

Festival Tourism:  
Advertising the Western North Carolina Tourist Industry Through Cultural Performance in  
the Cherokee Indian Fair, the Rhododendron Festival, and the Grandfather Mountain  
Highland Games

By  
H. Brent McKnight, Jr.

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History Department  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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## Introduction:

### What do Festivals have to do with Anything?

When someone mentions western North Carolina today, a host of possible travel destinations and tourist attractions come to mind. The Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Blue Ridge Parkway attract many visitors annually to their scenic overlooks and expansive views of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Grandfather Mountain blends conservation and tourism into a single attraction where visitors can see native wildlife and walk on the mile-high swinging bridge. One might also think of Harrah's Cherokee Hotel and Casino and the Museum of the Cherokee Indian in Cherokee, North Carolina, or the craft beer scene, Grove Park Inn, and Shindig on the Green in Asheville. More generally, one might think of folk music or handmade arts and crafts.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, no one could have predicted that the tourist industry in western North Carolina, which at the time was dominated by health resorts catering to the wealthy, would transform over the course of the century into a multi-faceted \$3 billion industry in 2014.<sup>1</sup> The health resort industry began in the nineteenth century and attracted visitors who came to enjoy the hot springs and mountain water, both thought to improve health.<sup>2</sup> Over the course of the twentieth century, the tourist industry diversified and expanded to incorporate new forms of leisure. Tourist boosters in western North Carolina

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<sup>1</sup> Number calculated by adding the total 2014 tourist expenditures for Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke Caldwell, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey counties. These counties are included based on N.C. Department of Commerce's definition of western North Carolina, which can be found at <<https://www.nccommerce.com/tourism/research/economic-impact/teim>>. The 2014 statistics came from "2014Country Tourism Statistics by NC Prosperity Zone," *Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina*, accessed on Mar. 5, 2016 via <<http://partners.visitnc.com/uploads/teim/2014-Visitor-Spending-by-Prosperity-Zone.pdf>>

<sup>2</sup> C. Brenden Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South: A Double-Edged Sword* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 17-18.

drew on the region's scenic landscapes and built new attractions in Asheville, Hendersonville, and elsewhere to appeal to visitors.

With the rise of the American middle class in the early twentieth century, tourist boosters had new opportunities to market attractions to a broader and larger swath of the population than just the very wealthy. Two factors aided tourist boosters' efforts to build a more robust tourist economy in western North Carolina and cater to the larger group of possible tourists: improved transportation and new forms of leisure. While improved transportation made it possible for the tourists to come and new focuses in leisure provided opportunities into which the tourist industry could expand, officials and tourist boosters in western North Carolina cities still needed attractions and ways to publicize the region to potential tourists. This thesis argues that festivals emerged as an important mechanism to both entertain tourists and advertise the broader region as a tourist destination.

### **Making Western North Carolina Accessible to Tourists**

Access to western North Carolina was a major obstacle to the tourist industry until the late nineteenth century, when western North Carolina became accessible by railroad. Through the nineteenth century, and especially after the Civil War, railroads were being built throughout the South. In 1870, there were 11,550 miles of railroad tracks running through the South, and by 1899 the number had nearly tripled to 33,473 miles.<sup>3</sup> In western North Carolina, the construction of the Western North Carolina Railroad (WNCRR) provided unprecedented access to Asheville and the surrounding region. Chartered in 1855, the railroad was originally intended to link the North Carolina Railroad with the western part of

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<sup>3</sup> Fairfax Harrison, *Legal Development of the Railroad System of Southern Railway Company* (Washington, DC: 1901, Digitized by the University of Michigan), 22, accessed March 18, 2016 via <<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015020918564;view=1up;seq=6>>.

the state and eventually extend further into the Mississippi Valley. The Civil War, embezzlement within the company, and financial difficulties slowed progress. Finally, the track reached Asheville in October, 1880.<sup>4</sup>

Routing a railroad over the Blue Ridge Mountains into Asheville was challenging. The terrain required a winding track to climb up and over the mountains. A passenger described, almost romantically, his trip on the WNCRR:

In climbing the mountains over the Western North Carolina Railroad towards Asheville, the curves are so numerous and sharp that one can often, without leaving his seat at the car window, watch the engine labor its way, through cut and gorge and tunnel, up the steep grades. An acquaintance of mine would have clapped his hands with exultant pleasure at the sight of those huge festoons of black, volcanic smoke which trailed from the engine towards the clouds only to vanish into nothingness.<sup>5</sup>

The “cut and gorge and tunnel” mentioned by the passenger referred to the circuitous route of the track and the 1800-foot tunnel near Swannanoa, which WNCRR leased convicts from the North Carolina state government to construct.<sup>6</sup> One train captain who made the trek over the mountains in 1883 claimed that the “Western North Carolina Railroad, from Asheville to Henry Station, is the greatest piece of railroad engineering in the world.”<sup>7</sup> Although he may have exaggerated, his claim highlights that the railroad was no small feat. The WNCRR brought a host of new people to Asheville. After the railroad was completed in 1880,

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<sup>4</sup> Richard D. Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2005), 24-25.

<sup>5</sup> J.F. Crowell, “A Visit to Western North Carolina,” *Raleigh Christian Advocate*, Apr 23, 1890, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 24.

<sup>7</sup> “Charlotte Observer,” *The Wilmington Morning Star*, Jan 11, 1883, 3.

Asheville's population quintupled during the following decade due to the new access provided by the railroad and the rise of health tourism in western North Carolina.<sup>8</sup>

In 1894, the WNCRR went into foreclosure and was incorporated into the Southern Railway Company, which continued to operate the line. After the construction of the WNCRR, other railroads soon ran lines to Asheville as well. For example, in 1886, the Asheville and Spartanburg Railroad was completed with a line stopping in several smaller towns along the way. From Asheville, the Southern Railway built tracks west to other towns, including to Cherokee, North Carolina, as will be discussed in Chapter 1. The railroad build-up in western North Carolina after the Civil War was emblematic of the growth of the region. As one historian notes, "The railroad embodied the New South spirit, the desire for economic progress and prosperity, and transformed the areas it reached."<sup>9</sup>

By 1915, railroad access to western North Carolina had increased dramatically. In July 1915, one train official claimed that 1,000 tourists had arrived in western North Carolina in a single day. That year the Southern Railway ran two lines to Asheville from Memphis and Charleston, and for the first time ran Pullman cars between Asheville and Wilmington and a different train from Asheville to Atlanta. One journalist writing about train access to western North Carolina commented that "when it is remembered that these excursions to the land of high altitudes do not by any means come all together one gathers some idea of the thousands of people from all sections of the south and central states who will take their vacations in the mountains."<sup>10</sup>

Railroads brought thousands of people—both new residents and tourists—to western North Carolina. After the turn of the twentieth century, new and improved roads further

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<sup>8</sup> Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 25.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 24-25.

<sup>10</sup> "Tourist Travel is Now Heavy," *Asheville Gazette*, Jul 23, 1915, 2.

expanded access to the region. By 1904, only 31,780 of the 790,284 miles of roads in the South were “improved,” that is, they had at least been macadamized with a layer of gravel or topsoil if not totally hard-surfaced. Further, most of these “improved” roads were in urban areas. Between 1910 and 1920, automobile traffic in the United States increased as the middle class became increasingly able to purchase cars. However, unimproved roads inhibited travel, which in turn sparked increased interest in improving them. To that end, organizations such as the American Automobile Association advocated and promoted building new roads and improving old ones across the country. Beginning in the 1910s, activists in what became known as the Good Roads Movement advocated for state and federal governments to step in and improve roads across the South.<sup>11</sup>

In western North Carolina, Good Roads advocates successfully lobbied for improved roads in a number of counties. The discourse around the roads was often linked to tourism. In Buncombe County, for example, the local Good Roads Association worked with the county commissioners and other officials to improve roads. By 1913, one newspaper headline read, “Prospects for Good Roads in Buncombe for Tourist Season Were Never Better.”<sup>12</sup> That year, the Asheville board of trade worked with the boards of trade in Hendersonville and Waynesville to repair roads between the cities in preparation for the summer tourist season.<sup>13</sup> Further, the county commissioners issued \$30,000 in bonds in response to requests from Buncombe county citizens to improve county highways.<sup>14</sup> In 1915, the board of county

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<sup>11</sup> Howard Lawrence Preston, *Dirt Roads to Dixie: Accessibility and Modernization in the South, 1885-1935* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 13, 39.

<sup>12</sup> “Road System Nearly Done,” Mar 28, 1913, *North Carolina Good Roads Movement, Volume 1*, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Memorial Library, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 64. Wilson Library contains three volumes of newspaper clippings related to the good roads movement. However, it is difficult to tell which newspapers some articles came from, and dates are missing on some articles.

<sup>13</sup> “Board Is Working for Better Roads,” *Asheville Citizen*, Mar 21, 1913, *North Carolina Good Roads Movement, Volume 1*, 66.

<sup>14</sup> “For Buncombe Roads,” May 7, 1913, *North Carolina Good Roads Movement, Volume 1*, 66.

commissioners voted in favor of a \$10,000 appropriation to pave South Main Street from downtown Asheville all the way to the Biltmore Estate. The commissioners made the appropriation early enough in the year that many hoped that the improved road would be completed before “early summer, when the tourists begin to arrive.”<sup>15</sup>

Other counties benefitted from the Good Roads Movement as well. In Henderson County just south of Asheville, the success of improving roads was tied to being able to attract an increased number of tourists to the city of Hendersonville. In 1913, the state legislature offered one million dollars in appropriations and bonds for good roads in western North Carolina, of which \$210,000 was spent in Henderson County.<sup>16</sup> By 1914, the county had built 150 miles of improved roads in and around the city.<sup>17</sup> Advertising to tourists, a newspaper headline read, “Hendersonville and Western North Carolina: The Switzerland of America and the Future Resort of the World. Its Wonderful Climate, Magnificent Scenery, Its Good Roads and Excellent Hotels.”<sup>18</sup> In Haywood County west of Asheville, officials issued a \$50,000 bond for improved roads following what one journalist described as a “vigorous campaign” by the citizens for road improvement, specifically for a link between Asheville and Atlanta, Georgia.<sup>19</sup> Haywood County officials also paid to complete the county’s section of the State Central Highway from Tennessee to the coast, which also was part of the Southern National Highway that went to Washington, D.C.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> “Speakers Urge that Highways Be Paved,” “The Biltmore Road Paving Now Assured,” 1915, *North Carolina Good Roads Movement Volume 1*, 68-69.

