The Trail of Tears
Historic Drama
1973

The Theatre at Tsa-La-Gi

ONE DOLLAR
We are only now emerging from a period where history recorded this nation as agriculturally oriented. As a tide of immigration surged into this new country, we necessarily formed an agricultural economy where power is measured by land ownership. The play you see here in The Theatre at Tsa-la-gi describes the result of a power struggle.

The play should be placed in historical perspective. It is about a people and their land. Since the drama takes place on new ground, the players must represent the vanquished in a land cession. The path of the Cherokee’s displacement is called, “The trail where they cried.” What did they leave in the old land and why did they go?

Before colonization, the Cherokees controlled about 40,000 square miles in the southern Allegheny mountains. Today this area comprises southwest Virginia, the western portions of the Carolinas and parts of Tennessee, Georgia and Alabama.

The pressures on these people for this land can be measured by a series of treaties between the government and the Cherokee Nation between 1794 and 1819 involving land cessions which reduced the Indian holdings to about half their original size.

This remaining land was the cause of great pressure from outside which created dissension within the Cherokee Nation. The forces closing in on the land were inexorable. President Jackson had no sympathy for the plight of these people. The tribe split over the questions of emigration to new lands and the value of their old.
The Trail of Tears - Westward Routes

- A group recognized by the U.S. Government signed a treaty of removal. They were opposed by many of the Indian people, led by John Ross; but the deed was done. Those who signed the treaty also signed a warrant for trouble because it was against the sacred law of the Cherokee Nation to sign away land without the common consent of the people.

- Now the remaining Cherokees had to move west and join some of their number, about 5,000, who had already gone to new lands on the sunset side of the Mississippi River.

- The journey was long and hard. Many cried in sorrow. Many died. The drama begins...
Act One

Scene 1

Along the Trail of Tears, winter 1838. The beloved wife of John Ross, Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, has died. Ross is comforted by the Cherokee statesman, Jesse, and his son, Dennis. After Ross wanders off, father and son discuss what has happened to the Cherokees.

Scene 2

A field by the Illinois River near Tahlequah, June 1839. Ross angrily confronts the rations boss who is cheating the Cherokees. Later, members of eastern and western groups
gather to discuss their differences. Sequoyah prevents violence between Ross' easterners and Stand Watie's western band, but it is clear serious problems remain.

**Scene 3**

Unfinished Ross home at Park Hill, June 1839. Dennis and Sarah continue their courtship. A law practice in Washington awaited Dennis, but he chose to go west to rejoin Sarah, Watie's niece. Jesse interrupts with tragic news. Several leaders of the western band have been murdered. Chief Ross, knowing he will be blamed, disperses his family.

**Scene 4**

The Ross home, two years later. Sequoyah comes to Chief Ross and tells him that he intends to leave. Ross pleads for him to stay, but the old leader holds firm to his decision.

**Scene 5**

The White House, Washington, D.C., summer 1846. The long efforts of Chief Ross bear fruit. He wins an audience with President James K. Polk. After much discussion, President Polk proposes a new treaty. It is agreed upon and a handshake between Ross and Watie reunites the Cherokee Nation.

**Scene 6**

The Public Square of Tahlequah, autumn 1846. News of the treaty reaches Indian Territory and a giant rally takes place. The Victory Dance symbolizes the beginning of a period of Cherokee progress. But peace remains elusive. Through the 1850s Chief Ross ponders the tragedy of a people strangely unable to find themselves.

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**Act Two**

**Scene 7**

Park Hill, a dressing room in the female academy, evening of May 6, 1861. A few moments of lightness introduces this scene as Sarah, now in her 30s, attempts to help a young girl dress for the evening dance.

**Scene 8**

The garden, a few minutes later. Stand Watie and John Ross position themselves on the question of aligning the Cherokee Nation with the North or the South. Chief Ross tries valiantly to keep his people neutral. He and Dennis argue their case with Watie who leans heavily to aligning the Cherokee Nation with the Confederacy.

**Scene 9**

Home of Stand Watie south of Tahlequah, summer 1861. Cornelius Boudinot arrives with news that the Governor of Arkansas wants Watie to lead that state's Confederate Army. Boudinot urges Watie to force Ross to call a council and let the Cherokee leaders vote on secession.

