

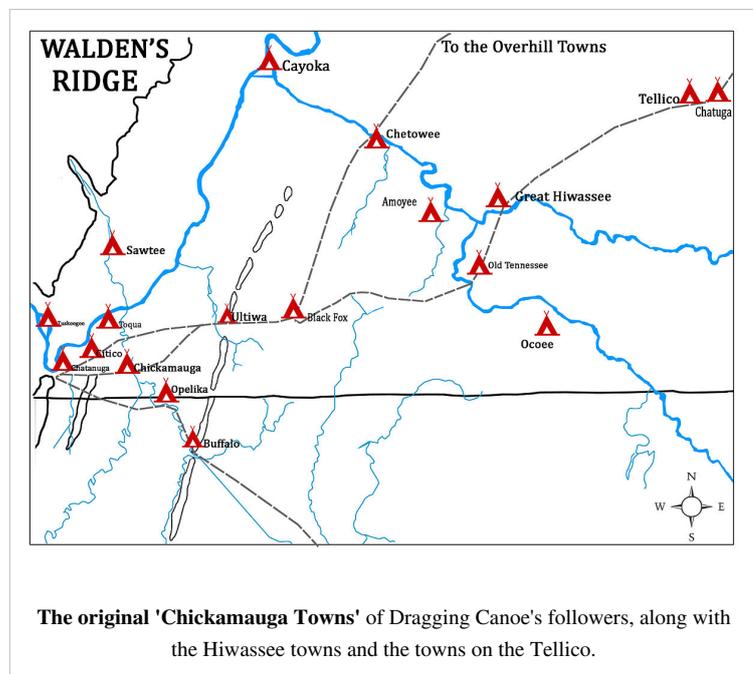
Chickamauga Cherokee

The **Chickamauga Cherokee**, also known as the **Lower Cherokee**, were a band of Cherokee who supported Great Britain at the outbreak of the American Revolutionary War. Followers of the Cherokee chief Dragging Canoe, in the winter of 1776/1777, they moved with him down the Tennessee River away from the historic Overhill Cherokee towns. In this more isolated area, they established almost a dozen new towns to gain distance from colonists' encroachment. The frontier people often referred to the people as "Chickamaugas," after the name of the new town on the Chickamauga River where Dragging Canoe resided. After the Cherokee moved further west and southwest five years later, they were more commonly known as the "Lower Cherokee," after the "Five Lower Towns," whose people originally formed the new settlement. Neither they nor other Cherokee considered them separate from the 19th-century Cherokee people.

Migration to the Chickamauga and Lower Towns areas

"Chickamauga" towns

Establishing these communities further down river allowed (at least initially) the band to insulate themselves from the constant encroachment of settlers migrating west from Georgia, Tennessee, Virginia and North Carolina. Migration increased in the years following the Revolutionary War. Dragging Canoe and his Cherokee followers settled at the place where the Great Indian Warpath crossed the Chickamauga River, near present-day Chattanooga, Tennessee, naming their town Chickamauga after the river. The entire adjacent region was referred to in general as the Chickamauga area, and for the reason American settlers in the early years of the wars called the militant Cherokee "Chickamaugas". In 1782, the eleven Cherokee towns were destroyed by militia forces under John Sevier and William Campbell. Dragging Canoe led his people further down the Tennessee River.



"Five Lower Towns"

Dragging Canoe relocated his people west and southwest, into new settlements centered on Running Water (now Whiteside) on Running Water Creek. The other towns founded at this time were: Nickajack (near the cave of the same name), Long Island (on the Tennessee River), Crow Town (at the mouth of Crow Creek), and Lookout Mountain Town (at the site of the current Trenton, Georgia). In time more towns spread south and west and all these were referred to as the Lower Towns. From this the "Chickamaugas" or "Chickamauga Cherokee" began to be referred to as "Lower Cherokee".

