

The Cherokee Syllabary from Script to Print

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Abstract. The development of the Cherokee syllabary from script to print happened during a time in the tribe's history when great pressures were upon them to civilize, adopt English and the Roman alphabet, and establish a government. Between 1821 and 1828, the syllabary itself went through considerable change from the manuscript version to the print version recognized today. These changes remark on the sociocultural pressures of the time and reveal that the tribe had a larger stake in developing the script into print than previously understood. When the Cherokee syllabary became available in print, it facilitated Cherokee identity creation as a tribe and political position as a nation.

Introduction

Presented to the Tribal Council in 1821, the eighty-six-character Cherokee writing system invented by Sequoyah became widely used by the tribe within the span of a few years—without mass education and print to facilitate its spread. With the advent of printed Cherokee in 1827, the Cherokee published one of the first Native American newspapers in Cherokee and English, *The Cherokee Phoenix*, even as they continued to use the manuscript version of the syllabary in a range of genres. The arrangement and style of the syllabary shown here is often credited to Samuel A. Worcester, a missionary who worked tirelessly with the Cherokee in the early 1800s (see fig. 1).¹ His version of the “Cherokee Alphabet” is the one most commonly seen in Cherokee stores, language resources, and books (Bender 2002). “It is important to note,” writes Margaret Bender (2002), “that it is largely the *printed* syllabary as codified by Worcester in the *Phoenix* . . . that is seen” by the North Carolinian Cherokee as being the standard for linguistic

| Cherokee Alphabet. | | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| D _a | R _e | T _i | Ꭰ _o | O _u | i _v |
| S _{ga} Ꭰ _{ka} | F _{ge} | Y _{gi} | A _{go} | J _{gu} | E _{gv} |
| V _{ha} | P _{he} | A _{hi} | F _{ho} | Γ _{hu} | Ꭱ _{hv} |
| W _{ta} | Ꭰ _{te} | P _{ti} | G _{to} | M _{tu} | A _{tv} |
| S _{na} | O _{me} | H _{mi} | Ꭰ _{mo} | Y _{mu} | |
| Ꭰ _{na} Ꭰ _{na} Ꭰ _{na} | A _{ne} | h _{ni} | Z _{no} | A _{nu} | O _{nv} |
| E _{qua} | Ꭰ _{que} | P _{qui} | V _{quo} | Ꭰ _{quu} | E _{quv} |
| U _{sa} Ꭰ _s | A _{se} | B _{si} | F _{so} | S _{su} | R _{sv} |
| L _{da} W _{ta} | S _{de} T _{te} | J _{di} J _{ti} | A _{do} | S _{du} | Ꭰ _{dv} |
| Ꭰ _{dda} L _{ta} | L _{tle} | C _{tti} | J _{tto} | V _{ttu} | P _{ttv} |
| G _{tsa} | V _{tse} | h _{tsi} | K _{tso} | J _{tsu} | C ^m _{tsv} |
| G _{na} | Ꭰ _{ne} | Ꭰ _{ni} | Ꭰ _{no} | J _{nu} | G _{wv} |
| Ꭰ _{ya} | B _{ye} | Ꭰ _{yi} | h _{yo} | G ^m _{yu} | B _{yv} |
| Sounds represented by Vowels | | | | | |
| <i>a</i> , as <i>a</i> in <i>father</i> , or short as <i>a</i> in <i>rival</i> | | | <i>o</i> , as <i>or</i> in <i>law</i> , or short as <i>o</i> in <i>net</i> . | | |
| <i>e</i> , as <i>a</i> in <i>hate</i> , or short as <i>e</i> in <i>met</i> | | | <i>u</i> , as <i>oo</i> in <i>foot</i> , or short as <i>u</i> in <i>pull</i> . | | |
| <i>i</i> , as <i>i</i> in <i>prize</i> , or short as <i>i</i> in <i>pit</i> | | | <i>v</i> , as <i>u</i> in <i>but</i> , nasalized. | | |
| Consonant Sounds | | | | | |
| <i>g</i> nearly as in English, but approaching to <i>k</i> . <i>d</i> nearly as in English, but approaching to <i>t</i> . <i>h</i> , <i>k</i> , <i>l</i> , <i>m</i> , <i>n</i> , <i>q</i> , <i>s</i> , <i>w</i> , <i>y</i> , as in English. Syllables beginning with <i>g</i> , except <i>S</i> have sometimes the power of <i>k</i> . <i>A</i> , <i>S</i> , <i>O</i> are sometimes sounded <i>to</i> , <i>tu</i> , <i>tv</i> , and Syllables written with <i>tl</i> except <i>S</i> sometimes vary to <i>dl</i> . | | | | | |

Figure 1. Samuel A. Worcester's arrangement of the Cherokee syllabary. Mooney 1900

accuracy and historical knowledge (129). While the development of a print version of the syllabary is commonly credited to Worcester, the scholarly record suggests it should not be.

Walker and Sarbaugh's (1993) detailed and thoroughly researched essay on the history of the Cherokee syllabary addressed this very topic, arguing that "the Cherokees alone developed the syllabary and adapted it to the requirements of printing" (1). While this essay should have set to rest any claims to the contrary, recent histories of writing systems and print still erroneously attribute this development to Worcester and to designs drawn largely from the Roman alphabet. In his essay on the development of Cherokee print, Joseph Thomas (2008) credits the creation of the print version of the Cherokee writing system to the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missionaries (ABCFM) and Worcester exclusively. Worcester's arrangement of the characters, along with other changes to a selection of the characters, Thomas claims, all point to his authority over the development of the Cherokee syllabary into print: "Samuel Worcester's influence on the standardization of the syllabic characters and the potential for appropriation of native means of expression certainly represent an addition to the scholarly record of Native American publishing history" (14). "The first Cherokee types, then," Thomas surmises, "were not made to correspond to manuscript characters, but rather to conform to some degree with the appearance of already respected typefaces used for English," and he concludes, "the appearance of the Cherokee types was not designed specifically with Cherokees in mind" (6). The extent to which the Cherokee writing system in print corresponds to manuscript characters, or to the "already respected typefaces," merits further consideration not only to maintain accuracy in the historical record but also, and more important, to better understand the ideological intricacies at play when peoples innovate and alter their writing systems.

