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THE RHETORIC OF JOHN ROSS

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BY

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THE RHETORIC OF JOHN ROSS

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ABBREVIATIONS

A.R.O.I.A. . . . . Annual Report of the Office of Indian Affairs

A.S.P. . . . . American State Papers

J.R.P. . . . . John Ross Papers

L.R.O.I.A. . . . . Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs

O.H.S. . . . . Oklahoma Historical Society

# THE RHETORIC OF JOHN ROSS

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The history of the European colonization and development of the North American continent is inseparably interwoven with that of the aborigines found here. The right of possession created problems from the first settlement. Then, as the colonies mushroomed in size, immediate conflict of interests arose with the native Indians. Some tribes acquiesced to the demands of the white man, but many resisted them. One of the tribes to offer resistance to the white greed was the Cherokee.

The organized power of the white man was too much for the simplicity of the Indians, and the Cherokees' holdings melted before the advancing tide of white settlers. Each conflict between the Cherokees and the white man ended in a treaty conference in which the Indian was forced to accept the terms dictated by the white man. John Ross, born in 1790, grew to manhood seeing a succession of treaties. Repeatedly, a treaty made in good faith by the Indians was shortly broken by the white man, and the Cherokees left each treaty conference with less acreage.

The narrowing of the boundaries of the Cherokees affected the economy; each conflict reduced the numbers of the Cherokees. So rapid

was the decrease in Indian population that extinction seemed probable. In 1825, Jeremiah Niles, editor of the Niles Register, questioned whether the federal government sincerely felt any concern for the Indians. Niles invited an honest examination of the federal policy of making treaties with the Indians:

We shall, indeed, be glad if even one tribe is saved to prove to posterity that a desire really existed to prevent the extermination of all. For the fact is that our repeated treaties with them to obtain more lands, and drive them further and further back into the forest, decidedly discredits all the acts passed from the time of Washington to the present day, <sup>1</sup> pretending to have regard for the civilization of them. . . .

Although John Ross had full knowledge of the difficulties between the Cherokees and whites, he entered public service and spent his life dedicated to the advancement of his people. Ross, nineteen years of age, was sent by Return J. Meigs, Indian Agent, to help survey the land west of the Arkansas. After the survey Ross was convinced that the Cherokees' lands, allotted for their removal westward, were undesirable.<sup>2</sup> On his return Ross was elected the first president of the National Council at its organization in 1817. He was serving in this capacity when the deaths of Path Killer and Charles Hicks left vacant the offices of principal chief and assistant chief. In 1827, instead of selecting new chiefs to replace Path Killer and Hicks, a constitutional convention was held. The delegates drew up a permanent constitutional government patterned after that of the United States. William Hicks was selected principal chief and young John Ross was selected as assistant

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<sup>1</sup>Niles Register, 15 October 1825, p. 105.

<sup>2</sup>James Franklin Corn, Red Clay and Rattlesnake Springs (Cleveland, Tennessee: n.p., 1959), 31. Also in E. E. Dale, "John Ross," Dictionary of American Biography, p. 179.



chief.<sup>3</sup> Because of the untimely death of the former, John Ross became principal chief in 1828 and served in that capacity until his death in 1866. Thus John Ross served the longest period of leadership of a people in the history of this continent and, further, served during crises in the Cherokees' relations with the United States.

Only one-eighth Cherokee, John Ross was more a white man than an Indian; yet he rose to fame as the Principal Chief of the Cherokee Indians. The question naturally arises as to how this was possible. What rhetorical methods did John Ross use to identify himself with the Cherokee Indians? What were the means of identification and persuasion used by John Ross? Kenneth Burke connects persuasion with how well a speaker identifies with the audience: "A speaker persuades an audience by the use of stylistic identifications; his act of persuasion may be for the purpose of causing the audience to identify itself with the speaker's interests to establish rapport between himself and his audience."<sup>4</sup> Burke sees an indivisible welding of the meanings of persuasion, identification and communication:

You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his. Persuasion by flattery is but a special case of persuasion in general. . . . [But,] if we systematically widen its (flattery) meaning, we see behind it the conditions of identification or consubstantiality in general. And you give the 'signs' of such consubstantiality by deference to an audience's 'opinions.' For the orator . . . will seek to display the appropriate 'signs' of character needed to earn the the audience's good will.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Niles Register, 9 June 1827, p. 255.

<sup>4</sup>Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives (New York: World Publishing Company, Meridian Books, 1962), p. 570.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 580-581.

Burke would state that Ross identified with the Cherokees "insofar as their interests were joined," or that Ross could identify himself with the Cherokees "even when their interests were not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so."<sup>6</sup>

Chapter II will present John Ross as a leader whose honesty and expertness stimulated the Cherokees to confer credibility upon him. Ross's leadership credibility will be examined according to (1) Cherokee traditional leadership; (2) Ross's biographical information; (3) testimonies of whites who knew him: travelers in the Cherokee Nation, missionaries to the Cherokees, government officials, and newsmen and journalists; and (4) the ideas expressed in his annual messages to the Cherokee National Council.

Chapter III will consider the thematic emphasis on the spirit of unity in Ross's messages. It will consider unity as a source from which Ross drew leadership strength. The importance of unity to successful leadership will be analyzed in Ross's messages to show his awareness of it.

Chapter IV will consider thematic emphasis on spiritual substantiality in Ross's messages. These messages will be analyzed to find Ross's identification with religious beliefs and activities of the Cherokees by which he gained strength of leadership. The chapter will trace the Cherokees' spiritual progression from primitive beliefs toward the Christianization of the Cherokee Nation.

Chapter V will examine the peaceful coexistence policy adopted by the Cherokees and its importance to the type of leadership represented

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 544.

by John Ross. It will reveal the transition from a dual-type leadership of the early Cherokees to the singular leader: a leader much like the peace time (white-task) leader rather than the warrior (red-task) leader. Ross will be placed in the structural context of a peace time leader who must maintain peaceful coexistence with the whites if his leadership is to continue. The final chapter will present a conclusion.

Previous studies on the Cherokees have passed over Cherokee eloquence. Existing studies are historical studies with emphasis more on the Cherokees as a tribe than on their leaders. Reed's study of the "Ross-Watie Conflict"<sup>7</sup> concentrates on the effect of national factionalism upon the Cherokee Nation. Biographies, such as Eaton's<sup>8</sup> and Ruskin's,<sup>9</sup> are figure studies. No previous study has considered rhetorical methods utilized by John Ross.

Opinions differ and are so numerous concerning John Ross that truth seems a chimera or will-o-wisp. However, both friendly and hostile camps agree on the unusual nature of the man, John Ross.

During his years as chief, Ross was faced with continuous controversies. His handling of these brought forth an analysis in 1842 by P. M. Butler, officer in the Bureau of Indian Affairs:

I think him, privately, a retiring, modest, good man; as a public man he has dignity and intelligence. He is ambitious and stubborn, often tenacious of his own views to an extent that

<sup>7</sup>Gerald A. Reed, "The Ross-Watie Conflict: Factionalism in the Cherokee Nation, 1839-1865" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of History, University of Oklahoma, 1967).

<sup>8</sup>Rachael Caroline Eaton, John Ross and the Cherokee Indians (Manasha, Wisconsin: George Banta Publishing Company, 1914).

<sup>9</sup>Gertrude M. Davis Ruskin, John Ross: Chief of an Eagle Race (n.p.: John Ross House Association, c. 1963).

prejudices both himself and his cause; wanting in wisdom and policy in selecting at all times his own friends and partisans for public employment. He looks rather to what he thinks the rights of his people than to what is obtained for them.<sup>10</sup>

Included among those who observed and thought seriously about John Ross, seeing both his virtues and his faults, Ethan Allen Hitchcock, a traveler through the Indian Territory, described Ross in 1841:

John Ross is an honest man and a patriot laboring for the good of his people. In the recent trouble of his nation, including several years, with almost unlimited opportunities he has not enriched himself.

.....  
It would be stranger if there was not ambition with the patriotism of John Ross, but he seeks the fame of establishing his nation and heaping benefits upon his people. Though not a fluent speaker, even in conversation, he is a clear-minded accurate thinker of very far-reaching views.<sup>11</sup>

The aforementioned assessment of the speaking ability of John Ross was based upon the standards of white society within the experience and education of Hitchcock. Although he traveled throughout the western frontier and observed the numerous Indians living there, Hitchcock was not knowledgeable in the Indian dialects. He expected the Indians to conform to the vocal variations of inflection, rhythm and tempo common in white society. Hitchcock was only one of the many travelers through the "Indian country" who was greatly impressed by Ross.

Probably the most credible group of observers to be found were those who served among the Cherokees in some official capacity. These

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<sup>10</sup>P. M. Butler to T. Hartley Crawford, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 4 March 1842, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, National Archives Microfilm, Roll 90, cited by Reed, p. 72. Cited hereafter as L.R.O.I.A.

<sup>11</sup>Ethan Allen Hitchcock to J. C. Spencer, 21 December 1841, A Traveler in Indian Territory: The Journal of Ethan Allen Hitchcock, ed. Grant Foreman (Cedar Rapids: The Torch Press, 1930), p. 234.

proved to be numerous during the years the federal government struggled to solve the Indian problem. Besides the officials of the federal government who were assigned to specific administrative and service duties, a number of missionaries and traders spent years, even their entire life, among the Cherokees. These men who lived and worked among the Cherokees had many contacts with Principal Chief John Ross. Among those expressing admiration of John Ross was Gen. Waddy Thompson. In his opinion Chief Ross was "a man of good, but not liberal education; an accurate, an elegant writer; a man of high order of intellect, unflagging energy, indomitable courage; perfectly temperate; and his private character without spot or blemish."<sup>12</sup>

Thompson's analysis points out major character traits that were admired and noted by other observers of John Ross. By every standard of education of his time, Ross was not only educated but, considering the illiteracy rate of the whites, was a member of the educational elite. His writing ability later drew caustic comments from critical whites who accused the Cherokees of having their petitions drawn up by white men.

An incisive view of John Ross as leader of the Cherokees is gained from the one man who seemed completely dedicated to resisting him and his people, Wilson Lumpkin. Lumpkin opposed Ross and the Cherokees while Governor of Georgia, while United States Commissioner, and as United States Senator from Georgia. Lumpkin acknowledged his personal influence and his efforts in removing the Indians, and he desired credit for being successful "for it was admitted from one end of the Union to the other that I [Lumpkin] had been the unfaltering and efficient instrument in

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<sup>12</sup>Cherokee Advocate, 9 March 1852.

removing the Cherokees to the west."<sup>13</sup>

Lumpkin and Kennedy, while acting as United States Commissioners at New Echota in 1837, labeled Ross as the "idol" of the "ignorant Cherokees."<sup>14</sup> They also designated John Ross as

being the Master Spirit of opposition to the execution of the late Treaty.

[He was] a very reserved, obscure and wary politician. We know of no overt direct act of opposition to the execution of the Treaty that legally criminales him, but we do know, since his return home from Washington . . . that the spirit of emigration has greatly subsided.<sup>15</sup>

Lumpkin's chagrin and irritation brought forth caustic appraisal of Ross as removal was delayed month after month. Yet in his denouncement of John Ross is a tribute to the leadership and ability of Ross:

Ross is the soul and spirit of his whole party, and they will act in accordance with his views. In regard to Ross himself, he is a sagacious, subtle man. Under the guise of an unassuming deportment, his arrogance is unsurpassed. He always takes high ground, and maintains his assumptions with the utmost pertinacity and obstinacy. When he deems it necessary, he maintains the most dignified reserve, and never communicates freely and without reserve even with his best friends. He has the art of acquiring talents and wisdom which he never possessed.<sup>16</sup>

Looking beyond the personal bitterness and frustration of Lumpkin, we find that he acknowledges "the daring and cunning opposition of

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<sup>13</sup>Wilson Lumpkin, The Removal of the Cherokee Indians from Georgia, 1827-1841 (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1907), Vol. II, p. 35.

<sup>14</sup>Wilson Lumpkin and John Kennedy to J. Mason, Jr., 9 September 1837, ibid., p. 136.

<sup>15</sup>Lumpkin and Kennedy to C. A. Harris, Esq., 5 June 1837, ibid., pp. 111-112.

<sup>16</sup>Lumpkin, The Removal of the Cherokee Indians from Georgia, Vol. II pp. 229-230.

Ross,"<sup>17</sup> a "mischievous"<sup>18</sup> and "highhanded opposition."<sup>19</sup> After Congress ratified the Treaty of New Echota, Lumpkin and his cohorts felt that the problem with the Cherokees had been solved. They expected immediate removal, but the delay created a much greater agitation. After the Cherokees' memorials before Congress were tabled, a device Ross and his associates came to accept, and after Ross's extensive correspondence with high government officials proved unfruitful, Lumpkin admits that Ross "in all his actings and doings--has continued boldly to protest against the validity of the Treaty, declaring the Treaty to be a fraudulent attempt to divest the Cherokees of their just rights, etc."<sup>20</sup>

So great did Lumpkin assess the influence of John Ross that he felt removal of the Indians "without the effusion of blood"<sup>21</sup> doubtful after Ross returned from Washington. However, Lumpkin sought a rationalization of this influence by declaring that "nineteen-twentieths of the Cherokees are too ignorant and depraved to entitle their opinion to any weight or consideration."<sup>22</sup> In their report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, C. A. Harris, Lumpkin and Kennedy admitted that there was a class of Cherokees "enveloped in gross darkness, who know nothing, and will hear nothing, except it come from Ross; [who] say they will

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

never leave this country--that they intend to die here."<sup>23</sup>

The aforementioned comments are testimony to the leadership role and personality of John Ross. He was an "obstinate" but "a most extraordinary man."<sup>24</sup> The early acceptance of civic responsibility by Ross is indicative of a potential energy necessary for an ambitious man. Ambition and ability in youth undoubtedly primed Ross for leadership. Lumpkin felt "many circumstances pointed to him [Ross], from early boyhood, as the prospective ruler of the Cherokees, and that he governed them, in the most absolute manner."<sup>25</sup> Yet Lumpkin attempts to explain Ross's career by saying that his control of the immense wealth paid to the Cherokees by the federal government "is the key that unlocks the secret cause of his long career of absolute reign and power, as well as his great popularity, at home and abroad."<sup>26</sup> Was this the key?

The Rev. Samuel A. Worcester, missionary to the Cherokees, makes an assessment of Ross in 1830 which refutes a later printed allegation of Lumpkin that Ross was a dictator holding power by force, threat, or control of the purse strings:

It is said, abroad, that the common people would gladly remove, but are deterred by the chiefs, and a few influential men. It is not so. Nothing is plainer than that it is the earnest wish of the people to remain where they are. They may be overawed by popular opinions, but not by the chiefs. On the other hand, if

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<sup>23</sup>Lumpkin and Kennedy to Harris, 5 June 1837, cited by Lumpkin, The Removal of the Cherokees from Georgia, Vol. II, p. 112.

<sup>24</sup>S. C. Stambough and Amos Kendall to W. L. Marcy, 30 December 1835, H. R. Doc. 185, p. 57.

<sup>25</sup>Lumpkin, The Removal of the Cherokee Indians from Georgia, Vol. I p. 187.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 187-188.



there were a chief in favor of removal, he would be overawed by the people.<sup>27</sup>

Worcester recognized that Ross, as an elected official, could have been removed by the wishes of the people. The "Treaty Party" (Those signing the treaty agreeing to removal) offered opportunity for defection from Ross, but few Cherokees were tempted away. However, Lumpkin was not alone in criticizing Ross of avarice. The fluent pen of Elias Boudinot, editor of the Cherokee Phoenix, charged that Ross failed to comprehend the decaying moral and physical conditions of the Cherokees because of his being "absorbed altogether in the pecuniary aspects of this nation's affairs."<sup>28</sup>

"Perish your gold mines and your money," Boudinot challenged, "if in the pursuit of them, the moral credit of this people, their happiness and their existence are to be sacrificed."<sup>29</sup> No one would deny that Ross enjoyed wealth and the good living it assured, but he "aspired to political leadership more than wealth."<sup>30</sup> Dishonest handling of the Nation's monies, or dishonesty as a personal trait of Ross, is strongly rejected in the case of bribery attempted by Major McIntosh of the Creek Indians. This is one example which supports Hitchcock's testimony of John Ross's honesty. In the grip of avarice, Major McIntosh offered a bribe to Ross for information on the chiefs' decision relative to

<sup>27</sup> Rev. Samuel A. Worcester to William S. Coodey, May 1830, The Missionary Herald (May 1830), p. 155.

<sup>28</sup> Ralph Henry Gabriel, Elias Boudinot, Cherokee and His America (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941), p. 161.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

relinquishing lands in Georgia. "He had mistaken his friend; Ross was not to be bought; for three days after the letter was written, viz. 24 October, a council was held, and McIntosh was present; the letter was read, and he was publicly exposed."<sup>31</sup> In his speech denouncing the bribery attempt, Ross expresses his contempt:

The trust which you have reposed in me has been sacredly maintained, and shall ever be preserved. A traitor, in all nations, is looked upon in the darkest color, and is more despicable than the meanest reptile that crawls upon the earth. An honorable and honest character is more valuable than the filthy lucre of the whole world. Therefore, I would prefer to live as poor as the worm that inhabits the earth, than to gain the world's wealth and have my reputation as an honest man tarnished by the acceptance of a pecuniary bribe, for self-aggrandizement.<sup>32</sup>

At the time he denounced McIntosh, Ross was serving as President of the National Council. His action testifies to his personal integrity and supports his contention that, as a leader, his chief concern was always to do what was best for his people. Ethan Allen Hitchcock, although he acknowledged the wealth of John Ross, felt that his reputation suffered most from the obvious prosperity of several relatives. Yet, Hitchcock did not accept this as evidence of unlawful or dishonest dealings, nor Ross's wealth as the secret to his holding power over the Cherokees.<sup>33</sup>

Regardless, then, of his personal wealth or the control of the

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<sup>31</sup>Samuel G. Drake, The Aboriginal Laws of North America; Comprising Biographical Sketches of Eminent Individuals, and an Historical Account of the Different Tribes, From the First Discovery of the Continent to the Present Period with a Dissertation on their Origin, Antiquities, Manners and Customs, Illustrative Narratives and Anecdotes, and a Copious Analytical Index, 15th ed., rev., with valuable additions by Prof. H. L. Williams (New York: Hurst & Co., Publishers, 1880), p. 393.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 448.

<sup>33</sup>Hitchcock to Spencer, 21 December 1841, cited by Hitchcock, A Traveler in Indian Territory, p. 234.

Nation's funds which he supervised, Ross held the Cherokees' loyalty and devotion by giving loyalty and service to his people. Ross's long time missionary admirer, Evan Jones, agreed with Hitchcock's assessment of the "uprightness and personal integrity"<sup>34</sup> of John Ross. Some reason for Ross's power with the Cherokees must be found other than his control of the Nation's treasury.

Another hypothesis of Ross's power is that he was a "natural" leader with strong charisma. Evidence is insufficient to support charismatic contentions, but it does show that John Ross was an effective leader and a guiding light to the Cherokees. His leadership not only brought recognition of the Indians as people but brought the benefits of the white man's culture to them. In support of their rights and in defense of their integrity, Ross served with a persevering zeal and passion that demanded the attention of the whites and gained the faith of his people. He saw only one avenue of survival and directed his people toward it. He answered the American slurs on Indian savagery and lack of intelligence and capability: "Our letters are our own; and if they are thought too refined for 'savages;' let the white man take it for proof, that, with proper assistance, Indians can think and write for themselves."<sup>35</sup>

John Ross was observed so often in the national scene in Washington and surrounding cities that he gained notice for his intelligence and ability. A correspondent of the Montreal Courier of Canada wrote his editor from New York after having met Ross: "There is something noble

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<sup>34</sup>Evan Jones's Statement, 20 July 1868, U. S. Senate 41st Cong., 2d Sess., Senate Report 113, p. 6.

<sup>35</sup>John Ross et. al. to Messrs. Gales & Seaton, April 1824, Niles Register, 26 June 1824, p. 277.

in the Indian's resolve. But Ross is no ordinary man. He is one of those apparently marked out by nature for great and lofty enterprise."<sup>36</sup>

If Ross was marked for leadership, it was by his ability. He did not hold power by being a typical physical specimen nor from the amount of Cherokee blood he had inherited. Stambough and Kendall were two observers of the Cherokees who recognized that to the Cherokees "John Ross is an extraordinary man. With scarcely enough Cherokee blood in his veins to mark him as of Indian descent,"<sup>37</sup> Ross holds the respect of the Cherokee Nation. The power of Ross over the Cherokees was suspect because of his obvious white ancestry and whites were quick to suspect devious motives. Ross did not measure up to Cherokee "warrior" standards in many respects. William Bartram, in 1791, observed that the Cherokees were "by far the largest race of men I have seen."<sup>38</sup> Ross was a short man of less than five and one-half feet; the average Cherokee males were "tall, erect, and moderately robust."<sup>39</sup>

Emphasis on physical prowess was evidenced in the dances which exhibited "astonishing feats of military prowess, masculine strength and activity."<sup>40</sup> John Ross did not fit these basic Cherokee physical

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 15 September 1838, p. 35.

<sup>37</sup>Stambough and Kendall to Marcy, 30 December 1835, H. R. Doc. 185, p. 57.

<sup>38</sup>William Bartram, Travels Through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida, the Cherokee Country, the Extensive Territories of the Muscogulges or Creek Confederacy, and the Country of the Choctaws. Containing an Account of the Soil and Natural Productions of the Indians (Philadelphia: James and Johnson, 1791), p. 482.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 481.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 369.

specifications. However, Bartram observed an exception which shows that Ross was not the first leader not physically a "warrior" type:

There are, however, some exceptions to this observation [of height], as I have myself witnessed. Their present chief or emperor (Little Carpenter, Atta-kul-kulla) is a man of remarkably small stature, slender, and of a delicate frame, the only instance I saw in the nation: but he is a man of superior abilities.<sup>41</sup>

Physical typicality was not, apparently, a criterion for being principal chief. The description of Little Carpenter by Bartram is startling in that it could easily be a description of John Ross in 1828. It was not through physical prowess, control of monies, hereditary rights, or by accident that John Ross was the chosen leader of the Cherokees. John Ross undoubtedly held his power by symbolizing the values of a changing Indian culture.

The Cherokees had been aware since the end of the eighteenth century that an intelligent "spokesman" was needed if their interests were to be fully represented with the white man. In his speech to the Secretary of War on January 7, 1792, Bloody Fellow, Cherokee Chief, had indicated the Cherokee Nation's comprehension of the importance of having a spokesman capable of conversing fully with the white man. He recounted an earlier incident when Nontuaka was sent as representative of the Cherokee Nation to New York in 1789 to speak to the President. "When he was there, he had not a good interpreter, and not well understanding the English language, he could not receive so much advantage from his journey as his nation expected."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 482.

<sup>42</sup>"Cherokees," 2d Cong., 1st Sess., Senate Doc. 24, American State Papers, Vol. IV (Washington: Gales & Seaton, 1832), p. 203. Cited hereafter as A.S.P.

Following Nontuaka's return, the whole Cherokee Nation had assembled and agreed to send an embassy of five chiefs and a delegation of warriors with two interpreters to present their desires to the new government. Bloody Fellow had headed this embassy which arrived December 28, 1791, at Philadelphia.<sup>43</sup> The message they brought was indicative of the changing way of life the Cherokee were moving toward as the warrior and hunter gave way to the political spokesman and the farmer. Bloody Fellow made known his concern for peace in his address to the Secretary of War:

Before I left my nation, it was determined that a stop should be put to the further effusion of blood, and that they should take the United States by the arm with a warm heart.