Constant war

The Chickamauga Cherokee became known for their uncompromising enmity against United States settlers, who had pushed them out of their traditional territory. From Running Water, Dragging Canoe led attacks on white settlements all over the American Southeast. Later, his Chickamauga warriors raided as far as Indiana, Kentucky and Virginia (along with the Western Confederacy—which they helped establish). Due to a growing belief in the Chickamauga cause, as well as the destruction of the homes of the other Native Americans, a majority of the Cherokee came to be allied against the US.

After the death of Dragging Canoe in 1792, his hand-picked successor John Watts assumed control of the Lower Cherokee. Under Watts' lead, the Lower Cherokee continued their policy of Indian unity and hostility toward European Americans. Watts moved his base of operations to Willstown to be closer to his Muscogee allies. Prior to this, he had concluded a treaty in Pensacola with the Spanish governor of West Florida, Arturo O'Neill de Tyrone, for arms and supplies with which to carry on the war. The Chickamauga/Lower Cherokee and the frontiersman were continuously at war until 1794, in what were called the Chickamauga Wars.

On the "Chickamauga" or "Lower Cherokee" as a separate tribe

When a representative of the Moravian Brethren, Brother Steiner, met with Richard Fields at Tellico Blockhouse in 1799, the former Lower Cherokee warrior whom he had hired to serve as his guide and interpreter. Br. Steiner had been sent south by the Brethren to scout for a location for a mission and school they planned to build in the Nation, ultimately located at Spring Place on land donated by James Vann. On one occasion, Br. Steiner asked his guide, "What kind of people are the Chickamauga?". Fields laughed, then replied, "They are Cherokee, and we know no difference."^[1]

In truth, the Chickamauga Towns and the later Lower Towns were no different vis-a-vis the rest of the Cherokee than were the Middle Towns, Out Towns, (original) Lower Towns, Valley Towns, or Overhill Towns into which the Cherokee were grouped when the Europeans first encountered them. The groupings did not constitute separate political entities as much as groupings for geographic convenience. The only real government among the Cherokee was by town and clan, and though there were regional councils, these had no binding powers. The Chickamauga/Lower Cherokee were no more a separate tribe from the rest of the Cherokee than were the Overhill Cherokee, the Valley Cherokee, etc.

The only "national" position which existed before 1788 was First Beloved Man, which was in reality nothing more than a chief negotiator from the boondocks towns of the Cherokee farthest from the reach of the intruders. Yes, after 1788 there was a national council of sorts, but it met irregularly and at the time had no prescriptive or proscriptive powers. Even after the peace of 1794, the Cherokee were broken up into five groups: the Upper Towns (formerly the Lower Towns of western Carolina and northeastern Georgia), the Overhill Towns, the Hill Towns, the Valley Towns, and the (new) Lower Towns, each with their own regional councils more important than the "national" council at Ustanali.

It should be apparent from the number of times which Dragging Canoe spoke to the National Council at Ustanali and the fact that he publicly acknowledged Little Turkey as the senior leader of all the Cherokee, along with the fact that he was memorialized at the council following his death in 1792, that the "Chickamauga" were exactly as Richard Fields said, Cherokee. If that is not enough, there is the constant communication between leaders of the "Chickamauga" with the Cherokee of other regions, the number of times warriors from the Overhill Towns and other groups participating in the warfare, and the number of "Chickamauga" who signed treaties with the federal government along with other leaders of the Cherokee *as Cherokee*.

Dick Justice, The Glass, Tahlonteeskee (brother of Doublehead), John Jolly (*Ahuludiski*; his nephew and adopted father of Sam Houston), John Brown (owner of Brown's Tavern, Brown's Landing, and Brown's Ferry, as well as judge of the Chickamauga District of the Cherokee Nation), Young Dragging Canoe, Richard Fields, and red-headed Will Weber, for whom *Titsohili* was called Willstown, among others. The former warriors of the Lower Towns dominated the political affairs of the Nation for the next twenty years and were in many ways more conservative, adopting many facets of acculturation but keeping as many of the old ways as possible.^[2]

