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Belated acknowledgment

The July 2005 issue of the *Technical Papers* included papers that had been presented at a conference on Bible translation at Denver Seminary, Denver, Colorado, early in 2003. The paper by **Prof Richard Hess**, “Adam, Father, He: Gender Issues in Hebrew Translation,” was among those published in that issue of *BT*. We failed to acknowledge that Dr Hess was also coeditor for the issue; and in rectifying this error, we would like to publicly thank him for his contribution.

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PAMELA JEAN OWENS

**BIBLE TRANSLATION AND LANGUAGE PRESERVATION:
The Politics of the Nineteenth Century Cherokee Bible
Translation Projects**

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In the common thinking of religious persons, one likely would consider that the purpose of any Bible translation is simply to place the Scriptures into the hands of a community which lacks the written word of God in its own language or which is in need of a better translation. Persons involved in Bible translation itself, however, know that Bible translations often become much more significant events in the language history of a people than the initial translators might have

anticipated. The early nineteenth century translations of the New Testament and parts of the Old into Cherokee proved to be such events: beyond the mere placing of texts in the hands of contemporary believers, the various translation projects and the translations they produced became highly political and politicized acts which would help to ensure the survival of the Cherokee language and, ultimately, the continued sovereignty of the Cherokee people.

For some thousands of years prior to colonization, the Cherokee had occupied a sizeable share of what is now the southeastern quadrant of the United States. Cherokee territory covered the intersection of North Carolina, Tennessee, South Carolina, and Georgia, and spread across the Smokey Mountains for vast areas into each of those states. To the South were the Muskogean peoples of the Creek Confederacy and Seminole; to the west, the Chickasaw; and to the southwest, the Choctaw.

The Cherokees are linked in American history with their four southeastern neighbors as the “Five Civilized Tribes,” all forcibly removed to Indian Territory by Andrew Jackson in the 1830s. In reality, however, the Cherokees’ origin was to the north, among the Iroquoian-speaking peoples of the Great Lakes area. The Cherokee language is related to the Iroquoian languages of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy tribes and is considered linguistically to be the only surviving representative of a southern branch of Iroquoian. Whether the branch once had other representatives is no longer known; Cherokee itself exists today in several dialects, but the dialects are mutually intelligible and do not represent distinct languages.¹ Cherokee is a highly complex language, built on what one may conveniently, if not completely accurately, term “verbal roots,” by analogy to Semitic languages. The analogy was readily apparent to early missionaries among the Cherokee. For example, Baptist missionaries Evan Jones and Thomas Roberts noted to their surprise that “the construction of the language bears a striking resemblance to the Hebrew. Every modification of the verb being made by prefixes and suffixes.”²

Prior to colonization, the Cherokees were already a settled people, agricultural, staunchly matrilineal, and clan based (like all Iroquoian peoples), living in villages with well-constructed dwellings, and having a well-developed

1 Barbara F. Grimes, ed., “Cherokee, a Language of the USA,” *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (14th ed.; Dallas: SIL International, 2003). Cherokee language information available at http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=chr.

2 From one of their “Letters from the Baptists’ missionaries among the Cherokee, 1818-1826,” as printed in the *Latter Day Luminary* (Philadelphia, 3:214). The apparent similarity of Cherokee to the word formation structure of Hebrew encouraged missionaries who were already disposed to view the Native American tribes as the descendants of the so-called “Lost Tribes of Israel.” This historically impossible, yet attractive, theory had been suggested by very early Puritan missionaries and preachers in the New England colonies and was believed to be true even by many Native Christians. The possibility, now known as fact, that the ancestors of the Native tribes had been in the Americas for millennia before the fall of Samaria (722 B.C.E.) apparently was not considered by the missionaries in their eagerness to fit the peoples of America into the descendants of the three sons of Noah, which they understood to be the white, yellow, and black races. As McLoughlin notes, it “gave a great incentive to missionary work to believe this, but it did not make Cherokee easier to master.” See his extended discussion of these Baptist missionaries’ comments on Hebrew in William G. McLoughlin, *Champions of the Cherokees, Evan and John B. Jones* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 35.

ritual and ceremonial life.¹ They were hospitable to intermarriage with the Scots-Irish fur traders and trappers who frequented the Smokey Mountains, and Cherokee families took for granted that a woman's white husband was welcome in their community.

