

ROSS, ELIZABETH

SEQUOYAH - ROSS BUSTS

7488

458

Elizabeth Ross  
September, 13, 1937

## BUSTS OF NOBLES

Two white marble busts, one of Sequoyah, or George Guess, originator of the Cherokee alphabet, and the other of John Ross, principal Chief of the Cherokee nation, were long preserved at the Cherokee National Female Seminary at Park Hill, and later at the new seminary in Tahlequah. The busts were executed by Miss Minnie Ream, later Mrs. Richard L. Hoxie, who maintained a studio at Washington,

---

D. C., for a number of years.

As both subjects had been dead for some years when Miss Ream began her career as a sculptress at Washington, she gained her information concerning their features

---

from pictures. A fine likeness of Sequoyah was found in a volume relating to Indian tribes and leaders, the authors of which were McKinney and Hall. The original portrait of Sequoyah, painted in 1828 by Charles B. King was also accessible in the gallery of the War Department.

A number of likenesses of John Ross were available.

According to Cherokee citizens of bygone years who personally knew both Sequoyah and John Ross, the busts are

---

- 2 -

excellent representations of these noted members of the Cherokee Nation.

It is probable that the visit of Sequoyah to Washington was the only occasion in his lifetime that he had opportunity of viewing the capital of the United States. He was a member of a delegation from the western Cherokee nation, the lands occupied by them being situated between the White and Arkansas Rivers. Several other prominent Western Cherokees were delegates with Sequoyah. Business of importance made

necessary their journey to Washington. While there the delegation was called upon to sign a treaty, often called the treaty of 1828, under the terms of which the western group agreed to relinquish the lands down

in Arkansas Territory and remove farther west into a region which later became called the Indian Territory.

The delegates did not wish to sign the treaty, but

were subjected to such pressure from the War Department that all attached their signatures. But having done so they were afraid to return to their homes. A

law of the western Cherokees forbade the signing of a treaty or agreement of any kind without authority of

- 3 -

the general Council. Any delegate or individual signing an unauthorized treaty was regarded as guilty of treason, subject to the death penalty.

The Secretary of War, however, prepared a written message which informed the western Cherokees that the members of the delegation had been compelled to sign the treaty and were not guilty of a treasonable act. The delegation then returned home and were not molested. But the belief was entertained by many that the members of the delegation received good-sized sums of money as an inducement to agree to and sign the treaty of 1828, so it has been related.

The best pictures in existence of Sequoyah are those which have been copied from pictures of the original painting in Washington. Some portraits by amateur artists are excellent and some are very poor. Photographs made from some of the latter bear small resemblance to genuine likenesses of the subject.

A photograph for which some unknown Cherokee seems to have posed was made several decades ago. There was only one portrait ever made of Sequoyah, that of 1828

- 4 -

which shows him without vestige of beard or mustache, but the photograph mentioned depicts a bony-faced man wearing a small mustache.

( Note : The teachers of Cherokee National Schools met in Tahlequah in the summer of each year to spend several days discussing methods of teaching as well as other matters of interest and importance to the teachers. William P. Ross was president of the Cherokee National Board of education several years at intervals, and was included among those who addressed the assembled teachers on several occasions.

As a delegate on behalf of the Cherokee Nation, Mr. Ross visited Washington on several occasions, and after one of these visits in an address before the Teacher's Institute he said, " I saw an artist modeling a bust. The artist was Miss Vinnie Beam, whose Abraham Lincoln holds a conspicuous position in the statuary hall of the capitol. The bust was that of Sequoyah."

The information in this manuscript comes in part from old Cherokee documents. For the most part, however, it is the personal knowledge of the writer and her brother, to whom these Cherokee happenings are tradition. Ed. )