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Cherokee Shorthand: As Derived from Pitman Shorthand and in Relation to the Dot-Notation Variant of the Sac and Fox Syllabary

NATHAN E. BENDER

INTRODUCTION

In 1891, a shorthand version of the Cherokee syllabary was introduced which permitted rapid, accurate writing of the Cherokee language. This shorthand system, composed of various regular combinations of short lines and dots, was developed by William Eubanks (1841-1921),¹ a Cherokee. Eubanks's shorthand is strikingly similar to Pitman shorthand, a system then at the height of its popularity in America. The success of Cherokee shorthand was not great, yet it may have had some impact on the development of the equally unusual dot-notation variant of the Sac and Fox syllabary, as suggested by similar styles of construction.²

Biographical information on William Eubanks, or Unenudi, is sketchy. It is recorded that he was born in 1841 in the Illinois district of the Cherokee Nation, Indian Territory.³ During the Civil War, he fought for the Confederacy as a captain under the command of General Stand Watie⁴ and afterwards found employment translating between English and Cherokee for *The Cherokee Advocate*, the leading newspaper of the Cherokee Nation. In 1892, the year following introduction of his shorthand system, he translated the *Constitution and Laws of the Cherokee Nation* into the

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Cherokee language.⁵ He is reported to have been an accomplished amateur astronomer⁶ and was active in researching what he believed to be historical links between the Cherokee, Hebrew, Egyptian, Greek, and Sanskrit languages.⁷

CHEROKEE SHORTHAND AS DERIVED FROM PITMAN SHORTHAND

Figure 1 is a photograph of an imprint devised by William Eubanks to show his shorthand characters in relation to the traditional Sequoyan characters.⁸ Eubanks printed copies of this table at his own expense,⁹ with two separate printing runs identified from copies within the Bureau of American Ethnology of the National Anthropological Archives and the Western History Collections of the University of Oklahoma Libraries.¹⁰ Both copies were printed by the *Indian Arrow*, a newspaper published at Fort Gibson, Cherokee Nation, Indian Territory. Figure 2 shows the symbols missing from lines 5 and 6 of figure 1.

The Sequoyan characters of figure 1 differ in several respects from the "classic" version of the syllabary as printed by Samuel Worcester and used for *The Cherokee Phoenix* and *The Cherokee Advocate*. Printed from different sets of type, the *Indian Arrow* character styles are noticeably slimmer, reminiscent of the way in which the Sequoyan characters are written with a pencil as opposed to a quill or fountain pen. Such stylistic differences more likely derive from the *Indian Arrow* publishers or typesetters than from Eubanks. However, William Eubanks does appear responsible for the different number of characters shown and the revised order of presentation. Only eighty-four of the usual eighty-five Sequoyan characters are present, the symbol of G (*nah*) being dropped, perhaps as too similar in sound to Θ (*na*) for the purposes of shorthand writing. The rearrangement of the characters from the order devised by Worcester seems ill-conceived, except that it permits a one-for-one pairing of the Sequoyan with the shorthand symbols. Although the left-to-right sequence of vowel sounds is retained in rows 1-13 and the first half of row 14, the top-to-bottom sequence of consonants differs significantly. No obvious reason is apparent for the new consonant order, since not even the shorthand symbols form a particularly logical order. Oddly, this unusual arrangement of syllabic

G W Y 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15

1	G /	V /	Ir /	K /	J /	C ^o /
2	6 /	S /	J /	V /	S /	o ^o /
3	f /	r /	y /	A /	J /	E /
4	θ /	λ /	h /	Z /	q /	o ^o /
5	U -	4 -	b -	f -	∞ -	R
6	D /	R /	T /	o ^o /	o ^o /	
7	T /	ω /	o ^o /	o ^o /	ω /	ε /
8	o ^o /	L /	C /	U /	o ^o /	P /
9	G /	o ^o /	θ /	o ^o /	o ^o /	6 /
10	f -	o ^o -	H -	o ^o -	y -	
11	o ^o -	p -	o ^o -	r -	Γ -	o ^o -
12	∞ -	β -	o ^o -	h -	G ^o -	B -
13	W -	o ^o -	f -	6 -	M -	o ^o -
14	W /	6 /	J /	o ^o /	t /	l /
15	o ^o o	o ^o 6 /	o ^o f /	o ^o T /		

[INDIAN ARROW PRINT.]