The talk which I am now delivering to you, is the talk of the beloved men of my nation, with a desire that their children might grow upon the land in peace.<sup>44</sup>

John Ross was a child of the generation forecast by Bloody Fellow. Peace was felt to be necessary for the survival of the Cherokees but was uncertain because of the white man's greed for Indian lands. As succinctly stated by a resident in North Carolina: "So great the thirst for Indian lands prevails, that every method will be taken by a party of people to prevent a treaty with the Indians."<sup>45</sup> The thirst knew no respect for the treaty after it was made. Still the Cherokees, once decided on the route of peace, were to pursue it as a national policy throughout the lifetime of John Ross. Ross was able to sustain his leadership of the Cherokee Indians because he symbolized the values of a changing

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 203-204.

<sup>45</sup>Jos. Martin to H. Knox, 2 February 1789, "Indian Affairs," A.S.P., IV, p. 48.

Indian culture. These changes were instituted and given impetus during the first year of Ross's life, from the Treaty of 1791. The great push toward culturizing the Indians had come with the signing of this treaty by forty-one Cherokee chiefs and warriors with William Blount, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Southern District, negotiating for the federal government. Article fourteen of the treaty specified

That the Cherokee nation may be led to a greater degree of civilization, and to become herdsmen and cultivators, instead of remaining in a state of hunters, the United States will, from time to time, furnish gratuitously the said nation with useful implements of husbandry . . . <sup>46</sup> . [and] to establish a certain mode of communication. . . .

From this early beginning, change was immediately seen during the first decades of the nineteenth century both in the new occupations and in the education of the Indians. Through the efforts of the missionary schools, the Indians moved toward the white man's culture. By the treaty on the Highwassee River, July 13, 1805, change was evident to two of the United States Commissioners. They expressed their delight and joy "in contemplating the progress the Cherokees are making toward a state of civilization and refinement, in exchange for the state of barbarism, in which their ancestors had long been plunged."<sup>47</sup>

Governor Sevier of Tennessee, also present at the aforementioned treaty, is quoted by Rev. Gideon Blackburn relative to the advancement of the Cherokees toward acculturation:

I have often stood unmoved amidst showers of bullets from the

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<sup>46</sup>"The Cherokees, Six Nations, and Creeks," 2d Cong., 1st Sess., Senate Doc. 19, *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 125.

<sup>47</sup>Gen. Daniel Smith and Col. Return J. Meigs to Gideon Blackburn, 13 July 1805. Cited in Gideon Blackburn to Rev. Dr. Morse, 14 December 1807, Missionary Herald, February 1808, p. 417.

Indian rifles; but this [hearing the recitation of Washburn's students] effectually unmans me. I see civilization taking the ground of barbarism, and the praise of Jesus succeeding to the war whoop of the savage.<sup>48</sup>

The Cherokees were not completely converted from their ancient customs at this time, but evidence was sufficient to indicate future possibility. No greater testimony of the desired change in culture was needed than the consistent pursuit by the Cherokees of "civilization" through the missionary education plan. Results of this education are seen by 1817 in the laws enacted and codified by the Cherokee Council and in the establishment of a Cherokee National Government.<sup>49</sup>

Another element of the white man's civilization, property ownership, proved to the Indian that his property, the land, was valuable. The Cherokees were determined to hold their land; thus, the removal conflict was also to emerge as a major problem facing the Cherokees and John Ross. To insure understanding of the policy of the Cherokee Council on exchange or sale of their land, on October 24, 1824, an act was passed declaring the death sentence for anyone guilty of selling tribal land without the consent of the Council.<sup>50</sup>

John Ross was fully aware of the aims and feelings of the Cherokees, and his acceptance by them is evidenced by the early age at which he assumed civic responsibility. He not only gained the respect of the Cherokees but established a good communication with others. Editor Niles

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Laws of the Cherokee Nation (Tahlequah: Cherokee Advocate Office, 1852), p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> Cherokee Phoenix, 20 January 1830. Copy of Act in John Howard Payne Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago.



of the Niles Register thought highly of Ross: "He is intelligent and quite a man of business."<sup>51</sup> Ross had increased confidence in himself, according to Lumpkin and Kennedy, because of the special treatment "which he received at Washington and elsewhere. . . . He, Ross, feels secure in the courtesy and respect which he receives from every officer of your administration. . . ."<sup>52</sup> Lumpkin personally affirmed Ross's influence by remarking that "Ross received the countenance and support of many of the political men of the country. He is countenanced and sustained in his opposition to the treaty by officers and agents of the federal government."<sup>53</sup>

Newspapers also supported Ross, as we are assured by John Ridge's comments in 1838:

They [the editors] all know that in the East the Cherokees have had no elections for nine years past; and yet John Ross is, in their estimation, a constitutional chief over all the Cherokees, and if the President refuses to recognize this preposterous claim and determines to see that all Cherokees shall share alike from the avails of their lands, then they proclaim him a monster, and John Ross the Cherokee Christian.<sup>54</sup>

When Ross and his delegation met with government officials in Washington in 1836 in opposition to the removal treaty, the objection was voiced that Ross and his party were white men, not Indians, with "the principles of white men."<sup>55</sup> In his answer to the charge, Ross reminds

<sup>51</sup>Niles Register, 9 June 1827, p. 355.

<sup>52</sup>Lumpkin and Kennedy to Harris, 5 June 1837, cited by Lumpkin, p. 115.

<sup>53</sup>Wilson Lumpkin to Andrew Jackson, 24 September 1836, cited by Lumpkin, Vol. II, p. 45.

<sup>54</sup>John Ridge to Wilson Lumpkin, May 1838, ibid., p. 205. This letter was read to the U. S. Senate, 15 May 1838.

<sup>55</sup>Niles Register, 8 October 1836, p. 90.

the objectors that only the achieved state of civilization has preserved peaceful conditions:

I will own that it has been my pride, as principal chief of the Cherokees, to implant in the bosoms of the people, and to cherish in my own, the principles of white men! It is to this fact that our white neighbors must ascribe their safety under the smart of the wrongs we have suffered from them. It is in this they may confide for our continued patience. But when I speak of the principles of white men, I speak not of such principles as actuate those who talk thus to us, but of those mightly principles to which the United State owes her greatness and her liberty.<sup>56</sup>

In this caustically eloquent statement, Ross admits his dedication to the white civilization and testifies to the change in Indian culture. He makes a distinct point of saying that were the Indians not more civilized than their ancestors, wrongs such as they had suffered at the hands of the whites would have been erased in the ancient method--by blood.

Considering the dynamic leadership and ability of John Ross, I contend that he held the respect of the Cherokees by identifying with the emerging ideals of Cherokees in transition between two cultures, and by fulfilling the "spokesman" and "mediator" role between the Cherokee Nation and the United States of America. If we accept the act of 1824 which condemned the sale of tribal lands as an expression of the people and extend this to make obvious opposition to removal, John Ross symbolized this element to the fullest extent. John Ross was a man who made a career of being "in the constant service of his people, furnishing an instance of confidence on their part and fidelity on his, which has never been surpassed in the annals of history."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Laws of the Cherokee Nation, Passed during the Years 1839-1867, Compiled by Authority of the National Council (St. Louis: The Missouri Democrat Print, 1863), p. 137.

## CHAPTER II

### INTEGRITY OF LEADERSHIP

John Ross held the reins of leadership of the Cherokee Indians because the Cherokees, as well as the whites, granted him high credibility. The Cherokees' cultural background, although quite different from that of the whites, had leadership traits common to both whites and Cherokees. Ross's leadership credibility was conferred by the Cherokees according to the plateau of acculturation the Cherokees had reached.

What constitutes source credibility? Carolyn Sherif, Muzafer Sherif and Roger Nebergall assert that "contrary to abstract notions, there is no such animal as a perfectly credible communicator, although there may be a few persons willing to accept absolutely anything some other special person says."<sup>1</sup> Yet, this statement does not deny the effects of credibility on the persuasion of the source; it designates only that credibility varies with persuasion of each source. Carl I. Hovland, Irving L. Janis and Harold H. Kelley concur with the variance in credibility but assert that the "effectiveness of a communication is commonly assumed to depend to a considerable extent upon who delivers it."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Sherif, Muzafer Sherif and Roger E. Nebergall, Attitude and Attitude Change (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders & Company, 1965), p. 201.

<sup>2</sup> Carl I. Hovland; Irving L. Janis and Harold H. Kelley, Communication and Persuasion (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), p. 19.

Gerald R. Miller adds another definitive dimension as he contends that "no speaker possesses source credibility; it is conferred upon him by his listeners."<sup>3</sup> Miller defines source credibility as being the audience's perception of the speaker's trustworthiness, his competence, his dynamism.<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Andersen and Theodore Clevenger agree with Miller that credibility is the "audience's image of the speaker."<sup>5</sup> Hovland, Janis and Kelley note that "the perceived expertness and trustworthiness of the communicator may determine the credence given them."<sup>6</sup> Franklyn Haiman affirmed that "audiences in general assign high credibility to those speakers of high social status."<sup>7</sup> These findings testify to the complexities of credibility.

However, the communicator contributes to his own credibility which the audience confers upon him. William Sattler contends that to safeguard his trustworthiness a speaker must exhibit "intrinsic goodness and honesty."<sup>8</sup> Added to this is William Schrier's warning: "Do not lie; do not stimulate a feeling which is not genuine."<sup>9</sup> Schrier further

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<sup>3</sup>Gerald R. Miller, Speech Communication: A Behavioral Approach (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1966), p. 39.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>5</sup>Kenneth Andersen and Theodore Clevenger, Jr., "A Summary of Experimental Research in Ethos," Speech Monographs, Vol. XXX (June, 1963,) p. 72.

<sup>6</sup>Hovland, Janis and Kelley, pp. 19-20.

<sup>7</sup>Franklyn Haiman, "An Experimental Study of the Effect of Ethos in Public Speaking," Speech Monographs, Vol. XVI (June, 1949), p. 201.

<sup>8</sup>William M. Sattler, "Conceptions of Ethos in Ancient Rhetoric," ibid., Vol. XIV (June, 1947), p. 55.

<sup>9</sup>William Schrier, "The Ethics of Persuasion," Quarterly Journal of Speech, Vol. XVI (November, 1930), p. 482.

admonishes the speaker to "be yourself persuaded of the course to which you would persuade others."<sup>10</sup>

Thus, in summary, a speaker exhibits trustworthiness or honesty and expertness or competence which stimulates the audience to confer credibility upon him. John Ross exhibited these traits to such a degree that the Cherokees conferred credibility upon him.

John Ross, indoctrinated with the Cherokee culture of his time-- a culture moving rapidly through a pattern of acculturation to white culture, had high source credibility. To place Ross in proper perspective, a close look at the changing Cherokee concept of leadership is necessary; as the Cherokees defined leadership, they thus set the audience-held norms for source credibility.

The central unit of eighteenth-century Cherokee life was the village. Raymond Fogelson and Paul Kutsche contend that the village unit "can be seen as a predominantly autonomous self-sufficient unit with a highly developed sense of identity."<sup>11</sup> The scarcity of population and the natural environment of a hunter-warrior society contributed to village individuality. However, the comparative stability of the eighteenth-century Cherokee village system was threatened by the advancing white population after mid-century. In order to survive the Cherokee villages formed a loose confederacy which gradually grew into a stronger, more united confederacy. By the close of the century, the Cherokees operated

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Raymond D. Fogelson and Paul Kutsche, "Cherokee Economic Cooperatives: The Gadugi," Symposium on Cherokee and Iroquois Culture, eds. William N. Fenton and John Gullick (Washington: Government Printing Office; Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 180, 1961), p. 97.

under a central authority with representation from the villages. A definite spirit of nationalism prevailed by the early twentieth century which was climaxed by 1827 in a republic form of government with a written constitution patterned after that of the United States.

Economically the early Cherokees were dependent upon nature and their skill at hunting and fishing. Abundant game made possible a communal concept of survival which was also seen in a village community agricultural plot which supplemented the meat diet. Nuts, fruits, and berries were gathered in their seasons and preserved to form a part of the simple economy the Cherokees enjoyed. Then, pressures of the whites created an economic problem. Narrowing boundaries from numerous land cessions meant less game; food became scarce. Survival meant change, so the offer of President George Washington to teach them the arts of agriculture and industry was accepted.

Leadership reflected both political and economic influences. Village leadership was determined according to a dual task system: red-tasks and white-tasks. Fred Gearing explains the special functions of each:

Red-Tasks--war, negotiation with foreign powers, ball games--were coordinated by command through a hierarchy of war ranks under the village war chief. White-tasks--ceremonials, councils, perhaps agriculture--were coordinated by voluntary consensus which was created through the influence of old men in their respective clans,<sup>12</sup> all under the leadership of the village priest chief who was both the symbol of village harmony and

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<sup>12</sup>"Cherokee society was originally divided into a series of seven clans, once considered more binding than blood relationship--Wolf, Blind Savannah, Paint, Long Hair, Bird, Deer, Holly." Marion L. Starkey, The Cherokee Nation (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), p. 6. Also, see Charles Hicks (Chief of the Cherokee Nation), "Manners and Customs," Niles Register, Supp. to Vol. XVI (13 March 1819), p. 101.

the major cause of that harmony.<sup>13</sup>

Leadership for red-tasks fell to the young men who were trained as warriors. The warrior code was based on a competitive scale which affected selection of the red-task leader. Gearing concluded that "leaders seem to have been selected purely on the basis of demonstrated competence."<sup>14</sup> The obvious test of ability was during war with the enemy. Thus the "leader in red-tasks rose in the war ranks through success at war which included not only killing enemies"<sup>15</sup> but, to command, the leader was expected to be egotistic with a haughty bearing and fearful demeanor.

Charles DeWold Brownwell in his observations of the Southern Indians of North America makes specific reference to the red-task leader: "To lead the warriors in battle, the bravest, most redoubted, and sagacious of the tribe was elected."<sup>16</sup>

The dual leadership role continued during the loose confederacy system with war being a constant activity demanding a red-task leader. However, with a series of severe defeats in conflict with the whites the Cherokees made a drastic change by adopting a policy of peaceful coexistence. This decision, supplemented with the acceptance of President Washington's offer to teach them the art of agriculture and industry, eliminated the need for a red-task leader and he passed from the scene.

<sup>13</sup>Fred Gearing, "The Rise of the Cherokee State As an Instance in a Class: The 'Mesopotamian' Career to Statehood," Symposium on Cherokee and Iroquois Culture, pp. 128-129.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Charles DeWold Brownwell, The Indian Races of North and South America (Boston: Horace Wentworth, 1853), pp. 22-23.

The dual task system was noted as seldom permitting the selection of the same individual for both tasks.<sup>17</sup> Brownwell notes that it only occurred "when the lawful sachem [priest chief], from a spirit of emulation or from natural advantages, showed himself worthy of the position."<sup>18</sup> Even if a single individual served in both tasks, the culture included a safeguard against demagogy--its structure did not allow for a "prophet" figure even under great stress or threat.<sup>19</sup>

The white-task leadership usually fell to the old men. The leader accumulated affection by being perceived as "patient, restrained, and sensitive to the sentiments, often unspoken, of those around him. This leadership epitomized the good man, the Cherokee ideal."<sup>20</sup> The white-task leader held great importance through his place in the economy. His supervisory duties over the agricultural plot became of great importance with the scarcity of game as Cherokees found their boundaries shrinking.<sup>21</sup> Reacting to economic stress and the threat of extinction, the Cherokees gradually moved from the dual task system of leadership to a select leader--a leader possessing the talent of sensing and forming public sentiment. Or the white-task leader evolved into head chief, an office to be constitutionalized as the Principal Chief in 1827.

The new leadership was representative of the cultural standards set by the Cherokees and reflected the acculturation level of them. The

<sup>17</sup>Gearing, p. 130.

<sup>18</sup>Brownwell, p. 27.

<sup>19</sup>Robert K. Thomas, "The Redbird Smith Movement," Symposium on Cherokee and Iroquois Culture, p. 165.

<sup>20</sup>Gearing, p. 130.

<sup>21</sup>Fogelson and Kutsche, p. 97.



leader, although evolving from the white-task leader, embodied in the office of principal chief traits of both task leaders. He reflected the qualities of bravery and sagacity of the red-task leader and competence and trustworthiness of both leaders. He was the Cherokee "good man" who possessed those traits respected by the Cherokees. William Bartram, who was highly impressed by the character of the Cherokees, gives an elaborate analysis of the traits they respected in a leader:

The Cherokees in their disposition and manners are grave and steady; dignified and circumspect in their deportment; rather slow and reserved in conversation; yet frank, cheerful, and humane; tenacious of the liberties and natural rights of man; secret, deliberate and determined in their councils; honest, just and liberal, and ready always to sacrifice every pleasure and gratification, even their blood, and life itself, to defend their territory and maintain their rights.<sup>22</sup>

(William Bartram's account could easily be a description of John Ross during the years of his serving as principal chief.) Bartram's list of characteristics is supplemented by Thomas L. McKenney, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, who carefully observed the Cherokees. McKenney adds: "National pride, patriotism, and a spirit of independence mark the Cherokee character."<sup>23</sup> Brownwell extended the list by adding two virtues: namely, "their keen sense of honor, and their keen sense of justice."<sup>24</sup> When these traits are considered along with the white-task leader's ability to gain the affection of his people with an alert sensitivity to their feelings and sentiments, we have a fairly complete picture of the type of man suited to lead the Cherokees. This "ideal man" was one on whom

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<sup>22</sup>Bartram, p. 483.

<sup>23</sup>Thos. L. McKenney to Hon. James Barbour, 13 December 1825, House Doc. 102, 19th Cong., 1st Sess., p. 18.

<sup>24</sup>Brownwell, p. 22.

they could confer credibility without reservation. These traits made him trustworthy and competent.

The new leadership, faced with confronting the whites and speaking for the Cherokees with the white man's government, required great skill in the art of speaking. Skill in speaking was an integral part of the Cherokee culture, but the new acculturation level also emphasized the need for the leader to have a knowledge of the white man's language. This was dramatically demonstrated when Nontuaka was sent to communicate with President Washington. Chief Bloody Fellow, who headed the delegation sent to Philadelphia following Nontuaka's return to the Cherokees, explains the limited success Nontuaka had in speaking for the Cherokees as being the result of a poor interpreter. Bloody Fellow said that because of Nontuaka's "not well understanding the English language, he could not receive so much advantage from his journey as his nation expected."<sup>25</sup>

To demonstrate competence, a leader was expected to be accomplished in the art of public speaking, especially following the 1890's when the Cherokees embarked on a pattern of acculturation. Brownwell testifies to how successful the leaders were by noting that examples of their oratory were "models of stirring eloquence."<sup>26</sup> The responsibility of speaking for the people was recognized as being accepted by the chief. No exceptions are noted after the constitutional government was established in 1827. However, one exception demonstrates the importance of the art of speaking in the early years of acculturation and shows how the Cherokees,

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<sup>25</sup>Speech of Bloody Fellow, 7 January 1792, A.S.P., Class II, p. 203.

<sup>26</sup>Brownwell, p. 22.

as an audience, respect the talent.

When the missionary, Elias Cornelius, appeared before the Cherokee Nation to request permission to establish mission schools among them, The Ridge, who spoke fluent English, assumed the role of spokesman rather than the aged chief who spoke only Cherokee. The admirable manner in which he spoke on this occasion was greatly respected. His reputation was even more enhanced by his performance at a later occasion when his office, President of the National Council, required that he assume the role of spokesman. He was to perform a painful duty; he had to censure the attempted bribe of John Ross by Chief McIntosh, a friend of The Ridge.<sup>27</sup> The eloquence of The Ridge and his fulfilling his duty regardless of personal feelings undoubtedly was a contributing factor in his later election as assistant chief to John Ross. Marion Starkey states that Ridge's "influence depended less on his various official functions than on his personality and his extraordinary power as a speaker."<sup>28</sup> The Cherokees placed great emphasis on the ability to speak effectively and it was an art acquired through observation and through experience.

Another instance in which a chief reflected the will of the Cherokees and spoke for them occurred in 1792. This occasion was the meeting of a Cherokee delegation with the President of the United States and his Secretary of War. The leader of the delegation was Chief Bloody Fellow. As a trusted leader, he made sure that the whites knew he spoke for his people. He informed them that his speech was "the talk of the

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<sup>27</sup>Niles Register, 26 June 1824, p. 278.

<sup>28</sup>Starkey, p. 51.

beloved men of my nation."<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, Bloody Fellow expressed the necessity of the delegation's following instructions they had received from the beloved men and warriors of their people. "They told us to make haste, to finish our business, and to return as soon as possible, so that by fully informing them of the good disposition of General Washington, measures might be taken to restrain the young warriors. . . ." <sup>30</sup> Thus a credible leader of the Cherokees spoke for them. A leader's competence was definitely demonstrated by his honesty in reflecting their wishes and by his ability to intelligently guide them in every facet of leadership.

The credibility of John Ross is signified in the elective positions and offices he held in the Cherokee Nation. His grasp of leadership was no circumstance of the moment or quirk of fate. As a leader he demonstrated competence and trustworthiness, and he assumed responsibility. His people gave evidence of recognition in according him greater elective positions; as his biography reveals.

Ross's leadership and public life began early. He was given his first political position at the age of nineteen. His mission was to serve as an emissary to the Cherokee lands on the Arkansas and to bring back a report of conditions there. This appointment by Return J. Meigs, Indian agent, was the beginning of service for his people which terminated only with his death. Meigs was a white man who recognized Ross's ability and the favorable position he held in the eyes of his people. His choice was highly approved by the Cherokees. Later

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<sup>29</sup>Speech of Bloody Fellow, 7 January 1792, A.S.P., Class II, p. 204.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

Ross served as a delegate in the group appearing before President Madison in 1816, and he acquired the affection and respect of his people so that they honored him by electing him President of the Council in 1819. This was followed by his election as President of the Constitutional Convention in 1826-1827; his election as Assistant Chief under William Hicks of the newly constituted republic; and, finally, his election to the office of the Principal Chief of the Cherokees in 1828 when Chief Hicks died.<sup>31</sup>

Evidence of the extent of Ross's credibility is reflected by the Cherokees; by his own actions which demonstrated competence and willingness to serve his people unselfishly; by the testimony of whites: federal officers, senators, governors, travelers, missionaries, newsmen and journalists; and by the trust and respect of other Indians. All these attest to the credibility of John Ross as the Principal Chief of the Cherokee Indians.

The Cherokees held Ross in high respect to the extent of making personal sacrifices of material goods. They trusted him to the endangerment of their lives as pro-removal forces of Georgia and the federal government abused lawful procedures and killed at the least excuse. The Cherokees gave their loyalty and trust even as they endured the tragedy of the march over the "Trail of Tears" and still, by election, said: John Ross is our leader.

The loyalty of the Cherokees is seen in those instances of attempts to discredit Ross. Holding perhaps the greatest significance, and being the most unusual of all such attempts, was a plan instigated by President

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<sup>31</sup>Corn, p. 31.

Andrew Jackson of the United States.

