

# Major Ridge

## Major Ridge



This portrait of Major Ridge was painted by Charles Bird King in 1834 & published in History of the Indian Tribes of North America.

<b>Born</b>	1771, exact date unknown Great Hiwassee, present-day Tennessee
<b>Died</b>	June 22, 1839 (aged 67 or 68) White Rock Creek, AR
<b>Cause of death</b>	Assassination
<b>Nationality</b>	American
<b>Ethnicity</b>	American Indian
<b>Citizenship</b>	United States
<b>Occupation</b>	Cherokee Leader
<b>Spouse</b>	Sehoyah (Susannah Catherine Wickett) Kate Parris
<b>Children</b>	John Ridge

**Major Ridge, The Ridge** (and sometimes **Pathkiller II**) (c. 1771 – June 22, 1839) (also known as *Nunnehidihi*, and later *Ganundalegi*) was a Cherokee Indian member of the tribal council, a lawmaker, and a leader. He was a veteran of the Chickamauga Wars, the Creek War, and the First Seminole War.

Along with Charles R. Hicks and James Vann, Ridge was part of the "Cherokee triumvirate," a group of younger chiefs in the early nineteenth century Cherokee Nation who supported changes in how the people dealt with the United States. He became a wealthy plantation owner, slave owner and ferryman.

Ridge signed the controversial Treaty of New Echota of 1835, supported by the minority Treaty Party. It required the remaining Cherokee inhabiting tribal lands in the southeastern United States to cede the lands to the US and relocate to the Indian Territory. Opponents protested to the US government and negotiated a new treaty the following year. After Indian Removal to what is now Oklahoma, in 1839 Major Ridge was assassinated by tribal members under Cherokee Blood Law for alienating the land, as a majority had opposed removal.

## Background

### Early life

Ridge was born into the Deer clan of his mother, a Cherokee-Scots woman, in the Cherokee town of Great Hiwassee, along the Hiwassee River (an area later part of Tennessee).<sup>[1]</sup> From his early years, Ridge was taught patience and self-denial, and to endure fatigue. On reaching the proper age, he was initiated as a warrior.<sup>[2]</sup> The Cherokee believed that a man's achievements as a warrior were a sign of his spiritual power and part of his leadership.

Until the end of the Chickamauga Wars, he was known as *Nunnehidihi*, meaning "He Who Slays The Enemy In His Path," or The Pathkiller (not the same as the chief). For most of his later life, he was named *Ganundalegi* (other spellings include Ca-Nun-Tah-Cla-Kee, Ca-Nun-Ta-Cla-Gee, and Ka-Nun-Tah-Kla-Gee), meaning "The Man Who Walks On The Mountain Top."

### Marriage and family

In 1792 Ridge married *Schoya*, also known as Suzannah Catherine Wickett, a full-blood Cherokee of the Wild Potato clan.<sup>[3]</sup> Her name was also spelled Sehoyah; she was the daughter of Kate Parris and *Ar-tah-ku-ni-sti-sky* ("Wickett"). One of their children was John Ridge, whom his parents sent as a young man to Connecticut to be educated in European-American classical studies. After the Chickamauga Wars, The Ridge and Sehoya and their family lived in Oothcaloga, near the modern city of Calhoun, Georgia, until 1819, when they moved near the town of Chatuga at the confluence of the Oostanaula and Etowah Rivers. The family's house there still exists as the Chieftain's Museum, and was nearby the home of his protoge, John Ross.

### Young warrior

Besides small raids and other actions during the wars, *Nunnehidihi* took part in the attack on Gillespie's Station and in Watts' raids (from their encampment on the Flint River) in the winter of 1788–1789; the attack on Buchanan's Station in 1792; the campaign against the settlements of Upper East Tennessee in 1793 (that resulted in the massacre and destruction of Cavett's Station); and the so-called "Battle of Hightower" at Etowah. (Before the 1793 campaigns, he had taken part in a horse-stealing raid against the Holston River settlements that had left two men dead.) The subsequent pursuit of his band by the frontiersmen ended at Coyatee (near the mouth of the Little Tennessee River). Several leading Cherokee were killed and others wounded, including Hanging Maw, the chief headman of the Overhill Towns.

When *Nunnehidihi* was 21, he was chosen a member of the Cherokee Council. He proved a valuable counsellor, and at the second session proposed many useful laws.<sup>[2]</sup> After the Chickamauga war, he changed his name to *Ganundalegi*, which the English version simplified as "The Ridge".

In 1807, Chief Doublehead was bribed by white speculators to cede some Cherokee land. The National Council of the Cherokee Nation determined this to be a capital crime, and directed Ridge, James Vann, and Alexander Sanders to execute Doublehead. (Vann became too drunk to participate. The other two men used guns, knives, and a tomahawk to dispatch the old chief in a schoolmaster's house at the Hiwassee Garrison in Tennessee on August 9, 1807).

