

SEQUOYAH

Inventor of the Cherokee Written Language

Diane Shaughnessy
Jack Carpenter



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FAMOUS NATIVE AMERICANS





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Sequoyah

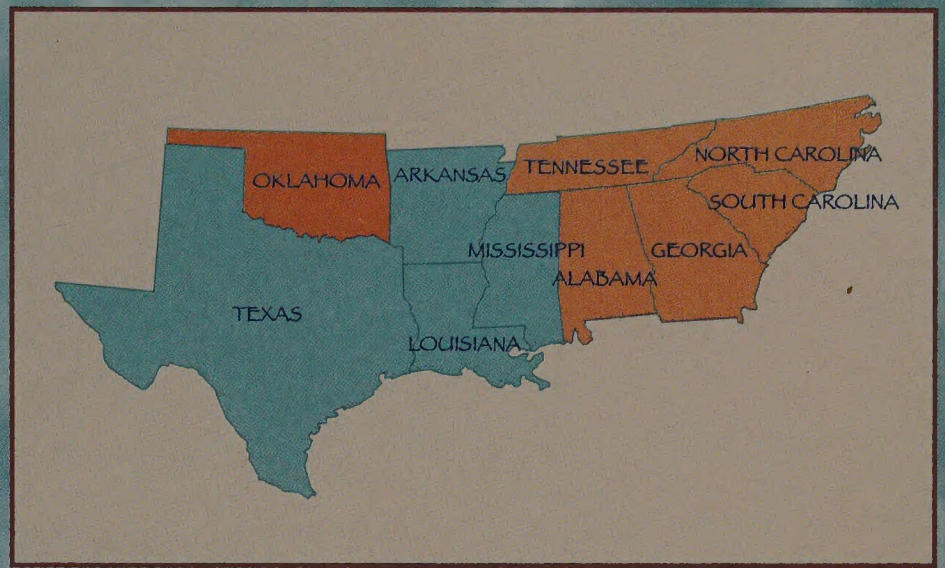
Sequoyah (seh-KOY-uh) was born around 1770 in the village of Tuskegee in what is now the state of Alabama. Most

Americans knew Sequoyah as George Guess, but the Cherokees called him Sogwali. British **missionaries** (MISH-un-ay-reez) gave him the name Sequoyah.

Sequoyah was



The Cherokees once lived in the area that is now the states of North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama. Today, they live in the state of Oklahoma.



raised as a

Cherokee. He is famous for inventing the **syllabary** (SIL-uh-BEHR-ee) for the Cherokee language. The syllabary is an alphabet whose letters stand for the **syllables** (SIL-uh-bulz) that make up the words in the Cherokee language. Sequoyah created a way for the Cherokees to write in their own language.

- ◀ Sequoyah's mother was a Cherokee woman named Wureth. His father was a white man named Nathaniel Gist.



The Cherokee Nation

The Cherokee Indians once lived in the southern part of the Appalachian Mountains. This area is now the states of North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama. Today, they live in what is now the state of Oklahoma.

The Cherokees called themselves Ani-Yunwiya. They were given the name "Cherokee" by a tribe who lived nearby. Cherokee means "people of a different language." The Cherokee Nation was strong and powerful. They were leaders among the Native Americans in their area.

◀ *The Cherokees were forced by the U.S. government to leave their homeland in the Appalachian Mountains.*

A Man of Words

As a young man, Sequoyah was a brave **warrior** (WAR-ee-yer) and a good hunter and **trader** (TRAY-der). He also worked as a **silversmith** (SIL-ver-smith). He was able to speak many languages, including Cherokee, Spanish, and French. This made him a good **interpreter** (in-TER-preh-ter) between the Cherokees and the neighboring white settlers.

Sequoyah was interested in the way white people could **communicate** (kuh-MYOON-ih-kayt) with each other by writing on sheets of paper. Some Native Americans called this "talking leaves."

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Like many young Cherokee men, Sequoyah was a good hunter. He was also good at learning new languages.





