

Cherokees shared medicines with European settlers



Photo courtesy of the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (Thomas G. Barnes @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database / Barnes, T.G. & S.W. Francis. 2004. *Wildflowers and Ferns of Kentucky*. University Press of Kentucky.)

It has two Cherokee Name: U-gwi-t(i) - translation unknown and Dalon(e)usdi - translation means "little yellow" is used as a natural dye for making baskets.

English Name: Goldenseal

Scientific Name: *Hydrastis canadensis* L.

Family: Ranunculaceae

Uses: Medicine

This plant is rare in the Cherokee Nation. Traditional healers obtain it from secret locations deep in the moist woods along the Arkansas border or from friends living on the Eastern Cherokee Reservation in North Carolina. It is never purchased from farms or herbal stores, as only wild plants contain the properties needed for Cherokee medicine. Goldenseal is a widely known plant among herbalist, who learned its use from the Cherokee people as early as 1640. Its medicinal use is as a wash for skin diseases, wounds, and for sore, inflamed eyes. Goldenseal can be used to fight cold and flu symptoms, especially coughs and sore throats. It is also used for telling fortunes. After being "doctored" the root can be held up to the rising sun, asked questions and the answers may be revealed during the day. Its roots are bright yellow, thus the English name. Goldenseal root is widely known as a natural antibiotic and as a remedy for various gastric and genitourinary disorders.

Plants in Cherokee culture and lore - Part I

by David Cornsilk

Plants have always been an important part of Cherokee culture, not only as food, but also as medicine and symbols representing clan, family, life, death and many other important areas of Cherokee lifeways.

One of the most important stories recorded among the Cherokees of old was the tale of how plants came to the rescue of humans when the animals decided to send diseases against mankind for the wrongs we

commit against them. In short, the animals were angry that mankind was killing animals and trampling on them with no regard. They gathered together and decided that each animal would send a disease against any human who wronged an animal. Each animal chose a different disease. The plants, who were friends of humans, heard of the evil plan and decided to provide a cure for every disease the animals created.

Most of the important medicines known to man are created from compounds found in plants. Many cures exist in the plants of the world, most still unknown. The Cherokees understood the importance of plants and hold them in high esteem. Several plants are known to be sacred in Cherokee religious practice. Traditional Cherokees collecting plants for medicinal purposes will always thank the plant for its use, leaving behind a gift to the plant spirit.

This new section of the Cherokee Observer will provide information regarding plants important to Cherokee cultural practices. The plants featured in this column will range from food plants to symbolic plants. Some plants have multiple uses, including food, medicine and symbolism, while others may have only one known use. The information I have gathered over the years is not all that is or can be known about certain plants and their relationship to the Cherokee people. This column is not meant to as a be all or know all. It is a jumping off place for the gathering of more information regarding the sacred relationship between Cherokees and our friends the plants.

In most instances, I will include scientific information about a plant so that it can be clearly identified. This information will include the plant family and genus, English common name and most importantly, its Cherokee name. Some plants may have multiple Cherokee names, depending upon the Cherokee speaking community. If I know more than one name, I will list it. Any other available information will be included in a short narrative. I invite all of our readers to send in information they may have regarding Cherokee plant lore so that the knowledge of our ancestors will live on. Send your submissions to: cherokeepants@yahoo.com

Law of the Cherokee emanated from religious beliefs

Cherokee Nation Tribal Profile

The Cherokee Nation is one of the largest Indian tribes in the United States.² The traditional territory of the Cherokee Nation originally encompassed the entire southeastern portion of the United States.³ Due to forced removal in 1838-39,⁴ however, the Cherokee people were displaced to Indian Territory in what is now the state of Oklahoma.⁵ Located in northeastern Oklahoma, the Cherokee tribe currently has over 150,000 members.⁶ In addition, approximately 13,000 people in northeastern Oklahoma currently speak a dialect of the Cherokee language.⁷ The tribal land base consists of 124,000 acres spanning fourteen counties.⁸ Although the land base does not have the status of a reservation, the Cherokee Nation is dictional service area.⁹ The current tribal government is organized into a ipartite democratic structureve, executive, and judicial branches.¹⁰

The focus of this profile is to provide an overview of the internal laws of the Cherokee Nation, with specific emphasis upon tribal use of traditional law, law of governance, enacted law, case law, and legal issues concerning the tribe at the international level.

