

INDEX CARDS

Civil War

Opothlayohola

Civil War refugees--Northern

OLD INDIAN CAMP AND BURIAL GROUND NEAR LEROY KANSAS. 252

(Furnished by Henry Johnson, Gernett, Kansas, Supervisor Federal Writers' project)

Shortly after the beginning of the Civil War, Chief Opothleyahole, Chief of the Muscogee Indians was driven out of the Indian Territory by confederate soldiers and their Indian allies. The great Muscogee chief and his braves were outnumbered and besides were not armed or equipped as well as their adversaries. They fought bravely under the skilled old warrior chief, but were compelled to retreat into Kansas, a Union State.

The retreat was conducted in an orderly manner and the rear guards kept the pursuing army at bay, despite their advantage in both warriors and arms. This rear guard fighting with never a let-up persisted for days. In fact it was not until the Indians had reached Kansas that the constant fighting ceased.

Down the territory they had fought as long as human endurance could stand before they even thought of retreat. and when they entered Coffey County, Kansas, Chief Opothleyahole, had still under his command about 700 Indians. There were hundreds more who died from disease and starvation, at the first camp in Kansas on the Verdigris River. The Indians' agent, Mr. W. G. Coffin, made his headquarters at Leroy, Kansas, to be near his charges, who had been removed from the southern

part of the state after a short time. Mr. Coffin, under date of February 13, 1862, reported to the government that "hundreds of the Indians have died." "1500 ponies are dead and lying around the camp on the Verdigris River."

After Mr. Coffin removed the to Leroy, death still pursued the . As the old time papers would say: "The rider on the pale horse kept pace with them."

The government at the time was unable to send them clothing or rations, or at any rate did not assist them. After their removal to the vicinity of Leroy, hundreds died in their new camp. They were buried by the survivors in shallow graves, in hollow logs, with the ends of the logs closed with chunks of wood. Anything to prove a hurried burial with an attempt to keep the bodies immune from the depredations of the wolves and other animals.

For many years after the country was settled the white man's plough share turned up the bones of these unfortunate warriors and decayed logs revealed the hiding places of the Indian graves of the sixties.

A citizen of Leroy told the writer that as a boy he plowed up a number of bones on his uncle's (Wm. T. Hamilton) farm, one mile west and mile north of Leroy. He asked his uncle if he knew anything about them and he replied that they were the bones

of some of the Chief Opothleyshola's tribe of Indians.

The Indians were camped from a point about eight miles southwest of Leroy to about three miles northwest of the town. They were poorly clad and ill fed. They killed their ponies by the hundreds to subsist upon their flesh and the horses themselves died by the hundreds from starvation.

Mr. W. S. Callmore gives an enumeration of the Indians as follows: Muskogee 5000, Seminole 1096, Chickasaws 140, Quapaws 315, Euchees 544, Keechis 83, Delawares 197, Comes 240 and 60 Negroes. There were others not included in the above list. The Indians remained in the vicinity for a year or more. Chief "Hope" (as his name was abbreviated) and the most of the Indians were removed by the Government to the Sac and Fox reservation in Franklin County. Chief Hope was considered to be over a hundred years old at the time. He was an exceedingly wise chief and true friend to the Union.

He first came to the Indian Territory in 1836 and was recognized as the greatest war chief the Muskogee's ever had. His retreat into Kansas was a marvel of military genius over the overwhelming strength of his adversaries, both numerically and in equipment. He was defeated by Gen. Jackson in battle and thereafter swore fealty to the Government which he kept faithfully until his death when he was consigned to an unknown grave.

The location of his grave even is in doubt. Some authorities claim Ft. Belmont, a few miles southwest of Yates Center, Kansas, while others state he was buried on the Sac and Fox agency in Franklin County. If the latter surmise is correct, the cemetery is situated $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles south and $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of omone, located on K.68.