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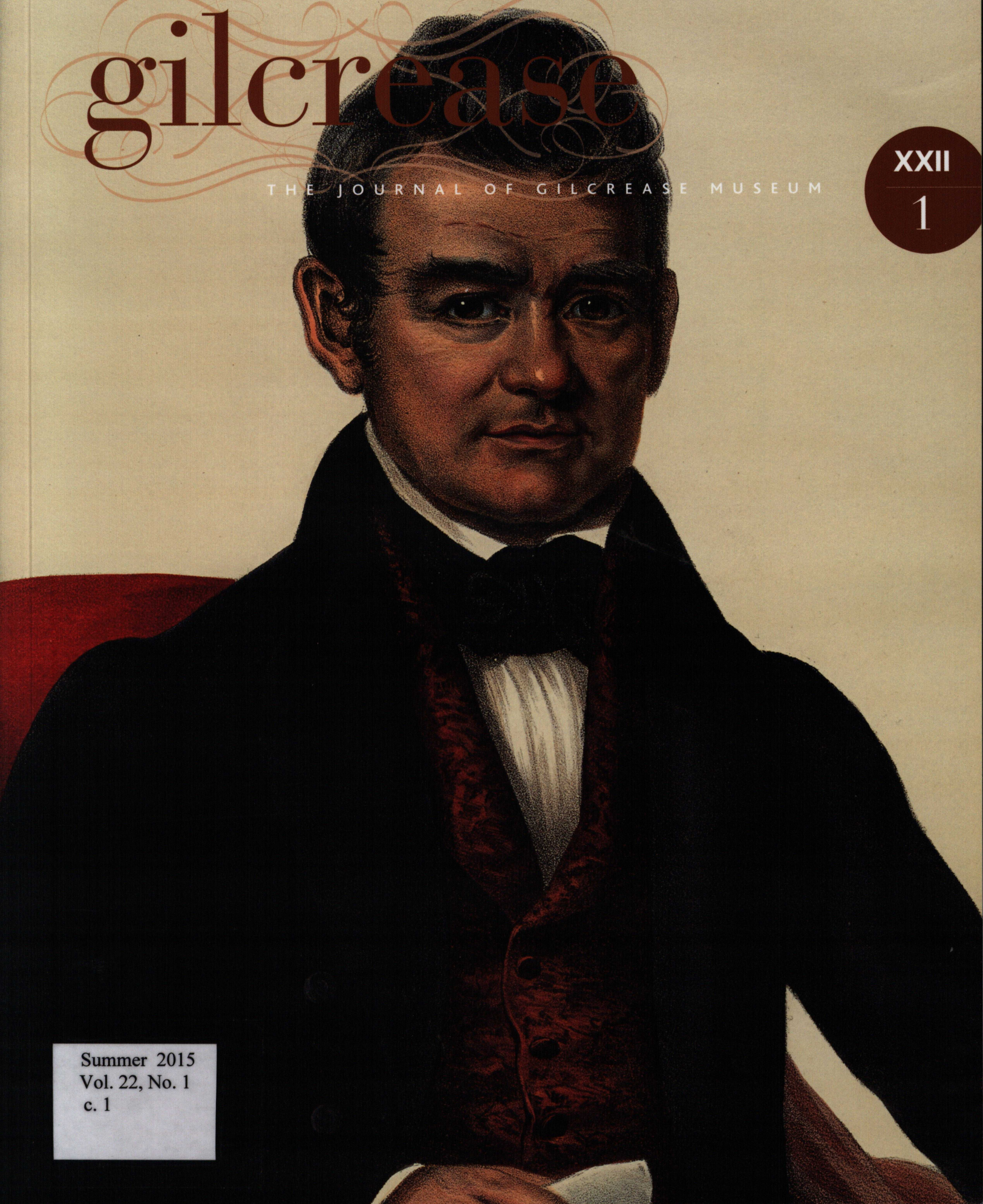

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FRONT: John Ross, a Cherokee Chief. McKenny and Hall, from *History of Indian Tribes of North America*. Vol. III, p. 176. GM2126.1816.22b.
BACK: Mary Brian Stapler Ross Bracelet (detail). Nell Stapler Bradshaw papers, 1884–1992, Coll. No. 2007.005.6.1.1 McFarlin Library. Department of Special Collections and University Archives. The University of Tulsa.
PAGE ONE: Cherokee syllabary. GM4026.312.

CHEROKEE

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF PRINCIPAL CHIEF JOHN ROSS
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ex- tions for the observance of our citi-
says, zens in working the Gold mines of
him the nation and other valuable minerals,
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Unit- the fate of their wicked pursuers;
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oces- teries of an Omnipotent and all-wise
hav- Being be unshaken, for in the appear-
rter- ance of impossibilities, there is still
are hope. JNO ROSS.
heir *New Echota, C. N. July* 1830.

Facing: Message of the Principal Chief to the General Council of the Cherokee Nation. July 1830, broadside. GM3526.161. See page 11 for another detail of the document.

Inset: *The Three Cherokees*. 1762, hand-colored wood engraving. GM3576.429.

John Ross (1790–1866) was the longest-serving principal chief in the history of the Cherokee Nation, leading the Nation from 1828 to 1866, thirty-eight years. His tenure encompassed their struggle against forced removal from their original homeland, internal violence due to post-removal factionalism, the unification and rebuilding of the Cherokee Nation in Indian Territory, and the American Civil War. All these, as well as the chief's family life, are chronicled in the eleven lineal feet of the John Ross Papers in the Gilcrease Collection.

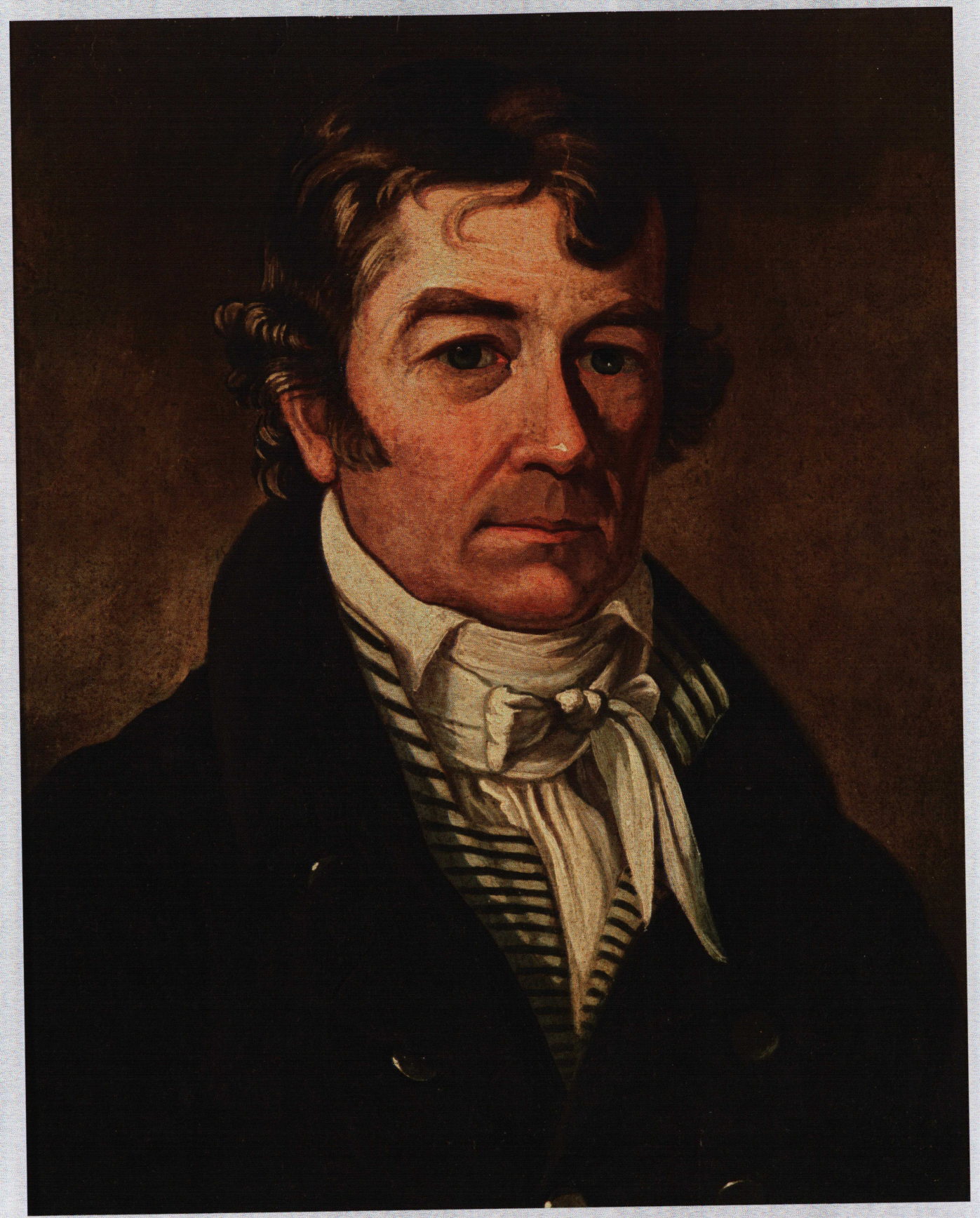
The papers cover a period from 1814 to 1897 and contain correspondence, legal documents, records of the Cherokee Nation, proclamations of the principal chief, petitions and protests to the U.S. government, financial accounts and transactions, records from the forced removal (including rations issued and payments made to officers of each detachment during the removal), documents that chronicle Cherokee relationships with other tribes, and records of Cherokee involvement in the American Civil War. The collection contains more than 2,000 primary documents, many written by or to Chief Ross, constituting perhaps the singular most important record of Cherokee history during the nineteenth century.[1]



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ᎩᎬᎾᏀᏒ ᎤᏬᎶᏗ ᏣᎻ ᎫᎾᏍᎫᎾ

PRINCIPAL CHIEF JOHN ROSS

DUANE KING



Daniel Ross. James Earle, 1815, oil on board. GM0126.1215.

John Ross was born on 3 October 1790 the great-grandson of Ghigooie, a member of the Bird Clan, and William Shorey, Sr., a Virginia fur trader.[2] The Shoreys' oldest daughter, Annie, married John McDonald, who emigrated from Scotland to Charleston, South Carolina, in 1766.[3] McDonald opened a supply store on Chickamauga Creek in present-day Chattanooga, Tennessee. In 1776, after the Overhill Towns were destroyed by the Virginia militia, Cherokee war chief Dragging Canoe and the families that followed him established eleven new towns in the vicinity of McDonald's store. They became known as the Chickamauga Cherokees. They developed a reputation as "marauders of the frontier" because of their efforts to stem the tide of encroachment on prime hunting grounds after the American Revolution. In 1785 Daniel Ross, a native of Scotland, was traveling down the Tennessee River on a trading mission to the Choctaws when he was captured by Chickamaugans. McDonald interceded, spared Ross's life, and gave him sanctuary in his home.[4]

Encouraged by Cherokee friends, Daniel Ross opened a trading post at Setico and within a year married McDonald's daughter Mollie. In 1788 Ross, Mollie, and her parents John and Annie McDonald moved to Turkeytown, near present-day Center, Alabama. There, two years later, their third child was born. As the first son he was named after his grandfather John McDonald. Thus, John Ross was seven-eighths Scottish by blood and 100 percent Cherokee by birth. In the matrilineal society, he inherited the clan of his mother, Anitsiskwa or Bird Clan. His clan and family affiliations were unbroken throughout his lineage. During the period of removal the federal government declared anyone who had one-quarter Indian blood to be Indian. John Ross was one-eighth Cherokee and did not meet the federal criterion, but he considered himself Cherokee by birth. The federal government considered him Cherokee by choice, and as a result his property was confiscated and he was removed.[5]

By 1797 Daniel Ross and his family had moved back to the Chattanooga area, where Ross operated a store on Chattanooga Creek near the foot of Lookout Mountain until about 1816. Wanting a good education for his nine children, Daniel built a small school and employed John Barber Davis as a teacher. After attending Davis's school, John Ross went on to a school in Kingston, Tennessee, and later to the academy at Maryville.[6]

In about 1813 John Ross married Elizabeth Henley. Elizabeth, or Quatie, was the widow of Robert Henley, who was killed in the War of 1812. She had one child by Henley and six children by John Ross. Elizabeth was one-half Cherokee and her children with John Ross were five-sixteenths Cherokee.[7]

RED STICK WAR

In autumn 1813, a hostile faction of upper Muscogee-Creeks known as the "Red Sticks" joined Chief Tecumseh of the Shawnees in a rebellion against white encroachment on Native land. The Cherokee and Creek loyal to the U.S. joined local and state militia to quell the rebellion. Ross entered military service in Captain Sekekee's (Katydid) company of mounted Cherokees as a 2nd Lieutenant under the command of Colonel Gideon Morgan.

1 H.H. Keene, *A Guidebook to Manuscripts in the Library of the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art* (Tulsa, OK: Gilcrease Institute, 1968), 70–71.

2 Ghigooie was born about 1730; William Shorey was born about 1720 and died aboard the frigate *L'Epreue* on 4 June 1762, according to the log kept by Captain Peter Blake. A microfilm copy can be found in the Museum of the Cherokee Indian Archives. Shorey's death on the way to England left a three-member Cherokee diplomatic mission along with Ensign Henry Timberlake and Sergeant Thomas Sumter without a competent interpreter. Timberlake, who had spent three months in the Overhill country, attempted to fill the role. A British newspaper, after the Cherokee audience with King George III on 8 July 1762, noted that the interpreter was so confused that the King could ask but few questions.

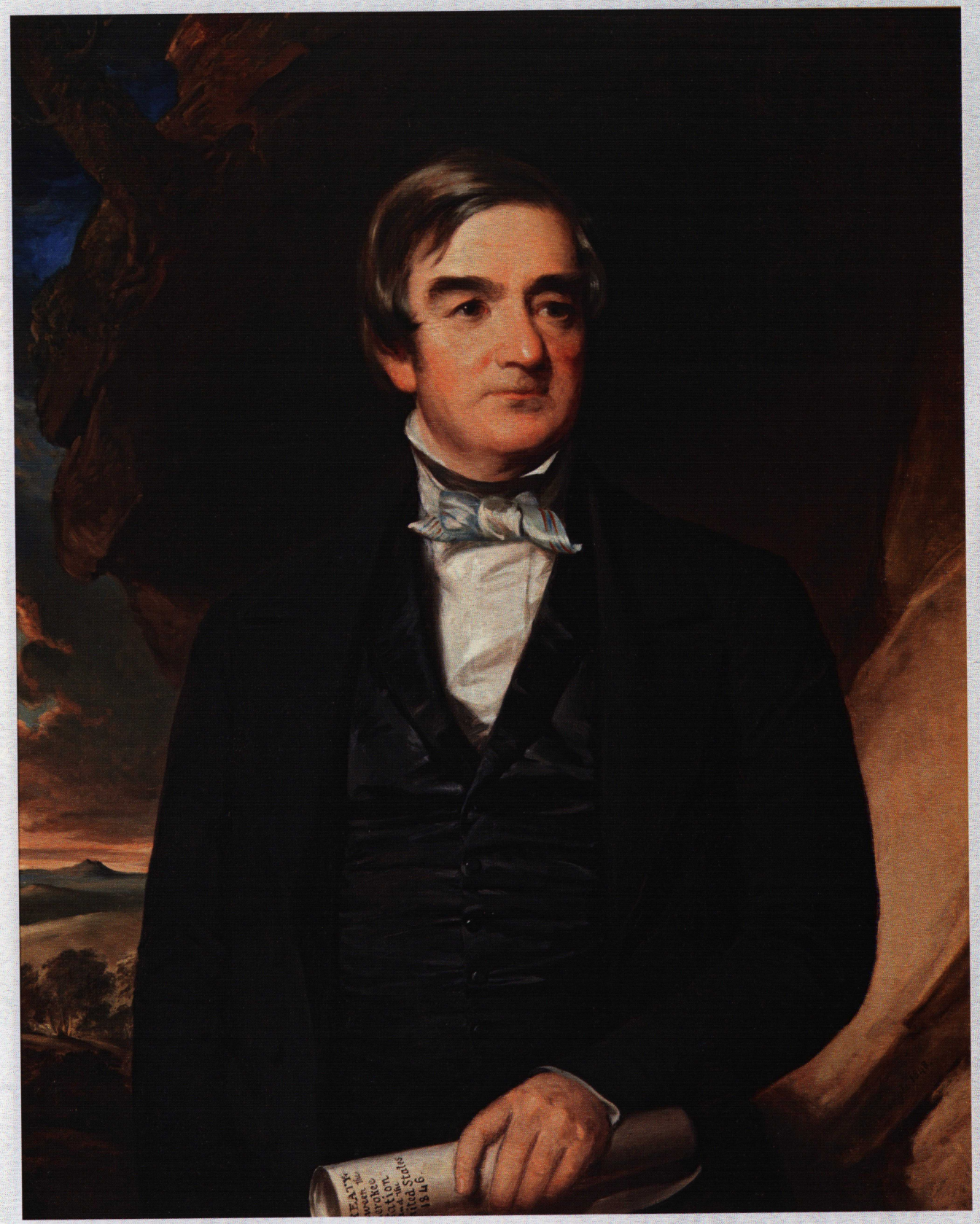
3 The Shoreys' oldest daughter Annie was born about 1746 and died on 28 May 1825. Annie married John McDonald (ca 1747–ca. 1824), who emigrated from Scotland to Charleston, SC, in 1766. In 1770 he was appointed assistant superintendent for Indian Affairs. Their daughter Mary Molly McDonald was born on 1 November 1770 and died in 1808.

4 See John P. Brown, *Old Frontiers: The Story of the Cherokee Indians from the Earliest Times to the Date of Their Removal to the West,* 1838 (Kingsport, TN: Southern Publishers, 1938), 163; In 1779 another frontier army laid waste to the Chickamauga Towns and confiscated all the supplies from McDonald's commissary. Bickering among the troops over the division of the loot forced the army to stop at a place henceforth called Sale Creek to auction the looted property. The item that commanded the highest bid was McDonald's prized white horse.

5 Gary Moulton, *John Ross, Cherokee Chief* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1978), 5–6.

6 Samuel Cole Williams, "Christian Missions to the Overhill Cherokees," *Chronicles of Oklahoma,* volume 12 (March 1934), page 66.

7 Emmet Starr, *History of the Cherokee Indians and Their Legends and Folklore* (Oklahoma City: The Warden Company, 1921), 410.



John Neagle. *John Ross,* 1848. Oil on canvas. Museum purchase, 1942.12.1© 2015 Philbrook Museum of Art, Inc., Tulsa, Oklahoma.

In January 1814, the Cherokee regiment trained in military discipline, weapons firing, and hand-to-hand combat at Ross's Landing. At the beginning of the year, General Jackson began assembling his forces at Fort Strother on the Coosa River below Turkeytown. At the same time, the Creeks had amassed a force of 1,200 warriors at the Horseshoe, a bend in the Tallapoosa River fifty miles south of Fort Strother. By mid-March, Jackson's forces had reached their maximum strength of nearly 5,000 men, mostly Tennessee and Kentucky militia, but also the 39th U. S. Infantry, some friendly Creeks, and the Cherokee Regiment of 335 men.[8]

Menawa, the Creek commander, ordered the building of a massive stockade across the neck of the bend in the Tallapoosa River. Jackson's strategy was to launch a frontal assault on the barricade across the narrow part of the Horseshoe. Twenty-six Americans were killed and 106 wounded in the battle. The Cherokees, who made up less than ten percent of Jackson's forces, lost eighteen men; thirty-five were wounded. For the Creeks, the battle was a crushing defeat with nearly eight hundred killed. Only a few Creek warriors, including Menawa, escaped the carnage.[9]

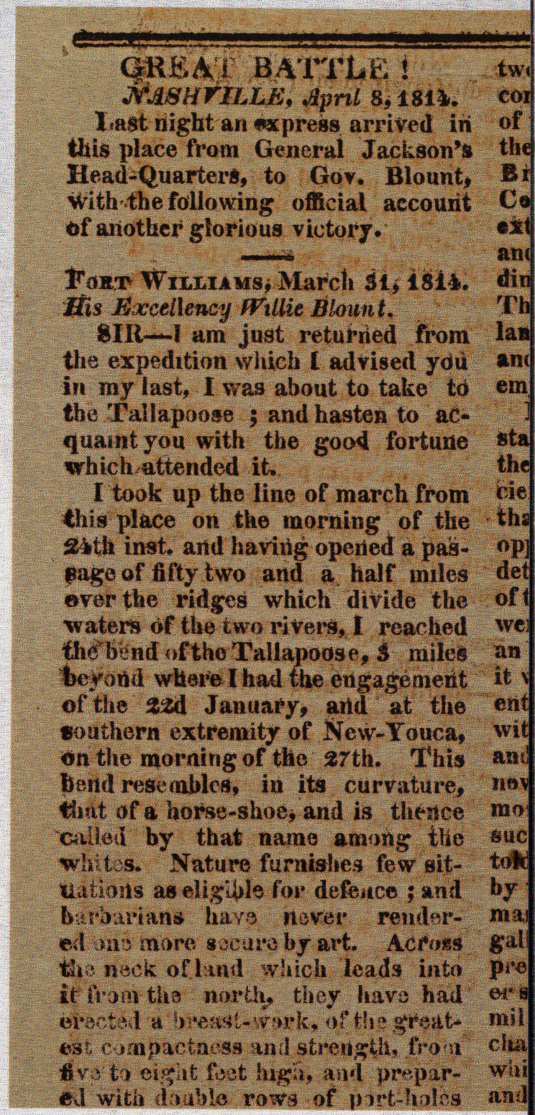
Ross ended his brief military career two weeks after the battle, perhaps contemplating two obvious lessons: no tribe could withstand the military power of the United States, and the reward for armed resistance was annihilation. Perhaps a third lesson was "To the victor go the spoils."

