

Continued from page 6

Chapter Two - The Birth and Growth of the Keetoowah Society

Lodge), that there were also members of the Ross Party who belonged to these so-called "Blue Lodges." It appears that there was a split within the Freemasonic lodges within Indian Territory along the lines of party affiliation related to the efforts of the Grand Lodge of Arkansas to use the lodges to promote the issue of "Southern Rights." [107] Some members of the lodges were opposed to the efforts of the Grand Lodge as revealed in a later discussion by Lodge historian T. L. Ballenger:

There seems to have developed some misunderstanding between the mother Lodge and Cherokee Lodge at that time, the exact nature of which the records fail to reveal: possibly it was a coolness that had grown out of different attitudes toward the war. The Cherokees were divided, some of them fighting for the North and some for the South. It happened that the leading members of the Lodge sympathized with the North. [108]

Other records indicate that a John B. Jones, was a prominent member of the Freemasonic order in the Indian Territory following the Civil War; he could have also been a member during the ante-bellum period. [109]

As a result of the split within the lodges within Indian Territory or perhaps precipitating the split, some of the members of the "Blue Lodges" became associated with a secessionist secret society by the name of the "Knights of the Golden Circle"; [110] this was the "sinister plot" that Ross described in a letter to Evan Jones which later historians have assumed to be identical with the "Blue Lodges." The Knights of the Golden Circle was founded in 1854 by George W.L. Bickley for the purposes of "expanding the superior Anglo-American civilization" and extending the slave empire throughout the West Indies, the Southern United States, Central America, and into South America -- hence the name Golden Circle. [111] Closely affiliated with the "No-Nothing" party and later the "Copperheads," Bickley traveled throughout the South establishing "castles" (lodges) and promoting Southern militancy and expansionism. [112]

The leader of the Knights of the Golden Circle was Stand Watie, a Freemason probably affiliated with Federal Lodge #1 in Washington, D.C. Members of the Knights of the Golden Circle included many of the elites of the Cherokee Nation: John Rollin Ridge, Elias Boudinot, William Penn Adair, James Bell, Joseph Scales, and Josiah Washbourne -- all leaders of the Southern Rights party and former "Treaty Party" members. [113] The Constitution of the Knights of the Golden Circle, as recorded on August 28, 1860 states among its provisions:

We, a part of the people of the Cherokee Nation, in order to form a more perfect union and protect ourselves and property against the works of Abolitionists do establish this Constitution for the government of the Knights of the Golden Circle in this Nation...

No person shall become a member of the Knights of the Golden Circle in the Cherokee Nation who is not a pro-slavery man...

The Captain, or in case of his refusal, then the Lieutenant has the power to compell each and every member of their Encampment to turn out and assist in capturing and punishing any and all abolitionists in their minds who are interfering with slavery....

You do solemnly swear that you will keep all the secrets of this order and that you will, to the best of your abilities protect and defend the interests of the Knights of the Golden Circle in this Nation, so help you God. [114]

The leadership of the Northern Baptist Churches of the Cherokee Nation sought a mechanism to respond to the growing militancy of the Cherokees now associated with the Knights of the Golden Circle. [115] At the encouragement of Chief John Ross, the Baptist missionaries Evan and John Jones

approached the native ministers who met with the concerned laypersons of their missions. The people decided that something must be done and scheduled meetings in their churches to decide what path must be taken in order to restore unity to the people and sanity to the Nation. These were the beginnings of the Keetoowah Society. [116]

The Keetoowah Society

The few men who gathered on April 15, 1858, in the chapel of the Peavine Baptist Church in the Goingsnake District of the Cherokee Nation had grave decisions before them, both of a political nature and a personal nature. The rift that was tearing apart not only the Nation and bringing to the surface old tensions best left buried, it was ripping asunder the very churches in which had become the foundation of a new form of collective identity. Furthermore, the very culture which lay at the roots of this collective identity was being challenged by an alien ideology which asserted the rights of the individual over the rights of "the people." In this challenge between old and new, a way to the future had to be found through an understanding of the past.

Among the men gathered in the chapel that evening were Lewis Downing, Budd Gritts, Smith Christie, Thomas Pegg, and James McDaniels, all leaders among the fullblood Northern Baptists; it is likely that Evan Jones and John Jones were present also. A brief biography of these men is as follows:

Lewis Downing (Lewie-za-wau-naskie): Downing was born in Eastern Tennessee in 1823, of British, Irish, and Cherokee heritage. He came west with the party led by Jesse Bushyhead and Evan Jones to settle near the Baptist Mission in the Goingsnake District. He was educated in the Valley Town Mission (West) and the Baptist Mission (Bacone University) under the tutelage of Evan Jones. Downing was unanimously chosen Pastor of Flint Baptist Church succeeding Jesse Bushyhead. He was also chair of the Cherokee Missionary Society.