## Later life

Ridge acquired the title "Major" in 1814, during his service leading the Cherokee alongside General Andrew Jackson at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend during the Creek War against the Red Sticks. He used this as his first name for the rest of his life. He also joined Jackson in the First Seminole War in 1818, leading Cherokee against the Seminole Indians. His war achievements added to his stature among the Cherokee.

After the war, Ridge moved his family to the Cherokee town of Head of Coosa (present-day Rome, Georgia). He developed a plantation, become a wealthy planter and owner of 30 African American slaves. He built and was the first owner of the house now used as the Chieftains Museum. Major Ridge also owned a profitable ferry and, in partnership with a white man named George Lavender, a trading post.

## Cherokee removal

Ridge had long opposed U.S. government proposals for the Cherokee to sell their lands and remove to the West. But, Georgia efforts to suppress the Cherokee government and the pressure of rapidly expanding European-American settlements caused him to change his mind. Advised by his son John Ridge, Major Ridge came to believe the best way to preserve the Cherokee Nation was to get good terms for their lands from the U.S. government before it was too late and preserve their rights in Indian Territory. On December 29, 1835, Ridge signed the Treaty of New Echota, which ceded the remainder of Cherokee tribal land east of the Mississippi River for land in Indian Territory, to be supplemented by the payment of annuities for a period of time, plus support from the government in terms of supplies, tools and food. The national party of Chief John Ross and a majority of the Cherokee National Council rejected the treaty, but it was ratified by the US Senate. The next year Ross negotiated changes with the US government, but fundamentally, Cherokee removal was confirmed.

Ridge, his family, and many other Cherokee emigrated to the West in March 1837. The treaty had been signed in December 1835 and was amended and ratified in March 1836. Georgia put Cherokee lands in a lottery and auctioned them off; settlers started arriving and squatting on Cherokee-occupied land. Georgia supported the settlers against the Cherokee. After 1838, the US government forcibly rounded up the remaining Cherokee (along with their slaves) on tribal lands. They were the last people to make the journey that became known as the "Trail of Tears," during which nearly 4,000 Cherokee died.

## Assassination

In the West, the Ross faction blamed Ridge and the other signers of the Treaty of New Echota for the crime of alienating communal land and for the hardships of removal. In June 1839, Cherokees of the Ross faction assassinated Major Ridge, his son John, and nephew Elias Boudinot, to remove them as political rivals and to intimidate the political establishment of the Old Settlers, which the Ridge faction had joined. The Old Settlers were Cherokee who had gone to the West before removal, about 1818.

Among Ridge's killers was Bird Doublehead, whose father Chief Doublehead had been slain by Major Ridge. Another killer was Bird's half-brother, James Foreman. In 1842 Stand Watie killed Foreman. Watie was Ridge's nephew and a brother of Elias Boudinot, who had also been assassinated for signing the Treaty of Echota.

In 1839 Watie had been targeted for assassination but escaped. He also survived the ensuing violence of the 1840s, when the Cherokee had open conflict over political differences and essentially had their own civil war. Tribal divisions were exacerbated by the outbreak of the American Civil War, as the people were divided on alliances. Many Cherokee supported the Confederacy, which suggested they would recognize an Indian state if successful in creating an independent nation. Stand Watie served as Principal Chief of the pro-Confederate Cherokee after Ross and many Union-supporters withdrew to another location. He served as a Confederate general and was the last to surrender to Union troops.

## Burial

Ridge and his son are buried in Polson Cemetery in Delaware County, Oklahoma. After his nephew Stand Watie died much later, he was buried near them.

## Legacy

## Media

Ridge's life and the Trail of Tears are dramatized in Episode 3 of the Ric Burns/American Experience documentary, *We Shall Remain*, about Native Americans as fundamental to United States history.

## Sources

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  - [2] "Ridge, Major". *Appletons' Cyclopædia of American Biography*. 1900.
  - [3] Johansen, Bruce Elliot and Barry Pritzker. *Encyclopedia of American Indian History, Volume 2*. ([http://books.google.com/books?id=sGKL6E9\\_J6IC&lpg=PA777&dq=john ridge" clan 1839&pg=PA777#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=sGKL6E9_J6IC&lpg=PA777&dq=john%20ridge%20clan%201839&pg=PA777#v=onepage&q&f=false)) ABC-CLIO, 2007. ISBN 978-1-85109-817-0
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## External links

- "Major Ridge" (<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-2885>), *New Georgia Encyclopedia*
  - "Major Ridge ([http://ngeorgia.com/ang/Major\\_Ridge](http://ngeorgia.com/ang/Major_Ridge)), About North Georgia
  - Ridge genealogy (<http://www.paulridenour.com/mrcomplt.htm>), Paul Ridenour website
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