<sup>16</sup> “One Million Dollars for Good Roads, \$200,000 in Henderson County,” 1913, *North Carolina Good Roads Movement, Volume 2*, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Memorial Library, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 106c.

<sup>17</sup> “Good Roads Work in County of Henderson,” 1914, *North Carolina Good Roads Movement, Volume 2*, 105.

<sup>18</sup> “Hendersonville and Western North Carolina,” no date, *North Carolina Good Roads Movement, Volume 2*, 106a.

<sup>19</sup> “Bonds Voted In Sum of \$50,000 For Roads,” no date, *North Carolina Good Roads Movement, Volume 2*, 83.

<sup>20</sup> “Roads in this county will form important link in highway from Pacific Coast to Capital of the Nation,” no date, *North Carolina Good Roads Movement, Volume 2*, 88a.



Outside of the Good Roads Movement, U.S. highway 221 was also important for tourist development in western North Carolina. The road was originally built in 1889 by Hugh MacRae, who bought Linville Ridge and Grandfather Mountain with the financial help of his father in 1885. Built as a toll road, U.S. 221, nicknamed the “Little Parkway,” was the major connecting road between Blowing Rock and Linville before the completion of the Blue Ridge Parkway. In addition to the road, MacRae built a golf getaway and resort in Linville. U.S. 221 was the major road by which tourists could travel not only to Linville and the resort, but also to Grandfather Mountain, which Hugh MacRae’s grandson made into a for-profit tourist attraction in the 1950s.<sup>21</sup>

New rail lines and improved roads in and around western North Carolina connected the region with the rest of the state as well as to other major cities, such as Atlanta, Memphis, Charleston, and Washington, D.C. Further, highways such as U.S. 221 provided important means of travelling to smaller towns and resort areas like Linville. While the improved roads provided the infrastructure to make western North Carolina accessible, the rise in automobile ownership provided the means to get there. North Carolina started licensing automobiles in 1909. At that time, there were 1,600 vehicles in the state. By 1912, the number of registrations had risen to 6,000, and in 1919 the number of automobiles registered in North Carolina had jumped to 109,000. The number of vehicles continued to grow over the 1920s, reaching 473,623 vehicles by 1928.<sup>22</sup> The growing number of automobile owners in North

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<sup>21</sup> North Carolina Department of Transportation, *North Carolina Scenic Byways, Fourth Edition* (June, 2008), 50, accessed Mar 19, 2016, via <[http://www.ncdot.gov/download/travel/scenic\\_byways.pdf](http://www.ncdot.gov/download/travel/scenic_byways.pdf)>. Jonathan Martin, “Grandfather Mountain,” *North Carolina History Project*, accessed Mar 19, 2016 via <<http://www.northcarolinahistory.org/encyclopedia/760/entry/>>.

<sup>22</sup> Robert E. Ireland, “Automobiles,” *NCpedia*, 2006, accessed Mar 25, 2016, via <<http://ncpedia.org/automobiles>>.

Carolina and elsewhere motivated road improvement projects in western North Carolina, which in turn brought more tourists to the region.

### **Changes in Leisure Shape Developments in Tourism**

Across the United States, leisure time became available to more and more people at the beginning of the twentieth century. The six-day, sixty-hour work week in 1919 had, by 1929, shortened to a five day, forty-eight hour work week, giving workers more time for leisure.<sup>23</sup> Technological advances that led to new labor-saving devices also contributed to the new time and space for leisure. Further, municipal, state and federal governments created recreation and park agencies to improve cities and promote new leisure activities.

Entertainment, sports, travel, and tourism all became popular forms of recreation between 1900 and 1930.<sup>24</sup>

During the first decades of the twentieth century, baseball and boxing became even more widespread past times, and the rise of professional teams and athletes led to a growing viewership and following in sports. Bicycling was a primarily male activity by 1900, but in the first decades of the twentieth century it became a common form of leisure and freedom for women as well. As the price of automobiles decreased and more middle-class workers could afford them, touring and automobile vacations became a widespread part of leisure and recreation. Also, fairs and amusement parks were popular. Midways, which were areas with rides, games, and concessions, began at the Chicago World Colombian Exposition and subsequently were used elsewhere as well. They led to the establishment of permanent

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<sup>23</sup> Ralph G. Giordano, *Fun and Games in Twentieth-Century America: A Historical Guide to Leisure* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 2003), 50.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Kraus, *Leisure in a Changing America: Trends and Issues for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon), 26.

amusement parks. Finally, fishing, vacation resorts, and the cinema also captured the public's attention.<sup>25</sup>

During the first decades of the twentieth century, city planners, civic boosters, and others thought that not only were these new forms of recreation important, but that state and municipal governments ought to be involved in building and providing them for their citizens. Advocates of governments providing recreational facilities argued that social problems were linked to how people used free time. With the right forms of recreation, they promised, good characteristics could be instilled in people, especially in the youth. For example, one writer argued that sports and other forms of play could be directed to develop cooperation, loyalty, and fairness in participants. In the first half of the twentieth century, city governments concluded that investing in recreation was worth the money. In 1915, one journalist claimed that 600 cities across the United States were appropriating funds to build "playgrounds, recreation centers, bathing beaches, golf courses," and other forms of amusements.<sup>26</sup>

Officials in North Carolina were also concerned with leisure and recreation. For example, Joseph Hyde Pratt, State Chairman of Recreation for the North Carolina Congress of Parents and Teachers and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the North Carolina Forestry Association, held the view that cities should be actively involved in providing recreational facilities for their citizens. In his 1927 pamphlet entitled "Recreation," Platt argued that due to the mechanization of industry, more of "life's interests" lay outside of the workplace, such that more people spent their free time and extra money on leisure and recreation. He noted a general increase in leisure time across all socioeconomic classes. Platt

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<sup>25</sup> Giordano, *Fun and Games in Twentieth-Century America*, 15-28.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

argued that athletics would improve the physical condition of youth and that playgrounds could help prevent tuberculosis. He went on to argue further that playgrounds and public parks could eliminate slums and crime-ridden areas, thus reducing the number of juvenile criminals. His pamphlet ended with a proposal for a Community Recreation Service that would build, maintain, and operate play grounds, fields, gymnasiums, public swimming pools, and recreational centers.<sup>27</sup>

Pratt lauded Asheville as a city that had succeed in providing lots of playgrounds, parks, ball fields, and open areas for recreation for its citizens.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Asheville had built up a number of facilities for recreation and leisure, as will be discussed in Chapter 2. The city, along with other places in western North Carolina, hoped to use those facilities to attract tourists. In 1922, Pratt suggested and helped organize a conference in Asheville geared towards continuing to develop western North Carolina into an even more robust tourist destination. Pratt's philosophy of recreation outlined in his pamphlet may have been influenced by discussions at the conference. Speakers during the multi-day event focused the use of Pisgah National Forest as a recreational facility, the preservation and use of scenic lands as public attractions, the cooperation among hotels in the area, the relationship between state highways and the tourism industry, camping sites for automobiles, and state parks, to name a few.<sup>29</sup> Pratt's work and the conference in Asheville serve as examples of how ideas around leisure and recreation in the first half of the twentieth century were brought to bear on the tourist industry in western North Carolina.

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<sup>27</sup> Joseph Hyde Pratt, *Recreation* (Chapel Hill, NC: 1927), 3-6, 12-14.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> "Langren Hotel Is Making Preparation," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, Oct 24, 1922, 5. "Cocke Going to Talk Lakes," *The Charlotte News*, Oct 20, 1922, 3.

Just as officials in Asheville focused on how to use new recreation trends that encompassed public spaces, parks, and scenic lands in order to bolster their tourist industry, other officials and tourist boosters also based new tourist attractions on current trends in leisure in order to cater to tourists. One type of attraction, festivals, often incorporated several forms of leisure—midways, scenic landscapes, sports, and entertainments, to name a few— and attracted thousands of tourists each year.

### **The Importance of Studying Festivals**

In the context of improved transportation and access to western North Carolina coupled with the changing leisure market, tourism in western North Carolina developed into several different categories. As Richard Starnes explains, two of those categories are destination and cultural tourism. Destination tourism is defined as tourists coming to particular place because of attractions and entertainments built by developers and corporate interests. Cultural tourism (also called heritage tourism) is the use of history, culture, and tradition to draw tourists to a place or event. Although these categories overlap in many instances, they provide helpful labels for thinking about forms of tourism in western North Carolina.<sup>30</sup>

During the twentieth century, festivals emerged as primary forms of cultural and destination tourism in western North Carolina. This thesis explores how three festivals—the Cherokee Indian Fair, the Rhododendron Festival, and the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games—drew thousands of tourists to western North Carolina, thereby functioning as advertisements for the region. They promoted western North Carolina as a viable tourist

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<sup>30</sup> 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.

destination. This thesis argues that the Cherokee Indian Fair, the Rhododendron Festival, and the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games were mechanisms by which city officials and local boosters used cultural expression and performance to advertise western North Carolina and thus further build the tourist economy in the region throughout the twentieth century.

The Cherokee Indian Fair, which began in 1914, was primarily an agricultural fair intended to promote subsistence farming on the Cherokee reservation through contests and educational exhibits. However, as the fair drew more interest from non-Cherokee visitors, it became a market to sell handicrafts and perform Cherokee culture. The expression of Cherokee culture—or at least Indian culture, for it was not always authentically Cherokee—drew in tourists and elevated the wider public’s awareness of the Cherokee reservation as a possible tourist destination. The fair was a catalyst for the tourist industry on the reservation because it not only drew people to the reservation, but also incentivized the development of tourist related activities such as performance and handiwork. The tourism started by the fair was later bolstered by the establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and roads that went through the reservation to the park.

