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The Cherokee Indian Fair and the Making of a Tourist Economy

The first Cherokee Indian Fair, held in 1914 in Cherokee, North Carolina, was a simple festival. The main exhibit featured agricultural produce and goods made by Cherokees from across the reservation. Regional companies D.K. Collins, R.J. Roane, Sylva Supply Company, Asheville Seed Company, and C.M. McClung Hardware contributed farm equipment and supplies as prizes for the exhibits since the tribe did not have the funds to purchase prizes themselves.¹ Other popular features of the festival included automobiles that were driven around the fair-grounds—an exciting prospect, since cars were rare on the Qualla Boundary at the time—as well as a merry-go-round that provided entertainment to children, and an ice cream stand.² Another key attraction was the Cherokee Indian Ball game, played by teams representing each township. An intense sport, Indian Ball drew crowds of spectators at each fair. One journalist described the game as “a combination of football, soccer, wrestling, boxing, and miscellaneous mayhem,” not a sport “recommended for

1 James Henderson to W.J. Parks, August 23, 1916, Folder 2a-81 thru 2a-90, Correspondence (Series 5), Cherokee Indian Agency, Bureau of Indian Affairs Records, National Archives Building, Atlanta, GA.

2 Mary Ulmer Chiltoskey, *Cherokee Fair and Festival: A History thru 1978* (Asheville, NC: Gilbert Printing Company, 1979), 8. The Qualla Boundary is a land trust created for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.



Visitors overlook the Cherokee Indian Fair, which attracted tourists from across North Carolina after its creation in 1914. (Photo courtesy of the Museum of the Cherokee Indian.)

sissies or even spectators with weak stomachs.”³

The fair in 1914 was the start of a more than century-long annual event that would be an economic boon to the Cherokees while simultaneously presenting challenges to the way that Cherokees presented themselves in the public sphere. The fair provided a way for Cherokee leaders and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to promote agriculture on the Qualla Boundary, a goal that became especially important after the Cherokee’s agriculture industry had been weakened by the western North Carolina logging boom. The fair also served as a catalyst for the tourist industry on the Qualla Boundary by drawing visitors from around North Carolina and surrounding states. Along with the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the fair put the city of Cherokee, North

3 “Cherokee Fair October 7-11 W.N.C. Feature,” *The High Point Enterprise*, Sept 25, 1941, 10.

Carolina on the map as a tourist destination. It also promoted Cherokee culture and provided opportunities for Cherokees to play Indian Ball, compete in archery and blowgun demonstrations, and perform traditional Cherokee dances across the United States. These activities bolstered the Cherokee Nation's reputation and provided yet another source of income for Cherokee performers.

This article will examine the economic and cultural dimensions of the fair by offering a brief history of the fair's beginnings before exploring its evolution over time. The fair was originally intended to promote the Cherokee economy through subsistence agriculture and education but was simultaneously marketed as a tourist attraction. Tourists' growing interest in the fair had implications for the presentation of Cherokee culture in arts, crafts, and drama. Agriculture, cultural performance, and tourism were all central to the fair from the beginning in 1914, but each developed and became increasingly significant parts of the fair at different times during its history. As this article will show, fair organizers increasingly emphasized cultural performance as tourism increased in the 1920s and 1930s. Although handicrafts, like the fair itself, changed in style as tourism increased, they also preserved Cherokee modes of craftsmanship. Cultural performance and the economic benefits of tourism went hand in hand.

The relationship between the fair's roles as tourist attraction and stage for cultural performance generally fits two theoretical categories of tourism advanced by historian Richard Starnes: destination tourism and cultural tourism. Destination tourism involves tourists traveling to a particular place to take advantage of attractions and entertainments built by developers and corporate interests. Cultural or heritage tourism is the use of history, culture, and tradition to draw tourists to a place or event.⁴ The Cherokee Indian Fair shows that these categories are not mutually exclusive, but can overlap and reinforce each other. The Cherokee Indian Fair began as a cultural tourism event but eventually evolved into a destination tourism event with cultural appeal. Cherokee culture, in other words, made the fair an attractive destination for tourists. The fair itself became a commodity that was marketed as a destination for tourist travel.

Over time, popular elements of the fair became tourist attractions

⁴ Richard D. Starnes, "Introduction," *Southern Journeys: Tourism, History, and Culture in the Modern South*, Richard D. Starnes, ed. (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2003), 2.

in and of themselves apart from the fair. Inadvertently, the fair became a litmus test for the popularity of certain tourist attractions, the most popular of which moved beyond the fair to become independent parts of the tourist economy on the reservation. Indeed, the Cherokee Indian Fair birthed nearly all of the major tourist attractions on the Cherokee reservation. This study of the Cherokee Indian Fair therefore contributes to the study of fairs in general, given the fair's broad, long-term, impact on the local economy even in the period between annual fairs.⁵

The Birth of the Fair

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in North Carolina was an isolated population in 1900. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, trespassing on Cherokee land, tribal factionalism, and the tribe's unclear legal status under the state and federal governments all presented economic and political challenges for the Band.⁶ In 1889, the Eastern Band was legally incorporated, but the legal citizenship status of Cherokee people was contested until the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924.⁷ At this time, the Cherokee economy was primarily agrarian, focusing on crops for subsistence rather than cash income. The tribal council sponsored a mining project in the 1880s in an attempt to grow their economy, but operations in the mine never began. Instead, lumber was the Band's main source of income and, beginning in 1881, Chief Nimrod Jarrett Smith sold walnut trees near Big Cove for logging.⁸ Large-scale commercial logging began in the 1890s when the Cherokee tribal council sold the rights to the Cathcart tract.⁹

By 1904 four white-owned lumber companies had established outposts near the Qualla Boundary and provided many Cherokees with jobs. Seeing

5 The sources used for this article are primarily from the BIA and from fair brochures and materials that Cherokee fair planners had a hand in making. As such, most of the sources were created by BIA agents. It is possible, however, to read between the lines of printed fair materials to assess Cherokee perspectives on the fair, particularly regarding the preservation and adaptation of handicraft techniques and styles.

6 The Eastern Band of Cherokee refers to the people in the Cherokee nation that stayed in North Carolina after the Great Removal, were later incorporated into a federally recognized tribe under this name, and given the Qualla Boundary in western North Carolina as a land trust to live on.

7 John R. Finger, *Cherokee Americans: The Eastern Band of Cherokees in the Twentieth Century* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 10-11.

8 John. R. Finger, *The Eastern Band of Cherokees: 1819-1900* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 147-149.

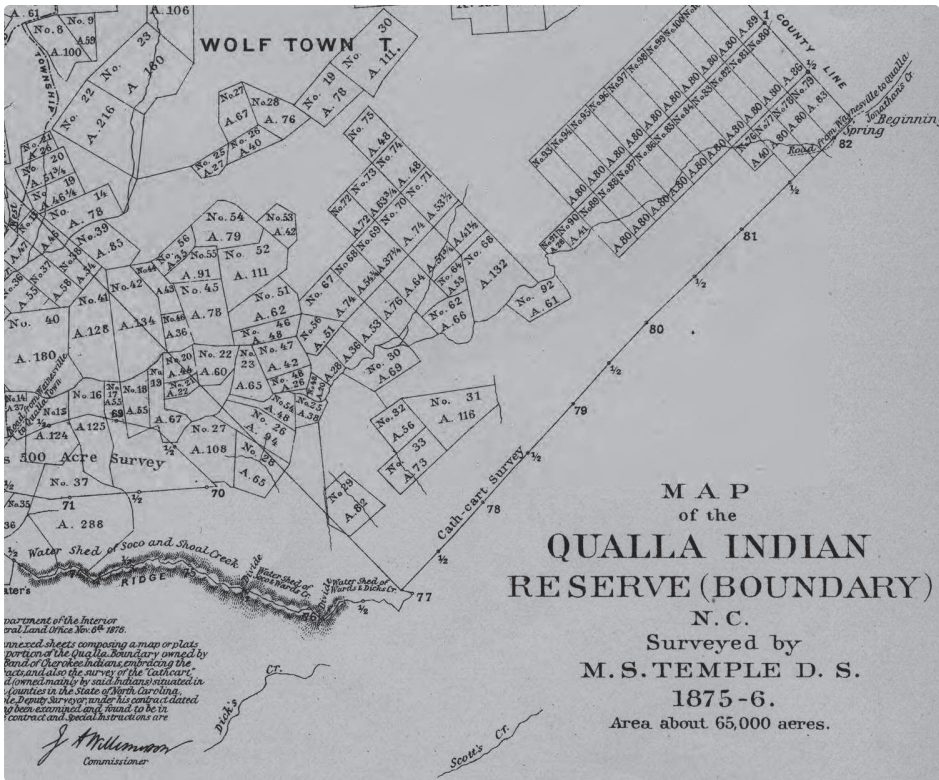
9 Finger, *Cherokee Americans*, 10-11.



the positive benefits of increased employment for its citizens, the tribal council sold tracts of land to logging companies, hoping to encourage more economic activity in the area. For example, in 1906, the tribal council sold the 33,000-acre Love tract for \$245,000.¹⁰ As an increasing number of Cherokee sought employment in the lumber companies, many neglected their farms, most of which were small subsistence farms with some beans grown as a cash crop. Encouraging logging on the reservation came with other problems as well. For example, tribal leadership had difficulty enforcing contracts so that companies did not take more than was specified, and in preventing independent individuals from logging illegally on fringe areas of the reservation.¹¹

10 Ibid., 17-19; Charles J. Weeks, "The Eastern Cherokee and the New Deal," *The North Carolina Historical Review*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (July 1976): 305.

