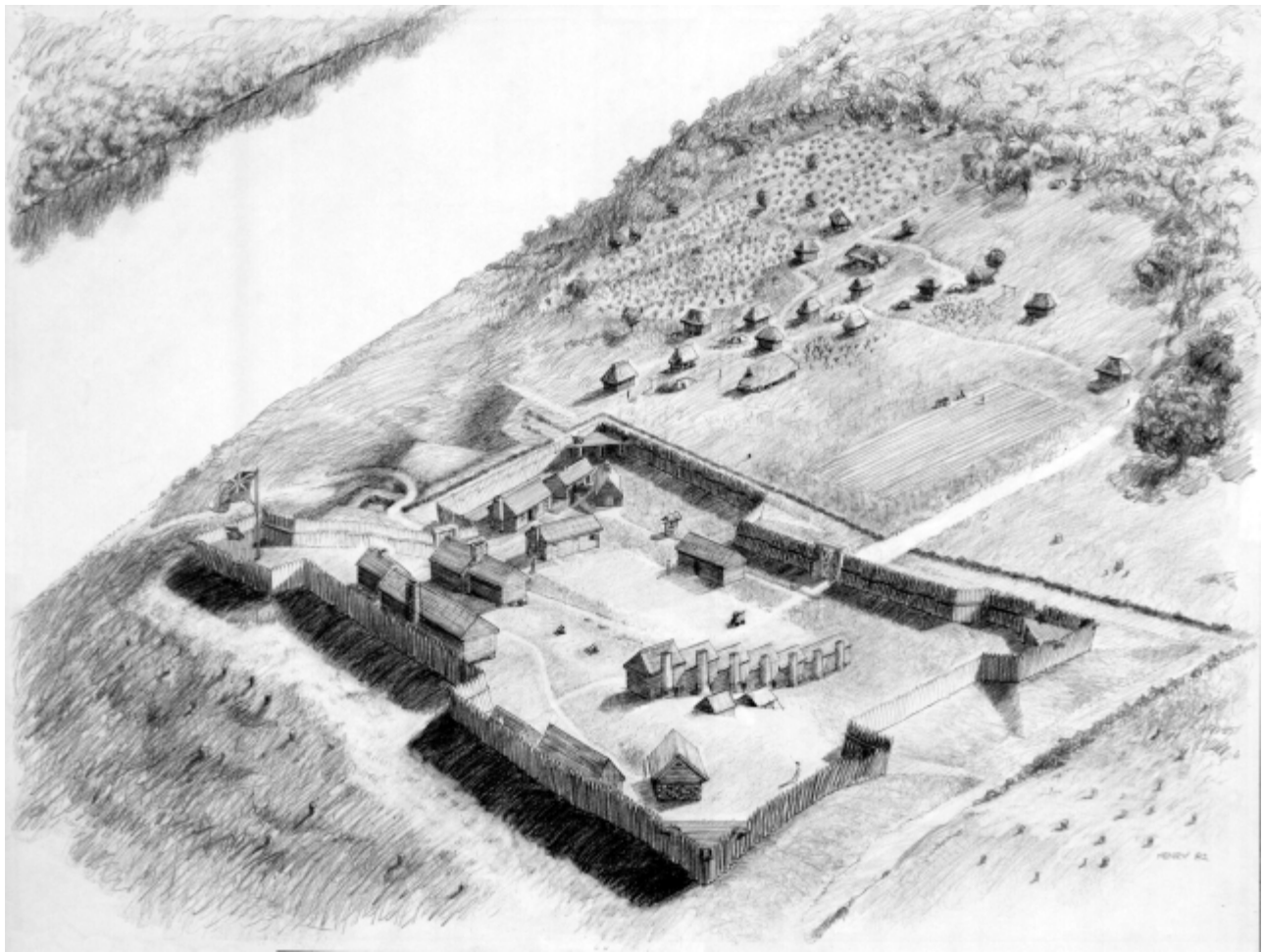


Fort Loudoun

Fort Loudoun, named in honor of John Campbell, the British commander-in-chief in North America and the 4th Earl of Loudoun, was a colonial American fort located on the banks of the Little Tennessee River near the Cherokee “capital” city of Chota (present-day Vonore, Monroe County). It was originally built during the French and Indian War (Seven Years War) at the request of the British-allied Cherokee warriors fighting the French-allied Shawnee Indians in the Ohio country as a means of protecting their women and children when the tribe’s warriors were fighting battles far from their homes. Ft. Loudoun was the first British fort of any significance west of the Appalachians.