One of the earliest documents in the Ross Papers is a copy of the Treaty of Fort Jackson, signed 9 August 1814, by which the defeated Creeks ceded 23 million acres of land, and the Creek-Cherokee boundary was fixed in favor of the Cherokees. The next nine documents written in 1815 and 1816 relate to the reaffirmation of the new boundary between the Cherokees and Creeks.[10]

DIPLOMATIC SERVICE

In 1816 the National Council named Ross to its first delegation to Washington. The delegation was directed to resolve sensitive issues of national boundaries, land ownership, and white intrusions on Cherokee land. The instructions from Principal Chief Path Killer to the delegation were to press Cherokee claims against the East Tennessee militia, which plundered Cherokee farmsteads on its way home from the war. A letter from delegate John Lowry to President James Madison dated 19 February 1816, also asks that Cherokees be treated the same as white soldiers.[11]

Of the delegates, only Ross was fluent in English, making him the central figure in the negotiations. This was a unique position for a young man in Cherokee society, which traditionally favored older leaders. Andrew Jackson was angry with President Madison for acceding to Cherokee wishes. He was especially unhappy that the Cherokees might gain land through the redrawing of the Cherokee-Creek boundary, proclaiming that he would "not yield with a pen what I have gained with a sword." In the meantime, Cherokees escaping the lawlessness of the Tennessee-Carolina frontier continued to move south and west into northwest Georgia and northeast Alabama onto lands formerly occupied by the Creeks.[12]



GREAT BATTLE!

NASHVILLE, April 8, 1814.

Last night an express arrived in this place from General Jackson's Head-Quarters, to Gov. Blount, with the following official account of another glorious victory.

FORT WILLIAMS, March 31, 1814.

His Excellency Willie Blount.

SIR—I am just returned from the expedition which I advised you in my last, I was about to take to the Tallapoose ; and hasten to acquaint you with the good fortune which attended it.

I took up the line of march from this place on the morning of the 24th inst. and having opened a passage of fifty two and a half miles over the ridges which divide the waters of the two rivers, I reached the bend of the Tallapoose, 3 miles beyond where I had the engagement of the 22d January, and at the southern extremity of New-Youca, on the morning of the 27th. This bend resembles, in its curvature, that of a horse-shoe, and is thence called by that name among the whites. Nature furnishes few situations as eligible for defence ; and barbarians have never rendered one more secure by art. Across the neck of land which leads into it from the north, they have had erected a breast-work, of the greatest compactness and strength, from five to eight feet high, and prepared with double rows of port-holes

Andrew Jackson's account of the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, from *Nashville Whig Extra,* 1814. GM3526.224.

8 Moulton, John Ross, 10-11.

9 Ibid., 10-12.

10 John Ross Papers. Treaty of Fort Jackson, 9 August 1814. GM4826.2.

11 John Ross Papers. Pathkiller to Cherokee Delegation, 10 January 1816, GM4026.18a; William C. Crawford to Return J. Meigs, 2 March 1816, GM4026.22; John Lowry to James Madison, 19 February 1816, GM4026.19a; Conversation between John Lowry and James Madison, 22 February 1816, GM4026.17.

12 John Ross Papers. Copy of Remarks of Andrew Jackson, no date. GM4026.1978.1.

13 The 1797 date seems to have emerged in the 1950s when fundraising efforts were underway to save the historic structure. See Gary E. Moulton, *John Ross, Cherokee Chief*, 6.

14 John Ross to Return J. Meigs, 11 April 1817, Record Group 75, M 208, Roll 7, National Archives; Gary Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, vol. 1 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 30.

15 John Ross to Calvin Jones, 8 December 1818, Miscellaneous Collections, Tennessee State Historical Society, Tennenesee State Library and Archives, Nashville, as published in Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 31.

16 Georgina G. DeWeese, W. Jeff Bishop, Henri D. Grissino-Mayer, Brian Parrish, and S. Michael Edwards, "Dendrochronological Dating of the The Chief John Ross House, Rossville, Georgia." *Southeastern Archaeology* 31 (Winter 2012), 221–30.

17 Builders of log cabins agree that trees should be felled in early winter. Cool temperatures make for slower drying time, which reduces log cracking, and splitting. It's also easier to haul logs over hard or frozen ground. Logs are seasoned by stacking off the ground with stickers or smaller logs in between the courses for maximum air flow around the logs and allowed to air-dry for one to two years before use.

18 The last letter from Ross with the Rossville address was to Hugh Montgomery February 23/27, 1827, Record Group 75, M 208, Roll 10 dated February 23 and Record Group 75, M 234, Roll 72, 373–374, February 27, National Archives; On August 1, 1827, Ross wrote to James Barbour from his new home at the Head of Coosa, Record Group 75, M 234, Roll 72, 251-3, National Archives; See also Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 129–30.

19 John Ross Papers. Resolution of National Committee and Council, 31 October 1831, GM026.99; the Constitution and Laws of the Cherokee Nation (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1840), 6–15; 22–25; 33. See also Duane King, "Sequoyah or George Guess (Gist)," in *Dictionary of Georgia Biography*, ed. Kenneth Coleman and Stephen Gurr (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983), 878–880.

It has generally been accepted that the only surviving home of John Ross, relocated in Rossville, Georgia, was built by his grandfather, John McDonald, in 1797 and occupied by Ross as early as 1808. Recent evidence, however, would indicate a much later date.[13] Ross's letters suggest that he moved to the house in 1817 or 1818. His letters dated April 1817 are from Poplar Spring, Cherokee Nation.[14] In December 1818 Ross gives his return address as Rossville, Cherokee Nation.[15] Dendrochronological studies suggest that the logs for the house were cut during the winter of 1816–17, which corresponds to the earliest historical records for the home.[16] If the house was built a year after the logs were cut and had time to season,[17] then it was probably built by John Ross, who lived there for nearly a decade, until spring or summer of 1827.[18]

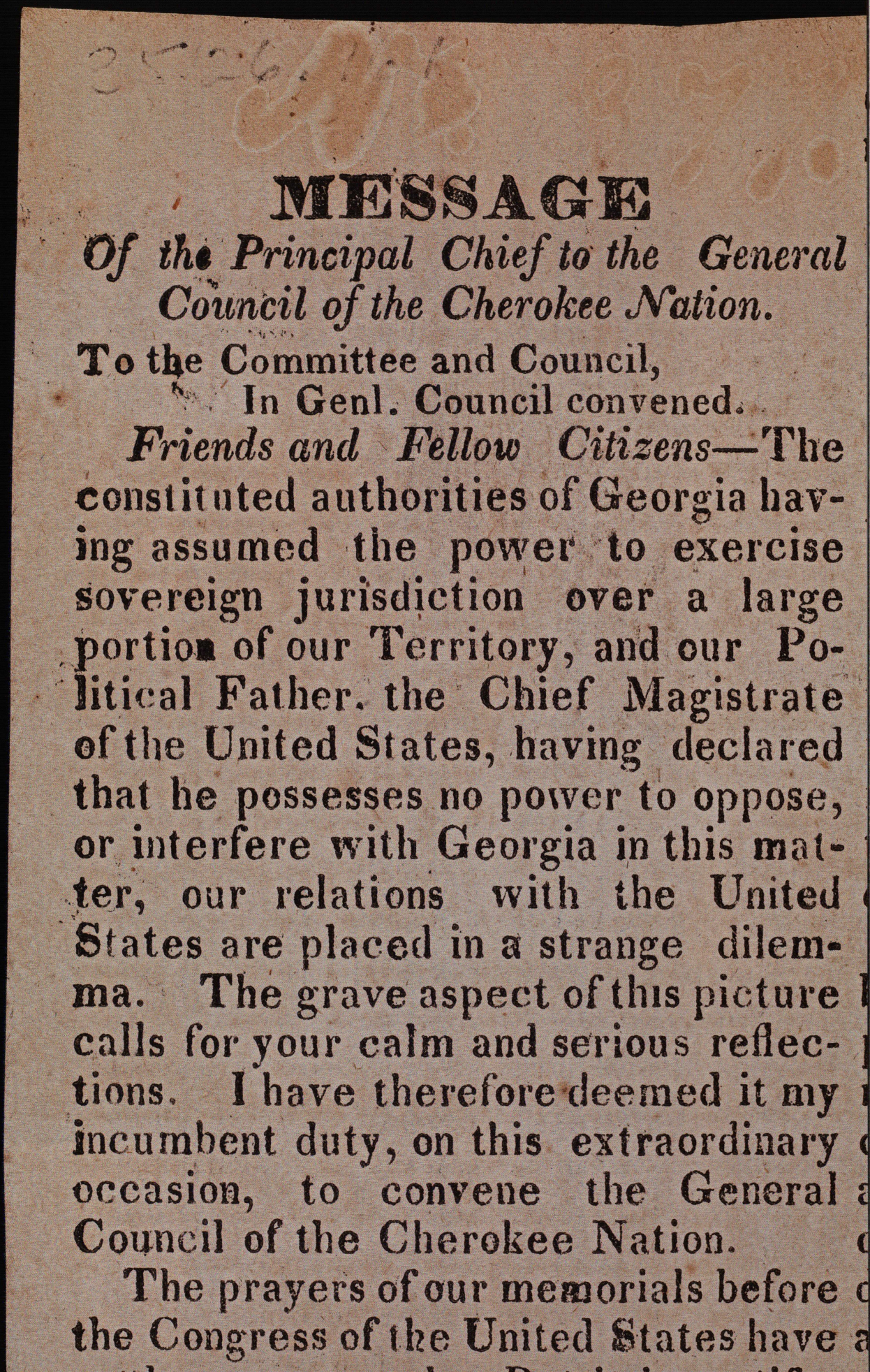
RISE OF THE CHEROKEE STATE

In 1821 Sequoyah devised the syllabary which expedited the Cherokee Nation's rise as a political state. The Cherokee Nation had already formalized the offices of principal chief and deputy chief in 1793; they organized a national police force called the "Light Horse" in 1798 and abrogated the traditional law of blood revenge for all crimes except horse stealing and murder in 1810. The Cherokees created a bicameral legislature in 1817, consisting of the National Council and the National Committee, and established a court system with eight judicial districts in 1819. In 1822 the Cherokee Nation created a Supreme Court, ten years before the State of Georgia had one, thus completing a three-branch government, as a mirror of the United States government. The acceptance of Sequoyah's syllabary facilitated written communication in the Cherokee language. Within a matter of months the Cherokee Nation had a higher literacy rate than its white neighbors. Laws could be written in Cherokee. In 1827, the Nation adopted a constitutional form of government. On February 21, 1828, the *Cherokee Phoenix* made its debut as the first national bilingual newspaper in the United States.[19]

AN ELECTED OFFICIAL

Ross's first political position came in November 1817 with the formation of the National Council. He was elected to the thirteen-member body, where each man served a two-year term. The council was created to consolidate Cherokee political authority after General Jackson made two treaties with small cliques of Cherokees representing minority factions. In November 1818, on the eve of the General Council meeting with Cherokee agent Joseph McMinn, Ross was elevated to presidency of the National Committee, a position he held through 1827. The council perceived Ross to have the diplomatic skill necessary to rebuff U. S. requests to cede Cherokee lands. In May 1827 Ross was elected to the twenty-four-member Constitutional Committee, which drafted a constitution calling for a principal chief, a Council of the Principal Chief, and a National Committee, which together would form the General Council of the Cherokee Nation. Although the constitution was ratified in October 1827, it did not take effect until October 1828, at which point Ross was elected principal chief. He was re-elected until his death in 1866.

Message of the Principal Chief to the General Council of the Cherokee Nation. July 1830, broadside. GM3526.161.



MESSAGE

Of the Principal Chief to the General Council of the Cherokee Nation.

To the Committee and Council,
In Genl. Council convened.

Friends and Fellow Citizens—The constituted authorities of Georgia having assumed the power to exercise sovereign jurisdiction over a large portion of our Territory, and our Political Father, the Chief Magistrate of the United States, having declared that he possesses no power to oppose, or interfere with Georgia in this matter, our relations with the United States are placed in a strange dilemma. The grave aspect of this picture calls for your calm and serious reflections. I have therefore deemed it my incumbent duty, on this extraordinary occasion, to convene the General Council of the Cherokee Nation.

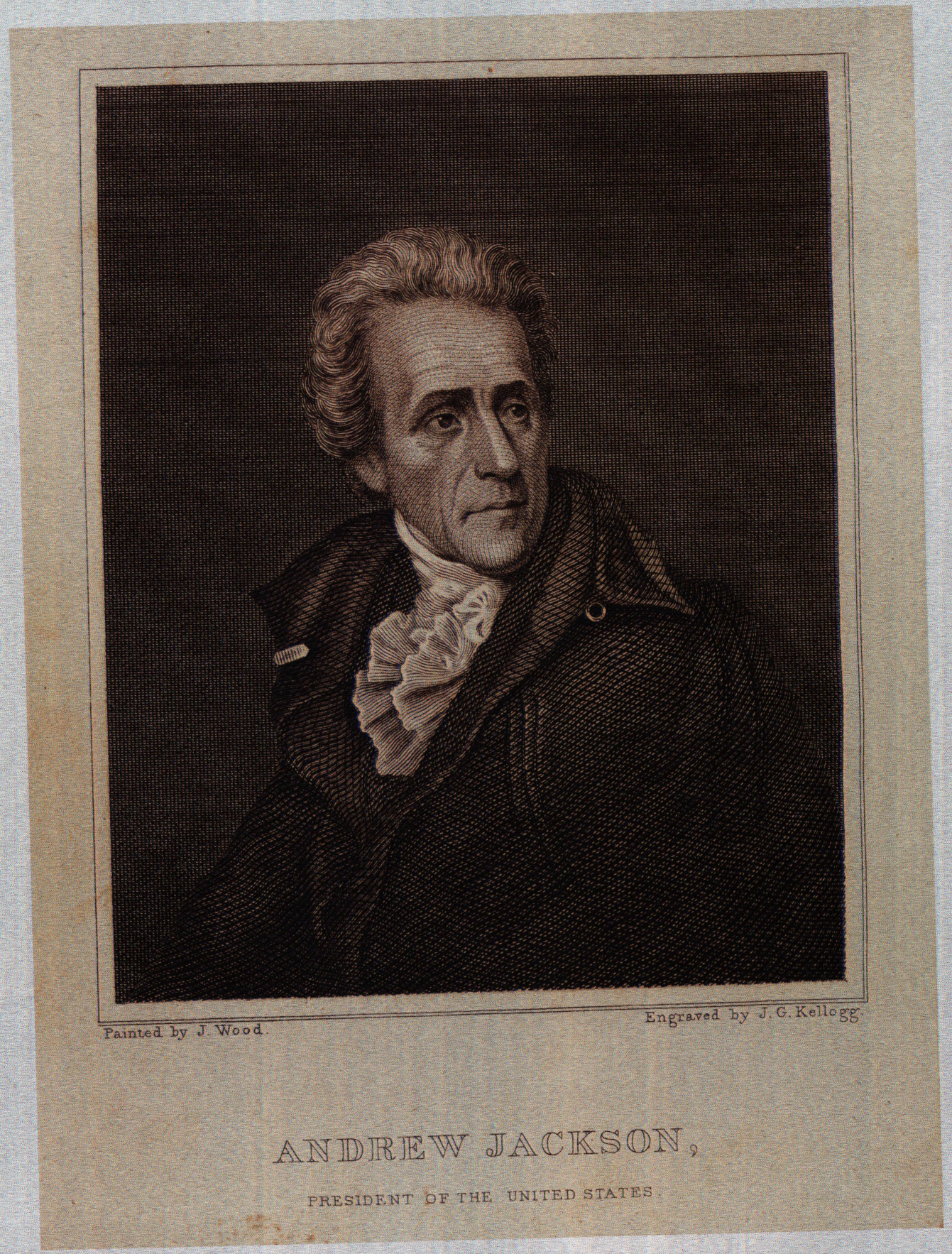
The prayers of our memorials before the Congress of the United States have



Samuel Bell Waugh. *Children of John and Mary Ross*, ca. 1848. Oil on canvas. GM0126.1220.



Facing: Samuel Bell Waugh. *Mary Stapler Ross*, 1848. Oil on canvas. Museum purchase, 1942.12.2. ©Philbrook Museum of Art, Inc., Tulsa, Oklahoma.



In 1828, Andrew Jackson was elected the seventh president of the United States, having campaigned largely on a platform of Indian Removal. Inspired by his election, the State of Georgia passed a series of anti-Indian laws on December 20, 1828. By stripping the Cherokees of their rights, Georgia attempted to pressure Congress into expediting the removal. In 1830, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act.[20] The U. S. Senate passed the bill on 24 April 1830 (28–19), the U. S. House passed it on 26 May 1830 (102–97).[21]

Ross found additional support in Congress from individuals in the National Republican Party such as Senators Henry Clay, Theodore Frelinghuysen, Daniel Webster, and Representative Ambrose Spencer. Despite this support, in April 1829, John H. Eaton, Secretary of War (1829–1831), informed Ross that President Jackson would support the right of Georgia to extend her laws over the Cherokee Nation. In May 1830, Congress endorsed Jackson's policy of removal by passing the Indian Removal Act. It authorized the president to set aside lands west of the Mississippi to exchange for the lands of the Indian nations in the east.[22]

When Ross and the Cherokee delegation failed in their efforts to protect Cherokee lands through dealings with the executive branch and Congress, Ross took the radical step of defending Cherokee rights through the U. S. courts. In June 1830, at the urging of Senator Webster and Senator Frelinghuysen, the Cherokee delegation selected William Wirt, U. S. attorney general in the Monroe and Adams administrations, to defend Cherokee rights before the U. S. Supreme Court.[23]

Wirt argued two cases on behalf of the Cherokee: *Cherokee Nation v Georgia* and *Worcester v Georgia.* In his decision, Chief Justice John Marshall never acknowledged that the Cherokee were a sovereign nation. He did not compel President Jackson to take action that would defend the Cherokee from Georgia's laws. The Cherokee Nation claim was denied on the grounds that the Cherokees were a "domestic dependent sovereignty" and as such did not have the right as a nation state to sue Georgia. The court later expanded on this position in *Worcester v Georgia,* ruling that Georgia could not extend its laws into Cherokee lands. It was not because they were fully sovereign, but because they were a domestic dependent sovereignty. As such the court ruled the Cherokee were dependent not on the state of Georgia, but on the United States. According to the series of rulings, Georgia could not extend its laws because that was a power in essence reserved to the federal government. The Cherokee were considered sovereign enough to legally resist the government of Georgia, and were encouraged to do so.[24]

The court carefully maintained that the Cherokee were ultimately dependent on the federal government and were not a true nation state, nor fully sovereign. Thus the dispute was made moot when federal legislation in the form of the Indian Removal Act exercised the federal government's legal power to handle the whole affair. The series of decisions embarrassed Jackson politically, as Whigs attempted to use the issue in the 1832 election. They largely supported his earlier opinion that the "Indian Question" was one that was best handled by the federal government, and not local authorities.[25]

20 John Ross Papers. Letter from J. H. Eaton to Colonel Ward, 2 August 1830, 4026.77; Letter from John E. Wool to Cherokee People, 19 September 1836. GM4026.345.

21 Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 206.

22 John Ross Papers. Note from Kooweeskoowee, no date. GM4026.3047.

23 Letter from W. W. [William Wirt] to Geo. R. Gilmer, Governor of Georgia. Concerning legal representation of Cherokees, 4 June 1830, 4026.71; William Wirt to John Ross, 4 June 1830, 4026.72, as cited in Moulton, *The Papers of Cherokee Chief John Ross,* 189-90.