Jackson, although he tried to deny it energetically on several occasions, was an Indian hater. He grew up on the frontier and from his earliest memories had seen the result of Indian revenge. Most of his success in the military was in fighting the Indians and his list of unpleasant memories was undoubtedly filled with the Indian in the role of villain. Politically, Jackson was greatly indebted to the support of the westerners or frontiersmen and this demanded he be anti-Indian to hold their loyalty. The Indian problem was a thorn in Jackson's flesh from the moment he became President, and he found the Cherokees the most adamant to removal. His strategy was to discredit John Ross whom he felt to be the focal point of Cherokee resistance.

Jackson found the Cherokees' Achilles heel, he thought, when he discovered the weakness in the new Cherokee constitution. No provision had been made for financial independence for the Cherokee government, but finances were felt assured in the annuities owed by the United States. Jackson felt he could undermine Ross's influence by stopping payment of the annuities. He felt the government would cease to function if money was not available to pay the officials. In this Jackson underestimated the loyalty of the Cherokees. His plan failed as citizens paid their own expenses and Ross's government continued to function under a financial handicap.

Unwilling to accept defeat, Jackson ordered the annuities deposited in the United States Bank at Nashville. Colonel Hugh Montgomery, United States Commissioner, was instructed to pay only individual Indians, not to pay the money to the Cherokee Nation as was customary. It was

hoped that the War Department could thus wean the people from their leaders by offering funds of which Chief Ross and his officials had seemingly been depriving them.<sup>32</sup> Jackson's plan succeeded in embarrassing the Cherokee government financially: the councilmen's salaries could not be paid, nor were funds available to finance the delegation to Washington. The virtue of justice so indelibly a part of Cherokee life brought Ross even greater support and loyalty by his people, and most spurned the offer of funds.<sup>33</sup> The majority of the Cherokees turned away with the comment that the money should be paid to their nation as before.

Jackson saw another opportunity as a rift seemed eminent among the Cherokees. A very small minority was headed by affluent mixed bloods, who came to be stigmatized by the appellation of "Treaty Party." They found the loyalty of the majority of the Cherokee impervious to their attempts to sever them from John Ross. Though they numbered less than a hundred, Jackson thought this minority worth considering as a force to use against Ross. Jackson's strategy was put into effect when the Ross delegation to Washington was confronted with a treaty delegation purporting to represent the Cherokees. Jackson rejected Ross and his delegation and concentrated upon the treaty delegation of Ridge and Boudinot were unable to arouse support from their people. Schemmerhorn went into the Cherokee Nation but the Cherokees were staunchly loyal to Ross.<sup>34</sup>

Whether the next event was instigated by Jackson is unknown, but he did not disapprove of the outcome. It was primed by the arrest of John

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<sup>32</sup>Starkey, p. 51.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 150-151.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., pp. 254-268.

Ross by the Georgian Guard. Schemmerhorn set as a date for a new meeting for considering new treaty arrangement: December 23, 1835. The Cherokees were urged to attend by the treaty party and by Schemmerhorn. Ross, having secured release from prison, ignored the plans for the meeting as he and his delegation made preparations to go to Washington. Schemmerhorn offered a bribe of free blankets to those attending the meeting, but only about three hundred men, women and children attended. Most of these adults were of the treaty party. The Cherokees boycotted the meeting because they felt it would be disloyal to Ross to attend. The boycott plus Ross's absence left only a minority present to oppose the treaty; the treaty was signed December 29, 1835.

Schemmerhorn was jubilant as he wrote the War Department that now Ross was prostrate with the power of the Nation taken from him.<sup>35</sup> However, if he expected Ross to be deserted by the Cherokees, he was disappointed. The people rallied immediately in angry protest. Ninety percent of the people "voted to invest John Ross with full power to adjust the Nation's difficulties in whatever way he might think most beneficial."<sup>36</sup> Such a vote of confidence and power of attorney over a people's destiny is unusual and rare in the annals of history. It would have been remarkable under ordinary circumstances; but, since the Cherokees had seen so many respected men of their nation betray them in recent months, it was a tribute of astounding proportions.

Evidence of Ross's credibility is reflected by his own actions.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.; Woodward, p. 190.

<sup>36</sup> Ben F. Curry to Elbert Herring, Esq., 23 May 1835, Cherokee Indian Letters, Talks and Treaties, 1786-1838, Vol. I, WPA Project No. 4341 in Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta.



His actions were greater than just words. In a message to the Council, Ross supposed an event which did come to pass. In his address to the National Council in July, 1830, he concluded: "Confiding in the superintending care of a kind providence, we should not despair, even should we for a season be plunged into the cells of Georgia's prisons; means for our deliverance may yet be found."<sup>37</sup> As Georgia flexed the power of a state and fed upon her successful use of it, the Cherokees filled her prisons. Georgia moved against Ross in the fall of 1835 with full confidence that President Jackson would do nothing to hinder her. Captain Bishop and the Georgia Guard, by orders of Major B. F. Curry,<sup>38</sup> seized Ross and John Howard Payne at Ross's cabin. Payne, a guest of Ross at the time, was a traveler in the Cherokee Nation. Public documents of the Cherokees were seized also.<sup>39</sup> Ross's arrest only gave him greater credibility with the Cherokees, for now he, too, suffered the indignation many Cherokees had been and were being subjected to.

Another action of Ross permanently recorded in the annals of Cherokee history attests to his personal integrity and testifies to his trustworthiness. At the time the Cherokees were being pressured to release lands in Georgia, Major McIntosh offered a bribe to John Ross for information on the decision of the Cherokees. Ross not only refused the bribe but publicly denounced McIntosh before the Cherokees.

Undoubtedly, this action of Ross was remembered when later attempts were made to discredit his character and question his honesty in handling

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<sup>37</sup> Message of John Ross, July 1830, Niles Register, 7 August 1830, p. 423.

<sup>38</sup> Tennessee Journal (Athens, Tennessee), 18 November 1835.

<sup>39</sup> Niles Register, 5 December 1835, p. 239.

the Nation's funds. Those who attempted to convince the Cherokees of avarice on the part of John Ross failed. The "treaty party" and Wilson Lumpkin both attempted this. Lumpkin tried in Washington and in the Cherokee Nation as well. As in other attempts of his, Lumpkin was frustrated in his attempts by the credibility of Ross, both in Washington and among his own people.<sup>40</sup>

Naturally, the main action of Ross which not only revealed his dedication but also his willingness to serve was his constant trips to Washington on behalf of the Cherokees. He exhibited a tireless energy and a fervor the Cherokees could respect. From his first assignment by Return J. Meigs, John Ross was always a willing servant to his people.

The credibility of John Ross was testified to by the white men who knew him. They observed his credibility both with his people and with the whites. The first of this group were the federal officers or government employees. Most of these were appointed officials whose position demanded they work against the Cherokees, and they were often highly prejudiced in their outlook. P. M. Butler, Bureau of Indian Affairs, had numerous opportunities to observe Ross's status with his people. In 1842, Butler commented that Ross was trusted by his people and sincere in his concern for their rights.<sup>41</sup>

Another federal official Gen. Waddy Thompson, while serving in the Cherokee Nation, commented on the extent of Ross's education and "high order

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<sup>40</sup>Lumpkin, Removal of the Cherokee Indians from Georgia, Vol. I. pp. 187-188.

<sup>41</sup>P. M. Butler to T. Hartley Crawford, 4 March 1842, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, National Archives Microfilm, Roll 90. Cited hereafter as L.R.O.I.A.

of intellect, unflagging energy, [and] indomitable courage."<sup>42</sup> Acknowledging the success of Ross's leadership, Thompson was aware that the aforementioned were greatly responsible for Ross's success in holding the confidence of his people.

Yet, the most extensive comments come from the arch enemy of Ross, Wilson Lumpkin. Lumpkin was a Georgian, first and last. He served both as governor and as United States senator. During the years of crisis over Indian removal after the Treaty of 1835, Lumpkin and John Kennedy were United States commissioners in the Cherokee Nation. In expending their fullest efforts to get the Cherokees to emigrate peaceably, they were frustrated and, in 1837, acknowledged Ross's great leadership and influence. Desiring to rationalize Ross's influence in Washington and to disparage the Cherokees' tribute to Ross, Lumpkin and Kennedy labeled him the "idol" of the ignorant Cherokees.<sup>43</sup> Later in his account of the removal of the Cherokees from Georgia, Lumpkin makes an unexplained statement that "many circumstances pointed to him [John Ross] from early boyhood, as the prospective ruler of the Cherokees."<sup>44</sup> Lumpkin had numerous reasons to complain of Ross's leadership from his many personal experiences. He categorized Ross as the "Master Spirit of opposition" and a wary politician.<sup>45</sup> As commissioner in the Cherokee Nation, Lumpkin felt some

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<sup>42</sup>Cherokee Advocate, 9 March 1852.

<sup>43</sup>Wilson Lumpkin and John Kennedy to J. Mason, Jr., 9 September 1837, Lumpkin, Removal of the Cherokee Indians from Georgia, Vol. II, p. 136.

<sup>44</sup>Lumpkin, Removal of the Cherokee Indians from Georgia, Vol. I, pp. 187-188.

<sup>45</sup>Lumpkin and Kennedy to Harris, 5 June 1837, ibid., Vol. II, p. 112.

success in persuading the Indians to emigrate. However, he discovered their desire subsided as soon as Ross returned to the Nation from Washington. He acknowledged that the Cherokees acted in accordance with Ross's will. Lumpkin even admitted that Ross was a "sagacious, subtle man" of great reserve and dignity.<sup>46</sup> By his comments Lumpkin gives Ross the characteristics the Cherokees had through generations revered in their white-task leader; now they reposed in the Principal Chief. It was understandable that the whites should recognize that a man qualified under Cherokee standards to be their leader should be a "most extraordinary man."<sup>47</sup>

Ross was able to gain acceptance by another type of white official the Cherokees could well appreciate. Ross seemed to gain readily the sympathy and respect of the army officers sent to serve in the Nation. Lumpkin and Kennedy witnessed and complained of the affection Ross seemed to possess with army officers as well as complain about the respect Ross commanded in Washington. They felt that the reserved and confident manner of Ross resulted from "the courtesy and respect which he receives from every officer of your [C. A. Harris, Commissioner of Indian Affairs] administration, and the kind feelings entertained for him in a special manner, by the Army agents."<sup>48</sup> Lumpkin, himself, also complained to

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Stambough and Kendall to W. L. Marcy, 30 December 1835, H. R. Doc. 185, p. 57.

<sup>48</sup> Lumpkin and Kennedy to C. A. Harris, Esq., 5 June 1837, Lumpkin, Removal of the Cherokee Indians from Georgia, Vol. II, pp. 111-112.

President Jackson in 1836 that John Ross was encouraged and supported in his opposition to removal by federal agents and officers.<sup>49</sup> These comments were made during the time of extensive hardships and persecution of the Cherokees as the question of removal pushed them to the precipice of extinction. This overwhelming evidence of Ross's ability to command the respect of the whites only added to his credibility with his people.

Ross's credibility is reflected in the comments of travelers in the Cherokee Nation. John Howard Payne records an incident which he observed at the Red Clay Council in 1835 while he was a guest of Ross. In a noiseless procession the Cherokees formed diagonally in two lines before the gate of Ross's cabin and in silence gave Ross their hand, a symbol of complete trust.<sup>50</sup>

Another traveler in Cherokee territory was one of the first to indicate the extent of Ross's influence with his people. In 1819 Buttrick wrote of Ross: "He is not in point of influence inferior to any except Mr. Charles Hicks.<sup>51</sup> These two walk hand in hand in the National Councils and are the hope of the Nation."<sup>52</sup>

Ross's credibility was reflected in the comments of Ethan Allen

<sup>49</sup>Lumpkin to Andrew Jackson, 24 September 1836, ibid., p. 45.

<sup>50</sup>Starkey, p. 258.

<sup>51</sup>Hicks was Assistant to the Principal Chief and Ross was president of the Council. The Principal Chief, Pathkiller, was infirm and Hicks was actually performing the duties of the Principal Chief. Pathkiller was the last non-English speaking, illiterate Principal Chief elected by the Cherokees.

<sup>52</sup>Starkey, p. 51.

Hitchcock in 1841 after he had traveled through the Cherokee Nation. He noted that "John Ross is an honest man and a patriot laboring for the good of his people."<sup>53</sup> He further affirmed that Ross sought to establish his nation for the benefit of his people. He thought Ross a "clear-minded accurate thinker of very far reaching views"<sup>54</sup> but did not consider him a fluent speaker.

A major source of material on Ross's credibility is found in the missionary journals and letters over the lifetime of Ross. One missionary traveled extensively in the Nation, the Rev. William H. Goode. He observed that Ross held great status with his people. He thought Ross "quite equal . . . in mental caliber and business tact, to the average of our Congressmen."<sup>55</sup> Goode doesn't disagree with Hitchcock's assessment of Ross as a speaker but rather qualifies his observation. Goode felt Ross was not a dynamic speaker in white man's terms but compared him in debating ability to be the equal of a Congressman.<sup>56</sup> Ross's speeches and letters reveal a more-than-adequate control of the English language and an ability to express his ideas explicitly. Hitchcock and Goode affirm Ross's ability to meet with whites on a favorable level, attesting to his competence in speaking for his people. This favorable reception is noted in an incident in the United States Congress. Congressman Henry Wise of Virginia "cogently invited a comparison of John Ross

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<sup>53</sup>Hitchcock, p. 234.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>William H. Goode, Outposts of Zion (Cincinnati: Poe & Hitchcock, 1863), p. 72.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

and 'Mr. Haley,' a member of the House from Georgia, who had tried to belittle Ross. 'And the gentlemen from Georgia will not gain greatly by comparison, either in civilization or morals.'"<sup>57</sup> Little doubt exists of the ability of John Ross to speak well for his people.

Ross's credibility is reflected in other missionaries' comments. One of these, Samuel A. Worcester, was dedicated to the task of bringing the Cherokees into the ranks of civilization acceptable to white society. In 1830, having personal knowledge of the chiefs and the governmental structure of the Cherokees, Worcester denied a rumor that was circulating among the whites and in the Nation that the chiefs ruled by force and kept the Indians from accepting removal. Worcester said: "It is not so. Nothing is plainer than that it is the earnest wish of the whole of the people to remain where they are."<sup>58</sup> The chiefs were merely reflecting the will of the people; if they did not, they would be removed.<sup>59</sup> Thus Worcester proves the retention of the ancient white-task trait of a leader's having to reflect the sentiments of the people, and John Ross did reflect his people's wishes.

Another missionary, Rev. Evan Jones, was a great admirer of Ross. [He was the force that resolved factionalism in the Nation after Ross's death.] Following the death of Ross, Jones noted characteristics of Ross which qualified him as leader of the Cherokees according to their norms of leadership. "Mr. Ross's uprightness and personal integrity,"

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<sup>57</sup>Woodward, p. 195.

<sup>58</sup>Rev. Samuel A. Worcester to William S. Coodey, 15 March 1830, Missionary Herald, Vol. XXVI (May 1830), p. 155.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

states Jones, "his intense patriotism and life-long care for his people, and his self-sacrificing devotion to their interests, are facts so well known that to be recognized they have only to be mentioned."<sup>60</sup>

Missionaries found they had the full support of Ross in their efforts to teach the Cherokees. Even though Ross, in the earlier years, claimed no alignment with any of them religiously, he was responsible for the Cherokees' fulfilling their agreements with the missionaries.

Ross's credibility was reflected by newsmen and journalists. This proved a great asset in presenting the Cherokees' case to the United States. Newsmen liked and respected John Ross and thus gave favorable accounts of the Cherokees. A correspondent of the Montreal Courier wrote his editor from New York: "Ross is no ordinary man. He is one of those apparently marked out by nature for great and lofty enterprise."<sup>61</sup> This comment, in conjunction with others along the same line, indicates a charismatic quality in Ross and suggests that his totality of personality was magnetic and powerful. Ross seemed to have the aura of vision which gave him great spiritual appeal. Regardless, evidence strongly supports the theory that Ross commanded notice and respect.

Opponents of Ross felt newsmen were biased in his favor. John Ridge complained that editors of eastern newspapers erroneously recognized Ross as leader of the Cherokees. As a member of the "treaty party," Ridge felt Ross should not be given newspaper publicity as Principal Chief. "They all know," wrote Ridge, "that in the East the Cherokees have had no elections for nine years past; and yet John Ross is in their

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<sup>60</sup> Evan Jones' Statement, 20 July 1868, U. S. Senate Doc. 113, p. 6.

<sup>61</sup> Niles Register, 9 June 1827, p. 355.



estimation, a constitutional chief over all the Cherokees. . . ."62 Yet Ridge at the time knew Ross held the respect and support of the Cherokee majority.

Perhaps the greatest friend to the Cherokees in the journalist field was the editor of the Niles Register, a weekly publication. Jeremiah Niles respected John Ross and sympathized with the Cherokee cause. He thought John Ross to be "intelligent and quite a man of business."<sup>63</sup> Whether at the instigation of John Ross or not, the Niles Register faithfully printed the Cherokees' side of the conflict. Undoubtedly this was an aid to the friendly reception of Ross in Washington. The articles from the Cherokee Phoenix, the national Cherokee paper, were reprinted regularly in Niles Register and served as a link in the propaganda campaign launched by the Cherokees during the conflict with Georgia.

Ross's ability to gain respect and hold influence is reflected in the credibility he held with his red brethren. His influence was used to advantage by Albert Pike in his attempt to identify the Indians with the cause of the Confederacy in 1861. The situation was set in the first months of the Civil War and at a time when the United States seemed most neglectful of the Indians. Ross had hoped for neutrality when he called an Intertribal Council in the spring of 1861. At his request for a policy of neutrality, all the tribes unanimously agreed. In the fall of that year, Albert Pike, acting as a Confederate emissary, called a council of the same tribes to meet at the Cherokee capitol of Tahlequah. In order

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<sup>62</sup> John Ridge to Wilson Lumpkin, May 1838, Lumpkin, Removal of the Cherokee Indians from Georgia, Vol. II, p. 205.

<sup>63</sup> Niles Register, 9 June 1827, p. 315.

to insure attention, Pike stated that John Ross was to speak. Pike recognized the credibility Ross had both with his people and the rest of the Indians. The Indians came to the meeting; but, instead of Ross, Pike addressed the Council.<sup>64</sup>

The federal commissioners sent into the Indian Territory after the Civil War were immediately made aware of the influence of John Ross with other tribes. Although Ross was not permitted to attend as an official delegate, he was the controlling force outside the official arena and was consulted by the leaders of many of the tribes.

Ross was indeed a man able to establish his credibility. Such credibility is demonstrated with his own people in his continuous election as Principal Chief, but he held credibility with whites as well as with his brethren. A man with lesser ability and influence would have been unable to sustain leadership during the chaotic times of removal and relocation.

These extrinsic proofs reveal the extraordinary nature of John Ross and reveal the personal traits and abilities which made him so. But the aforementioned testimonials to Ross's credibility with the Cherokees are not alone; the bases for credibility of John Ross are found within his messages. He identifies his actions as being reflective of the best interests of his people. He affirms: I serve you. His assumption of the leadership of the Cherokees came at a time of crisis and conflict, with Georgia demanding that the Cherokees be removed from their lands to others west of the Mississippi. His loyalty to his people was constant, and he

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<sup>64</sup>Baptiste Peoria to G. A. Collom, Esq., 1 May 1862, A.R.O.I.A.--1862, p. 173.

declared it a "sacred privilege . . . to promote the interest and happiness of our citizens."<sup>65</sup>

Whether it was intentional or not, John Ross projected his leader image by inviting the comparison between the Cherokees and the Israelites in Egypt. The Israelites were delivered through the leadership of Moses, who unselfishly spent all of his efforts to bring the Israelites out of bondage to safety and relocation in a new land under divine guidance.

Ross addressed the Council:

Confiding in the superintending care of a kind Providence, we should not despair, even should we for a season be plunged into the cells of Georgia's prisons; means for our deliverance may yet be found. Let us not forget the circumstance related in holy writ of the safe passage of the children of Israel through the crystal walls of the Red Sea, and the fate of their wicked pursuers . . . there is still hope.<sup>66</sup>

The Cherokees undoubtedly knew the biblical story, and little imagination was needed to see a comparative relationship between Moses leading the Israelites and Ross leading the Cherokees. Moses's judgment proved correct; Ross's judgment would too.

Ross felt that it was an incumbent duty of his office to keep the people informed and was diligent in this regard. Frequently in his messages he states this important duty: "In pursuance of duty, I will suggest, for your consideration, such topics as in my opinion, the public good seems to require. . . ."<sup>67</sup>

The critical times as a result of the State of Georgia's

<sup>65</sup>Message of John Ross, 14 October 1829, Niles Register, 14 November 1829, p. 189.

<sup>66</sup>Message of John Ross, July 1830, ibid., 7 August 1830, p. 423.

<sup>67</sup>Message of John Ross, 11 October 1830, Cherokee Phoenix, 16 October 1830.

determining to get rid of the Cherokees at all costs and in any way possible, regardless of legality, justice or rights, aroused the Cherokees to vote a blanket power of attorney to Ross to speak and act for them:

To meet the exigency of the times, a law was passed at the late extra session, authorizing the Principal Chief to take measures for defending the rights of this nation before all courts of law and equity in the United States, against the acts of any individual state attempting to exercise jurisdiction within our limits, to the end that the question, touching the right of sovereignty may be taken up before the supreme Court of the United States, for adjudication.<sup>68</sup>

To be spokesman for the nation, even armed with the power of the people, was not an easy task; at times, Ross realized his life was in danger. He projected this idea in his message to the Cherokees: "Acts of the most innocent character, however necessary and expedient, when performed under the authorities of this nation, in these days, are too apt to be misrepresented and magnified into an offense."<sup>69</sup> But physical safety was overshadowed by the threat to the harmony and unity of the Cherokees as the young editor of the Cherokee Phoenix was ensnared in the removal question. Sensitive to the suffering of his people, Elias Boudinot was persuaded to join with the removal party. He demanded that censorship be lifted and the issue be discussed in the paper so the Cherokees would be completely informed. John Ross would not consent, and Boudinot resigned.<sup>70</sup> Ross accepted the resignation and presented it to the National Council. In accepting the resignation, Ross stressed the responsibility of public officials to answer the will of the people:

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Elias Boudinot to John Ross, 1 August 1832, Indian Advocate, 11 August 1832.

The views of the public authorities should continue and ever be in accordance with the will of the people; and the views of the editor of the national paper be the same. The toleration of diversified views to the columns of such a paper would not fail to create fermentation and confusion among our citizens, and in the nation. The love of our country and people demands unity of sentiment and action for the good of all.<sup>71</sup>

Ross was indeed sensitive to keeping the people informed of the actions of the National Committee and Council, as well as himself and the delegations representing the Nation. In his message to the National Council, he reviews the United States policy in regard to the emigration scheme and advises the Council:

In the present state of things, you can do little more by legislation than to adopt such measures as will be calculated to keep our citizens correctly informed of the true posture of the public affairs, that they may remain united in the support of our common interests and national rights. . . .<sup>72</sup>

He demonstrated this concern for keeping the people informed each time a delegation returned from the federal capital. In 1833 he reported the results of the delegation's trip to Washington to the National Council so that they could inform the people in their districts "as it is important that they should at all times be correctly informed of our public affairs."<sup>73</sup>

With removal behind them, the Cherokees struggled to build again in their new location. The federal government had not paid Cherokee annuities and a delegation, headed by John Ross, was sent to present their case. In 1840 Ross reported to the National Council. He presented

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Message of John Ross, 10 October 1832, Cherokee Advocate, 27 October 1832.

