Cherokee history

Cherokee history draws upon the oral traditions and written history of the Cherokee people, who are currently enrolled in the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Cherokee Nation, and United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians, living predominantly in North Carolina and Oklahoma.

Origins

There are two prevailing views about Cherokee origins. One is that the Cherokees are relative latecomers to Southern Appalachia. The other theory is that they have been there for thousands of years.

Some historians believe that Cherokees came to Appalachia as late as the 13th century. Over time they moved into Muscogee Creek territory and settled on the sites of Muscogee mounds.[1] Several Mississippian sites have been misattributed to the Cherokee, including Moundville and Etowah Mounds but are in fact Muscogee Creek. Pisgah Phase sites are associated with precontact Cherokee culture, and historic Cherokee villages featured artifacts with iconography from the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex.

The other possibility is that Cherokee people have lived in western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee for a far longer period of time. During the late Archaic and Woodland Period, Indians in the region began to cultivate plants such as marsh elder, lambsquarters, pigweed, sunflowers and some native squash. People began building mounds, created new art forms such as shell gorgets, adopted new technologies, and followed an elaborate cycle of religious ceremonies. During Mississippian Period (800 to 1500 CE), Cherokee ancestors developed a new variety of corn called eastern flint, which closely resembles modern corn. Corn was central to several religious ceremonies, especially the Green Corn Ceremony.
Early culture

Much of what is known about pre-19th century Cherokee culture and society comes from the papers of American writer John Howard Payne. The Payne papers describe the account by Cherokee elders of a traditional societal structure in which a "white" organization of elders represented the seven clans. According to Payne, this group, which was hereditary and described as priestly, was responsible for religious activities such as healing, purification, and prayer. A second group of younger men, the "red" organization, was responsible for warfare. Warfare was considered a polluting activity, which required the purification of the priestly class before participants could reintegrate into normal village life. This hierarchy had disappeared long before the 18th century. The reasons for the change have been debated, with the origin of the decline often located with a revolt by the Cherokee against the abuses of the priestly class known as the Ani-kutani. [2]

Ethnographer James Mooney, who studied the Cherokee in the late 1880s, first traced the decline of the former hierarchy to this revolt. [3] By the time of Mooney, the structure of Cherokee religious practitioners was more informal, based more on individual knowledge and ability than upon heredity. [2]

Another major source of early cultural history comes from materials written in the 19th century by the didanvwisgi (Cherokee:ᏗᏓᏅᏫᏍᎩ), Cherokee medicine men, after Sequoyah's creation of the Cherokee syllabary in the 1820s. Initially only the didanvwisgi used these materials, which were considered extremely powerful. [2] Later, the writings were widely adopted by the Cherokee people.

Unlike most other Indians in the American southeast at the start of the historic era, the Cherokee spoke an Iroquoian language. Since the Great Lakes region was the core of Iroquoian language speakers, scholars have theorized that the Cherokee migrated south from that region. However, some argue that the Iroquois migrated north from the southeast, with the Tuscarora breaking off from that group during the migration. Linguistic analysis shows a relatively large difference between Cherokee and the northern Iroquoian languages, suggesting a split in the distant past. [4] Glottochronology studies suggest the split occurred between about 1,500 and 1,800 B.C. [5] The ancient settlement of Kituwa on the Tuckasegee River, formerly next to and now part of Qualla Boundary (the reservation of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians), is often cited as the original Cherokee settlement in the Southeast. [4]

16th century: Spanish contact

The first known European-Cherokee and African-Cherokee contact was in 1540, when a Spanish expedition led by Hernando de Soto passed through Cherokee country. De Soto's expedition visited many of the Georgia and Tennessee villages later identified as Cherokee, but recorded them as then ruled by the Coosa chiefdom, while a Chalalauq nation was recorded as living around the Keowee River where North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia meet. [6] Diseases brought by the Spaniards and their animals decimated the Cherokee and other Eastern tribes. [7]

A second Spanish expedition came through Cherokee country in 1567 led by Juan Pardo. Spanish troops built six forts in the interior southeast. They visited the Cherokee towns Nikwasi, Estatoe, Tugaloo, Conasauga, and Kituwa, but ultimately failed to gain dominion over the region and retreated to the coast. [8]
17th century: English contact

