

MODERN INDIANS OF ALABAMA

Remnants of the Removal

by

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TURKEY TOWN: The exact location of this Cherokee village or community in Northeast Alabama cannot be pinpointed with complete accuracy. Perhaps the missionaries were more accurate in calling the locations "places," rather than the white man's conventional "towns."

A List of Places in the Cherokee Nation, prepared by the Brainerd Brethren about 1822, stated, "Turkey Town, where lived the King, his first council and many other old chiefs, was about 30 or 40 miles long."³⁹

It was about one mile from Centre on the west side of the Coosa River, not far from the mouth of Terrapin Creek. This fact is attested to by all of the authorities on the subject, and is shown on a half a dozen maps owned by this writer, dating from 1817 to 1825. The Old Indian Trail or Creek Path, running from Creek Path Town, now Guntersville, crossed the river at Turkey Town, where after the turn of the 19th century, Path Killer, King of the Cherokees operated a ferry,⁴⁰ according to one chronicler of Cherokee County history.

Another county historian has written, Turkey Town was named for the noted chief, "The Turkey," and was located in the bend of the Coosa River opposite to and one mile south of the town of Centre. It was founded about 1770, and was of considerable size and importance. It is marked on Royce's Map (1884) opposite the influx of Terrapin Creek. Chief Turkey lived on the east side of Turkey Creek. By some Indian agents and traders, the town was called New Seneca.⁴¹

Turkey Town was home to some of the greatest leaders of the Cherokee Nation:

GUWISGUWI (John Ross), was born October 3, 1780, down on the Coosa in Alabama, believed by some historians to be Turkey Town. Some whites who had intermarried with the Indians settled in Turkey Town. In 1783, John McDonald, a British agent, married a Cherokee maiden and moved to Turkey Town. McDonald thoroughly assimilated the Indians' mode of life, and was wholeheartedly accepted into their activities. Two years later Daniel Ross, a Scottish emigrant, opened a general merchandise store in Turkey Town. His marriage to Millie McDonald, John's daughter, produced a significant union. John Ross, their third son, would become "Principal Chief"⁴¹ of the Eastern Cherokee Nation from 1828 in Alabama until 1866 in the Western Nation following their removal. He was only one-eighth Cherokee, fair-skinned, blue-eyed, but reared as an Indian. He epitomized the Cherokee way of life and culture more than many of the full-blooded chiefs and warriors who sought to emulate the ways of the Unaka (white) man.⁴²

Daniel Ross moved his family to Turkey Town, not far from present-day Chattahoochee. He received schooling at Kingston Academy, and engaged in the business of a trading post and ferry. He moved, with his wife, Quatie, to the Georgia, where he built an elegant home, with fruit orchards, cotton and tobacco fields, and decorative peacocks on the grounds. The Coosa.

Much of the Cherokee's history is centered in Georgia. Ross was named postmaster at his log home that area settlers arrived every two weeks on the Nashville. In his honor, area residents celebrate his birthday. His home became a National Historic Site. Today, the town celebrates its name with a festival each year, held on the grounds of the old structure.

Chief Ross devoted his life to making the Cherokee a more advanced and civilized tribe in the country. In despair, he too was forced to lead his people to the new Indian Territory of Oklahoma.

Guwisquwi (John Ross) served as Principal Chief and scouted the site of the new town of Talladega at the beginning of the Cherokee removal. Serving as President of the Cherokee Nation, he was elected Principal Chief, Ross divided the Nation into districts, each entitled to send four representatives to the Council for terms of two years. Each district had a council house, court and local judge to enforce the laws. Each district had a mounted horse, consisting of six mounted warriors. The dream of the Cherokee Nation one day of its inhabitants becoming citizens of the United States was shared with ninety-five people. He never lost their respect as a leader. The fight was taken all the way to the battle was lost when the National Council between the Ross Party and the Ridge Party advocated a peaceful move to the settlement of their claims, and were signed in the Treaty of New Echota.