The Rhododendron Festival, which started in 1928 in Asheville, was a civic celebration intended to highlight Rhododendron and other mountain flowers and to commemorate Asheville’s economic growth and success during the 1920s. Over time, the festival became a performance of white southern and European culture, drawing on stereotypes of Appalachia as a reservoir of “pure” American whiteness. This aspect of the festival contributed greatly to the festival’s success, since the performance of such culture appealed to Asheville’s primarily white southern tourist clientele. Furthermore, the festival functioned as a form of escapism in the 1930s, as the images of wealth and success in the

festival were reminiscent of Asheville during the 1920s and provided a temporary distraction from the hardships of the Great Depression.

The Grandfather Mountain Highland Games (GMHG) began in 1956. The games celebrated Scottish culture, fostering a sense of Scottishness that appealed to Scots living in North America and sparked the curiosity of non-Scots interested in watching the celebration. As the GMHG drew tourists to the region, they were exposed to the tourist attractions in the surrounding area beyond the games themselves. The GMHG served as an advertisement for Grandfather Mountain by drawing thousands of tourists to the mountain, which had just opened as a tourist attraction in 1952.

The cultural tourism and destination tourism inherent in these festivals are inextricably linked. The cultural expressions in the festivals appealed to tourists and drew them to the region. In addition, the festivals functioned as destinations in and of themselves while at the same time promoting and advertising the broader locales in which the festivals were held. The economic impact of these three festivals is not limited to the amount of money that each festival brought in during its multi-day celebration. Rather, the economic impact of the festivals should also include revenue from tourists who came back to western North Carolina as a result of having attended one or more of the festivals. In short, festivals in western North Carolina, as forms of cultural and destination tourism, have promoted the development of the tourist industry in western North Carolina not only by drawing tourists to the festivals themselves, but also by advertising the region more generally, inviting tourists to return at other times and to visit different attractions. Each of the three festivals this thesis analyzes thus promoted the growth of a durable tourist economy in western North Carolina during the twentieth century.

**Chapter 1:**  
**Growing Tourists: Agriculture, Cultural Performance, and Tourism at the Cherokee  
Indian Fair**

**Introduction**

The Eastern Band of Cherokee in North Carolina was mainly an isolated population in 1900. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, trespassers on Cherokee land, tribal factionalism, and the tribe's unclear legal status under the state and federal governments all presented challenges to the Cherokee people. In 1889, the Eastern Band was legally incorporated, but the legal citizenship status of Cherokee people was doubtful until the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924. Even after the legal incorporation of the tribe, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) officials continued to exert federal authority over tribal matters and over the Cherokee Indian Boarding School.<sup>1</sup>

Further, the tribe lacked a viable economic base, mainly relying on subsistence agriculture. In a challenge to federal authority, the Cherokee chief in 1891 sold the rights to all the lumber on the Cathcart tract, a 33,000-acre section of land on the Qualla Boundary, the area of land purchased and placed in federal trust for the Eastern Band of Cherokee, who live there. The sale of the Cathcart tract provided jobs for Cherokee and enough revenue for the tribe to pay their taxes for several years. The sale also opened the Qualla Boundary to the logging industry, which provided employment for many Cherokees until the western North

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<sup>1</sup> John R. Finger, *The Eastern Band of Cherokees: 1819-1900* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 147-178. John R. Finger, *Cherokee Americans: The Eastern Band of Cherokees in the Twentieth Century* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 7-8.



Carolina logging boom declined in the 1920s. Even with employment in the logging industry, subsistence agriculture remained the main form of Cherokee-owned production.<sup>2</sup>

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, access to the Qualla Boundary was difficult since no railroads yet went to the reservation and most of the roads were difficult to travel.

Construction on the Appalachian Railroad finished in April 1909, which ran a line to Ela, North Carolina, and provided the first railroad access to the Cherokee reservation.

Construction also provided jobs for Cherokee at \$1.25 per day. By 1920, several spurs off the main railroad line wound through different parts of Qualla Boundary.<sup>3</sup> Over the first several decades of the twentieth century, roads to the reservation were improved as well, especially once plans for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park were put into place and roads were needed to get from Asheville to the park. Some of those roads were routed through the reservation, allowing tourists to stop there on their way to the park.<sup>4</sup> The emergence of the Cherokee from relative isolation on the Qualla Boundary, the growth of the logging industry, and the new access to the reservation provided opportunities for economic expansion, leading to a number of Cherokee to take jobs in logging and construction. This growth eventually opened the reservation up to the tourist industry, which would become a major part of the Cherokee economy.

As these economic developments were taking place in western North Carolina, the Bureau of Indian Affairs was undergoing changes in Washington, D.C. Caught up in the trends of the Progressive Era, the BIA sought to reform its bureaucracy by streamlining its administrative systems and improving efficiency. The BIA also put new emphasis on

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<sup>2</sup> Finger, *The Eastern Band of Cherokees*, 147-178.

<sup>3</sup> Finger, *Cherokee Americans*, 17-21.

<sup>4</sup> "Cherokee Indians Will Be First To Get Highway Jobs," *The Daily Times* (Burlington, North Carolina), Sept. 12, 1933, 5. John R. Finger, *Cherokee Americans: The Eastern Band of Cherokees in the Twentieth Century* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 78-79.

reconsidering the professionalism standards for their employees as well as the rationalization for BIA-sponsored programs. This reconsideration led to the BIA experimenting with new types of programs for Native Americans nationwide.<sup>5</sup> The ethos of experimentation in the BIA may have spurred BIA Commissioner Cato Sell's suggestion of a Cherokee fair during his visit to the reservation in 1912. BIA Superintendent James Henderson and Farm Agent James Blythe, two leaders on the reservation, agreed to his idea.<sup>6</sup>

The Cherokee Indian Fair, more than just a community celebration, was an economic tool that served three primary functions. First, the fair provided an avenue by which Cherokee leaders and the BIA could promote agriculture on the Qualla Boundary, a necessity from the fair's inception since the Cherokee's agriculture industry had been weakened by the western North Carolina logging boom. Second, the fair served as one of the catalysts for the tourist industry on Qualla Boundary by drawing visitors from North Carolina and the surrounding states. The fair, along with the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, put Cherokee, North Carolina, on the map as a tourist destination. Finally, the fair was a promotion of Cherokee (or at least Indian) culture that provided opportunities for the Cherokee to perform the Indian ball game, archery and blowgun demonstrations, and traditional Cherokee dances across the nation. This promoted the Cherokee's reputation and provided another source of income for Cherokee performers.

This chapter will begin with a brief picture of the early Cherokee Indian Fair before turning to focus on all three functions of the fair in order to argue that the Cherokee Indian Fair was built around the need to make money in economically difficult times. Although the

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<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Ulmer Chiltoskey, *Cherokee Fair & Festival: A History thru 1978* (Asheville, NC: Gilbert Printing Company, 1979), 5.

fair could not, through its promotion of agriculture, alleviate all problems in the short-term, it did have long-term benefits in building and promoting the Cherokees' tourist industry.

Though the Cherokee Indian Fair was in some ways an authentic expression of Cherokee life and culture, it was largely tailored to tourist's interests. For white tourists, the Cherokee Indian Fair presented a first exposure to "exotic" Cherokee life. As more tourists attended the fair each year, they became aware of the Cherokee reservation more broadly and came to see the reservation as a viable tourist destination.

### **A Brief Picture of the Fair**

The first fair was a simple festival. The main exhibit featured agricultural produce and goods made by Cherokees across the reservation. D.K. Collins, R.J. Roane, Sylva Supply Company, Asheville Seed Company, and C.M. McClung Hardware, companies in Asheville, North Carolina; Sylva, North Carolina; and Knoxville, Tennessee; and elsewhere contributed farm equipment and supplies as prizes for the exhibits since the tribe did not have the funds to purchase prizes themselves.<sup>7</sup> Other popular parts of the festival included automobiles being driven around the fair-grounds (since cars were rare on Qualla Boundary), a merry-go-round that provided much entertainment to children young and old alike, and an ice cream stand. That first ice-cream stand was run by Will Wahnetah, who only knew how to make vanilla.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> James Henderson to W.J. Parks, letter, 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.

<sup>8</sup> Chiltoskey, *Cherokee Fair and Festival*, 8.

In addition, rounds of the Indian Ball game were played by teams representing each township.<sup>9</sup> The Indian Ball game is an intense sport that 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 sissies or even spectators with weak stomachs.”<sup>10</sup> The game required two twelve man teams to line up on opposite sides of the field and advance towards each other until they met in the middle. In the middle of the field, some players placed bets with each other on the outcome of the game. To start the game, a judge threw a hickory nut or small ball into the air. The players had to pick up the nut using small sticks like racquets. Once the nut was picked up, the player put it in his mouth and ran for the goal, having to fight his way through the other team, who was allowed to tackle, wrestle and otherwise fight the player and team with the nut. If a player was injured during the game, no substitutions were allowed and the team with the injured player had to continue without the player. The game continued until twelve goals were scored or there were no players left to play.<sup>11</sup>

As the fair progressed, new events such as a well-baby contest and an airplane that would give rides to fair participants were introduced. Further, horse traders came to swap horses, a ferris wheel was added alongside the merry-go-round, and folk music conventions with fiddlers and banjo pickers were held in an auditorium.<sup>12</sup> More than just conventions, these folk music performances were heated competitions, as during the 1921 fair, for example. Fiddler J. H. Everette beat rival fiddler O.H. Helton in a competition, which Helton

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<sup>9</sup> The highway had not yet been totally constructed when the fair being described took place. However, the highway would have been constructed by the time the interview took place in the 1970s, which is why it is used as a reference point.

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

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. “Cherokees Plan Big Doings,” *The Baltimore Sun*, Sept 12, 1937, T8.