24 John Ross to William Wirt, 8 June 1832, Wirt Papers, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, as cited in Moulton, *The Papers of Cherokee Chief John Ross,* 244-6.

25 Samuel Rhea Gammon, Jr., *The Presidential Campaign of 1832* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1922).

Facing: "Andrew Jackson," from *Biography of Andrew Jackson.* Philo Goodwin. Clapp and Benton: Hartford, 1832. GM2326.1875.

David Crockett was the only Tennessee congressman to vote against the Indian Removal Act. Crockett, a veteran of the Red Stick War, grew up in east Tennessee and developed friendships with and respect for Cherokees during the campaign. In 1830 Crockett was a freshman congressman from Tennessee. He argued vehemently against the Removal Act on the floor of the House. "Compelling the Indians to forsake their land" represented "oppression with a vengeance," he said. Crockett insisted that he would rather be "honestly and politically dead, than hypocritically immortalized, by supporting a wicked, unjust measure."[25] He later recalled, "I gave a good honest vote, one that will not make me ashamed in the day of judgment."[26]

Ross wrote to Crockett on 13 January 1831, "To those gentlemen who have so honorably and ably vindicated the rights of the poor Indians in Congress, this nation owes a debt of gratitude, which the pages of history will bear record until time shall be no more."[27] Crockett's enemies rallied against him. He was defeated in his bid for reelection in 1831, won in 1833, and was defeated again in 1835. Ross appreciated Crockett's friendship and found inspiration in his words as indicated in a letter to William Underwood in 1834.[28]

Crockett's frustration with partisan politics in Washington compelled him to head for Texas, following in the footsteps of another Tennessee politician and friend of the Cherokees, Sam Houston. Both were caught up in the movement for Texas independence. Crockett died at the Alamo on 6 March 1836, and Houston went on to become president of the Republic of Texas and later governor of the State of Texas.

FORCED REMOVAL

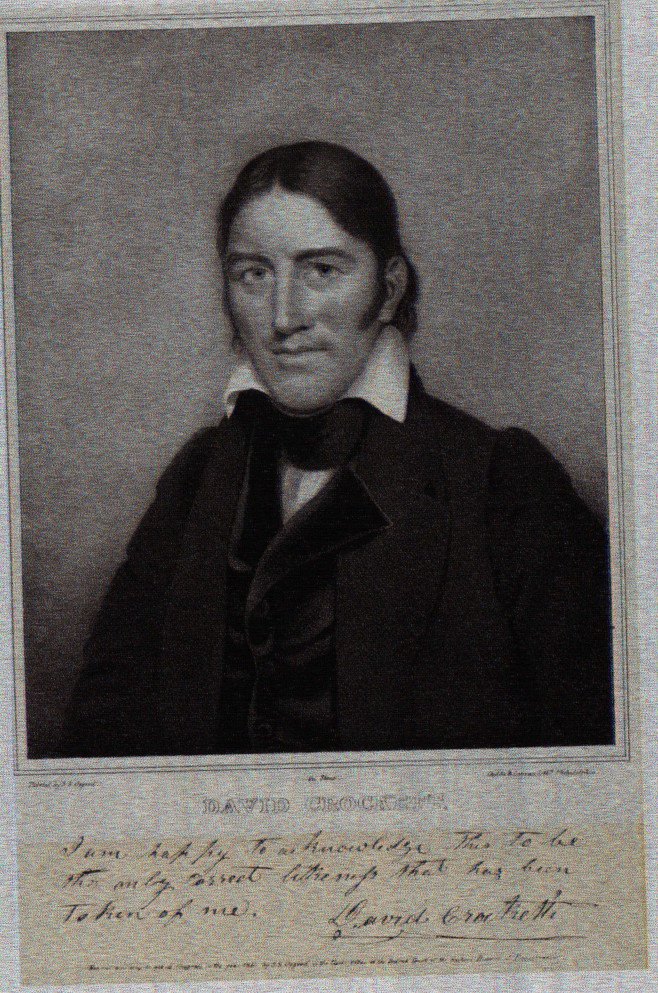
The government's case for removal had been debated in the halls of Congress and in the public media for decades before the event. On 29 December 1835 representatives of the United States government, unable to conclude an agreement with the duly authorized leaders of the Cherokee Nation, signed a treaty with a minority faction willing to cede the last remaining portion of the original Cherokee homeland. Despite the protests of the overwhelming majority of Cherokee people, the United States Senate ratified the fraudulent "Treaty of New Echota" on 23 May 1836. The Cherokees were given two years from that date to remove to the Indian Territory. When the time had expired, only 2,000 of the more than 17,000 Cherokee remaining in the east had voluntarily emigrated.[29]

26 James Atkins Schackford, *David Crockett: The Man and Legend* (reprint ed., Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981), 116–17; see also Donna Akers, "Native Nations in an Age of Western Expansion, 1820–80" in *American Indians American Presidents: A History*, ed. Clifford Trafzer (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2009), 76.

27 John Ross to David Crockett, 13 January 1831, Ross Papers, Newberry Library, cited in Gary Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 210-12.

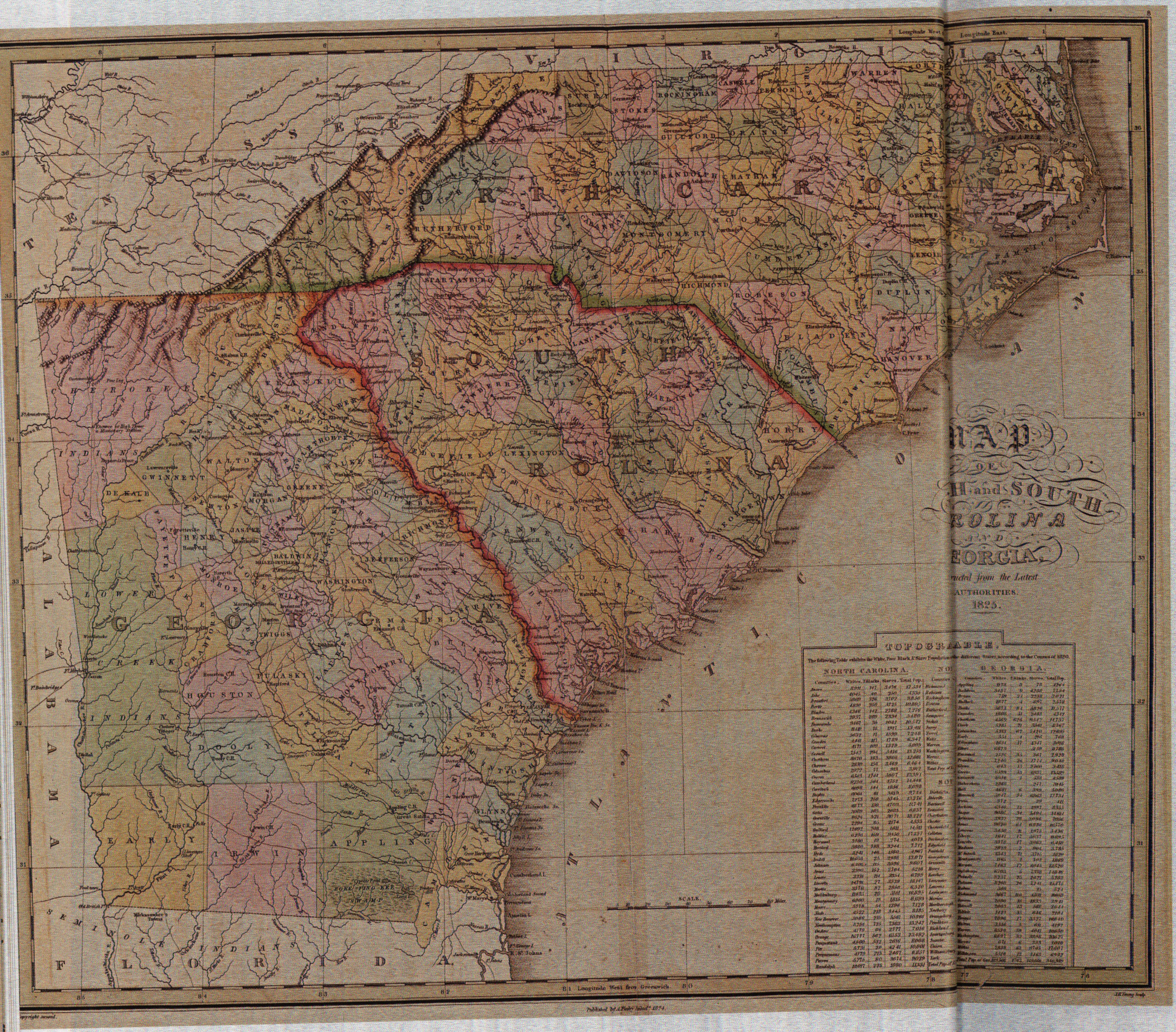
28 John Ross Papers. John Ross to William H. Underwood, 22 June 1834. GM4026.152.

29 Duane H. King, *The Cherokee Trail of Tears* (Portland: Graphic Arts Books, 2005), 11–31.

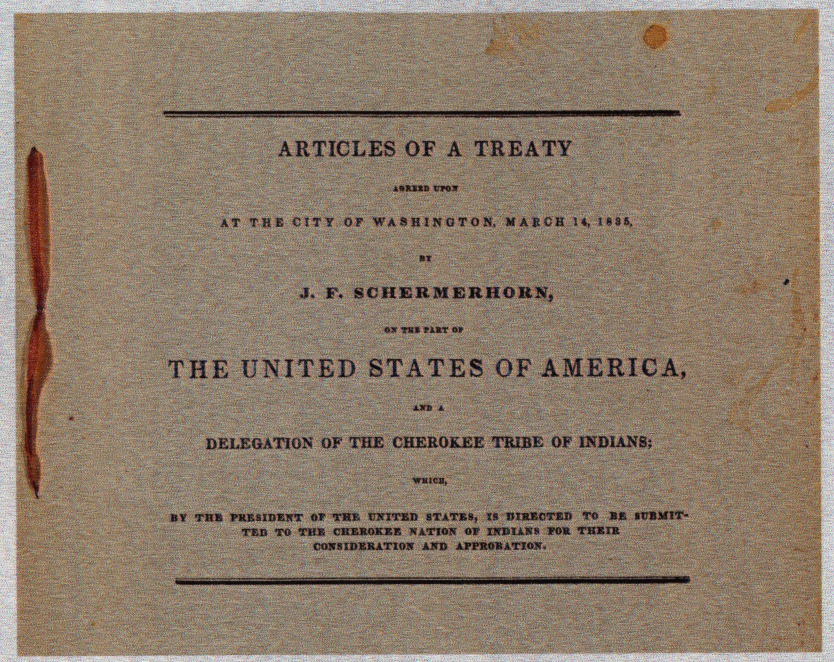


David Crockett. S. S. Osgood, 1834, engraving. GM1526.81.

Facing, detail: *Trail of Tears.* Jerome Tiger, 1966, tempera. GM0227.1961.



Facing: A Map of North and South Carolina and Georgia Constructed from the Latest Authorities. 1825. (detail), GM3926.539.



ARTICLES OF A TREATY

AGREED UPON

AT THE CITY OF WASHINGTON, MARCH 14, 1835,

BY

J. F. SCHERMERHORN,

ON THE PART OF

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

AND A

DELEGATION OF THE CHEROKEE TRIBE OF INDIANS;

WHICH,

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, IS DIRECTED TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE CHEROKEE NATION OF INDIANS FOR THEIR CONSIDERATION AND APPROBATION.

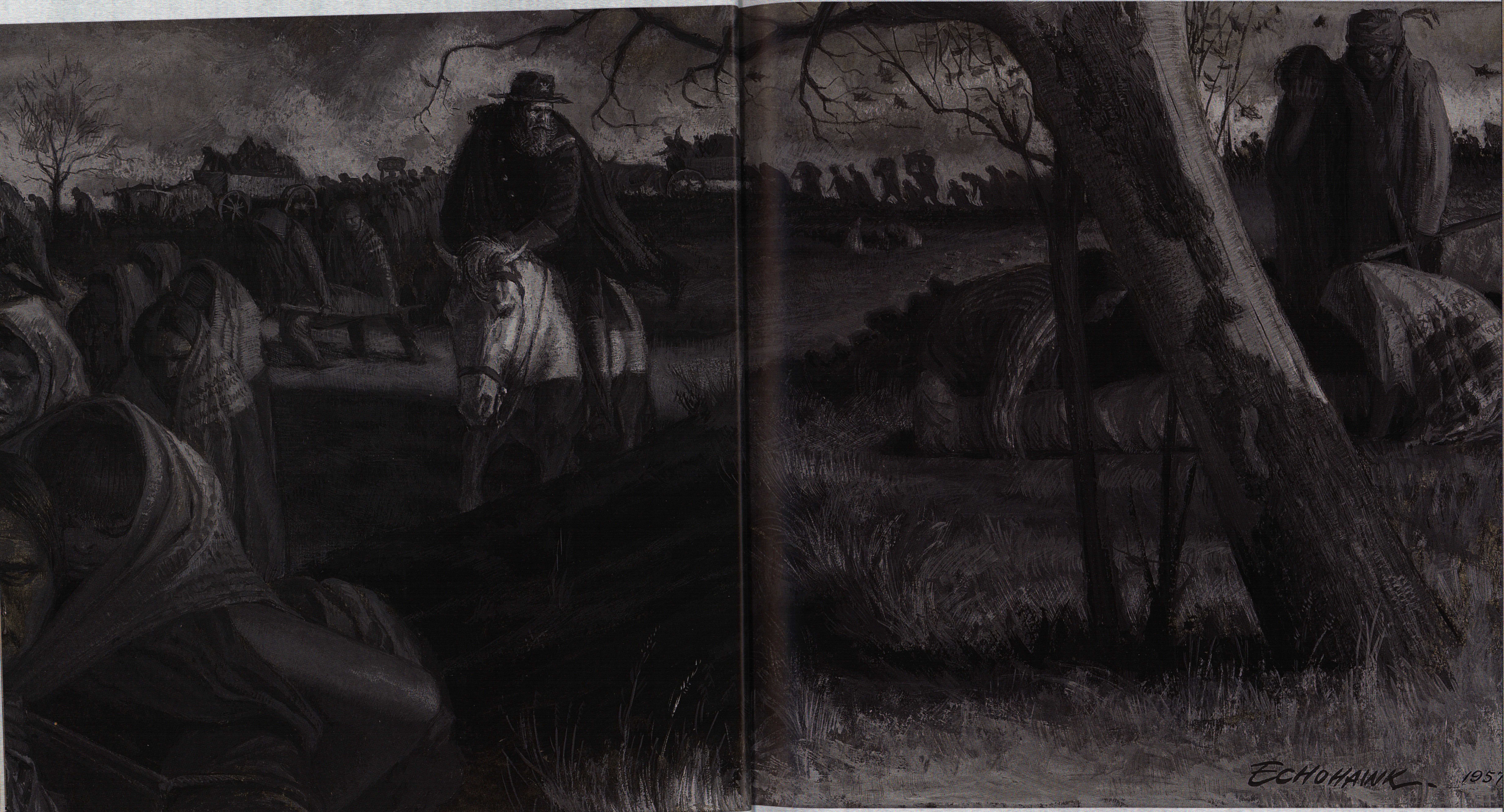
Cherokee Treaty dated 14 March 1835. GM4826.40.

The papers of Chief John Ross contain letters, receipts, muster rolls, and spoliation claims chronicling in detail the Trail of Tears.[30] In late May 1838 General Winfield Scott and 7,000 federal and state troops arrived in the Cherokee Nation to enforce the removal. Cherokee families were forced from comfortable homes into thirty-one stockades and open military stations scattered throughout the Cherokee Nation in southeast Tennessee, western North Carolina, northwest Georgia and northeast Alabama. From the stockades, the Cherokee were sent to the principal emigrating depots near Ross's Landing at Chattanooga, Tennessee, Fort Cass, near Calhoun, Tennessee, and a camp south of Fort Payne, Alabama.

On 25 May two regiments of Georgia Militia began rounding up all the Cherokee remaining in the state. By 9 June more than 3,600 were captured and sent to Ross's Landing for deportation to the West. On 6 June 1838, the first group of 489 individuals departed on the Steamboat *George Guess,* escorted by Lieutenant Edward Deas. On 12 June another detachment under Lieutenant R. H. K. Whiteley departed from Ross's Landing by boat. Both groups traveled a portion of the distance by rail, sixty miles between Decatur and Tuscumbia, Alabama, to avoid the most treacherous shoals in the Tennessee River.[31]

30 In 1987, Congress designated the Cherokee Trail of Tears a National Historic Trail. At that time, the emigration routes were virtually unknown. In 1989, I was asked by the National Park Service to undertake a study of the trail routes and historic sites along the trail. I began my research with the John Ross Papers in the Gilcrease archives, which I considered to be one of the most important sources of primary material related to the forced removal of the Cherokees. Over the years, the collective research by many people has resulted in a corpus of data that has made it possible to ascertain, with a high degree of confidence, most of the routes used by seventeen Cherokee detachments during the period of Forced Removal.

31 The Papers of Winfield Scott, Record Group 75, National Archives.



Trail of Tears. Brummett Echohawk, 1957, ink wash on paper. GM0227.1487.

The third detachment, with 1,072 people conducted by Captain Gus Drane, left Ross's Landing 17 June. With no boats available, this group was forced to travel overland to Waterloo, Alabama, a distance of some two hundred miles. By the end of June, more than a dozen were dead and 293 had escaped to make their way back to the concentration camps in east Tennessee. They began their journey again with other detachments later in the year. On the Arkansas River, steamboats carrying the Whiteley and Drane detachments were both stranded by low water on sandbars downstream from Lewisburg (present-day Morrilton), Arkansas. From there they traveled overland through western Arkansas during the peak of the summer. In addition to hot, dry, dusty conditions, both detachments suffered from excessive sickness along the way. Towards the end of the journey, Whiteley had to halt the detachment because more than half the members were sick. Whiteley reached the head of Lee's Creek in the Flint District on 2 August 1838 and reported seventy-two deaths on the 1,554-mile journey.[32]

Early reports of the suffering by the Drane and Whiteley detachments caused the military and the Cherokee leaders to rethink the strategy of the removal. General Scott gave permission to delay the removal of the other groups until fall.[33] He also transferred authority for supervising the removal to Cherokee Principal Chief John Ross.[34] Most of the citizens of the Cherokee Nation spent the summer of 1838 in concentration camps in Tennessee and Alabama, where they were organized into thirteen detachments of about a thousand people each for the journey west. They all had Cherokee conductors. After enduring an extremely severe winter, all of the Ross detachments arrived in the Indian Territory between January and March 1839. Most disbanded at one of the issuing depots established to provide rations during the first year in the Indian Territory.[35]

Of the nearly fifteen thousand immigrants subjected to the forced removal, nearly two thousand died as the result of the arduous conditions of confinement or travel. Another thousand managed to avoid removal by escaping to the Great Smoky Mountains or claiming citizenship under previous treaties. The highest mortality rates were among the very old and the very young. No families were immune to the suffering. Quatie Ross, the wife of the principal chief, died on the steamboat *Victoria* at Little Rock, Arkansas, on 1 February 1839.

INDIAN TERRITORY

In the Indian Territory plans were quickly drawn up to reunite the Cherokee people and reestablish the government.[36] Despite official reunification, the three factions—the Old Settlers (about 8,000 people who emigrated before 1835), the Treaty Party (about 2,000 who favored exchanging lands), and the Ross Party (about 13,000 who were opposed to leaving their homelands)—had differing opinions about the future of the Cherokee Nation in the Indian Territory.

Many of those who opposed the removal blamed the treaty signers for the collective suffering of the Cherokee people. On 11 June 1839, Major Ridge, his son John Ridge, and his nephew Elias Boudinot, were killed, ostensibly for signing the treaty and advocating removal.[37] Over the next seven years as many as 150 people died as a result of post-removal factionalism. The factionalism temporarily ended with the Treaty

32 Robert Hodsden, the physician for the Whiteley detachment, reported an even higher number. He stated that either seventy-three or seventy-four of the 875 members of the detachment died en route. His Journal "Medical Report of Dr. Robert Hodsden" is in the collection of the Five Civilized Tribes Museum in Muskogee, Oklahoma.

33 John Ross Papers. General Winfield Scott to George Lowrey, 19 June 1838. GM4026.587.

34 John Ross Papers. General Winfield Schott to John Ross, Elijah Hicks, J. Brown, E. Gunter, Sitewakee, White Path, and Richard Taylor, 25 July 1838. GM4026.603.

35 John Ross Papers. John Ross to Matthew Stokes, 5 April 1839. GM4026.728a and b.

36 John Ross Papers. Resolution for Plan of Union, 13 June 1839. GM4026.751a and b.

37 John Ross Papers. John Ross to General Matthew Arbuckle, 22 June 1839. GM4026.757.

Facing: Address from General Scott to the Cherokee People, 10 May 1838. GM4026.565a.

