

The University Of North Carolina At Asheville

Tourism In Cherokee, North Carolina From 1910 to 1930

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the History Department for Consideration for the
Degree of Bachelor In Arts

By

David Armstrong

Asheville, North Carolina

21 November 2003

“The Cherokee Exposition is considered one of the most colorful events in Western North Carolina and always draws visitors from far away.” This simple sentence from a small town newspaper in 1928, directly contradicts the common historical view of the tourism industry in Cherokee, North Carolina. Dates presented, by historians for the rise of tourism in Cherokee range from 1914 to the late 1940’s, usually linking the development of the industry with the opening of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the Blue Ridge Parkway, or even later with the great tourism boom that followed the end of World War II. This common interpretation neglects the tourism industry’s beginnings as an unintentional side effect of a greater plan for improvement by the Office of Indian Affairs, and the work done by the Cherokees themselves in bringing “the wily tourist” and their money, onto the Reservation.¹

Other historians have written extensively about the Cherokees during the twentieth century. The most conclusive book on the Cherokees in this period, John Finger’s *Cherokee Americans*, provides background information on the period, but links the development of the tourism industry to the New Deal programs of the 1930’s. The only Cherokee to write about this period was Mary Chiltosky, who assembled a history of the Cherokee Fall Fairs, in 1974, and although she covers the history of the fair through interviews and other primary sources, she does not link it with other events that were occurring on the reservation or in the region.²

¹“Indian Fair to be Held October 2 at Cherokee”. *The Ruralite*, Sylva, NC. Vol. III No. 10, 18 August 1928: John R. Finger. *Cherokee Americans: The Eastern Band of the Cherokees in the Twentieth Century*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991) 54-6, 97-8: And Anne V. Mitchell. “Culture History and Development on the Qualla Boundary: The Eastern Cherokee and the Blue Ridge”. *Appalachian Journal* 24 (Winter 1997) 147.

² Finger 1-16, 97. And Mary Ulmer Chiltosky. *Cherokee Fair and Festival A History Thru 1978*. (Gilbert Printing, 1996.) 1-12.

Historians writing about the tourism in the region have included at least some mention of the Cherokees, although usually with an eye to how outside influences affected them. Richard Starnes thesis on the tourism industry in Western North Carolina focuses on Asheville and the White communities in the mountains, only mentioning the Cherokees as an example of how good roads and Native culture brought tourists. The work of Anne Mitchell also mention the Cherokees, but only to demonstrate how the Blue Ridge Parkway and the opening of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park affected them. This theme, of linking the development of tourism in Cherokee to outside events, is also evident in Dan Pierce's work on the Smoky Mountain National Park, which only mentions Cherokee as a gateway to the park, without explaining its past.³

In 1910 The North Carolina Mountains had already been attracting tourists for 300 years. Places such as Warm Springs-- today called Hot Springs--served as summer retreats for planter families from the coast. Thanks to their wealth these families could afford to escape the sweltering heat and malarial outbreaks of the low country by spending a few months at one of the resorts in what would later be termed "the land of the sky."⁴

In addition to elites from within the region more people from the Northeast began to explore the Western Carolina Mountains after the Civil War. Many of these northern guests came to the area because of its supposed curative properties for lung ailments. In Asheville, sanatoriums sprouted up to house the sickest of these consumptive patients,

³ Richard D. Starnes. "Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina." (Ph.D. diss., Auburn University, 1999) 226-9;. Mitchell 147; And Daniel S. Pierce. *The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to National Park*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000). 195-9.

⁴Starnes "Creating the Land of the Sky" 14-5, 21-2, 71. And Pierce 8.

while many of the less serious cases simply took up residence in one of the numerous boarding houses or hotels that had opened in the wake of the post war tourism boom.⁵

In 1900 hotels such as the Battery Park and Kenilworth Inn already catered to the well to do seasonal visitors of Asheville. By emulating amenities found in northern hotels, such as fine dining, orchestras, and servants, these hotels helped secure Asheville a reputation as an island of civilization in the Western Carolina Mountains. As roads improved this reputation would come to influence tourists coming to the region, who would use Asheville as a base from which to journey into the wilderness, and still return in time for a fine meal and hot bath.⁶

All of this did not equal a total lack of tourism west of Asheville. Waynesville, approximately thirty miles west of Asheville, housed a resort hotel in 1910. And in Sylva, 10 miles south of the Cherokee reservation, a fine, although not luxury hotel continued to expand and improve, adding amenities such as hot water, telephones, and electricity during the 1920's.⁷

The region's economic dependence on tourism made developing infrastructure a priority for local leaders. Throughout the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century community leaders worked to improve access to the area. Initially this would come in the form of a connection to the Southern and Appalachian Railroad. Later, encouraged by the good roads movement, communities would improve roads as part of general infrastructure development. Though the mountains would continue to lag

⁵ Richard D. Starnes. "A Conspicuous Example of What is Termed the New South: Tourism and Urban Development in Asheville, North Carolina 1880-1925." *North Carolina Historical Review* 80. no. 1 (2003): 61. And Idem. "Creating the Land of the Sky", 38-9, 41, 66.

