

Nancy Ward Musical
(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on April 24, 2012)

On a Sunday about two years ago, I met Becky Hobbs. (see her web site at: <http://www.beckyhobbs.com/>). She is a well respected song writer and entertainer who lives in Nashville, TN. She had found me through my Nancy Ward web site: <http://smithdray.tripod.com/nancyward-index-5.html>

She had just finished visiting Long Island on the Holston River in Kingsport, TN, where Nancy Ward gave her famous speech in 1781. Becky is a fifth great granddaughter of the Beloved Woman, Nancy Ward of the Cherokee (1738-1822). Becky refers to Nancy Ward by her Cherokee name, Nanyehi.

Nancy said at this treaty, "You Americans look at women as though we are nothing. But we are your mothers; you are our sons. Our cry is all for peace. Let it continue. This peace must last forever. Let your mother's sons be ours, our sons be yours. Let your women hear our words." Such profound words! She was the ONLY Native American woman to speak in treaties with white settlers. Obviously she was a woman of powerful influence in both the Cherokee and among the white settlers.

As many of you may know, I am a historian because of John Rice Irwin's request for me to take a photograph of a four to five foot statue of Nancy Ward that was on a white woman's grave in the Arnwine Cemetery in Grainger County in the mid 1970's. After taking the photo he requested, I began to wonder about who the woman might have been who inspired such a statue of Bear Creek marble stone.

Thus began a lifelong dedication to the history of Nancy Ward - as Fanny says, the "other woman" in my life. I have written of her in *An Encyclopedia of East Tennessee* and the *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*. I have published a web site, <http://smithdray.tripod.com/nancyward-index-5.html>.

If you google "Nancy Ward" you will get my website. There I have told the story of Nancy Ward as well as the saga of the marble statue that was stolen from the Arnwine Cemetery grave of Maggie Farmer in 1980. I located the statue in February, 2006, when a descendent of Nancy Ward sent me an email telling me the statue was shown in an art and antique show in New York City.

That started a campaign to secure the stolen statue's return to East Tennessee and to have it placed in the East Tennessee History Center in Knoxville. We have a reinforced floor space reserved for it there. Obviously, securing the return was not as easy as David Alexander (Maggie Farmer's descendent) and I felt it should be. We continue to work that issue with the person who has possession of the statue.

There is a whole story to be written, maybe even a book, about the stolen statue and its history. However, David Alexander and I hesitate to write that story until we have the statue back in East Tennessee where it belongs. Then I will write the full story detailing each person who has had the statue in their possession over the past 32 years.

I have recorded testimony from the person who participated in the theft, I have interviewed the person who hauled the statue from East Tennessee to Maine, I know who sold it to whom and can prove its unique ownership by the descendent of the person on whose grave it stood for 70 years.

The struggle continues at this time to convince the person in possession of the statue to return the historically significant artifact. David and I are in conversation with him. I still hope he will see the historical value of the statue as more important than a mere folk art object for resale.

Nancy Ward Musical
(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on April 24, 2012)

The important story of Nancy Ward's search for peace between the Cherokee and white settlers is filled with romance, intrigue, struggle and an emotional journey for young Nancy Ward who was forced by fate to grow up quickly and to form strong convictions for peace as a result of the horrible experience of seeing her young husband killed in war. This personal loss stayed with her the rest of her life.

Nancy was fighting in the Battle of Taliwa in 1755 when her husband was killed. She had been chewing his bullets to make them more deadly. The battle was going badly for the Cherokee. A young 17 year old Nanyehi picked up the rifle used by her dead husband, Kingfisher, and by ferocious and fearless charges she rallied the Cherokee to victory.

This act of valor was the reason the Cherokee gave her the title of "Beloved Woman" or "War Woman" and placed her in a seat on the Council of Chiefs. She also was the head of the powerful Women's Council as the Cherokee society was a matriarchal society. She was allowed the privilege to determine the fate of captives, to make the "black drink" used to prepare for war and to participate in all aspects of leadership decisions among the Cherokee, including speaking up at treaty negotiations.

