Methodist Mission Work Among the Cherokee Indians Before the Removal

By Mary Thomas Peacock *

INDIANS are those people found inhabiting the New World when Columbus thought he had discovered a short cut to India. Indians call one another by tribal names . . . Navaho, Shawnee, Cherokee, Chickasaw or Chippewa. Secondary in their thinking is the fact that they are Indians.¹

The various American Indian tribes in the years 1650 and their location and distribution are graphically shown on a map in Oliver LeFage's Pictorial History of the American Indian.² Within the bounds of what is now the United States, there were more than two hundred tribes who spoke in some fifty-seven languages and many more dialects.³

The people found here by our forefathers have often been misunderstood. Basically the Indian was honest, faithful to a covenant, and loyal to his clan. Usually the Indian went to war only when he felt that his rights had been transgressed. There is some truth in the jest that when the Pilgrim Fathers landed at Plymouth Rock they fell on their knees and then fell on the aborigines. At different times the United States made some 370 treaties⁴ with the Indians which were filled with entangling statements, and then the whites finally squeezed the Red Men gradually (sometimes not so gradually) from their hunting grounds and homes. The Indians contracted smallpox⁵ and venereal disease from the whites, maladies that all but wiped out some Indian clans. Whiskey, which the innocent Indians not inappropriately called “firewater,” was intro-

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⁴ Morrison, op. cit.

duced by the whites. Small wonder that the natives came to view
the newcomers with suspicion, and that in some dialects the word
for white man became synonymous with the word "liar." 6

When missionaries translated the Bible into Cherokee, Chief
Yonaguska of the Reservation in Western North Carolina wanted
it read to him before he would approve its introduction among his
people. After listening to a portion of Matthew's Gospel he said dry­
ly, "It seems to be a good book, but it is strange that the white peo­
ple are not better after having it for so long." 7

According to carbon dating, men were living in America in pre­
historic times . . . as far back as 38,000 years ago. Archaeological
findings at Russell Cave near Bridgeport, Alabama, show continuous
habitation for the last 8,000 years. 8

While some Indians have left their tribal ways and have been as­
similated into our society, we should not forget that there are still
between 400,000 and 500,000 Indians in twenty-nine of the forty­
eight continental United States who prefer to retain their identity
as Indians. Our forefathers had to deal with this tenacious adher­
ence of the Indian to the clan and its way of life. This fact should be
borne in mind when we attempt to evaluate the work of early Chris­
tian missionaries among the Indians.

The first missionaries among the Indians were the Franciscan
Friars who came over with Coronado in 1540. 9 Coronado's primary
motive in coming to America was greed and not philanthropy or
Christian missions, and this is one reason why each of the friars who
accompanied Coronado finally met a martyr's death. The greatest
work of the Franciscans was done in California where they estab­
lished a trail of missions from San Diego to San Francisco. 10

The first Protestant mission to the Indians seems to have been
established on Martha's Vineyard in 1643 by Thomas Mayhew, 11
a Puritan who was the son of Governor Mayhew. However, ac­
cording to Morrison, the prince of early missionaries in America
was John Eliot. 12 Beginning at the age of thirty-nine Eliot devoted
three years to the study of the Indian language. In 1646 he estab­
lished his first mission. Twenty-eight years later he had "praying
Indians" in fourteen different missions. Eliot died in 1690 at eighty­
six years of age, leaving his Indian Bible, the first book printed in
America.

6 Morrison, op. cit.
7 Brown, John P., Old Frontiers, South­
467.
8 Miller, Carl F., "Life 8,000 Years
Ago Uncovered in an Alabama Cave," The National Geographic, Oct. 1956, The
National Geographic Society, Washing­
ton, D. C., p. 542.

Office, Washington, D. C., 1907, p. 874
summary mission work among Indians;
Morrison, op. cit.
10 Ibid.
682
12 Ibid., p. 883
Now what were the conditions in Tennessee? Sometime between 10,000 and 15,000 years ago, it is believed, the first human beings set foot on what is now Tennessee soil. About 1000 A.D. the Mississippi Indians came, probably from Mexico. They were fine artisans, good farmers, and withal progressive. The Creeks, Chickasaws, Choctaws and others were descendants of these people. Last of all around 1200 A.D. came the Cherokees from the north. They were of Iroquois origin. Taking up their abode in the southern Appalachians, their domain originally extended over parts of what we know as Virginia, West Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee and Kentucky. The word Cherokee came from the Cheerake Nation. It is derived from the word “chee-ra” meaning fire, men possessed of divine fire. The word Cherokee seems to date from 1708. The Cherokees called themselves Yunwiya, meaning “real or principal people.” On ceremonial occasions they frequently spoke of themselves as the Kituhwagi or Cuttawa. In early times the Tennessee River was called the Cussate.

