

# Tennessee during the Revolutionary War

*Essential Question: How did the American Revolution impact Tennessee?*

The American Revolution brought profound changes to the settlements in East Tennessee. It should come as no surprise that settlers who defied the British government by settling west of the Appalachian Mountains, privately purchasing the land from the Cherokee and creating their own independent government, would endorse the Patriot cause. However, the outbreak of fighting at Lexington and Concord, which came only one month after the Transylvania and Watauga Purchases, made the settlers realize how precarious their situation was. The settlers in Watauga, Nolichucky and Carter's Valley and other settlements formed a Committee of Safety and later took the name Washington District.<sup>1</sup>

The British intended to use American Indian allies to attack settlements along the frontier and began arming warriors from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico with hatchets, guns and ammunition.<sup>2</sup> The Cherokee and many other tribes sided with the British for a number of reasons. First, since the removal of the French at the end of the French and Indian War, the British had been the key trading partner of most tribes. Secondly, many American Indians had close personal or family ties with British traders and Indian agents. For example, John Stuart, British Indian Agent during the Revolution, was spared during the Fort Loudoun Massacre because of his friendship

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Bergeron, Stephen Ash and Jeanette Keith, *Tennesseans and Their History*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 24.

<sup>2</sup> James Mooney, (1900) *Myths of the Cherokee and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees*. Reprint. (Nashville: Charles and Randy Elder Publishers, 1980.),47.

with Attakullakulla. Lastly, the British government had made clear efforts to stop the flow of settlers into American Indian lands.

When the British government repeated its demand that the settlers abandon their lands or face war with the Cherokee in the spring of 1776, the settlers took action. The settlers asked North Carolina for help in a document known as the Watauga Petition. North Carolina eventually agreed to assist the Washington District as the settlers now called their allied settlements. However, before help could arrive, Dragging Canoe and his allies launched a series of attacks against the settlements in 1776 known as the Cherokee War of 1776. The settlers were warned of the attack by Nanye-hi and had time to prepare.<sup>3</sup> The settlers defeated the force led by Dragging Canoe at the Battle of Long Island. The Wataugans held out against a two week siege of their fort at Sycamore Shoals. The Carter's Valley settlers fled, allowing the Cherokee to easily raid and burn the homesteads there.<sup>4</sup> Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia retaliated by sending militia forces to attack Cherokee towns in the region. By 1777, more than 50 Cherokee towns had been burned and hundreds of Cherokee had been killed or sold into slavery. The Treaty of Long Island negotiated in 1777 ended the hostilities, but also created a rift within the Cherokee which resulted in Dragging Canoe and others moving south to Chickamauga.<sup>5</sup>

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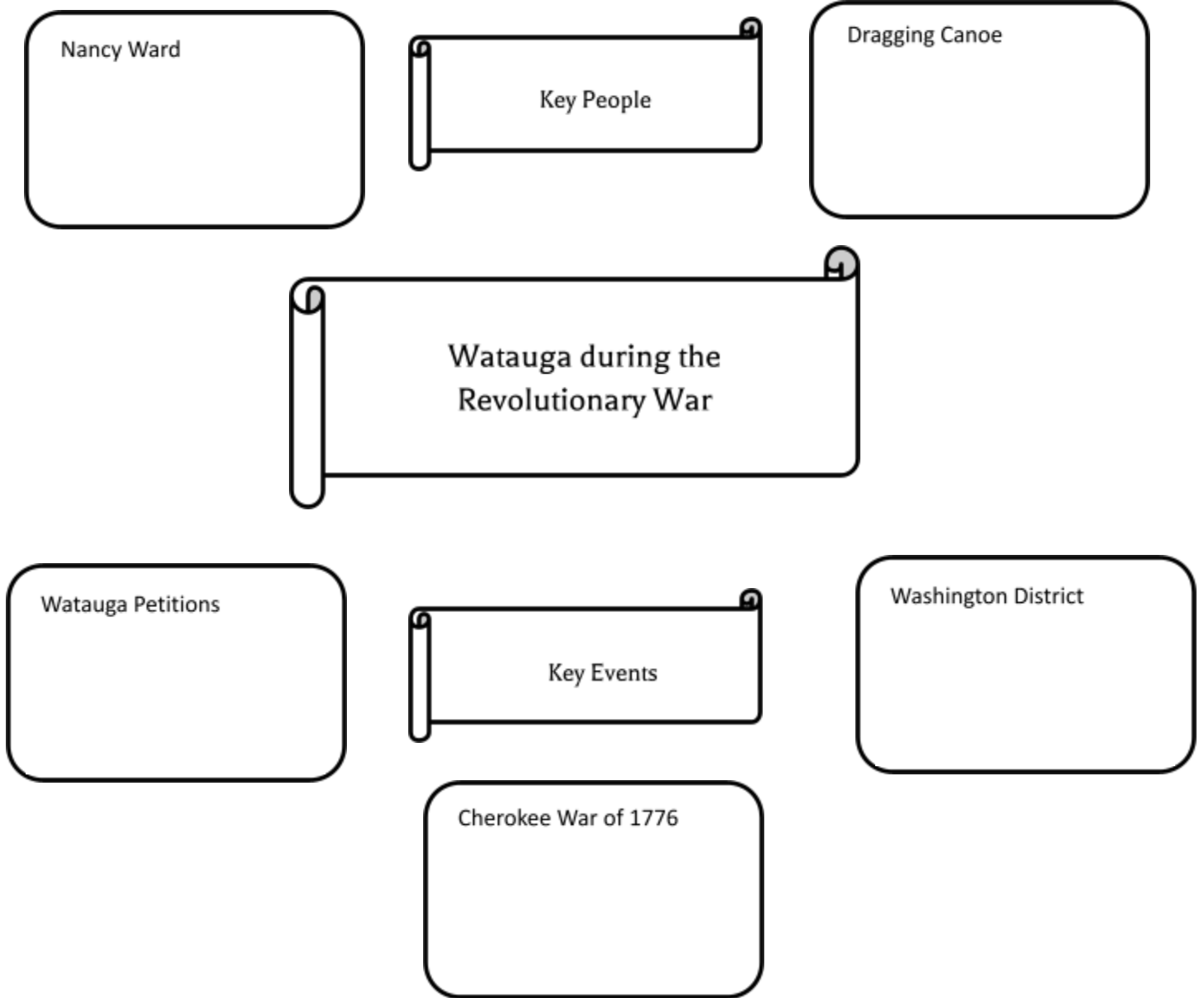
<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 47-48.

<sup>4</sup> Bergeron, Ash and Keith, *Tennesseans and Their History*, 27-28.

<sup>5</sup> Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee*, 53-54.

# Watauga during the Revolutionary War

Complete the graphic organizer below, by filling in supporting details about each of the people or events listed below. Then complete the statement at the bottom of the page.



I believe that the effects of the Revolutionary war on were mostly \_\_\_\_\_  
because \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, and  
\_\_\_\_\_.