

# Oklahoma Indian Education Tribal Guide: The Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma

## Tribal Seal/Flag/Website

Tribal Seal:



Tribal Flag:



Tribal Website: <https://www.cherokee.org/>



## Migration/Movement/Forced Removal

The Cherokees are original residents of the American southeast region, particularly Georgia, North and South Carolina, Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Most Cherokees were forced to move to Oklahoma in the 1800's along the Trail of Tears. Descendants of the Cherokee Indians who survived this death march still live in Oklahoma today. Some Cherokees escaped the Trail of Tears by hiding in the Appalachian hills or taking shelter with sympathetic white neighbors. The descendants of these people live scattered throughout the original Cherokee Indian homelands.

After the Civil War a new treaty allowed the government to dispose of land in the Cherokee Outlet. The settlement of several tribes in the eastern part of the Cherokee Outlet (including the Kaw, Osage, Pawnee, Ponca, and Tonkawa tribes) separated it from the Cherokee Nation proper and left them unable to use it for grazing or hunting. In 1889, Congress authorized the Cherokee Commission to persuade the Cherokees to cede their complete title to the Cherokee Outlet. After a great amount of pressure, and confirmed by a treaty Congress approved March 17, 1893, the Cherokees agreed, for "the sum of \$8,595,736.12, over and above all other sums" to turn title over to the United States government. On September 16, 1893, the eastern end of the Cherokee Outlet was settled in the Cherokee Strip land run, the largest land run in the United States and the largest event of its kind in the history of the world. This section of land is still known as the Cherokee Strip, and the term has often been applied to the whole of the Cherokee Outlet.

The major concentration of contemporary Cherokees lives in fourteen northeastern Oklahoma counties within the original 1835 tribal treaty boundaries. These counties are Adair, Cherokee, Craig, Delaware, Mayes, McIntosh, Muskogee, Nowata, Ottawa, Rogers, Sequoyah, Tulsa, Wagoner, and Washington. The Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma headquarters is just south of the city of Tahlequah in Cherokee County. It is sixty-five miles from Tulsa and twenty-eight miles from Muskogee.

### **Oklahoma Historical Society source to consider for Indian Removal information:**

<http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/i/in015.html>

### **The Library of Congress Documents:**

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Indian.html>

### **Oklahoma Indian Country Guide, Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department:**

[https://issuu.com/otrd/docs/oklahoma\\_indian\\_country\\_guide](https://issuu.com/otrd/docs/oklahoma_indian_country_guide)



## Maps



Original homeland map

### The Trail of Tears

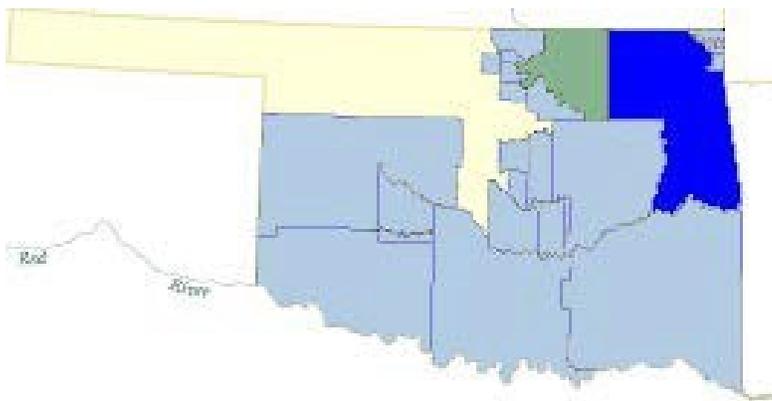


Trail of Tears was the Cherokee name for what the Americans called Indian Removal. During the 1800's, the U.S. government created an "Indian Territory" in Oklahoma and sent all the eastern Native American tribes to live there. Some tribes willingly agreed to this



plan. Other tribes didn't want to go, and the American army forced them. The Cherokee tribe was one of the largest eastern tribes, and they didn't want to leave their homeland. The Cherokees were peaceful allies of the Americans, so they asked the Supreme Court for help. The judges decided the Cherokee Indians could stay in their homes. But the President, Andrew Jackson, sent the army to march the Cherokees to Oklahoma anyway. They weren't prepared for the journey, and it was wintertime. Thousands of Cherokee Indians died on the Trail of Tears. Many Native Americans from other tribes died too. It was a terrible time in history.

