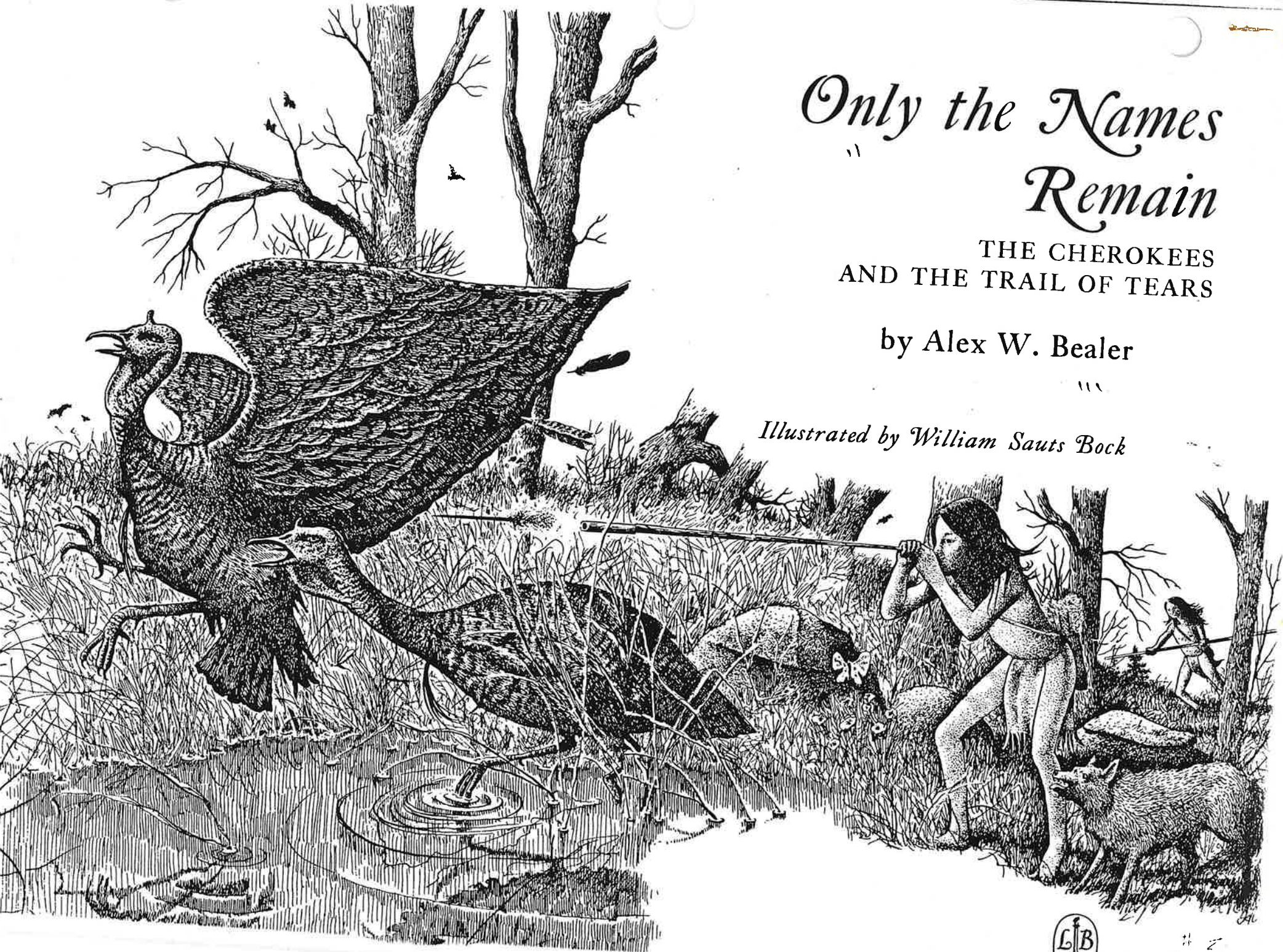


*Only the Names
Remain*

THE CHEROKEES
AND THE TRAIL OF TEARS

by Alex W. Bealer

Illustrated by William Sauts Bock



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Bealer

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Hope and Despair

In 1828, the great John Ross was elected principal chief of the Cherokees. Under his leadership the Cherokee Nation reached the high point of its history, and later suffered its greatest tragedy.

Ross was an elegant, blue-eyed mixed-blood, the son of a white trader and a Cherokee mother. He was a well-educated man, and devoted to the welfare of his people.

By the year 1828, there were many fine homes and farms owned by Cherokees and mixed-bloods. In addition to the outstanding Vann house at Spring Place there was the comfortable house of John Ross near Chattanooga, the huge house of Major Ridge, another Cherokee chief, and other houses as fine as any owned by rich white men. Barns had been built for livestock,

and neat fences of split rails surrounded many Cherokee fields. Impressive herds of cattle and hogs were owned by Cherokee farmers who had once been hunters. No longer did the people depend on the dwindling supply of wild game for their food.

Several good roads, one called the National Road, had been built within the Cherokee Nation by this time. Thus it was easy to bring goods into the nation and ship cotton and other farm goods out to markets in Georgia and Tennessee. Steamboats, owned by Cherokees, operated on the Coosa and Tennessee rivers. Cherokees could sell farm goods to the world in return for money, which is needed for any nation to grow and become strong and independent.

New Echota, the national capital, had grown into a thriving town during the nine years since its founding. It had several government buildings, a courthouse, a council house, a printing office, a number of stores and three taverns. Some of the missionaries and a number of Cherokees had built fine houses there.