The "mountain men" did not as a rule press Christianity on the Cherokee people and, prior to 1799, Cherokee chiefs rejected all overtures by missionaries to bring the white man's religion to their people, despite the repeated attempts of English-speaking Anglicans and Presbyterians and German-speaking Moravians. The missionaries, at least initially, found little support from the white husbands, who had not been especially religious prior to joining the Cherokee and were not inclined to become the representative of religion after the fact.

A typical Cherokee response was that of the respected chief Yâ'nû-gûñ'ski "Drowning-bear," the acknowledged chief of all the Cherokees living in the old Kituhwa country, location of the ancient council fire of the Cherokee people (in English transliteration he became the Chief Junaluska whose name now graces a popular church-related camp and conference grounds in North Carolina). Yâ'nû-gûñ'ski had always counseled peace and friendship with the whites, but he had long rebuffed the missionaries and remained, to his death, extremely suspicious of their intentions. James Mooney and others report that the great chief refused to allow the white man's Scripture to be read to his people until he had heard it himself. According to Mooney, after the first Bible translations were begun using the Sequoyan syllabary, someone brought a copy of the Gospel of Matthew from New Echota. Although Mooney does not report many details of the incident, it seems likely that what arrived was a copy of the new bilingual Cherokee newspaper, *The Cherokee Phoenix*, which was being published at New Echota. In 1828, after hearing one or two chapters of the Gospel of Matthew read aloud to him in Cherokee, Yâ'nû-gûñ'ski is said to have responded, "Well, it seems to be a good book; strange that the white people are not better after having had it so long."²

The Moravians had visited the Cherokee in 1735, 1753, and 1783, to no avail. Finally in 1798, after experiencing success among some of the northern tribes, including the Delaware, the Moravians tried again. This time they made an effort to learn a bit about what the Cherokee people already believed. The Moravians were pleased to find out the Cherokee had a word which seemed to the missionaries to reference a supreme God, "Utajah," translated roughly (in the missionaries' understanding) "a great man who dwells above." The Moravians also discovered that over the years some of the chiefs who had been to Washington to sign peace treaties with the new nation (including Arcowee, the former war chief of the Upper Towns), had become convinced that the whites had a book of great power and secrets, containing the hidden words which made them so strong. The chiefs understood that the whites called this book "God's Word." Arcowee

1 For this and other general information on Cherokee history mentioned in this article, see any standard history of the Cherokee, such as Grace Woodward, *The Cherokees* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968). Also, see James Mooney, "Historical Sketch of the Cherokee," Introduction to *Myths of the Cherokees*, in *History, Myths, and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees* (Asheville, N.C.: Historical Images, 1992), which contains the full texts of *Myths of the Cherokee* (1900) and *The Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees* (1891) as published originally by the Bureau of American Ethnology.

2 Mooney, *Myths*, 163. One or two chapters of the Gospel of Matthew were printed in each issue of the *Phoenix*, followed by other gospels and parts of the Bible once Matthew was finished.

and others among the chiefs were interested in learning these secrets of the white man's power, and they had heard rumors that this was what the missionaries wanted to bring to them. They wanted, in the words of Arcowee, "the great book from which they can learn all things."¹ Arcowee and the other Cherokee chiefs sought in the Bible the source of the white man's seeming ability always to come out the winner in Indian/White affairs. The missionaries were only too glad to interpret this completely political motive of the Cherokee as a true spiritual awakening.

