

THE TRAIL OF TEARS

Years after the Cherokee removal, the ethnologist James Mooney interrogated participants, both Indian and white, and he condensed their accounts into one of his own. "Families at dinner were startled by the sudden gleam of bayonets in the doorway and rose up to be driven with blows amid oaths along the trail that led to the stockade. Men were seized in their fields or going along the road, women were taken from their [spinning] wheels and children from their play. . . .

"To prevent escape the soldiers had been ordered to approach and surround each house, as far as possible, so as to come upon the occupants without warning. One old patriarch when thus surprised calmly called his children and grandchildren around him, and kneeling down bid them pray with him in their own language, while the astonished soldiers looked on in silence. Then rising he led the way into exile. A woman, on finding the house surrounded, went to the door and called up the chickens to be fed for the last time, after which taking her infant on her back and her other children by the hand, she followed her husband with the soldiers."

But behind the soldiers came white looters who plundered the homes and graves the Cherokees left behind and stole their livestock.

The Cherokees fell sick in the holding camps. The main body departed west in the midst of a drought that made water and food scarce. They continued to travel into a viciously cold winter. People sickened and died and were buried along the way. The journey took an especially terrible toll of women and children. The road they traveled was the "road they cried": the bitter Trail of Tears.

The Trail of Tears
by Robert Lindneux, 1942.

