

# **TRAIL OF TEARS MOTORCYCLE RIDE THE REAL STORY**

**By Bill Cason, Ride Leader & Originator**

**In 1994 I started the Trail of Tears Motorcycle Ride. Jerry Davis formed a Trail of Tears committee. He chose each person that he wanted on the committee. He did not own a motorcycle, nor did he know how to ride one. From then on, I made all decisions and handled all matters concerning the motorcycle ride because it belonged to me. I personally drew by hand the first flyer advertising the ride.**

**The goal of the committee was to recognize a trail that had been lost in history and to get a resolution passed in Alabama proclaiming it as an official trail. That goal has long since been accomplished with the resolution being passed, by putting a historical marker in Waterloo, AL and Chattanooga, TN, trailblazer signs on both sides of the highway from Chattanooga to Waterloo, and an \$18,000 retaining wall to keep the land from eroding where the marker was placed in Waterloo.**

**After the 2005 Trail of Tears ride, it was realized that merchandise sales (which funded Native American scholarships, Historical Markers, Trailblazer signs, porta-johns, police escorts, road barricades, and other expenses) were way down due to the fact that the town of Waterloo was allowing too many other vendors to sell Trail of Tears shirts (including Waterloo's own shirt booth). Mayor McIntyre was asked to limit those types of vendors and replace them with others (this would not reduce the amount of vendor fees that he took in—yes, Waterloo kept all money from vendor fees while we paid for the powwow, escorts, and porta-johns). The mayor agreed to do something about the situation, but put his decision off until we mailed out the 2006 Ride Flyers all over the country. He then refused to limit those types of vendors, so our board of directors voted by majority vote (including Jerry Davis and Rod Wheeler) to move the event to McFarland Park in Florence. Jerry vowed that if I took the ride into McFarland Park, he would follow me. I decided that the ride would end in McFarland also. The next day and after the wheels were in motion to make the change, Jerry Davis, Patricia Young, and Rod Wheeler changed their minds and joined forces with Mayor McIntyre (Politics). Someone started the rumor that Florence had been trying to take over the event for years, but the Board had never in 13 years been approached by anyone about moving it to Florence—it was strictly a TOT board decision.**

**At our August, 2006 board meeting Jerry and Patricia brought a group of non-board members. As we tried to have a meeting, Jerry and Patricia started yelling at our President, so the meeting had to be adjourned. They insisted that we were illegal because no amendments had been filed at the courthouse since our incorporation. Ms. Young was our so-called executive secretary at that time and everyone assumed she was fulfilling her duties by filing all amendments in Huntsville where our headquarters was located and where she resides. The first**

**amendment upon our incorporation was that we would not have members—only a board of directors to handle the event.**

**Thinking that Davis, Young, and Wheeler would be removed from the board because of their disloyalty, they went to Waterloo during the Trail of Tears event and sold memberships. In October, they held an illegal meeting with these new members and supposedly voted the other 7 of us off the board. None of the original members listed on the Articles of Incorporation were invited to the meeting except for Davis and Young.**

**A lot of illegal things ensued due to our then TOT lawyer advising both groups to do different things. Some of the details of their lawsuit against us and our countersuit against them cannot be discussed at this time. Basically they want my motorcycle ride or to stop me from bringing it into Alabama if they can't have it. They also want a domain name that also belongs to me and they have accused me of taking the Harley Davidson dealership sponsors away from them. The dealerships sponsored me and Ken Markham because they know us and what we stand for. We gave the other group the old TOT logo, and the organization name, and left \$10,000 in the bank account (all money is accounted for by audit). We wanted nothing else to do with those types of people. We are suing them for slandering our good names and for the cost of all litigation. We are also asking them to cease and desist putting out false information and to select a different date if they plan to start a motorcycle ride in the future. The only ride that left Chattanooga this year was the Trail of Tears Remembrance Ride led by me. A defense fund has been established to raise money for our legal fees so that our money for scholarships will not be affected. Please visit our web site at [www.trailoftears-remembrance.org](http://www.trailoftears-remembrance.org). All donations will be greatly appreciated.**

**Since the original goals of the AL-TN Trail of Tears Corridor Assn. had been fulfilled and after realizing that none of the changes we had voted on through the years had happened, the 7 of us decided to form a new corporation, the Trail of Tears Remembrance Assn., that would allow us to expand our scholarship program and erect historical markers in other states. Thanks to monetary donations from our many friends and our sponsors who believed in us and our cause, we were able to make this happen.**

**We have been accused of trying to change history, but that is not true. That particular trail that we marked goes from Chattanooga to Waterloo, but there are many other trails, and we honor all Native Americans who walked on all of the trails. It is not a reenactment. I have made many changes through the years that were necessary due to the continued growth of the ride that most people don't even realize. The first ride was in October, 1994. I changed the month to September due to weather and other activities happening in October. I looked at all biker events in the Southeast and chose the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday in September because there were no conflicts. Other stopping places in the past were Scottsboro, Stevenson, Rocket City Harley Davidson in Huntsville, Walmart in Huntsville, and McFarland Park in**

**Florence. This is how the ride has changed and may continue to change as I try to make the ride the best that it can be and for the safety of all participants.**

**I have been asked to address the problem in Madison. Here it is: In January, two Alabama troopers and I visited the police chief in Madison and submitted my ride permit application. The chief assured me that everything was in order and there would be no problem. Eight months later I still did not have a permit. Madison City Councilman Vannoy (Politics again) had issued himself a permit for another ride. At this point, I met with representatives from Huntsville, AL and asked for permission to bring my ride into the area around the new baseball stadium. They assured me that it was a done deal and I went home feeling good about the plan. The next thing I hear is that Huntsville did not have enough time to plan it before the ride. I got the news from a person in Huntsville who had read it in the newspaper. No one called me. Politics again. This is when I decided that we would bypass Huntsville and Madison and ride straight to Florence. Most people can make the ride without refueling. Then came the Deal. Alabama troopers contacted me about stopping in Madison. I still did not have a permit, but they assured me that it would be o.k. They also said that I would have to pick up Councilman Vannoy's VIP's and insert them into my ride because his ride didn't show up. They were told that they would be required to stop in McFarland Park in Florence since that is where my ride goes. They would have to remain there until my ride was completely in the park before they could go on to Waterloo. That was the Deal. The Alabama Troopers and the Florence Police did an excellent job. There is only one guy in Huntsville who owes me an apology. He thought I didn't have a ride, so I hope that he was somewhere in town watching me lead the only Trail of Tears Motorcycle Ride through Huntsville. He now realizes that someone he trusted pulled a deal on him.**

**The Trail of Tears Remembrance Association will continue educating needy Native Americans and other educational projects through the support of everyone who rides with us and buys our official merchandise. From the proceeds of this year's ride, we hope to provide additional scholarships to the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, and to Alabama.**

**The 2007 Trail of Tears Remembrance Ride was one of the best ever despite the controversy. Thanks to everyone who rode with us from Chattanooga to Florence, and also those who continued on to Okmulgee, OK where we presented a scholarship check to the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. A special thanks also to Road Rash Magazine for wanting to know the real story. Hope to see you all on the Trail next year.**