



The late Howard Walkingstick at the old Walkingstick cemetery on Walkingstick Mountain, Adair County, Oklahoma (Goingsnake District, Cherokee Nation)

Howard was 86 years young in May of 2001 when Michael Gregory and I accompanied him to Walkingstick Mountain knowing that he may need our support upon seeing firsthand the sad state of his old family burial ground. As it turned out, it was Howard who somehow found the strength to uphold all three of us as the full import of the desecration at the cemetery hit us. The markers were strewn about and a cattle pen had been built enclosing the gravesites. Cattle had trampled the stones and many markers were broken if not missing altogether.

Few words were necessary that day as Howard's face said it all. First shock and anger, then disbelief. "How can this have happened?" Quickly recovering himself, mostly for the sake of us boys, as he called us, he slipped into a deep sadness for a very long, short moment. The bones of his ancestors lay here. Forced to this foreign territory during the 1830's by the invasion of the white people into their ancient homelands in the Old Cherokee Nation East, the Walkingsticks had come here. Through hard work and perseverance they made a new home for themselves. Was it so much to ask that their final resting places be left undisturbed? Though the tears that ran down his cheeks had not yet dried, by now Howard was already looking to turn this around, to take a bad situation and turn it into something positive. "Michael," he said, "some of the headstones are still here. Can you make a note of them and take some pictures?" "Joe, can we get the Williams boys to put in a new fence here? And where can we get a sign made for the new fence?"

The current property owners did allow us to install a new fence over a portion of the old burial ground. A new sign in both Cherokee & English was placed at the new gate. With no way of knowing where exactly the scattered markers should be replaced, we carefully placed them within the new enclosure in hopes that for the next few centuries at least, the memorials would be kept safe.

Upon returning home, I had my film developed and was speechless when I saw the above photo of Howard. His tears, the pained look on his face. I quietly put the picture away. It remained buried under my desk for the last six years. Finally I decided it was time to bring out the picture, in hopes of turning a sad situation into something positive. If this picture might prevent even one person from vandalizing a cemetery, or encourage someone to take out a little time to care for the family burial ground, I think that Howard would agree that it is a worthwhile thing.



Joe Scrapper Jr.

Sacred Ground

Can a man really own these lands?
These lands were here long before he arrived,
and they will be here long after he has gone.
Surely these lands more rightfully belong to the trees
which have stood here for hundreds of years,
or do they belong to the rocks and the rivers
which have been here for thousands of years?
Maybe the only land a man can truly call his own is his final resting place. It is here that
the circle of life joins him to the land, and it to him.
This is now Sacred Ground.
Surely then, this small piece of the land can be left unplowed,
undisturbed, out of respect for the one buried here.
I ask that you allow him to rest in peace.
I ask that you do not disturb this grave.
Buried here and there are our parents, our grandparents,
and the grandparents of our parents grandparents.
Respect is due for those who went before us.
They gave us life, without them we would not exist.
They endured many hardships while they walked the path of life.
Cold and hunger they endured, sickness and disease they endured,
treachery and humiliation they also endured.
These things and more they endured so that their children,
and the children of their children's children could also walk the path of life.
I ask that you think on these things before you overturn
a tombstone to plant a few more beans or corn.
I ask that you consider these things before you push aside the markers in a burial ground
to gain a few feet of pasture.
For this is Sacred Ground.
Perhaps one day you too will have your own small piece of land.
Perhaps, in a few years, or in a few centuries,
someone will stop by and place a flower,
or a feather on your land out of respect.
Perhaps, they will gently place a stone on your land to honor you,
and then carefully back away.
I hope that no one disturbs your Sacred Ground,
and I hope you will not disturb the Sacred Ground of others.

Copyright © 1999 by Joe Scaper Jr All rights reserved

Back to **Scraper website** - <http://scraperhistory.com/>