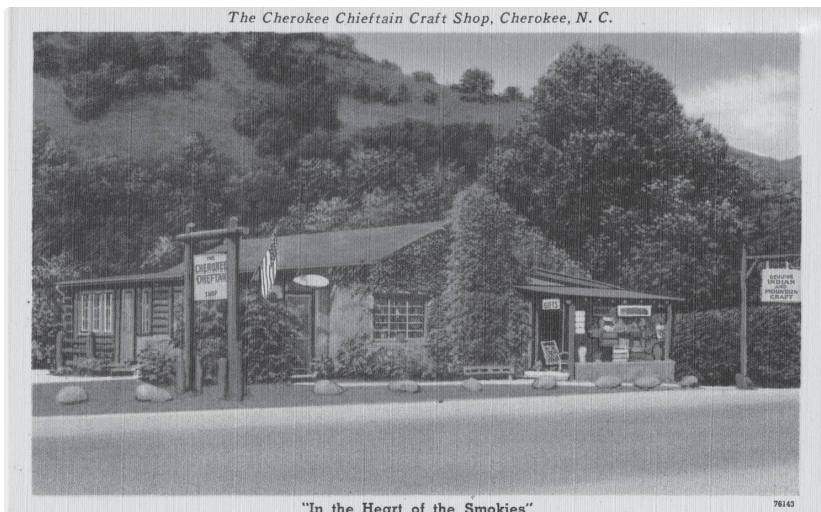
11 Ibid.



A nineteenth-century map hints at the Cherokee people’s uncertain legal status and claims to land, which presented them with economic challenges. (Photo courtesy of the National Archive.)

Railroad construction increased alongside the logging boom, facilitating travel to the reservation. Construction on the Appalachian Railroad, which ran a line to Ela, North Carolina, was completed in April, 1909, providing the first railroad access to the reservation. This opened a new way for tourists to travel to the Qualla Boundary. Construction also provided jobs for Cherokee workers. By 1920, several spurs off the main railroad line wound through different parts of Qualla Boundary, easing transportation through the reservation.¹² Over the first several decades of the twentieth century, roads to the reservation were improved as well, in part because plans for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park would require roads between Asheville and the Smoky Mountains. Some of these roads were routed through the reservation, allowing tourists to stop there on their way

12 Finger, *Cherokee Americans*, 17-21.



A postcard advertising the Cherokee Chieftain Craft Shop in Cherokee, from the 1930s. The BIA circulated similar posters in North Carolina, hoping to attract tourists to the Cherokee Indian Fair. (Image courtesy of Wikimedia.)

to the park.¹³ These improvements in transportation made it progressively easier for tourists to come to the reservation. The fair provided a reason for them to come.¹⁴

As these economic developments were taking place in western North Carolina, the BIA was undergoing changes in Washington, DC. The BIA was established in 1849 as part of the US Department of the Interior, purportedly to represent the interests of Native Americans. However, the BIA often functioned as a contested form of government for Native Americans, providing social services such as grant funding, education, and policing. They were also responsible for organizing many of the Native American tribes into reservations.¹⁵

13 "Cherokee Indians Will Be First To Get Highway Jobs," *The Daily Times* (Burlington, North Carolina), September 12, 1933, 5; John R. Finger, *Cherokee Americans*, 78-79.
14 Betty J. Duggan, "Tourism, Cultural Authenticity, and the Native Crafts Cooperative: The Eastern Cherokee Experience," *Tourism and Culture: An Applied Perspective*, ed. Erve Chambers (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 36.
15 Paul G. Pierpaoli, Jr., "Bureau of Indian Affairs," *The Encyclopedia of North American Indian Wars, 1607-1890: A Political, Social, and Military History*, eds. Spencer Tucker, James Arnold, Roberta Weiner (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2011), 100-101; See also Laurence M. Hauptman, "The American Indian Federation and the Indian New Deal: A Reinterpretation," *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (November 1983): 378-402; Sherry Smith, "Comments: Native Americans and the Indian Policy in the Progressive Era," *Journal of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (October 2010): 503-507.

In the first years of the twentieth century, the BIA was caught up in the tendencies of the Progressive Era, seeking to reform its oft-criticized bureaucracy by streamlining its administrative systems and improving efficiency. The BIA also placed new emphasis on reconsidering its standards of professionalism for employees, leading to the creation of new experimental programs for Native Americans nationwide.¹⁶ In 1912, national BIA Commissioner Cato Sells suggested one such program during a visit to the reservation: a Cherokee fair. BIA Superintendent James Henderson and Farm Agent James Blythe, two BIA leaders on the reservation, agreed to his idea.¹⁷ Cherokee leaders supported the idea and many Cherokees were personally involved in fair planning.¹⁸ Though the idea originated with Sells, the fair was a collective effort.

Tourism, Subsistence Farming, and Education

Superintendent Henderson's initial idea was to use the fair to promote particular values among the Cherokee. In a 1916 letter to Commissioner Sells, Henderson quoted a Department of Agriculture agent who wrote that "the fair at Cherokee is doing a big work in training the Indians for better living and more enlightened citizenship."¹⁹ Enlightened citizenship, a Progressive Era ideal among social activists, denoted the value of education and individual intelligence to US citizenship. As historian Kevin Mattson has commented, "Not property or virility (or even balanced government) but widespread critical enlightenment was now the most important source of citizenship."²⁰ The idea was that citizens who were educated—or enlightened—would see themselves and their work in the broader scope of the community, accepting a personal responsibility to make their communities better.²¹ By using this phrase, Henderson expressed a hope,

16 Cathleen D. Cahill, *Federal Fathers & Mothers: A Social History of the United States Indian Service, 1869-1933* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 211.

17 Chiltoskey, *Cherokee Fair & Festival*, 5.

18 *Ibid.*, 1-10.

19 James Henderson to Cato Sells, October 30, 1916, Folder 2a-34 Cont. thru 2a-48, Box 1, Correspondence (Series 5), Cherokee Indian Agency, Bureau of Indian Affairs Records, National Archives Building, Atlanta, GA. This set of records will henceforth be abbreviated as the "Cherokee Indian Agency."

20 Kevin Mattson, *Creating a Democratic Public: The Struggle for Urban Participatory Democracy During the Progressive Era* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 79-80.

21 *Ibid.*

grounded in Progressive Era ideals, that by educating Cherokees through the events at the fair, Cherokees would become more productive members of both the larger Cherokee community and the state of North Carolina. Henderson wrote to the secretary of the Asheville Chamber of Commerce, saying, “I know that if I make a good citizen of one of the Indians I have done a good work for the state.”²²

The fair was marketed to tourists from its very beginning. In a 1914 letter to Cherokee fair planner Johnson Owl, Henderson wrote, “I find that the white people are very much interested in the fair, and I think that if we properly advertise and get up a good exhibit it will be a success,” but “if we fail to put up a fine exhibit the fair will be a rank failure and the visitors will be disgusted and we will not get them to come again.”²³ In the letter, Henderson used tourists’ approval of the fair as an incentive for his collaborators to put on an exhibit for the first fair. Furthermore, Henderson and Johnson worked together to print posters advertising the fair, and they had 500 tickets printed in anticipation of the fair’s visitors.²⁴

Henderson tried to use the Cherokee Indian Fair to revive the agricultural economy on the reservation, a common goal for his predecessors as well. The attempt was even more important since the decline in agriculture on the reservation had continued into the 1910s. In 1915 he wrote that “the object of the fair is to awaken the Cherokee Indians to better farming, fruit growing, and cattle raising.”²⁵ In multiple letters, Henderson wrote to companies outside the reservation to ask for donations that could serve as prizes for the fair’s agricultural contests. Instead of cash prizes, however, Henderson requested primarily farm instruments, clothing, or other goods that would be beneficial to agricultural work. Prizes that would “aid ... in interesting these people in better farming” were important to Henderson.²⁶ The solicitation of donations as prizes was

22 James Henderson to N. Buckner, October 28, 1921, Folder 2a-1, Box 1, Correspondence (Series 5), Cherokee Indian Agency.