**Scene 10**

Home of Ross, August 1861. Action shifts again to Ross Cottage where Superintendent Pike of the Confederacy and Watie debate with Ross and Dennis concerning the alliance of the Cherokees. A vote of the council is forced. Dennis sides strongly with Ross to remain neutral, but all others arise at the motion to join the Confederacy.

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**Scene 11**

The Civil War, 1861-65. This Civil War dance sequence is in four parts. First is the gathering storm, as war comes. Second, families in despair over the tragedies of war. Third, the war itself. Fourth, the return home.

**Scene 12**

Home of Dennis, spring 1865. Ross talks with Sarah about the impending end of the war. He reveals he is going to Washington in an attempt to help the Cherokees. Later, Dennis comes home and is, late in the evening, struck down by assassins from the Confederate Cherokee group.

**Scene 13**

Home of Stand Watie, spring 1865. Watie is confronted with bad news from every quarter as the Confederacy nears defeat. Finally Watie, talking to Sarah, admits that he has been wrong.

**Scene 14**

The public square at Tahlequah, November 17, 1907. A long rebuilding period has followed the Civil War. Gradually bowing to the inevitable, Cherokee leaders play an important role in the creation of Oklahoma. Sarah, in her 80s, attends the statehood ceremony with her grandson, Dennis. The Cherokees have always believed the Great Spirit has destined them to do one great thing. Sarah wonders aloud if the creation of Oklahoma will fulfill that destiny. The rebirth of the Cherokees is symbolized by the hauntingly beautiful Phoenix Dance. As the play ends, Sarah gives herself willingly to death. She now realizes that perhaps, after all, "The Trail of Tears" will end in triumph.
1. Ration Boss — Raymond D. Slater
2. President Polk & Property Master — Earl Squyres
3. Jesse — Joseph Conley
4. Daniel Webster — Lee Medinets
5. John Ross — Frank W. Kopyc
6. Sarah — Kathleen P. Hurley
7. Dennis — John S. Mansfield
8. General Female Understudy — Becky Burroughs
9. Sequoyah — Dino Almond
10. Boudinot — Thomas L. Allard, II
11. Phoenix Dancer — Dewey Daley
1. Stand Watie — Charles Seat
2. Marcy — John Rothrock
3. Talara — Exie White
4. General Male Understudy — David G. Cupp
5. Stage Manager — Ray Heinicke
6. Associate Director — Carl H. Parker
7. Technical Director — Jim Kohler
8. Master Electrician — Jack L. Hagerstrand
9. House Manager — Jerry Bread
10. Costumer — Maria C. Nichols
11. Sound Technician — John Goldesberry
a short history

Of Iroquois linguistic stock, the Cherokees called themselves Ani’-Yun’ wiya’ meaning leading or principal people. The original Cherokees were found in early times in Georgia, Alabama, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky and West Virginia.

The Cherokees were first discovered by the Spanish, then the French, and the British. During Colonial times the British had the greatest influence over this tribe. British goods, especially firearms, were important in making the Cherokees a powerful nation.

British traders settled among the Cherokees, took Indian wives, and produced mixed-blood family names like Adair, Lowry, Rogers, Ross, Vann and Ward. These mixed-bloods became prosperous merchants, traders, planters, and slave owners, teachers, writers, and tribal statesmen.

Pressure by settlers reduced the tribal range principally to northwestern Georgia, western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee. This had the effect of consolidating and unifying the Cherokee Nation. The tribal council directed the construction of a national capital at New Echota, Cherokees established new enterprises, and the Cherokee Nation flowered in this unity.

Of the missionaries sent to the nation, none were more outstanding than Samuel A. Worcester. He built schools and churches throughout the nation and encouraged the Cherokees in their upward advance; through his influences, mission school graduates were sent on to academies and colleges in New England. This system of education produced well-informed, dedicated leaders for the nation and included such names as John Ross, Elias Boudinot (Buck Owatie), his brother Stand Watie, John Ridge, Charles Hicks, and many others.