The first Anglo-Cherokee contact was in 1654. English settlers in Virginia fought the Powhatan Confederacy, and 600 Cherokees settled in abandoned Powhatan lands in Virginia. The English colonists and Cherokees fought, with the Cherokees emerging victorious but eventually moving away.\[9\]

In 1673, two Englishmen, James Needham and Garbiel Arthur were sent to Overhill Cherokee county in 1673 by fur-trader Abraham Wood from Fort Henry (modern Petersburg, Virginia). Wood hoped to forge a direct trading connection with the Cherokee to bypass the Occaneechi Indians, who were serving as middlemen on the Trading Path. The two colonial Virginians probably did make contact with the Cherokees. However, Wood called them Rickohockens in his book on the expedition. The map accompanying the book, showed the Rickohockens occupying all of present day southwestern Virginia, southeastern Kentucky, northwestern North Carolina and the northeastern tip of Tennessee.

Needham departed with a guide nicknamed 'Indian John' while Arthur was left behind to learn the Cherokee language. On his journey, Needham engaged in an argument with 'Indian John', resulting in his death. 'Indian John' then tried to encourage his tribe to kill Arthur but the chief prevented this. Arthur, disguised as a Cherokee, accompanied the chief of the Cherokee tribe at Chota on raids of Spanish settlements in Florida, Indian communities on the east coast, and Shawnee towns on the Ohio River. However, in 1674 he was captured by the Shawnee Indians who discovered that under his disguise of clay and ash he was a white man. The Shawnee did not kill Arthur but alternatively allowed him to return to Chota. In June 1674, the chief escorted Arthur back to his English settlement in Virginia. By the late 17th century, colonial traders from both Virginia and South Carolina were making regular journeys to Cherokee lands, but few wrote about their experiences.

The character and events of the early trading contact period have been pieced together by historians' examination of records of colonial laws and lawsuits involving traders. The trade was mainly deerskins, raw material for the booming European leather industry, in exchange for European technology "trade goods", such as iron and steel tools (kettles, knives, etc.), firearms, gunpowder, and ammunition. In 1705, traders complained that their business had been lost and replaced by Indian slave trade instigated by Governor James Moore of South Carolina. Moore had commissioned people to "set upon, assault, kill, destroy, and take captive as many Indians as possible". When the captives were sold, traders split profits with the Governor.\[10\] Although colonial governments early prohibited selling alcohol to Indians, traders commonly used rum, and later whiskey, as common items of trade.\[11\]

During the early historic era, Europeans wrote of several Cherokee town groups, usually using the terms Lower, Middle, and Overhill towns to designate the towns, from the Piedmont across the Allegheny Mountains. The Lower Towns were situated on the headwater streams of the Savannah River, mainly in present-day western South Carolina and northeastern Georgia. Keowee was one of the chief towns, as was Tugaloo.

The Middle Towns were located in present western North Carolina, on the headwater streams of the Tennessee River, such as the upper Little Tennessee River, upper Hiwassee River, and upper French Broad River. Among several chief towns were Nikwasi and Joara, first recorded in the late 16th century during Spanish settlement there with the establishment of Fort San Juan.
The Overhill Towns were located across the higher mountains in present eastern Tennessee and northwestern Georgia. Principal towns included Chota, Tellico, and Tanasi. These terms were created and used by Europeans to describe their changing geopolitical relationship with the Cherokee.[4]

There were two more groups of towns often listed as part of the three: the Out Towns, whose chief town was Kituwa on the Tuckaseegee River, considered the mother town of all Cherokee; and the Valley Towns, whose chief town was Tomotley on the Valley River (not the same as the Tomotley on the Little Tennessee River). The former shared the dialect of the Middle Towns and the latter that of the Overhill (later Upper) Towns.

Of the southeastern Indian confederacies of the late 17th and early 18th centuries (Creek, Chickasaw, Choctaw, etc.), the Cherokee were one of the most populous and powerful. They were relatively isolated by their hilly and mountainous homeland. A small-scale trading system was established with Virginia in the late 17th century. In the 1690s, the Cherokee had founded a much stronger and important trade relationship with the colony of South Carolina, based in Charles Town. By the 18th century, this overshadowed the Virginia relationship.[12]

### 18th century history

Further information: Cherokee military history

The Cherokees gave sanctuary to a band of Shawnee in the 1660s, but from 1710 to 1715 the Cherokee and Chickasaw, allied with the British, fought Shawnee, who were allied with the French, and forced them to move north.[13] Cherokee fought, along with the Yamasee, Catawba, and British in late 1712 and early 1713, against the Tuscarora in the Second Tuscarora War. The Tuscarora War marked the beginning of an English-Cherokee relationship that, despite breaking down on occasion, remained strong for much of the 18th century.