<sup>73</sup> Message of John Ross, 13 May 1833, Niles Register, 19 October 1833, p. 121.

himself as the determined spokesman who liquidated the financial embarrassment of the Nation (a result of unpaid annuities from the United States) from personal funds paid him for improvements in his previous location east of the Mississippi. He paid all expenses outstanding against the delegates. Ross thus was presented as an unselfish and loyal patriot who put his people's good before his own. Ross wanted the people to know that he had been one with the people in suffering and privation during the recent removal westward and that his sole concern was for their interests. He reminds them of his contribution:

It will be remembered that I myself have made no charge for time nor services, but that I enrolled myself under a conductory of my own appointment, and moved, with my family, on the same terms with my fellow<sup>74</sup> countrymen; hence, I am only interested in common with them.

This was given added emphasis by the knowledge that Ross had suffered the loss of his wife, Quatie, in the removal. The people knew that he had suffered as they had in the removal westward.

With their journey westward, the Cherokees brought the grievous reminder that the majority had been sold out by a minority, the Treaty Party. This small group was not a serious threat to the nation, only a threat to its harmony. Yet its history is vital to an understanding of events in later history.

The evolvment of the "treaty party" was a result of the concentrated efforts of Georgia to so mistreat the Indians that they would be glad to remove westward. Heinrich Glauder, a Moravian missionary, wrote in 1833 that it was unsafe to live on any lands claimed by

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<sup>74</sup>Message of John Ross, October 1840, House Exec. Doc., 27th Cong., 2d Sess., No. 1098, pp. 44-47. Bound in Indian Documents (O.H.S.), Vol. IV, pp. 576-579.

Georgia.<sup>75</sup> The Cherokee newspaper printed the lament that

The beautiful and beloved country of the Cherokees is now passing to the occupancy of the Georgians. The drawing of the lands and Gold mines of the Cherokees continues to be prosecuted with vigor, under the authority of the enlightened and christian Governor of Georgia. . . . The Cherokee country is now wedged with settlers, and droves of land hunters, to which the Indians cry daily, and it is literally, Robbery! Robbery! [sic] This crusade on our rights forms a new era in the history of the United States by which the Cherokees are de-nationalized, treaties destroyed, the legislation of Congress to carry them into effect annulled, and the faith of the republic fled to the western wilds.<sup>76</sup>

Elias Boudinot was one who felt that only moral death could result from attempts to cling to Cherokee lands under such circumstances. John Ridge was one of the first to endorse removal and to complain of the suffering of his people. Since the Cherokees were "robbed & whipped by the whites almost every day," Ridge urged Ross to establish the Nation elsewhere.<sup>77</sup> Ridge made his sentiments known to his friends and persuaded his father, Major Ridge, to back removal even though The Ridge had helped execute one who had illegally ceded Cherokee land in 1809. By 1833 the Treaty Party was a reality and advocated selling all the land of the Nation.

By 1834 the Treaty Party called a meeting to promote a treaty, but few Cherokees joined them. Numerically small, they were only an irritant to most Cherokees, but the schism tore the nation with the Treaty of 1835. The treaty was signed by a handful of treaty party

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<sup>75</sup> Heinrich Clauder, "The Diary of the Moravian Missions Among the Cherokee Indians," 7-13 January 1833, bound typescript in O.H.S.

<sup>76</sup> Cherokee Phoenix, 19 January 1833.

<sup>77</sup> John Ridge to John Ross, 2 February 1833, J.R.P.

members, who were designated by the majority as traitors. The signing led to the murder of some of the signers. These murders were to sever the full loyalty of the Ridge and Stand Watie families as long as Ross lived and to form a smouldering ember ready to blaze at the slightest provocation.

Following removal, this enmity was evident in the attacks on Ross's integrity. He was accused of mishandling the Nation's funds. The accusation that he pocketed the funds for his own use brought a reply in his message to the National Council in 1842. The request had been that he render a full account of disbursements since 1835. He stated that all annuities were received by the treasurer, John Martin, until the fall of 1837; then, none were received until 1841 when the annuities and school fund were received by the present treasurer, David Vann. The monies received in 1838 by the delegation to Washington, \$1,147,000, was disbursed by the national committee in charge of the debts of the nation, most of which was spent in the emigration. Ross stated that he thought it would be good to have the committee of thirteen, who disbursed the funds, to lay a report before the council and the people.<sup>78</sup> In answer to the demand that he declare any funds he had now, he assured them: "There are no moneys in my hands subject to legislation."<sup>79</sup> Again Ross was the honest leader, good man, concerned for his people and a spokesman who wants his people to be informed.

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<sup>78</sup>Message of John Ross, 20 December 1842, House Doc. No. 234, 27th Cong., 3d Sess., Bound in Indian Documents (O.H.S.), Vol. IV, pp. 22-32.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.



Nor was Ross willing to let the deaths of outstanding public officials deter the people from their duties or any official from his duty. Ross's message was a practical one, accepting the deaths and declaring that each one would follow in his turn but reminding them that the living had duties. "We cannot, therefore, be too strongly impressed with the importance of so discharging our respective duties as good and faithful servants, that our individual and National prosperity may be promoted, and our future happiness secured."<sup>80</sup> Thus Ross implied that he was dedicated to his duties so that personal sorrow was secondary to the interests of the Nation.

Ross was so often a delegate to Washington that he was expected to speak for the Cherokees and expected to give a full report to the Nation. He did not disappoint them in reporting on all delegations sent to Washington. After the signing of the Treaty of 1846, he reported that "I am persuaded that the treaty of 1846 will meet the approval of the Cherokee people."<sup>81</sup> Indeed Ross had had the confidence of his people so long that he could accurately judge what they would approve.

Ross was also given the opportunity of playing a role of watchful leader in 1852. The assistant chief was ill, and although Ross had been elected to head the delegation to Washington, he did not go. He later informed the National Council that he had remained to watch over the affairs of the Nation because it was expedient that he do so.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>Message of John Ross, 18 November 1844, The Cherokee Messenger, Vol. I, No. 1. A bound volume, almost entirely in Cherokee, in the possession of Mrs. Messenbaugh, O.H.S.

<sup>81</sup>Message of John Ross, 12 November 1846, Niles Register, 26 December 1846, p. 259.

<sup>82</sup>Message of John Ross, 4 October 1852, Indian Advocate, Louisville, Kentucky, Vol. VII, No. 6 (December 1852).

The strength of the credibility of John Ross with his people is seen in his re-election in 1859. The Cherokees needed someone they could trust as the question of slavery split the State and the Indians became pawns in the struggle. The years of turmoil proved too much for the Cherokees, and their progress and livelihood were swept away by the tidal wave of war. The disaster that the Civil War brought upon the Cherokees did not break the reserved dignity of their leader who remained fortified by "soft, easy, gentlemanly manners" and "a good moral character."<sup>83</sup>

Ross tightly bound his people to him throughout his life and died in 1866 holding the reins of leadership as his people wished. Undoubtedly Ross made errors in judgement, "Yet they were not the mistakes of a small man, but of a great one. If he erred it was on the side of zeal for a cause which he thought to be right."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Lumpkin, Removal of the Cherokee Indians from Georgia, Vol. I, p. 186.

<sup>84</sup>Rachael Carolyn Eaton, John Ross and the Cherokee Indians (Menasha, Wisconsin: George Banta Publishing Co., 1914), p. 208.

## CHAPTER III

### THE SPIRIT OF UNITY

The sources of credibility John Ross enjoyed both with his own people and with the whites were examined in detail in Chapter II. After an extensive study of all of the annual messages of Ross to the National Council, Ross's credibility is further substantiated. By analyzing his speeches as a block of messages, emphasis of certain themes are noted. Ross's thematic emphasis on the spirit of unity is a source from which he drew leadership strength.

The importance of unity in group leadership is stressed by modern writers on communication. Halbert E. Gulley in discussing leadership states that a leader's ability "to increase the 'groupness' or the spirit of unity among the members"<sup>1</sup> of a group contributes to all the objectives of leadership. One means by which this is facilitated is by the leader's placing the welfare of the group above his own. This element is listed by A. Paul Hare as a common function in all types of leadership--the leader acts without regard to his own self-interest.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Halbert E. Gulley, Discussion, Conference, and Group Process (2d ed.; New York: Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968), p. 232.

<sup>2</sup>A. Paul Hare, Handbook of Small Group Research (New York: The Free Press, 1962), pp. 239-294.

Irving Lee notes, on the same idea of leadership, that a leader must have a willingness to lead, to assume the responsibilities of leading.<sup>3</sup> Sociologist, George Homans, adds to this the criterion that a leader must know himself so that he can discipline himself. He must be disciplined in order to direct the ends of the group and to conform to the group norms. He also stresses that a leader must maintain a "moving equilibrium" of the social system sufficient to induce his followers to obey him.<sup>4</sup> This chapter will consider material to substantiate the contention that the leadership of John Ross was strengthened by his ability to increase unity (1) by denying self interests, (2) by being willing to lead and to assume responsibilities, and (3) by maintaining a sufficient balance of incentives to induce the people to follow him.

The importance of unity to successful leadership is illustrated and emphasized in the history of the Cherokees. The origin of leadership within the Cherokee culture and traditions sheds light upon the enormity of the task Ross faced. A brief sketch of Cherokee leadership structures the situation Ross faced.

The traditional leadership was to accelerate in importance with the acculturation of the Cherokees until it evolved into the constitutional office of Principal Chief. The ability to speak well was a prerequisite of leadership, and leadership was granted to an individual according to demonstrated competence rather than by birth.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Irving Lee, How to Talk with People (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1952), Chapter XII.

<sup>4</sup>George C. Homans, The Human Group (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1950), pp. 423, 440.

<sup>5</sup>Gearing, pp. 129-130.

With the need for warriors diminishing as the tomahawk was laid aside for the ways of peace, it was easy for a singular power of leadership to develop. "Hence these first leaders are those who, among all villages, are, through natural bent and through training, most patient, most restrained, most sensitive to the nuances of feeling in others."<sup>6</sup> Here was the key to unity of the village and the leader was actually the rallying figure, the cohesive and magnetic force.

Culturally the Cherokee character and personality made possible the evolvement of the Principal Chief, as is indicated by Gearing's comment:

Cherokee antipathy to coercive acts inside the village caused most Cherokees to develop highly the art of sensing and affecting the sentiments of others. That same antipathy to coercion caused them to elevate their least coercive and most sensitive persons into the positions of greatest influence, the priest-chief and the men who assisted him; the Cherokee village appears to have selected and trained a leadership especially gifted in sensing and forming public sentiment. Given the need to coordinate the actions of more than one village, that priestly leadership was especially equipped to sense minute jealousies and to nurture trust.<sup>7</sup>

The only way power was taken from this evolving leader was the withdrawal of affection.<sup>8</sup> His term of office was determined by his unifying ability to hold the people by his sensitivity to their sentiments. He did not gain the affection of the people overnight, but it was the accumulation of years in which he successfully assessed the sentiments and acted in accord with them.

A drastic change in leadership came following the Treaty of Peace

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

and Friendship negotiated in 1791 between the President of the United States, George Washington, and forty-one chiefs and warriors of the Cherokee Nation. The opening line of the Treaty states: "The parties being desirous of establishing permanent peace and friendship between the United States and the said Cherokee nation. . . ." <sup>9</sup> The policy of peaceful existence accepted by the Cherokees at this time was adhered to with only minor violations previous to the election of Ross as principal chief.

A nation of warriors naturally found the ways of peace difficult, and misunderstandings occurred on both sides. The routine of making the long, arduous trip to the capitol of the United States to resolve difficulties and complaints soon was a precedent. In January, 1792 a Cherokee delegation made the trip to converse with the Secretary of War over land disputes. Bloody Fellow, speaking for the Cherokees, reminded the Secretary of War that cessions of land were made by the Cherokees only "for the sake of peace and quietness." <sup>10</sup> However, the Cherokees were united behind the peace policy. This was demonstrated in 1793 when the Cherokees notified the governor of Tennessee that, although the Northern Indians were bent on war, the Cherokees should not be held responsible "for we are for peace, as all the head-men of our nation have concluded to lie quiet. . . . As the beloved men have taken pity on us, we will be at peace." <sup>11</sup> The precedent of delegate representation for resolving

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<sup>9</sup>"Indian Affairs," 2d Cong., 1st Sess., No. 19, A.S.P., Vol. II, pp. 124-125. This was communicated to the Senate 26 October 1791.

<sup>10</sup>Secretary of War Address to Chiefs and Warriors of the Cherokee Nation, 11 January 1792, 2d Cong., 2d Sess., No. 29, ibid., p. 205.

<sup>11</sup>Little Turkey, John Watts, et. al. to Governor Blount, 23 May 1793, A.S.P., Vol. II, p. 457.

problems was followed through the years. However, it soon became evident that a stronger government was needed in order to bargain effectively.

The first major step toward a stronger government was the calling of a constitutional convention in 1827 following the deaths of the two chiefs, Pathkiller and Charles Hicks. Ross, as the President of the National Council, was instrumental in organizing the convention and was elected president of it. The strength of Ross's influence brought him the office of assistant chief to the Principal Chief, William Hicks. Within the year Ross was elevated to the office of principal chief.

The new government was a binding, cohesive force immediately recognized by white neighbors, particularly the State of Georgia. In his first message, Ross comments on the change: "The circumstance of our government assuming a new character, under a constitutional form and on the principles of republicanism, has, in some degree, excited the sensations of the public character of Georgia."<sup>12</sup>

Thus Ross was conscious of the threat to his nation which the question of removal and the giving up of ancestral lands brought into prominence. Only in unity of purpose and sentiment could the Cherokees present a strong front to resist the forces seeking to drive them from their land. Peace and unity were primary forces Ross had to maintain, and his speeches reflect his awareness of this. Quite early in his leadership, the reality of organized malcontents favoring removal was recognized both within the nation and among the whites beyond their

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<sup>11</sup>Little Turkey, John Watts, et. al. to Governor Blount, 23 May 1793, A.S.P., Vol. II, p. 457.

<sup>12</sup>Message of John Ross, 13 October 1828, Niles Register, 22 November 1830, pp. 198-199.

their borders. This schism had to be mended or, at least, prevented from becoming a destructive abyss. Only in increased unity was their strength to gain advantage in dealing with the federal government.

Ross had the ability to increase the unity among his people.

In his second message to the Council, Ross reminds them that the efforts of the United States agents, under instructions from the Secretary of War to divide the people and create distrust of the leadership, have met a unified people who remain firmly loyal in support of their chiefs. The agents' attempts to persuade the Cherokees in the East to sign papers to emigrate through use of the personal testimonies of James Rogers and Thomas Maw, two western Cherokees who signed the Treaty of Washington, aroused the indignation of the eastern Cherokees. The two western Cherokees were branded as traitors by Cherokee laws and traditions, and their presence in the Nation placed a tremendous strain on the customary hospitality of the Cherokees.<sup>13</sup>

John Ross was aware, however, of a more immediate threat--a much stronger threat--activated by the actions of the legislature of Georgia which had ignored the United States government and passed a series of acts aimed at depriving the Cherokees of all rights as a nation and as individuals. This threat served to unite the people behind Ross. In his message he outlined the Cherokees' "grievances in the many outrages committed by her [Georgia] intrusive and lawless citizens."<sup>14</sup> Ross also reported the failure of the delegation to Washington although the delegation presented a protest memorial when they received the letter of the

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<sup>13</sup>Message of John Ross, 14 October 1829, Niles Register, 14 November 1829, pp. 189-190.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.



Secretary of War condoning Georgia's extending her boundaries and jurisdiction over the Cherokees and their lands. "The extraordinary latitude of construction given by the Secretary, on the sovereignty of Georgia, exhibits a glaring attempt of innovation in our political rights," stated Ross.<sup>15</sup> He also observed that the decision supporting Georgia was "calculated to affect seriously" the relationship of the Cherokees with the United States government.<sup>16</sup>

To further unite his people, Ross reminds them that "abundant evidence to convince the world that this land is the soil of the Cherokees" is in public documents in the archives of the United States.<sup>17</sup> Nothing could have cemented the Cherokees into a unified force more than the threat to their ownership of the lands of their fathers. Also, injustice and persecution shared in common serves as a unifying force. Ross verbalized the common grievances felt by the people and summed them up with the threat: "A crisis seems to be fast approaching when the final destiny of our nation must be sealed. The preservation, and happiness of the Cherokee people are at stake. . . ."18

The remedy was also prescribed by Ross with the diagnosis of the ailment:

Our treaties of relationship are based upon the principles of the federal constitution, and so long as peace, and good faith are maintained, no power, save that of the Cherokee Nation and the United States jointly, can legally change them. Much, therefore, depends on our unity of sentiment and firmness of action. . . .19

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

Ross added an element of finality to the solution by proposing the possibility of the United States withdrawing their solemn pledge of protection to allow utter disregard of the Cherokees' rights and allow the seizure of Cherokee lands. Ross predicted that if such did occur, that under such anguish and misfortune, "there is no place of security for us, no confidence left in the United States will be more just and faithful toward us in the barren prairies of the West. . . ." <sup>20</sup> Uncertainty blanketed the Cherokee Nation and security seemed to have left the land.

Realizing that excitement and uncertainty can undermine and destroy the unity and strength of a nation, Ross called for "calm and serious reflection" in 1830. New laws enacted by Georgia had extended jurisdiction over the Cherokee Nation. <sup>21</sup> Help from the federal government was not to be counted on as the new President, Andrew Jackson, notified the Cherokees that he would not interfere with Georgia's seizure of Cherokee lands, nor interfere to prevent the violation of individual rights of the Cherokees guaranteed by treaties with the United States. <sup>22</sup>

Ross could only express astonishment when he was shown a letter addressed to Col. H. Montgomery, United States agent. It stated that the constituted authorities of the Cherokee Nation were expected to sanction the jurisdiction of Georgia and not to give provocation to the civil authority of Georgia. This civil authority was processing the laws of Georgia within the Cherokee Nation contrary to Cherokee law and authority.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Message of John Ross, July 1830, Niles Register, 7 August 1830, p. 423.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

"It cannot be expected," wrote Ross, "that the constituted authorities will, by their act, and with their own hands, demolish the fabric reared by the voice of the people for the Government of the Cherokee Nation."<sup>23</sup>

No leader that violated the will of the Cherokees could have remained their leader, and Ross knew and respected this. He strongly contested the documents printed for the United States Congress in which were statements accusing the chiefs of the Southern Indians, which included the Cherokees, of having "'a fixed purpose by threats or otherwise, to keep their people from emigrating.' Again: 'there is no doubt but these people fear their chiefs, and on that account keep back.'"<sup>24</sup> In answering these statements in his memorial to the House of Representatives and the Senate of the United States, Ross stated that if it were meant to refer to the chiefs and people of the Cherokee Nation, it betrayed either ignorance or "wanton disposition to misrepresent facts. The chiefs of our nation are the immediate representatives of the people, by whose voice they are elected. . . ." <sup>25</sup>

Scurrilous attacks were minor in comparison to the physical suffering of the Cherokees at the hands of Georgia. With complete lack of resistance by the United States government to her treatment of the Cherokees, Georgia increased her oppressions, and her avaricious hordes swarmed over the Indian country. The Cherokee leaders were helpless.

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<sup>23</sup> John Ross to H. Montgomery, 20 July 1830, Cherokee Phoenix, 31 July 1830.

<sup>24</sup> Memorial of John Ross, 27 February 1829, presented to the House of Representatives, 3 March 1829--read and laid upon the table, Niles Register, 7 August 1830, pp. 423-424.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

The threat of arrest of council members at the points of bayonets by the Georgia troops climaxed a long series of attempts to subvert Cherokee leadership. The Council could not meet at New Echota, the regular meeting place, as Georgian troops were waiting there; it met at Chatooga, Cherokee Nation, where Ross delivered his annual message, October 24, 1831. Regardless of injustices, Ross stated: "It is the ardent desire of this nation, that the peace and friendship which has so happily existed within the United States, almost half a century, should be forever continued inviolate. . . ." <sup>26</sup>

Rumors were active, and the people's fears were fed and inflamed by them. In order to minimize this activity, Ross took active measures to prevent false representation of conditions. The delegation to Washington, headed by Ross, in order to inform their constituents, visited them in their respective districts. <sup>27</sup> Even though they were well informed of oppressive conditions, they were shocked by Georgia's seizure of the missionaries in their nation. The Cherokees were given a common strength of unity by hearing Ross verbalize their extensive grievances. In doing so Ross seemed to share their individual burdens. Ross also recounted the people's rejection of the President's attempt to destroy their faith in the Cherokee chiefs and government. The President's plan was to bring the Cherokees to terms by commanding the United States agents to pay annuities directly to individuals. The failure of the agents' efforts was evident in the flood of written protests sent by the Cherokees to

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<sup>26</sup> Message of John Ross, 24 October 1831, Cherokee Phoenix, 19 November 1831.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Washington. In a desperate attempt to carry out the scheme, United States agents traveled through the Nation "to induce them [the Cherokees] to accept of it under the persuasion that the President of the United States, from his great regard for his red children, has directed this money to be paid to them as a free gift from their Great Father."<sup>28</sup> The Cherokees, however, remained united behind John Ross and his council, although a few were suffering great personal afflictions.

Justice seemed to have closed her eyes to the Cherokees' cause and especially so when the United States Supreme Court weighed the case of Georgia-Cherokee differences. In his message in 1832, Ross once more emphasized the need for unity. No doubt this message was prompted by the presence of a group of young Cherokee men who had organized in favor of removing westward. The confrontation with Elias Boudinot over the policy of the Nation's newspaper, the Cherokee Phoenix, brought forth the statement from Ross that "the views of the public authorities should continue and ever be in accordance with the will of the people; and the views of the editor of the national newspaper be the same."<sup>29</sup> This confrontation with Boudinot who aligned himself with the young men favoring removal, indicated more than a threat--it denoted a definite crack in the wall of Cherokee resistance. If the people were to present a united front, Ross felt that the elected representatives of their interests should be of one mind. "The toleration of diversified views to the columns of such a paper would not fail to create fermentation and confusion among our

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Message of John Ross, 4 August 1832, Senate Executive Doc. No. 121, 25th Cong., 2d Sess., pp. 4-5.

citizens," stated Ross, "and in the end prove injurious to the welfare of the nation."<sup>30</sup> The final strength of decision lay in two factors: "The love of our country and people," exhorted Ross, "demand unity of sentiment and action for the good of all."<sup>31</sup>

Although Boudinot was a serious and well-known editor of their newspaper, his severance from support of Ross did not alter the faith or loyalty of the Cherokees. They supported Ross, and Boudinot joined the ranks of the small minority of malcontents desiring removal. The conflict of wills between Ross and a highly respected and influential member of the representative public officials served to strengthen Ross's position of leadership. Ross was the leader of his people, and he reflected their sentiments; in return he received their loyalty and affection.

By 1835 the responsibilities of leadership were weighing heavily upon Ross. He constantly faced frustrations in Washington, and still he fanned the embers of hope for justice as the Cherokees were threatened with extinction (1) by the boldness of Georgia, (2) the determination of the President of the United States, and (3) the blindness of the courts. Ross's adamant resistance in face of overwhelming odds was inspirational to the proud Cherokees. In his address to the National Council during this time of concentrated oppression, Ross voiced again his plea for oneness:

It is to be hoped that you may be duly impressed with the importance of being united among yourselves, in order that your deliberations and acts may not only give general satisfaction to the people, but that they may prove to be salutary and permanently

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

beneficial to the common welfare of our afflicted nation.<sup>32</sup>

Ross kept the lifeline out to Washington as delegation after delegation trekked to the United States capital hoping for support from the executive and legislative branches of government. The 1835 delegation, headed by John Ross, met with no more success than the previous ones. Ross reported their efforts "to draw from the President of the United States any terms upon which he would be willing to negotiate for a final termination of the suffering of our people, that they might repose in peace and comfort in the land of their nativity."<sup>33</sup> The President not only refused to aid the Cherokees but blocked their efforts to gain a sympathetic hearing in the Senate.