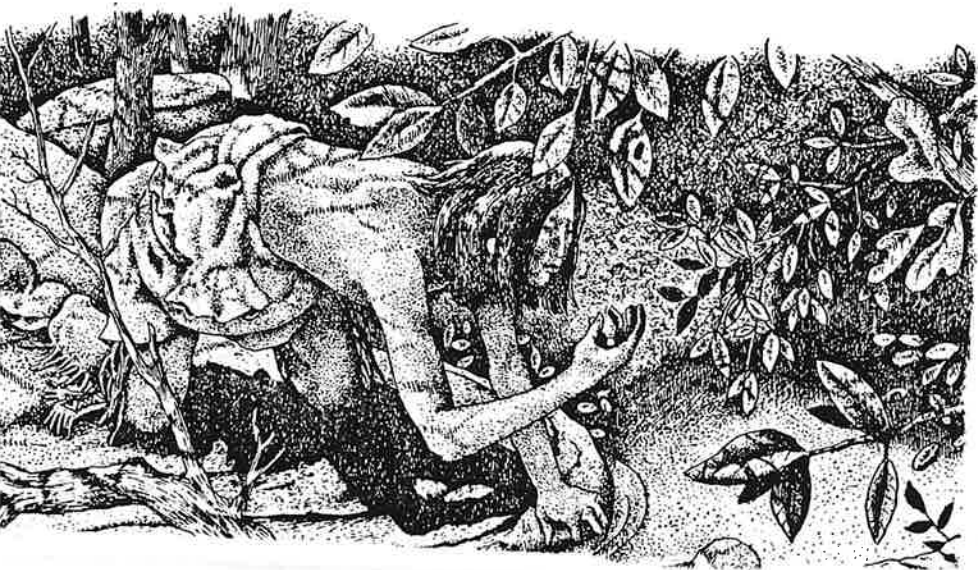
With all their progress, though, the Cherokees were fiercely proud of the old traditions which kept them Cherokees.

Comfortable moccasins were still worn instead of the stiff, awkward shoes of the white man. The hunter was still respected as in the past. The old dances still took

place in the spring and fall, and Cherokee ball was still the favorite sport.

By this time, too, the Cherokees thought that finally they had learned the secret to a comfortable, civilized life — to live and let live. But the secret was no good unless everyone, white and Cherokee alike, felt the same way. Unfortunately this was not true.

In the same year that Ross was elected chief, Andrew Jackson was elected president of the United States. Also in 1828, near the Cherokee mountain village of Dahlonega, a Cherokee boy found a small nugget of gold, the treasure old Hernando de Soto had sought three hundred years earlier. Many Cherokees did not realize it at the time, but the combination of President Jackson and the discovery of gold eventually made it impossible for the Cherokees to stay in their beloved mountains.



President Jackson and the Gold Rush

Andrew Jackson had been a great general before he was elected president. He had defeated the powerful British at New Orleans in the War of 1812. Later, with the help of the Cherokees, he had defeated the fierce Creeks at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in Alabama. His armies had always been made up of frontiersmen who had fought Indians since before the American Revolution. Many of them had seen members of their families killed and captured by Indians. Because of this they hated all Indians. Besides, they had always coveted the fertile Indian lands across the mountains.

Andrew Jackson was the hero of these rough, tough, brave frontiersmen. He too had been born in a log cabin and reared on the frontier, where his family had fought

Indians. Jackson did not like Indians any more than the land-hungry frontiersmen did.

When the first gold nugget was found in the mountains near Dahlonega the Cherokees thought very little about it. They were happy and prosperous, with no need for gold. Cherokees had never understood why the white man, starting with de Soto, had always wanted gold.

But all through history men have fought and killed and stolen for gold. It represents wealth and wealth brings power. White men outside the Cherokee Nation were very much interested in hearing that gold had been discovered there. They started the first gold rush in the United States.

Many of the gold miners were rough, cruel men. They paid no attention to laws or treaties or the rights of Cherokees. Cherokee families were driven from their homes and gold hunters took over the neat cabins. The miners stole the food from Cherokee gardens and killed Cherokee cattle and hogs. Cherokee men who tried to protect their families were beaten or even killed by the miners.

Appalled by what was happening, Chief Ross immediately sent in Cherokee marshals to drive the gold hunters from Cherokee lands. There were too few marshals, however, and too many white men.

More and more miners invaded the Cherokee Nation.

Ross then appealed to President Jackson. He asked the president for United States army troops to close the gold camps and to stop white men from killing Cherokees and stealing their cabins and food. Under the last treaty signed by the Cherokees the president was supposed to protect the Indians and their lands, with soldiers if necessary. Jackson sent so few troops, however, that he might as well have sent none. The handful of soldiers could do no more to control the robbery and murder than the Cherokee marshals.

The governor of Georgia, knowing that Jackson would not stop him, used this opportunity to send militia troops into Cherokee lands. But, the Georgia troops protected the miners instead of the Cherokees and actually helped the miners drive Cherokees out of the gold fields. Then the state of Georgia began to pass a number of laws aimed at forcing the Indians out of the state.

