

BY C.L. LANEY

WILMA MANKILLER

CHIEF OF THE CHEROKEE NATION



CHAPTER 1

Who Was Wilma Mankiller?

Picture a leader. What qualities come to mind?

Some think of strength. Others see courage.

What about compassion? Any of these traits might make a good leader. Wilma Mankiller had them all.

Mankiller was the Cherokee Nation's first female **principal chief**. She helped the tribe make important changes. Living conditions got better. Health care and education improved. Government was reformed too.

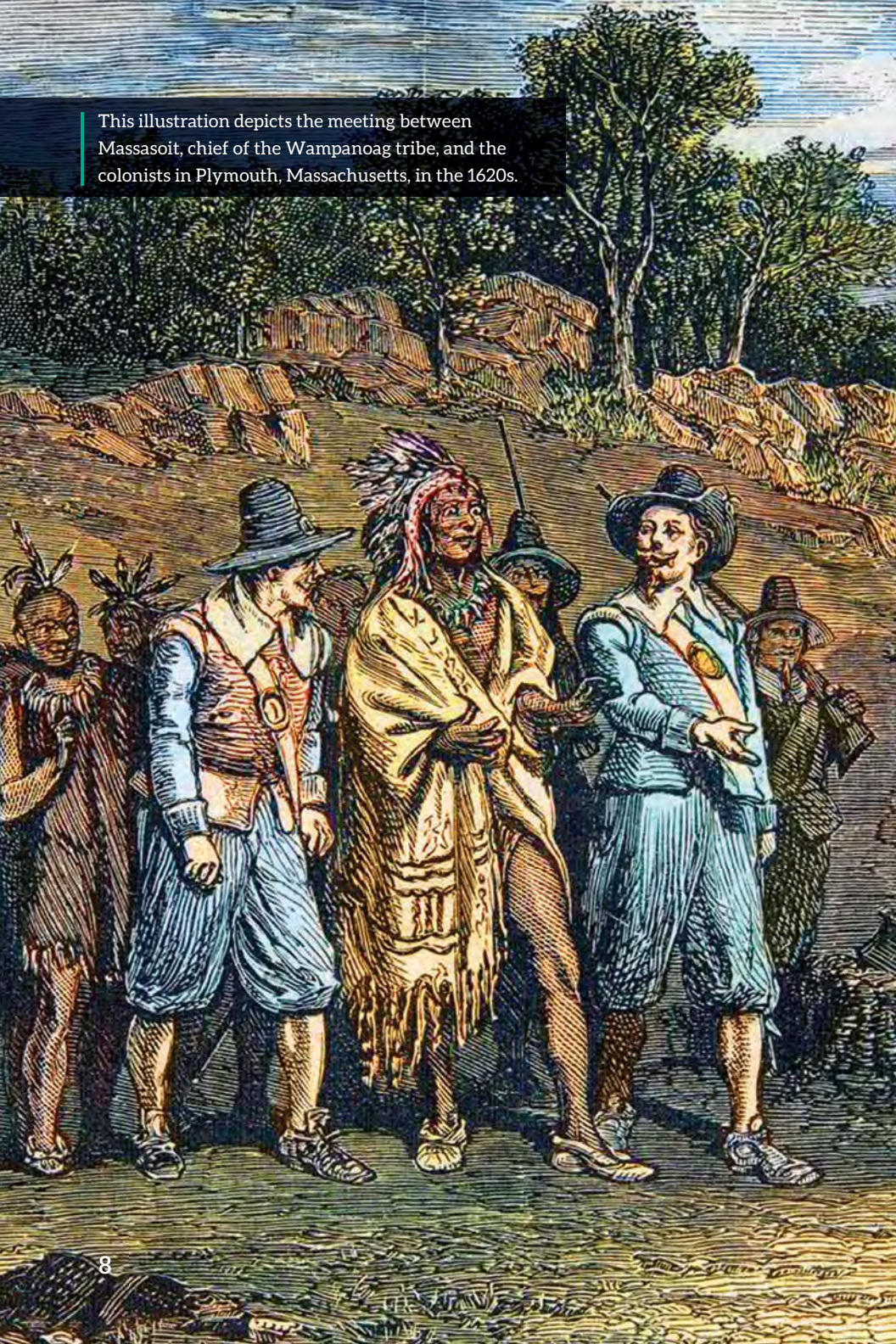
As a child, Mankiller lived in poverty. At age 11, she left her home in Oklahoma. Her family moved to California in hopes of finding a better life. There, the Mankillers faced **discrimination**. The future chief's personal struggles would later inform her leadership. Problems she witnessed within her tribe would too.