Pressures within the Nation reached a new high with the seizure of the Cherokee press. Ross turned this act to his advantage. He declared it was perpetrated so that "the ear of humanity might thereby be prevented from hearing [the cries of the Cherokees] . . . from wounds inflicted upon them."<sup>34</sup>

In addition to enduring the failures of obtaining a hearing in Washington and the federally contrived oppressive acts within the Nation, the Cherokees knew the annoyance of a minority actively fomenting confusion. They joined forces with the United States agent, Rev. J. F. Schemmerhorn, who was under direct orders from the President. The National Council was admonished by Ross that their sole concern was, as

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<sup>32</sup>Message of John Ross, October 1835, House Executive Doc. No. 1098, 27th Cong., 2d Sess., pp. 40-41. Bound in Indian Documents (O.H.S.), Vol. IV, pp. 572-573.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

always, to decide on what best represented "the interest and permanent welfare of the Cherokee people."<sup>35</sup>

Aware of the minority's delegation going to Washington proclaiming themselves the authorized representatives of the Cherokee Nation, John Ross asked that the new delegation be provided with a document stating full power of representation from the people. This document, Ross hoped, would serve as proof to the President of the United States "that the Cherokee people are united in the support of their common rights, and that they are determined never to sanction any measure which may be adopted to affect those rights by any unauthorized individuals."<sup>36</sup> Ross was acutely conscious that two delegations in Washington, claiming they were the true representatives of the Cherokees, was evidence of a flaw in Cherokee unity--it weakened their singleness-of-purpose argument. The Council granted Ross the power requested. However, Ross underestimated the opposition--those forces he designated as "calculated to produce dissensions [sic] and divisions among the people, which can but result in evil and ruinous consequences to the best interests of the nation."<sup>37</sup> Ross expressed the hope that "these young men will return to their sense of duty . . . and as peaceable and patriotic citizens unite, hand in hand with them, in the support of our common cause."<sup>38</sup>

The majority of the Cherokees were united behind Ross, but the

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.



few malcontents signed a removal treaty. The President now had a document he could assess as legal to give some semblance of legality to the forced removal of the Indians. One thing the forced removal was to contribute to the Cherokees was unity. The months of removal brought dire hardships and suffering to the Cherokees, and in these they were more strongly united than ever before. Faced with relocation and reorganization with the western Cherokees, the people looked for a leader best suited to lead the Nation of Cherokees. Once again the choice was John Ross. In his address in October, 1840, Ross gave verbal reinforcement to the idea of a united nation of Cherokees by enumerating commendable elements any united group would possess. He congratulated the people on "the good spirit which seems to pervade our nation."<sup>39</sup> By saying the good spirit was there, Ross emphasized its need and affirmatively argued for it. He praised their patience and good conduct exhibited during the months just past:

There is no recorded instance, within my memory, of an entire change in the position of so extensive a community, even when wrought with its own consent, which has not been made by the pretext for frightful disorders, fomented by the restless and the disaffected. I think it due to our own people to remind them of the praise they merit for having, although their position was altered not voluntarily, but without their consent and against their will, borne the necessity in a noble temper of philosophic endurance and to encourage them to persevere in the same disposition, by picturing the gratitude they will gain from their posterity for having, after only a few sad days of confusion, even while destitution, disease, and death, in every appalling form, raged around them, at once emerged from the tempestuous chaos into the calm sunshine of a settled Government, to which neither suffering nor intrigue appear likely ever to render them untrue.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Message of John Ross, October 1840, House Executive Doc. No. 1098, 27th Cong., 2d Sess., pp. 44-47. Bound in Indian Documents (O.H.S.), Vol. IV, pp. 576-579.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

Ross also noted that the minority had reconciled with the majority. Once again his suggestion was a strong argument for its being so. The acceptance of this reconciliation was of national importance since the seeming division in the nation was one excuse for the federal government's withholding the annuities due the Cherokees. Ross said of the reconciliation:

The reconciliation of the minority to the constitution and laws cannot but destroy the misapprehensions growing out of the state of things prevailing while the few kept back from the many. If this spirit of unanimity is cherished, and continues thus hourly to extend, it will remove every cause of difficulty, and, under the express declarations of the Secretary [of War] himself, render our appeals for justice irresistible.<sup>41</sup>

Ross headed a delegation to Washington but failed to convince government officials of the justice of releasing the annuities to the Cherokees. He reported:

I abstain from remarking upon the postponement of the past dues to our nation, further than to add, that the unanimity now prevailing among ourselves, and other circumstances, justify the expectation of a change of policy in the United States Government, regarding our affairs. . . . Let us not afford an excuse for withholding our dues, by dissention [sic] among ourselves.<sup>42</sup>

Ross further reminded the National Council of his policy advocating peace and harmony:

I have uniformly . . . throughout my entire connexion [sic] with public affairs, endeavored to impress it upon you never to encourage any dispositions towards one another but those of kindness, and to be gentle and forbearing towards our white neighbors and the surrounding tribes of our red brethren, under whatever circumstance may arise. . . . In short, let justice and peace, and friendship, towards all, be perpetually our ruling motto.<sup>43</sup>

Ross could see beyond the Cherokees' immediate situation. He

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

saw a united effort among the Indians in the new territories. Hoping to gain greater strength for bargaining and preventing a repetition of the unsuccessful negotiations forced upon the Indians by the whites, Ross set out to guide his red brethren to a more unified front. He called the Intertribal Council to meet at Tahlequah in 1843. Response was gratifying as twenty-one tribes attended as guests of the Cherokees. In his opening speech to the Council, Ross stated his hope of unification. He realized that peace and friendship were the necessary ingredients for intertribal unity. He recalled:

When we look back on the days when the first council-fires were kindled around which the pipe of peace was smoked, we are grateful to our Creator for having united the hearts of the red men in peace; for it is in peace only that our women and children can enjoy happiness and increase in number. By peace our condition has been improved in the pursuits of civilized life. We should therefore, extend the hand of peace from tribe to tribe, till peace is established between every nation of red men within the reach of our voice.<sup>44</sup>

Ross wanted a unified effort on the part of all the Indians to better secure possession of their new lands in the West. Intertribal strife common to tribal fathers would mean their own destruction and possible extinction. At least it would render them highly vulnerable to intruders upon their lands. Ross stated the purpose of the Council:

Brothers, it is for renewing in the West the ancient talk of our forefathers, and of perpetuating forever the old pipe of peace, and of extending them from nation to nation, and of adopting such international laws as may redress the wrongs done by the people of our respective nations to each other, that you have been invited to attend the present Council. Let us therefore so act that the peace which existed between our forefathers may be pursued and that we may live as members of the same family.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Message of John Ross, 5 June 1843, Goode, p. 74.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

Ross's efforts were successful. The first step toward unity was the signing of a covenant among the twenty-one tribes for the protection of rights and redress of wrongs in a pact of peace and friendship.<sup>46</sup>

This unifying of the Indians newly removed to lands designated by the United States government was a great tribute to John Ross's influence. Within his own nation, his efforts to increase unity among the Cherokees seemed more secure with the successful treaty negotiations in 1846. Ross reported to the people his personal satisfaction from the large number present and "from beholding the prevalence of such general good feeling . . . and I trust the manifestations here seen are but the foreshadowing of brighter and more auspicious times for the Cherokees.

. . ."<sup>47</sup> Ross sought to increase the spirit of unity by expressing a singular hope of prosperity. He described the new era as one to be "distinguished for the reign of law and order, for the promotion of industry and economy, for the prevalence of sobriety and harmony, and for the general improvement of our moral and intellectual condition."<sup>48</sup>

The Treaty of 1846 was submitted for the approval of the Cherokee people. Ross, who was interested in creating the image of a prosperous, civilized life for the Cherokees, felt the treaty was good. It called for "the dissolution of former parties, the renewed recognition of our government, the possession in fee [simple] of our domain unimpaired, the restoration of peace and the fresh acknowledgment of our national

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<sup>46</sup>Message of John Ross, 23 October 1843. Bound in Indian Documents (O.H.S.), Vol. XIII, pp. 173-176.

<sup>47</sup>Message of John Ross, 12 November 1846, Niles Register, 29 December 1846, pp. 258-259.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

rights by the government of the United States."<sup>49</sup> In his message Ross reminded the Cherokees that former parties or factions were "the fountain of many bitter waters" and removing such sources should "cause the people to coalesce more and more, until they shall become united in sentiment as they are in interest and destiny."<sup>50</sup>

Ross's expression of hope for prosperity seemed realized in the five years following the Treaty of 1846. Fortune favored the Cherokees and Ross could say in his message to the National Council in 1852 that "the past year has been of general harmony and unusual prosperity."<sup>51</sup> However, even though the Nation was prosperous, all was not well. The Nation faced an embarrassing national debt. This problem was a threat to the unity because there was a wide difference of opinion over the means of clearing it. One solution, the retrocession of a part of their assigned lands in the Indian country known as the "neutral lands" of the Cherokees, was not acceptable to many. Public spirit had not been honored as a result of the trouble and confusion over retrocession of land within the newly assigned borders of the Kansas Territory. "Humiliating as must be these things to the pride of patriotic men," chided Ross, "they are not the only evil consequences. . . . It disturbs the harmony of the people. . . ."<sup>52</sup> Ross felt that the worst consequences were the excitement of "disagreements and divisions, and is insidiously sapping the foundations

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Message of John Ross, 4 October 1852, Indian Advocate, December 1852.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

of the government."<sup>53</sup>

Divided sentiment over any issue was a threat John Ross wanted to erase. He hopefully addressed the Council: "I cannot doubt that you will, by a spirit of mutual conciliation, be able to devise measures that will accomplish these results."<sup>54</sup> The Cherokee territory was being threatened from without and Ross knew inner strife and division could destroy all the Indians had gained since removal. Land-hungry whites were once more extending tentacles into the Nation. The political scene in Washington was discouraging as it was fraught with bitterness and conflict of interests over slavery. As slavery blossomed into gigantic proportions as a national issue, Ross reminded the Cherokees that in a showdown with a state such as Kansas "the Indian treaties will constitute no obstacle. . . ."<sup>55</sup> Ross desired statehood for the Cherokee Nation as a means of protecting their land. He warned his people of the fate of the Indians in Kansas and Nebraska whose lands were taken over by the state without consideration for Indian rights. To prevent the Cherokees from the same fate of the Indians in Kansas and Nebraska, Ross urged: "It behooves us to stand united, to watch with a jealous eye every aggression, to strengthen our government, and to cling to the protection often and solemnly pledged by the United States."<sup>56</sup>

Ross was acutely aware in his inaugural address in 1859 that subversive forces were active within the Nation. In his opening paragraph

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

he emphasizes the vote of confidence he has received from the people. He expresses his gratitude "to the Cherokee people, who without solicitation or agency on my part, have given this evidence that the confidence they have reposed in me for so long a period remains undiminished."<sup>57</sup> Ross's reelection was evidence of the trust granted him by his people. He acknowledged that a great responsibility also came with the vote. He felt he must fulfill this responsibility or "prove ungrateful to those who have given such assurances of their trust and their satisfaction."<sup>58</sup> As usual Ross expressed his willingness to serve even in face of troubled times.

By 1860 troubles had increased. Money was still a problem, and the number of white squatters on Cherokee land had increased to threatening proportions. Ross registered a complaint with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs while in Washington with a delegation. Being away from the Nation as head of a delegation to Washington, gave Ross's enemies an advantage they quickly seized. Ross realized the effect of rumors on the people outside the Nation and knew that doubts were being raised by the malcontents within the Nation. In his address to the Nation in October, he once more argued for unity:

There is no cause that need disturb our peace and harmony. The difficulties and excitement alleged to hold sway in your midst have had their origin in the distempered imaginations, or been greatly exaggerated to our prejudice by designing enemies to your tranquil existences as a distinct community. Reports are often fabricated for the purpose of misleading the Public abroad, as to our true condition, and for the accomplishment

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<sup>57</sup>Message of John Ross, 4 October 1859. From printed pamphlet in possession of T. L. Ballenger, Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

of ends neither calculated, nor intended to advance our real interests.<sup>59</sup>

Ross saw the issue of slavery as a hideous behemoth looming on the horizon. He saw the emotional force stirred by it. Since slavery was legalized under Cherokee law, Ross emphasized the need for squelching agitation regarding it. He asked the Cherokees to "discountenance everything of the sort, and not needlessly and unwisely disturb our peace."<sup>60</sup> In reaffirming his commitment to his office, Ross affirmed his alignment with the constitution and with the welfare of the people: "In all constitutional measures designed to preserve the harmony of the people, and to advance the common welfare, you shall have my cordial cooperation."<sup>61</sup> However, in 1861 the slavery issue exploded, and sentiments and emotions sharply divided the country. Outside forces already had been at work within the Cherokee Nation trying to gain identity with the Cherokees. Fearing involvement, Ross tried to smother the flames of doubt by issuing a proclamation on May 17, 1861. He urged the people to go about their regular duties and abstain from discussion and demonstrations relative to the slavery question. He reminded the Cherokees of their treaty obligations to the United States. "I earnestly impose upon the Cherokee people," Ross stated, "the importance of noninterference in the affairs of the People of the states, and the observance of unswerving neutrality between them."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Message of John Ross, 4 October 1860, John Ross MMS, No. 2755-40.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Proclamation of John Ross, 17 May 1861. A printed copy in the possession of Mrs. Czarine Conlan, Curator, O.H.S. Museum, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.



Ross was aware that slumbering factions in the Nation had awakened to seize upon the issue of slavery to destroy the unity among the Cherokees. He warned the people against being alarmed by false reports designed to create doubts and dissension. He urged the Cherokees "to cultivate harmony among themselves and observe in good faith strict neutrality between the State threatening civil war."<sup>63</sup> Ross wanted the Cherokees "to maintain their rights unimpaired and to have their own soil and fire-side spared from the baleful effects of a devastating war."<sup>64</sup>

By August emotions were such that a general meeting of the people was called at Tahlequah. Approximately four thousand males attended to hear Ross speak. At this time the Stand Watie forces were organizing troops under Confederate supervision and the long suppressed warrior image was tempting the young men. Ross had always held the pulse of the Cherokees, and now he received their pulsing response to the Confederacy cause. He knew he had to reflect their wishes to remain their leader.

In his opening remarks at the August meeting, Ross stated the purpose of the meeting as being "to make stronger the cords that bind us together and to advance the common welfare."<sup>65</sup> John Ross reminded the people that his May proclamation advising neutrality was issued because it was his duty to advise them as to the best course of action. Since May, Ross stated, alarming reports circulated pertinaciously "to create strife and conflict, instead of harmony and good will . . . and to

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Message of John Ross, 21 August 1861, War of the Rebellion--Official Records, Series 1, Vol. III, pp. 673-675.

engender prejudice and distrust, instead of kindness and confidence. .  
 . ."66 Now, at the August meeting, Ross asked the people to express  
 themselves:

Say whether you are arrayed in classes one against the other--  
 the full-blood against the white and mixed blood citizens; say  
 whether you are faithful to the constitution and laws of your  
 country--whether you abide by all the rights they guarantee,  
 particularly including that of slavery and whether you have any  
 wish or purpose to abolish or interfere with it in the Cherokee  
 Nation.<sup>67</sup>

The great plea in Ross's address restated his motive and goal  
 as Principal Chief:

The great object with me has been to have the Cherokee people  
 harmonious and united in the full and free exercise and enjoy-  
 ment of all their rights of person and property. Union is  
 strength; dissension is weakness, misery, ruin. In time of  
 peace, enjoy peace together; in time of war, if war must come,  
 fight together. As brothers live, as brothers die.<sup>68</sup>

Ross was brought to the moment of decision. He asked the people  
 to state their desire, and the Cherokees allied themselves with the  
 Confederacy.<sup>69</sup> -Once committed, Ross wanted no lingering doubts to pre-  
 vent the Nation presenting a unified front. In his address on October  
 9, 1861, Ross voiced his faith in the success of the Confederacy and  
 stated that "self preservation fully justifies" the Cherokees' aligning  
 their interests with the Confederate States of America.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> "The Cherokees Join the Rebels," Harper's Weekly, Vol. V (19  
 October 1861), p. 659.

<sup>70</sup> Message of John Ross, 9 October 1861, Emmet Starr, History of  
 the Cherokee Indians, pp. 153-155.

The tests of leadership presented by the forced removal of the Cherokees and the war of rebellion were met successfully by John Ross. His ability to maintain unity among his people was undoubtedly one strong reason he maintained his position of leadership. Ross made himself the central figure by placing his own interests secondary to the welfare of his people. The extent of his success is illustrated in the circumstances of the post-war conferences held with the agents of the United States. The Cherokees adamantly rejected all efforts of the government agents of the United States to discredit John Ross. Even though Ross was refused permission to be a delegate at the treaty meetings, he advised and directed the official delegates from outside the meeting. Standing firm in their loyalty to John Ross, the Cherokees reelected him Principal Chief, and he died in office in 1866.

The messages of John Ross reveal a strong thematic emphasis on the spirit of unity, and they also reveal his ability to turn events to his advantage in keeping people unified behind his leadership. He increased unity by denying his own interests, by willingly accepting leadership with its heavy responsibilities, and by keeping a balance of incentives before his people. The loyalty of the Cherokees serves as a memorial to his ability to keep them in a spirit of unity.

## CHAPTER IV

### SPIRITUAL CONSUBSTANTIALITY--A REPETITIVE THEME

One source which helps explain Ross's continued leadership of the Cherokees is the study of themes repeated in his messages to the National Council. In Chapter III the theme of unity was traced as a means by which Ross strengthened his leadership. His messages also reveal a thematic emphasis on spirituality, which undoubtedly strengthened his leadership of the Cherokees and his identification with them.

Kenneth Burke in his Rhetoric of Motives states that "you persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his."<sup>1</sup> To the extent that Ross increased his identity with the Cherokees, he also strengthened his persuasiveness. One way persuasion was accomplished was through a consubstantiality in spirituality.

The history of the Cherokees reflects a simple spirituality. Living close to nature, the Cherokees developed a spirituality attuned with it. Fogelson and Kutsche affirm that "ceremonialism and, in fact, much of the Cherokee personality, seems oriented toward harmony with nature through knowledge and control."<sup>2</sup> Lacking sufficient knowledge to

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<sup>1</sup>Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, pp. 580-581.

<sup>2</sup>Fogelson and Kutsche, p. 216.

explain the happenings in nature, the Cherokees developed a massive structure of superstitions. However, the religion of the Cherokees was not pagan even before the first missionaries, approved by the Federal Government per the Treaty of 1791, came to work among them. Return J. Meigs, Indian agent, lived among the Cherokees for years and notes that

The Cherokees universally believe in the being of God; they call him the Great Spirit; they mention him with reverence-- with them, his attributes are power and goodness. They never profane the name of God in their own language. They have no use of words that they can combine to profane the name of God.<sup>3</sup>

Thomas Nuttall was struck by the absence of paganism as he traveled among the Cherokees in 1819. His observations coincide with Meig's comments:

In no part of North America have we ever met with that kind of irrational adoration called idolatry. All the natives acknowledged the existence of a great, good, and indivisible Spirit, the author of all created being. Believing also in the immortality of the soul, and in the existence of invisible agencies, they were often subjected to superstitious fears, and the observance of omens and dreams, the workings of perturbed fancy. By these imaginary admonitions, they sometimes suffered themselves to be controlled in their most important undertakings, relinquishing every thing which was accidentally attended by an inauspicious presage of misfortune.<sup>4</sup>

"Practiced religion" was not within the Cherokee "heathen" way of life, according to observations by Rev. Elias Cornelius; yet he notes the eagerness and attentiveness given to information of the Creator:

They have, as a nation, no system of idolatry of their own to prejudice their minds against the religion of Christ. For many years the religion of their forefathers has been forgotten. It has no place whatever in the moral existence of the nation. Neither do we find individuals in their heathen state in the practice of any system of religion; while yet it is unusual for any of them to hear of the great Creator of all things, without

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<sup>3</sup>Meigs to Mitchell, 6 July 1816, J.R.P.

<sup>4</sup>Nuttall, pp. 132-133.

lending the most serious attention. Such is the native reverence of the Deity, which is cherished by them.<sup>5</sup>

The superstitious nature of the Cherokees was reflected in their reverence. To them the Great Spirit was just that, a spirit having the dual attributes of power and goodness. One notable difference between the red man's concept of the Spirit and that of the white man was that the Cherokees felt the Spirit, although invisible, was present and walked among them. To them he assumed greater reality than in the white man's concept; thus natural happenings became explicit spiritual manifestations.

As a being of power, the Great Spirit commanded respect and reverence. The Rev. Gideon Blackburn recounts an anecdote of an incident at the signing of the treaty on the Highwassee River in 1807 which illustrates the sensitivity of the "savage" conscience and reflects the Cherokees concept of the Great Spirit and his power:

One day, while sitting at dinner, a cloud arose and portended a considerable storm. The vivid lightnings flashed and the thunders roared at a distance. A white man by the name of Rodgers, who had long been a resident in the nation, and abandoned to every wickedness, used very profane and blasphemous expressions respecting the thunder. At length a flash of lightning struck a tree near the bower in which all were seated, and passed off without any remarkable injury, except giving all a very severe shock. Silence reigned in the whole assembly about the space of a minute, when Enotta, i.e. The Black Fox, the king of the nation, broke the silence by saying, The Great Spirit is mad at Rodgers.<sup>6</sup>

Such evidence of the Cherokees' reverence for the power of the Great Spirit was observed and commented on frequently by whites traveling or living in the Nation.

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<sup>5</sup>Cornelius, p. 567.

<sup>6</sup>Gideon Blackburn to Rev. Doctor Morse, 14 December 1807, Missionary Herald, February 1808, p. 418.

Blackburn records another observance of the extent of Indian reverence during the Dwight Council in 1827. As an observer he was especially honored to be asked to open the Council with a prayer. A more distinct honor was in being requested afterwards to serve in the capacity of chaplain during the duration of the conference. His greatest surprise came at the end of the week when all business was suspended on the Sabbath, and he was asked to preach to the delegates. He commented on the respect the audience gave to his text: "I have scarcely ever had, in any country, a more orderly, and attentive audience."<sup>7</sup> Although most were non-Christians, they were respectful to the information on the Spirit.

The Cherokees showed reverence to the Great Spirit because of his goodness, also. Primary in his blessings was the great gift of land. "When questioned by white men in the eighteenth century, the Cherokees stoically maintained that their domain had been given to them by the Great Spirit (Asga-Ya-Gelun-Lati), to whom the whole earth belonged."<sup>8</sup> This legend was still believed as late as January, 1830, as it was stated in the Cherokees' petition to the Supreme Court of the United States.<sup>9</sup>

When John Ross is placed in the religious setting as it existed among the Cherokees, he presents an unusual image. Although he grew to manhood during the rapid Christianization of the Cherokees, he did not affiliate with any group. Even when leading men of the Nation were

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<sup>7</sup>An abstract of the correspondence of Gideon Blackburn cited in "Cherokees of the Arkansas," ibid., December 1827, p. 383.

