

Steve Stone and the Burial Ground Incident

In 1996, right after Steve broke his foot, and got deeply involved in the Trail of Tears, something happened in the town where he lived. In fact, it happened practically next door. It was just one of many fascinating coincidences relating to his art and understanding of Native Americans that still make him shake his head today.

You see, there was a piece of property near where Steve lived that became very controversial. The people who owned it wanted to build a house there, but when that became known, it caused a storm of indignation. Why? Because at least part of the land was generally thought to be a Native American burial ground. And before long, that information spread to Native American communities across the country.

Onsite protests against the building of the house in question popped up that included around 100 Native Americans from all different parts of the country and representing multiple tribes. And when Steve found out they needed a place to set up their tents for several days, he let them use his property. His empathy for their cause and his growing understanding of how Native Americans had been treated in the past made him happily become their host.

As part of the protest, Steve's new friends invited local people, and anyone else who was interested, to join them in a pow wow like atmosphere. And people did come, including Steve. He got to know a lot of the Native Americans and he even joined them in their customary dances. He called it "hobble dancing" for him since he still had only recently take the cast of his damaged foot. But most of all, Steve was honored to be asked to read his poem, "Lost Lake Cherokee," to the assembled group.



Note: This 1996 newspaper photo shows Steve sitting on his land near the creek where his boys found the slate for his first art project and where his Native American visitors set up their camp.

Behind Steve are the remains of a sweat lodge from that visit and next to him are two of his first marble sculptures. The carvings are replicas of artifacts discovered in Native American mounds. The small one is called, "The Kneeling Man," and was

found in Shiloh Tennessee. The larger one is named, "The Squatting Man," and was found in Moundville Alabama.

As heartfelt as the protest was, however, it did nothing to change the course of events. Eventually, the house was built on the property. The thing is, Steve paid a big price for his support of the Native American protesters. Certain neighbors and others in his town turned against him for his efforts. And that included some people in his church, including

the minister. Saddened by those negative reactions, Steve left the church and found himself somewhat isolated in his community.

Steve wanted to understand Native Americans and Native American history, but he wasn't counting on sharing their experience of being excluded. Even so, it was indeed, a very enlightening lesson that he could probably never have learned any other way. And in the process, those events greatly sharpened his desire to expose the terrible mistreatment of Native Americans in the past and to honor those who suffered the most. And in this way, Steve now hopes that his art will help promote kindness, compassion and especially the inclusiveness of all groups of people in this great nation.