

## United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma

*(Oklahoma Social Studies Standards, OSDE)*

**Tribe: United Keetoowah (ki-tu'-wa) Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma**

**Tribal website(s): [www.keetoowahcherokee.org](http://www.keetoowahcherokee.org)**

### 1. Migration/movement/forced removal

***Oklahoma History C3 Standard 2.3*** “Integrate visual and textual evidence to explain the reasons for and trace the migrations of Native American peoples including the Five Tribes into present-day Oklahoma, the Indian Removal Act of 1830, and tribal resistance to the forced relocations.”

***Oklahoma History C3 Standard 2.7*** “Compare and contrast multiple points of view to evaluate the impact of the Dawes Act which resulted in the loss of tribal communal lands and the redistribution of lands by various means including land runs as typified by the Unassigned Lands and the Cherokee Outlet, lotteries, and tribal allotments.”

### Original Homeland

Archeologists say that Keetoowah/Cherokee families began migrating to a new home in Arkansas by the late 1790's. A Cherokee delegation requested the President divide the upper towns, whose people wanted to establish a regular government, from the lower towns who wanted to continue living traditionally. On January 9, 1809, the President of the United States allowed the lower towns to send an exploring party to find suitable lands on the Arkansas and White Rivers. Seven of the most trusted men explored locations both in what is now Western Arkansas and also Northeastern Oklahoma. The people of the lower towns desired to remove across the Mississippi to this area, onto vacant lands within the United States so that they might continue the traditional Cherokee life. In 1817, the United States ceded such lands to the Kituwah people (also known as Old Settlers, or Western Cherokee) in exchange for a portion of the Cherokee lands they had occupied and were entitled to in the East. As many as 4,000 Kituwah Old Settlers came. The Treaty of 1817 with the United States exchanged lands back East for lands in Arkansas. By 1828, dissatisfied with their lands on the Arkansas and White Rivers, partly due to encroachment by white settlers, the Kituwah people entered into a treaty with the United States to move onto lands further west. This treaty granted the "Western Cherokee" seven million acres of land running along the Arkansas, Canadian and Grand Rivers. They were also given a perpetual outlet West, as far as the sovereignty of the United States extended. By the Treaty of 1828 the Keetoowahs

moved to Indian Territory in Oklahoma ten years prior to the forced removal of the Cherokee Nation. During that same year, the Keetoowahs went on to adopt a written constitution. It was also the same year that John Ross became Chief of the Old Cherokee Nation, eleven years after the Keetoowahs, or Western Cherokee, left the Old nation for lands in Arkansas.

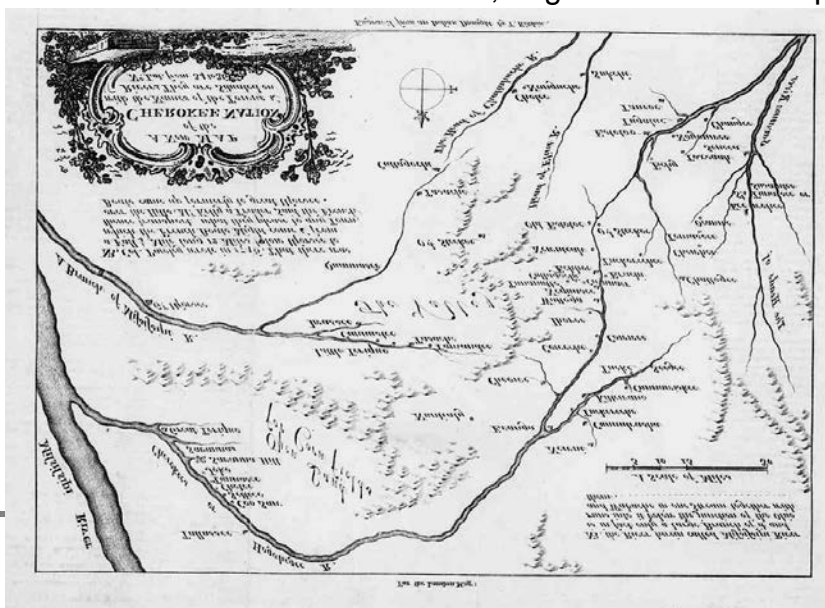
Members are composed primarily of the descendants of the "Old Settlers," Cherokee who settled in present-day Arkansas and Oklahoma around 1817, before the bulk of Cherokee were forcibly relocated to Indian Territory in the 1838 Trail of Tears, as well as Cherokees who walked the Trail of Tears. Keetoowah people believe that "Kituwah" or "Keetoowah" is the true name of the Cherokee people given to them by the Creator atop a mountain peak known as Kuwahi. This site today is referred to as Clingman's Dome and straddles the borders of North Carolina and Tennessee in the Great Smoky Mountains. The Keetoowahs also received their laws and sacred fire in their ancestral homelands (present day North Carolina, Tennessee, South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama) and still see themselves as the guardians of traditional Cherokee ways today.