<sup>8</sup>Woodward, p. 18.

<sup>9</sup>U. S. Supreme Court Records, Cherokee Nation vs Georgia, 5 Peters, p. 1.

converted to Christianity, including Charles Hicks with whom Ross worked closely while President of the Council, Ross remained uncommitted.

Whether it was a politically inspired move on Ross's part or not, it was true that his main supporters throughout his career were the full bloods who made up the greater portion of the non-Christian segment of the Nation. The Principal Chief of the Cherokees had to identify with both spiritual factions in the Nation, and Ross accepted the challenge.

From the aforementioned comments, the basic spiritual concepts of the non-Christian Cherokees were: (1) a deep reverence for the spiritual being, the Great Spirit; (2) the attributing of goodness as one major trait of the spirit; and (3) the attributing of power as the other trait. In checking Ross's messages, these three concepts are examined. If Ross can successfully identify with the non-Christians in these three concepts, he will also be in an acceptable position with the Christian Cherokees since Christianity also incorporates these concepts within its structure.

Ross not only was aware of the reverence of the Cherokees for the Great Spirit but was also aware of how interwoven were the superstitions inherent in their culture. His awareness is noted in his use of spiritual references in opening many of his messages to the national council. The reverence with which the Cherokees listened to any information on spiritual matters gained instant attention and set a serious mood for the message delivered.

For the purpose of clarification, Ross's messages will be analyzed for ways he reflects awareness of the dual attributes of the spirit by dividing our considerations into four categories: (1) titles and phrases,



(2) references in the introductions, (3) references in the bodies, and (4) references in the conclusions.

First, obvious recognition of both aspects of goodness and power is revealed in the titles and phrases of reference to the spiritual being. The quality of goodness is noted a number of times.

Ross refers to a "kind Providence"<sup>10</sup> and a "Benignant Providence"<sup>11</sup> who bestows blessings; who is worthy of trust; and who guides with superintending care.<sup>12</sup> Other statements denoting the quality of goodness refer to the "Great Source of Blessings" and to "the Almighty source of all health and happiness."<sup>13</sup> Closely related to these is his reference to "the great Author of our existence."<sup>14</sup> To other designations signifying the goodness of the Spirit indicate Him as a personage, "the Divine Redeemer"<sup>15</sup> who rewards with "the Smile of Heaven."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Message of John Ross, 13 October, 1828, Niles Register, 22 November 1830, pp. 189-190; October 1840, House Exec. Doc., 27th Congress, 2d Sess., No. 1098, pp. 44-47; 18 November 1844, The Cherokee Messenger.

<sup>11</sup>Message of John Ross, 10 October 1832, Cherokee Advocate, 27 October 1832.

<sup>12</sup>Message of John Ross, 13 October 1828, Niles Register, 22 November 1830, pp. 198-199; July 1830, ibid., 7 August 1830, p. 423; October 1840, House Exec. Doc., 27th Cong., 2d Sess., No. 1098, pp. 44-47.

<sup>13</sup>Message of John Ross, October 1840.

<sup>14</sup>Message of John Ross, 14 October 1829, Niles Register, 14 November 1829, pp. 189-190; October 1835, House Exec. Doc., 27th Cong., 2d Sess., pp. 40-41.

<sup>15</sup>Message of John Ross, 4 October 1859. From printed pamphlet in possession of T. L. Ballenger, Tahlequah.

<sup>16</sup>Message of John Ross, October 1840.

The quality of power is also indicated in the titles used by Ross. The universal aspect is noted in Ross's reference to the "Omnipotent and allwise Being,"<sup>17</sup> "the great ruler of the universe,"<sup>18</sup> and reference to "Him, who holds the destiny of man and governs the Universe."<sup>19</sup> One reference reflects the Holy Bible by designating him "King of Kings."<sup>20</sup>

The variety of designations undoubtedly were chosen to reflect the cultural concept of the Cherokees: their existence was attributed to the supplier of good things, the all powerful creator and ruler of the universe. No Cherokee refusing Christianity to hold fast to the beliefs of his ancestors could find fault or fail to identify with Ross's references.

When introductory references of Ross's speeches are further analyzed, the designation of blessings which merit the thanks of the Cherokees show definite political orientation. Ross's survival as principal chief hinged upon the correct functioning of the government; therefore he designates the privilege of assembling in National Council as the "great blessing." He refers to the greatest blessings and then specifies the "sacred privilege of assembling in general council . . . to promote

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<sup>17</sup>Message of John Ross, July 1830, Niles Register, 7 August 1830, p. 423.

<sup>18</sup>Message of John Ross, 14 October 1829, ibid., 14 November 1829, pp. 189-190.

<sup>19</sup>Message of John Ross, 11 October 1830, Cherokee Phoenix, 16 October 1830.

<sup>20</sup>Message of John Ross, 13 October 1828, Niles Register, 22 November 1830, pp. 198-199. Expression relates to I Tim. 6:15, King James version of The New Testament.

the interest and happiness of our citizens."<sup>21</sup> He again states the meriting of thanks for the "privilege of meeting in General Council"<sup>22</sup> to "deliberate and act upon the affairs of your . . . nation."<sup>23</sup>

To the successful working of the government, the National Council, the representative core containing some uneducated Cherokees, had to approach their duties with seriousness and determination. By placing the stamp of spiritual responsibility on their duties, Ross strengthens them and increases their efficiency. He emphasizes the reciprocal nature of their efforts and the blessings from the Spirit by stating that the Cherokees receive the "fostering beneficence" from the "Great Source of Blessings."<sup>24</sup> Thus Ross emphasizes the possibility of the Great Spirit withholding his blessings if not dutifully earned.

As part of the beneficence of the spiritual being, Ross indicates the avenues of hope and trust available to the Cherokees. The best example of the effectiveness of such spiritual reference is the introduction in his message of 1830. With physical and material comfort lacking as Georgia extends her laws over the Cherokees, Ross reminds his people of the spiritual avenues available through which their fears and uncertainties can be alleviated:

Friends and Fellow Citizens: We are permitted once more, to witness the dawn of that day, which, by the provision of the

<sup>21</sup>Message of John Ross, 14 October 1829, Niles Register, 14 November 1829, pp. 189-190.

<sup>22</sup>Message of John Ross, 11 October 1830, Cherokee Phoenix, 16 October 1830.

<sup>23</sup>Message of John Ross, October 1840, House Exec. Doc., 27th Cong., 2d Sess., No. 1098, pp. 44-47.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

Constitution, is designated for the annual convention of the General Council. For this inestimable privilege, our thanks are due to him who holds the destiny of man and governs the Universe. In the tempestuous scenes of revolving time, we have had our day of trial and affliction; yet through his merciful interposition, we have experienced seasons of joyful hope--and should trouble and difficulties still rise up as vivid clouds, o'er our aching breasts, and threatening destruction chime its doleful note in our ears, hope and faith in him can remove them.<sup>25</sup>

With such references to the beneficence of the spiritual being, Ross gains the immediate attention of his audience. He sees beyond the immediate audience as he pleads for "hope and faith" in that the majority of the Nation is Christianized and this is a means of identifying with them when they read his message.

Ross's references to spiritual elements in the body of his messages are less frequent but used carefully. The first is in his refutation of Georgia's claim to Cherokee lands by right of charter from the King of Great Britain. In his denial of the claim, Ross's statement rings with righteous fervor:

Thus stands the naked claim of Georgia to a portion of our lands. The claim advanced under the plea of time immemorial possessed this country, not be a charter from the hand of a mortal king, who had no right to grant it, but by the will of the king of kings, who created all things and liveth for ever and ever.<sup>26</sup>

Nor is Ross hesitant in declaring another God-given right in answer to Georgia. When Georgia declares her intentions and passes legislation usurping the individual rights and freedom of the Cherokees, Ross protests: "The right of regulating our own internal affairs, is a right which we have always exercised, and have never surrendered."<sup>27</sup> Here

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<sup>25</sup>Message of John Ross, 11 October 1830, Cherokee Phoenix, 16 October 1830

<sup>26</sup>Message of John Ross, 13 October 1828, Niles Register, 22 November 1830, pp. 198-199.

<sup>27</sup>Message of John Ross, 27 February 1829, ibid., 7 August 1830, pp. 423-424.

again Ross emphasizes trust in Providence.

To quiet the quick-tempered individuals in the Nation who want a vengeful expression of protest over the withholding by the United States of the justly due annuities, Ross appeals to them to trust in Providence: "Let us remain in the right and trust in Providence and an upright cause for the result."<sup>28</sup>

In recounting the affairs of the Nation, Ross asks for trust and hope in the goodness of the Spirit. At the time the Cherokees are plagued by extensive and debilitating sickness from disease and the fear generated by a high death rate. Ross comforts them with an expression of his gratitude "to the Almighty Source of all health and happiness, for having seen fit to render the diseases which have so sorely afflicted the new emigrants less during the present year. . . . Though sickness has been unsparing, more have survived its ravages."<sup>29</sup>

Ross also uses spiritual references in concluding his messages, and in these references is reflected the dual characteristics of goodness and power. It is easy for Ross to remind his people of their common inheritance and the vital blessing of occupancy of the soil "inherited from the Great Author of our existence."<sup>30</sup> Emphasis to the comment is added when the conditions surrounding the Cherokees at that moment are considered. Georgia is threatening the Cherokees' ownership of the land, and other whites are crying for the United States Congress to remove them

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<sup>28</sup>Message of John Ross, October 1840, House Exec. Doc., 27th Cong., 2d Sess., No. 1098, pp. 44-47.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Message of John Ross, 14 October 1829, Niles Register, 14 November 1829, pp. 189-190.

from their lands.

Understandably, Ross emphasized the trust, or faith, which must rest in the spiritual being since help from earthly sources seemed non-existent at the moment. One of the most outstanding references to faith is in the closing remarks of Ross's message of July, 1830. The uncertainty of the time presented a bleak future and much suffering with Georgia's extension of her laws over the Cherokees. Ross demonstrates his knowledge of the Holy Bible in presenting a thought-provoking analogy of the Cherokees' bondage and that of the Israelites in Egypt. He also stresses the deliverance of the Israelites under seemingly impossible circumstances and implies that the Cherokees, too, can be delivered by

Confiding in the superintending care of a king Providence, we should not despair, even should we for a season be plunged into the cells of Georgia's prisons; means for our deliverance may yet be found. Let us not forget the circumstances related in holy writ, of the safe passage of the children of Israel through the crystal walls of the Red Sea, and the fate of their wicked pursuers; let our faith in the unsearchable mysteries of an Omnipotent and allwise Being be unshaken, for in the appearance of impossibilities there is still hope.<sup>31</sup>

Ross associates hope with the spiritual source and stresses the Power which can protect and deliver the Cherokees as he concludes his message.

Ross specifies an example of goodness of providence in concluding his message delivered following the severe drought of 1830, a year in which a shortage of bread was a dire hardship. Ross reminds the Cherokees that "through the indulgence of a king Providence . . . the crops of this year have yielded abundantly, and our citizens generally are happily enjoying the fruits of their labors."<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup>Message of John Ross, July 1830, Niles Register, 7 August 1830,

<sup>32</sup>Message of John Ross, 24 October 1831, Cherokee Phoenix and Indians' Advocate, 19 November 1831.

Fatalism is emphasized in Ross's conclusions as a part of spiritual beneficence. The upheaval created by Georgia disrupted the Nation and events moved toward complete disaster. By 1835 the gravity of the situation prompts Ross to conclude his annual message on a note of fatalism:

And, should it please the Providence of God to extricate us from the difficulties which surround us, and once more to permit us to enjoy prosperity and happiness, let all participate in those blessings; but, on the other hand, should it be his will that our nation shall be doomed to inextricable adversity and extinction, then, as one people, let us be united, and calmly disappear with colors flying, and leave a character on the page of history that will never dishonor the name of the Cherokee Nation.<sup>33</sup>

In these words Ross embodies the strongest appeals possible: the pride of the Cherokees and the will of the Great Spirit, or the supreme being.

Following the removal with its decimating hardships, Ross expresses a specific benedictory expression in concluding his address: "May your labors for the public good merit the smile of Heaven."<sup>34</sup> Here the qualifying phrase "for the public good" is an intentional reminder of duty and responsibility as elected representatives of the people. A similar benedictory conclusion reflects the possibility of a failure of blessings, or seems to imply that continued blessings depend upon how effectively the elected members reflect the good of the nation. Ross concludes by "invoking a spirit of good will and harmony upon your deliberations, and the continuance of the favors of that kind Providence that has

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<sup>33</sup>Message of John Ross, October 1835, House Exec. Doc., 27th Cong., 2d Sess., No. 1098, pp. 40-41.

<sup>34</sup>Message of John Ross, October 1840, House Exec. Doc., 27th Cong., 2d Sess., No. 1098, pp. 44-47.

preserved our people from the vicissitudes of an eventful career."<sup>35</sup>

No Cherokee, Christian or non-Christian, could find fault or fail to identify with Ross's spiritual references. His adherence to the reverence of the non-Christian Cherokees as well as his acceptance of the dual attributes of the spirit were congruent with Christian beliefs. Prior to Ross's second marriage to Mary Stapler in 1844, there is no formal affiliation with any church; yet in his public speeches and on many formal occasions he presided over, Ross makes frequent references to a spiritual being. Ross was also a strong supporter of the missionaries and their contributions to the Nation and paid verbal tribute to the advancement of the Cherokees through their efforts. Ross's formal membership in the Methodist church came in 1855, following his wife's membership in 1850. From 1855 forward, evidence indicates that John Ross was serious in his faith, which was a unifying element to him and Mary and their two children.<sup>36</sup> Ross writes a friends who is ill during this time: "Verily the only consolation we can find for all the troubles, pains and woes of this life is in the Gospel; to believe and trust in Him who doeth all things well."<sup>37</sup> Although Ross is not identified with any church group during the first twenty-eight years as principal chief, his messages reveal a strong spiritual concern.

Politically, John Ross had to present an image of being spiritually concerned to strengthen his consubstantiality. He was aware of the strong

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<sup>35</sup>Message of John Ross, 4 October 1852, Indian Advocate, December 1852.

<sup>36</sup>Mary Ross statement, Hargett Collection.

<sup>37</sup>John Ross to Rev. O. L. Woodford, 7 March 1858, ibid.



influence of Christianity in the Cherokee Nation and observed its quick dominance during the 1830's.

Ross as a non-Christian led his people during the upheaval of removal, but the last ten years of his life Ross leads his people as a Christian. His greatest crisis following his affiliation with the Methodist Church in 1855 was the Civil War. Hope was within the realm of the Great Spirit (God), and Ross referred to him with the familiarity of an evangelist. With the wide-spread acceptance of Christianity among the Cherokees, plus the cultural beliefs of his people, Ross had a responsive and fertile field--his words reinforced those of the missionaries and native ministers. When Ross directed attention to the spirit, he found a common ground for identifying with his people.

The death of a respected public figure and close friend of John Ross in 1859 gave opportunity for Ross to affirm his own faith. In a eulogizing paragraph on Archibald Campbell, Ross lifts the banner of hope and creates a reflective mood as he assures the Council:

It is most gratifying to add that our departed friend and fellow-citizen was a Christian. He had long ago possessed that faith in the Divine Redeemer, which secures a title to a better world. While therefore we mourn the loss of a devoted friend of our country; while we sympathize with the sorrows of the bereaved family, we sorrow not as those that have no hope.<sup>38</sup>

It is interesting to note that only after his Methodist affiliation does Ross's terminology conform to the Christian standard reference, the simple designation of the Great Spirit as "God."<sup>39</sup>

Ross gives complete allegiance to spiritual hope in concluding

<sup>38</sup>Message of John Ross, 4 October 1859. From a printed pamphlet in possession of T. L. Ballenger, Tahlequah.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

his message in 1861. As civil war stalks the Nation, Ross pleads that hope lies in "trusting that God will not only keep from our own borders the desolations of war, but, that he will in infinite mercy and power stay its ravages among the Brotherhood of States."<sup>40</sup>

Thus Ross was able to identify in spiritual matters with his people. Although he lacked personal commitment with a specific Christian group during the first twenty-eight years as their leader, a reader of his messages would assume he was a Christian. Ross so aligned himself with Christian efforts that he made his people feel that consubstantiality existed. He chose his words so well that the non-Christians in the Cherokee ranks felt the same identity as those who were Christians.

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<sup>40</sup> Proclamation of John Ross, 17 May 1861. From a printed copy in the files of Mrs. Czarina C. Conlan, Curator, O.H.S. Museum.

## CHAPTER V

### PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

The acculturation of the Cherokee and the adoption of a policy of peaceful coexistence with the whites was the death knell to traditional dual leadership. The singular leadership of the Cherokees evolved after the Treaty of Holston in 1791. John Ross accepted the office of principal chief knowing that only in a time of peace could he hold his leadership over the Cherokees.

The enormity of Ross's task in maintaining peace is understood by a close examination of Cherokee traditions. Vengeance and justice were tied firmly to the war practices of the Cherokees. Traditions in these elements were firmly entrenched. War was thought to be the principal occupation of the Cherokees until the nineteenth century according to whites with whom they came in contact. Evidence supporting this idea is found in letters, journals and official records of colonists, traders and missionaries.<sup>1</sup> "If not engaged in wars initiated by the colonists or in legitimate wars of their own, Cherokees in the eighteenth century would start wars with neighbors admittedly to provide practice for warriors."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Woodward, The Cherokees, pp. 31-32.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

The traditional importance of war is revealed in a letter of William Fyffe in 1761:

War is their principal study & their greatest ambition is to distinguish themselves by military action . . . even the old men who are past the trade themselves use every method to stir up a martial ardour in the youth. The women (as among whites know how to persuade by Praises or Ridicule the young men to what they please) employ the art to make them warlike. . . . Their young men are not regarded till they kill an enemy or take a prisoner. Those houses in which there's the greatest number of scalps are most honoured. A scalp is as great a Trophy among them as a par of colours among us.<sup>3</sup>

A Cherokee boy was taught by his parents that he was dishonored unless he avenged an insult. Woodward explains the disciplinary aspects of such a society:

And, fearful that drastic punishments would blunt their warlike dispositions, Cherokee tribal government did not provide laws for such punishments of villainous youths. Thus, miscreants were merely 'dry-scratched' with briars or snake teeth, publicly ridiculed, or simply ignored.<sup>4</sup>

"Their punishments are voluntary acts of justice done by the Father or head of the cabin upon any offender in his cabin. They are so regular," states Fyffe, "without laws & punishments to force them that they adhere punctually to what their fathers practiced before them."<sup>5</sup>

No doubt exists as to the integral nature of revenge and justice in Cherokee society. Nuttall found the revenge segment of the warrior code closely resembled the Jewish "an eye for an eye" code. Also, the Cherokees had a town of refuge as did the Jews. Nuttall felt that brotherhood operated successfully, natural to the clan system in the social pattern.

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<sup>3</sup>William Fyffe to Brother John, 1 February 1761, original MS in Gilcrease Institute.

<sup>4</sup>Woodward, The Cherokees, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup>Fyffe to Brother John, 1 February 1761, original MS in Gilcrease Institute.

The dire hatred the Cherokees bore their enemies

was a lasting proof of the strength of their affections, and mutual attachment. They felt for each other as members of the same family, as sons of the same father; a band of brothers mutually bound to defend and revenge the cause of each other, by a just and undeviating system of retaliation.<sup>6</sup>

When the Indians were moved by revenge according to their warrior code, it was the consuming passion overriding all restrictions and considerations.

Nuttal explains the extent to which retaliation was carried:

The conviction of natural justice went so far as frequently to draw no distinction of punishment betwixt manslaughter and murder. Governed also by the idea of a general fraternity existing throughout a tribe of people, the brother of a murderer, or even his nearest relative was not secure from the fatal avenger, in absence of the principal. In consequence of this, it sometimes happened that the brother became the executioner of his brother or nearest relative who had committed a murder, in order to save himself from vengeance. He who had taken away the life of another . . . was also occasionally suffered to redeem it, by obtaining, and presenting to the injured party, a scalp or a prisoner of the enemy, as they were satisfied in any way to obtain life for life.<sup>7</sup>

A murderer could enter a town of refuge by offering an excuse for the crime or stressing repentance. Occupied by the supreme chief, the town of refuge did not allow the shedding of blood.<sup>8</sup> Timberlake affirmed the intensity of revenge. He felt the Indians were "implacable in their enmity, their revenge being only completed [sic] in the entire destruction of their enemies."<sup>9</sup>

According to their traditions and beliefs, revenge was just.

Brownwell was greatly impressed with their virtues: "The most pleasing

<sup>6</sup>Nuttal, p. 132.

<sup>7</sup>Nuttal, p. 134.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Timberlake, p. 78.

traits in the character of these strange people are their reverence for age, their affection for their children, their high notions of honor, and their keen sense of justice."<sup>10</sup>

John Ross inherited the national policy of peaceful coexistence and also the traditions of the Cherokees. The basic problem composing a threat to peace was land. The whites coveted the land claimed by the Cherokees. The Cherokees were aware and highly appreciative of the fertility of their land and the prosperity it afforded them. Thus the request to leave their land and remove westward was strongly rejected. By 1828, when Ross took over his duties as principal chief, the encroachments on Cherokee land and the violations of Cherokee rights were serious threats to peace, and Ross had to find peaceful ways to resolve them. An examination of the messages of John Ross reveals his concern with maintaining peaceful coexistence. To understand his references requires a brief resume of negotiations prior to his election as principal chief.

The Cherokees were by nature respectful of an authority figure; to them the President of the United States was an awesome person. Fortunately, the initial relations between the United States and the Cherokees were favorable because of the person of George Washington. Having fought with Indian allies and observed the results of whites and Indians at war, Washington suggested that peace was the only sensible course to follow. He instructs his commissioners to treat the Indians in every event in such a way as to reflect the determination of the federal government that "Indian affairs shall be directed entirely by the great principles of

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<sup>10</sup>Brownwell, p. 22.

justice and humanity."<sup>11</sup> This idea was successfully transmitted through the emissary of the Cherokees, Nontuaka, who reports back to his people "the intention of General Washington to do justice to the red people about their lands."<sup>12</sup>

Being convinced of the integrity of the United States as represented in the President, the Indians accepted peace. But establishing a policy of peace is not the full solution. Peace must be maintained by enforcement when it is violated. Peace did not erase the white man's greed for land nor remove immediately the Indian ideas of revenge for wrongs. Breaches of the peace occurred and were a serious threat. "The evil seems to require a remedy," wrote Henry Knox, Secretary of War, "but no Indian peace will be permanent, unless an effectual mode can be devised to punish the violators of it on both sides."<sup>13</sup> The astuteness of Knox's observations was proved during the next two decades, and "the evil" was a major problem facing Ross in maintaining peace. Knox is also incisive in his observation concerning one-sided justice: "It will be with an ill grace that the United States demand the punishment of banditti Indians, when, at the same time, the guilty whites escape with impunity."<sup>14</sup> George Washington would not accept such injustice.

George Washington's approach to the Indian problem was ideal and,

<sup>11</sup>G. Washington and H. Knox to Benjamin Lincoln, Cyrus Griffin, and David Humphreys, 29 August 1789, A.S.P.--1790, Vol. II, p. 68.

<sup>12</sup>Bloody Fellow to Secretary of War, 10 January 1792, A.S.P.--1792, Vol. II, p. 205.

