

## CHIEF BOWLES OF THE TEXAS CHEROKEE

By Dorman H. Winfrey\*

Chief Bowles<sup>1</sup> of the Texas Cherokee, son of a Scotch-Irish father, who was a trader, and a Cherokee mother,<sup>2</sup> is supposed to have been born in the year 1756.<sup>3</sup> It is not known definitely in what section of the country Bowles was born, but according to Emmet Starr, the Cherokee Indian historian,<sup>4</sup> it could have been in North Carolina.

The physical appearance of Chief Bowles must have been commanding. Emmet Starr describes Bowles as "being decidedly Gaelic in appearance, having light eyes, red hair, and somewhat freckled."<sup>5</sup> John H. Reagan, seeing Bowles for some length of time before the battle of the Neches, was impressed by Bowles' "manly appearance"<sup>6</sup> and his being a "magnificent specimen of manhood." Though Bowles was somewhat tanned in color, he did not seem to be an Indian. "His eyes were gray, his hair was a dirty sandy color, and his was an English head."<sup>7</sup> Most Texans having contact with Chief Bowles considered him highly intelligent; James T. De Shields, author of many Indian articles, describes him as "a

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<sup>1</sup> The name has several spellings. Frederick Webb Hodge (ed.), in *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico* (Washington, 1912), Vol. I, p. 163, gives the name as The Bowl, a translation of his native name, *Dawo E*. The name Colonel Bowles is common in Texas history books. Other names have been Old Bowles, Big Bowles, and Towells. Chief Bowles is the title the Cherokee chief is given in Walter P. Webb and H. Bailey Carroll (eds.), *The Handbook of Texas* (Austin, 1932), Vol. I, p. 198, and the title used in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> James T. De Shields, *Border Wars of Texas* (Tioga, Texas, 1912), p. 300. The father of Chief Bowles was probably William Augustus Bowles. See the article on William Augustus Bowles by Arthur P. Whitaker in Allen Johnson (ed.), *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1943), Vol. II, pp. 519-520.

<sup>3</sup> Albert Waldert, "The Last of the Cherokees in Texas," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. I, No. 3 (June, 1923), p. 187.

<sup>4</sup> Waldert quoting Emmet Starr without citation reference in *ibid.*, p. 188. (John Bowles, or "The Bowl," became Town Chief of Running Water on the Tennessee River, Western Tennessee, in 1792, at the death of Dragging Canoe, leader of the Chickasawgas and son of the noted Cherokee chief, Attakulliskulla. These references are in Emmet Starr, *History of the Cherokee Indians, and Their Legends and Folk Lore* (Oklahoma City, 1921), pp. 35, 472.—Ed.)

<sup>5</sup> Waldert quoting Starr, *ibid.* (See Starr, *op. cit.*, p. 472.—Ed.)

<sup>6</sup> John H. Reagan, "Expulsion of the Cherokees from East Texas," *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association*, Vol. I, No. 3 (July, 1897), p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> Waldert quoting John H. Reagan in "The Last of the Cherokees in Texas," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. I, No. 3 (June, 1923), p. 188.

man of unusual sagacity.<sup>18</sup> In old age Bowles retained a good physique; he was "vigorous and strong" with "manly bearing." He maintained erect posture while walking and riding; Reagan says Bowles always carried himself with "dignity."

One of the earliest mentions of Chief Bowles was in 1794 when he had attained the position of Chief of the Running Water Town on the Tennessee River at Muscle Shoals.<sup>9</sup> In June of 1794 a group of Cherokee under Chief Bowles captured some boats in the Tennessee River and killed all the boatmen.<sup>10</sup> Women and children on the boats, however, were not harmed and were guided to their destination in New Orleans. A member of the party is quoted as speaking of the "kindness and courtesy with which she and all the white ladies and children were treated by Bowles and his party."<sup>11</sup>

As soon as the Muscle Shoals massacre was known, the Cherokee called a general council to draw up a memorial to the United States government disowning the act of Chief Bowles and his followers. The memorial stated that the Cherokee would assist in the arrest of Bowles.<sup>12</sup> A commission appointed by the United States government investigated the incident and cleared Chief Bowles and the participating Cherokee. Evidently there had been justification in what took place at Muscle Shoals.

