

John Ross

(1790 ~ 1866)



John Ross was the Principal Chief of the Cherokee tribes for nearly 40 years. Described as the Moses of his people, after devoting his life to resisting our government's seizure of Cherokee lands, he ultimately shepherded his people through their forced removal to the Oklahoma Territory.

Ross was born in Turkeytown, Cherokee Nation (modern-day Alabama) in 1790. His mother, Mollie Ross, was of mixed Scots-Cherokee ancestry, and his father, Daniel Ross, was an immigrant trader from Scotland. Under the matrilineal kinship system of the Cherokee people, Ross and his siblings were considered to be Cherokee; they were raised bicultural and bilingual. After being educated at home, John attended mixed-race schools in southeast Tennessee, and finished his schooling at Kingston Academy in Tennessee.

Ross started a series of business ventures which made him among the wealthiest of all Cherokees. He owned a 170-acre tobacco plantation in Tennessee, and also established a trading firm and a ferry service.

During the War of 1812, he served as an adjutant in a Cherokee regiment, fighting under General Andrew Jackson. From 1819 to 1826, as president of the Cherokee National Council, he was the leader of the resistance to the white man's acquisition of Cherokee land, exposing attempts by federal commissioners to bribe him into approving land sales. Five years later, Ross became the principal chief of the Cherokee Nation.

In May 1830, the U.S government passed the Indian Removal Act, which forced the tribes to exchange their traditional lands for unknown western prairie. Despite years of negotiation, by 1838 Ross realized he had no choice but to lead his people to a new home west of the Mississippi River on the tragic journey that came to be known as the Trail of Tears. His wife, Quatie, was among the 2,000 who did not survive the journey.

Ross died on August 1, 1866, in Washington, D.C., while negotiating a treaty with the U.S. government.

"It is foreign to the Cherokee principle to feign friendship where it does not exist."

St. Mary Magdalen is honoring the different communities of our parish throughout 2022.