Budd Gritts: Gritts was a prominent fullblood Baptist minister, author of the first Keetoowah Constitution.

Smith Christie (Gasannee): Christie was a full-blood blacksmith/gunsmith whose shop served as political forum. He was a leader of conservative fullblood politics as well as a native Baptist minister.

Thomas Pegg: Pegg was member of the Grand Council of the Cherokee and a delegate of John Ross to Washington in 1855.

Evan Jones: Jones was born in Brecknockshire, Wales in 1788. [117] Though a communicant in the Church of England, upon coming to America he became a Methodist then a Baptist. He was sent to Valley Town, North Carolina in 1821. Jones was fluent in Cherokee, thus he and Jesse Bushyhead led a delegation to the West in 1838. They established the Baptist Mission in Westville, Indian Territory. Jones was a leading abolitionist and confidant and advisor to Chief John Ross from 1839 to 1866. He was made a member of the Cherokee Nation after being twice expelled by government agents for his dedication to the Cherokee.

John Jones: Jones was the son of Evan Jones and Elizabeth Lanigan. He was born in Valley Town, North Carolina in 1824 and came west with his father in 1838. He graduated from the University of Rochester in 1855 and was ordained to the ministry by a native Cherokee minister. Jones was fluent in Cherokee and served as a translator for his father.

Little did these men know that what they were about to do was to profoundly affect Cherokee history and the history of Indian Territory for the next one hundred years. From the leadership of the Peavine Baptist Church was to come the leadership of the Cherokee Nation through the most troublesome period in Cherokee his-

tory. The mechanism for political action was to become the Keetoowah Society.

Derived from the Cherokee term "Ani-kitu-hwagi" meaning "people of the Kituwah," the name Keetoowah has become synonymous with the conservative fullblood element of the Cherokee Nation. It is believed that the Kituwah settlement is the original settlement of the Cherokee in what is now North America. [118] James Mooney, a cultural anthropologist and among the first to study the Cherokee, as well as Howard Tynes, who wrote the first extended treatment of the Keetoowah, concur that the word is undecipherable from the original Cherokee. [119] Members of the Keetoowah Society believe that a messenger from God came down and gave the name "Ani-kitu-hwagi" to them and that the name bespeaks their special relationship with the divine. [120] Tribal members were forbidden to reveal the meaning of "Ani-kitu-hwagi" and that, in time, many forgot it. David Whitekiller, a Keetoowah didahnvvisgi, prayed for many hours over whether he could reveal the meaning of the word; finally, he translated the word "Ani-kitu-hwagi" to mean "the covered or protected people." [121]

The name Kituwah also refers to an ancient Cherokee settlement formerly on the Tuckasegee River just above the present Bryson City, in Swain County, North Carolina which was one of the "seven mother towns" of the Cherokee. The inhabitants of Kituwah, the "Ani-kitu-hwagi," exercised a controlling influence over all of the towns along the Tuckasegee and Little Tennessee River and the people of this region became known as the Kituwah. Because the Keetoowah were responsible for the protection of the Northern border from the Iroquois and the Algonquian, the name became synonymous with the Cherokee among these people. [122] As early as the 1750's, the "mother town" of Kituwah had a status and independence not granted less ancient settlements; town debates and political actions were kept a "profound secret." [123]

From the very beginning, the mother towns were known as a place of refuge where those fleeing enslavement could run. Christian Pryber, a German Jesuit who was among the first Europeans to live among the Cherokee, described one of these mother towns as "a town at the Foot of the Mountains among the Cherokee, which was to be a City of Refuge for all Criminals, Debtors, and Slaves, who would fly thither from Justice or their Masters." [124] The Kituwah dialect, itself, is described by Tom Hatley in his *The Dividing Path: Cherokees and South Carolinians through the Revolutionary Era* as being the product of multicultural synthesis: "from the beginning the Kituwah dialect was mixed with the English of white Tories, traders, and black refugees." [125] It was also with this most conservative element that the opposition to the enslavement first spread; [126] many fullblood Cherokee having been slaves themselves in the mid-eighteenth century, opposition to slavery ran deep. [127]

Although Kituwah was synonymous with the oldest of the mother towns, the legend of the origins of Kituwah goes much further back in Cherokee history. According to Kituwah legend, the Cherokee people originated from an island somewhere east of South America in the Atlantic Ocean where they were continually plagued by attacks from neighboring peoples. However, in spite of the fact they were heavily outnumbered, the Cherokee were victorious in their struggles; one enemy saw in the plume of smoke from the Cherokee encampment an eagle bearing arrows in its claws and thus became convinced that the Cherokee were the divine's chosen people. The assault was halted and the enemy withdrew. [128] According to the same legend, the Breathgiver did indeed grant the Cherokee unlimited and mysterious special powers; their wisemen were accorded a special status as those who could interpret and report upon the Breath-giver's wishes.

