

The Trail of Tears

Between 1790 and 1830 the population of [Georgia](#) increased six-fold. The western push of the settlers created a problem. Georgians continued to take [Native American lands](#) and force them into the frontier. By 1825 the Lower Creek had been completely removed from the state under provisions of the Treaty of Indian Springs. By 1827 the [Creek](#) were gone.

Cherokee had long called western Georgia home. The [Cherokee Nation](#) continued in their enchanted land until 1828. It was then that the rumored [gold](#), for which [De Soto](#) had relentlessly searched, was discovered in the North Georgia mountains.



In his book *Don't Know Much About History*, Kenneth C. Davis writes:

Hollywood has left the impression that the great Indian wars came in the Old West during the late 1800's, a period that many think of simplistically as the "cowboy and Indian" days. But in fact that was a "mopping up" effort. By that time the Indians were nearly finished, their subjugation complete, their numbers decimated. The killing, enslavement, and land theft had begun with the arrival of the Europeans. But it may have reached its nadir when it became federal policy under President Andrew Jackson.

The Cherokees in 1828 were not nomadic savages. In fact, they had assimilated many European-style customs, including the wearing of gowns by Cherokee women. They built roads, schools and churches, had a system of [representational government](#), and were farmers and cattle ranchers. A

Cherokee alphabet, the "[Talking Leaves](#)" was perfected by [Sequoyah](#).

In 1830 the Congress of the United States passed the "Indian Removal Act." Although many Americans were against the act, most notably Tennessee Congressman Davy Crockett, it passed anyway. President Jackson quickly signed the bill into law. The Cherokees attempted to fight removal legally by challenging the removal laws in the Supreme Court and by establishing an independent Cherokee Nation. At first the court seemed to rule against the Indians. In *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, the Court refused to hear a case extending Georgia's laws on the Cherokee because they did not represent a sovereign nation. In 1832, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Cherokee on the same issue in *Worcester v. Georgia*. In this case Chief Justice John Marshall ruled that the Cherokee Nation was sovereign, making the removal laws invalid. The Cherokee would have to agree to removal in a treaty. The treaty then would have to be ratified by the Senate.

**"I would sooner be
honestly damned than
hypocritically immortalized"**

Davy Crockett
His political career destroyed
because he supported the
Cherokee, he left
Washington D. C. and
headed west to Texas.

By 1835 the Cherokee were divided and despondent. Most supported Principal Chief [John Ross](#), who fought the encroachment of whites starting with the 1832 land lottery. However, a minority (less than 500 out of 17,000 Cherokee in North Georgia) followed [Major Ridge](#), his son John, and [Elias Boudinot](#), who advocated removal. The Treaty of [New Echota](#), signed by Ridge and members of the Treaty Party in 1835, gave Jackson the legal document he needed to remove the First Americans. Ratification of the

treaty by the United States Senate sealed the fate of the Cherokee. Among the few who spoke out against the ratification were Daniel Webster and Henry Clay, but it passed by a single vote. In 1838 the United States began the removal to Oklahoma, fulfilling a promise the government made to Georgia in 1802. Ordered to move on the Cherokee, General John Wool resigned his command in protest, delaying the action. His replacement, General [Winfield Scott](#), arrived at New Echota on May 17, 1838 with 7000 men. Early that summer General Scott and the United States Army began the invasion of the Cherokee Nation.



Painting by Robert Lindneux
Woolaroc Museum

In one of the saddest episodes of our brief history, men, women, and children were taken from their land, herded into [makeshift forts](#) with minimal facilities and food, then forced to march a thousand miles (Some made part of the trip by boat in equally horrible conditions). Under the generally indifferent army commanders, human losses for the first groups of Cherokee removed were extremely high. John Ross made an urgent appeal to Scott, requesting that the general let his people lead the tribe west. General Scott agreed. Ross organized the Cherokee into smaller groups and let them move separately through the wilderness so they could forage for food. Although the parties under Ross

left in early fall and arrived in Oklahoma during the brutal winter of 1838-39, he significantly reduced the loss of life among his people. About 4000 Cherokee died as a result of the removal. The route they traversed and the journey itself became known as "[The Trail of Tears](#)" or, as a direct translation from Cherokee, "[The Trail Where They Cried](#)" ("*Nunna daul Tsuny*").