Several sources indicate that the earliest mission work among the Cherokees was by one Christian Gottlieb Priber. He was said to be a Jesuit who, acting in the interests of the French, appeared among the Cherokees in 1736. Apparently he acquired facile use of the language, adopted tribal dress and customs, and quickly rose to a place of influence among the Indians. He drew up a form of government along European lines; the capital was at Great Tellico in East Tennessee. The chief medicine man was made emperor with Priber as Secretary. All went well until Priber signed himself as Prime Minister in some correspondence with the government of South Carolina. This opened the eyes of the South Carolinians to the dangerous possibility that Priber might win the Cherokees over to the French. After some six or seven years among the Cherokees, Priber was seized by English traders and he later died in prison. His enemies have pictured him as a scoundrel who blasphemed all religions, especially the Protestant. However, it is recorded that he spoke Latin, French, German, Spanish and Cherokee fluently. Among his papers was found a Cherokee dictionary, which was to have been published in Paris, along with data pertaining to the Cherokees. All of these materials would be invaluable today, but unfortunately they were destroyed. Even Priber’s enemies

13 Mudge, Enoch, A History of the Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in History of American Missions by Tracy and Others.
15 Ibid.
17 Brown, op. cit., p. 554; Williams, op. cit., p. 252.
admitted that he possessed outstanding scholarship, courage and devotion.

Apparently there was no further missionary work among the Cherokees until 1752-1753 when the Moravians then established in Pennsylvania, determined to launch a movement in the south. They purchased approximately 99,000 acres of land around the headwaters of the Yadkin River in western North Carolina, and named the area Wachovia. From the beginning the one purpose of the Moravians was to Christianize the Cherokees in the region. They called their first settlement Bethabara. They established Bethania in 1759 and Salem in 1766. Bethabara became known as “the Dutch fort where there are good people and much bread.” In 1758, the Moravian Brethren asked the Cherokees if they would like for the Brethren to come to their country and learn their language. The answer was in the affirmative, but one year later the French and Indian War intervened and prevented establishment of the mission. During the war many refugees sought asylum in Bethania.

The next link seems to be Lieutenant Henry Timberlake of Virginia. Timberlake himself was not a missionary to the Indians, but his work opened the way for the Moravians. Timberlake served as an ensign under Colonel George Washington in the French and Indian War. Timberlake was with the Virginia troops at Long Island (or Great Island) on the Holston River (now Kingsport, Tennessee) in 1761 when a large delegation of Cherokees came suing for peace which was concluded on November 19. The Cherokee chiefs then requested that an officer be sent to their Over Hill Towns to cement the newly made friendship. Adam Stephen, the white commander, fearing trickery, would not order one of his men to such a mission. Timberlake volunteered and was allowed to go. During his visit he made warm friendships with the Indians.

After Timberlake returned to Virginia, the governor of the colony persuaded him to accompany a delegation of Indians to England to see the great white father and to plead for redress for the continued loss of their hunting grounds to the white man. A little later a wealthy friend prevailed on Timberlake to cross the ocean again with another group of Indians for the same reasons. Timberlake was motivated by a sincere desire to help the Indians, but some persons in Virginia and England accused him of seeking publicity and monetary reward. He died in England, September 30, 1765.


21 Bureau, Nineteenth Annual Report, op. cit., p. 45.
While Timberlake's second delegation was in England, they met one John Daniel Hammerer, a Lutheran, who had emigrated from Straussberg, Alsace, because of religious oppression. Hammerer and a German companion, desiring to serve as missionaries to the Indians, accompanied the Cherokees back to Virginia, arriving June 24, 1765. Informed that a great Cherokee chief, The Little Carpenter, was coming to Williamsburg, Hammerer and his friend went there to meet him and ask his approval of their plan. His reaction was favorable, and he promised to take them under his protection. On July 18, 1765, he started with them for his home, journeying by way of Fort Chiswell in southwestern Virginia. From Fort Chiswell Hammerer wrote to the Moravians in Salem of his plan to "civilize and humanize" the Cherokees. On September 27, news reached the Moravians that the two would-be missionaries had been well received by the Indians. But unfortunately the plan to start a mission came to naught, because about the time Hammerer and his friend arrived, all of the Over Hill chiefs, including The Little Carpenter, were called out for war against the Shawnees.

In 1775, the Moravians again renewed negotiations with the Cherokees, but the Revolution intervened and nothing came of the move. In 1783, Brother Martin Schneider volunteered to approach the Cherokees. He left Wachovia on December 24, 1783. Two days later he arrived at the home of Col. Joseph Martin, but Martin had departed on December 22 without leaving the treaty which Schneider needed in his approach to the Indians. From dwelling to town, from hut to ford, Schneider trailed Martin, struggling against snow, high water, and a "visitent (sic) storm of thunder and lightning." On December 29, he wrote, "It continued to snow very fast. I made a fire before a leaning tree which was burnt hollow and set myself during the night in that hollow tree where I was kept dry but was dyed pretty black." His horse was stolen and he had to pay a dollar for its return. Finally on January 3, 1784, Schneider overtook Martin at Sitiko, and on the fourth day they went to Chota where a council was arranged.

Schneider asked for permission to begin mission work among the Indians. Old Chief Tassel put him off for some days, and then announced that most of the chiefs were away on a beaver hunt and that nothing could be decided without their consent. Constrained to abandon his plans for starting a mission, Schneider returned home. His diary for January 13, 1784, recounts some of his experiences en route:

I breakfasted before day and put on as few clothes as possible. With our Savior I had a peculiar conversation. For example, I had deserved his displeasure in many ways, but I begged it as a favor that he help me through

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22 Williams, Early Travels, op. cit.  
23 Schwarze, op. cit.
this water (the French Broad River) ... Three quarters of the way it went very well, but now two large flakes of ice between which I must pass through, got hold of my horse and with a violent current carried it down stream into a hole 12 to 15 feet deep ... My horse, which otherwise can swim very well, could scarcely keep up on account I was several times in water till under my arms. On shore there was no place for landing because there are nothing but rocks which are as straight as a wall ... At last I saw a little opening between the rocks, where to my good fortune was also so much ground that my horse could stand in the water above his belly. I jumped down in the water, took off my things and tied my horse to a piece of wood fastened by the ice, and climbed through the narrow pass which was too straight for my horse ... I ran three miles through the snow over hills without road or path to Captain Guest's. But my heart was so full of joy and thankfulness to our Savior for his wonderful help that I forgot my difficulties.

