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KEETOOWAH PROPHECY

Where we have been and where we are going

Organizer of the American Board. In 1822 Sequoyah visited the KEETOOWAH people to teach them the knowledge of his great invention. The invention of the alphabet or (commonly known as the Syllabaries) it had an immediate and wonderful effect on the KEETOOWAH people's development. Sequoyah is the only man in history to invent a written language single handily. This remarkable man never attended school and in all his life never earned to speak, read, or write the English language. On account of the remarkable adaptation of the Syllabary to the KEETOOWAH/Cherokee language, it was only necessary to learn the characters to be able to read at once. There were no schoolhouses or teachers, however the whole tribe were able to read and write in their own language. Sequoyah took up permanent residence with the KEETOOWAH people living somewhere in the area between present-day Scottsville and Russellville. By the Treaty of 1828 the KEETOOWAH people were forced to exchange their lands in Arkansas for lands in Oklahoma. The KEETOOWAHS moved to Indian Territory in Oklahoma ten years prior to the forced removal (commonly known as the "Trail of Tears") of the Cherokee Nation. The KEETOOWAH people had a great part in shaping this western part of Arkansas. The KEETOOWAHS went on to adopted a written constitution in 1828. During the Civil War the KEETOOWAHS sided with the Union. They fought against the mixed blood Cherokees who sided with the confederates. The word "KEETOOWAH" is the name which my people have always called themselves. The word "Cherokee" has no meaning in the language of my people. It is derived from a Muscogean Language and its meaning is the "inhabitant of the cave country." The word "KEETOOWAH" means "PRINCIPAL PEOPLE." **The Legend and The Prophecy.** The following legend of the KEETOOWAH people, which dates back to the beginning of time, has been passed orally by each generation. Upon the creation of the KEETOOWAH people, the Creator gave them mysterious powers and placed them in large settlement on an island located in the Atlantic Ocean. There were other tribes on the island which attacked the KEETOOWAH people, and the KEETOOWAHS were victorious. Another tribe watched the fierce fighting from a mountain top. The leader of the tribe watched the valley ascend toward the Heaven. The smoke divided into three paths midway in the ascension an eagle was seen holding three arrows in its claws. The leader asked his warriors if the smoke and eagle were visible to them and they replied they were. The tribal leader then told his warriors not to attack the KEETOOWAH people because they were the Creators people and they were very powerful. The tribe came

down from the mountain and made friends with the KEETOOWAH people. In later years, some of the medicine men of the tribe became selfish and used their powers to harm their own people. The Creator gave the powers to the medicine men to be used in the best interest of all the people. Other tribal members prayed to the Creator for direction and the Creator heard their prayers. The instruction was to move their fire away from the island and the medicine men. After the departure, the island sank into the ocean. The people migrated north and settled in the southeastern part of what is now the United States. Many years later, again the medicine men became selfish and committed crimes against their own tribal members. The people gathered to discuss the solution to this problem and it was decided that seven medicine men, one from each of the seven clans, would travel to a mountain top and pray. The seven medicine men went up to the mountain top and prayed. Soon a messenger from the Creator appeared and told them the Creator had heard their prayers and had great sympathy for them. The messenger told the medicine men their tribe would be called "KEETOOWAH" from that day forward. The messenger revealed to them that a "white ball" would arrive from the east which would be an enemy to the people. The grandchildren of the KEETOOWAHS would point their feet to the west and great hardship would be placed upon them at the edge of the prairie. Their blood and families would be divided and the enemy would not respect the KEETOOWAH people. The messenger revealed that a young leader would lead the KEETOOWAH people back to the east. However, if the KEETOOWAH people chose not to follow the Creator's direction, they would continue further west to a sea of water and disappear forever. The Creator said, "If the KEETOOWAH people are destroyed or become extinct, then the end of the world will follow." The move back to east: The UNITED KEETOOWAH BAND OF CHEROKEES are the only landless tribe in this country. This recognition is based on Congressional legislation, Bureau of Indian Affairs policies and the Federal Courts rulings made over the past several years. They have all ruled the KEETOOWAHS do not have a land base or a jurisdictions area. The only alternative the KEETOOWAH'S had was to move away from Oklahoma. This is what prompted the KEETOOWAHS to request the BIA to approve the UKB to establish a land base outside of Oklahoma and back to the east in Arkansas. The BIA central office in Washington DC gave approval on June 23, 1994 to establish a land base outside of Oklahoma into Arkansas. The KEETOOWAHS now have established a land base and also an office in Waldron, Arkansas. Now, based on what you have heard, is the move back to the east purely by accident, or is this according to the prophecy? That concludes my presentation. I want to thank everyone for being here today and giving me the honor of speaking to you. THANK YOU.