Though he was not entirely right in his understanding of what the missionaries wanted to bring, Arcowee was not entirely wrong either. The missionaries did want to bring God's Word, which they did see as being full of power. From a twenty-first century perspective, one might argue that the nineteenth century Cherokee view of that power was more nearly on target than might appear. Through the entire nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth, civilization and Christianity were considered by most adherents of Western Christianity to be synonymous. Therefore, one might well claim (and numerous Indian scholars have made such a claim) that the power of western civilization, i.e., the force behind all the white man could do, did indeed derive from the Bible. Most particularly, the white man himself (male gender intended) took his colonizing mandate from his understanding of the first chapter of Genesis, i.e., the mandate to subdue and dominate all creation and all creatures, most assuredly including the American savage.² When the Cherokee chiefs understood that the white man drew his authority and thus his power to do what he did from the Bible, they were, at least in a certain sense, quite correct.

To bring God's Word to the Cherokee required deciding which language to use, and the early missionaries differed widely in their approach to the Cherokee language. Some, like the Moravians, tried for many years to learn the language and failed, blaming their lack of success on the presumed deficiencies of the language itself. The Moravians finally decreed that the Cherokee language was incapable of expressing abstract thought. From the Moravian viewpoint, before the Cherokee could be evangelized, they must be civilized; civilization included learning to speak and read English. On the other hand, the Moravians were unwilling to invest in building the schools which the Cherokee wanted without a core of native Christians worthy of educating. Ultimately this conflicted vision of their Cherokee mission doomed the Moravian effort to failure.³

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, missionary activity was flourishing around the globe. As part of this work, linguists on both sides of the Atlantic were working on ways to write the many new native languages they were encountering, languages the missionaries called "savage." One difficulty missionaries encountered was the discovery that the native languages had sounds

1 William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries, 1789-1839* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 35-39; idem, *The Cherokees and Christianity, 1794-1870: Essays on Acculturation and Cultural Persistence* (ed. Walter H. Conser, Jr.; Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 12, 17-18, 20-21. McLoughlin discusses the vision which had come to Arcowee on the night before the Moravians arrived and shows how the meaning of the vision to the chief led to his acceptance of the missionaries, but not on the terms the Moravians thought he was extending.

2 See, for example, Vine Deloria, *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion* (Golden, Colo.: Fulcrum, 1994; 30th Anniversary Edition 2004). See also Dennis McPherson, "A Definition of Culture," in *Native American Religious Identity—Unforgotten Gods* (ed. Jace Weaver; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998).

3 See McLoughlin's extensive writings on the efforts of the various denominations in this regard.

lacking in the languages of the would-be translators. Moreover, when the linguists in the field tried to write the language as they heard it, they each represented native language sounds with letters as they were used to represent sounds in the linguist's own language, whether that language was English, German, French, Spanish, or Portuguese.

The linguistic dilemma of matching sound to symbol prompted work in Europe and in America which would lead indirectly toward a Phonetic Alphabet. One very early laborer in this task was John Pickering, a Boston lawyer and linguist. Pickering's father, Timothy Pickering, was known for his checkered career with the Federalist Party in New England and had served, among other posts, as an ambassador and treaty negotiator with the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. As a young man, John had accompanied his father on diplomatic visits and had learned the basics of the Iroquoian language systems. The younger Pickering became fascinated with philology and is celebrated as the chief founder of American comparative philology and as one of the founders and the first president of the American Oriental Society.¹

Pickering observed that the proliferation of idiosyncratic systems for writing newly "discovered" languages was resulting in complex sets of representations unique to every recorder's needs but unintelligible to other linguists. Seeking a solution to this growing dilemma for Bible translators and other students of the various indigenous peoples of the world, he determined that the goal of linguistic work must include the adoption of a Uniform Orthography for the Indian Languages of North America. Pickering published a paper on the subject in 1820; in it he revealed his fear, quoting his colleague, DuPonceau, that "every man, however little qualified, 'will think himself adequate to the task of inventing new characters and will delight to display himself in that way.'"²

In those early years of philology, Pickering worked on his Native Orthography project with the cooperation and encouragement of linguists at the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, although his own private goals were far broader than theirs. Pickering felt it imperative that the Americans develop a uniform way to represent the languages of their own indigenous peoples, since "various nations of Europe have already published and will continue to publish books respecting the American Indians and their languages, either with a view to the information of the learned or to the propagation of the Christian religion." For this reason, "it is extremely desirable, that such a *common orthography* [emphasis in the original] as I have mentioned should be adopted." Pickering saw the advantage of collaboration among missionaries but, as a scholar, he also recognized "the important advantage of being enabled to discover at once by the eye, etymologies and affinities in the

