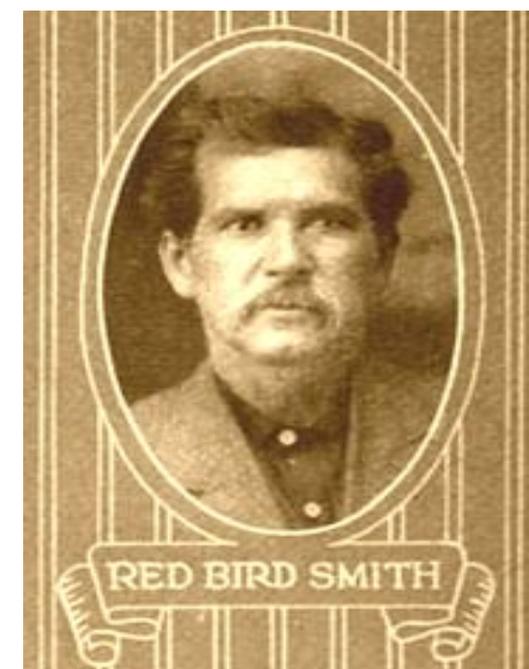


WHO WAS REDBIRD SMITH?



Redbird Smith was a Cherokee man dedicated to preserving the traditional ways of his ancestors. He helped found the Nighthawk Keetoowah Society which is known for reviving traditional spirituality among Cherokees from the mid-19th century to the early 20th century. He was born in 1850 and "crossed over" in 1918 at the age of 68.

Redbird was born near the current city of Fort Smith, Arkansas. His father (Pig Redbird Smith) was given the last name of "Smith" by non-Natives because he used to work as a blacksmith. His mother was Lizzie Hildebrand. Redbird's parents were removed from northern Georgia to "Indian Territory". They were both ardent traditionalists. When Redbird attained the age of 10, his father dedicated him to the ceremonies and traditions of the Cherokee people in accordance with ancient customs.

The Dawes Commission tried to break up collective tribal lands into individual allotments and open up the "surplus" tribal lands to be settled by non-Natives. Redbird Smith led a political resistance to the Dawes Allotment Act and sought to return to traditional Cherokee religion and values.

Redbird Smith said: *I have always believed that the GREAT CREATOR had a*

great design for my people, the Cherokees. I have been taught that from my childhood up, and now in my mature manhood I recognize it as a great truth. Our forces have been dissipated by external forces, perhaps it has been just a training, but we must now get together as a race and render our contribution to mankind. We are endowed with intelligence, we are industrious, we are loyal and we are spiritual but we are overlooking the Cherokee mission on earth, for no man nor race is endowed with these qualifications without a designed purpose. Our pride in our ancestral heritage is our great incentive for handling something worthwhile to our posterity. It is this pride in ancestry that makes men strong and loyal for their principal in life. It is this same pride that makes men give their all for their Government.

Redbird Smith repatriated wampum belts belonging to his tribe. In 1910 he was selected as chief of the Nighthawk Keetoowahs. Also in 1910, Smith and fellow Nighthawks traveled to Mexico with documents supporting Cherokee land claims in that country. The Mexican government did not recognize these claims. In 1914, he petitioned President Woodrow Wilson to create a Keetoowah reservation, but this was seen as a backward step in the U.S. Federal government's "assimilation policy." In 1921, a hundred Cherokees from 35 families moved together to the southeastern corner of Cherokee County, Oklahoma, and created a traditional community, which was a dream of Redbird Smith.

Redbird Smith married Lucy Fields. She was the daughter of Richard Fields and Eliza Brewer. Together the Redbird Smiths had ten children who survived into adulthood, including eight sons and two daughters.

Redbird Smith is the Great Grandfather of former Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation Chad Corn Tassel Smith.

After falling ill for two days, Redbird Smith "crossed over" on November 8, 1918. He is buried in the Redbird Smith

Cemetery in Sequoyah County, Oklahoma.

He served as chief of the Nighthawk Keetoowahs until his death and was succeeded by Levi Gritts. His son Sam Smith became chief of the Nighthawk Keetoowahs on April 7, 1919.

The Redbird Smith Grounds is an active Ceremonial Grounds in Redbird, Oklahoma, where Redbird Smith's July 19th birthday is celebrated annually.



Redbird Smith 1850 - 1918



Chad Smith, former Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation Of Oklahoma, and great grandson of Redbird Smith.

