

Talking Leaves: The Cherokee Syllabary and the Trail of Tears

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Historical Paper

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Process Paper

When the theme for this year's competition was announced, I immediately had an idea for a topic. As someone who loves languages, I thought that the theme of "Communication in History" would be a great way to incorporate my interests into my NHD project. I thought back to an elementary school unit on the Cherokee, and remembered learning about the creation of the Cherokee written language. After doing some basic research, I realized that this topic was a perfect fit for the theme.

Once I settled on this topic, I thought about which of the project categories would be most well-suited to it. I decided to write a paper. I am much more comfortable with words and sentences than I am with technology or performances, and I thought that the paper format would be the most elegant and effective way for me to present my research and argument. After all, I studied the Cherokee written language, so it was fitting that my project took the form of written words.

I began my research process by looking for general information, mainly in the form of biographies about Sequoyah. Once I had laid the groundwork, I looked for secondary sources that provided more information about periods of Sequoyah's life and details of his work that were particularly relevant to the theme. These secondary sources pointed the way to specific primary sources: the laws, articles, and treaties that I needed to understand the syllabary and its impact on Cherokee history. As I wrote my paper around these sources, I researched more to fill in gaps in my understanding, and this research guided me into new directions of my topic. This organic process let my project be guided by the research, and as a result, my final thesis has grown significantly from my earliest drafts.

In its final incarnation, my thesis argues that the syllabary was essential to the

development and survival of the Cherokee nation before and after the Trail of Tears. I supported this argument with evidence from a variety of sources showing the many uses of the syllabary, and the effect these uses had on Cherokee history. From the *Cherokee Phoenix* to the Constitution, the syllabary brought knowledge, information, and unity to the tribe, showing the importance of communication, especially in difficult times.

However, my work was not done. After moving on to the state and national competitions, I talked to my teacher about an idea I disagreed with in some secondary sources: the characterization of the Cherokee syllabary as an example of Westernization. While the syllabary was partly created in response to British and American use of written language and the power that came with it, it was not intended to make Cherokee communication more Western, but rather more permanent. Written language is not exclusive to Western societies, as the Cherokee syllabary, and countless other written languages, prove. Everyone deserves the ability to write their thoughts and feelings, and with his syllabary, Sequoyah gave the Cherokee just that.

In a trailblazing act of innovation, Sequoyah, a Cherokee man, created a written language for his people in less than a decade. This language, the Cherokee syllabary, was the first written language of a North American Indigenous tribe, and it is still used today. Sequoyah's creation came at a critical juncture in history, as the Cherokee faced removal from their homeland by the U.S. government. The syllabary, when used in a newspaper, allowed the Cherokee to spread knowledge of this crisis throughout the tribe. When the Cherokees' leaders signed a treaty to sell the entirety of the tribe's land without the consent or knowledge of the people, copies of the treaty written in the syllabary armed every citizen with information to hold their government accountable. After the U.S. brutally removed the Cherokee from their homeland and forced them to migrate along The Trail of Tears, dividing the tribe, the syllabary was essential to reconstruction and unification. The tribe wrote a constitution in the syllabary that has defined and preserved their nation for centuries. However, the syllabary also resulted in the loss of elements of traditional Cherokee culture and government. Sequoyah's language, from its inception to the present day, rapidly replaced previous methods of communication to enable the Cherokee to convey information on a broader scale, ensure transparency in their government, create laws, and persevere through challenges as a unified, informed, and sovereign nation.

Prior to the invention of Sequoyah's syllabary, the Cherokee did not use a written language, relying instead on oral history to record the past.¹ While the lack of writing was never problematic for the Cherokee before, it became disadvantageous as the nation's interactions with the British, and later, the Americans, increased. Cherokee leaders signed more treaties to define borders, sell land, and maintain peace with settlers. Without a written language of their own, the Cherokee had to rely entirely on the English recordings of agreements, allowing the British and

¹ National Geographic Editors, "Sequoyah and the Creation of the Cherokee Syllabary," *National Geographic*, November 13, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/article/sequoyah-and-creation-choerokee-syllabary/>.

Americans to control the narrative of treaties, twist the terms of agreements, and go back on their word.

This exploitation was first addressed by Sequoyah.² While most Indigenous people had observed Americans writing, and many learned how to write themselves, Sequoyah was the first to attempt to create a written language for an Indigenous tribe. However, Sequoyah's ideas were met with skepticism. The longstanding tradition of oral history, as well as their past experiences with manipulative writing, made many Cherokee wary of written language. They called books, treaties, and other pieces of writing "talking leaves," as White people communicated through leaf-like sheets of paper. Some conservative Cherokee denounced these talking leaves as witchcraft.³ Despite the doubts of his community, Sequoyah became committed to giving writing to the Cherokee, saying in a translated quote, "If our people think I am making a fool of myself, you may tell them that what I am doing will not make fools of them."⁴

Sequoyah's earliest attempt to create a written language for the Cherokee was a logogram, where each individual word in the spoken language is associated with a symbol.⁵ This approach proved to take far too long to create and even longer to learn. Instead, Sequoyah turned to the sounds that make up spoken Cherokee. He isolated eighty-five different spoken syllables, and then created a symbol to represent each one. In 1821, he finished the Cherokee Syllabary, as seen in Appendix A, a system of symbols that constitutes the first written language of a North American Indigenous tribe.⁶ After presenting the syllabary to the Cherokee Council, the tribe's

² Sequoyah was also known as Sequoya, Sequoia, Sikwayi, Tuskegee, George Gist and George Guess. See "Sequoyah," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed February 18, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sequoyah>

³ National Geographic Editors, "Sequoyah."