1 Mary Orne Pickering, *Life of John Pickering by his daughter* (Boston: John Wilson & Son for private distribution, 1887); Samuel Lee Wolfe, "John Pickering," in *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature in 19 Volumes* (ed. A. W. Ward, W. P. Trent, et al.; Vol. XVIII: American, Book III: Later National Literature, Part III, Chap. XXV: Scholars (N.Y.: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1907-1921), section 6.

2 John Pickering, *An Essay on a Uniform Orthography for the Indian Languages of North America* (*Memoirs of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*) (Cambridge, Mass.: University Press/Hillard & Metcalfe, 1820), 38-39. Available electronically in page images at <http://www.canadiana.org/ECO/mitq?doc=21080>.

Indian dialects, which with our present orthography are only discernible by the ear.”¹

In the meantime, the Moravians’ conclusion that the Cherokee language could not express theological concepts was proven wrong. Missionaries from the Presbyterians, the Baptists, the Methodists, and the ABCFM found that mixed-blood Cherokees who were already bilingual were able to translate Christian sermons, lessons, and even Bible readings, delivered in English by the missionaries, into Cherokee for their full-blood, non-English-speaking relatives. These nineteenth century biracial individuals, living between two worlds such as biracial persons do today, effectively and efficiently accomplished with their bilingual skills what the Moravian missionaries had declared to be impossible.

With the assistance of such “interpreters,”² the missionaries began by the early 1820s to win full-blood, monolingual Cherokee converts. In this early period of Protestant Missions, the missionaries began sending their brightest students to America to attend college in New England and then return to assist in evangelization in their native lands. In the case of the American Indian missions, these were often mixed-blood students who were already bilingual and, at least to some extent, bicultural. The young Native Christians received a classical education at the Cornwall Mission School in Connecticut and the most promising were then admitted to Andover Seminary, where they studied the biblical languages and texts alongside their white brethren in Christ.³

Seeing the Cherokee as the most dedicated, and the most “civilized” of the American Indians, Pickering decided to make the Cherokee language his test case for developing a uniform orthography. Working with a young mixed-blood Cherokee convert named David Brown, Pickering began his attempt to construct a Cherokee alphabet using English letters. Also working on the project was the missionary Daniel Buttrick. By 1823, the team had the beginnings of a writing system and were at work compiling a Cherokee grammar.⁴

Hundreds of miles from the work proceeding in New England, however, and (at least according to legend) with no knowledge of written English and no particular interest in the Bible or Christianity, a Cherokee genius, Sequoyah, was also working on writing his language.⁵ While other tribes of the western hemisphere including the Maya, the Aztec, the Delaware, and (according to oral

1 Ibid., 10.

2 For stories of Choctaw interpreters on the Trail of Tears, see Homer Noley, “The Interpreters,” in Jace Weaver, ed., *Unforgotten Gods*.

3 Theda Perdue, ed., *Cherokee Editor: The Writings of Elias Boudinot* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 6-10; McLoughlin, *Missionaries*, 139-40.

4 Althea Bass, *Cherokee Messenger* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1936), 13-14, and many others, including McLoughlin.

5 The story of Sequoyah became the stuff of legends and, at this point, no certainty exists about the precise facts of either his life or his linguistic efforts. Susan Kalter summarizes the arguments for the very real possibility that the true accomplishment of Sequoyah was not inventing the syllabary but, rather, simplifying, democratizing, and popularizing an extremely ancient writing system known to have been represented in treaties from the earliest time of contact between the Cherokee and the Europeans, “‘America’s Histories’ Revisited: the Case of Tell Them They Lie,” *American Indian Quarterly* 25 (2001): 329-51. Whether the syllabary was a new invention or merely the making of a system previously known only to a few available to the many, is actually, from the point of view of Bible translation, of minimal importance. The rapid spread of literacy among the Cherokee population is a certainty documented by history; the Cherokee demand for a Bible printed in the syllabary followed directly upon their achievement of literacy. Whether the syllabary was new or old, mass literacy was new in the 1820s and 1830s, and the Cherokee Bible was an immediate and enduring outcome.