Location In Oklahoma - Keetoowahs trace their lineage to the Old Settler Cherokees who settled in Arkansas in 1817 and moved to present-day northeastern Oklahoma in 1828. The headquarter of the "United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians" is in Tahlequah (on Highway 62 leading into town from the south, two miles from the larger headquarters of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma). Members are spread throughout the surrounding fourteen counties and elsewhere.

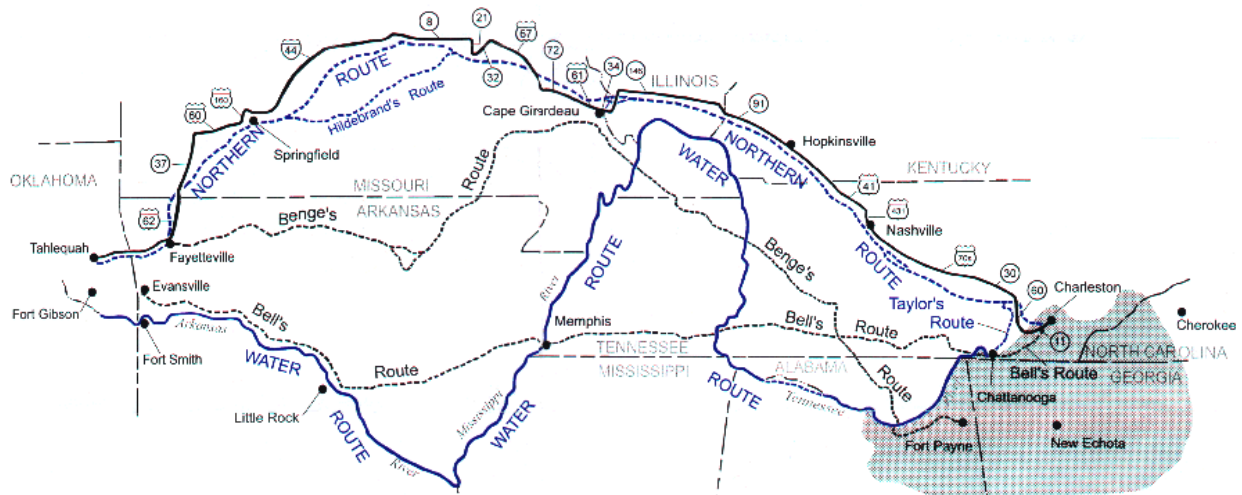
## 2. Maps

**Oklahoma History C3 Standard 2.3** *"Integrate visual and textual evidence to explain the reasons for and trace the migrations of Native American peoples including the Five Tribes into present-day Oklahoma, the Indian Removal Act of 1830, and tribal resistance to the forced relocations."*