From 1795 to 1813 Bowles served as the First Chief of the Western Cherokee,<sup>13</sup> and was situated in the valley of the St. Francis in southeastern Missouri. In December, 1811, a seismic disturbance occurred in the vicinity in which the Cherokee were established. Fearing that the area was under the ban of the Great Spirit, Bowles and the Cherokee moved to the present day county of Conway, Arkansas. The new Cherokee home was outside of the stipulated Cherokee Territory.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup>De Stieck, *Border Wars of Texas*, p. 300. It is interesting, perhaps, that Rebecca Bowles, a daughter of Chief Bowles, married Teezey Coosa, a son of Sequoyah, the inventor of the Cherokee alphabet. See Emmet Starr, *Early History of the Cherokees* (Kansas City, 1916?), p. 50.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>10</sup>Hodge (ed.), *Handbook of American Indians*, Vol. I, p. 163. (This "Muscle Shoals Massacre" was caused by the action of two unprincipled traders among the white emigrants aboard the boats, the two traders having sold a lot of whiskey and some worthless goods for an exorbitant sum to Chief Bowles's men encamped by the river on their return to their village, from an annuity payment. The details of the tragedy were told many years later by one of the women emigrants who witnessed the fight to the Rev. Cephas Washburn, A.M., this account appearing in his book *Reminiscences of the Indians* [Richmond, 1869], under "Letter I, Origin of the Cherokee Nation West," pp. 76-9. Mr. Washburn was the founder of Dwight Mission in Arkansas, which was moved to Oklahoma in 1829.—Ed.)

<sup>11</sup>Hodge, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 163.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>Starr, *Early History of the Cherokees*, p. 124.

<sup>14</sup>Starr, *History of the Cherokee Indians*, p. 187.



MAP OF THE CHEROKEES LAND GRANT IN TEXAS



(Drawing by William A. Berry, Texas Univ., from recorded descriptions)

**CHIEF BOWLES, CHEROKEE**

As the American frontier moved westward, pressure on the Cherokee was increased by white settlers in the Arkansas Territory. There appears to have been a general desire on the part of the Cherokee people and leaders to locate once again within Spanish territory. This desire to live under Spanish rule, along with the pressure being placed on the Cherokee, and the fact that they were living outside of stipulated Cherokee Territory, caused Chief Bowles with sixty of his men and their families to emigrate in the winter of 1819-1820 to territory along the Angelina, Neches, and Trinity rivers in the Mexican province of Texas.<sup>15</sup>

Chief Bowles was about sixty-six years old when he led his small group of Cherokee into Eastern Texas. Evidently he lost the chiefship of his tribe; for seven years after arrival in Texas, Richard Fields, a half-breed Cherokee who fought as a soldier with American troops in the War of 1812, figured as the principal chief of the Cherokee.<sup>16</sup>

Under the leadership of Richard Fields the Cherokee in Texas increased. They united with other refugee Indians from the United States, forming together a loose confederacy later known as "the Cherokee and their associated bands," which has been described by James Mooney as "consisting of Cherokee, Shawano, Delawars, Kickapoo, Quapaw, Choctaw, Biloxi, 'Iawanie' (Heywani, Yowani) 'Uataqua' (Nada ko or Anadarco, another Caddo subtribe), 'Tahookatookie' (?), Alabama (a Creek subtribe), and 'Cooshatta' (Kosaa ti, another Creek subtribe)."<sup>17</sup> The Cherokee were the largest and most important group; the Cherokee chief always was regarded as the principal leader of the associated tribes.

Fields's first concern was to get a written approval from the Mexican government for Cherokee title to the East Texas lands.

<sup>15</sup>E. W. Winkler, quoting the *National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.) for September 15, 1820, in "The Cherokee Indians in Texas," *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association*, Vol. VII, No. 2 (October, 1903), p. 96. Winkler points out that "the precise date of the entrance of the Cherokee into Texas has not been ascertained." Frederick Webb Hodge (ed.), in *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. I, p. 163, gives the date as "about 1824." This date must be an error; the Bexar Archives has documents dated as early as 1822 concerning the Cherokee in Texas. Walter P. Webb in *The Texas Rangers* (Boston, 1935), p. 7, must be in error also when he gives the date of Cherokee arrival as "about 1824."

<sup>16</sup>Winkler, "The Cherokee Indians in Texas," *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association*, Vol. VII, No. 2 (October, 1903), p. 96.

<sup>17</sup>James Mooney, "Myths of the Cherokee," *Nineteenth Annual Report*, Bureau of American Ethnology (Washington, 1900), Part I, p. 143. (These associated bands later joined the main body of their different tribes, whose descendants are now living in Oklahoma. The "Shawano" of Mooney's list are the modern Shawnee; the "Iawanie" are the Iainai, or Joni. The "Tahookatookie" were said to have been a band of Cherokee, known by the name of their leader, Chief Degataga or Takatoka. For a recent study of these tribal groups, giving their ethnic origins and histories, with the exception of the "Tahookatookie," see Mariel H. Wright, *A Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma* [Norman, 1951].—Ed.)