⁴ Sequoyah, quoted in Bill Carey, "Sequoyah, a great man whose life is shrouded in mystery," *Tennessee History*, June 2015, <https://www.tnmagazine.org/sequoyah-a-great-man-whose-life-is-shrouded-in-mystery/>.

⁵ National Geographic Editors, "Sequoyah."

⁶ *Ibid.*

governing body, Sequoyah was formally asked to teach the Cherokee to read and write.

Sequoyah's efforts to teach his syllabary were one of the most effective and efficient literacy education programs in history. Since each symbol corresponds to a syllable, Cherokee speakers can easily spell by sounding out words.⁷ Consequently, it took only a month for most Cherokee to learn to read and write, and by 1825, most of the tribe was literate. The tribe's mistrust of writing waned, and while some still considered it to be witchcraft, they recognized that this witchcraft could be useful. The Cherokee were soon creating talking leaves of their own; one of the first of which was a newspaper called the *Cherokee Phoenix*.

The *Cherokee Phoenix* is one of the most important demonstrations of the communication enabled by Sequoyah's syllabary. First published on February 28, 1828 in New Echota, the capital of the Cherokee nation, the *Phoenix* is a bilingual newspaper written in both English and Cherokee.⁸ It was created and edited by Elias Boudinot,⁹ the nephew of Major Ridge, an influential member of the Council.¹⁰ Ridge was the mentor of Principal Chief John Ross, then the leader of the Council.¹¹ Due to his connection with Ridge, and by extension, Ross, Boudinot also served on the Council and as a result, the newspaper he created was largely intended to be a government-sponsored source of information for both the Cherokee people and White Americans. Since the newspaper was also written in English, the *Phoenix* was able to

⁷ "Language," Cherokee Nation, accessed November 30, 2020, <https://language.cherokee.org>.

⁸ Elias Boudinot, "New Echota,," *Cherokee Phoenix*, February 21, 1828, <https://www.wcu.edu/library/DigitalCollections/CherokeePhoenix/Vol1/no01/new-echota-page-3-column-2b-4.html>.

⁹ Boudinot was also known as Gallegina and Buck Oowatie. See "Sequoyah and the Cherokee Syllabary," Georgia Historical Society, accessed November 30, 2020, <https://georgiahistory.com/education-outreach/online-exhibits/featured-historical-figures/sequoyah/talking-leaves/>.

¹⁰ Jess Kung and Sheeren Marisol Meraji, "A Treacherous Choice and a Treaty Right," NPR, last modified April 8, 2020

<https://www.npr.org/2020/03/31/824647676/a-treacherous-choice-and-a-treaty-right>.

¹¹ *Ibid*.

communicate the experiences of the Cherokee and the issues they faced to a broad audience of White Americans, many of whom had never been exposed to their perspective before. The *Phoenix* was also published under the name *Cherokee Phoenix and Indian's Advocate*, a clear demonstration of its use as a mouthpiece of Indigenous points of view. However, many historians define the *Phoenix's* impact in terms of the communication it enabled with White people when truly, its impact should be defined by the communication it enabled within the tribe.¹² Unlike Americans, the Cherokee people had previously only had access to news through word of mouth, but the *Phoenix* communicated to a much broader audience and provided them with reliable, authenticated information, leading to a knowledgeable public that had never existed before. The *Phoenix* is still produced today, continuing to inform the Cherokee people.¹³

When the first issues of the *Phoenix* were published, the Cherokee faced immense pressure from the U.S. government to cede their land, so the *Phoenix* focused primarily on this issue.¹⁴ In 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act, designed to “provide for an exchange of lands with the Indians residing in any of the states or territories, and for their

¹² Angela F Pulley, “Cherokee Phoenix,” New Georgia Encyclopedia, Last modified July 16, 2020, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/cherokee-phoenix>. Georgia Historical Society, “Sequoyah and the Cherokee Syllabary,” Accessed November 30, 2020,

<https://georgiahistory.com/education-outreach/online-exhibits/featured-historical-figures/sequoyah/talking-leaves/>.

Alexander F. Chamberlain, “Acquisition of Written Language by Primitive Peoples,” *The American Journal of Psychology*, no. 1 (January 1906): 73-76,

https://www.jstor.org/stable/1412459?refreqid=excelsior%3A63284b6a8e9a7346da4dfef7fc24df36&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

¹³ Will Chavez, “Sequoyah wins Cherokee Phoenix’s ‘Most Influential Cherokee’ poll,” *Cherokee Phoenix*, June 2, 2020

https://www.cherokeephoenix.org/culture/sequoyah-wins-cherokee-phoenixs-most-influential-cherokee-poll/article_bd1b859e-6a4e-548e-811a-eb1b1975175d.html.

¹⁴ Cherokee Phoenix, New Echota, Georgia, Georgia, 1828, photograph, <https://www.loc.gov/item/97512373/>.

removal west of the river Mississippi.”¹⁵ The Act enabled the government to trade land in the West with Indigenous tribes in exchange for their homelands in the East. However, these “trades” were never intended to be equal exchanges, but rather seizures of land hidden behind a facade of fairness.

