

Caddo struggle

By Mary Pierpoint
TODAY CORRESPONDENT

The first encounter between the Caddo Nation and Europeans was in 1542 and the French and the Spanish vied for Caddo territory in the Mississippi Valley area in what is now Louisiana in the late 17th century.

Now LaRue Parker, chairwoman of the Caddo Nations of Oklahoma, battling to prevent her ancestors from being dug up and sold to artifact collectors in Europe.

As the Caddos were displaced over and over again, they left behind their Caddoan Mounds, burial and sacred religious sites.

The Louisiana Purchase changed the lives of the Caddos forever in 1803, as Americans moved into their homelands on a quest for more and more land. Displaced, the Caddos were sent to Texas. By 1857, the displacement was complete - they were moved to reservations along the Brazos River. Once a nation that lived in woodlands, the Caddo were forced on to semi-arid prairies. Those who didn't starve or die from disease were constantly harassed by other displaced tribes in the area. Yet they survived, a at a high price, leaving all that was sacred behind.

Their homeland and dead

Please See **NO** page **C3**

INDIAN COUNTRY TODAY, WEDNESDAY, MAY 3, 2000

No protection in Texas

from page C1

ancestors were in the hands of strangers who didn't understand the rich tradition and culture. The new landowners and those who succeeded them considered the sacred mounds private property and are disposing of the artifacts and remains of the Caddo dead through sales to collectors and museums around the world.

"Our tribe originally came from Louisiana, Arkansas and Texas," Parker said "It was a huge confederacy of Caddos. When we finally were moved to Oklahoma there were 300. We are now back to about 4,000."

With no land base for protection in Texas, the Caddo are fighting to stop the grave robbing.

"The wholesale selling of our pottery and our ancestors is something we are really concerned about," Parker said. "If there are Caddo mounds and gravesites on private property in Texas, those people can take anything out, even the skeletons and sell them, and the tribe can't do anything. There are lots of Caddo mounds and they

are sacred sites. They are being dug up, leveled and used as farmland. There are no laws in Texas like there are in Louisiana to prevent this."

Parker had hoped to voice her

**"THERE ARE LOTS OF
CADDO MOUNDS AND THEY
ARE SACRED SITES. THEY
ARE BEING DUG UP, LEVELED
AND USED AS FARMLAND,"
CADDO CHAIRWOMAN
LARUE PARKER SAID.
"THERE ARE NO LAWS IN
TEXAS LIKE THERE ARE IN
LOUISIANA TO PREVENT
THIS."**

concerns at the recent Tribal Leader's Summit in Albuquerque.

She hoped the first step in stopping the grave robbing would be to help presidential candidates understand the problem. But, since none of the candidates was present, her pleas went unheard.

"There are thousands of Indians who live in cities. We have Caddos who live in every major city in the United States. They have needs, too, and we can't reach all their needs. The basic needs of all tribes are education and health. That is what we are trying to do here, along with letting people know about the mounds," she said.

Parker is aware she has to protect current members of the Nation as well as the ancestors left behind. She works hard to balance the two as she tries to get legislation passed in Texas to make selling Caddo remains and artifacts against the law.

"Nobody wants their ancestors dug up, raked over, sold off. Nobody in the world wants that. Yet it is happening to our Native people, Caddos," she said, shaking her head.

MARY PIERPOINT INDIAN COUNTRY
Right: LaRue Parker, Caddo chairwoman, fights to prevent sale of her ancestors.