## Sequoyah

லிந்√ு Ssiquoya, as he signed his name, or 4√ு Se-quo-ya, as his name is often spelled today in Cherokee



He was given the name George Gist by his father. As a result of an early hunting accident, he was given the name Sequoyah which means "pig's foot" in Cherokee. After being permanently crippled, he developed a talent for craftsmanship, making silver ornaments and blacksmithing. His handicap became the source of both ridicule and a blessing in his life.

Sequoyah married a Cherokee woman and had a family. He and his family moved to Cherokee County, Georgia. Later, he and other Cherokees enlisted to fight on the side of the United States for General Andrew Jackson in the War of 1812 against the British and Creek Nation.

Sequoyah never learned to read or write English, but while in Georgia he became captivated by whiteman's ability to communicate by making marks on paper and reading from "talking leaves." He began work on developing a Cherokee writing system in 1809. During the war, he became convinced he was on the right path. Unlike white soldiers, he did not write letters home and could not read military orders.

After the war Sequoyah began in earnest to create symbols that would make words. He and his daughter, Ayoka, played games using the symbols. He became obsessed with developing a new Cherokee alphabet writing system because he knew it would help his people. Sequoyah became a recluse in his obsession to perfect the writing system. He endured constant ridicule by friends and even family members, who said he was insane or practicing witchcraft.

Sequoyah moved west to Arkansas and continued his work. Finally, after twelve years of labor, ridicule and abuse he finally reduced the complex language into 86 symbols, each representing a unique sound of Cherokee speech. In 1821, after a demonstration of the system to amazed tribal elders, the Cherokee Nation adopted his alphabet, now called a 'syllabary'.

In 1824 the Cherokee National Council at New Echota, Georgia, honored him with a silver medal, which he proudly wore for the rest of his life, and later with an annuity of \$300, which his widow continued to receive after his death.

By 1825, the Bible and numerous religious hymns and pamphlets, educational materials and legal documents and books of every description were translated into the Cherokee language.

In 1827, the Cherokee National Council appropriated funds to print the first Indian newspaper published in the United States.

"...Early the following year, the hand press and syllabary characters in type were shipped by water from Boston and transported overland the last two hundred miles by wagon to the capital of the Cherokee Nation, New Echota. The inaugural issue of the newspaper, "Tsa la gi Tsu lehisanunhi" or "Cherokee Phoenix", printed in parallel columns in Cherokee and English appeared on February 21, 1828."

In 1828, Sequoyah moved with the Western Cherokee to Indian Territory (Oklahoma). He was active in tribal politics and served as an envoy to Washington D.C. to assist displaced Eastern Cherokees.

His memory is honored in the names of two species of giant redwood trees and Sequoia National Park in California named after him.

Indian people were freed from the bonds of illiteracy by a poor, crippled, uneducated and ridiculed half-breed. His single-handed achievement marks the only known instance of an individual creating a totally new system of writing. Today, his legacy lives on in the hearts and minds of his beloved Cherokee people.