23 James Henderson to Johnson Owl, September 18, 1914, Folder 2a-61 thru 2a-80, Box 1, Correspondence (Series 5), Cherokee Indian Agency.

24 James Henderson to Johnson Owl, letter, Sept. 8, 1914, Folder 2a-1, Box 1, Correspondence (Series 5), Cherokee Indian Agency; James Henderson to R.L. Sandidge, letter, Oct. 7, 1914, Folder 2a-1, Box 1, Correspondence (Series 5), Cherokee Indian Agency.

25 James Henderson to C.M. McClung and Co., August 20, 1915; James Henderson to Marr Boburn and Company, letter, August 20, 1915; James Henderson to W.H. Duncan, letter, August 20, 1915, Folder 2a-81 thru 2a-90, Correspondence (Series 5), Cherokee Indian Agency.

26 James Henderson to J.L. Morgan, August 23, 1916, Folder 2a-81 thru 2a-90, Correspondence (Series 5), Box 1, Cherokee Indian Agency.

Final Roll of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians of North Carolina, under Act of June 4, 1924 (43 Stat., 376) 74

SERIAL REFERENCE	Cherokee Roll		FAMILY NAME	FIRST NAME	Relationship to Head of Family	Sex	Age	Date	Date	Date of Death	Remarks
	No.	No.									
2344	64	1899	Smith	Joseph L.	Husband	M	37	December 31, 1879	5/6		
2345	65		Smith	Ollie	Wife	F	50	August 17, 1876	3/9		
2346	66		Smith	Lorraine	Son	M	19	March 20, 1907	13/16		
2347			Smith	Charles H.	Son	M	15	January 31, 1911	13/16		
2348			Smith	Arthur	Son	M	14	November 30, 1912	13/16		
2349			Smith	Dezmon	Daughter	F	10	April 25, 1916	13/16		
2350	109		Smith	James David	Husband	M	46	April 09, 1878	1/2		Wife, white, divorced.
2351			Smith	Yorsha	Daughter	F	12	January 23, 1913	1/9		
2352			Smith	John Ross	Son	M	10	April 25, 1916	1/9		
2353	190		Smith	James G. T.	Husband	M	38	March 26, 1899	1/6		Father, John Q. A. Smith, Churchill Roll #269.
2354			Smith	John Ross	Daughter	F	12	November 25, 1914	1/6		
2355			Smith	Blayne	Daughter	F	9	June 16, 1917	1/6		
2356	189		Smith	John Q. A.	Husband	M	56	August 19, 1870	1/9		Wife, white.
2357	189		Smith	Robert A.	Son	M	28	April 1, 1908	1/6		
2358	189		Smith	Ross B.	Son	M	19	December 25, 1907	1/6		
2359	189		Smith	Lizzie	Single	F	28	July 26, 1908	1/16		Churchill Roll #269.
2360			Smith	Deena G.	Son	M	5	June 21, 1891	1/30		CONTESTED. Mother, William T. Smith Bates, illegitimate. Father, white.
2361	1370	1320	Smith	Lynd H.	Husband	M	53	February 25, 1873	7/6		Wife, white.
2362	1373		Smith	Such	Son	M	23	September 5, 1903	7/16		
2363	1375		Smith	John S.	Son	M	20	November 17, 1906	7/16		
2364			Smith	Bert	Daughter	F	17	February 27, 1909	7/16		
2365	104	1003	Smith	Louis H.	Husband	M	28	November 27, 1884	3/6		Died March 5, 1906.
2366	105	1009	Smith	Rancy	Wife	F	75	December 23, 1851	3/6		
2367			Smith	Margaret	Daughter	F	14	February 9, 1912	1/6		Wife, App. #180.
2368			Smith	Harlie	Son	M	12	May 4, 1913	1/6		CONTESTED. Mother, Sallie Smith, Miller Roll CONTESTED.
2369	164		Smith	Marshall	Single	M	29	September 12, 1897	1/16		Churchill Roll #269.
2370			Smith	May	Wife	F	29	April 30, 1901	1/16		CONTESTED. Mother, Sallie Smith, Miller Roll #269. App. #180.
2371			Smith	Helen	Daughter	F	6	August 30, 1900	1/30		CONTESTED. Mother, Sallie Smith, Miller Roll #269. Father, James
2372	196	1873	Smith	Harv Milton	Widow	F	78	June 16, 1858	1/9		Husband, Harv Tiger, deceased.
2373			Smith	Illinois	Orphan	F	5	December 3, 1917	1/6		Churchill Roll #269.
2374	208	1775	Smith	Sam Ed.	Husband	M	33	March 27, 1853	1/2		First wife, white. Second wife, Cherokee Indian.

The population of the Qualla Valley increased beginning in 1924, as thousands of people tried to claim membership on the "Baker Roll," a census taken during the process in which tribal lands were placed into a federal trust. (Photo courtesy of the National Archives.)

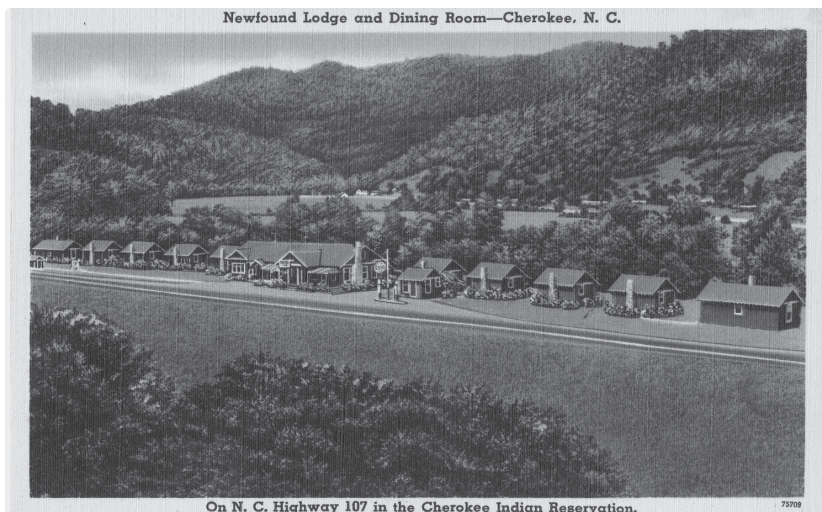
also crucial to hosting contests and enticing participants, since in its first years the fair lacked financial support from the BIA and the tribal council.²⁷ The national BIA assistant superintendent told Henderson that it would be better for the Cherokees to exhibit at the North Carolina State Fair, because BIA funds would not be appropriated to provide prizes for a fair in Cherokee.²⁸ In 1915, the BIA appropriated \$200 for fair expenses, but a large enough Cherokee faction protested the appropriation that Henderson never used the funds.²⁹

In addition to promoting agriculture in the Cherokee economy through contests, the fair also provided opportunities to learn agricultural skills

27 James Henderson to W.J. Parks, letter, August 23, 1916, Folder 2a-81 thru 2a-90, Correspondence (Series 5), Box 1, Cherokee Indian Agency.

28 E. B. Meritt, Assistant Commissioner, to James Henderson, April 16, 1914, Folder Correspondence (1), Box 9, General Records Correspondence Chronological File 1890-1914, Cherokee Indian Agency.

