

Rebuilding a Nation:  
Cherokee Tribal Architecture, 1839-1907

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A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science in Architecture

University of Washington  
2019

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Program authorized to offer degree:  
Department of Architecture

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**Abstract**

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The Cherokee Nation was forcibly relocated from their ancestral homeland in the American southeast to Indian Territory (in what is now the State of Oklahoma) in 1839. This thesis discusses the architectural history of the administrative and institutional buildings constructed by the tribal government in the Cherokee Nation in Indian Territory. This analysis covers the period between 1839 to 1907, encompassing the years between the establishment of the Cherokee Nation in Indian Territory and the admittance of the state of Oklahoma to the Union. In this period, the Cherokee Nation engaged in a process of acculturation both socially and architecturally, selectively adapting building forms drawn from Euro-American cultural traditions. This thesis argues that the Cherokee Nation used Euro-American architectural styles to demonstrate the tribe's ability to govern themselves according to the standards of the United States and, therefore, their right to retain political autonomy.

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis committee, Professors Louisa Iarocci and Jeffrey Ochsner, for their invaluable advice and guidance. Their high standards and extensive knowledge have enriched the quality of this document, and their encouragement has made the writing process enjoyable as well. I am also grateful to the faculty of the Department of Architecture and the College of Built Environments Historic Preservation Program at the University of Washington in Seattle for their support in my coursework, which helped to refine and focus the ideas contained in this thesis.

I appreciate the research assistance provided by the staff at the Cherokee Heritage Center, the Northeastern State University Archives, the University of Oklahoma Western History Collections, and the Oklahoma Historical Society.

I am thankful to the University of Washington Special Collections Division for providing the opportunity to work with their Architecture Collection and the Pacific Northwest Collection. My friends and colleagues at the have provided a wonderful support system throughout my degree program, for which I am grateful. Most of all, I thank my parents, Jonathan and Amy Chambers Dement, my brother, Drew Dement, and my husband, Sam Hurd, for encouraging and supporting my academic endeavors.



## Introduction

The history of the relationship between Native Americans and the United States is, in many ways, a spatial history. This is exemplified by the forced relocation of the Cherokee Nation and other southeastern Indian tribes from their ancestral homelands to reservations in what is now the State of Oklahoma, an undertaking authorized in 1830 by President Andrew Jackson when he signed the Indian Removal Act. The majority of the Cherokee Nation endured relocation along what came to be known as the Trail of Tears from 1838 through 1839. While the Cherokees no longer resided in their homeland, they persisted as a tribe nonetheless and rebuilt their civic and educational institutions. This thesis explores the ways in which the nineteenth-century Cherokee Nation used architecture to negotiate their identity as a tribe, as perceived by both outsiders and Cherokees themselves. Much of United States policy towards Indians was enacted under the guise of bringing civilization to so-called “unenlightened” native groups. Thus, using Euro-American architectural styles served as one way for the Cherokee Nation to demonstrate their civilized status to the U.S. government. By constructing monumental buildings, the Cherokee Nation used architecture to create a recognizable image of civilization. Moreover, the governmental buildings constructed in the Cherokee capital at Tahlequah created a sense of authority and permanence—important qualities for a people who had been forcibly relocated. This thesis argues that the official tribal architecture of this period reflects Cherokee leaders’ aspirations for their nation after their forced removal as part of their continual negotiation of cultural change in the nineteenth century.

This study addresses the official government architecture of the Cherokee Nation from 1839 to 1907. This study is limited geographically to the official boundaries of the Cherokee Nation, which were established in 1834 by the Indian Non-Intercourse Act; the Cherokee Nation

was located in Indian Territory and roughly corresponded with the northeast corner of what became the State of Oklahoma (Figure 1). This study begins with the signing of the constitution of the Cherokee Nation in 1839 and ends with the creation of the State of Oklahoma in 1907. These were major events that significantly changed the political climate in the region, establishing the beginning and end of Cherokee tribal construction efforts. This study focuses on buildings that were constructed by the tribal government and the ways in which they served as expressions of collective identity. Members of the Cherokee Nation also built private homes, commercial buildings, and religious structures during this period, but these are mentioned only as a backdrop to the development of official tribal architecture. The primary focus of this thesis is on the architecture commissioned by the tribal government that sought to represent the tribe as a whole.

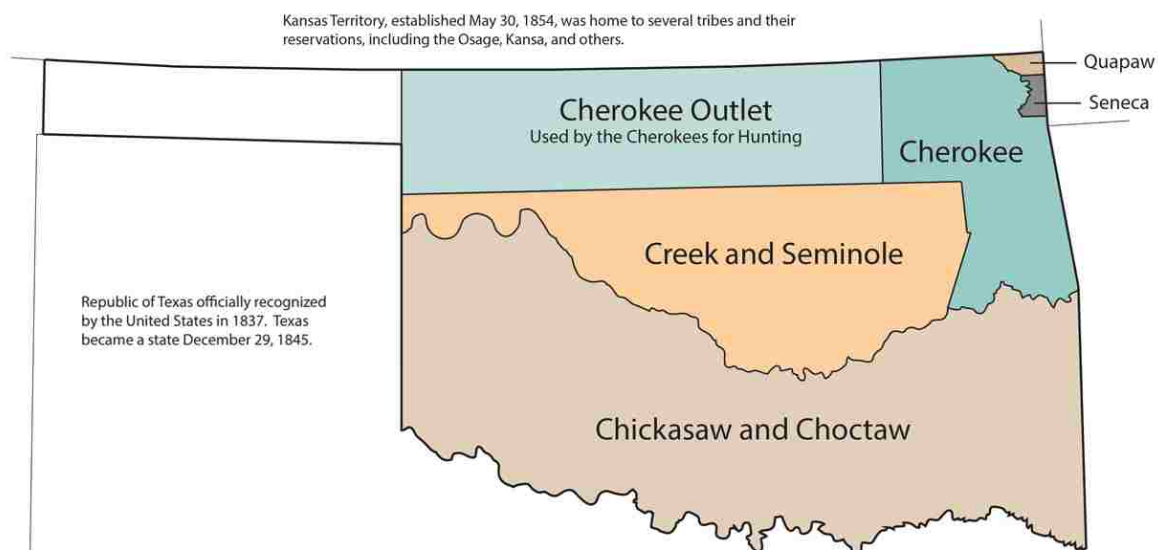


Figure 1: Map of Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma) showing the boundaries of the Cherokee Nation established by the 1834 Indian Non-Intercourse Act. Map created by Katie Bush, Oklahoma Historical Society, 2018.

The official architecture of the Cherokee Nation must be understood in its political, cultural and architectural context in the nineteenth century. The first chapter reviews existing literature related to Native American architectural history; the second discusses the thesis

methodology. The third chapter provides an overview of the architectural traditions of the Cherokee tribe prior to contact with Euro-Americans and the influence of European architecture on Cherokee construction practices prior to their removal from the Southeast. The fourth chapter explores the historical context of the Cherokee Nation after the Trail of Tears, with particular focus on early construction within the Cherokee Nation. The fifth chapter discusses the design and construction of the official tribal government buildings, including the Cherokee Supreme Court (1844), the Cherokee National Capitol (1869), the Cherokee National Jail (1874), and the nine courthouses constructed in the judicial districts of the Cherokee Nation in 1886, of which only the Saline District Courthouse is still extant. The sixth chapter covers the major educational and welfare buildings constructed by the Cherokee government: the Cherokee Male and Female Seminary buildings constructed in 1851 (no longer extant), the 1874 Cherokee Orphan Asylum (no longer extant), the 1874 Cherokee Insane Asylum (no longer extant), the second Female Seminary building constructed in 1887-1889, and the 1889 Cherokee Colored High School (no longer extant). The seventh chapter discusses the creation of the State of Oklahoma and the accompanying political and physical disenfranchisement of the Cherokee people at the turn of the twentieth century. Through the analysis of the buildings constructed by the tribal government, this thesis argues that Cherokee architectural production served as an expression of collective tribal identity.

While the buildings discussed represent the official architectural output of the Cherokee Nation, they do not necessarily reflect the architectural preferences or cultural values of individual tribal members. The tribal government did not universally represent the views of all Cherokees, with individual Cherokees adapting elements of white American culture and maintaining traditional practices to varying degrees. In general, tribal members with mixed white

and Cherokee ancestry tended to adopt white culture to a greater extent than full-blooded Cherokees. Political leaders were primarily mixed-race men, many of whom were educated at Euro-American boarding schools and military academies. Thus, the building committees that commissioned the construction of government buildings were comprised of politicians who were generally proponents of adapting elements of Euro-American culture in an effort to maintain political and cultural autonomy. The buildings constructed by the Cherokee tribal government reflected this philosophy, but this did not necessarily indicate that every individual Cherokee subscribed to acculturation to the same degree as the nation's political leaders.

### **Terminology**

A limited number of terms are used to describe the major cultural actors involved in the creation of nineteenth-century Cherokee architecture. In this thesis, “full-blooded” and “mixed-race” are used to refer to phenomenology, while “traditionalist,” “conservative,” and “progressive” refer to cultural adherence. This follows the terminology used by indigenous scholar Devon Mihesuah in *Cultivating the Rosebuds: The Education of Women at the Cherokee Female Seminary*.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, “Euro-American” and “western” are used to refer to cultural practices, while “white” is used as a description of phenomenology. The terms “Cherokee tribe” and “Cherokee” are used to refer to the Cherokee people as a social group sharing linguistic and cultural traditions. However, “Cherokee Nation” and “tribal government” are used to refer to the formal governing body of the Cherokee tribe as it existed both in the Southeast prior to removal and in Indian Territory after removal. The term “federal government” refers to the national government of the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> Devon Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds: The Education of Women at the Cherokee Female Seminary, 1851-1909* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

The cultural debates regarding tribal adaptation of Euro-American culture in the nineteenth century were not unique to the Cherokee Nation; other tribes shared similar experiences of displacement, dispossession, and acculturation in this period. The term “Five Civilized Tribes” has frequently been used to refer five tribes whose traditional homelands were in the American Southeast, who were relocated to Indian Territory, and who adapted elements of Euro-American culture: the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole tribes. While in use since 1866, this term will only be used in this thesis when it was employed in American policies of the late nineteenth century. Many of the Cherokees’ experiences throughout the nineteenth century were shared by these other tribes, as were their adaptations of Euro-American institutions and architectural designs. However, while commonalities are evident with other tribes, this thesis focuses only on the Cherokee Nation. The architectural production of the nineteenth-century Cherokee Nation represents one important response to broader societal debates surrounding the changing relationship between Native-American and Euro-American culture in this era (Figure 2).

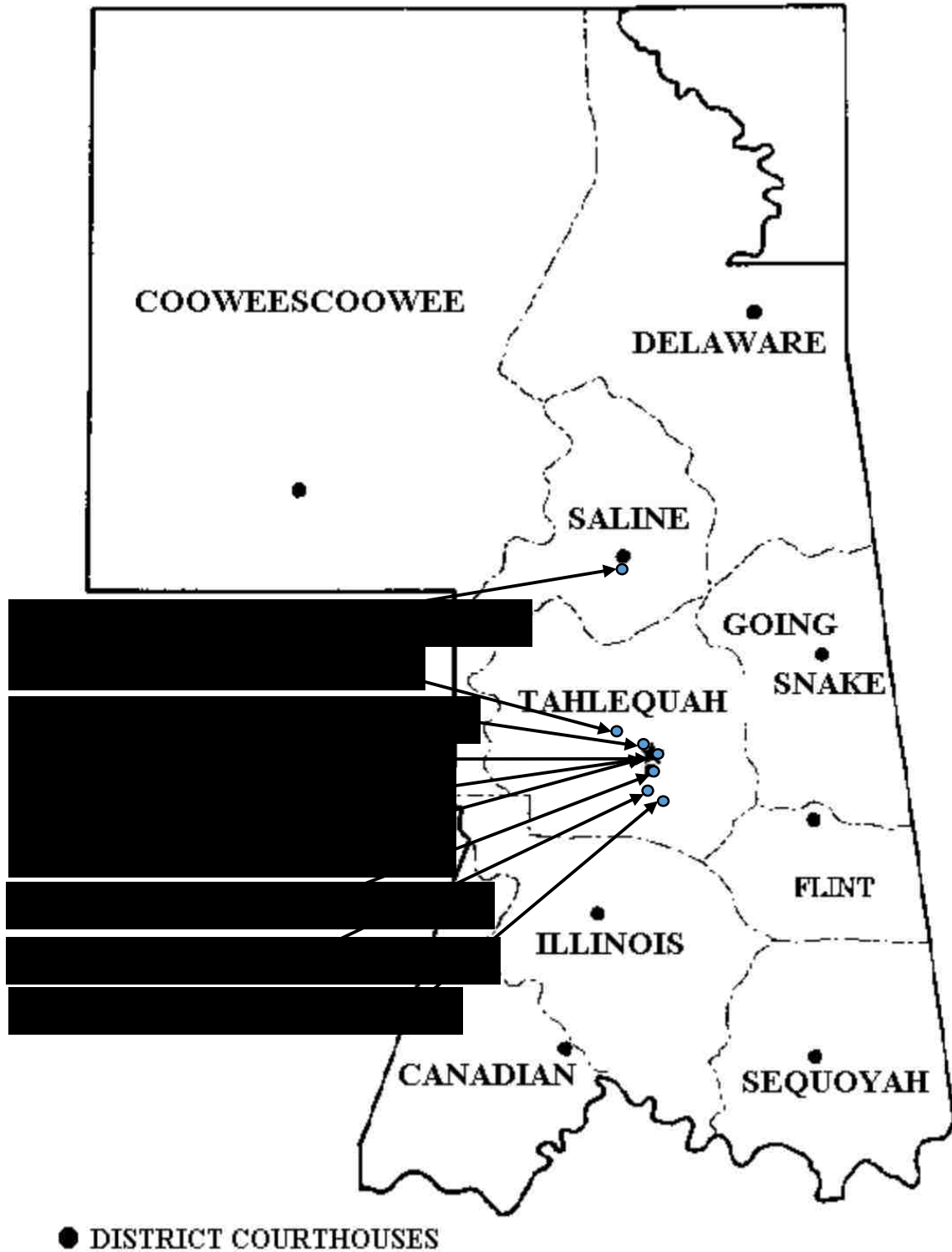


Figure 2: Map of the nineteenth-century Cherokee Nation, showing the boundaries of the Nation's nine political districts and the approximate locations of study buildings. Original map courtesy of Cherokee Courts, undated. Modified by author. Not to scale.

## Chapter One: Literature Review

This thesis offers what is believed to be the first scholarly study of the architectural production of the Cherokee Nation after the Trail of Tears. However, the historical significance of these buildings has been recognized through their documentation and preservation in other ways. Much of the architecture of the Cherokee Nation in this period has been documented through heritage documentation programs, such as the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and National Register of Historic Places nominations. The Cherokee Nation currently uses three of the nineteenth-century government buildings—the Supreme Court, the National Capitol, and the National Jail—as museums dedicated to the tribe’s history, while the Cherokee Heritage Center has occupied the site of the first Cherokee Female Seminary since 1967. The nineteenth-century buildings of the Cherokee Nation are also mentioned in several histories of the era, but they have typically served as a backdrop for discussions of historical events and cultural developments. This study foregrounds these buildings, using architecture as a lens for understanding the cultural dynamics of the Cherokee Nation in this era.

### Native American Architectural History

Although scholarship in Native American architecture has increased in recent decades, the field is still relatively underexplored, with many scholars focusing on either pre-contact architectural traditions or on their resurgence in the late twentieth century. The first broadly comprehensive study of the subject was Peter Nabokov and Robert Eason’s *Native American Architecture*, published in 1989; this remains the only comprehensive, survey of Native American architecture.<sup>2</sup> Nabokov and Eason focus on traditional building practices and their persistence in the twentieth century, but largely overlook the ways in which Native American

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Nabokov and Robert Eason, *Native American Architecture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

architecture changed after contact with Euro-Americans. Similarly, archaeologists and anthropologists have studied Native American building traditions extensively, but these fields have focused primarily on the state of tribal architectural production at or before the moment of contact with European settlers. In *Contemporary Native American Architecture: Cultural Regeneration and Creativity* Carol Krinsky observes that architects have shown increasing interest in Native American architecture since the 1960s, and they have sought to integrate traditional building forms and techniques with modern needs. She argues that this contemporary revival of Native American architectural traditions reflects a broader movement towards indigenous cultural regeneration as well as increased political and economic power held by tribes.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Native American architectural history has enjoyed a new level of interest from scholars and designers; however, much of the work in the field has neglected the development of Native American architecture in the nineteenth century.

There have been two shorter studies that focus on the architecture of Native Americans during the assimilation period. Carroll Van West's article "Acculturation by Design: Architectural Design and the Montana Indian Reservations, 1870-1930" discusses the Blackfoot and Northern Cheyenne Indian reservations in Montana.<sup>4</sup> Van West examines the architecture of reservation buildings constructed by Jesuit missionaries and the federal government and argues that these groups used the built environment as part of their attempts to assimilate native populations into Euro-American culture. Similarly, the scholarly article "In the Lodge of the Chickadee: Architecture and Cultural Resistance on the Crow Indian Reservation, 1884-1920"

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<sup>3</sup> Carol Krinsky, *Contemporary Native American Architecture: Cultural Regeneration and Creativity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Carroll Van West, "Acculturation by Design: Architectural Design and the Montana Indian Reservations, 1870-1930," *Great Plains Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (Spring 1987), 91-102.



by Thomas Carter and others discusses the architectural design of buildings and landscapes of the Crow Reservation in Montana.<sup>5</sup> The essay examines the process by which the Crows were moved to their reservation, the strategies used by the federal government to promote the Euro-American way of life through the built environment, and the Crows' resistance to these efforts. These studies both link architecture to federally imposed policies of assimilation, which also affected the Cherokee Nation in this era. However, the architectural production of the Cherokee Nation in the nineteenth century differs significantly from the Montana cases discussed by Van West and Carter because the Cherokee constructed tribal buildings themselves for their own government institutions and schools. The autonomy of the Cherokee Nation in defining their built environment in this period distinguishes them from the Native American tribes previously studied by scholars.

### **Cherokee History and Architecture**

Although the architecture of the nineteenth-century Cherokee Nation has received little scholarly attention, the history of this period has been explored through other academic lenses. The most comprehensive work on the Cherokee in this era is historian William McLoughlin's *After the Trail of Tears: The Cherokees' Struggle for Sovereignty, 1839-1880*.<sup>6</sup> McLoughlin studies the ways in which the Cherokee people rebuilt their nation and fought for their right to govern themselves after both the Trail of Tears and the Civil War. He pays particular attention to the effects of slavery on Cherokee society in this period, but also provides contextual information on the evolution of society, the economy, and politics in the Cherokee Nation. Other

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Carter, Edward Chappell, and Timothy McCleary, "In the Lodge of the Chickadee: Architecture and Cultural Resistance on the Crow Indian Reservation, 1884-1920," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 10 (2005), 97-111.

<sup>6</sup> William McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears: The Cherokees' Struggle for Sovereignty, 1839-1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

studies focus on particular aspects of Cherokee life in this era. Historian Devon Mihesuah's *Cultivating the Rosebuds: the Education of Women at the Cherokee Female Seminary, 1851-1909* discusses the history of the Cherokee Female Seminary, while historian Natalie Panther's dissertation "*To Make Us Independent*": *The Education of Young Men at the Cherokee Male Seminary, 1851-1910* explores the education of male Cherokee students at the Male Seminary.<sup>7</sup> In *Cherokee Women in Crisis: Trail of Tears, Civil War, and Allotment, 1838-1907*, historian Carolyn Johnston details the experiences of Cherokee women during three major crises that arose during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>8</sup> Anthropologist Circe Sturm discusses issues of race and identity in the Cherokee Nation from the nineteenth century to the present day in *Blood Politics: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma*.<sup>9</sup> Historian Gregory Smithers explores the effects of displacement and migration on Cherokee identity and memory in *The Cherokee Diaspora: An Indigenous History of Migration, Resettlement, and Identity*.<sup>10</sup> Together, these works provide a detailed examination of the cultural and political context of the nineteenth-century Cherokee Nation. Still, none of these works focus on the built environment, with only occasional mentions of buildings and settlement patterns as a backdrop for social and political developments.

There have been three previous studies that focus on the built environment of the Cherokee people. Archaeologist Christopher Rodning has researched the Cherokee tribe's construction practices prior to contact with Europeans, and his ideas are summarized in essays as

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<sup>7</sup> Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds*; Natalie Panther, "*To Make Us Independent*": *The Education of Young Men at the Cherokee Male Seminary, 1851-1910* (Ph.D. diss., Oklahoma State University, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Carolyn Johnston, *Cherokee Women in Crisis: Trail of Tears, Civil War, and Allotment, 1838-1907* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Circe Sturm, *Blood Politics: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Gregory Smithers, *The Cherokee Diaspora: An Indigenous History of Migration, Resettlement, and Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

well as in his book *Center Places and Cherokee Towns: Archaeological Perspectives on Native American Architecture and Landscape in the Southern Appalachians*.<sup>11</sup> This provides important context for understanding the process of architectural change in the Cherokee Nation after contact with European settlement. Meanwhile, architectural historian Jennifer Elliott's master's thesis, *Ga-ne-tli-yv-s-di (Change) in the Cherokee Nation: The Ridge, Ross, and Vann House in Northwest Georgia* discusses three Cherokee houses that were constructed prior to removal using Euro-American building styles and techniques.<sup>12</sup> Like Rodning's study, Elliott's work provides context for the architectural production of the Cherokee Nation after removal, showing that the process of adopting Euro-American building techniques was well underway before removal began. Finally, geographer Brad Bays' *Townsite Settlement and Dispossession in the Cherokee Nation, 1866-1907* is a study of the economic and political processes of white and Cherokee settlement in the Cherokee Nation between the Civil War and Reconstruction.<sup>13</sup> Although land use and economics are the focus of Bays' study rather than building design, his work provides an important frame of reference for understanding the development of the built environment in the Cherokee Nation after relocation. Together, these works are key sources for this study that illustrate the central themes of architectural and cultural change in this thesis.

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<sup>11</sup> Christopher Rodning, *Center Places and Cherokee Towns: Archaeological Perspectives on Native American Architecture and Landscape in the Southern Appalachians* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Jennifer Elliott, *Ga-ne-tli-yv-s-di (Change) in the Cherokee Nation: The Ridge, Ross, and Vann Houses in Northwest Georgia* (master's thesis, University of Virginia, 2008); portions of this thesis have been published as Jennifer Elliott, "Ga-ne-tli-yv-s-di (Change) in the Cherokee Nation: The Vann and Ridge Houses in Northwest Georgia," *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2011), 43-63. The Vann House and its residents were also the subject of Tiya Miles' book *The House on Diamond Hill: A Cherokee Plantation Story* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Brad Bays, *Townsite Settlement and Dispossession in the Cherokee Nation, 1866-1907* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998).

## Chapter Two: Methodology

This thesis combines research methodologies and theoretical frameworks of analysis taken from vernacular architecture studies and American Indian studies, both of which are highly interdisciplinary in their approach. The formal analysis of the study buildings is undertaken in relation to its historical context regarding stylistic trends in American architecture; the circumstances of construction are tied to broader patterns of development and cultural change in the Cherokee Nation. The theoretical concept of acculturation is drawn from anthropology as a framework for understanding the interaction and exchange of cultural practices between two disparate people groups, in this case the Cherokees and the Euro-Americans. Theories of acculturation are applied to architecture to form a framework that recognizes the unique status of architecture as a form of cultural expression. This anthropological approach is combined with architectural theories about the medium's use in conveying the collective identity of a nation. Similarly, the research methodology used in this thesis combines conventional archival sources and fieldwork documentation with a discussion of broader historical context drawn from secondary sources. This interdisciplinary approach uses the buildings constructed by the Cherokee Nation as a lens for understanding the broader cultural developments of the tribe during the nineteenth century.

### Theoretical Framework

As a field, vernacular architecture studies encompasses a variety of traditional building types, focusing on the cultural meanings they embody. As architectural historian Thomas Hubka describes in a 1991 essay on the field, the rise in vernacular architecture marks a shift in architectural scholarship from a nineteenth-century approach that emphasized buildings as objects, asking “what was it?” to a meaning-oriented approach centered on “the cognitive-

symbolic question, ‘what did it mean (to the people who built and inhabited it)?’<sup>14</sup> While earlier scholarship often focused on origins and precursors—as in the sources and forms of styles—vernacular architecture instead uses “a culturally comprehensive ideal of consensus sharing and collective development” and seeks to “find the shifting center of normality, consensus, and shared values, from which explorations can be made to earlier precursors and later developments.”<sup>15</sup> The buildings that the Cherokee Nation produced in the nineteenth century can be analyzed as individual objects, but the circumstances surrounding their appearance can be best understood through a study of the buildings’ meanings and collective development both individually and as a group.

The use of Euro-American architectural styles by the Cherokee Nation can be understood through the anthropological theories like acculturation, assimilation, integration, and biculturalism. These theories address the ways in which the cultural practices of two different groups are shared and adapted when those groups come into contact. Acculturation can be defined as when two cultural groups “come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups,” often resulting in one taking a dominant position politically or socially.<sup>16</sup> Under the perception that they are culturally superior as well, the dominant group then encourages the subordinate group to adopt practices and forms of expression from the dominant group’s culture.<sup>17</sup> Assimilation is a process through which an individual or subordinate group is incorporated into a dominant group by adopting all aspects of

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas C. Hubka, “American Vernacular Architecture,” in *Advances in Environment, Behavior and Design*, ed. Ervin H. Zube and Gary T. Moore, Vol. 3 (New York: Plenum, 1993), 168.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton, and Melville J. Herskovits, “Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation,” *American Anthropologist* 38, no. 1 (January-March 1936), 149.

