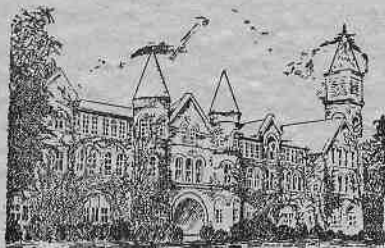


Early Educational History
of the
Cherokee Nation

By Judge O. H. P. Brewer



Complete text of an address delivered by Judge O. H. P. Brewer,
at the "Century of Progress" anniversary of the Cherokee Semi-
nary Association, May 7, 1946.

Early Educational History



Perhaps no more convincing proof that all human enterprises are but the reflex of the character of the people engaging in them may be found than that adduced from the early educational endeavors of the Cherokee people, resulting in a superb elemental grandeur. On the threshold of a healthy educational expansion and development a series of timely incidents entered into the tribal life in this important field, tending to stimulate and accelerate its activities to an unusual degree.

In 1730 Sir Alexander Cuming was sent from Roanoke Colony to hold a secret conference with the Cherokee Chiefs and leading citizens at Nequassee in western North Carolina. After renewal of the terms of a previous treaty entered into in 1721, and concluding a covenant of everlasting peace and friendship, he invited the assemblage to send delegates with him to the British Empire to visit and confer with the people of Great Britain concerning their future welfare and to pay respect to the King of England. His invitation was accepted and seven persons were selected to make the trip with him including Atacullaculla and Oconostota, two able young men with notable careers before them. The delegation made the journey to the British Empire and was there treated with gracious attention and distinguished courtesy by leading British subjects and the King. Articles of Union were entered into and it was agreed by the parties that the Cherokee people should submit to the King's authority; that their lands should be a part of the British Empire, that they would ever be faithful

subjects of the King and that a golden chain would bind their hearts in a continuous compact "which should last while the mountains stand, the sun shines and the rivers run." This incident was fraught with Cherokee destiny and upon the return of the delegates to their homes in America they gave engaging accounts of the interviews with the royal families of England and the King, indicating the deep impression made upon them by the wonders of the ocean voyage, the beauty of the country seats, the splendors of the royal palaces, conveniences and luxuries of London and the leading cities of England. Assuredly the refinement of society, attainment of intellect and glory of achievements there displayed, was a revelation to the Chiefs and their glowing reports stimulated the awakened desire of the listening tribesemen for economic improvement, social advancement and educational pre-eminence.

In 1736 Christian Priber, a Jesuit Priest, came up from New Orleans as a secret agent of the French and lived among the Cherokees for a number of years, and by reason of his charming personality, ingratiating attitude, natural ability, profound learning and cultivated manners he produced a wholesome and beneficial effect upon the people. He quickly learned the Cherokee language, adopted their dress, manners and customs, completely won their confidence, directed their minds to higher learning and recited for their entertainment and delectation the commonplace stories of the Holy Bible which were later artfully woven into tribal traditions. He formulated a simple constitution for the Cherokees and had them make Moytoy their Emperor, with himself as secretary to that official.

His guiding influence directed their attention to the necessity of social and moral training, was of great assistance to them in pursuing their desire for a more abundant life and was greatly missed by them upon his passing which occurred in the State of Georgia about the year 1741.

By reason of the early continued influx of white population into the Cherokee Nation considerable racial amalgamation had quickly taken place and before the end of the 18th century many mixed blood Cherokees had become men of property and some owned negro slaves. Some of those who were financially able erected modest school houses on their properties where their children might be instructed under private tutors, and others sent their children to established schools in the adjoining colonies.

In 1801 the Cherokee Nation which theretofore knew nothing of Christian Missionary laborers was visited by Moravian ministers Rev's. Abraham Steiner and Gottlieb Byhan who administered their calling in and around the home of Joseph Vann, a prominent mixed blood Cherokee. A mission was established and called Springplace, where now is a village of the same name in northwestern Georgia. The Cherokees were more interested in education than theology and after a meeting of the council they sent orders to the missionaries to organize a school in six months or leave the nation. These good men immediately became interested in the building of schools and with loyal tribal assistance established the first school at Springplace. During the period 1801 to 1828 the Moravians, the Presbyterians, the Congregationalists, the Methodists and the Baptist were very active at different points

throughout the Nation in establishing missions, preaching the Gospel and encouraging the establishment of schools among the Cherokee people, which increased their devotion to intellectual and moral pursuits to a degree altogether pleasing to the missionaries and the natives as well. Indeed during the period from 1801 to 1835 some eight missions and thirteen schools were put in operation in the nation.

