

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Cherokee Yarns

Just arrived on my desk is a copy of "Legends of the Ancient Cherokee" a book ordered in March when we spent a delightful couple of days touring in North Carolina and visited Cherokee at the gateway to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. We were told at the Museum of the Cherokee Indian that the book would be published soon and so we left our one dollar bill with the curator and hoped for the best. We are not disappointed. To the contrary we are very pleased with these legends and are sure that any child would be delighted with the stories and with the colored drawings which illustrate them.

The "living museum" which we visited in the village, was conceived by the Cherokee Historical Association, a non-profit organization as part of an ever-expanding program to perpetuate the history and traditions of the Cherokee Indians. The Association also maintains the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, where is displayed the largest and most complete collection of the tribes early handiwork and historical material in America, according to the claim of those in charge.

The cover design and illustrations are by Amanda Crowe. The title of the typical Indian drawing is "Stormy Weather" and the story it gives out to those who can decipher it is this: "Longer than long ago a Cherokee man and woman set out from their home to go to town. For four days and nights they traveled until they came to the town.

"The woman watching the man became angry when she saw him slipping away to go and gamble at the chunky game. She picked up the man's stone axe and made angry war on this head. Then she drug him home and did not go to town again for a long time."

The clouds and rain in the center of the cover design are symbols for stormy weather. Thomas Bryan Underwood and Moselle Stack Sandlin adapted these stories for publication.

Among the delightful legends printed in the small booklet are, "How the Earth Was Made", "The Rattlesnake's Vengeance", "How the Milky Way Came To Be", "Why the Possum's Tale was Bare", "The Race Between the Crane and the Hummingbird", "Why the Buzzard's Head is Bare," and "Why the mink Smells".

We think children would be fascinated with these titles and delighted with the stories.

There is a story to end the book —not so gay and childlike as the stories we have been telling you of, but the serious tale of the removal of the Cherokees in 1838-39 from their native home across the continent to Oklahoma. It is the birthday story of Private John C. Burnett, Captain Abraham McClellan's Company, 2nd Regiment, 2nd Brigade, Mounted Infantry, of what occurred on trek. Burnett was sent as an interpreter into the Smoky mountain country in May 1838. He saw the helpless Cherokees arrested and dragged from their homes, according to his diary, and driven by bayonet point into the stockades. In the chill of a drizzling rain on an October morning he saw them loaded like cattle or sheep into 645 wagons and started toward the west.

"The long painful journey to the west ended March 26th, 1839, with four-thousand silent graves reaching from the foothills of the Smoky mountains to what is known as Indian territory in the west." With that statement the story of the settling of the Cherokees in Oklahoma ended. It was written by Private Burnett on December 11, 1890.