4026.565.9

MAJOR GENERAL SCOTT, of the United States Army, sends to the Cherokee people, remaining in North Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and Alabama, this

ADDRESS.

Cherokees! The President of the United States has sent me, with a powerful army, to cause you, in obedience to the Treaty of 1835, to join that part of your people who are already established in prosperity, on the other side of the Mississippi. Unhappily, the two years which were allowed for the purpose, you have suffered to pass away without following, and without making any preparation to follow, and now, or by the time that this solemn *address* shall reach your distant settlements, the emigration must be commenced in haste, but, I hope, without disorder. I have no power, by granting a farther delay, to correct the error that you have committed. The full moon of May is already on the wane, and before another shall have passed away, every Cherokee man, woman and child, in those States, must be in motion to join their brethren in the far West.

My Friends! This is no sudden determination on the part of the President, whom you and I must now obey. By the treaty, the emigration was to have been completed on, or or before, the 23rd of this month; and the President has constantly kept you warned, during the two years allowed, through all his officers and agents in this country, that the Treaty would be enforced.

I am come to carry out that determination. My troops already occupy many positions in the country that you are to abandon, and thousands, and thousands are approaching, from every quarter, to render resistance and escape alike hopeless. All those troops, regular and militia, are your friends. Receive them and confide in them as such. Obey them when they tell you that you can remain no longer in this country. Soldiers are as kind hearted as brave, and the desire of every one of us is to execute our painful duty in mercy. We are commanded by the President to act towards you in that spirit, and such is also the wish of the whole people of America.

Chiefs, head-men and warriors! Will you, then, by resistance, compel us to resort to arms? God forbid! Or will you, by flight, seek to hide yourselves in mountains and forests, and thus oblige us to hunt you down? Remember that, in pursuit, it may be impossible to avoid conflicts. The blood of the white man, or the blood of the red man, may be spilt, and if spilt, however accidentally, it may be impossible for the discreet and humane among you, or among us to prevent a general war and carnage. Think of this, my Cherokee brethren! I am an old warrior, and have been present at many a scene of slaughter; but spare me, I beseech you, the horror of witnessing the destruction of the Cherokees.

Do not, I invite you, even wait for the close approach of the troops; but make such preparations for emigration as you can, and hasten to this place, to Ross' Landing, or to Gunter's Landing, where you all will be received in kindness by officers selected for the purpose. You will find food for all, and clothing for the destitute, at either of those places, and thence at your ease, and in comfort, be transported to your new homes according to the terms of the Treaty.

This is the address of a warrior to warriors. May his entreaties be kindly received, and may the God of both prosper the Americans and Cherokees, and preserve them long in peace and friendship with each other!

WINFIELD SCOTT.

CHEROKEE AGENCY, *May* 10, 1838.



Estimated quantity of Land assigned to the tribes, who have emigrated from the Eastern to the Western side of the Mississippi.

	acres
Choctaws	15,000,000
Creeks & Siminoles	13,440,000
Senecas & Shawanees	500,000
Quapaws	96,000
Rankeshaws & Weas	150,000
Kaskaskias & Peorias	96,000
Ottowas	34,000
Shawanees	160,000
Delawares	224,000
Kickapoos	768,000

Statement of the number of the Indians West of the Mississippi who have emigrated.

Delawares	826
Shawanees	1250
Kickapoos	470
Ottawas	200
Weas	222
Piankeshaws	162
Peorias, and Kaskaskias	132
Potawatomies	141
Senecas from Sandusky	251
Senecas and Shawanees	214
Creeks	2,459
Cherokees	5000
Appalachicoles	261
Chocktaws	15,000

Statemenent of the number of Indian tribes east of the Mississippi.

Indians in New York	4716
Indians from New York at Green Bay	725
Wyandot in Ohio and Michigan	823
Winnebagoes	4,231
Ottowas and Chippewas of Lake Michigan	530
Chippewas	6798
Chippewas Ottowas, and Potawatomies	8000

* Part of these have gone West of the River but their number is not known.

Miamies	1200
Weas	60
Creeks	22668
Cherokees	16,000
Chickasaws	5,429
Choctaws	3500
Siminoles	2420
Appalachicolas	340
Menomonies	4200
Pottawatomies	14,000

Statement of the numbers of the Indian tribes resident West of the Mississippi.

Sioux	27,500
Ioways	1200
Sacs of the Missouri	500
Omahas	1400
Ottoes and Missouries	1600
Pawnees	10,000
Camanches	7000
Mandans	1500
Minetarees	1500
Assinaboins	8000
Crees	3000
Gros Ventres	3000
Crow	4500
Quapaws	450
Caddoes	800
Poncas	800
Osages	520
Kansas	1471
Sacs	4800
Arickaras	3400
Chayennes	2000
Blackfeet	3400
Foxes	1600
Arrapahas Keiwas &c	4400

Facing: Map of Indian Territory. United States War Department, 1833. Map #125.

of 1846, when a general amnesty was granted to all those who had participated in the violence, and the Cherokee Nation received payments promised by the federal government under the terms of the Treaty of New Echota.

For much of the 1840s and 1850s, the Cherokee Nation enjoyed a golden age of prosperity and enlightenment. Funds from the treaty were used to construct public buildings in and around Tahlequah. Male and female seminaries were opened and the Cherokee Nation school system flourished. The post-removal factionalism may have remained buried forever had it not been for the American Civil War.

AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Chief John Ross first attempted to maintain neutrality of the Cherokee Nation, but on 7 October 1861 the Cherokee Nation aligned with the Confederacy. A declaration repudiating all treaties with the federal government was ratified. The treaty with the Confederacy, signed by Ross and Albert Pike, was violated when the Cherokee soldiers, led by Pike, were asked to fight outside their own territory at Pea Ridge, Arkansas. The more than 11,200 federal troops massed on the high ground at Pea Ridge and the 17,000 Confederate forces attacked the flanks. After some initial success on 7 March 1862, the Confederates were repulsed and withdrew from the field.

As the federal Army under Colonel William Weer approached the Indian Territory, Ross asked the colonel for a "civilized and honorable warfare" by the army invading the Cherokee Nation. He declined Weer's invitation for an interview in his camp.[38] On 15 July Ross welcomed Colonel Weer and his officers at Rose Cottage. For the next two weeks Ross was guarded by a strong force of Colonel Drew's Cherokee Regiment. Soon the regiment would give their allegiance to the northern cause, adding 1,500 men to the Union Army.

38 John Ross Papers. Park Hill to Colonel William Weer (U. S.), 8 June 1862. GM4026.1352.





"Major Ridge" and "John Ridge" from *Indian Tribes of North America.* Thomas McKenney and James Hall. Rice and Hart: Philadelphia, 1854. Volume II. GM2926.1119.

On 3 August 1862 John Ross, with his family and a number of Cherokee refugees, departed for Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, under federal escort. Ross took with him the national papers that he was able to pack. He was encouraged to go on to Washington to gain President Lincoln's sympathies for the Cherokees. The party made its way to the Stapler homes in Philadelphia and Wilmington that Ross's second wife, Mary Stapler Ross, had inherited. Ross's first meeting with President Lincoln was on 12 September 1862. He detailed Cherokee needs and stressed that the Cherokees had placed themselves under the protection of the United States and when that protection was withdrawn they had no choice except to align with the Confederacy. They were unable to assume their true position until summer 1862 when a "great mass of Cherokee people rallied spontaneously around the authorities of the United States."[39]

For the next three years, John Ross and his family were refugees. John spent most of his time in Washington pleading the case before elected officials. His son, John, Jr. (b. March 1847) attended a boy's academy in Nazareth, Pennsylvania, and high school in Lawrenceville, New Jersey. His daughter, Annie Bryan (b. 7 June 1845) stayed with Mary at the Stapler homes. Ross lamented the separation from his family, fearing he had become an "old crusty homeless Bachelor."[40]

The war was a tragedy for the Ross family. The older sons, James, Allen, Silas, and George, served in the Third Regiment of Federal Indian Home Guards organized from former Confederate forces under Colonel John Drew. Allen was captured by Confederate troops in 1862 while returning to Park Hill to take badly needed supplies to his family. He was sent to various prison camps and died a prisoner in 1864. The home of John Ross's daughter Jane was attacked by Confederate marauders in 1863 and her husband Andrew Nave was shot and killed while trying to flee.

In 1863, in Ross's absence from the Cherokee Nation, Confederate sympathizers gathered in Tahlequah and elected Colonel Stand Watie principal chief. After burning the National Capitol Building, Watie's troops proceeded to Park Hill and burned Rose Cottage, the home that Ross had built for his new wife, Mary Stapler, in 1844.

The end of the war did not bring the end of the suffering for the Ross family. On 20 July 1865, Mary Stapler Ross, the thirty-nine-year-old wife of the aging principal chief, died of "lung congestion," possibly tuberculosis. Two months later the grieving chief attended the Grand Council of Southern Indians at Fort Smith, where new treaties between Cherokee and the Federal government were prepared. During his travel he wrote to his sister-in-law, Sarah Stapler:

> I know that I am fast approaching my country & my people, and I shall soon meet with my dear children, relatives & friends who will greet me with joyful hearts—but where is that delightful Home [Rose Cottage] & the matron [Mary B. Ross] of the happy family who so kindly and hospitably entertained our guests. Alas, I shall see them no more on earth. The loved wife and mother is at last in the Heavenly mansions prepared for the redeemed—and the family Homestead ruthlessly reduced to ashes by the hand of rebel incendiaries. And Whilst the surviving members of our family circle are scattered abroad as refugees—I am here journeying as it were, alone to find myself, a stranger & Homeless, in my own country. [41]

39 John Ross Papers. John Ross, Lawrenceville, NJ, to President Abraham Lincoln, 16 September 1862. GM4026.1353a, b.

40 Gary E. Moulton, *John Ross, Cherokee Chief* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1978), 175.

41 John Ross Papers. John Ross to sister-in-law Sarah Stapler, from the steamer *Iron City*, five miles below Van Buren, AR. 13 August 1865. GM4027.1521.1.

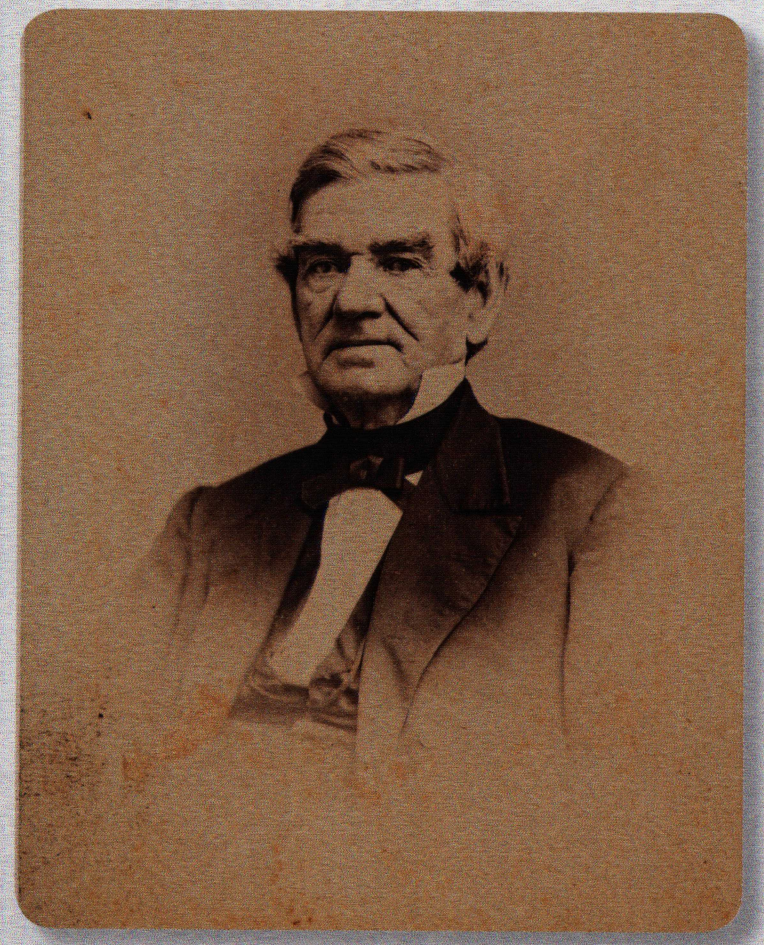
In October Ross visited Park Hill for the last time. In his annual address to the Cherokee Nation from Park Hill on 28 October 1865, he noted that the feeble state of his health would allow him to address them only briefly.[42] Soon he was back in Philadelphia and then went back to Washington.

LAST DAYS

In March 1866 Ross confided to his sister-in-law Sarah that his health was declining and encouraged her and his nineteen-year-old daughter Annie to come and stay with him for a while. In April, Ross reflected on his fifty years of service to the Cherokee people: "Not one act of my public life rises up to abraid me. I have done the best I could, and today, upon this bed of sickness, my heart approves of all I have done. And still I am, John Ross, the same John Ross of former years, unchanged."[43]

Ross wrote his last letter on 28 June 1866 to President Andrew Johnson, proclaiming his unwavering loyalty to the Union.[44] On 11 July he finalized his last will and testament.[45] On 19 July he signed the Treaty of 1866, his last public act for the Cherokee Nation.

Less than two weeks later, on 1 August 1866, John Ross died at Medes Hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue across the street from the present-day U. S. National Archives. His work is chronicled in the voluminous documents he left behind. His hopes for the prosperity of the Cherokee Nation through ingenuity and education are still felt today.



John Ross. GM4326.409.

42 John Ross Annual Message to the Cherokee Nation, Park Hill, 28 October 1865, Ballenger Collection, Newberry Library. Chicago. In Moulton 1985. 653-57.

43 John Ross Papers. Daniel Ross, Washington, D.C., to William P. Ross, 3 April 1866. GM4026.1878.

44 John Ross Papers. John Ross, Washington, to President Andrew Johnson, 28 June 1866.

45 John Ross Papers. John Ross, Last Will and Testament, Washington, 11 July 1866. GM4026.1884.

Duane King has been vice president for museum affairs, University of Tulsa since 2008. He served as executive director of the Thomas Gilcrease Institute for American History and Art and Thomas Gilcrease Chair for six years. He was appointed the inaugural executive director of the Helmerich Center for American Research and Walter H. Helmerich Chair in 2014.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

WILLIAM POTTER ROSS AND CHEROKEE EDUCATION

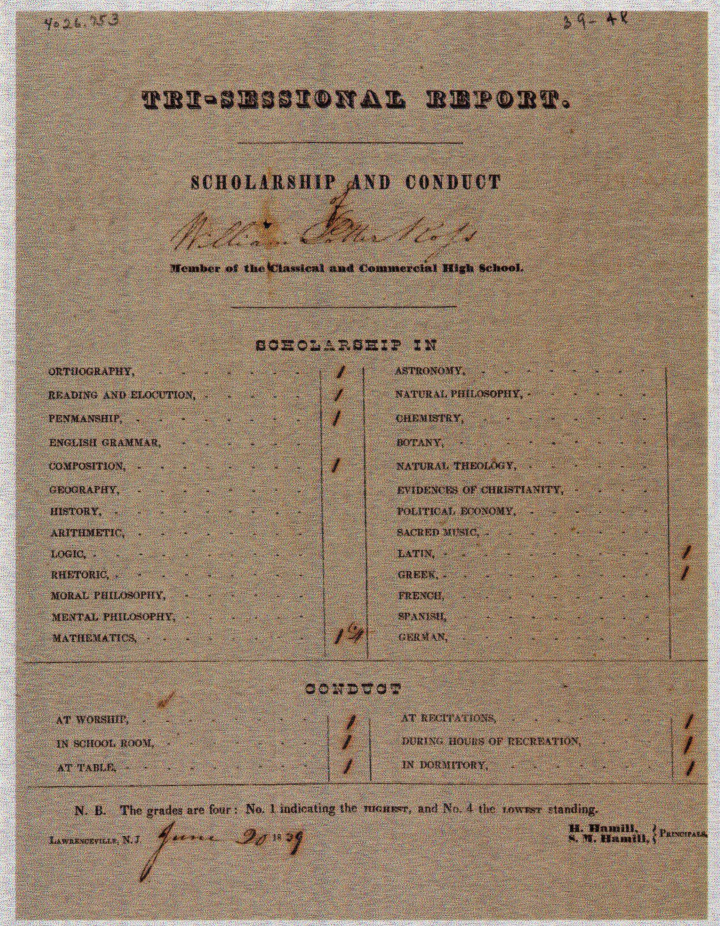
NATALIE PANTHER

". . . in due time they will enter College and graduate in a degree that will reflect credit upon the mental capacity of the Cherokee . . ." ~ PRINCIPAL CHIEF JOHN ROSS, 18 JUNE 1844 ~

In the immediate aftermath of forced removal, Cherokee Principal Chief John Ross questioned how to prevent future attacks on tribal sovereignty. Education was his answer. Provide the next generation of Cherokees with a first-rate education, arm them with the intellectual arsenal available to their Euroamerican counterparts, and they will protect and defend Cherokee independence. With this emphasis on education in mind, Ross financed the formal schooling of multiple members of his extended family. One nephew in particular, William Potter Ross, exceeded the principal chief's expectations of academic excellence and became one of the most successful and influential Cherokees in Indian Territory.

William P. Ross was a teacher, newspaper editor, Confederate Lieutenant Colonel, senator, and Cherokee principal chief. His voice is prevalent throughout the John Ross Papers housed in Gilcrease Museum's archival collection. This manuscript collection spans several decades, from the early nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, and spotlights some of the most significant events in Cherokee history, including the Trail of Tears, the Civil War, allotment, and statehood. The John Ross Papers feature several letters written to and from William Potter Ross, all of which reveal his fierce commitment to education and tribal sovereignty.

William Potter Ross was born 20 August 1820 to John Golden and Eliza Ross, sister of Principal Chief John Ross. He spent his childhood in a town just south of Chattanooga, Tennessee, where he learned the basics



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TRI-SESSIONAL REPORT.

SCHOLARSHIP AND CONDUCT

William Potter Ross

Member of the Classical and Commercial High School.

SCHOLARSHIP IN

ORTHOGRAPHY,	1	ASTRONOMY,	
READING AND ELOCUTION,	1	NATURAL PHILOSOPHY,	
PENMANSHIP,	1	CHEMISTRY,	
ENGLISH GRAMMAR,		BOTANY,	
COMPOSITION,	1	NATURAL THEOLOGY,	
GEOGRAPHY,		EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY,	
HISTORY,		POLITICAL ECONOMY,	
ARITHMETIC,		SACRED MUSIC,	
LOGIC,		LATIN,	1
RHETORIC,		GREEK,	1
MORAL PHILOSOPHY,		FRENCH,	
MENTAL PHILOSOPHY,		SPANISH,	
MATHEMATICS,	1 4	GERMAN,	

CONDUCT

AT WORSHIP,	1	AT RECITATIONS,	1
IN SCHOOL ROOM,	1	DURING HOURS OF RECREATION,	1
AT TABLE,	1	IN DORMITORY,	1

N. B. The grades are four: No. 1 indicating the HIGHEST, and No. 4 the LOWEST standing.

LAWRENCEVILLE, N.J. June 20 1839

H. Hamill, S. M. Hamill, } PRINCIPALS

Tri-Sessional Report for William Potter Ross. GM4026.753.