⁶ Starnes "Creating the Land of the Sky", 72, 74-5, 86-7, 122.

⁷ National Archives *Office of Indian Affairs: Superintendents Annual Report and Statistical 1910-28*. General Accounting Office, Washington D.C. 1971.(Henceforth: OIA) 1910 report 3: And "Addition

behind the rest of the country in road development; given their limited tax base, and the amount of debt accrued by various communities, Asheville in particular, their achievement in bringing the mountains within a days drive of Atlanta, Knoxville and, Charlotte was commendable.⁸

The development of the region had little effect on the Eastern Cherokees at first. The place that they called home, the Qualla Boundary, had been removed from most of this tourism traffic. The isolated coves, and Valleys had always made the area difficult to reach. The Eastern Cherokees had remained there for that very reason. Protected from the reach of Military in the 1830's the five communities that would come to make up the reservation had escaped the Trail of Tears. Through a mixture of luck, economic opportunity, and the influence of a few outsiders most notably W.H. Thomas, they secured title to their lands and a treaty with the Federal Government, guaranteeing their status in addition to a corporate charter from the state of North Carolina.⁹

In 1910 the Eastern Cherokee Reservation consisted of about two thousand people living on 50,818 acres. The Office of Indian Affairs and people from the region considered the Cherokee hard workers, scraping a living from their steep mountain farms, with minimal contact from the outside world. Ninety percent of the Cherokees used agriculture as their means of subsistence raising traditional foods such as corn, beans, and squash, in addition to some tobacco oats and other grains, on what little tillable soil they had.¹⁰

to New Jackson Hotel Completed" *Ruralite*, Vol III Sylva, NC. 11 September 1928: And Starnes "Creating the Land of the Sky" 72-4.

⁸ Starnes, "Creating the Land of the Sky", 71-2, 113-4, 116.

⁹ Finger 2, 3, 8, 10: OIA 1910 report no. 11: And Private Laws of North Carolina Session 1897, Chapter 207(Henceforth Cherokee Corporate Charter) Section 22.

¹⁰ OIA 1910 report 1-3.

In the view of the Office of Indian Affairs, the Eastern Cherokees had mostly been assimilated. The few traditional occupations of the Eastern Cherokees were on the verge of disappearing. Basket weaving, a skill handed down from mother to daughter, although still practical, had begun losing importance, which the State of North Carolina accelerated when it passed a law compelling the Cherokees to send their children to the reservation boarding school. The traditional pottery of the Cherokees had already disappeared entirely, but two Catawba Indians who moved to the reservation during the Catawba Diaspora of the late 1800's, were selling their pottery at local stores, and had taught a few Cherokee women the craft.¹¹

The myth that the Eastern Cherokees were a devoutly traditional people who had clung to their mountains out of a sense of religious reverence was evident in 1910. Two thirds of the population were Baptists, and approximately one hundred people belonged to the Methodist Church, all of whom attended services on the reservation, conducted in Cherokee. While the medicine men were still called on to treat disease and help ensure victory in the ball game, the Christian ministers had usurped their position as religious leaders.¹²

The language of Sequoyah still dominated as the language of choice for most people on the reservation. The first Chief who spoke English as their primary language was not elected until 1931, and even after this the tribal council continued to conduct its

¹¹ James Merrell. *The Indians New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal*. (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1989) 251-2, 262; Amanda Smoker, interviewed by Lois Calonehuskie, *Journal of Cherokee Studies: Fading Voices Special Edition*. Cherokee Historical Association, 1989; Bessie Jumper, interviewed by Lois Calonehuskie, Gil Jackson, and Earl Davis. *Journal of Cherokee Studies: Fading Voices Special Edition*. Cherokee Historical Association, 1989; And Thomas J. Blamer. "Rebecca Youngbird: An Independent Cherokee Potter." *Journal of Cherokee Studies*. Spring (1980), 43.

¹² Mitchell. 169. And OIA 1913 report 2, 1914 report 5, 7, 1920 statistical 2.

meetings simultaneously in English and Cherokee. Overtime the preference to speak Cherokee eroded, helped in part by the mandatory attendance law, and the English only policy at the boarding school, but the effects of this would not truly be felt until after 1930.¹³

In 1910 the Cherokees found themselves at a crossroads. They were Indians living on a Reservation, which enabled them to work closely with Federal Officials. At the same time, they were a Corporation under North Carolina state law, with a communal land system, which allowed the tribe to orchestrate large timber sales that would help finance future development. This also prevented the federal government from dealing with them as arbitrarily as it did with tribes in the west. Finally they were situated in some of the most picturesque country in the United States, less than 60 miles from a town with a well developed tourism industry. All these factors combined resulted in a tourism industry that no one initially planned to happen, but in the end would be the lifeblood of the community.¹⁴

The involvement of The Office of Indian Affairs in developing the Cherokee Reservation is especially noteworthy considering the common perception of the Office of Indian Affairs. At best the OIA, which was renamed the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the 1930's, has been viewed as an ineffective bureaucracy, more concerned with micromanaging individuals' lives than with providing assistance to Indian Peoples. At worst the policies of the OIA could be considered criminally negligent, through

¹³ Western Carolina University Clippings File: Cherokee Indians 1930's. "Western Carolina Cherokees Descended From Incurables." News and Observer, 20 September 1931 (Hereafter WCU Clipping); Bessie Jumper interview; And OIA 1930 report 2.