29 James Henderson to Cato Sells, April 5, 1915, Folder 2a11, Correspondence (Series 5), Box 1, Cherokee Indian Agency.



The Cherokee Reservation, depicted here in another postcard advertisement from the 1930s, was located on steep mountainous terrain. While this certainly attracted tourists, it made large-scale agriculture difficult as the Eastern Band’s population grew. *(Image courtesy of Wikimedia.)*

that had been lost when Cherokees gave up farming for logging industry jobs. BIA officials and fair planners used the agricultural exhibits to teach subsistence agriculture and housekeeping. In the 1916 fair, for example, a district agent for the federal Department of Agriculture and several aides gave lectures on agricultural practices in addition to judging the exhibits. The use of lectures and exhibits as educational tools during the early fairs had some measure of success based on improvement from prior years. E.S. Millsaps, district agent for the Department of Agriculture, wrote that the 1916 fair was “far better than the white people had in Buncombe [County] a week ago, and much better than the White Rock Fair in Madison [County] this week.”³⁰ In his analysis of the fair, he praised the improvements in the corn and cattle exhibits over the previous year and noted the high quality of the fruit and potato exhibits.³¹

The educational endeavors in the fair extended beyond agriculture to health as well. The 1916 fair included a baby contest, in which babies were scored for their looks, wellbeing, and level of health. To enter in a baby contest, each child had to be examined by a physician, whose responsibility

30 James Henderson to Cato Sells, October 30, 1916, Folder 2a-34 Cont. thru 2a-48, Box 1, Correspondence (Series 5), Cherokee Indian Agency.

31 Ibid.

was to talk with the mothers about the care of their children.³² Since most infant deaths on the reservation occurred after the babies had been weaned, a nurse provided demonstrations on how to prepare more solid food for babies.³³ During the 1917 fair, the North Carolina State Department of Health provided materials for a health exhibit in conjunction with the contest.³⁴ The health component of the contests dovetailed well with the fair planner's educational goals.³⁵

When the logging industry declined in the 1920s, the fair's focus on agriculture became even more economically important for the Cherokee. This decline signaled the loss of jobs for many, leaving Cherokees to return to subsistence agriculture.³⁶ Making matters more difficult, the population on the Qualla Boundary had grown substantially during this shift. The growth was primarily due to the thousands of people who moved to the area to try to claim membership on the "Baker roll," a census taken in 1924 by the Eastern Cherokee Enrolling Commission to determine membership in the Eastern Band during the process in which tribal lands were placed into a federal trust.³⁷ Since the Cherokee agricultural industry relied on subsistence farming, families needed arable land to support themselves. However, the increase in population meant that there was not enough arable land to sustain this growth.³⁸

Even though the Qualla Boundary was comprised of 63,400 acres at the time, the reservation's topography limited the amount of land suitable for farming, creating scarcity on the reservation. The mountainous region's steep hillsides were often too steep to be tilled or plowed. BIA Superintendent R.L. Spalsbury described this problem in his 1930 Annual Report, noting, "The entire region covered by this reservation is a rough mountainous section of country ... yet it is a fact that tillable land is at such a

32 James Henderson to Cato Sells, October 25, 1915, Folder 2a-34 Cont. thru 2a-48, Box 1, Correspondence (Series 5), Cherokee Indian Agency; Chiltoskey, *Cherokee Fair and Festival*, 8-9.

33 Ibid.

34 James Henderson to Cato Sells, December 17, 1917, Folder 2a-61 thru 2a-80, Box 1, Correspondence (Series 5), Cherokee Indian Agency.

35 For more on baby contests, see Annette K. Vance Dorey, *Better Baby Contests: The Scientific Quest for Perfect Childhood Health In the Early Twentieth Century* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1999).

36 R.L. Spalsbury, *Annual Report 1930: Narrative Section, Section 4*, 1930, 1-2, Box 24, General Records and Correspondence (Series 6), Cherokee Indian Agency.

37 "Baker Role, 1924-1929," *National Archives*, accessed February 13, 2016 via <https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/rolls/baker-roll.html>.

38 Charles J. Weeks, "The Eastern Cherokee and the New Deal," 305.

premium that the steep hillsides are often planted in crops.”³⁹ Most families owned five acres of level or moderately sloping land, although some had managed to acquire as many as 25 or 30 acres. With limited land, families only produced what they needed to survive and did not “raise any crop which can be considered a money crop.”⁴⁰ The beans that Cherokees had previously grown as cash crops had been obliterated by pests. Furthermore, land on the steep slopes had to be cultivated using hoes and other hand instruments, since modern agricultural equipment could not yet navigate the slopes’ inclines.⁴¹

When the Great Depression hit in 1928, dramatic job loss increased the importance of subsistence farming for the Eastern Band.⁴² In 1930, Spalsbury wrote that “a majority” of Cherokees had only “a small spot of land” to cultivate, and that most Cherokee families were unable to preserve “enough fruits and vegetables” to last through the winter season.⁴³ During his tenure as BIA superintendent of the Eastern Band, Spalsbury supported subsistence farming on the reservation. He hoped that farming would “take the place of and surpass the old method of depending upon nearby logging and lumber operations for a livelihood.”⁴⁴ This goal, now more important with the decline of the logging industry, was the same as Henderson’s and his predecessors’ goals for the Cherokee.

Without other industries to employ Cherokees or a local market to sell cash crops, the arable land problem notwithstanding, subsistence agriculture and modern agricultural practices were major focuses of the fair in the 1930s. One of the fair’s main exhibits during the 1930s was the Better Home and Farm Contest, first established in 1933. The contest celebrated the agrarian history and economy of the Cherokee and encouraged further agricultural development and education, especially in subsistence farming.⁴⁵ In the 1934 fair, the rules of the contest stipulated that it would “improve living conditions among these Indians” and teach subsistence

39 R.L. Spalsbury, *Annual Report 1930: Narrative Section*, 1.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., 1-2; Charles J. Weeks, “The Eastern Cherokee and the New Deal,” 305.

42 For health conditions during the 1920s, see Weeks, “The Eastern Cherokee and the New Deal.”

43 R.L. Spalsbury, *Annual Report 1930: Narrative Section*, 2.

44 Ibid., 3.

45 Cherokee Indian Fair Association, *Cherokee Indian Fair 1933* (Cherokee, NC: Cherokee Indian Fair Association), 2, File 047, Box 24, General Records and Correspondence (Series 6), Cherokee Indian Agency.

“farming activities to a point where all the Indian homes shall be practically self-supporting.”⁴⁶ The contest allowed members of the Eastern Band to enter food, livestock, and handmade goods into the fair to be judged for monetary prizes. To be eligible participants, Cherokees had to provide sufficient garden produce and field vegetables for their family for an entire year; use improved, modern farming methods; maintain a clean home; and store all agricultural and homemade products in a root cellar, crib, or spring house.⁴⁷ As the rules for the exhibit show, the contests were used as incentives to promote agriculture across the reservation, particularly subsistence farming.

The Better Home and Farm Contest also contained educational elements. In 1933, for example, during the inaugural contest, an announcement in the fair brochure noted that “photographs will be taken during the year of the exhibitor and his family, showing improvement, if any, in the home or farm.” These photographs, the organizers stated, would “greatly improve the educational value of the exhibit.”⁴⁸ Ostensibly, families whose photographs exhibited the greatest amount of improvement or whose home and produce were of the highest quality provided the best educational examples for those viewing the exhibits.

The Better Home and Farm Contest and other educational programs continued throughout the 1930s. By providing cash and material incentives to the Cherokee and educational opportunities to learn better farming and home care practices at the fair, BIA officials and Cherokee fair planners successfully used the fair to raise standards of living on the reservation. The extent to which the focus on agriculture and the educational programs were successful is best understood from a commemoration of the fair’s twenty-fifth anniversary in 1938, which described the history of the fair as “a quarter century of economic progress” that attracted “the attention and interest of visitors from twenty-eight different states of the United States in 1937.”⁴⁹ A 1939 article on the history of the fair echoed the brochure’s sentiment, noting that “homes and living conditions have greatly improved

46 Cherokee Indian Fair Association, *Cherokee Indian Fair 1934* (Cherokee, NC: Cherokee Indian Fair Association, 1934), 4.