tradition) the Chippewa, long ago in a time lost to memory, had developed hieroglyphic writing systems that might be seen as parallels of Egyptian. Sequoyah produced a syllabary, a type of alphabet which worked linguistically something like the ancient Babylonian syllabary. In Sequoyah's syllabary, each syllable combination of consonant and vowel in the spoken Cherokee language was represented by a unique symbol in the written system. The Babylonians had borrowed a writing system developed for Sumerian and then used it to represent their much different language, requiring many modifications and complications, so that eventually their syllabary had hundreds of symbols and could be mastered only by persons who devoted their entire life to the study of writing. Sequoyah, on the other hand, was able to represent his entire language with a mere 86 characters. Cherokee is a meticulous, economical language which uses few individual word bases, a contained system of sounds, and a precise system for elaborating each word base. Cherokee verbs are short phrases that tell not only what happened, but also specify when and how. Nouns are descriptive: for example, a horse is *so gwi li* "he carries heavy things." Cherokee verb forms are complicated, but highly informative. Besides person, number, and time elements, a verb form tells the hearer whether the speaker experienced the event firsthand or is relaying information received from another.¹ Once Sequoyah had developed his syllabary of 86 characters, each representing a different combination of sounds, it very quickly became clear that he had found the most efficient way to represent his native Cherokee language.

As the story goes,² once Sequoyah had perfected his system, his daughter became his first student. Together they traveled the nation demonstrating the power of what they called the "Talking Leaves." It did not take long for people to be convinced of the power of an easily learned written language, and Sequoyah's system spread rapidly. Unlike written English, which could take years for even a fluent speaker to learn, the system of Sequoyah was so perfect a representation of the language that a native Cherokee speaker required only a few days to learn the syllabary and become a proficient reader and writer of the language.

With the invention of the Sequoyan syllabary, all of the missionary work toward writing Cherokee in an English-based orthography was abandoned. According to Pickering's daughter, he and other linguists (including DuPonceau and von Humboldt) saw the syllabary as a tragedy for linguistic science, since it cut short their attempt to record Cherokee in the adjusted phonetic/alphabetic orthography that would allow them to compare it to other world languages.³ Now that ordinary monolingual Cherokees could read their own language in a symbolic system devised by one of their own scholars, literacy spread rapidly. But readers need books, and no written literature in Cherokee yet existed.

Surely pleasing the missionaries beyond their wildest dreams, and confirming all their hopes, one of the first books to be demanded was the Bible.

1 See William Pulte and Durbin Feeling, *Outline of Cherokee Grammar* (Talequah: Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, 1975). One can hypothesize that this element of the Cherokee language, i.e., distinguishing experience from hearsay, is a prime reason why honesty and utter frankness are seen as prominent Cherokee personality traits even in the modern day. Missionaries or Indian agents who were duplicitous found themselves quickly unwelcome in Cherokee country, as one discredited Presbyterian missionary learned (see McLoughlin, *Cherokee and Missionaries*, 78-80, for the story of Gideon Blackburn).

2 See Mooney, *Myths*, 219-20, for an early publication of the commonly accepted version of the Sequoyah story.

3 Pickering, *Life of John Pickering*.

Now as Christian Cherokees heard passages of Scripture translated, they could write them down and pass them around. Men like John Arch who had been serving as regular interpreters for the missionaries furnished copies of favorite passages of Scripture to be copied and shared.¹ The demand grew quickly for a translation of the whole Bible. According to Mooney, the first manuscript portion of the Scripture to circulate in handwritten copies was a portion of the Gospel of John, translated from English by John Arch.²