Before becoming chief, Mankiller was an **activist**. The Native American rights movement of the 1960s inspired her. During this time, American Indians **protested** unfair treatment. They fought to regain lands their people had lost. These had been taken by the U.S. government. Mankiller's passion for helping others was sparked. She wanted to make life better for her tribe.



American Indians continued to fight for their rights well past the 1960s. Here, activists protest in front of the White House in 1976.

This illustration depicts the meeting between Massasoit, chief of the Wampanoag tribe, and the colonists in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in the 1620s.





CHAPTER 2

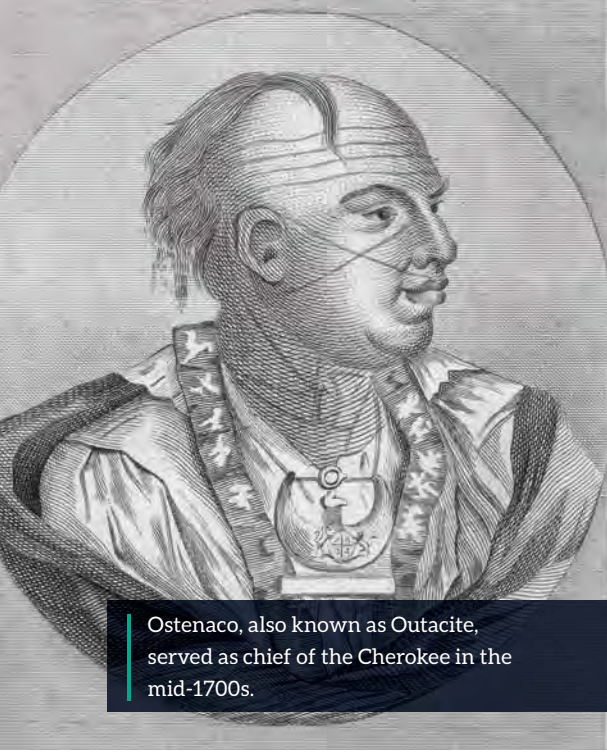
American Indian Life

American Indian culture is **ancient**. For the Cherokee, it goes back thousands of years. Long ago, each Cherokee village had several leaders. Peace chiefs handled **domestic** issues. War chiefs focused on matters outside their village. One was trade. Another was war. Each leader had specific duties. All helped shape the culture of the tribe.

In the 1500s, Europeans explored North America. They soon began to interact with American Indians. But the cultures were very different. This led to many misunderstandings. One was about leadership.

Europeans had kings and queens. These roles were passed down within powerful families. The settlers thought American Indians had the same kind of leadership. This made them expect certain qualities from tribal leaders. More settlers came. Slowly, tribal leadership changed. Chiefs needed to show strength. They had to be practical and logical too.

Trade greatly affected the lives of American Indians. Settlers had metal tools and weapons. American Indians wanted them. The groups began trading. But they exchanged more than goods. Europeans also brought diseases. These were new to the American Indians. They could not fight off the illnesses. Many died.