FIGURE 1. Cherokee shorthand characters compared to the traditional Cherokee syllabary. Photograph courtesy of the Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries.

Row	Sequoyan	Shorthand
5	R	⌒.
6	i	!

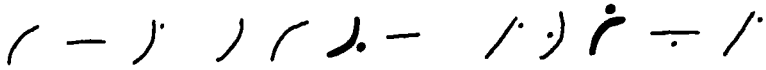

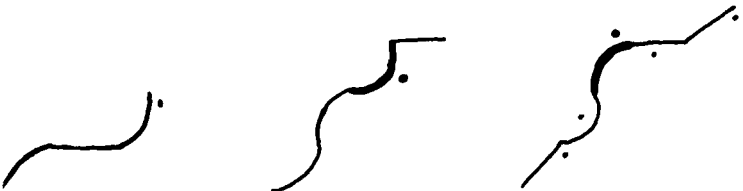
G W Y ʒ G ɥ W ɹ A ʋ G ɹ




FIGURE 2. Shorthand characters missing from figure 1 imprint.

characters was chosen by the O'Beirne brothers to illustrate the Cherokee syllabary in their 1892 biography of Sequoyah.¹¹


Lines 14 and 15 of Eubanks's table are of interest for deviating from the orderly vowel sequence of the previous lines. Line 14 contains the six characters that Worcester paired with similar sounding characters in his scheme. Eubanks neatly put all six in one row, as *ta*, *te*, *ti*, *ka*, *hna*, *tla*. Line 15 is devoted to the consonant *s*, with its unique circular shape. The last three pairings in this line show how a preceding *s* may be added to the shorthand symbols for the characters **ᄁ** (*da*), **ᄂ** (*ga*), and **ᄃ** (*kwa* or *qua*).

Handwritten notes signed by Eubanks on the copy of the shorthand table held in the Bureau of American Ethnology show the pronunciation of the symbols for *sda* and *sga* written as *sta* and *ska* (with a small *x* beneath each changed consonant). No change in pronunciation seems indicated for *skwa*, the last pair of characters depicted. Documentation explaining these final *s* shorthand characters is lacking, but it would seem reasonable to suppose that the second and third pairings, which show the pronunciation changes, were included to show irregularities within the Cherokee language, and the final pairing was used to show the general principal for adding an *s* to regular Cherokee syllables.

The characters of Cherokee shorthand were taken directly from the shorthand writing system devised by Isaac Pitman of Bath, England in 1837.¹² The Pitman shorthand system, or phonography, was introduced in America by his brother Benn Pitman in the 1850s.¹³ Widely successful, it was advertised as "The American System of Shorthand."¹⁴ Figure 3 shows the Pitman symbols used for the consonant and vowel sounds of the English language. Because the Pitman system was designed to represent sounds rather than traditional alphabetic letters, it was not limited to any particular alphabet. In fact, it has been adapted to over fourteen languages.¹⁵


Pitman shorthand uses separate characters for consonant and vowel sounds. (See figure 3.) Consonant sounds are indicated by straight lines, arcs, or circles. Twelve simple vowels are represented by dots and dashes, while three diphthongs are indicated by *v*'s and three triphthongs by small right-angle symbols. Simple vowels coalescent with the consonants *w* and *y* are depicted by half-circle vowel symbols, resulting in another twenty-four possible sounds.¹⁶ Non-English language vowel symbols include vertically paired dots, vertical dashes, and *s* shapes.¹⁷

PITMAN SHORTHAND




Consonants

p \	f \	l /
b /	v /	r /
t	th (m (
d	TH (n (
ch /	s)	ng /
j /	z)	w /
k —	sh /	y /
g —	zh /	h /



Plurals

s, z	○	ses, zes	○
------	---	----------	---



Vowels

é /	au /	i /
i /	o /	oi /
ā /	ö /	ow /
e /	u /	wi /
ah /	ū, oo /	woi /
a /	u, oo /	wow /




FIGURE 3. Shorthand characters for the Pitman writing system.