<sup>12</sup> Chiltoskey, *Cherokee Fair and Festival*, 9-10.

claimed was unfair since the competition was judged by “some ladies... whom I believe to be acquaintances of [Everette’s].” The grievance between the two was so deep that Everette’s challenge to a rematch and Helton’s acceptance were both published in the *Asheville Citizen-Times*.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Fair, Agriculture, and Education**

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Cherokee economy was primarily agrarian. Beginning in 1880, logging companies established themselves in western North Carolina to take advantage of its rich forests and woodlands. By 1904, four white-owned lumber companies had established outposts near Qualla Boundary and provided many Cherokees with jobs. Seeing the positive benefits of increased employment for its citizens, the tribal council decided to encourage more logging companies to come by selling tracts of land for the companies to harvest. For example, in 1906, the tribal council sold a 33,000-acre tract of land for \$245,000, despite opposition from J.S. Holmes of the North Carolina Geological Survey. As more and more Cherokee sought employment in the lumber companies, many neglected their farms, most of which were small and only provided enough produce for subsistence along with some beans that might be sold as a cash crop. Encouraging logging on the reservation came with other problems as well. For example, tribal leadership had a difficult time both enforcing contracts so that companies did not take more than was specified in their contracts and also preventing independent people from logging illegally on fringe areas of the reservation.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> “Challenge to Wield Rosin Bow for State Honors Is Accepted,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, June 21, 1922, 7.

<sup>14</sup> John R. Finger, *Cherokee Americans*, 17-19. Charles J. Weeks, “The Eastern Cherokee and the New Deal,” *The North Carolina Historical Review*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (July, 1976), 305.

By 1904, BIA Superintendent Willard S. Campbell and his successor, DeWitt Harris, both recognized the need for stronger Cherokee agriculture. Since 1900, the number of farmed acres on the reservation was declining as a result of Cherokees seeking employment in the logging companies. Given the limitations on the amount of arable land, Campbell and Harris tried to introduce the idea of raising livestock as a replacement for the declining agricultural economy. However, these initiatives never took off as planned since many Cherokee did not properly take care of or tend to the animals purchased by the BIA.<sup>15</sup>

The decline in agriculture on the reservation continued into the 1910s and 1920s. Continuing in Campbell and Harris's footsteps to try to revive the agricultural economy on the reservation, Superintendent James Henderson used the Cherokee Indian Fair from its conception in 1914 to promote agriculture. He wrote in a 1915 letter, "The object of the fair is to awaken the Cherokee Indians to better farming, fruit growing, and cattle raising," and in another 1915 letter, "The object of this fair, as you doubtless know, is to interest the Cherokees in better farming." In both letters (and in others similar), Henderson was writing to companies outside the reservation asking for donations that could serve as prizes for the various agricultural contests. However instead of cash prizes, Henderson primarily requested farm instruments, clothing, or other goods that would be beneficial to agricultural work.<sup>16</sup> Prizes that would "aid . . . very materially in interesting these people in better farming" were important to Henderson.<sup>17</sup> The solicitation of donations as prizes was also crucial to having

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<sup>15</sup> Finger, *Cherokee Americans*, 18-19.

<sup>16</sup> James Henderson to Cato Sells, letter, August 4, 1917, Folder 2a-61 thru 2a-80, Correspondence (Series 5), Cherokee Indian Agency, Bureau of Indian Affairs Records, National Archives Building, Atlanta, GA. James Henderson to C.M. McClung and Co., letter, 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, Bureau of Indian Affairs Records, National Archives Building, Atlanta, GA.

<sup>17</sup> James Henderson to J.L. Morgan, letter, 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.

successful contests and enticing participation since in its first years the fair was not supported financially by either the BIA or by the tribal council.<sup>18</sup>

When the logging boom declined in the 1920s, the fair's focus on agriculture became even more economically important for the Cherokee. The logging industry's decline signaled the loss of jobs for many, leaving Cherokees to return to subsistence agriculture. In BIA Superintendent R.L. Spalsbury's 1930 Annual Report, Spalsbury described the agriculture industry on the reservation, writing:

For many years there were two large lumber operations within easy reach of the reservation where our Indians could obtain employment and earn money. Many of them took advantage of this opportunity to earn real money, and in doing this a large percentage of them neglected the cultivation of their little farms, and have to some extent lost interest in the occupation of farming. Now that these industrial plants have shut down on account of the establishment of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park and the consequent condemnation of their timber lands, these Indians no longer have any place where they can go to earn a dollar except to their little farms, unless of course they can and are willing to leave their homes and seek employment elsewhere. Very few of them would be willing to do this.<sup>19</sup>

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 Qualla Boundary to try to claim membership on the "Baker roll," which was the census taken in 1924 by the Eastern Cherokee Enrolling Commission to determine

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<sup>18</sup> James Henderson to W.J. Parks, letter, 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.

<sup>19</sup> R.L. Spalsbury, *Annual Report 1930: Narrative Section, Section 4*, 1930, 1-2, Box 24, General Records and Correspondence (Series 6), Cherokee Indian Agency, Bureau of Indian Affairs Records, National Archives Building, Atlanta, GA. "Qualla Boundary" is the name of the lands that make up the Cherokee reservation.

membership in the Eastern Band during the process of the tribal lands being placed into a Federal trust.<sup>20</sup> Since the Cherokee agricultural industry now relied on subsistence farming, families needed arable land in order to support themselves. However, the increase in population meant that there was not enough arable land to go around.<sup>21</sup>

Arable land was scarce because even though the Qualla Boundary at the time was comprised of 63,400 acres, the topography on the reservation limited the amount of land that was suitable for farming. The mountainous region's steep hillsides were often too steep to be tilled and plowed. Spalsbury described it in his 1930 Annual Report saying, "The entire region covered by this reservation is a rough mountainous section of country . . . much of this coverage is too steep and rough to be cultivated, yet it is a fact that tillable land is at such a premium that the steep hillsides are often planted in crops."<sup>22</sup> Spalsbury went on to write that most families owned five acres of level or moderately sloping land, although some had managed to acquire as many as twenty-five or thirty 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." The beans that Cherokee had previously grown as cash crops had been obliterated by pests that they had not yet found a way to kill or drive off. Further, cultivated land on the steep slopes had to be cultivated using hoes and other hand instruments since modern agricultural equipment could not navigate the slopes' inclines.<sup>23</sup>

When the Great Depression hit in the late 1920s, the loss of even more jobs made subsistence agriculture even more important and necessary for the Cherokee. In 1930, BIA Superintendent R.L. Spalsbury wrote, "A majority of them managed to live on the crops

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<sup>20</sup> "Baker Role, 1924-1929," *National Archives*, accessed Feb. 13, 2016 via <<https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/rolls/baker-roll.html>>.

<sup>21</sup> Charles J. Weeks, "The Eastern Cherokee and the New Deal," 305.

<sup>22</sup> R.L. Spalsbury, *Annual Report 1930: Narrative Section*, 1.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 1-2. Charles J. Weeks, "The Eastern Cherokee and the New Deal," 305.



raised on a small spot of land they cultivate . . . It is the exception to the rule where a family does not can enough fruits and vegetables during the season to last the family all winter.”<sup>24</sup> During his tenure as BIA Superintendent of the Cherokee, Spalsbury worked to support subsistence farming on the reservation. He hoped that “in the course of time [farming would] take the place of and surpass the old method of depending upon nearby logging and lumber operations for a livelihood.”<sup>25</sup>

BIA officials and Cherokee leaders continued to use the Cherokee Indian Fair as a means to promote subsistence agriculture and modern agricultural practices through the 1920s and into the 1930s. One of the fair’s main exhibits during the 1930s was The Better Home and Farm Contest, first established in 1933, though contests and exhibitions related to agricultural products had existed in some form since the fair’s beginning. The contest both celebrated the agrarian history and economy of the Cherokee and also served as a tool to encourage further agricultural development, especially in subsistence farming.<sup>26</sup> In the 1934 fair, the rules of the contest stipulated that “the purpose . . . will be to improve living conditions among these Indians and to develop the farming activities to a point where all the Indian homes shall be practically self supporting . . . Subsistence farming or the production of food and feed for the home will be emphasized.”<sup>27</sup> The contest allowed members of the Eastern Band to enter food, livestock, and handmade goods into the fair to be judged for monetary prizes. The criteria for the contest required Cherokees to be able to provide sufficient garden produce and field vegetables for their family for an entire year; use

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<sup>24</sup> R.L. Spalsbury, *Annual Report 1930: Narrative Section*, 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>26</sup> 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, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives Building, Atlanta, GA.

<sup>27</sup> Cherokee Indian Fair Association, *Cherokee Indian Fair 1934* (Cherokee, NC: Cherokee Indian Fair Association, 1934), 4.

improved, modern farming methods; maintain a clean home; and store all agricultural and homemade products in a root cellar, crib, or spring house.<sup>28</sup> As the rules for the exhibit show, the contests were used as incentives to promote the agriculture industry across the reservation, particularly subsistence farming.

In addition to being a tool to promote agriculture in the Cherokee economy, the fair's focus on agricultural produce and the home also had educational value. The BIA and fair planners used the agricultural exhibits as means to educate Cherokee about growing subsistence crops and keeping a clean home. 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. Henderson wrote, "I believe the fair at Cherokee is doing a big work in training the Indians for better living and more enlightened citizenship."<sup>29</sup>

Enlightened citizenship, a Progressive Era ideal among social centers activists, denoted the value of education and intelligence to citizenship. As one historian has commented, "Not property or virility (or even balanced government) but widespread critical enlightenment was now the most important source of citizenship." 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.<sup>30</sup> By using this phrase, Henderson expressed a hope, grounded in Progressive Era

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> James Henderson to Cato Sells, letter, Oct. 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.

<sup>30</sup> 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.

ideals, that by educating Cherokees through the events at the fair, Cherokees would become more productive members of the larger Cherokee community.

Using the fair for educational purposes continued on into the 1920s and 1930s. In 1933, for example, during the very first Better Home and Farm 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 arranged in his exhibit at the fair will greatly improve the educational value of the exhibit as well as adding to its attractiveness.”<sup>31</sup> 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 educational endeavors in the fair extended beyond agriculture to health as well. During the 1917 fair, for example, the North Carolina State Department of Health provided the reservation with materials for a health exhibit. The exhibit probably was made in conjunction with or connected to the baby contest, in which babies were scored not only for their looks, but also for their wellbeing and level of health.<sup>32</sup> To enter in a baby contest, each baby had to be examined by a physician, whose responsibility it was to talk with the mothers about the care of their children.<sup>33</sup>

The fair went beyond being simply a celebration, but promoted agriculture and better living standards on the reservation. By economically incentivizing the Cherokee with cash and material prizes and providing educational opportunities to learn better farming and home care practices at the fair, BIA officials and Cherokee fair planners successfully used the fair

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<sup>31</sup> Cherokee Indian Fair Association, *Cherokee Indian Fair 1933*, 2.