One law made it illegal for a Cherokee to mine gold, even on his own land. Another stated that Cherokees could not testify against white men in a court of law. The worst of the white men could burn and steal and murder all they wanted and would escape punishment in the Georgia courts. But if a Cherokee killed a white man while defending his family, he would surely be

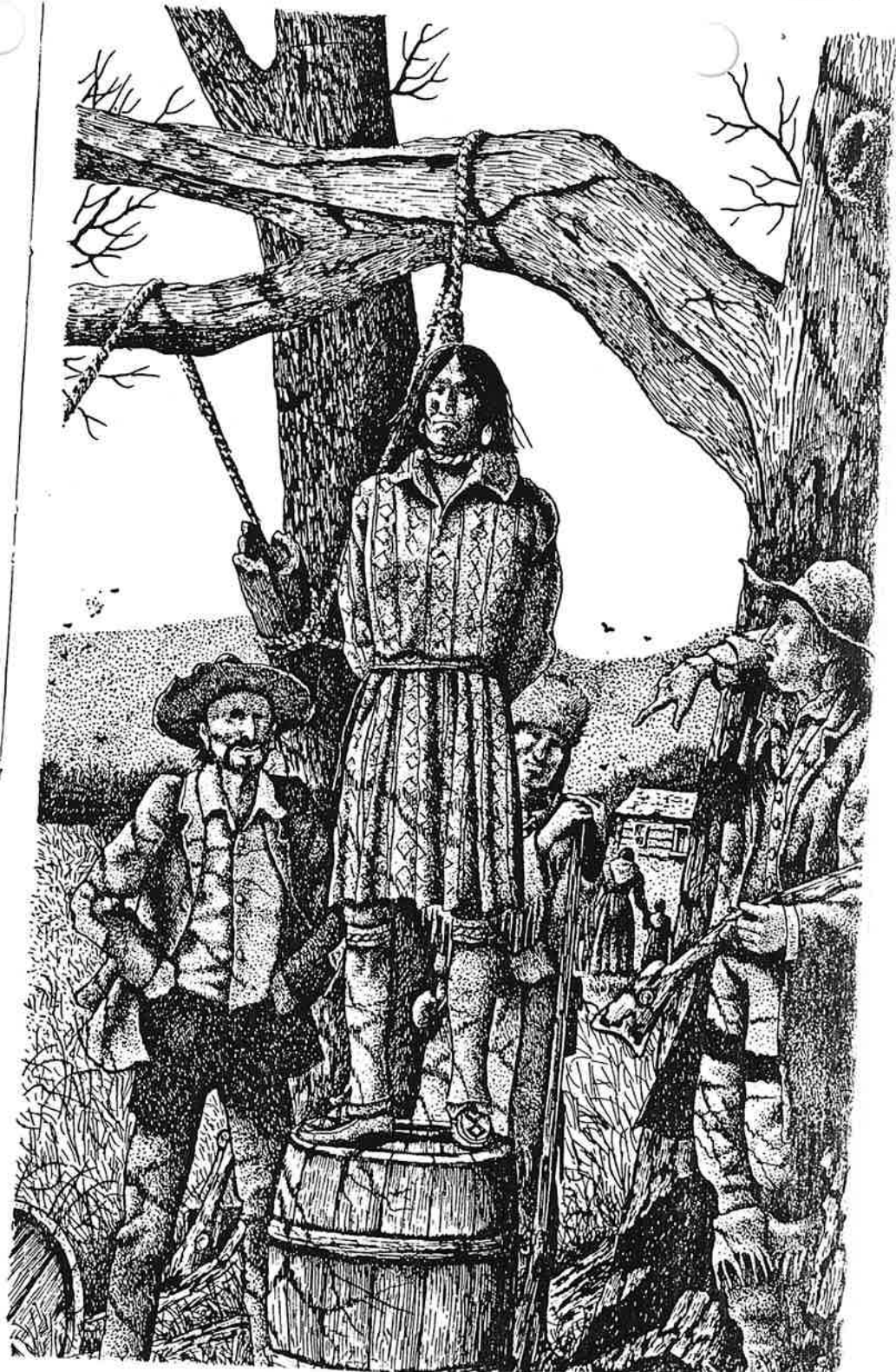
hanged for murder, and the Cherokee government was powerless to interfere.

Even more humiliation was heaped upon the Cherokees when the Georgia legislature passed a law claiming that the whole Cherokee Nation was only another county in Georgia and subject only to Georgia laws. This selfish act completely ignored the constitution and laws of the Cherokee Nation and all of the treaties between the Cherokees and the United States government. Georgia state officials were sent into every part of the Cherokee Nation to take over its government, and Georgia militia troops protected these officials with muskets and cannons.

Outraged by these acts, John Ross hired a famous lawyer in Philadelphia to take the Cherokee case before the United States Supreme Court. The court ruled that the new Georgia laws were illegal, and the Chief Justice, John Marshall, immediately ordered President Jackson to send United States troops to Georgia to move all white men from Cherokee lands.

Andrew Jackson, however, refused to obey the court's order. "John Marshall made the ruling," Jackson said. "Let him enforce it." This statement encouraged even more white men to move into the Cherokee Nation.

When all this happened, old Chief Junaluska, the





Cherokee leader who had helped Jackson fight the Creeks at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, said, "If I had known this would happen I would have killed Jackson that day at Horseshoe Bend." But Jackson was very much alive and determined to use his high office to help drive the Cherokees from the state of Georgia so that white men could take over Cherokee lands.

Not all of the people of Georgia agreed with what their state government was doing to the Cherokees. Many people from all over the country objected strongly to President Jackson's attitude, but the po-

litical forces behind Jackson were more powerful than the friends of the Cherokees.

