

Trail of tears and the five civilized tribes

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During the early years of 1800s, valuable gold deposits were discovered in tribal lands, which by previous cessions had been reduced to about seven million acres in northwest Georgia, eastern Tennessee, and southwest North Carolina. In 1819, Georgia appealed to the U. S. government to remove the Cherokee from Georgia lands. When the appeal failed, attempts were made to purchase the territory. Meanwhile, in 1820 the Cherokee established a governmental system modeled on that of the United States, with an elected principal chief, a senate, and a house of representatives.

Because of this system, the Cherokee were included as one of the so-called Five Civilized Tribes. The other four tribes were the Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and the Seminoles. In 1832, in spite of the fact the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that the Georgia legislation was unconstitutional, federal authorities, following Jackson" s policy of Native American removal, ignored the decision. About five hundred leading Cherokee agreed in 1835 to cede the tribal territory in exchange for \$5, 700, 000 and land in Indian Territory (now Oklahoma).

Their action was repudiated by more than nine-tenths of the tribe, and several members of the group were later assassinated. In 1838 federal troops began forcible evicting the Cherokee. Approximately one thousand escaped to the North Carolina Mountains, purchased land, and incorporated in that state; they were the ancestors of the present-day Eastern Band. Most of the tribe, including the Western Band, was driven west about eight hundred miles in a forced march, known as the Trail of Tears.

The march west included 18, 000 to 20, 000 people, of whom about 4000 perished through hunger, disease, and exposure. The Cherokee are of the Iroquoian linguistic family. Their economy, like that of the other southeastern tribes, was based on intensive agriculture, mainly of corn, beans, and squash. Deer, bear, and elk were hunted. The tribe was divided into seven matrilineal clans that were dispersed in war and peace moieties (half-tribes). The people lived in numerous permanent villages, some of which belonged to the war moiety, the rest to the peace moiety.

In the early 19th century, the Cherokee demonstrated unusual adaptability to Western institutions, both in their governmental changes and in their adoption of Western method of animal harvesting and farming. Public schools were established and in the 1820s, a tribal member invented an 85-character syllable script for the Cherokee language. Widespread literacy followed almost immediately. In 1828 the first Native American newspaper, the Cherokee Phoenix, began publication. Today in Oklahoma, much of the culture has remained the same.

Their traditional crafts are most strongly preserved by the Eastern Band where their basketry is considered to be equal to or better than that of earlier times. In Oklahoma the Cherokee live both on and off the reservation, scattered in urban centers and in isolated rural regions. Their occupations range from fishing to industrial labor to business management. In North Carolina, farming, forestry, factory work, and tourism are sources of income. As of 1990 there were 308, 132 Cherokee descendants in the United States.

Another member of the five tribes is the Seminoles, a Native American tribe of the Muskogean language family. Most now live in Oklahoma and southern Florida. The Seminole tribe developed in the 18th century from members of the Creek Confederacy, mostly Creeks and Hitchiti, who raided and eventually settled in Florida. After the United States acquired Florida in 1819, the territorial governor, Andrew Jackson, initiated a vigorous policy of tribal removal to open the land for white settlers.

After the capture of their leader Osceola in 1837 and the end of the Second Seminole War in 1842, several thousand Seminole were forcibly moved west to Indian Territory. At the end of the Third Seminole War in 1858, about 250 more were sent west. The rest were allowed to remain, and their descendants signed a peace treaty with the United States in 1935. In 1964 the Miccosukee signed a 50-year agreement with national Park Service that allows the Miccosukee access to more than 300 acres of the Everglades. The Florida Seminole have five reservations.

They farm, hunt, fish, and some run tourist-related businesses. Many still live in thatch-roofed, open-sided houses on stilts and wear patchwork and applique clothing. The Seminole in Oklahoma were given a smaller reservation after the American Civil War. In the late 19th century they yielded to pressure to divide their tribal land into individual allotments and cede the surplus to the United States; this land was opened to settlers in 1889. In 1990 Seminole descendants numbered 13, 797. Many were Baptists, but both the Florida and Oklahoma groups retained traditional Muskogean observances.

The three remaining tribes, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and the Creek, are all close in relationship. All tribes are of the Muskogean linguistic family and all occupied an area that now includes Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Kentucky. The Chickasaw lived in dwellings constructed alongside streams and rivers rather than in villages. They obtained food by hunting, fishing, and farming. The Creek were an agricultural tribe, living in villages consisting of log houses. Creek women cultivated corn, squash, beans, and other crops, and the men hunted and fished.

The Choctaw were less warlike than their traditional enemies, the Chickasaw and the Creek. They lived in mud and bark cabins with thatched roofs. They were also agricultural people, probably the most able farmers of the southeastern region. They also raised cattle, fished, and hunted. In 1990 the Chickasaw and their descendants numbered 20, 631, the Creek heritage numbered 43, 550, and a large number of Choctaw and their descendants live principally in Oklahoma and also in Mississippi and Louisiana.

During the 18th and 19th centuries the Choctaw were forced to move farther and farther west to avoid conflict with European settlers. By 1842 they had ceded most of their land to the United States and were relocated in Indian Territory, land set aside for them in present-day Oklahoma. Here the Choctaw became, along with Creek, Cherokee, Chickasaw, and Seminole, part of a group of Native Americans known as the Five Civilized Tribes, so called because they had organized governments, the establishment of public schools and newspapers.