On the face of it, the print version of the Cherokee syllabary certainly appears to be quite distinct from the manuscript version developed by Sequoyah. Sequoyah illustrated the arrangement of the syllabary and design of the characters in script and print in a manuscript he is believed to have prepared for John Howard Payne (Walker and Sarbaugh 1993). To an untrained eye and hand, the script and print characters bear little resemblance to each other, for, as Walker and Sarbaugh find of the syllabary Sequoyah produced for Payne (fig. 2), the "right-hand characters [show] undeniable contrast with those on the left. It is not clear, however, that the right-hand forms can be attributed to Worcester" (82). At first glance, it does indeed appear that the characters on the right-hand side of each of the pairs shown in figure 3 retain little of the visual information from the char-

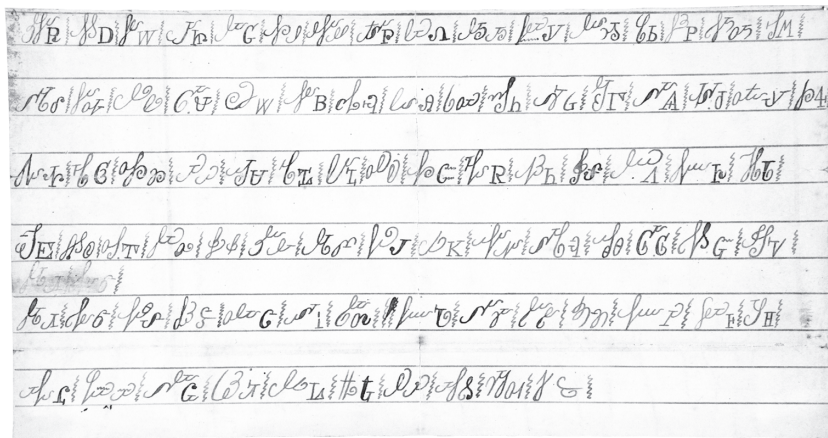


Figure 2. Sequoyah's original arrangement of the syllabary shows each character in both its longhand and print forms separated by vertical lines. Jack Kilpatrick attributed the document to Sequoyah (Walker and Sarbaugh 1993). Contained in the John Howard Payne papers, collection of the Thomas Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, OK

acters on the left written in longhand. Some of these characters seem to borrow their designs from the Roman alphabet.

Judging from initial observations of the characters produced side by side (figs. 2 and 3), the Cherokee writing system in print appears to be (a) completely different from the longhand characters originally learned by Cherokees, (b) deeply influenced by the Roman alphabet and English speakers, and (c) designed with audiences other than Cherokees in mind. Given these apparent differences between Cherokee in script and print, “how, then,” Thomas rightly asks, “might Cherokees familiar with handwritten versions of the syllabary adjust to the changes necessitated by casting it in type?” (2008: 6). If indeed the typesets of the Cherokee writing system were created to resemble the alphabet, and thus were markedly distinct from the original manuscript version of the writing system, then one might expect a decrease in reading and writing indicators after print arrived on the scene. Such was not the case.

Mooney (1900) found that the creation of typesets and the purchase of a press for the nation allowed for an expansion of the types and kinds of literacy artifacts in both Oklahoma and North Carolina: “In addition to numerous Bible translations, hymn books, and other religious works, there have been printed in the Cherokee language and syllabary the *Cherokee*

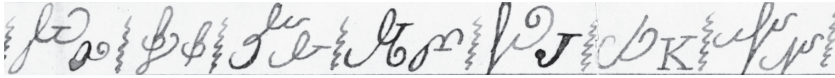


Figure 3. Detail of the syllabary Sequoyah is believed to have produced for Payne in 1839. Reproduced from the collection of the Thomas Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, OK

Phoenix (journal), *Cherokee Advocate* (journal), *Cherokee Messenger* (periodical), *Cherokee Almanac* (annual), Cherokee spelling books, arithmetic, and other schoolbooks for those unable to read English, several editions of the laws of the Nation, and a large body of tracts and minor publications” (111–12). The proliferation of genres published by the nation in the Cherokee writing system offer one indication of the ways in which print allowed for a proliferation of material indicators of literacy. Elias Boudinot (1983 [1832]), editor of the *Phoenix*, offers another indication of the Cherokees’ interest in seeing their language in print: “About 200 copies of this newspaper are circulated weekly, in the nation. . . . At the same press have also been published in Cherokee, the Gospel of Matthew, and a Hymnbook, and a tract containing portions of Scripture. It is found that these publications are read with great interest, and weekly meetings are held in some neighborhoods, to read the *Cherokee Phoenix*” (58). Boudinot estimates the reading and writing rates of the nation in 1830 to be about 50 percent (58), with the census of 1835 showing 43 percent of households having Cherokee language readers (63).²

This inconsistency, in addition to the apparent distinctions in design features of the manuscript and printed Cherokee syllabary, brings up larger questions as to the full story of its move from manuscript to print: To what extent do the script and print versions of each character of the Cherokee writing system actually differ? Who influenced the design of these characters for print and under what exigencies? And finally, what was at stake for the tribe as its newly invented writing system made its way from script to print?

Answers to these questions matter because scripts are introduced and widely disseminated through social processes that are shaped in the historical pressures of the time and indicate the formation of group identity.³ However they may work instrumentally, writing systems are not neutral mediation tools but are ideologically loaded. Research in cross-cultural approaches to literacies explores the ways in which literacy artifacts, events, and practices come to be valued by those who use them (Street 1984, 1993, 1995; Collins 2003; Cushman et al. 2001; Coiro et al. 2008). Scribner and

Cole's (1991) seminal study of the cognitive and social consequences of Vai script explored the ideological import of the invention, selection, and continued use of writing systems other than the alphabet. Mark Sebba's (2009) sociolinguistic research on writing systems considers the ways in which orthographies situate in social processes that shape cultures and identities. "The establishment of a script . . . can be a powerful symbol of group membership, identifying the users as belonging to or differing from other groups using the same or different scripts" (42). The alphabetic influence on the development of scripts, Sebba finds, "is not coincidental, nor is it because of some inherent superiority"; it is, rather, a consequence of the script mediators who first introduce the writing system (41). The story of the Cherokee syllabary's development from manuscript to print production is a story of identity formation and political maneuvering all the way back. A closer examination of the evolution of the Cherokee syllabary is needed to clarify Cherokee influence in the process and the extent to which this writing system may have been influenced by the alphabet, by white missionaries, and by the larger sociocultural milieu.

