

# 1777 Treaty of Long Island on the Holston

## *Reader's Theater Script*

Note: spelling and punctuation edited

### Cast of Characters:

- |                     |               |
|---------------------|---------------|
| - Colonel Christian | - Old Tassell |
| - Raven             | - Avery       |
| - Narrator          | - Sharp       |

### Place Names to Know and Find on Maps:

- Watauga: /wah-TAH-guh/
- Chote: /cho-tuh
- Nolichucky: /no-li-chuck-ee/

### **Narrator:**

In 1763, a royal proclamation limited British colonists from moving west beyond the Eastern Continental Divide (a high ridge in the Appalachians where the rivers flow east on one side and west on the other). Within a few years, however, Virginians and North Carolinians began settling on the western land. This created problems with the Cherokee and other tribes who had lived there for thousands of years.

Young Cherokee warriors like Dragging Canoe wanted to protect their land from White settlement and in 1776 they launched attacks. Virginia and North Carolina responded by sending troops to attack the Cherokee and burned more than 50 Cherokee villages with houses and corn crops.

With the new states fighting a war with British soldiers and loyalists, they did not want to continue war with American Indians on the frontier. Dragging Canoe did not think peace was possible. In July 1777, delegates from Virginia & North Carolina, translators, writers, soldiers, and more than 400 Cherokee met to make a peace treaty at Long Island on the Holston River, a sacred place.

Dragging Canoe did not attend. But here are some of the leaders from both sides who negotiated the treaty.

### **Colonel Christian:**

My name is William Christian. I am from Virginia. I am a politician and a colonel of the 1<sup>st</sup> Virginia Regiment. Last year Governor Patrick Henry sent me to stop the Cherokee attacks. Now he has sent me to work out a peace treaty.

**Avery:**

My name is Waightstill Avery. I am a politician and lawyer from Mecklenburg County in North Carolina. I was a part of the First Provincial Congress and helped write the first state constitution. Now Governor Richard Caswell has sent me to make a peace treaty with the Cherokee.

**Sharp:**

My name is William Sharp. I am a politician and lawyer from Rowan County, North Carolina. I fought against the Cherokee last fall. Now Governor Caswell has sent me to make a peace treaty with them.

**Raven:**

My name is Raven. I am a Cherokee elder from the village Chote. Hospitality and friendship are very important to my people. I want to hunt and live on our land in peace.

**Old Tassell:**

I am often called Old Tassell. I am a Cherokee diplomat. I am a First Beloved Man, a leader of my people. I have been a part of many peace talks with the British and the Americans. My people should be treated fairly. I want to live on our land in peace.

**Narrator:**

People began arriving at Long Island on the Holston River in early July for the peace talks. Leaders from the Cherokee and the state delegations gave speeches promising friendship.

**Avery:**

We are glad to hear that a chain of friendship is established—one end in your Nation and the other end in Charles Town & that another chain of friendship is fixed—one end in Chote and the other end in Williamsburg. We have power and are willing to establish another chain—the one end in Chote and the other end in New Bern.

We have power to carry one end to our Governor in New Bern and he is there ready to take hold and hold it fast. Your elder Brothers of North Carolina were not first to make peace, nor will they be first to break it but will be steady and faithful friends.

**Narrator:** On July 15, negotiations began.

**Col. Christian:**

Our Governors, the beloved men of Virginia and North Carolina, have given us their commissioners' full power and authority to settle a peace and fix a boundary line between the Overhill Cherokees...and their own countries.

**Raven:**

As the beloved man of Virginia has taken pity on us from the greatest to the smallest, and the beloved men are here from both States, who we are thankful to hear, and hope they will take upon themselves to do us justice. We have been trespassed upon by bodies of people on our hunting grounds...The Nolichucky people have extended much down that River and on several Creeks. They are the people we want moved off, and some about the mouth of Watauga.

**Col. Christian:**

We desire [the boundary to include] those who have actually settled on the River and planted corn last year...and to run a straight line from the River to a point two or three miles below the Cumberland Gap, that our road to our settlements on the Kentucky...may be open.

**Narrator:**

Col Christian **presented a double string** of wampum with his proposal of the new boundary but after the Cherokee consulted each other, they **returned the string**, rejecting the proposal. On July 16<sup>th</sup>, the talks continued. Avery made a speech supporting the new boundary line and **presented a string** of beads to the Cherokee delegation.

**Old Tassell:**

I look upon it; the line you ask is much too near to my Nation. It takes in all your settlers on Nolichucky River, which are themselves too near; but this shall not spoil our good talks. I want liberty to raise my children and have an open Country. I speak freely because I have a right to speak in my own behalf. This line I cannot agree to, as it is too near my Nation; nearer I believe than you think for I look upon it you would not make an unreasonable demand. I am very thankful for the many good talks between us for the safety and security of my people; but did not expect you would talk of boundaries so near my towns.

**Narrator:**

Each group discussed the speeches of that day. On July 17<sup>th</sup>, negotiations resumed.

**Old Tassell:**

Now the beloved men of North Carolina shall hear my reply...The talks you gave me came from the Governor to make a path from your Country to mine and was very good till you came to talk of the boundary line...by their asking so much land it seems as if they want to see what we would say, that we might refuse something, and they might catch us in a trap for an excuse.