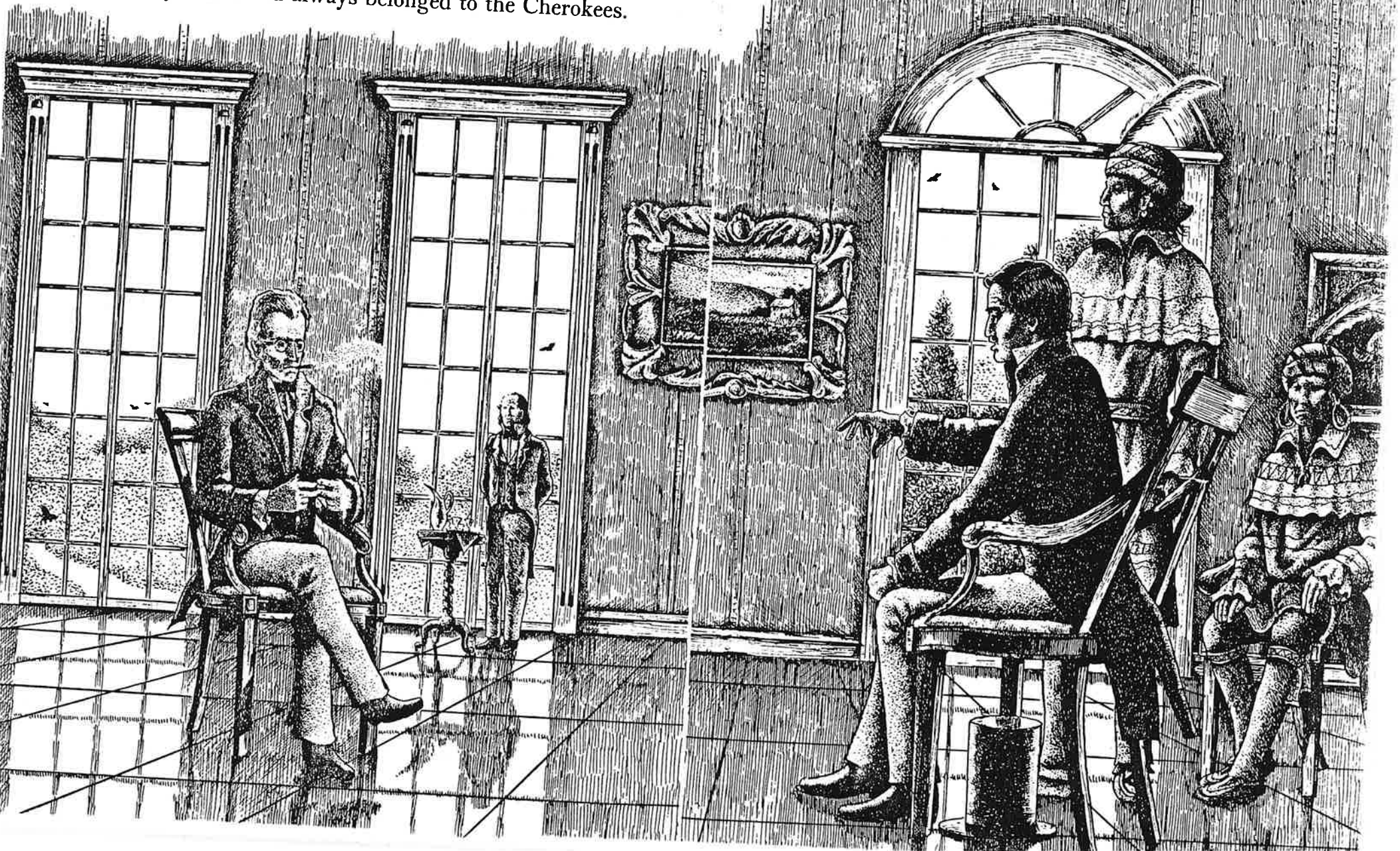
In the next few years the Georgia legislature passed more laws against the Cherokees. Among the worst of these was the Cherokee Land Lottery Law of 1832, by which the state sold all the Indian lands in North Georgia to white men. According to this new Georgia law, no Cherokee was allowed to own land in the state.

Some white families moved in immediately to take over the farms they had won in the lottery, driving off Cherokee families who had lived on the land for generations. Other whites took over farms which had been abandoned by discouraged Cherokees who had moved on to Arkansas. Some of the new owners waited patiently to claim their farms when all the Cherokees were moved west.

During this period there was much fighting between Cherokees and white men, with many deaths and much suffering on both sides. The peace the Cherokees had hoped to have by following the white man's path was lost. The fine Cherokee government with its written constitution and schools was unable to operate effectively. Soon, only six years after it had been founded, even the *Cherokee Phoenix* could no longer be printed.

The poor Cherokees, so proud of their remarkable progress, were frustrated and angry. Chief John Ross

and members of the national council traveled frequently to Washington, pleading with president and Congress for help in keeping the beautiful mountain country which had always belonged to the Cherokees.