<sup>32</sup> James Henderson to Cato Sells, letter, Dec. 17, 1917, Folder 2a-61 thru 2a-80, Box 1, Correspondence (Series 5), Cherokee Indian Agency, Bureau of Indian Affairs Records, National Archives Building, Atlanta, GA.

<sup>33</sup> James Henderson to Cato Sells, letter, Oct. 25, 1915, Folder 2a-34 Cont. thru 2a-48, Box 1, Correspondence (Series 5), Cherokee Indian Agency, Bureau of Indian Affairs Rec

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 an article on the history of the fair printed in the 1939 fair brochure. The brochure read:

The aim and purpose of this fair as stated in the early stages of its existence was “To stimulate and encourage a greater interest in agriculture among the Indians of the reservation and to create and foster among them a desire for better homes and better living conditions.” The fact that the agricultural exhibits at this fair have been proclaimed by competent outside judges to be of superior quality and from the further fact that homes and living conditions have greatly improved on the reservation, since the fair began, seem to point to the conclusion that the fair and its founders should receive at least a part of the credit for bringing about these desirable conditions.<sup>34</sup>

### **Catering to the Tourists**

Other than the main agricultural exhibits, the fair had few attractions to entice non-Cherokee visitors. Even so, by 1917, white visitors had begun showing interest in the fair and came to see the agricultural exhibits. From Superintendent Henderson’s perspective, the white visitors were one measure of the fair’s success. Writing to BIA Commissioner Cato Sells about the 1917 fair, Henderson noted, “I am glad to be able to tell you that our Cherokee Indian Fair was far better this year than ever before . . . The Cherokee Fair has begun to attract the attention and favorable comment of the best thinking white people of the

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ords, National Archives Building, Atlanta, GA.

<sup>34</sup> 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, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives Building, Atlanta, GA, 3-4.

state. Although there are a few attractions outside of the exhibits large numbers of white persons were in attendance.”<sup>35</sup>

As interest from white visitors increased, access to the reservation became a logistical challenge since good roads to the reservation were scarce. However, the railroad infrastructure established to serve the logging industry still remained after the industry itself 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.<sup>36</sup> In the absence of good roads, the railroads provided an important form of transportation to bring tourists to 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. A roundtrip ticket cost two dollars.<sup>37</sup> The specials offered by the trains brought over 1,000 visitors from Asheville to the fair that year.<sup>38</sup>

Even though the fair was growing in popularity and attracting an increasing number of visitors to the reservation each year, the fair alone was not enough to bring the number of tourists necessary for a robust tourism industry. However, plans for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park promised to attract such visitors. The park, which shares a border with Qualla Boundary, provided new opportunities for tourism to the Cherokee economy. Park planners wanted to build roads through Cherokee to the park that would not only aid tourist travel to the park, but which would also route more tourists through the reservation.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Daniel S. Pierce, *The Great Smokies: From Natural Habitat to Natural Park* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 33.

<sup>37</sup> “Southern Railway System,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, Sept. 15, 1921, 28.

<sup>38</sup> “Large Attendance at Cherokee Indian Fair,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, Oct 2, 1921, 8.

<sup>39</sup> “Cherokee Indians Will Be First To Get Highway Jobs.”

While some of the roads were completed, others were halted due to conflicts with the Appalachian railroad and disputes between federal and Cherokee officials.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, the opening of the park did increase attendance at the fair. Regarding the 1941 fair, one journalist wrote, “The fair . . . is expected to draw visitors from many states since tourist travel in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park has been the heaviest in history.”<sup>41</sup> Over time, the park has made the Eastern Band of Cherokee the “most visited Native American group in the United States.”<sup>42</sup>

With the new influx of tourism during the 1930s anticipating the park’s opening in 1938, elements of the fair grew or changed in order to cater to the interests of the tourists. One major element of growth in the fair was new opportunities for fair exhibitors to sell handicrafts and other artisan work to the increasingly large numbers of tourists. Though the Cherokee had no doubt been selling their work throughout the 1920s, R.L. Spalsbury noted in his 1930 annual report that the Cherokee sold basketry, pottery, bead work, bows and arrows, and more during the fair.<sup>43</sup> That the Cherokee handiwork at the fair that year was significant enough to warrant mention points to a revival in Cherokee arts and crafts that had taken place since the decline of craftsmanship that had begun with the beginning of a money economy among the Cherokee people.<sup>44</sup> The revival largely owes its success to the Cherokee Indian Fair, which promoted the dying arts of pottery, wood carving, and basket weaving.<sup>45</sup> The fair’s contests provided financial incentives for quality workmanship, and the fair as a

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<sup>40</sup> Finger, *Cherokee Americans*, 78-79.

<sup>41</sup> “Cherokee Fair October 7-11 W.N.C. Feature.

<sup>42</sup> Laurence French and Jim Hornbuckle, *The Cherokee Perspective: written by eastern Cherokees* (Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1981), 26-27.

<sup>43</sup> R.L. Spalsbury, *Annual Report 1930: Narrative Section, Section 4*, 1930, 2, Box 24, General Records and Correspondence (Series 6), Cherokee Indian Agency, Bureau of Indian Affairs Records, National Archives Building, Atlanta, GA.

<sup>44</sup> C. Brenden Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South: A Double-Edged Sword* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 162.

<sup>45</sup> Cherokee Indian Fair Association, *Cherokee Indian Fair 1939*, 4.

whole attracted thousands of non-Cherokee tourists, literally bringing the market for Cherokee crafts right onto the reservation.

Care must be taken using the word “revival,” however. The resurgence in Cherokee craftsmanship leading up to and even including the 1930s has more to do with quantity than authenticity. The revival in Cherokee craftsmanship refers to an increasing number of people engaged in industry making various arts and crafts. Yet during this time, the work was not totally authentically Cherokee, that is to say, the items being made were not in historically traditional Cherokee style. Cherokee craftsman altered the style of their wares in order to cater to white tourists. Many styles used in the weaving and pottery were borrowed from mountain whites and the Catawba Indians, who had already altered their styles to appeal to tourists, while incorporating the colorful features of Southwestern Indian work. It is not that basketry, weaving, and pottery were not traditionally Cherokee activities, but rather that the styles employed in the 1920s and 1930s were not styles traditionally Cherokee. In addition, the variety of goods produced was limited in scope. Nevertheless, such a revival in quantity was necessary for the quality to improve and for the handicraft industry to grow substantially.<sup>46</sup>

While the lack of cultural authenticity in Cherokee handiwork during the 1920s and 1930s might be lamentable, the purpose of the crafts was not preservation of culture. With the fair growing as a tourist attraction, the sale of crafts was an important part of the economic value of the fair.<sup>47</sup> In this case, profit was more important than historical authenticity. The Cherokee chose specific styles and forms in order to cater to tourists’

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<sup>46</sup> Finger, *Cherokee Americans*, 99. Cherokee Indian Fair Association, *Cherokee Indian Fair 1950*, Printed Documents Collection, Hunter Library Digital Collections, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, North Carolina, 39-43.

<sup>47</sup> 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.

interests. For example, Cherokee basketry and pottery shifted from utilitarian designs to decorative designs as a result of the growth of a tourist market.<sup>48</sup>

Women were traditionally the weavers in Cherokee society, since most basket designs had utilitarian functions within and around the home. Baskets were often used as “sifters, winnowers, sieves, food servers, storage containers, and gathering and carrying baskets.” 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. 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 decorative.<sup>49</sup>

The arts-and-crafts revival in the first part of the twentieth century further pressured Cherokee weavers to tailor their wares to the tourist industry. In the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, seven craft guilds opened within fifty miles of the reservation. Cherokee weavers sold their baskets to the guild directors, who in turn sold them to tourists. However, the guilds’ control on the market meant that Cherokee weavers had to meet the guilds’ standards for quality and style. Cherokee weavers saw the tourist market for basketry as a way to meet financial needs.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Sarah H. Hill, “Marketing Traditions: Cherokee Basketry and Tourist Economics,” *Selling the Indian: Commercializing & Appropriating American Indian Cultures*, Carter Jones Meyer and Diana Royer, eds. (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 2001), 213.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 212-224. M. Anna Fariello, *Cherokee Basketry: From the Hands of Our Elders* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2009), 33.

<sup>50</sup> Hill, “Marketing Traditions,” 212-224. Allen H. Eaton, *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1973), 176.



Cherokee pottery, in addition to the weaving, also underwent changes to cater to the tourist market. Traditional Cherokee pottery, as sociologist Allen Eaton described it, was a simple gray style, shaped by hand, and then hardened in ovens where the clay would be turned brown or black by contact with the blazing wood.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, most Cherokee styles, like the basketry, were geared towards domestic and utilitarian uses. As the pottery market among tourists expanded, many Cherokee adopted Catawba styles that had already evolved away from utilitarian functionality towards decorative tourist-oriented products. Many Catawba potters had moved into or near the Cherokee reservation area after they lost their land in the 1840s. 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.<sup>52</sup>

Fair planners also promoted handicrafts by introducing model ancient Indian villages, one Cherokee and the other Hopi. The villages were a way to display Indian arts and crafts as well as to provide a backdrop for performances of traditional dances and tribal ceremonies. Further, visitors could see 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.”<sup>53</sup>

In addition to arts and crafts, the creation of a pageant called “The Spirit of the Great Smokies” was an important part of increasing tourism to the fair. Largely compiled and orchestrated by Superintendent Harold Foght, “The Spirit of the Great Smokies” was directed by Margaret Speelman from the Haskell Institute in Kansas. The show was first put on in

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<sup>51</sup> Eaton, 209.

<sup>52</sup> M. Anna Fariello, *Cherokee Pottery: From the Hands of our Elders* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2011), 37, 45-46.

<sup>53</sup> “Cherokees of North Carolina Prepare for a Gay Festival,” *The Washington Post*, Sept. 8, 1935, F1.