In 1822, after years of hard work, Sequoyah completed his Cherokee alphabet, an eighty-five character system which reduced the Cherokee language to written form. While many of the mixed-bloods were literate in English, Sequoyah’s invention made it possible for the entire tribe, young and old alike, to learn to read and write in the native language in the matter of a few months. Sequoyah’s gift to his people made them the only Indian tribe in the United States to have a language written in its own characters or alphabet.

Spurred by this, the Cherokees advanced rapidly. In 1828, Elias Boudinot established the Cherokee Phoenix, America’s first Indian newspaper, printed in both English and Cherokee.

In 1827 an Indian convention at New Echota wrote a constitution for the nation. John Ross was elected Principal Chief by the first election under this constitution. The constitution roughly paralleled the U.S. constitution, providing for two houses of an elected legislature, a system including a Supreme Court, a jury system, and a national police to enforce the edicts.

During the first quarter of the nineteenth century great pressure was exerted on the tribe to move west. Actually small bands of Cherokees had been moving west from as early as 1795, and by 1817, a community of about 5,000 Cherokees had settled between the White and Arkansas rivers in northwestern Arkansas. That year the United States government signed a treaty granting to the Cherokees this new domain. All eastern Cherokees were invited to join their brethren in Arkansas.

In 1828, the Arkansas Cherokees signed another treaty. They surrendered their lands in Arkansas in exchange for a 7,000,000 acre tract in what is now northeastern Oklahoma. This was to be the domain for the Cherokee Nation until Oklahoma Statehood in 1907.

At least three-fourths of the Cherokee Nation remained in the east. Continual harassment convinced certain Cherokees that removal was inevitable and that the tribe should sign an agreement with the United States surrendering their Georgia lands and join their kinsmen in Indian Territory. The leaders of this group were Major Ridge, John Ridge, Elias Boudinot (Buck Owatie), and Stand Watie; they came to be called the Treaty Party. Chief John Ross and most of the full-blood Cherokees were opposed to leaving.

United States Commissioners repeatedly attempted to obtain a cession treaty but the Ross group refused. Finally at New Echota late in 1835, United States commissioners met with a group comprising a small minority of the nation, and got their treaty. This agreement was accepted by the United States as the will of the Cherokee Nation and over the protests of Ross and his full-blood following put it into effect. The Treaty Party members left for Indian Territory soon after signing this agreement at New Echota. The treaty allowed the Cherokees until 1838 to wind up their affairs and remove, but the Ross party remained firm and made no effort to remove.

During May, 1838, federal troops under General Winfield Scott occupied the Cherokee Nation, rounded up the reluctant Indians, and literally drove them from their homes over the western trails to Indian Territory. The Cherokee “Trail of Tears” was a time of suffering, blizzards, disease, and hunger.

The Treaty Party was blamed for this mass suffering and death and when the survivors arrived in Oklahoma, they vowed vengeance on the signers of the New
Echota Treaty. During June, 1839, the signers were struck down by unknown assassins, even the scholarly Elias Boudinot falling before the executioners' knife. Only Stand Watie escaped.

The so-called "Cherokee Murders" triggered a vicious, destructive civil strife in the Cherokee Nation, but eventually the factions fused for the common good. On September 6, 1839, a new constitution was signed at Tahlequah. Civil disturbances quieted, and the Cherokee turned to taming the Oklahoma wilderness. They chose Tahlequah as their national capital.

Mission schools were set up throughout the nation, and in 1841 the Cherokees established a national public school system. Cherokee Male and Female Seminaries were opened in 1851 in the vicinity of Tahlequah. Indian youth could pursue an education from kindergarten through academy level in their own Nation; then the top scholars were selected to attend state-side colleges to complete their education.

The Golden Years in the Cherokee Nation ended in 1861. Secession split the United States on the Ohio River.

In the west, states adjacent to the Indian Territory except Kansas went for the Confederacy. Confederate officials were interested in the Indian Territory.

Confederate Commissioner Albert Pike worked hard on Chief John Ross, and the Cherokee Council urging them to join the Confederacy. At first Ross refused, but late in 1861 he signed a treaty of alliance with the Confederacy. The Cherokee Nation became a battleground for Union and Confederate armies. Union forces drove through, captured Tahlequah in the summer of 1862, and the nation was under Union occupation.