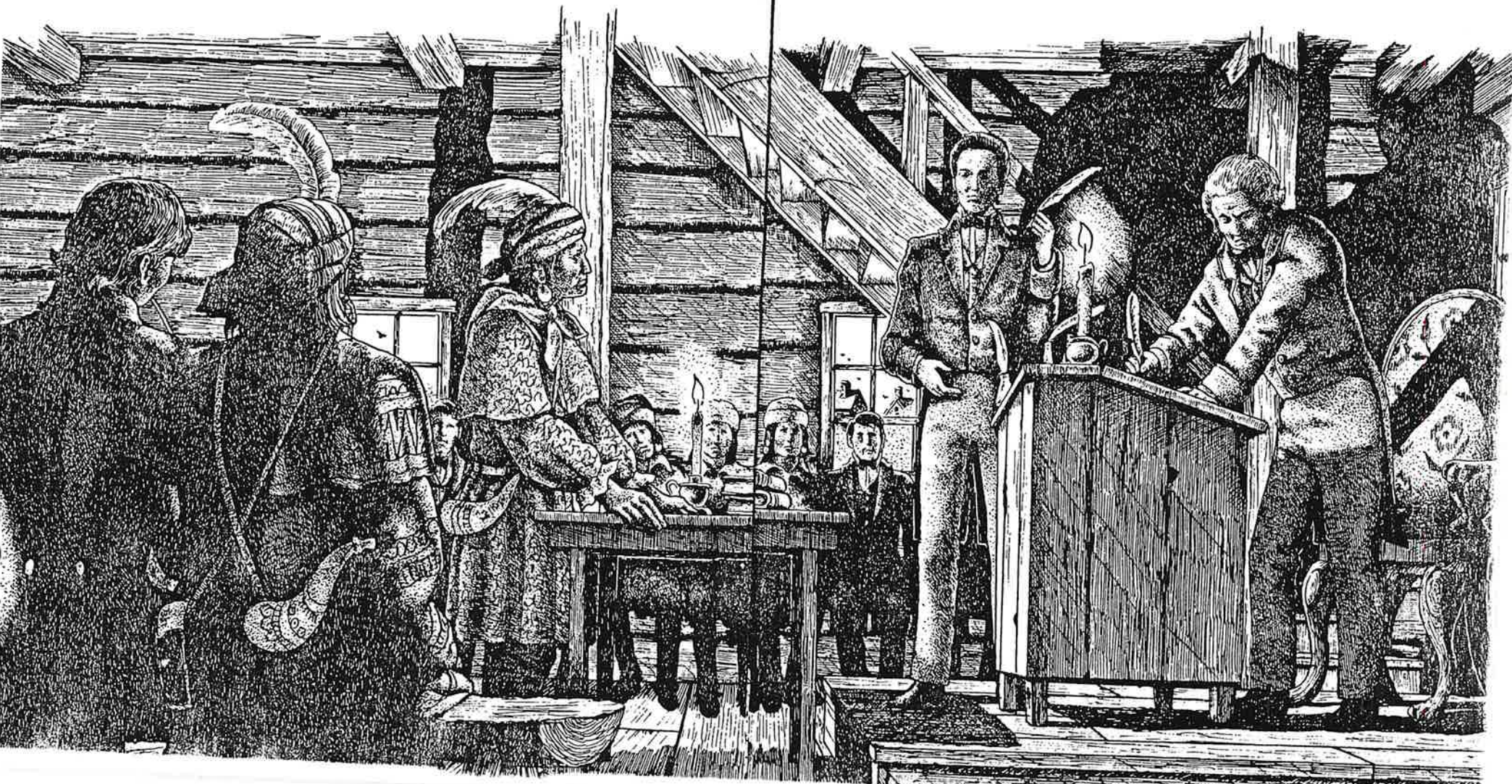


But then the Cherokees became divided among themselves, and what happened made all of the efforts of John Ross and other leaders useless.

In the year 1835, at a time when Ross was in Washington, a group of only three hundred Cherokees, led by rich Major Ridge and the former editor of the *Phoenix*, Elias Boudinot, met and signed a new treaty with

the United States. This infamous treaty stated that the Cherokee Nation had agreed to give up all its lands in Georgia and Alabama, and to move all its people to new lands in the wild country west of the Mississippi River.

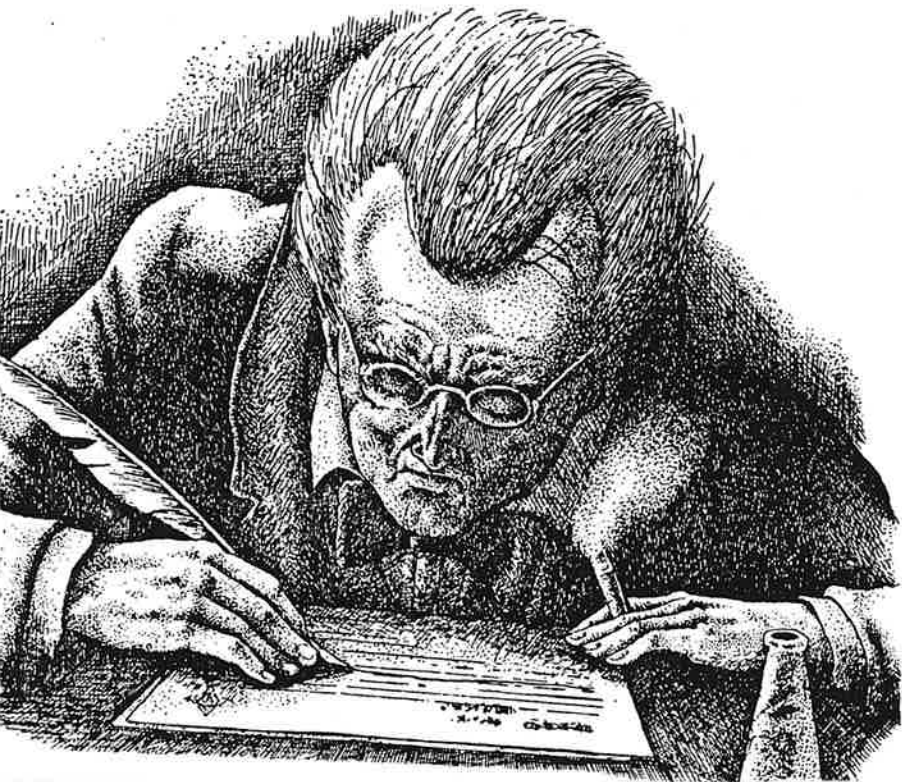
A treaty signed by only three hundred Cherokees was quite illegal according to Cherokee law and treaties with the United States. Only a majority of the sev-



enteen thousand Cherokees could legally make such an important decision. Yet this treaty was accepted eagerly by President Jackson. In 1836, the United States Senate decided by one vote to approve it. Once the Senate had voted, all hope for the Cherokees was lost.