The Cherokee National Council or Court in 1822 corresponding to the United States would hold session concurrently

were symbolic of the seven clans among the Cherokee before they organized into a confederation. The number seven was sacred to the Cherokee and other southeastern tribes, and was observed in many ways. Their tribal council houses were seven-sided, and the number pervaded all aspects of their lives.

NUNNA-DA-UL-TSUN-YI (The Trail On Which They Cried)⁵¹

Throughout the spring of 1838, the Cherokees in Northeast Alabama watched, solemn-faced, and sad-eyed, as the stockades went up. A total of 13 were constructed throughout the Nation to hold the more than 18,000 Cherokees, including some blacks, whites and servants, who would be rounded up in May and penned within their walls awaiting removal to their new home of Oklahoma (Red People). But it was the concentration camps at Barry Springs, Fort Payne, and Guntersville, which drew the interest and attention of Alabama's Cherokees.

When the dragnet went out in May many Cherokees fled their homes seeking escape from the white man's roundup. To the credit of many southern white settlers, some Cherokees were taken in and concealed. They were given Christian names and escaped removal from their homeland. Others hid out in swamps and caves then later made their way back to their homes. Many escaped removal by professing to be of a foreign nationality. Many hid out in mountainous, isolated, inaccessible places.

When John Ross returned to the Nation from Washington, D.C. on July 13, 1838, he found it abandoned, for the first contingent of unwilling, bitter emigrants had left Ross's Landing in Tennessee on June 6. Others would follow from other concentration camps, including the one at Fort Payne, Alabama. They boarded flatboats, lashed together for the trip, at Gunter's Landing (Guntersville) and traveled to Decatur. From Decatur they traveled by railroad to Tuscumbia where they boarded a double-decked keelboat, escorted by a steamer to the Ohio River; then on to the junction of the Mississippi and the Arkansas. They disembarked a little above Little Rock and continued their overland journey through Arkansas to Oklahoma. The first contingent's exodus was a sorrowful preview of events to come. The Cherokee's bitter hegira would later be called "nunna-da-ul-tsun-yi," or "the trail on which they cried." The hardships of the trail, heat, drought, and disease, combined with their broken spirits, left Cherokee graves scattered along the long trail to their new homeland.⁵²

Of the original 875 of the first contingent, only 602 reached the western reservation. The old settlers in the west, those who had crossed the Mississippi between 1818 and 1828, and

including some who had traveled west to the first small group of Cherokees, proceeded with a great deal of caution. Back east, the sun was extinguished, as their Cherokee fire was prepared for the last contingent's departure. The sun shined in brilliant autumn colors, but blue mists covered their beloved mountains. They could not carry with them to their new homes the remains of abandoned shelters, dying campfires, and the smoke, as they resolutely set their faces westward where the sun was extinguished. The 18,000 Cherokees who began the westward journey perished.

An officer made the following notation: "The hand of death was upon the Cherokees. I stretched around me and within a few feet of me these afflicted creatures dead or dying. Their lamentations went up from the bereaved Cherokees. They were true Indian blood; they looked upon their loved ones with sorrow, silently dug graves for them, and they laid them out in their new homes. They were in their grief which is sublime. They were destitute, ignorant and unbefriended. I respect them."⁵⁴

When the main body finally reached the west, controversies began with the settlers already in the land and murders. Only two of the leaders, "Tears" and subsequent assassinations. In addition, three were handed the task of leading the Indian Nation. They chose a site among the rolling hills. When they were sure the site was good, they gave in their new homeland, one of the leaders said "Tahlequah," which means "the Cherokee." The name stuck.

Today Tahlequah remains the essence of the Cherokee spirit, the spiritual center for the rich Cherokee Nation, which translated means Cherokee, is southern Oklahoma. The Cherokee Heritage Center. The entire site is listed in the National Register of Historic Places since 1966. The Cherokee Female Seminary, the first school of education for women west of the Mississippi

