Everyone is invited to attend these free meetings. For more information contact Jim or Gene Strain at 573-759-2468 or Roy Clevenger 573-647-7509.



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