David Brown, already known to his people as a Cherokee student working on writing their language, was commissioned by the Cherokee National Council to make an official translation of the New Testament. As a ministerial student, Brown worked not from English, as the interpreters were doing when they translated for the missionaries as they preached, but rather from the Greek and Hebrew he had learned at Andover. To confirm the accuracy of his Cherokee, the missionary-educated multilingual Brown had the help of George Lowrey, an important Cherokee chief and an early convert to Christianity. Within a year they were finished with the New Testament and by 1825 the manuscript began circulating widely.³ Even before Brown's work was completed, however, John Arch had finished his translation of the New Testament into Cherokee, translated from the English Bibles brought by the missionaries, but with the characteristic Cherokee turns of phrases and interpretive glosses for which John Arch had become known in his translations of missionary sermons. Both Brown and Arch's efforts circulated as fast and as widely as they could be recopied and distributed to eager readers.

For the first time in history an evangelized people were reading the New Testament translated by their own kinsmen, into their own language, using a writing system developed, refined, and popularized entirely as their own. As has happened countless times in history, new Christians reading the Bible in their own language and making their own inspired interpretations struck fear into the hearts of church leaders back in New England. Surely such hastily made translations would be "bungled" and full of errors. Quickly the American Board dispatched a missionary trained in linguistics, Samuel Worcester, to minister to the Cherokee and produce an authorized translation. Worcester devoted the rest of his life to the Cherokee people, and his translation is the only Cherokee language Bible widely available today. Worcester worked with the help of Elias Boudinot, a Cherokee who, like David Brown and John Arch, had been educated at the Cornwall School. Boudinot's name at birth was *Galagi'na*, but at Cornwall he adopted the name of his patron, the president of the American Bible Society, Dr Elias Boudinot. The Cherokee Boudinot became the publisher and editor of the *Cherokee Phoenix*, the first newspaper of an American Indian nation, which he printed using both English and Cherokee stories and columns and in which he published Worcester's NT translations chapter by chapter, as they were completed.⁴

1 Mooney, *Myths*, 110; Bass, *Cherokee Messenger*, 36-37.

2 Mooney, *Myths*.

3 The degree to which the first translation actually was the work of David Brown, rather than the work of his collaborators in New England, is disputed. David's sister Catherine was also a well-known linguist and was celebrated at the ABCFM as their first Cherokee convert. Her contributions to the volume likely were far more extensive than the public record, then or now, has noted.

4 Bass, *Cherokee Messenger*, 37-39, for the story of the Worcesters; Perdue, *Cherokee Editor*, for the writings of Boudinot on many topics.

In 1820, however, before the ABCFM had sent Worcester, the Baptists already had sent Evan Jones and his family, along with several other families, to work as teachers among the Cherokee. After the election of Andrew Jackson and the passage of the Indian Removal Act, Jones and his son John (who was born in the Cherokee nation and learned Cherokee as his first language) became closely allied with Chief John Ross, the elected head of the Cherokee nation and the leader of the traditionalists. The Baptists, supporting the traditionalists, are remembered among the Cherokee today as having been strong advocates of abolition and resolute opponents of removal. James Mooney, whose history remains the most accepted version by traditional Cherokee people, records Evan Jones as the first to be known among the Cherokee as a Bible translator, well established already when Worcester first arrived to learn the language. At the beginning, Jones saw Worcester as his brother in Christ and both men made every effort to be collaborative with one another in the translation endeavor. In the end, however, Jones' translation came to be at odds with that of Worcester, and as a result, it is not the "authorized" one available in print today. In all of the confusion of versions, the David Brown and John Arch translations still circulated, but they were gradually eclipsed by the machine-printed copies of Worcester's translation, which could be turned out in thousands.¹

Even though the later translations were produced on missionary initiative, native Cherokee speakers could always read and write their language with more fluency than any missionary could achieve. This linguistic advantage meant that, unlike the case of most peoples evangelized after colonization, the Cherokee themselves retained the final authority as to how the biblical translations would be worded in their native language. Ultimately Christianity came to the Cherokee on their own terms, not those of the missionaries, just as receiving the missionaries into their territory had come about only when the Cherokee themselves were interested.

