

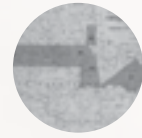
The Cherokee People

How three federally recognized Cherokee Tribes came to form.



In the beginning, we were all one Cherokee people.

Born in the mountains of the southeastern United States, we were all one Indian nation. We were a single sovereign Cherokee tribe with inherent powers to enter into treaties with the United States. Historically, the Cherokee called themselves Keetoowah.



The Move to Arkansas

In 1809, Cherokees who wanted to maintain their traditional ways as well as Cherokees who had become assimilated with Europeans requested a separation of the two groups. By the Treaty of 1817, the traditionalists voluntarily moved to the Arkansas Territory. In 1828, they were forced into Indian territory which is today, Oklahoma. This group became known as the Old Settlers.

The Place Where They Cried

Through the winter of 1838-1839, thousands of Cherokee people walked a forced march from our homelands in the southern Appalachians to present-day Oklahoma. Enduring cold, hunger, and disease, this path walked was later memorialized across nine states and 5,000 miles, by the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail.



The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

A small number of Cherokee people successfully resisted the forced removal and claimed North Carolina citizenship. These people and their descendants were recognized in 1868 by the federal government as the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. In the present day, they live on the Qualla Boundary, and have over 13,000 enrolled members.



The United Keetoowah Band

When the United States passed the 1936 Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act, The United Keetoowah Band was formed from the Keetoowah Society as well as other groups that attempted to maintain traditional Cherokee ways. The United Keetoowah Band resides in Tahlequah, Oklahoma and has over 14,000 tribal members.



Department of Interior M-Opinion

On January 17, 2025, the U.S. Dept. of Interior's Solicitor's Office released an M-Opinion reaffirming the UKB's jurisdiction on the Oklahoma Cherokee Reservation. Meaning, the rights over the Oklahoma Cherokee Reservation once exercised by the historic Cherokee Nation continue today through both the UKB and Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. To learn about the M-Opinion click

Fighting for a seat at the table

We've all had almost 200 years to get this done and there is still no Cherokee seated as a Congressional delegate in the United States. So, it's long overdue. But with the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma attempting to have a delegate seated, we need to respect the original treaty and treat all three branches of what once was the Cherokee Nation equally.

1828

1838 - 1839

1868

1936

2025

1785

The Treaty of Hopewell

"...they shall have the right to send a deputy of their choice, whenever they think fit, to Congress." In 1785, our tribe signed the Treaty of Hopewell with the United States ensuring the Cherokee people a Congressional delegate.

1835

The Treaty of New Echota

The Cherokee people "shall be entitled to a delegate in the House of Representatives of the United States whenever Congress shall make provision for the same." In 1835 our tribe signed the Treaty of New Echota reinforcing the agreed upon understanding that a Cherokee delegate would gain a seat in Congress.

1858

The Civil War

There was again a division among the Cherokee people. Typically, the full bloods also known as the Keetoowahs, fought with the Union and the mixed bloods fought with the Confederacy. From 1858 through 1859 the Keetoowah Society was established to attempt to hold the Keetoowahs together and maintain a governing body for the Cherokee people.

1898

Allotment and Assimilation

Division continued among the full bloods who opposed allotment and the mixed bloods who were for allotment. The Curtis Act of 1898 was put into place to weaken and dissolve Indian Territory tribal governments by abolishing tribal courts and subjecting all people in that territory to federal law. This meant that tribal laws could no longer be enforced, and any tribal legislation passed after 1898 had to be approved of by the president of the United States. The Curtis Act stripped the Cherokees and other tribes of their sovereignty, autonomy, and authority to govern themselves. This was known as the period of allotment and assimilation.

1976

Rebuilding the GNO

The UKB saw a need for those that did not meet the blood quantum requirements and wanted to help, so they helped form the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma in 1976 and for years the two tribes worked together on issues.

The Late 1970's

Division among the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma and the United Keetoowah Band leadership began and the UKB was ousted from working with the GNO. Unfortunately, that division continues today.

