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VIRTUAL VISION QUEST

led by Wanda Patterson, Chair

American Indians Committee

Fielding Lewis Chapter NSDAR

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The early Cherokee home of the Adairs was crumbling in the mid 1970's.

Historic Cherokee structure home of famed Adairs

Over 40 years ago I explored a huge log house which had reportedly been the home of Cherokee Indians in early Gordon County, Georgia. The house, which was

covered in wood siding at some point, was crumbling; and the roof was caved in, leaving a hole about the size of a VW bus. The floor below the hole was caved in with a similarly sized opening, displaying huge tree trunks which had served as the joists on which the floors were laid. The wreck was on farmland recently purchased by a friend of my father's; and the owner had given me permission to see the house, so long as I did not try to enter the structure. He stressed the danger of falling or encountering poisonous snakes. I couldn't resist exploring the first floor, despite the danger.

I couldn't rest until I began researching the house and the Cherokee family who had lived there. Research was easier than I expected because I found that the "Freeman – Hurt House" was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. The name "Freeman" comes from the family who owned the property after the Cherokee Land Lottery of 1832, and "Hurt" denotes the well known family of later owners who founded the Trust Company of Georgia and were railroad and Atlanta trolley tycoons. The original log cabin had been built by George Washington Adair. Adair's father, "Black Watt" Adair, served on the Cherokee National Committee, and G.W.'s grandfather was a Scotsman who had married a Cherokee woman, thus making the Adairs half-breeds. The family was well-to-do, both financially and politically, in the Cherokee Nation.

Called Rockdale Plantation, the Adair home was listed on the 1835 Census of the Cherokee Nation as a plantation with 30 fertile acres in cultivation, eight separate buildings, including a 1½- story dwelling house, an 18-square-foot cook house, slave quarters for five slaves, an overseer's house, fruit trees, and 23 acres of improved land. The plantation was located on the Sally Hughes Road (later becoming part of Hwy. 411), so the property also included a "Traveler's Rest," a one-story house which served as lodging for travelers who passed on the Sally Hughes Road. According to the application for the National Register, the interiors of both the Traveler's Rest and the main dwelling house were painted with the traditional Cherokee colors such as those in the Chief Vann House.

The plantation house and the Traveler's Rest remain in good condition today rather than being destroyed during the Civil War because General Sherman attended West Point with the brother of Major James Freeman, the owner of the property at the time of the war. Another Civil War connection to the property is that when Union soldiers camped on the grounds of the plantation, many of them scribbled their names on the front exterior wall of the Traveler's Rest. Their names are still readable today, and many have been verified as Union participants in the war.

When President Andrew Jackson and the state of Georgia were trying to remove all

Native Americans from east of the Mississippi, various attempts were made by white Americans to block removal. Perhaps the most effective voice in support of Native rights was that of Jeremiah Everts, secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Everts wrote 24 essays during the fall of 1829 called "Essays on the Present Crisis in the Condition of the Indians." The essays were printed anonymously in over 40 newspapers under the pseudonym "William Penn." The articles were masterpieces of pro-Indian propaganda, and although their contents were a conclusive argument against removal, they were unsuccessful. However, "William Penn" and his efforts on their behalf became a hero to Indians. In coming years, many Native sons were named after him, including George Washington Adair's son, William Penn Adair.

When President Jackson ignored the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling against Indian Removal and the state of Georgia passed punishing laws to drive the Cherokees out of the state, a group of Cherokees without legal authority signed the Treaty of New Echota, selling the Cherokee Nation for five million dollars, an act which led to the Trail of Tears. Among the twenty signers were George Washington Adair and his father-in-law, John Martin. The signers and their families realized that they should leave Georgia immediately to avoid danger from angry members of the tribe. Thus, William Penn Adair and his family left for Indian Territory in 1837.

William Penn Adair attended Cherokee schools in Indian Territory and studied law. He became a Freemason and served the Cherokee Nation as a senator, a justice of the Cherokee Supreme Court, and Assistant Principal Chief of the Nation. Throughout the 1860's and 1870's he served as a delegate from the Cherokee Nation to Washington, D.C.

Adair was described as being "six foot and two inches in height, magnetic, logical and frankly agreeable, the ablest and most brilliant of all Cherokees." He was friends with Cherokee Clem Rogers, father of William Penn Adair Rogers - famed humorist Will Rogers.