1935 and was popular enough to be repeated again in 1937, incorporating more than 350 Cherokee into the production.<sup>54</sup>

The pageant was a way to cater to tourist interests because many white visitors came to the fair with a desire to see and experience what they perceived to be authentic Cherokee culture. “The Spirit of the Great Smokies,” which told the famous story of the Trail of Tears, provided such an experience. The pageant was first performed at the very tail end of the American historical pageantry fad prevalent during the early twentieth century Progressive Era. One of the legacies of American historical pageantry after its decline is that the public imagery of historical pageants fostered a connection between a geographic location and a people 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.<sup>55</sup> “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. Further, the pageant not only presented a history of the Cherokee, but also presented a vague, but optimistic vision of a bright future for the tribe.

“The Spirit of the Great Smokies” begins with a medicine man addressing the audience in a long monologue. In part, he says, “Here in our mountains, 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.”<sup>56</sup> From the very beginning, the pageant connects the Cherokee people with the mountain lands and ties both to Cherokee history and tradition.

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<sup>54</sup> 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.

<sup>55</sup> 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.

<sup>56</sup> “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.

The spirituality of the medicine man and the pageant's connection of Cherokee spirituality with the Smoky Mountains is similar to Lynn Rigg's popular play *The Cherokee Night* (1932), which tells the story of mixed-blood Cherokee youths between 1895 and 1931. One of the major themes of the play, drawn out through a conflict between general modern society and Native traditions, is the spiritual relationship between people and their homelands.<sup>57</sup> The two dramas similar subject matter—Cherokee people and connections to homeland and Native traditions—and closeness in time may at least suggest a continuity of ideology among Native Americans in the 1930s.

Following the introduction of the pageant, the first two scenes depict the arrivals of the Spanish, French and English, the colonial expansion, and the effects of these events on the Cherokee. The third scene depicts the Great Removal, the centennial of which the 1935 pageant was meant to commemorate. Rather than focus on the Cherokee that left, the pageant focuses on those that stayed, which maintains the pageant's focus on a particular land and a particular people.<sup>58</sup>

The pageant paints a grim picture of the Great Removal, adding in a level of accuracy unusual for its time, especially since the pageant was mainly written and put together by BIA officials. In the 1935 Pageant brochure, the subtext for the Great Removal scene of the pageant read:

Again the whites looked on with greed, and the state of Georgia threatened to secede if the President, Andrew Jackson, did not remove the Indians . . . and they [the Cherokee] were ordered to move West beyond the Mississippi to what is now Oklahoma . . . Finally, they were driven by the military out of their homes and down

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<sup>57</sup> Christy Stanlake, *Native American Drama: A Critical Perspective* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 43.

<sup>58</sup> "The Spirit of the Great Smokies," 6-10.

the roads and rivers towards the West. This is the infamous “Trail of Tears.” Over a third of the number died on the way, and the record of their suffering is a blot on our national history.<sup>59</sup>

The text, taken from white scholars Charles C. Royce and James Mooney’s 1883, 1884, 1887, and 1890 reports to the Smithsonian Institution, presented the Trail of Tears in such a way that it did not whitewash the history for the tourists.<sup>60</sup>

The final scene commemorates the restoration of the Cherokee to some of their land in North Carolina, and especially focuses on the development of schools in Cherokee and the education of the children. The narrator finishes with a prayer, saying, “Teach them [the spectators], O Spirit, all that it has taken to keep us truly Cherokee; restore to us the best that was our fathers’, help us to use the best our conquerors brought us; But keep this bit of Hills forever Indian, Our tribe in honor, and our children, Men!” 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.”<sup>61</sup> 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 prayer to maintain the lands as Indian, and the hope brought by the Cherokee schools and education was a voice of optimism for the future. At the time the pageant was written, the future being spoken about was grounded in the emphases on modern techniques in subsistence farming and the expansion of the tourist

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>61</sup> “The Spirit of the Great Smokies,” 12.

industry on the reservation—both which started in the fair, but were taught in the Cherokee schools as well.

Telling the story of the Cherokee people in North Carolina and their history with land indeed resides within the legacy of American historical pageantry, “fostering a sense of connection between past and present, between locale and nation.”<sup>62</sup> Further, “The Spirit of the Great Smokies,” and particularly its presentation of the Great Removal, resembled Great Depression culture, which in part focused on “biting social criticism,” often from a leftist perspective that focused on the values of community. The pageant commemorated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great Removal by criticizing the U.S. government’s actions and indicting the Great Removal as a “blot” on U.S. national history. Such criticism was similar in tone to works performed by the Federal Theater Project, which was started just months before “The Spirit of the Great Smokies” first debuted. Though institutionally unconnected, both capture the spirit of criticism in the Great Depression and the desire to focus on reality for the sake of grappling with it, as many did in trying to interpret and explain the Great Depression itself.<sup>63</sup>

“The Spirit of the Great Smokies” was popular during its debut performances in 1935, but because of the work involved to put the pageant on and because of opposition from the “white” Indian faction, who opposed the BIA’s involvement in the fair and other areas of the reservation, the pageant was not performed in 1936. However, the pageant was performed again in 1937, where it was presented six times during the summer and then again at the fair.<sup>64</sup> “The Spirit of the Great Smokies” was discontinued after 1937, despite its success that

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<sup>62</sup> Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 290.

<sup>63</sup> Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark: A Cultural History of the Great Depression* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 4. Barry B. Witham, *The Federal Theater Project: A Case Study* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1-6).

<sup>64</sup> So-called “white” Indians were people of mixed racial heritage that generally lived on the fringes of the reservation, but had an extremely vocal minority voice in tribal politics. For many years, the white Indian

year, and a pageant was not reintroduced until the first performance of “Unto these Hills” in 1950.<sup>65</sup>

The Cherokee arts and crafts, the model Indian villages, and the pageant were all ways to attract 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.”<sup>66</sup> More specifically, journalists focused on events at the fair they deemed would be the most attractive to white tourists, which generally were culturally “exotic” performances, events, or exhibits. One journalist wrote of the 1935 fair, “The event, which will feature native traditional sports and crafts, is expected to attract a large attendance of white visitors and tourists.”<sup>67</sup> Another journalist wrote that the 1937 “fair, an event which mixes the primitive with modern Indian customs, is expected to attract a large attendance of white spectators this season.”<sup>68</sup> The 1934 fair brochure said 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.”<sup>69</sup> The focus of the fair, at least the way it was advertised to tourists, was on the unfamiliar, or “exotic,” Cherokee culture presented at the fair.

The ability to attract tourists was important for the Cherokee economy. The fair, which began in 1914, was the first major Cherokee event to successfully attract non-Cherokee tourists from around North Carolina and beyond to the reservation. Changes made

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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.

<sup>65</sup> Finger, *Cherokee Americans*, 100. Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 165-168.

<sup>66</sup> “Cherokees Prepare for Harvest Fair,” *The Washington Post*, Sept. 25, 1938, TT10. “Cherokees of North Carolina Prepare for a Gay Festival.”

<sup>67</sup> “Cherokees of North Carolina Prepare for a Gay Festival.”

<sup>68</sup> “Cherokees Plan Big Doings: Primitive And Modern Customs Of Red Men Comingle in Great Smokies’ Event,” *The Baltimore Sun*, Sept. 12, 1937, T8.

<sup>69</sup> Cherokee Indian Fair Association, *Cherokee Indian Fair 1934*, 19.

to the fair over time, like the addition of the Indian villages and “The Spirit of the Great Smokies,” were made in part to draw more tourists to the event. Further, the way in which the fair promoted the revival of Cherokee crafts and handiwork affected the quality of exhibits available to tourists during the fair. The emphasis on handicrafts also promoted a more general craftsman economy on the reservation to serve the increasing numbers of tourists came to the reservation not just for the fair, but to visit Cherokee and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park at other times during the year. Finally, the Cherokee Indian Fair as a tourist attraction helped to put the Cherokee reservation on the map as a popular destination for visitors, diversifying the Cherokee economy with the expansion of a viable tourist industry.

### **Performance In and Beyond the Fair**

During the fair season, the best elements of Cherokee life were put in the spotlight for the increasingly large number of tourists attending the fair in the 1920s and 30s. The best of Cherokee agriculture, dance, performance, sport, and handicrafts were all put on display during the fair season, exposing tourists to some facets of Cherokee life and culture. Indeed, the fair was a performance of culture designed to attract tourists. The designs of the handicrafts, the dance performances, pageants, model villages, and ball games were able to attract tourists because the expression of Cherokee culture (historically accurate or not) was exotic to the white tourists visiting the fair. As more visitors came to spectate, the reputation of the Cherokee spread, allowing for performance beyond the fair as well.

This was especially true of Cherokee dance and the Indian Ball Game, two forms of performance during the fair. The exposure gained at the fair afforded Cherokee opportunities

to take their performances beyond the Cherokee Indian Fair to other fairs, festivals, and events around the state and around the country. In some instances, archers also traveled with the ball teams or the dancers in order to put on a shooting show as well. For example, in 1935, the Cherokee 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, which that year was held 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, was created in order 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 as well as handicraft exhibits displayed in Graham Memorial, the university's student union at the time.<sup>70</sup> In 1935, the festival planning committee paid for the Cherokee's travel expenses, lodged them in a classroom building, and paid each player \$2.00 per day for their services. Spectators at the game were charged \$0.50 admission, while university students were charged a discounted rate of \$0.25.<sup>71</sup>

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

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<sup>70</sup> "Initial Dogwood Events to Extol North Carolina," *The Daily Tar Heel*, Mar 26, 1933, 1.

<sup>71</sup> Harold Foght to Felix Grisette, letter, Feb 27, 1935; Felix Grisette to Harold Foght, letter, Mar 9, 1935; Harold Foght to Felix Grisette, letter, Mar. 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.



Cherokee history.<sup>72</sup> In addition to performing at the festival, the Cherokee obtained permission from the chairman of Lovemans Department Store to display and sell Cherokee handicrafts. During 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 Lovemans, thought Chattanooga would be a great market for Cherokee goods since “many Chattanooga people . . . visit [the] reservation.”<sup>73</sup>

Despite the economic benefit of travelling to perform, there was some risk associated with it. In some instances, hosts did not provide adequately for the Cherokee’s stay. At other times, hosts refused to pay the performers either out of unwillingness or an inability to pay. Because of such “exploitations,” as BIA Commissioner John Collier called them, he required anyone who wished to hire Cherokees to perform at an event sign a contract outlining terms regarding compensation, lodging, food, medical care if necessary, and travel expenses. Further, Collier required potential hirers to mail a bond ahead of time to the reservation of an amount agreed in the contract in order to guarantee the contract’s fulfillment.<sup>74</sup>

Even with a contract, guarantee of its fulfillment, and the exposure gained for the Cherokee by such travel, leaving the reservation to perform did not always make sense economically. In such cases, the Cherokee would turn down some invitations. In 1935, for

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<sup>72</sup> 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).

