

economic, political, and financial position of people of Georgia, Carolinas, and other eastern states common to the Cherokees in the early 1800s and up until their removal in 1838-39, the Ridge family were people of influence and wealth. John Ridge, for one, brought a number of negro slaves with him to the Indian Territory, and at once began clearing, fencing, farming and other pioneer settlement work in the New Country. One of the Negro slaves was one known only as Peter, and who was considered as a foreman or leader among the Ridge-owned slaves. It is believed that out of respect and love of this slave, John Ridge named the large flatland area for him. Many accounts of the assassination of the two Ridge men on that day in June, 1839 have been told, and Mr. Fields, who was born and raised in that area, tells of this same event in the early history of the Indian Nation. Probably, the last remaining landmark of the beginning of the Indian Nation dating from the coming of the Cherokees on the Removal is what is now known as Polson Cemetery. The name comes from a family of whites who came in and settled on the old Ridge place just after the Civil War. The graveyard was originally known as Peters Prairie Cemetery, and according to monuments there was first used in 1839. Mr. Fields was visiting the cemetery one year at Memorial Day observance in the company of an old timer by name of Billy Stevens. Mr. Stevens had lived in the area most of his life. As they talked Mr. Stevens pointed to a grove of pines just northeast of the cemetery and said that was where John Ridge's home was located. He said that Mr. Ridge had a large number of slaves, and that at the east side of the Polson Cemetery there were accounts of many negroes having been buried there. It is believed that when John Ridge and Major Ridge were killed there on their home places many of their slaves who tried to aid them were also killed, and all buried in what is now the well known cemetery of that area. Adjoining the grave sites of the Ridge family is the graves of the Watie family, including that of General Stand Watie. Stand Watie, among others, had been marked for assassination on that fateful day, but he escaped to live another thirty years. Tragic as were the events that unfolded even after the Cherokees began their new life in the Indian Territory, the events also spoke for a people of strong beliefs and convictions, and who were not afraid in the face of odds. The Pro- and Con- factions of the Removal Treaty Parties, the Nighthawks, the Keetoowahs, and others did little to unify the Cherokee Nation for many years. Tragic again it was that the advent of the Civil War seemed to work as a blessing in disguise to bring about the final unity of the Western Cherokees. This unity did exist for the Cherokee Nation for some forty years, until the ever-loving whiteman brought it to an end with the statehood movement. Without compassion, concern, or reservation the flowery strokes of the pen creating Oklahoma, did in fewer flowery strokes provide the death wreath ending forever the Cherokee Nation, the Indian way of life, and the beginning of other trails of tears that will last until the end of time.

On the north end of Peters Prairie near the site of the old pioneer town of Dodge is the Bud Fields Cemetery. Bud Fields was an uncle of Jess Fields. It is believed that Ezekiel Fields (1789 - 1839) was another of the first pioneer Cherokee settlers to establish in this northern part of the Cherokee Nation. Ezekiel Fields is buried here. It is told that the elder Fields got caught in a grass prairie fire and was killed on this prairie, and may have been one of the first to be buried there, although some of the unmarked grave may have been there before his death.