<sup>17</sup> Melville J. Herskovits, *Acculturation: The Study of Culture Contact* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1958), 8.

their cultural practices.<sup>18</sup> Integration, meanwhile, involves a subordinate group's adaptation of some elements from the dominant society's culture without losing characteristics of its own culture. Integration can involve compartmentalization, with new elements "kept separate from traditional culture," or fusion, with two cultural systems merging.<sup>19</sup> Finally, biculturalism describes individuals' participation in two cultural systems, a model in which individuals adapt different behaviors according to context.<sup>20</sup> All of these processes are evidenced in the nineteenth-century Cherokee Nation to varying degrees. However, the theory of integration is the most relevant for this study, as it accounts for the agency of the subordinate group—in this case, the Cherokees. Furthermore, the theory of integration allows for varying degrees of cultural adaptation within a group, a phenomenon evident in the architecture produced by Cherokee Nation in the nineteenth century.

This study focuses on the buildings constructed by the national government of the Cherokees as an expression of collective identity. Governments have long used architecture as an expression of power and an assertion of a nation's identity. "More than mere homes for government leaders, [government buildings] serve as symbols of the state," urban historian Lawrence J. Vale argues.<sup>21</sup> Vale posits that "the perceived need to make architecture and urban design serve politics is most salient in those countries where the form of politics is new and the forms of architecture are old."<sup>22</sup> He notes that government architecture can be used to "proclaim the worthiness of the new regime" and "forge something most often termed national identity or

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<sup>18</sup> Raymond H. C. Teske, Jr. and Bardin H. Nelson, "Acculturation and Assimilation: A Clarification," *American Ethnologist* 1, no. 2 (May 1974), 358-359.

<sup>19</sup> Steven Michael Leuthold, "*Telling Our Own Story*": *The Aesthetic Expression of Collective Identity in Native American Documentary* (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1992), 28.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Lawrence J. Vale, *Architecture, Power, and National Identity* (London: Routledge, 2008), 3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

national unity.”<sup>23</sup> Although his arguments are focused on postcolonial governments in the twentieth century, they can also be applied to the nineteenth-century Cherokee Nation. The earliest government buildings in the Cherokee Nation were constructed during a period of political conflict between a faction of Cherokees who moved to Indian Territory following the 1835 Treaty of New Echota and a faction of Cherokees who were forcibly moved on the Trail of Tears in 1839. Similarly, later buildings were constructed after the Civil War divided the Cherokee Nation. Vale’s argument supports an interpretation of the Cherokee government’s building activities as an expression of unity and stability following periods of conflict. This thesis also argues that government architecture was used as an expression of collective identity aimed at those outside the Cherokee Nation—Euro-Americans and the United States government—and intended to convey the tribe’s ability to conform to the dominant group’s cultural and political standards.

### **Research Methodology**

The sources for this thesis include a range of primary and secondary sources and fieldwork undertaken on the extant subject buildings in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. Research began with consultation of secondary sources to identify the major buildings constructed by the Cherokee Nation. Secondary sources consulted include existing scholarship on the history of the Cherokee Nation, local history publications and newspaper articles, HABS documentation, National Register nominations, journal articles, theses, dissertations, and museum exhibits. After a preliminary list of major buildings was compiled, fieldwork locations were identified and potential archival sources were assessed for the scope and scale of their content.

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<sup>23</sup> Vale, *Architecture, Power, and National Identity*, 10.

Fieldwork was conducted in September 2019 on a trip to study extant buildings in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. The buildings that were visited include the National Capitol, the Supreme Court, the National Jail, and the second Female Seminary building, which is now part of Northeastern State University and known as Seminary Hall. Also visited were the ruins of the first Female Seminary building at Park Hill, Oklahoma. These site visits allowed for an assessment of existing conditions. The current use of the sites allowed for interior access, as three of the buildings now house museums and one houses academic offices. Fieldwork primarily consisted of photographic and written documentation of the existing conditions of the buildings. These site visits facilitated an enhanced understanding of the buildings' salient architectural features, their immediate settings, and their physical relationship to the town of Tahlequah and the broader Cherokee Nation.

The Oklahoma Historical Society in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and the University of Oklahoma's Western History Collections in Norman, Oklahoma, are the primary repositories that hold the nineteenth-century government documents of the Cherokee Nation. Both archives possess legislative acts, correspondence, committee reports, contractor proposals, property surveys, building contracts, and speeches related to the properties owned by the Cherokee Nation. Most of the documents in these collections date from after the Civil War through Oklahoma statehood in 1907. Material from these collections provided information about the commission process, design process, cost, construction process, and sources of materials for the study buildings. These textual sources provide a valuable range of information about the genesis of these buildings and their relationship to the Cherokee Nation during the study period.

Several archives provided visual resources that are used as study materials and illustrations for this thesis. The Cherokee Heritage Center in Park Hill, Oklahoma, which is the



official archival repository of the Cherokee Nation, provided architectural drawings from the 1875 renovation of the Male and Female Seminary buildings, and the Northeastern State University Archives in Tahlequah provided architectural drawings for the 1887 Female Seminary building. Historical photographs were compiled from a number of archives, including the Oklahoma Historical Society, the University of Oklahoma’s Western History Collections, the Cherokee Heritage Center, the Northeastern State University Archives, and the Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Photographs of the study buildings were used to help determine their original appearances—particularly important for those buildings that are no longer extant. Together the visual resources consulted provide a body of evidence for assessing the architectural features and design of the study buildings.

Historical newspaper articles also provided contextual information on the study buildings and their reception by the public. Online databases provided remote access to historical publications, including the tribally published newspaper *The Cherokee Advocate*, other newspapers published in Indian Territory, and national newspapers and syndicates.<sup>24</sup> Newspaper articles on the study buildings were used to clarify and corroborate information gleaned from textual archives. These accounts also provided insight into contemporary reactions towards the buildings from both Cherokee citizens and non-tribal members. Newspaper articles, historical photographs, and the textual archives of the Cherokee Nation served as the main sources of

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<sup>24</sup> Evidence from the *Cherokee Advocate* is somewhat limited due to gaps in the newspaper’s publishing. The paper was printed from 1844 to 1853, when it was suspended due to lack of funds, and resumed printing in April 1870. Printing was suspended again in February 1875 when a fire destroyed the printing office, and it was reinstated in March 1876. The paper then ran until 1906, when the dissolution of the Cherokee government ended the publication’s funding. For more information, see Cullen Joe Holland, *Cherokee Newspapers 1828-1906: Tribal Voices of a People in Transition* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014).

primary source material, which was then used to interpret the results of fieldwork to better understand the history of the nineteenth-century architecture of the Cherokee Nation.

### Chapter Three: Cherokee Architecture Before Removal

Prior to their removal to Indian Territory in 1839, the Cherokee had interacted extensively with Europeans and Americans for more than a century. After the American Revolution ended in 1783, contact between the tribe and white settlers increased, with growing numbers of Euro-Americans encroaching on the Cherokees' traditional homelands. The United States government encouraged the Cherokees to adopt white agricultural practices and other ways of life, but the adaptation of Euro-American culture was highly contested within the tribe, with individuals accepting and rejecting new cultural practices to varying degrees. Meanwhile, the Cherokee tribe—who had traditionally lived in villages without a centralized tribal government—underwent political centralization. While this increased the tribe's power in treaty negotiations, it also represented the tribal leaders adopting elements of the American political system to their own needs. The tribe also established a national capital at New Echota in Georgia, with a grid plan and building designs that drew from Euro-American architectural traditions. Thus, the processes of integration in both architecture and Cherokee culture as a whole were well under way even before the tribe was moved to their reservation in Indian Territory.

#### Traditional Cherokee Architecture

Although the Cherokee people had experienced indirect effects of European colonization since the 1500s, they did not have sustained contact with Euro-Americans and their cultural practices until the eighteenth century. The traditional Cherokee homeland includes nearly 40,000 acres in the American Southeast (Figure 13).<sup>25</sup> The traditional Cherokee homeland includes nearly 40,000 acres in the American Southeast, a region that now includes portions of Georgia,

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<sup>25</sup> James Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), 14.

Tennessee, Alabama, Kentucky, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia (Figure 3).<sup>26</sup> The Cherokee spoke an Iroquoian language. Cherokee towns shared cultural ties and a matrilineal system of seven clans, but they were independent from each other and pursued separate political and military aims.<sup>27</sup> The earliest Europeans to pass through Cherokee territory were Spanish explorers in the sixteenth century; English trade and treaty relationships began in earnest with the establishment of the South Carolina colony in 1670. These interactions foreshadowed the cultural changes that extended contact with European-Americans would bring, but traditional Cherokee cultural practices remained relatively intact through the late eighteenth century.

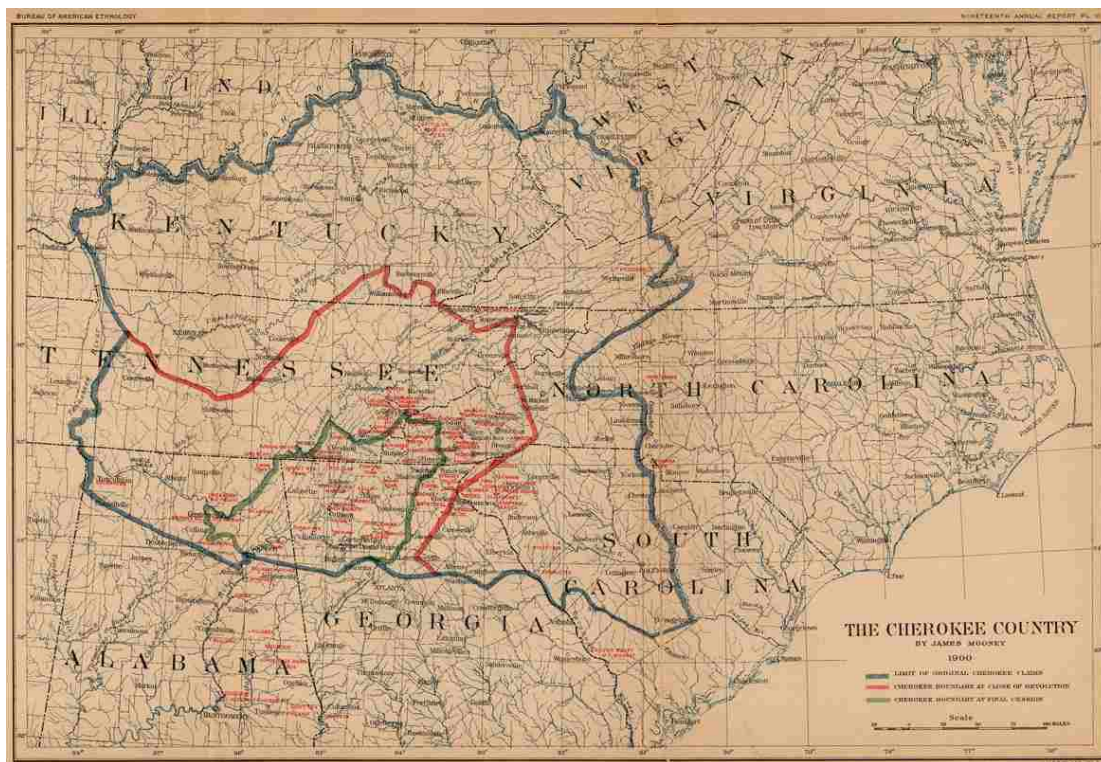


Figure 3: Map of the Cherokees' traditional territory, showing original claims and subsequent reductions. Published in James Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), plate iii.

<sup>26</sup> James Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), 14.

<sup>27</sup> Rodning, *Center Places and Cherokee Towns*, 4.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

Archaeologist Christopher Rodning describes the traditional layout of Cherokee towns and argues for their symbolic importance (Figure 4). During the eighteenth century, towns were “groups of households who shared a common identity and a set of ritual practices and civic responsibilities.”<sup>29</sup> Along with ceremonial squares, public structures known as townhouses were the distinguishing characteristics of formal towns. They served as an architectural symbol of the town by providing a “focal [point] of Cherokee public life and town identity,” whose round forms paralleled their centrality in Cherokee life and myth.<sup>30</sup> American naturalist William Bartram visited Cherokee towns in the late eighteenth century, and described the central townhouses of these towns as follows:

“The council or town-house is a large rotunda, capable of accommodating several hundred people; it stands on the top of an ancient artificial mount of earth, of about twenty feet perpendicular, and the rotunda on the top of it being above thirty feet more, gives the whole fabric an elevation of about sixty feet from the common surface of the ground...they first fix in the ground a circular range of posts or trunks of trees, about six feet high, at equal distances, which are notched at top, to receive into them, from one to another, a range of beams or wall plates; within this is another circular order of very large and strong pillars, above twelve feet high, notched in like manner at top, to receive another range of wall plates, and within this is yet another or third range of stronger and higher pillars, but fewer in number, and standing at a greater distance from each other; and lastly, in the centre stands a very strong pillar, which forms the pinnacle of the building, and to which the rafters centre at top; these rafters are strengthened and bound together by cross beams and laths, which sustain the roof or covering, which is a layer of bark neatly placed, and tight enough to exclude the rain, and sometimes they cast a thin superficies of earth over all. There is but one large door...all around the inside of the building, betwixt the second range of pillars and the wall, is a range of cabins or sophas, consisting of two or three steps, one above or behind the other, in theatrical order, where the assembly sit or lean down...near the great pillar in the centre the fire is kindled for light, near which the musicians seat themselves, and round about this the performers exhibit their dances and other shews at public festivals, which happen almost every night throughout the year.”<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Rodning, *Center Places and Cherokee Towns*, 6.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> William Bartram, *Travels Through North & South Carolina, East & West Florida, the Cherokee Country, the Extensive Territories of the Muscogulges, or Creek Confederacy, and the Country of the Chactaws* (Philadelphia, James & Johnson, 1791), 367.



Figure 4: An artist's rendering of the mound and townhouse at the Coweeta Creek archaeological site on the Little Tennessee River in Macon County, North Carolina. This site dates from the Middle Qualla period, which lasted from ca. 1450 to ca. 1700, and typifies the characteristics of Cherokee town layout and building construction prior to sustained European contact. Drawing by Frank Weir, University of North Carolina Research Laboratories of Archaeology, 1970.

In the late nineteenth century, ethnologist James Mooney recorded the Cherokee oral tradition “The Mounds and the Constant Fire: The Old Sacred Things,” which describes earthen mounds that were “built by the ancestors of the old Ani'-Kĭtu'hwagĭ for townhouse foundations...on the level bottom lands by the river in order that the people might have smooth ground for their dances and ballplays and might be able to go down to water during the dance.”<sup>32</sup> Mooney describes the ceremonies that accompanied mound and townhouse construction, as well as the role of the fire keeper, a man who stayed in the townhouse and tended an everlasting fire that was the source of new fires for houses in a settlement. This myth and the ceremonies associated with it underscore the symbolic importance of townhouses in Cherokee

In addition to their symbolic meaning, townhouses also served a practical function as community centers. They were the setting for town council meetings, in which all members of a town, regardless of age or gender, were welcome to participate. However, seating arrangements

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<sup>32</sup> Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee*, 395.

within the townhouse reflected social divisions. Members of the seven tribes sat in their own sections of the townhouse, with special seating given to those with particular accomplishments or status.<sup>33</sup> In the colonial era, townhouses also housed talks with traders and diplomats. The structures served as the setting communal rituals like dances and purification fasts conducted by warriors.<sup>34</sup> Townhouses were central to the community life of Cherokee people, and they emphasize the importance of place in traditional tribal life.

In addition to townhouses, Cherokee towns featured a number of domestic complexes that housed extended family units (Figure 5). These complexes included hot houses or winter houses with round plans, rectangular summer houses, and storehouses. In the eighteenth century William Bartram described these complexes as including:

“One oblong four square building, of one story high; the materials consisting of logs or trunks of trees, stripped of their bark, notched at their ends, fixed one upon another, and afterwards plaistered [sic] well, both inside and out, with clay well tempered with dry grass, and the whole covered or roofed with the bark of the Chesnut [sic] tree or long broad shingles. This building is however partitioned transversely, forming three apartments, which communicate with each other by inside doors; each house or habitation has besides a little conical house, covered with dirt, which is called the winter or hot-house; this stands a few yards distance from the mansion-house, opposite the front door.”<sup>35</sup>

Christopher Rodning notes that Bartram’s description of horizontal log construction differs from earlier construction methods of vertical posts, observing that “Cherokee groups continued building traditional forms of public architecture even as they experimented with new forms of domestic architecture.”<sup>36</sup> Archaeologist Jon Bernard Marcoux argues that this is a result of “the chaotic social, political, and economic landscape inhabited by these Cherokee households

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<sup>33</sup> Rodning, *Center Places and Cherokee Towns*, 47.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Bartram, *Travels*, 367.

<sup>36</sup> Rodning, *Center Places and Cherokee Towns*, 90.

[which] necessitated a radical, yet strategic shift from practices emphasizing continuity with the past to those aimed at negotiating an uncertain future.”<sup>37</sup> Horizontal log structures could be constructed more expediently than those of vertical posts, and they reflected a need for more mobile towns as a result of increased contact with Euro colonists, as well as a change in materials available wrought by deforestation and shifting territorial boundaries. These changes to domestic construction methods foreshadowed the more extensive architectural changes that would occur in Cherokee construction during the nineteenth century.



Figure 5: The Cherokee Homestead Exhibit, Haynesville, North Carolina. This site reconstructs a typical Cherokee home complex from the 17th or 18th century, and it includes a winter house, a summer house, and a food storage crib. Courtesy of the Archaeological Conservatory, 2016.

### **Euro-American Contact and Socio-Cultural Change**

Throughout the eighteenth century, English colonists increasingly moved westward from their coastal Atlantic colonies and encroached upon traditional Cherokee territories. Trade with Europeans altered traditional Cherokee practices, with one chief remarking, “my people cannot

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<sup>37</sup> Jon Bernard Marcoux, *Pox, Empire, Shackles, and Hides: The Townsend Site, 1670-1715* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 17.



live independent of the English...the clothes we wear we cannot make ourselves. They are made for us. We use the ammunition with which to kill deer. We cannot make our own guns. Every necessary of life we must have from the white people.”<sup>38</sup> The tribe also engaged in treaty negotiations with England, and by 1776 they had ceded 50,000 square miles to the English.<sup>39</sup> The Cherokee sided with the English during the American Revolution, and the conflict forced many Cherokees to resettle farther inland. After the war ended, the United States signed its first treaty with the Cherokee in 1785. The Treaty of Hopewell established the boundaries of Cherokee territory and gave the tribe permission to evict whites living within them. However, guerilla warfare continued between the Cherokee Lower Towns and the United States until 1794, when the Cherokee were defeated at the Battle of Fallen Timbers. After this defeat, the Cherokee Nation was recognized as an official government by the United States, with Little Turkey designated the first Principal Chief of the Nation. National Council meetings with chiefs from across the Nation were held; however, these meetings were irregularly scheduled, and not all factions of the tribe participated. By 1794, three-fourths of Cherokee land had been ceded to the United States, drastically reducing the tribe’s traditional hunting grounds and making their traditional hunting-based economy increasingly infeasible.<sup>40</sup> The political and cultural landscape of the Cherokees’ homeland was rapidly changing by the turn of the nineteenth century, and the tribe would adapt their institutions and cultural practices in response.

In the early American republic, government officials encouraged Native Americans, including the Cherokees, to assimilate into white society and enacted policies that supported this

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<sup>38</sup> Chief Skiagunsta to authorities in Charlestown, South Carolina, 1745; quoted in David H. Corkran, *The Cherokee Frontier, 1740-1762* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), 14.

<sup>39</sup> William McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance in the New Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 3.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

goal. Federal officials recognized tribal sovereignty, noting that Native Americans' land "cannot be taken from them unless by their free consent...to dispossess them in any other principle would be a gross violation of the fundamental laws of nature, and of that distributive justice which is the glory of a nation."<sup>41</sup> The 1791 Treaty of Holston between the U.S. and the Cherokees stipulated that the U.S. would provide "implements of husbandry" to the Cherokees so that they "may be led to a greater degree of civilization, and to become herdsmen and cultivators, instead of remaining in a state of hunters."<sup>42</sup> As president, George Washington encouraged the tribe to learn "to till the ground, to build good houses, & to fill them with good things, as the white people do" and to "learn from the white people to make [your houses] better & more lasting."<sup>43</sup> Federal policy also promoted sending "missionaries of excellent moral character" to Indian nations in order to establish vocational schools that would promote conventional Euro-American gender roles, English literacy, and Christianity.<sup>44</sup> Moravians established the first mission in Cherokee territory in 1801 at Springplace, Georgia, with other denominations founding their own missions in the following decades. Federal policies and missionary efforts were encouraged under an Enlightenment-era belief, articulated by Thomas Jefferson, that "the Indian is the equal of the European in mind and body."<sup>45</sup> In the eyes of federal officials in the early republic, Native Americans were capable of participating in mainstream America as cultural equals of whites

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<sup>41</sup> "Report of Henry Knox on the Northwestern Indians," June 15, 1789; in *American State Papers: Indian Affairs, vol. I, Documents, Legislative and Executive of the Congress of the United States*, ed. Walter Lowrie, Walter S. Franklin, and Matthew St. Clair Clarke (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1832), 13.

<sup>42</sup> "Treaty of Holston," opened for signature July 2, 1791, *Avalon Project*, Yale University, accessed September 30, 2019, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/chr1791.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/chr1791.asp).

<sup>43</sup> "From George Washington to Cherokee Nation, 29 August 1796," *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed September 30, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-00897>.

<sup>44</sup> "From Henry Knox to George Washington, July 7, 1789," *American State Papers*, 53.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Jefferson, quoted in McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance in the New Republic*, xv.

while simultaneously existing as autonomous nations with their own territories and political systems.

Individual Cherokees responded to these policies and changes in the landscape by adapting Euro-American practices to varying degrees. As historian William McLoughlin notes, some Cherokees withdrew to the remotest region of Cherokee territory, the hills of the Great Smoky Mountains in western North Carolina, and continued traditional lifeways, adapting “from white culture only the minimum they needed to survive.”<sup>46</sup> Most Cherokees, however, would “keep what was important from their heritage and yet graft onto it those aspects of the government’s civilization program that would bring order to their lives and a new kind of economic and political security.”<sup>47</sup> According to McLoughlin, Cherokee women adopted Euro-American practices, like weaving cloth, more readily than their male counterparts adopted farming, which was traditionally a female task in Cherokee culture. However, by 1805 the opportunities for hunting had diminished to such an extent that most Cherokee men turned to farming.<sup>48</sup> Along with the economic change, social structures changed as well. Rather than living in matrilineal extended family units, Cherokees increasingly lived in nuclear family units on dispersed, relatively isolated farms, which McLoughlin argues marked “the beginning of the end of Cherokee communal life in the townhouse and the ceremonial square.”<sup>49</sup> The process was accelerated by intermarriage between whites and Cherokees, as Cherokees of mixed-race ancestry tended to be more receptive to Euro-American cultural practices. Adaptation of Euro-

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<sup>46</sup> McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance in the New Republic*, 57.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

American culture was not a uniform process, but it became a clear trend as the nineteenth century progressed.

The Cherokees also adapted Euro-American cultural institutions to serve their own purposes. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, the federal government negotiated with chiefs from separate regions of the Cherokee territory as separate and occasionally conflicting factions. In September 1809, a national council was held in Willston, Alabama, where tribal leaders noted that “we have been much confused and divided in our opinions,” but proclaimed that they had “become as one” and would no longer negotiate as “the lower towns nor the upper towns but [as] the whole Cherokee Nation.”<sup>50</sup> The Willstown council also created a National Committee, which was a representative executive committee comprised of thirteen chiefs. The committee would guide the Cherokee Nation between national councils, manage the treasury, serve as liaison to the U.S. federal agent appointed to supervise Cherokee affairs, and appoint the Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, who served for a five-year term. In 1819, the National Council and National Committee set a regular meeting place at New Town near present-day Calhoun, Georgia, which was renamed New Echota and designated the permanent Cherokee capital in 1825. In 1820, the National Council established a republican election system, dividing Cherokee territory into eight districts that elected representatives to the Council, and they established the Cherokee Supreme Court in 1822. The Cherokee Nation adopted its first constitution in 1827, which codified a tripartite government based on the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the U.S. federal government. Furthermore, by 1821 the Nation had adopted a syllabary created by a Cherokee man named Sequoyah, also known as George Guess.

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<sup>50</sup> Result of a Council at Willston, Path Killer and other chiefs to Return Meigs, September 27, 1809; quoted in McLouglin, *Cherokee Renaissance in the New Republic*, 156.

In 1828, the General Council established a newspaper, *The Cherokee Phoenix*, which published its content in both English and Cherokee. The creation of these institutions drew elements of literacy and governance from American society. The creation of these institutions of the Cherokee people reveals their efforts to maintain Cherokee sovereignty by selectively adapting to white culture.