*Drawing courtesy of Douglas Henry, TN State Parks
(<http://www.fortloudoun.com>)*

Virginians were desperate for the assistance of Cherokee warriors in their war against their French and Shawnee enemies. Reeling from a French and Indian victory over British forces under General Edward Braddock in western Pennsylvania, territory claimed by Virginia, the royal governors of Virginia and South Carolina agreed to construct a fort in the Overhill country

as the price for Cherokee enlistment. The fort was to serve as a point of refuge for Cherokee women and children to protect them in the event that the French or French-allied Indians attacked during the absence of the Cherokee warriors, who would be away fighting on the behalf of the British and the colonists. But when the Virginians arrived in June 1756 to construct the fort, the South Carolinians were not present. Unaware that the South Carolinian construction team led by Sergeant William Gibbs was temporarily delayed by the appointment of a new governor, the Virginians pondered their next course. Eager to return home, they hastily built a small outpost across the Little Tennessee River from Chota and then made their trek back east over the Appalachian Mountains. Because they failed to leave behind a garrison to guard it, the Cherokee destroyed it in order to prevent its capture by the French. The land remained vacant until Gibbs's Independent Company of South Carolina, consisting of 120 short-term troops and several Cherokee warriors, including the chief Attakullakulla, on an expedition from Fort Prince George (near present day Clemson, South Carolina), along with 80 British regulars, finally arrived later that year to build a proper fort. They opted to construct the fort further down river on the south side of the Little Tennessee River near the mouth of the Tellico River about five miles below Chota.



Art by Ken Smith

Designed by William Gerald de Brahm, a German engineer, the new outpost was operational and garrisoned in the summer of 1757. Upon completion, the British regulars guarding the fort invited their families to join them and soon a small community emerged complete with farms and a trading network with the Cherokees. Food supply was a problem, however, as all external provisions had to be shipped from the nearest white settlement, 200-miles east over the Appalachian Mountains.

Diamond-shaped and 300 feet long on each side with a bastion at each corner, Ft. Loudoun was an imposing fortification that occupied the high ground overlooking the Little

Tennessee. The fort was surrounded by a deep ditch and a palisade fifteen feet high along the embankments; twelve small cannon, three at each corner, provided formidable protection. Fort Loudoun served 3 purposes. First, it protected the Overhill region from French attacks. Second, it helped maintain the alliance between the Cherokees and the British colonies. Lastly, it served to prevent any possible alliance between the Cherokees and the French.



Photo taken by Bill Porter, March 2007

Rather than wedding the Overhill Cherokees to the British cause, Fort Loudoun quickly came to symbolize Native American distrust of English white intentions. Clearly, they understood that the fort was not so much for the benefit of protecting Indians as it was a manifestation of the British struggle for empire in North America. The French further exacerbated the deteriorating relations between the British settlers and the Cherokees as they convinced the Overhill Indians that the English intended to enslave them once they had cleared all the non-English whites from the region. Further complicating relations between the Cherokees and the British was the fact that when the fort's original commander, Raymond Demere, who had been friendly to the natives, departed, he was replaced by his brother Paul, whose rude and overbearing nature proved to exacerbate tensions.

In January 1760, the Overhill Cherokees began attacking scattered settlements and trading houses in the southern backcountry. In February, Indians ambushed the commander of Fort Prince George, which led the British to retaliate. The Cherokee of Chota were unwilling to attack Fort Loudoun frontally as they waited for possible assistance from French and Creek allies. They then decided surround the fort, cut off its supply lines, and prepared to lay siege in March 1760. Three hundred men, women, and children were inside the fort, along with a

company of South Carolina troops. Fortunately the fort had been adequately stocked with enough provisions to last months, but the Cherokee were persistent. The few relief expeditions sent to reinforce the fort failed for various reasons, leaving the fort's inhabitants totally vulnerable. As their provision depleted the inhabitants were forced to subsist solely on horseflesh, but by July even those were mostly gone. On August 7, Captain Paul Demere dispatched emissaries to meet with the Indians and negotiate terms of surrender. Meeting at Chota's town house, Demere's emissaries agreed to turn over the fort, its cannons, extra small arms, and the remaining powder, and ammunition to the Cherokees in return for safe passage to either Fort Prince George or Virginia. The sick and disabled troops could remain until they had finally recuperated.



<http://www.fortloudoun.com>

But the British did not necessarily comply with the agreement as they buried or destroyed some of the fort's weaponry before evacuating Fort Loudoun on August 9. The soldiers then marched 15 miles to an encampment for the evening. Early the next morning an overwhelming force of attacking Cherokees awakened them from their sleep. Approximately 30 or more soldiers died including all the officers except Captain John Stuart who was taken captive and then later ransomed. According to reports brought back by Abram, a black slave, Captain Demere met a grisly death. The Cherokees scalped him while he was still alive, forced him to dance, then chopped off his arms and legs before stuffing his mouth with dirt.

Despite their victory at Fort Loudoun, the Cherokees realized it was in their best interest to declare peace and reestablish trade with the British. They lacked essential items that they had grown accustomed to by trading with Europeans and the French were losing the war against the British. But the British struck back in the summer of 1761 in retaliation, burning numerous Cherokee towns, destroying their crops, and driving thousands into the mountains to starve.



Photo taken by William E. Hardy, November 2006

In late 1761, the Cherokee consented to a peace agreement under which the fort would be returned to the British. Fort Loudoun was never garrisoned again, but it had served its purpose well. By serving to protect the uneasy alliance between the Cherokee and the British, even if only for a while, the fort helped the English hold out against the French until the war turned in their favor.

Sources: John R. Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers: Three Regions in Transition* (2001); Paul H. Bergeron, Stephen V. Ash, and Jeanette Keith, *Tennesseans and their History* (1999); Fort Loudoun, www.fortloudoun.com