Guest and another man rescued the horse while his family gave Schneider some dry clothing.

The patient Moravians bided their time. In 1799 a group of Cherokees including James Vann and Charles Hicks, requested a mission school at Vann's house, Springplace, Georgia. As a result of this request, the first mission among the Cherokees was opened in 1802. In 1805, John Gambold and his wife, Anna Rosel took charge of the Springplace work. Anna Rosel Gambold was a remarkable woman. An excellent teacher, she was also a good botanist. When Henry Steinhauer, a distinguished English scholar, asked her to send him some botanical specimens, she gathered and correctly identified about 1,400 species. When Correa de Serra, a minister to Portugal from the United States, who was also a Catholic abbe and a naturalist, visited Springplace, he exclaimed, "Judge of my surprise, in the midst of the wilderness, to find a botanic garden, containing many exotic and medicinal plants, the professor, Mrs. Anna Rosel Gambold, describing them by their Linnean names." 24

It was nine years before the Moravians won their first convert at Springplace.25 The second person to accept Christianity was Charles Hicks. A student in the school whose Indian name was Kul-le-gee-nah, later attended Andover College. He visited Elias Boudinot, President of the American Bible Society, took his name, and was thereafter known among the Indians as Elias Boudinot. He returned to the Cherokees and taught school. Elias Boudinot (Kul-le-gee-nah, Kill-le-nah, and many other forms of spelling, meaning "The Buck") was the first editor of the Cherokee Phoenix at New Echota.26

24 Karl von Linnaeus (1707-1778), a Swedish naturalist, developed a system used by botanists for classifying plants; Walker, Robert Sparks, Torchlights to the Cherokees, The Macmillan Company, New York, N. Y., 1931.


26 Brown, op. cit.
Gideon Blackburn did missionary work for the Presbyterian Church among the Cherokees, opening a mission school north of the Hiwassee River in 1803. Later the Presbyterians established branch missions; one of them was at Sale Creek north of Chattanooga. Blackburn also conducted the Ross School, a small private undertaking at Chickamauga. For lack of funds, Blackburn was forced to abandon his work in December, 1807. He claimed that in the four years he had labored among the Indians he had taught more than 400 young people to read the English Bible. After Blackburn’s departure the Moravian work at Springplace remained as the only mission among the Cherokees.

In 1816, the Cherokees agreed to allow the Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians to undertake mission work among them, with the understanding that they, like the Moravians, would center their ministry around schools.

In 1816-1817, The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, supported by the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians, established the Chickamauga Mission on Chickamauga Creek, east of Missionary Ridge, an area lying within the city of Chattanooga today. Because of confusion with the Indian town of Chickamauga just across the creek, the name of the mission was later changed to Brainerd in honor of David Brainerd who a century before had done lasting mission work among the Mohicans in the north. Brainerd was the most influential mission and school to be developed among the Cherokees. At Brainerd students were instructed in household and agricultural arts as well as in the Christian faith. The congregation in the meetinghouse was said to be composed of approximately equal numbers of whites, reds and blacks. Brainerd served as a training ground for ten additional missions, namely, Carmel, Creek Path, Hightower, Willstown, Haws, Candy’s Creek, New Echota, Ahmohee, Red Clay and Running Water.

The ritual of the Baptists was similar to that of the Cherokees’ “going to the river.” The Baptist missionary endeavors centered in the Cherokee Valley Towns, in the vicinity of what is now Murphy, North Carolina.

The Cherokees perhaps held the Moravians in higher esteem than any other white group that worked among them. The Moravians exhibited wisdom in dealing with the Indians. However, they were so non-aggressive in their efforts to win converts that the great body

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27 Mudge, op. cit.; Walker, op. cit.
28 Walker, op. cit.
of the Cherokee Nation never knew that the Moravians had a mission at Springplace.\textsuperscript{31}

The Methodist approach to the Indians was different from that of the other denominations. According to Nathan Bangs:

So far as the Methodist aboriginal missions are concerned, a different method has been pursued, and so far different results witnessed. Instead of endeavoring first to introduce among them the arts of civilized life, thus gradually preparing the way for their spiritual improvement and salvation, the missionary has marched directly up to the savage heart, adapted his mode of instruction to his condition, and God has in a very signal manner blessed His word to the conversion and salvation of the Indian. This accomplished, he has been easily brought by gentle steps to walk in the path of civilization.\textsuperscript{32}

Methodist missions among the Indians in the south began in January, 1821, when, at the meeting of the South Carolina Conference in Columbia, Bishop William McKendree appointed William Capers as missionary to the Creeks in Alabama.\textsuperscript{33}