### **Architectural Change Before Removal**

The changing cultural landscape of the Cherokee homeland was reflected in the physical built environment, particularly in the buildings constructed by the national government. As anthropologist Barbara Little argues, the tribe “found it necessary to present themselves so as to be understood by whites as ‘civilized’ and simultaneously to maintain their identity as Cherokee.” She argues that in order to do so they “selectively accepted and manipulated the foreign idea of civilization, expressing through material culture both the adoption of ‘white ways’ and the preservation of their own traditions.”<sup>51</sup> This phenomenon is most clearly evidenced in the built environment of New Echota, established as the first *de jure* capital of the Cherokee Nation in 1825 and named for Chota, a Cherokee village in present-day Monroe County, Tennessee. The town was laid out in a grid plan in 1826 with 100 one-acre lots and a two-acre public square at the center; proceeds from the sale of private lots were used to fund the construction of public buildings. This method of town planning emulated the plans of European colonial cities in the New World. Its use at New Echota signified the Cherokee Nation’s desire to gain legitimacy as a civilized nation in the eyes of the American government. The construction of the main public buildings at New Echota also reflected Euro-American influence. The Council

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<sup>51</sup> Barbara J. Little, “People with History: An Update on Historical Archaeology in the United States,” *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 1, no. 1 (1994), 25.

Building (Figure 6) and Print Shop (Figure 7) at the capital display dovetail log construction, while the Supreme Court Building (Figure 8) features frame construction with clapboard cladding, both Euro-American building techniques.<sup>52</sup> As Little argues, New Echota embodies “the Cherokee’s most explicit demonstration of [the] white ideology of civilization.”<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, the city was planned through the efforts of elected Cherokee leaders, providing physical evidence that the tribe could meet American standards of civilization as a government, and thus that they were capable of coexisting with white Americans in the Southeast.



Figure 6: The Cherokee National Council House, New Echota, Georgia. Originally constructed in 1826 and rebuilt in 1960. Photograph courtesy of Robert M. Craig via *Archipedia*, 2014.

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<sup>52</sup> Wayne Brown, *Reconstructing Historic Landmarks: Fabrication, Negotiation, and the Past* (University of Cambridge Press: 2008), 167-201. It should be noted that the buildings at New Echota, with the exception of the Worchester House, were either entirely reconstructed or moved to the site from other places in the Cherokee Nation. As Brown shows in his chapter on New Echota, these preservation efforts of the 1950s were based on limited archaeological evidence and paper documentation and relied heavily on preconceived notions that the Cherokees were a “civilized” tribe. However, the existing documentation and buildings show that the Cherokees in this period were consciously adapting elements of European culture, including architecture, even if the extant buildings are not exact representations of what was originally built at New Echota.

<sup>53</sup> Little, “People with History,” 25.



Figure 7: Print shop of *The Cherokee Phoenix*, New Echota, Georgia. Originally constructed in 1828 and rebuilt in 1960. Photograph courtesy of Robert M. Craig via *Archipedia*, 2014.



Figure 8: Cherokee Supreme Court building, New Echota, Georgia. Originally constructed in 1828 and rebuilt in 1960. Photograph courtesy of Robert M. Craig via *Archipedia*, 2014.

Although the official government architecture of the Cherokee Nation reflected Euro-American cultural influence, the living spaces of individual Cherokees represented a wider range of cultural adherence. Furthermore, as Little observes, “while some of the most external and visible elements of material culture, especially architecture and planned settlement pattern followed white rules, less visible elements, particularly objects used within households or within activities of limited audience, preserved traditional culture.”<sup>54</sup> By 1820, as McLoughlin observes, most Cherokees lived in log cabins that “ranged from the barest one-room, dirt floored, and stick-chimneyed style to elaborate double-houses with brick chimneys and large porches” (Figure 9).<sup>55</sup> McLoughlin notes that most full-blooded Cherokees “kept to themselves and did not seek to accumulate wealth [preferring instead] the steady routine of life and the extended kinship system of clans.”<sup>56</sup> In contrast to the Euro-American style of the Cherokee Nation’s public buildings, the tribe’s domestic architecture represented a wider range of lifestyles among the Cherokee people in the nineteenth century.



Figure 9: Log cabin on the Cherokee Qualla Reservation in North Carolina, photographed in 1888. Although it was photographed nearly a century later, this house typifies the homes of average Cherokees between 1810 and 1838. Photograph courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institute.

<sup>54</sup> Barbara Little, “People with History,” 26.

<sup>55</sup> William McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renascence*, 327.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 29.



However, a number of Cherokee individuals adapted many Euro-American cultural practices, including architecture, and these individuals were often more likely to become the tribe's political leaders. A subsection of Cherokees were entrepreneurs who owned taverns, gristmills, ferries, and other businesses catering to white and Native American farmers; another, smaller group of mixed-race Cherokees participated in the Euro-American capitalistic economy as slave-owning plantation owners. The homes of the latter group were commensurate with those of Euro-Americans of the same economic standing; foremost among these was Joseph Vann's house at his plantation, Diamond Hill, in Springplace, Georgia (Figure 20). His two-story, brick house was constructed in 1803-1804, and Vann "employed the Federal mode in his plantation house to project his prestigious status in the Cherokee Nation to his fellow Cherokee and to Euro-Americans travelers and traders."<sup>57</sup> Although houses like Vann's were exceptional in the Cherokee Nation—and in the southeastern landscape in general—it is noteworthy that their owners were often the political leaders of the Nation, and thus the ones guiding the government's architectural decisions.



Figure 10: Chief Vann House, Chatsworth, Georgia, constructed in 1804. Photograph courtesy of Georgia State Parks and Historic Sites, undated.

<sup>57</sup> Elliott, *The Ridge, Ross, and Vann Houses*, 42.

## Political Change and the Removal to Indian Territory

Despite the Cherokees' efforts to maintain their sovereignty in their homeland and adapt to Euro-American standards of civilization, the federal government chose nonetheless to forcibly relocate tribal members to a reservation in Indian Territory. This removal policy was first suggested by Return Meigs, the federal Indian Agent to the Cherokees, following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803; small groups of Cherokees agreed to this plan and moved west of the Mississippi River during the 1810s and 1820s. While the Cherokee Nation, led by Principal Chief John Ross after his election in 1828, defended their status as a sovereign nation, the state of Georgia passed a series of laws between 1827 and 1831 that extended the state's jurisdiction over Cherokee territory with the aim of seizing Cherokee lands for distribution to white settlers. These acts reflected the burgeoning demand for land among white settlers, and they were also indicative of a larger ideological shift in Euro-American thought towards a view of Native Americans as inherently savage and incapable of assimilation. Andrew Jackson, elected as the president of the United States in 1828, argued that, because the Cherokees were "established in the midst of another and a superior race and without appreciating the causes of their inferiority or seeking to control them, they must necessarily yield to the forces of circumstances and ere long disappear."<sup>58</sup> This perspective increasingly shaped federal policy, to the detriment of the Cherokee Nation.

The pressures for removal escalated after 1830, and the issue fostered disagreements among the Cherokees. Congress passed the Indian Removal Act in 1830, authorizing the president to negotiate treaties that would move the Cherokees and other eastern tribes to

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<sup>58</sup> Andrew Jackson, Message to Congress, December 3, 1833, *House Executive Documents*, 23<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session (Washington, D.C.: Gale and Seaton, 1833), 254.

reservations in the United States' territory west of the Mississippi River. While it was highly controversial and opposed by many white Americans—such as Congressman Edward Everett, who remarked that “the evil, Sir, is enormous; the inevitable suffering incalculable”—the act nonetheless formalized the shift in white attitudes towards Native Americans.<sup>59</sup> Over the 1830s, the Cherokee Nation experienced increasing pressure from the federal government to sell their land in the East and move to a reservation. The Cherokees were divided between those who wanted to stay in southern Appalachia and resist removal—led by Principal Chief John Ross and known as the Ross Party—and those who wanted to move west in hopes of maintaining sovereignty away from the pressures of white demands for their land. A group of chiefs representing the latter faction—also known as the Treaty Party—signed the Treaty of New Echota in 1835, exchanging Cherokee land for a designated reservation in Indian Territory. The majority of the Cherokee Nation protested the legality of this treaty and refused to vacate their homeland, prompting President Martin Van Buren to issue an order in 1838 for the U.S. Army to forcibly march the Cherokees to Indian Territory.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Edward Everett, *Speeches on the Passage of the Bill for the Removal of the Indians Delivered in the Congress of the United States* (Boston: Perkins and Martin, 1830), 299.

<sup>60</sup> For a concise summary of the removal process and the Trail of Tears, see Julia Coates, *Trail of Tears* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2014).

## Chapter Four: Continuity and Change in the Cherokee Nation

The Trail of Tears represented an ending to the Cherokees' residence in their ancestral homeland, but it was not the end of the Cherokee Nation itself. Instead, the Cherokee people created new institutions that would shape Indian Territory into a new home. This process was complicated initially by inner disagreements that had emerged during the crisis of removal and escalated into a *de facto* civil war; after this crisis was resolved, the Cherokee Nation experienced a period of economic prosperity during which the tribal government's first wave of building projects were constructed. However, the outbreak of the American Civil War spurred another domestic conflict within the Cherokee Nation, who divided their loyalties between slave-owning Confederate allies and Union allies. After the war, the Cherokee government undertook another series of construction projects, several of which would house newly created social institutions—an orphanage, an insane asylum, and a freedmen's high school—that met needs created by the Civil War. The architectural choices made by the tribal government cultivated an image of a Cherokee Nation that was unified, prosperous, and capable of ruling themselves. At the same, their construction was also strongly shaped by the economic and political climate of the Cherokee Nation during this era.

### Political Division and Reunion After the Trail of Tears

The Trail of Tears, which the Cherokees call "The Trail Where We Cried," brought the majority of the Cherokee Nation to a place that was nearly 900 miles from their homeland. A small group of about 1,200 Cherokees avoided removal to Indian Territory by hiding on private land in the remote hills of western North Carolina; this group and their descendants became the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. Another group of pro-treaty Cherokees moved to western Arkansas between 1836 and 1839, and—along with Cherokees who had moved west of the

Mississippi in the preceding decades—came to be known as the Old Settlers. The largest group, however, was composed of approximately 16,000 Cherokees and 400 African slaves, who were forced into stockades in the southeast by federal and state troops; Cherokee “captains” were designated to lead detachments along a land route to Indian Territory. Although this process began May 26, 1838, most detachments did not leave until late September and did not reach their new home until the early months of 1839. Recent estimates place the number of deaths on the Trail of Tears at around 2,000 to 2,500, with an additional 1,000-1,500 people left unaccounted for; they likely abandoned the journey and relinquished their tribal citizenship.<sup>61</sup> The majority of the Cherokee Nation reached their new reservation in Indian Territory by June 1839, bringing an end to the process of removal in the eyes of the United States government.

For the Cherokee Nation, the removal process created political dissent and psychological distress that lasted long after the physical process ended. In an effort to unify the disparate factions of the Cherokees, Principal Chief Ross called an assembly of the Old and New Settlers at Takatoka Camp Ground, four miles northeast of the current location of Tahlequah, on June 3 and June 20, 1839. The Old Settlers wanted the New Settlers to adhere to their existing government; the New Settlers believed that the government should reflect their majority, nearly two-thirds of the tribal population. The assembly ended without resolving the tribe’s political divisions. Another conflict would soon erupt between members of the Ross Party—a political group that had opposed removal to Indian Territory and was led by Chief John Ross—and the Treaty Party—a faction comprised of those that had supported removal and signed the Treaty of New Echota in 1835. Many members of the Ross Party resented the Treaty Party for their perceived betrayal of the tribe, and on June 22, 1839, a group of over 100 anti-removal

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<sup>61</sup> Coates, *Trail of Tears*, 134.

conspirators murdered John Ridge, his father Major Ridge, and his cousin Elias Boudinot—three Treaty Party members who had signed the Treaty of New Echota—in revenge. Boudinot's brother Stand Watie escaped his attack and would lead the Treaty Party in their opposition to the Ross Party over the coming years. The violence between the political leaders of the Cherokees manifested the resentment and upheaval that removal had brought to the tribe.

Amidst the upheaval among his tribe, Principal Chief Ross continued in his efforts to reunite the Cherokees as one nation. A new people's council began on July 1, 1839, at the Illinois Camp Ground near present-day Tahlequah. On July 12, the assembly adopted the Act of Union, officially establishing the Cherokee Nation as a political entity in Indian Territory. The document was not accepted by either the Treaty Party or the Old Settlers, who both held their own conventions later in July. However, after the Illinois Camp Ground council temporarily adjourned, pro-reunion members of the Old Settler party convinced a majority of the Old Settlers to agree to the Act of Union. Meanwhile, a committee drafted a constitution modeled on the 1827 Cherokee Constitution, which was presented and adopted when the people's council reconvened at Tahlequah on September 6. A full slate of officers was elected, and the newly elected National Council met on September 19, 1839, at Tahlequah. The majority of the Cherokee people supported these political documents, which represented a significant accomplishment in reunifying the nation, but factions of Old Settlers and Treaty Party members continued to oppose the tribal government led by Chief Ross.

By 1841, political unrest had escalated, driven by the issue of per capita payments. The U.S. government still owed the Cherokee Nation millions of dollars in exchange for their land in the southeast, and this money was to be distributed to tribal members in per capita payments. Payment was deferred while Chief Ross negotiated for a larger sum from the federal

government, but by 1841 many Cherokee individuals were growing discontented with the delay. Meanwhile, members of the Treaty Party turned to violence in their efforts to undermine Ross's government. In 1842, Treaty Party member Stand Watie killed Ross supporter James Foreman in retaliation for the 1839 murders of his family members. James Starr (a signer of the Treaty of New Echota), his six sons, and roughly fifty other men formed bands of outlaws that robbed and pillaged Cherokee communities, making "every effort to drive Ross from office."<sup>62</sup> On the tribal election day in 1843, three election judges were attacked by six members of the Treaty Party; one was killed and two were severely beaten. Violence continued to mount in what was effectively a civil war, and in October 1844 the National Council established eight light horse patrols to police the eight electoral districts. Nonetheless, violence on both sides continued, and U.S. Indian agents attempted to broker reconciliation. On April 13, 1846, President James K. Polk told Congress that "the well-being of the whole requires that [the different bands of Cherokee] be separated and live under separate governments as distinct tribes."<sup>63</sup> To avoid dividing the Nation, Ross conceded the validity of the 1835 Treaty of New Echota, accepted the \$5 million price set by the treaty for the Cherokees' ancestral lands, agreed to include the tribe's Old Settlers in the per capita payments from that money, and consented to a general amnesty for all crimes committed in the past seven years. With the signing of the Treaty of 1846 on August 7, the Cherokee Nation was reunited.

The peace brought by the Treaty of 1846 allowed the government of the Cherokee Nation to expand the services it provided to its citizens as well as the facilities that housed them. The 1835 Treaty of New Echota had established a trust fund of \$500,800, which was held in trust by

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<sup>62</sup> McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears*, 42.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in *ibid*, 56.

the president of the United States and provided an annual income of about \$35,000 to \$45,000 for the Cherokee Nation.<sup>64</sup> This annuity paid for operational expenses, including salaries, courts, police, a national newspaper, and the tribe's public school system. It also paid for the building projects undertaken by the tribe. However, expenses exceeded the income from the annuity, and the Nation supplemented their income from the annuity with loans from private banks. Proposals to supplement the national income through taxation were rejected by the National Council. Meanwhile, Chief Ross negotiated with the U.S. government for payment of the costs of removal, which the U.S. War Department had deducted from the payment for the Cherokee homeland in violation of an 1838. However, Congress did not repay this sum until 1882, and Cherokee debt mounted to \$300,000 by 1860.<sup>65</sup> Although the government incurred a great deal of debt between removal and the outbreak of the American Civil War, this facilitated the creation of cultural institutions and the construction of tribal buildings that would promote the feasibility of Cherokee sovereignty to the American government and tribal unity to the Cherokee people.

### **Private Construction and Land Use**

During the first decades after removal, Cherokee families struggled to restart their lives in Indian Territory. The U.S. Congress had agreed to provide food to the Cherokees for their first year in Indian Territory; however, these rations were unfit for human consumption because the flour was infested with weevils and, according to Chief Ross, the meat was “poor and unhealthy.”<sup>66</sup> Few tribal members were able to bring their household tools and farming implements on the Trail of Tears, and, as historian William McLoughlin describes, “a people who had learned to live by the standards of white frontier families were suddenly thrown back

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<sup>64</sup> McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears*, 60.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 62; ibid, 66.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Grace Woodward, *The Cherokees* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 219.



upon skills that only the oldest members of the tribe remembered.”<sup>67</sup> Meanwhile, white merchants from Arkansas and Missouri provided manufactured goods to individuals on credit, in anticipation of repayment after per capita payments were distributed, and communities shared their resources with their poorer neighbors. Cherokee communities had remained relatively intact throughout the process of removal and resettlement. As historian Julia Coates describes, they continued to function as “associations of families that had lived near each other for decades, sometimes for centuries” and maintained traditional community ties and cultural practices in towns across the Cherokee Nation.<sup>68</sup> Thus, communal ties were crucially important as the Cherokees rebuilt their lives in Indian Territory.

After the Treaty of 1846, individual Cherokees received per capita payments for their ancestral homelands from the U.S. government, which fostered economic prosperity and cultural stability for the tribe as a whole. Most Cherokees farmed, and the wealthiest farmers sold surplus goods through river trade, using the profits to purchase more land and slaves. McLoughlin notes that several hundred Cherokee families “became wealthy as merchants, tavern keepers, cattle ranchers, millers, and saltworks operators as well as from other occupations of manufacture and trade including trading in slaves.”<sup>69</sup> The Cherokee land had a wealth of natural resources and a temperate climate that supported agriculture. Cherokee territory was connected to the rest of the nation via the Arkansas River, allowing Cherokee farmers and merchants to trade with markets as far away as the eastern seaboard. Meanwhile, white settlers—who provided a customer base for Cherokee merchants—moved to Cherokee land in violation of Cherokee laws and treaty

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<sup>67</sup> McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears*, 35.

<sup>68</sup> Coates, *Trail of Tears*, 134.

<sup>69</sup> McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears*, 66-67.

agreements prohibiting unauthorized settlement by non-tribal members.<sup>70</sup> Despite the efforts of these interlopers, most Cherokees were financially stable by the 1850s, and this prosperity fostered political unity within the nation.

Nonetheless, the Cherokee Nation became increasingly stratified by income, which tended to correspond with race, with mixed-race Cherokees typically being wealthier than their full-blooded counterparts. This stratification was reflected in the population's range of living conditions. Most Cherokees have been described as "poor subsistence farmers who built their own homes, cleared their own land, plowed it with a horse, a mule, or an ox, and harvested 8 to 10 acres of corn, wheat, and hay." They lived in "double log cabins" and had "a minimal amount of household furnishings," cooked "on an open hearth," and "slept on the floor of their homes."<sup>71</sup> According to McLoughlin, this meant that Cherokee farmers "lived about the same way that the poorer frontier homesteaders did."<sup>72</sup> There was also a small middle class of Cherokees, who were mostly of mixed ancestry and lived on farms of around 100 acres and owned between one and ten slaves. Several others were merchants and tradespeople who lived in "double log houses with porches front and back." and kept "good barns and stables."<sup>73</sup> While the physical living conditions of individual Cherokees were generally similar to those of white settlers on the western frontier at the time, tribal members had an advantage because Cherokee land was owned in common. This meant that tribal farmers could move at will, without being tied to specific plots of land by mortgages or deeds.

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<sup>70</sup> McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears*, 67.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 69.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 78.

Many Cherokees continued to maintain traditional lifeways in their homeland. Evan Jones, a white Baptist missionary living in the nation, stated in 1857 that there were “two distinct classes [of Cherokees] in very different circumstances with regard to property and the means of acquiring it.” According to Jones, full Cherokees, who did not speak English and had little schooling, were “just now in a transition state. They have abandoned, to a great extent, their old mode of living and to a corresponding extent have adopted those of white people.” Jones noted that, “compared with their conditions 25 years ago, they have made great improvement, but on account of their deficiency in skill and industry...their progress is necessarily slow.”<sup>74</sup> Many full-blooded Cherokee expressed pessimism about building large farms, with one remarking, “I worked hard once and got a good farm [in the old homeland]. And it was taken from me, and I am not going to try again.”<sup>75</sup> McLoughlin observes that maintaining traditional practices was “both a source of pride or strength and a sign of insecurity,” providing both “a sense of unity and a desire for isolation.”<sup>76</sup> At the same time, however, these changed farming practices of the Cherokee reflected cultural exchange with white Americans and adaption of Euro-American customs.

Socio-economic tensions gradually increased during the 1840s and 1850s, as cultural differences manifested themselves in increasingly stratified levels of economic prosperity. As McLoughlin notes, cultural division was driven by disagreements over “whether the best Cherokee was the one who tried to adhere to traditional ideals or the one who proved he or she

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<sup>74</sup> Evan Jones to Solomon Peck, January 22, 1857, in American Baptist Mission Union Papers, American Baptist Historical Society, Rochester, New York; quoted in McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears*, 70-71.

<sup>75</sup> Charles Torrey. “Notes of a Missionary among the Cherokees,” ed. Grant Foreman, *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 16 (June 1938), 171-189.

<sup>76</sup> McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears*, 73.

could do everything the white man or woman could.”<sup>77</sup> Cherokees of mixed-race ancestry tended to take the latter approach. A small group of mixed-race families formed a *de facto* upper class based on wealth, cultural practices, and political influence. These families lived on plantations ranging from 500 to 1,000 acres in size, with dozens of slaves. They tended to live near Park Hill, a community that was also the location of the Methodist and Congregational missions. The town was “noted for its sophisticated social life, stately residences, well-stocked shops, ornamental shrubs, fine carriages, and well-kept farms and plantations.”<sup>78</sup> Among the town’s houses were the Greek Revival residences built by Chief Ross, whose estate was called “Rose Cottage” (no longer extant; Figure 11), and George Murrell, a white man who married a Cherokee woman and whose 1845 house is called “Hunter’s Home” (Figure 12). Differing levels of economic prosperity in the Cherokee Nation were similar to those of white Americans in the same period. This was complicated, however, by the degrees to which Cherokees followed tradition or adapted aspects of American culture, and economic fates tended to correlate significantly to these cultural practices.

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<sup>77</sup> McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears*, 76.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 84.

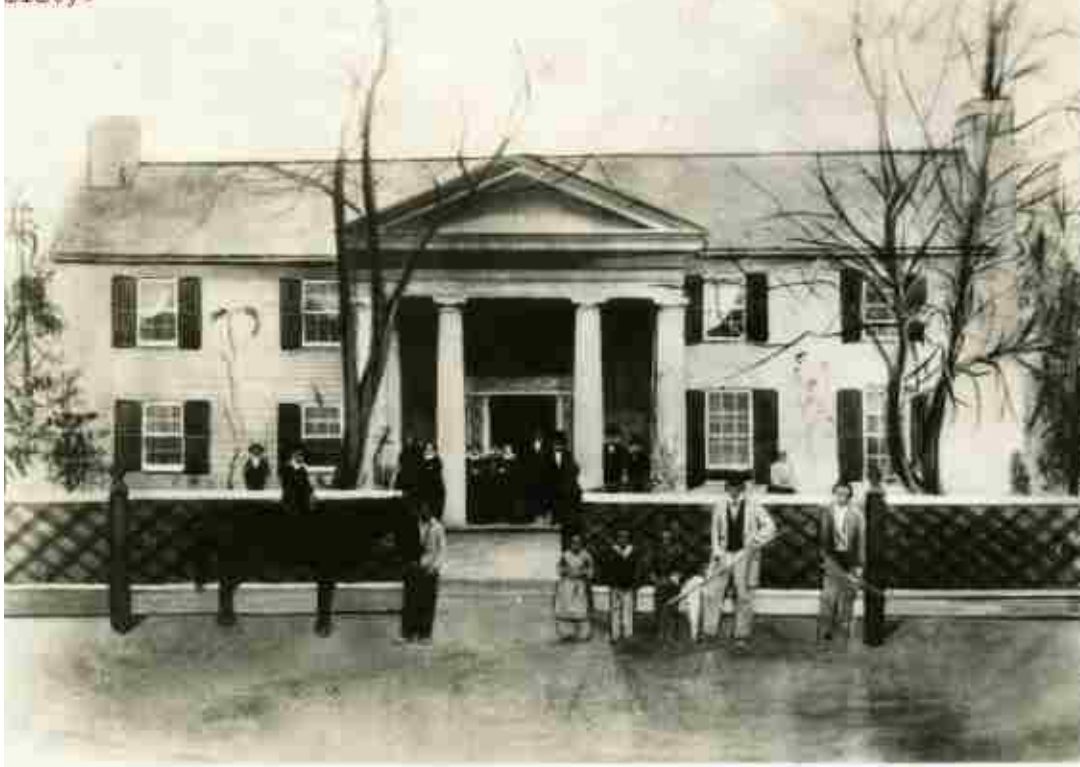


Figure 11: Rose Cottage, Park Hill, Oklahoma, 1844. This Greek Revival building was the home of Principal Chief John Ross. Courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society, undated.