The Descendants of Freedmen and their supporters will hold their next meeting at 2:00 p.m. at the Tollier Center, 2001 North Martin Luther King Avenue on Saturday May 14, 2005, Oklahoma City Oklahoma. Special speaker will be Mr. Bruce Fisher, multi-cultural director for the Oklahoma Historical Society.

The Keetoowah Society and the Avocation of Religious Nationalism in the Cherokee Nation, 1855-1867

Chapter Two - The Birth and Growth of the Keetoowah Society

In the long run, it was the slavery issue that brought a new ethnic identity of the full-blood majority to organizational unity -- a unity in which the traditionalists and Christians shared a common definition of who was a true Cherokee and what those qualities were that should unify the Nation and inform its policies. When that time came, after 1855, the organizational strength and experience of the northern Baptist Christians and the leadership abilities and charisma of the native Baptist preachers provided the guidance for the full-blood effort to drive the mixed bloods from their influential role in Cherokee affairs. Only then was it clear how powerful the revitalization of Cherokee religious life had become.

William Gerald McLoughlin
The Cherokees and Christianity, 1794-1870: Essays on Acculturation and Cultural Persistence

Introduction

On April 15, 1858, a small group of men met in the chapel of the Peavine Baptist Church in the Goingsnake District of the Cherokee Nation. The church, originally known as the Amohee Church after its mother church in eastern Tennessee, was founded by Jesse Bushyhead upon the arrival of his contingency in the western Nation. [1] When Bushyhead died in 1844, Lewis Downing, a native minister and member of the National Council, became pastor. The church, which changed its name to Peavine Baptist Church in 1858, was a center for revival meetings and as the southernmost church in the Nation, it served as a jumping off point to missions among the Creek Nation.

At this discussion conducted in Cherokee, the men decided that the Cherokee Nation was in a difficult position torn by political divisions and rife for potential catastrophe. At the instigation of native minister Budd Gritts of the Peavine Baptist Church, the men decided to move from the informal meetings that had been held in the church over the years to a formal organization with a written declaration of intent:

... Our secret society shall be named Keetoowah. All of the members of the Keetoowah Society shall be like one family. It should be our intention that we must abide with each other in love...We must not surrender under any circumstance until we shall "fall to the ground united." We must lead one another by the hand with all our strength. Our government is being destroyed. We must resort to bravery to stop it. [2]

Over the next fifty years, the Keetoowah Society was to come to define what it meant to be a member of the Cherokee Nation. What was in later years referred to by missionaries as "the pagan form of worship" and "the work of the devil" [3] was actually a unique synthesis of traditional religion and the newly adopted principles of the Christian faith. To understand what role the Keetoowah played in the Cherokee Nation, we must understand the events that led to the birth of the Keetoowah Society.

Indian Pioneers

Once in the "Indian Territory" of Oklahoma, the dissension that had led up to the removal of the Cherokee Nation continued with a vengeance. When Major Ridge, leader of the "Treaty Party", signed the Treaty of New Echota on December 29, 1835, he is reported to have said, "I may yet die some day by the hand of some poor infatuated Indian, deluded by the counsels of Ross and his minions: ... I am resigned to my fate, whatever it may be." [4] Less than four years later, and less than six months after the arrival of the anti-removal Cherokees in Indian Territory, Ridge's prophecy came true. Elias Boudinot, Major Ridge, and his son John Ridge were ambushed by parties of armed Cherokee and assassinated for their participation in what was considered to be treason. [5] The only member of the "Treaty Party" to escape the assassination attempt was Stand Watie,

brother of Elias Boudinot. [6]

Following the assassination of these members of the "Treaty Party," a factional dispute ripped through the Cherokee Nation with the killings on both sides being so great as to bring it to the brink of civil war. [7] Chaney Richardson, and ex-slave from the Cherokee Nation, described the Cherokee "troubles:"

My master and all the rest of the folks was Cherokees, and they'd been killing each other off in the feud ever since long before I was borned, and jest because old Master have a big farm and three-four families of Negroes them other Cherokees keep on pestering his stuff all the time. Us children was always afeared to go any place less'n some of the grown folks was along. We didn't know what we was afeared of, but we heard the Master and Mistress keep talking 'bout "another Party Killing" and we stick pretty close to the place...