The majority of the Cherokee, including Ross, the most powerful person in the tribe, opposed removal. Some members of the Council, however, believed that they were incapable of stopping the growth of the U.S. and that it was better to stand aside than to risk being crushed. Boudinot, in particular, shared this view, having once stated that the tribe “must either become civilized and happy, or, sharing the fate of many kindred nations, become extinct.”¹⁶ Giving in to the American idea of civilization meant cooperating with the Indian Removal Act, so a few members of the Council, acting against Ross’s orders, began negotiations with the U.S. to sell the tribe’s land. These negotiations eventually resulted in the Treaty of New Echota, the most controversial document in the tribe’s history.¹⁷

The Treaty of New Echota was supported by only 500 Cherokee out of a tribe of thousands. The Treaty’s signers, which included Boudinot and Ridge, sold all of the Cherokee land east of the Mississippi River in exchange for \$5 million and a portion of land in the Oklahoma “Indian Country.”¹⁸ Although the treaty describes the signers as acting “with the full power and authority to conclude a treaty with the United States,” in reality, they acted without

¹⁵ “An act to provide for an exchange of lands with the Indians residing in any of the states or territories, and for their removal west of the river Mississippi, May 28, 1830,” U.S. Congress, May 28, 1830,

<https://americanindian.si.edu/static/nationtonation/pdf/Treaty-of-New-Echota-1835.pdf>.

¹⁶ Elias Boudinot, “An Address to the Whites,” (speech, First Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, May 26, 1826), <https://archive.org/stream/addresto00boud#page/10/mode/2up>.

¹⁷ Kung, “A Treacherous Choice.”

¹⁸ “Treaty of New Echota,” conclusion date: December 29, 1835,

<https://americanindian.si.edu/static/nationtonation/pdf/Treaty-of-New-Echota-1835.pdf>.

the consent of the vast majority of the tribe.¹⁹

Boudinot published copies of the treaty translated into Sequoyah's syllabary in the *Phoenix*, with the intent to show the tribe that the signers had transparency and the will of the people at heart, but his plan backfired. For the first time in the tribe's history, non-English-speaking Cherokee were able to read and understand their tribe's treaties. This newfound knowledge inspired protests against the Treaty of New Echota. The tribe was furious that the signers had sold away the entirety of their land, without the permission of anyone outside of the government. Ridge, Boudinot, and the other signers of the treaty were instantly met with intense backlash, including several assassination attempts. Ridge was recorded saying that he had "signed [his] death warrant" when he wrote his name on the treaty.²⁰

Beyond violence, information about their leader's betrayal also motivated the Cherokee into civic action. With the help of Ross, a group of Cherokee numbering "upwards of fifteen thousand" signed a petition to the U.S. Congress to nullify the treaty, calling it "fraudulent" and saying that the signers had acted "against the wishes of the great body of the Cherokee people."²¹ While Congress, at the urging of Americans eager to take over Cherokee land, rejected the petition, it is still a powerful example of the Cherokee people taking power into their own hands.²² This petition was the first time the common people attempted to negotiate with the U.S. government, as well as the first time a significant number of Cherokee challenged the Council.

¹⁹ "Cherokee Petition Protesting Removal, 1836," *House Documents, Otherwise Publ. as Executive Documents: 13th Congress, 2d Session-49th Congress, 1st Session*, United States congressional serial set, Doc. No. 286. 1-5, <https://www.americanyawp.com/reader/manifest-destiny/cherokee-petition-protesting-removal-1836/>.

²⁰ Major Ridge, quoted in Kung, "A Treacherous Choice."

²¹ "Cherokee Petition."

²² Dennis Zotigh, "The Treaty That Forced the Cherokee People from Their Homelands Goes on View," Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, last Modified April 24, 2019, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/blogs/national-museum-american-indian/2019/04/24/treaty-new-echota/>.

Without the written communication of the *Phoenix*, the Cherokee would have been left in the dark as their government signed away their homes, but thanks to Sequoyah's syllabary, they were informed and spurred into action against their leaders.

Since the translated copies of the treaty informed and incited the Cherokee into protests against the Council, the removal did not follow the timetable the Council had established with President Jackson. As a result, Jackson sent federal troops to evict the tribe, beginning the Trail of Tears. From 1830 to 1840, more than 16,000 Cherokees were forcibly removed from their homes and began a journey to the "Indian Territory" west of the Mississippi.²³ This journey is known as the Trail of Tears, because of the pain of the people forced to walk it. The Trail led to the deaths of nearly a quarter of the Cherokees from sickness, hunger, exposure, and the violence of U.S. soldiers.²⁴ By the end of the decade, most Cherokees had moved to the West, but they were poor, weak, and scattered throughout the land that is now Oklahoma. Furthermore, small groups of Cherokee stayed in the East, hiding out in remote locations. This resulted in a fragmented tribe, with different populations struggling to communicate with one another. The divisions were heightened by grudges carried over from the East, as the signers of the treaty and those who supported them found themselves the subject of hate and disdain by the rest of the tribe. The Trail of Tears had not only taken the Cherokees' homes and lives, but also their unity.

As the tribe adjusted to life in the West, Sequoyah and his syllabary were essential to reconstruction. Sequoyah "assisted much in the reorganization of the Nation," working alongside Ross and the Council to find housing, reunite families, and re-establish the government.²⁵ He

²³ "The Trail of Tears - The Indian Removals," U.S. History, accessed February 18, 2021, <https://www.ushistory.org/us/24F.ASP>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ James Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee, Extract from the Nineteenth Annual Report on the Bureau of American Ethnology* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), 148, <http://gutenberg.org/files/45634/45634-h/45634-h.htm>.

also worked with Boudinot to set up offices for the *Phoenix* in the West.²⁶ The newspaper was incredibly important to the tribe's reunification, as it allowed for communication between the different political and geographic groups. The *Phoenix* devoted space to obituaries of those who died on the trail, news stories, and, in a section aptly titled "Communication," recorded conversations, arguments, and statements from people throughout the tribe.²⁷ These stories were then distributed across "Indian Territory," bringing people together where conversation could not. The usage of the *Phoenix* in the West demonstrates how written language can bridge differences across distance and political ideology, making a divided tribe unified once more.