Figure 12: Hunter's Home, Park Hill, Oklahoma, 1845. This plantation house was constructed for George Murrell, a white man who married a Cherokee woman. Courtesy of *Tahlequah Daily Press*, 2019

## The Civil War and Reconstruction

Residual tensions from the removal process were reignited with the outbreak of the American Civil War and exacerbated by increasing economic stratification. In the antebellum era, attitudes towards slavery varied among Cherokees. In 1861, when rates of chattel slavery in the Cherokee Nation peaked, less than one in ten Cherokee families owned slaves, with 3,500-4,000 slaves owned by approximately 400 Cherokee families, out of 21,000 total individual Cherokees.<sup>79</sup> According to McLoughlin, most full-blooded Cherokees valued “egalitarianism, sharing, and consensus government” over “material success,” and they “gradually moved from a neutral to a hostile attitude toward the slave-owning elite who came to dominate the Cherokee political and economic system.”<sup>80</sup> Antislavery sentiment among the Cherokees was driven by a belief that plantation slavery was incompatible with traditional Cherokee values. As tensions surrounding the slavery debate escalated in the United States, the issue threatened to divide the Cherokee Nation as well. Around 1855, proslavery Cherokees, many of whom were mixed-race former Treaty Party members, formed a secret society known first as the “Blue Lodges” and later “The Knights of the Golden Circle,” which promoted political decisions that aligned with proslavery southern views. Shortly thereafter, a group of primarily full-blooded Cherokees formed a secret society later known as the Keetoowah Society, drawing their name from an ancient sacred town in Cherokee history. This group dedicated themselves to preserving Cherokee traditions, and they opposed slavery as a threat to the tribe’s traditional way of life. The formation of these groups foreshadowed the division that the American Civil War would bring to the Cherokee Nation.

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<sup>79</sup> McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears*, 123.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

Initially, the Cherokee Nation attempted to maintain neutrality in the American conflict. When approached by Arkansan Confederates seeking an alliance in May 1861, Chief Ross told them that “the Cherokee are your friends and the friends of your people, but we do not wish to be brought into the feuds between yourselves and your Northern Brethren. Our wish is for peace.”<sup>81</sup> However, a group of proslavery Cherokees, led by Stand Watie, met with Confederate leaders in June 1861 and declared their support for the southern cause; one month later, Watie was commissioned as a colonel in the Confederate army. As internal factionalism undermined the Cherokees’ official stance on neutrality, other large tribes in Indian Territory—the Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Seminoles—all signed treaties of alliance with the Confederacy in July and August 1861. The United States had removed all federal military garrisons in Indian Territory between January and April 1861 in anticipation of the coming conflict with the Confederacy, leaving the Cherokee Nation vulnerable to attack. As circumstances shifted, the Cherokee National Council decided that aligning with the Confederacy would provide the best chance of maintaining tribal unity, and ratified a treaty of alliance with the Confederacy on October 7, 1861.

Despite this official alliance, the tribe was divided by the Civil War and experienced a great deal of destruction as a result. Several Keetoowah Society members took refuge in Kansas and joined the Union Army, rather than fighting with the Confederates. As increasing numbers of Cherokees abandoned the Confederate cause, Union leaders from Kansas petitioned Chief Ross to align the tribe with the Union instead. In August 1862, Ross traveled to Washington, D.C., with President Abraham Lincoln and pledged his loyalty to the Union. Viewing this as an act of

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<sup>81</sup> John Ross, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 2 vols., ed. Gary Moulton (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), vol. 2, 466.

treason against the Cherokee Nation, Confederate Colonel Watie and his supporters held a self-appointed National Council in Tahlequah on August 21 in which Watie was elected as Principal Chief. Ross remained in Washington, but on February 17, 1863, a group of Cherokees aligned with the Union held a National Council, reelected Ross as chief, deposed all of the Confederacy's Cherokee allies from national office, repealed the 1861 treaty with the Confederacy, and passed an act of emancipation that nominally freed all slaves in the Cherokee Nation. The Confederate faction did not recognize the validity of these acts, and Cherokees continued to fight for both sides. Watie and the Confederate soldiers waged guerilla warfare in Cherokee territory, driving Union loyalists to Kansas for refuge. In 1863, U.S. Indian Agent Justin Harlin noted that, "their houses, barns, fences and orchards, after two years of partial or total abandonment, look as hopeless as can be conceived. From being the once proud, intelligent, and wealthy tribe of Indians, the Cherokees are now stripped of nearly all."<sup>82</sup> In one 1863 raid, Watie burned Ross's mansion and the Council House at Tahlequah. The Civil War, then, brought widespread disruption to the Cherokee built environment as well as violently dividing the Cherokee people.

As the Civil War drew to a close, Chief Ross negotiated with the U.S. government for funding for post-war relief efforts in the Cherokee Nation. Stand Watie, who had been promoted to general in 1864, was the last Confederate general to surrender on June 23, 1865. However, Watie and his fellow ex-Confederates did not immediately rejoin the Ross-led Cherokee Nation, instead advocating for the division of the tribe into two separate nations. Negotiations between the two Cherokee parties and the U.S. continued until a treaty was signed on July 19, 1866, and

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<sup>82</sup> Justin Harlin to W. G. Coffin, September 2, 1863, in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1863), 179-181.



ratified by Congress on July 27. This treaty maintained the Cherokee Nation as one united political body, Chief Ross's primary goal in the negotiations. The U.S. did not recognize Watie's faction as a separate government, and in return for this concession, Ross agreed to give citizenship to former Cherokee slaves and allow two railroads to have rights-of-way through Cherokee territory. The treaty also granted amnesty to all Cherokees for crimes committed during the Civil War. Four days after the treaty's ratification, Chief Ross passed away at the age of seventy-six, leaving the tribe's leadership in a state of uncertainty.

Under the leadership of interim Principal Chief Lewis Downing, the Cherokee Nation reunited and rebuilt its homes and political institutions. In a special meeting on October 19, 1866, the National Council chose John Ross's nephew, William Potter Ross, to become Principal Chief. Both full-blood traditionalist Cherokees and ex-Confederates questioned the choice, as Ross was a mixed-blood advocate of acculturation and a staunch opponent of the Confederacy. In the August 1867 general election, the Cherokee people voted him and elected Downing, who ran as a compromise candidate—appealing to full-bloods as a founder of the Keetoowah Society and to ex-Confederates through a series of negotiations with their leaders. Downing served as Principal Chief until his death in 1872, and during his tenure most “Cherokees recognized that survival required unity and...factionalism gave way to the need for unity.”<sup>83</sup> In the remainder of the nineteenth century, the tribe's population and economic prosperity steadily increased. Farmers expanded their operations and used the new railroads running through Cherokee territory to ship their wares across the U.S. The Cherokee government reopened public schools that had closed during the war, established a fund to support children that were orphaned during the war, rebuilt the National Capitol at Tahlequah, and opened a colored high school and an

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<sup>83</sup> McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears*, 245.

insane asylum. Despite these outward indicators of prosperity, Cherokee national debt remained high, and several unsuccessful harvest cycles brought financial distress to Cherokee farmers.<sup>84</sup> Nonetheless, the post-war period primarily brought prosperity that allowed the Cherokee Nation to strengthen its governmental institutions and construct new edifices to house them.

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<sup>84</sup> McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears*, 239.

## Chapter Five: Cherokee Government Architecture

The buildings that the Cherokee Nation constructed to house their governmental institutions not only met the tribe's spatial needs, but also represented tribal strength, unity, and permanence. The Cherokees constructed permanent government buildings at times of division and unrest, and these projects served as a symbol of a Cherokee Nation that would endure beyond political disagreements. The 1844 Supreme Court House was built after the Trail of Tears during a period when the unity of the national government was hotly contested; similarly, the 1869 National Capitol was constructed after the tribe was divided by the American Civil War. The 1875 National Jail and the 1883 District Courthouses expanded the capacity of the Cherokee Nation's judicial system during an era when increased violence and crime prompted the U.S. government to consider expanding their judicial oversight in Cherokee Territory; the jail and district courthouses also physically represented the Cherokees' ability to maintain law and order without the assistance or interference of the U.S. The administrative buildings of the Cherokee Nation, then, signaled the unity and strength of the Cherokee government to both tribal members and the federal government—particularly during times of conflict or unrest that might undermine the government's sovereignty.

### The Cherokee Governmental Structure

The Constitution of 1839 established the structure and functions of the Cherokee Nation, and this document guided the governance of the tribe until its dissolution in 1907.<sup>85</sup> The constitution divided the government into Legislative, Executive, and Judicial departments; the Legislative branch was further divided into the National Committee and the National Council.

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<sup>85</sup> "Constitution of the Cherokee Nation," September 6, 1839, *The Constitution and Laws of the Cherokee Nation: Passed at Tahlequah, Cherokee Nation, 1839-1851* (Tahlequah: Cherokee Nation Press, 1852), 6.

The Nation was divided into eight political districts: the Canadian, Illinois, Sequoyah, Flint, Going Snake, Tahlequah, Saline, and Delaware; a ninth, the Cooweescoowee, was added in 1856.<sup>86</sup> Each of these districts elected two members for the National Committee and three members of the National Council, chosen in elections held every two years, starting in 1839.<sup>87</sup> Executive power was held by the Principal Chief, who—along with the assistant Principal Chief—was chosen in a national election every four years. Additionally, the National Council appointed a council of five members to serve as an Executive Council with two-year terms and a Treasurer, who served a four-year term.<sup>88</sup> Judicial power was vested in a Supreme Court and in Circuit Courts held in each of the districts; the National Council elected judges for each of these courts to serve for four-year terms. In each district, sheriffs were elected by popular vote to serve for two-year terms.<sup>89</sup> The Constitution limited eligibility for public office and the right to vote to free male Cherokee citizens over the age of twenty-five.<sup>90</sup> The constitution also allowed the National Council to appoint other officers not specified in the Constitution, eventually including a Superintendent of Education. All of these public offices required meeting space and office space that would eventually be provided by the Cherokee Nation’s building program.

### **The Cherokee Capital at Tahlequah**

As the capital of the Cherokee Nation, the town of Tahlequah served as the physical and symbolic home of the tribal government. In 1839, the Illinois Camp Ground—near the future site of Tahlequah—served as the location of National Council meetings where the tribe adopted its Act of Union and Constitution. The Old Settlers had established a capital at Tah-lon-tees-kee

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<sup>86</sup> McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears*, 75.

<sup>87</sup> “Constitution of the Cherokee Nation,” 7.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 9-11.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 13-15.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

(near present-day Gore, Oklahoma) in 1829, but the Illinois Camp Ground provided a neutral site for council meetings. The name “Tahlequah” first appears in print in the final line of the 1839 Cherokee Constitution, which read “done in Convention at Tahlequah, Cherokee Nation, this sixth day of September, 1839.”<sup>91</sup> Historian Brad Agnew notes that, although the origins of the name are not definitively known, local legend holds that it was chosen in honor of Tellico, the name of a large Cherokee town in eastern Tennessee that meant “the open place where the grass grows.”<sup>92</sup> Located on the western banks of Bear Creek, the town site hosted several National Council meetings before Tahlequah was officially named the seat of the Cherokee government in October 1841.<sup>93</sup> The town also hosted a Grand Council of nineteen Indian tribes that began on June 9, 1843. The meeting was attended by as many as 10,000 people, including several U.S. government officials (among them General Zachary Taylor). Chief John Ross called the meeting in order to “renew their ancient customs, and to revive their ancient alliances,” establishing peace with neighboring tribes in Indian Territory.<sup>94</sup> In addition to its avowed purpose of cultivating peaceful intertribal relations, this meeting positioned Tahlequah as the political center of Indian Territory and presented the Cherokee Nation as a unified political body led by Ross, belying the tribe’s continued internal divisions. Tahlequah, then, became a crucial location as both a literal meeting place and as a symbol of Cherokee national unity.

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<sup>91</sup> “Constitution of the Cherokee Nation,” *The Constitution and Laws of the Cherokee Nation*, 15.

<sup>92</sup> Brad Agnew, “Origins of ‘Tahlequah Name Lost in Mists of Time,” *Tahlequah Daily Press*, April 7, 2018.

<sup>93</sup> “An Act Establishing the Seat of Government,” October 19, 1841, in *The Constitution and Laws of the Cherokee Nation*, 120.

<sup>94</sup> John Ross, quoted in Woodward, *The Cherokees*, 239.



Figure 13: John Mix Stanley, *International Indian Council* (Held at Tallequah, Indian Territory, in 1843), 1843, oil on canvas. Courtesy of Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Little is known about early appearance of Tahlequah. In 1845, the *Cherokee Advocate* newspaper observed, “after it became the seat of government, a number of ‘log cabins’ were ‘thrown up’ about the place, without, however, much regard to order, as they were designed for the temporary accommodation of public business.”<sup>95</sup> The exact location or number of these “log cabins” is not known, but they likely resemble the structure depicted in the 1843 painting *International Indian Council* by John Mix Stanley (Figure 13). The painting shows the Grand Council at Tahlequah, with several hundred delegates sitting on benches arranged in a semi-circle under an open-sided arbor, with rough-hewn logs supporting a thatched roof. After the

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<sup>95</sup> *Cherokee Advocate*, October 26, 1845, reprinted in “Civilization of the Cherokees,” *The Friend: A Religious and Literary Journal*, 18, no. 18 (January 25, 1845), 138-139.

Grand Council adjourned, the Cherokee National Council passed several acts for improvements to the town. First, 160 acres around the National Council meeting grounds were platted 1843; the five-by-five grid plan had the “present public square the center from north to south” and the eastern boundary at Wolf Creek. Certificates of occupant rights for the town lots were sold exclusively to citizens of the Cherokee Nation.<sup>96</sup> By 1845, the *Cherokee Advocate* observed that “a few houses have, however, been already erected, and others are in contemplation, of the ‘jam-up’ kind,” and a public school opened in Tahlequah in 1845.<sup>97</sup> The town continued to grow steadily in the antebellum era, with local businesses supported by visitors who came to the town during National Council sessions.

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<sup>96</sup> “An Act to Lay Off Tahlequah Council Ground into Town Lots, and to Dispose of the Same,” October 28, 1843, *The Constitution and Laws of the Cherokee Nation*, 82-84.

<sup>97</sup> *Cherokee Advocate*, October 26, 1845.

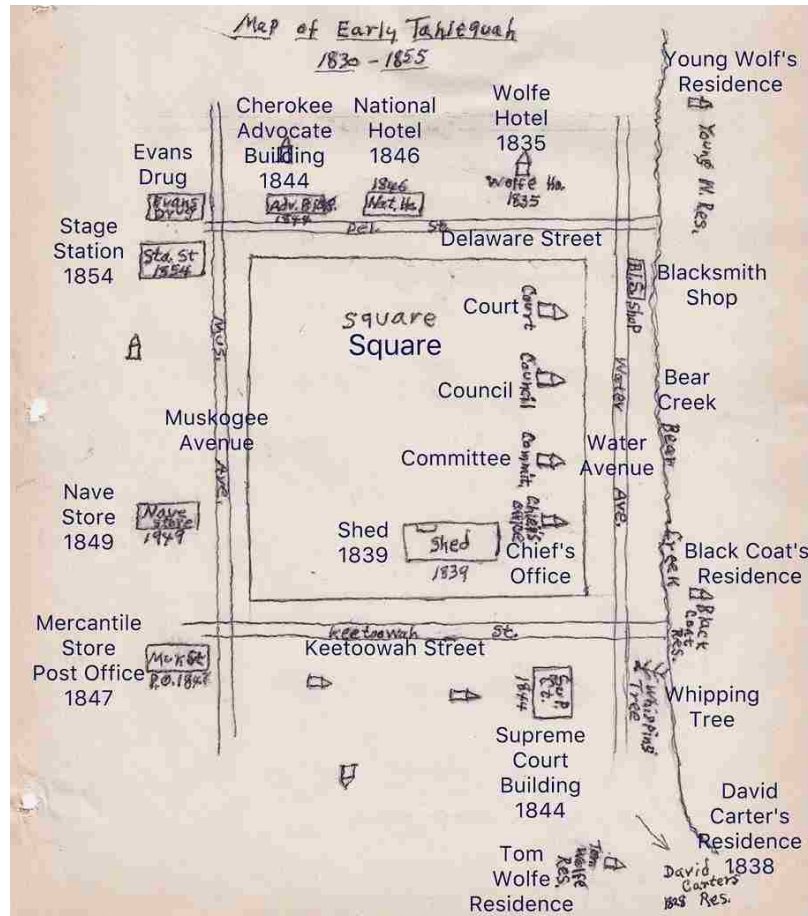


Figure 14: Thomas L. Ballenger, map of Tahlequah between 1830 and 1855, drawn in 1975. Courtesy of *Tahlequah Daily Press*.

In addition to encouraging Tahlequah's private development, the National Council expanded and formalized the complex of government buildings in and around the central public square. The square is bordered by N. Muskogee Avenue to the west, E. Delaware Street to the north, S. Water Avenue to the east, and E. Keetoowah Street to the south (Figure 14). In 1843, a two-story, wood-frame building with a shingle roof was constructed by George W. Corbin at a cost of \$972 to house the printing office of the *Cherokee Advocate*. This building, located north of the public square on E. Delaware Street, is described as having plastered walls, tongue-and-groove flooring, six windows with fifteen glass lights each, batten shutters, three box stoves, and



desks and watering troughs.<sup>98</sup> The Supreme Court House was constructed in 1844, and in 1847 the National Council contracted James Kell to construct two hewn-log buildings to house the National Committee and the National Council. Each was one-story, measuring 20 by 20 feet, and had a brick chimney, one door, and four windows. These buildings were “erected on the public square at or near the sites occupied by the cabins heretofore used by the Committee and Council” at a cost of \$250 each.<sup>99</sup> The following year, two houses for the Executive Department and National Treasurer were constructed “of the same dimensions, and to be finished off, in the same style and manner, as the Committee and Council houses, including window blinds or shutters.” These buildings stood “on a line with the Committee and Council houses on the east side of the public square,” and they were constructed by Johnson Thompson at a cost of \$200 each.<sup>100</sup> The earlier temporary buildings had been razed, leaving instead an open public square to the west of the government complex. Although these buildings were relatively modest and utilitarian compared to the later buildings of the tribal government, they nonetheless represented a government that was steadily expanding its physical presence regardless of political divisions within the tribe.

### **The Cherokee Supreme Court House**

The Cherokee Supreme Court House was the first permanent building constructed by the Cherokee Nation in Tahlequah, and it is the only building that predates the Civil War remaining in the town today. The courthouse is located on the southwest corner of S. Water Avenue and E.

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<sup>98</sup> “An Act Providing for the Building of a Printing Office,” December 23, 1843, *The Constitution and Laws of the Cherokee Nation*, 102; “An Act for the benefit of G. W. Corbin, Contractor,” November 11, 1844, *ibid*, 111-112.

<sup>99</sup> “An Act Relative to Building Committee and Council Houses,” November 10, 1847, *The Constitution and Laws of the Cherokee Nation*, 155-156; “An Act Making Appropriation for the Benefit of James Kell, Contractor,” October 5, 1848, *ibid*, 167.

<sup>100</sup> “An Act for Building Offices for the Executive and Treasurer, and for enclosing the Public Square with a post and rail-fence,” October 14, 1848, *The Constitution and Laws of the Cherokee Nation*, 171; “An Act making appropriation to pay for building of the Executive and Treasurer’s Offices,” November 2, 1849, *ibid*, 196.

Keetoowah Street opposite the public square (Figures 15-16). The building features a limestone foundation, wall of brick, a hipped roof clad with wood shingles, and brick chimneys on the east and west sides of the roof. The symmetrical front façade faces north towards the public square; the central entryway has a wood door with a four-light transom. The door is flanked by a window on either side, with corresponding windows on the second floor. The east and west elevations each include four windows. On the southern or rear elevation, there is an additional central entrance with a second-story window above and a bay of windows on either side. The double-hung, four-over-four windows are accented with limestone lintels and sills and wood shutters. The building measures twenty-six by thirty feet, and the interior is bisected by a central stair hall. The upper floor originally had three offices, while the lower story enclosed a court room with a judge's bench and jurors' boxes; the exact original layout is not known.<sup>101</sup>



Figure 15: Cherokee Supreme Court House, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, constructed 1844. Photograph by author, 2019.

<sup>101</sup> Act for Building of a Court House at Tahlequah. 4026.1075-.1. John Ross Papers. January 9, 1844. Tulsa: Gilcrease Museum, <https://collections.gilcrease.org/object/40261075-1>.



Figure 16: Cherokee Supreme Court House, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 1844. Courtesy of Cherokee National Archives, undated.

The Supreme Court building was authorized in “An Act for Building a Court House” that was passed January 9, 1844, and authorized the Principal Chief to appoint a commissioner who would receive bids for the building. James S. Price was chosen to build the structure for \$2,775.50.<sup>102</sup> Little is known about Price, but the *Cherokee Advocate* noted that the contractor for the Supreme Court building “is a *Jersey* carpenter, whose habits of industry secure him constant employment. The mason-work was done by a ‘little Yankee’ all the way from Boston.”<sup>103</sup> The *Cherokee Advocate* described the building itself as “a new and commodious brick court-house, which, in point of neatness and durability, is perhaps surpassed by no building

<sup>102</sup> “An Act for the Benefit of James S. Price, Contractor,” October 22, 1844, *The Constitution and Laws of the Cherokee Nation*, 115.

<sup>103</sup> *Cherokee Advocate*, October 26, 1845.

of the kind in Arkansas.”<sup>104</sup> The article emphasizes the exceptional quality of the Supreme Court building relative to similar structures constructed by Euro-American settlers in the region. Numerous reprints of the article helped to disseminate the architectural achievements of the nation to a larger audience.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, the building was constructed while there was still considerable opposition to the Ross-led national government, and the building served as a symbol of the government’s legitimacy, strength, and permanence. It is notable that a brick building costing thousands of dollars was constructed for the Supreme Court, while the National Council, National Committee, Principal Chief, and Treasurer were all housed in smaller wood buildings that were considerably cheaper. This suggests that government leaders prioritized the construction of the Supreme Court House. Perhaps because the Supreme Court administered law and order in the Cherokee Nation, making it a prominent part of the built environment would signify the Nation’s commitment to peace during a period when Ross’s opponents were using violence to undermine the government.

The Supreme Court building housed the Nation’s high court and district courts until 1869, when the courts moved into new facilities in the National Capitol. At that time, the *Cherokee Advocate* printing offices—whose own building had been destroyed during the Civil War—moved into the Supreme Court building. After a fire destroyed much of the interior in 1874, the Cherokee Nation hired the architecture firm Haskell and Wood of Topeka, Kansas, to redesign the interior and supervise the building’s reconstruction. Haskell and Wood would go on to design four other projects for the Cherokee Nation: additions to the Male and Female Seminaries, the conversion of the Lewis Ross House into the Cherokee Orphan Asylum, and a

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<sup>104</sup> *Cherokee Advocate*, October 26, 1845.

<sup>105</sup> See, for instance, “Civilization of the Cherokees,” printed in *The Friend and Littell’s Living Age* 4, no. 34 (January 4, 1845), 38-39, both reprinted from the *Cincinnati Chronicle*.

new building for the Cherokee Insane Asylum. John G. Haskell and Louis H. M. Wood were Euro-American architects based in Topeka, Kansas. Haskell (1832-1907), the firm's primary architect, was originally from Massachusetts, studied at Brown University, and practiced in Boston before moving to Lawrence, Kansas, in 1857. Haskell quickly became one of the leading architects in the state, receiving the commission for the Kansas Statehouse in 1866 and Fraser Hall at the University of Kansas in 1870. He partnered with Wood from 1875 to 1887, and the firm designed dozens of institutional buildings across Kansas.<sup>106</sup> Haskell and Wood were among the most prominent architects in the region when the Cherokee Nation hired the firm in 1874, and by selecting the firm to design several of their institutional buildings, the tribe demonstrated a continued commitment to governmental architecture that aligned with Euro-American standards.

### **The Cherokee National Capitol**

Constructed in 1869, the Cherokee National Capitol stands at the center of the public square in Tahlequah (Figure 17). The Italianate building stands two stories tall, with an ashlar limestone foundation and brick exterior walls. The building has a rectangular plan, measuring fifty feet by sixty-eight feet, and a hipped roof with a central cupola. Each elevation is symmetrical with a projecting center block with a triangular pediment. The east and west elevations have five bays, while the north and south elevations have seven bays; these bays are divided by brick pilasters. The first floor windows are topped with segmental arches, while the second floor windows have semicircular arches. The single-hung windows have six-over-six panes, limestone sills, and painted-brick headers. The western façade has a single-story enclosed

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<sup>106</sup> John M. Peterson, *John G. Haskell: Pioneer Kansas Architect* (Lawrence: Douglas County Historical Society, 1984).

portico with a triangular pediment and a double door topped with a four-light pediment. This portico was likely added during a renovation in 1928 following a fire; historical photographs show the façade with a central entry door with transom and a pediment above which appears to have been replaced several times. Historic photographs show that, at various points in the building’s history, the entry door was topped with a straight lintel (Figure 18), a triangular pediment (Figure 19), and a broken pediment (Figure 20).<sup>107</sup> Above the front portico, the second floor features two paired windows with four-over-four panes and semicircular brick headers. The east elevation also includes a central entry on the first floor, which has double doors with a four-light transom and a segmented-arch header, and two paired windows on the second floor. A handicapped-accessible porch was added to the west elevation in 2013. The roof features bracketed eaves and a central cupola. The cupola is square, with clapboard cladding and four gables; each of the four sides features two windows with semicircular arches, separated by wooden pilasters. There were originally eight chimneys along the north and south edges of the roofline, but these were removed in the early twentieth century.