Keeping the Language

Sequoyah saw young Cherokees learning English to communicate with white people. He was afraid that these Cherokees would forget their own language and **culture** (KUL-cher). People use language to preserve their cultural **traditions** (truh-DISH-unz) and history. At that time, Cherokee was only a spoken language. There were no letters that Cherokee people could use to make words to write with. Sequoyah believed that he could create a written form of the Cherokee language. In that way, the Cherokee culture could be kept alive.

◀ *Sequoyah was afraid that without a written language the Cherokees would lose their culture to the white settlers.*

Getting to Work

In 1809, Sequoyah began to work on creating a Cherokee alphabet. At first, Sequoyah drew a picture for each Cherokee word or idea. He soon realized that it would take too many pictures to write down one sentence. No one would be able to learn or remember that many pictures.

During this time, Sequoyah built himself a cabin in the woods, away from his wife and family. He needed time alone to work. His friends couldn't understand why he was spending so much time on this project.

12 *Sequoyah lived by himself in a small cabin like this in the woods while he worked. He once said that trying to write sounds down on paper was "like catching a wild beast and taming it."* ►



Cherokee Alphabet

D _i	R _e	T _i	Ꮖ _e	O _u	i _v
S _{ga} Ꮝ _{ka}	F _{ge}	y _{gi}	A _{go}	J _{gu}	E _z
V _{ha}	P _{he}	A _{hi}	F _{he}	Γ _{hu}	Ꮚ
W _{la}	Ꮖ _{te}	P _{ti}	G _{lo}	M _{lu}	A
Ꮖ _{na}	O _{me}	H _{ni}	Ꮖ _{mo}	y _{nu}	
Ꮖ _{na} t _{huu} G _{nah}	A _{ne}	h _{ni}	Z _{uo}	A _{nu}	O _z
T _{qua}	Ꮝ _{que}	Ꮖ _{qui}	v _{quo}	Ꮝ _{quu}	E
U _{sa} Ꮝ _s	A _{se}	B _{si}	F _{se}	Ꮖ _{su}	R
U _{du} W _{ta}	S _{de} Ꮖ _{te}	A _{di} A _{ti}	A _{do}	S _{du}	Ꮖ
Ꮖ _{lla} L _{ta}	L _{tu}	C _{ti}	V _{to}	Ꮖ _{tu}	P
G _{tva}	V _{tse}	h _{tvi}	K _{tse}	J _{tva}	C
G _{wa}	Ꮝ _{we}	Ꮖ _{wi}	Ꮖ _{wo}	J _{wu}	G
Ꮝ _{va}	B _{re}	Ꮖ _{yi}	h _{yo}	G _{vu}	B

Starting Over

Sequoyah's wife finally became tired of Sequoyah's project. One night, she went to his cabin and threw all of his papers into the fireplace. Some people would have been angry. But Sequoyah saw this as a new beginning. He started the work all over again.

This time, instead of breaking sentences into words, Sequoyah broke the words into sounds, or syllables. He drew one **character** (KEHR-ek-ter) for each syllable. He knew that all Cherokee words were made up of the same sounds. The sounds, or syllables, were put together in different ways to make words.

◀ *These are the symbols that Sequoyah created for each syllable.*

Cherokee Talking Leaves

Twelve years later, in 1821, Sequoyah had developed 86 characters. This was later changed to 85. Sequoyah took his syllabary, or alphabet based on syllables, to the leaders of the Cherokee Nation. They were amazed. They quickly accepted Sequoyah's characters as the Cherokee written language. The Cherokees finally had their own "talking leaves." They were the first Native Americans to develop a written language.



DJG

(ah-gay-hyoo-jah)

BOY

DFGG

(ah-choo-jah)

GIRL

GWY



J. A. A. A.

CHEROKEE

PHOENIX.

VOL. I.

NEW ECHOTA, THURSDAY MARCH 20, 1829.

NO. 5.

EDITED BY ELIAS BOUDINOTT. PRINTED WEEKLY BY ISAAC H. HARRIS, FOR THE CHEROKEE NATION.

At \$2 50 if paid in advance, \$3 in six months, or \$3 50 if paid at the end of the year.

To subscribers who can read only the Cherokee language the price will be \$4 00 in advance, or \$5 50 to be paid within the year.

