



ERIK S. LESSER/The Journal staff

David West of Brimer Monument takes a rest after helping to load the 3-ton marker which be dedicated Aug. 1 to mark the site of Tanasi, the Cherokee Indian city from which Tennessee got its name.

Tenn. honors its Indian heritage

BY ANNA GARBER
of The Journal staff

Tennessee's name is celebrated in song the world over, but nobody knows for sure what the word means.

The origin of the word "Tennessee" has been traced back as far as the Cherokee town of Tanasi. But the meaning of "Tanasi" has never been substantiated.

The state's link with Tanasi will be preserved in the form of a monument just 300 yards from the underwater site of the town that was briefly the capital of the Cherokee nation. It now lies beneath Tellico Lake.

The monument will be dedicated Aug. 1 by Lt. Gov. John Wilder and other officials. It will have seven sides, representing the seven ancient clans of the Cherokees, forming an open circle. The public will be able to walk inside the circle. The middle stone of black granite is 5 feet wide and 3 feet high, with the history of Tennessee's name engraved and gold-leafed on it.

At the center of the opening to the circular space is a gray granite horizontal stone with a seven-point Cherokee star set on it.

Tanasi was prominent between 1721 and 1730, said Max Ramsey, manager of cultural resources at the Tennessee Valley Authority, which is combining with the Tennessee Historical Commission Foundation to finance the memorial project. Cherokee records show that

when 37 chiefs got together to elect a spokesman to deal with the settlers who were moving into the district, they chose the chief of Tanasi, who became the emperor, Ramsey said.

At about the same time, according to an inscription on the monument, the name Tanasi was applied to the river on which the town was located.

Although Tanasi was the name the Cherokees used for the town, "apparently it has no etymology in the Cherokee language," Ramsey said. In the 1920s, it was thought to mean "bend in the river," but there is no such word in the Cherokee language, he said.

The word apparently came from Muskogean-speaking tribes who lived in the same spot before the Cherokees, Ramsey said. The Creeks and other native American tribes spoke Muskogean, he said.

After 1730, Tanasi was no longer the principal Cherokee town, and eventually it became absorbed into the larger town of Chota.

The first recorded spelling of Tennessee was on Lt. Henry Timberlake's map of the area in 1762. "It was probably an English spelling of the way the word sounded," Ramsey said.

Tennessee was also the name of a county whose seat was Clarksville. When the name was chosen for the state, Tennessee County gave up its name and became Montgomery County, said Herbert Harper, executive director of the Tennessee Historical Commission.

In 1796, Tennessee was the name chosen for the nation's 16th state.

At the monument's dedication ceremony at 1:30 p.m. Aug. 1, Walter Durham, chairman of the Tennessee Historical Commission Foundation, will be master of ceremonies. Dignitaries will include Wilder, John Waters, TVA director, and Chief Jonathan Taylor, principal chief of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee nation. Ceremonial dancers will perform.

The total cost is a little under \$20,000, Harper said. To get to the monument site, take state route 411 south from Knoxville. Turn left just short of Vonore onto state route 360. About 15 miles south, signs will mark the road to the left that leads to the monument, 400 to 500 yards in.



DON WOOD/The Journal staff

They are running a correction on time.