<sup>13</sup>Message of Henry Knox, 13 December 1793, A.S.P.--1793, Vol. II, p. 363.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

if followed, could have changed the entire history of the continent. However, his sentiments and influence faded with time. His policy was accepted and followed by the succeeding four presidents: Jefferson, Adams, Madison and Monroe. The two decades of peace following Washington saw the United States expand in area and also permitted a fast rate of acculturation on the part of the Cherokees that brought them an enviable prosperity. The breakdown of peace began, however, during the presidency of James Monroe.

President James Monroe faced the contentions of states such as Georgia that Indians had no rights to the land. He reaffirmed his acceptance of the benevolent policy of George Washington in his address to Congress in 1824. He was aware that the compact with Georgia in 1802 stipulated that the federal government would secure relinquishment of Indian title to the land within the state of Georgia. The method was either to remove the Indians west of the Mississippi<sup>15</sup> or to pay the Indians for their land. Georgia demanded that force be used to gain the land, but Monroe refused to be intimidated. He explains his idea on Indian title to the land:

I have no hesitation, however, to declare it as my opinion that the Indian title was not affected in the slightest circumstance by the compact with Georgia, and that there is no obligation on the United States to remove the Indians by force. The express stipulation of the compact, that their title should be extinguished at the expense of the United States; when it may be done peaceably and on reasonable conditions, is full proof that it was the clear and distinct understanding of both parties to it, that the Indians had a right to the territory, in the disposal of which they were to be regarded as free agents. An attempt to remove them by force would, in my opinion, be unjust.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>The first to suggest removal was Thomas Jefferson.

<sup>16</sup>Message from the President of the United States, James Monroe, to both House of Congress, 29 March 1824, cited in "Indian Reservations in Georgia," Niles Register, 17 April 1824, p. 101.



Monroe was for removal, but he felt the Indians had the right of refusal. He was also concerned with the disruption of the acculturation policy which had been followed for twenty-odd years. He reflected Washington's policy of justice and humanity toward the Indians when he reminded Congress:

Their improvement in the arts of civilized life was made an object with the government and that has since been persevered in. This policy was dictated by motives of humanity to the aborigines of the country, and under a firm conviction that the right to adopt and pursue it was equally applicable to all the tribes within our limits.<sup>17</sup>

President Monroe also reminds Congress that the compact with Georgia deserves to be considered in the same good faith it was made, but he warns:

In doing this, however, it is the duty of the United States to regard its strict import, and to make no sacrifice of their interest not called for by the compact, nor contemplated by either of the parties, when it was entered into, nor to commit any breach of right or of humanity in regard to the Indians, repugnant to the judgment, and revolting to the feelings, of the whole American people.<sup>18</sup>

With the President's opposition to forced removal, the crisis was postponed briefly, and the Cherokees kept faith in the federal government. The crisis came in the first year Ross was principal chief with the election of Andrew Jackson to the presidency of the United States. His secretary of war, John H. Eaton, was a non-sympathizer with the Indians. Eaton recognizes the inevitable conflict as he writes Gen. William Carroll in 1829: "A crisis in our Indian affairs has arrived. Strong indications are seen in this in the circumstance of the legislatures

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<sup>17</sup>Message of President Monroe, 29 March 1824, Niles Register, 17 April 1824, p. 101.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

of Georgia and Alabama extending their laws over the Indians within their respective limits."<sup>19</sup> This threat to the sovereignty of the Cherokee Nation was also a foreboding threat to peace. The Cherokees were only one generation away from their ancestral warrior-controlled society. The state of Georgia was to press the issue to its ultimate conclusion, the forced removal of the Cherokees. In the intervening years of the controversy the Cherokees faced the greatest test of their patience and integrity as numerous provocations tempted them to break the peace. The observance of the treaty proved how sincerely the Cherokee leader spoke for the people, as in the statement of Bloody Fellow at the Treaty of Tellico Blockhouse in 1794: "I want peace, that we may . . . sleep in our houses, and rise in peace on both sides."<sup>20</sup> The people proved he spoke for them by accepting the policy of peace.<sup>21</sup> Ross faced the threats to peace by adopting a policy no civilized country could fault or criticize. What was this policy to maintain peace?

According to Marion Starkey, Ross's policy was "that no acts of reprisal must be taken against the Georgians; no matter how great the provocation, the Cherokees must wait on the process of the law for redress of their wrongs. It is a tribute to their self-control that the policy was largely successful."<sup>22</sup> This assessment is verified and amplified by the statements of Rev. Elias Cornelius, who traveled and preached in the Cherokee Nation during the time of their harrassment by Georgia:

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<sup>19</sup>Niles Register, 22 November 1830, p. 198.

<sup>20</sup>Woodward, The Cherokees, p. 116.

<sup>21</sup>Both conservative and war parties attended the treaty conference and about forty chiefs signed it. Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Starkey, p. 156.

The forbearance and patience of the Cherokees under their accumulated wrongs is certainly very great, and ought to endear them to all good men. They are standing on the brink, of a fearful precipice, but they have such a hold on the justice and integrity of our government, that they cannot fall without bringing disgrace and heavy judgment on our whole nation.<sup>23</sup>

The extent of their endurance, Chamberlin felt, was not known.

Government officials in close contact with the Cherokees saw justice as linked with peace. In the annual report for 1841 to T. Hartley Crawford, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, William Armstrong, Acting Superintendent of the Western Territory, explains the meaning of justice:

Justice requires at our hands that a faithful fulfillment of the various treaty obligations be strictly complied with. This done, and a mild and judicious policy observed towards the Indians, we may expect a continuance of peace, with a fair prospect of civilization, or at least improving the condition of a race of people that are entitled to our deepest sympathy.<sup>24</sup>

John Ross was a staunch believer in lawful and peaceful practices. His course of action and his attitude are clearly revealed in his messages. By examining the content of his messages, Ross's policy in maintaining peace is revealed. Each problem was faced by lawful means with an unwavering belief in justice.

One of the first problems Ross concentrated upon was of long standing in the affairs of the nation. By the treaty of 1819, four tracts of Cherokee land, comprising fifteen square miles, was designated to be sold under the direction of the President of the United States to provide

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<sup>23</sup>Extract of a letter of Rev. Elias Chamberlin, dated at Willstown, 29 April 1831, Missionary Herald, Vol. XXVII (August 1831), p. 248.

<sup>24</sup>Wm. Armstrong to T. Hartley Crawford, 30 September 1841, A.R.C.I.A., 1841, Doc. No. 2, No. 34, p. 317.

funds for education of Cherokee youths. The Cherokees had planned to build a National Academy at New Echota and needed these funds. Ross suggests in his first message to the national council that they "memorialize the president on this important subject, and respectfully request that the available funds be applied to the support of the contemplated National Academy."<sup>25</sup> Such memorials were to be presented by official delegations of the Cherokee Nation throughout Ross's terms in office as peaceful and law-abiding means of securing justice.

Ross's insistence on lawful channels reflected the people's trust in the executive power of the United States. (The Cherokees so highly esteemed President Washington that his name was magical.) Ross gains support of the new constitution of the Cherokees by reminding his people:

This improvement in our government is strictly in accordance with the recommendations, views and wishes of the great Washington, under whose auspicious administration our treaties of peace, friendship and protection, were made, and whose policy in regard to Indian civilization has been strictly pursued by the subsequent administrations.<sup>26</sup>

The Cherokees had prospered under the administrations following Washington, and they had faith in subsequent administrations continuing Washington's policies. Their delegations had been courteously received and relations with the United States had been peaceful. Grievances had occurred but the Cherokees had been granted audiences. For example: President Madison had welcomed the Cherokee delegation in February, 1816, and expressed the gratitude of the United States for their services in the recent war.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Message of John Ross, 13 October 1828, Niles Register, 22 November 1830, pp. 198-199.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Conversation between President Monroe and Col. John Lowrey, 21 February 1816, Ross Papers, Gilcrease.

The Cherokees anticipated the continuance of such an interchange with the executive branch.

However, disappointments were only beginning in attempts of the Cherokees to reach the President through their correspondence and elected delegations. In 1829, Ross reports the failure of the memorials placed before President Adams. "The late administration did not act upon any of the subjects submitted by the delegation, but referred them all to the consideration of the present administration."<sup>28</sup> Faith in the President is reflected in Ross's statement concerning their protest

against the proceedings of Georgia, relative to the extension of her laws over the territory within our jurisdiction, believing at the same time that he would have deemed the matter of sufficient importance to have submitted a special message to congress, respecting so unjust an assumption of power on the part of Georgia, but finding that our anticipation would not be realized, and being desirous that the true sentiments of the nation on this subject should be made known to that honorable body, the delegation at a late hour presented a memorial and protest.<sup>29</sup>

While in Washington, Ross's delegation received the first inkling of the trend of the new administration of Andrew Jackson and his Secretary of War, John Eaton. The Secretary of War argued in favor of "Georgia's extending her jurisdiction over a portion of our territory."<sup>30</sup> The experience prompted Ross to warn his people:

The extraordinary latitude of construction given by the Secretary, on the sovereignty of Georgia, exhibits a glaring attempt of innovation in our political rights, and is calculated to affect seriously our relationship with the general government.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Message of John Ross, 14 October 1829, Niles Register, 14 November 1829, pp. 189-190.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

The new relationship was immediately interpreted by Georgia as meaning the Cherokees were in disfavor, and Georgia presented an outrageous claim to the major portion of Cherokee land. Ross hoped to keep his people in the path of peace and explained "that this fraudulent and unfounded claim was set forth by some of the Georgia politicians with a view of causing a delay in the removal of intruders. . . ." <sup>32</sup> The great pressure imposed by border-land intrusion was an immediate threat to the peace with extensive harrassment of Cherokees living along the borders of the Nation. Ross explained that Georgia hoped "that by a system of fraud, violence and oppression, practiced upon the frontier Cherokees, they would abandon their improvements and remove further into the interior of the nation." <sup>33</sup> By such pressures it was hoped that the Cherokee national authority might eventually be forced to cede these lands to keep the peace.

Ross reports to his people that Jackson's administration was favorable to Georgia's interests. He had been shown a letter from the Secretary of War to Col. H. Montgomery, United States Agent, declaring the suspension of the orders for removing the intruders from Cherokee lands. Ross calms the Cherokees' apprehensions by assuring them that justice is on the side of the Indians. He argues that there is abundant evidence of Cherokee rights to the land in the archives of the United States to convince the world. <sup>34</sup> Being conscious of the unorthodox action of the Secretary of War, Ross informs his people:

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

The course taken by the secretary of war in this matter seems strange, as you will see, from the documents submitted, that this unfounded claim to a portion of our lands, was brought to his view by the delegation, and the only attention then given to it by the department, was, the positive assurance given by the president that the intruders should be removed. This unexpected delay in their removal is calculated to encourage them to multiply and the consequences cannot fail to produce serious evils to our bordering citizens.<sup>35</sup>

The seriousness of the situation was heightened by the action of government agents conducting enrollments for emigration to Arkansas. These agents encouraged emigrating Cherokees to claim improvements they did not own and further encouraged them to make extra disposition of these improvements to white citizens of the United States, thereby adding another class of intruders to annoy the peaceful Cherokees living upon their own soil.<sup>36</sup> However, Ross proclaimed his adamant faith in justice and the United States and, in his concluding appeal in his message in 1829, clearly outlines the policy the Nation is to follow in maintaining peace:

A crisis seems to be fast approaching when the final destiny of our nation must be sealed. The preservation and happiness of the Cherokee people are at stake, and the United States must soon determine the issue--we can only look with confidence to the good faith and magnanimity of the general government, whose precepts and profession inculcate principles of liberty and republicanism, and whose obligations are solemnly pledged to give us justice and protection. Our treaties of relationship are based upon the principles of the federal constitution, and so long as peace and good faith are maintained, no power, save that of the Cherokee Nation and the United States jointly, can legally change them. Much, therefore, depends on our unity of sentiment and firmness of action, in maintaining those sacred rights, which we have ever enjoyed; and in deliberating upon this subject, our minds should be matured with that solemnity its great importance demands.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Ross's pleas for justice and protection were also stated in the memorials to Congress. In the memorial of February, 1829, Ross states his nation's protest:

We would therefore respectfully and solemnly protest in behalf of the Cherokee nation, before your honorable bodies, against the extension of the laws of Georgia over any part of our territory, and appeal to the United States for justice and protection.<sup>38</sup>

But the prayers of the Cherokee memorials before Congress were not answered by 1830, although Ross reported the staunch vindication of their rights by some of the most distinguished statesmen. Ross reports to his people: "The chief magistrate of the United States, having declared that he possesses no power to oppose, or interfere with Georgia in this matter, our relations with the United States are placed in a strange dilemma."<sup>39</sup> Ross, still holding to his faith in the justice of their cause, recommends the

authorizing of some person to address the president of the United States frankly, openly and respectfully, on the subject of our unhappy situation, and respect his paternal interference in all points as far as the treaties and laws of the United States acknowledge and secure to us our rights. . . .<sup>40</sup>

Ross reinforces the hope of the Cherokees by reporting that "petitions from various sections of the United States have been presented in favor of our cause, by a large portion of the most respectable class of the community. . . ."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Memorial of John Ross, 27 February 1829, Niles Register, 7 August 1830, pp. 423-424.

<sup>39</sup> Message of John Ross, July 1830, Niles Register, 7 August 1830, pp. 423-424.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.



Ross recognized that their cause was a political football which Jackson and his party were adept at kicking about. The integrity of the office of the presidency was a puzzlement to the Cherokees because of the ambiguous and self-contradictory statements coming from it. Ross informs his people:

The chief magistrate of the union has warned us against any hope of interference on his part, with Georgia, in the exercise of his power--yet he says, that such power as the laws give him for our protection, shall be executed for our benefit, and this will not fail to be exercised in keeping out intruders: beyond this he cannot go.<sup>42</sup>

Troops were sent into the Nation under Lieutenant Trainer, who admitted his troops were sent to remove white intruders on Cherokee land in violation of the treaty with the Cherokees. However, shortly after their arrival, Trainer showed Ross a notice ordering his mutual assistance with the civil authorities of Georgia. He advised the Cherokees to submit to the state's authority. No white intruders were removed and the troops were shortly withdrawn. As hope had blazed forth, so it died to a mere spark.

Accepting the failure of efforts to gain justice from the executive branch, Ross advised the employment of legal counsel to take their cause before the judiciary. Ross confidently assures his people that in the Supreme Court of the United States, "the conservatory of the constitution, treaties and laws of the union, we can yet hope for justice, and to which we should fearlessly and formly [sic] appeal."<sup>43</sup> Ross is so enthusiastic that he urges "authorizing some person to assert the rights of

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

the Cherokees in all courts of law and equity in the United States. . . ."44

The Cherokees followed Ross's advice, and professional counsel was hired. Cherokees were constantly brought before the Georgia courts, where they had no individual rights under state laws. Since testimony by an Indian was not admissable in the courts, only through testimony of a white man could the Cherokees defend themselves. Justice had to be sought in the higher federal courts. "If the authorities of the General Government will not order the necessary antidote," Ross asks, "how can the evil be effectively remedied [peaceably]?"45

The Cherokees placed their immediate hopes on the courts. However, the courts of Georgia were alerted to prevent appeals to the federal courts. Ross notes that the "courts of Georgia were disposed to prevent as far as possible any case from going up to the Supreme Court of the United States."<sup>46</sup> In cases before the courts of Georgia dealing with the right of Cherokees to work their gold mines, Governor Gilmer ordered the Georgia Guard to ignore court findings and keep everyone from the mines. Truly, the Cherokees faced seeming disaster by 1831.

"By enumerable acts of injustice and oppression," admits Ross, "the rights, liberties and lives of our Citizens have been threatened and jeopardized. . . ."47 Ross informs his people that the President hopes by this form of duress to destroy the people's faith in their

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Message of John Ross, 11 October 1830, Cherokee Phoenix, 16 October 1830.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Message of John Ross, 24 October 1831, Cherokee Phoenix and Indian's Advocate, 19 November 1831.

leader and force them to emigrate. Ross defends the justice in their cause by assuring his people: "There can be no subject easier understood than the true relationship between this Nation and the United States; nor the justness of any cause more obvious than ours when fairly investigated."<sup>48</sup> He supports his hope for justice by asking the people to keep faith with those who "surrendered a portion of our sovereignty, as a security for our protection."<sup>49</sup> Also, Ross claims justice by the actions of the Cherokees and censures President Jackson as he asks:

And have not the Cherokees at all times been ready to meet the common foe of the United States? Did they not sufficiently prove to the world their disposition on this subject during the last war? Did they not meet and fight the enemy as became warriors? Let the gallant commander, who now administers the affairs of the United States Government answer.<sup>50</sup>

Ross's message found fertile ground with his people. The Cherokees were familiar with the battle of Horseshoe Bend, and the part the Cherokees played in the victory. The victory was a great boost to the fame of Andrew Jackson, and a memorable example of courage to the Cherokees.

Maintaining his idea that "Justice will triumph," Ross reminds his people that time will not only usher in a new administration but will prove the justness of the Cherokee cause. He appeals to the Cherokees to hold faith:

Situating, therefore, as we are under the fostering care and protection of a magnanimous Government there is every reason to cherish the hope that, under the auspices of a kind and generous administration, time would soon put to shame and

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

lull to silence all the sophistry and unnatural clamour so boisterously paraded against our peaceful continuance upon the land of our fathers.<sup>51</sup>

Although prospects were dismal, Ross still sustained his people's faith in their cause, and they maintained their trust in his leadership. He held out the hope that the American people were sympathetic to their cause. The Cherokee Phoenix was engaged in a propaganda campaign hoping to elicit support for the Cherokee cause. The press in Ross's words was effective in making the American people aware of "the improving conditions, character and stability of the Cherokee people."<sup>52</sup> Herein was yet another hope for winning justice peaceably.

A crushing blow came in 1832 with the decision of the United States Supreme Court denying Cherokee sovereignty. This was decisive as far as the young editor of the Cherokee Phoenix, Elias Boudinot, was concerned, and he resigned. His belief in the hopelessness of the Cherokee cause was expressed in his letter of resignation to Ross: "I cannot tell them that we will be reinstated in our rights when I have no such hopes, and after our leading, active and true friends in Congress, and elsewhere, have signified to us that they can do us no good."<sup>53</sup>

Ross accepted Boudinot's resignation but not his loss of faith. He only exerted greater effort to keep his people united in the justness of their cause. "There was a day when better feeling directed the helm of Government--and in that day," Ross reminisced, "justice stalked abroad in the land."<sup>54</sup> Ross appeals to the pride of the Cherokees in their

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Elias Boudinot to John Ross, 1 August 1832, Cherokee Advocate, 11 August 1832.

<sup>54</sup>Message of John Ross, 10 October 1832.

improvements which serve to dispel "all doubts in regard to the practicability of Indian civilization."<sup>55</sup> Ross recounts the history of Cherokee-United States relationships and reaffirms that only in the trust in eventual justice is hope possible: "There is no safety for this nation to change the relation it sustains toward the United States, under existing treaties and to adopt the new one by emigration."<sup>56</sup> As early as 1829 Ross had stressed the possibility of broken faith and the resulting fate left the Cherokees:

But if, contrary to all expectation, the United States shall withdraw their solemn pledges of protection, utterly disregard their plighted faith, deprive us of the right of self government, and wrest from us our land--then, in the deep anguish of our misfortune, we may justly say, there is no place of security for us, no confidence left in the United States will be more just and faithful toward us in the barren prairies of the west, than when we occupied the soil inherited from the Great Author of our existence.<sup>57</sup>

The Cherokee majority remained solidly behind Ross and placed their hopes in eventual justice. Ross was able in 1833 to call their attention to a hopeful statement in the President's proclamation to the people of South Carolina regarding nullification. The President declared the supremacy of the constitution and laws of the United States over state authority. In doing so, he verified the contentions Ross had made for years. Ross advised his people that the time had not been appropriate at the time the delegation had been in Washington to agitate Congress with their cause, but the decision on nullification and secession was certain to affect the Cherokee-Georgia controversy. He argued that

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Message of John Ross, 14 October 1829, Niles Register, 14 November 1829, pp. 189-190.

"the only difference in the principle as maintained by South Carolina and Georgia, is that the former has only asserted it in theory, when the latter has reduced it to practice."<sup>58</sup> Ross argued that more than ever the Cherokees should unite behind their common cause in hope for justice.

By 1835, Cherokee delegations had presented numerous memorials appealing for justice for their people. Ross acknowledged that unity of the Cherokees had not been maintained in Washington because a delegation headed by Ridge had destroyed their effectiveness with the President. Ross's delegation had memorialized Congress, however, by

appealing to the honor, magnanimity, and justice of the American Government, to determine whether their propositions ought not to be met; and if not, whether the rights of their nation, under existing treaties, ought not to be enforced; or whether the Cherokee people ought to be forced to abandon their country by the force of unprovoked oppressions, under the exercise of State authority, &c.<sup>59</sup>

Activities in the nation gives Ross justification to claim that the rightness of their cause is evidenced by the seizure of their press by Georgia:

The manner of the seizure of the public press could not have been sanctioned for any other purpose than to stifle the voice of the Cherokee people, raised by their cries from the wounds inflicted upon them by the unsparing hand of their oppressors, and that the ear of humanity might thereby be prevented from hearing them.<sup>60</sup>

Ross could still maintain that the American people were a power the oppressors could not afford to have aroused. An attempt had been launched to discredit the influential men in the Cherokee Nation, and

<sup>58</sup>Message of John Ross, 13 May 1833, ibid., 19 October 1833, p. 121.

<sup>59</sup>Message of John Ross, October 1835, House Exec. Doc., 27th Cong., 2d Sess., No. 1098, pp. 40-41.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

Georgia had been actively arresting numerous Cherokees, including White-path, a venerable and noble chief. Ross's belief in justice is expressed in his letter to Colonel Rockwell in 1835:

It has been reported that there was a system of operation designed by the oppressors of the people to hatch up lies and falsehoods against the most respectable and influential Cherokee citizens with the view of perplexing their minds and destroying their reputation abroad.

.....  
 But it is hoped that sufficient honesty and justice will be found still to exist in the breast of man. If so, such vile infamous cullumination will but recoil on . . . those who may attempt the abominable project. I trust that you will be a close observer of matters and as far as practicable will endeavor to avert the poisoned dart--aimed at your much abused and innocent clients.<sup>61</sup>

All Ross's efforts to bring the United States government to compromise were futile once a treaty was signed in 1835 by a few Cherokees. Having now a legal-appearing document, however flimsy, Jackson carried out his plan to remove the Indians. The American public did not raise sufficient protest to prevent the scheme. The New York American gave probably the best reason why response was weak in an article on the Cherokee question:

The subject has already been so long before the country, that public sympathy, never a very enduring emotion, is nearly worried out, and, like a veteran who is reproached for telling an old story, when the infirmities of age are added to the wounds which broke his constitution in youth, the Cherokee must be content to forego his claims upon our feelings, because the story of his wrongs can no longer excite from its novelty.<sup>62</sup>

The reporter's comment that appeals by Ross would prove futile was a true prophecy. So the Cherokees accepted their fate and traveled the "Trail

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<sup>61</sup>John Ross to Col. Richard Rockwell, 15 September 1835, in Ross Ms and Papers.

<sup>62</sup>The New York American, cited in "The Cherokees," Niles Register, 8 October 1836, p. 90.

of Tears" to the Indian Territory still trusting in the guidance of their chief, John Ross.