47 Ibid.

48 Cherokee Indian Fair Association, *Cherokee Indian Fair 1933*, 2.

49 Cherokee Indian Fair Association, *Cherokee Indian Fair 1938* (Cherokee, NC: Cherokee Indian Fair Association, 1939), File 047, Box 24, General Records and Correspondence (Series 6), Cherokee Indian Agency.

on the reservation since the fair began.” Such “desirable conditions,” the author wrote, was in part due to “the fair and its founders.”⁵⁰

Although the authors of these brochures are unknown, both texts reference the all-Cherokee Board of Directors that managed the fair planning as well as the Cherokee leadership in the fair, which was marked by five members of the board of directors who had been on the board since the fair’s beginning in 1914.⁵¹ The Cherokee’s leadership in the fair’s planning and decades-long memory of the fair’s progress, impact on the reservation, and development as a tourist attraction, lends credibility to this assessment of the fair, to the extent that either the BIA or Cherokee planners contributed to and supported the fair brochures’ claims.

Tourism and the Handicraft Revival

By 1917, white visitors had begun traveling to the reservation to attend the fair. From Henderson’s perspective, the white visitors were one measure of the fair’s success. Writing to Commissioner Sells about the 1917 fair, Henderson reported that it “was far better this year than ever before” because it had “begun to attract the attention and favorable comment of the best thinking white people in the state.” Indeed, he noted that “large numbers of white persons were in attendance.”⁵² Henderson’s focus on the “best-thinking white people” shows that he saw white North Carolinians’ approval of the fair as a better measurement of success than the Cherokee people’s thoughts on it, at least as far as reporting to the commissioner was concerned.

As interest from white visitors increased, access to the reservation became a logistical challenge due to the scarcity of good roads to the reservation. However, the railroad infrastructure first built to serve the logging industry remained even after the industry declined. Before the logging boom had totally disappeared, increasing numbers of tourists were already making use of the railroad infrastructure to travel to western North Carolina and to visit the Cherokee Indian Reservation.⁵³ In the absence

50 Cherokee Indian Fair Association, *Cherokee Indian Fair 1939* (Cherokee, NC: Cherokee Indian Fair Association, 1939), File 047, Box 24, General Records and Correspondence (Series 6), Cherokee Indian Agency.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Daniel S. Pierce, *The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to Natural Park* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 33.



The Yankee Horse Railroad in Buncombe County, North Carolina, pictured here, was one of many logging railroads that were eventually used by tourists in western North Carolina. (Image courtesy of Wikimedia.)

of good roads, railroads provided an important form of transportation to bring tourists to the Qualla Boundary for the fair. In 1921, for instance, the Southern Railway System ran a special train from Asheville to Ela with a connection to Cherokee just for the fair.⁵⁴ The specials offered by the trains brought over 1,000 visitors from Asheville to the fair that year.⁵⁵

Although the fair was not primarily intended to be a tourist attraction, it evolved into one over time as the fair grew in popularity and attracted an increasing number of visitors to the reservation each year. Plans for the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park promised to attract even more. The park, which shares a border with the Qualla Boundary, provided new opportunities for tourism to the Cherokee economy. Park planners wanted to build roads to the park that would cut through the town of Cherokee, North Carolina, which would route more tourists to both the

⁵⁴ "Southern Railway System," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, September 15, 1921, 28.

⁵⁵ "Large Attendance at Cherokee Indian Fair," *Raleigh News and Observer*, October 2, 1921, 8.

park and the reservation.⁵⁶ Some of the roads were completed, but others were halted due to conflicts with the Appalachian railroad and disputes between federal and Cherokee officials.⁵⁷

With a new influx of tourism during the 1920s and 1930s, elements of the fair grew or catered to the interests of these tourists. Increased tourism, for example, created new opportunities for fair exhibitors to sell handicrafts and other artisan work. Handicraft exhibits were present since the beginning of the fair in 1914. Writing to the *Asheville Citizen*, Henderson argued that this handicraft exhibit was the finest in the state. However, this was not entirely because of the quality of Cherokee work, but rather because the exhibit was “made much more interesting by exhibits of blankets, pottery, baskets and various other exhibits from a large number of the Indian tribes of the United States.”⁵⁸ For the 1914 exhibit, Henderson and the Cherokee fair planners supplemented the Cherokee exhibits with other Native American handiworks from around the country.

In the mid-1920s, the federal Indian office began offering cash prizes for the best handicrafts to encourage the production and sale of such goods.⁵⁹ By 1930, Superintendent Spalsbury noted in his 1930 annual report that the Cherokees sold basketry, pottery, bead work, bows and arrows, and more during the fair.⁶⁰ Spalsbury’s mention of handicrafts points to a revival in Cherokee arts and crafts after a decline in Cherokee craftsmanship in prior decades.⁶¹ The revival owed its success to several factors, including federal encouragement of arts and crafts, especially in New Deal programs that promoted the teaching of handicrafts in schools, increased tourism on the reservation, and incentives provided by the Cherokee Indian Fair, which promoted the dying arts of pottery, wood carving, and basket weaving.⁶²

56 “Cherokee Indians Will Be First To Get Highway Jobs.”

57 Finger, *Cherokee Americans*, 78-79.

58 James Henders to *The Asheville Citizen*, letter, October 12, 1914, Folder 2a-1, Box 1, Correspondence (Series 5), Cherokee Indian Agency.

59 Duggan, “Tourism, Authenticity, and the Native Crafts Cooperative: The Eastern Cherokee Experience,” 36-37.

60 R.L. Spalsbury, *Annual Report 1930: Narrative Section, Section 4*, 1930, 2, Box 24, General Records and Correspondence (Series 6), Cherokee Indian Agency.

61 C. Brenden Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South: A Double-Edged Sword* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 162; “Duggan, Tourism, Authenticity, and the Native Crafts Cooperative: The Eastern Cherokee Experience,” 36; Finger, *Cherokee Americans*, 14.

62 Cherokee Indian Fair Association, *Cherokee Indian Fair 1939*, 4. Duggan, “Tourism, Authenticity, and the Native Crafts Cooperative: The Eastern Cherokee Experience,” 36-38. For more on Cherokee and the New Deal, see Weeks, “The Eastern Cherokee and the New Deal.”

The fair's contests provided financial incentives for quality workmanship, and the fair as a whole attracted thousands of non-Cherokee tourists, literally bringing the market for Cherokee crafts right onto the reservation.

Though the crafts were not wholly made in traditional Cherokee styles, their authenticity cannot be denied. One scholarly perspective on authenticity defines cultural authenticity as traditions that have not yet been commoditized by market forces or altered to cater to a tourist market. Others argue that authenticity is malleable, changes over time, and is most defined by what is meaningful to a people at a particular time, including times when cultural traditions are used, and even changed, for the purposes of commoditization and economic gain.⁶³ The evolution of the Cherokee Indian Fair is demonstrative of, and was a catalyst for, changes in Cherokee culture, including the switch from a primarily agrarian economy to a primarily tourist economy. The change in Cherokee arts and crafts, as part of the development of the tourist economy, was a modification of traditional, historical Cherokee designs and styles. These shifts borrowed heavily from the designs of other cultural groups and were largely driven by economic motivations. Basketry and pottery are two examples.

Women were traditionally the weavers in Cherokee society, and they designed most baskets for utilitarian functions. In order to appeal to tourists, women began making designs, like sewing containers, specifically to appeal to tourists. Instead of making baskets out of the traditional river cane or white oak, women started weaving with honeysuckle and light, imported materials that were more delicate and ornamental. These basketry forms included elements from Anglo-American and European styles. In 1934, a honeysuckle basket category was added to the Cherokee Indian Fair, a sign of the wood's growing popularity as a material among Cherokee weavers. In addition, the Cherokee started using commercial dyes in order to make the baskets even more visually appealing.⁶⁴

Cherokee pottery also underwent changes to cater to the tourist market. Traditional Cherokee pottery was a simple gray style, shaped by

63 Laurie Kroshus Medina, "Commoditizing Culture: Tourism and Maya Identity," *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2003), 353-354.