On November 8, 1822, José Felix Trespalcacios, governor of the province of Texas, entered into an agreement with the Cherokee at Bexar.<sup>18</sup> In part the agreement stated that the Cherokee "until the approval of the Supreme Government is obtained . . . may cultivate their lands and sow their crops in free and peaceful possession."<sup>19</sup> Governor Trespalcacios made arrangements for Fields to go to Mexico City to get final approval for Cherokee title to the desired land in East Texas. Bowles was one of the persons accompanying Fields to Mexico City early in 1823.<sup>20</sup> Revolutionary conditions and changing administrations in the Mexican capital made it difficult to obtain approval of Cherokee claims. On April 27, 1823, Fields did get from Lucas Alamán, minister of relations, a statement that "the agreement made on 8th November, 1822, between Richard Fields and Colonel Felix Trespalcacios, Governor of Texas, remains provisionally in force . . ."<sup>21</sup> Fields considered the statement to imply that the Mexican government had granted territory to the Indians. In the years following the agreement made in 1823, the Mexican government paid scant attention to Cherokee claims to land, and on April 15, 1825, Benjamin Edwards was given a grant to settle families on land which had been occupied by the Cherokee since their first arrival in 1819-1820. Much unrest developed among the Cherokees; Fields in 1826 sent John Dunn Hunter,<sup>22</sup> a white member of the tribe, to Mexico City to try and obtain for the Cherokee a written title to the land. Hunter failed in the attempt.

The Cherokee were not the only dissatisfied people living under Mexican jurisdiction in East Texas in the middle 1820's. The white settlers had become angered by a controversy between Mexican authorities and the empresario Hayden Edwards. The argument resulted in what is known as the Fredonian Rebellion, begun on December 16, 1826, when Benjamin Edwards and some thirty followers rode into Nacogdoches and proclaimed the Republic of Fredonia.

<sup>18</sup>The agreement may be found in Record of Translations of Empresario Contracts, 85, General Land Office, Austin, Texas.

<sup>19</sup>Article 5 of the "Articles of an agreement, made and entered into between Captain Richard, of the Cherokee Nation, and the Governor of the Province of Texas," in *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>*Texas Almanac for 1828* (Galveston, 1827), p. 168.

<sup>21</sup>Lucas Alamán, minister of relations, to Felipe de la Garza, commandant general of the Eastern Interior Provinces, April 27, 1823, in Record of Translations of Empresario Contracts, 85, 86, General Land Office, Austin, Texas.

<sup>22</sup>Hunter was born about 1796 and claimed when a child he had been captured by the Indians before they came to Texas. He was fairly well educated, traveled considerably through the United States and England, and while in England he wrote an account which was published in London in 1824 under the title of *Memoirs of a Captivity among the Indians of North America*. Hunter joined the Cherokee again in East Texas in 1826.

Cherokee leaders Fields and Hunter, despairing of the possibility of the Mexican government's allowing a separate Cherokee territory, began negotiations with the Fredonian leaders Benjamin Edwards and Martin Parmer on December 21 at Sand Springs in southern Rusk County.<sup>23</sup> In return for Indian help in the rebellion, a portion of the proposed Fredonian Republic was to be given to the Indians.

During the time Fields and Hunter were working with the Fredonians, Bowles was in contact with the loyal element of settlers in Texas, and was urging the Cherokee not to co-operate in the projected rebellion.<sup>24</sup> He felt that a loyalty to Mexico would eventually result in the long-awaited land grant. Bowles won out, and Fields and Hunter were never able to muster more than thirty warriors.<sup>25</sup> With the collapse of the Fredonian Rebellion in Nacogdoches, Fields and Hunter were tried by the Cherokee and executed on May 8, 1827. Bowles succeeded Fields as war chief, and Big Bush succeeded Hunter as civil chief.

For the few years following the Fredonian Rebellion, Chief Bowles and the Cherokee were befriended by both Mexicans and loyal Texans. Stephen F. Austin and numerous Mexican officials praised the role Chief Bowles had played in keeping the Cherokee loyal to Mexico.<sup>26</sup> The Mexican government was appreciative of the role the Cherokee had played; on July 13, 1827, Lt. Nicolas Flores was sent to Cherokee Village to deliver to Chief Bowles the commission of lieutenant-colonel in the Mexican army.<sup>27</sup> On July 19, Bowles arrived in Nacogdoches and "placed himself with his people at the disposition of the (Mexican) commander." On January 8, 1828, Bowles visited Colonel José de las Piedras, Mexican commander at Nacogdoches, and informed him of a desire to tighten the bonds of friendship between the Cherokee and Mexico.