Variables in these sound symbols are indicated by whether a character is drawn lightly or heavily and, for vowels, where they are placed relative to consonant characters. The result of this multitude of sound-specific characters is a flexible and precise system of phonetic writing, hence Pitman's designation of it as phonography.

Cherokee shorthand, although using many of the same symbols, differs in several important respects. Eubanks did away with the idea of independent symbols for vowels and consonants and instead created invariable line-dot characters. By so doing, he relied on the phonetic qualities of the original Sequoyan syllabary rather than attempting to provide for further distinctions. The ω (s) character in line 15 of figure 1 was retained as a pure consonant sound within the syllabary and was given a distinctive circular shape, the same shape as was used in Pitman shorthand. It is the only character Eubanks shows appended to other Cherokee shorthand characters.

For vowel symbols, Eubanks used only dots, as opposed to the eight shapes employed by Pitman. Cherokee shorthand has six vowel positions in its line-dot characters (none, top left, top right, middle left, middle right, and bottom), which differ from the six possible vowel positions of the Pitman system (top left, top right, middle left, middle right, lower left, and lower right). While Eubanks's vowel placement was fixed, the Pitman system relied on symbol placement to indicate whether a vowel preceded or followed a given consonant by placement to the left or right, respectively, of a consonant symbol.

There is little correspondence between sounds for the various consonant symbols of the two systems. Part of the reason for this may be the presence of more than one consonant sound in several of the Cherokee syllables; by starting anew, Eubanks was able to keep the syllabic shorthand characters simple. The disadvantage of using old symbols for new sounds, however, is that persons already skilled in Pitman shorthand would find it difficult to learn the new use of familiar characters.

The Pitman system commonly linked consonant lines together to form words, much as in cursive handwriting. It is not known whether Eubanks joined his characters together in the same manner (see figure 4), since no manuscript writings in Cherokee shorthand have yet been located, although the affixing of the s consonant symbol of line 15, figure 1 is suggestive. In identifying Cherokee as opposed to Pitman shorthand writing, the re-

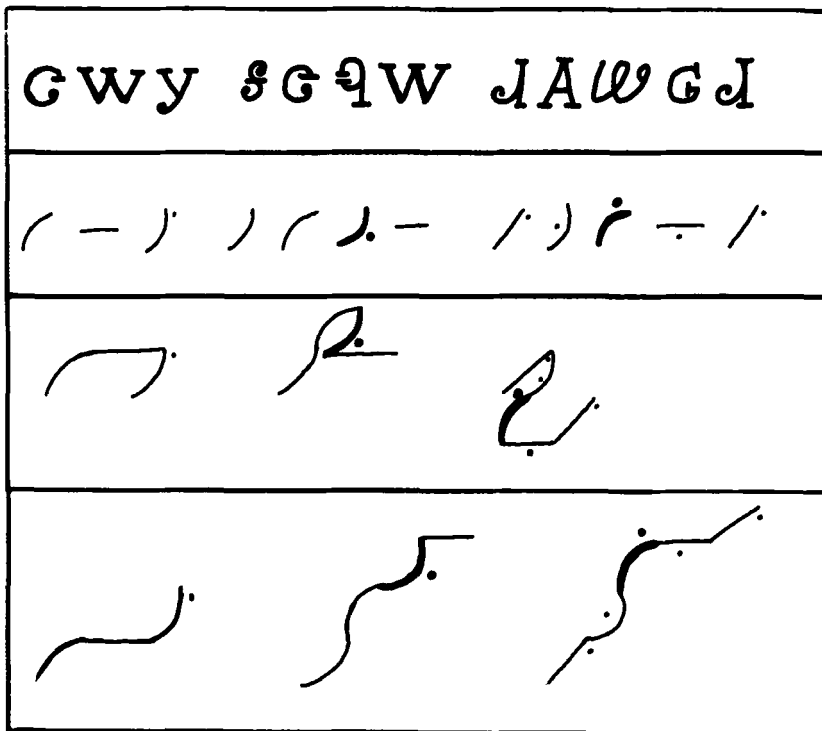


FIGURE 4. Possible word formation techniques in Cherokee shorthand.

searcher should remember that Cherokee uses only dots for vowels and that light lines are always paired with light dots and heavy lines with heavy dots; in Pitman the light and heavy consonant and vowel symbols are used independently.