64 Sarah H. Hill, "Marketing Traditions: Cherokee Basketry and Tourist Economics," in *Selling the Indian: Commercializing & Appropriating American Indian Cultures*, Carter Jones Meyer and Diana Royer, eds. (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 2001), 212-224; M. Anna Fariello, *Cherokee Basketry: From the Hands of Our Elders* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2009), 33; Duggan, "Tourism, Authenticity, and the Native Crafts Cooperative: The Eastern Cherokee Experience," 36-38.

hand, and then hardened in ovens where the clay would be turned brown or black by contact with the blazing wood.⁶⁵ Like basket weavers, Cherokee potters geared their styles towards domestic and utilitarian uses.⁶⁶ As the pottery market among tourists expanded, many Cherokees adopted styles from Catawba Indians and nearby white North Carolinians, many of whom had moved away from utilitarian functionality towards decorative tourist-oriented products. The Cherokee also borrowed the colorful features of the highly popular Southwestern Indian style.⁶⁷ Many Catawba potters had moved into or near the Cherokee reservation area after they lost their land in the 1840s and, with Catawba and Cherokee potters living in the same area, the styles became blended. As with basketry, Cherokee potters adopted their style to fit the tourist market.⁶⁸

Cherokees engaged in basketry, weaving, and pottery long before the advent of the fair, but the styles employed in the 1920s and 1930s reflected a unique kind of crafting style with new techniques, designs, and marketability that adapted to economic and cultural developments. In addition, the variety of goods produced was limited in scope. Nevertheless, such a revival in output was necessary for the preservation of craftsmanship on the reservation and for the growth of the handicraft industry.⁶⁹

The new style of the 1920s and 1930s was a complex mingling of economic and cultural preservation. On the one hand, the growth of a tourist market preserved the tradition of Cherokee craftsmanship and some traditional styles. On the other hand, many traditional styles were put aside to cater to the very market that was helping to preserve the craft. With the fair growing as a tourist attraction, the sale of crafts was an important part of the economic value of the fair.⁷⁰ In this case, profit was more important

65 Allen H. Eaton, *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1973), 209.

66 M. Anna Fariello, *Cherokee Pottery: From the Hands of our Elders* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2011), 37.

67 Finger, *Cherokee Americans*, 99.

68 M. Anna Fariello, *Cherokee Pottery: From the Hands of our Elders* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2011), 37, 45-46.

69 Cherokee Indian Fair Association, *Cherokee Indian Fair 1950*, Printed Documents Collection, Hunter Library Digital Collections, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, North Carolina, 39-43. For more on change in basketry over time, see M. Anna Fariello, *Cherokee Basketry: From the Hands of Our Elders* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2009).

70 During the 1920s and 30s, increasing numbers of tourists came to Qualla Boundary during other times of the year as well, which was also a substantial market for the handicraft industry.

than adherence to traditional Cherokee styles. After all, tourists came to the fair seeking the “exotic” and unfamiliar. As long as the styles represented something “Indian” to tourists, they were marketable. The Cherokee therefore chose specific styles and forms that catered to tourists’ interests.⁷¹

In addition to being driven by the market for goods at the Cherokee Indian Fair, the changes in style and design were also influenced by the early twentieth-century arts-and-crafts revival, which pressured Cherokee craftsmen to tailor the styles and designs of their wares to the tourist industry. In the first part of the twentieth century, seven craft guilds opened within 50 miles of the reservation. Cherokee artisans sold their products to the guild directors, who in turn sold them to tourists. However, the guilds’ control on the market meant that Cherokees had to meet the guilds’ standards for quality and style. Cherokee craftsmen saw the tourist market, especially during the time of the fair, as a way to meet financial needs.⁷² Over time, handicrafts became an avenue to supplement a family’s subsistence farming with a cash income.⁷³

By drawing in tourists and financially incentivizing craftsmanship, the fair contributed significantly to the revival of Cherokee craftsmanship and growth of the tourist economy. However, in order to cater to the increasing number of tourists, Cherokee artisans imported styles and designs that replaced what had been traditional Cherokee designs. The revival was an important step in building the Cherokee economy, but it was not until after World War II that mass tourism would begin on the reservation.⁷⁴

Pageantry and Performance at the Fair

In addition to handicrafts and artisanal work, cultural performances were an important part of the Cherokee Indian Fair, one which was not necessarily exclusive of other elements. For instance, fair planners combined handicrafts and cultural performance by introducing model historic Indian villages, one Cherokee and the other Hopi. Both villages displayed Indian arts and crafts and provided a backdrop for performances of traditional dances and tribal ceremonies. Visitors could also see

71 Hill, “Marketing Traditions,” 213.

72 Hill, “Marketing Traditions,” 212-224; Eaton, *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands*, 176.

73 Duggan, “Tourism, Authenticity, and the Native Crafts Cooperative: The Eastern Cherokee Experience,” 37.

74 *Ibid.*, 38-39.

Indians, as one newspaper advertised, “garbed in native costumes and engaged at their native crafts of weaving, basket making or demonstrating the ancient Cherokee methods of cooking and the true-to-tradition life of an Indian village.”⁷⁵

Cherokee arts and crafts, model Indian villages, and tribal dances attracted non-Cherokee tourists to the fair. For instance, journalists predicted that “thousands of white spectators will gather at Cherokee to witness the events of the fair,” or that the fair “is expected to attract a large attendance of white visitors and tourists.”⁷⁶ More specifically, journalists focused on events at the fair that they believed would be the most attractive to white tourists, usually culturally “exotic” performances, events, or exhibits. “The event, which will feature native traditional sports and crafts,” one journalist wrote of the 1935 fair, “is expected to attract a large attendance of white visitors and tourists.”⁷⁷ Another journalist wrote that the 1937 fair, “an event which mixes the primitive with modern Indian customs,” was “expected to attract a large attendance of white spectators this season.”⁷⁸ The 1934 fair brochure said that the “tribal dances will give the visitor an insight of the original Cherokee in his native environment and his means of expressing his emotions in rhythmic group action.”⁷⁹ The focus of the fair, as advertised to tourists, was on the unfamiliar or “exotic” Cherokee culture presented on the reservation.

A pageant called “The Spirit of the Great Smokies” was another draw for tourists. Largely organized by BIA Superintendent Harold Foght, the pageant was directed by Margaret Speelman from the Haskell Institute, a federally-run school for girls in Lawrence, Kansas, that had previously put on historical pageants designed to educate the public about Native American history and culture.⁸⁰ Speelman had directed the school’s 1934 pageant performed as part of the school’s fiftieth anniversary celebrations.⁸¹

75 “Cherokees of North Carolina Prepare for a Gay Festival,” *The Washington Post*, September 8, 1935, F1.

76 “Cherokees Prepare for Harvest Fair,” *The Washington Post*, September 25, 1938, TT10. “Cherokees of North Carolina Prepare for a Gay Festival.”

77 Ibid.

78 “Cherokees Plan Big Doings: Primitive And Modern Customs Of Red Men Comingle in Great Smokies’ Event,” *The Baltimore Sun*, September 12, 1937, T8.

79 Cherokee Indian Fair Association, *Cherokee Indian Fair 1934*, 19.

80 “Haskell Institute Scrapbook: 1935-1936,” *Haskell Institute*, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

81 “Kansas Historical Notes,” transcribed by Ihn, *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 108, accessed February 15, 2017 via <http://www.kshs.org/p/kansas-historical-notes-february-1935/12630>.





An elderly woman weaves a basket at the Oconaluftee Indian Village in 1963. The Cherokee Indian Fair not only contributed to the preservation and adaptation of Cherokee basketry techniques, but the Oconaluftee Indian Village started as the model Indian village in the fair before becoming its own tourist attraction. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia.)

“The Spirit of the Great Smokies” was first performed in 1935 and was popular enough to be repeated in 1937, incorporating more than 350 Cherokees into the production.⁸²

The pageant catered to white tourists’ desire to see and experience what they perceived to be “authentic” Cherokee culture. Written mainly by BIA officials working on the reservation, the pageant enacted the famous story of the Trail of Tears and provided the cultural experience that tourists hoped to observe. Even though the historical subtext in the program did not center on the expression of a Cherokee voice, by painting a grim picture of the Great Removal, the writers added a level of historical accuracy unusual for its time. The pageant begins with a medicine man addressing the audience in a long monologue. In part, he intones, “Here in our mountains,

