

Watts for Dinner *with* THE CHEROKEE NATION



Cherokee Indians are Native American people who settled in the southeastern region of the United States in and around Georgia, the Carolinas and eastern Tennessee. Linguistically, they are part of the Iroquoian language family. Historians have recorded an oral tradition that tells of the tribe having migrated south long ago from the Great Lakes region.

The Cherokee refer to themselves as *Tsalagi*, which means *Principal People*. The distinction as one of the Five Civilized Tribes was given the Cherokee for having assimilated numerous and advanced cultural practices.

Around 1809, Sequoyah began developing a written form of the Cherokee language. His experiences as a silversmith dealing regularly with white settlers convinced him that the Cherokee needed to develop written communication. In 1821, he introduced the Cherokee syllabary, the first written syllabic form of a North American Indian language.

In 1819, the Cherokee began holding council meetings at New Town, near present-day Calhoun, Georgia. New Town became capital of the Cherokee Nation and was renamed New Echota. Sequoyah's syllabic alphabet was adopted and, in 1827, the tribe drafted a constitution modeled after the United States.

A dark chapter in the tribe's history unfolded when the Indian Removal Act authorized the relocation of Native Americans east of the Mississippi to a new Indian Territory. Over 16,000 Cherokee were forcibly relocated westward to Indian Territory in 1838-1839, a journey known as the Trail of Tears. Escorted by federal troops, members of the tribe marched over 800 miles across Tennessee, Kentucky, Illinois, Missouri and Arkansas. As many as 4,000 Cherokee died as the result of disease, exposure and starvation.

The federal government dissolved the former Cherokee Nation to make way for the incorporation of Indian Territory into the new state of Oklahoma, and from 1906 until 1975, the structure and function of Cherokee tribal government were not clearly defined. The tribe drafted a constitution that was ratified in 1976 and the tribe received federal recognition.

The Cherokee tribe today is a sovereign Indian nation under federal law and treaties. The tribe is headquartered at the W.W. Keeler Complex near Tahlequah, the capital of the Cherokee Nation. Tribal jurisdiction extends to an area covering 14 counties in northeast Oklahoma. With nearly 300,000 citizens, the Cherokee Nation is the largest of the 565 federally recognized Native tribes in the United States.

The Cherokee Nation has a constitutional government. Executive power is held by the principal chief, an elected position. The council serves as the tribe's elected legislature, consisting of representatives

from districts across the tribe's jurisdiction. The tribe has an appointed supreme court and district court, as well as a marshal service and a variety of governmental commissions.

The Cherokee Nation has achieved unprecedented expansion in economic growth, equality, and prosperity for its citizens. It has significant business, corporate, real estate, and agricultural interests. The tribe is the largest employer in northeastern Oklahoma, employing over 8,000 people in its government and in various business entities. Tribal businesses are controlled by Cherokee Nation Businesses (CNB). CNB is incorporated under the laws of the tribe and is wholly-owned by Cherokee Nation. CNB pays a dividend to the Cherokee government used for services to the Cherokee people. The tribe and its business entities have an annual payroll of over \$240 million and are a powerful and positive economic and political force in eastern Oklahoma.

The Cherokee Nation, with a government budget of over \$600 million, provides services and opportunities for its people. It has constructed health clinics throughout Oklahoma, contributed to community development programs, built roads and bridges, constructed learning facilities and universities for its citizens, instilled the practice of self-reliance in its citizens and revitalized language immersion programs for its children and youth.

The Cherokee Nation preserves its culture and heritage through the operation of the Cherokee Heritage Center in Tahlequah. The tribe also hosts the Cherokee National Holiday on Labor Day weekend each year. Some 90,000 Cherokee citizens travel to Tahlequah for the festivities. It also publishes the Cherokee Phoenix, the tribal newspaper, published in both English and the Sequoyah syllabary.

Pumpkin Fry Bread

2 cups sifted flour	3/4 cup brown sugar
4 teaspoons baking powder	1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon salt	1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
1 egg	1/4 teaspoon vanilla
2 cups fresh pumpkin	1/2 cup warm water or milk
<i>(or 16 ounces canned pumpkin)</i>	

Sift together flour, baking powder and salt. Stir in beaten egg and add remaining ingredients (additional warm water or milk may be needed to soften dough). Knead dough lightly on a floured surface. Roll dough into half-inch thick strips and cut into two-inch pieces. Drop into deep fat and fry until brown on both sides. Serve hot with butter, honey or powdered sugar. Try substituting pumpkin with sweet potatoes for a delicious alternative.

Bean Bread

1 cup of cornmeal	1 cup melted shortening
1 cup flour	1 beaten egg
2 teaspoons baking powder	2 tablespoons honey
1 tablespoon sugar	4 cups drained brown beans
2 cups milk	

Set beans aside and mix all other ingredients thoroughly. Fold beans into batter. Pour batter into greased, heated pan. Bake at 450 degrees F until brown (usually 30 minutes).

An artist rendering of the new Cherokee Nation Health Clinic set to open in Vinita during the summer of 2012.