¹⁴ Cherokee Corporate Charter Section 22: Mitchell 146; And Harley E. Jolley. *The Blue Ridge Parkway*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1969). 88.

mismanagement of funds or outright theft. In this case however, the Indian Agents, who were appointed to work with the Cherokees and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, actually managed to improve the situation on the reservation.¹⁵

Despite a multitude of attempts by the Office of Indian Affairs to develop some form of industry on the Qualla Boundary, the limited access to outside markets prevented any true industrial development. However in the process of trying to bring industry to the Cherokees, the Office of Indian Affairs, the residents of the Qualla Boundary, and the population of the region as a whole, succeeded in converting the Cherokees themselves into an industry, bringing outside money to the reservation, in the wallets of wide eyed tourist.¹⁶

Tourism on the reservation could not have happened without the various men who occupied the job of Agency Superintendent, however it was not their primary concern. The first priority of the Office of Indian Affairs was the stewardship of Indian lands and monies. Their secondary goal was the education and training of the Indian population to become economically self sufficient, thus ending the Indians' dependency on the government.¹⁷

As the local embodiment of the Office of Indian Affairs the Superintendent of the Cherokee Agency had to be a mixture of boarding school director, politician, and county agricultural extension agent. In this last role the various agents stationed at Cherokee

¹⁵ Vine Deloria Jr. *Custer Died for Your Sins*. (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 13-4, 125, 128-9, 131. And Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior. *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee*. (New York, The New Press, 1996), 48-50, 91, 121, 174.

¹⁶ OIA 1910 report, 1, 1915 report 1.

¹⁷ *The American Indian and the United States: A Documentary History*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press), 2:802, 810

worked extremely hard, and although they occasionally thought of tourism as a means to Cherokee economic independence, their primary plan became agriculture for profit.¹⁸

From 1910 until 1930 no Office of Indian Affairs agent failed to mention some form of potentially profitable agriculture. The first such plan, and the one that the agents pursued the most, was to "awaken and interest in cattle raising" amongst the Cherokee. Cattle were the main focus of the agents' livestock plan, but dairy cattle, and sheep were also considered at other times. Stock raising had been tried before on other reservations successfully, which gave the agents in Cherokee reason to believe it would work in Cherokee as well. To further this plan the agents repeatedly requested aid from the federal government, to purchase "two well bred bulls" for the agency with which they could improve the overall quality of the stock on the reservation. They were finally able to purchase the bulls in 1914, as part of a livestock purchase for the Cherokee Boarding School. They also encouraged the Cherokees to purchase cattle themselves whenever per capita payments of money were given out, either as a result of timber sales or as part of federal land settlements.¹⁹

The second agricultural endeavor of the agency lasted much longer, becoming an effective part of the Agency's agricultural plan until at least 1930. What began as a simple statement by the agent in 1911, "the soil in the area is well suited to raising apples" turned into twenty thousand fruit trees given to individual Cherokees by the Agency school. These orchards became the subject of much competition, and by 1915

¹⁸ OIA 1910 report Section 2.

¹⁹ OIA 1910 report 7, 1911 report 33, 1914 report 20, 1915 report 19. And *The American Indian and the United States*, 2:813.

Cherokees were winning agricultural competitions for canning and fruit crops at state and local fairs.²⁰

In the process of suggesting any industry that, the agents thought, would be profitable, tourism would be mentioned from time to time. In 1911, Frank Kyselka, the Indian Agent at the time, took note of the fact that “this section would prove unusually attractive as a summer resort.” The fact that Waynesville had a successful resort at this time led the agent to suspect that “in the right hands” maintaining such a resort would be profitable.²¹

Besides working with the reservation as a whole the Indian Agent also served as the head of the Cherokee Boarding School. The Agent’s role at the school was “to give each boy and girl such an experience as will best enable them to successfully carry out farm and homemaking”. In this respect, the Cherokee School served the same purpose of industrial education as all Indian Schools. In other ways it was exemplary, preceding the urgings of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to be self-sufficient; the school raised much of their own food and produced their own clothing until the late 1920’s²²

The Cherokee school had few official graduates during this period yet there were students who went on to further their education at the Indian Colleges such as the one at Carlisle, Pennsylvania or the Haskell Institute in Kansas. The Agents’ referred to the students who returned from these postsecondary industrial schools as shining examples of the advancement of the Cherokees; and described them as assets for encouraging improved farming, and invaluable in staging the Fall Fairs.²³

²⁰ OIA 1911 report 34, 1914 report 21, 1917 report 17.

²¹ OIA 1911 report Section Four 1.

²² OIA 1910 Report Section 2 3. And *The American Indian and the United States*. 2:835-6.

²³ OIA 1910 report section 2, 1916 report 18, 1918 report 14-5. And WCU Clipping.