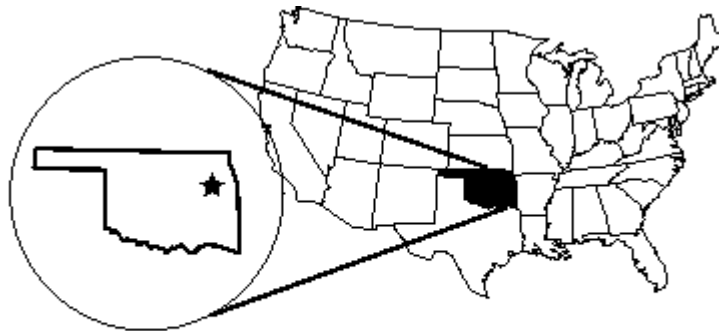
Maps of tribal hometowns before 1830; original homeland map



- Trail of Tears route



- Tribal lands after 1830



## United Keetoowah Cherokee

### 3. Population Past/Present

- Total tribal enrollment – 14,300
- Tribal enrollment in Oklahoma – 13,300

- Tribal membership criteria

Today the UKB has over 14,300 members, with 13,300 living within the state of Oklahoma. The United Keetoowah Band of Oklahoma (UKB) is a federally recognized tribe and headquartered in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. After the national government of the Cherokee Nation was dissolved in 1907, the Keetoowah's became the only federally recognized government of the Cherokee people for a period of time prior to World War II. Pres. Harry S. Truman appointed W. W. Keeler as chief of the Cherokee Nation in 1948, creating an anomaly of two governments for one people, a situation that still exists today. Both the UKB and the CNO consider themselves to be the legitimate government of the Cherokee people.

Membership is limited to those of one-fourth or more Cherokee blood, and enrollees cannot carry dual citizenship in both the UKB and the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma.

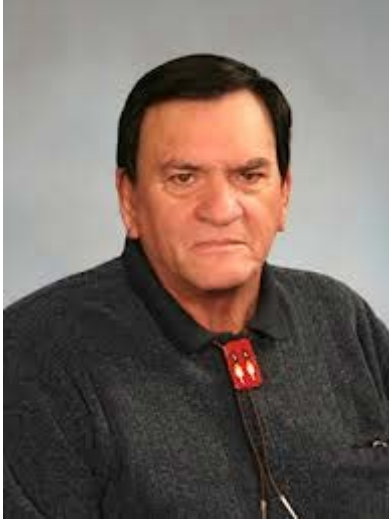
#### **4. Government; Chiefs vs Chairman; Elected or Paternal**

***US Government C3 Standard 3.4*** “Summarize and explain the relationships and the responsibilities between national and state governments including tribal and local governments.

***Oklahoma History C3 Standard*** “The student will analyze the formation and development of constitutional government in Oklahoma. 1) Compare and contrast the development of governments among the Native American tribes, the movement for the state of Sequoyah. 2) Describe and summarize attempts to create a state constitution joining Indian and Oklahoma Territories including the impact of the Progressive and Labor Movements resulting in statehood on November 16, 1907.”

#### **Tribal Government leadership**

Their elected Chief is George G. Wickliffe, serving a four-year term. Charles Locust is the Assistant Chief. Tim Goodvoice is their executive director of tribal operations. The tribal complex is located in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. Tribal Constitution can be found at <http://www.keetoowahcherokee.org/government>.



Chief George G. Wickliffe

## 5. Language Group

***Oklahoma History C3 Standard 4.1*** “Compare and contrast the successes and failures of the United States policy of assimilation of the Native Americans in Oklahoma including the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 and the effects of the Indian Boarding Schools (1880s-1940s) upon Native Americans’ identity, culture, traditions, and tribal government and sovereignty.”

"Keetoowah" (or "Kitua" or "Kituwa") means "principal People" in Cherokee language. It is also the name of the mother town and seat of authority, located in the Great Smoky Mountains of western North Carolina, which they claim as their homeland

Linguistics provides some insight into Cherokee origins. Scholars view Cherokee as an Iroquoian language that branched off some 3,500 or 3,800 years ago. Six distinguishable dialects of Cherokee may have been spoken prehistorically, but only two survive. Kituhwa or Middle Cherokee is spoken among the Eastern Band in North Carolina, while Otali or Overhill or now Western Cherokee is used in Oklahoma. Because of the larger Oklahoma Cherokee number, Western Cherokee predominates as the major form today.