Although it is not known to what extent Cherokee shorthand was adopted by the Cherokee people, it is known that Eubanks actively attempted to teach it. In their historical overview in 1892, H. F. and E. S. O'Beirne wrote quite glowingly of Eubanks's accomplishment.¹⁸ In that same year, however, James Mooney, an ethnologist who had a long association with the Cherokee people, correctly predicted the low impact of Eubanks's system.¹⁹ The shorthand's major competition seems to have been the growing practice of using roman letter syllables, as found on nearly all printed versions of the syllabary, in place of the actual Sequoyan characters. The use of the roman letter spellings of the syllables dates back at least to 1879, when they were advocated

by Louis Francis Hadley,²⁰ a teacher at the Cherokee Male Seminary and a student of Native American languages.

SAC AND FOX DOT-NOTATION IN RELATION TO CHEROKEE SHORTHAND

Cherokee shorthand may have seen just enough use to eventually influence the Sac and Fox syllabary. Within this orthography, each syllable is written out in cursive characters when handwritten or in roman letters when typed or printed. Nonstandardized until 1977,²¹ the following romanized version was collected from the Fox in Iowa in the 1920s:²²

<u>A</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>I</u>	<u>O</u>
a	e	i	o
da	de	di	do
ga	ge	gi	go
ka	ke	ki	ko
la	le	li	lo
ma	me	mi	mo
na	ne	ni	no
sa	se	si	so
ta	te	ti	to
tta	tte	tti	tto
wa	we	wi	wo
ya	ye	yi	yo

In the dot-notation version, however, the vowels have been replaced by position dots:

<u>A</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>I</u>	<u>O</u>
d	d.	d'	d..
g	g.	g'	g..
k	k.	k'	k..
l	l.	l'	l..
m	m.	m'	m..
n	n.	n'	n..
s	s.	s'	s..
t	t.	t'	t..
tt	tt.	tt'	tt..
w	w.	w'	w..
y	y.	y'	y..

The dot-notation syllabary was reported in use among the Fox, or Mesquakie, of Tama, Iowa in 1906 by ethnologist William Jones.²³ It is quite possible that it was also used or even created by the Sac in Oklahoma Territory. Syllabic writings were popular among the Sac and Fox to write letters and postcards to far-off relatives and friends, in a continual correspondence among Indian Territory (later Oklahoma Territory), Kansas, and Iowa. This correspondence began at least as early as 1880, when the Sac and Fox syllabary appears first to have been adopted,²⁴ and lasted well into the early twentieth century.²⁵ The dot-notation variant of the Sac and Fox syllabary was itself uncommon, and virtually nothing is known about it other than the brief description provided by Jones, where he states that it was used for "hidden purposes."²⁶ It should be recognized that there was and is a great deal of orthographic variation encompassed by the term *the Sac and Fox syllabary*, because it was not received as a complete, standardized system taught by government school teachers or missionaries.

Cherokee shorthand seems a probable stylistic source for the invention of the unusual dot-notation variant of the Fox syllabary. The two orthographies share the concepts of positioned dot for vowel and of fixed character combinations. Actual vowel placement positions in dot-notation (none, lower right, upper right) are three of the six found in Cherokee shorthand. Independent development from the Pitman system seems unlikely, given the above similarities and the fact that where dot-notation differs from Cherokee shorthand, it also differs from the Pitman system. Pure, independent invention cannot be ruled out, but to invoke it as an explanation, one would have to argue that the above similarities are mere chance and unlikely to have spread by known historical contacts between the Indian nations. Further, I have found no similar dot-notation orthographies mentioned for any other native languages.

