

SEAL OF THE CHEROKEE NATION

A reproduction in colors of the Seal of the Cherokee Nation appears on the front cover of this summer number of *The Chronicles*, made from the original painting in the Museum of the Oklahoma Historical Society.¹ The official Cherokee Seal is centered by a large seven-pointed star surrounded by a wreath of oak leaves, the border encircling this central device bearing the words "Seal of the Cherokee Nation" in English and seven characters of the Sequoyah alphabet which form two words in Cherokee. These seven characters representing syllables from Sequoyah's alphabet are phonetically pronounced in English "Tsa-la-gi-hi A-ye-li" and mean "Cherokee Nation" in the native language. At the lower part of the circular border is the date "Sept. 6, 1839," that of the adoption of the Constitution of the Cherokee Nation, West.

Interpretation of the device in this seal is found in Cherokee folklore and history. Ritual songs in certain ancient tribal ceremonies and songs made reference to seven clans, the legendary beginnings of the Cherokee Nation whose country early in the historic period took in a wide area now included in the present eastern parts of Tennessee and Kentucky, the western parts of Virginia and the Carolinas, as well as extending over into what are now northern sections of Georgia and Alabama. A sacred fire was kept burning in the "Town House" at a central part of the old nation, logs of the live oak, a hardwood timber in the region, laid end to end to keep the fire going. The oak was thus a symbol of strength and everlasting life in connection with the sacred fire. The seven-pointed star centering the device of the Cherokee Seal represents the seven ancient clans in tribal lore.

The Seal of the Cherokee Nation was adopted by law of the National Council, and approved by Lewis Downing, Principal Chief, on December 11, 1869. The imprint of the seal was used on official Cherokee documents as provided by law, until the close of the Cherokee government at the time that Oklahoma became a State in 1907. The original manuscript of the law providing for the Seal of the Cherokee Nation is preserved on display in the Museum of

¹ The original paintings of each of the official seals of the Five Civilized Tribes were done as a contribution to the Museum of the Oklahoma Historical Society in 1940, by Mr. Guy C. Reid, of Oklahoma City, now Past President of the Oklahoma State Architects Association and member of the Institute of American Architects. Each of these paintings was designed from the impress of the original seals preserved in the Office of the Five Civilized Tribes Agency at Muskogee, and checked for accuracy on the available Indian laws describing the seals. For more details on the history of the Seal of the Cherokee Nation see Muriel H. Wright, "Official Seals of the Five Civilized Tribes," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XVIII, No. 4 (December, 1940), pp. 356-70.

the Oklahoma Historical Society. A facsimile of this rare manuscript appears on the opposite page in this number of *The Chronicles*. The law itself reads as follows:

An Act to Procure a National Seal

Be it enacted by the National Council. That the Principal Chief, be, and he is hereby authorized to procure a National Seal for the use of the Cherokee Nation, to be used by the Principal Chief, and such officers as may be designated by law in the sealing of Documents. and the expense of said seal, shall be paid out of any funds in the National Treasury belonging to the National Fund not otherwise appropriated; and the Principal Chief is authorized to draw warrants accordingly.

Be it further enacted. That the said Seal, shall bear the following devices. Viz: In the centre thereof there shall be a seven pointed star, surrounded with a wreath of oak leaves, and in the margin of said seal, shall be the words "Seal of the Cherokee Nation," Sept. 6th, 1839, and the following Cherokee characters **GWYΔ DβJ** and the said seal shall be one and a half inches in diameter.

Tahlequah, C. N.

Dec. 11, 1869.

Approved

Lewis Downing

Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation

The Cherokee was an Iroquoian tribe that originated in the North but was found in possession of the southern Alleghany region by De Soto's expedition in 1540. Cherokee relations beginning with the British in the Carolina colonies 150 years later made the 18th Century the age of Cherokee heroes under the last of the ancient tribal regime. The old colonial records give the names of Cherokee chiefs and leaders who sparred wits in councils with the colonial authorities, and who fought in battles to save the Cherokee country from European colonists on the east; they also fought in battles with the Iroquois on the north, and the Creeks, on the south. During this century, Irishmen, Germans, Englishmen and Scots who settled and married among the Cherokees were the progenitors of number of mixed-blood Cherokee families, some of whose members were wealthy traders and planters, owners of substantial residences, Negro slaves and herds of cattle by 1800. Some of the children of these families were taught by hired tutors or sent to school in the neighboring states. The establishment of Springplace Mission in Georgia, by the Moravians in 1801 was the beginning of schools

within the Cherokee country that brought educational advantages to the people generally.

The Cherokees were the most advanced of the southeastern Indian tribes by 1828, in which year they established their nation under a written constitution providing for legislative, executive and judicial departments. Their country was divided into eight districts for government purposes, and their capital was established at New Echota,² located a few miles northeast of present Calhoun, Gordon County, Georgia. Cherokee leaders at the same time planned the establishment of institutions of higher learning, a national museum and the preservation of Cherokee history. The first Indian newspaper in America, called the *Cherokee Phoenix*³ was soon published with its columns printed in both the English and the characters of the Cherokee syllabary that had been invented by the famous Sequoyah and was widely used by the people in the nation.