Facing: *William Potter Ross.* John Mix Stanley, oil on canvas. GM0126.1147.

of reading and writing from his mother. He completed his elementary education at a Baptist missionary school in Alabama and later attended Tusculum Academy[1] in Greeneville, Tennessee. In 1837, with his uncle's financial support, William relocated to Lawrenceville, New Jersey, where he attended Hamil's Preparatory School (later named Lawrenceville Preparatory School), known nationally as one of the most prestigious high schools in the Northeast. The John Ross Collection contains one of William's report cards from the academy from 20 June 1839; he earned the highest possible scores in all of his classes, including Orthography, Reading and Elocution, Penmanship, and Mathematics and received recognition for excellent conduct.[2]

In fall 1839 William enrolled at Princeton, fulfilling John Ross's expectations that he "enter College and graduate in a degree that will reflect credit upon the mental capacity of the Cherokee." While at Princeton, William wrote several letters (featured in the "John Ross Collection") to his uncle, all of which highlight the close and mutually respectful nature of their relationship. One particularly fascinating exchange between the two reveals the seriousness with which John Ross viewed his own role as mentor and the high expectations he placed on William to achieve academic excellence. In a letter dated 12 August 1841, William confessed to his uncle a recent adventure which pulled him away from his studies. He writes,

> I was informed lately by Cousin William Coodey and two others of the arrival in Philadelphia of two fair Cherokee friends. I did not resist the temptation to make them a short visit which I did at the close of the week as less would be done at that time in the way of study by the members. While in the city I was invited by both parties to attend a Cherokee wedding in New York. I returned to Princeton and at the appointed time fell in company and went on with the party. I remained in New York a day and two nights then returned to College. My time could not have been spent other than pleasantly in such company . . . During my absence I lost a few lectures on Geology and four or five hundred lines of Greek. I have nearly made up all the Greek and will do the same with the lectures.[3]

John Ross's response, written seven days later, fused his role as uncle/mentor with his views on the importance of education to the future of the Cherokee Nation. He began, ". . . had you not informed me of the Caper, I should certainly have looked upon your silence as a dereliction of duty."[4] While the principal chief seemed to appreciate the forthright nature of the letter, he went on to warn William that "making up for lost lessons by over studying will not remove the objectionable features, in the irregularity of habit, which a student may indulge in; Economy! & well spent *time* are the surest guarantees for the completion of an honorable education."[5]

John Ross reminded William of the importance of academic success to both himself and the tribe, writing ". . . I trust that our highest hopes and expectations will be fully realized when you shall have graduated—and that you may acquit yourself as high in the Honors to be confered [*sic*] as any student of your Class—thereby show to the civilized world that the faculty of the North American Indian is not inferior to that of the White European."[6]

1 Renamed Tusculum College in 1844.

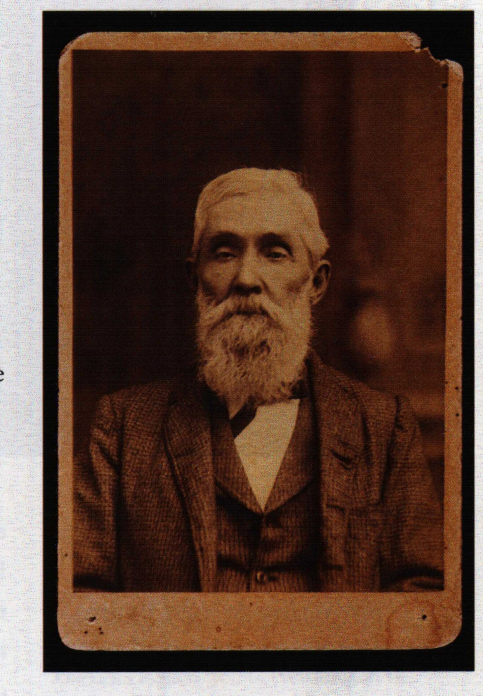
2 John Ross Papers. Tri-Sessional Report for William Potter Ross, 20 June 1839. GM4026.753.

3 William Potter Ross, "From William P. Ross to Chief John Ross," 12 August 1841, in Gary E. Moulton, ed., *The Papers of Chief John Ross* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 97.

4 John Ross Papers. From John Ross to William Potter Ross, 19 August 1841. GM4026.942.

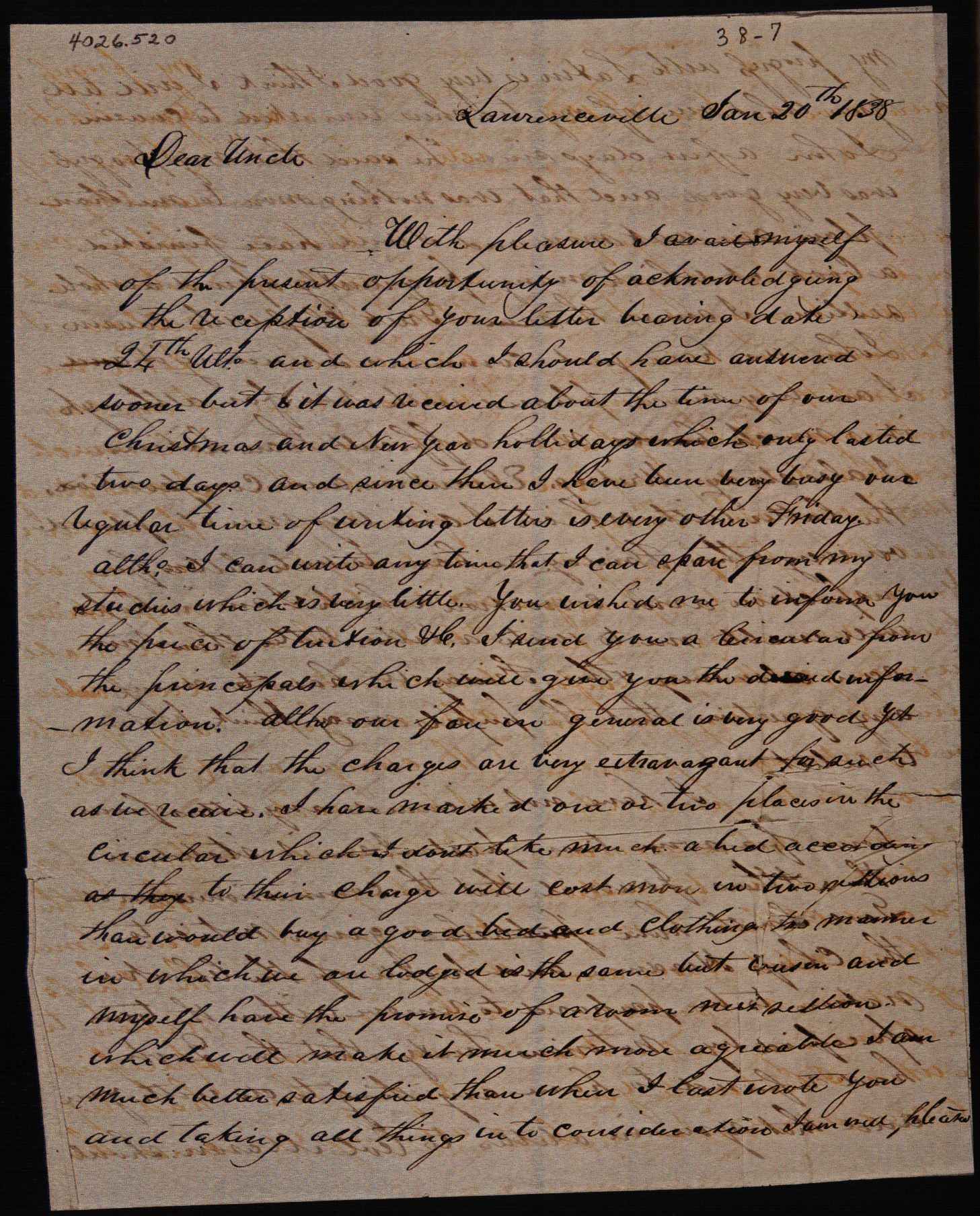
5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.



William P. Ross as an older man. GM4326.3672.

Facing: Letter from William Potter Ross to Chief John Ross, dated 20 January 1838. GM4026.520.1.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38-7

Lawrenceville Jan 20th 1838

Dear Uncle

With pleasure I avail myself of the present opportunity of acknowledging the reception of your letter bearing date 24th Ult. and which I should have answered sooner but it was received about the time of our Christmas and New Year holidays which only lasted two days and since then I have been very busy our regular time of writing letters is every other Friday altho I can write any time that I can spare from my studies which is very little. You wished me to inform you the price of tuition &c. I send you a Circular from the principals which will give you the desired information. altho our fare in general is very good yet I think that the charges are very extravagant for such as we receive. I have marked one or two places in the Circular which I dont like much as they to their charge will cost more in two stations than would buy a good bed and clothing the manner in which we are lodged is the same but Cousin and myself have the promise of a room next session. which will make it much more agreeable I am much better satisfied than when I last wrote you and taking all things in to consideration I am well pleased



Elizabeth Ross. John Mix Stanley, 1844, oil on canvas. GM0126.1141.

Pressing upon William the virtues of education, he ends the letter, "I hope you will persevere in the path of duty, and that you may finish your collegiate studies with prominence and honour."[7]

Ross's response to William's "Caper" underscores the chief's belief in education as a path toward Cherokee survival. By Ross's estimation, William and other similar Cherokee youth were to inherit the task of running the Cherokee Nation and protecting tribal sovereignty. By providing these youths with the best education possible and training them in the legal and cultural practices of white society, Ross believed that they would be on equal footing with whites. They would possess the skills necessary to move the tribe into a more powerful position in dealings with the federal government.[8]

William's letters reveal that he shared John Ross's views on the critical role of education to the future of the tribe. William was clearly disappointed when his cousin, Daniel H. Ross, decided to forgo college and instead opted to "fall into some wholesale establishment in New York."[9] William wrote to his uncle, "I regret very much the choice he has made and think that he has acted unwisely in deciding his future character and destiny with so little reflection . . . I felt so strong a desire to have him go on with his studies that I endeavored to influence his mind that way as much as was becoming, but to no purpose."[10] Clearly, William preferred a university education for his cousin.

William's own academic success provides further evidence of the value he placed on education. While at Princeton, he studied natural philosophy, geography, and grammar, among other subjects, and graduated with honors. He wrote his final essay on the "Romance of Indian History," for which he requested from John Ross a copy of "the Cherokee alphabet almanac."[11] Nearly every semester, William earned top grades, a feat which landed him the honor of delivering a speech on commencement day.[12]

7 Ibid.

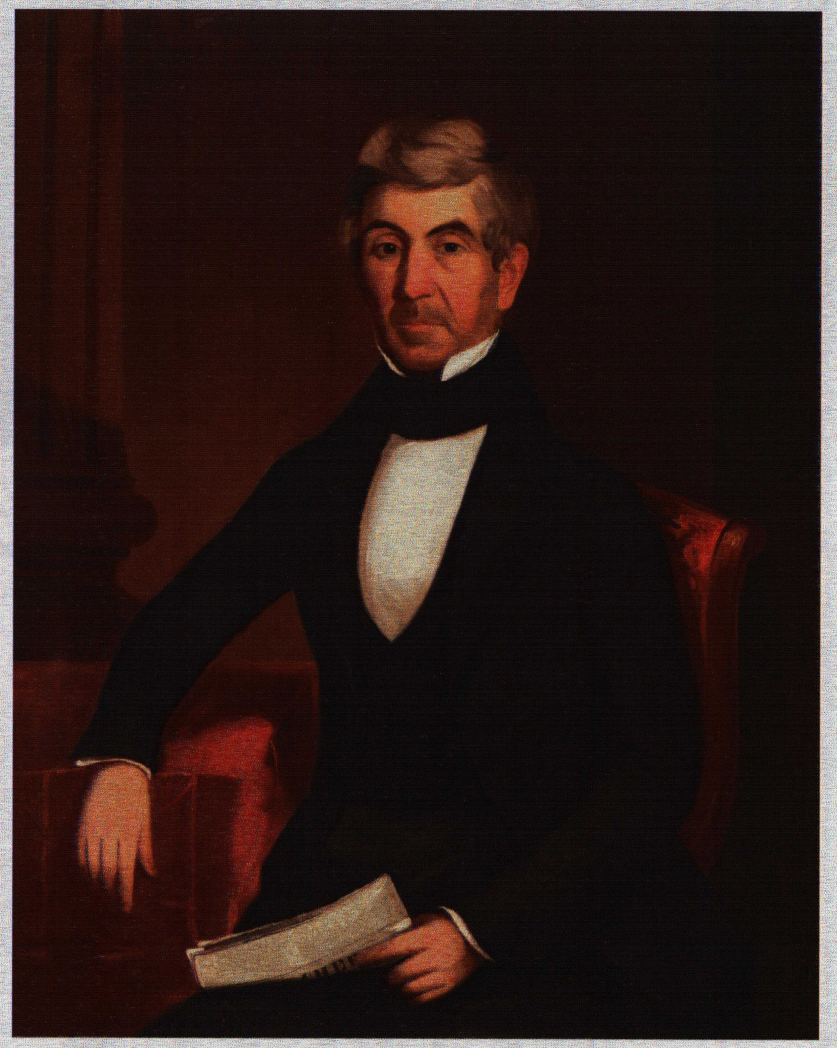
8 Natalie Panther, "To Make Us Independent: The Education of Young Men at the Cherokee Male Seminary," Ph.D. diss., Oklahoma State University, 40–42.

9 William Potter Ross, "From William Potter Ross to John Ross," 19 June 1842, in Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross,* 135-36.

William arrived home in Park Hill in August 1844, at the height of the violent conflict between members of the Treaty Party and the Ross Party. The conflict, lasting from 1839 to 1846, began when members of the John Ross Party killed three signers of the Treat of New Echota—Major Ridge, John Ridge, and Elias Boudinot.[13] Over the course of seven years, more than a hundred Cherokees died in the conflict.[14] William wrote two letters to John Ross (who was in Washington) informing him of the increased bloodshed, explaining "more deeds of horror have been committed. The torch and the deadly weapons have reeked the vengeance of the dark and hellish band of desperadoes who have so long infested our country."[15] He continues,

> But this is not all, on Tuesday evening last we received intelligence at Park Hill that a dead man had been found not more than a mile from his house. A number of us immediately repaired to the spot where I witnessed the awful sight imaginable. There upon a rocky hill side laid the lifeless remains of Crawford Fox commonly called in Cherokee, Crawfish and Ahtolahi who had been murdered in the most cruel manner. The just named had been shot through, and stabbed below the left nipple with a very large bowie or butcher's knife. The other had been dragged about fifty yds. He had his throat cut, a stab in each side, his bowels partially let out and a deep gash in the forehead about the inside corner of the left eye. One of them, had also been severely whipped . . . The men have been buried at Tahlequah. The Council ha[ve taken] no steps to arrest or hunt down the murderers. Compa[nies] are however, out and god grant they may take them. There is now no security in the country.[16]

Nine days later, William wrote again to his uncle, describing acts of retaliation for the two murders just described. He writes, "James Starr Sr. and Suel Rider have been cut short in their career of crime and infamy. On Sunday morning last a company of our citizens went to old Jim Starr's about sunrise and shot him twice, once through the heart. He fell dead . . . these events have stirred up considerable excitement, especially on the line across which many of that family and the "Treaty Party" so called, have fled."[17]



John Golden Ross. John Mix Stanley, 1844, oil on canvas. GM0126.1149.

10 Ibid.

11 John Ross Papers. From William Potter Ross to John Ross, 2 August 1842. GM4026.1041.

12 Ibid.

13 Duane King, "Cherokees in the West: History since 1776," *The Handbook of North American Indians,* vol. 14 (Washington D. C.: Smithsonian Institute, 1978), 359.

14 Ibid., 361.

15 William Potter Ross, "From William Potter Ross to John Ross," 5 November 1845, in Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross,* 271–274.

16 Ibid.

17 William Potter Ross, "William Potter Ross to John Ross," 14 November 1845, in Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross,* 279–180.





Left: Home of William Potter Ross in Fort Gibson. GM4327.3262.

Right: Cherokee Female Seminary. GM4326.5945.

William also informed the principal chief that Matthew Arbuckle sent troops into the area in an attempt to prevent any further bloodshed and relayed that tribal members cried out for protection.[18]

Aware of the divisions within the Cherokee Nation long before his arrival in Park Hill, William made his views on the internal fighting known in a letter to the *New York Morning Express.* Shortly after graduation, on 14 June 1844, William wrote a scathing response to an article in the newspaper about Principal Chief John Ross and the current state of tribal politics. The writer, "R.S.M." incorrectly stated that the majority of the John Ross Party opposed John Ross himself, and that the Cherokee requested assistance from the United States government to interfere and divide the Nation along party lines.

William takes the unnamed author to task for perpetuating misinformation, claiming that he is "either shamefully ignorant of the subject on which he writes, or, what seems more probable, as he professes to have got his 'facts from a variety of sources,' recklessly disregardful of truth."[19] This letter reveals William's stance on tribal independence and his disdain for the United States government's repeated attempts at interference in Cherokee affairs. He asserts that the "Cherokees are fully competent and desire to settle themselves within their own limits, any matters relating exclusively to them . . . Let the Cherokee Nation solemnly protest against any interference in the internal affairs of the Nation."[20]

In response to the reporter's assertion that the Cherokee are under the "protection" of the United States, William asks skeptically, "Shall that protection be what it has been . . . Shall they ever be permitted to feel *fixed*—to say they have a home?"[21] The letter also gives insight into William's antipathy for the Treaty Party. He writes that the "Treaty Party have not even a shadow of authority to do anything with the Government . . . that will be morally, or, legally binding in the Cherokee Nation," and that the John Ross delegation "is *the* delegation of the Cherokee Nation, appointed by its National Council and *alone* authorized to transact any business in its name and behalf with the Government."[22]

Clearly, William was not inclined to recognize the authority of the Treaty Party or willing to tolerate the idea of separating the Cherokee Nation along factional lines. Fortunately, in 1846, leaders from the three factions signed a treaty calling for an end to violence, recognizing John Ross as principal chief, and accepting the legitimacy of the Treaty of New Echota.[23] As William predicted, the compromise was reached without the interference of the federal government.

From 1843 to 1866 William served the Nation in a variety of capacities, including Committee clerk, editor of the *Cherokee Advocate,* lawyer, tribal councilman, and Lieutenant Colonel in the Confederate Army. Arguably his most influential position came in autumn 1866, when he was appointed interim principal chief following the death of John Ross. By the end of the war, the Cherokee Nation lay in ruins. More than four thousand Cherokees were killed, thousands were disabled, and more than a thousand children were left orphans.[24] As principal chief, William was charged with rebuilding a broken Cherokee Nation.

The newly-appointed chief immediately made plans to improve public education, working to reopen Cherokee public schools. He resuscitated the Board of Education to manage the growing public education system. As stated in "An Act Relating to Education," William nominated the board members for a three-year appointment, and the National Committee confirmed these nominations. He expected the members to be of "liberal literary attainments, and free from immoral or intemperate habits."[25]

Although the board controlled the funds, approval for any increase in funding came directly from the principal chief.[26] By the early 1870s, hundreds of public elementary schools had opened across the Nation, some in the most remote and isolated towns. As part of the effort to improve public education, the Board resolved to provide "uniform textbooks, stationary, globes, apparatus, fixtures, and appliances" in all the schools.[27]

William also resolved to make improvements to the Cherokee male and female seminaries (high schools). Originally, John Ross had modeled the high schools after academies in the Northeast such as Mount Holyoke and Lawrenceville Preparatory School. The schools' rigorous curriculum required advanced English skills and a prior familiarity with classical subjects, which, unfortunately, prevented many full-blood children from passing entrance exams.

After the Civil War, however, William envisioned an entirely new path for the Cherokee academies. In 1873, the National Council demanded that "the board of education shall, without delay, cause the Male Seminary to be reopened and manned with an efficient corps of teachers."[28] Both seminaries incurred substantial damage during the war (including the loss of the library); nevertheless, in 1874, William Potter Ross approved their reopening. He modified the seminaries to include a greater proportion of the populace, creating programs such as the Primary Department, which provided lessons in the basics of English, and the Indigent Program, which enabled students from lower-income families to attend the schools tuition free. Interestingly, while William shared John Ross's belief that education was critical to maintaining tribal independence, the former made his own path, distinct from his uncle's, and succeeded in providing a quality education to an even greater proportion of Cherokees.[29]

John Ross wanted to educate Cherokee young men "so as to make them a blessing to their Nation."[30] William undoubtedly achieved this goal. In many respects, William fulfilled John Ross's great expectations.

18 Ibid.

19 John Ross Papers. William Potter Ross, "For the New York Express: The Cherokee Indians," 14 June 1844, GM4026.1078.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Duane King, "Cherokee in the West," 361.

24 In 1860, the total population, including slaves and intermarried whites, was between 21,000 and 22,000. In 1865, the total population was between 14,000 and 17,000, William McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears: The Cherokees' Struggle for Sovereignty, 1839-1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 220-24.

25 *Constitution and Laws of the Cherokee Nation,* Chapter 10, Articles 1, Sec. 1 (St. Louis: R.&T.A. Ennis Stationers, Printers, and Book Binders, 1875), 193.