Things were never the same for the Cherokees after the war. Old differences were slow in healing; tribesmen were destitute; their homes and improvements had been destroyed, their fields and ranches desolated by four years of wasteful war. Thus weakened by internal division and economic loss, the Cherokees were unable to present a united front to thwart the drastic changes in the post-Civil War period.

Railroad construction across the nation began in 1870, and while the railroads quickened economic development, they brought the land hungry homesteaders. After years of "Boomer" promotion by the homeseekers, and over the protests of the Cherokees and other Indian tribes, western Indian Territory was opened to settlement in 1889. Oklahoma Territory was organized in 1890, and it grew so rapidly that by 1907 the Twin Territories, Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory, were fused into the State of Oklahoma.

Today, the Cherokee people have many of the same basic character traits as their earlier known ancestors — notably humor, persistence, adaptability, and aggressiveness.

Will Rogers, undoubtedly the best known American of Cherokee blood, demonstrated a type of humor that bore strong resemblance to his heritage. Rogers' most famous quote is from the epitaph he proposed for himself. It read, "I joked about every prominent man of my time, but I NEVER MET A MAN I DIDN'T LIKE." Will went on to say, "I am so proud of that I can hardly wait to die so it can be carved. And when you come around to my grave, you'll find me sitting there proudly reading it."

Rogers' words compare in humor, and in approach to life's realities, with an 1809 Cherokee epitaph found in Georgia. It reads: "Here lies the body of James Vann, He killed many a white man, At last by a rifle ball he fell, And devils dragged him off to hell."

Cherokee traits such as persistence and aggressiveness translate in modern society to a strong "will to win." Many Oklahoma Cherokees are highly successful today as athletes, creative artists, business and professional men, scientists, and city, state, and national officials.

It is estimated there are well over 100,000 persons of Cherokee descent in America, perhaps 50,000 of them in Oklahoma.

Most remaining full blood Cherokees live in eastern Oklahoma, primarily in Adair, Cherokee, Mayes and Delaware counties. It has been estimated that over 15,000 full bloods and near full bloods are located primarily in these counties. Many still live on small farms allotted to them, or to their close kin, prior to Oklahoma statehood.

While many full bloods prefer remaining close to nature on such family homesteads, and while Cherokee mixed bloods as a rule have blended into the general population, common ancestry promotes a notable measure of understanding between them. Both share a strong remembrance of the tribulations and the achievements — a pride in heritage — of the great Cherokee Nation.
To Catch a Girl

One of The Little People is reputed to have given this method to a young Cherokee. It may work.

"Say this when there is a young woman who ignores you. Sing this song and think of the young woman's name. When the sun comes up, early in the morning and is very large and red, face the sun and sing this song. You can't fail."

Id-wu-si-xi nu-dó-gó-hnó
i-yu nú-da-qua
du-yú-heñó hi
tai-ne-gó ni-xi
yú e-xi
ge-gó-ka-hnó
nu sáquiyó-sqú
i-hi-gó-yó-hi
yu que-iñó-hó
a-yó di-mó
et dí-nú-ga-li
sgó-xó-wá-gié-ed
a-qua-los-nu-gí
u hips-ti-ná
ge-sú na. Di-gi-dí-dí.
Medicine

Cherokee medical practices in the pre-colonial days were drastic. There is no comment on their efficiency. We have this description by William Fye in a letter to his brother dated 1761. "The conjurors also act as their physicians using charms and conjurations 'tho they have a universal remedy which they use for all disorders which is to place the sick in (a Cherokee hothouse) in which is placed a large stone. This is made very hot and water thrown on it until by the steam and his own sweat the patient is well soaked and then they hurry him to the nearest river and throw him in.' There are conjurations that you can use today. Here's one for healing a burn. "Sprinkle cold water on it and say: Ice has been brought by the Anidawehi. Snow has been brought by the Anidawehi. They quickly make it feel cool. Let the heat disappear into a very old tree."