And then came the history making incident of "talking leaves." Sequoyah, a mixed blood Cherokee, who was probably born about the year 1765, during his young manhood suffered an accident which rendered him a cripple, limiting his physical activities and he became a silversmith and later in life some-what of a recluse devoting much time to reflection and meditation. About the year 1809 his attention was called to the ability of the white settlers, to communicate by means of writing on sheets of paper which he designated "talking leaves," and he conceived the idea of devising a similar system for his own people, the Cherokees. So he began. After twelve years of earnest effort, in the face of ridicule and discouragement, he completed a syllabary, and in 1821 submitted it to public test by the leading men of the nation. The invention was recognized at once as invaluable to the elevation of the tribe and in a short while multitudes were able to read and write in their own language. The adaptation of the syllabary to Cherokee language was such that it was only necessary to learn the characters to be able to read. Sequoyah's reputation grew apace and his invention was a source of pride by reason of its practical and educational value. The missionaries of the various denominations heretofore mentioned, after temporary ob-

jection, saw the advantage of the syllabary in connection with their religious work and they encouraged the use of this medium of information and instruction among the people throughout the Nation.

In 1817 the Congregationalists established a school for the education of the Cherokee youth at Cornwall, Connecticut and seven boys were in attendance in 1822 among them being John Ridge and Elias Boudinot, his cousin, two pupils who were later to bring distinction to the Tribe. In 1825 Rev. S. A. Worcester, a Congregational minister, a graduate from the University of Vermont, after marriage to a Christian lady of culture, was given an assignment to missionary work among the Cherokees and after a long and tedious journey he appeared among them to fulfill the covenant he made with his Church and the Master. Soon thereafter he became acquainted with Elias Boudinot, who had been graduated from the school at Cornwall, and was so impressed with him that he assisted Mr. Boudinot in establishing a newspaper called the Cherokee Phoenix which they hoped to have printed, part in the Cherokee language and part in the English language. Rev. Worcester made the long trip to Boston, Massachusetts and had type cast in conformity to the Sequoyah syllabary and shipped them back for use in the Cherokee Phoenix and thereafter he assisted Elias Boudinot in making the paper a success. This likewise was a wonderful agency in forwarding the educational progress of the Cherokees and in a short while a large percentage of the Tribe were being advised as to current events of interest happening within the limits of the Cherokee domain, in the adjoining states and in the National Government at Washing-

ton. The paper continued in publication greatly to the satisfaction of the people as a source of information and instruction and also as a means of disseminating the principles of christianity but was suspended by arbitray action of the Georgia authorities in 1824.

The disturbing heart-rending experiences of the Cherokees in their dealings with the authorities in Georgia and the National Government at Washington wherein they were threatened with enforced removal from their homeland brought to them untold mental distress but they were so absorbed in their educational advancement and spiritual well being that no untoward circumstance could wholly divert their minds from the main objective, though suffering from the pangs of despondency caused by the fear of eviction. Even the miseries and distractions of the enforced migration along the "trail of tears" marking their tragic journey from the old Cherokee Nation to the new home provided for them by treaties of 1828 and 1835, did not still their inborn yearning for intellectual and spiritual acquirements and in an attitude of prayerful resignation they softened the hardships of travel by constant supplication to Divine Providence who they had learned to praise and adore through the intercession of the christian missionaries.

Radical differences of opinion on the question of removal occasioned a most bitter feeling among the members of the tribe in Georgia which continued after the arrival of the factions in the new Cherokee Nation and on June 22nd, 1839 three of the most distinguished citizens were ruthlessly murdered on the same day, a tragedy which tore the nation apart and disorders, riots and expressed in-

tentions of reprisal were heard on every hand, which grave situation continued for years. To the credit of the citizens be it said, that in the throes of factional distractions and threats of internal war a constitution was written and ratified by them in the fall of 1839. On the subject of education the constitution provided "religion, morality and knowledge being necessary to good government, the preservation of liberty and the happiness of man-kind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged in this Nation." This official action again proved that educational advancement was still a paramount objective.

In 1841 eleven public schools were created by the Cherokee authorities to be followed in 1843 by the establishment of seven more. From this modest beginning the number increased at intervals to the aggregate of one hundred and twenty before the tribal government was discontinued. In 1844 the publication of the Cherokee Phoenix, always educational in style and tone, was resumed under the name of the Cherokee Advocate. Its publication was suspended in 1857 and resumed again in 1870 and thereafter continued to inform and uplift its readers until the Cherokee Nation gave place to another form of government when it became an integral portion of the State of Oklahoma.