Some whites wanted to allow Cherokee families to own one hundred sixty acres each in Georgia. Many would have stayed in Georgia if they could have kept their farms. Andrew Jackson, however, personally took this provision out of the treaty.

So, no more would Cherokees fish for trout in the cold mountain creeks. Never again would the drums



and rattles and songs of the Green Corn Dance echo from the mountainsides. The brilliant colors of autumn leaves, which covered the mountains like a Paisley shawl, would no more be seen by Cherokee eyes.

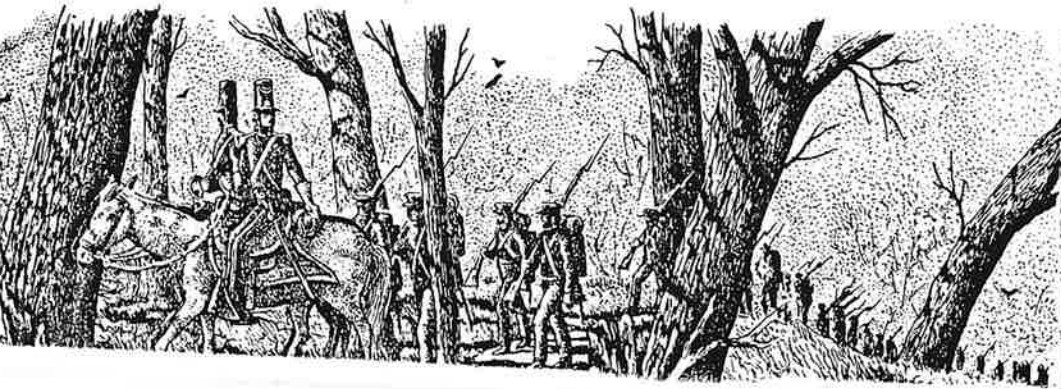
Chief John Ross was dismayed by this treaty and continued to fight it, but he could do nothing but delay the actual removal for three more years. At this time some Cherokees voluntarily moved their families to the West, but most could not believe what had happened. They continued to farm and hunt as they had always done until the year 1837, the last year of the Cherokee Nation in Georgia.

Andrew Jackson was no longer president in 1837. President Van Buren, however, carried out Jackson's policy of removal. In the fall of the year, when the bears were fattening for the winter and Cherokee corn was being harvested, Van Buren sent United States army troops to the Cherokee Nation. He ordered them to collect all the Cherokees living there and move them under guard to Arkansas.

The Soldiers Come

Now came the time of sorrow for the Cherokees. Now came removal to the West, where the evil spirits of Cherokee legend dwelt.

Soldiers came into the nation from every direction. Some marched over from Augusta and some came down the National Road from Nashville. Each soldier carried his musket and bayonet and pouch of bullets. With the soldiers came great wagons loaded with tools



and food and ammunition. Officers in bright uniforms, swords at their sides, rode prancing horses at the head of their marching troops. The heavy wheels of cannons rumbled along the rough roads which wound through the valleys and across the mountain passes of Cherokee land.

At night the soldiers camped along the roads, their fires gleaming in the thick woods. Far from home, they sat around the fires and listened to the owls and wolves and raccoons and panthers which prowled through the forests on the mountainsides.

When the soldiers arrived at their destinations they built great stockades of huge split trees set upright in the ground. Around the inside walls they built rough huts in which the Cherokee families could live, for the cold mountain winter was coming on. Here, in these prison camps, the Cherokees would be kept while they waited to be marched to the West.

Then, when the stockades were built, and firewood had been cut for the winter, and army rations stored at



each of the stockades, the soldiers were sent out to gather in the Cherokees.

