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Eastern Cherokee Indians

1954

Recent Progress

In the past eight years great changes have taken place on the Cherokee Reservation in Western North Carolina and in the life of the people who have their homes there. The Reservation is comprised of 56,000 acres of mountain land--4,698 acres in crop land, 3,979 acres in open pasture and 47,000 acres in forest land. The farm lands are located in the valleys and foothills of the great Smoky Mountains. Most of the people live in the valleys and have some flat land for crops, but many live high on the mountainsides with only a few acres of steep lands which would be considered impossible of cultivation by most lowlanders. Approximately 3000 Cherokees of varying degree of Indian blood live on the Reservation. 565 of the 653 families do some farming, though some have only a home garden, a corn field and a few chickens.

The Cherokees once obtained most of their income from forest products, but now most of the best timber has been marketed and the income from timber has dwindled. The timber that is left is now out on a sustained yield management plan which allows a million board feet annually for home use and another million for sale.

The Cherokee Reservation lies adjoining the Great Smoky Mountains National Park which is one of the most visited areas in the United States. Two national highways pass through Cherokee. Because of its location near the park, its scenic beauty, its fine climate and the presence of the Indians themselves, a stream of tourists flows through Cherokee, to some extent during all of the year, but especially during the eight months when motoring is most pleasant.

Because there is insufficient land for large farming operations and the once glorious forests are depleted, it has become necessary for the Cherokees to develop intensively all of their old sources of income and to find new sources. The Cherokees are still poor, as modern society thinks of the term, but their standard of living is rising fast, and many individual families have good incomes. On the whole they are cheerful, hopeful, and self confident. Four themes run through all of their recent progress: Cherokee resources must be developed by and for the benefit of Cherokees; make the most of every opportunity to profit honestly from the tourist traffic; community organization and development; and friendly cooperation with the people and organizations of Western North Carolina who are working for the economic and social development of the whole area including the Cherokee Reservation. Almost every major accomplishment in the past eight years has been brought about through the application of one or more of these principles.

In 1945 Mr. Charles Collier of Atlanta made a survey of the Reservation. As a result of the study of the findings of this and other surveys, representatives of the Tribal Council, the local Indian Service and the Steve Youngdeer Post of the American Legion drew up a program of improvements which they considered desirable and attainable. Then they took their program to the people of the Reservation, holding numbers of meetings in every community to explain the desirability of the improvements and how they could be attained. The more they talked with the people the more comprehensive and ambitious the program became. Nearly all of what was then planned has been attained or is the process, and much greater possibilities yet lie before the Cherokee people.

At that time local election officials of the Counties of Jackson and Swain in which the Cherokee Reservation lies, would not permit the Cherokees to vote in any county, state or national elections. The superintendent went with delegations of Indian veterans to register and the Indians were refused. Immediately the local Post and Indian Service, with the help of Legion Posts throughout the state, took up the fight and as a result the Cherokees were given their rights and have voted ever since.

In 1945 no Indian owned or operated a tourist court, but two or three small courts were operated by white people who leased Indian land and built their own facilities. One of the first projects undertaken under the improvement plan was the building of the tribal tourist enterprise which is called the Boundary Tree Motor Court. There was strong opposition to this enterprise from Indians who feared they might lose the money invested in it and that the government would then take their land for the debt, and from white people in the tourist business who feared competition from a fine tribally owned court. However, the Tribal Council, under the leadership of Chief Jarrett Blythe, a truly great leader, voted to borrow \$150,000 from the revolving fund of the Indian Service, to use in building a tribal motor court, and to lend to Indians to finance individual business enterprises. The Council also appointed a Tribal credit committee of three members to be in charge of building and running the court, and this committee is still serving.

The layout consists of four housekeeping and eighteen overnight cottages, a lodge containing a diningroom, a service station and a handicraft sales room, all very handsome and built of native stone. Many of the furnishings were made by Cherokees, and practically all of the construction was done by Cherokee workmen. The enterprise is managed by a Cherokee, Woodrow Welch, who has been very successful. During 1953 the business cleared \$13,500 which includes the money repaid on the loan. Repayments have been made through 1960, and part of the payment due in 1962 and the loan will, if times remain good, be repaid ten years ahead of schedule.

Business on the Cherokee Reservation is closely related to the tourist trade, and therefore is largely seasonal. The Cherokees realize the opportunities afforded them through this trade and are rapidly taking advantage of them. During last season (1953) Cherokees owned and operated 23 motor courts, 33 shops selling handicrafts and souvenirs, 10 service stations, 8 grocery stores and 5 restaurants. In 1945 the only businesses operated by Cherokees were 2 craft shops, 2 filling stations and 2 grocery stores. At present (1-28-54) two new tourist courts are going up and rooms are being added to three others. These businesses provide employment for a large number of Cherokees during the tourist season and for a small number throughout the year.