The Cherokee National Capitol was authorized in “An Act to Build a Capitol at Tahlequah,” which was passed on December 9, 1867. The act stated that “it is necessary and desirable that the Principal Chief shall reside at the seat of government...such an arrangement will add to the convenience...of the Cherokee people themselves.” It established a three-person building committee to oversee the project and directed that that the building be “sufficiently large not only to accommodate the Executive Department, but also to accommodate the Supreme Court, the National Senate and Council, and the superintendent of public schools, and to be

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<sup>107</sup> Francine Weiss, “Cherokee National Capitol,” National Register Nomination Form, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, 1978.

located in the center of the public square.”<sup>108</sup> Architect Charles Wesley Goodlander was hired to design the capitol building; completed in 1870, the project cost a total of \$15,000.<sup>109</sup> Goodlander practiced architecture in Fort Scott, Kansas, from 1858 until his death in 1914; he primarily designed buildings in the town, where he also served three terms as mayor.<sup>110</sup> Like the earlier Supreme Court building, the Cherokee National Capitol was constructed after a period during which the nation had been divided politically and culturally—the American Civil War. Its monumental appearance, ornate architecture, and cost suggest that the national government placed a high degree of importance on the building. As the National Capitol, the building served as a physical symbol of the nation itself, and—given the circumstances in which it was built—it represented the nation as a stable, prosperous, and unified entity.



Figure 17: Cherokee National Capitol, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 1869. Photograph by author, 2019.

<sup>108</sup> “An Act to Build a Capitol at Tahlequah,” *The Laws of the Cherokee Nation* (Tahlequah: Cherokee National Press, 1870), 169.

<sup>109</sup> “An Act to amend an Act, passed December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1867, for Building a Capitol for the use of the National Council, &c., &c., in the Town of Tahlequah,” September 30, 1868, *ibid*, 58; correspondence from the Building Committee to Assistant and Acting Principal Chief James Vann regarding payment for work on the national capitol building, February 22, 1870, box 86, folder 2888, Cherokee National Papers, University of Oklahoma Library Western History Collections.

<sup>110</sup> Charles W. Goodlander, *Memories and Recollections of C. W. Goodlander of the Early Days of Fort Scott* (Fort Scott: Monitor Printing Co., 1899).



Figure 18: Cherokee National Capitol, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 1869. This image shows the front entry with a straight lintel. Courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society, ca. 1869-1907.



Figure 19: Cherokee National Capitol, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 1869. Courtesy of United States National Archives, ca. 1869-1907.





Figure 20: Cherokee National Capitol, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 1869. Courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society, ca. 1905-1924.

Contemporary accounts indicate that the National Capitol building impressed Euro-American commentators who visited Indian Territory. One newspaper correspondent from Boston described the Capitol as “a pretentious brick capitol building”; a writer from Los Angeles informed their readers that, “in the center of the town is the Capitol, a new brick building, of large size when compared with the surrounding houses. It is a neat, comely structure.”<sup>111</sup> In their descriptions of the Cherokee Nation, correspondents frequently linked the architectural achievements of the tribe to their “civilized” character as a whole. This is exemplified by an 1885 article in the *Atlanta Constitution* in which the author wrote that the Cherokees “are as

<sup>111</sup> “Among the Indians,” *Boston Daily Globe*, May 9, 1872; “The Cherokee Nation: Present condition of Affairs Among This People,” *New York Times*, December 26, 1874.

thrifty, prosperous and intelligent as most agricultural communities...though descended directly from aboriginal stock, they dress and act like civilized white folks.” The author describes the tribe’s buildings, saying that “the Capitol building—a large brick structure—occupies a commanding position in the midst of the public square” and “the seminaries and asylums are all of brick, and well adapted to their various purposes.”<sup>112</sup> The National Capitol and other tribal buildings were viewed by Euro-American travelers and politicians who visited the Cherokee Nation, and the buildings bolstered the tribe’s reputation in the eyes of white Americans.

### **Expanding the National Justice System**

The National Jail expanded the capabilities of the Cherokee justice system in a way that reflected nineteenth century America’s changing attitudes towards criminal reform. Before the building was completed, the Cherokee Nation punished criminals through fines, whipping, and hanging; persons awaiting trial were boarded in private homes whose residents were compensated for room and board.<sup>113</sup> The National Council first proposed building a jail in 1851, observing that “the present system of corporeal punishment is contrary to the spirit of civilization; has not diminished crime in our country; is degrading to the spirit of freemen; and has been long since tried and abolished by the most civilized nations of the world.”<sup>114</sup> They argued instead that a system based on imprisonment “renders the escape of offenders against the law less liable to take place; will have a great tendency to discriminate from crime, and will afford a means to us to... better proportion the punishment in all cases to the degree of

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<sup>112</sup> “Zig-Zags in ‘No Man’s Land’ and Old Mexico,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 10, 1886.

<sup>113</sup> Julie Reed, *Serving the Nation: Cherokee Sovereignty and Social Welfare, 1800-1907* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 133

<sup>114</sup> Untitled act making provisions to build a jail, October 20, 1851, *The Constitution and Laws of the Cherokee Nation* (Tahlequah: Cherokee National Press, 1852), 221-222.

offence.”<sup>115</sup> A lack of funding, however, meant that the project was postponed until 1873, when an act was passed that created a Board of Commissioners to locate and build a national prison “for the safe-keeping and punishment of persons charged with criminal offenses.”<sup>116</sup> The act stipulated that the walls were to be made of stone and allocated \$6,000 for the jail’s construction. S. Cavanaugh of Fort Smith, Arkansas, was hired as the contractor, and the project was completed in 1874 (Figure 21).<sup>117</sup>

The present appearance of the Cherokee National Jail substantially differs from the building’s original design. The jail sits at the southwest corner of S. Water Avenue and E. Choctaw Street, two blocks south of the Supreme Court. Today, the building is one-and-a-half stories tall, with an above-ground basement, a flat roof, and a large portico leading to the front entrance (Figure 22). Originally, however, the building was two-and-a-half stories tall with a hipped roof and no portico. The basement and first floors housed prisoners, while the second floor was home to the warden’s family. There was no interior staircase to the second floor, which was accessible only by ladder. For this reason, the building was condemned in 1925 and the second floor was removed; this is likely when the front portico was added as well.<sup>118</sup> The building’s footprint, measuring forty-eight by thirty-five feet, remains the same, as does the configuration of the first-floor and basement windows. The building’s north façade has three bays, with a central entry door flanked by windows. The east and west elevations have a single window each on the first floor, and originally had two windows on the second. The rear elevation

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<sup>115</sup> Untitled act making provisions to build a jail, October 20, 1851, 221-222.

<sup>116</sup> “An Act to Build a Jail,” November 24, 1873, in *Constitution and Laws of the Cherokee Nation* (St. Louis: Ennis Printers, 1875), 270.

<sup>117</sup> Michael A. Tomlan, and John D. Hnedak, “Cherokee National Penitentiary.” Historical and Descriptive Data, Historic American Buildings Survey, National Parks Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1975. From Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (HABS No. OK-25), 2.

<sup>118</sup> Tomlan and Hnedak, “Cherokee National Penitentiary” (HABS No. OK-25), 2.

has three bays of windows, with an entry door leading to the basement. The first-floor windows were originally covered with iron grates without glass, while the second floor had six-over-six pane glass windows. The building is constructed of rusticated ashlar masonry.

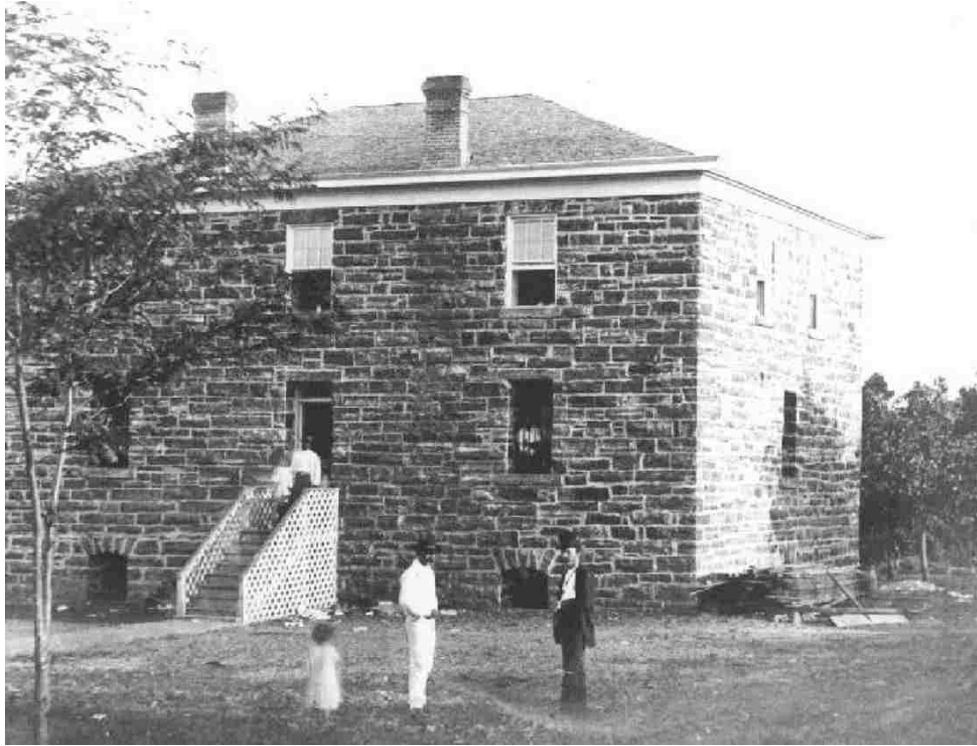


Figure 21: Cherokee National Jail, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 1874. Courtesy of the United States National Archives, ca. 1875-1925.

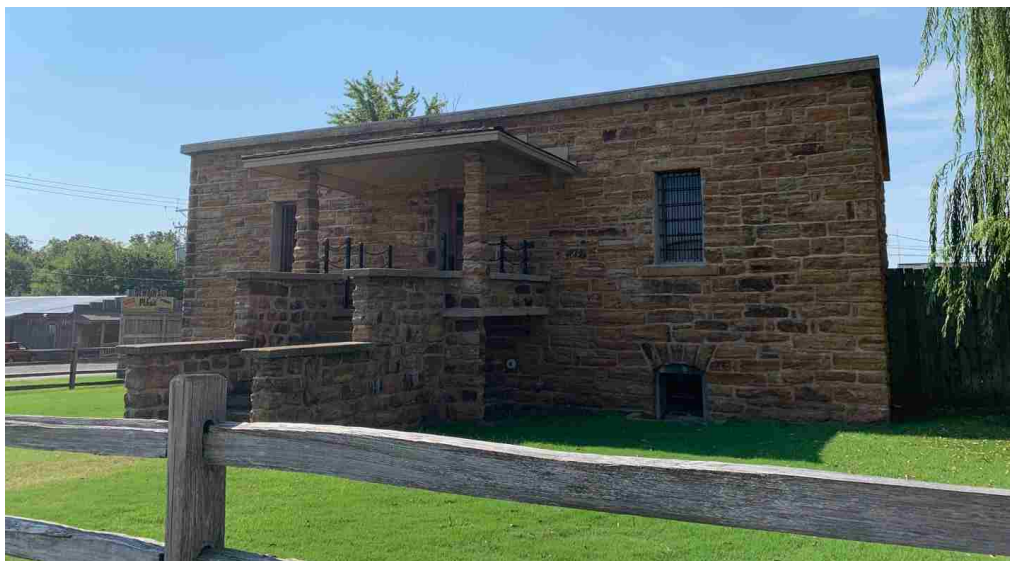


Figure 22: Cherokee National Jail, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 1874. Photograph by author, 2019.

Both the building's exterior appearance and the layout of the prison grounds reflect nineteenth-century American philosophies on prison administration. Sociologist Norman Johnston states that the exteriors of nineteenth-century American prisons were designed "to send a message to both the inmates and the public concerning the punishment process itself... what had originally been elements of military architecture... were chosen for prisons in order to impress, perhaps frighten, or at least intimidate, and to be harmonious with some of the goals of the law and of imprisonment itself."<sup>119</sup> Johnston lists massive walls, recessed narrow windows, and secure entryways as defining features of the style, all of which can be found in the Cherokee prison. The building represents a vernacular interpretation of the style, but it nonetheless conveys the essential qualities of intimidation and security that characterized prison design of the era. The prison grounds also included a wood-frame mechanic's building, where prisoners were required to learn the trades of shoe-making, black-smithing, and wagon-making with the aim of making "the National Prison self supporting" (Figure 23).<sup>120</sup> As Johnson argues, this practice reflected the philosophy of a nineteenth-century prison reform movement that held that "labor had a curative and moral value... work was necessary to preserve the health and sanity of the inmates and teach them habits of industry, as well as to defray some of the expenses of their imprisonment."<sup>121</sup> The National Jail building, then, reflected the Cherokee Nation's desire to establish a prison that would embody justice in the same way that communities in the United States did.

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<sup>119</sup> Norman Johnston, *Forms of Constraint: A History of Prison Architecture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 85.

<sup>120</sup> "An Act Making an Appropriation to Enable the Prison to Become Self-Supporting," December 7, 1877, in *Laws and Joint Resolutions of the National Council* (Tahlequah: Cherokee National Press, 1878), 31-32

<sup>121</sup> Johnston, *A History of Prison Architecture*, 69.



Figure 23: Cherokee National Jail, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 1874. Prison yard with blacksmith's building and gallows. Courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society, ca. 1898-1903.

The physical presence of the Cherokee judicial system was expanded with the construction of nine district courthouses across the Nation. The buildings were authorized in 1883, in an act that appropriated \$9,000 for the project—\$1,000 for each district—and appointed the judge, sheriff, and solicitor of each district as a building committee for each project. The act also provided specifications for each building; they were to be twenty-one feet wide, thirty-three feet long, and two stories high. The buildings could be constructed of wood or stone, and they were to contain a court room on the first floor and offices on the second.<sup>122</sup> The Saline District Courthouse is the only one of the nine buildings still standing today, and the exact appearance of the other buildings is not known (Figure 24). The Saline Courthouse was altered in the twentieth century for use as a private house, with its length extended to fifty-seven feet and its interior divided into smaller rooms. The wood-frame building has five bays of windows on its façade in addition to a first-floor entry door, a side-gable roof, brick chimneys on both side elevations, and

<sup>122</sup> “An Act Making an Appropriation to Build Court Houses in the Several Districts of the Nation,” *Laws and Joint Resolutions of the Cherokee Nation* (Tahlequah: Cherokee National Press, 1884), 131-133.

a front porch.<sup>123</sup> The district courthouses were relatively simple and inexpensive compared to the national buildings constructed in Tahlequah, but they nonetheless represent the continued efforts of the Cherokee Nation to expand their governmental presence and efficacy through the built environment.



Figure 24: Saline District Courthouse, Rose, Oklahoma, 1883. Walter Smalling, Jr., “General view of building, from Northwest—Saline Courthouse, Leach, Delaware County, OK.” Photograph, Historic American Buildings Survey, National Parks Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1978. From Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (HABS OKLA, 21-Rose.V,1—1; <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/ok0011.photos.129315p/resource/>, accessed October 6, 2019).

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<sup>123</sup> Michael A. Tomlan and John D. Hnedak, “Saline Courthouse,” Historical and Descriptive Data, Historic American Buildings Survey, National Parks Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1975. From Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (HABS No. OK-33), 10.

## **Chapter Six: Cherokee Institutional Facilities**

A Cherokee-run educational system was a key component in the process of rebuilding the Cherokee Nation, and after the Civil War the social services provided by the tribal government were expanded to include an orphanage, an insane asylum, and a colored high school. The Cherokee Nation had established a public school system soon after moving to Indian Territory. A network of primary schools served children across the nation, and after 1851 the Male and Female Seminaries provided a high school education to Cherokee students at tribal expense. Prior to removal, many Cherokees had selectively adapted elements of Euro-American culture, and the tribal government continued this process of acculturation through the seminaries with a curriculum modelled on Euro-American precedents. The 1851 seminary buildings, as well as the second Female Seminary building constructed in 1887, represent this process of acculturation in designs derived from the Euro-American architectural tradition. The 1875 Insane Asylum, 1875 Orphan Asylum, and 1890 Colored High School buildings were more modest than those constructed to house the seminaries, but they represented a similar dedication to the care of tribal members. The buildings represented the tribe's ability to care for their own indigent, rather than relying on support from missionaries or the U.S. government. However, the institutions they housed were adapted from Euro-American models of social care, and their architectural designs adhere to Euro-American traditions in their physical designs and symbolic meaning. Together, the buildings that housed the Cherokee Nation's educational and social services physically manifest the tribe's commitment to autonomous control of Cherokee education and social care.

### **Establishing the Cherokee Educational System**

The Cherokee Nation committed itself to education and literacy, hoping to better equip the tribe in their efforts to maintain cultural autonomy and political sovereignty both before and



after removal. In treaty negotiations with the United States between 1805 and 1835, the Cherokees negotiated for a clause that would allow for the sale of tribal land in exchange for an educational fund. The treaty of 1819 stipulated that the federal government would sell fifteen acres of land in order to fund a national academy at New Echota; however, this clause was unrealized.<sup>124</sup> Meanwhile, Christian missionaries established several schools in Cherokee Territory from around 1805 onward. The Cherokees welcomed these educational opportunities, but they really only served those Cherokees who were fluent in English. However, in 1821 a Cherokee man named Sequoyah created a syllabary that allowed tribal members to write in the Cherokee language. Similarly, the Cherokees began publishing the first Native American newspaper, the *Cherokee Phoenix*, in 1828. These efforts represent one way in which the Cherokees adapted Euro-American forms of expression as a way of maintaining their own cultural practices, but they also underscored the need for education and literacy in both the Cherokee and English languages.

After removal, the Cherokee Nation reasserted its commitment to education—specifically, an educational program directed by the tribe rather than white missionaries. The Cherokee Constitution, ratified in 1839, included a section which asserted that “religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government, the preservation of liberty, and the happiness of mankind, schools, and the means of education, shall forever be encouraged in this Nation.”<sup>125</sup> The mechanics of this were detailed in the 1839 “Act Relative to Schools,” which stated that “all facilities and means for the promotion of education, by the establishment of

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<sup>124</sup> James W. Parins, *Literacy and Intellectual Life in the Cherokee Nation, 1820-1905* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 69.

<sup>125</sup> “Constitution of the Cherokee Nation,” Article 6, Section 8 (ratified September 6, 1839) in *The Constitution and Laws of the Cherokee Nation*, 15.

schools...shall be afforded by legislation, commensurate with the importance of such objects” and that all schools in the Nation “shall be subject to such supervision and control of the National Council as may be provided.”<sup>126</sup> The act specifically prohibited the establishment of missionary schools without the express permission of the National Council, and it established a three-person committee to supervise the Cherokee school system. These educational efforts were intended to provide all Cherokee children with an education funded and controlled by the Nation, rather than outside interests.

The establishment of the Cherokee National Seminaries followed the creation of a larger network of primary schools for younger students. In 1841, the National Council passed the Public Education Act, which established eleven common schools that would provide a voluntary education for children between the ages of six and sixteen; the number of schools eventually expanded to 150 by the turn of the twentieth century. These schools were housed in small, utilitarian buildings located near their constituents. Although little evidence of their appearance remains today, they were likely similar to one-room schoolhouses elsewhere (Figure 31). They were initially staffed by white teachers who were hired by the Nation; however, the tribe ultimately wanted Cherokees themselves to teach in the elementary schools. The Cherokee Female Seminary would help to fulfill this purpose, while the Male Seminary would “prepare the boys for a university education [so that they could] return to become political leaders and businessmen in the Cherokee Nation.”<sup>127</sup> In 1846 the National Council appropriated funds for a male and a female seminary, each of which would enroll 100 high-school-age students and at which “all those branches of learning shall be taught, which may be required to carry the mental

<sup>126</sup> “An Act Relative to Schools,” September 26, 1839, in *The Constitution and Laws of the Cherokee Nation*, 30-31.

<sup>127</sup> Devon Mihesuah, “‘Out of the Graves of Polluted Debauches’: The Boys of the Cherokee Male Seminary,” *American Indian Quarterly* 15 (Autumn 1991), 503.

culture of the youth of our country to the highest practicable point.”<sup>128</sup> The school board modelled the schools’ curriculum on Mount Holyoke Seminary in South Hadley, Massachusetts, where Reverend Samuel Worchester and Reverend Doctor Elizur Butler—white missionaries from Massachusetts who ministered to the Cherokees both before and after removal—had sent their daughters. Mount Holyoke also supplied many of the instructors at the female academy, while graduates of Newton Theological Seminary in Massachusetts and Yale University in Connecticut were hired to teach at the male seminary.<sup>129</sup> After construction of the seminary buildings was completed, both schools officially opened in May 1851.



Figure 25: Tahlequah Primary School, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, established 1845. This structure is representative of the type of buildings that housed the Cherokee Nation’s primary schools. Courtesy of the Cherokee Studies Institute, 1875.

<sup>128</sup> “An Act for the Establishment of two Seminaries or High Schools: one for the education of Males, and the other of Females, and for the erection of buildings for their accommodation,” November 26, 1846, in *The Constitution and Laws of the Cherokee Nation*, 146-147.

<sup>129</sup> Brad Agnew, *Northeastern: Centennial History* (Tahlequah: John Vaughn Library, Northeastern State University, 2009) 3.

### **Building the Male and Female Seminary Buildings**

Chief Ross and the National Council were responsible for securing the sites and plans for the Male and Female Seminaries. The site for the female seminary building was located three miles southwest of Tahlequah in the upper-class community of Park Hill, while the male seminary building was one and a half miles southwest of Tahlequah. The Cherokee Nation hired Sheppard H. Blackmer, a contractor from Boston, Massachusetts, to oversee the construction of the buildings, and the Tahlequah firm of Brown and McCoy provided the carpentry. Construction costs totaled over \$60,000 for each building.<sup>130</sup> Each building was a two-story block with a square plan constructed of red clay bricks fired in a kiln near Park Hill (Figures 26-29). Each had a two-story portico on the west, south, and east sides, with fifteen Doric columns made of exposed pie-shaped bricks. Both structures faced south, with facades that featured two entrances on the east and west ends of the first floor, with six windows with six-over-six panes, and eight six-over-six windows on the second floor. Entry doors were located on the east and west corners of the southern façades and in the middle of the northern elevations. The square plans were bisected by a stair hall running the length of the building from east to west, with a set of stairs at either end. To the north of the stair hall in each building, two classrooms flanked a central court accessed from the north entry door. To the south of the stair hall, a large assembly hall was flanked by smaller classrooms.<sup>131</sup> The only major difference between the two original buildings was in the wooden cupolas; the one on the Male Seminary was square, while the one on the Female Seminary was round.

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<sup>130</sup> Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds*, 26.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid; Kent Ruth, "Cherokee Female Seminary (1<sup>st</sup> Site)," National Register Nomination Form, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, 1974.

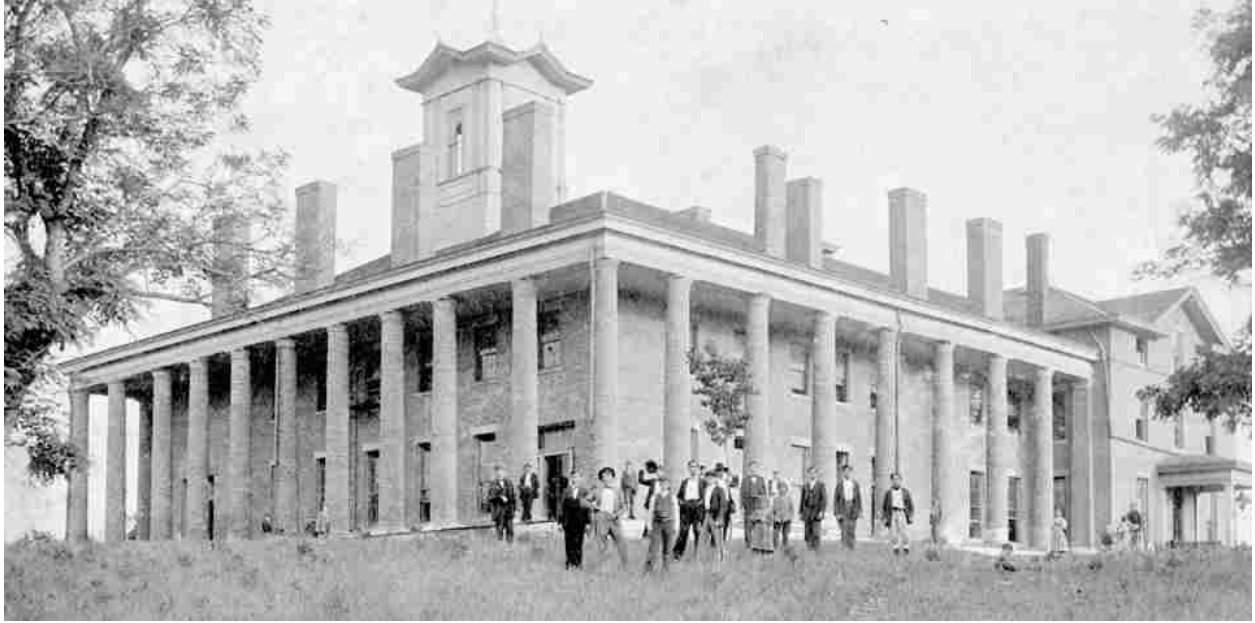


Figure 26: Cherokee Male Seminary, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 1846-51. Courtesy of Cherokee Heritage Center, ca. 1851-1907.



