

John Ross

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John Ross

Essential Question: What role did John Ross play in Cherokee removal?

John Ross was born in Turkey Town on the Coosa River in Alabama in 1790. His family then moved to Lookout Mountain where his father ran a store. The store served the Cherokee community and allowed Ross to learn about traditional Cherokee customs and traditions. Ross' biracial family spoke English at home and practiced European traditions. In fact, Ross may not have spoken Cherokee himself.

Ross attended school in Tennessee and married. He began to sell goods to the United States government and ran a store near present day Chattanooga on the Tennessee River. By 1827, Ross had accumulated enough wealth to begin a plantation and ferry business near the junction of the Oostanaula and Etowah rivers. During this same period the Cherokee formed the new Cherokee Nation with a Constitution based on that of the United States. Ross was known for his diplomatic skills and in 1828 was chosen to lead the newly formed nation as Principal Chief.

At the same time white Georgians were increasing their demand for the removal of the Cherokees from the Southeast. When gold was discovered on Cherokee land in 1828, a gold rush began and made the demands for removal even stronger. In 1830, President Jackson pushed Congress to pass the Indian Removal Act. Ross believed that because the Cherokee had formed a republican government, had the support of Whig politicians and the United States Supreme Court, they would not be removed. Other Cherokee leaders, including Major Ridge, a onetime ally of Ross saw it differently. They believed that the best hope for the Cherokee was to take the money offered by the United States and move west on their own terms. In 1835, Major Ridge and other Cherokee leaders signed the treaty of New Echota without Ross' knowledge or consent. Though Ross' allies in Congress tried to block it, the treaty passed in the Senate by one vote. Ross continued to fight removal until it became inevitable. He then negotiated with the United States government to provide for supplies along the way. Sadly, his preparations could not prevent the horrors of the journey that came to be called the Trail of Tears.

Upon reaching Indian Territory, present day Oklahoma, Ross encouraged his people to establish farms, businesses and schools. It was a turbulent time for the Cherokee nation due to the split over removal, but Ross retained his power. When the Civil War began in 1861, Ross first supported the Confederacy, but then shifted his support to the Union. As with the issue of removal, the Cherokee were divided during the Civil War. Ross was reelected by pro-union Cherokees and continued to be recognized by the United States as leader of the Cherokee. John Ross remained Principal Chief of the Cherokee until his death in 1866.

Source: "John Ross." *New Georgia Encyclopedia*. Georgia Humanities Council, 2014. Web. 28 June 2014. <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/john-ross-1790-1866>

John Ross and Removal Primary Sources

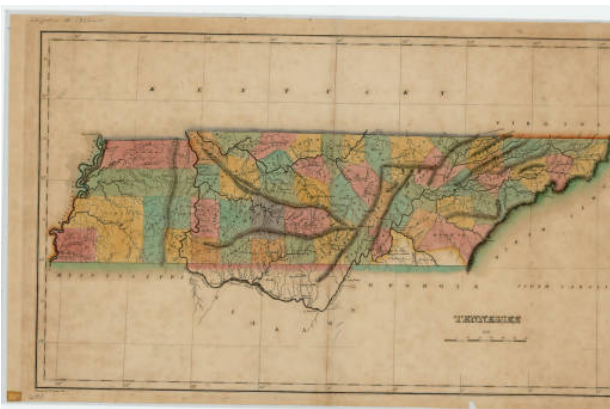
These sources can all be found at the Tennessee State Library and Archives. Click on the link to the [Education Outreach](#) site. You can download jpegs of the files by clicking the download icon in the upper right hand corner.



[John Ross](#)



[Major Ridge](#)



[Tennessee Map, circa 1822](#)

Map shows Cherokee land in southeast