Richard Neely bears the distinction of starting Methodist mission work among the Cherokees. Neely was born in Rowan County, North Carolina, January 13, 1802. His parents soon moved with him to Rutherford County (Murfreesboro), Tennessee. On August 20, 1819, young Neely professed religion and joined the Methodist Episcopal Church. He was licensed to exhort in April, 1821, licensed to preach the following September, and admitted on trial into the traveling connection before the year ended.\textsuperscript{34} During his first year in the Tennessee Conference, while serving the Paint Rock Circuit, Huntsville District (Alabama), Neely became friends with Richard Riley. Riley was a mixed blood who lived twelve miles south of Fort Deposit on the Tennessee River about five miles northwest of present-day Guntersville.\textsuperscript{35} In the spring of 1822, Riley invited Neely to preach at his home. Neely and his assistant on the circuit continued to hold services there once a month during the remainder of the conference year. Neely reported in the summer of 1822 that he had "organized a society of thirty-three, all natives, and appointed Brother Riley class leader."\textsuperscript{36} Riley’s place at Creek Path became successively Neely’s Grove, Gunter’s and finally Gunters-
ville. Such was the beginning of Methodist mission work among the Cherokees.

The Tennessee Conference met in Greene County, Tennessee, in October, 1822. In his report to the conference, Neely recommended that a mission be established in the Cherokee Nation and that a missionary be sent to reside in the neighborhood of Riley's home. The conference appointed Andrew Jackson Crawford as missionary. Crawford opened a school for the Indians on December 30, 1822, with an enrollment of twelve children. The number soon rose to twenty-five. Success of the project was assured when a council of the Indians approved it. There was some opposition among the Indians to Crawford's preaching, but with the help of Riley this was removed. A comfortable meetinghouse was erected in which Crawford and other preachers regularly held services. The Lord was in the midst at a quarterly meeting on Sunday, January 18, 1823; a love feast on that occasion proved to be a moving experience as the simple-hearted people spoke with sincerity and power. The mission prospered.

Another work in the Cherokee Nation was launched in 1822 when a layman by the name of Coody living near Ross's Post Office on the main Federal Road from Nashville to Georgia invited two Methodist preachers to hold services in his house. The result was the formation of a Methodist society.

In 1823 the Cherokee mission field was divided. Nicholas D. Scales was appointed to the Upper Mission at Ross's Post Office. At the request of the Cherokees, Richard Neely was again appointed to Creek Path (Riley's) in 1823. Anson West says, "The most advanced pupils in the Nation (Cherokee) were at Lookout" (the Upper Mission).

A very successful camp meeting was held at Riley's beginning July 31, 1823:

All who attended the meeting, and many natives there were, some from sixty miles away, were comfortably bedded. Thirty-one professed to find peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ and twenty-five adults and twenty children were baptized. It was difficult to close the meeting so intense was the interest. A new society was formed at a place within range of the camp ground.

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38 The Holston Conference was not organized until 1824.
39 West, op. cit.
40 American Missionary Register, op. cit.
42 This mission was in Georgia but a few hundred feet from the Tennessee line. Today Chattanooga runs to the state line so that one passes from Chattanooga into Rossville (Ross's Post Office) without knowing it. Both the Missionary Register and Posey erroneously place Ross's Post Office in Tennessee.
43 Starkey, op. cit.
44 West, op. cit.
By the end of 1823, Riley’s had more than 100 members and two Cherokee exhorters named Gunter and Brown.

No doubt camp meetings appealed to the Indians because they could participate wholeheartedly in them. During prayer sessions the entire congregation voiced their petitions aloud.\textsuperscript{46} Since the din in such meetings was terrific, some members of the mission board doubted their spiritual value. But the Indians liked them.\textsuperscript{46} The people were more dismayed when John Ross became a Methodist while his wife, Quatie, stood with the conservative Moravians.\textsuperscript{47}

In 1824 a new circuit called Gunter’s was formed in the Tennessee Conference. Richard Neely was appointed once more to the Lower Mission and Nicholas D. Scales to the Upper Mission at Ross’s Post Office. Isaac W. Sullivan was assigned to the Middle Station.\textsuperscript{48}

The missionaries gave attention to the schools during the week and preached on Sunday. They received some assistance from natives who traveled the circuits with them. The Indian helpers served as interpreters, and also won converts by singing, praying and exhorting in the Cherokee language.

The Holston Conference was organized in 1824.\textsuperscript{49} On November 28, the third day of its first session, this conference adopted a resolution to set up a committee to determine the amount of money necessary for the support of the missionary or missionaries who might be appointed to the Upper Cherokee Mission at Coody’s (Ross’s Post Office). Thus the Holston Conference was prompt to consider its responsibility for missions to the Indians. The conference minutes for the 1825 session record “Cherokee Mission to be supplied.” It may have been that funds were lacking to carry on the mission work. However, the matter of mission work does not appear in the minutes of Holston Conference until the Tennessee Conference turned over the work to Holston in 1834. At that time the great body of Indian members of the Methodist missions outside the bounds of Holston Conference emigrated west, and those remaining within Holston Conference were turned over to that Conference by the Tennessee Conference.\textsuperscript{50}

The Tennessee Conference appointed Richard Neely to form the Wills Valley Circuit in 1824.\textsuperscript{51} The bounds of Neely’s operation

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{46} Starkey, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Tennessee Conference Minutes.
\textsuperscript{50} Bureau American Ethnology, Nineteenth Report, op. cit.; Holston Conference, Original Minutes, 3 vols., Archives of Holston Conference, Emory and Henry College, Emory, Va., Vol. I, 1824-1836; M’Ferrin, op. cit.; West, op. cit.
\end{footnotesize}
were: A line from Chickasaw Island in the Tennessee River to the
junction of the Coosa River with Wills Creek; thence along the
Coosa River to the junction of the Etowah and Oostanaula Rivers;
thence to the point of Lookout Mountain (Chattanooga); and thence
along the Tennessee River to the starting point at Chickasaw Is-
land. 52

