

ROSS, ELIZABETH

STRONG MEDICINE

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A well known citizen of early days of the Cherokee Nation in what is now the state of Oklahoma was Judge Riley. A tall man, some six feet and four inches in height, large and strong, this pioneer served as judge of the Tahlequah District long before the outbreak of the Civil War. On a number of occasions Judge Riley sentenced violators of the law to be punished with the infliction of lashes upon their bare backs. For a number of years Judge Riley lived in the Tahlequah District, a distance of several miles from the town of Tahlequah. Eventually, he removed to a farm in the Cooweescoowee District, where the remainder of his long life was spent.

During the closing decade in the seventies of the last century Judge Riley was elected as a member of the Cherokee National Council from the Cooweescoowee District, and rode down to Tahlequah for the convening of the legislative bodies in the fall of each year. Some of the relatives of Judge Riley, now an old man, well past seventy-years, lived in the Tahlequah District. One of these relatives, a nephew, Judge Riley Keys, lived near the banks of the Barren Fork River, in the vicinity of the present hamlet of Welling, Cherokee County, Oklahoma.

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One day, while the council was in session, Judge Riley became ill. He felt that he would soon be prostrated and immediately went to the home of Judge Keys. Soon the old councilman was in a very serious condition. A doctor was called, who pronounced him critically ill with pneumonia. In fact, the doctor said, the attack would prove fatal, the advanced years of the patient being against him. Furthermore nothing could be done, the doctor said, but to keep the patient as comfortable as possible, giving him very light nourishment, broth or thin soup. In a few days the malady would terminate in the demise of the patient, according to the doctor's opinion.

Judge Riley lingered. He didn't like the broth, and one day called to his nephew's wife, telling her that he was starving to death and must have something to eat. He requested that he be brought a "big hunk" of corn pone, a bowlful of turnips with their sprouting tops, boiled with a piece of bacon, and a cupful of strong black coffee. The old man was reminded that the doctor had forbidden him having any solid food, whereupon he remarked that if he was going to die he wanted to die with a full stomach.

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So strongly did he insist upon having the food requested that Mrs. Keys went to the kitchen and prepared the articles desired. She carried the food to the patient's bedside, saying afterwards that she felt as if she were administering poison. Immediately Judge Riley began eating and drinking. He soon called for a second helping, ate it all, drank the coffee and with a sigh of satisfaction, turned over and fell into a profound slumber. He awoke some time later and said he felt much better. Thereafter his recovery was rapid, and he returned to his duties in council and later to his home. His term of life was prolonged for a number of years, for he was past eighty years of age when his eventful career came to its close.

The turnips had been "holed up" and small sprouts or "shoots" had grown upon their tops. Judge Riley particularly desired that the sprouts be cooked along with the turnips and bacon.

Authorities: List of members of Cherokee National Council; particulars narrated by Mrs. Minerva Keys, (Judge Key's wife). Recollected by William H. Balentine, Sr.