Through the businesses which cater to tourists much of the handicraft work made by the Indians is sold. More than \$125,000 was paid to Cherokee craftsmen during 1952 for craft work. The main crafts of the Cherokees are basket making which is the most important and best known of their crafts, wood carving, pottery, hand weaving, making of bows, arrows, quivers, and many souvenir items, art metal work, making of small articles from wood, beadwork, Indian dolls of various types, apron and rug making and other less important work. Some Cherokee handicraft is sold in shops off the Reservation, especially through the Southern Highlands Handicraft Guild of which the Cherokee Schools, the Qualla Cooperative and individual Indians are members, but a very high percentage of the work is sold on the reservation through privately owned craft shops and the all Indian Craftsman's organization, Qualla Arts and Crafts Cooperative.

In 1946 about 60 Cherokee craftsmen, with help from the Indian Service personnel, organized this cooperative. Membership has now grown to about 160. The purposes of the organization are to provide a year around market for crafts, to promote high standards of workmanship and design, to help craftsmen solve their problems and to secure better prices for craft work. This organization maintains the Qualla Cooperative salesroom at Boundary Tree. Its sales amounted to more than \$35,000 during the year 1953. This cooperative buys crafts the year around from the Indians and markets them mostly during the tourist season. Articles are given a sufficient mark-up to pay for overhead, a small amount of advertising, furnish a small miscellaneous fund, and pay the members a dividend of 5% every six months on the value of work sold to the cooperative.

Most of the people do subsistence farming, raising the vegetables eaten by the family and enough corn for meal, canning their vegetables and fruit for winter use, and often keeping chickens and a pig or two. Cherokees who have more farm land available use it to good purpose, with the help and advice of agricultural extension and soil conservation specialists.

Tobacco is now one of the main cash crops. In 1945 only two Indians had tobacco allotments. Now 89 farmers have tobacco allotments, and the income from tobacco this season was more than

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\$35,000.00. Five farmers raised onions on a large scale for the market, three produced strawberries for the wholesale market, and hundreds of gallons of wild strawberries were picked and sold or used at home. The same is true of the wild blackberries. Snap beans are raised for the wholesale and local market. Many other fresh vegetables are raised for sale locally.

The Cherokees have a fine roadside market building where they may come and sell their farm products, which was provided for them through the cooperation of the Cherokee Historical Association (about which more later) and the Indian Service. One Indian family sold \$800.00 worth of farm products at this market last season, and 40 other families sold varying smaller amounts.

The number of beef cattle on the reservation has increased from 124 in 1949 to 490 in 1952. Eight farmers produce hatching eggs for the hatcheries, and there are over 600 colonies of bees on the Reservation.

The people of the six townships of the Reservation and the agency personnel have come to believe that there is hardly any limit to what the people of a community, working together, can do for themselves and the community. Practically every family on the Reservation has profited by community development work. All six townships have active community organizations working for community betterment, under their own chosen leaders, according to plans which they themselves have worked out. All of them have entered the community development contest sponsored jointly by the Cherokee Fair Association and the Cherokee Historical Association, as well as the Western North Carolina Rural Development contest. In 1952 Soco Community won second place in the Western North Carolina Community Contest in competition with 23 non-Indian communities in 12 Western North Carolina Counties. In 1952 Big Cove Community won third in the same contest and again the same Indian community won third in 1953, in competition with more than 70 communities.

Many improvements were made in the communities through the inspiration of the community clubs during the past year. They have cut a 40 foot right-of-way for 23 miles over rough, mountain terrain so that a power line could come into the community, were hosts to two work camps, repaired and painted houses and outbuildings, built and furnished a community house, repaired two old school buildings to use for community purposes, built roadside parks, sponsored soft ball teams and Indian ball teams, put up uniform mail boxes, put up road signs, bought a community farm and farmed it to meet the payments on it, built sanitary toilets, screened homes, raised a community garden, sponsored recreation program, beautified yards, built two houses for indigent families, and have made a great many other valuable contributions toward better and happier living on the Reservation.

At the last Tribal election which took place in September, 1953, the presidents of four of the community clubs of the Reservation

were elected to represent their townships on the Tribal Council. This is an indication of the development of local leadership which is being brought about by the organized community clubs.

Cherokee Farms have improved greatly through the use of Soil Conservation practices, and where possible modern farm methods. Cherokees have many acres of improved pasture, plant most of their row crops land to winter cover crops, use recommended fertilizer, plant hybrid corn and certified seed, plow on the contour, drain their marshy land and on the whole obtain excellent yields on their small plots.

Even before any of the more than 300 Cherokee veterans returned from World War II, the Superintendent and his staff began to work with the State Veterans Administration to have in readiness an educational for the veterans when they should return. The Veterans Training Program on the Cherokee Reservation was the first one to go into operation in the state.

The program at Cherokee, which was carried on through the Cherokee High School, was planned to meet the needs of men who had little more than a grammar school education, some had attended school only a few years. Many had families and could not leave their homes on the Reservation to take training elsewhere. Those who could profit by taking training in institutions off the Reservation were encouraged to attend such schools, and a number of them did. The courses at Cherokee were designed to help Indians make a better living on the Reservation, but a number of men who received their training in these classes have used the skill acquired there successfully in jobs off the Reservation.

