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Review of *The Standing Bear Controversy: Prelude to Indian Reform* By Valerie Sherer Mathes and Richard Lowitt

Sidney L. Harring

City University of New York, harring@mail.law.cuny.edu

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removed to the Indian Territory after a negotiation process in which, since such terms as “land,” “sale,” and “removal” had no meaning in the Ponca language, they could not possibly have understood what was happening to them. In the Indian Territory they died by the hundreds, a result, in the view of the Office of Indian Affairs, to be “expected” whenever a cold weather tribe was moved to the south. Standing Bear walked back, carrying the body of the sixteen-year-old son he had promised to bury in his own country. He was arrested by the army and held in Fort Omaha. With the help of white friends he challenged his imprisonment, arguing that an Indian had as much right to travel in the United States as did any other person. At stake was the whole question of the legal status of Indians, and Indian citizenship.

The Standing Bear Controversy is a welcome addition to the steady series of books describing the legal history of Indians in the United States. More than any other population in America, Indians repeatedly went to the courts to seek redress for the injustice done them time after time. Each case is different, as each struggle takes a different legal form. Standing Bear nominally won his case, when the United States decided not to appeal, but the Ponca never got back their lands. Indian sovereignty and the entire question of the legal status of Indians was deeply rooted in the fundamental issue of who owned Indians’ land. The forced removal of Indians from their lands was the central fact of the development of the American West. This is an important study of one part of that history.

The Standing Bear Controversy: Prelude to Indian Reform. By Valerie Sherer Mathes and Richard Lowitt. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003. x + 211 pp. Photographs, map, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95.

Standing Bear v. George Crook, an 1879 case brought in the Federal District Court in Omaha, is today little more than a footnote in United States Indian law. Yet this case, like thousands of other cases that American Indians brought to US courts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was an important effort by one group of Indians to define their relationship with the United States through law. The Ponca story is among the best known, but certainly no more tragic than many of the other Indian cases.

The Ponca’s lands were given to the Lakota, without their knowledge or consent. They were

SIDNEY L. HARRING
School of Law
City University of New York