Every subscription will be considered as annual unless subscribers give notice to the contrary before the commencement of a year.

Five persons procuring six subscribers, becoming for the payment, receive a seventh gratis.

Advertisements will be inserted at seven cents per square for the first insertion, thirty cents and a half cents for continuance; longer ones in proportion.

All letters addressed to the Editor, and paid, will receive due attention.

... TO THE EDITOR OF THE CHEROKEE NATION. ...

CHEROKEE LAWS.

[CONTINUED.] Unanimously agreed. That school-masters, blacksmiths, millers, salt-petre and gun powder manufacturers, iron-men and turpentine keepers, and mechanics, are hereby privileged to reside in the Cherokee Nation under the following conditions; viz:—Their owners procuring a permit from the National Committee and Council, and becoming responsible for good conduct and behaviour, and liable to removal for misdemeanor; and they agree, that blacksmiths, millers, ferrymen and turpentine keepers are privileged to improve and cultivate twelve acres of ground for the support of themselves and families should they please to do so. JNO. ROSS, Pres't N. Committee. A. M'COY, Clerk N. Committee.

any person or persons, citizens of the Nation, shall receive and bring into the Nation, spirituous liquors for disposal, and the same or any part thereof, be found to be the property of any person or persons not citizens of the nation, and satisfactory proof be made of the fact, he or they shall forfeit & pay the sum of one hundred dollars, and the whiskey be subject to confiscation as aforesaid, and this decree to take effect from and after the first day of January, one thousand eight hundred and twenty, and to be strictly enforced; Provided nevertheless, That nothing shall be so construed in this decree, as to tax any persons bringing sugar, coffee, salt, iron, & steel, into the Cherokee Nation for sale; but no permanent establishment for the disposal of such articles, can be admitted to any person or persons not citizens of the Nation.

JNO. ROSS, Pres't N. Committee. his mark. PATH KILLER, CHARLES HICKS, A. M'COY, Sec'y to the Council. New Town, October 29, 1818.

In Committee, New Town, Cherokee Nation, October 30th, 1819.

De it hereby resolved, That no person or persons whatsoever, shall be permitted to cut out any road or roads leading from any main road now in existence, so as to intersect the same again and to the injury of the interest of any person or persons residing on said road, without first getting an order from the National Council for the opening of said roads; & any person or persons violating this decree, contained in the foregoing resolution, shall be subject to such punishment and fine as the National Council and Committee may hereafter decide and inflict, on any such case as may be brought before them for trial.

JNO. ROSS, Pres't N. Committee. his mark. Approved—PATH KILLER, CHARLES HICKS, A. M'COY, Clerk.

New Town, Cherokee N. Nov. 1, 1819. IN COMMITTEE. Resolved by the National Committee, that no contract or bargain entered into to with any slave or slaves, without

... PROTECTION ...

... CHURCH ...

... WASHINGTON AND THE CHEROKEES ...

It has been common of late days, amongst the great men of the United States, to say much on the subject of Indian civilization, and in but very little, towards accomplishing this desirable thing. Many plans have been recommended, but as yet they have existed only in declamation. The fact is, that mere theory will never civilize an Indian, or any other man; it will require active, unremitting and persevering exertions—with these, and correct theory, the rising Indian may be turned to an industrious and respectable citizen. Among those who properly understood the subject of Indian civilization, Gen. Geo. Washington, that truly great and illustrious man, deserves a particular notice. Under his administration, originated this liberal and kind policy, which the United States have exercised towards the Indians, and under which the Cherokees have made manifest improvement, in agriculture and civilization; thereby showing the practicability of the measures of Washington to enlighten the Indians. The following talk will exhibit to the reader, the plan of improvement which he recommended to the Cherokees, and it may not be amiss to state, that their present situation proves beyond a doubt, that this plan was not mere declamation.

... TUESDAY ...

... WASHINGTON AND THE CHEROKEES ...