Neely preached anywhere he could gather a congregation in the bounds of
that territory. Anywhere he was at home, and the spot where night overtook
him in the journey was his bed. He was for Christ's sake a rover among
savages, for Christ's sake he adopted the style of life peculiar to that wild
tribe, and for Christ's sake he accepted the people as his people. He married
one of the natives, a Miss McNair, a woman of education. 53

The 1825-1826 minutes of the Tennessee Conference show three
appointments to the Cherokee Mission: Newtown, Francis Owen;
Gunter's, Ambrose F. Driskell, and Wills Valley Circuit, Richard
Neely. Newtown was New Echota near the present Calhoun, Geor-
gia. Coody's at Ross's Post Office was one of the points on the Wills
Valley Circuit. Because of ill health, Richard Neely was superan-
nuated in November 1827. He died at twenty-six years of age of
tuberculosis in February 1828. Anson West paid Neely this tribute:
"The name of Richard Neely will live as long as self denial is prac-
ticed, philanthropy is appreciated, and the history of the gospel
among the aborigines of Alabama is preserved." 54

In 1826 the Tennessee Conference gave Turtle Fields, a full-
blooded Cherokee, an appointment. He was the first Cherokee
Indian to be received into the Methodist itinerancy. 55 The next year
The Boot, who after his baptism took the name of John Fletcher
(and was usually called John Fletcher Boot), was admitted on trial.

In 1827 the Cherokee missions had seven stations and a number
of preachers, among them John B. M'Ferrin. James J. Trott was ap-
pointed to Wills Valley Circuit, and Turtle Fields was assigned to
travel and preach in the Nation under the supervision of William
McMahon. A letter from McMahon published in the Methodist Maga-
zine in 1828 reported:

I have held five quarterly meetings in the Nation in the last year. Schools
under our care have generally prospered. There has been an addition of 225
members to the societies this year, total 675 members, three circuits, four
schools which are stations with three or four societies attached to them.
Several of the converted natives are licensed exhorters and preachers who
declare the truth in Christ Jesus to their red brethren in the native tongue.
Three of the quarterly meetings were also campmeetings. I have taken one
of Turtle Fields' sons to educate for the same purposes and for all their
support I have to beg my way. Could you send us some clothing, books, or
anything for their support? It would be thankfully received.56

\[52 \text{Methodist Episcopal Church Minutes, op. cit.} \\
53 \text{West, op. cit.} \\
54 \text{Ibid.} \\
55 \text{Tennessee Conference Minutes.} \\
56 \text{Methodist Magazine, The, Vol. XI, Edited and Published by The Methodist Book Concern, New York, N. Y., 1828.} \]
Turtle Fields formed regular circuits, divided the converts into classes, and administered the ordinances. He was distinguished for his piety and devotion to the mission.\textsuperscript{57} The missionary work had a salutary effect upon the general habits and manners of the Indians. They laid aside the chase, cultivated their lands, attended to domestic duties, established laws for wholesome government, and as a result, good order and religion prevailed.

In 1829, the Tennessee Conference had seven appointments to the Cherokee Missions: Wills Valley, John B. M’Ferrin; Coosewattee, Turtle Fields; M’Wesley and Asbury, D. C. McLeod; Chattooga, Greenberry Garrett; Salakowa, Nicholas D. Scales; Neely’s Grove, Allen F. Scruggs; and Conesauga, Thomas J. Elliott. In addition, James J. Trott was appointed general missionary to travel through the Nation.

The 1833 Tennessee Conference Minutes report a school in operation in Bradley County, Tennessee, near the Indian Agency (now Charleston) north of Chatata Creek. Chatata in Cherokee (pronounced with the first two a’s long like the a in ate, and the last a short, almost like the short i in it, with the accent on the first syllable) means “clear water.” The Methodists were probably at Chatata as early as 1830. Later a combined church and school was erected there. Under the name of Tasso this church continues today.

While the mission schools established by the Methodist Episcopal Church among the Cherokees were primarily for the Indians, some white children also enrolled in them. Mary Rowles, a granddaughter of William P. Rowles, who was assigned to the Chatata School in 1833, preserved a needlework sampler made by her aunt in the Chatata school.\textsuperscript{58}

Some later incidents connected with Chatata are of passing interest. Soon after the Civil War, W. W. Pyott started revival services at Chatata which lasted a month. Interest grew and a brush arbor was built to accommodate the crowd. Forty-two pupils and two teachers were at the mourners’ bench at the same time. Thomas L. Bryan commented, “They hooked a lot of our cane, apples and turnips on their way home, but they had a big meeting!”\textsuperscript{59}

The first organ brought into the church provoked heated discussion. Billy Patterson and Frank Hays would leave the church if an organ was used in the services. A compromise was worked out

\textsuperscript{57}Methodist Episcopal Church Minutes, op. cit.


whereby the instrument was played at Sunday School but not during church service! During this altercation it was reported that they even had a fiddle in one of the Nashville churches!

It is said that James Atkins, later bishop, may have preached his first sermon at Chatata. Other preachers also began their ministry there, among them Junior Starr, whose education was limited. It is claimed that in preaching to the Negroes of the community, Starr took his text from First Peter 4:18, but altered it to make it read, "If the white man scarcely be saved, where shall the poor Negro appear?"