Perhaps most importantly, the newspaper also detailed the ongoing process of creating written laws, which would not have been possible without Sequoyah's syllabary.²⁸ Ross and a new Cherokee Council began creating formal laws, and on September 6, 1839, the tribe's lawmakers ratified a constitution for the nation, written in the syllabary.²⁹ In the Constitution, the Cherokee Nation "reaffirms its sovereignty and mutually beneficial relationship with the United States of America," as well as determining its territorial boundaries, the structure of its government, and the rights of its citizens.³⁰ This constitution, and the systems it implemented, were invaluable to the expansion of the tribe. About 16,000 Cherokee lived in the West after the Trail of Tears, but today, that number is 141,000, making the Cherokee the largest Indigenous

²⁶ National Geographic Editors, "Sequoyah."

²⁷ Elias Boudinot, "Communication," *Cherokee Phoenix*, July 2, 1828, <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/15586/view/1/4/>.

²⁸ Aimee Lewis, "Exiled to Indian Country: Cherokee Nation," *Cherokee Phoenix*, March 1, 2020, https://www.cherokeephox.org/news/exiled-to-indian-country-cherokee-nation/article_25e8a483-7423-5bd8-958b-499d1bb15980.html.

²⁹ Cherokee Nation, "History."

³⁰ Cherokee Constitution, English translation, art 1-3, https://www.cherokee.org/media/abbelmas/constitution_english.pdf.

tribe in the U.S..³¹ As the tribe has grown, it has needed its government to grow with it, and so the more organized and extensive administration created by the Constitution has been far more effective in modern times than the Council could have been.

Nevertheless, the progress achieved by Sequoyah's syllabary has not been without costs. The syllabary and its use in sources like the *Phoenix* have rendered the Indigenous tradition of oral history practically obsolete, and while oral history is still widely used today, it is now an art form rather than a necessary means of communication. The constitutional government has replaced the Council, a system of government with deep historical and cultural roots. These are intangible losses, yet they exemplify the disappearance of traditional culture in favor of modernized and increasingly Americanized developments. No invention comes without consequences, and Sequoyah's syllabary has caused losses as well as gains.

Still, the syllabary's importance to history cannot be overlooked. The *Phoenix* and the Constitution may be some of the most powerful examples of the syllabary at work, but they are far from the only ones. Today, the Cherokee language has more literature written in it than any other North American Indigenous language, with hundreds of talking leaves.³² Beyond the Cherokee, Sequoyah's syllabary has also been the inspiration for 21 written languages from North America, Africa and Asia.³³ Though it was created in only a few years, Sequoyah's syllabary has lasted for two hundred. In the form of *The Cherokee Phoenix*, the syllabary brought knowledge, power and action to the Cherokee people and transparency to their government.

After the Trail of Tears, the communication enabled by the syllabary reunited the tribe. Through

³¹ "Cherokee Nation Home," Cherokee Nation, accessed April 8, 2021, <https://www.cherokee.org>.

³² Native Languages, "Native Languages of the Americas: Cherokee (Tsalagi)," accessed April 15, 2021, <http://www.native-languages.org/cherokee.htm>.

³³ Peter Unseth, "The International Impact of Sequoyah's Syllabary," *Written Language and Literacy* 19, no. 1, (January 2016): 75, <https://www.jbe-platform.com/content/journals/10.1075/wll.19.1.03uns>.

laws and the Constitution, the syllabary allowed the Cherokee to build back stronger than before and create a framework for future development. The rapid growth, longevity and many forms of the Cherokee syllabary speak to the power of writing, as a tool of communication that can spread knowledge, create governments, empower citizens, inspire resistance, and bring people together in even the most trying of circumstances. Most of all, Sequoyah's syllabary has enabled the tribe to record their stories, so that rather than being defined by English histories, the Cherokee can write their own talking leaves.

Appendix A

D _a	R _e	T _i	Ꭰ _o	Ꭱ _u	i _v
Ꭲ _{ga} Ꭳ _{ka}	Ꭴ _{ge}	Ꭵ _{gi}	Ꭶ _{go}	Ꭷ _{gu}	Ꭸ _{gv}
Ꭹ _{ha}	Ꭺ _{he}	Ꭻ _{hi}	Ꭼ _{ho}	Ꭽ _{hu}	Ꭾ _{hv}
Ꭿ _{la}	Ꮀ _{le}	Ꮁ _{li}	Ꮂ _{lo}	Ꮃ _{lu}	Ꮄ _{lv}
Ꮅ _{ma}	Ꮆ _{me}	Ꮇ _{mi}	Ꮈ _{mo}	Ꮉ _{mu}	
Ꮊ _{na} Ꮋ _{hna} Ꮌ _{nah}	Ꮍ _{ne}	Ꮎ _{ni}	Ꮏ _{no}	Ꮐ _{nu}	Ꮑ _{nv}
Ꮒ _{qua}	Ꮓ _{que}	Ꮔ _{qui}	Ꮕ _{quo}	Ꮖ _{quu}	Ꮗ _{quv}
Ꮘ _{sa} Ꮙ _s	Ꮚ _{se}	Ꮛ _{si}	Ꮜ _{so}	Ꮝ _{su}	Ꮞ _{sv}
Ꮟ _{da} Ꮠ _{ta}	Ꮡ _{de} Ꮢ _{te}	Ꮣ _{di} Ꮤ _{ti}	Ꮥ _{do}	Ꮦ _{du}	Ꮧ _{dv}
Ꮨ _{dla} Ꮩ _{tla}	Ꮪ _{tle}	Ꮫ _{tli}	Ꮬ _{tlo}	Ꮭ _{tlu}	Ꮮ _{tlv}
Ꮯ _{tσα}	Ꮯ _{tse}	Ꮰ _{tσι}	Ꮱ _{tso}	Ꮲ _{tsu}	Ꮳ _{tsv}
Ꮴ _{wa}	Ꮵ _{we}	Ꮶ _{wi}	Ꮷ _{wo}	Ꮸ _{wu}	Ꮹ _{wv}
Ꮺ _{ya}	Ꮻ _{ye}	Ꮼ _{yi}	Ꮽ _{yo}	Ꮾ _{yu}	Ꮿ _{yv}

This is Sequoyah's completed syllabary, with each symbol listed next to an English phonetic pronunciation of the sound.

