

## **Oconostota**

*Oconostota (ca. 1710-1783) was the Warrior (skiagusta) of Chota and a Principal Chief. A powerful leader, he led the siege at Fort Loudoun that drove the British from the fort. Unfortunately for the Cherokee, the destruction of the fort provided only a brief respite from the tide that would eventually sweep the Cherokee from their homeland.*

*In his later years, Oconostota lived with Virginia Indian Agent John Martin at his home on the Long Island of the Holston River. The two men were very close and Oconostota requested that Martin accompany him back to his beloved Chota to be buried there. When death was finally near, Martin fashioned a canoe into a make-shift coffin and, following a ceremony reserved for only the greatest of his people, Oconostota, the Great Warrior of Chota, was laid to rest in front of the city's Council House where his voice had once carried the weight of the Cherokee Nation.*

*In the late 1960's, as T.V.A. was preparing to flood the Little Tennessee River to create Tellico Lake, University of Tennessee archaeologists, Dr. Jeff Chapman and Charles Faulkner, led an excavation of the region and found the Council House of Chota. They located the seven columns of the circular structure, which is said to represent the seven clans of the tribe, and a variety of other artifacts associated with it. In addition, they excavated the front entrance of the Council House and discovered the remains of a man between the ages of 69 and 72 believed to be Oconostota. This was confirmed by a pair of reading glasses which Oconostota owned and were buried with him.*

*"It says a lot about the stature of Oconostota among the Cherokee," said U.T. Archaeologist Dr. Charles Faulkner. "Their burial of him at the front door of the Chota Council House was a high honor that indicated he was regarded as being above the stature of most Cherokee leaders. The members of the Council would have to walk over his grave to enter the structure and remember his contributions to the Chota village."*

*The columns of the Chota Council House and his grave were placed back in their original positions, and then concrete was poured over them to prevent looting of the site. A memorial sits at the location of the Council House and a gravestone marks the location of Oconostota's grave. It is now under the dominion of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indian and overseen by the Sequoyah Birthplace Museum in Vonore. Visitors come here to honor Oconostota and remember a time when Chota was the capital of the Cherokee Nation.*

*Oconostota's grave and the memorial to Chota are located about 12 miles from the Sequoyah Birthplace Museum ([Put hyperlink below here](#)). From the museum, follow Hwy 360 to Hwy 455. Turn left onto Hwy 455 for about 5 miles, and then turn left onto County Road 461.*

[www.sequoyahmuseum.org/](http://www.sequoyahmuseum.org/)