The Character of the Characters

To better determine the ways in which design features of the Cherokee characters might have changed from script to print, a systematic analysis of the writing system as Sequoyah developed it was completed for each character pair. First, using digital imaging software, each pair of characters was copied from a high-resolution image of the document provided by the Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Sequoyah indicated the boundaries of character pairs with vertical zigzag lines, and he consistently included the script version of the character on the left and the print version on the right. The print version of each character pair was compared to the Hicks (1825) syllabary and a conventionalized syllabary chart (fig. 1).

Characters were then grouped according to visible levels of correspondence between the script and print elements. These levels of resemblance included: (a) direct correspondence showing a clear relationship between the script and print characters; (b) some correspondence showing one to two transformations of visible elements;⁴ (c) little correspondence to former script characters, showing deeply revised characters created for print; and (d) no correspondence to former script characters, showing that alphabetic characters were borrowed.

Of the eighty-six characters created in the original syllabary, all were developed into a print version, though only eighty-five were cast into type. Of this and the other changes made from Sequoyah's original syllabary,

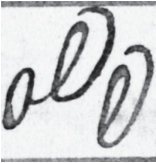
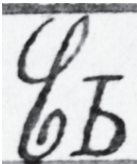
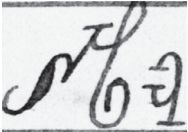
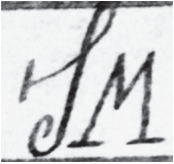
Worcester (1828a) writes: “The present number is 85; the necessity of one of the characters not having been found sufficient to require that it should be retained. The arrangement of the characters, as made by the inventor, like that of other alphabets, is entirely without system” (162). Thus, Worcester finds that little has changed from the original manuscript version to the final version in print, save for the arrangement and deletion of one character. This would suggest something quite contrary to the visual evidence presented in the document that Sequoyah created for Payne (fig. 2).

Closer inspection of the characters reveals that sixty-seven of them were created with relationship to the original script characters: forty-four of these characters had either a direct or some correspondence to the visual elements from original script forms, while twenty-three of them had little visual information retained in the design elements of the original script forms. Table 1 includes an overview of the results showing a comparison between Sequoyah’s script and print designs for each character. The level of correspondence indicated the amount and type of visual elements that were retained from script to print versions for each character. When the character showed no correspondence, then its design features seemed to have been borrowed from the Roman alphabet. Three characters did not fit conclusively into any of the categories, and, as noted, one character was dropped from the entire system when it moved into print.

A total of sixty-seven, or 77.9 percent, of the original eighty-six characters corresponded to the script in some fashion or were completely new designs created for the print version. This would seem to indicate that the print version takes its cues from the original script forms of the characters, making it potentially recognizable to the Cherokee readers and writers who would be the audience for materials printed in the Cherokee language. In other words, the print version of the characters was more likely to resemble some aspect of the corresponding original manuscript version than it was to resemble any aspect of the Roman alphabet. This analysis suggests that the Cherokee print versions of the characters were indeed meant to correspond to the manuscript characters, as opposed to conforming “to some degree with the appearance of already respected typefaces” (Thomas 2008: 6). The script and print versions of Sequoyah’s original alphabet were more alike than different, in other words, putting a check to claims that the print versions of these characters were developed in order to appeal to the eye of outsiders.

Historical evidence bears out the results of this visual analysis. In a letter that Worcester (1828a) wrote to the ABCFM publication the *Missionary Herald* in May 1828, he revealed something of the scope of his interactions with the typesetters in developing the characters from script to print. Worcester discarded one of the characters as not being distinct enough in form

Table 1. Comparison of Sequoyah's script and print designs

| Level of correspondence | Number of characters | Sample character in script and print | Analysis |
|-------------------------|----------------------|---|---|
| Direct | 21 |  | The top right flourish was retained to create the final print character for $\text{\textcircled{D}}$ /ka/ to the left. Other characters in this category retained key elements of the original to create the print. |
| Some | 23 |  | Here in the character for $\text{\textcircled{B}}$ /si/, the flourishes were reduced and substituted with line serifs with circular sweeps made into half circles. In this category, the transformations of the script characters might have included a selection and amplification of elements (e.g., $\text{\textcircled{S}}$ /ga/ selects the top and bottom ornamentations and adds a horizontal line to replace the middle fligree), or an inversion of the script (as $\text{\textcircled{4}}$ se has flipped horizontally), or lines that were once curved were straightened (e.g., $\text{\textcircled{\Gamma}}$ /hu/, $\text{\textcircled{\text{T}}}$ /qua/, and $\text{\textcircled{Z}}$ /no/). |
| Little | 23 |  | The script for $\text{\textcircled{\text{Q}}}$ /nu/ seems to retain an element from the middle of the first upstroke that is a circle that nearly closes upon itself. The transformations of the script characters in this category may have little correspondence with the original script and instead create new shapes altogether. |
| None | 16 |  | The print version for $\text{\textcircled{M}}$ /lu/ has no correspondence to its original script. All in this category seem to have been borrowed from the Roman alphabet. |

or sound to merit inclusion, thus reducing the eighty-six script characters to eighty-five print characters, as noted above. Worcester goes on to address which letters might be modeled after alphabetic ones. Sixteen of the characters could be easily represented with several capital letters from the Roman alphabet. In an 1827 letter to Jeremiah Evarts, Worcester specifies that “there will be no occasion for new matrices for sixteen of the characters, viz. R, D, W, G, P, M, B, A, Z, E, T, J, K, S, H, L, as the small capitals of the English fount will answer every purpose.” Of the eighty-five he sent to the typesetters, sixty-nine characters, or 81 percent, needed completely new matrices to be developed because they had no counterpart in the existing alphabetic typesets. The majority of the characters were developed using a design drawn from their longhand versions.