The language of the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians is the Kituwa dialect. It is estimated that more than 60 percent of the membership of the tribe speak the Keetoowah Cherokee language. The Traditional Cherokee people, the Keetoowah Cherokees, use the language in their homes, in public and in their everyday lives. The United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma hosts Keetoowah Cherokee Language classes throughout the tribal jurisdictional area on an ongoing basis. Classes meet once a week for ten weeks and are free of charge.

## 6. Cultural Identifiers - ie. Mound Builders; Plains

**Oklahoma History C3 Standard 4.1** *“Compare and contrast the successes and failures of the United States policy of assimilation of the Native Americans in Oklahoma including the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 and the effects of the Indian Boarding Schools (1880s-1940s) upon Native Americans’ identity, culture, traditions, and tribal government and sovereignty.”*

Many of the UKB tribal members practice the traditional Cherokee Religion, the Stomp Dance. During the last part of the 1890s throughout the mid-1900s, there were over twenty ceremonial grounds in Cherokee Indian Country. The stomp ground religion was the main component of the Nighthawk Keetoowah Society which was founded and kept alive by Redbird Smith, the most revered person of the religion. This was the church of the Nighthawk Keetoowah Cherokees. The stomp dance religion is not just unique to the Cherokees, but also unique to the Creeks and the Choctaws.

One of the traditional games practiced by the Keetoowah Cherokees is stickball. The traditional stickball game was also called the “Little Brother of War” game. When a Cherokee village was preparing for battle against an enemy the young warriors would participate in the stickball game to prepare themselves for battle. The game would also be played to settle arguments between villages, which ever warriors from one of the villages won the game that village would be considered as victor to their arguments between the two villages. For those purposes, no women were allowed to play, and it was a very rough game with no rules other than the men could not touch the ball with their bare hands. The stickball game is played as a recreational and ceremonial game today, and women are allowed to play but do not use the sticks - only their hands. It is also played at the ceremonial grounds in conjunction with the stomp dance. There is no set amount of players, and anyone can participate in the game.

The cornstalk shoot goes back to the time when Cherokee hunters and warriors would compete for accuracy with their bow and arrow. To keep the tips of the arrows from breaking, participants shot through a large bank of dried cornstalks. Today the game remains very popular and is played in much the same way.

Oklahoma Historical Society source to consider for Boarding Schools:

<http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/a/am012.html>

## 7. Fine arts

**Oklahoma History C3 Standard 4.1** *“Compare and contrast the successes and failures of the United States policy of assimilation of the Native Americans in Oklahoma including the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 and the effects of the Indian Boarding Schools (1880s-1940s) upon Native Americans’ identity, culture, traditions, and tribal government and sovereignty.”*



## Music

The water drum which is a earthen pot or kettle with a skin stretched over the top of it. An inch or so of water or other liquid is placed inside before playing. The River Cane flute, which in 1835 was reported to have been approximately one foot long, and had 6 holes was used by the Cherokee. Trumpets were sometimes made from buffalo horns, and sometimes from long neck gourds or the thigh bone of the crane. Conch shells were used in very early times. Turtle shells are used for ceremonial rattles; a single rattle to be held in the hand for use by men, and turtle shell shackles worn on the legs of women. Sometimes the ceremonial hand rattles are made of gourd, as well.

## Art

The ancient art of basket weaving is the most prominent tradition on display with artisans making everything from traditional single-weave and double-weave baskets to business card holders. Whether made from traditional honeysuckle vines, buck brush or commercial reed, the same skills used more than a thousand years ago are still in use today.

Bow makes or bowyers still take their time in producing one of the finest single-material bow systems ever designed. Using bois d' arc (also known as Osage orange) wood from the east side of a tree cut during the Black Moon (Dec. 21 to Jan. 12), bowyers can spend several years perfecting a bow to be used for hunting or cornstalk shoots. Archers commonly use river cane arrows with flint tips for hunting and cedar arrows with 12-inch steel tips for cornstalk shoots.