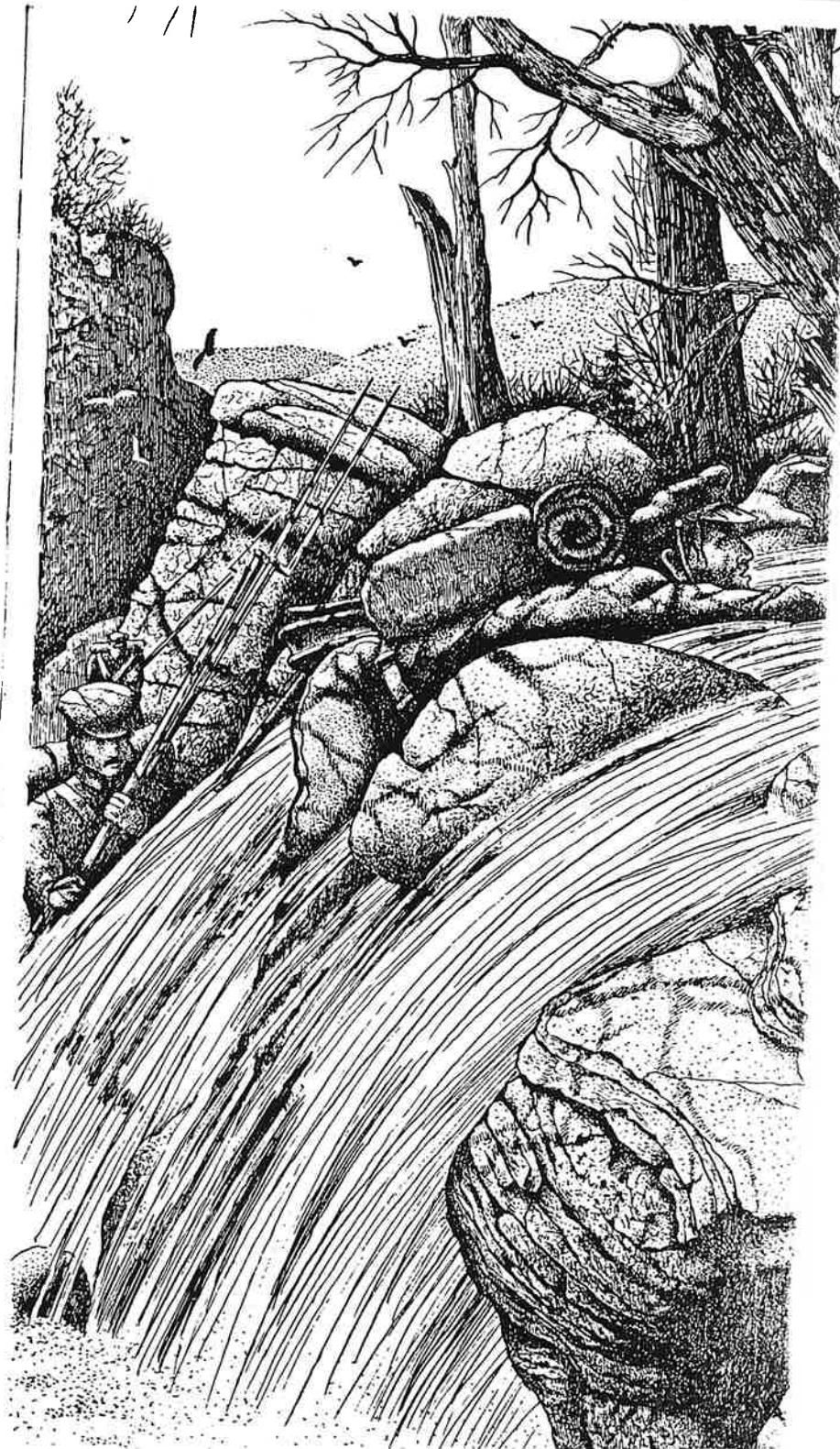
This was not an easy job. Some of the Cherokees lived near roads, but most lived deep in the mountains in small coves where no road could be built. The only way to reach most of the Indian cabins was by a narrow woodland trail. Often there was not even a trail and the soldiers had to wade up mountain creeks to reach some of the Cherokee homes.

The Cherokees were given no chance to do more than gather a few clothes and cooking pots and baskets of corn before they were marched to the stockades. Some were eating when the soldiers came, and they were not even allowed to finish their meals.

Sick persons were forced to get out of bed and dress and march to the stockades with the rest. Old people were prodded with bayonets if they did not move quickly enough. Sometimes Cherokee men tried to protect their families and were knocked down and beaten by the soldiers.

Some of the soldiers took what they liked from the Cherokee cabins. Others killed chickens and hogs and cattle for their own food.

Often families which had won land in the Cherokee Lottery came with the soldiers. The last view of home many Cherokees had was of white people moving into



soldier mistreated Tsali's wife. Tsali killed this soldier and he and his family quickly ran into the woods and managed to escape to the Great Smokies. Later Tsali was to become one of the heroes of the removal.

Most of the Cherokees, however, were imprisoned in the stockades.

Soon the winter came. It was particularly cold in that winter of 1837–1838. Many of the Cherokees had very little food, and Cherokee women did not know how to prepare the flour given them by the army. They were not allowed to go out of the stockades and hunt, for the soldiers were afraid that the hunters might escape. Often the firewood gave out and Cherokee children and



the neat houses and barns that the Cherokees had worked so hard to build. The fields they had cleared with so much labor and the fences they had built from split chestnut logs were left forever.

Some soldiers tried to help the Cherokees as much as they could. One wrote about his experiences years later. He said, "I fought through the Civil War and have seen men shot to pieces and slaughtered by the thousands. But the Cherokee Removal was the cruelest work I ever knew."

A few of the Cherokees managed to escape the soldiers by taking their families on hidden trails which led from the Georgia mountains to the wilderness of the Great Smoky Mountains. There the soldiers could not find them.

There was one Cherokee named Tsali Wasituna, or Charlie Washington, who could not bear to see the soldiers hurt his family. While marching to a stockade a



a firing squad of Cherokee men who were forced to do this dreadful task. Only the youngest son, a small boy, was saved. Then the soldiers marched, leaving about a thousand Cherokees to start life again in the Great Smokies.

These few were the only Cherokees who stayed in their beloved mountains. They once more built cabins and cleared small gardens in the hidden valleys of the high mountain ranges surrounding the Oconee Luftee River and its tributaries. Their descendants live there still, close to the graves of the brave Tsali and his sons.