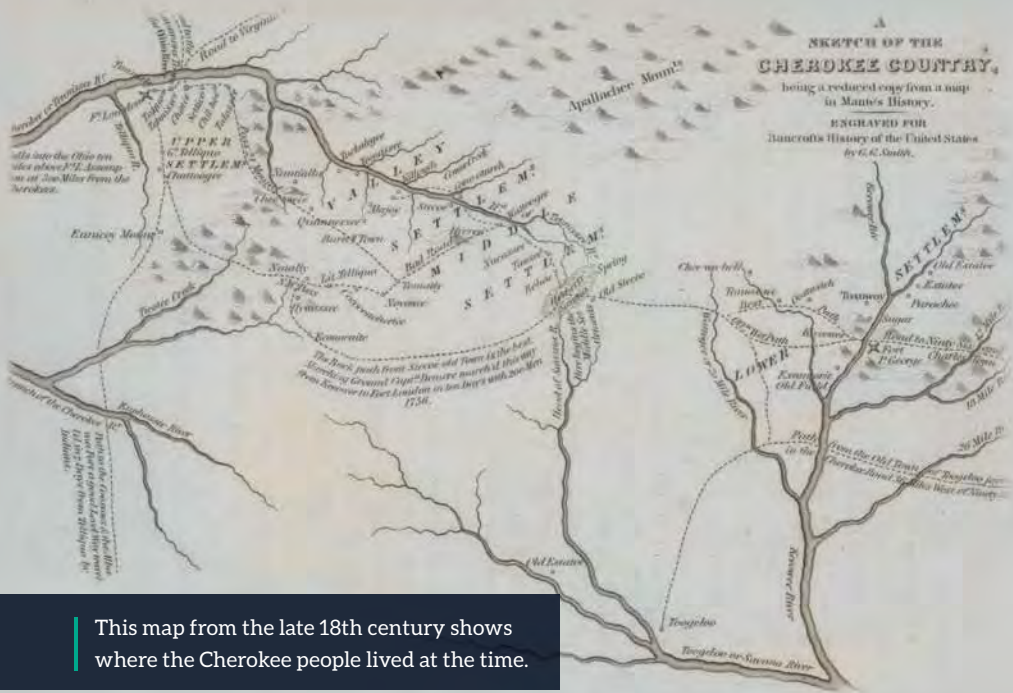
Ostenaco, also known as Outacite, served as chief of the Cherokee in the mid-1700s.



In the early 1800s, Chief Tah-Chee led the Cherokee people.

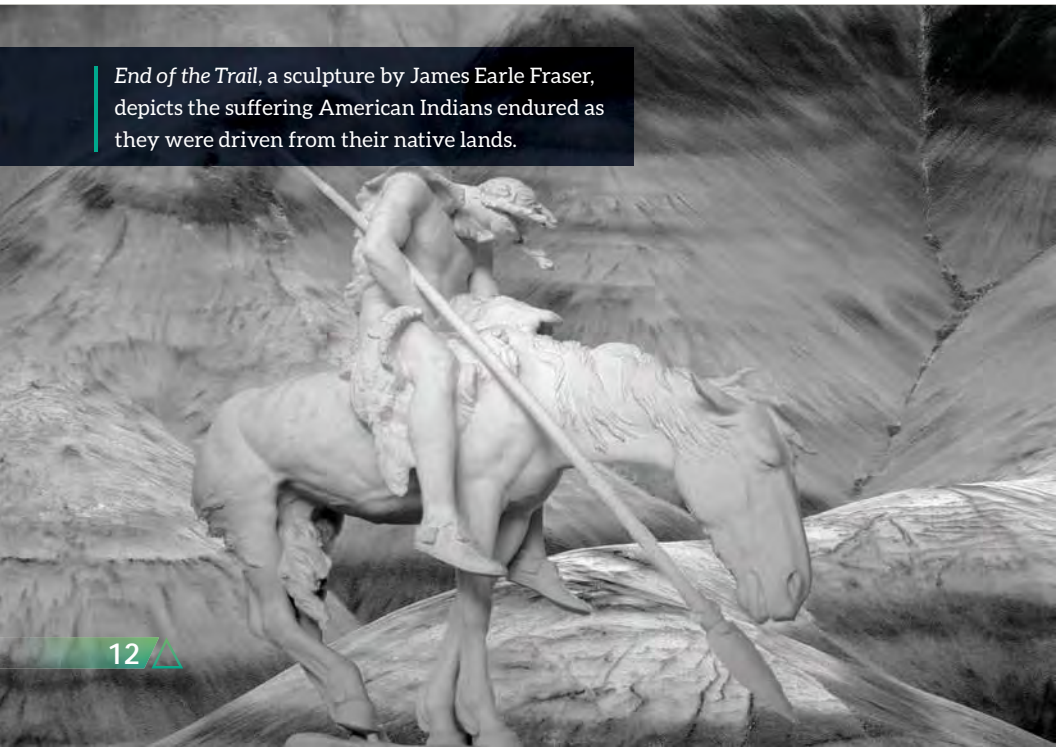


Beaver pelts were a commonly traded item in the late 1700s.