Figure 27: First Cherokee Female Seminary building, Park Hill, Oklahoma, 1846-51. Courtesy of Northeastern State University Archives, ca. 1851-75.

The virtually identical designs for the Male and Female Seminaries paralleled the gender equivalence of traditional Cherokee society. As historian Carolyn Johnston argues, traditionally Cherokee women “had autonomy and sexual freedom, could obtain divorce easily, rarely experienced rape or domestic violence, worked as producers/farmers, owned their own homes

and fields, possessed a cosmology that contains female supernatural figures, and had significant political and economic power.”<sup>132</sup> Although cultural exchange with Euro-Americans had altered many aspects of Cherokee life, including gender roles, historian Theda Perdue argues that Cherokees were able to adapt aspects of Euro-American culture without restructuring gender roles prior to removal.<sup>133</sup> After removal, education would play a key role in the adaptation of Euro-American culture. As historian Sarah Robbins shows, white Americans in the early republic established institutions for female education in order to equip women for the “responsibility of preparing young males for their future duties as citizens in the new republic.”<sup>134</sup> As Mihesuah argues, the Cherokee Nation similarly subscribed to the belief that “women should be educated in order to lend the ‘social salvation’ of their community (in this case, the Cherokee tribe) and to lend stability and solidarity to the population by instructing the young,” an ideology which placed women “in a position that seemed exalted yet was subservient.”<sup>135</sup> In this context, the virtually identical appearance of the Male and Female Seminary buildings suggests a recognition of the traditional prominence of women in Cherokee culture as well as the role of female education in white American culture in this era. Providing equal facilities for males and females placated traditionalist Cherokees who subscribed to more egalitarian gender roles, but the Greek Revival architectural style suggested that these were institutions dedicated to a Euro-American conception of civilization.

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<sup>132</sup> Carolyn Ross Johnston, *Cherokee Women in Crisis: Trail of Tears, Civil War, and Allotment, 1838-1907* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>133</sup> Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 195.

<sup>134</sup> Sarah Robbins, “‘The Future Good and Great of Our Land’: Republican Mothers, Female Authors, and Domesticated Literacy in Antebellum New England,” *The New England Quarterly* 75, no. 4 (December 2002), 564.

<sup>135</sup> Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds*, 21.



Figure 28: Cherokee Male Seminary, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 1846-51. Courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society, ca. 1875-1908.

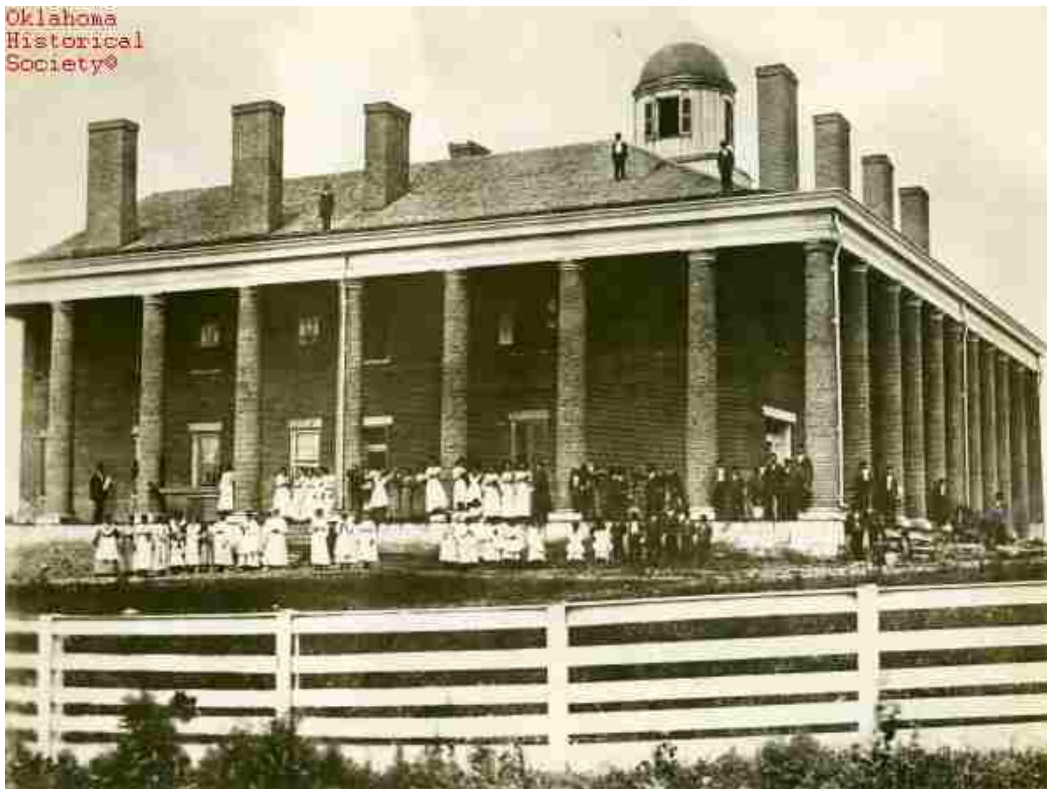


Figure 29: Cherokee Female Seminary, Park Hill, Oklahoma, 1846-51. Courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society, ca. 1851-75.

The first seminary buildings provided a physical manifestation of the tribe's proficiency in adapting Euro-American cultural practices. The cornerstone for the Cherokee Female Seminary building was laid by Chief Ross on June 21, 1847. The cornerstone contained twenty-seven documents, including: the constitution of the Cherokee Nation, Sequoyah's syllabary, a Bible printed in Cherokee, copies of the *Cherokee Advocate* newspaper, *The Cherokee Almanac*, and *The Cherokee Primer*.<sup>136</sup> These items were forms of expression drawn from whites and adapted by the Cherokee people, and they demonstrated the tribe's existing tradition of education and literacy. These documents provided a symbolic foundation for the activities of the seminaries, made literal through their inclusion in the building foundation. Furthermore, the act of laying a cornerstone was itself a practice drawn from the Euro-American building tradition. A cornerstone ceremony was used to indicate a building's importance to the group that built it, and, by celebrating the foundation of the seminary building through this ritual, the Cherokees indicated its importance to the tribe as a community.

The building architecture also impressed Euro-American commentators. A teacher from Massachusetts at the Female Seminary described the building as "a beautiful brick building with pillars on three sides of it and [it] presents a fine appearance from here."<sup>137</sup> Meanwhile, a missionary described the Female Seminary structure as "a large, handsome, well-finished brick building" and observed "one almost wonders what such a noble edifice is doing away out there."<sup>138</sup> The newspaper *The Daily National Whig* reported that "the cornerstone of a Cherokee Male Seminary has been laid. Can it be that the red man, in these better days, is to be elevated to

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<sup>136</sup> Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds*, 26.

<sup>137</sup> Ellen Whitmore to her brother, November 13, 1850, Cherokee Historical Society Archives, Park Hill, Oklahoma; quoted in Agnew, *Northeastern*, 5.

<sup>138</sup> Augustus W. Loomis, *Scenes in the Indian Country* (Philadelphia, 1859) in Grant Foreman, *Advancing the Frontier* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1933), 317.



the niche of the white man in the scale of human civilization?”<sup>139</sup> These comments suggest that the building was relatively successful in conveying the Cherokee Nation’s cultural accomplishments according to white standards of civilization.

The buildings themselves came to be symbols of education and its promise of improvement for the Cherokee Nation. The Male Seminary was dedicated on May 6, 1851, and the Female Seminary the following day. The *Cherokee Advocate* reported that “we never before saw the old Chief [Ross] so cheerful, so happy, and so full of hopes for the future.”<sup>140</sup> In the Male Seminary’s student-published newspaper, the buildings themselves were described as symbols of the development of the Cherokee Nation: “when we consider the past and present, and behold those two noble edifices, reared for the development of the young and vigorous minds of the Cherokee youth, we find that these are, as it were, the arteries through which the life-blood of our Nation's prosperity circulates.”<sup>141</sup> However, the progressive benefits of the seminaries were limited by an entrance examination based on a Euro-American curriculum. As historian Devon Mihesuah argues, this meant that the majority of students were wealthy, mixed-blood Cherokees who had attended missionary schools or schools outside of the Cherokee Nation and thus “had an advantage over the poorer full-bloods (and poor mixed-bloods) who often attended schools that did not teach in English, or who attended the mission schools only for a short time.”<sup>142</sup> For the tribe’s leaders and its students, the seminary buildings represented the promise of education, but their architecture also implicitly reinforced the primacy of Euro-American culture in the seminaries’ educational program.

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<sup>139</sup> “The Cherokees,” *The Daily National Whig*, November 24, 1847, 3.

<sup>140</sup> *Cherokee Advocate*, May 5, 1880, in Agnew, *Northeastern*, 6.

<sup>141</sup> *Sequoyah Memorial*, July 31, 1856, newspaper of the Cherokee Male Seminary, 1; in Mihesuah, “The Boys of the Cherokee Male Seminary,” 507.

<sup>142</sup> Mihesuah, “The Boys of the Cherokee Male Seminary,” 506.

### **Education and Social Support After the Civil War**

The seminaries were dependent on Cherokee national funding for their operation, and, due to a lack of funding, they were closed indefinitely in the fall semester of 1856. However, the National Council appropriated funding for basic maintenance of the buildings, indicating their intent to reopen the institutions as soon as possible. Meanwhile, students attended common schools in their local communities until they also closed after the outbreak of the Civil War.<sup>143</sup> The Cherokee education system was suspended through the war, and both seminary buildings sustained extensive damage during the conflict. The Cherokee Reconstruction Treaty of 1866 appropriated half of tribal funds for education, with common schools reopening first, the Female Seminary following in 1872, and the Male Seminary in 1874. In 1874, the Nation hired the architecture firm of Haskell and Wood to design renovations and additions to the seminary buildings (Figure 30-31). The three-story additions to the northern side of both seminary buildings had T-shaped plans, each of which included a new stair hall, classrooms, a dining hall, and a kitchen. The brick additions each featured three one-story porches on the north, east, and west elevations. The physical additions to the seminary buildings served a practical purpose by expanding the facilities and capacity of the schools, and they represented the Cherokee Nation's continued commitment to providing education to as many Cherokee children as possible.

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<sup>143</sup> Agnew, *Northeastern*, 16.

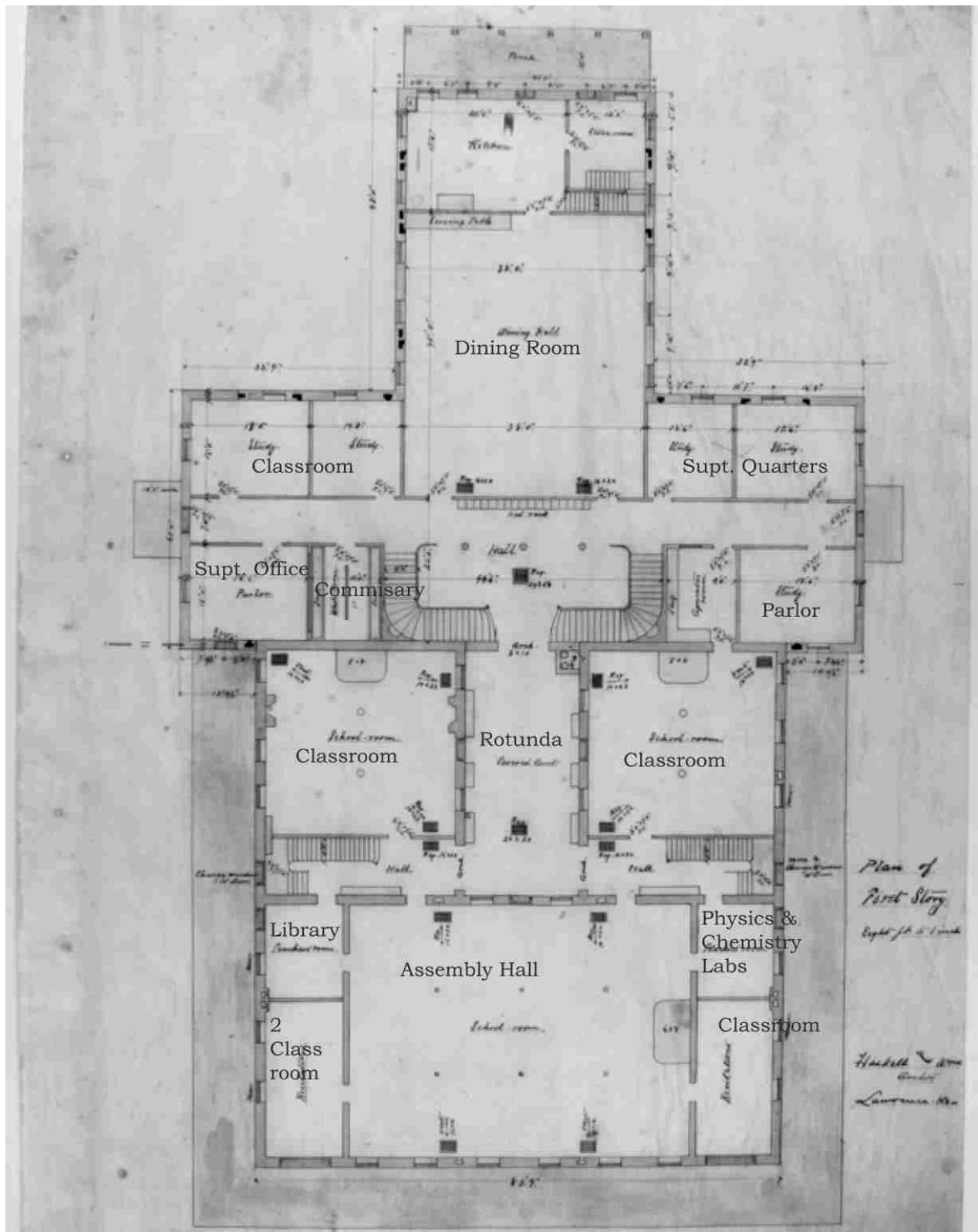


Figure 30: Haskell and Wood, first floor plan, renovation drawings for Male and Female Seminaries, 1875. Courtesy of Cherokee Heritage Center.



Figure 31: Cherokee Male Seminary, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 1846-51, with 1875 addition on left. Courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society, ca. 1875-1908.

The Civil War necessitated the expansion of the social services offered by the tribe to orphaned children, and Haskell and Wood provided plans for the renovation of the Lewis Ross house into a new orphanage in 1874. Prior to the Civil War, orphans were cared for by their extended family or community members, and the national government provided a small stipend to caretakers through the primary school system. However, the number of children orphaned by the war exceeded the capabilities of this system, and in 1867 the Cherokee Nation began planning for a dedicated orphanage by authorizing a census to determine the number of orphans in the nation.<sup>144</sup> In March 1872, the Cherokee Orphan Asylum opened with fifty-four students, temporarily in the Cherokee Male Seminary building.<sup>145</sup> The former Lewis Ross plantation in

<sup>144</sup> “An Act Authorizing Orphan Institutes,” October 23, 1866, in *Laws of the Cherokee Nation Passed During the Years 1839-1867* (St. Louis: Missouri Democrat Print, 1868), 65.

<sup>145</sup> Julie Reed, *Family and Nation: Cherokee Orphan Care, 1835-1903* (Ph.D. Diss., University of North Carolina, 2003), 13.

Salina was chosen as the permanent home of the Orphan Asylum in 1873, despite controversy that Principal Chief William P. Ross would benefit from the Nation's \$28,000 purchase of the property as the heir of Lewis Ross, who had died in 1860.<sup>146</sup> The property included a three-story brick house constructed by Lewis Ross in 1844, a limestone spring house (the only structure on the property extant today), and slave quarters. Haskell and Wood were hired to design an interior conversion and a east wing addition, a project which cost approximately \$8,000; an identical west wing was added later according to the architect's plans (Figure 32-34).<sup>147</sup> The first superintendent of the orphan asylum, Walter Adair Duncan, stated that the orphanage would "supply the place of home and parent to the orphan."<sup>148</sup> Although the Lewis Ross House was larger and more ornate than most Cherokees' homes, it nonetheless had a physical presence that clearly denoted that it was a home, making it an appropriate setting for the orphanage's mission to provide a surrogate home to the tribe's orphaned children.



Figure 32: Cherokee Orphan Asylum, Salina, Oklahoma, 1875. Printed in Emmet Starr, *History of the Cherokee Indians*, 312.

<sup>146</sup> Reed, *Cherokee Orphan Care*, 14.

<sup>147</sup>Office of the Asylum Board of Trustees to Honorable Charles Thompson, October 13, 1877, box 21, folder 684, Cherokee National Papers, University of Oklahoma Library Western History Collections; John Haskell to Principal Chief William Potter Ross, October 6, 1875, box 20, folder 639, *ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> Quoted in James R. Carselowey, "The Cherokee Orphan Asylum: History of an Old School Now Extinct," June 15, 1937, volume 102: 419, Indian-Pioneer Papers, University of Oklahoma Library Western History Collections.



Figure 33: Cherokee Orphan Asylum, Saline, Oklahoma, 1875. Building shown before the completion of the west wing. Courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society, 1875.

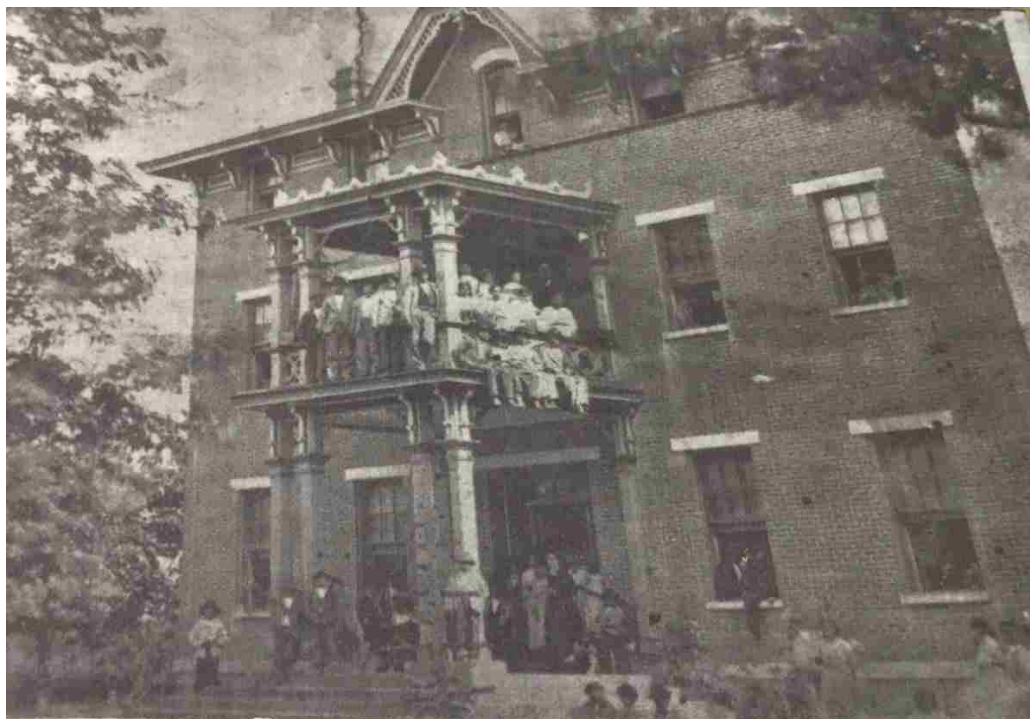


Figure 34: Cherokee Orphan Asylum, Saline, Oklahoma, 1875. Courtesy of Cherokee Heritage Center, 1875.

The original appearance of the Lewis Ross House is not precisely known, nor is the extent of the alterations made by Haskell and Wood during the building's conversion into the Orphan's Asylum. Photographs taken after the conversion, however, reveal that the original Ross House was rectangular in plan with a symmetrical southern. The façade featured a central two-story portico flanked by four six-over-six double-hung windows, topped with stone lintels, on each floor. The portico had a flat roof and paired bracketed columns. The mansard roof included a balustrade around the topmost slope, and its eaves were supported by brackets. The third floor featured six-pane windows tucked underneath the eaves, as well as a central jerkinhead gable with carved wooden bargeboards. The original house was flanked by two wing additions, each of which featured a hip roof, six bays of windows, and a first-floor porch with bracketed wooden columns. The design included elements of Italianate and Queen Anne architecture, both popular styles for domestic architecture in the U.S. during this era. At the same time that the building's stylistic elements evoked domesticity, its symmetrical façade and brick construction created a sense of formality and permanence that conveyed the value that the Cherokee Nation placed on the orphanage.

The Cherokee Asylum for the Deaf, Dumb, Blind, and Insane (commonly known as the Cherokee Insane Asylum) served a similar purpose to the Orphan Asylum, and it was housed in a similar building that was also designed by Haskell and Wood. The 1868 census identified approximately forty "unfortunates" living in the Cherokee Nation, and the asylum was created in 1872 to care for the tribe's disabled members.<sup>149</sup> At the same time that the Lewis Ross House was purchased for the Orphan Asylum in 1873, the Cherokee Nation purchased an improvement

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<sup>149</sup> "An Act in Relation to the Asylum for the Blind, Insane, and Others," October 31, 1872, in *Constitution and Laws of the Cherokee Nation*, 196-200.

belonging to Lewis Ross, Jr., about six miles southeast from Tahlequah, for the Insane Asylum, at a cost of \$1,200.<sup>150</sup> Haskell and Wood were again commissioned to design a new building for the asylum, which was constructed between 1874 and 1877 (Figure 35). Like the Orphan Asylum, the Insane Asylum building was a brick building in the Italianate mode. The four-story building had a rectangular plan and a hipped roof. The symmetrical façade had a projecting central pavilion with five bays of windows and a front gable. The central bay had a one-story porch with a flat roof, paired bracketed columns, and wooden railings carved with circular Chippendale-style designs. On either side of this central pavilion, there were four bays of windows, with additional porches and entries on the innermost bays. The eaves were accented with brackets, and the fourth-floor windows were tucked between these brackets. The six-over-six pane windows were topped with stone lintels. The roof of the central pavilion featured a carved Chippendale-style balustrade. The siting and design of the Insane Asylum closely followed the architectural precepts of Thomas S. Kirkbride, who published *On the Construction, Organization, and General Arrangements of Hospitals for the Insane* in 1854. Kirkbride recommended that asylums be located on large properties in the country where inmates could learn to farm, that they have windows and sunlight in all patient rooms.<sup>151</sup> The Insane Asylum contained these features, drawing both this institutional type and its key architectural features from the Euro-American tradition. The Insane Asylum then created a home-like atmosphere for its residents, while its monumental qualities of symmetry and ornate decoration emphasized the importance of the building and the institution it housed.

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<sup>150</sup> *The Cherokee Advocate*, December 20, 1873, 3.

<sup>151</sup> Thomas Kirkbridge, *On the Construction, Organization, and General Arrangements of Hospitals for the Insane* (Philadelphia, 1854), 5.





Figure 35: Cherokee Insane Asylum, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 1875. Courtesy of the Gilcrease Museum, 1875.

The Cherokee Colored High School markedly differed from the Cherokee seminaries and asylums in both its architectural design and the circumstances of its construction. The Treaty of 1866 granted citizenship in the Cherokee Nation to the former African-American slaves; in practice, however, Cherokee freedmen did not receive the same individual payments or social services as other Cherokees. Nonetheless, by 1872 the tribe had seven primary schools for the instruction of African-American tribal members.<sup>152</sup> These students did not have access to a high school-level education, however, until the Colored High School was constructed in 1890. In his 1887 election campaign for Principal Chief, Joel B. Mayes made the establishment of a

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<sup>152</sup> T. L. Ballenger, "The Colored High School of the Cherokee Nation," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 30, no. 4 (1952), 454.

freedmen's high school the central issue of his campaign, and after his election the Cherokee Nation appropriated \$10,000 for the building's construction.<sup>153</sup> A site at Double Springs, approximately five miles northwest of Tahlequah, was purchased for \$400, and a plan for the building was purchased for \$55 from W. Hoffman, about whom nothing is known. Cherokee tribal member Robert D. Knight was hired to construct the school building at a cost of \$9,945.<sup>154</sup> The three-story building was constructed of brick and had a rectangular plan measuring 48 by 50 feet (Figure 36). The symmetrical façade had a one-story porch covering the front door, which was flanked by two windows on either side and had two windows above. The mansard roof featured dormers on the front and side elevations. The first floor included a living room, a dining room, kitchen, an office, and a school room, while the second floor was used for girls' quarters and the third floor used for boys' quarters.<sup>155</sup>

The Colored High School building was completed in 1890, and in his 1889 annual address Principal Chief Mayes used the building as evidence that “the feeling of race prejudice is fast dying out, and that the Cherokee Government can fully and cheerfully award to all of its citizens the rights and privileges that belong to them.”<sup>156</sup> The Colored High School had the capacity to serve fifty residential high school students; however, by 1895 this enrollment had not been reached, and a residential primary department was added to the school instead.<sup>157</sup> Although

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<sup>153</sup> “Act Providing for the Erection of a High School for the Children of the Colored Citizens of the Cherokee Nation,” December 6, 1888, in *Constitution and Laws of the Cherokee Nation* (Parsons, Kansas: Foley Printing, 1893), 278.

<sup>154</sup> Contract between building committee and Robert D. Knight, November 22, 1889, microfilm roll CHN 97, Cherokee Nation Papers, Oklahoma Historical Society.

<sup>155</sup> “Specifications for the building of a high school for the colored citizens of the Cherokee Nation to be erected at Cherokee Nation,” undated, box 31, folder 909, Cherokee Nation Papers, University of Oklahoma Library Western History Collection.