During the early 1830's Chief Bowles and the Cherokee made repeated efforts to secure from the Mexican government a written guarantee for the land the Cherokee were occupying. After numerous failures with the Mexicans, Bowles decided to join his forces with the Texans who were in the first stages of a revolt against Mexico.

<sup>23</sup> R. B. Blake, "John Dunn Hunter," in Webb and Carroll (eds.), *Handbook of Texas*, Vol. I, p. 865.

<sup>24</sup> "Richard Ellis et al. to Austin, January 22, 1827," in Eugene C. Barker (ed.), *The Austin Papers* (Vols. I and II, Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Years 1919 and 1922, Washington 1924, 1928; Vol. III, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1926), Vol. II, p. 1507.

<sup>25</sup> Eugene C. Barker, *The Life of Stephen F. Austin* (Nashville, 1925), p. 193.

<sup>26</sup> "Papers Pertaining to Cherokee Lands in Nacogdoches County," in *Indian Papers*, I, 1835-1841, Archives, Texas State Library, Austin, Texas.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

The Consultation meeting at San Felipe in November 1835, held for the purpose of deciding what attitude Texas should take toward the dictatorship established in Mexico by Antonio López de Santa Anna, was aware of the danger which unfriendly Cherokee might constitute in a crisis. On November 13, the following declaration was drawn up:<sup>28</sup>

**Be It Solemnly Decreed,**

That we, the chosen delegates of the consultation of all Texas, in general convention assembled, solemnly declare,

That the Cherokee Indians, and their associate bands, twelve tribes in number, agreeably to their late general council in Texas, have derived their just claims to lands included within the bounds hereinafter mentioned, from the government of Mexico, from whom we have also derived our rights to the soil by grant and occupancy.

We solemnly declare, that the boundaries of the claims of the said Indians to lands is as follows, to wit: lying north of the San Antonio road and the Neches, and west of the Angelline and Sabine rivers.

We solemnly declare, that the governor and general council, immediately on its organization, shall appoint commissioners to treat with said Indians, to establish the definite boundary of their territory, and secure their confidence and friendship.

We solemnly declare, that we will guarantee to them peaceable enjoyment of their rights to their lands, as we do our own.

Done at San Felipe de Austin 13 Nov. 1835

The Consultation instructed Sam Houston, longtime friend of Bowles and the Cherokee, John Forbes, and John Cameron to serve as commissioners to meet with Chief Bowles to carry out the proposed treaty.<sup>29</sup> On February 23, 1835, the day General Santa Anna arrived with forces in San Antonio, Sam Houston and the appointed Texas commissioners concluded a treaty with Chief Bowles and representatives of the Cherokee and associated tribes whereby peace and commercial relations were established and the Cherokee boundaries defined, and lands guaranteed to them.<sup>30</sup> The Cherokee remained at peace and the attention of Texans was focused on the Mexicans who were defeated on April 21 at San Jacinto.

<sup>28</sup> H. P. N.ammel (comp.), *The Laws of Texas* (Austin, 1898), Vol. I, p. 596.

<sup>29</sup> Houston kept Bowles informed of what went on at San Felipe. On November 22 he wrote the following to the Cherokee chief:

My friend

. . . All that I promised to you at our talk in Nacogdoches has been done and your land is secured to you! So soon as it is possible you will find Commissioners sent to you, to hold a treaty and fix your lines, that no bad men will be inside them without leave.

I expect that I will be sent to you, and I will then take you the Great paper that was signed by all the Council— It will make you happy and all your people contented as long as you live. . . .

Your friend and Brother  
Sam Houston

Amelia Williams and Eugene C. Barker (eds.), *The Writings of Sam Houston* (Austin, 1938-1943), Vol. IV, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> A copy of the treaty is in *Indian Papers*, I, 1835-1841, Archives, Texas State Library.