Tribal lands after 1830 Source: <https://www.cherokee.org/about-the-nation/history/>  
Cherokee Nation's jurisdiction in the dark blue.



## Population Past/Present

The Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma has 320,000 members, with twice that number self-described as Cherokees. There is no blood quantum requirement, just citizenship descendency based on the Dawes Roll. The 2000 U. S. Census identified over 700,000 who claimed Cherokee heritage nationwide. Northeastern Oklahoma has some 100 Cherokee communities. Perhaps 100,000 tribal members reside within the fourteen- county area. Cherokees are also scattered across the globe, with large enclaves in many major U. S. Cities. The Cherokees are one of the largest tribes in the United States.

## Government: Chiefs vs Chairman, Elected or Paternal

The modern Constitution of the Cherokee Nation was approved by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs on Sept. 5, 1975, and ratified by the Cherokee people on June 26, 1976. A Constitutional Committee convened in 1999 to create a new Constitution. In 2003 the Cherokee people voted overwhelmingly to accept it. The new Constitution was enacted in 2006 and calls for a tri-partite government consisting of Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches.





The Executive Branch of the Cherokee Nation is charged with the execution of the laws of the Cherokee Nation, establishment of tribal policy and delegation of authority as necessary for the day-to-day operations of all programs and enterprises administered by the Cherokee Nation tribal government. These offices include the Principal Chief, Deputy Principal Chief and four cabinet positions. The current chief is Bill Baker.

The Cherokee Nation Judicial Branch consists of three distinct tribal courts, the District Court, the Supreme Court and the Healing and Wellness Court. Each court is open to every person or entity in the 14-county Cherokee Nation jurisdictional area.

The Cherokee Nation Tribal Council is the lawmaking branch of the Cherokee Nation's tripartite government. The Tribal Council is comprised of 17 elected members who serve staggered four-year terms. Fifteen Council members represent Cherokee Nation citizens who live within districts of the Cherokee Nation's tribal service jurisdiction, along with two additional At-Large Council members who represent citizens that live outside of the Nation's boundaries.

The Cherokee Nation Marshal Service is a full-fledged, certified law enforcement agency with jurisdiction throughout the Cherokee Nation. The Marshal Service is cross deputized with 50 municipal, county, state, and federal agencies. With more than 32 Deputy Marshals, the agency offers array of special teams focusing on prevention and justice in matters concerning criminal activities.

## Language Group

The tribal name derived from Tsa-La-Gi (CWY in the Sequoyah syllabary), "principal People" or "cave People." It was corrupted to "Chalache" (in Portuguese and Spanish), "Cherqui" (in French), and finally "Cherokee" in English by the late 1600s. Their designation for themselves in Ani-yunwi-ya, "real People."

Linguistics provides some insight into Cherokee origins. Scholars view Cherokee as an Iroquoian language that branched off some 3,500 or 3,800 years ago. Six distinguishable dialects of Cherokee may have been spoken prehistorically, but only two survive. Kituhwa or Middle Cherokee is spoken among the Eastern Band in North Carolina, while Otali or Overhill or now Western Cherokee is used in Oklahoma. Because of the larger Oklahoma Cherokee number, Western Cherokee predominates as the major form today.

The Cherokee language has an innovative writing system that was invented by the Cherokee scholar Sequoyah. Sequoyah's writing system is a syllabary. That means one character represents each syllable.