Roughly speaking, the Lower Towns were south and southwest of the Hiwassee River along the Tennessee down to the north border of the Muscogee nation and west of the Conasauga and the Ustanali in Georgia while the Upper Towns were north and east of the Hiwassee and between the Chattahoochee and the Conasauga. This was approximately the same area as the later Amohee, Chickamauga, and Chattooga Districts of the Cherokee Nation East.^[3]

The settlements of the Cherokee remaining in the highlands of western North Carolina which had become known as the Hill Towns, with their seat at Quallatown, and the lowland Valley Towns, with their seat now at Tusquitee, were more traditional, as was the Upper Town of Etowah, notable for being inhabited mostly by full-bloods and for being the largest town in the Nation. In addition, the Overhill towns remaining along the Little Tennessee remained more or less autonomous, with their seat, naturally, at Chota.

All five regions had their own councils, which predominated in importance over the nominal nation council until the reorganization in 1810 after the council that year at Willstown.

Leaders of the Lower Towns in peacetime

John Watts remained the head of the council of the Lower Cherokee at Willstown until his death in 1802. Afterwards, Doublehead, already a member of the triumvirate, moved into that position and held it until his death in 1807 at the hands of The Ridge, Alexander Saunders (best friend to James Vann), and John Rogers, a white former trader who had first come west with Dragging Canoe in 1777 and was now considered a member of the nation, even sitting on the council. He was succeeded by The Glass, who was also assistant principal chief of the nation to Black Fox, and remained at the head of the Lower Towns council until the unification council in 1810.



The Ridge (*Ganundalegi*), formerly known as Pathkiller (*Nunnehidihi*), illustration from *History of the Indian Tribes of North America*.

By the time of the visit to the area by John Norton (a Mohawk of Cherokee and Scottish ancestry) in 1809–1810, many of the formerly militant Cherokee were among the most acculturated members of the Cherokee nation. James Vann, for instance, was a plantation owner with over a hundred slaves and one of the wealthiest men east of the Mississippi. Norton became a personal friend of Turtle-at-Home as well as John Walker, Jr. and The Glass, all of whom were involved in business and commerce. At the time of Norton's visit, Turtle-at-Home himself owned a ferry on the Federal Road between Nashville and Athens, Georgia, where he lived at Nickajack, which had itself spread not only down the Tennessee but across it to the north as well, eclipsing Running Water.

When pressure began to be applied to the Cherokee Nation for its members to emigrate westward across the Mississippi, leaders of the Lower Towns, such as

Tahlonteskee, Degadoga, John Jolly, Richard Fields, John Brown, Bob McLemore, John Rogers, Young Dragging Canoe, George Guess (*Tsiskwaya*, or Sequoya) and Tatsi (aka Captain Dutch) spearheaded the way. These men established in Arkansas Territory what later became the Cherokee Nation West, which moved to Indian Territory after the treaty in Washington of 1828 between their nation and the federal government, becoming the "Old Settlers".

Likewise, the remaining leaders of the Lower Towns proved to be the strongest advocates of voluntary westward emigration, even as they were most bitterly opposed by those former warriors and their offspring who led the Upper Towns. Many of the latter, such as Major Ridge (as The Ridge had been known since his military service during the Creek and First Seminole Wars), his son John Ridge, his nephews Elias Boudinot and Stand Watie, ultimately switched sides to join westward emigration advocates John Walker, Jr., David Vann, and Andrew Ross (brother of then Principal Chief John Ross) leading to the Treaty of New Echota in 1835 and the Cherokee removal in 1838–1839.

Tecumseh's return and later events

Before beginning his great campaign, Tecumseh returned to the South in November 1811 hoping to gain the support of the southern tribes for his crusade to drive back the Americans and re-establish the old ways. He was accompanied by representatives from the Shawnee, Muscogee, Kickapoo, and Sioux. Tecumseh's exhortations in the towns of the Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Lower Muscogee found no traction, the exception being the Upper Muscogee, and even then only among a sizable faction of the younger warriors, the Upper Muscogee headman, The Big Warrior, having repudiated Tecumseh before the assembly.