Native Languages, "Native Languages of the Americas: Cherokee (Tsalagi)," accessed April 15, 2021, <http://www.native-languages.org/cherokee.htm>.

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources

“An act to provide for an exchange of land with the Indians residing in any of the states or territories, and for their removal west of the river Mississippi, May 28, 1830.” U.S. Congress. May 28, 1830.
<https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsl&fileName=004/llsl004.db&recNum=458>.

This source is the Indian Removal Act, which I found through the Library of Congress’s online database. The act, signed by President Jackson, gave the U.S. government the power to trade land with eastern Indigenous tribes and force them onto new land in the west. In addition to quoting part of the act in my paper, I relied on this source to explain the Trail of Tears.

Boudinot, Elias. “An Address to the Whites.” Speech, First Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, May 26, 1826. <https://archive.org/stream/addressto00boud#page/n4/mode/2up>.

This source is a transcript of a speech given by Elias Boudndiot at an American church in Philadelphia. As the name implies, the speech is a discourse on what Boudinot, as an Indigenous person, wishes to say to White Americans. Though he was Cherokee, Boudiniot’s speech is heavily influenced by white supremacist rhetoric, and includes the idea that White civilization is superior to that of Indigenous people. I quoted this speech in my paper to illustrate the views of Boudinot, an important figure in the story of the Cherokee Syllabary.

Boudinot, Elias. “Communication.” *Cherokee Phoenix*, July 2, 1828.
<https://www.wdl.org/en/item/15586/view/1/4/>.

Another source created by Boudinot, this excerpt from an issue of the *Cherokee Phoenix* shows an example of the “Communication” section of the newspaper. The *Phoenix* was a bilingual newspaper written in English and Sequoyah’s syllabary, and it served as the unofficial national newspaper of the Cherokee. I referenced this section in my paper, and although the writing in this particular section was not relevant to my topic, it was still helpful for me to see what the newspaper actually looked like in its paper form.

Boudinot, Elias. “Laws.” *Cherokee Phoenix*, July 2, 1828.
<https://www.wdl.org/en/item/15586/view/1/1/>.

This source is another excerpt from the *Cherokee Phoenix*, taken from the same issue as the one above. I found that this excerpt was more pertinent to my topic, as it demonstrated the intersection of written communication, in this case a newspaper, with politics and events I mentioned in my paper. I listed all of my articles from the *Cherokee Phoenix* under Boudinot's name in my bibliography, as none of the articles contain an author's byline.

Boudinot, Elias. "New Echota." *Cherokee Phoenix*, February 21, 1828.

<https://www.wcu.edu/library/DigitalCollections/CherokeePhoenix/Vol1/no01/new-echota-page-3-column-2b-4.html>.

This article is the very first one ever published in the *Phoenix*, making it the first newspaper article ever to be published in a North American Indigenous language. I used this article for information about the creation and early production of the *Phoenix*.

Boudinot, Elias. "For the Cherokee Phoenix. Sign of the Times." *Cherokee Phoenix*, March 29, 1834.

<https://www.wcu.edu/library/DigitalCollections/CherokeePhoenix/Vol5/no43/for-the-chokeke-phoenix-signs-of-the-times-page-3-column-3b.html>.

The database of the Western Carolina University was an amazing resource for me, as it contains dozens of digitized issues of the *Phoenix*. I used this article, a description of current events in the U.S. capital, as an example of how the Phoenix was used to distribute news.

Bartam, William. *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 Chactaws. Containing an Account of the Soil and Natural Productions of Those Regions, Together With Observations on the Manners of the Indians*. James and Johnson, 1791. <http://gutenberg.org/ebooks/63678>.

At my teacher's suggestion, I found this source on a database called Project Gutenberg. Project Gutenberg has a collection of historical books from around the world, and the sources I found on it were very useful to my research. This book is a scientific, historical and cultural account of the American southeast, and I found its primary account of the political relationships between Indigenous people and European people at the time valuable to my paragraphs about the early history of the Cherokee.

Cherokee Constitution, pg. 2.

https://www.cherokee.org/media/lich3n22/cherokee_lang-constitution.pdf.

Since it was written in Sequoyah's syllabary, I could not actually read this source. Nevertheless, it was still useful for me to see the document in its original form. Also, I noticed a portrait of Sequoyah and a copy of his syllabary on the first page, which stuck out to me as an illustration of his importance to the Cherokee nation.

Cherokee Constitution, English translation, art 1-3.

https://www.cherokee.org/media/abelmas/constitution_english.pdf.

This copy of the Cherokee Constitution was translated into English, so I was able to understand it. I quoted a passage from the Constitution and summarized its purpose in my paper to show the impact the constitution had for the Cherokee, an impact that would not have been possible without Sequoyah's language.

“Cherokee Petition Protesting Removal, 1836. *House Documents, Otherwise Publ. as Executive Documents: 13th Congress, 2d Session-49th Congress, 1st Session*. United States congressional serial set. Doc. No. 286. 1-5.

<https://www.americanyawp.com/reader/manifest-destiny/cherokee-petition-protesting-removal-1836/>.