<sup>156</sup> Joel B. Mayes, “Third Annual Message of Hon. J. B. Mayes,” November 6, 1889, Box M-48, Folder 46, Joel B. Mayes Collection, University of Oklahoma Western History Collection.

<sup>157</sup> Ballenger, “The Colored High School,” 458.

politicians like Mayes used the building as evidence of tribal unity that transcended race, the lower-than-anticipated enrollment numbers indicated that many African-American Cherokees were unable to meet the academic requirements for admission because they had not been able to attend primary school.<sup>158</sup> Moreover, the Colored High School—in contrast with the Nation’s primary schools, seminaries, and asylums—was constructed several decades after the need for the institution arose. The building cost a fraction of the construction costs for the seminary buildings and the orphan asylums, and its design was relatively simple and utilitarian compared to the seminary and asylum buildings that were constructed fifteen years earlier according to designs by prominent white architects. Thus, the physical designs and the circumstances surrounding the construction of the Orphan Asylum, the Insane Asylum, and the Colored High School—all institutions necessitated in the aftermath of the Civil War—reveal the socioeconomic priorities of the Cherokee Nation in the post-war era.



Figure 36: Cherokee Colored High School, Double Springs, Oklahoma, 1890. Courtesy of Northeastern State University Archives, undated.

<sup>158</sup> Ballanger, “The Colored High School,” 459.

## The Second Cherokee Female Seminary Building

On April 10, 1887, in what one Cherokee man described as “a calamity hitherto unknown in the history of the country,” the Cherokee Female Seminary building burned to the ground.<sup>159</sup> It was Easter Sunday, and the flames were out of control before the seminary students and the townspeople of Tahlequah could make it from their church services to the site. The National Council’s investigation determined that the blaze was an accident, and a three-member committee was appointed to oversee construction of a new seminary building. The site of the first seminary building was not located near a source of water, and the nearby community of Park Hill had declined in population and importance since the Civil War. The second seminary building was located instead on the northern edge of Tahlequah, on a forty-acre lot adjacent to the Hendricks Spring that was purchased by a group of seminary parents who donated it to the Nation.<sup>160</sup> The Cherokee Nation solicited bids for the building’s design and construction in the *Cherokee Advocate*, the *Kansas City Times*, the *Fort Smith Times*, and the *St. Louis Globe Democrat*. The contract for the building was awarded to a white architect from St. Louis, Missouri, Charles Edward Illsley, and his son, William A. Illsley, a contractor from Chetopa, Kansas. The original bid for the building’s design and construction was \$25,000, but the total cost for the seminary was \$78,000.<sup>161</sup> It officially opened on August 26, 1889 (Figure 37-38).

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<sup>159</sup> Mrs. William Potter Ross, *Life and Times of William Potter Ross* (Fort Smith: Weldon and Williams, Printers, 1893), cited by Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds*, 56.

<sup>160</sup> Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds*, 57-58.

<sup>161</sup> Tomlan, Michael A. and John D. Hnedak. “Cherokee Female Seminary (Seminary Hall) on the campus of Northeastern Oklahoma State University.” Historical and Descriptive Data, Historic American Buildings Survey, National Parks Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1975. From Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (HABS No. OK-23), 2.



Figure 37: Second Cherokee Female Seminary building, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 1887-89. Photograph by author, 2019.



Figure 38: Second Cherokee Female Seminary Building, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 1887-89. Courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society, ca. 1889-1908.

Charles Illsley was a leader in the Midwestern architectural community in the late nineteenth century. He was born in New York City in 1842 and graduated from St. Louis High School. His father, Edward Illsley, was a carpenter and building contractor who worked in Boston, Massachusetts, New York City, Chicago, Illinois, and Saint Louis, Missouri. Charles Illsley attended Washington University in St. Louis before graduating from Renasselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1867 with a degree in Civil Engineering. He worked at Washington University as an instructor in mathematics and civil engineering and as assistant city engineer in the St. Louis city government's street department before he began practicing as an architect in 1872. In December 1884, he was unanimously elected as the first president of the Western Association of Architects at its first convention in Chicago; the *Inland Architect & Building News* noted that "Mr. Illsley is, besides his high rank in the profession, peculiarly fitted to represent the architects of the West, his education being of a practical as well as theoretical nature, giving him a peculiar advantage in the performance of those duties which come within the province of his office...as an architect, Mr. Illsley, though a comparatively young man, ranks well in his profession."<sup>162</sup> The Cherokee Female Seminary building is the only extant building commonly attributed to Illsley; two other attributions, the 1890 Hotel Adam in Muskogee, Oklahoma, and the 1890 Muskogee Bank Building, are no longer extant.<sup>163</sup> At the time he was hired to design the Cherokee Female Seminary, Illsley was a prominent member of the architectural profession in the American West, and hiring him signaled that the Cherokee Nation intended to have one of the foremost examples of architecture in the region.

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<sup>162</sup> "First president of the Western Association of Architects," *Inland Architect & News Record* 4 (December 1884), 61.

<sup>163</sup> "Chas. E. Illsley attends opening of Hotel Adams," *Muskogee Phoenix*, January 16, 1890, 5.

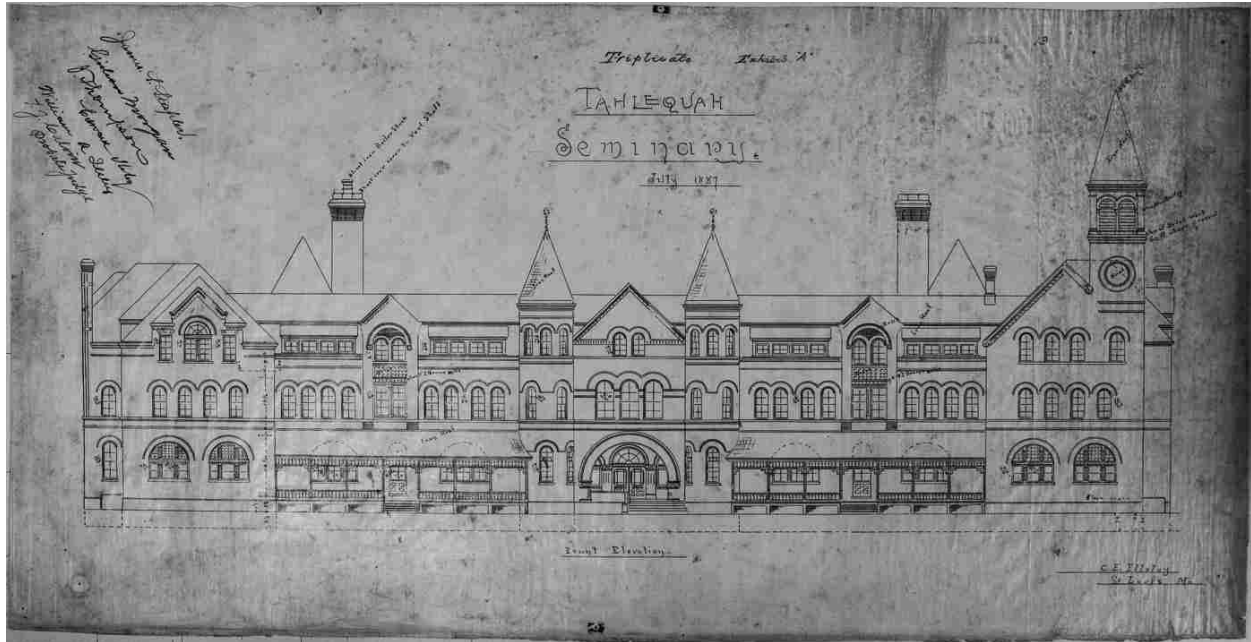


Figure 39: Charles Illsley, elevation drawing for the Cherokee Female Seminary, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 1887. Note signatures of the building committee in the upper left-hand corner. Courtesy of Northeastern State University Archives.

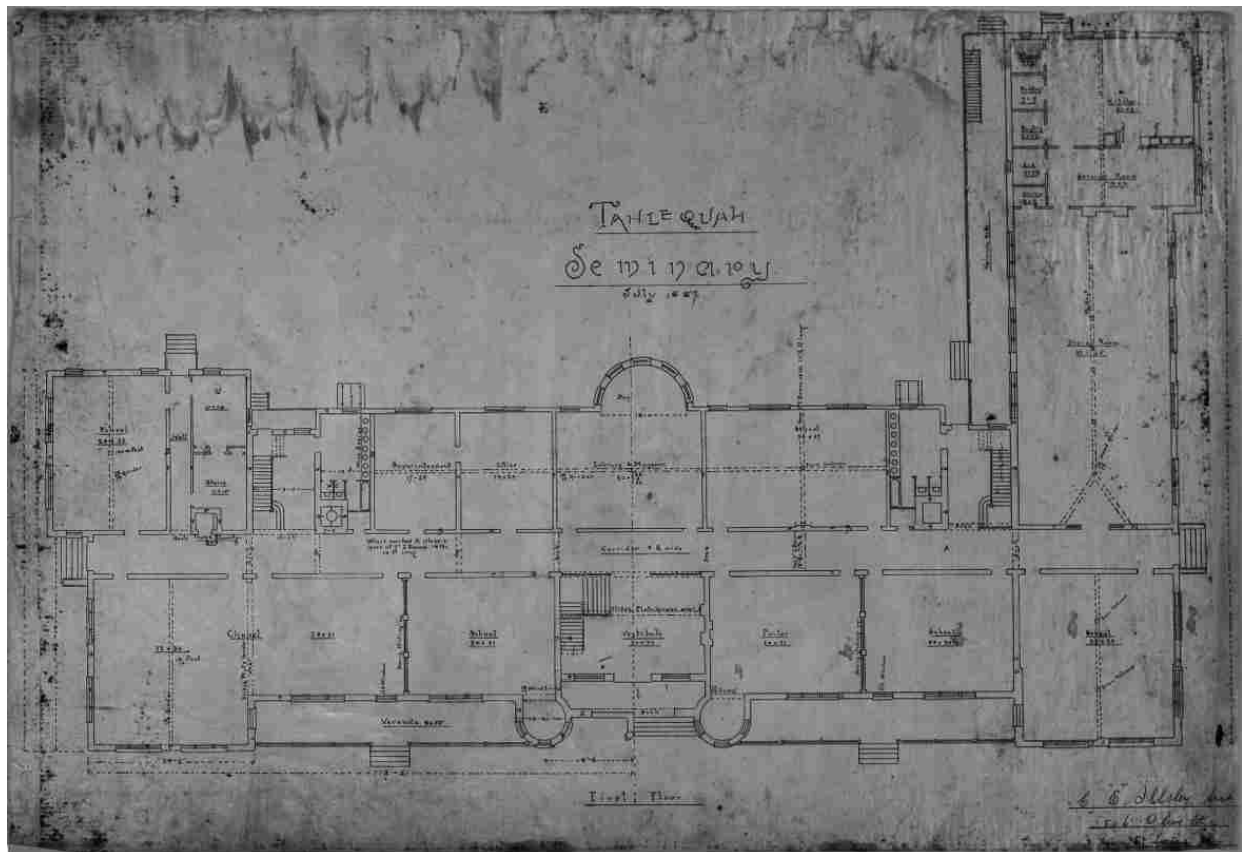


Figure 40: Charles Illsley, first floor plan for the Cherokee Female Seminary, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, 1887. Courtesy of Northeastern State University Archives.

The design for the Female Seminary Building was most likely produced by Illsley as a competitive submittal, which was then selected by the building committee (Figures 39-40). The advertisement for bids requested “sealed proposals” for “building the Female Seminary...in accordance with the plans and specifications adopted” and specified that “the Committee specially reserves the right to reject any and all bids received.”<sup>164</sup> This wording suggests that the Cherokee clients selected Illsley’s design for the building as it was presented in his bid. Illsley’s remarks on the relationship between owner and architect further suggest that this was the process that was followed. At the annual convention of the Missouri State Association of Architects, Illsley told his peers: “my rule is after a bid comes in, never to make a change in the plan or specifications, except in such a way as to show that it is changed... between the owner and myself, I am responsible for errors...The architect is required to provide for all parts of the building.”<sup>165</sup> Both the Cherokee Nation’s solicitation for bids and Illsley’s own remarks suggest that the design was produced by Illsley based on a general program provided by the Nation. Illsley’s statement also indicates that this was a standard practice for building design in the late nineteenth century. Although the Cherokee Nation and their Seminary Building Committee probably did not work extensively with the architect to determine the building’s appearance, they nonetheless directed its scale and style by choosing Illsley’s proposal to be constructed.

The second Female Seminary Building is a three-story Romanesque Revival structure with an L-shaped plan (Figure 41). The primary façade faces south, and a secondary wing extends north on the eastern end. An elaborate wrought-iron fence surrounded the property, with

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<sup>164</sup> James S. Stapler, Gideon Morgan, and J. Thompson (Female Seminary Building Committee), “Take Notice!” *Cherokee Advocate*, June 22, 1887, 4.

<sup>165</sup> “[Minutes of the third annual] Convention of the Missouri State Association of Architects,” *The Inland Architect and Builder* 8, no. 2 (January 1887), 84.



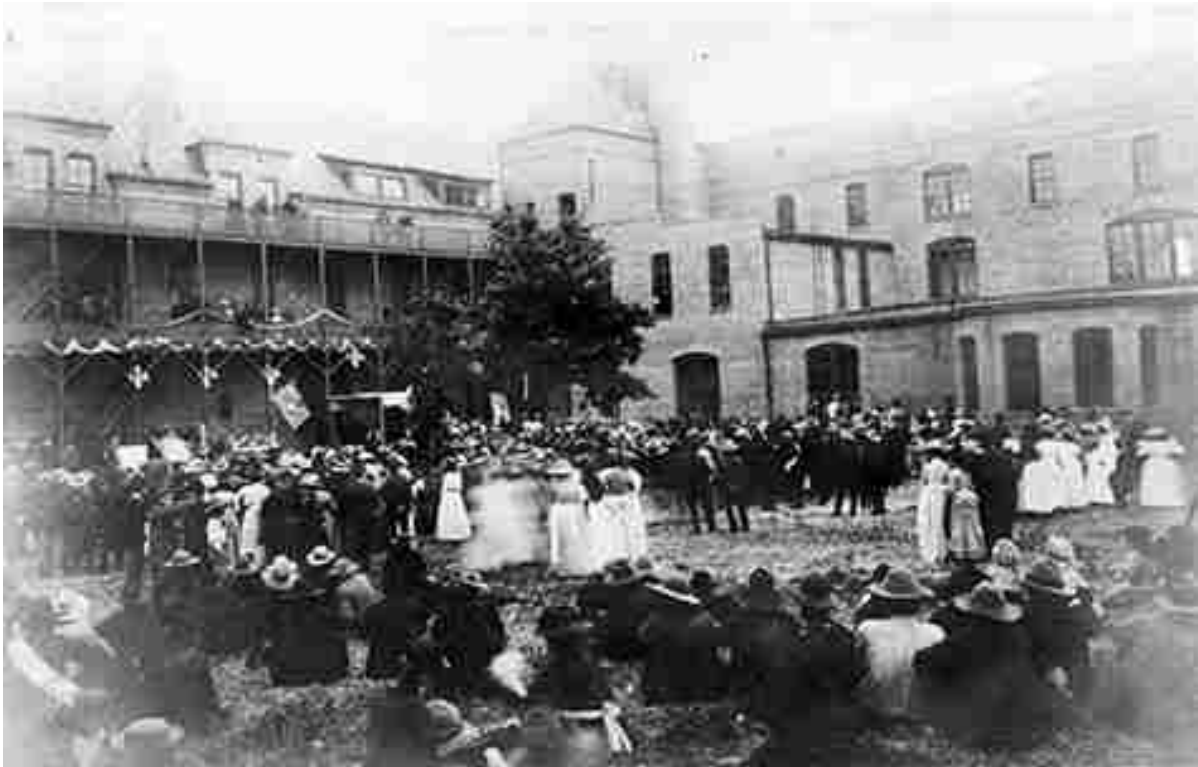


Figure 41: Dedication ceremony for the second Cherokee Female Seminary building, showing interior of ell. Courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society, 1889.



Figure 42: Students pose outside the gates of the second Cherokee Female Seminary building. Courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society, ca. 1889.

an arch above the entry gate bearing the words “1888 Cherokee Female Seminary” (Figure 42). The building was constructed of locally fired bricks, with a limestone foundation and interior woodwork made from lumber hewn at local sawmills. Only those building elements which could not be produced locally—including windows, hardware, mechanical systems, and exterior terracotta ornaments—were imported from outside the Cherokee Nation, because the distance from the nearest railroad station at Muskogee made importing the bulk of materials infeasible. The main block of the building measures 246 by 96 feet, and the eastern wing measures 70 by 100 feet. The building featured the latest advancements in building technology, with steam heat, indoor plumbing, an elevator, and a dumbwaiter. Its interior arrangement included the same functions as the earlier seminary building, with some additions: classrooms, a chapel, a kitchen, a dining room, a parlor, music rooms, and administrative offices on the first floor; a library, music rooms, and teachers’ and students’ quarters on the second; an infirmary and more student rooms on the third floor; and indoor bathrooms on all three floors (Figures 42-43). The building was filled to capacity in the year after it opened, with 232 girls in attendance—more than twice the first female seminary building’s capacity of 100.<sup>166</sup> The building’s program reflected the tribe’s continued ambitions to expand their educational program and rival the facilities of their white contemporaries in the United States.

The design of the seminary building demonstrates its architect’s awareness of the latest trends in American architecture at the time of its construction. In contrast to the block-like massing of the 1851 seminary buildings, the 1889 Female Seminary building has a dynamic façade with projecting pavilions on the north and south ends and an entryway pavilion flanked

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<sup>166</sup> “Specifications of materials and labor for the construction of a Female Seminary for the Cherokee Nation at Tahlequah, Indian Territory, per plans, elevations, sections, and detail drawings by C. E. Illsley, Architect,” September 7, 1887, University of Oklahoma, Cherokee Nation Papers, box 28, folder 846.



Figure 43: Alice Timmons' class, showing classroom in Cherokee Female Seminary. Courtesy of Northeastern State University Archive, 1905.



Figure 44: Music Club, showing parlor Cherokee Female Seminary. Courtesy of Northeastern State University Archive, ca. 1889-1907.

by turreted towers. A square clock tower marks the southeast corner, and there were originally two wooden porches stretching between the front pavilions (these were removed between 1909 and 1912).<sup>167</sup> The front entry is marked by an oversized arch, and the majority of the windows have arched profiles. The façade is accentuated with limestone windowsills, decorative brick voussoirs and cornices, and terra-cotta ornaments. The monochrome treatment and extensive use of arches strongly suggests the influence of H. H. Richardson. In particular, the composition of the central pavilion, with a front gabled roof flanked by two towers, an oversized, arched portal, and smaller arched windows above recalls Richardson's 1883-1885 Billings Library at the University of Vermont. The building was a source of pride for tribal members, with the newspaper *The Tahlequah Arrow* describing it as an "imposing edifice" and "one of the finest pieces of modern architecture to be found in the Southwest."<sup>168</sup> The building also impressed Euro-American commentators, exemplified by the *Chicago Tribune*, which remarked in an 1889 article on the newly completed seminary building, "where now stand splendid structures of modern architecture, half a century ago was almost a forest."<sup>169</sup> By constructing architecturally outstanding buildings to house their educational and social support programs, the Cherokee Nation demonstrated their continued commitment to self-governance and a cultural program that would meet or exceed the standards expected in American society.

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<sup>167</sup> Tomlan and Hnedak, "Cherokee Female Seminary," HABS, 3.

<sup>168</sup> "Some Institutions Which Have Made Tahlequah Famous," *The Tahlequah Arrow*, December 22, 1900.

<sup>169</sup> "In the Cherokee Nation," *The Chicago Tribune*, June 23, 1889.

## **Chapter Seven: Dispossession of the Cherokee Nation**

Despite the cultural achievements of the Cherokee Nation, the tribe lost its political independence and control over its buildings when the State of Oklahoma was established in 1907. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the territorial autonomy of the Cherokee Nation was undermined as white settlers and railroads moved onto Cherokee land, in violation of treaties between the Cherokee Nation and the United States. Furthermore, U.S. politicians worked to enact allotment in Indian Territory, which divided tribal lands held in common into parcels owned by individual tribal members. White proponents of allotment argued that it would facilitate the acculturation process among Native Americans; Cherokee lobbyists countered that the process was unnecessary because the tribe had already achieved a high degree of civilization and allotment would undermine tribal sovereignty. The movement toward allotment and away from tribal autonomy were vigorously opposed by the Cherokee government. Along with the institutions they housed, tribally owned buildings were cited as evidence of the tribe's cultural achievements in arguments against allotment. The process of disenfranchisement culminated in 1907 with the dissolution of the Cherokee tribal government and the concurrent establishment of the State of Oklahoma. Ownership of tribal buildings was transferred from the tribal government to the Secretary of the Interior and then sold to various American governmental entities for the use of their own institutions. Thus, the loss of ownership of their built environment manifested the Cherokee Nation's loss of political autonomy at the turn of the century.

### **Reduction of Cherokee Territorial Claims**

The Treaty of 1866 included several provisions that would undermine Cherokee control over their own territory and its further development. The treaty provided for the building of two railroad lines through Cherokee territory by any company authorized by the U.S. Congress, and

it granted these companies ownership of rights-of-way through the Cherokee Nation.<sup>170</sup> The Atlantic & Pacific Railroad and the Missouri, Kansas, & Texas Railway were given the right to construct rail lines running east to west and north to south, respectively. Railroad construction began in 1870, and the two lines were completed and operational by 1875 (Figure 45).<sup>171</sup> The railroad companies encouraged town-site development along their routes, which was provided for in the Cherokee Nation's Townsite Law of 1870. The railroads increased accessibility to the Indian Territory from the United States, intensifying the rate of white settlement in the Cherokee Nation. Under the Cherokee Constitution, only members of the Cherokee Nation were permitted to settle on tribal lands; however, white settlers circumvented this restriction in a variety of ways. Some were squatters who possessed no legal right to occupation, while other white men married Cherokee women and were granted tribal status as Cherokee citizens. Finally, white speculators would pay Cherokee citizens to claim occupancy rights to land within Cherokee territory and then use multi-year labor contracts to "hire" these speculators as laborers.<sup>172</sup> By 1889, Indian Agent Leo Bennett observed that "there was no difficulty for white squatters to come in, make improvements, and try for citizenship."<sup>173</sup> While the post-bellum era witnessed increased economic productivity in the Cherokee Nation, much of the region's economic development was undertaken by white settlers—to the detriment of Cherokee sovereignty over their tribal lands.

Cherokee power was also diminished by a series of losses in land ownership in the late nineteenth century, most significantly the sale of the six-million-acre Cherokee Outlet. The

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<sup>170</sup> Article 11, "Treaty with the Cherokee, 1866," July 19, 1866, in Charles J. Kappler, ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 945.

<sup>171</sup> Brad Bays, *Townsite Settlement and Dispossession*, 42-45.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-78.

<sup>173</sup> United States Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1885* (Washington: Government Publication Office, 1885), XXIX.

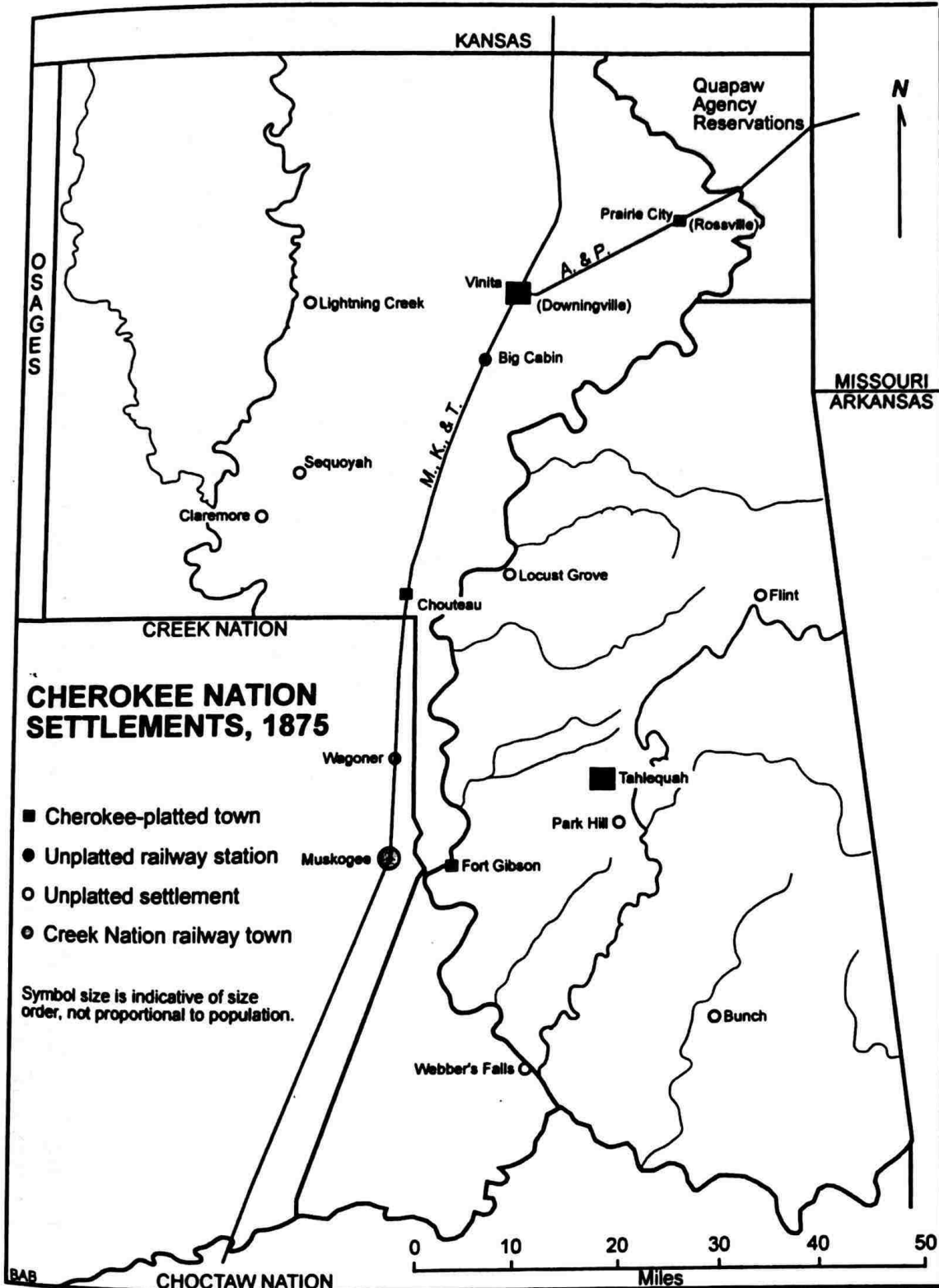


Figure 45: Map of Cherokee Nation, showing locations of towns and railroads in the Cherokee Nation. Printed in Brad Bays, *Townsite Settlement and Dispossession in the Cherokee Nation, 1866-1907* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 145.