Even as these returned students and other Cherokees began to play a role in the development of tourism, the Tribal Council largely ignored tourism's possibilities. In the words of James Henderson, the Indian Agent from 1911 to 1928, "the council at times has been in session for long periods of time without transacting any considerable business." On the surface this may have been accurate, but the Tribal Council was the assigned adjudicator of the two most important economic issues of the time, timber sales and land transactions.²⁴

The regular meetings of the Tribal Council, and its Business Committee--which included the agent, chief and vice chief--all centered on the economics of the day. The Cherokees held their land in common, which meant that individual tracts were not owned by their occupants, but were instead under control of the tribe. It fell to the council to collect the taxes that were due on these lands, which they paid to the state until 1925, when they deeded their lands to the federal government. Additionally, disputes over land "ownership" or transfers fell to the council to decide.²⁵

As an extension of common land ownership, the rights to all timber on the Cherokee reservation belonged to the tribe as a whole. This meant the tribal council, and later the Business Committee, spent a considerable amount of time giving individuals permission to cut and sell wood, or dealing with those who did so against the tribe's wishes.²⁶

One advantage of this system was that the tribe as a whole could make large-scale

²⁴ Eastern Cherokee Council. *Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation Tribal Council Minutes in English 1900-1932*. North Carolina Department of Records, Raleigh, 1971. (Hereafter: Council Minutes) 129, 198-99, 265-8, 153, 175, 197, 232-3. And OIA 1910 report 10-11, 1911 report 42.

²⁵ Cherokee Corporate Charter sec 22: Council Minutes 198-99, 68, 197: And, OIA 1925 report 12.

²⁶ Council Minutes 49-53, 71, 85. And OIA 1910 report 11.

timber sales, for which they could receive needed cash and some benefits in kind. The most important of these large sales, the Love Tract, brought six payments of \$24,500 to the tribe, beginning in 1908. Additionally, the timber company agreed to build a spur line connecting the town of Cherokee with Ela, the closest stop along the Appalachia Railroad line, which brought train service to Cherokee for the first time in 1908.²⁷

The council members did play a role in developing tourism, although with some coaxing. Beginning in 1912, with pressure from The Office of Indian Affairs in Washington, the Cherokee Superintendent's office assembled what would become the Cherokee Fall Fair Committee. The Committee consisted of the Superintendent, as the president of the committee, and the Chief Clerk of the School, John L. Walters, representing the Office of Indian Affairs, and a committee of 20 Cherokee men and women, representing all five Cherokee Communities. After two years of work they inaugurated what would become a yearly tourist draw, The Cherokee Fall Fair.²⁸

The Cherokees who made up this committee were virtually a who's who of the Eastern Cherokees of the time. John Tahquette, Will Saunooke, James Blythe and Johnson and Sampson Owl were some of the tribe's largest landholders, according to OIA records. Serving on the committee also seemed to have a direct link with serving on the Tribal Council, with most council members serving on the committee at one time or another. Besides land rich and politically active Cherokees the committee also included

²⁷ Council Minutes 31-2: OIA 1910 report 3. Finger 19.

²⁸Western Carolina University Special Collections.(Hereafter: WCU Special Collections) 1929 *Cherokee Fall Fair Pamphlet*.
Mary Ulmer Chiltosky. *Cherokee Fair and Festival A History Thru 1978*. (Gilbert Printing 1996), 5.

people would become major beneficiaries of the tourist trade, such as Carl Standingdeer.²⁹³⁰

The original idea for the fall fair has never been accurately credited to one individual. The 1911 Superintendents report mentions the idea of holding a fair. Similar Indian fairs had been held on other reservations and were encouraged by the Office of Indian Affairs. Some accounts also credited John L. Walters, the Chief Secretary of the Agency, with the original idea. Other accounts state that Cato Sells, the head of the Office of Indian Affairs pushed the idea on his visit to Cherokee in 1912. Another possible stimulus for the fair may have been two Agricultural Fairs put on by the Big Cove community before 1914, although people interviewed in the 1970's by Mary Chiltosky did not remember attending any such fair.³¹

Regardless of where the idea came from, the Cherokee's experiences at other county fairs certainly provided encouragement. In 1912 James Henderson and 25 Cherokee men traveled to the Western Carolina State Fair held outside of Asheville. Upon returning the Cherokees must have been very pleased at what they had seen and in the 1912 Agent's report James Henderson implied that plans were under way to hold a fair in Cherokee "Next year if a suitable site can be secured in some way." The agent's

²⁹ Carl Standingdeer was admitted by all sources to be the inventor of the occupation of "chiefing." In simple terms the Cherokee chiefs are men who dress in traditional Plains Indian garb and posed for photos with tourists, serving as advertisements for various craft shops. When this practice was begun, however, is a matter of dispute between various sources, dates presented for its beginning range from as early as 1924 or as late as the 1930's. Joyce C. Dugan and Lynne B. Harlan. *The Cherokees*. (Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation, 2001), 36-7: Finger 161-3: And Jack Wolfe interviewed by author 17 November 2002.

³⁰ Sampson Owl. "Indian Fair at Cherokee" *The Charlotte Observer*, 6 October 1929, Pack Memorial Library Clippings File 0329 WN-Cherokees- Fairs/Fall Festivals/ Etc. (Hereafter: Sampson Owl) And, OIA 1920 statistical, 1923 statistical.

