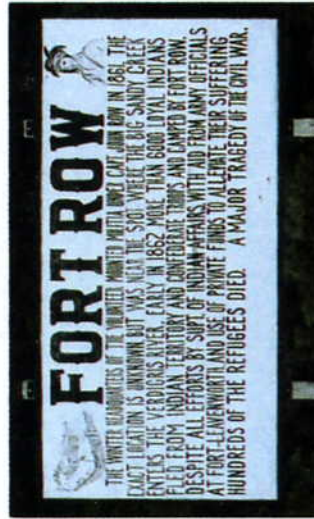


Intertribal animosities—long standing and bitter—divided the Creek Nation long before the white man's war came to Indian Territory in 1861. These tribal hostilities were further compounded by choices to either support the Confederacy or declare favor toward the Union.

### Opothleyahola's Great Escape!

The Creek leader, Opothleyahola, was joined by nearly 10,000 dissidents, some from four other major tribes and 600 black slaves, some their own and others escaped from the Confederate Indians, on a trek from Indian Territory to Kansas and freedom from harassment. They were twice attacked and were 50 miles short of Kansas when a third attack at Bird's Creek sent them fleeing into sub-zero weather without food, clothing or other protection. About 10% of their numbers perished during the first 3 months of 1862 in Wilson and Woodson counties in Kansas.



This sign marks the vicinity of Fort Row. It is located 9 miles north of Fredonia, Kansas, on Harper Road. While there are no visible remnants of the old fort, a visit will give you a good feel for the geography and help you imagine the Indians' winter trek to get here.

The flood of refugees arrived at the area around Fort Row in Wilson County. The fort was really not much more than a local militia stockade and not equipped to aid the thousands who sought shelter. It served about 80 area home guard militia. Indian Agents and US Army officials made small attempts at help during the brutally cold winter, but it was too slow, too little, and too late.

After many died from exposure and starvation from the extreme winter weather, Opothleyahola and his

survivors were moved 12 miles to Fort Belmont in Woodson county.



The site of Fort Belmont south of Yates Center, Kansas, in Woodson County. It is 3 miles south of Yates Center on Hwy. 75 to 80th Road, then 2 miles west to Kanza Road and 1/4 mile south. 240 refugees died here the first two months of 1862 and over 100 amputations were performed here. Opothleyahola's daughter was the first to be buried; he soon followed. They are both still buried in Woodson County in unmarked graves, the exact location unknown. The refugees then moved to Neosho Falls and Coffey County.

Finally the remaining healthy were taken to LeRoy in Coffey County where the Superintendent of Southern Indians was headquartered. Here, 1000 surviving Indians and Blacks volunteered to form the 1st Indian Home Guard Regiment in 1862 and marched four abreast to Camp Hunter/Logtown at Humboldt in Allen County. This brought great opposition from officers under whom they were to serve. Refugee Blacks acted as interpreters between the Indians and the officers.



Visit the Opothleyahola Memorial building across from the library at LeRoy, Kansas, commemorating the bravery of these people and follow the wooded rivers and roads in some of the area's best kept secrets. Explore beauty in the wildflower bountiful late spring and summer, or experience colorful autumn when the leaves add

their glory to the landscapes. Take time to explore lesser traveled roads for a truly enjoyable trip. Celebrate first-hand this important but little known segment of Kansas history when Native Americans and African Americans demonstrated their "enduring struggle for freedom" by fleeing into free-state Kansas where some survived.

Leroy was the first county seat of Coffey County, founded in 1857. William Coffin, Southern Indian Superintendent had to headquarter there in the early 1860s. The town played an important part in Bleeding Kansas' pre Civil War days.



At Humboldt, Allen County, visit South Park (west end of Pine), former site of Camp Hunter/Logtown. From here, the 1st Indian Home Guard Regiment went south to fight border battles in Indian Territory during the Civil War. Visit Humboldt Historical Museum at 2nd & Neosho and view the DVD: Tracing Trails of Blood on Ice. "Reconciliation Ceremony between Descendants of Opothleyahola and Black Slaves".



Many Osage artifacts have been found in Wilson County from the days when the land was part of the Osage Indian reservation. At left are some of the artifacts on display at the Norman #1 museum at 106 S. 1st in Neodesha, Kansas.

Wilson County extended to the Indian Territory border and was the Osage Indian reservation. These people, also under duress due to the loss of their corn supply at the sacking of Humboldt did not stand in the way of the refugees streaming northward.