But what to make of those remaining characters? Three of those sixteen characters that Worcester mentioned were incorrectly changed by the typesetters: the characters for S /*du*/, V /*do*/, and Z /*no*/. S /*du*/, had a shape similar to the capital letter S to the alphabetic eye, but in Sequoyah’s hand, it was oriented horizontally with a stronger emphasis on the serifs that formed into nearly half-circles, as seen in figure 2, fifth row from the top, third cell from the left. In the print developed by the typesetters, the character was oriented vertically, making it appear to be more like the alphabetic letter S than it was originally designed to be. Likewise, the print version of V /*do*/, was originally developed with longer serifs and was flipped vertically to look more like a pyramid, as seen in figure 2, third row from top, third cell from left. In 1834, Worcester himself changed the orientation of that character, informing the Missionary Board that he would start using a capital letter V for this character (Thomas 2008: 5), as seen in figure 2, third row from the top, seventh cell from the left. Finally, the script and print versions of the character Z /*no*/ had little relation to the type cast for this character, which was replaced with a capital letter Z. The original script had a vertical line connecting the two serifs at top and bottom, each balancing the other in opposite directions. The resemblance of these three characters to letters of the Roman alphabet seems more imagined than real, an imagined resemblance made by type casters and Worcester, who necessarily viewed the syllabary using the forms of letters as their baseline for design judgment.

Examination of the remaining thirteen characters that were thought to have their design influence from the Roman alphabet reveals that nine of those characters actually have elements in common with the original script versions, suggesting a logic behind the borrowings. If an element of the capital letter in English might map onto the design elements of the script, it seems to have been borrowed. The first script version of the syllables *e*, *a*, *wa*, *li*, *tlv*, *sv*, *gv*, *tso*, and *tle* (respectively, R, D, G, P, P, R, E, K, L) have

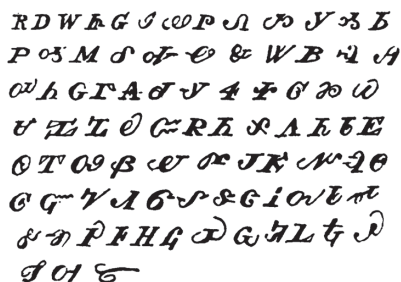


Figure 4. A handwritten syllabary produced by Chief Charles Hicks in a letter to Thomas McKenney of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1825, two years before type-sets were cast for the Cherokee syllabary, suggesting that the type casts were modeled after a manuscript shorthand already in use

visual elements that carry over to the corresponding print characters that were borrowed from the Roman alphabet. It appears that when Sequoyah was inspired by the design elements of alphabetic letters, he borrowed elements that resembled those he developed in the script.

Taken together, it seems likely that visual cues from the script version of the characters might still inform the shape of the print versions. This makes some sense considering that the creator of the writing system was interested in facilitating the ease of learning and use of the writing system—major changes between the two forms of script and print would have been inconsistent with this goal. Given the number of characters that carry forward from script to print, Cherokee readers might have easily recognized the syllabary in print as a shorthand of the Cherokee cursive.

Charles Hicks, Second Chief of the Cherokees, in an 1825 letter to the head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Thomas McKenney, described all of the ways in which the Cherokee “may be considered as a civilized people,” with the chief indicator being their development and use of this writing system. At the end of this letter, Hicks includes a reproduction of this “alphabet” (fig. 4) together with a sample of the transliterations into English phonetics for each of the characters.

The Hicks syllabary, created before the advent of the print syllabary and arranged in the order Sequoyah originally used, reveals that the shorthand of the script appeared prior to the creation of the print characters. Hicks’s shorthand syllabary nearly matches the characters that were produced on the right side of each pair in the syllabary Sequoyah produced for Payne, with perhaps one exception in the characters for ᵐ /da/ and ᵑ /te/

that seem to be the same in Hicks's version. This letter was penned two years before the Cherokee Nation commissioned the foundry to create a type set and nine months before Worcester arrived at Brainerd. Walker and Sarbaugh (1993) believed that Hicks's syllabary was an engraver's copy (91), though Thomas (2008) argues that "Barbour had this syllabary engraved and printed to support his report to Congress" (6). If this shorthand of the Cherokee cursive was in use before the models for these characters were sent to the foundry, then the print version of the syllabary would have been immediately recognizable to Cherokees. The mechanical reproduction of the Cherokee syllabary in print, then, was not as distinct from the original manuscript versions as both Walker and Sarbaugh (1993) and Thomas (2008) have proposed.

The Aura of Sequoyan

Given the historical evidence and visual analysis of the Cherokee syllabary presented here, several points can be made regarding the process by which this writing system developed from script to print. First, the role that Worcester played in developing the print version of the Cherokee writing system has been and continues to be largely overstated. Cherokees not only influenced the design of the types for use in the *Phoenix* but, as described below, fought to ensure the inclusion of Cherokee types. And second, the designs for the type relied on shapes found in the original longhand and shorthand of the manuscript form and were less influenced by the design of Roman letters than previously believed. But why did the design of the types and the publication of the *Cherokee Phoenix* in both Sequoyan and English matter so much, and to whom?

In some respects, Worcester's role in the development of standardized print for the Cherokee writing system deserves attention because it offers a sense of what precisely was at stake and for whom in controlling the language and design by which print would reach the hands of Cherokees. When Worcester arrived at Brainerd Mission, the Cherokees were already a reading and writing tribe. He described for readers of the *Missionary Herald* in 1828 the ways in which the Cherokees' writing and reading developed:

Probably no people in the world can learn to read their own language, when written, so easily as the Cherokee; and of course, among no other people, probably, could knowledge be disseminated so rapidly, and with so great facility. . . . This is evident from the fact, that so large a portion of the people could read before the language was printed. The press and types arrived in the nation in February last. Previous

to that time the people had no other means of language to read, than such scraps of the language as were found, written, or painted, or cut. (1828b: 330)

Worcester observed that Cherokees could easily learn this writing system and seemed to have developed many means to reproduce this script that was “found, written, or painted, or cut.” Given the ease with which Cherokees could learn, read, and write Sequoyan, it would have made little sense for the tribe to develop type that departed from the original script. Their practice with the Cherokee writing system in longhand suggests that the status of the Cherokee writing system was already established within the tribe before the types cast for their writing system arrived in New Echota.