When I was about 10 years old that feud got so bad the Indians was always talking about getting their horses and cattle killed and their slaves harmed. I was too little to know how bad it was until one morning my own mammy went off somewhere down the road to git some stuff to dye cloth and she didnt come back. [8]

The lawlessness was so great and the ability of government officials to stop the killings so weak that the ancient law of blood returned to the land and a "reign of terror" arose. John Candy, in a letter to Stand Watie reported, "Murders in the country have been so frequent until the people care as little about hearing these things as they would hear of the death of a common dog." [9] Sarah Watie wrote to her brother of the desperateness of the situation, "I am so tired of living this way. I don't believe I could live one year longer if I knew that we could not be settled. It has wore my spirits out just the thought of not having a good home. I am so perfectly sick of the world." [10]

Though the dispute was largely between the "Treaty Party" and the "mountain Indians" who were the last to be removed, the factionalism also broke down quite evenly among those "ardent and enterprising" Cherokees who owned ninety percent of the nation's slaves and those "ignorant and but slightly progressed in moral and intellectual improvement" who owned few, if any, slaves. [11] At the center of much of the "troubles" was a notorious gang by the name of the "Starr Boys" associated with the "Treaty Party" who engaged in a reign of terror throughout the Cherokee Nation. The "Starr Boys" targets were not only Ross Party members, but they also engaged in frequent slave-stealings and the random murder of African American members of the Cherokee Nation. [12] In the years 1845-1846, at least thirty-four politically related murders were carried out within the Cherokee Nation. [13]

As the post-removal "troubles" were sweeping the Nation, another problem began to plague the slave-owning population of the Cherokee Nation. In 1842, a major slave uprising occurred within the Canadian District of the Cherokee Nation in which the slaves of several large slave owners fled their masters, joined with fugitives from the Creek Nation, and attempted to reach a settlement of free blacks in Texas. [14] The cause of the problem was later cited as being "missionaries from Boston and other abolition centers [who] were devoting far more effort to inculcate among the slaves the doctrine of freedom than that of salvation." [15] The Cherokee Council sent John Drew and a hundred Cherokee horsemen who captured and returned the slaves; the desperate and starving slaves were reportedly glad to see Drew's men. The militiamen cared for them "liberally" and returned them to their masters without punishment. [16] However, the Council passed a fugitive slave act that severely punished anyone found guilty of aiding or participating in a slave escape. [17]

A few years later, another group of Cherokee slaves attempted to flee

their masters and seek refuge among a group of Afro-Indians from the Creek and Seminole Nation led by Chief Wildcat. Chief Wildcat, the Negro Abraham, Luis Pacheco, and their band of renegades fled through Texas and formed a free community just across the Rio Grande in Mexico. [18] A posse of slaveowners from Indian Territory surrounded the slaves and captured most of them. William Drew, brother of John Drew stated that "the Negroes talked like fighting, but when we got there, they had no fight in them, and most of them ran off and put us to a great deal of trouble to gather them up. We collected 300...There were a good many of these Negroes that had been sold, or went off to live with Wildcat." [19] Many fugitive slaves from the Cherokee Nation remained within the Indian Territory and settled among the Seminole and Upper Creek who had historically been receptive to runaway slaves. [20]

In 1846, due to the outstanding leadership of Cherokee Chief John Ross, the factional disputes were ameliorated to the point in which a sense of placidity began to occur within the Nation. To the amazement of all, enemies John Ross and Stand Watie stood and shook hands at the signing of the Treaty of 1846, pledging themselves to peace, harmony, and general welfare of the reunited Cherokee Nation. In this period of prosperity following the Treaty of 1846, the Cherokee Nation began to reclaim its heritage and struggled to remove itself from the cruel legacy of forced displacement. [21] At the same time that many were meeting with success and prosperity and making great strides in education, political, and social autonomy, the gap between the rich and the poor -- the assimilated and the full-bloods -- began to widen and the cultural chasm began to reflect the economic one. [22] As this chasm widened, it laid the foundations for the coming struggle over the issue of slavery.

The Baptist Churches and Slavery in Indian Territory

The years 1846-1855 continued to be prosperous ones for the Cherokee Nation, but they were years where the issue of slavery moved from the background of the factional struggle between conservatives and progressives and came to eclipse all other issues that beset this new nation. The number of slaves within the Cherokee nation had grown immensely in the years following removal; in 1839 slaves represented ten percent of the Nation, by 1860 they represented nearly twenty-five percent. The 4,000 slaves in the Cherokee Nation were owned by ten percent of the population. [23] The slave revolts among the Cherokee in 1842, in 1846, and in 1850 solidified the Cherokee elite in the belief of the efficacy and importance of slavery.