This document is the petition sent to Congress by Cherokee protesting the Treaty of New Echota. Reading the petition enabled me to understand how the Cherokee resisted removal, which made this one of my most valuable primary sources. I quoted several short pieces of this source in my paper to give the reader a summary of the petition.

Cherokee Phoenix, New Echota, Georgia. Georgia, 1828. Photograph.

<https://www.loc.gov/item/97512373/>.

This source is the first volume of the Cherokee Phoenix, from the archive of the Library of Congress. By looking through the English side of the newspaper, I was able to understand the concerns of Boudinot and the Council at the time of the first volume, specifically, the rising pressure from the U.S. government to cede their land.

“Treaty of New Echota.” Conclusion date: December 29, 1835. *Museum of the American Indian*.

<https://americanindian.si.edu/static/nationtonation/pdf/Treaty-of-New-Echota-1835.pdf>.

This document is the original Treaty of New Echota, stored online in the database of the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian. While I had secondary sources that explained the treaty, I found that reading the original document gave me a deeper understanding of the Cherokees' relationship with the U.S., and the conflict between the treaty signers and the rest of the tribe. Also, I quoted a passage from the Treaty in my paper.

Secondary Sources

Carey, Bill. "Sequoyah, a great man whose life is shrouded in mystery." *Tennessee Magazine*, June 2015.

<https://www.tnmagazine.org/sequoyah-a-great-man-whose-life-is-shrouded-in-mystery/>.

The Cherokees' original land is now split up amongst a variety of Southeastern American states. As a result, historical journals, magazines and societies from these states, like the *Tennessee Magazine* or the Georgia Historical Society were great resources for both general information about the Cherokee people and specific, regional details of the tribe's history. In this source, I found a quote from Sequoyah that had been translated into English, which I used in my paper.

Chamberlain, Alexander F. "Acquisition of Written Language by Primitive Peoples." *The American Journal of Psychology*, no. 1 (January 1906): 73-76.

https://www.jstor.org/stable/1412459?refreqid=excelsior%3A63284b6a8e9a7346da4dfef7fc24df36&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

This source is from more than 100 years ago, and so it talks about Indigenous people in an outdated and blatantly racist manner. Chamberlain describes the creation of the syllabary as the "advancement" of a "primitive" people into one that meets American standards of culture, language and civilization, a characterization I disagree with. I, along with the authors of most of my more modern secondary sources, believe that the Cherokee were just as "civilized" as White people before and after the syllabary, and that to suggest otherwise is a racist and overly simplistic view of history.

Chavez, Will. "Sequoyah wins Cherokee Phoenix's 'Most Influential Cherokee' poll." *Cherokee Phoenix*. June 2, 2020. <https://www.cherokeephoenix.org/Article/index/134790>.

The *Cherokee Phoenix* is a newspaper published in both Cherokee and English, and it played a central role in the story of my paper. The *Phoenix* is still publishing, and its articles about Cherokee history gave me the perspective of present-day Cherokee on the events I described. This article discusses a poll operated by the *Phoenix* to determine the “Most Influential Cherokee” in the tribe’s history. Sequoyah won the poll, which demonstrated to me the cultural and historical significance he still has today.

Cherokee Nation. “Cherokee Language.” Accessed November 30, 2020.
<https://language.cherokee.org>.

I relied heavily on this source, a history of the Cherokee language from the nation’s official website. This page is managed by the tribe’s government, and it gave me important information about the syllabary from the voice of the Cherokee people.

Cherokee Nation. “History.” Accessed February 17, 2021.
<https://www.cherokee.org/about-the-nation/history/>.

Another page from the nation’s website, this account of the history of the Cherokee gave me a broad summary of the Cherokees’ experiences over the last few centuries. Specifically, I relied on this website for descriptions of early interactions between the Cherokee and the British, and later, the Cherokee and the Americans.

Cherokee Nation. “Cherokee Nation Home.” Accessed April 8, 2021.
<https://www.cherokee.org>.

This webpage provided me with the current day population of the Cherokee nation, an important detail when it came to examining the modern-day impact of Sequoyah’s syllabary.

Digital History. “Indian Removal Timeline.” Last modified 2018.
https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/active_learning/explorations/indian_removal/removal_timeline.cfm.

This timeline of the systematic removal of Indigenous people from the east was an important source in my paragraphs discussing the Trail of Tears. I structured my telling of the Trail around the order of events used in this source, but looked at the events through the lens of communication and Sequoyah’s syllabary.

Georgia Historical Society. “Sequoyah and the Cherokee Syllabary.” Accessed November 30, 2020.
<https://georgiahistory.com/education-outreach/online-exhibits/featured-historical-figures/>

sequoyah/talking-leaves/.

As I mentioned above, organizations and publications dedicated to the history of Southeastern states often contained information about the Cherokee, the original inhabitants of those lands. This page from the Georgia Historical Society was one of my most valuable sources, as it was essentially three comprehensive sources in one: a biography of Sequoyah, a description of the syllabary and a detailed account of the historical context needed to understand Sequoyah and his work.

Giasson, Patrick. "The Typographic Inception of the Cherokee Syllabary." Tiro. Last modified September 2004. http://www.tiro.com/syllabics/Cherokee/Giasson_ChkrSyll.pdf.

This essay describes the early formation of Sequoyah's language, particularly his shift from a logographic language to a syllabary. Additionally, it details the creation of the typeset used to print the *Cherokee Phoenix*. It was interesting for me to learn about the process of printing newspapers in a time before digital printing, the only method I have ever known.

Kidwell, Clara Sue. "The Effects of Removal on American Indian Tribes." National Humanities Center. Accessed April 5, 2021. <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nattrans/ntecoindian/essays/indianremoval.htm>.

