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‡ Famous American Indians ‡

SEQUOYAH

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Sequoyah was a Cherokee Indian. His people lived along the mountain edges of what is now a part of Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky and Virginia. His people were the only native people that the Spaniards were unable to conquer. At one time they pressed De Soto so closely that they captured his personal servant, who was a negro. They made a slave of him and thus became the first slave holders in America.

Sequoyah's people were not savages, but they fought to protect their homes, and this they did ruthlessly and pitilessly. They believed in a Great Spirit, or God. With them the sunshine of a beautiful day and the storm at night were signs of the pleasure or anger of the Spiritual Ruler of the world.

The Cherokees had a name for soul—adanta—which many other so-called civilized tribes did not have. The Cherokee language resembled Greek and few that studied it ever mastered it. Such were Sequoyah's ancestors.

Sequoyah was born in the Cherokee town of Tuskegee, near the Chillhowee mountain, between 1765 and 1775. His home was a wigwam in the forest, surrounded by a progressive people growing corn, beans, potatoes, squash, pumpkins, onions, and tobacco. Sequoyah's mother was the niece of the chief of her clan. The chiefs of the clans composed the great council of the Cherokee Nation. So these people had a very good form of organized government. Nothing is known of his father, but many white men have been accused without any proof.

Like all Indian boys of his time, Sequoyah wanted to be a great hunter and warrior and help protect his people. He learned to ride and shoot as well as the rest of the boys of the village. He played ball (a game like basketball), ran races, wrestled, fought, swam, rode horses bareback, and was skilled in the use of the spear and the bow. He made his own arrow points from flint rocks. He made his own canoes and spears. When he became a young man he was

called to listen to the talks of the wise of the Cherokees. After listening to them he was given the opportunity to choose his work and he wanted to be a tribal warrior and hunter.

Once Sequoyah and his comrades captured a white man with a note on him. Sequoyah said he could make a talking leaf. His comrades made fun of him, which hurt his feelings and made him determined to carry out his threat. In about 1801 he was wounded and rheumatism followed, which prevented him from being a warrior any longer. He realized that the people of his race would be better off if they could read and write.

He began working in metals and became so proficient that white men came to trade with him. The white men offered "fire water" in exchange for Sequoyah's fine metal work. Sequoyah soon cultivated a taste for it and became a drunkard. His people scorned him and called him worthless. His wife really made the living. He was in disgrace. The Indians did not blame the white men for this. Sequoyah then thought of the talking leaf. This was in 1809, and he started to work on it. He little dreamed that this work would require years of toil and thought to finish—"A work which no man, white, red or yellow had accomplished in the history of the world."

Years passed and Sequoyah worked by his door or fire place scratching on white bark. His people now called him "Crazy Sequoyah." His faithful wife was his only friend. In 1819 he called a meeting of the Indians and told them he had made his talking leaf. The Indians came unbelieving and left the same way. His "talking leaf" would not talk. They then were thoroughly satisfied Sequoyah was crazy.

Sequoyah saw the fault of his symbols, or letters. They were entirely too many to analyze each spoken word and to classify its composition. He eliminated scores of symbols until he reached a number that could not be reduced. He worked it out by unlimited patience and toil so that all words were made up of vowels and consonants.

In 1821 he called for the young men of the tribe to meet with him. He demonstrated the practicability

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