## Cherokee Syllabary

1.	<b>D</b> a	<b>R</b> e	<b>T</b> i	<b>Ꭰ</b> o	<b>Ꭱ</b> u	<b>i</b> v
2.	<b>S</b> ga Ꭰka	<b>P</b> ge	<b>Y</b> gi	<b>A</b> go	<b>J</b> gu	<b>E</b> gv
3.	<b>Ꭰ</b> ha	<b>Ꭱ</b> he	<b>Ꭲ</b> hi	<b>Ꭳ</b> ho	<b>Ꭴ</b> hu	<b>Ꭵ</b> hv
4.	<b>W</b> la	<b>Ꭰ</b> le	<b>P</b> li	<b>G</b> lo	<b>M</b> lu	<b>Ꭰ</b> lv
5.	<b>Ꭶ</b> ma	<b>Ꭰ</b> me	<b>H</b> mi	<b>Ꭴ</b> mo	<b>Y</b> mu	
6.	<b>Ꭰ</b> na Ꭰhna Ꭰnah	<b>Ꭱ</b> ne	<b>h</b> ni	<b>Z</b> no	<b>Ꭰ</b> nu	<b>Ꭱ</b> nv
7.	<b>T</b> qua	<b>Ꭰ</b> que	<b>Ꭲ</b> qui	<b>Ꭳ</b> quo	<b>Ꭴ</b> quu	<b>E</b> quv
8.	<b>Ꭰ</b> sa Ꭰs	<b>Ꭱ</b> se	<b>b</b> si	<b>Ꭳ</b> so	<b>Ꭴ</b> su	<b>R</b> sv
9.	<b>L</b> da Ꭰta	<b>S</b> de Ꭰte	<b>J</b> di Ꭰti	<b>V</b> do	<b>S</b> du	<b>Ꭱ</b> dv
10.	<b>Ꭰ</b> dia Ꭰtia	<b>L</b> tle	<b>C</b> tli	<b>Ꭳ</b> tlo	<b>Ꭴ</b> tlu	<b>P</b> tlv
11.	<b>G</b> tsa	<b>T</b> tse	<b>I</b> rtsi	<b>K</b> tso	<b>J</b> tsu	<b>C</b> tsv
12.	<b>C</b> wa	<b>Ꭰ</b> we	<b>Ꭱ</b> wi	<b>Ꭳ</b> wo	<b>Ꭴ</b> wu	<b>E</b> wv
13.	<b>Ꭰ</b> ya	<b>B</b> ye	<b>Ꭲ</b> yi	<b>f</b> yo	<b>G</b> yu	<b>B</b> yv

## Traditional Lifeways

Cherokees resided in villages with plazas and earthen mounds. A priestly class-maintained temples with perpetual fires atop platform mounds. By the time Europeans arrived, however, the Cherokees had abandoned mound culture. Extended families lived in dwellings that were arranged around a central council house and a plaza. The plaza hosted games of stickball as well as ceremonies. A protective stockade enclosed the town. Cherokee society is historically matrilineal; meaning clanship comes from the mother. There are seven clans in Cherokee Society: a ni gi lo hi (Long Hair), a ni sa ho ni (Blue), a ni wa ya (Wolf), a ni go te ge wi (Wild Potato), a ni a wi (Deer), a ni tsi s qua (Bird), and a ni wo di (Paint).

The knowledge of a person's clan is important for many reasons; historically, and still today among Cherokee traditionalists, it is forbidden to marry within your clan. Clan members are considered brother and sisters. In addition, when seeking spiritual guidance and Indian doctoring, it is necessary to name your clan. Seating at ceremonial stomp dances is by clan, as well.

One of the traditional games practiced by the Keetoowah Cherokees is stickball. The traditional stickball game was also called the “Little Brother of War” game. When a Cherokee village was preparing for battle against an enemy the young warriors would participate in the stickball game to prepare themselves for battle. The game would also be played to settle arguments between villages, which ever warriors from one of the villages



won the game that village would be considered as victor to their arguments between the two villages. For those purposes, no women were allowed to play, and it was a very rough game with no rules other than the men could not touch the ball with their bare hands. The stickball game is played as a recreational and ceremonial game today, and women are allowed to play but do not use the sticks - only their hands. It is also played at the ceremonial grounds in conjunction with the stomp dance. There is no set amount of players, and anyone can participate in the game.

**Oklahoma Historical Society source to consider for Boarding Schools:**

<http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/a/am012.html>

## Fine Arts

**The traditional musical instruments of the Cherokee consist of the following:** The water drum which is a earthen pot or kettle with a skin stretched over the top of it. An inch or so of water or other liquid is placed inside before playing. The River Cane flute, which in 1835 was reported to have been approximately one foot long, and had 6 holes was used by the Cherokee. Trumpets were sometimes made from buffalo horns, and sometimes from long neck gourds or the thigh bone of the crane. Conch shells were used in very early times. Turtle shells are used for ceremonial rattles; a single rattle to be held in the hand for use by men, and turtle shell shackles worn on the legs of women. Sometimes the ceremonial hand rattles are made of gourd, as well. Some musical legends of Cherokee heritage include the following: Rita Coolidge, Douglas Blue Feather, Johnny and June Carter Cash, Litefoot, Loretta Lynn, opera star Barbara Mcister, songwriter John Loudermild, and Tommy Wildcat.