In this paper, I found a detailed analysis of the Cherokees' reconstruction efforts, and how they compared to that of other Indigenous tribes who were forced to migrate to the West. This passage was useful in developing my own argument that the syllabary was essential to reconstructing.

Kung, Jess and Shereen Marisol Meraji. "A Treacherous Choice and a Treaty Right." NPR. Last modified April 8, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/31/824647676/a-treacherous-choice-and-a-treaty-right>.

This article from NPR explains the Council's betrayal of the Cherokee government as they signed the Treaty of New Echota. It provides an in-depth analysis of the Treaty, as well as context about John Ross, Major Ridge and Elias Boudinot. I relied heavily on this source when describing the Treaty of New Echota and the actions of the treaty's signers.

Lewis, Aimee. "Exiled to Indian Country: Cherokee Nation." *Cherokee Phoenix*, March 16, 2020. https://www.cherokeephoenix.org/news/exiled-to-indian-country-cherokee-nation/article_25e8a483-7423-5bd8-958b-499d1bb15980.html.

This article from the *Cherokee Phoenix* describes earlier issues of the newspaper. It focuses on issues from the time of rebuilding in the West, which made it a valuable resource in describing the use of written communication during this period.

McMillan, Ovid Andrew. "Cherokee Indian Removal: The Treaty of New Echota and General Winfield Scott." Masters diss., East Tennessee State University, May 2003.
<https://dc.etsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1935&context=etd>.

This dissertation was integral to my paragraphs about the Treaty of New Echota and the Trail of Tears, as it offered detailed information about the two events that was difficult to find elsewhere. It also included a small biography of Major Ridge, which was very helpful in understanding his influence on the tribe.

Mooney, James. *Myths of the Cherokee; Extract from the Nineteenth Annual Report on the Bureau of American Ethnology*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902.
<http://gutenberg.org/ebooks/45634>.

When I first found this source, a compilation of Cherokee myths by an American anthropologist, I doubted that it would provide relevant information. However, I soon found that it contained a few chapters dedicated to Cherokee history, including Sequoyah. I used this source to find information about Sequoyah's late life, and I quoted it in one section.

National Geographic Editors. "Sequoyah and the Creation of the Cherokee Syllabary." *National Geographic*, November 13, 2019.
<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/article/sequoyah-and-creation-chokeee-syllabary/>.

One of my most important secondary sources, this article gave me a brief but informative biography of Sequoyah. From the starting point provided by this article, I was able to identify which direction my research needed to go in, and I searched for other sources accordingly. Additionally, I used this source for information about the modern-day use of the Cherokee syllabary.

National Parks Service. "Cherokee Relations with US Government Before Removal." Last modified August 29, 2017.
<https://www.nps.gov/fosm/learn/historyculture/chokeee-relations-with-us-government-before-removal.htm>.

This source was important to my writing about early Cherokee history and the tribe's relationship with the United States. In particular, I relied upon this source to describe the way the Cherokee were manipulated by written language.

National Parks Service. "Ninety Six: Bridging the Language Divide." Accessed February 17, 2021. https://www.nps.gov/nisi/planyourvisit/upload/SB_Cherokee-Language.pdf.

This source, like the one above, is from the National Parks Service, and it elaborates on the idea of written language as a tool of deception used by the British and Americans against the Cherokee. These two sources illustrated the need for the syllabary, as it allowed the tribe to take matters into their own hands and record their own accounts of treaties.

National Parks Service, Cave Spring and the Trail of Tears. "The Trail Where They Cried." Accessed February 19, 2021. <https://www.nps.gov/trte/learn/historyculture/upload/TRTE-Cave-Spring-two-panels-combined.pdf>.

Another one of my most valuable sources, this page from the National Parks Service describes the early process of removal, and the involvement of the U.S. military in the removal. Additionally, it detailed the tensions between the Cherokee and White Georgians leading up to the Indian Removal Act.

Native History Association. "Cherokee Syllabary." Accessed November 30, 2020. http://www.nativehistoryassociation.org/tutor_syllabary.php.

This source provided me with a copy of the syllabary, which helped me to understand how incredible Sequoyah's work was. To create a written language, something that will be used by millions of people every day, is an amazing feat, and seeing his work up close made me appreciate the magnitude of Sequoyah's creation.

Native Languages. "Native Languages of the Americas: Cherokee (Tsalagi)." Accessed April 15, 2021. <http://www.native-languages.org/chokeee.htm>.

Native Languages is a website dedicated to the history of Indigenous languages, and it was a great resource for me in learning about the origin of Sequoyah's language. In addition, it provided me with the image of the syllabary I used in Appendix A. Finally, I used this source in my conclusion to mention the wealth of literature that has been written in the syllabary.

Office of the Historian "Milestones: 1830-1860." Accessed February 17, 2021.
<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1830-1860/indian-treaties>.

From the Office of the Historian, this source is a timeline of treaties between Indigenous peoples and the U.S. Government. This source greatly added to my knowledge of the Cherokee-American relationship, and helped me in my paragraphs devoted to historical context about the Indian Removal Act and the Treaty of New Echota.

Palmer, Alex. "For These Native American Artists, the Material Is the Message". *Smithsonian Magazine*. March 25, 2016.
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/these-native-american-artists-material-message-180958567/>.

This source is an article about modern-day Indigenous artists practicing traditional methods of art that have been used for centuries to record history. These artworks are the closest thing North American Indigenous tribes had to a written language before Sequoyah, so this article gave me necessary context about the history of North American material communication.

Rice, Marah. "Cultural Differences in Communication." Accessed February 17, 2021.
<https://unioncollegenativeamericans.weebly.com/cultural-differences-in-communication.html>.