Chief Bowles must have felt that he had a champion on his side when his close friend Sam Houston became president of the Republic of Texas on October 22, 1836. Houston had been admitted to citizenship among the Cherokee on November 29, 1829, had taken an Indian wife, and had long been a friend and advisor to the tribe. Houston earnestly desired to carry out the treaty commitments made with Bowles on February 23, 1835, and told the senate on December 20, 1836: ". . . (1) most earnestly recommend its ratification. You will find upon examining this treaty, that it is just and equitable, and perhaps the best which could be made at the present time."<sup>31</sup>

In the senate an Indian committee was appointed to examine the treaty made with Bowles. The committee found much fault with the document; the Indians had not fought with the Texans during the revolution and besides a grant to the Cherokee would conflict with a grant given to David G. Burnet. The senate refused to ratify the treaty "inasmuch as that said treaty was based on promises that did not exist and that the operation of it would not only be detrimental to the interests of the Republic but would also be a violation of the vested rights of many citizens."<sup>32</sup> With such strong opposition to fight, there was nothing Sam Houston could do to get the land for Bowles and the Cherokee.

Although Houston was unable to get the desired land for the Cherokee, Chief Bowles was always a close friend. In 1837, when frontier conditions in Texas were especially bad, Houston sent Chief Bowles to try to conciliate the plains Indians.<sup>33</sup> Bowles claimed that on this venture he received an unfavorable reception. He gave some sort of promise to the Texans that his Cherokee tribe would join in a war against the wild tribes. Indian agent William Goyens was at Bowles Village when the Cherokee chief returned, and on May 10, 1837, he sent the following in a letter to Sam Houston: ". . . The whole nation had been for several days indulging themselves in festivities in honor of Bowles' return. . . . The confidence of Bowles in you is unabated and to you he looks for every thing."<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Ernest W. Winkler (ed.), *Secret Journals of the Senate of the Republic of Texas, 1836-1845* (Austin, 1911), p. 26.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Ann Mucklenoy, "Indian Policy of the Republic of Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XXVI, No. 1 (July, 1922), p. 12.

<sup>34</sup> *Telegraph and Texas Register* (Houston), June 13, 1837. White persons frequently attended Cherokee tribal functions. Hattie Joplin Roach in *A History of Cherokee County* (Dallas, 1934), p. 13 says that "White friends are known to have accepted the hospitality of Chief Bowles who enjoyed serving his venison stew with a solid silver spoon which had been a gift from Andrew Jackson."

Samuel Maverick in 1838 recorded the following with Chief Bowles:

One day, "Old Bowles," Cherokee chief, with twelve or thirteen of his tribe, coming from Houston, camped at Spring Hill near the house. After tea, we were

Bowles visited in Sam Houston's home frequently; on one occasion they made a trip to Galveston Island. On May 2, 1838, the *Telegraph and Texas Register* at Houston reported that "Bowles the Cherokee Chief arrived in this city last evening."

Houston is said at one time or another to have presented to Chief Bowles a cane, a hat, a beautiful blanket, and a sword. On one occasion a member of the legislature charged that: "The president (Sam Houston) offered Bowles a commission of brigadier general in the army of Texas, with the pay of two thousand dollars per year, if he should perform any service, and one thousand whether he performed any service or not."<sup>35</sup>

While Houston remained president he appears to have felt that eventually the Cherokee would be given a guarantee to the land they occupied. Houston wrote to Chief Bowles on August 11, 1838:<sup>36</sup>

My Brother,

. . . . Do not be disturbed by the troubles which are around you, but be at peace— Remember my words, and listen to no bad talks of any one! I have never told you a lie, nor do I intend it.

Tell my sister and the children not to be disturbed—they will not be harmed, but they will be protected, by the Americans (!) Tell all my red brothers to remain at peace!

Your brother  
Sam Houston

After the Cherokee were unable to get any land grant from the government of the Republic of Texas, Chief Bowles again looked to Mexico. He saw an opportunity in the promises of Vicente Cordova, the Mexican revolutionary leader. Bowles even went so far as to permit Cordova's forces to operate for a time in the area occupied by the Cherokee. When a force of militia under the command of General Thomas J. Rusk, moved into Bowles' Village in August, 1838, Cordova escaped into Mexico and Bowles denied any connection with the Mexicans. Cordova continued to agitate in Texas, and when on May 14, 1839, Manuel Flores, a member of the Cordova group, was killed near Seguin, documents were found

dancing, when "Bowles" came in dressed in a breechcloth, anklets, moccasins, feathers and a long, clean white linen shirt, which had been presented to him in Houston. He said the pretty ladies in Houston had danced with, kissed him and given him rings. We, however, begged to be excused and requested him to retire, when he in great contempt stalked out, and our dance broke up. Bowles told us President Houston had lived in his Nation, that he had given Houston his daughter for his squaw, and had made him a "big chief"; but that now he was no longer Cherokee, but "The Great Father" of the white men. See Rena Maverick Green (ed.), *Samuel Maverick Texas: 1803-1870* (San Antonio, 1952), p. 70.

