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An interview with S. W. Ross, Park Hill, Oklahoma
By- Elizabeth Ross, Investigator
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CHIEF BOWLES' SWORD

An interesting relic, the sword once worn by Chief Bowles of the Texas Cherokee group, was once to be seen in the executive office at Tahlequah. During the 1890's William H. Barker, member of the National Council from the Canadian District serving as speaker of the Council, presented the sword of Chief Bowles to the Cherokee Nation. The weapon had been in possession of a Masonic Lodge in Texas.

Chief Bowles, also referred to as Colonel Bowles, and sometimes as "The Bowl", was of half white and half Cherokee blood. His full name appears to have been John Bowles, but the given name very seldom receives mention in documents having reference to the leader of the Texas band in the two battles in which the Cherokees were defeated and driven from Texas.

As a member of the Western Cherokee group, Bowles lived in Arkansas Territory, but becoming dissatisfied with a boundary line within which the settlement where he lived was

not included, he assembled a number of followers and left Arkansas Territory; journeying to Texas which was then Mexican Territory. In course of time Bowles and his band occupied a fertile region within the boundaries of Texas. He had a powerful friend in General Sam Houston, the hero of Texas independence. Houston, who became President of the Republic of Texas following his defeat of Santa Anna, the Mexican Commander, in the battle of San Jacinto, favored the acquisition of land by the Cherokees. However, when Mirabeau B. Lamar became President of the Republic of Texas, the Cherokees soon found themselves in a critical condition. President Lamar soon announced that the Cherokees, as well as other Indians, would be expelled from within the Republic. The efforts of General Houston in behalf of the Cherokees met with failure and soon the Texan army marched against the Cherokees. In the two contests which ~~resulted the~~ Cherokees were defeated and scattered and eventually most of the survivors reached the Indian Territory. The battles occurred in 1839, the same year in which the Cherokee Nation was established in Indian Territory.

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Chief Bowles, still active at the age of eighty-four years, showed conspicuous bravery. He wore a military hat, a sash and sword, gifts from General Sam Houston, and was mounted on a fine horse, described as a "paint horse", a sorrel animal with white splotches or markings. In the course of the last battle Chief Bowles received a severe wound in the thigh. His horse received wounds and the old man ~~dismounted~~ and tried to walk from the field but he was unable to do so and sat down upon the ground facing the soldiers as they advanced. Among the soldiers was John H. Reagan, a young man who in later years became one of the distinguished men of his state. Reagan, as he wrote in his recollections of the battle, felt great admiration for the old Chief and hoped that his life would be spared, but Robert W. Smith, a Captain in the Texas army, rushed forward and, before Reagan could prevent, shot Chief Bowles through the head. Captain Smith then took possession of the sword worn by the Chief and eventually the weapon was presented to the Masonic Lodge where it was long preserved.

The sword was not a regulation officer's sword but was a long and heavy blade, similar to the weapons carried

by United States cavalymen in the early years of the nineteenth century. Upon dissolution of the Cherokee Government the Bowles sword was kept for awhile in the Carnegie library at Tahlequah, but it was finally removed from the library and its present whereabouts are unknown. Somewhat recently the highly erroneous statement has been made in a newspaper article that the sword of Chief Bowles is preserved in Cherokee Lodge NO. 10 A. F. and A. M. at Tahlequah.