Despite the use value that the Cherokee syllabary had for Cherokees even before print, Worcester had to convince the ABCFM to support the creation of a Cherokee typeset and to abandon their efforts to print religious materials for the Cherokee in a Roman alphabet-based orthography developed by philologist John Pickering in 1819. First and foremost, he argues, Cherokees prided themselves on the superiority of their own writing system: “If books are printed in Guess’s character, they will be read; if in any other, they will lie useless” (1827a: 212).⁵ Second, he reports on the ubiquity of handwritten Cherokee, writing practices that an introduction of alphabetic printed materials would be unlikely to change: “Their enthusiasm is kindled; great numbers have learned to read: they are circulating hymns and portions of Scripture, and writing letters every day” (212). Finally, it simply wouldn’t have been pragmatic to print scriptural materials in English, since the creation of Cherokee types was currently under way, types that were designed after those models proposed by Sequoyah himself: “As a fount of types, on the model proposed by Guess and approved by the principal men among the Cherokees, is in a course of preparation, it may be expected that the Cherokees will soon have the means, as many of them certainly now have disposition, to become a reading people” (212).

By Worcester’s own admission, the model for the font of types was proposed by Sequoyah himself, not created by Worcester. The type set was in the course of preparation before Worcester arrived at Brainerd, through funding and initiative taken by the Cherokee Nation’s principal people. In these respects, Worcester was working at the behest of Cherokees, helping them to realize an initiative they had already undertaken. Worcester’s letter (1827b) reveals allegiance to the Cherokees’ value of their own script, and this was noteworthy because he was undermining work that the ABCFM had already undertaken. Ensuring the production of Sequoyan in print, Cherokees, including their principal men, excluded an alphabetic influence

on the orthography of the Cherokee language. The ideological battle lines had been drawn by Cherokees before Worcester arrived on the scene.

In print, Cherokees might have understood Sequoyan to be related to the original longhand and shorthand, and therefore an authentic reproduction of the shorthand. The authenticity of any object of design or art is reduced when mass production replaces the original, manual production, or so Walter Benjamin argues in his 1936 essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” The original form of the art, situated as it is in the context of its creation, has all of its authority because the manual labor of its production is still intact. When mass produced, the work of art loses its authenticity because the tools used to produce it influence the content and because reproductions of the original travel well beyond the context of their creation (Benjamin 2006 [1936]: 115–17). He writes: “That which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. . . . The technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition” (117). The shorthand version of this writing system, as seen in the Hicks’s syllabary, suggests that its production in manuscript form had retained significant design features of longhand characters. The print version, designed as it was based on its precursor shorthand, retained visual features that Cherokees accustomed to the shorthand would have recognized. Further, to Cherokee audiences, who understand the system as morphographic rather than merely syllabic, there is semantic, syntactical, morphological, and phonetic information potentially available in each character (Cushman forthcoming).⁶ At both the visual and linguistic levels for Cherokee audiences, then, Sequoyan in print would have retained its aura as a writing system because it traces visually to the original longhand and linguistically to tradition.

For English-speaking audiences, the Cherokee typeset and print made possible the mass production of the syllabary for its own sake, divorced as the characters were from semantic content and contiguous visual designs. English speakers were effectively excluded from gathering the several levels of meaning potentially available in each character because they simply approached it as a syllabary, seeking only phonetic information. Once widely produced in print, the qualities that link Sequoyan to the language traditions and communicative contexts for Cherokee readers would have been lost on English-speaking audiences. Benjamin (2006 [1936]) notes: “One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence” (117). Certainly, this loss of aura would have obtained for white readers who approached this writing system as though it were an alphabet, work-

ing solely on sound-to-character correspondences. In other words, the aura of the artful original manuscript form of Sequoyan remained for Cherokee audiences, while for English-speaking audiences, it passed from ritual to political process. For English-speaking audiences, the syllabary became symbolic of the civilized nature of Cherokees.

Competing Ideologies of Orthographies

Cherokee insistence on seeing Sequoyan in print was crucial at this time because they faced the unwelcome influence of an alphabetic orthography. Worcester (1827a) describes their political reasons for developing their writing system into print:

Whether or not the impression of Cherokees is correct, in regard to the superiority of their own alphabet for their own use, that impression they have, and it is not easy to eradicate. It would be a vain attempt to persuade them to relinquish their own method of writing. . . . At their national council they have listened to a proposal to substitute an alphabet like Mr. Pickering's, and have rejected it: they have talked much of printing in the new and famous character. . . . Tell them now of printing in another character, and you throw water upon the fire, which you are wishing to kindle. (213)

By his account, the Cherokees had already attached pride and utilitarian value to their own writing system and desired to see it in print; they had considered in tribal council replacing it with a system of writing created by Pickering and rejected the proposal outright. They had been eagerly anticipating a typeset and printing press. By 1827, six years after its introduction at tribal council, the Cherokee syllabary had been deemed superior to Pickering's orthography, and their resistance to the latter was clear. Though both Perdue (1994: 122) and Walker and Sarbaugh (1993: 85, 91) mention Pickering's orthography and the tribe's rejection of it, they do not explore the political, ideological, and social processes and implications of rejecting Pickering's orthography and demanding Sequoyan in print.