82 Finger, *Cherokee Americans*, 99-100; Richard D. Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2005), 165-167.

<p style="text-align: center;">FRIDAY October 4th, 1935</p> <p>A. M. 7:30 Entrance Gate Opens. 8:00 Agricultural Hall Opens. 8:30 Arts and Crafts Hall Opens. 10:00 Indian Dance—in Front of Grandstand. 10:30 Archery and Blowgun Contests—in Front of Grandstand. Awarding of Prizes for High Scores in Archery and Blowgun Contests.</p> <p>P. M. 2:00 Indian Dance—in Front of Grandstand. 2:30 Indian Ball Game. 8:00 Finals—Square Dancing Contest—in Front of Grandstand.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">THE CHEROKEE INDIAN FAIR —AN AMERICAN INSTITUTION</p> <p>This Fair is now in its twenty-second year, and has become renowned over the nation at large for the excellence of its programs and its thrilling Indian games and pageantry. The prospects are that this year's Fair will attract increasingly large crowds for its splendid Indian programs.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Do Not Miss—</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">THE PAGEANT</p> <p>"The Spirit of the Great Smokies," an historic pageant depicting the struggles between the Cherokee and the encroaching whites, will be enacted in a rustic, open-air stadium by five hundred Cherokee Indian players, on Wednesday and Thursday evenings.</p> <p>The Tuesday evening's dramatic program will be rendered in the stadium by a group of Chillico, Oklahoma Indians, representing twelve distinct tribes.</p> <p>All Fair guests should plan to remain over the evenings for these remarkable entertainments.</p> 	 <p style="text-align: center;">CHEROKEE INDIAN FAIR AND FOLK FESTIVAL</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PROGRAM</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Cherokee, North Carolina OCTOBER 1, 2, 3, 4, 1935</p> <p style="text-align: center;">CHEROKEE INDIAN FAIR ASSOCIATION Harold W. Focht, President J. L. Walters, Secretary-Treasurer</p>
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for we are a mountain people ... we come before you ... in dance, in song, in ancient tribal rites to celebrate the glories of the past."⁸³ From the very beginning, the pageant connected the Cherokee people with the mountain lands and tied both to Cherokee history and tradition.

Following the introduction of the pageant, the first two scenes depict the effects of the arrival of Europeans and colonial expansion on the Cherokees. In each scene, the pageant focuses on a new group (e.g., the Spanish, French) interacting with the Cherokee people, making treaties and promises, and then breaking them to the detriment of the Cherokee people. This pattern of broken promises in the pageant culminates in the third scene, a depiction of the 1835 Great Removal, the centennial of which the 1935 pageant was meant to commemorate. Rather than focus on the Cherokees who left, the pageant focuses on those who remained, which maintains the pageant's focus on a particular land and a particular people.⁸⁴

The 1935 pageant brochure described the subtext for the Great Removal scene, referring to "the whites looking on with greed," and noting that "the state of Georgia threatened to secede if the President ... did not remove the

83 "The Spirit of the Great Smokies: A Pageant Commemorating the One-Hundredth Anniversary of the Great Removal 1835-1935," *The Cherokee Nation*, North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library, Asheville, North Carolina, 5, 12.

84 "The Spirit of the Great Smokies," 6-10.

TUESDAY October 1st, 1935	WEDNESDAY October 2nd, 1935	THURSDAY October 3rd, 1935
<p>A. M. 7:30 Entrance Gate Opens. 8:00 Agricultural Hall Opens. 8:30 Arts and Crafts Hall Opens. 10:00 Indian Dance—in Front of Grandstand. 10:30 Archery and Blowgun Contests—in Front of Grandstand.</p> <p>P. M. 2:00 Indian Dance—in Front of Grandstand. 2:30 Indian Ball Game. 7:30 American Indian Lore—Chilocco Indian School Dramatics Club—in the New Outdoor Stadium.</p>	<p>A. M. 7:30 Entrance Gate Opens. 8:00 Agricultural Hall Opens. 8:30 Arts and Crafts Hall Opens. 10:00 Indian Dance—in Front of Grandstand. 10:30 Archery and Blowgun Contests—in Front of Grandstand. 11:00 Singing Contest—Auditorium Above Fair Hall.</p> <p>P. M. 2:00 Indian Dance—in Front of Grandstand. 2:30 Indian Ball Game. 7:30 Pageant—"The Spirit of the Great Smokies"—to be rendered by 500 Cherokee Indians. 9:00 Square Dancing Contest—in Front of Grandstand.</p>	<p>A. M. 7:30 Entrance Gate Opens. 8:00 Agricultural Hall Opens. 8:30 Arts and Crafts Hall Opens. 10:00 Indian Dance—in Front of Grandstand. 10:30 Archery and Blowgun Contests—in Front of Grandstand. 11:00 Baby Show—Auditorium.</p> <p>P. M. 2:00 Indian Dance—in Front of Grandstand. 2:30 Indian Ball Game. 7:30 Pageant—"The Spirit of the Great Smokies." 9:00 Square Dancing Contest—in Front of Grandstand.</p>
OTHER ATTRACTIONS - - - EACH DAY		
<p>CHEROKEE & HOPI INDIAN VILLAGES</p> <p>In addition to a Cherokee Indian Village, there will be a Hopi Indian Village on the grounds. In these villages there will be displays of Indian arts and craft, as well as the ancient dances and ceremonies practiced by each tribe centuries ago.</p>	<p>THE MIDWAY</p> <p>There will be a Midway on the Grounds. The Standard American Shows will be on hand to furnish rides, side show amusements, and other attractions usually enjoyed at large agricultural fairs.</p>	<p>THE EXHIBITS</p> <p>Exhibits of Indian Crafts in great variety, such as Cherokee pottery, basketry, bows, arrows, and blowguns are on display and actually made in the Indian Village and the Arts and Crafts Hall. The agricultural and home making exhibits will be of exceptional quality and number and will demonstrate recent Indian advancement in these fields.</p>

The 1935 fair, which commemorated the Great Removal of 1835 through "The Spirit of the Great Smokies" historical pageant, focused on those who remained rather than those who left the region. (*Images courtesy of Wikimedia.*)

Indians." The brochure included the horrors of removal, stating that the Cherokees "were driven by the military out of their homes" with "over a third" dying while traveling westward. This event, the brochure authors explained, "is a blot on our national history."⁸⁵

The text was borrowed from white scholars Charles C. Royce and James Mooney's reports to the Smithsonian Institution in the late nineteenth century. Though it is notable that the historical subtext in the pageant's program was not the expression of a Cherokee voice, it nevertheless presented the Trail of Tears in a way that did not whitewash the history for the tourists.⁸⁶ The pageant's first two scenes, which span centuries, culminates with a presentation of the Great Removal, the part of Cherokee history probably most familiar to tourists. This focus allowed the BIA pageant writers to present both a somewhat familiar history while giving tourists the "cultural experience" they came to see. According to the pageant's program, the pageant was meant to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the Great Removal, yet it is unclear if either the Cherokee performers or audience members felt that the pageant was appropriately commemorative or that their viewpoint was accurately represented.

85 Ibid., 11.

86 Ibid., 1.

The final scene of the pageant commemorated the return of the Cherokees to some of their land in North Carolina and focused on the development of schools in Cherokee and the education of the children. A note under the final words of the narrator tells the spectators: “Out of these brave beginnings has developed the Cherokee schools of today, which are fostering all of the arts and crafts and culture that is truly and distinctly Indian, teaching the young folk pride of race and heritage, and leading the older ones to live wholesome, happy lives.”⁸⁷ This ending brought the pageant full circle, tying the people of the past and the history of the land to Cherokee and the Qualla Boundary that existed at the time of the performances. The hope brought by the Cherokee schools and education demonstrated optimism for the future. At the time that the pageant was written, the future being spoken about was grounded in the emphases on modern techniques of subsistence farming, the handicraft revival, and the expansion of the tourist industry on the reservation—all of which started in the fair, but were taught in the Cherokee schools as well.⁸⁸ This voice of optimism is the way the Cherokee tell their story today. The official Cherokee tourism website finishes a brief history of the people by saying, “As the tribe looks out into the 21st century, its bright future emanates a light for other tribes to follow.”⁸⁹

Cherokees first performed the pageantry in the Progressive Era, during which American historical pageantry was especially popular. The public imagery of historical pageants fostered a connection between a geographic location and a group by telling the story of the people in a particular place, often leaving the spectator with some ideal or otherwise optimistic vision about the future.⁹⁰ “The Spirit of the Great Smokies” is a part of this legacy, connecting the Cherokee Indians and the geographical location of the pageant, the reservation itself, with the history of the Trail of Tears. The pageant not only presented a history of the Cherokee, but also presented an optimistic vision of a bright future for the tribe.

The pageant was popular during its debut performances in 1935, but it

87 “The Spirit of the Great Smokies,” 12.

88 For information on handicrafts taught in Cherokee schools, see Duggan, “Tourism, Authenticity, and the Native Crafts Cooperative: The Eastern Cherokee Experience,” 37-38. Also see Weeks, “The Eastern Cherokee and the New Deal.”

89 “Chapter IV: The Renaissance,” *Cherokee North Carolina*, accessed February 16, 2017 via <http://visitcherokeenc.com/play/culture/history/>.