I. Traditional Law Section A. Historical Use of Traditional Law

The traditional Cherokee conception of law was not embodied in conventional ideas of Western law.¹¹ In fact, during the eighteenth century, the Cherokee had no centralized political system, police system, or formal court system.¹² Rather, the Cherokee people were divided into independent towns with r chief and a peace chief[,]. . .charged respectively with the external and internal affairs of government.¹³ In addition, each town also maintained a council, although these councils were mere hey did not legislate or adjudicate.¹⁴ National councils were occasionally called during this time, but only to deal peace, or trade alliance that concerned all the towns.¹⁵

The traditional law of the Cherokee emanated from religious beliefs, rather than from written secular rules mandating certain behavior.¹⁶ The basic tenet of religious belief that guided tribal life was the maintenance of harmony.¹⁷ Specifically, Cherokees lived by ed pattern and structure to their lives, sustained by age-old customs, rituals, beliefs, ceremonies, and symbols guiding the rightful and eternal order of things.¹⁸ These prescriptions for conduct embodied gnificance in every respectar area of life free from spiritual meaningl aspects of Cherokee life were unified pattern of religious rules and connections involving harmony with the world above, the world below, and the world around. . . .¹⁹

Moreover, the cite the law once a year through reading from wampum belts. In the beads of these belts were the history and tradition of the people. . . .²⁰

Manifestation of this social and religious synchronism was s exercised by clearly defined groups, such as the clans.²¹ In essence, responsibility but of clan relationships: a law which consisted largely of procedural rules defining who could act, when he could act, and what form his action should take.²² Cherokee traditional law contemplated only clan wrongs, and not tes; so the clan became the sole adjudicatory entity.²³ Simply put, a Cherokee looked to his clan if he sought by others.²⁴ Finally, it should also be noted that the seven Cherokee clans²⁵ were traditionally matrilineal.²⁶ Examples of traditional law enforced via this matrilineal clan system included regulation of such matters as marriage, clan member protection, homicide, family life, and inheritance.²⁷

Most studies of the traditional law of the Cherokee have focused on the use of this law in cases of homicide. For example, McLoughlin states, mily the clan had the duty to avenge or seek restitution for loss by death (whether by malice or accident) of any of its members.²⁸ Under traditional Cherokee homicide law, basically, when one Cherokee killed another Cherokee, their respective clans would settle the matter internally through restitution.²⁹ There was an exception to this stringent rule, however, that involved the ability of an innocent or by accident taken the life of another. . . .[to] flee to one of four 'free cities,' or 'sacred cities of refuge,' where the murderer would be safe. A priest might offer the same protection on sacred ground in any town.³⁰ It must be kept in mind, however, lan retaliation was not punitive but rather to equalize the balance of things and to overcome the disorder brought by premature death.³¹ Other traditional Cherokee laws based upon the clanship system prescribed that cluding the dwelling and garden.³² Furthermore, clan membership dictated marital relations by prohibiting the marriage of members of the same clan.³³

B. Modifying Influences Upon Traditional Law

Although the traditional law governing the Cherokee tribe was well established and well adhered to by its members, external influences upon Cherokee life commenced as early as 1690.³⁴ Between 1776 and 1794, external impacts included encroachment on the Cherokee land base, destruction or cession of over half of all Cherokee towns, significant declines in Cherokee population due to disease and warfare, and intermarriage between whites and Cherokees.³⁵ Furthermore, the impact that Christian missionaries had

continued in next months issue

NCAI President Joe Garcia Joins Cherokee Councilors For New Mexico Cherokee Thanksgiving

By Ed Crittenden

Thanksgiving

Albuquerque NM – New Mexico Cherokee Chief Bobby Leech welcomed to the annual Thanksgiving Dinner Meeting in Albuquerque this month three Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, (CNO), Council members and the new President of the National Congress of American Indians, (NCAI), Joe Garcia who is also Governor of Ohkay Owingeh, (Pueblo of San Juan, New Mexico). Garcia was recently elected President during the NCAI Annual Conference held last month was in Tulsa, OK for the first time in 17 years.

Cherokee Councilors Joe Crittenden of the Trail of Tears District, Linda O'Leary and Melvina Shotpouch both of the Delaware District, attended the New Mexico meeting and spoke to tribal members about the true condition of services back home within the Cherokee Nation.