[129]

As time passed, this ancient and mysterious clan of wisemen became known as the Ani-Kutani; the Ani-Kutani totally controlled the religious functions of the Nation because of their mysterious powers and control over the forces of nature. At this point, the Ani-Kutani were known as a clan, as opposed to a society, because their power and position were hereditary. [130] As the powers granted to the Ani-Kutani were granted by special dispensation from the divine Breathgiver, the powers were to be used only for the best interests of the people. [131]

As power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely. The Ani-Kutani became selfish and began to use their powers in ways other than that which God had intended. One legend tells that one of the Ani-Kutani used his magical powers to seduce the wife of a young warrior while the warrior was away on a raid; when the warrior returned and discovered what had taken place, he led the warriors and the people in an uprising in which all of the Ani-Kutani were slain. [132] Another story tells of the corruption of the Ani-Kutani due to the abuses of power, but relates that the people entered into cycles of prayer to beseech the Breathgiver to deliver them from their collective malady. However, as the people had fallen from grace, the divine Breathgiver refused to acknowledge their invocation. [133]

It was revealed to one of the didahnvvisgi that they were to go to the top of a high mountain where they were to fast and pray for the deliverance of their people; each day for seven days a different didahnvvisgi from each of the seven clans joined the others on the mountain. [134] On the seventh day when all of the clans were represented, the medicine men heard a loud noise followed by a bright light and a voice spoke to them saying:

I am a messenger from the Great Spirit. He has heard your prayers and has great passion for your people. Go back to your fires and worship, there is a white ball coming from the East who is your enemy and your grandchildren's feet are directed West. You must prepare to leave and the Great Spirit will direct your footsteps. Hereafter, you will be known as the KEETOOWAHS. [135]

The didahnvvisgi returned to their respective clans and reported the message that God had given them, but only the true believers followed their instructions and made preparations to leave their fellows to follow the will of the Great Spirit. The small band set forth from their island and proceeded West. As they turned to take one last look at their homeland, the island sank into the ocean taking with it the remainder of their people and the last vestiges of their ancient civilization. The survivors traveled West through Meso-America and up the Atlantic Coast and settled among the Iroquois; in the winters the Keetoowah migrated South into the Carolinas and Georgia and returned each Spring. Eventually, the Keetoowah settled permanently in the Carolinas and Georgia and made this area their permanent home until the coming of the Europeans in the eighteenth century. [136]

A critical element in the above story is the existence of what is called "the Kituwah Spirit." The presence of divine power among God's chosen people, the Keetoowah, is a gift provided that the power is used only to the benefit of the collective body and not for purely personal or selfish ends. It is this sense of identity tied to a bond of collective responsibility that is the key factor in the above myths of the origins the Keetoowah. It was this "strong band of comradeship" which was a central element in the belief system of the Keetoowah Society and in its focus upon national/spiritual identity and the preservation of cultural integrity. [137]

J.R. Carselowey, a member of the Keetoowah Society quoted by T.L. Ballenger, stated that the purpose of

the Keetoowah Society was the "perpetuation of the full-blood race" and that the Society was to stand for unity and brotherly love among the Cherokee and, in every way possible, to work for the best interests of the tribe as a whole. [138] For the Keetoowah, from time immemorial, the Great Spirit and national patriotism seemed to be synonymous terms. The "Kituwah Spirit" stood for the autonomy of the Cherokee race -- a religious nationalism that sought to keep the Nation pure from within and free from outside influences and their ultimate control of the Cherokee destiny. [139]

So when these men sat down on April 15, 1858 in Peavine Baptist Church to formerly articulate the aims and the purposes of what was to become the Keetoowah Society, these were their pressing concerns:

On April 15, 1868, a small number of the leading members of the Keetoowahs got together and discussed the affairs of the Cherokees, the purpose and objectives for which they had always stood. They discussed what the final result probably would be caused by the existing state of affairs in the United States. The people of the United States were divided and it was clear they were about to fight. The Cherokees were situated too far in the South and the men were becoming reckless and seemed to be taking sides with the South, but the leading cause was those who owned Negro slaves. It was plain to be seen that Cherokee people without a full understanding were taking sides with the South. It was plain that the teachers for the North were being objected to and were being forced out of the Cherokee Nation. They believed that if the Missionaries were gone all of the Cherokee people would go to the side of the South, but they were mistaken. These matters were already understood by the Keetoowahs, and the Keetoowahs felt what the final result would be. They knew the relative members of the several states. It seemed certain that the states of the South were entering into a conspiracy to abandon the union of states to set up a separate government. Keetoowahs had already studied their means of defense and knew the business followed by them.