Yet even as the tribe supported, valued, and took pride in the Cherokee syllabary, missionaries had already begun to use Pickering's orthography, which is based on the Roman alphabet, in their materials to try to convert native peoples to Christianity (M. Pickering 2009 [1887]: 352–3) (fig. 5). Indeed, the editors of the *Missionary Herald* expressed in an essay in 1826 their resistance to the Cherokees' development of their own system of print—an essay to which Worcester seems to have been responding indirectly in his previously mentioned 1827(a) essay. Speculating on the ease of

| | | |
|-----|------------|---|
| A a | <i>A a</i> | long, as in <i>ah</i> ; short (ä) as in the first, or unaccented syllable of <i>aha'</i> . |
| Ā ā | <i>Ā ā</i> | long, as in <i>all</i> ; short (ǎ) as in <i>although</i> . See <i>Remarks</i> , p. 13. |
| D d | <i>D d</i> | as in <i>English</i> , nearly. See <i>Remarks</i> , p. 13. |
| E e | <i>E e</i> | long, as the first <i>e</i> in <i>where</i> , or like <i>a</i> in <i>made</i> ; short (ë) as in <i>when</i> , <i>met</i> . |
| G g | <i>G g</i> | always hard, as in <i>gate</i> , <i>get</i> , <i>give</i> , &c. |
| H h | <i>H h</i> | as in <i>English</i> . See <i>Remarks</i> , p. 13. |
| I i | <i>I i</i> | long, as in <i>antique</i> , or like <i>ee</i> ; short (i) as in <i>antick</i> . |
| K k | <i>K k</i> | as in <i>English</i> . See <i>Remarks</i> , p. 13. |
| L l | <i>L l</i> | as in <i>English</i> . |
| M m | <i>M m</i> | as in <i>English</i> . |
| N n | <i>N n</i> | as in <i>English</i> . |
| O o | <i>O o</i> | long, as in <i>tone</i> , <i>mole</i> ; short (ö) as in <i>intonate</i> , <i>immolate</i> . |
| S s | <i>S s</i> | as in <i>English</i> at the beginning of words. |
| T t | <i>T t</i> | as in <i>English</i> . See <i>Remarks</i> , p. 14. |
| U u | <i>U u</i> | long, as <i>u</i> in <i>rule</i> , or <i>oo</i> in <i>pool</i> ; short (ü) as <i>u</i> in <i>bull</i> , or <i>oo</i> in <i>wool</i> . |
| Ū ū | <i>Ū ū</i> | as in <i>dumb</i> ; short (ů) as in <i>undo</i> . See <i>Remarks</i> , p. 14. |
| Ū ū | <i>Ū ū</i> | nasal, as in pronouncing the first part of the words <i>uncle</i> , <i>hunger</i> , &c. See <i>Remarks</i> , p. 14. |
| W w | <i>W w</i> | as in <i>English</i> . |
| Y y | <i>Y y</i> | as in <i>English</i> . |

Figure 5. Orthography for the Cherokee language based on the Roman alphabet (Pickering 1830: 10). Courtesy of the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Libraries

use of Sequoyah's syllabary when compared with Pickering's, the editors argue: "One would think it must take longer to express the sounds by means of Guyst's alphabet, than by means of the alphabet, which has been recommended by Mr. Pickering for the Indian languages" (*Missionary Herald* 1826). The instrumentality of the Cherokee writing system questioned this way, the editors go on to reveal their ideological reasons for wanting Cherokees to learn to use Pickering's orthography and English in their daily writing: "It should, also, be remembered, that, by the use of this alphabet, to the exclusion of the English, the Cherokees will be deprived, in great measure, of an acquaintance with the many excellent works, in the English language, on religion and general science." In one final argument the ABCFM makes

in the *Missionary Herald* (1826) in favor of Pickering's alphabetic orthography for the Cherokee language, the editors cite the bottom line of having to print editions of the bible solely for Cherokee use when "there could not be sufficient prospect of a sale, to authorize, in many instances, the publication of any but works of small magnitude." For these three reasons, the ABCFM understood that the move to develop a type set for printing the Cherokee language represented a practical, financial, and ideological obstacle to their progress in civilizing the tribe.

Though Pickering's work had been under way since 1819, the ABCFM decided not to use this system for printing their materials. Instead, at Worcester's (1827a) urging, they chose to support printing in the Cherokee syllabary, for instrumental and political reasons: "As it is, the difference in the time of writing, between [Sequoyah's] and Mr. Pickering's alphabet, is found by experience to be small, and the variation to which practice in writing will naturally lead, will probably soon make the difference in favor of Guess, on count of the fewness of the characters required" (212). Compared to Pickering's orthography, Worcester finds the syllabary to be just as economical in time needed to create printed materials. By Worcester's estimation, the letter sound correspondence in Pickering's alphabetically based system for spelling the Cherokee language seems less likely to account for variation in the pronunciation of Cherokee words.

Pickering's linguistic materials bent the Cherokee language to the rules of spelling found in the Roman alphabet, and he was unaware at the time he labored to develop this orthography that the Cherokee had developed and were extensively using their own writing system. None too happy with the Cherokee script being used for print, Pickering (1830) criticized the writing system in a letter to Baron Humboldt in 1827:

A gazette or newspaper in the Cherokee and English languages is about to be published in the Cherokee nation. The types are now making in this city (Boston) for a new set of characters, made by a native Cherokee. I should inform you that this native, whose name is Guest, and who is called by his countrymen "The Philosopher," was not satisfied with the alphabet of letters or single sounds which we white people had prepared for him in the sheets of Cherokee Grammar formerly sent to you, but he thought it fit to devise a new syllabic alphabet, which is quite contrary to our notion of a useful alphabetic system. (353)

Though Pickering does not explain on what basis he makes these claims about Sequoyah's motives for developing the syllabary, he certainly believes that the development of the print version of Cherokee steals any thunder his system may have had for representing spoken Cherokee. While it's uncertain how Pickering came to perceive that Sequoyah himself was "not sat-

isfied with the alphabet of letters or single sounds which we white people had prepared for him," it is safe to say that Sequoyah had been working for more than a decade to develop the writing system before Pickering had started his in 1819, that the tribal council had rejected an orthography like Pickering's, and that the Cherokee system of writing was quite unlike the Roman alphabetic one.