Outlet was a stretch of land extending westward from the boundary of the Cherokee Nation which, according to the Treaty of New Echota, was to extend “as far west as the sovereignty of the United States and their rights of soil extend.”<sup>174</sup> As part of the Compromise of 1850, the western boundary of the Cherokee Outlet was designated as the 100th meridian, with the area to its west known as the Public Land Strip (colloquially called “No Man’s Land” and later the Oklahoma Panhandle). The western area claimed by the Cherokee Nation was further diminished by the Treaty of 1866, in which the Cherokees ceded roughly 800,000 acres of their land to be included in the limits of the State of Kansas. The Cherokees also agreed that the United States could settle other tribes within the Outlet in exchange for payment; ultimately, six tribes were relocated to the eastern portion of the Outlet by 1881.<sup>175</sup> Meanwhile, the American public pressured the U.S. Congress to open the Unassigned Lands for white settlement. This swath of land in the center of present-day Oklahoma was surrounded by Indian reservations but had not been assigned to a tribe. Instead, a U.S. presidential proclamation opened the region to settlement and spurred the Land Run of 1889. The two-million-acre Unassigned Lands did not satisfy demands, however, and in 1889 the U.S. Congress appointed a commission to negotiate for the sale of the Cherokee Outlet to the United States for white development. Negotiations continued until 1891, when the Cherokee Nation agreed to sell the Outlet for \$8.5 million, and the Outlet was opened for white settlement in 1892.<sup>176</sup> The sale of the Outlet underscored the loss of Cherokee bargaining power in the face of increasing numbers of white settlers moved to Indian Territory.

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<sup>174</sup> Treaty of New Echota, Dec. 29, 1835, quoted in Chadwick Smith and Faye Teague, “The Response of the Cherokee Nation to the Cherokee Outlet Centennial Celebration: A Legal and Historical Analysis,” *Tulsa Law Review* 29, issue 2 (Winter 1993), 273.

<sup>175</sup> Smith and Teague, “Cherokee Outlet Centennial Celebration,” 277-278.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 289-290.



## The Movement for Allotment

The movement for allotment advocated dividing tribal lands into homesteads (land parcels of 160 acres as per the Homestead Act of 1861) that would be allotted to individual tribal members. Advocates of allotment argued that allotment would accelerate the acculturation process and encourage Native Americans to participate in the civilized society of the United States as farmers and capitalists. The leading proponent of the movement was Senator Henry Dawes, who held that communal tribal ownership discouraged “selfishness, which is at the bottom of civilization.”<sup>177</sup> Dawes later argued that under communal land ownership, some “keen, able, enterprising business men” of the Five Civilized Tribes had “appropriated everything for their own benefit,” leaving other members of the tribes destitute. Dividing the land equally among tribal members, he argued, would counteract this imbalance.<sup>178</sup> These contradictory arguments belied another advantage of allotment for white Americans: tribal lands that were not allotted would be sold to the United States and opened to white homesteads. Allotment also meant that individual tribal members were free to sell their own land holdings to white individuals, further diminishing the tribal land base and the efficacy of tribal laws over their legal jurisdiction within each Indian nation.

The allotment of Indian lands was strongly contested by the Cherokee Nation. Allotment was first proposed in Congress in 1877, and from the 1870s through the 1890s the Nation sent delegations of lobbyists to Washington D.C. to advocate for tribal interests and against

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<sup>177</sup> “Third Annual Meeting of the Lake Mohonk Conference,” in *Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1886), 86-91.

<sup>178</sup> *Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian, 1894* (Lake Mohonk: The Lake Mohonk Conference, 1894), 29-30.

allotment.<sup>179</sup> In 1886, for example, the National Council instructed the delegates to oppose any bills “for the establishment of a Territorial Government for the Indian Territory” or any measures “that would weaken or destroy the Government of the Cherokee Nation or expose it to white settlement.” The delegates were also asked “to aid the other Nations and smaller tribes in resisting encroachments among them [that are] thus destroying the security and hindering the progress of the Nations and Tribes of the Indian Territory.”<sup>180</sup> The Cherokee National Press, a printing press owned by the tribal government, produced pamphlets that outlined the tribe’s official position on congressional bills, and each member of Congress was sent a free subscription to the *Cherokee Advocate*.<sup>181</sup> Furthermore, the Cherokee Nation invited the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs to visit Tahlequah in 1884; the committee, chaired by Henry Dawes, visited the Cherokee Nation the following year.<sup>182</sup> These efforts sought to expose congressional members to the Cherokee’s civilized achievements—including their transformation of the built environment in Tahlequah—as support for the argument against allotment.

Despite the concerted lobbying efforts of the Cherokee Nation, the passage of the Dawes Severalty Act in 1887 made allotment a reality in the majority of Indian tribal reservations across the country. The act divided tribal lands into 160-acre homesteads to be allocated to household heads, provided for the sale of surplus lands, and granted citizenship to Indians who accepted allotments. This 1887 act exempted the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Seminole, Osage, Peoria,

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<sup>179</sup> Tom Holm, “Indian Lobbyists: Cherokee Opposition to the Allotment of Tribal Lands,” *American Indian Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (May 1979), 115-116.

<sup>180</sup> “An Act Instructing and Empowering the Delegation to Washington, D.C.,” December 20, 1886, *Laws of the Cherokee Nation*, 63-64.

<sup>181</sup> Holm, “Cherokee Opposition to Allotment,” 117.

<sup>182</sup> “Joint Resolution of the Cherokee National Council Inviting the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs to Tahlequah,” November 10, 1884, in *Laws of the Cherokee Nation*, 81-82.

Sac and Fox, and the Seneca nations.<sup>183</sup> However, in 1893, Congress established the “Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes” (commonly known as the Dawes Commission), whose primary mission was to negotiate for allotment and the dissolution of tribal governments in Indian Territory.<sup>184</sup> The Cherokee Nation continued to argue against allotment, but the Dawes Commission held that a majority tribal land and power had fallen into the hands of a small number of mixed-race men—many of whom were the Cherokee politicians arguing against allotment—and that dividing tribal lands for individual ownership would help to correct this inequity.<sup>185</sup> Furthermore, the Dawes Commission argued that the Cherokee educational system was inadequate because it barred some groups from attending the schools; the Cherokee Nation responded that only non-Indians who were in Indian Territory without tribal permission were barred from tribal schools. The Cherokee Nation also noted that they had spent “three times as much per capita for education as is spent in the State of Mississippi.”<sup>186</sup> Despite vigorous opposition from the Cherokees and other tribes, the 1898 Curtis Act amended the Dawes Act so that the policy of allotment would apply to the Cherokees and other previously exempt tribes, and it called for the abolition of tribal governments by 1906.<sup>187</sup> Allotment called for the registration of Cherokee tribal members, recorded on what became known as the “Dawes Rolls,” after which individuals could claim their allotments (Figure 46). The policies enacted under the Curtis Act would allow the territory claimed by the Cherokees and other tribes to be absorbed into the new State of Oklahoma.

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<sup>183</sup> An Act to Provide for the Allotment of Lands in Severalty to Indians on the Various Reservations (General Allotment Act or Dawes Act), February 8, 1887, Statutes at Large 24 Stat. 388.

<sup>184</sup> Holm, “Cherokee Opposition to Allotment,” 124.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>186</sup> “Denial of Indians to Charges Made by the Dawes Commission” pamphlet, quoted in Holm, “Cherokee Opposition to Allotment”, 126.

<sup>187</sup> An Act for the protection of the people of the Indian Territory (Curtis Act), June 27, 1898, Statutes at Large 30 Stat. 495.

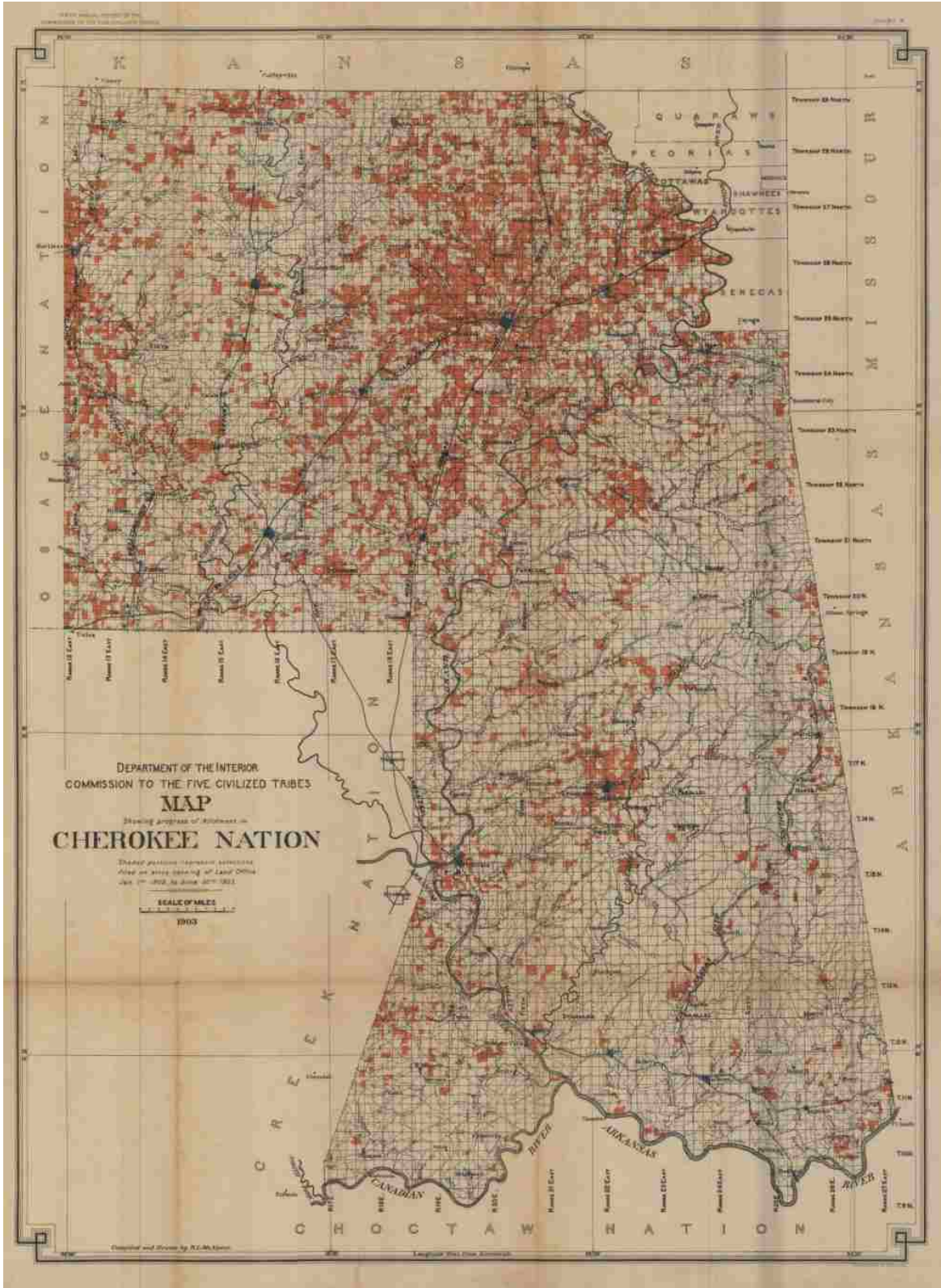


Figure 46: : Mcalpine, R. L., and United States Commission To The Five Civilized Tribes, *Map showing progress of allotment in Cherokee Nation*. (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, 1903), Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

## Creation of the State of Oklahoma

The State of Oklahoma incorporated two land areas, Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory, into a single American state. Indian Territory included the lands owned by the Five Civilized Tribes. These territories were excluded from Oklahoma Territory, which was established by the Oklahoma Organic Act passed by Congress on May 2, 1890, and encompassed the land west of the Five Civilized Tribes and east of the Texas panhandle (Figure 47). After the passage of the Curtis Act indicated the federal government's desire to abolish tribal governments, leaders of the Five Civilized Tribes met in Muskogee for the Sequoyah Constitutional Convention on August 21, 1905. The convention proposed that Indian Territory join the United States as the State of Sequoyah, sending a draft constitution and a petition for statehood to the U.S. Congress in November 1905. Congress rejected the bill for statehood, and instead President Theodore Roosevelt signed the Enabling Act of 1906, which proposed joining the Oklahoma and Indian Territories into a single state. This came to fruition on November 16, 1907, when the State of Oklahoma officially joined the Union. On the same day, the federal government of the United States officially disbanded the government of the Cherokee Nation.

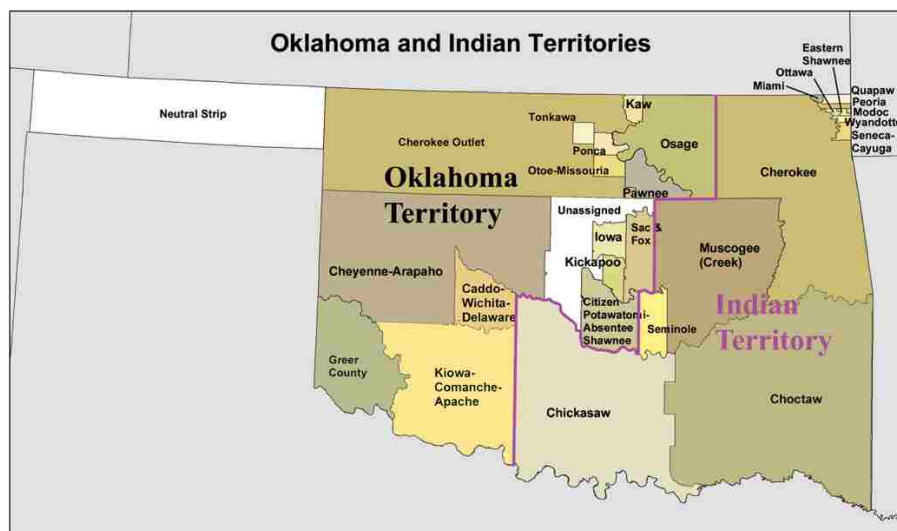


Figure 47: Map of present-day Oklahoma, showing boundaries of Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory established by the Oklahoma Organic Act of 1890. Courtesy of Katie Bus, Oklahoma Historical Society, 2018.

With the creation of the State of Oklahoma imminent, a group of Cherokee women formed an organization to advocate for the preservation of Cherokee history by turning the National Capitol building into a museum and memorial. The National Historical Society submitted a petition to the Cherokee National Council in 1904, arguing that “the passing of the Tribal Government in the not distant future...will obliterate every vestige of a tribe further advanced in the civilization of the 20th Century than any aboriginal people.” They requested that the National Capitol be placed in their care in order to “transmit in enduring form the memorial of a noble race” and to preserve “the memory of a noble ancestry” by using the building as a museum.<sup>188</sup> The petition was promoted in newspapers across the Cherokee Nation, with one writer describing the building as “a living testimonial to the greatness of those men, who struggled for their people, who led them and taught them and advised them, until they became the most enlightened of their race.”<sup>189</sup> The historical society’s goals were unrealized, with the Capitol building becoming the newly created Cherokee County courthouse in Oklahoma. Nonetheless, the movement emphasized the importance of the National Capitol to tribal members as a symbol of the Cherokee Nation and its cultural achievements.

Congress transferred possession of all tribally owned buildings to the Secretary of the Interior through the Indian Appropriation Act of April 3, 1908. The Department of the Interior was authorized sell the property, with proceeds credited to the tribe. The first building sold was the Cherokee Female Seminary, which the State of Oklahoma purchased in March 1909 at a cost of \$45,000 to house the newly created Northeastern State Normal School.<sup>190</sup> The Cherokee

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<sup>188</sup> Petition of the National Historical Society to the National Council of the Cherokee Nation, December 7, 1904, microfilm roll CHN 68, Cherokee Nation Papers, Oklahoma Historical Society.

<sup>189</sup> “A Monument to Greatness,” *The Nowata Advertiser*, November 25, 1904, box 176, folder 7650, Cherokee National Papers, University of Oklahoma Library Western History Collections.

<sup>190</sup> Miheusuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds*, 69.

school system had been nominally absorbed into the State of Oklahoma's educational department in 1907, but the tribal board of education continued to administer the seminaries. They elected to turn the Male Seminary into a coeducational boarding school that would accommodate some of the Female Seminary students, with its first term beginning in September 1909. Male teachers and students were housed on the second floor, and their female counterparts roomed on the third. This arrangement was short-lived, however, because the Male Seminary building burned to the ground on Palm Sunday in 1910; like the earlier fire that destroyed the first Female Seminary, most of the building's occupants were at church and could not respond quickly enough to save the structure. The loss of the seminary buildings, coupled with the erosion of the tribe's political autonomy, effectively ended the Cherokees' tribally-run educational program.

Some buildings constructed by the Cherokee Nation continued in their original uses after statehood, but were operated by federal and state agencies; others were sold to private citizens and organizations. The 1875 Orphan Asylum building burned to the ground in 1903, and the Cherokee Nation moved the orphans into the Insane Asylum building. The Insane Asylum residents were temporarily moved to the National Jail and later transferred to other institutions.<sup>191</sup> The Bureau of Indian Affairs officially purchased the former Insane Asylum property for \$5,000 in 1914, and they took over operation of the Orphan Asylum as a boarding school, renaming it the Sequoyah Orphan Training School in 1925. The National Capitol, National Jail, and Supreme Court House were transferred to the newly created Cherokee County in 1914. The county used the Capitol as a courthouse, continued to use the Jail as a prison, and used the Supreme Court House as county offices. Also in 1914, the Colored High School was sold to Collate Missionary Baptist Association, an African-American religious group based in

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<sup>191</sup> Reed, *Family and Orphan Care*, 1.

Fort Gibson, Oklahoma.<sup>192</sup> The building burned to the ground in 1916, and the property was sold to a private citizen.<sup>193</sup> The buildings constructed by the Cherokee Nation in the nineteenth century were physically destroyed or taken over by other entities in the first decades of the twentieth century. Thus, ownership and control of the built environment served as one marker of political power in the region, paralleling the Cherokee Nation's loss of political sovereignty at the beginning of the twentieth century.

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<sup>192</sup> Ledger recording sale of Cherokee tribal property, April 1, 1914, microfilm roll CHN 68, Cherokee Nation Papers, Oklahoma Historical Society.

<sup>193</sup> Ballenger, "The Colored High School," 462.



## Conclusion

Ultimately, the story of the Cherokee Nation and its tribal buildings is a story of resilience. Since the mid-twentieth century, Cherokee political sovereignty has been partially restored, and tribal members have worked to preserve and promote the tribe's culture and heritage. The Cherokee National Historical Society was formed in 1963, and in 1967 the non-profit opened the Cherokee Heritage Center on the site of the first Female Seminary in Park Hill, Oklahoma. The Heritage Center complex was developed according to a plan by Charles Chief Boyd, a Cherokee tribal member who designed the Center as his thesis at the University of Colorado, where he graduated in 1964.<sup>194</sup> The development of the Heritage Center coincided with the rise of the American Indian Movement, which advocated for individual civil rights and tribal sovereign rights for tribes across the United States.<sup>195</sup> The latter goal was realized in 1970, when President Richard Nixon signed the Principal Chief's Act, which provided for the reestablishment of tribal governments, including that of the Cherokees. In 1971, the tribe elected as W.W. Keeler Principal Chief, and in 1975 the Cherokee Nation adopted a new Constitution.

Reinstated political autonomy was followed by the reclamation of most of the tribe's nineteenth-century government buildings. In 1979, the Cherokee Nation reacquired the National Capitol, the Supreme Court House, and the National Jail. These buildings would eventually house three museums, operated by the tribal government. The Supreme Court Museum opened in 2010, followed by the National Prison Museum in 2013 and the National Capitol Museum in 2019.<sup>196</sup> The Cherokee Nation reacquired the Saline District Courthouse in the 1980s, and the

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<sup>194</sup> "Frequently Asked Questions," Cherokee Heritage Center, last modified November 15, 2011, <http://www.cherokeeheritage.org/chc-faq>.

<sup>195</sup> Smithers, *The Cherokee Diaspora*, 262-263.

<sup>196</sup> "Ownership Regained, Legacy Preserved," Visit Cherokee Nation, accessed September 16, 2019, <https://www.visitcherokeemuseum.com/events/ownership-regained-legacy-preserved>.

tribe is currently (2019) working to stabilize the building and turn it into a museum.<sup>197</sup> Other sites are used by the tribe even though their original buildings no longer exist. The Cherokee Nation took over ownership and management of Sequoyah High School, the successor of the Cherokee Orphan Asylum, in 1985. The land on which the Insane Asylum originally stood is still in use today as the school's campus, although the original building is no longer extant.<sup>198</sup> Since 2008, the Male Seminary site has housed the tribally run Male Seminary Recreation Center.<sup>199</sup> The continued tribal use of these sites underscores the continued importance that these locations have for the Cherokee Nation. The Cherokee Heritage Center and the Cherokee Nation's museums, meanwhile, preserve extant tribal buildings while educating the public on the history and culture of the Cherokee people.



Figure 48: Opening of Cherokee National Capitol Museum, August 8, 2019. Photograph courtesy of Public Radio Tulsa.

<sup>197</sup> "Cherokee Nation Begins Work to Save Historic Saline Courthouse," *Tahlequah Daily Press*, September 7, 2018.

<sup>198</sup> "History," Sequoyah High School, accessed September 19, 2019, <https://www.sequoyahschools.org/vnews/display.v/SEC/Home%7CHistory>.

<sup>199</sup> "Male Seminary Recreation Center approaches year mark," *Cherokee Phoenix*, July 10, 2009.

The nineteenth-century governmental buildings constructed by the Cherokee Nation endure today as a symbol of the tribe's persistence and cultural achievements. These buildings were constructed after the Cherokee people were forcibly removed from their homeland, and they represent one way in which the Cherokee Nation physically and symbolically rebuilt their lives in Indian Territory. Throughout the nineteenth century the tribe was faced with internal divisions and a persistent imbalance of power with the United States government that threatened the tribe's autonomy and existence. Despite these obstacles, the Cherokee Nation survived, altering their forms of governance and cultural expression in response to their changing circumstances. The Cherokee Nation's nineteenth-century architecture represents one way in which the tribe adapted Euro-American forms of cultural expression to represent themselves as a unified and civilized people who were worthy of self-governance. Today, these buildings stand as a testament to the Cherokee Nation's resiliency after the Trail of Tears and to its nineteenth-century cultural achievements.

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### Appendix A: Timeline of Subject Buildings

- 1844: Supreme Court House  
Tahlequah, Oklahoma  
*Currently houses Cherokee Supreme Court Museum*
- 1846-51: Male Seminary building  
Tahlequah, Oklahoma  
*No longer extant; site is now used as Male Seminary Recreation Center*
- 1846-51: First Female Seminary building  
Park Hill, Oklahoma  
*No longer extant; site is now home to Cherokee Heritage Center*
- 1869: National Capitol  
Tahlequah, Oklahoma  
*Currently Cherokee National Capitol Museum*
- 1874: National Jail  
Tahlequah, Oklahoma  
*Currently Cherokee National Prison Museum*
- 1875: Cherokee Insane Asylum  
Tahlequah, Oklahoma  
*No longer extant; site is now home to Sequoyah High School*
- 1875: Cherokee Orphan Asylum  
Saline, Oklahoma  
*No longer extant*
- 1883: Nine District Courthouses  
Cooweescoowee, Delaware, Saline, Going Snake, Tahlequah, Flint, Illinois, Sequoyah, Canadian, and Sequoyah Districts  
*Saline District Courthouse is only extant courthouse; located in Rose, Oklahoma*
- 1887-1889: Second Female Seminary  
Tahlequah, Oklahoma  
*Currently used as Seminary Hall at Northeastern State University*
- 1890: Colored High School  
Double Springs, Oklahoma  
*No longer extant*