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CHEROKEE SECRET COUNCIL

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Several years after the close of the Civil War, bills were introduced from time to time in Congress having for their object the erection of a territorial form of government for the Indian Territory. Little consideration was manifested for the welfare of the various tribes and nations of Indians occupying the territory, and as a consequence much uneasiness prevailed among the Indians.

Some citizens of the Cherokee Nation favored the proposed change in government, but a large majority was greatly opposed to it. There were times when it seemed that one of the objectionable bills would be passed, but the interests of the Cherokees, as well as of other Indians, were ably defended and the tribal governments continued for some years, or until the various tribes were more ready for allotment of lands and the advent of state government.

It was during the early portion of the decade of the seventies that an organization which has been called the "Secret Council" came into notice, and continued in existence for a number of years. The principal object of this secret organization was the discouragement of any effort on the part of Cherokee citizens to aid or encourage in any

manner the sentiment in favor of opening the Indian lands.

The Cherokee laws strictly prohibited citizens of that nation from taking part in any plans or negotiations having in view the opening of lands to outside settlers, or for the sale of land. Those who ignored the laws to some extent in advocating a change, were regarded as little less than traitors.

Several of those who were known to favor the proposed territorial form of government lived at Tahlequah or in its vicinity, and against these persons the "Secret Council" manifested stern opposition. One of the agitators was shot and seriously wounded by a person who had been delegated to do so by the secret organization. Other agitators, fearing the vengeance of the secret organization, fled to distant sections and remained until conditions became more settle.

Several mysterious acts of violence were said to have been the result of orders given by the chief captain of the "Secret Council". Members of the council considered and decided whether or not persons suspected of treacherous acts, deserved severe punishment.

Eventually the Secret Council disbanded; as the years passed those who had once been members, died, one by one

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until at this period none so far as is known are alive.

Headquarters of the organization were among the woodlands near Fourteen Mile Creek.

Prospective members were subjected to close questioning, and if found satisfactory were initiated, and given signs and pass words. After having taken an "iron-clad" oath each new member was required to deposit the sum of twenty-five cents with the treasurer. He was then informed that the silver coin would be used to purchase ammunition for the firearms which would be used in his execution in case he disregarded his oath of allegiance to the "Secret Council".

Authority: Mr. S. W. Ross of Park Hill and the writer of this manuscript have known the facts above set forth for many years and have discussed the same with the late J. M. French, long a resident at Tahlequah. Also with John M. Smith, a white man, who asserted that he was the only white man ever to become a member of the organization. In this way the subject matter is well authenticated.