Bishop William McKendree made a tour of the Cherokee Nation in 1828. He estimated that at the time there were 15,000 Cherokees. Three Methodist circuits, claiming 700 members, covered half of the Cherokee territory.

In 1828 Chief John Ross was converted under the preaching of John B. M'Ferrin and joined the Methodist Episcopal Church. During the Civil War, when the Battle Above the Clouds was raging on Lookout Mountain, M'Ferrin, who was then serving as a chaplain in the Confederate Army, told a companion in arms about the conversion of Chief Ross.60

In 1830 there were eleven missions among the Cherokees. Spear, The Boot, Bird, Graves, Turtle Fields and McIntosh were listed as interpreters. There were seventeen missionaries including the interpreters. Francis Owen was superintendent of the work. This was the peak year of the Tennessee Conference's mission work among the Indians. Some 1,028 Cherokees were enrolled in the missions. Many of the young Indians manifested a thirst for learning and sought places in the schools taught by the missionaries.61

The Tennessee Conference continued the mission work among the Cherokees until 1834 when all of it within the bounds of Holston Conference was turned over to that conference.62 At that time the missions listed 508 Indians and 17 Negro members.

By this time some of the Cherokees had become wealthy citizens; they owned horses, cattle, sheep, swine, saw mills, grist mills, and upwards of 500 Negro slaves. Intermarriage with the whites brought in the use of the English language and the white man's customs. The children of mixed marriages were often given a good education. Sequoyah's eighty-six character syllabary brought enlightenment to the Cherokees in their own language. This table of syllables was developed in 1826 by a half-breed who had little or no formal education.

The Cherokee Phoenix for May 21, 1828, carried an account of a wedding. The item was written by Waterhunter, a Christian Indian

60 M'Ferrin, op. cit.
61 West, op. cit.
62 Holston Conference Original Minutes, op. cit.
who was a reporter for the *Phoenix*. He also served as interpreter at the wedding:

The bride is a quarter white, possesses a fine figure, somewhat tall, beautiful complexion, with dark hair and eyes: her features bear the evidence of amiability and good nature and altogether she is an interesting woman. She is a member of the Methodist Church. The bridegroom, a cousin of mine, is a full-blooded Indian of Aboriginal deep copper complexion, low in stature, fine figure, but does not possess a handsome face, though depicted upon it are the marks of honesty, fidelity and good nature. He was dressed in a clean northern domestic suit and his bride in white cambric.

The principal chief of the Cherokee Nation was John Ross. About 1827 he moved from his home at Ross’s Post Office, having sold his ancestral home to Nicholas D. Scales, the Methodist minister who had married Ross’s niece. Then Ross built at the “head of Coosa” near the present site of Rome, Georgia. Today the Ross House at Rossville, Georgia (Ross’s Post Office) sitting on the state line alongside Chattanooga, is a restored shrine, the property of the Ross House Association. Ross’s house on the beautiful Coosa at the junction of the Etowah and Oostanaula Rivers, was comparable to the dwellings owned and occupied by men of ample fortunes and enlightened habits. His house was surrounded by well cultivated fields. He owned and made use of a well selected library.

Chief Ross was a zealous member of and a leader and worker in the Methodist Episcopal Church, and his home became a center of worship. In 1830 a United States Government officer with a small party of American soldiers came to the Cherokee country because some white men had intruded upon the Nation’s territory. The officer and the soldiers called upon Chief Ross, arriving on

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63 The *Cherokee Phoenix* was a weekly newspaper printed in English and Cherokee (using Sequoyah characters cast in Boston) at New Echota (Newtown), Georgia. It was issued from February 21, 1828 to May 31, 1834 (when suppressed by the U. S. Government). In addition to the weekly, during that period many books came off the press. Complete files are extant as follows: State Archives, Oklahoma City, Okla.; Boston Antheneum, Boston, Mass. (library of an antiquities society in existence when the *Phoenix* was current); Univ. of Tennessee Library, Knoxville, Tenn.; The British Museum, London. Two copies are in the library of the Methodist Publishing House, Nashville, Tenn. (first and last issues); Mrs. Penelope Johnson Allen has one copy, June 25, 1828. The account of the wedding was taken from notes made at the State Archives, Oklahoma City, by Mrs. Allen.


Sunday. Chief Ross invited them to attend religious services as his guest. The officer wrote the following account of the worship service:

There were present about fifty Indians, who were dressed much after the manner of white people, and in garments of their own manufacture. There were at and participating in that service two regularly ordained preachers of the Methodist Episcopal Church, one a full blood Indian and the other one-fourth white. The service was conducted in the Cherokee language according to the order of service used by the Methodist Episcopal Church. The hymns sung by the congregation were in the Cherokee language, having been translated from the English. Hymn books printed in Cherokee were used and nearly all the congregation participated in the singing. The Scriptures were read, a sermon preached, and exhortations were delivered after the style of the Methodists of the time. The congregation was orderly, attentive and devout. Christ was owned in the wilds of the Cherokee Nation, and worshiped in the tongue of the savage tribe, and the wilderness and the solitary place was made glad.

Anson West gives an account of a meeting held at Chatooga (LaFayette, Walker County, Georgia) in 1830. He says that two women, one near seventy and the other approaching ninety, joined the church. A man named Bonecracker was changed in heart and united with the church, thus producing wide and sweeping sensation.