This map from the late 18th century shows where the Cherokee people lived at the time.

End of the Trail, a sculpture by James Earle Fraser, depicts the suffering American Indians endured as they were driven from their native lands.



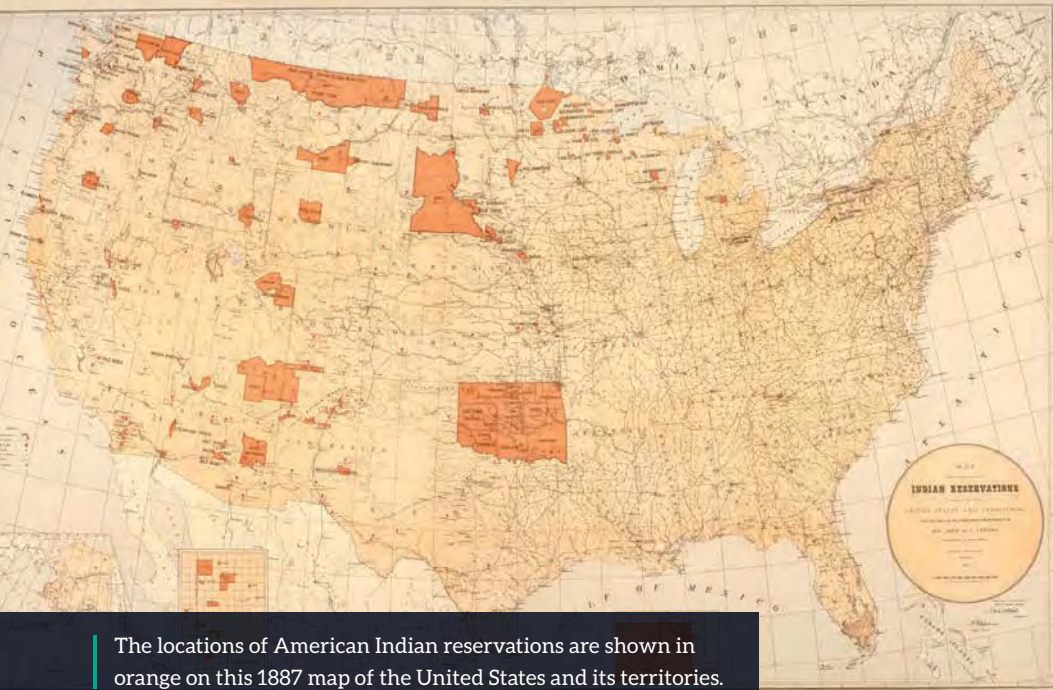
American Indians had lived on their lands for centuries. Some areas were good for farming. Others were close to rivers and lakes. This made them ideal for trade. Settlers wanted these lands. Many battles were fought over them. These started in the 1600s and stretched into the late 1800s. They became known as the American-Indian Wars.

The Cherokee had lived throughout the South. But in 1838, the U.S. government made them leave their lands. They were forced to walk to an area west of the Mississippi River. It was over 1,200 miles away. Thousands of Cherokee died on the journey. The route later became known as the Trail of Tears.

Life for the Cherokee did not improve after that. In the 1850s, they were moved onto sections of land the U.S. government set up for them. These were called **reservations**. Many tribes had to live together. Some fought. Disease spread easily.

Cultures were hard to maintain too. American Indians were often forced to dress like white people. Many had been hunters. Now, they struggled to become farmers.

For decades, American Indians had few rights. In 1924, they were granted U.S. citizenship. However, they were not guaranteed the right to vote. This did not come until 1962. Still, conditions on reservations remained poor. Many had no fresh water. Some were without electricity too. Protests in the 1960s brought attention to these issues. Wilma Mankiller took part in these. They would shape her life forever.



The locations of American Indian reservations are shown in orange on this 1887 map of the United States and its territories.



Members of the Pueblo tribe visited the White House in 1924.