Spurned by the choice of the ABCFM to print in the Cherokee type, Pickering describes the development of the Cherokee writing system incorrectly, saying that Sequoyah "has, however, taken Roman letters as the basis, and has added to them some little mark, or has distorted their shapes, in order to suit his purpose. This is much to be regretted as respects the facility of communication between these Indians and the white people" (ibid.). Pickering's motive for developing an orthography for native languages ran contrary to Sequoyah's and Cherokees' and illustrates the symbolic and functional weight of writing systems circulated in print. Pickering favors a spelling and printing convention based on the alphabetically encoded sounds of the Cherokee language because it will facilitate communication "between these Indians and the white people." Whites could have perhaps more readily mediated the Cherokee language using the rules and letters of the Roman alphabet; however, a writing system designed separately from that alphabet, specifically for and by Cherokees, ensured that mediation of the Cherokee language was conducted through a system not easily understood to whites or any person who learned the Roman alphabet as a first writing system.

Pickering was not simply begrudging what he perceived to be a distortion of the alphabet in print. His was not a neutral interpretation of the instrumentality of Sequoyah's syllabary for print but instead reveals a larger paternalistic ideology of language at play.

In 1825, Pickering had been corresponding with Thomas Jefferson regarding the former's progress on developing the orthography of the Cherokee syllabary. In one of these letters, Pickering writes that he has been "obliged to form an alphabet, as well as reduce the language to grammatical order. . . . I might flatter myself that you would find in this particular dialect some matter of no little novelty, as well as interest to a philosophical inquirer" (1830: 335). In his reply to Pickering's letter, Jefferson receives these writings well, commenting upon the ways in which Pickering's work coincides with his own ongoing mission to understand native languages in order to aid his developing philosophy of languages. "We generally learn languages for the benefit of reading the books written in them; but here our reward must be the addition made to the philosophy of language" (ibid.). The philosophy of language that Jefferson refers to considers the ways in which certain words might carry universal meanings for all governed.

The Jeffersonian philosophy of language relates to the politics and governance of “the children” of the republic. According to Thompson (2003), “Jefferson’s statecraft was predicated on the assumption that certain words, for example, ‘father’ or ‘republic,’ indicated ideas bundled together in a particular and, from his point of view, commendable and instructive fashion. Jefferson sought through his study of languages a confirmation of this position” (191). As patriarch to the country, Jefferson relied on all of his “children,” such as Indians, to agree upon the manner in which he used words, particularly in English, as organizing concepts of governance. Thus, he undertook a study of languages to facilitate the communication of his paternalistic concepts of governance. “Jefferson’s willingness to present himself as a father figure to the Cherokee, . . . even at the risk of rejection or opposition, suggests the attraction to him of a political understanding of paternalism that his study of languages could have challenged but ultimately confirmed” (223). Jefferson’s philosophy of language was helpful to him in developing a paternalistic role vis-à-vis the Cherokee, his “children”; Pickering supported this philosophy and sent his orthography to Jefferson in the hope that Jefferson would see the value of the Cherokee grammar he had developed.

John Pickering’s development of an orthography for the Cherokee language connected to national political ideologies of the time, in which native languages were considered obstacles that hindered the “communication between these Indians and the white people” (J. Pickering 1830: 335). While Worcester and others lauded the accomplishment of Cherokees developing a writing system and a typeset for it, Pickering found it strange: “So strong is their partiality for this national alphabet that our missionaries have been obliged to yield to the impulse, and consent to print their books in future in the new characters” (353). Understanding the Cherokee syllabary in print as a symbol of national pride and identity for the Cherokee, Pickering reveals the political significance of this writing system being developed into print—the ABCFM was obliged to use the Cherokee syllabary in print if they hoped to reach the Cherokee readers and writers. The commission and creation of a Cherokee typeset and press undermined the articulation of an English-based philosophy of language that Pickering shared with Jefferson. For Cherokees, the revision of the writing system from script to print secured their right to mediate and distribute knowledge in their own language, using a writing system foreign to outsiders.

Sequoyan, the Tribe, and the Nation

While Sequoyah, his cousin George Lowrey, and Chief John Ross had practical reasons for facilitating the development of the syllabary from script to

print, the political reasons were just as compelling. Promoting Sequoyan in print alongside English in the *Phoenix* facilitated a necessary and useful distinction between the Cherokee tribe and nation. The term *nation* proves thorny to define, though; as Benedict Anderson (2006 [1936]) suggests, *nation* is “an imagined community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (6). *Nation* is an imagined impression of communion with neighbors that works through membership markers showing a shared understanding of freedom from monarchy rule within a pluralist society in a defined territory: “the gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state” and a shared sense of “deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). This comradeship is established in part through print culture in which readers of newspapers and novels build a shared sense of communion and simultaneous experience that traces to historically important cultural expressions. “Nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being” (12). Anderson contents himself with relevant religious and dynastic realms of cultural significance, finding that these manifest themselves through language, print, and ideologies of language “to create communities out of signs, not sounds” (13).

Classical communities trace to modern nation states through the transformative technologies of mediation: sculptures and stained glass windows gave way to the newspaper and novel (25). When economic change, scientific discoveries, and new communication technologies emerged, “the search was on, so to speak, for a new way of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together. Nothing perhaps more precipitated this search, nor made it more fruitful, than print-capitalism, which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profound new ways” (36). Print culture is central to any notion of nationhood because it allows for the simultaneous experience of the world and history told in its pages, thereby creating an imagined sense of brotherhood and unity around the rituals of reading the morning news and “experiencing” the story therein. But the imagined community produced by reading the *Phoenix* seems to have differed for Cherokees and English readers, a negotiation of shared experience not altogether adequately captured by Anderson’s idea of imagined communities.

Anderson’s project does not take up cultural imperialism, especially in the case of Native Americans, as literary scholar Ed White (2004) has pointed out. This lacuna rests on the bold assumption that nationalism developed in the same ways for native peoples and the United States as it did for Europeans. White argues that histories of American nation building must be “more attentive to the original colonial and indigenous resonance of the term *nation*” (77). Indigenous peoples in the Americas have an

understanding of peoplehood and identity that shapes their negotiations with other Indians and with outsiders as sovereign states (Holm, Pearson, and Chavis 2003). As states, several unified under a longhouse model of shared government, thus maintaining the significant distinctions among the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, and later, Tuscarora states within the Iroquois Nation.