As a result of removal, begun with the old settlers in the 1780s and completed with the Trail of Tears in 1838 and 1839 (when 16,000 remaining Cherokees were forced from their homeland in the southeast to Indian Territory in what would later become Oklahoma and Texas), the Cherokee language split into two main dialects. Those Cherokees who remained in the hills of North Carolina became linguistically separated from the larger number of the tribe, and over time their dialect diverged in significant ways. Today their descendants comprise the eastern branch of the Cherokee, recognized as a separate nation, but speakers of the two dialects generally can understand one another with little difficulty. Because of the renewed interest in cultural heritage that paralleled cultural revitalization across Indian America in the last quarter of the twentieth century, more and more Cherokee people are learning their language, making it one of the few Native American languages that has an increasing number of speakers.² Currently Cherokee is one of the most widely spoken languages native to North America; it

¹ See McLoughlin, *Champions*, for the story of the rift that developed between the denominations. The issues were significant, both theologically and politically. For example, the support of slavery by the New Testament, allowed by Worcester and questioned by Jones, was only one of many important differences. Ultimately Worcester's group is remembered as supporting the discredited "Treaty Party," and going with them to Indian Territory somewhat voluntarily, while the Baptists stayed with the traditionalists all the way until removal and accompanied them on the Trail of Tears.

² Grimes, "Cherokee."

is taught now in many Oklahoma public schools as well as in schools of the Eastern Band in North Carolina.¹

One of the chief means of the preservation of the Cherokee language in times when it could not be spoken widely was the popularity of the Bible in Cherokee, as well as a body of hymns which were beloved by the people and which comforted them on the Trail of Tears. Even when they did not speak the language regularly, even when it was illegal to speak in a Native language, Cherokees still sang their beloved hymns as they rocked their babies and read their precious Bibles when they went to church.²

Today Cherokee scholars interpret the decision of the Cherokee Nation to adopt the syllabary, rather than develop an alphabet based on English, as having been ultimately an act of linguistic, cultural, political, and possibly even religious resistance, the long-term results of which we cannot even yet presume to know.³ By using the Sequoyan syllabary to record translations of the Bible, a book no oppressive power would dare to destroy, the nation assured itself of the survival of its language through even the worst of times.

Additional reading

- Carter, Samuel III. *Cherokee Sunset: A Nation Betrayed*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976.
- McLoughlin, William G. *After the Trail of Tears: The Cherokees' Struggle for Sovereignty, 1839-1880*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993.
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- Phillips, Joyce B., and Paul Gary, eds. *The Brainerd Journal: A Mission to the Cherokees, 1817-1823*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998.

1 James Estes, "How many indigenous American languages are spoken in the United States? By how many speakers?" Table 2, Indigenous Languages Spoken in the United States (by Number of Speakers). Updated Feb., 2002. National Clearing House for English Language Acquisition, formerly the National Clearing House on Bilingual Education. Available electronically at <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/expert/faq/20natlang.htm>.

2 Author's personal note: As a mixed-blood Cherokee, daughter and granddaughter of mixed blood women, I heard my grandmother sing the Cherokee songs she remembered from her mother as she was a child growing up in Texas in the 1910s. She recalled that her mother could "talk Indian real good," but only did so "when our grandmother came to visit from Oklahoma." Like many speakers of English as a second language, my great-grandmother probably avoided using her first language most of the time because she did not want her children to speak it by accident away from home. I did not learn to sing the songs, but I still recognize them as familiar when I hear them on recordings. I believe that my having grown up understanding myself as fully Indian, even though invisibly so beyond my family, came at least in part from having heard the language sung in my very earliest childhood memories. Neither my brother nor any of my cousins remembers hearing our grandmother singing in Indian, and they all think of themselves merely as "having some Indian blood." The living reality of language, heard primarily in hymns sung as lullabies, created me, but not them, as fully Cherokee.

3 I thank Prof Susan Kalter, Illinois State University, for verifying to me that this has begun to be a widespread opinion among Cherokee scholars, confirming what I believed was true but might have been reluctant to assert on my own. (Personal correspondence of April 28, 2002.)