



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

The University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center will use a \$50,000 grant to bring together descendants of 72 Native Americans held captive in St. Augustine, Florida from 1875 to 1878.

The project, “Calling Back the Spirits: A Healing Journey,” hopes to uncover more oral history of the experiences of those held as prisoners of war and what happened after release.

The National Endowment for the Humanities donated the funds for OUHSC to hold a three-day convening of tribal leaders, scholars, museum professionals and descendants of Native American prisoners of war from Fort Marion in St. Augustine, also known as Castillo de San Marcos, to discuss experiences stemming from captivity.

Dolores Subia Bigfoot, a child psychologist by training and a presidential professor who directs the Indian Country Child Trauma Center within the Center on Child Abuse and Neglect at OUHSC, is the principal investor for the grant.

“What we’re doing is bringing together as many descendants of these 72 POWs that went to Fort Marion 150 years ago,” Bigfoot said. “And to some of them, some of the families have stories. Some of them don’t have very much information.”

The convening is set to take place from March 25 to 27 at OUHSC in Oklahoma City. The funds granted will pay for mileage, hotel rooms and supplies.

“We want to give people an opportunity to come together in an event that hasn’t occurred before, and to gather any oral stories not necessarily about Fort Marion, but just their own experiences,” Bigfoot said. “And also to do the convening in such a way that is not re-traumatizing, but that we have some healing aspects that will be comforting and reassuring and soothing as we go through this process.”

Bigfoot said the convening is just the first step of the project. She said other elements will include an exhibit, a book, historical markers and more events. Also in the works is figuring out how to get bronze busts made of some of the prisoners for an exhibit.

Bigfoot’s late husband’s grandparents, Medicine Water, a leader of the Cheyenne Bowstring Society, and his wife Mo-Chi were held together at Fort Marion as they were seen as key figures opposing U.S. encroachment.

Ten of the 72 prisoners from the Kiowa, Arapaho, Caddo, Cheyenne and Comanche tribes died in the fort, Bigfoot said.

Bigfoot said the project is working with a professor from the University of Central Florida looking into identifying where the graves are located.

“We can showcase and highlight the impact of the last 500 years, much less the last 200 years, and what led up to Fort Marion and that captivity, and then what happened afterward, and how that impact has been for the last 150 years on these families,” Bigfoot said.