

**Unconquerable: The Story of John Ross, Chief of the Cherokees, 1828–1866.** By John M. Oskison; edited by Lionel Larré. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2022. \$99.00 cloth; \$30.00 paper; \$30.00 ebook.

Previously unpublished, *Unconquerable* presents a biographical story of John Ross by Cherokee journalist, author, and activist John Milton Oskison. Ross served as elected principal chief of the Cherokee Nation between 1828 and his death in 1866 and was very influential in the centralization and reformation of Cherokee government prior to his election. Oskison, better known for his novels such as *Wild Harvest* and biographical works on Tecumseh and Sam Houston, submitted this manuscript to the University of Oklahoma Press, but was rejected in 1933. *Unconquerable* follows up Larré's 2012 *Tales of the Old Indian Territory and Essays on the Indian Condition*, which published a collection of Oskison's previously unpublished novels and short stories. This manuscript ended up in the McFarlin Library at the University of Tulsa, with the balance of Oskison's works being donated to the University of Oklahoma by his daughter after his death.

While admittedly the work has to be read with an eye for creative license, Oskison put together a relatively thorough and accessible history of Ross for the time. His publication attempt fell chronologically between Rachel Caroline Eaton's work, which was published in 1921 and drawn upon by Oskison, and the more well-known work by Gary Moulton in 1978. Like Eaton's work, Oskison's work is a Cherokee history written by a Cherokee author. Unlike Eaton's dissertation work, Oskison relied less on professional history methods, taking creative and narrative liberties, likely given his background in journalism and the perceived need to "liven up" the history and fill perceived gaps in the narrative. Larré commendably goes through these sections in great detail, identifying and correcting the sources referenced by Oskison and making notes of the sections where additional information was created that doesn't have a source or correcting aspects that Oskison overlooked or omitted. While taking these things into consideration, Oskison's rejection and review notes from 1933 view the work as a good piece of writing or "story," with a major focus on the Indian Removal Act and early period of Ross' tenure as principal chief of the Cherokee Nation.

Larré posits that part of the reason for Oskison's rejection was his timing, as Oklahoma had just published Grant Foreman's *Indian Removal* in 1932, and much of Oskison's work dealt with the same area related to the Cherokee, although focused on Ross. At the same time, John Ross has been a complicated subject with many Cherokee and other historians, as factionalism among the Cherokee around the Ross–National Party and the Ridge–Treaty Party, ran deep within the population, even into Oskison's lifetime. Indeed, one of the criticisms of Oskison's work was that he showed particular bias in Ross' favor, which could have been a detriment to the work's publication at the

time. That being said, the book today would meet criticism for the additions and inaccuracies given the number of primary and secondary sources that have been discovered or created since the time of its original submission and the inherent bias of the sources and passages within. The unedited work would likely fall into the categorization of a “popular history” in today’s terms, falling outside the consideration for an academic press due to scientific inaccuracies and citation issues.

Although the work does not improve on the later work by Moulton from a pure history standpoint, it is useful for scholars looking to understand the evolution of discourse surrounding the Cherokee Nation, removal, and tribal sovereignty issues in the 1800s. Ross served as principal chief of the Cherokee from 1828 effectively through his death in 1866, leading the nation through tremendous events like the formation of the Cherokee Constitution, forced removal, the ensuing conflict between the National and Treaty factions in Oklahoma, and the American Civil War. Any history of Ross is inherently a history of the Cherokee Nation during these tumultuous times, and Oskison’s work provides an intensive view of the Cherokee removal period. This work is also useful as an example of the early period of Indigenous scholars entering into the field a generation prior to the formal establishment of Indigenous studies as a discipline in the 1960s–1970s. Oskison is part of an incredibly influential generation of American Indian author-activists who founded the Society of American Indians, including Zitkála-Šá, Arthur C. Parker, and Charles Eastman. In addition, the work itself falls into a smaller representation of works supporting or promoting concepts of Cherokee nationhood and nationalism following Oklahoma statehood and the supposed dissolution of the nation as a political power in 1907.

Larré has made a name for himself as a noted scholar on Oskison and this work continues his contributions toward highlighting the works of an often overlooked, but influential, Cherokee author. Known more for his fiction and editorial work, Oskison’s writing flows quite well with little pretension and is readily accessible in comparison to purely academic works of the period. Larré’s editing helps to fill out and support the story Oskison put together by commenting on anomalies and adding support from more recently collected or discovered sources that would not have been available when Oskison wrote this work. While the book might not have met close historical or scientific publication standards today on its own merit, Larré’s work has elevated it to a usable and innately readable source material. It provides a unique snapshot into a time period where tribal sovereignty was being challenged in the United States, and especially in Oklahoma, and the types of writings that this environment inspired by an emerging field of Indigenous authors and scholars. While Oskison admittedly presents a story and not a sterilized history of John Ross, it does contain useful, if not supplemental, information for historians and historical researchers. Undoubtedly though, the primary audience who will benefit from this work are scholars interested in this early period of American Indian literature and Oskison as an author.

*Jonathan Byrn*  
Yakima Valley College