Good Things To Eat

Indian food is plain fare, simply prepared. Some is declared delicious by everyone who samples it. A taste for others may need cultivation. You may wish to try these examples:

SQUAW BREAD
- one pint sour milk
- one tablespoon shortening
- one-half teaspoon soda
- three heaping teaspoons baking powder
- one teaspoon salt
Add enough flour to make the dough easy to handle. Knead it smooth and roll out until your dough is about one-half inch thick. Cut this into portions about the size of a quart jar lid and make some slits in it. Now cook in deep fat, just like doughnuts.
The Crane and the Hummingbird

- The Crane has always been very clever. He was a fisherman and always rolled his pants-legs up to his knees while he was searching for crawdads and fish.
- The Hummingbird was also living, even in those old times. He was very youthful and always wore a suit and a shiny necklace. His clothes were blue-black and also very shiny.
- The young women all loved the Hummingbird. When they would see him coming they would begin to cheer and yell. These young women loved him very much because he was so good looking.
- Their parents told them not to pay so much attention to the Hummingbird because it was only his good looks that were attracting them. He didn't work and wouldn't provide any food if they married him.
- But the young women paid no attention to their parents. They didn't like the crane who worked and fished every day. The parents liked him because he always gave them some fish.
- The Hummingbird married the prettiest of the young women. After they were married they had a good time all the time.
- The Crane also asked for the hand of one of the young women, but was refused. He was told, "You are so ugly. You are not a good prospect," by the young woman. Now this was the same young woman who later married the Hummingbird.
- After a while, the beautiful young woman became hungry but the Hummingbird had never thought of any way to get food. She told him, "You don't think about anything but your looks. I'm going to leave this hungry house."
- She left and went to the Crane's house. There she said to the Crane, "Let's get married and we can eat together then because you know how to get food. I see you carrying some every day."
- The Crane replied, "I tried to marry you once and you rejected me. Now you can just stay with the hummingbird." His feelings had been hurt.
- Now the Hummingbird and Crane are not friends. They do not fly together and the Hummingbird packs at the Crane when he finds him around the Hummingbird's nesting place. They always fight.
Thunder and the Turtle were friends. One time they were talking to each other and the Turtle asked Thunder to be his fighting partner. Thunder asked the Turtle, "What can you do?"

The Turtle quickly ran and jumped over a small stick of wood and broke off a piece of the stick.

"This is what I can do," he said proudly as he walked back to the side of Thunder, "What can you do?"

Thunder said, "I can do this," and caused lightning to strike a nearby tree and shatter it into slivers.

Turtle was frightened and ran to a stream and jumped into the water. That's when the Turtle began making his home in the water. The reason is because he's afraid of Thunder and when it thunders and rains, he doesn't come out of the water.

Thunder frightened him forever so they never became fighting partners.

Like the folklore of many imaginative people, Cherokee stories tell the adventures of "The Little People" whom they often encounter. Here is a Cherokee story told by an elderly man that is being acted out here tonight in this excavated amphitheater.

THE LITTLE PEOPLE

"In the valley near my home there was a deep hole, and that is where these little people with magic powers lived. I sometimes went there and got together with them. They had a beautiful place to live. They used to have dances with music. Sometimes I would pass there at night and they were dancing and I could hear beautiful music. Sometimes I would just pass by, and at other times I would join them."

What would the old man say if he passed by here tonight? Would he join us?
The Rabbit - The Bear and the Buzzard

The Rabbit and the Bear lived many years ago. The Bear was fat and the Rabbit was lean. One day they cooked beans. They decided that they needed some seasoning for the beans. Since the Bear was fat, he cut himself in the side and used some of his fat as a seasoning for the beans. Later on, when the Bear was visiting the Rabbit, the Rabbit decided that he would try to get some fat off himself for his seasoning, but he nearly killed himself because he was so lean. The Rabbit decided that he needed a doctor, so the Bear went for one. He met the Crow first. "I'm not a doctor," said the Crow, "because I have black legs." Later the Bear met the Terrapin. The Bear asked him if he could doctor. The Terrapin said, "No, because I have red eyes." Still later, the Bear met the Buzzard and asked if he could doctor. "Yes, I'm a doctor," said the Buzzard. Then the Bear said, "All right, come with me." They went to the Rabbit's house and the Buzzard said, "When I doctor, all the doors must be closed." When the Buzzard closed the door, he grabbed the Rabbit and began to eat him. While this was happening, the Rabbit of course, cried out in pain. The Bear said, "Why is the Rabbit making all those noises?" "He is making those noises because every time I rub him, it hurts him," said the Buzzard. That's all.
The Way It Was

An old man speaks of the changing land. "We talk about how the woods used to be long ago. Acorns used to cover the ground. There were tall oak trees and acorns were thick out in the woods. People don't believe you now when you tell them, but that's the way it was. The trees were very large, and the ground in wintertime was covered with acorns. That was mast in the woods many years ago. When you tell this to the white people, they won't believe it. When the people wanted to fatten their hogs, they just let them live in the woods and they would return home as fat as could be.