<sup>35</sup> Harriet Smither (ed.), *Journals of the Fourth Congress of the Republic of Texas* (Austin, 1931), Vol. II, p. 103.

<sup>36</sup> Houston to Bowles, August 11, 1838, in Charles Adams Gulick and others (eds.), *The Papers of Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar* (Austin, 1921-1923), Vol. II, p. 199. Cited hereafter as *Lamar Papers*.

which gave some evidence that a possible conspiracy was going on between the Mexicans and the Cherokee. Mirabeau B. Lamar, who became president of the Republic on December 10, 1838, charged that Chief Bowles had secretly collaborated with Cordova.<sup>37</sup>

Texas historians for some time have argued that the documents found on Flores, which did propose a sort of alliance between the Cherokee and Mexicans, were insignificant although they were addressed to Chief Bowles. Henderson Yoakum maintains that the Mexican leaders only had a slight acquaintance with the Cherokee.<sup>38</sup> Walter Prescott Webb says "there is a lack of evidence that the Cherokees did more than listen with Indian politeness to the warlike proposals of the Mexican agents."<sup>39</sup>

Lamar felt that since there was a possibility that the Cherokee would give trouble some sort of military force should be kept in the area the Cherokee occupied. Sometime in April or early May, 1839, Major B. C. Waters was ordered to construct a military station on the Great Saline, situated in the extreme southwest part of present-day Smith County, which was in territory claimed by the Cherokee. Chief Bowles warned Waters that any attempt to establish the post would be met with force.<sup>40</sup> The action of Chief Bowles was condemned by President Lamar. He wrote to the Cherokee chief:<sup>41</sup>

I have learned with much surprise, that you have ordered Major Waters from the great Saline. In this, you have committed an error. That officer was acting under the authority and orders of this Government, and any attempt on your part, either by force or threats to impede the execution of his duty, cannot be regarded by the Executive in any other light than as an outrage upon the sovereignty of the Nation.

<sup>37</sup> M. B. Lamar to Colonel Bowl and other Head men of the Cherokees, May 26, 1839, in *ibid.*, p. 591.

<sup>38</sup> Henderson Yoakum states in his *History of Texas from Its First Settlement in 1665 to Its Annexation to the United States in 1846* (New York, 1855), Vol. II, p. 268: "It is inferred from these documents, found on Flores, and addressed to the Cherokee chiefs, that the latter were in correspondence with the Mexican authorities. I have before me the original papers sent them by Canalizo: they are directed to 'Señor Vizc. Mas, Gefé de los Charcoques' — 'S. or Teniente Coronel Vel.' It is remarkable, if the alleged correspondence had existed, that their names were not better known. The fact that Big Muck was addressed as *chief* and Bowles as *Lieutenant-colonel*, shows how slight was their acquaintance with these chiefs."

<sup>39</sup> Webb, *Texas Rangers*, p. 53. Sam Houston charged that there was no proof that Chief Bowles had engaged in a conspiracy against the Texans. "If the Mexicans saw proper to open a correspondence with him, must he be punished for receiving the letter," Williams and Barker (eds.), *Writings of Sam Houston*, Vol. II, p. 338.

<sup>40</sup> A. Sidney Johnston, Secretary of War, "Report to the President of the Republic," November, 1839, in Smith (ed.), *Journals of the Fourth Congress*, Vol. III, p. 105.

<sup>41</sup> M. B. Lamar to Colonel Bowl and other Head men of the Cherokees, May 26, 1839, in *Lamar Papers*, Vol. II, p. 590.

Lamar had never been friendly to the Cherokee, and a part of his program called for their removal. He had announced in his first inaugural address that his policy toward the Indians would be directly opposite to that of his predecessor, Sam Houston, who was held to have been too lenient. Lamar told the Texas Congress and wrote to Chief Bowles that the "final removal (of the Cherokee) is contemplated, is certain."<sup>42</sup> The discovery of documents of Flores gave President Lamar an excellent excuse to demand that the Cherokee be expelled. The threats Chief Bowles had made against Major Waters and the murder of several East Texas families blamed on the Cherokee increased the demand for the removal of the Cherokee. By July, 1839, a showdown between the Texans and the Cherokee took place; the Texans were demanding that the Cherokee leave the Republic.