Cherokee Basketry has endured from prehistoric times to the present day. The women do the basket making. The principal materials used by the Cherokee are cane, white oak, hickory bark and honeysuckle. Originally the only two materials used for dyes were black walnut and blood root. Butternut has been added for black, yellow root for yellow and broom sedge for orange. Ella Mae Blackbear and Mavis Doering are just two of many acclaimed basketweavers. Another art form is pottery. Jane Osti, Crystal Hanna, Anna Mitchell and Victoria Mitchel Vazquez are potters. Other famous painters include Murv Jacob, Dorothy Sullivan, Bill Rabbit, and Virginia Stroud.



Cherokee Double Wall Basket

## Significant Events

- Cherokee leader Junaluska saved the life of Andrew Jackson during the Creek war during the battle of Horseshoe Bend.
- A U.S. Supreme Court ruling in favor of Cherokee authority, the Indian Removal Act passed in Congress by one vote, over the objection of Daniel Boone and others, and was signed into law by Andrew Jackson.
- After their Supreme Court victory in the case of Worcester v. Georgia (1831) and the subsequent refusal of Pres. Andrew Jackson to follow the court, the Cherokee Nation split into factions.





- In 1844, The Cherokee Advocate, printed in both Cherokee and English, became the first newspaper in Indian Territory.
- What remained of Cherokee tribal land after the Civil War was divided into individual allotments, which were given to Cherokees listed in the census compiled by the Dawes Commission in the late 1890s
- Oklahoma Historical Society source to consider:  
<http://www.okhistory.org/research/indianrecs>

## Current Tribal Information

The modern Cherokee Nation is not an isolated entity – it is all around you, encompassing 14 counties in northeastern Oklahoma. The Cherokee Nation holds significant businesses, corporate, real estate and agricultural interests. We are a powerful and positive political force in Oklahoma. Our people benefit from a growing economy, equality and prosperity. At the same time, our leaders are promoting the ancient practice of *ga du gi*, working together for a common cause, encouraging citizens toward self-reliance and independent sovereignty. The Cherokee language is being preserved and revitalized. Historic sites are being restored, museums endowed. Ancient history, culture and ceremonies are being honored and revived.

Every Cherokee who speaks the language, every basket maker, potter, wood carver, stickball player, singer, and citizen is helping revive that sacred Redbird Smith spoke of that sparked long ago.

"Walk along the pathways of our ancestors and let our unique cultural offerings ignite a fire within you."

While Robert J. Conley is an enrolled United Keetoowah Band citizen he has written 70 books, published a collection of short stories, several reprints, including 3 British editions, and several books on tape. Robert also wrote the novelization of a screenplay, *Geronimo: An American Legend* which was published in the U.S. by Pocketbooks and reprinted in translation in Italy. The *Real People* series is a historical fiction over Cherokee history. Interviews and other stories include the following: "Backtracking from Oklahoma to North Carolina", Sandra Ballard, *Appalachian Journal: A Regional Studies Review*, 28, Number 3, Spring, 2001. "A More Realistic Picture: An Interview with Robert J. Conley", Joseph Bruchac, *Wooster Review*, 8, 106-114, 1988 Spring.

Wili Woyi: An Exploration in "Fantasy" Literature An outline for a class discussing this Robert J. Conley story.



Dancing Drum: A Cherokee Legend (Native American Legends) by Terri Cohlene James Mooney's Myths and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees

The First Strawberries by Joseph Bruchac

Famous Cherokee tribal members include the following: Willma Mankiller, John Ross, Sequoyah, Will Rogers, Stand Watie, Joseph J. Clark, Henry Starr, Redbird Smith, Ned Christie, and Zeke Proctor.

“One of the things my parents taught me, and I’ll always be grateful for the gift, is to not ever let anybody else define me.” — Wilma Mankiller, first female chief of the Cherokee Nation

Source:

Cherokee Nation website Chiefs:

<http://www.cherokee.org/AboutTheNation/History/Chiefs.aspx>

<http://www.cherokee.org/AboutTheNation/History>

Sources:

Cherokee Nation website: <http://www.cherokee.org>

Clark, Blue. Indian Tribes of Oklahoma. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman. 2009. Oklahoma Historical Society

Oklahoma Indian Country Guide, Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department

Redish, Laura and Lewis, Orrin. “Cherokee Indian Fact Sheet.” Native Languages of the Americas. 2013. Web. 18 Nov. 2013.