This source approaches Indigenous languages from a modern perspective, pointing out the differences in the way Americans and Indigenous people communicate. Rice's writing helped me to understand the early struggles of the Cherokee against unfair treaties, as well as the stigma surrounding writing that Sequoyah had to overcome.

Rindfliesch, Bryan C. "What We Say Matters: The Power of Words in American and Indigenous Histories." Accessed February 17, 2021.
<https://www.oah.org/tah/issues/2017/february/what-we-say-matters-the-power-of-words-in-american-and-indigenous-histories/>.

In this essay, Rindfliesch reminds us to use sensitive and kind language when writing about Indigenous people, as they have often been described with derogatory terms, even by historians. After reading this essay, I researched to find the most accurate and up-to-date terminology, and I came to the decision to use “Indigenous People” rather than “Native Americans” or “Indians” throughout my paper.

Staff Reports. “The Cherokee Phoenix Breakdown: Celebrating the Cherokee Syllabary.” *Cherokee Phoenix*. January 28, 2021.
<https://www.cherokee phoenix.org/Article/Index/195829>.

Another article from the *Cherokee Phoenix*, this source describes the impact the syllabary had on the Cherokee nation, in the form of a video. I used the source when writing about the importance of the syllabary to the reconstruction of the tribe in the West, as well as to fill in my understanding about its creation.

“The Life of Major Ridge.” Chieftain Museum: Major Ridge Home. Accessed April 5, 2021.
<https://chieftainmuseum.org/2011/05/history-of-chieftains/>

This biography of Major Ridge, published by the museum dedicated to his life, was an important resource in understanding Ridge’s position within the tribe. This source also focused on how Ridge betrayed his people when he signed the Treaty of New Echota, which was important to my own account of that event.

Thornton, Richard. “The secret history of Sequoyah’s Cherokee syllabary.” *Native Times*, November 27, 2012.
[https://www.nativetimes.com/46-life/commentary/8116-the-secret-history-of-the-sequoyah s-choerokee-syllabary](https://www.nativetimes.com/46-life/commentary/8116-the-secret-history-of-the-sequoyah-s-choerokee-syllabary).

This source explores the historical context of Sequoyah’s life, and the events surrounding his creation of the syllabary. It also provided me with biographical information about Elias Boudinot, and led me to a source written by him: a speech in which he explains his assimilationist ideas.

Unseth, Peter. “The International Impact of Sequoyah’s Syllabary.” *Written Language and Literacy* 19, no. 1 (January 2016): 75.
<https://www.jbe-platform.com/content/journals/10.1075/wll.19.1.03uns>.

In this journal article, I found information about other written languages that have been inspired by the Cherokee syllabary. Indigenous people from North America, Africa and Asia have all looked to Sequoyah’s work as a baseline when creating their own written languages. I used this fact in my conclusion as a demonstration of the ways Sequoyah’s

influence spread throughout the world and changed not only social history, but also linguistics.

U.S. History. "The Trail of Tears - The Indian Removals." Accessed February 18, 2021.
<https://www.ushistory.org/us/24F.ASP>.

This source offers an account of the events leading up to the Trail of Tears, and focuses on both the Indian Removal Act and the Treaty of New Echota. I relied heavily on this source when writing about President Jackson's use of military force to expel the Cherokee, and the tragedy and cruelty of the Trail of Tears.

Zotigh, Dennis. "The Treaty That Forced the Cherokee People from Their Homelands Goes on View." Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian. Last Modified April 24, 2019.
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/blogs/national-museum-american-indian/2019/04/24/treaty-new-echota/>.

This source is a news article about the Treaty of New Echota, which, at the time this article was written, had just gone on display at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian. In addition to providing information about the current-day location of the treaty document, this source gave me an understanding of how John Ross and the Council betrayed the tribe when they signed the Treaty, and how the tribe resisted this abuse of power.

Tertiary Sources

Anchor: A North Carolina History Online Resource. "The Cherokee Language and Syllabary." Accessed May 15, 2021. <https://www.ncpedia.org/anchor/ Cherokee-language-and>.

This database entry about Sequoyah and his creation gave me several interesting facts: Sequoyah was originally a silversmith, the first book published in Cherokee was the Bible, and several colleges offer language classes in Cherokee. Supporting my knowledge with details like this helped me to take a big-picture view of the importance of the syllabary.

Bright, William O. "North American Indian languages." Encyclopaedia Britannica. Accessed February 17, 2021.
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/North-American-Indian-languages#ref75310>.

From this encyclopedia entry, I learned about the history of North American Indigenous languages, including Cherokee. The entry focuses on spoken languages, which was useful to me as I wrote about Sequoyah's process of creating the written language. Additionally, this entry looks at Sequoyah's work from a linguistic perspective, which was an interesting departure from the majority of my sources, which looked at it from a historical lens.

Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Sequoyah." Accessed February 18, 2021.
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sequoyah>.

Another encyclopedia entry, I used this source for information about Sequoyah as a person. In particular, this source illustrated the cause of Sequoyah's interest in writing, which was extremely helpful as I wrote the beginning of my paper. I also found this source to be helpful when describing (in a footnote) the Sequoia tree, which was named after Sequoyah.

Pulley, Angela F. "Cherokee Phoenix." New Georgia Encyclopedia. Last modified July 16, 2020.
<https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/cherokee-phoenix>.

Rather than an article from the *Cherokee Phoenix*, this source is a web page describing early issues of the *Phoenix*. Since it was difficult for me to find issues of the *Phoenix* from the time period I studied, I relied on secondary sources to fill in the gaps of my understanding. This source was particularly helpful in writing about the *Phoenix*'s use as a tool of communication with White Americans.