³¹ OIA 1911 report 36: *The American Indian and the United States: A Documentary History*. 2: 841-2: Chiltosky 5: And Sampson Owl.

unwavering belief that “a fair could be successfully conducted on the Reservation” also encouraged the Cherokees.³²

What the Superintendent and the Office of Indian Affairs intended for the fair, and what the fair became were two different things. To the Office of Indian Affairs the fair would be an agricultural exposition, designed to stimulate the Cherokees progress in areas such as farming, canning, and other civilized skills. Though the agents knew that basket weaving and pottery still brought valuable part time income to the reservation, they would only be marginally represented at the fair, as would all other elements of the Cherokee’s traditional culture or other entertainments.³³

To the Cherokees the fair presented an opportunity to experience new things. The merry-go-round, ferris wheel, and other rides that were brought in would be swamped by adults who had never seen anything like them before, and were eager to pay their nickel or dime to take a ride. Automobiles and airplanes also appeared on the reservation during the fair, providing many Cherokees with their first look at these machines.³⁴

In 1929 Sampson Owl equated the Fall Fair with the traditional Green Corn Ceremony, which celebrated the beginning of the Harvest Season. With school out, and people coming from all over the reservation, the fair presented an excellent opportunity for people to be merry, dance, visit with friends, or meet new loves. In addition to showing off their best crops or crafts, and maybe selling a few items.³⁵

³² OIA 1912 report 13.

³³ OIA 1914 report 18. And, *The American Indian and The United States: A Documentary History*. 841-2

³⁴ Jack Wolfe interview: Chiltosky 6,9: “Plane Kills 3 at Indian Fair.” *Jackson County Journal*, 9 October 1927.

³⁵ Sampson Owl: Martha Wachacha, interviewed by Lois Calonehuskie, Earl Davis and Tom Hill. *Journal of Cherokee Studies: Fading Voices Special Edition*. Cherokee Historical Association, 1989: Chiltosky 6-7: And Jack Wolfe interview

Initially the Agent's idea prevailed. The fairs showcased home canning, best corn crops, and other agricultural goods, which would compete for cash, or prizes donated from stores as far away as Knoxville. A small midway would be set up, usually with a sideshow and a few rides. The Cherokees themselves would sell food, in part as a fundraiser for the school, especially ice cream and soda, which were rare or unknown on the reservation. The only events which could be considered unique to the Cherokee fair were the archery and blowgun competitions.³⁶

The fair immediately became a popular attraction for people from within the Western Carolina Mountains, but more things had to change for the Cherokee to become a regional attraction. Besides the railroad connection, roads would become a necessity for the Cherokees to develop any kind of industry, especially tourism. The agents described the roads as "exceedingly rough" and "generally very poor." They requested funding for road improvements in addition to inviting people to stage demonstrations on the construction of improved roads at the school. But, by 1921 the only roads on the reservation that had been improved connected Cherokee with Bryson City and Whittier, and even these were unpaved. The condition of the roads in Cherokee was largely in line with the rest of region, although the state and counties were less willing to give funds for improvements in a constituency with no voters.³⁷

The Asheville to Atlanta Highway, running roughly along the course of the present Great Smoky Mountains Expressway, completed in 1926 provided a valuable link. It brought Cherokee within a six or seven hour drive of Charlotte. Once tourists

³⁶ Chiltoskey 5: WCU Special Collections *1929 Fall Fair Pamphlet*. "Cherokee Indian Fair" *Jackson County Journal* Vol. I No. 7, 8 October 1915: And OIA 1914 report 18.

³⁷ OIA 1910 report 3, 1911 report 31, 1915 report 11, 1917 report 18, 1918 report 17, 1919 report 18, 1922 report 2: "Asheville Murphy Atlanta Highway Association Meeting" *Asheville Citizen Times* 14

reached the reservation, they would still have to ride the last miles on the unpaved, but “fairly good dirt road” from Bryson City to Cherokee township. These road improvements, and special rates offered by the Appalachian railway, expanded the possible number of tourist who could reach Cherokee³⁸.

To induce outsiders to make such a trip took advertising. Word of mouth would be a valuable means of drawing people to such a unique event, especially when those who were spreading the word were the “elites” of their area. But the Fall Fair Committee also sent people out from the reservation to spread news of the fair. The first people to be assigned this task were Sibald and Jacob Smith, who traveled “as far as Northern Georgia” in 1914 promoting the first fair. They would continue their work in subsequent years. Local newspapers in Sylva regularly carried information on the Cherokee Fall Fair, along with the other regional fairs in Jackson and Haywood County. One piece of press coverage, which had to have been a boon, was the presence of a reporter from The Charlotte Observer in 1925, and an article by Henry Owl that appeared there in 1929 describing the fall fair in detail.³⁹

As the fair changed most of the new attractions were events that moved it further away from its original purpose as an agricultural fair, with one important exception. As part of the Agency’s role in promoting good health they began a Beautiful Baby pageant at the 1917 fair. In order to qualify for the prizes, for the fattest, prettiest and healthiest

October 1914: And “Good roads Proclamation by the Governor”. *Jackson County Journal* Vol. I No. 17 3 October 1913.