90 David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 290.

was not performed in 1936 in part because of opposition from Cherokees who opposed the BIA's involvement in the fair and the reservation more generally.⁹¹ However, the pageant was performed again in 1937, where it was performed six times during the summer and then again at the fair. "The Spirit of the Great Smokies" was discontinued after 1937, despite its success that year, due to disputes within the tribe over the festival. Pageants were absent in the fair's programs until the first performance of "Unto these Hills" in 1950.⁹²

Cultural performance in the fair not only brought tourists to the reservation, but it also gave Eastern Band Cherokees opportunities to travel to perform elsewhere. This was especially true of Cherokee dance and the Indian Ball game, two forms of performance presented during the fair. The exposure gained at the fair afforded the Cherokee opportunities to take their performances beyond the Cherokee Indian Fair to other fairs, festivals, and events around the state and country. In some instances, archers traveled with the ball teams or the dancers to put on a shooting show as well. For example, in 1935, Cherokees were invited to exhibit and perform at a number of events, including the Dogwood Festival at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill and the second annual National Folk Festival, held that year in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

The Indian Ball teams were invited to play in the University of North Carolina's football stadium in 1935 as part of the university's annual Dogwood Festival. The Dogwood Festival, which started in 1933, began as an attempt to "inaugurate a movement for the preservation of the natural beauty of the state and particularly of dogwood trees." The festival featured traditional folk music and dances presented in the outdoor Forest Theater and handicraft exhibits on display in Graham Memorial, the university's student union at the time.⁹³ In 1935, the festival planning committee paid

91 Many of those who complained were so-called "white" Indians, people of mixed racial heritage that generally lived on the fringes of the reservation, but had become an extremely vocal minority voice in tribal politics. For many years, the white Indian faction was led by Fred Bauer, who staunchly opposed any and all federal involvement on the reservation and who generally advocated for more assimilationist policies among the Cherokee.

92 Finger, *Cherokee Americans*, 100; Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 165-168.

93 "Initial Dogwood Events to Extol North Carolina," *The Daily Tar Heel*, Mar 26, 1933, 1.



In 1935, North Carolina native and nationally recognized expert in folk music and dance Bascom Lamar Lunsford worked with the Cherokee to ensure that their performances were “authentic.” (Photo courtesy of Appalachian Consortium Press.)

for travel expenses, lodging, and pay.⁹⁴

Later in the year, 30 Cherokees danced at the National Folk Festival in Chattanooga, Tennessee. In preparation for the event, Bascom Lamar

⁹⁴ Harold Foght to Felix Grisette, February 27, 1935; Felix Grisette to Harold Foght, letter, Mar 9, 1935; Harold Foght to Felix Grisette, March 13, 1935; Felix Grisette to Harold Foght, letter, Apr 11, 1935, File 072, Box 31, General Records and Correspondence (Series 6), Cherokee Indian Agency, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives Building, Atlanta, GA: “Writer Likens Rough Indian Game to Gangster Riot in Chicago Streets,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, Apr 26, 1935, 3: “Annual Festival Will Open Today with Exhibitions,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, Apr 25, 1935, 1.

Lunsford, a North Carolina local and nationally recognized expert in folk music and dance, worked with the Cherokee to ensure that all parts of their performances were “traditional” and authentic to Cherokee history.⁹⁵ In addition to performing at the festival, the Eastern Band obtained permission from the chairman of Loveman’s Department Store to display and sell Cherokee handicrafts. The week before the festival began, Cherokee artisans worked behind the department store windows as a way of advertising their wares inside the store. The act of making the handicrafts themselves was a performance and an advertisement. M.J. Pickering, the executive secretary of the National Folk Festival who helped to arrange for the Cherokee goods to be sold in Loveman’s, thought that Chattanooga would be a great market for Cherokee goods because many locals were visitors to the reservation.⁹⁶

The high number of invitations shows the extent to which the Eastern Band Cherokees had opportunities to make money through performance beyond the reservation. The popularity that garnered so many invitations came largely from the Cherokee Indian Fair, which raised public awareness for Cherokee performance by attracting tourists to the fair. As such, both pageantry and performance during the fairs on the reservation and elsewhere contributed to the popularity of Cherokee performance as a tourist attraction.

The Lasting Impact of the Fair

Though the Cherokee Indian Fair brought many Cherokees together in celebration, the fair was primarily an economically oriented event. The emphasis on agriculture and subsistence farming in the fair represented a focus on economics on the reservation during a time when the Cherokee lacked other forms of industry. The fair also sparked a revival in Cherokee handicrafts that in turn led to an adaptation of style and design in order to cater to the tourist market. As early as 1914, the fair provided an outlet for Cherokees to present their crafts and handiwork and to win monetary

⁹⁵ For more on Bascom Lamar Lunsford, see Loyal Jones, *Minstrel of the Appalachians: the story of Bascom Lamar Lunsford* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2002).

⁹⁶ Harold Foght to John Collier, May 23, 1935; Sarah Knott to Harold Foght, letter, Apr 1, 1935; M.J. Pickering to Harold Foght, April 25, 1935, File 072, Box 31, General Records and Correspondence (Series 6), Cherokee Indian Agency. The Cherokee also performed at the National Folk Festival in following years, this year featured the interesting addition of Cherokee handicrafts being taken down and sold at the department store.

awards for the quality of their work. As the fair grew, it became an industry unto itself, attracting thousands of tourists each year. The admission fees and the opportunity to sell handicrafts made the fair a money-making opportunity while supporting and promoting a tourist economy on the reservation during the rest of year as well.

As the fair became a significant tourist attraction, the expression of culture became more of a performance that catered to tourists' interests. The fair sold tourists on the "exotic" culture of Cherokee life, which could be seen, experienced, and even bought in the dances, pageants, handicrafts, and model Indian villages of the fair. Invitations to perform elsewhere in North Carolina and around the United States were prompted by the quality of performances in the fair.

Today, the Cherokee Indian Fair is still used as a tool to promote different initiatives on the reservation. Although Cherokees can still win prizes for the best food and handicrafts, these contests are no longer used primarily to promote certain industries like handicrafts and subsistence agriculture.⁹⁷ However, the idea of using the fair as a tool to promote a specific initiative is still prevalent. For example, in 2011 Cherokee Chief Michell Hicks used the fair as a platform to further his health education programs by inaugurating a running event in the fair, to bring attention to diabetes and the benefits of living an active lifestyle.⁹⁸

In addition to promoting specific initiatives within the Cherokee Nation, the fair continues to attract tourists each year. On one of the Cherokees' tourism websites, they advertise the Indian Ball Game along with "thrilling demonstrations ... authentic Cherokee culture, including archery and blowgun demonstrations, local art, dance, music, and more."⁹⁹ Many of the attractions advertised to tourists in newspaper articles during the fair's first decades are the same attractions advertised today. The performance of "authentic Cherokee culture" in the past is, in effect, the same performance being offered now. The difference now is that, in

97 Tonya Carroll, "Cherokee Indian Fair," *The Digital Heritage Project*, Western Carolina University, 2009, accessed March 25, 2016, via <http://digitalheritage.org/2010/08/cherokee-indian-fair/>.

98 Maria Scandale, "The 99th Annual Cherokee Fair Comes to the Cherokee Indian Fairgrounds," *Indian Country Today*, accessed March 25, 2016, via <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2011/10/02/99th-annual-cherokee-fair-comes-cherokee-indian-fairgrounds-54434>.

99 "104th Annual Cherokee Indian Fair," *Cherokee North Carolina Website*, accessed Mar 25, 2016, via <http://visitcherokeenc.com/events/detail/cherokee-indian-fair/>.

addition to the fair, the Eastern Band of Cherokee has a host of other tourist attractions that have diversified the tourist industry on the reservation. Visitors can attend the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, walk through the Oconaluftee Indian Village, attend the “Unto These Hills” outdoor drama, or buy Cherokee handicrafts at the Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual cooperative business that now boasts more than 350 member artisans.¹⁰⁰ These facets of the Cherokee tourist industry in North Carolina descend from programs in the Cherokee Indian Fair that have for a century influenced the tourist industry on the reservation. The fair birthed many important aspects of the Cherokee tourist economy, making a lasting impact on Cherokee life.

100 “Attractions,” *Cherokee North Carolina Website*, accessed March 25, 2016, via <http://visitcherokeenc.com/play/attractions/>.