In January 1716, a delegation of Muscogee Creek leaders was murdered at the Cherokee town of Tugaloo, marking the Cherokee's entry into the Yamasee War, which ended in 1717 with peace treaties between South Carolina and the Creeks. Hostility and sporadic raids between the Cherokee and Creek continued for decades.[14] These raids came to a head at the Battle of Taliwa in 1755 (in present-day Ball Ground, Georgia) resulting in the defeat of the Muscogee.

In 1721, the Cherokee ceded lands to South Carolina. In 1730, at Nikwasi, a manipulative Britain, Sir Alexander Cumming, convinced Cherokees to crown Moytoy of Tellico as "Emperor." Moytoy agreed to recognize King George II of Great Britain as the Cherokee protector. Seven prominent Cherokee, including Attakullakulla, traveled with Cuming back to London, England. The Cherokee delegation signed the Treaty of Whitehall with the British. Moytoy's son, Amo-sgasite (Dreadful Water) attempted to succeed him as "Emperor" in 1741, but the Cherokees elected their own leader, Standing Turkey of Chota (or, sometimes, Echota).[1]

Political power among Cherokees remained decentralized with towns acting autonomously. In 1735 the Cherokee were estimated to have sixty-four towns and villages and 6000 fighting men. In 1738 and 1739 smallpox epidemics broke out among the Cherokee, who had no natural immunity. Nearly half their population died within a year. Many—possibly hundreds—of the Cherokee people also committed suicide due to disfigurement from the disease.

From 1753 to 1755, battles broke out between the Cherokee and Muscogee over disputed hunting grounds in North Georgia. Cherokees were victorious in the Battle of Taliwa. British soldiers built forts in Cherokee country to
confront the French, including Fort Loudoun, near Chota. In 1756 the Cherokees fought along side the British in the French and Indian War; however, serious misunderstandings between the two allies arose quickly, resulting in the 1760 Anglo-Cherokee War. The Royal Proclamation of 1763 issued by King George III forbade British settlements west of the Appalachian crest, attempting to afford some temporary protection from colonial encroachment to the Cherokee, but it proved difficult to enforce.[15]

In 1769–72, predominantly Virginian settlers squatting on Cherokee lands in Tennessee, formed the Watauga Association.[16] In "Kentuckee", Daniel Boone and his party tried to create a settlement in what would become the Transylvania colony, but the Shawnee, Delaware, Mingo, and some disgruntled Cherokee attacked a scouting and foraging party that included Boone's son. This sparked the beginning of what was known as Dunmore's War (1773–1774).

In 1776, allied with the Shawnee and led by Cornstalk, Cherokees attacked settlers in South Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, the Washington District and North Carolina in the Second Cherokee War. An Overhill Cherokee, Nancy Ward (a niece of Dragging Canoe), warned settlers of the impending aggression. European-American militias retaliated, destroying over 50 Cherokee towns. In 1777, most of the surviving Cherokee town leaders signed treaties with the states.

Dragging Canoe and his band, however, moved to the area near present day Chattanooga, Tennessee, establishing 11 new towns. Chickamauga was his headquarters and his entire band was known as the Chickamaugas. From here he fought a guerrilla-style war, the Chickamauga Wars (1776-1794). The Treaty of Tellico Blockhouse, signed 7 November 1794, ended the Chickamauga wars.

19th century

The Cherokees organized a national government led by Principal Chiefs Little Turkey (1788–1801), Black Fox (1801–1811), and Pathkiller (1811–1827).

The seat of the Upper Towns was at Ustanali (near Calhoun, Georgia), also the titular seat of the Nation, and with the former warriors James Vann and his protégés The Ridge (formerly known as Pathkiller) and Charles R. Hicks, the "Cherokee Triumvirate", as their dominant leaders, particularly of the younger more acculturated generation. The leaders of these towns were the most progressive, favoring acculturation, formal education, and modern methods of farming.

