

**REBECCA  
KETCHER  
NEUGIN  
1830-1932**



**LAST  
SURVIVOR  
OF CHEROKEE  
REMOVAL**

In the 1830s, the Cherokees were forcibly relocated from their ancestral lands in the Southeast United States to Indian Territory. Three-year-old Rebecca Ketcher left her home with her family, along with other Cherokees, on the Trail of Tears.

Rebecca Ketcher was born in 1830 in Georgia. In May 1838, the family of Tickaneesky and Sallie Ketcher were rounded up by soldiers and marched to a Tennessee camp where they stayed until they were forced on the death march in September. Her father loaded his wagon with provisions for the trip. Her mother was allowed to retrieve bedding and cooking utensils she could carry. They didn't reach Indian Territory until the next summer.

In the winter of 1829, gold was discovered in great abundance upon Cherokee soil in Georgia. Mining operations quickly sprang up. In January 1830, Cherokee warriors, led by Cherokee leader Major Ridge, drove out the white settlers. President Andrew Jackson soon signed the Indian Removal Act, giving the government power to relocate the native population to the west. Major Ridge, against the wishes of John Ross, signed the Treaty of New Echota in 1835, which exchanged Cherokee lands in the east for land in Indian Territory and \$5 million to help them with relocation. John Ross and a majority of the Cherokee National Council rejected the treaty, but it was ratified by the U. S. Senate in 1836.

Only 2,000 Cherokees had left by 1838 so the government sent General Scott and thousands of soldiers to gather the remaining family and put them in camps before the removal. Settlers waited to seize their home and possessions as soon as they left. The Removal began in October 1838, with many Cherokees forced to walk all the way to Indian Territory. They carried heavy loads, and didn't have enough food or medicine. Nearly one-fifth or 4,000 Cherokees died, especially children and the elderly.

Major Ridge settled fifty miles from the territory assigned to the Cherokee. He no longer wished to live among his people. The Ross faction blamed Ridge for the Treaty and the deaths along the trail. In June 1839, Ridge was executed by part of the Ross faction. The U. S. government never paid the Cherokee the \$5 million it promised in the Treaty.

The Ketcher family came into the Goingsnake District and John began looking for a location for his home. Their team of oxen were worn out and unfit for work so he managed to get hold of a team of little mules to work and farm with that first year. John had been willing to come and had planned towards that end. The family moved to a place on Clear Creek, west of Hulbert.

Rebecca never had an opportunity to attend school so she signed her name by mark. Her second husband, Bark Neugin, was a Civil War Union Captain. They lived near Tahlequah until Bark died in 1880, leaving seven children. Rebecca, with the help of her older sons, did some farming. When she needed money, she would walk to Tahlequah, fifteen miles away, and work at the old jail-house washing for a week. Then she would buy the things she needed and have her sons come after her in a wagon.

In 1932, Rebecca was interviewed by Grant Foreman about her Removal experiences. At the time she was the last survivor of the Trail of Tears. Since being so young at the time of Removal, her account was based largely on information given to her by her family. Her narrative provided a first-hand account of the terrible journey. Rebecca died shortly thereafter in July 1932 at age 102.