The advancement of the Cherokees as a nation had gone forward under the auspices of the United States government that from the early days of the Republic had established peace with the southeastern Indian tribes and had taken steps to aid them in their steps to become progressive communities. The first treaty between the United States and the Cherokees was signed at Hopewell, on the Keowee River, in present South Carolina, on November 28, 1785. Government commissioners of the time advised that Indians should be paid for lands taken from them, and that the money thus raised should be used to teach them useful branches of mechanics.

Plans for the removal to the West of all the Indian tribes living east of the Mississippi River was promoted by the United States even in President Jefferson's administration when already some of the Cherokees were making their homes in the White River region of what is now the state of Arkansas. These people became known as the Western Cherokees though they were only a small part of the original tribe. Of fourteen treaties between the United States and the Cherokees, including that at Hopewell, eleven made cessions of tribal land. Finally a treaty signed at New Echota on December 29, 1835, by special United States Commissioners, provided the removal of the Cherokees to the West and the sale of all their domain in what are now the Southeastern States. The Cherokee cession by the terms of this Treaty amounted to approximately 8,000,000 acres for which the tribe was paid little more than fifty cents an acre. The policy of the United States for the removal of the eastern tribes to

²The restoration of New Echota, the last capital of the Cherokee Nation in Georgia, carried on under the sponsorship of the Georgia Historical Commission is reviewed in "Notes and Documents" of this number of *The Chronicles*, pp. 229-30.

³A history of the *Cherokee Phoenix* and its successor the *Cherokee Advocate* (first newspaper in Oklahoma, printed at Tablequah, 1844) is Robert G. Martin's "The Cherokee Phoenix: Pioneer of Indian Journalism," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXV, No. 2 (Summer, 1947), pp. 102-118.

the West beyond the Mississippi River and the opposition of the State of Georgia against the continuance of the Cherokee government within her borders created an impossible situation for Cherokees. Major Ridge, his son John, and his two nephews, Elias Boudinot and Stand Waite, with other prominent leaders signed the treaty at New Echota, thinking it the only course open to the tribe. Chief Ross, Assistant Chief George Lowery and other leaders representing a large majority of the people, had not been at the New Echota meeting with the United States Commissioners, and bitterly opposed to the treaty. A proposal made by Chief Ross at Washington some time before this that the Cherokee Nation be paid approximately \$2.50 per acre for its lands had been turned down by Government officials as exorbitant.⁴

Not long after the New Echota council, members of the Ridge party moved west and joined the Western Cherokees, or "Old Settlers," in the Indian Territory. The latter had moved to this region, and established their government, by the terms of the Treaty of 1828, which had provided 7,000,000 acres in what is now North-eastern Oklahoma, as well as some 9,000,000 acres west known as the Cherokee Outlet, to be owned and settled by all the Cherokees, west and east.

Members of the Ross Party, nearly two-thirds of the nation refused to leave Georgia, remaining peaceably in their homes with the hope that the New Echota Treaty would not be carried into effect but Chief Ross's efforts at Washington to have it annulled were not successful. A council was held at Red Clay in 1837, and matters reached a crisis in the following summer. General Winfield Scott, carrying out the orders of President Jackson, established army headquarters at New Echota, and issued a proclamation that every Cherokee man, woman and child must be on the way west within thirty days. The delay came to an end when soldiers under General Scott's orders with rifles and bayonets drove the startled Cherokees from their homes and marched them to stockade encampments. Suffering deprivation and hardship, the emigrants were thence in large groups, on horseback, in wagons and thousands on foot, under military supervision over several different routes to the West, in the midst of (1838-39) winter storms.⁵ Others of the Five Civilized Tribes had had similar experiences, beginning with the Choctaw Removal from Mississippi in 1831-2, and today in retrospect, the many different roads traveled by the Indian people from their eastern homelands to the Indian Territory are symbolized in the general expression the "Trail of Tears."

⁴ Principles and policies of the Federal Government in its treatment of the Cherokee Indians is given in Thomas Valentine Parker's book, *The Cherokee Indians* (New York, 1907).

⁵ James Mooney reviews the Cherokee Removal in his "Myths of the Cherokee," *Nineteenth Annual Report*, Bur. Amer. Ethnol. (Washington, 1900).