Among the full-bloods (who were largely Northern Baptists as opposed to the elite who were often Southern Baptists and Methodists), the abolitionist message continued to spread and gain strength. Only five of the 1100 Cherokee Baptists owned slaves and at least fifty slaves were members of the Baptist missions, although their owners were not. Though Baptist missionaries seldom publicly preached against slavery, the Cherokees came to "look forward to the extinction of slavery." [24] Baptist missionary Evan Jones noted that among the strongest opponents of slavery were the native preachers who "are decidedly and steadfastly opposed to slavery....We have no apology to make for slavery nor a single argument to urge in its defence, and our sincere desire and earnest prayer is that it may be speedily brought to an end." [25]

It is important to note that from the very first Baptist Church in Oklahoma, the congregations were of mixed cultural heritage. The Ebenezer Baptist Church, the first Baptist church in Oklahoma, was organized in the Creek Nation by missionary Isaac McCoy on September 9, 1832. It was composed of "three blacks, two white people, and one Indian in its six charter members." [26] The founding

members of the church were Reverend David Lewis, his wife, John Davis -- a Creek, and three black members of the Creek Nation by the names of Quash, Bob, and Ned. [27] Ebenezer Baptist Church conducted its first baptisms the following sabbath:

The following Saturday, two Creeks and two Blacks were received for baptism, and on the following Sunday took place the first baptism in the Indian's Home. On the same day, under the shade of the wide-spreading, hospitable, forest trees, in the presence of a great gathering of wondering, dusky Indians, and their darker slaves, the Memorial Supper was spread, and observed in apostolic simplicity. [28]

Later, the church continued to grow under the tutelage of the licensed preacher, Mr. John Davis:

On the 14th of October, thirty seven people were baptised at a meeting at the Muscogee church, eight or ten of whom were Creeks, and the rest, except one, colored persons and slaves. On the 10th of November, nine were baptised, three of whom were Indians. [29]

On October 20, 1833, Native Creek Minister John Davis was ordained to the Baptist ministry; he remained as pastor of Ebenezer Church until his death in 1839. [30] In January 1836, the church membership numbered 82 -- 6 whites, 22 Native Americans, and 54 African Americans. An outstation of the Ebenezer Baptist Church was started some 30 miles distant, called Canadian Station. In 1839, a school was opened with fifty students at the Canadian mission with John Davis as its principal; the chief instructor at the school was a Native American Baptist minister. [31] The outpost at the Canadian River became the center of the Cherokee Baptist missions among the Creek Nation for the next twenty-five years.

As soon as they arrived in the new territory in the West, Jones and his native ministers began an outreach to the disparate members of their Baptist congregations settling in their new homes as well as to surrounding communities. Evan Jones described these missions: "friendly deputations have visited have visited the National Convention, from the Creeks, Seminoles, Shawnees, Delawares, and Senecas." [32] There is no doubt that many of these early efforts were met by African American Baptist ministers, for most of the earliest ministers in Indian Territory were African American slaves or freedmen. [33] These early black ministers in Indian Territory included Joseph Island, Old Billy, and Brother Jesse, a slave-preacher persecuted for his ministry: [34]

One of them came and tied another rope around my wrists; the other end was thrown over the fork of a tree, and they drew me up until my feet did not quite touch the ground, and they tied my feet together. Then they went a little way off and sat down. Afterwards one of them came and asked me where I got this new religion. I said in the Old Nation. 'Yes,' replied the Indian, 'you have set half of this nation to praying and this is what we are going to whip you for.' Five men gave me five strokes each. [35]

Native Christians were punished for following black ministers, "One woman who received fifty lashes for affirming her faith in Christ went down to a spring...washed her wounds, and walked ten miles to hear Joseph Islands preach that night." [36] However, the most famous black Baptist preacher of them all was Monday Durant, "a large, strong, man, of fine physical proportions. He readily spoke the Creek language, and commenced preaching when a young man." [37]

[On the "trail where we cried"] Many negroes came with them. These secretly held their meetings, baptizing after midnight in the streams, with guards posted to keep from being surprised and arrested. A free negro, named Monday Durant, made many preaching visits to the negroes, in the Seminole Nation. A church was orga-