No historical evidence has yet been found documenting direct contact between the Fox in Iowa and the Cherokee in Indian Territory. However, contact between the Sac and Fox and the Cherokee in the Indian and Oklahoma territories of the 1890s, when Eubanks was promoting his system, seems quite likely. One place of possible contact is the Carlisle Indian School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where both nations sent students. Although these students were few in number, the educational environment at

Carlisle was among the best of all Indian boarding schools. In 1891, Carlisle enrolled two Sac and Fox and one Cherokee student,²⁷ and in 1892 three Sac and Fox and three Cherokee.²⁸ It is not inconceivable that Cherokee shorthand was known to these students, but proof is lacking.

Another possibility was the movement of families from the Sac and Fox agency lands to the Cherokee and neighboring Creek and Seminole lands in 1892-93.²⁹ This movement into Indian Territory was the result of taxation of the Sac and Fox, Shawnee, Kickapoo, and Potawatomi by Oklahoma Territory authorities after reservation lands had been divided and individual allotments assigned. Whether this actually resulted in direct Sac and Fox/Cherokee interactions, however, is again uncertain.

Other possibilities for contact include trade, social gatherings, and intermarriage. The distance from the boundaries of the Cherokee lands to the Sac and Fox lands is less than one hundred miles, with roads crossing the Creek Nation in between.

Direct contact between members of the Cherokee and the Sac and Fox nations may not have been necessary to transfer the positioned dot-for-vowel concept. The cursive writing form of the Sac and Fox syllabary was also used by the Kickapoo and Potawatomi nations in the Indian and Oklahoma territories. The number of possible routes along which this idea could have moved are plentiful, including direct Cherokee to Sac and Fox, or through intermediate tribes, such as the Kickapoo or Potawatomi, with similar cultures, languages, and syllabic orthographies. It is also possible that a printed copy of Eubanks shorthand simply landed in the hands of the right person at the right time to effect a transfer of the basic positioned dot-for-vowel concept.

CONCLUSION

Cherokee shorthand was an interesting attempt to further Cherokee literacy, but it was not widely adopted for use. Eubanks quite likely developed the system while he was working as a translator for *The Cherokee Advocate* prior to 1891. Stylistically, Eubanks's orthography is very similar to Pitman shorthand, so much so that the Pitman system characters evidently served as the models from which Cherokee shorthand characters were derived.

The dot-notation variant of the Sac and Fox syllabary has some

similarities to Cherokee shorthand. Strongest among these is the concept of a positioned dot as a vowel indicator. The two syllabic systems also share the concept of fixed character combinations, in contrast to the more flexible Pitman shorthand system. The similarities between the Sac and Fox dot-notation and Cherokee shorthand are strong enough to be very suggestive but not so strong as to be conclusive. Historical evidence suggests that limited interaction between members of the two cultures could have allowed Eubanks's orthography to influence the creation of the Sac and Fox dot-notation system.

Shorthand writing systems have traditionally supplemented rather than replaced alphabets. The advantage of all shorthand systems is that they save the user time and effort in writing legible script. Potentially, Cherokee shorthand could still be employed by writers of Cherokee in need of a faster hand.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Etta Deason of Stillwell, Oklahoma graciously translated the Cherokee caption of Eubanks's printed broadside. Also I want to thank the reviewers of the manuscript for their helpful critical comments.

NOTES

1. Lester Hargrett, *Oklahoma Imprints 1835-1890* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1951), entry 705.
2. William Jones, "An Algonquin Syllabary," in *Anthropological Papers Written in Honor of Franz Boas* (New York: G. E. Stechert & Co., 1906), 88-93.
3. H. F. O'Beirne and E. S. O'Beirne, *The Indian Territory: Its Chiefs, Legislators and Leading Men* (St. Louis, MO: C. B. Woodward Co., 1892), 88.
4. Hargrett, *Oklahoma Imprints*, 705.
5. Cherokee National Council, $\$J\omega\theta^{\circ}A D\phi J\theta tG^{\circ}\mathcal{A} O\omega GWY D\beta f$, 1892 (Parsons, KS: 1893); see also Lester Hargrett, *A Bibliography of the Constitutions and Laws of the American Indians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947), entries 71 and 72.
6. Hargrett, *Oklahoma Imprints*, 705.
7. O'Beirne, *The Indian Territory*, 88; William Eubanks to William H. Holmes, 7 October 1909, Bureau of American Ethnology File 3706, National Anthropological Archives of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.
8. Hargrett, *Oklahoma Imprints*, 705.
9. James Mooney, "Improved Cherokee Alphabets," *The American Anthropologist* 5 (January 1892), 63-64.

