

The Great Hoax against Cherokee Indians

It seems that scam artists have always been around. Here is one who promised a land of paradise to the Cherokees, under his superb guidance, of course. "One of the greatest, most artful, and most successful intriguers the French ever sent amongst the Cherokees was a man named Christian Priber, a German Jesuit in the service of France." and "although a man of great learning and intelligence; a Hebrew, Greek, and Latin scholar, yet he made himself, to all intents and purposes, an Indian."

He selected the town of Coosawattee to be the capitol of his kingdom and when Priber referred to the town in a conversion with a reporter who signed his work Americus, he claimed that Coosawattee or Cussetta, the war capitol of the Creeks had previously been in Cherokee hands. Priber was married to an Indian woman and advertised that his kingdom of paradise was also open to Creeks and that women could frequently marry different men, however, her children would be heirs of the state. His proposals caused great concern to the officials in Georgia and the Carolinas.

What concerned them most was that he was willing to allow the French and black slaves to live freely in his Paradise. Oglethorpe believed he had already been in contact with Spanish. Priber, however, won the confidence of the natives and impressed them with feelings of hatred and contempt for the English. Also, the use of rum degraded their manhood and they were plagued with small-pox which was prevalent when a pack-horse train carried goods to Charlestown. Meanwhile, he was stirring up such troubles between the natives and settlers that Charlestown offered 402 Pounds to Colonel Joseph Fox to find Priber among the Cherokee and return him to the city. The reward was to be paid by the English Board of Trade.

About 1741, Priber went to Mobile which was a French town at that time near the navigation on the Tallapoosa. The English traders among the Creeks suspecting the object of his journey, went in a body to the town of

Tookahatchka where he was lodging and arrested him. They then carried him to Frederica and delivered him to General Oglethorpe who put him in prison, where he soon afterwards died. Priber was known to have written a Cherokee dictionary, but this work did not survive. Priber was fluent in Cherokee, Creek, and possibly other Indian languages and variations of the "trading language." According to Oglethorpe he spoke fluent German, French and Latin, but broken English.

Source: History of Edgefield County, South Carolina by John A. Chapman, A. M. (1897). South Carolina County Records and Histories