Facing removal, the Lower Cherokee were the first to move west. Remaining Lower Town leaders, such as Young Dragging Canoe and Sequoyah, were strong advocates of voluntary relocation.

Removal era

In 1815, the US government established a Cherokee Reservation in Arkansas.[17] The reservation boundaries extended from north of the Arkansas River to the southern bank of the White River. The Bowl, Sequoyah, Spring Frog and Tatsi (Dutch) and their bands settled there. These Cherokees became known as "Old Settlers."

John Ross became the Principal Chief of the tribe in 1828 and remained the chief until his death in 1866.
**Treaty party**

Among the Cherokee, John Ross led the battle to halt their removal. Ross' supporters, commonly referred to as the "National Party," were opposed by a group known as the "Ridge Party" or the "Treaty Party". The Treaty Party signed the Treaty of New Echota, stipulating terms and conditions for the removal of the Cherokee Nation from the lands in the East for lands in Indian Territory.

**Trail of Tears**

Cherokees were displaced from their ancestral lands in northern Georgia and the Carolinas in a period of rapidly expanding white population. Some of the rapid expansion was due to a gold rush around Dahlonega, Georgia in the 1830s. President Andrew Jackson said removal policy was an effort to prevent the Cherokee from facing the fate of "the Mohegan, the Narragansett, and the Delaware". However there is ample evidence that the Cherokee were adapting modern farming techniques, and a modern analysis shows that the area was in general in a state of economic surplus.

In June 1830, a delegation of Cherokees led by Chief Ross brought their grievances about tribal sovereignty over state government to the US Supreme Court in the *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* case. In the case *Worcester v. Georgia*, the United States Supreme Court held that Cherokee Native Americans were entitled to federal protection from the actions of state governments. *Worcester v. Georgia* is considered one of the most important decisions in law dealing with Native Americans.

Despite the *Worcester v. Georgia* ruling in their favor, the majority of Cherokees were forcibly relocated westward to Indian Territory in 1838–1839, a migration known as the Trail of Tears or in Cherokee *O安置 Gʷәb or Нәма Дәула Tsvyi* (Cherokee: The Trail Where They Cried). This took place during the Indian Removal Act of 1830. The harsh treatment the Cherokee received at the hands of white settlers caused some to enroll to emigrate west. As some Cherokees were slaveholders, they took enslaved African-Americans with them west of the Mississippi. Intermarried European-Americans and missionaries also walked the Trail of Tears.

On June 22, 1839, Major Ridge, John Ridge and Elias Boudinot were assassinated by a party of twenty-five extremist Ross supporters that included Daniel Colston, John Vann, Archibald Spear, James Spear, Joseph Spear, Hunter, and others. Stand Watie fought off the attempt on his life that day and escaped to Arkansas.
Eastern Band

Some Cherokees were able to evade removal, and they became the East Band of Cherokee Indians. William Holland Thomas, a white storeowner and state legislator from Jackson County, North Carolina, helped over 600 Cherokee from Qualla Town obtain North Carolina citizenship, which exempted them from forced removal. Over 400 other Cherokee either hid from Federal troops in the remote Snowbird Mountains, under the leadership of Tsali (ᏣᎵ), or belonged to in the former Valley Towns area around the Cheoah River who negotiated to stay in North Carolina with the state government. An additional 400 Cherokee stayed on reserves in Southeast Tennessee, North Georgia, and Northeast Alabama, as citizens of their respective states, mostly mixed-bloods and Cherokee women married to white men. Together, these groups were the basis for what is now known as the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

Civil War

Further information: Cherokee in the American Civil War and Native Americans in the Civil War

The American Civil War was devastating for both East and Western Cherokees. Those Cherokees aided by William Thomas became the Thomas Legion of Cherokee Indians and Highlanders, fighting for the Confederacy in the American Civil War. Cherokees in Indian Territory split into Confederate and Union factions.

Reconstruction and late 19th century

As in southern states, the end of the Civil War brought freedom to enslaved African Americans held by Cherokee. By an 1866 treaty with the US government, the Cherokee agreed to grant tribal citizenship to freedmen who had been held by them as slaves. Both before and after the Civil War, some Cherokee intermarried or had relationships with African Americans, just as they had with whites. Many Cherokee Freedmen were active politically within the tribe.