I left people both at home and in the woods far beyond there, who are waiting and listening to hear what I do. As you are talking of much land, I don't know how they would like that part of your proposal...It seems mysterious to me why you should ask so much land so near me.

I know that if we give up these lands, they will bring you more a great deal than hundreds of pounds. It spoils our hunting grounds...Your [livestock] are tame and [branded]; but we don't know ours – they are wild. Hunting is our principle way of living...you require a thing I cannot do. I return [your] string of beads to consider upon again...I looked for nothing but to raise my children in peace and safety.

**Narrator:**

Old Tassell **returned the string of beads** to Avery and Sharp. This shows that he did not agree with the boundary that the North Carolina diplomats presented.

**Old Tassell:**

Now this is the last talk I have to give. We have been long here and some of my people are desirous to go to their cornfields which may be suffering for want of labor. Tomorrow I am very sensible some of them will set out. I want the talks over myself...but I know matters of great consequence cannot be hurried. I hope the business will get so far done that I may go in three days. But we will see one another often times at this place where the beloved fire is.

**Narrator:**

When the Cherokee debated an issue, it was a process. They believed in consensus, meaning that everyone should agree. There was ritual and time to reflect and deliberate. But now, in the middle of July, Old Tassell was worried about the crops. He knew the Cherokee needed to give them attention so they would have food for the winter. The talks continued on July 19<sup>th</sup>.

**Avery:**

Beloved man and chiefs of the Cherokee Nation. Brothers, We (North Carolina and Chote) have for some days past been speaking the talks of peace. We have listened attentively to what you said and hope we remember all. What you say about peace is very good and friendly...

In your talks to us, day before yesterday, you seemed to doubt whether your Brothers of North Carolina were sincerely willing to make peace with you. Brothers, we were sorry to hear this. We appeal to the great being above who knows all our hearts...[Know we] are sincere, and that we are willing to have peace with you, if you will make peace with us on just and honorable terms.

We do not desire to make a short Peace; but a firm and everlasting peace. If you will not settle a boundary line with us the peace cannot be lasting; for we cannot tell our people how far to go, and this will make disputes between us hereafter.

**Narrator:**

The Cherokee remembered past broken treaties with British colonists and hoped that working with the new state governments would bring better results.

**Avery:**

Lastly, to convince you that we are sincerely disposed for peace & willing to be as easy with you as we possibly can, in justice to our own inhabitants, we have reconsidered the matter of the boundary line and now propose one which we understand will be more agreeable to your Warriors.

**Narrator:**

To offer these new terms, Avery **gives the string of beads back** to Old Tassell. His acceptance meant the Cherokee would consider this new proposed boundary.

**Old Tassell:**

The beloved men of Carolina shall now hear what I have to say... You have asked me for the ground I walk upon; you have asked me for my land... As you are the beloved men of Carolina, I listened to your talks [and] they went to my heart.

The land I give up, will ever hold good; it will ever be as good as it is now; and when we are all dead and gone, it will continue to produce... Now I am done; I give up the land you asked; I shall say no more. If you ask for more, I will not give it. In confirmation, I give you a string.

**Narrator:**

To show that he accepts Avery's proposal, Old Tassell **gave him a string of beads.**

**Sharp:**

Brothers, we have now heard you talk about the Boundary line and want to understand it clearly... Remember now that we don't promise, nor flatter you with the hopes of any reward but our friendship, which we hope you will merit and thereby may be as lasting as your Nation.

**Raven:**

I do not know how to answer. I am agreeable to the last talk. I hope the great beloved man of Carolina will take pity on us and consider us for the land which I think he ought to do, but I do not demand it. But it was always a custom when [boundary] lines were run to get something. I hope pity will be taken on me but the line shall be made firm and lasting as I give up the land.

**Colonel Christian:**

Friends and Brethren, Warriors and Chiefs... All our talks have been good as they were intended to strengthen and brighten the chain of friendship... We have buried the War hatchet.

We have made a firm, lasting, and as we believe, an honorable Peace; and established a boundary between your country and ours, which we hope will last till time shall be no more. Future generations will see it and enjoy the happy effects of it.

**Narrator:**

Colonel Christian **gave a string of beads** to the Cherokee.

**Avery:**

Our alliance has been made stronger by our brothers of North Carolina who sit before this council fire with us. They have taken hold of the Great chain to put it into the hands of their Governor at New Bern who...will receive it with pleasure and hold it fast.

We have buried the War hatchet and the black belts deep in the ground, and planted a tree over them, that they may forever be hid and forgotten by us; and in their place we have taken fast hold of the Great Chain and the White Belts...we have made a firm, lasting, and as we believe, an honorable Peace; and established a boundary between your country and ours.

**Narrator:**

Official state clerks wrote down the terms of the peace treaty and all leaders present signed it on July 20<sup>th</sup>. The next day, state leaders issued a letter to be read in Cherokee villages. It read:

"Friends and Brethren. We the Commissioners from Virginia and North Carolina have the pleasure to inform you that we have kindled the Great Council fire at this place...We have established a boundary between the Overhill country and the states of Virginia & North Carolina. A boundary so strong that it cannot be broken.

We and the Chiefs & warriors have signed our names to the articles of our peace and are about to part in peace tomorrow and return to our homes in safety and think of nothing but raising our children...**In confirmation we send you a string of White Beads.**"