When the spring of 1838 arrived, and the mountainsides were painted with a mist of fresh green and geese

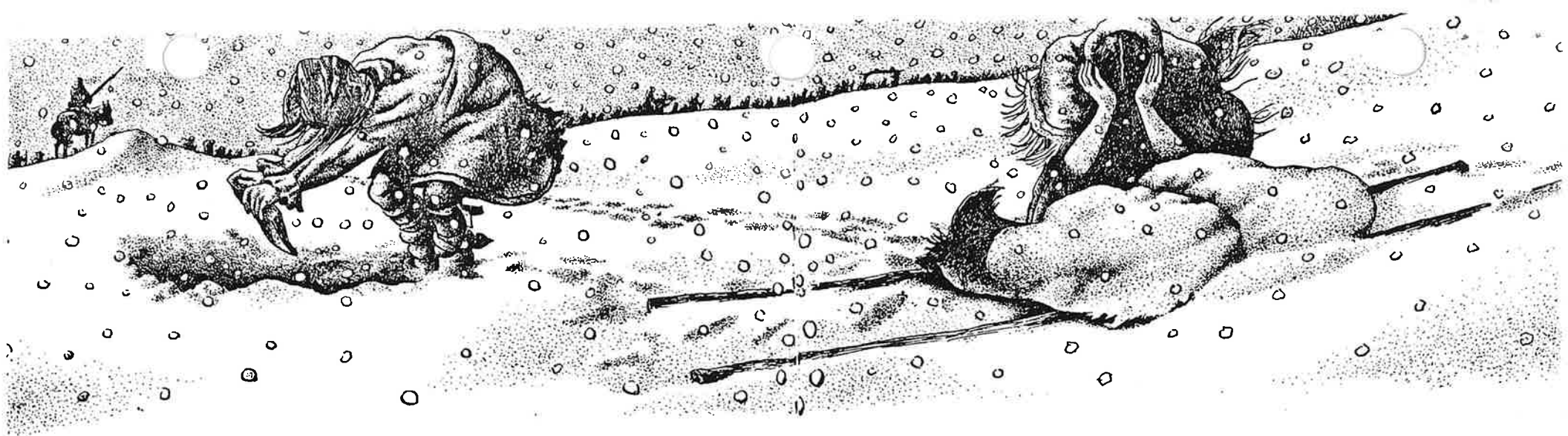


old people shivered in the crude huts inside the stockades. Many died from disease and exposure and malnutrition.

When spring finally came, the weakened, weary Cherokees were told to prepare for the long march to Arkansas. Before leaving, the soldiers tried one more time to capture the few families who had escaped to the Great Smoky Mountains. They were unsuccessful. Finally they agreed that if Tsali and his family would give themselves up, the other families in the mountains could remain.

Tsali and his sons were brave men. One morning they surrendered to the soldiers and were executed by





were flying north, the Cherokees were told to prepare for the long journey to Arkansas. About five thousand started by boat down the Tennessee River to the Mississippi, and then up the Arkansas River to their place of exile. It was a cruel journey, supervised by soldiers who cared little about the health and welfare of their captives.

The heat of summer came early that year and the hot summer sun brought much sickness. The boats were crowded and uncomfortable. To make things worse, some of the government contractors, who were to supply food to the Cherokees, were dishonest. They supplied rotten meat and weevily corn, much of which could not be eaten. So hunger was added to the discomfort and sickness which afflicted the poor Cherokees.

Chief John Ross heard of the suffering of this first

group of Cherokees to leave Georgia. Ross got permission from the army to delay the departure of the rest of his people until cool weather. He hoped to prevent more sickness and death by this delay.

Most of the remaining Cherokees left Georgia in October 1838. This last party went overland, instead of by water. Wagons carried the few belongings of the Cherokees as well as sick people, old people and young children. Some of the more prosperous Cherokees rode horses, but most of them walked the thousand miles or more to Arkansas. The route they took went through Tennessee and Kentucky, across the southern tip of Illinois, then through Missouri to the western part of Arkansas.

Unfortunately, that winter was exceptionally bitter. The freezing winds were worse for the Cherokees in Ross's party than the summer heat had been on the

SUMMER
1838

first party to leave. Food was scarce, as earlier travelers had killed most of the game along the route. There was no shelter along the way; no help from anyone.

The Cherokees sometimes walked through driving snow for days on end. Many of the rivers and creeks they crossed were frozen, and there were no bridges. When the parties halted at night they slept on the icy ground with only thin blankets to protect them.

As a consequence, many old people and children grew sick and died along the way, and were buried in shallow graves dug in the frozen earth. The rich died along with the poor, and even Chief John Ross lost his beloved wife, and was forced to bury her in a strange



land and face his bitter exile without her. One out of every four failed to survive the long, hard journey.

The graves of the dead were like teardrops falling on a sandy trail, lost and forgotten as the Cherokees moved on. This cruel journey is still known among the Cherokees as the "Trail of Tears."

In Arkansas the Cherokees tried to start over again. They built new cabins, cleared new fields, cut and split logs to make new fences. The unfamiliar country was not the same as home, however. The Osage Indians, who had always lived in Arkansas, resented the new invaders and fought them. The Cherokee government never became as strong as it had been in Georgia.



There was no established national capital like New Echota, no newspaper, no hope. There was only courage.

In Georgia, after the Trail of Tears, most traces of the remarkable Cherokee Nation disappeared. The Cherokee mission schools were torn down, and the town of New Echota was destroyed. The land where the council house and the taverns and the missionary houses had once stood was made into fields. All traces of the proud capital were plowed under like the rotting stalks of last year's corn.

Now, in all of Georgia and Alabama, there is nothing left of the nation that had lived there for a thousand years before the white man came. The Cherokees are gone, pulled up by the roots and cast to the westward wind.

They are gone like the buffalo and the elk which once roamed the mountain valleys. They have disappeared like the passenger pigeons which once darkened the sky as great flocks flew over the river routes from north to south and back again. Like wayah, the wolf, and like the chestnut trees, the Cherokees are no longer found in the mountains of Georgia.

Now only the names remain: Dahlonega, Chattahoochee, Oostenaula, Etowah, Nantahala, Tennessee, Ellijay, Tallulah, Chatoga, Nacoochee, Hiawassee, Chickamauga, Tugalo, Chattanooga . . .