... when you can get no skin by the traders will give you powder nor clothing; and you that without other implements for tilling the ground than the hoe, you continue to raise only scanty crops of corn. Hence you are sometimes pined to suffer much from hunger cold; and as the game are lessening numbers more and more, these sufferings will increase. And how you to provide against them? to my words and you will know. My beloved Cherokees— I am glad you already experienced the advantage of keeping cattle and let all keep them and increase their numbers, and you will ever have plenty of meat. To these add and they will give you clothing as well as food. Your lands are sold of great extent. By proper management you can raise live stock for your own wants, but to save the White people. By using the plow you can vastly increase your crops of corn. You can also grow wheat which makes the best of bread, well as other useful grain. To this you will easily add flax and cotton which you may dispose of to the White people, or have it made up by your own women into clothing for yourselves. Your wives and daughters soon learn to spin and weave to make this certain, I have directed Mr. Dixonson, to procure all the necessary apparatus for spinning, weaving, and to hire a woman to teach the use of them. He will also procure some plows and other implements of husbandry, with which to bring improved cultivation of the soil, which I recommend, and employ a person to show you how they are to be used. I have further directed to procure some cattle and sheep the most prudent and industrious of whom shall be willing to exert themselves in tilling the ground and raising useful animals. He is often to talk with you on these subjects, & you all necessary information to promote your success. I must therefore desire you to listen to him; and to follow his advice. I appointed him to dwell among you as the Agent of the United States because I have to be a faithful man, and to follow my instructions, and to do

Using the Language

In 1822, Sequoyah visited Cherokees who lived in other areas. He taught them to read and write the new language. Soon most Cherokees could read and write Cherokee.

In 1827, the Cherokee tribal leaders wrote their own **constitution** (kon-stih-TOO-shun) using their new written language. The leaders also agreed to set aside money for a Cherokee newspaper. One year later, the first edition of the *Cherokee Phoenix* was printed. The articles were printed in English and Cherokee.

◀ *The Cherokee Phoenix was the first Native American newspaper ever published in the United States.*

The Trail of Tears

In 1838 and 1839, the U.S. government decided it wanted the Cherokee land for white settlers. Soldiers forced the Cherokee people to move nearly 900 miles west of their homeland, to what is now the state of Oklahoma. This forced march was later called the "Trail of Tears." Of the 16,000 people who walked the Trail of Tears, over 4,000 people died. It is not known whether Sequoyah made the march. But he did move to Oklahoma around that time. Sequoyah lived to be 84. He died in 1843.

The Cherokees who survived the long march from their homeland to Oklahoma called the march "The Place Where They Cried." Today, it is called the Trail of Tears. ►



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GEORGIA

MISSISSIPPI

TEXAS

LOUISIANA

A Strong Nation

The Cherokee written language is believed to be the only known language created by one person and used by many. To **honor** (ON-er) Sequoyah, the giant sequoia trees found in California's Yosemite Valley were named for him. Thanks to Sequoyah's characters, nearly everyone in the Cherokee Nation can read and write in Cherokee. Today, the Cherokee Nation is still one of the strongest Native American nations in the United States. They have a written history that can be passed down from parent to child, and will never be forgotten.

Glossary

character (KEHR-ek-ter) A letter, number, mark, or sign.

communicate (kuh-MYOON-ih-kayt) To share information or news.

constitution (kon-stih-TOO-shun) A written set of rules that a group of people agree to live by.

culture (KUL-cher) The customs, art, and tools of a group of people.

honor (ON-er) To show respect to.

interpreter (in-TER-preh-ter) Someone who translates from one language to another.

missionary (MISH-un-ayr-ee) A person who teaches a religion to the people of another country or people with different beliefs.

Sequoyah (seh-KOY-uh) Inventor of the Cherokee written language.

silversmith (SIL-ver-smith) A person who makes things out of silver.

syllabary (SIL-uh-BEHR-ee) A set of characters based on the syllables of the words in a language.

syllable (SIL-uh-bul) A word or part of a word that is pronounced as a unit.

trader (TRAY-der) A person who exchanges goods with others.

tradition (truh-DISH-un) A way of doing something that is passed down from parent to child.

warrior (WAR-ee-yer) A person who fights in a war.

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SACAJAWEA: Shoshone Trailblazer

SEQUOYAH: Inventor of the Cherokee
Written Language

SITTING BULL: Courageous Sioux Chief

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