26 Ibid., 232.

27 Ibid., 193.

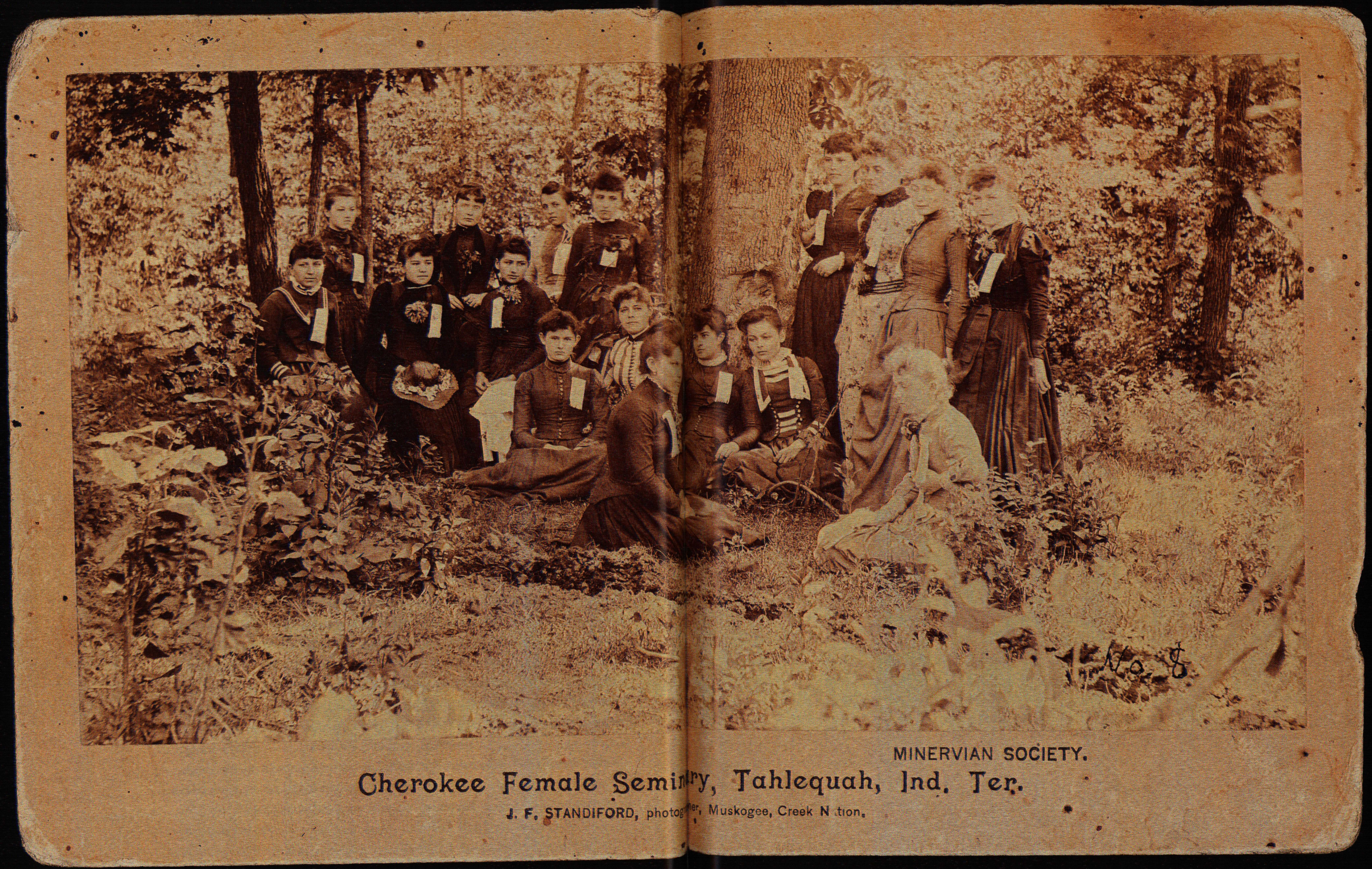
28 Ibid.

29 *Cherokee Male Seminary Catalogue:* 1884, University Archives, John Vaughn Library, Northeastern State University, 13.

30 John Ross Papers. From John Ross to John Alexander, 19 February 1840. GM4026.896.

31 John Ross Papers. From John Ross to Mary Stapler, 18 June 1844. GM4026.1084.

Natalie Panther earned an MA and PhD in American history from Oklahoma State University. Her dissertation on the education of young men at the Cherokee Male Seminary was named the Oklahoma Historical Society's outstanding dissertation on Oklahoma history in 2013. Her research interests include American Indian, Latin American, and women's and gender history. Natalie lives in Tulsa with her daughter and cat.



Students from Cherokee Female Seminary. GM4326.1091.

Down from the Mountains to the Swamps

The Cherokee Delegation to the Seminole in 1837

Jerry "Catcher" Thompson

The Cherokee Delegation to the Seminole in 1837 was a diplomatic mission to prevent the massacre of a kindred warrior people whom the United States government viewed as defiant terrorists. Furthermore, it was an attempt to create stronger ties with the U. S. government. During this period the Cherokee Nation was fighting against removal to Indian Territory.[1] Meanwhile, in Florida, the U. S. government was engaged in the Second Seminole War, fighting against an enemy waging guerrilla warfare in nearly impenetrable swamps. The U. S. government, embarrassed by its failure to achieve a military victory over the Seminole, requested the help of the Cherokee Nation to end the conflict. Although the Cherokee Nation engaged in the effort in good faith, the incompetence and deceit of the U. S. military doomed the mission to failure. The Seminole leaders were imprisoned under a flag of truce, resulting in the Seminole retreating further into the swamps. The U. S. military's treachery shattered any hope for negotiating a peace, and the Cherokee delegation had to reassure the Seminole, and the U. S., that they were not duplicitous.

Once the U. S. government began removing southeastern Indians west of the Mississippi River, the Seminole drove deeper into the swamps of Florida in an effort to avoid removal. Government forces pursued the Seminole with the intention of forcible removal, precipitating an event now called the Second Seminole War. On 15 June 1837, while the war raged on, Major General Thomas S. Jesup submitted a proposal to Secretary of War Joel R. Poinsett.[2] In it he outlined the tactics necessary to defeat the Seminole, force them west, and "preserve the country from entire devastation."[3]

While General Jesup tried to defeat the Seminole, others in Washington were trying to find a peaceful resolution. On 8 July 1837 John H. Sherburne wrote a confidential letter to Principal Chief John Ross of the Cherokee Nation revealing a private meeting he had had with Secretary Poinsett. During the meeting, Sherburne mentioned how in the First Seminole War, Chief John Ross said he would assist in brokering a peace between the U. S. and the Seminole to end the bloodshed. Sherburne inquired as to Chief Ross's willingness to offer his services during this war. The hope was that he could persuade the Seminole to end the conflict without making the U. S. appear weak during negotiations.[4] Chief Ross replied to Sherburne that a "personal visit to Florida on this subject … could not be justified by the suffering interests of the Cherokee people."[5]

1 The Gilcrease Museum collection contains eleven lineal feet of John Ross Papers which chronicle his tenure as Principal Chief, including the Cherokee struggle against removal and the Cherokee Diplomatic Mission to the Seminoles in 1837.

2 John Ross Papers."General Thomas S. Jesup to Secretary of War Joel R. Poinsett, 6 July 1838, in The Senate's Message from the President of the United States: 25th Congress, 2nd Session." GM4026.598.

3 Ibid., 3.

4 Ibid., 1

5 John Ross Papers. "Principal Chief John Ross to John H. Sherburne, 5 September, 1837. GM4026.467.

Facing: Map 35. GM3976.646.



"Massacre," from *An Authentic Narrative of the Seminole War* (Blanchard: Providence, 1836), exemplifies propaganda against Seminoles and African Americans in the mid-1830s. GM3026.214.

After much deliberation and reflection, Chief Ross wrote to Sherburne saying that although he could not personally travel to Florida to deliberate with the Seminole, he had decided to send a delegation of influential men in his place. He believed it was his duty to sue for "peace and justice for the welfare of the human race."[6] Chief Ross understood the strife that the Seminole faced, as his own people were in the process of being forcibly removed. To keep the Seminole from being annihilated, he agreed to help the U. S. broker an agreement with the Seminole.

Chief Ross appointed "Tekahskeh (alias Hair Conrad), Taskeketehee (alias Jesse Bushyhead), Oosahetah (alias Richard Fields), and Ahnahstaquah (alias Thomas Polecat) members of the newly appointed delegation to the Seminole.[7] Oosahetah (Richard Fields) waited in Augusta, Georgia, with Colonel Sherburne, who was charged with overseeing the Cherokee Delegation. Fields wrote to Chief Ross that he had received a communication from Secretary Poinsett containing instructions for General Jesup to allow the delegation safe passage through Florida. The instructions also outlined the objectives of the delegation[8] and spoke of the "peaceful mission on which they have come to Florida."[9]

On 18 October 1837 Chief Ross created his "Talk"—his message to the Seminole—which the delegation was to deliver to the chiefs, headmen, and warriors. The Talk transmitted Chief Ross's conversations with Secretary Poinsett and President Martin

6 Principal Chief John Ross to John H. Sherburne, 18 September 1837, in Gary E. Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, vol. 1 (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 519-520, 520.

7 Principal Chief John Ross to the Chiefs, Headmen, and Warriors of the Seminoles, 18 October 1837, in Gary E. Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, vol. 1 (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 523-526, 525.

8 John Ross Papers. "Richard Fields to Principal Chief John Ross, 7 October 1837. GM4026.473.

9 John Ross Papers. "John H. Sherburne to Principal Chief John Ross, 7 October 1837. GM4027.472.

Van Buren. He stated his wish that the Seminole and the U. S. could come together to negotiate an end to this conflict, adding that "if your people desire[d] peace and would lay aside your war like attitude and come in . . . a treaty of peace would be negotiated with you under the authority of the President of the United States."[10] Ross hoped that mediation would resolve the issues and result in a new relationship of mutual trust and friendship.[11] He believed the government would do its best to bring about a peaceful solution to the war. It was in this hope that he penned the Talk to the Seminole.

Chief Ross was, however, concerned about actions the U. S. government might take to bring the Seminole in from the swamp and what role the delegation might ultimately play in the conflict. He feared the government would renege on its arrangement with the Cherokee Delegation and prevent the deputation from completing its task.

Chief Ross wrote to George Lowrey about the delegation, telling him that Secretary Poinsett had "sanctioned an attempt to bring about a treaty of peace with them through our mediation."[12] The chief also wrote to members of the delegation saying that Secretary Poinsett had "given sanction to our mediation, and approves of the Talk [18 October] for the Seminoles."[13]



George Lowrey. Unknown artist, oil on canvas. GM0126.2180.

10 Chief Ross to the Chiefs, Headmen, and Warriors of the Seminoles, 18 October 1837, in Moulton, 524.

11 Ibid., 524-526.

12 Principal Chief John Ross to George Lowrey, October 1837, in Gary E. Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, vol. 1 (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 529.

13 Principal Chief John Ross to Hair Conrad, Jesse Bushyhead, Richard Fields, and Thomas Woodward, 20 October 1837, in Gary E. Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, vol. 1 (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 526-528, 526.

"Oseola" from *The Territory of Florida*. John Lee Williams. Goodrich: New York, 1837. GM3926.114.

Although Ross had many conversations with Secretary Poinsett, he was still worried about the deputation. In a letter of 20 October 1837 to the delegation, he expressed his concerns, saying that success was solely dependent on cooperation from the military. He reminded the delegation that under no circumstances should they take over the proceedings, but that the U. S. must be seen as the party who completed the negotiations to ensure the government could not blame the Cherokee for sabotaging the mission. He gave strict orders that they "only [to] act the part of mediators for the restoration of peace between the Seminoles and the United States." The object of their mission was entirely to "endeavor to restore peace & friendship between the Seminoles & the U. S. with the approbation of the Secry [Secretary] of War"[14] and the Cherokee Nation's reputation was not of the greatest significance, but rather that the Seminoles received fair due process.[15]

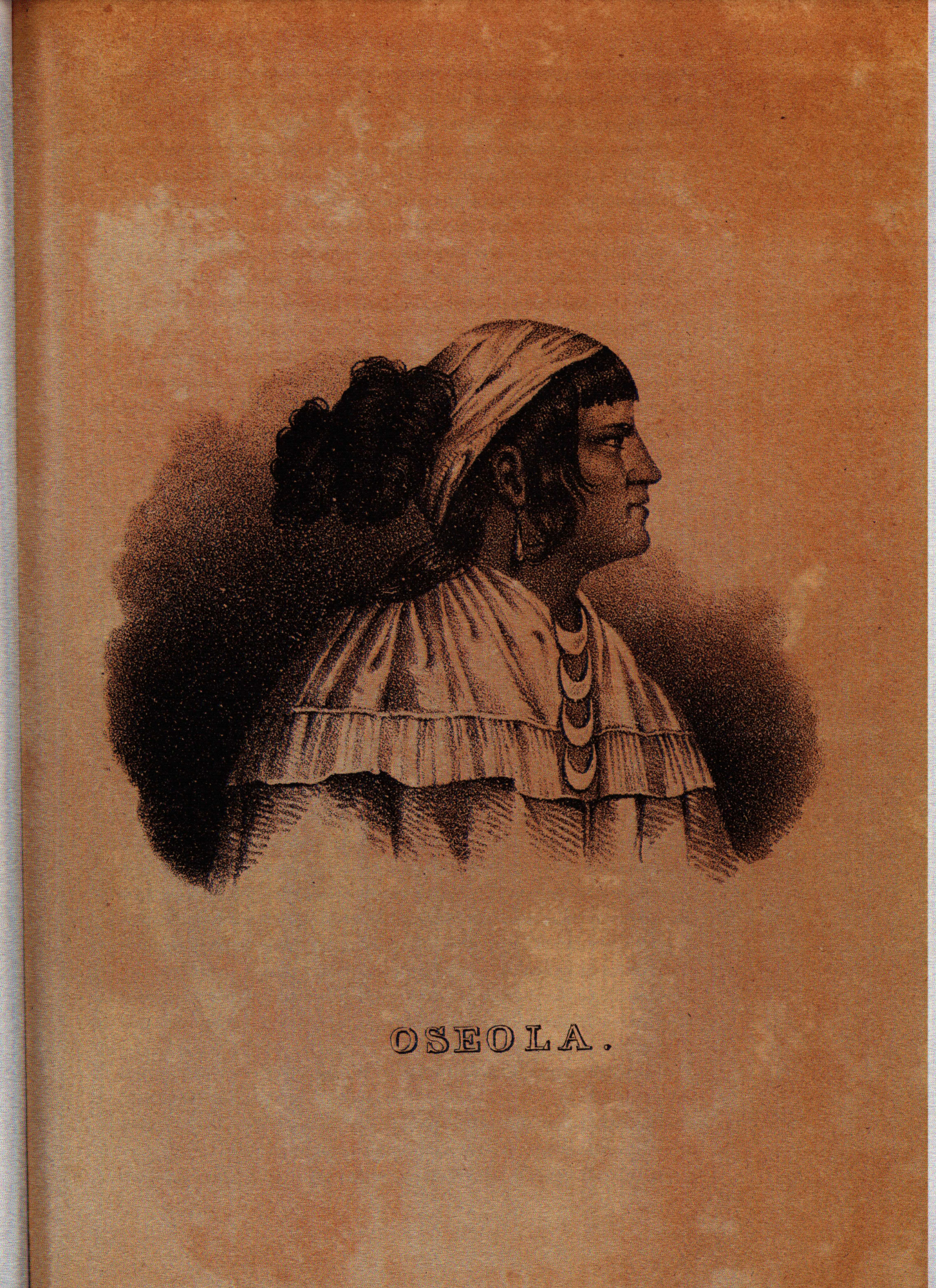
Chief Ross's distrust of the U. S. government's policies was not without merit, considering the forcible removal of his people and the recent history of broken treaties with numerous indigenous tribes. In a letter to Richard Fields of 23 October 1837, he relayed a conversation he had had with the recently deposed Sauk Chief Black Hawk. Chief Black Hawk mentioned that the government asked him to send warriors to fight the Seminole. He assured Chief Ross that he refused their proposition, because "the Seminoles had never harmed his people."[16] Ross continued that he had approached Secretary Poinsett about Chief Black Hawk's remarks and questioned him about whether the military had enlisted the help of any other American Indian tribes to fight in the Florida Campaign. Secretary Poinsett said that at the time there were none fighting the Seminole, but that the Delaware and Shawaneese were going to send some warriors at the government's request, but only if the delegation's mission were to fail.

Chief Ross, extremely distressed by this, warned the secretary that "if there were any Indians in the service of the U.S…& the fact be known to the Seminoles[,] that [the deputation's] lives may be endangered, as the Seminoles might distrust [the delegation's] friendly visit, & suspect [them] for being Spies &c."[17] Secretary Poinsett assured Ross that he would do everything in his power to keep the delegation safe and would convey these concerns to General Jesup so that he could take appropriate action.[18]

According to Chief Ross's letter to his brother Lewis Ross on 11 November 1837, Richard Fields had already arrived in Florida and had connected with General Jesup on Black Creek. Fields communicated to Chief Ross on 12 November 1837 that the other members of the delegation had arrived two days prior with Colonel Sherburne. He added that they were allowed to hold a meeting with the imprisoned Seminole chiefs and that the chiefs "were glad to see [the delegation], and expressed much gratitude, and good feeling for [the deputation's] friendly intentions, and hoped that every thing 'would be made straight,' when [the delegation] could have an interview with the Chiefs of the [Seminole] Nation in Council.[20]

As Ross feared, the government did not cooperate. General Jesup began to deter the delegation from the start. Even though Secretary Poinsett assured Chief Ross that his Talk was acceptable and that it could be transmitted to the Seminole chiefs, Richard Fields wrote to Chief Ross that the officers at Fort Mellon prohibited them from reading his Talk to the imprisoned chiefs. He said the officers were given direct orders from

14 Ibid., 527-528.
15 Ibid., 527-528.
16 Principal Chief John Ross to Richard Fields, 23 October 1837, in Gary E. Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, vol. 1 (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 530-532, 531.
17 Ibid., 532.
18 Ibid., 532.
19 John Ross Papers. "Principal Chief John Ross to Lewis Ross, 11 November 1837. GM4026.488.
20 Richard Fields to Principal Chief John Ross, 12 November 1837, in Gary E. Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, vol. 1 (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 543-544, 543.



General Jesup to suppress the Talk. Richard Fields wrote there was no surprise at this since General Jesup expressed to him that "he could not permit your talk to go to the Seminoles, as it held out expectations that could not be realized."[21]

This was in direct conflict with what Chief Ross and Secretary Poinsett had agreed to, and what was relayed and accepted by President Van Buren. But, according to General Jesup, the "talk contained, as [he] thought, propositions at variance with [his] instructions. It held out on the Seminoles the promise of a treaty; but [he] was required to enforce the provisions of an *existing* treaty, not to make a *new* treaty."[22] This was in contradiction to Ross having been previously assured by Secretary Poinsett that President Van Buren had authorized the Seminole to negotiate a new treaty with the U. S. if they ended the conflict.[23]

Fields also wrote to Chief Ross that the general was not going to assist in the delegation's mission. General Jesup affirmed that he was "not fighting for peace, but emigration and violated treaties—that the Seminoles must surrender themselves into his power completely."[24] General Jesup also chided Fields, saying that he did not need the delegation to make peace, and that he could end this war on his own accord whenever he pleased.[25] General Jesup's conversation with Richard Fields was highly disturbing and volatile. From a military perspective, the U. S. was engaged in one of the costliest wars yet, and General Jesup was commander of the campaign, so his frustrations are understandable. However, his comment that they were not fighting for peace, but rather for violations of treaties and the forced relocation of the Seminole was outlandish and hypocritical. If any group in the U. S. had a reason to fight due to treaties being violated, it was the Seminole and the rest of the indigenous population. The Seminole were only defending themselves, their land, and their rights that the government assured them through treaties.

The failure of General Jesup's orders to reflect the correspondence and discussions between Chief Ross and Secretary Poinsett raises questions about the U. S. government's true intent. Chief Ross told Secretary Poinsett that he could not understand "that whatever, [he] as Secry [Secretary] of War had sanctioned in this affair would be suppressed by those who are subject to [his] orders."[26] Did the U. S. really want to find a peaceful solution to the conflict, or just to foster an image of cooperation? Chief Ross even expressed to Secretary Poinsett that if he knew of the falsities given to him he "would not only have refused to communicate it to [the Seminole]—but would have declined any agency in this mediation."[27] Chief Ross was coming to the conclusion that the government did not intend to resolve its conflict with the Seminole. He sternly wrote Secretary Poinsett that "a suppression of my talk…cannot be viewed in other light than a rejection of the Cherokee Mediation."[28] He brought this opinion to the forefront in the hope that Secretary Poinsett would change his course of action and be more receptive to the delegation's mission.

Although the military pushed back against the delegation, Richard Fields seemed optimistic. His letter to Chief Ross of 12 November 1837 expressed his belief that the deputation could accomplish its mission in a short time, and in a way that would please all involved even though both sides were wary of the other and of the delegation's mission. He mentioned that two imprisoned Seminole chiefs, Osceola and Coa Hadjo, had been asked by the deputation whether "they thought there would be any danger in … going to visit the Seminoles in their camps" and that the chiefs answered that there was no danger in the visitation.[29] This gave hope to members of the delegation that they could accomplish their mission as long as the military gave them an opportunity to broker a peace.