<sup>73</sup> Harold Foght to John Collier, letter, May 23, 1935; Sarah Knott to Harold Foght, letter, Apr 1, 1935; M.J. Pickering to Harold Foght, letter, Apr 25, 1935, File 072, Box 31, General Records and Correspondence (Series 6), Cherokee Indian Agency, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives Building, Atlanta, GA. The Cherokee also performed at the National Folk Festival in following years, but I have only decided to focus on this one because of the interesting addition of Cherokee handicrafts being taken down and sold at the department store.

<sup>74</sup> John Collier to Fredrick Voss, letter, Feb 16, 1938, File 072, Box 31, General Records and Correspondence (Series 6), Cherokee Indian Agency, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives Building, Atlanta, GA.

example, Superintendent Harold Foght turned down an offer for two teams to perform the Indian Ball game in Union, South Carolina. He did so for two reasons. First, the Cherokee had performed in a number of other events during the year, and adding yet another seemed like too many events at the time. Second, the Indian Emergency Conservation Work (IECW) as part of the Civilian Conservation Corps provided work to the team members on a highway building project. Because of the work opportunities available to the Cherokee as part of the Indian New Deal, leaving the reservation to perform, even for some payment, was not always worth it. Players could make between \$2 and \$50 per day working for the IECW, depending on the job, which was more money than than teams could generally make performing an Indian Ball game or giving an archery or blowgun demonstration.<sup>75</sup>

Regardless of whether or not an offer was accepted, the high number of invitations shows the extent to which the Cherokee had opportunities to make money through performance of culture. The popularity that garnered so many invitations came largely from the Cherokee Indian Fair, which raised public awareness for Cherokee performance by attracting tourists. In short, the fair attracted tourists, which in turn increased outsiders' exposure to Cherokee life and culture, the very same cultural elements that the Cherokee were then invited to perform elsewhere.

## **Conclusion**

Though the Cherokee Indian Fair brought many Cherokee together in celebration, the fair was primarily an economically-oriented event. The emphasis on agriculture and subsistence farming in the fair was a focus on economics within the reservation during a time

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<sup>75</sup> Harold Foght to R.C. Eubanks, letter, June 4, 1935, File 072, Box 31, General Records and Correspondence (Series 6), Cherokee Indian Agency, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives Building, Atlanta, GA.

when the Cherokee lacked other forms of industry. The fair also sparked a revival in Cherokee handicrafts. It provided an outlet as early as 1914 for Cherokee to present their crafts and handiwork and to win monetary awards for the quality of the work. As the fair grew, it became an industry in itself, attracting thousands of tourists each year. The admittance fees and the opportunity to sell handicrafts made the fair a money-making opportunity in and of itself at the same time that it promoted a tourist economy on the reservation during the rest of year as well.

As the fair became a larger tourist attraction, the expression of culture became more of a performance 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.

The public's awareness of the Cherokee reservation as a tourist destination was raised by performance both in and beyond the fair. More broadly, the fair brought more tourists to western North Carolina both to the event itself and to the growing number of other attractions on the reservation. Although the fair did have some economic impact on the Cherokee reservation since it provided a real way to make money during times when the Cherokee economy did not have other viable industries, the long-term economic impact by publicizing the Cherokee people and their reservation is yet greater.

## Chapter 2:

# Entering the Kingdom of Rhododendron: White Culture, Escapism, and Tourism in the Rhododendron Festival

### Introduction

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Asheville was in the middle of an economic boom that started in 1880 when the first train from the Western North Carolina Railroad arrived, signaling the beginning of unprecedented access to the city. In the 1880s, the city's population grew from 2,600 to more than 10,000, and by 1900, the population totaled 15,000 people. During the initial wave of growth, lumber magnate George Willis Pack, real estate investor Frank Coxe who built Battery Park Hotel, Edwin Wiley Grove who built Grove Park Inn, George Washington Vanderbilt who built the famous Biltmore mansion, and lumberman Edwin George Carrier all moved to Asheville and invested heavily in the development of the city.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1870s, Asheville began to grow in popularity as a destination for health tourists, those traveling to the mountains to seek cures for various ailments and illnesses. By the 1910s, the healthcare industry had expanded to include a wide variety of both scientific and alternative medical options for paralysis, rheumatism, dyspepsia, asthma, and others. Health resorts catered not just to those seeking treatment from specific ailments, but also to wealthy elites in search of rest and leisure.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nan K. Chase, *Asheville: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2007), 29-31.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 33-34, 82. C. Brenden Martin, *Tourism in the Mountain South: A Double-Edged Sword* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 8. Richard D. Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2005), 17-18.

The health resort industry was Asheville's primary tourist attraction until the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when other forms of recreation became popular in the area. Hunting clubs, golf courses, country clubs, tennis, bicycle racing, and horse racing were all popular forms of recreation. Riverside Park, built along the French Broad river, offered a place to have picnics, watch horse shows, listen to live music, and pay to go on amusement rides. The park also had baseball diamonds where the Asheville Moonshiners, Asheville Redbirds, and Asheville Tourists (all different professional baseball teams that played during different years between 1897-1915) played before McCormick Field was built in the 1920s.<sup>3</sup> The city also built an auditorium, allowing Asheville to expand into the convention trade. In short, Asheville's population growth, urban development, and burgeoning tourism industry made Asheville an example of a flourishing city in the New South.<sup>4</sup>

Across the United States, the beginning of the 1920s was a major period of real estate expansion and speculation. The real estate bubble, which began to balloon in 1921, deflated in 1926 shortly before the start of the Great Depression.<sup>5</sup> Asheville was no exception. Asheville experienced a large real estate boom marked by rampant speculation during the 1920s. Rather than crashing in 1926 as the real estate markets in many other U.S. cities had, the Asheville real estate bubble took longer to deflate, lasting through the 1920s and up to the start of the Great Depression in 1929. It was in the context of the 1920s growth, set against the previous forty years of economic success, that the Rhododendron Festival was designed and celebrated.

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<sup>3</sup> Chase, 82-85.

<sup>4</sup> 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*, Vol. 80, No. 1 (Jan. 2003), 52-80.

<sup>5</sup> Marc A. Weiss, "Real Estate History: An Overview and Research Agenda," *The Business History Review*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Summer, 1989), 241-282.

Inaugurated in 1928, the Rhododendron Festival was originally intended celebrate Asheville's economic success and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which city officials and tourist boosters hoped would bring an influx of tourists to Asheville in conjunction with their trip to the park. Held annually in June, the festival was timed "in accordance with the advance of the blooming season of the wild mountain shrubs, namely the eponymous rhododendrons, mountain laurels, and azaleas." By 1930, the festival was already being advertised in *Asheville Life* as the "most colorful celebration held in the south."<sup>6</sup>

During the festival, Asheville's residents transformed their city into the mythical Kingdom of Rhododendron, ruled by the annually crowned King and Queen of Rhododendron. The king and queen were accompanied by an array of nobility, guards, jesters, heralds, and a host of other royal staff, all arrayed in medieval clothing reminiscent of a bygone age.<sup>7</sup> Although the variety and intensity of events at the festival evolved over time, a number of events were considered traditional and expected parts of the festival by the mid-1930s. These events included a Military Ball that began in 1933, the Rhododendron floral parade, the Brigade of the Guards, the Rhododendron Pageant—which involved 500 to 1,500 people, not including spectators—the Rhododendron Ball and coronation, and the Sponsor's Ball. In addition to these "royal" events, there were also parades of various sorts, such as the baby parade and dog parade.<sup>8</sup>

The Rhododendron Festival was in many ways a copy of Miami's Fiesta of the American Tropics. Both Asheville and Miami followed similar economic trajectories in the 1920s, thanks largely to rampant real estate speculation. Fred Weede, who was prominent in

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<sup>6</sup> "Support the Festival," *Asheville Life*, Apr. 19, 1930, page 1, accessed Oct. 11, 2014 via <<http://www.newspapers.com/image/74263630>>

<sup>7</sup> Chase, *Asheville*, 121.

<sup>8</sup> "Asheville Festival: Western North Carolina Prepares for Its Ninth Rhododendron Celebration In June," *The Baltimore Sun*, Apr. 5, 1936: MM13.

Miami's Chamber of Commerce during the 1920s, was hired as manager of the Asheville Chamber of Commerce in 1928 and ran the Rhododendron Festival for 12 years. Weede and the other festival planners hoped to use the event to publicize Asheville and attract more tourists to the city. While some have labeled the festival as a form of escapism in the 1930s, the focus on tourism should be the primary interpretation of the festival.

This chapter will begin by examining the background of the Rhododendron Festival and its links to Miami's Fiesta of the American Tropics before discussing the development of the festival itself, arguing that the goal of attracting tourists was accomplished by the incorporation of white southern and European culture into the festival. Such incorporation appealed to white tourists. The inclusion of these elements was also indicative of Asheville's race relations in the 1920s, in which the interests of attracting white tourists were placed above the interests of promoting healthy race relations in the city. Finally, this chapter examines the extent to which the Rhododendron Festival was a form of escapism. Although an interpretation of the festival in favor of escapism should be secondary to the festival's tourist-oriented focus, the festival, as an expression of collective memory remembering Asheville's wealth in the 1920s, did function as a form of escapism during the hardships of the Great Depression.

The Rhododendron Festival functioned as an exhibition of white culture in southern Appalachia and as a form of escapism from the hardships of the Great Depression. Further, the Rhododendron Festival attracted thousands of tourists each year, heightening the general public's awareness of Asheville and its offerings as a possible tourist destination.