³⁸ Sampson Owl: “Highway Celebrations.” *Ruralite* Vol. I No. 21, (Sylva NC) 14 September 1926: “The Indian Fair” *Ruralite* Vol. I No. 22, 20 September 1926: “Cherokee Fair Opens October 3” *Jackson County Journal* 19 May 1922: And 1919 report 18.

³⁹ “Cherokee Indian Fair October 6-9”. *Jackson County Journal* 3 August 1925: “The Indian Fair” *Ruralite* Vol. I no. 22, 20 August 1926: Chiltoskey 5-6: Sampson Owl: Walter B. Candler “Modesty and Virtues”. *Jackson County Journal* 6 October 1922: And “Cherokee Indian Fair Starts Today”. *Ruralite*, 5 October 1923.

near-to-full blood babies, children had to be examined by the Agency's doctor. Despite the completion of the Cherokee Hospital, in 1916, this would be the first time most of these children saw a doctor, and probably the only time before they enrolled in school.⁴⁰

Even though the Fair itself did not undergo major changes until 1921, the local press always made it clear that the reason to go to the Fair were those few things that made it uniquely Cherokee. The papers in Sylva consistently mentioned the Cherokees arts and crafts, and the Indian competitions, often ignoring, or at least playing down, the agricultural elements of the fair.⁴¹

The ball games--a traditional Cherokee sport resembling lacrosse or Iroquois stickball--in particular drew the attention of the press. The Agents had often mentioned the games, and the dances that were associated with them, as times when gambling or drunkenness could be likely. When these elements were absent the fact that the games and accompanying dances had lost their religious significance made them allowable in the agents' eyes, especially considering the wholesale adoption of Christianity that had taken place on the reservation.⁴²

The reason the Ball games drew so much attention may have been their sheer brutality. In the words of Sampson Owl, "Any method is used to disable the opponent by any player, and it is permissible." The only discernable rules to outsiders were that to win a team had to carry the ball between the goal post--two sapling stuck into one end of the field--twelve times. With no rests, quarters, or time outs for injuries or substitutions

⁴⁰ "Indian Baby Show at Cherokee Today" *Asheville Citizen Times* 15 October 1917: Chiltosky 8-9; Finger 30; OIA 1915 report 9.

⁴¹ "Cherokee Indian Fair" *Jackson County Journal* Vol. I No. 7, 8 October 1915: "Cherokee Fair Opens October 3". *Jackson County Journal* Vol. I No. 7 19 May 1922.

⁴² OIA 1911 report section 1 4, 1912 report 3, 1915 report 5, 1916 report 6, 1918 report 6, 1919 report 7, 1920 report 7, 1921 report 7, 1922 statistical: Sampson Owl: And "Cherokee Indian Fair Draws Larger Crowds" *Jackson County Journal*, 6 October 1922.

games would often be ended with only one player from each team remaining on the field. Despite the fact that whites often noticed the resemblance of Indian Stick Ball to lacrosse, the Cherokees themselves explained the game to outsiders as having aspects of all of the “tame” sports of boxing, wrestling, football and basketball.⁴³

This popularity led to more and more games being held at the fair. By 1929 games were held everyday of the fair, in something of a league system, with the winners from the games on Wednesday and Thursday playing each other on Friday. As the ball game became a bigger part of the fair the committee began to award prizes, paying the winners sixty dollars, while the losing team only got thirty, which they would then have to divide amongst the ten to twenty players on the team.⁴⁴

In the late 1920's the ball games and archery were joined by traditional dances, a move totally contrary to the wishes of the Office of Indian Affairs. Initially the Big Cove community staged traditional dances on their own, appropriate considering their legacy of being the most traditional of the five townships that comprised the Cherokee reservation. However by 1932 these traditional dances became one of the competition categories for the fair, with Soco and Cherokee townships also competing. The Big Cove Cherokees also brought an additional attraction, the Cherokee Language, into the choir competition.⁴⁵

This sort of cultural display violated the very spirit of what the Office of Indian Affairs intended for their wards. Although unopposed to tourism, the Commissioner of the Office of Indian Affairs in 1917 noted that Indians turning themselves into an

⁴³ Sampson Owl.

⁴⁴ WCU Special Collections *1929 Cherokee Fall Fair Pamphlet*. And Sampson Owl.

⁴⁵ Sampson Owl: *WCU 1929 Cherokee Fall Fair Pamphlet*: “Colorful Event to Open Tuesday for Four Days” *Asheville Citizen Times* 21 October 1932.

attraction by reenacting traditional dances or participating in Wild West shows led to backsliding, and increased moral decay.⁴⁶

Despite the Office of Indian Affairs' concern, the Cherokees did not exploit themselves frivolously. In 1924 the Cherokees resisted outside pressure on them to perform dances or stage ball games regularly for tourists in order to draw more people to the region, and "assist in the needed lengthening of the season." The fact that so many Cherokees had either fully assimilated, or did not wish to see their culture paraded as part of a dog-and-pony show made the prospect of any kind of wild west show on the reservation unlikely.⁴⁷