The delegation was presented with good news after a meeting with Coa Hadjo and Osceola concerning how best to deliver Chief Ross's Talk. Fields wrote Chief Ross that General Jesup had said that his interpreter felt the Talk would be a positive influence on the Seminole in the hope to end the conflict. The general also assured Fields that "he would do all he could to save [the Seminole], and that it was not his wish to shed any more blood…"[30] This was a complete change of cadence from General Jesup's previous conversations with Richard Fields. The information from the interpreter gave the delegation the hope that its mission could be a success. In addition, according to Fields, "The officers in general wish an end put to this war by any means; and most of them, particularly [Brigadier] Genl. [General] [Joseph M.] Hernandez, is warm in the belief that through our aid, the object can be easily effected."[31] Chief Ross expressed to Secretary Poinsett that he was "pleased" that General Jesup had a change of heart toward the delegation's mission and intentions and the possibility of its success.[32] However, General Jesup only allotted six days for the delegation to meet with the Seminole in council and return to Fort Mellon.[33]

On 6 December 1837, Fields sent a letter to Chief Ross regarding the delegation's council with the Seminole chiefs, headmen, and warriors. The deputation traveled to the inner swamps to deliver Chief Ross's Talk. When they first arrived, there was no one at the meeting grounds. Chief Coa Hadjo went out to the swamp to bring in the other Seminole. It seemed the others waited away from the council grounds so as not to be double-crossed by the military. When all the chiefs were gathered, the delegation was granted the opportunity to give Chief Ross's Talk. Afterwards, the delegation returned to their staging area.

On the next day, the delegation was again summoned to relay the Talk to other chiefs who had not been present previously. That evening, the Seminole Principal Chief Micanopy thanked the delegation for traveling to Florida and stated his appreciation for the risks assumed by the delegation. "The Seminole exhibited every demonstration of feeling and friendship towards [the delegation] and [their] cause that brought [the deputation] among them."[34] Chief Micanopy, Opiahki, Cloud, and other sub-chiefs decided to speak with General Jesup.

The delegation succeeded in its mission of convincing the Seminole chiefs to negotiate peace. After a stressful interrogation, the chiefs agreed to send for their people to come in to the forts, and asked for a week for the people to prepare for their journey. The general agreed. Ironically, the general also reminded the Seminole chiefs that they must abide by and uphold the treaties they had made with the U. S. since "she [has] always fulfil[led] hers."[35]

While the runners were sent to give word to the Seminole to come in, the situation at Fort Mellon turned into a travesty. General Jesup labeled the Seminole chiefs prisoners of war, even though they came to Fort Mellon under a white flag of truce

21 Ibid., 544.

22 General Jesup to Secretary Poinsett, 7 July 1838, Message from the President.

23 Chief John Ross to the Chiefs, Headmen, and Warriors of the Seminoles, 18 October 1837, in Moulton, 524-525.

24 Richard Fields to Chief John Ross, 12 November 1837, in Moulton, 544.

25 Ibid., 544.

26 John Ross Papers. "Principal Chief John Ross to Secretary of War Joel R. Poinsett, 28 November 1837. GM4026.496.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Richard Fields to Chief Ross, 12 November 1837, in Moulton 544.

30 Richard Fields to Principal Chief John Ross, 14 November 1837, in Gary E. Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross,* vol. 1 (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 545.

31 Ibid., 545.

32 Principal Chief John Ross to Secretary of War Joel R. Poinsett, 29 November 1837, in Gary E. Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross,* vol. 1 (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 555-556, 556.

33 John Ross Papers. "Principal Chief John Ross to William Shorey Coodey, December 1837. GM4026.508.

34 John Ross Papers. "Richard Fields to Principal Chief John Ross, 6 December 1837. GM4026.500.

35 Ibid.



Facing: John Ross. GM4326.3264.

with the Cherokee Delegation for negotiations. Chief Ross berated Secretary Poinsett for this treacherous action and stated that it was an "unprecedented violation of that sacred rule…recognized by every nation, civilized and un-civilized…for the purpose of proposing the termination of a warfare."[36] Chief Ross insisted that the Seminole chiefs should be released at once and allowed to return to their people. He was enraged by the outlandish deception by the U. S. government, and was greatly hurt by how the U. S. portrayed the Cherokee Delegation. He felt that the Cherokee were used as pawns in the military's mission, since the delegation was able to get the Seminole to come to Fort Mellon to negotiate a peace.[37]

The imprisonment of their chiefs caused the Seminole, especially the Mikasuki, to rally against this egregious action, refuse to come to the forts, and continue to fight. The Cherokee Delegation left Florida in disgust after the Seminole chiefs were herded on steamers towards the Gulf of Mexico. Secretary Poinsett refused to correspond with Chief Ross concerning the subject of the Seminole imprisonment. The only subject that Secretary Poinsett would write of was to state that he had received Chief Ross's letters.[38]

The U. S. government immediately went on the offensive to create a smear campaign against the Cherokee Delegation to cover up the fact that it was their actions which caused the mission to fail. According to Lewis Ross in his letter to Chief Ross of 17 January 1838, a number of letters supposedly written in Florida went to the papers in Georgia, blaming the failure on the Cherokee Delegation and stating that they gave the Seminole false hope and lies.[39] Chief Ross wrote to George Lowrey on 27 January 1838, stating that the U. S. government had continued with its duplicity, and had turned the public against the Cherokee Delegation. He wrote that the *National Intelligencer* had censured the deputation for its failure and false-dealings.[40]

Chief Ross viewed the delegation as a success. When General Jesup botched the negotiations by imprisoning the Seminole chiefs, the U. S. government began looking for a scapegoat to avoid claiming an error on its part. Secretary Poinsett even went as far as to call for a formal inquiry into the delegation before the Department of War concerning possible charges to bring against them for their failure.[41] The delegation, according to Chief Ross, burdened "hardship and perils…by penetrating the deep swamps and hammocks of [F]lorida in the Service of the U. S. as mediators for the restoration of peace and friendship between the Seminoles and the U. S.,"[42] only to have that same agency accuse them for its own errors and failures. Chief Ross tried fervently to clear the deputation's name. He did not want the Seminole to believe that his people had had any hand in the treachery perpetrated against the Seminole chiefs and their people by the U. S. government. He knew that if the Seminoles were suspicious of and resentful toward the Cherokee, when they all were inevitably removed to Indian Territory, there could be hostility if they were neighbors. The delegation was only sent to negotiate a peace between the Seminole and the U. S. government, and not to falsely gain the Seminoles' trust and bring them to the forts to be imprisoned. The delegation was unaware of what General Jesup would do, and their intentions were of the purest means.[43]

36 Principal Chief Ross to Secretary of War Joel R. Poinsett, 2 January 1838, in Gary E. Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, vol. 1 (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 575-576, 576.

37 Ibid., 575-576

38 John Ross Papers. "Principal Chief John Ross to Lewis Ross, 13 January 1838. GM4026.514.

39 John Ross Papers. "Lewis Ross to Principal Chief John Ross, 17 January 1838. GM4026.515.

40 John Ross Papers. "Principal Chief John Ross to George Lowrey, 27 January 1838. GM4026.521.

41 John Ross Papers. "Principal Chief John Ross to Secretary of War Joel R. Poinsett, 5 March 1838. GM4026.535.

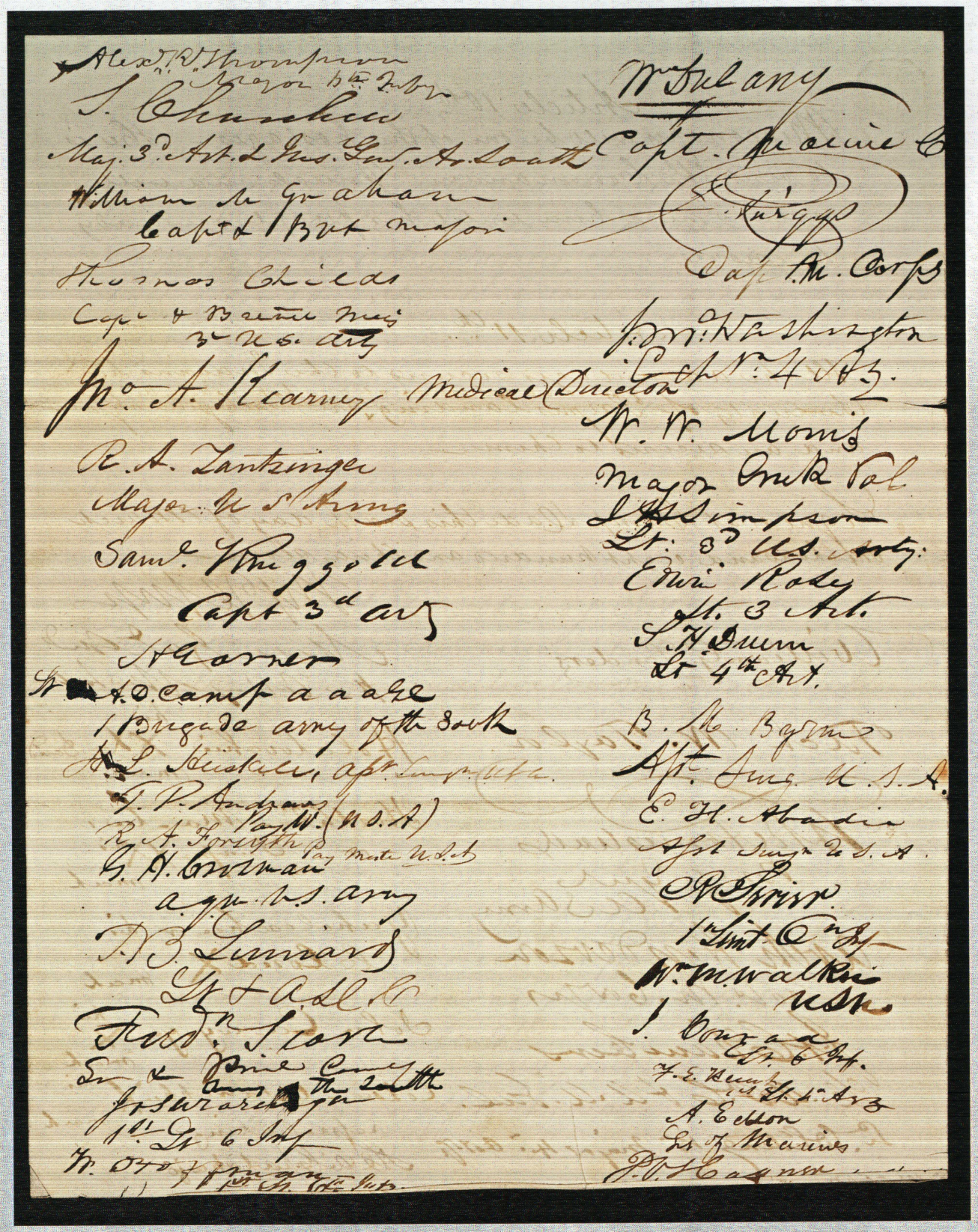
42 John Ross Papers. "Principal Chief John Ross to Lewis Ross, 13 January 1838. GM4026.514.

43 Principal Chief John Ross to Secretary of War Joel R. Poinsett, 8 March 1838, in Gary E. Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, vol. 1 (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 605-610, 606.



MICANOPY.

A SEMINOLE CHIEF.



Facing: "Micanopy" from *Indian Tribes of North America*. Thomas McKenney and James Hall. Rice and Hart: Philadelphia, 1854. Volume I. GM2926.1118.

Capitulation of the Seminole Nation. March 1837. To Major General Thomas Jesup from Micanopy. Broadside. GM4026.5933.

4026.5935

A List of deceased Indian Prisoners who have died from Jany. to May 31st 1837 out of 29 the whole number taken

No	Names	Sex	Tribe or Town	Estimate of Age Yrs	Mos	Remarks
1	Jim Natchamoochy	Male	Coby Hajo	60	"	Died at Fort Dade.
2	Dun, i. Ka	Female	Cooper	7	"	Died at Fort Dade
3	Pee. ha. mica	"	"	2	"	Died at Fort Dade
4	Woka	"	"	25	"	Died at Tampa Bay Appl. 23d.
5	Dueoka	"	"	5	"	Died at Tampa Bay May 4th.
6	Walupka	"	"	1	"	Died at Tampa Bay May 3d
7	Polly Factor	"	Jumper	28	"	Died at Tampa Bay. date unknown
8	Rosa or Lucy	"	Mickasuky	24	"	Died at Tampa Bay. May 11th
9	Jem. is. ho. ye	"	"	5	"	Died at Tampa Bay May 6th
10	Jom. its. ho. ye	"	"	1	"	Died at Tampa Bay May 31st
11	____ (to name)	Male	"	4	"	Died at Tampa Bay May 18th
12	Hyathee	"	"			Died at Tampa Bay May 31st

A List of deceased Negro Prisoners who have died from January to May 31st 1837. out of 109 the whole number taken

No	Names	Sex	Tribe or owner	Estimate of Age Yrs	Mos	Remarks
1	Clanda	Female	Micapulatka	"	2	Died at Tampa Bay May 27th
2	Mundy	Male	"	1	6	Died at Tampa Bay May 11th
3	George	"	Micanopf	1		Died at Tampa Bay May 23d
4	Morris	"	Long Swamp	1		Died at Tampa Bay May 21st
5	Lydia	Female	Natas. boc. co	80		Died at Tampa Bay May 11th
6	Philip	Male	Long Swamp	4		Died at Tampa Bay

Recapitulation

Indians	Negroes	Aggregate
12	6	18.

John W. Goodbye
P. Serg.t

Deceased Prisoners from January to May 31, 1837. Broadside. GM4026.5935.

The Cherokee Delegation to the Seminole was seen by the U. S. as a failure. From General Jesup's point of view, the delegation wasted valuable time and energy and gave the Seminole false hope.[44] Seen from the opposite side, the deputation was a success. It achieved what it set out to do: arrange for the Seminole Chiefs to come to Fort Mellon to negotiate a peace with the U. S. government and bring an end to the war. General Jesup's treachery in imprisoning the Seminole chiefs was the catalyst for the failure, not the delegation's efforts. The delegation was taken aback by the events at Fort Mellon and could not comprehend what General Jesup had executed under a flag of truce. The government was looking for a scapegoat and found a perfect candidate in the Cherokee Delegation, a group of men whose only intent was to bring an end to the bloodshed and save their brethren from annihilation. Without the Gilcrease Museum's tireless efforts to preserve the John Ross documents, the public might not have the opportunity to see these events portrayed by the very people who were involved.

44 General Jesup to Secretary of War Poinsett, 7 July 1838, Message from the President, 8.

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Unless otherwise noted, the following are from the John Ross Papers at Gilcrease Museum.

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"Principal Chief John Ross to George Lowrey, 27 January 1838." GM4026.521.

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"Principal Chief John Ross to Secretary of War Joel R. Poinsett, 28 November 1837." GM4026.496.

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INSIGHT

A View from the West

A PERSONAL INSIGHT INTO NATIVE IDENTITY

FROM DANIELLE CULP

From the time we take our first breaths we are constantly searching for who we are and where we belong. For me, that search has been confusing at times. My mother is Cherokee and, to put it simply, my father is not. There are times that I have felt pulled by two different worlds. History has proven the difficulty in the coexisting of these two worlds. The Europeans decided to stay on the North American continent and the previous inhabitants, my people, would face a dangerous future because of that decision. The fighting peaked in the 1800s and my mother's people would be forced to emigrate west. John Ross served as the chief of the Cherokees from 1828 to 1866. He led my people through one of the most trying times in our history. In some ways I can relate to John. Other times I cannot imagine the trials that he faced. We share backgrounds and ambitions, a realization that was fueled anew by going through his collection at Gilcrease Museum.

I never knew that I was different from other kids. I never thought about the way my mom had raised me, or that it was a different way of life than the other kids I went to school with. One of my oldest friends is Hispanic. When I would go to her house her mother would be cooking traditional Spanish food and have Selena, a top-selling Latin artist and songwriter, playing in the background. When I was younger I never thought about the differences, even when her parents were speaking a language I did not understand. As I got older, though, it became apparent that these differences were important to some people and even made some people angry. It is hard for me, even to this day, to understand how people can judge and discriminate based on nationality or cultural upbringing.

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Facing: My mom and me in our tear dresses while I was Miss Cherokee.

Unlike my childhood friend, who only belongs to one culture, I belong to two. I was Cherokee and I was "white." When we would go to my mom's side of the family I was the "lightest" one there and when we would go to my dad's side of the family I was one of the darkest. I know, through growing up around my mom, that she looks at the world differently than my dad. I am the product of their union, thus my worldview is the product of both of theirs colliding. I think that this allows me to step back from certain situations and look at the whole picture blending one culture and the other.

However, the existence of two worlds inside me was problematic. There were times in school that I was unsure of where I fit. I know that my life is not everyone else's but it is mine and these things did happen to me. There were times that I did not feel like I fit in with the Indian kids. They could tell by the lightness of my skin that I was also something else besides just Indian. There were also times that I did not feel like I fit in with the "white" kids because they knew that I was Indian. As troubling as this dichotomy would seem, I feel that it pushed me to be very firm in who I am and what I stand for. I know who I am, both parts, and I refuse to be ashamed of either.

Before I started working in digitization on the John Ross collection at Gilcrease I had studied my culture for years. I knew who John Ross was and the troubled time he lived in. I wonder if he had faced the same problems I did growing up. John Ross was one-eighth Cherokee through his mother. I feel like he would understand the struggle that I went through. Like John, my Cherokee heritage is passed on through my mother. In John's time this was more important than it is in mine. A long time ago your clan was your identity. It was everything. It was one of the most important things that made you Cherokee. If you had a clan, you belonged, no questions asked. Luckily for John, his mom was Cherokee and so he belonged to Anitsisqua, the bird clan, because she belonged to the bird clan. He had a place in Cherokee culture. Unfortunately, today few people know what clan to which they belong. Through disease, intermarriage, and shame the clan system started to die.

One of the scariest things for me to think about is the death of a star. Some stars are close enough that the light reaches us in minutes. Some stars are so far it takes tens of thousands of years for their light to travel to us. Like all things, stars die. If a star dies and it take hundreds of years for the light to reach Earth we will still see the light of that star even after it has passed. By the time that we realize it is gone it will have been gone a long time.

I am afraid that cultures are like stars, that they can die too. We know they do, even if we do not like to admit it or talk about it. The original inhabitants of the eastern coast were some of the first ones to come in contact with the new explorers. There were some tribes that were wiped off the face of the planet. Either by disease or by the sword. Those cultures are lost in time. There was no one left to pass on their stories, their language, their legacy. I equate them to the close stars, for we can see the immediate effect of their demise. I am afraid that other cultures have died and we are still seeing their light in present generations, but when we realize that they are truly gone it will be too late to save their memory. I know that this is not a happy thought, and if I allowed myself, it could be too big a burden to bear. Instead, I allow it to inspire me. It inspires me to fight for my culture to show the world that I am still here, that WE are still here. I refuse to let our light go out, because I want it to continue to shine in generations to come. Our existence is credited to the fight that John Ross and many others refused to surrender to.

John Ross's blood degree would be the least of his worries as he got older. He would have to deal with the settlers that were now encroaching, stealing, and living on our homelands. The balance was delicate and more often than not misunderstandings led to violence in the Southeast. I know about the history of my people and the big events that shaped our lives. Joining the staff at Gilcrease allowed me a deeper and more personal look into not only John's life but the lives of many in the late 1700s and the early 1800s.

I have had the privilege to look at my people's world from different perspectives. One of the most enduring was the Remember the Removal bike ride in 2012. The ride commemorates the forced removal of my people from the Southeast to present-day Oklahoma. We traveled across seven states on a bicycle, over 900 miles. It was, by far, the hardest thing I have ever done in my life. There was a great amount of pain involved in the undertaking, but that pain gave me a new connection with my people. Compared to the march they made in the wintertime our ride was a walk in the park. Still, their struggle was real and, on that bike, my struggle was real. It allowed me, for a moment, to get a glimpse of what they may have felt as they were forced from their homes. The ride leaves a longing inside of you. I longed to maintain that connection with my past and my ancestors. I choose to perpetuate their legacy in my life. This choice led me to the opportunity at Gilcrease. One of my elders told me that everything we do in life is a stepping stone. Sometimes we are happy where we are but we must always move forward. We must always take the next step, and digitization at Gilcrease was my next step.

I prepped for the job at Gilcrease during my employment at the Cherokee Heritage Center in Tahlequah. I remember working downstairs and helping with the exhibits. One day we were working with the petition that 90 percent of the Cherokee Nation signed opposing the Treaty of New Echota. I had heard about this document all my life but it was a whole new feeling seeing and handling it. This document embodied the hopes and beliefs of my people fighting for their homes and what they believed in. This made the prospect of working on the Ross collection so much more exciting.