After 1830 the number of Methodist members in the Cherokee missions steadily decreased. The Wills Valley Circuit continued to be the first and strongest work in the Nation.

During this period the white Methodists dwelling in north Georgia had come mainly from southern Georgia and South Carolina. In 1828 the Georgia Conference sent Nathaniel Rhodes into Habersham County which bordered on the Cherokee Nation. The fertile and alluring valleys which belonged to the Indians were already being settled by the more adventurous pioneers who managed to enter the Nation, clear land, establish homesteads, and plant crops. Nathaniel Rhodes crossed into the Nation and "joined hands" with the preachers from the Tennessee Conference who were holding a camp meeting among the Indians.

At the 1834-1835 session of Holston Conference, the territory north of the Blue Ridge was formed into circuits and designated as the Newtown District, with Thomas Stringfield as the presiding elder. This is the first time that the Newtown District appears in the Holston Minutes. The counties in the new district were in the Cherokee Nation.

The Georgia Conference met in Savannah, January 7, 1835, Bishop James O. Andrew presiding, and also formed a new district,
the Cherokee District, which swept entirely across the territory from Habersham County to Vann’s Valley, and from the northern boundaries of Carroll and Henry Counties (these counties lie south of present day Atlanta) as far north as Chatooga. The area within this district became Murray, Gordon, Whitfield, and Walker Counties. Isaac Boring was appointed presiding elder of the new district. A year later the conference minutes indicate that there were 3,666 members of the Methodist Church in this district.

There was an overlapping of conference authority in the region due to the efforts of both the Georgia and the Holston Conferences in order to minister to the white Methodists who moved into the Cherokee territory. The white Methodists were entering northern Georgia as fast as pioneer huts could be built and Methodist societies could be organized. Holston Conference maintained its Newtown District, and in 1835 reported missions at Chatooga, Springplace, Newtown, Ellijay, Hiwassee, Valley Town, Koontown, and Oothcalooga. A year later the conference minutes showed 752 Cherokees in the missions in upper Georgia and East Tennessee. By 1839 the number of assignments in the Newtown District had dropped to Cleveland Circuit, LaFayette (the old Chatooga) and Springplace, and these of course were now for white people. The removal of the Cherokees west of the Mississippi had taken place.

Since the missionaries wielded strong influence over the Indians, the people of Georgia became embittered toward them as well as toward the Indians. Georgia enacted laws against the missionaries. The missionaries refused to leave and on September 15, 1831, two of them, S. A. Worcester, one of the principals in founding the Cherokee Phoenix, and Elizur Butler, were convicted and sentenced to hard labor in the Georgia penitentiary. James J. Trott, who had ridden the Wills Valley Circuit in 1827, was arrested at the same time, beaten and thrown into prison. Dixon McLeod was arrested but later he escaped and calmly resumed his work of preaching the gospel of peace to the Red Men.

Chief John Ross left his home at Head of Coosa and went to Red Clay, Tennessee, the old Council Grounds of the Cherokee Nation. Ross, along with John Howard Payne, the author and composer of the internationally known song Home Sweet Home, who was seeking material on Indian lore and history for a book he planned to write, was captured. Both men were taken from Red Clay and imprisoned in the Vann House at Springplace for twelve days. James Vann was the one among the group of Cherokees who requested the Moravians to conduct a school at his home at Spring-

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72 At the Holston Conference held at Reems Camp Ground, Oct. 8, 1844, the north Georgia part of Holston was given to the North Georgia Conference. On Jan. 18, 1845, this territory was formally accepted by that conference.

73 Govan, op. cit.; Walker, op. cit.

74 Govan, op. cit.
place, in 1799. The Vann house where Ross and Payne were imprisoned was that of James Vann's son, "Rich Joe Vann," who had been a pupil in the Moravian school at Springplace. This house has been restored and is today the property of the Georgia Historical Society.

By formal treaty the Cherokees were recognized as a nation. By treaty they were under the protection of the United States Government and were supposed to be secure in the possession of their land against the intrusion of any white people. Fortified in this knowledge, the Cherokees resisted the encroachment of the State of Georgia. The United States Government undertook to restrain the state authorities, but Georgia defied the federal government. The people of Georgia were determined to get rid of the Indians, and President Jackson acquiesced.

Mrs. Allen contributes the following:

At the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in the Tallapoosa River, out from Anniston, Alabama, during the first big battle of the war led by Andrew Jackson against the Creek Indians, Col. Gideon Morgan was there. Morgan had Joseph Vann, Charles Reece and Chief Junaluska bring over the boat which saved Jackson's life by allowing him to escape. All three of the men swam over to bring the boat back and for their act each received a silver sword. Later when the Indians were in difficulty with Georgia and Jackson would not restrain them, Junaluska said if he had known that day at Horseshoe Bend what Jackson's attitude would be he would have killed him.

President Jackson appointed Rev. J. F. Schermerhorn to negotiate a treaty with the Ridge faction of the Cherokees since it was evident that an agreement with John Ross and his following was impossible. On December 29, 1835, at a meeting at New Echota attended by less than 500 of the more than 16,000 Cherokee population, the Removal Treaty of New Echota was signed by twenty Cherokees. These men did not favor the treaty but they had become wearied, disgusted and frustrated by the constant annoyance of the white people. Not one of the twenty was an official of the Cherokee Nation. The most prominent of the twenty were Major Ridge and Elias Boudinot, Editor of the Cherokee Phoenix. Neither Chief John Ross nor any official of the Cherokee Nation was present at the meeting. Both Ridge and Boudinot were executed as traitors after the removal to the west.