Chief Ross and his followers, many of whose relatives had died on the "Trail of Tears," arrived in the Indian Territory in the spring of 1839. The Western Cherokees held that the newcomers, Chief Ross and his followers, should join them and recognize the western laws and officers, at least until the regular elections in the fall. Party feeling was high among the full bloods of the Ross Party, who had suffered so recently in the eviction from Georgia, against the Ridge Party members who now took sides with the Western Cherokees or "Old Settlers." Major Ridge had sponsored a law in the Cherokee Council, making it a penalty of death to sell any of the tribal domain. Presumably for having signed the New Echota Treaty and failing to observe this law, Major Ridge, John Ridge and Elias Boudinot were assassinated by unknown parties, in different parts of the new country at almost the same hour on June 22, 1839. These tragic events were the beginning of a feud which together with controversies over the terms of the New Echota Treaty formed the background of political life in the Cherokee Nation for many years.

John Ross and his friends were blamed for the recent trouble yet despite threats against their lives, they proceeded to organize the Cherokee government in the new country. In July, 1839, an Act of Union was signed in a convention by members of the different political parties, over which the famous Sequoyah (or "George Guess") presided. On September 6, 1839, a new constitution was adopted in a national convention at Tahlequah, signed by Major George Lowry as president of the convention. The new constitution was similar to that which had been adopted in the Cherokee Nation East, a decade before. Elected members of a national committee (senate) and a council (house) together composed the National Council of the Cherokee Nation. The executive branch consisted of a principal chief and an assistant chief, with an executive council of five (or three) members appointed by the National Council. Supreme, circuit and lesser courts made up the judiciary. By 1841, the nation had been divided into eight districts (later increased to nine), for government purposes and Tahlequah had been designated the capital of the Nation. John Ross was elected many successive terms as principal chief, serving in this office until his death in Washington in 1866.⁶

The Cherokees were soon progressing in their new country. Homes and farms were improved and neighborhood schools increased under a public school system with a native Cherokee elected as Superintendent of Public Schools. Two national seminaries were opened in 1851 through the personal interest and work of Chief John Ross: the Cherokee National Male Seminary near Tahlequah, and the Cherokee National Female Seminary near Park Hill. Christ-

⁶The Constitution of the Cherokee Nation and other laws and data are in Emmet Starr, *History of the Cherokee Indians* (Oklahoma City, 1921).

ian churches gained converts; well selected libraries were found in a number of homes. Thousands of Cherokees could speak and write in English; many wrote using the Sequoyah alphabet in the native language. Many were able to draw up contracts and deeds, and were shrewd and intelligent in carrying on ordinary business transactions. The first Masonic lodge was established in the Nation in the 1840's, and was followed by other Masonic lodges in different communities. The noted Baptist missionaries, Evan Jones and his son, John Jones, organized a secret society among the fullblood Cherokees in 1859 called the "Keetoowah," to preserve Cherokee history and promote high ideals of individualism.

The Cherokee Nation aligned by treaty with the Confederate States during the War between the States was a scene of desolation at the close of the great conflict. The people had been hopelessly divided in the War: Stand Waite was the leader of the Confederate group, and was commissioned the only Indian Brigadier General in the Confederate Army; on the other hand John Ross and many of his followers sympathized with the Union. The Keetoowah members had served as scouts for the Federal forces that took over and occupied Fort Gibson in 1862; They were known generally as "Cherokee Pins" identified by two crossed pins on the lapel of the coat. When the new treaty with the Federal Government was signed and approved in 1866, the 14,000 Cherokees impoverished by the recent War began to build their homes and nation again with determination and perseverance.

Colonel Lewis Downing, a Cherokee who had been recently a lieutenant-colonel in the Union Army, was first elected principal chief of the Cherokee Nation in 1867. In this year when old factional and political strife threatened to disrupt the Nation, the Reverend Evan Jones and his son succeeded in futhering the organization of the Downing Party, an alliance between members of the former Ross Party (Union sympathizers) and the ex-Confederate Cherokees. From this time until the close of the Cherokee government in 1907, the Downing Party elected all the principal chiefs of the Nation, except one.

It was in Colonel Downing's second term as principal chief that the Seal of the Cherokee Nation was adopted by the National Council, reflecting his influence and his associations with his people.⁷ One of the darkest chapters in the history of the Cherokees,

⁷There are many publications on the history of the Cherokee Nation—articles in former numbers of *The Chronicles*, and books. Among the suggested references are: John P. Brown, *Old Frontiers* (Kingsport, Tenn., 1938); Grant Foreman, *Five Civilized Tribes* (Norman, 1934); Carolyn Thomas Foreman, *Park Hill* (Muskegee, 1948); Edward Everett Dale and Gaston Litton, *Cherokee Cavaliers* (Norman, 1939); Marion Lena Starkey, *The Cherokee Nation* (New York, 1946); Morris L. Wardell, *A Political History of the Cherokee Nation* (Norman, 1938); Muriel H. Wright, *A Guide To the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma* (Norman, 1951).

that of the War between the States, had recently closed. The mystic seven-pointed star and the wreath of oak leaves in the seal, surrounded by the name of the Cherokee Nation both in English and Sequoyah characters, together with the date of the adoption of the constitution west, formed a symbol of great promise.

—*The Editor*