Ironically, just as the [Creeks](#) killed Chief McIntosh for signing the Treaty of Indian Springs, the Cherokee killed [Major Ridge](#), his son and [Elias Boudinot](#) for signing the Treaty of New Echota. Chief [John Ross](#), who valiantly resisted the forced removal of the Cherokee, lost his wife Quatie in the march. And so a country formed fifty years earlier on the premise "...that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among these the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness..." brutally closed the curtain on a culture that had done no wrong.

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The Legend of the Cherokee Rose.

No better symbol exists of the pain and suffering of the [Trail Where They Cried](#) than the Cherokee Rose (pictured at top of page). The mothers of the Cherokee grieved so much that the chiefs prayed for a sign to lift the mother's spirits and give them strength to care for their children. From that day forward, a beautiful new flower, a rose, grew wherever a mother's tear fell to the ground. The rose is white, for the mother's tears. It has a gold center, for the gold taken from the Cherokee lands, and seven leaves on each stem that represent the seven Cherokee clans that made the journey. To this day, the Cherokee Rose prospers along the route of the "[Trail of Tears](#)". The Cherokee Rose is now the official flower of the State of Georgia.



The Neverending Trail

by Abe "Del" Jones

Exclusively on [About North Georgia](#)

We whites honor the "Hermitage"
And the man who once lived there -
But, that leader of our Nation
Was cruel, unjust, unfair -

He ordered the removal
Of the Cherokee from their land
And forced them on a trek
That the Devil must have planned -

One thousand miles of misery -
Of pain and suffering -
Because greed of the white man
Could not even wait till spring -

We should bow our heads in shame
Even unto this day
About "The Trail Of Tears"
And those who died along the way.

It was October, eighteen thirty-eight
When seven thousand troops in blue
Began the story of the "Trail"
Which, so sadly, is so true -

Jackson ordered General Scott
To rout the Indian from their home -
The "Center Of The World" they loved -
The only one they'd known -

The Braves working in the fields
Arrested, placed in a stockade -
Women and children dragged from home
In the bluecoats shameful raid -

Some were prodded with bayonets
When, they were deemed to move too slow
To where the Sky was their blanket
And the cold Earth, their pillow -

In one home a Babe had died
Sometime in the night before -
And women mourning, planning burial
Were cruelly herded out the door -

In another, a frail Mother -
Papoose on back and two in tow
Was told she must leave her home
Was told that she must go -

She uttered a quiet prayer -
Told the old family dog good-bye -
Then, her broken heart gave out
And she sank slowly down to die -

Chief Junaluska witnessed this -
Tears streaming down his face -
Said if he could have known this
It would have never taken place -

For, at the battle of Horse Shoe
With five hundred Warriors, his best -
Helped Andrew Jackson win that battle
And lay thirty-three Braves to rest -

And the Chief drove his tomahawk
Through a Creek Warrior's head
Who was about to kill Jackson -
But whose life was saved, instead -

Chief John Ross knew this story
And once sent Junaluska to plead -
Thinking Jackson would listen to
This Chief who did that deed -

But, Jackson was cold, indifferent
To the one he owed his life to
Said, "The Cherokee's fate is sealed -
There's nothing, I can do."

Washington, D.C. had decreed
They must be moved Westward -
And all their pleas and protests
To this day still go unheard.

On November, the seventeenth
Old Man Winter reared his head -
And freezing cold, sleet and snow
Littered that trail with the dead

On one night, at least twenty-two
Were released from their torment
To join that Great Spirit in the Sky
Where all good souls are sent -

Many humane, heroic stories
Were written 'long the way -
A monument, for one of them -
Still stands until this day -

It seems one noble woman
It was Chief Ross' wife -
Gave her blanket to a sick child
And in so doing, gave her life -

She is buried in an unmarked grave -
Dug shallow near the "Trail" -
Just one more tragic ending
In this tragic, shameful tale -

Mother Nature showed no mercy
Till they reached the end of the line
When that fateful journey ended
On March twenty-sixth, eighteen thirty-nine.

Each mile of this infamous "Trail"
Marks the graves of four who died -
Four thousand poor souls in all
Marks the shame we try to hide -

You still can hear them crying
Along "*The Trail Of Tears*"
If you listen with your heart
And not with just your ears.

The Neverending Trail was written by Del "Abe" Jones and appears in his book, "The World, War, Freedom, and More."