By the terms of the New Echota Treaty the Cherokee Nation ceded all of its lands lying east of the Mississippi River in consideration of five million dollars and a joint interest in the country then occupied by the Cherokees who had already moved west.75

When the troops of the United States sent by the President to the borders of the Cherokee Nation in Georgia were withdrawn,

75 Walker, op. cit.; Govan, op. cit.
the troops of the State of Georgia took their place. Then persecutions began. The white people cast lots for the houses and land of the Indians. They took their cattle, horses, hogs, provisions, produce of the fields, household furnishings . . . everything except their clothing. Resistance often resulted in bodily abuse. One man saw his wife dragged by a rope around her neck. Old women unable to walk fast were prodded with bayonets.

General Winfield Scott was appointed by the United States Government to enforce the expulsion. He established his headquarters at New Echota (near Calhoun, Georgia) with a force of 7,000 soldiers.

When nearly 17,000 Cherokees had been gathered into the various stockades, the work of removal began. Early in June several parties, aggregating about 5,000 persons, were brought down by troops to the old Agency on the Hiwassee at the present Calhoun, Tennessee, on the Hiwassee River (or Charleston where the river separates the two towns); Ross's Landing (now Chattanooga) and Guntersville, Alabama. Mrs. Allen says they were also assembled at Belle Fonte (now Scottsboro, Alabama). At these points they were placed on steamers and transported down the Tennessee and Ohio Rivers to the far side of the Mississippi, where the journey was continued by land to the Indian Territory . . . now Oklahoma. At that time 13,000 Cherokees began the "Trail of Tears" from Rattlesnake Springs alone, near Chatata. The last group departed on December 4, 1838. Altogether more than 4,000 died on the way west, among them Quatie (translated Elizabeth) Ross, the wife of Chief John Ross.

Mrs. Lulie Pitts says, "The removal was accomplished in 1838 amid scenes that rival in pathos the story of the Arcadians, and furnish material for the darkest chapter in the annals of Georgia and the National Government."

There had been much to forgive and much to forget. The Southwestern Christian Advocate (Nashville), July 20, 1839, reported as follows:

The Cherokee Mission within the bounds of the Holston Conference has been much disturbed by the removal of the Indians west of the Mississippi River. When collected in their camps for their removal, there were found 480 members of the church, forty of whom were expected to remain attached to the Waynesville Circuit. Though after they were encamped, they suffered much from sickness, yet the Christian party generally remained faithful. Two native preachers by the names of Campbell and Weelooker, were with them discharging their duties preaching, visiting the sick and finally went

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77 Starr, op. cit. The author has seen Quatie's grave in Mount Holly Cemetery in Little Rock, Arkansas, where it was moved from nearby after the establishment of Mount Holly.
78 Pitts, Lulie, History of Gordon County, Georgia, Georgia Press of the Calhoun Times, Calhoun, Georgia, 1933.
with them to their home west of the Mississippi. Their missionary, D. B. Cuming, having been transferred to the Arkansas Conference goes with them to their future home, determined to devote himself to their present and eternal welfare.\(^\text{79}\)

The converted Indians continued steadfast;\(^\text{80}\) "They were determined to carry their religion with them as their only solace in trouble and preparation for a better country that could not be taken away from them. Amid tears and suffering they bowed themselves before God as they committed themselves to the inevitable."

A news item in the *Southwestern Christian Advocate*, February 8, 1840, indicates that at least some of the Indians were held in esteem by white friends:

Mr. John Ross, the Cherokee Chief, and Messrs. Lewis Ross and Joseph Gunter, Members of the Council in the same Nation, passed through this city a few days ago on their way to Washington as a delegation to close matters between the Government of the United States and the Cherokees. They are spoken of as noble, generous, and intelligent men, an honor to the Nation. They represent, and are well calculated to guard and direct the interests of their people. In company with them were a son and a nephew of Mr. Ross and two sons of Mr. Gunter, whom they were about to place in the classical school under the care of Messrs. H. and S. M. Hamill, at Lawrenceville, New Jersey, designing to have them fitted for college.\(^\text{81}\)

And so the Methodist mission work among the Cherokees in the Tennessee and Holston Conferences came to an end. Henry T. Malone ventures the assertion that the Methodist mission work was more widespread and that it won more converts than the missionary endeavors of any other denomination. Indeed he declares that the Methodists made more converts among the Indians than all the other denominations together.\(^\text{82}\)

"Never did the religious life of the faithful Cherokees shine more brilliantly than at the time of their departure."\(^\text{83}\) The work begun in the land of their fathers was transferred to their western home, and it still goes on. "The redeemed of the Lord shall come from every land, and so they come from the land of the Cherokees."\(^\text{84}\)

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\(^\text{79}\) *Southwestern Christian Advocate*, Nashville, Tenn., Thomas Stringfield and John Wesley Hamner, Editors, June 22, 1839, July 20, 1839, Feb. 8, 1840.

\(^\text{80}\) Smith, op. cit., p. 390.

\(^\text{81}\) *Southwestern Christian Advocate*, op. cit.

\(^\text{82}\) Malone, op. cit.; Williams, Early Travels, op. cit.


\(^\text{84}\) West, op. cit.