10. A bibliographic description of William Eubanks's imprint detailing his shorthand may be found in Hargrett, *Oklahoma Imprints*, 705. A copy of an imprint matching this description is held in file 2931 of the Bureau of American Ethnology, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution. This differs slightly from that of the Western History Collections copy within the Cherokee Nation Papers, M943-1-30, box 2, folder 19, as shown in figure 1. The BAE copy has the publisher's identification (Indian Arrow Print) on the lower righthand side, whereas the WHC copy has the same wording (set in larger type, all capitals) on the lower lefthand side. Captions differ also. Hargrett assigned the title "Simplified symbols for Sequoyan characters," which is a description rather than a translation. In English, the caption would read word-for-word as "Cherokee fast writing. Unenudi founded." However, the last character (j or tsu) of the fourth word (U-ne-nu-di-tsu) in the WHC copy is the first character of the fifth word in the BAE copy (tsu-wa-dv-dv), indicating an apparent printing error within the WHC caption.

11. O'Beirne, *The Indian Territory*, 87.

12. Benn Pitman and Jerome B. Howard, *The Manual of Phonography* (Cincinnati, OH: The Phonographic Institute, 1895 [copyright 1885]); also Isaac Pitman, *A History of Shorthand*, 2d ed. (London, England: F. Pitman, 1868). Text in Pitman shorthand characters.

13. H. Glatte, *Shorthand Systems of the World: A Concise Historical and Technical Review* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 35.

14. Pitman and Howard, *The Manual of Phonography*, i. According to the 1893 Bureau of Education Circular no. 1, Table of Statistics on the Teaching of Shorthand in the United States, the Pitman shorthand system (as represented by the Benn Pitman, Isaac Pitman, Andrew Graham, and Munson variants) was in use by over 70 percent of all shorthand teachers. This is twice as many as any competing shorthand system of the time. This table is reprinted in Pitman and Howard, *The Manual of Phonography*, on page 1 of their appendix entitled "Catalogue of Phonographic Works."

15. Glatte, *Shorthand Systems*, 35.

16. Pitman and Howard, *The Manual of Phonography*, 97. These vowel symbols are not included in figure 3.

17. *Ibid.*, 88.

18. O'Beirne, *The Indian Territory*.

19. Mooney, "Improved Cherokee Alphabets."

20. "Hadley's Method with the Cherokee," *The Cherokee Advocate* (24 September 1879), 2.

21. Mary F. McCormick, *Primer Book: Sac and Fox Language* (Shawnee, OK: Sac and Fox Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma, 1977).

22. Huron H. Smith, "Ethnobotany of the Meskwaki Indians," in *Bulletin of the Public Museum of the City of Milwaukee* 4:2 (7 April 1928); 182.

23. Jones, "An Algonquin Syllabary," 90.

24. George L. Davenport, "Report of Agent in Iowa," in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior, 1880* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880), 97.

25. Willard Walker, "Native American Writing Systems," in *Language in the USA*, ed. Charles A. Ferguson and Shirley Brice Heath (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 157-59.

26. Jones, "An Algonquin Syllabary," 90.

27. R. H. Pratt, "Report of Carlisle School, Pa.," in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior, 1891* (Washington, DC: U.S. G.P.O., 1891), 588.

28. R. H. Pratt, "Report of School at Carlisle, Pa.," in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior, 1892* (Washington, DC: U.S. G.P.O., 1892), 691.

29. Samuel L. Patrick, "Report of Sac and Fox Agency," in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior, 1893* (Washington, DC: U.S. G.P.O., 1893), 263.