We had already studied all about them; we decided best to affiliate with the North. I was then and there appointed to devise some plan that would be best for the Cherokee people and would place us in control of the Cherokee government. We fixed for the next meeting April 20, 1858. On that day I submitted my report or draft of a paper I had written. Also I made some remarks of explanation, all of which was in the dark of night and in the woods. The report was approved and declared to be law.

We felt confident it would be acceptable to the Cherokee people and we informed them and it was accepted all over the Cherokee nation by confidential lodges. [140]

The Nation was divided and the institutions which guided the course of the Nation were equally divided. The Baptist churches which had become a point of cohesion and an institution which promoted a sense of community and fellowship among the fullbloods had been split by the issue

of slavery and the larger denominational fracture over the issue. The schools had become increasingly segregated as those who read and spoke in the native Cherokee were isolated within a process of socialization which promoted assimilation. The government had become further dominated by the mixed bloods and continued to act in the interests of those slaveholders and large scale agriculturists who were moving Cherokee society away from its traditional culture. Even the Freemasonic lodges which had been actively encouraging a spirit of brotherhood, citizenship, and collective responsibility found themselves ruptured to the point that it would take decades for them to be restored to their original position in society. [141]

Reverend Budd Gritts and Reverend Lewis Downing, and the senior leadership of the Peavine Church, considered the options and came to the conclusion that only a return of the "Kituwah Spirit" could resolve this national crisis. In Chapter One of the Constitution of the Keetoowah Society as approved on April 29, 1859, they articulated the problem and the solution:

As lovers of the government of the Cherokees, loyal members of Keetoowah Society, in the name of the mass of the people, we began to study and investigate the way our nation was going on, so much different from the long past history of our Keetoowah forefathers who loved and lived as free people and had never surrendered to anybody: They loved one another for they were just like one family, just as if they had been raised from one family. They all came as a unit to their fire to smoke, to aid one another and to protect their government with what little powder and lead they had to use in protecting it.

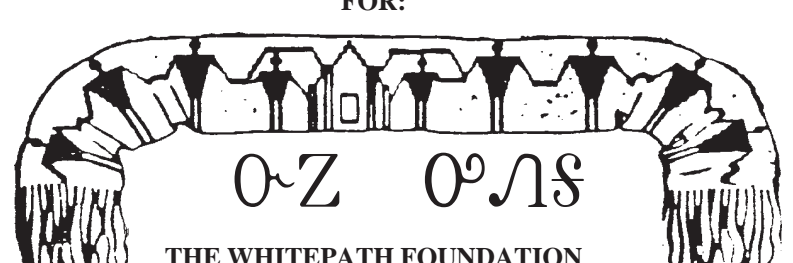
Now let us Cherokees study the condition of our government. We are separated into two parts and cannot agree and they have taken lead of us. It is clear to see that the Federal Government has two political parties, North and South. South are the people who took our lands away from us which lands the Creator had given to us, where our forefathers were raised. Their greed was the worst kind; they had no love and they are still following us to put their feet on us to get the last land we have. It is plain that they have come in on us secretly, different organizations are with them and they have agreed to help one another in everything. They control our political offices because our masses of the people are not organized.

We therefore now declare and bind ourselves together the same as under our oaths to abide by our laws and assist one another. There must be a confidential captain and lodges in numerous places and confidential meetings, the time and place to be designated by the captains. But we shall continue on making more laws. If any member divulges any secret to any other organization it shall be considered that he gave up thereby his life. But every time they meet they must fully explain what their society stands for. They must have a membership roll in order to reorganize one another.

Continued in next month issue

**Cherokee Translation courtesy of
THE WHITEPATH FOUNDATION**

The HIV / AIDS information booklet was translated into the Cherokee language by Mary L. Summerfield. Compiled by Marvin Summerfield. FOR:



**THE WHITEPATH FOUNDATION
P.O. BOX 487
BLACKWELL, OK. 74631-0487
www.whitepath.org
write or call 1-580-363-5438**

**Send in your tax deductible donation to help provide this important information to over 10,000 Cherokees that still only read /write in our Cherokee language.
Copyright © 1992-2005 The Whitepath Foundation**

Advertise in the Cherokee Observer helps us keep our Cherokee Language alive for our Great Grand Children. Call today - 1-580-363-5438 or Email: editors@cherokeeobserver.org