Finding out exactly who the thousands of outsiders who came to see the yearly festivities were, is impossible. Local newspapers cite "elites" from outside of the area attending the fair, but offered few specifics to say whom these elites were. George Masa, a renowned natural photographer from Asheville, attended almost every year, and became the first person to document the fair on film. Additionally the Agent in 1930 mented meeting a man from Georgia who attended every fair from 1920 to 1930.⁴⁸

Besides the Fall Fairs, tourism began taking off in other ways for the Cherokees. The sale of pottery, hand woven baskets, and beadwork had become an eleven thousand dollar a year enterprise for the 58 Cherokees who worked at these crafts part time in 1929. Regular trade at the shops in Cherokee brought in some of this money. The fair also served as a point of sale, bringing in \$500 in 1924, from the sale of baskets alone. In

⁴⁶ *The American Indian and the United States* 2:903-4.

⁴⁷ Pack Memorial Library Clippings File 0473 WN-History-Cherokees (Indians) Burnham S. Colburn "Colburn Sketches the Cherokees" *Asheville Citizen Times* 30 September 1925. And, Walter B. Candler "Modesty and Virtues" *Jackson County Journal*, 6 October 1922.

⁴⁸ "The Mystery OF Geroge Masa." Prod. Paul Bonesteel, Bonesteel Productions, 2001. DVD: "Cherokee Indian Fair Starts Today" *Ruralite*, 5 October 1923: And OIA 1930 sec 4.

addition Asheville's Grove Park Inn, which advertised itself as "the world's finest hotel", purchased baskets for sale in their gift shop.⁴⁹

It is important to note that, with the exception of D.K. Collins' General Store in Cherokee township, all of the shops in Cherokee at this time were owned by Cherokees, or whites that had partnered with Cherokees. Due to communal land holding, the tribal council was able to forbid the leasing of land to whites, which ensured that the profits from both general merchandise and the purchases of tourists went into the pockets of Cherokees.⁵⁰

Two Cherokees shop owners of note, James Blythe and John Tahquette, partnered with whites and ran stores in Soco and Cherokee, respectively. Blythe served on the Tribal Council, eventually becoming the first Chief who spoke English as a first language, and worked as the tribe's forester in addition to working with the fair committee. Tahquette's store in Cherokee township brought him just as much success and prestige, which he parlayed into a seat on the tribal council--eventually serving as Chief--in addition to being postmaster for a period, and a stint on the Fall Fair committee.⁵¹

Most of the early stores in Cherokee were not as prosperous as these two though. Due to limited capital the stores that began to spring up in downtown Cherokee, and in Ravensford--a timber camp that would later be incorporated into the reservation--were often little more than roadside stands. The Cherokees who ran these shops sold their own

⁴⁹ OIA 1929 Statistical, 1924 report 12: Pack Memorial Library Vertical File vol. 79 file 693. November 1913 advertisement for Grove Park Inn: And Finger 32.

⁵⁰ OIA 1910 report 9-10, 1912 report 13: Council Minutes 71, 158: And Sampson Owl.

⁵¹ OIA 1910 report 9-10: Council Minutes 71, 158: Sampson Owl: WCU Clipping: And Finger 21.

crafts, and produce to the few tourists who came through the reservation each day, and to the large numbers who came to see the fair.⁵²

In 1929 these experiences with tourism became more and more crucial to the Cherokees as other forms of supplemental income began to disappear. Even though most Cherokees were still farmers, the limited tillable acreage, erosion from years of farming on the steep hills and the lack of significant cash crops, made it increasingly necessary for Cherokees to work for wages at least part of the year. Tribe members sometimes traveled as far as Florida to find employment, but usually staying closer to the Reservation. Public works and timber provided the majority of jobs for the Cherokee men who worked off the Reservation, and some Cherokee women were employed as domestics or secretaries throughout the 1920's.⁵³

Even before the stock market crash of 1929, the depression began in the mountains. Due in part to the deforestation caused by three decades of heavy timbering, the timber companies had already begun to move further west in search of larger, more accessible stretches of forest, eliminating many of the logging and sawmill jobs in the region. The direct impact of this came to the Cherokees when the initial purchases of the land that would become the Great Smoky Mountains National Park dealt the final blow to few timber companies that remained near the reservation.⁵⁴

In addition to the economic factors that made tourism more appealing, the federal government created a highly political one, allotment. In 1924, after two years of congressional wrangling, the U.S. Congress passed a bill providing for the allotment of

⁵² Jack Wolfe interview.