Approximately 60 persons attended the dinner and asked questions of Councilors. Most seemed to realize they were being fed illusions within the tribal newspaper religiously circulated to non-resident Cherokees. The tribal paper has an almost unrestricted budget of over a million dollars a year. Tribal members were aghast to find that the administration is spending \$84,000 a month on the Cherokee Phoenix/Advocate for what one New Mexico Cherokee coined the Chief's rag, a term that is often heard from Cherokees living within the boundaries.

A former employee of the Cherokee Nation Cherokee now living in New Mexico stated, "The tribal newspaper today is nothing more than a political propaganda machine for the Chief, paid for out of tribal money that could be going into direct services to help the people."

Crittenden a former Commissioner on the Housing Authority of the Cherokee Nation, (HACN) spoke about housing problems and a dismantling of the housing authority over the past six years by the current administration. Crittenden said, "What six years ago was the number one housing authority in the entire United States has been redesigned by this Chief three times into little more than a rental management operation. Crittenden who is the Chair of the Health Committee also answered questions about healthcare and expressed his discontent with numerous legislative acts that he felt would have been good for the people yet they were killed by the slate or vetoed by the Chief.

O'Leary said "Cherokee Chief Chad Smith has publicly stated he doesn't care if we even build any more new homes." She said "He has also said if a person can not afford to maintain a home they do not deserve to own one." O'Leary explained "The administration has moved tribal housing toward counseling members in how to qualify for home loans and is presently budgeting millions of dollars toward creating salaried counseling positions within the tribe to help members understand what they must do to qualify for a loan." She said, "The problem is that many tribal members struggling to provide for a family while earning minimum wage are trapped in poverty and may never get to a place where they can ever qualify for a home loan."

Shotpouch also a former HACN Commissioner told the New Mexico group, "One trend under the current administration has been to put low income people unable to qualify for loans into trailer houses which is only a temporary fix to what most times is a permanent situation."

"Trailers immediately begin to depreciate and after ten years are not assets but ultimately become irreparable liabilities for tribal members," said Shotpouch. "Another trend is to purchase existing houses which gets the member within a house but fails to leverage tribal money by also creating productive construction jobs. Just purchasing existing homes has a huge drawback because we do not enjoy the multiplier effect by the injection of new money into the money supply through purchasing materials and labor from within Cherokee communities. The bulk of purchase price money for existing homes generally goes straight out of state to pay off underlying mortgages," Shotpouch explained. "It has no secondary effect for our people."

Economics experts estimate that every new dollar injected into a typical Cherokee community will change hands seven times before leaving that community.

O'Leary Co Chair of Health and Shotpouch both shared afterword stories about insufficient healthcare and elder care money within the system back home. They said that in the last six years the tribe has gone through a period of layoffs in housing and phasing out of positions and reorganization departments throughout the tribe while at the same time new positions were being created within tribal operations that saw many new faces with unprecedented increases in upper level salaries and raises. Councilors said they have seen an unending stream of new boards and board members being appointed in what they termed the building of a bureaucracy that is consuming service money yet they said they do not have the votes to stop it.

President Garcia an eloquent speaker shared the similarity of problems and solutions within tribes throughout Indian Countries across America. He spoke about Natives having to choose which tribe they are registered with when they are descendants from different tribes with mixed blood. Garcia said that is not our rules but the federal government's rules and it needs to be corrected. We are who we are and should be able to enroll in every tribe that we have ancestors. He said it is critical that tribal leaders unite as one strong voice that can not be denied and will be heard clearly in Washington D.C. where decisions affect all tribes. Garcia spoke extensively about a midnight rider injected into a recent bill by Oklahoma Senator Jim Inhofe, one night around midnight hence midnight rider, which places environmental issues on tribal lands throughout Oklahoma under the State's supervision. He called it is an assault on sovereignty. New Mexico Cherokees could not believe a U.S. Senator from an Indian State would propose such an underhanded tactic. Garcia said that the NCAI fully supports Oklahoma tribes in their immediate attention to address the recall of that rider.

We are not afraid to entrust the American people with unpleasant facts, foreign ideas, alien philosophies, and competitive values. For a nation that is afraid to let its people judge the truth and falsehood in an open market is a nation that is afraid of its people. If we make peaceful revolution impossible, we make violent revolution inevitable. John F. Kennedy (1917-1963) 35th US President

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POWER TO THE CHEROKEE PEOPLE!