The settling of the eastern Cherokees among the western Cherokees made a unified government essential. By 1840 Ross was still in command, but he faced the task of truly uniting the factions in the new nation. The major problem was the withholding of annuities from the Federal Government, monies withheld in face of a divided people. "If this spirit of unanimity is cherished, and continues thus hourly to extend," Ross reports to the people, "it will remove every cause of difficulty, and, under the express declarations of the Secretary [of War] himself, render our appeals for justice irresistible."<sup>63</sup> Dissatisfaction and bitterness from the recent experience of emigrating has frayed the tempers of many Cherokees, and violence runs near the calm surface. Ross recognizes this threat and pleads: "Let us remain in the right, and trust to Providence and an upright cause for the result. . . . In short, let justice, and peace, and friendship, towards all, be perpetually our ruling motto."<sup>64</sup> Ross managed to maintain the peace, but no monies were forthcoming from the Federal Government.

The several claims for adjustment which the Cherokees brought before the Secretary of War by sending delegations to Washington still were unsettled in 1842. Ross, however, assures the Cherokees: "We still hold not only just and equitable claims on the United States Government, but the unequivocal promise of the President that they shall be satisfied."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Message of John Ross, October 1840, House Exec. Doc. 27th Cong., 2d Sess., No. 1098, pp. 44-47.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.



Immediate solutions to the problems between the Cherokees and the United States Government could not be found, but the claims were officially kept open for settlement. With his people making great headway in getting homes firmly established and the prospects excellent for good crops, Ross holds out his unwavering hope for justice:

The righteous demands of our people upon the United States Government for justice, and the deep wrongs requiring it, with the reasonable assurance, already given, that they shall be redressed, leave us only to hope on, and to prosecute them with<sup>66</sup> prudence and perseverance, until they shall be finally settled.

In the following months, peace seemed joined with an evident prosperity in the Nation. After tedious and numerous negotiations, Ross's hopes were realized; the Treaty of 1846 was signed and presented to the people for acceptance. Ross felt that the treaty was just and was "a document of great importance to the Cherokees."<sup>67</sup> Not only did it give new legal status to the Cherokees but gave more urgency to keep peace among themselves. The settlement of claims against the Federal Government seemed to spur a great prosperity in the Nation, and factionalism drowsed beneath the peace cloaking the Nation.

In a dramatic gesture which was obviously acceptable to every Cherokee who had experienced the removal westward, Ross issued a proclamation following the people's acceptance of the Treaty of 1846. He declares a day of public Thanksgiving to God:

Our people have passed through a long series of difficulties and dangers of the most perilous and alarming character: distress and terror and insecurity of property and life, have

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<sup>66</sup>Message of John Ross, 18 November 1844, Cherokee Messenger, November 1844.

<sup>67</sup>Message of John Ross, 12 November 1846, Niles Register, 26 December 1846, p. 259.

harrassed and agonized the hearts of multitudes of our best citizens; but through the benign interposition of Him, whose hand controls the destinies of Nations, the tempest is hushed, and peace and security are restored to our country and to our families. Our national rights are placed upon a just and permanent basis, and a broad foundation is laid, for making rapid advances in those improvements which go to constitute an intelligent, virtuous and prosperous people.<sup>68</sup>

Ross and the National Council could now concentrate on internal problems in the Nation. By 1852 it became evident that the problem of the national debt was getting out of hand. The national debt had accumulated because of the failure of the Cherokee constitution to provide an independent means of revenue. The debt had reached proportions of alarming size. Added to this problem was the age old one--land-hungry whites-- which reared its head in the "neutral land" of the Cherokees. Presence of white intruders is expressed in the national paper: "Alas! for us Indians, for we are fearful we will be swallowed up by this land-acquiring and kind-occupying spirit of the pale faces."<sup>69</sup>

In 1857 Ross warns the Cherokees that, if they are to avert the fate of the Indians in Kansas and Nebraska whose rights and sovereignty has been lost, "it behooves us to stand united, to watch with a jealous eye every aggression, to strengthen our government, and to cling to the protection often and solemnly pledged by the United States."<sup>70</sup> Within this framework was the continuing road of peace, and Ross was determined to keep peace. Maintaining his adamant belief in lawful procedures,

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<sup>68</sup> Proclamation of John Ross, Cherokee Advocate, 3 December 1846.

<sup>69</sup> Cherokee Advocate, 30 March 1853.

<sup>70</sup> Message of John Ross, 5 October 1857, A.R.C.I.A.--1857, No. 90, pp. 218-223.

Ross recommends a delegation be sent immediately to Washington. As their past experience had shown them, Washington was not to be brought to action too quickly. By 1859 intruders upon the "neutral land" had increased to alarming numbers. One solution proposed that would settle the two major problems of the Nation: sell the "neutral land" to the United States. But Indian love of land was a serious obstacle to any sale of land. Too many remembered what the cession of lands had brought them in earlier years.

Ross assures the Council that if they are disposed to consider the sale of the "neutral land" as a solution for their problems: "I doubt not that the eminent statesman who now administers the Government of the United States will deal with us upon terms of enlightened justice and enlarged liberality."<sup>71</sup> Ross again recommends that a delegation be sent to Washington to negotiate the question of intruders. Ross recognizes the need for "a practical recognition on the part of the Government of the United States, of the spirit of friendship and justice which actuate our people in their intercourse with the whites."<sup>72</sup> The Cherokee government had the right (guaranteed by treaty) to punish whites violating their civil rights, and Ross assured his people that their actions in dealing with whites were so manifestly just that the United States Government would not deny their rights.

To keep peace, the Cherokees patiently endured and waited. Justice from the United States was once again delayed, since the spectre of slavery had entered the political arena. The Indian Territory was too far from Washington and the Indians always had some problem to be heard,

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<sup>71</sup>Message of John Ross, 4 October 1859. From pamphlet in possession of T. L. Ballenger, Tahlequah.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

but slavery was a threat to the Union. Unfortunately, neglect of the Indians by the Federal Government at this time presented an opportunity for partisan activity. Ross, vigilant to the threat, in 1860 reminds his people:

Our political relations are with the Government of the United States, and our rights are protected by the enforcement of the laws under the constitution. Our duty is to stand by our rights--allow no interference in our internal affairs from any source, comply with all our engagements and rely upon Union for justice and protection.<sup>73</sup>

Yet Ross had to report the failure of their memorials to Congress over the "neutral land"; furthermore, a bill in the U. S. Congress was still pending. If passed, a large section of Cherokee land would be within the boundary of the new State of Kansas. Ross holds fast to his belief in Justice: "Until the act shall be consummated, however, it behooves the Cherokees to insist upon a fair and just compliance with Treaty stipulations."<sup>74</sup>

Ross's assurances kept the semblance of peace, but unrest rippled across the Nation and fears gripped the Cherokees in their new prosperity. Slavery proved too disruptive a force to calm, and the United States Government was too far away and too unconcerned for Ross to gain aid in holding his people to his neutrality policy. His final attempt at neutrality is to warn:

When your nationality ceases here, it will live nowhere else.  
When these homes are lost, you will find no others like them.  
Then, my countrymen, as you regard your own rights, as you regard the welfare of your prosperity, be prudent how you act.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Message of John Ross, 4 October 1860, J.R.P.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Message of John Ross, 21 August 1861, War of the Rebellion--Official Records, Series I, Vol. III, pp. 673-675.

With the outbreak of hostilities between the states, the federal government seemed no longer to exist, and the Cherokees accepted the terms presented by the Confederacy. Ross acquiesced to his people's wishes and joined their destiny with the Confederate States of America.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSIONS

I have examined available materials to gain insight into the leadership of John Ross, remarkable for its longevity. My study has revealed that Ross held his leadership by the source credibility conferred upon him by his people. Being a product of the period of transition between two cultures, that of the Cherokees and that of the whites, Ross had the ability to serve successfully his people as spokesman to the whites. The traditional dual-leadership evolved through acculturation into the constitutional office of principal chief, an extension of the white-task, or peace time, leadership. Ross was well qualified to serve as the principal chief and, once elected to the office, strengthened his leadership by his ability to increase the spirit of unity among the Cherokees. My study of common themes in his messages revealed his awareness of this and of the necessity to keep the policy of peace. Unquestionably, Ross was a peacetime leader; war would have presented a challenge and threat to his leadership.

No study of Ross's leadership is complete without attention to the four years prior to his death. During this period a challenge to Ross's leadership was met, and Ross still emerged the leader of the majority of Cherokees. A brief resume is profitable to understanding the

greatness of the leadership of John Ross.

John Ross seemingly led a united Cherokee Nation into the Confederate alliance. However, the unity was ephemeral. Stand Watie had recruited and trained a troop of soldiers long before the treaty was signed with the Confederate States of America. Stand Watie's activities resurrected the red-task, or warrior, leadership of ancient Cherokee tradition and created the threat to Ross's leadership that he had avoided by keeping his nation at peace.

Even though a semblance of unity was demonstrated by Stand Watie's shaking hands with John Ross following the signing of a treaty with the South, the old bitterness and factionalism were still there. Two forces and two leaders were operating in the Cherokee Nation: One led by the military commander, Stand Watie, fifty-one years old; the other led by the venerable chief, John Ross, seventy-one years old. Indeed, a struggle was underway for leadership of the Cherokees. The mixed-bloods rallied behind Stand Watie, and he led them into battle. An early advantage was gained by Stand Watie as he proved victorious in the first skirmishes. Ross watched and waited patiently. Leadership was a will-of-the-wisp.

The turning point in the seeming leadership stalemate came early in the war at the battle of Pea Ridge. Following this battle the Confederacy's strategy west of the Mississippi became strictly defensive; thus the Indian country was doomed to become a buffer zone between Kansas and Texas. The show of strength by the Union forces in 1862 convinced the full-bloods that they were on the wrong side; and since they had always had great respect for the United States, they deserted their regiment. As a result of this action, the full-blood Cherokee regiment under the

Confederate flag was disbanded; this left Stand Watie and his troops carrying the Confederate flag for the Cherokee Nation. Many of the full-bloods joined the Union Army.<sup>1</sup>

Ross reflected the sentiment of his followers, and as soon as the Union Army occupied the Cherokee Nation on July 14, 1862, Ross capitulated. This move was anticipated by federal officers who were aware of Ross's long loyalty to the federal government.<sup>2</sup> Now the Nation divided between supporters of the Union and Stand Watie forces of the South. Factionalism erupted with its decimating violence and vengeance until a deserted nation remained. During the next three years followers of both factions struggled to keep alive.

Peace came in the summer of 1865, and the Cherokees returned to their barren and desolate country. Although the misery of war was over, the Cherokees now faced the misery of reconstruction. But two factions also returned to the Nation with both facing a common power, the federal government.

John Ross was an old man who grieved over the loss of his wife at the close of the war, and Stand Watie was a tired commander who wanted only peace. Both rejected the terms which the federal government offered at the Fort Smith Council and appealed to Washington for better terms. In the final efforts Ross's party arranged the treaty, but the Nation was still internally divided. However, Ross still inspired the loyalty of the

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<sup>1</sup>William Weer to Thomas Moonlight, 6 July 1862, War of the Rebellion, I, Vol. XIII, p. 138.

<sup>2</sup>W. G. Coffin to John Ross, 16 June 1862, Cherokee Nation Papers.



majority of the Cherokees in the summer of 1865.

Illness forced Ross to leave his people to convalesce in Philadelphia, where he died August 1, 1866.<sup>3</sup> Thus, John Ross yielded the reins of leadership by the process of death, still followed by the Cherokees. The Nation mourned his death and paid tribute to him.

Any honest consideration of Ross's leadership requires a tribute to his ability to keep his people from the road of violence. In fact, the Cherokees proved to the world that they were an orderly, civilized people standing on the law for their rights, convinced of the rightness of their cause. With patience and stoic acceptance of injustice, they shamed the white man's savagery and lawlessness by their own discipline.<sup>4</sup>

Few leaders of any people have been publicized during their leadership as John Ross was. Editorials from the Cherokee Phoenix and Cherokee Advocate were reprinted in publications all over the United States. The righteousness of the Cherokees and the justness of their cause inspired many sermons and gained sympathy from God-fearing people.<sup>5</sup>

Even though John Ross gained status through the publications about him and the Cherokees, he elicited greater respect in his personal contacts. Andrew Jackson was greatly chagrined by this ability of Ross and was frustrated in his attempts to malign Ross's leadership. During his second term as president, Jackson felt the full measure of frustration because of Ross. No matter how hard-bitten the army officer he sent into the Cherokee Nation, Jackson soon found that the officer was

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<sup>3</sup>Starr, History of the Cherokees, p. 296.

<sup>4</sup>Starkey, p. 157.

<sup>5</sup>Woodward, p. 161.

pro-Cherokee. An outstanding example is General Winfield Scott, the officer assigned to finalize the removal of the Cherokees westward. Scott succumbs as have others and holds John Ross in great respect. General Scott sympathizes with the Cherokees: "The Cherokees, by the advances they have made in Christianity and civilization, are by far the most interesting tribe of Indians in the territorial limits of the United States."<sup>6</sup>

That Ross's leadership commanded respect from Andrew Jackson is evident in his attempt to destroy it. One action taken was through the Secretary of War. He notified Ross that the "President had ceased to recognize any existing government among the eastern Cherokees, and that any further effort by him [Ross] to prevent the consummation of the treaty would be suppressed."<sup>7</sup> Jackson felt the backlash from his proclamation, published all over America, as a storm of protest was unleashed from private citizens revealing their emotional identity with the Cherokees.<sup>8</sup>

The response of the American people to the cause of the Cherokees is noted by John Ridge in his letter to Ross in 1831. Ridge at the time was on a propaganda and fund-raising tour. "I do hope," wrote Ridge, "that our people as usual remain united and continue to depend upon the advice of their chiefs--it is the only way to preserve them and their rights."<sup>9</sup> Yet Ridge within the following year becomes the initiating force

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<sup>6</sup>General Winfield Scott, Order No. 25, J.R.P.

<sup>7</sup>Grant Foreman, Indian Removal, p. 269.

<sup>8</sup>Woodward, p. 193.

<sup>9</sup>John Ridge to John Ross, 12 January 1831, J.R.P.

in forming an organized "peace party" in opposition to the wishes of the chiefs.

Of the many American citizens who joined in aiding the Cherokees, none surpassed the efforts of Colonel Thomas L. McKenney. In his letter to the Secretary of War, James Barbour, in 1825, McKenney states his belief in a policy which can preserve the Indians. His plea essentially followed Ross's ideas stated throughout his leadership. McKenney feels the solution to the Indian problem is to

Remove the existing causes that operate to humiliate them in their own eyes and to depress their energies; give them, under our laws, an assurance of protection in that Western home, and a share in the government, and of the public honors; make them, in a word, part of ourselves; and their improvement, so far from producing their extinction, as a people, would tend to their preservation as a race.<sup>10</sup>

Such sentiment brings his dismissal as Commissioner of Indian Affairs, but this does not deter his efforts to aid the Indians. Later McKenney pays great tribute to John Ross as leader of the Cherokees:

Chief John Ross, who, in the hope and expectation of seeing his people elevated to a place beside the English stock, cast in his lot with them in early youth, when worldly prospects beckoned him to another sphere of activity--has been identified with their progress for half a century, and is still a "living sacrifice" on the altar of devotion to his nation. His moral and religious character is unstained, his personal appearance venerable and attractive, and his name will be imperishable in the annals of our country.<sup>11</sup>

Other public officials reacted to the cause of the Cherokees, and Congress was not exempt. Typical of the pro-Cherokee spokesman in

<sup>10</sup> Tho. L. McKenney to James Barbour, 13 December 1825, House Doc. 102, 19th Cong., 1st Sess., p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas L. McKenney and James Hall, History of the Indian Tribes of North America with Biographical Sketches and Anecdotes of the Principal Chiefs (Philadelphia: Frederick W. Greenough, 1838), Vol. I, p. 446.

Congress was Horace Everett, Congressman from Vermont. His sentiments are expressed in a speech to the United States House of Representatives May 19, 1830. Everett appeals to the conscience:

The evil, Sir, is enormous; the violence is extreme; the breach of public faith deplorable; the inevitable suffering incalculable. Do not stain the fair name of the country: it has justly been said, it is in the keeping of Congress, on this subject.<sup>12</sup>

But justice was to be denied the Cherokees, as time drained faith and purpose from those whose consciences were pricked by the Cherokees' pleas for justice.

Another expression of sympathy which is indicative of the frustration public officials faced in considering the Cherokee question is that of Chief Justice John Marshall of the United States Supreme Court. In his comment on the case of the Cherokee Nation vs Georgia, Marshall evidences an awareness of "man's inhumanity to man:"

If the courts were permitted to indulge their sympathies, a case better calculated to excite them can scarcely be imagined. A people once numerous, and truly independent, found by our ancestors in the quiet and uncontrolled possession of an ample domain, gradually sinking beneath our superior policy, our arts and our arms, have yielded their lands by successive treaties, each of which contains a solemn guarantee of the residue, until they retain no more of their formerly extensive territory than is deemed necessary to their comfortable subsistence.<sup>13</sup>

Examination of evidence leaves no doubt of the full-blood Cherokees' support of Ross. They were devoted followers throughout his leadership. Woodward relates an incident of the respect Ross commanded from his people in The Cherokees:

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<sup>12</sup>Register of Debates in Congress (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1830), 2, Vol. VI, p. 1070.

<sup>13</sup>Cherokee Nation vs Georgia, 5 Peters (U. S. Supreme Court Reports) 1; 8L. Ed., p. 25.

Beloved by the common Indians, Chief Ross had only to tie his horse to a post in the square of any town or village in the Nation to be surrounded by hordes of Indians, most of whom were fullbloods living back in the mountains and coves. At the sight of Ross--sometimes attired in white men's clothes with a turban wound around his head in Turkish fashion, and sometimes wearing a black, broad-brimmed planter's hat, boots, and jacket--'the people,' many of whom yet wore ancient tribal dress, or a variation of it, formed two diagonal lines in the square. There each awaited his turn 'to take Chief Ross by the hand,' their dark eyes visibly brightening upon encountering Ross's steady blue ones.<sup>14</sup>

Ross's support by the people is given an added dimension in light of the statement made by David Brown, a highly educated and venerable Cherokee scholar, who writes Thomas McKenney: "It must be borne in mind, that it is the mass and common people, that form the character of a nation, and not officers of government, nor the lowest grade of peasantry."<sup>15</sup> Ross recognizes this and makes constant references to "the people" in his letters and messages. "Our country and our people," Ross writes John Ridge in September, 1834, "should be our motto and their will should direct us in the path of duty."<sup>16</sup> Ross needed the people as much as they needed him, and he identified with them in every sense.

By color and education, John Ross was easily prepared to enter the white man's world and pursue his fortune apart from the Cherokees. But, although he looked like a white man, his heart and soul were "full-blood" Cherokee. His pride in his people and concern for their welfare were prevalent themes in his messages. As a symbol of hope for better

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<sup>14</sup>Woodward, pp. 157-158.

<sup>15</sup>David Brown to Thomas McKenney, 2 September 1825, cited in House Doc. 102, 19th Cong., 1st Sess., 17.

<sup>16</sup>John Ross to John Ridge, September 1834, J.R.P.

things, Ross always expressed his faith in the ultimate destiny of the Cherokees.

Ross served as spokesman for his people, but he was not considered an eloquent man by white men's standards. He was rather a serious and reserved individual, quiet spoken and seldom revealing emotion. This was what the Cherokees expected in their leader. Ross was capable of making emotional appeals with great eloquence, as he demonstrated on certain occasions. It is profitable in this study, and necessary for adequate appreciation of this aspect of Ross's leadership, that one message of Ross be examined. The reserved style typical of Ross is observed in his annual message of 1840, as he addresses the newly united Cherokee Nation after the removal of the eastern group to the territory in which the western group settled. The occasion is immediately following his election as principal chief. His speech has an emotional element accentuated by a poetic strain which reveals definite insights into the feelings of man--feelings usually hidden under a reserved and dignified language and personal demeanor. The atmosphere is lighthearted since prosperity is visible on the horizon. Ross also feels some security in leadership, the past years having been the proverbial "test by fire." Ross believes that with a united people he can lead them to a remarkable posterity. Ross's message, above all other considerations, pays tribute to his people:

Friends and Fellow Citizens: In meeting you, after the lapse of more than a year from the term of our organization, once again, as an united people, it affords me greater satisfaction than I can express to have it in my power to congratulate you on the good spirit which seems to pervade our nation. Our thanks should be especially poured forth to the Great Source of Blessings, for his fostering beneficence, under circumstances of no common peril. There is no recorded instance, within my memory, of an entire change in the position of so extensive a community, even when

wrought with its own consent, which has not been made by the pretext for frightful disorders, fomented by the restless and the disaffected. I think it due to our own people to remind them of the praise they merit for having, although their position was altered not voluntarily, but without their consent and against their will, borne the necessity in a noble temper of philosophic endurance and to encourage them to persevere in the same disposition, by picturing the gratitude they will gain from their posterity for having, after only a few sad days of confusion, even while destitution, disease, and death, in every appalling form, raged around them, at once emerged from the tempestuous chaos into the calm sunshine of a settled government, to which neither suffering nor intrigue appear likely ever to render them untrue. When the clouds over us were the darkest, it afforded the true lovers of peace no ordinary consolation to be assured, in communications from the Secretary of War at Washington City, and from the Indian Commissioner, that it was the unalterable principle of the United States, in dealing with all Indian nations, to respect the will of their majorities; and, as such is the only principle ever to be tolerated among the Cherokees, we ought no longer to despair of satisfactorily adjusting our affairs with the Power by whom it is thus solemnly announced as her great law. I am encouraged in this impression when I observe, which I do with unfeigned delight, that some of those who lately differed most strenuously in opinion with their countrymen now array themselves on the side of the majority. . . . The reconciliation of the minority . . . render our appeals for justice irresistible.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, "neither suffering nor intrigue" during the years of Ross's leadership was enough to disturb the loyalty the majority gave to Ross. If, as some claim, he was responsible for much of the hardships of his people, he did not feel personally responsible. In the last months of his life, Ross faces death serene and guilt-free. He feels he has fully served his people and proudly states:

Yes Sir: I am an old man, and have served my people and the Govt of the United States a long time, over fifty years. My people have kept me in the harness, not of my seeking but of their own choice. I have never deceived them; and now I look back, not one act of my public life rises up to upbraid me. I have done the best I could, and today upon this bed of sickness, my heart approves all I have done. And still I am, John Ross, the same John Ross of former years.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Message of John Ross, October 1840, House Exec. Doc., 27th Cong., 2d Sess., No. 1098, pp. 44-47.

<sup>18</sup>John Ross's Nephew to W. P. Ross, 3 April 1866, J.R.P.

This personal evaluation is supported by Rev. Evan Jones, a missionary in the Cherokee Nation who is to be granted Cherokee citizenship in honor of his faithful service. Jones attests to the self-sacrificing devotion of Ross toward his people.<sup>19</sup>

If Ross devoted his efforts and himself to his people, they gave him loyalty and trust in return. The Cherokees conferred a measure of source credibility upon John Ross that endured all attempts of presidents, governors, statesmen, generals and even time to destroy. By his actions, he proved his dedication; by his unwavering faith in justice, he inspired hope; by his wisdom, he led them honestly; by his loss and suffering, he shared their most personal feelings; by his death, he gave them his final devotion.

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<sup>19</sup>Evan Jones's Statement, 20 July 1868, Senate Report No. 113, p. 6.



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