⁵³ OIA 1923 report section 4 13, 1925 report section 4 10, 1926 report 10, 1927 report 11, 1929 report section 4 1, 1930 report section 4 2.

the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation. In simple terms, this bill would be the culmination of the Office of Indian Affairs' effort, a total termination of the relationship between the Eastern Cherokees and the federal government. The Agent at the time expressed his concern at such a matter, stating both the complicated legal status, because of the Cherokees Corporate Charter with the State of North Carolina, and fact that the Cherokees themselves opposed allotment. The Tribal Council had already made their opinion clear, by deeding the Tribe's land to the Federal Government in 1919, when they passed "A Resolution Concerning the Final Disposition of the Eastern Band."⁵⁵

The Cherokees actually benefited from placing their land in trust with the federal government. Unintentionally this freed the Cherokee from paying local and state property taxes, even after the allotment plan was abandoned in 1932. The trust also placed the responsibility for improving infrastructure on the reservation into the hands of the federal government, which provided the money for infrastructure improvements that the state and counties would not. This included ten thousand dollars for ten more miles of paved road, and an unknown sum for bringing telephone and telegraph service to the reservation, or at least to the Boarding School.⁵⁶

All of these improvements and the valuable experiences the Cherokees gained with tourism from 1910 to 1930 would enable them to exploit the opportunities that

⁵⁴ Ronald D. Eller. *Miners Millhands and Mountaineers: The Industrialization of the Appalachian South 1880- 1930*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press 1982), 237-8. And, OIA 1929 report 1.

⁵⁵ OIA 1923 report 14, 1924 report 13. And Council Minutes 97-101.

⁵⁶ OIA 1922 report 2, 1928 statistical, 1930 statistical.

outside events brought to them later. By 1931 the Agricultural Extension Agent of the Boarding School began teaching classes on traditional crafts, in addition to farming, in a way validating the craft industry as a necessary part of the economy. The Cherokees and the Office of Indian Affairs, also used the presence of a tourism infrastructure to convince federal and local officials to locate the entrance to the Smoky Mountains National Park, and later the Blue Ridge Parkway in Cherokee.⁵⁷

Even though the Office of Indian Affairs tried to develop multiple forms of industry on the reservation, tourism became the one that succeeded, despite the Office of Indian Affairs' concerns about the moral effects such exploitation would have on the tribe. The Tribal Council, in part through the Fall Fair Committee, helped attract tourists to the reservation, and created a framework for later developments. Individual Cherokees played a much greater role in the development of the tourism industry than may be apparent here, people like Carl Standingdeer, Joe and Will Saunooke, James Blythe, the Owl family, and Sibald and Jacob Smith, all dedicated their time, and money, to something they saw as a means of success for them and their people. The lessons and successes of this early period would provide the business experience the tribe needed to take advantage of the tourism boom in the 1940's.

⁵⁷ OIA 1931 report sec 4.

Bibliography:

Primary Sources:

Amanda Smoker, interviewed by Lois Calonehuskie, *Journal of Cherokee Studies: Fading Voices Special Edition*. Cherokee Historical Association, 1989

The American Indian and the United States: A Documentary History. Vol. II. Wilcomb E. Washburn comp. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press

Asheville Citizen Times 1900-1930.

Bessie Jumper, interviewed by Lois Calonehuskie, Gil Jackson, and Earl Davis. *Journal of Cherokee Studies: Fading Voices Special Edition*. Cherokee Historical Association, 1989.

Eastern Cherokee Council. *Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation Tribal Council Minutes in English 1900-1932*. North Carolina Department of Records, Raleigh, 1971

Jack Wolfe, interviewed by author. 17 November 2003.

Jackson County Journal. 1915-1929.

National Archives *Office of Indian Affairs: Superintendents Annual Report and Statistical 1910-28*. General Accounting Office, Washington D.C. 1971.

Pack Memorial Library Clippings File 0329 WN-Cherokees- Fairs/Fall Festivals/ Etc.

Private Laws of North Carolina Session 1897, Chapter 207.

Ruralite. 1926-1932.

Western Carolina University Special Collections. *1929 Cherokee Fall Fair Pamphlet*.

Western Carolina University Special Collections Clippings File: Cherokees 1930's

Secondary Sources:

Blamer, Thomas J. "Rebecca Youngbird: An Independent Cherokee Potter." *Journal of Cherokee Studies*. Spring 1989.

Chaat, Paul Smith and Robert Allen Warrior. *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement From Alcatraz to Wounded Knee*. New York, The New Press, 1996.

Chiltosky, Mary Ulmer. *Cherokee Fair and Festival A history thru 1978*. Gilbert Printing, 1996.

Deloria, Vine Jr. *Custer Died for Your Sins*. Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1998.

- Dugan, Joyce C. and Lynne B. Harlan. *The Cherokees*. Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation, 2001.
- Eller, Ronald D. *Miners Millhands and Mountaineers: The Industrialization of the Appalachian South 1880- 1930*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press 1982.
- Finger, John R. *Cherokee Americans: The Eastern Band of the Cherokees in the Twentieth Century*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991.
- Jolley, Harley E.. *The Blue Ridge Parkway*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1969.
- James Merrell. *The Indians New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1989.
- Mitchell, Anne V. "Culture History and Development on the Qualla Boundary: The Eastern Cherokee and the Blue Ridge". *Appalachian Journal* 24 (Winter1997).
- "The Mystery OF Geroge Masa." Prod. Paul Bonesteel. Bonesteel Productions, 2001. DVD.
- Pierce, Daniel S.. *The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to National Park*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000.
- Starnes, Richard D. "Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina." Ph.D. diss., Auburn University, 1999.
- . "A Conspicuous Example of What is Termed the New South: Tourism and Urban Development in Asheville, North Carolina 1880-1925." *North Carolina Historical Review* 80. no. 1 (2003): 61.