Some people look back and say that those were the good old days. I look back too; I look back to those good times. It was good times in those days. People had an easy living. The Indians were left alone in the woods where they had all these things.

And when the sawmills came, well they done away with all that timber, you see, and we don't have the mast.

The sawmills did that."
CHEROKEE NATIONAL MUSEUM

The museum will serve to further communicate Cherokee history with professionally designed and prepared displays of priceless historical material. Now under construction and to be opened to the public in the Spring of 1974.

CHEROKEE HALL OF FAME

Prominent Cherokees who make significant contributions to the nation will be recognized by membership in this Hall of Fame and memorialized here at Tsa-La-Gi.

CHEROKEE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

This structure will contain the greatest collection of material written by or about Cherokees and their descendants to be found.
The old ways are swift birds—They fly away or die and leave no sign.

Here some of the Cherokee heritage is being passed on—

Cut into the stone facing of our National Archives Building in Washington, D.C. are these words: “WHAT IS PAST IS PROLOGUE.”

This message is being repeated here in the Green Country of Northeast Oklahoma where a history older than that of the United States is in the process of being preserved.

In the years to come, thousands and thousands of people will come to this place where history is being reenacted and recorded. Young and old, rich and poor, from all nations and all races, people will have here an opportunity to see the past and perhaps learn better preparation for the future.

This is an important contribution by the Cherokees to Oklahoma and to our Country.

We hope you return often, and profit from every visit.

David Hall
Governor
State of Oklahoma

W.W. Keeler
Principal Chief
of the Cherokees

THE GREAT PASSION PLAY — Eureka Springs, Ark., May 25 through Oct. 27, closed Monday and Thursday, performances 8:30 p.m.

ZION PASSION PLAY — More than 40 episodes in life and ministry of Jesus. Fridays, Saturdays, 8 p.m., throughout July and August. Passion Play Amphitheater, Dowie Memorial Drive, Zion, Illinois 60099.


TRAIL OF THE LONESOME PINE — John Fox, Jr.'s famous story adapted for the stage by dramatist Earl Hobson Smith. An exciting outdoor musical drama of proud mountain people. 10th season. Tuesday through Saturday nights, June 30 — September 1, 8 p.m. June Tailor Playhouse, Big Stone Gap, Virginia 24219.

TECUMSEH! — Allan W. Eckert's epic tragedy of the struggle between the Shawnee, the British and the Americans for supremacy in the Northwest Territory. 8:45 p.m., EDST, Tuesday through Sunday, Sugarcold Mountain Amphitheatre, Chillicothe, Ohio. July 1 through September 2. P.O. Box 73, Chillicothe, Ohio 45601, or phone (614) 774-2600.

AMERICAN OBERAMMERSBURG PASSION PLAY — Exciting, inspiring story of Jesus, with Val Balfour, is presented in English, nightly (except Monday and Thursday) June 30 — Labor Day at 8:30 p.m. at Strasburg, Va. Write Passion Play, Strasburg, Va. 22657. Phone 703-465-3688.

WILDERNESS ROAD — Paul Green's colorful, musical story of conflicts and passions of the Civil War. Nightly except Sundays 8:30 p.m. E.D.T. June 26 through September 2. Indiana Fort Theatre, Berea, Kentucky, Box 2355, Berea, Kentucky 40403. Phone (606) 986-9403.

SMOKY MOUNTAIN PASSION PLAY — Amphitheater — Rt. 73, Townsend, Tennessee. June 29 through September 3, 8:45 p.m., Monday through Saturday, and Labor Day. Phone 984-4111.