A second husband for Nancy Ward gave her the basis for her English name. Bryant Ward came among the Cherokee as a trader. He won Nancy's heart and she bore a third child (she and Kingfisher had two children, one of whom was born after his death).

It is this marvelous story that Becky Hobbs and Nick Sweet have co-written into a musical that is playing now at Hartwell, Georgia. Becky has said, "Ever since I was a young girl growing up in Bartlesville, OK, I dreamed that one day I could pay tribute to my 5th-great grandmother, Nancy Ward, Beloved Woman of the Cherokee. After many years of writing songs, recording albums, and performing all over the world, that day has come! I have written 17 songs, and have co-written the script with Nick Sweet, for a musical based on her life. At long last, Nancy Ward's voice will be heard!"

See this web site for more information from Becky Hobbs about Nancy Ward:

<http://www.nanyehi.com/about-nanyehi.html>. This musical is special to me, so Fanny and I journeyed to Hartwell, Georgia, last weekend to experience it personally. I made a series of photographs of the play:
https://picasaweb.google.com/lh/sredir?uname=109845787057992130059&target=ALBUM&id=5732207939233128529&locked=true&authkey=Gv1sRgCLukr-fj_4aBCw&feat=email

A news release for the musical begins, "The world premiere of the historical musical *NANYEHI – Beloved Woman of the Cherokee* appropriately takes place the next three weekends in Hartwell, Ga., which once was regarded by the Cherokee nation as the 'Center of the World.'"

The release continues, "Michelle Honaker plays the title role in *NANYEHI – Beloved Woman of the Cherokee*. Honaker lives in Blairsville, Ga., and last summer performed in the classic historical drama *Unto These Hills* staged annually in Cherokee, N.C."

She portrays the wife of Tsali, a lead character and is repeating that role this summer. Honaker grew up in Honolulu, Hawaii, where she first performed in the musical *Once On This Island*. She moved to north Georgia when she was 18.

Nancy Ward Musical
(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on April 24, 2012)

"Being the first to play this role in its first full production is overwhelming, wonderful," Honaker is quoted as saying in the news release announcing the premier of this historical musical."

She continues, "I want to work at setting the bar for all others who will play her in my footsteps. It's a lovely challenge. She's such a strong woman with such a tender outlook on life. It's an amazing role, a great script and the music is gorgeous."

While the history of Nancy Ward is intriguing and makes the basis for an exciting musical and Becky Hobbs original songs tell a haunting story, the "cry for peace" that the historic Nancy Ward made during the Revolutionary War era is one that still resonates today. She and her cousin Dragging Canoe held different opinions regarding how to deal with the "white settler problem."

He wanted to kill them all and for 17 years, until his death after dancing all night in 1792, he did all he could to remove the white settlers from his native land. Read more about this Dragging Canoe, who reminds me of a Crazy Horse type character in the Cherokee nation:

<http://smithdray.tripod.com/draggingcanoe-index-9.html>

The musical also features the story of Nancy Ward saving the life of captive Lydia Bean, wife of the first white settler in what was White's Fort or now the Knoxville area. From Lydia, Nancy learned the art of keeping cattle. From this experience, she introduced dairying to the Cherokee Nation.

Nancy died before the infamous Trail of Tears where the ugly mistreatment of the Cherokee grew to the point of forced removal to the west. She lived a long and influential life with her last years devoted to the children of the Cherokee.

Michelle Honaker has set her sights high and achieved a great accomplishment. She epitomizes the spirit of peace for which Nancy Ward is known. Becky Hobbs has honored her fifth great grandmother's memory - Nanyehi's voice is being heard! And her cry is all for peace!

Fanny and I enjoyed the musical greatly and plan to return later this month for a repeat performance.

Nancy Ward Musical
(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on April 24, 2012)



Becky Hobbs (writer) and Michelle Honaker (actress), key elements in the musical, *Nanyehi: Beloved Woman of the Cherokee*.