

Sequoyah

Sequoyah was born circa 1776 at the village of Tuskegee, which was very near where the Sequoyah Birthplace Museum is located today. His father was Nathaniel Gist, a Virginia fur trader. His mother was Wut-teh, daughter of a Cherokee Chief.

Sequoyah fled Tennessee as a youth because of the encroachment of whites. He initially moved to Georgia, where he acquired skills working with silver. While living there, a man who purchased one of his works suggested that he sign his work just like the white silversmiths were doing. Sequoyah considered the idea and since he did not know how to write, he visited Charles Hicks, a wealthy farmer in the area who wrote English. Hicks showed Sequoyah how to spell his name, writing the letters on a piece of paper.

He moved to Willstown, Alabama, where he and other Cherokees enlisted on the side of the United States under General Andrew Jackson to fight the British troops and the Creek Indians in the War of 1812. He fought in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, which effectively ended the war against the Creek Redsticks. During the war, he became convinced of the necessity of literacy for his people. Cherokees were unable to write letters home, read military orders, or record events as they occurred.

After the war, Sequoyah began in earnest to create a writing system. Using a phonetic system, where each sound made in speech was represented by a symbol, he created "Talking Leaves", 85 letters that make up the Cherokee syllabary. A short time later, in a Cherokee Court in Chattooga, he read an argument about a boundary line from a sheet of paper and word spread quickly of Sequoyah's invention.

In 1821, twelve years after the original idea, the Cherokee Nation adopted Sequoyah's syllabary as its own. Within months thousands of Cherokee became literate. By 1825 much of the Bible and numerous hymns had been translated into Cherokee. By 1828 Cherokees were publishing the "Cherokee Phoenix," the first national bi-lingual newspaper, along with religious pamphlets, educational materials and legal documents.

In recognition of his contributions, the Cherokee Nation awarded Sequoyah a silver medal created in his honor and a lifetime literary pension. He continued to serve Cherokee people as a statesman and diplomat until his death.

*To learn more about Sequoyah, visit the Sequoyah Birthplace Museum at Vonore, TN
www.sequoyahmuseum.org/*

The Cherokee Syllabary

D _a	R _e	T _i	Ꭰ _o	Ꭱ _u	i _v
Ꭶ _{ga} Ꭷ _{ka}	Ꭵ _{ge}	Ꭶ _{gi}	Ꭲ _{go}	Ꭳ _{gu}	Ꭴ _{gv}
Ꭸ _{ha}	Ꭶ _{he}	Ꭹ _{hi}	Ꭳ _{ho}	Ꭴ _{hu}	Ꭵ _{hv}
Ꭶ _{la}	Ꭷ _{le}	Ꭶ _{li}	Ꭴ _{lo}	Ꭲ _{lu}	Ꭳ _{lv}
Ꭶ _{ma}	Ꭲ _{me}	Ꭸ _{mi}	Ꭶ _{mo}	Ꭳ _{mu}	
Ꭲ _{na} Ꭶ _{hna} Ꭲ _{nah}	Ꭳ _{ne}	Ꭲ _{ni}	Ꭴ _{no}	Ꭵ _{nu}	Ꭶ _{nv}
Ꭲ _{qua}	Ꭴ _{que}	Ꭳ _{qui}	Ꭵ _{quo}	Ꭶ _{quu}	Ꭷ _{quv}
Ꭲ _{sa} Ꭴ _s	Ꭲ _{se}	Ꭳ _{si}	Ꭶ _{so}	Ꭳ _{su}	Ꭴ _{sv}
Ꭲ _{da} Ꭶ _{ta}	Ꭶ _{de} Ꭲ _{te}	Ꭲ _{di} Ꭳ _{ti}	Ꭴ _{do}	Ꭴ _{du}	Ꭵ _{dv}
Ꭴ _{dla} Ꭲ _{tla}	Ꭲ _{tle}	Ꭳ _{tli}	Ꭵ _{tlo}	Ꭶ _{tlu}	Ꭴ _{tlv}
Ꭲ _{tsa}	Ꭳ _{tse}	Ꭴ _{tsi}	Ꭴ _{tso}	Ꭵ _{tsu}	Ꭶ _{tsv}
Ꭲ _{wa}	Ꭴ _{we}	Ꭵ _{wi}	Ꭶ _{wo}	Ꭳ _{wu}	Ꭴ _{wv}
Ꭴ _{ya}	Ꭲ _{ye}	Ꭳ _{yi}	Ꭲ _{yo}	Ꭴ _{yu}	Ꭵ _{yv}

A syllabary is an alphabet where each symbol stands for a syllable. In Cherokee, there are 85 symbols, each representing a different syllable and sound. There are 6 vowels and an "S" that stands alone. The remaining 78 syllables are a combination of consonant and vowel. The "S" is used as a prefix and suffix - without it, 17 more symbols would be needed. There are no sounds for the English sounds B, F, J, P, R, V, X, or TH.

Other sources of information
[Visit Trail of Tears Website](#)
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