

CHEROKEE VOTING RIGHTS: THE LONG ROAD TO SUFFRAGE

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

-United States Constitution, Fourteenth Amendment, 1868



CHEROKEES IN WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA



"Panorama showing the unbroken forest of Great Smoky Mountains; from Andrews 'Bald,' Swain County, N. C." 1902.
Image courtesy Special Collections, Hunter Library, Western Carolina University.

Cherokee people have occupied western North Carolina for centuries and most Cherokee today consider this region their homeland. Members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) are descended from a small group who remained in the region after the forceful removal of 16,000 tribal members in the 1830s known as the Trail of Tears. By 1850, the Eastern Band numbered slightly more than 1,000 according to the US Census.

Eastern Band members do not live on a reservation, which is land given to a tribe by the federal government. As the Cherokee reorganized as a tribe in the late 19th century, they purchased 57,000 acres of property, part of their homeland. This land, called the Qualla Boundary, is owned by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and kept in trust by the federal government.