

Papers shed light on Cherokee relocation, genealogy

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (AP)—Jamie Russell reverently runs his finger down page after photocopied page, looking at names, seeking special ones.

He can't stop smiling. Like everyone who looks at the words from the long-forgotten and nearly 200-year-old papers — documents that show how Cherokee Indians lived while stockaded in Chattanooga just before the infamous Trail of Tears—he understands the value these pages hold for finding family and local history.

"Some of these names—families—are still prominent in the Cherokee society today," says Russell, who is Cherokee. "This

is a very valuable thing to have here."

Recorded by Albert S. Lenoir, a federal Indian commissioner during the Cherokee and Creek removal from 1836 to 1838, the papers list names such as Songshell, Raincrow, Calvin Wolf, Ave Vann and Chugualooke. They show that, over time in the encampment at New Echota, a Cherokee capital just north of Calhoun, Ga., Songshell and others had changing numbers of people in their family unit—usually decreasing numbers. And they show that the rations—corn, beef, bacon and salt—also were varied but most often were sparse.

The papers, technically known as Army ration papers, were donated to the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Public Library in the 1940s by the Zeboim Cartter Patten family, descendants of the soldier who recorded the ration distributions at New Echota. Lenoir, the recorder, was the grandfather of Zeboim Cartter Patten's wife.

Only in recent months, after a visit from Cherokee expert Dr. Duane King, did anyone realize what the ration books represent for Chattanooga, the beginning point of the Trail of Tears. About 4,000 Cherokees died on the forced march of about 15,000 Cherokees from

their homes in Georgia to reservations in Oklahoma.

King said the papers gives historians another way to look at the removal.

"The most important thing is they put names with the numbers, in that we can now know about how many Cherokees were forced to remove, and we (can) know when they were removed and how they were removed," King said.

The papers also provide information on the first regional home areas of Cherokees east of the Mississippi, something not really available before, he said.

"The value of these documents will continue to increase

over time, simply because of their age. And as our understanding of them begins to increase, their importance will be even more appreciated," King said.

The books were cataloged and stored among boxes of other Patten papers, said Mary Helms, head of the library's local history and genealogy department.

"Dr. King said these papers are priceless," she said. "He handled them with gloves and helped us understand their importance."

Now the photocopied pages are available for perusal in the local history section of the library, Helms said. The originals are in safekeeping.

Soon archivists hope to be

able to index the pages, she said.

American Indian villages and farms were rich and plentiful along the rivers and streams of the Tennessee Valley when the Spanish explorer Hernando DeSoto came here in 1540.

But by the time the American Revolution ended in 1783, many Cherokees had assimilated into normal European settler life, intermarrying and carrying on ordinary pioneer lives.

However, President Andrew Jackson, an Indian fighter in the early 1800s, wanted them gone. Under the Indian Removal Act of 1830, he ordered the removal of Cherokees from the eastern half of the country.

Panel addresses violence against Native women

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP)—A three-day conference was held in Anchorage to look at the issue of violence against Alaska Native women.

The panel, which concluded Wednesday, included some of the state's most prominent Alaskans and top law enforcement officials. The members of the Alaska Rural Justice and Law Enforcement Commission included U.S. Attorney Nelson Cohen, state Attorney General Talis Colberg, and Public Safety Commissioner Walt Monegan.

The conference, called "Building Momentum," was put on by the Alaska Native Justice Center with funding from the U.S. Justice Department, Office on Violence Against Women.

A separate panel of four women who had been raped or physically abused spoke out about their experiences. Among them was U.S. House candidate Diane Benson. She told the crowd that she was repeatedly sexually abused in foster care.

Benson has talked publicly about her experiences for a

dozen years.

She told the crowd gathered at a downtown hotel that when she went to the police, a Ketchikan officer not only didn't pursue charges but said he wanted to get in on it. She said she was raped three times by age 20. She didn't even try to report those, she said.

The panel asked tough questions about inadequacies in the system that is supposed to respond to the violence. Members of the panel on rural justice admitted they didn't always have good answers.

Benson, a Democrat, has talked publicly about her experiences for a dozen years at victim conferences around the country, though the rapes might be news to people in Alaska.

It's not the kind of thing she'd bring up as a campaign strategy, she said. She talks about the worst times of her life to offer hope to other women, she said.

"If I can be a person who can get out there and do what I do, after this violent, neglectful and abusive kind of history and still demand my dignity, find my self-respect, after all of it, so can somebody else," Benson said.

Lisa Frank, a board member

of the Alaska Native Women's Coalition who lives in Arctic Village, said she was raped 12 years ago Outside and was able to come home to heal. But think of all those assaulted by someone in their village, who may have to see the person who hurt them every day, she said.

"We're coming together and we're talking," said Denise Morris, president of the Alaska Native Justice Center.

Audience members stood one after the other to ask the panel questions.

Why has government funding for substance abuse treatment dropped when everyone knows that's a big need? Why are victims treated poorly by certain prosecutors and law enforcement officers? Shouldn't officers be required to use the specially trained Sexual Assault Response Teams whenever possible?

As to the last question, the answer for troopers is definitely yes, Monegan said. The teams help gather evidence, identify suspects and begin the healing process for victims, he said.



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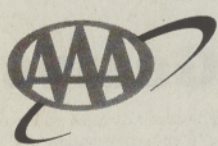
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