



Major Ridge<sup>3</sup> and John Ross shared a vision of a strong Cherokee Nation that could maintain its separate culture and still coexist with its white neighbors. In 1825, they worked together to create a new national capitol for their tribe, at New Echota in Georgia. In 1827, they proposed a written constitution that would put the tribe on an equal footing with the whites in terms of self government. The constitution, which was adopted by the Cherokee National Council, was modeled on that of the United States. Both men were powerful speakers and well able to articulate their opposition to the constant pressure from settlers and the federal government to relocate to the west. Ridge had first made a name for himself opposing a Cherokee proposal for removal in 1807. In 1824 John Ross, on a delegation to Washington, D.C. wrote:

We appeal to the magnanimity of the American Congress for justice, and the protection of the rights, liberties, and lives, of the Cherokee people. We claim it from the United States, by the strongest obligations, which imposes it upon them by treaties; and we expect it from them under that memorable declaration, "that all men are created equal."<sup>4</sup>

Not all tribal elders or tribal members approved of the ways in which many in the tribe had adopted white cultural practices and they sought refuge from white interference by moving into what is now northwestern Arkansas. In the 1820s, the numbers of Cherokees moving to Arkansas territory increased. Others spoke out on the dangers of Cherokee participation in Christian churches, and schools, and predicted an end to traditional practices. They believed that these accommodations to white culture would weaken the tribe's hold on the land.

Even as Major Ridge and John Ross were planning for the future of New Echota and an educated, well-governed tribe, the state of Georgia increased its pressure on the federal government to release Cherokee lands for white settlement. Some settlers did not wait for approval. They simply moved in and began surveying and claiming territory for themselves. A popular song in Georgia at the time included this refrain:

All I ask in this creation  
Is a pretty little wife and a big plantation  
Way up yonder in the Cherokee Nation.<sup>5</sup>

### **Questions for Reading 1**

**1.** In what ways did the Cherokees adopt aspects of white culture? What did they do to protect Cherokee culture?