Hardt and Dunn (2000) discuss the fact that Anderson's definition of nation as imagined community rests on an understanding of an earlier formation of nationhood as republic that may not have applied well to the Americas because it cannot account for the hybrid identities and cultures exhibited by tribes and African Americans.⁷ "First of all, nation is the wrong concept to use to name cultural heritage, identity, and community in this case. . . . I sometimes think that Benedict Anderson's motto should be reversed: the nation sometimes seems to be the only form in which we can imagine community" (168). Hybridity is best understood, according to Hardt and Negri's (2000) model of empire, as being subsumed by imperial sovereignty that comfortably "rules precisely through a kind of politics of difference, managing hybrid identities in flexible hierarchies. From this perspective, then, a politics of hybridity may have been effective against the now defunct modern form of sovereignty but it is powerless against the current imperial form" (165–68). Colas (2007) traces the ways in which culture, phenotype, and civilizing missions of European nations served to build imperialist nations through a twofold process of racialization that includes "on the one hand the cultural *differentiation* between natives and non-natives, and among indigenous peoples themselves, and on the other hand, the subordinate *devolution* of political rule by the colonial state onto groups of differentiated natives" (138). These simultaneous processes of differentiating and transferring limited powers to peoples so identified might better account for the processes of moving from modern to imperial forms of sovereignty in the United States during this time.

In the case of Cherokees, at least, publication of the *Phoenix* with a uniquely Cherokee typeset as well as the Roman alphabet reveals a public presentation of Cherokee hybrid identities that at once served to group, protect, and foster the continued survival of the Cherokee language and people as it also grouped, secured, and established the political face of the nation that accepted, indeed demanded, the transfer of political rights from the federal government. For outside readers, the *Phoenix* appeared to be a window onto the life of kindred spirits, these civilized savages who display their exotic genius in Sequoyan—the product of the first-ever indigenous language writing system and typeset. The fact that English speakers could not read Sequoyan mattered less than its appearance on the page.

Sequoyan at once symbolized solidarity with whites, because the Cherokees had developed a way to read and write, even as it excluded English language users by maintaining the Cherokee language. The creation of a Cherokee typeset based on the Cherokee shorthand secured a place for and the importance of the Cherokee language and script as markers of shared tribal community within the nation. While the *Cherokee Phoenix* may not offer sustained insight into traditional Cherokee culture, as Perdue (1977) points out, it served the important functions of nation building.

Delineating a boundary between Cherokee speakers and English speakers, the paper's inclusion of Sequoyan would have been exclusively for Cherokee readers, on one level, but the ways in which the rest of the paper translates Cherokee life into English created an imagined sense of communion with white sympathizers. Unseth (2005) outlines four motivating factors behind the choice of national languages that communities make: "to identify themselves with another group; . . . to distance themselves with another group;" to participate in broad-scale economic, social, and governmental developments; and to honor established utilitarian values of favored languages (22). Certainly, all of these motivational factors are mutually sustaining in the story of the insistence and decisions about which languages and typesets to include in the *Phoenix*. This newspaper made it possible for outsiders to imagine a sense of brotherhood with Cherokees, deeming them civilized in part because they had adopted "letters." It helped Cherokees establish themselves in terms of and through media that outsiders would recognize as markers of civilization because they included writing in both Cherokee and English.

This era in the evolution of the Cherokee syllabary from one material form to another marks a place where a tribe developed a national identity that was distinct yet intricately connected to its tribal identity and that was also separate and separable from the paternalistic one that the federal government had cast in its relationship to them. Maintaining control of the design and casting of Cherokee types proved to be a political move that ensured printed materials would reflect the Cherokee writing system with its aura of tradition left intact. The very selection of languages and insistence on Sequoyan designs for font types declared a standardized Cherokee writing system as it wrote a Cherokee constitution into the Cherokee and English languages. The *Cherokee Phoenix* became a mediator for the tribe to outsiders, interfacing with both in their respective languages, informing, persuading, and coalescing both readerships into resistance against further removal. The development and multiplicity of the *Phoenix* mirrors the development and multiplicity of the Cherokee Nation as a political interface for the tribe. At stake in this moment of history when the Cherokee writing sys-

tem developed from manuscript to print form is nothing less than the symbolic creation of a national identity for a tribe that is multiple, hybrid, and resilient.

Notes

- 1 James Mooney includes a reproduction of this particular syllabary chart as plate V in his *Myths of the Cherokee* (1900: 112).
- 2 Oddly, Perdue (1994) cites this same census as evidence for her claim that “a significant proportion of Cherokees apparently found no good use for writing. In 1835, 39 percent of Cherokee households contained no literate members” (123–24).
- 3 A growing area of study, the sociolinguistic and anthropological approaches to writing systems have benefited from the work of Mark Sebba (2006, 2007), Andrew Savage (2008), Peter Unseth (2005, 2008), Henry Rogers (2005), Margaret Bender (2002), and Mindy Morgan (2009).
- 4 Rudolph Arnheim (1954) discusses transformations of shape in some detail, referring to art and cognitive psychology to support his main definition of shape, in particular a triangle that remains a triangle despite changes in axes. “The structural skeleton of each triangle derives from its contours through the law of simplicity: the resulting skeleton is the simplest structure obtainable within the given shape” (94). This means that no matter what kinds of transformations take place to the shape, flipping it and altering its angle of stress, for instance, the “same structural skeleton can be embodied by a great variety of shapes” (95). Arnheim analyzes the simplest of drawings in order to come to these conclusions about shapes and how they become concepts behind entire forms of objects.
- 5 George Guess was Sequoyah’s English name and was spelled Guess, Guyst, and Guest by his contemporaries.
- 6 Aboriginal art historian Rex Butler (2002) offers the notion that precisely because art is produced for the masses, its distant presence produces an invented tradition in which the aura of a work remains to be created somewhere between the artist’s context and the consumer’s desire for authentic art.
- 7 Hybrid and indigenous identities as part of cultural imperialism are taken up in greater detail in Hardt and Negri (2000) as well as Colas (2007).

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