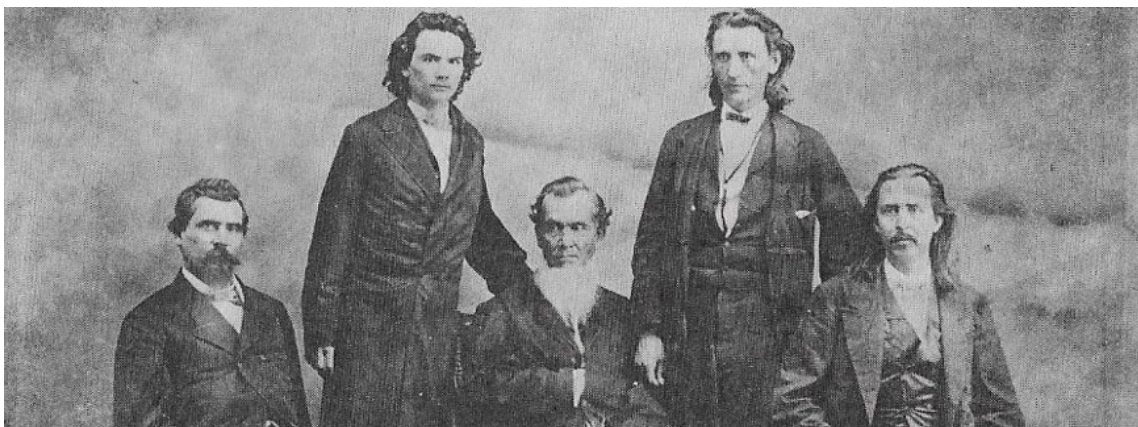


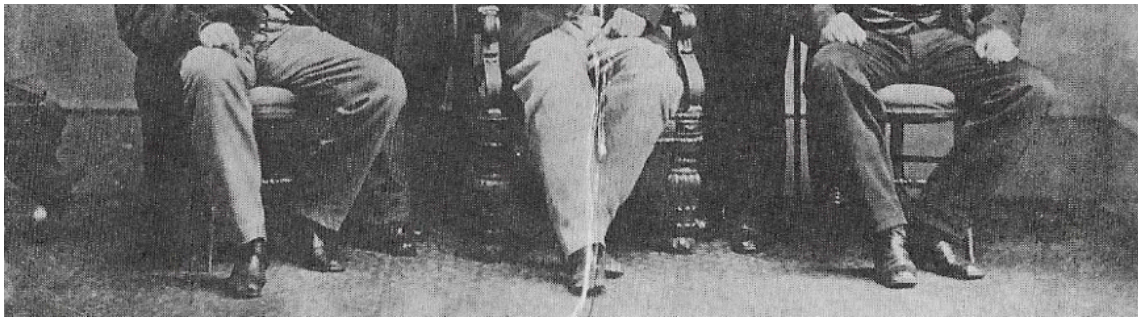


William Penn Adair

When the Civil War invaded the Cherokee Nation in Indian Territory, Adair served in the Confederate Army in the First Regiment of Cherokee Mounted Volunteers under General Stand Watie. Adair rose to the rank of Captain and saw action in the Battle of Pea Ridge in 1862. He was captured in July, 1862, and taken to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, after which he was taken to Vicksburg and was part of a prisoner exchange later that year. Soon he was back in action and was given command of the Second Cherokee Mounted Volunteers with the rank of Colonel.

After many Cherokees, as well as Creeks, Chickasaws, and Choctaws, fled Union troops and refugeeed south to Texas, food and clothing were in short supply. Stand Watie, by then elected Chief of the Cherokees, appointed Adair to oversee relief for the refugees. (Also serving as Brigadier General of the Confederates, Stand Watie held out until June 23, 1865, 20 days after General Lee surrendered.) Adair appealed to Federal authorities for relief for the Native refugees, estimating that approximately 15,000 needed to be fed. Adair's urgent appeal led to supply depots, suppliers of food, and a special agent to oversee the operation to aid to refugees.





Southern Cherokee delegates to Washington in 1866 to negotiate a post-war treaty with the government: (l – r) John Rollin Ridge, Saladin Watie, Richard Fields, Elias Cornelius Boudinot, and William Penn Adair.

When the war was concluded, two delegations of Cherokees went to Washington to negotiate a peace treaty with the U.S. Government. One delegation was headed by the original Cherokee Chief, John Ross. The second delegation represented the Southern Cherokees, those who had fought with the Confederacy. The second delegation tried to persuade the government to divide the Cherokee Nation and treasury into two parts, making the Southern Cherokees into a separate nation. They were not successful.

William Penn Adair died in Washington, D.C., in 1880. He was buried in Arlington National Cemetery; however, his body was transferred to the Tahlequah City Cemetery in the Cherokee capital of Tehlequah, Oklahoma, at the expense of the Cherokee Nation. Three weeks after Adair's burial in Tehlequah, Chief Dennis B. Bushyhead made the following statement:

“A faithful, honest, and true patriot, and able statesman and kind friend, his (*Adair's*) death is a National loss – it is more. It is a loss to the Indian race and will be felt keenly by every Nation and tribe, for his voice has been heard in appeal of defense for all, and they, as well as we, have looked up to him as a leader, counselor, and guide.”





The Colonel William Penn Adair Chapter, UDC, 1913.

Rockdale Plantation is now an official site on the Trail of Tears National Historical Trail. The 6,000-square-foot “big house” has been fully restored with six bedrooms and six fireplaces. Interior paint colors have been professionally matched to look as the house did in the 1700’s. The property still contains the remains of a two-story cook house and the Traveler’s Rest, and a well, plus two ponds. The property is located off Hwy 411. Unfortunately the plantation is privately owned and is no longer open to the public without special arrangement with the owner. It is a shame that more people cannot see the beautifully restored interiors; however, it is understandable that the owners are careful. More than once they have surprised relics hunters on the property with backhoes; and a lady was found on a ladder, trying to remove the historic hex symbol from the second-story gable!





The beautifully restored Rockdale Plantation stands the test of time.

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