Early in July John H. Reagan, along with the Indian agent Martin Lacey and two other persons, took a communication from President Lamar and presented it to Chief Bowles. The Cherokee leader was informed of the depredations charged to his tribe and was told the Indians must leave the Republic; peacefully if they would, but forcibly if they must. Payment would be made to the Cherokee for property they had to leave, but no payment would be made for the land. Reagan describes his first meeting with Bowles:<sup>43</sup>

When we reached the residence of Bowles, he invited us to a spring a few rods from his house, and, seated on a log, received the communication of the President. After it was read and interpreted, he remained silent for a time and then made a denial of the charges contained in that communication, and said the wild Indians had done the killing and stealing and not his people.

Bowles then defended the rights of the Cherokee to the land and reminded the Texans that a treaty signed at the time of the Consultation had promised the land to the Indians. Chief Bowles then asked that he be allowed time to consult with chiefs and head men before making a reply to President Lamar's communication. It was agreed that a second meeting be held in a few days.

A splendid account of the second meeting with Bowles is given by Reagan:<sup>44</sup>

On the day appointed, Agent Lacey returned to the residence of Chief Bowles, accompanied by Curdra, the interpreter, and by Dr. Jowers and myself. We were again invited to the spring, as upon our first visit. The grave deportment of Chief Bowles indicated that he felt the seriousness of his situation. He told Mr. Lacey that there had been a meeting of the chiefs and head men in the council; that his young men were for war; that all who were in the council were for war, except himself and Big Mush; that

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 593.

<sup>43</sup> Reagan, "Expulsion of the Cherokee from East Texas," *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association*, Vol. I, No. 1 (July, 1897), pp. 39-40.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

his young men believed they could whip the whites; that he knew the whites could ultimately whip them, but it would cost them ten years of bloody frontier war. He inquired of Mr. Lacy if action on the President's demand could not be postponed until his people could make and gather their crops. Mr. Lacy informed him that he had no authority or discretion beyond what was said in the communication from the President. The language of Chief Bowles indicated that he regarded this as settling the question, and that war must ensue. He said to Mr. Lacy that he was an old man (being then eighty-three years of age, but looking vigorous and strong), and that in the course of nature he could not live much longer, and that as to him it mattered not little. But he added that he felt much solatide for his wives (he had three) and for his children; that if he fought, the whites would kill him; and if he refused to fight, his own people would kill him. He said that he had led his people a long time, and that he felt it to be his duty to stand by them, whatever fate might befall him.

I was strongly impressed by the manly bearing and frankness and candor of the agent and the chief. Neither could read or write, except that Mr. Lacy could mechanically sign his name. And during their two conferences they exhibited a dexterity of bearing which could hardly have been exceeded by the most enlightened diplomats. There was no attempt to deceive or mislead made by either of them.

Negotiations between the Cherokee and the Texans fell through, and on July 15 and 16, 1839, Chief Bowles led his Cherokee for the last time in the battle of the Neches, fought a few miles west of Tyler, in present Henderson County. The Cherokee numbered perhaps seven or eight hundred. The Texans, numbering approximately five hundred, were under the command of Willis H. Landrum and included David G. Burnet, Albert Sidney Johnston, Thomas J. Rusk, Edward Burleson, and many other persons prominent in Texas history.

Accounts of the battle indicate that Bowles made every effort to win a losing fight. De Shields says Bowles "exhorted the Indians to fight bravely. During the last battle he could be repeatedly heard encouraging them, and more than once urging them to charge."<sup>45</sup> Bowles must have been a conspicuous figure during the battle. Major William J. Jones reported that Bowles was "mounted on a very fine sorrel horse, with blaze face and four white feet."<sup>46</sup> Bowles did dress for the battle; he had on "a sword and sash, and military hat and silk vest, which had been given to him by Sam Houston."<sup>47</sup> The conspicuous chief, according to

<sup>45</sup> De Shields, *Border Wars of Texas*, p. 300. Another account of the battle may be found in J. W. Wilberger, *Indian Depredations in Texas* (Austin, 1909), pp. 167-173.

<sup>46</sup> John Henry Brown, *History of Texas* (St. Louis, 1892-1893), Vol. II, p. 163.

<sup>47</sup> Sam Houston claimed he never did give Chief Bowles the military hat. See Williams and Barker (eds.), *Writings of Sam Houston*, Vol. IV, p. 355. Chief Bowles's military hat received considerable attention. On December 25, 1839, a remnant of the Cherokee trying to escape to Mexico, was camped at the mouth of the San Sabá. The party was led by The Egg, second to Chief Bowles, and by John Bowles, son of the dead chief. A fight broke out with a group of Texans commanded by Colonel Edward Burleson. The Cherokee were defeated, and a part of

Reagan, "rode up and down in the rear of his line, very much exposed during the entire battle."

