

ROSS, ELIZABETH

PANTHERS

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260

Elizabeth Ross,
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PANTHERS

Panthers were once fairly numerous in various sections of the Cherokee Nation. Men and women who recalled the periods preceding the outbreak of the Civil War were accustomed to relate recollections of the earlier time in which panthers received mention, and during some years after the close of the War in 1865, panthers were seen in the isolated sections of the hills, and their screams were heard at night.

Down the Caney Creek, which empties into the Illinois River, some miles south of the confluence of the Barren Fork with the Illinois, there is some rugged country.

Among the bluffs and dense growth of trees and underbrush, years ago, several panthers had their lairs. Going out one day in quest of a deer or turkey, John Stephens, a young man of the Caney Creek locality, reached the near vicinity of one of the most rugged spots along the creek, when he saw sunning themselves on a large flat stone several young panthers. Stephens immediately fired upon the small panthers. One of them was wounded to some extent and all began "crying", and to the great surprise of Stephens, the mother panther arrived almost instantly. Without the

-2-

least hesitancy this big panther rushed upon Stephens and began clawing. Trying to defend himself, Stephens, not having had time in which to reload his muzzle loading rifle, struck at the enraged animal with his gun, missed and the stock was broken from the barrel as a result of the butt of the gun striking the ground.

Clawing and snarling, the panther soon had Stephens' clothing torn into bits; whereupon he sought safety in flight and ran as he had never had occasion to do previously. The panther then ran back to the youngsters and hurried them into a place of safety.

While hunting wild horses down in the hills nearly opposite the confluence of Dry Creek with the Illinois River, some years after the close of the Civil War, Henderson Stephens and a companion found a large heap of grass and leaves. They investigated, and found part of the carcass of a deer. After eating a portion of the deer, the panther hid the remainder and went on its way.

A number of people recall that within several decades of the past, the screams of panthers have been heard in isolated regions, and a few of the animals have been seen. Early day Tahlequah and Park Hill people heard the screams

-3-

of panthers at times, but at this period the number of the animals is quite small. They will probably disappear entirely.

Authority: John Stephens, Henderson Stephens, both once of Park Hill section.