

ROSS, ELIZABETH

WHITE INTERPRETER

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Elizabeth Ross,
Interviewer,
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"White Interpreter"

Interpreters were employed by both the Cherokee National Senate and Council. When bills were introduced they were read in both the English and Cherokee languages, for there were in both legislative bodies members who had but small knowledge of the English, and spoke the native tongue only in their conversation and in making speeches. The interpreters, familiar with both languages, interpreted the remarks and speeches of full blood or native members into English, and similarly remarks and speeches in English into the Cherokee language. Usually Cherokees were selected as interpreters, but there was an exception; a number of years before the dissolution of the Cherokee Nation when a white man, a widely-known Presbyterian preacher was appointed as interpreter in the House of Council.

The Reverend A. N. Chamberlin, a white-haired and bearded man, badly crippled, was the son of the Reverend William Chamberlain, a missionary to the Cherokees when they lived east of the Mississippi River. Amory Nelson Chamberlain, the son, grew up in a settlement in which

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lived many Cherokees and became so familiar with their language that he understood and spoke it with the ease of a native. Upon the removal of the Cherokees to Indian Territory, A. N. Chamberlain removed also and his after lifetime was spent in the Cherokee Nation.

In the period of the Civil War, A. N. Chamberlain met with a distressing experience. While traveling from one section of the Territory to another he had occasion to cross a swollen stream, his feet became soaked, and the weather was bitterly cold in the time of winter. Both feet were frozen and no physician was to be had. Amputation soon became necessary, in which emergency A. N. Chamberlain filed teeth into the blade of a case or table knife, thus making a small saw, and without hesitancy amputated the frozen feet. One foot he amputated across its middle, of the other only the heel was left. He, of course, became a lifelong cripple.

After the close of the Civil War, A. N. Chamberlain preached at various places in the Cherokee Nation. At one time, near the beginning of the eighth decade of the last century, he served as superintendent of the Cherokee National Female Seminary at Park Hill. (He had married a

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Miss Hoyt, member of a prominent Cherokee family).

Also he preached on occasion in the old Park Hill Presbyterian Church which stood near the site of the early day mission school near Park Hill heights.

A more proficient interpreter than A. N. Chamberlain never served the National Council, according to competent authority. He was one of a few white men who were widely known as being thoroughly familiar with the difficult Cherokee tongue, and in practically all instances such white men had spent their boyhood days among the native Cherokees.

When matters of importance engaged the attention of the Council and many of the members spoke for or against pending measures, the veteran interpreter spent many hours repeating the various remarks into English or Cherokee.

Authorities: Proceedings of Cherokee Council; personal narrative of the Reverend A. N. Chamberlain, personal recollections.