213 Indian and 189 White veterans have been enrolled in the training classes conducted through the Cherokee High School. Courses have been offered in carpentry, masonry, painting, plastering, cabinet making, plumbing, electrical work, wood carving, art metal work, auto mechanics, pottery and on-the-farm agricultural training. The numbers in the G.I. training courses have declined as the veterans eligible for training have finished their courses. The numbers will rise again as veterans from Korea return. 17 veterans are now enrolled. Since there is no other school near by with the equipment to offer such vocational courses, many white veterans have taken the courses offered.

In 1950 an event took place which has proved to be of immense importance to the economic and social improvement of the Cherokees. That summer the drama "Unto These Hills", which is based on the history of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, was produced for the first time. The play was an immediate success and has continued so through four seasons. The play is produced by the Cherokee Historical Association, which is a non-profit corporation organized and chartered under the laws of North Carolina, for the purpose of "Perpetuating the history and traditions

of the Cherokee Indians," in any manner which seems practical and desirable. The Association is governed by a Board of Directors of which the Chief, the Secretary and the Agency Superintendent are ex-officio members. The Directors are men of high character, able in their own fields of endeavor and give their time and talents to the work, entirely without remuneration.

"Unto These Hills" is produced in a beautiful amphitheatre on the Cherokee Reservation. The money to build this theatre and to put the play into production the first season was given by citizens of 11 Western North Carolina ^{counties} (\$20,000.00), the Tribal Council (\$5,000.00), work amounting to about \$10,000.00 by the Indian Service and \$35,000.00 by the State of North Carolina. After the first few weeks of production the play was able to pay its own way and have a surplus which has been devoted to research in Cherokee history and culture, an educational, cultural and religious program, and the support of certain projects for the benefit of the Cherokees. ^{in material and services}

The Cherokee Historical Association operated two other enterprises, Oconaluftee Village, which is a small village constructed according to the manner of Cherokee villages in 1750, and peopled with Cherokee Indians in the costume of that date, going about the usual village activities of the period of 1750, and the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, which contains many relics and documents pertaining to the Cherokee and other southern tribes. The three enterprises together give the visitor a well rounded picture of Cherokee life in the past.

The Cherokee Historical Association, through all of its enterprises, paid to the Cherokee people during the past year (1953) approximately \$102,000.00 in wages and salaries, and to the tribal treasury approximately \$10,000.00 in the form of a 3% levy on the price of admissions to "Unto These Hills", Oconaluftee Village and the Museum of the Cherokee Indian. 220 Indians were employed by the Association at various times during the year. ^{\$3,000.00 for pro}

The Cherokee Historical Association has spent much of its surplus on constructive projects for the Cherokees. More than \$3,000.00 was offered in prizes given for the production of better handicrafts, better farm products, good farm practices, home improvement and community improvement and development. ^{in 1953,}

An annual scholarship of \$3,000.00 is given by the Association to a graduate of the Cherokee High School who will attend college, majoring in home economics, agriculture, dramatics, medicine or dentistry. A revolving loan fund has been set aside for the use of Cherokee College students needing help.

During the past year the Association paid the salary of a recreation director to have charge of and promote organized recreation on the Reservation, a dramatics teacher who has classes for pupils in the Cherokee Central School in the day time, and

for adults in the evenings, and an art teacher who also works with the school children in school hours and with adults two nights a week. The services of these teachers are free to all who wish to take advantage of them.

The Association has built three handsome shelters of native stone for the use of children waiting for school buses. Others will be built. Four entrance signs to be placed where national highways enter the Reservation will soon be erected with funds furnished by the Association, at a cost of \$ 700.00

The roadside market built by the Cherokee Historical Association in cooperation with the Indian Service has already been mentioned.

During the summer months the Cherokee Agency and the Cherokee Historical Association join forces to maintain a summer school, to which anyone, Indian or white, or any other color, may come, with no tuition charge. The finest of Instructors are employed to teach acting, the dance, play writing, speech, the film, hand weaving, pottery, wood carving, jewelry making, furniture making, art metal work and jewelry making. The Association also provides speakers and a choir for a vesper service in the Mountainside Theatre every Sunday afternoon during the summer. Nationally known ministers are engaged to speak at these inter-denominational services.

Recently the Cherokee Historical Association has appropriated money for a planning study of the Reservation to be made by two graduate students in the planning department of the University of North Carolina, under the direction of the University. The study will begin this spring.

Law and order at Cherokee is under the immediate direction of the tribe in cooperation with the county. The tribe also administers relief on the Reservation. The Tribal Council banks and has complete control of the expenditure of all fees from leases and revenue collected from the 3% assessment on retail sales on the Reservation.

The most important event of the year to the Eastern Cherokees is the Cherokee Indian Fair which runs for five days the first week in October. This will be the 37th fair. All of the entries except a few educational and commercial exhibits are made or produced by the Indians. The exhibits last year included 7 community exhibits, 24 individual farm-family exhibits, girls' club, womens' club and 4H Club exhibits and over 2000 individual single entries. The Fair Association and the Cherokee Historical Association paid to the Indians over \$6,100.00 in prizes.

A Cherokee Indian boy, Charles George, of Birdtown Community, has just been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, posthumously. He threw himself on an exploding grenade, saving the lives of his comrades.