## 8. Significant events (i.e. Massacres, Battles, Supreme Court cases...)

**Oklahoma History C3 Standard 2.4C** *“Summarize the impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction Treaties on Native American peoples, territories, and tribal sovereignty including the a) Required enrollment of the Freedmen, b) Second Indian Removal and the role of the Buffalo Soldiers, c) Significance of the Massacre at the Washita, d) Reasons for the reservation system, and e) Establishment of the western military posts of Fort Sill, Fort Supply, and Fort Reno.”*

Pig Smith, Creek Sam, and other traditionalists joined forces with Evan and John Jones, white Baptist Missionaries, to create a political and spiritual body to empower the full-bloods in Cherokee politics. In 1859, this faction of Cherokees lead by Old Settlers, incorporated as the Keetoowah Society. Favoring traditional Cherokee ways, values and religion, this group was opposed to mixed-blood domination of Cherokee affairs, land cessions, and slavery.

The Keetoowah Society became a secret society before the opening of the Civil War and due to pressures from missionaries and mixed-bloods, settled back to gain the strength that would be necessary to fight the Dawes Commission and the mixed-bloods over the allotment of tribal lands.

Under the remarkable leadership of the great Keetoowah Chief, Redbird Smith, son of Pig Smith, the Society gained the following of nearly every full-blood Cherokee in the Nation. Known as Nighthawks because of their nighttime ceremonies and secretive habits, the Keetoowahs embraced Cherokee culture and prevented its spiraling decline. The Keetoowahs even became involved in the manhunts staged by the U.S. Marshals in the 1890's for the so-called outlaws, Ned Christie and the Wickliffe boys.

Oklahoma Historical Society: <http://www.okhistory.org/research/indianrecs>

## 9. Current Information on tribe

John Hair Cultural Center and Museum

## 10. Other information (i.e. Elder testimonials; Guest speakers; Literature; Famous Tribal members...)

Literature - While Robert J. Conley is an enrolled United Keetoowah Band citizen he has written 70 books, published a collection of short stories, several reprints, including 3 British editions, and several books on tape. Robert also wrote the novelization of a screenplay, Geronimo: An American Legend which was published in the U.S. by Pocketbooks and reprinted in translation in Italy. The Real People series is a historical fiction over Cherokee history. Interviews and other stories include the following: "Backtracking from Oklahoma to North Carolina", Sandra Ballard, Appalachian Journal: A Regional Studies Review, 28, Number 3, Spring, 2001. "A More Realistic Picture: An Interview with Robert J. Conley", Joseph Bruchac, Wooster Review, 8, 106-114, 1988 Spring. Wili Woyi: An Exploration in "Fantasy" Literature An outline for a class discussing this Robert J. Conley story.

### Famous Tribal Members

Robert J. Conley (United Keetoowah Band-Cherokee Nation), historian and novelist, b. 1940

David Cornsilk (United Keetoowah Band-Cherokee Nation), legal activist and genealogist

Archie Sam (1914–1986), Natchez-Cherokee-Muscogee Creek traditionalist, stomp dance leader, and cultural historian

Virginia Stroud (United Keetoowah Band-Muscogee Creek), artist and former Miss Indian America, b. 1951



## Suggested book resources

The United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma By Georgia Rae Leeds.

## Sources:

Oklahoma Historical Society source to consider for Indian Removal information:  
<http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/i/in015.html>

The Library of Congress: <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Indian.html>

Oklahoma Indian Country Guide, Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department  
[NIE 2011 OK Indian Country Guide\[\[1\].pdf](#)

Clark, Blue. Indian Tribes of Oklahoma. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman. 2009.

United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians website:  
<http://www.keetoowahcherokee.org>

George R. Leeds, "The United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma: 1950 to the Present" ( Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1992).

Oklahoma Historical Society

Oklahoma Indian Country Guide, Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department *One State Many Nations*

Sandra Parker, "U.K.B. of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma."

Cherokee Observer (September 1997).

Chief George Wickliffe, "A Letter to the UKB People," Keetoowah News (August 2007).

The Library of Congress