Supplementing these commendable tribal activities, in 1846, a year of tempest and discord, the National Council projected two National High Schools, one for boys and one for girls, locating both in the vicinity of Tahlequah, the capital of the Nation. The corner stones were laid by Chief John Ross on June 7th, 1851. The completion of these leading institutions marks an epoch in Cherokee his-

tory for there was given that stimulus to education, that impetus to national pride, that vitality to tribal ambition, which has resulted in elevating the tribe to the plane of competent, capable American citizenship. Nor must we fail to appreciate and measure the phenomenal growth of these philanthropic institutions whose development has kept pace with the increasing ardor of their beneficiaries and whose influence upon the national life and character of this people can thus be appreciated by contact with that culture and refinement now prevalent in almost every section and cherished by every patriotic heart.

Multitudes of young men and women have been graduated from the two Seminaries beginning with the year 1865 and continuing annually thereafter, with suspension of operation during the period of war between the States, until the dissolution of tribal government in the early years of the present century. Graduates from the male seminary have been chiefs of the Cherokee Nation and many have occupied positions of distinction in various departments of official life under Cherokee government and under Federal authority as well. The Cherokee Female seminary has likewise sent out graduates who have distinguished themselves in the field of learning and literature and many were teachers in the Seminaries. Many, have glorified the homes, over which they presided, by creating a atmosphere of stability, concord and culture in their respective neighborhoods and have rendered splendid service in educating their children and instilling in their minds desire to uphold and improve the social, economic and political structure of the nation. Upon this occasion time will not permit personal mention



of the matchless men and women, who made this enviable record in days of stress and trouble and in days of peace and good will, who put aside every consideration of personal aggrandizement and gave their best efforts to the upbuilding of the Nation as a whole. The sacrifices they graciously made for the benefit of all will never be forgotten but will live on and on as a memorial until time shall be no more.

My dear good friends assembled upon this auspicious occasion, we pay tribute to our departed dead who through the fateful years "fought a good fight and kept the faith" in the historic struggle for civic, educational and cultural advancement, and in a spirit of respect and gratitude to their valiant sons who,, for justiable cause and for your safety and mine, lately engaged in two extirpating wars during which the blood of some was shed on foreign soil and the blood of others incarnadined the seas; let us avow eternal allegiance to the standards they upheld with a silent prayer that they may enjoy the ecstasies of eternal bliss on the Indian's Happy Hunting Ground.

In the light of the full measure of devotion given by our fathers to the task of gaining for their children the pleasures of civilized life, and in the faith of the high purposes for which they strove, we commend their momentous achievements to the appraisal of the ages and close the chapter with the fervent hope that we may emulate the virtues implanted in their hearts and minds by the instrumentality of Divine Grace; that we may be eternally grateful to the peerless men and women who performed labors of love for our sakes along the way; that through the years we may continue in unrestrained enjoyment of the delightful memories of

the days of long ago and that in traversing the uncertain paths which lie ahead we may persevere in the observance of the Divine Command "to do justly, to love mercy and walk humbly with our God."



Compliments of
NORTHEASTREN STATE COLLEGE
Tahlequah, Oklahoma

CHEROKEE ALPHABET.

CHARACTERS SYSTEMATICALLY ARRANGED WITH THE SOUNDS

D		R		T	o	oo	i
n	o	e		i	o	oo	v
g	ka	l		Y	A	J	E
ga		ge		gi	go	gn	gv
of		?		g	f	Γ	&
ha		be		hi	ho	hu	hv
W		d		f	o	M	q
la		le		li	lo	lu	lv
?		o		li	lo	lu	
ma		me		mi	mo	mu	
o	t	l	G	h	Z	q	o
na	nha	ne	nab	ni	no	nu	nv
l		o		o	o	o	s
qua		que		qui	quo	quu	quv
o	u	+		l	+	+	R
s	su	se		ni	so	su	sv
l	W	s	'b	l	l	S	+
da	ta	do	t	di	di	du	dv
o	l	L		O	U	U	P
dla	tia	tic		ole	tio	tlu	tlv
G		Y		le	K	+	o
tea		tse		tsi	tso	tsu	tsv
G		o		o	o	o	o
wa		we		wi	wo	wu	wv
o		+		+	+	+	B
ye		ye		yi	yo	yu	yv

SOUNDS REPRESENTED BY VOWELS

A as a in father, or short as a in rival.

E as e in hate, or short as e in met.

I as i in plique, or short as i in pin.

O as o in note, but as approaching to aw in law.

U as oo in moon, or short as u in pull.

V as n in but, nasalized.

CONSONANT SOUNDS.

G, is sounded hard approaching to k; sometimes before e, i, u and v, its sound is k. D has a sound between the English d and t; sometimes, before o, u, and v its sound is t; when written before l and s the same analogy prevails.

All other letters as in English.

Syllables beginning with g, except ga have sometimes the power of k; syllables when written with il, except tla sometimes vary to dla.