There was so much opposition from the Cherokee delegation under warrior The Ridge that visited his council at Tuckabatchee that Tecumseh cancelled plans to visit the Cherokee Nation (The Ridge told him if he showed his face in the Cherokee Nation he would kill him). However, throughout his time in the South, he was accompanied by an enthusiastic escort of 47 Cherokee and 19 Choctaw, who presumably went north when he left the area.^{[4][5]}

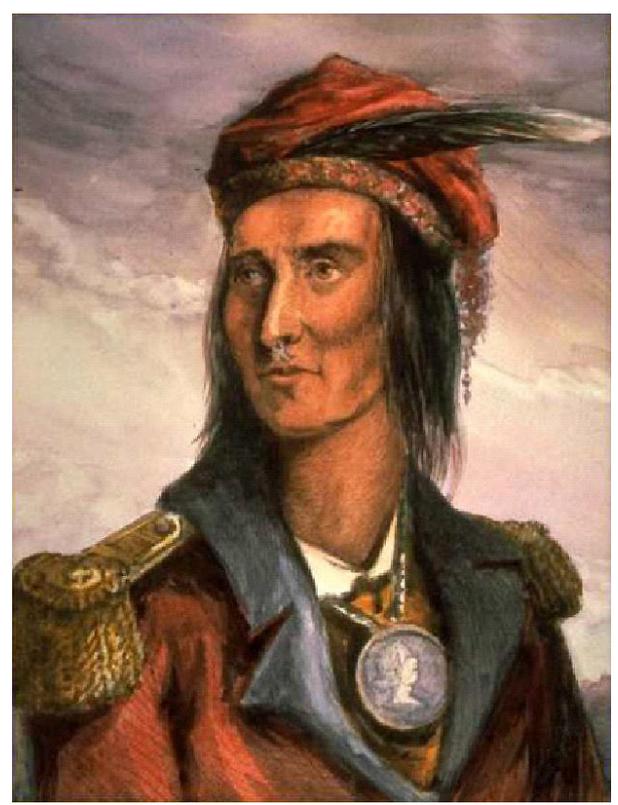
The Creek War

Tecumseh's mission did spark a religious revival which is referred to by James Mooney as the "Cherokee Ghost Dance" movement^[6] and was led by another former Chickamauga warrior, the prophet Tsali of Coosawatee, who later moved to the western North Carolina mountains where he was executed for violently resisting Removal in 1838. In Tsali's meeting with the national council at Ustanali, many of the leaders were moved enough to support his cause, until The Ridge spoke even more eloquently in rebuttal, calling instead for support for the Americans in the coming war with the British and Tecumseh's alliance. This ultimately resulted in over five hundred Cherokee warriors volunteering to serve under Andrew Jackson in helping put down their former Upper Muscogee allies in the Creek War, but only after the Lower Muscogee under William McIntosh, who opposed the war of the "Red Sticks", asked for their help.^{[7][8]}

A few years later, a troop of Cherokee cavalry under Major Ridge attached to the 1400-strong contingent of Lower Muscogee warriors under McIntosh accompanied the force of U.S. regulars, Georgia militia, and Tennessee volunteers into Florida for action in the First Seminole War against the Seminoles, refugee Red Sticks, and escaped slaves fighting against the United States.^[9]

Following that war, Cherokee warriors were not seen on the warpath in the Southeast until the time of the American Civil War, when William Holland Thomas raised the Thomas Legion of Cherokee Indians and Highlanders to fight for the Confederacy, though warriors from the Cherokee Nation East did travel to the lands of the Old Settlers (or Cherokee Nation West) in Arkansas Territory to assist them in their wars against the Osage during the Cherokee-Osage War of 1817–1823.

With one notable exception: in 1830, the State of Georgia seized land in its south that had belonged to the Cherokee since the end of the Creek War, land separated from the rest of the Cherokee Nation by a large section of Georgia territory, and began to parcel it out to settlers. Major Ridge dusted off his weapons and led a party of thirty south, where they drove the settlers out of their homes on what the Cherokee considered their land, and burned all buildings to the ground, but harmed no one.^[10]



A depiction of Tecumseh painted in 1848

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