I worked on digitizing the collection at Gilcrease for museum and database purposes. When you look at the big picture, the work I did at Gilcrease will make the collection accessible to people who would have never gotten the opportunity otherwise. It also rekindled the fire inside me as well. I saw the lives of many Cherokees in John's time. Some documents are from the council and some are letters from his family. Some have to do with the issue of slavery, and one letter is from a group of Creeks pleading for protection. This collection makes you feel a range of emotions as you work through it. Pride can be felt when reading some letters when you realize that they were not giving up without a fight. Sorrow can be felt when reading some letters and, for me, the letter from the Creek was hard to get through. As I photographed the letter from a small group of Creeks that had been staying among the Cherokee I felt an air of desperation. It was hard for me to imagine how they must have felt, how all of the Indians in the Southeast felt in that time of persecution. They were asking for protection and for guidance, they were asking for a friend when a friend was hard to find if you were an Indian.

The two cultures were colliding, and much like when a cold front meets a warm front a storm was coming. Cherokees were converting to Christianity and abandoning the old ceremonial ways. Some were relying on new medicine instead of the medicine of our grandfathers. Other Cherokees were farming and wearing European clothes. You could see the ripple of assimilation moving across the Cherokee Nation. When you are fighting to survive you do not think about what is being lost and what may never be able to be revived. Yet there were Cherokees who refused to give up the fight and who refused to abandon their way of life. These people were sometimes referred to as fullbloods, even when they did not have the full blood quantum. They were considered fullblood because of the traditional lives that they refused to abandon. Some Cherokees who were full by blood were considered mixed bloods because of the assimilated life they lived. We were not only at war with outside forces but with our brothers as well.

The Europeans did not understand us and we did not understand them. They had "justice" and we had blood law. They had church and we had gatiyo. They had formal education and we taught our children at home. Everyone in our village had a place and responsibility. If you took care of the village, the village took care you. Europeans had social class and not everyone had the same opportunities. They had a king and then a president. We had a peace and a war chief, but these men had a responsibility to us, not only themselves or their own agendas. Everyone in our culture had a voice and a right to be heard. Our women were farmers and our men were hunters. The Europeans looked to domesticate our women and make our men into farmers. They wanted to kill the Indian, and save the man. Even when we assimilated, were educated, and worshipped alongside them we were persecuted. Gold was found in Georgia and thus the fate of the Cherokees in the Southeast was sealed.

It can be easy to live in a place where you are angry with the past, especially working with the John Ross collection. It is easy to dwell there. I am proud to be a part of a nation that rose from the ashes and prospered against all odds. I feel as though we are special and rare just like a flower that blooms in adversity. One section I worked extensively with was when John and the Cherokees managed their own removal. We were sovereign and still remain so. We have







Above: The grandkids with Grandma Culp and Great Grandma Caudle. Left to right: Back row: Courtney and Grandma Culp. Middle row: Megan, Great Grandma Caudle, Michael. Front row: Danielle and Tony.

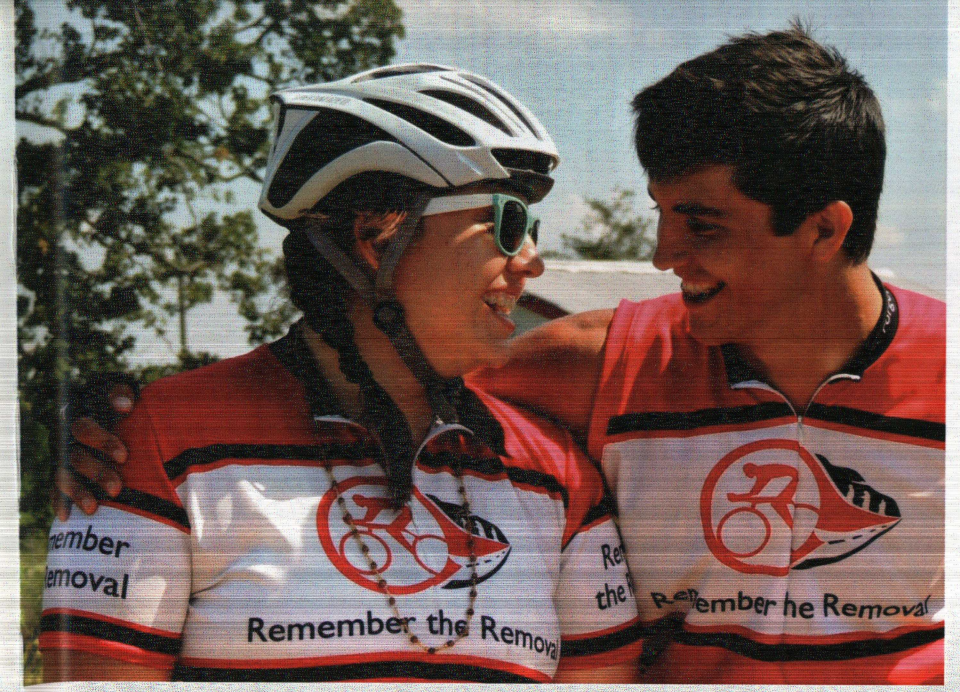
the ability to govern ourselves and have proved that we are competent to do so. In this part of the collection a certain word choice caught my eye. In many of these documents it is not called the removal, it is called an emigration. At first this struck me as odd. It was painful to think of the forced removal of my people as an emigration, like it was a choice. It made me think of those who signed the Treaty of New Echota. They knew that they were breaking Cherokee law by selling land without permission. They knew that there was a price to pay for their actions and that it would cost almost all their lives.

It is impossible to know all the details of the story but I sometimes ponder questions impossible to answer. What if the treaty had never been signed? Would my people have been moved anyway? Would we be wiped out while fighting for our land? Would the American government eventually allow us to stay? Who would I be if my ancestors had not "emigrated" to the West? These are things I will never know the answer to. This collection does give a fuller picture though. It means that we can further understand the history of our people. Projects like the John Ross Collection ensure that the Cherokee will not be forgotten. It shows that even to this day we are still fighting for what we believe in, for what John believed in.

I looked at the letters, the resolutions, and the signatures of my people in this time of turmoil. Above all else, I see the hope of my people. A long time ago in our villages and at our ceremonial grounds we had an eternal flame that was never allowed to die. This fire was sacred and the smoke from this fire carried our prayers up to unetlanvhi, our creator. I see the fire that burned inside our ancestors then and when I look around I see that same fire in my people today.

Now we are three separate federally recognized tribes: the Cherokee Nation, the United Keetoowah Band, and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians; the fire still burns all the same. We still speak the language that our ancestors spoke to each other as the sun was setting on the Smoky Mountains. We still tell the stories to our children that our grandfathers and grandmothers told us. Whether we are on the east or west side of the Mississippi River we will always be Cherokee.

Center left: My parents, Terry and Ellen Culp.
Bottom left: My grandfather Benny holding my brother Tony and me.



Below: The final leg of the nine-hundred-mile Remember the Removal Ride ride, just outside Tahlequah, Oklahoma, in 2012.



Above: Keaton Sheets and me after a long day of riding, finished by pedaling up the hills of Lebanon. Below: Leading the group onto the courthouse square in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, for the welcome home ceremony.



WHO I AM

A PERSONAL INSIGHT INTO NATIVE IDENTITY

FROM MARY M. ALLEN

"Who are you?" This question posited in such a way seems almost impertinent, yet we answer every day without even being asked. We answer with the clothes we wear, the music we listen to, and through a myriad of other seemingly idiosyncratic factors over the course of our days. These are all superficial pieces of a more complex concept: identity. One has several parts, intangible threads, that each contribute to the whole of an identity. I believed, for most of my life, save for my childhood, that my identity was my education, my Social Anxiety Disorder, and a multitude of other sins, achievements, and failures. The idea of holding a cultural identity, then, was lost on me.

My great-grandmother, my grandmother, and my father, as well as various other family members throughout the years, lived in homes built on an allotment in Briggs, Oklahoma. My father is a Cherokee fullblood and my mother is both Kiowa and Caddo. My younger sister and I grew up hearing stories of our mother's and my father's childhoods and visiting the places they remembered and where they grew up. Both our mother and father instilled in us a tremendous amount of respect for our heritage, as much as you can do so with children, from a very young age. It was something I intuited to be intensely important. I would happily proclaim that I was, "Cherokee, Kiowa, *and* Caddo" when my parents took us to cultural gatherings and events. My sister and I even had beautiful tear dresses made in one of the years in which she competed for the title of Little Miss Cherokee. However, as we shifted from childhood into adolescence I began to lose the enthusiasm I once had for my heritage. In adulthood, that loss became a complete rejection of my own cultural identity.

Facing: I follow my younger sister Emma Lea Allen down the aisle at a Navajo cousin's wedding in New Mexico.

"As members of a national body, Cherokees differed from one another in myriad ways, and these differences were sometimes a source of contradiction and tension," wrote Dr. Circe Sturm in her book *Blood Politics.* Dr. Sturm believes that factors such as "race, class, and political orientation" affect Cherokee people today as much as they did in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I enrolled in Tahlequah Junior High in summer 1997, and it was in the course of this same summer that I began to notice I was not as accepted by my tribal peers as I had once perceived. My grandmother's church in Briggs hosted a Vacation Bible School every summer, and for whatever reason, my sister and I attended in 1997. This was the first time I was told I was not "Indian enough." This behavior and aggression from my cultural peers continued from that summer through high school. I was continuously accused of, and bullied for, "acting white" and I spent countless hours fearing somebody would finally follow through with their threats. I became so disenchanted with the idea of a cultural identity that I began to dismiss and disregard anything that tied me to a cultural identity. My mentality at that point was to reject the people, and ultimately, the culture that rejected me.

One thing that remained constant throughout my detachment process was my relationship with my paternal grandmother, Lula Manus Allen. My grandmother was a modest, traditional Cherokee woman who, to this day, is still one of the most resilient, incredible people I have ever known. She told me stories about her life, took me hunting for mushrooms and wild onions, and, most importantly, gave me a place to run to when teenage angst kicked in and I rebelled against my parents; she was always on my side.

My younger sister, Emma, was interested in our heritage from a very young age. She understood something fundamental that was then unknown to me. She understood the real value of knowledge—specifically knowledge about our heritage and culture. She also understood that this knowledge would ultimately benefit others as well as herself. She understood that my grandmother was a wealth of knowledge concerning the Cherokee language, Cherokee history, and our own family history. As a youth, my sister sought out my grandmother for help with all three for various reasons. This is something I never did. My grandmother passed away in September 2003.

The passing of my grandmother was the end of a chapter. There was no longer any reason to visit the Briggs community as we had before, so we as a family ceased to do so. This was acceptable to me, even preferable. Detached from the idea that culture played into who I was, I spent the next several years searching for an identity in places a person is unlikely to find an identity they would likely want to keep. Culture was no longer something with which I felt even an inkling of a connection. It was not something I felt integral to my identity. I remained similarly-minded throughout the majority of my twenties.

Upon moving to Tulsa, I saw an abundance of religious and philosophical ideas and activities a person could participate in and subscribe to. Initially, it seemed beautiful. However it became clear quite quickly that if I failed to be secure in myself I could easily be pulled into something empty and lose myself completely. A phenomenon I was not unfamiliar with and one with which I could not reconcile myself.

It was during this time that my sister began her master's program in Native American Studies at the University of Oklahoma. She, too, was immersed in a new environment, one in which she was accepted and felt comfortable expressing herself. This marked a pivotal change in our relationship. My sister is my best friend and we naturally discuss our lives frequently. It was inevitable that cultural identity would be part of those conversations, as she felt passionately about the nature of the history of Native American people. She cried when she saw indigenous tribes mistreated by invasive contemporary government. It was she who reminded me that Native people, and even our own tribes, still suffer today. They face the stigma of a world that believes Native Americans and other indigenous people are figures from another time. It is because of this stigma that Native people are consistently misrepresented in popular culture, and possibly even more disturbing, not represented accurately nor adequately in the majority of modern educational systems.

This is important: her genuine love for our tribe and her passion for action and awareness, as they relate to our tribes and tribes around the world, humbled me. I attended a lecture with her early in the spring semester of 2014. There I heard her, for the first time, speak to a room full of people in a scholarly setting. She explained why we need to build our communities and teach them to be self-sufficient entities before we begin exploring the idea of international commerce. After that day, I began to re-evaluate my perception of cultural identity. It was also then I discovered a deep need to re-establish myself scholastically and, infinitely more important, culturally. Or more simply, *this* is important.

It was my mother who first made me aware of the Data Imaging Assistant position, a position which would allow me to work with the John Ross Papers. This was an invaluable opportunity to work firsthand with documents directly relating to the history of the Cherokee people. At the time of my application, I was not certain of anything other than my desire to work with these documents. When I received the news that I was selected to be part of such a prestigious educational project, I was elated. I was unsure of what I would take away from the experience. I only knew it was something of which I had to be a part. I am now nearing the last few weeks of my contract and I wholly believe the direct work our group did with the materials, coupled with researching and cross-researching documents closely in the *The Papers of Chief John Ross,* edited by Gary E. Moulton, has set me on a path to rediscovering and re-embracing my own cultural identity.

In *The Papers of Chief John Ross,* Gary Moulton quotes a letter to Andrew Jackson from Chief John Ross and his delegates that includes this passage:

> We were then your friends—and the conduct of man is an index to his disposition. Now in these days of profound peace, why should the gallant soldiers who in time of war walked hand in hand thro' blood and carnage, be not still friends? We answer that we are yet your friends. And we love our people, our country and the homes of the childhood of our departed sires. We have enjoyed the rights and liberties of freemen—and God forbid that we should ever live in vassalage to any power. And if we are too weak to live as freemen—it is easier for freemen to die, than live as slaves!

When my partner, Danielle Culp, and I began photographing documents, it was, at first, the quality of the photos with which we were concerned. However, as we became faster at the task, we were able to read the documents we were processing for the collection. The documents ranged from personal correspondence to political correspondence to receipts. Some objects were innocuous enough, but others were devastating to read. There were countless spoliation claims, but the most demoralizing documents were those which showed the Cherokee people, as well as other tribes involved in forcible removal, pleading with the government not to displace them from their homelands. This was to no avail.

At this time, I turned to my sister. What was happening to me was normal, she explained. When you delve into the history of most cultures, be prepared. She also explained I was going to experience anger and sadness at first, though it would lead me to a better place. I began to read articles on contemporary Native American issues as well as issues which have plagued the Native American community for years. True to her prediction, at first I did get angry. Just as in the past, Native American people today are treated as if they are not, in fact, real people. They have been treated as if they do not deserve consideration and respect despite the fact Native American people have been making real contributions to society as long as Europeans have been in America. Yet, there is still a fundamental disconnect. It seems nothing is sacred, and non-Native people feel entitled to a culture that does not belong to them. Native American history is so widely distorted that these people cannot understand why they are not entitled to another's culture. In a passage from *The Papers of Chief John Ross,* Moulton quotes Chief Ross: "now in these days of profound peace, why should the gallant soldiers who in time of war [literally] walked hand in hand thro' blood and carnage, be not still friends?"And, "[A]s Cherokees we cannot but feel a deep interest in the welfare of all the red people—and for this reason we would most earnestly recommend unto them unity of sentiment [and] action among themselves, as the only security for their own welfare [and] happiness."

In his address to the Seneca Delegation, Chief Ross encouraged unity between "all the red people," as the only real way to preserve the traditions of our respective





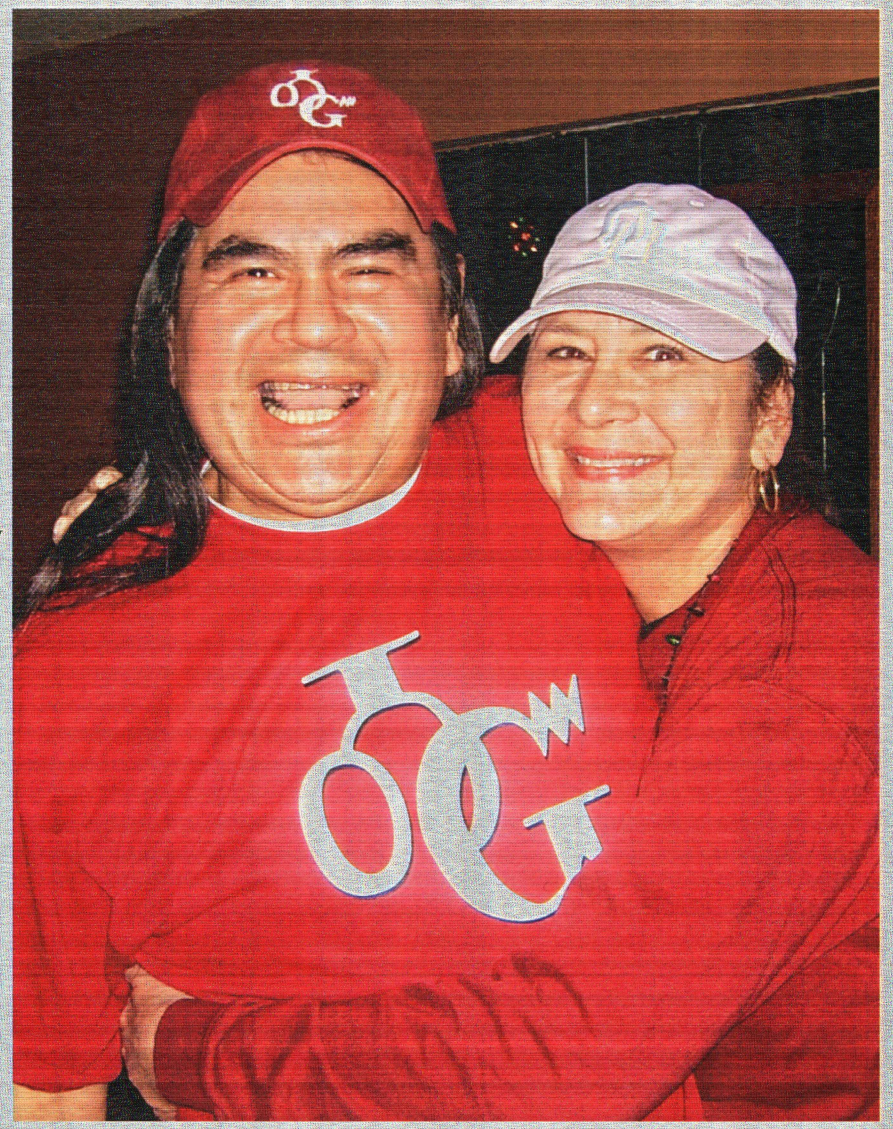
Above, from left: My maternal great-grandmother, Mary Keahbone Henry; my mother, Dr. Shelley Butler Allen; my maternal grandmother, Carole Henry Butler; and a baby girl who is me. Facing: My maternal grandmother, Carole Henry Butler, in traditional Kiowa buckskin regalia.

tribes. He was speaking in the context of remaining in our homeland, but this idea of solidarity is just as important in contemporary Native American politics. Instead of anger, unity, both inter- and intra-tribally is a better use of our collective power and knowledge. Halfway through the digitization project, I had become less angry and more determined to break the stigma I had faced as a child and embrace my heritage. Proud of the work we were doing, I began to let go of the anger I felt towards my cultural peers.

As Moulton quotes Ross, *It has pleased the great Author of our existence to permit you once more to assemble under your legislative authority, to deliberate and act upon affairs of your much oppressed and aggrieved nation. In the discharge of this sacred trust and solemn duty, it is hoped that you may be duly impressed with the importance of being united among yourselves, in order that your deliberations and acts may not only give general satisfaction to the people, but that they may prove to be salutary and permanently beneficial to the common welfare of our afflicted nation.*

In his annual message at Red Clay Cherokee Nation on October 12, 1835, Chief Ross encouraged a discouraged nation to unite. A message that many Native American tribes in sociopolitical conflict would do well to take to heart. The Cherokee Nation is, unfortunately, one of those Native American tribes. Over my lifetime, I have seen both the positive and the negative of Cherokee politics. Particularly with the last tribal election. We were a Nation divided against itself and it was one of the most exhausting experiences, as it was publicized in the traditional media and on social media. Perhaps if more Cherokee citizens were familiar with the politics surrounding removal, political division would decrease.

In one particular discussion with my sister, I revealed I still felt angry occasionally despite the renewed reverence I had found for my heritage. She sat down with me and showed me pictures and biographies of our Cherokee and Kiowa ancestors. She told me to really look at who those people were. The outside world and its insensitivity to uniquely Native American issues is not something I can fix. I can, however, fix how I view the world. Despite how the world views me. I am not who the world tells me I am. I am not who the world tells me I should be. I am the daughter of a Cherokee man and Kiowa-Caddo woman, the proud sister of a brilliant Native American scholar, and a proud Cherokee, Kiowa, *and* Caddo woman who now sees my culture and heritage as an inextricable part of who I am.



My parents, Dr. Richard L. Allen and Dr. Shelley Butler-Allen. Their clothing says "OU" in Cherokee syllabary.

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John Ross
to
Grace Leroy