The US government also acquired easement rights to the western part of the territory, which became the Oklahoma Territory, for the construction of railroads. Development and settlers followed the railroads. By the late 19th century, the government believed that Native Americans would be better off if each family owned its own land. The Dawes Act of 1887 provided for the breakup of commonly held tribal land. Native Americans were registered on the Dawes Rolls and allotted land from the common reserve. This also opened up later sales of land by individuals to people outside the tribe.
The Curtis Act of 1898 advanced the break-up of Native American government. For the Oklahoma Territory, this meant abolition of the Cherokee courts and governmental systems by the U.S. Federal Government. This was seen as necessary before the Oklahoma and Indian territories could be admitted as states.

By the late 19th century, the Eastern Band of Cherokees were laboring under the constraints of a segregated society. In the aftermath of Reconstruction, conservative white Democrats regained power in North Carolina and other southern states. They proceeded to effectively disfranchise all blacks and many poor whites by new constitutions and laws related to voter registration and elections. They passed Jim Crow laws that divided society into "white" and "colored", mostly to control freedmen, but the Native Americans were included on the colored side and suffered the same racial segregation and disfranchisement as former slaves. Blacks and Native Americans would not regain their rights as US citizens until the Civil Rights Movement and passage of civil rights legislation in the mid-1960s.

Notable Cherokees in history

- Attakullakulla (ca. 1708-ca. 1777), diplomat to Britain, headman of Chota and chief
- Bob Benge (ca. 1762–1794), warrior of the "Lower Cherokee" during the Chickamauga wars
- Elias Boudinot, Galagina (1802–1839), statesman, orator, and editor, founded the first Cherokee newspaper, the Cherokee Phoenix
- Ned Christie (1852–1892), statesman, Cherokee Nation senator, infamous outlaw
- Rear Admiral Joseph J. Clark (1893–1971), United States Navy, highest ranking Native American in the US military
- Doublehead, Taltsuska (d. 1807), war leader during the Chickamauga wars, led the "Lower Cherokee", signed land deals with the U.S.
- Dragging Canoe, Tsiyugunsini (1738–1792), general during the 2nd Cherokee War, principal chief of the Chickamauga (or "Lower Cherokee")
- Franklin Gritts, Cherokee artist who taught at Haskell Institute and served on the USS Franklin
- Charles R. Hicks (d. 1927), Second Principal Chief to Pathkiller in the early 17th century, de facto Principal Chief from 1813–1827
- Junaluska (ca. 1775–1868), veteran of the Creek War, who saved future president, Andrew Jackson's, life
- Oconostota, Aganstata (ca. 1710–1783), "Beloved Man", war chief during the Anglo-Cherokee War
- Ostenaco, Ustanakwa (ca. 1703–1780), war chief, diplomat to Britain, founded the town of Ultiwa
- Major Ridge Ganundalegi or "Pathkiller" (ca.1771–1839), veteran of the Chickamauga wars, signer of the Treaty of New Echota
- John Ridge, Skatlelohski (1792–1839), son of Major Ridge, statesman, New Echota Treaty signer
- Clement V. Rogers (1839–1911), Cherokee senator, judge, cattleman, member of the Oklahoma Constitutional Convention
- Will Rogers, Cherokee entertainer, roper, journalist, philosopher and author
- John Ross, Guwisguwi (1790–1866), Principal Chief in the east (during the Removal) and in the west
- Sequoyah (ca. 1767–1843), inventor of the Cherokee syllabary
- Nimrod Jarrett Smith, Tsaladihi (1837–1893), Principal Chief of the Eastern Band, Civil War veteran
- William Holland Thomas, Wil' Usdi (1805–1893), a non-Native, but adopted into the tribe; founding Principal Chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians
- James Vann (ca. 1765–1809), Scottish-Cherokee, highly successful businessman and veteran
• Stand Watie, Degataga (1806–1871), signer of the Treaty of New Echota, last Confederate general to surrender in the American Civil War

Notes


[7] Hill, 65


[18] Wishart, p. 120.


References


• Wishart, David M. "Evidence of Surplus Production in the Cherokee Nation Prior to Removal." *Journal of Economic History*. Vol. 55, 1, 1995, p. 120.
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