The Cherokee could not stand against the firepower of the seasoned Texans. The power of the Texans forced the Cherokee to retreat.<sup>42</sup>

"When at last the Indians retreated, Chief Bowles was the last out to attempt to leave the battlefield. His horse had been wounded many times, and he shot through the thigh. His horse was disabled and could go no further, and he dismounted and started to walk off. He was shot in the back by Henry Conner, afterwards Major Conner [sic]; walked forward a little and fell, and then rose to a sitting position facing us, and immediately in front of the company to which I belonged. I had witnessed his dignity and manliness in council, his devotion to his tribe in sustaining their decision for war against his judgment, and his courage in battle, and, wishing to save his life, ran towards him, and, as I approached him from one direction, my captain, Robert Smith, approached him from another, with his pistol drawn. As we got to him, I said, 'Captain, don't shoot him,' but as I spoke he fired, shooting the chief in the head, which caused instant death.

Another person to witness the death of Chief Bowles was C. N. Bell. On July 27, 1885, Bell wrote the following to W. N. Ramey, editor of the *Texian Annual*:<sup>43</sup>

I send you a picture of Capt. Smith's conflict with the Indian Chief, in which you will see the captain is represented as holding the chief by the throat, and using his sword on him. This is certainly a fancy sketch, for I was with Capt. Smith when he killed Bowles and nothing of this sort occurred.

Chief Bowles was wounded in the battle and after this Capt. Smith and I found him. He was sitting up in the edge of a little prairie on the Neches river. The chief asked for no quarter. He had a holster of pistols, a sword and bowie knife. Under the circumstances the Captain was compelled to shoot him as the chief did not surrender, nor ask for quarter. Smith put his pistol right at his head and of course had no use for the sword.

Smith was probably anxious to kill Bowles because his father-in-law Jesse T. Watkins had been killed by the Cherokee. According to tradition Bowles was left on the battlefield as he had requested.

the war booty included a hat which Burleson thought Sam Houston had presented to Chief Bowles. Burleson sent the hat to Colonel Hugh McLeod, adjutant general with a request that it be forwarded to Houston. As it turned out Houston took the incident as a personal insult. He introduced a resolution into Congress, later withdrawn, that McLeod be dismissed. For some time bitter feelings were evident on the hat episode. On June 15, 1840, the *Texas Sentinel* at Austin commented: "relation to the hat, however, we would state that it was not presented to the Gov. by Mr. Houston, but is a Mexican hat and was presented to him by an agent that government, at the time he received the commission of Colonel in the army Mexico."

<sup>42</sup> Reagan, "Expulsion of the Cherokees from East Texas," *Quarterly of Texas State Historical Association*, Vol. I, No. 1 (July, 1897), p. 46.

<sup>43</sup> Wm. Neal Ramey (ed.), *Texian Annual* (Austin, 1886), Vol. II, No. 37, p.

A newspaper account reported that "Some rude chaps scalped the poor chief after his death."<sup>59</sup>

After the battle Captain Robert Smith took Bowler's sword, the one given to him by Sam Houston, and presented it to the Masonic lodge in Henderson. Loaned to Colonel James H. Jones during the Civil War, the sword was afterwards returned to the Masonic lodge, where it remained until 1890 when it was presented to the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma.

The expulsion of the Cherokee in 1839 constitutes a tragic episode in Texas Indian relations. History will probably not fully justify the measures adopted by the Texans against the Cherokee. The fact that the Cherokee lands were coveted by the whites does not justify the removal and destruction of the Indians. It is necessary, however, to bear in mind that the Texans were facing Indian warfare on the whole western frontier. The Cherokee in the eastern part of the country could have been a serious threat; the papers found on Manuel Flores had implicated the Cherokee in a conspiracy against Texas. Also, the Cherokee most probably were guilty of the murder of several East Texas families.

If the expulsion of the Cherokee is considered a tragedy it may be said that Chief Bowler was the hero of the whole episode.

<sup>59</sup> *Telegraph and Texas Register* (Houston), September 1, 1841. Mildred Stanley, in "Cherokee Indians in Smith County," *Texas History Teachers Bulletin*, Vol. XII, No. 1 (October, 1924), p. 125, makes the following statement: "Mr. Tom Ingram who, as a boy, lived near the vicinity of this fight, stated that he has often seen Bowler's skeleton near the Neches River. The skull remained for many years, but finally disappeared in 1857, after a barbecue held on the river."