## Rampant Speculation in Asheville and Miami

In the first few decades of the twentieth century, Asheville experienced rapid population growth and economic expansion. By 1900, the city had grown to 15,000 residents, quite a sizable leap from the 2,600 residents the city had in 1880. By 1930, the population had grown to 50,000. Although resorts and tourism were Asheville's biggest industries in the early 1900s, Asheville's economy quickly grew and diversified into other sectors to include department stores, banks, engineering firms, and law offices, to name a few.<sup>9</sup> Vast city expansion, notably in real estate and public building projects, marked the 1920s. City and county officials wanted a new city hall, county courthouse, high school, and sport's fields, along with other projects. Since the projections for real estate value were promising, the high cost of such projects was not considered a great obstacle.<sup>10</sup>

The building frenzy reached its zenith in the latter half of the 1920s. Spending was rampant, and though many projects were useful for revamping the city, the rapid expansion of the real estate market, combined with the amount of credit being used, created a recipe for disaster. Greed was interpreted as the motivating factor. Thomas Wolfe observed in 1922, "Greed, greed, greed—deliberate, crafty, motivated—masking under the guise of civic associations for municipal betterment."<sup>11</sup> The new Art Deco architecture that changed the city's landscape, the growth of Asheville's health and leisure industries that brought tourists to the city, and the wide variety of other projects were all a part of "building the dream."<sup>12</sup>

But it was a dream never fully realized, because although the city was improving itself, it was impossible in reality to sustain such a rapid rate of growth, especially during the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 85-88. Lou Harshaw, *Asheville: Mountain Majesty* (Fairview, NC: Bright Mountain Books, 2007), 191.

<sup>11</sup> Chase, 102. For more detail on the building frenzy of the 1920s, see Chase, *Asheville: A History*, 82-110. Also see Harshaw, *Asheville: Mountain Majesty*, 191-212.

<sup>12</sup> Harshaw, 191.



Great Depression. On November 20, 1930, the Central Bank and Trust Company, the largest bank in the region, closed its doors. A run on the American National Bank occurred soon thereafter. By the end of the next day, eleven banks had closed in Western North Carolina. Asheville's decade long boom had come to an end.

Asheville's real estate expansion during the 1920s and economic crash in 1930 closely parallels that of Miami, Florida, during the 1920s. The Asheville Chamber of Commerce got the idea for the Rhododendron Festival from Miami's economic boom and their celebration of their economic success. The tourism boom in Miami began in 1910. The city's population had recently risen to 5,500 and the numbers of tourists arriving each year were steadily increasing. By 1920, the population had increased to 30,000, partly because many tourists who visited decided to move to Miami to become residents. By 1925, the population had more than doubled to 75,000.<sup>13</sup>

Like in Asheville, except on a larger scale, the real estate market in Miami exploded in the first half of the 1920s. With the price of land skyrocketing, investors stood to make millions. For example, a New York lawyer was offered \$240,000 for a small piece of land on Palm Beach about ten years before the boom. He declined the offer, eventually selling it in 1923 for \$800,000. However, the next year the same piece of land was split up into smaller sections and sold piece by piece for a total of \$1.5 million. Speculation was rampant, with many circumventing title checks and other administrative details in order to speed the buying

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<sup>13</sup> Paul S. George, "Miami: 100 Years of History," *Southern Florida History*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Summer, 1996), accessed at *History Miami*, via < <http://www.historymiami.org/research-miami/topics/history-of-miami/>>. Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), 206.

process. The speculation extended as far as thirty miles outside of Miami, as investors were interested in owning land around Miami, even if the land was not in the city itself.<sup>14</sup>

The boom reached its peak in 1925 amid confident declarations describing Miami as “The Wonder City” or “The Fair White Goddess of Cities.” To celebrate the rapid growth and financial success of the city and surrounding the area, the mayors of Miami, Miami Beach, Hialeah, and Coral Gables set aside December 31, 1925 to January 2, 1926 to be “The Fiesta of the American Tropics,” meant to be a grand celebration of Miami’s rapid expansion and growth. The mayors promised dancing, both in ballrooms and on the streets, and a pageant depicting the blessings of the city.<sup>15</sup>

The pageant depicted Ponce de Leon returning to Florida to continue his quest in search for the fountain of youth. The quest proved fruitless, until Leon learned that while the fountain of youth itself may not exist, the happiness, climate, energy, and activity of southern Florida would make for a long life. Ponce de Leon and his men further realized that such requirements for a long life could only be found in Miami. Leon then came to Miami and participated in in The Floral Parade as part of the fiesta.<sup>16</sup>

The fiesta, held only once, coincided with the end the Miami boom. In early 1926, speculators rapidly withdrew from Miami, many who bought land defaulted on their payments. Previous owners were forced to reclaim their land as a result of the defaults, but were unable to resell it in the shrinking market. In September 1926, a hurricane made landfall in Miami, with the eye of the hurricane actually passing over the city. The storm wiped out many properties, further destroying the failing real estate market.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Allen, *Only Yesterday*, 209-210.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 211-212.

<sup>16</sup> “Ponce Will Return in Fiesta of Tropics,” *The Washington Post*, Dec 27, 1925, FDN4.

<sup>17</sup> Allen, *Only Yesterday*, 209-210.

## **A Copy-Cat Festival**

Asheville's real estate boom closely paralleled that of Miami, but while Miami's boom failed in 1926, Asheville's continued until the end of the decade, when it was crushed under its own weight and the weight of the Great Depression. Following Miami's example, the Asheville Chamber of Commerce inaugurated the Rhododendron Festival as a way to celebrate Asheville's growth and economic success as well as the establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

From 1929 to 1939, the festival was directed by Asheville Chamber of Commerce manager Fred L. Weede, who had formerly been the secretary and then manager of the Miami Chamber of Commerce. Weede, born in Indianola, Iowa, was a newspaper man in Philadelphia before moving to Miami, where he was put in charge of advertising and publicity for the Miami Chamber of Commerce before becoming manager. Weede also was a junior partner in a large real estate firm in Miami and held a seat in Florida's state legislature for one term. In Miami, Weede was responsible for getting Miami's first deep water harbor channel and for organizing the city's first airplane races. The Asheville Chamber of Commerce hired Weede as manager in 1928, a post he held until 1939 when he resigned over a disagreement on changes being made to the Chamber. As manager of the Asheville Chamber, Weede helped lead the fight to have the Blue Ridge Parkway routed through western North Carolina, and he brought American Enka Corporation to Asheville (the company chose Asheville over 52 other cities in the United States). He also supported the

construction of a new tobacco warehouse during the Great Depression that helped the tobacco market to continue operating during the 1930s.<sup>18</sup>

Although Weede did not direct the first festival in 1928, he may have been partially responsible for the festival's birth, having spent the previous six summers in Asheville before being hired by the Asheville Chamber of Commerce in 1928.<sup>19</sup> Always the publicist, Weede realized the festival's potential for advertising the city, and thus ostensibly for attracting tourists and other businesses to Asheville. As one journalist later described, "[Weede] realized immediately that the festival had great publicity potential. He enlarged the event, perfected its machinery. The event soon became nationally recognized." During his tenure in the Asheville Chamber, Weede managed twelve Rhododendron Festivals.<sup>20</sup> Weede's promotion of the festival allowed it to function as both a tourist attraction in and of itself and as a advertisement for the city.

Weede's influence on the festival is also seen in the similarities between the Rhododendron Festival and Miami's Fiesta of the American Tropics. Like The Fiesta of the American Tropics, the Rhododendron Festival had a floral parade featuring floats sponsored by businesses from around the city. Further, the pageant of the fiesta and the Rhododendron Pageant contained thematic similarities. While the fiesta pageant was a combination of Floridian history and myth (Ponce de Leon and the fountain of youth), the Rhododendron Pageant instead combined myth with the flora of western North Carolina. The staple segment of the pageant each year focused on Rhodora and the Rhododendron Blossoms, using

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<sup>18</sup> "Many of City's Assets Can Be Traced Back to Fred L. Weede," *Asheville Citizen*, Nov. 15, 1959, Pack Library Newspaper File Collection: Biographies, Vol. 72, North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library, Asheville, NC.

<sup>19</sup> David Whisnant, "Finding the Way Between the Old and the New: The Mountain Dance and Folk Festival and Bascom Lamar Lunsford's Work as a Citizen," *Appalachian Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Autumn-Winter, 1979-1980), 137, 152-153. "Snow Requested," *Statesville Record and Landmark*, Dec 30, 1937, 7.

<sup>20</sup> "Many of City's Assets Can Be Traced Back to Fred L. Weede."

mythical characters to tie the floral theme of the festival to the region's summer blossoms. However, the Rhododendron Festival's planners took the pageant beyond a singular narrative, adding in numerous other scenes of fantasies and fairy tales to the pageants over the years. While Ponce de Leon provided a symbolic figurehead for the pageantry and the parade in Miami, the annually crowned King and Queen of Rhododendron acted as symbolic leaders of the festival and the mythical Kingdom of Rhododendron. Indeed, the Rhododendron Festival was Asheville's Fiesta of the American Tropics.

The first few Rhododendron Festivals were paid for by a publicity fund held by the Asheville Chamber of Commerce. However, the fund quickly dried up after the banks closed in 1930. Once the Chamber of Commerce was no longer able to fund the event, the festival planning committee solicited donations from private businesses and social organizations who sponsored the fair throughout the 1930s.<sup>21</sup>

To help build the festival into a major event, Weede hired J.F. Gastoff and E. Lew Lewellyn, professionals that had worked on a number of festivals in Florida, to take charge of designing the store-front displays and other festival decorations around the city.<sup>22</sup> Before Weede's arrival, the Chamber had already hired a local festival planning company, The Workshop Theater, headed by Edith Russell, to take charge of the pageantry and costuming. For the first Rhododendron Festival, Russell was hired to write, costume, and produce the Rhododendron Pageant; however, the event was so successful that the Asheville Chamber

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<sup>21</sup> Edith Russell to R.S. Templeman and Montgomery Ward, letter, June 4, 1934, Folder 3, Series 1, Edith Russell Papers.

<sup>22</sup> "Experts Come to Assist with Plans for Fete," Newspaper articles in scrapbook, Series 2, Box 2, Folder 28, in the Edith Russell Papers, #3821, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. These newspaper articles are all probably from the *Asheville Citizen Times* but were cut out by Edith Russell and pasted into a scrapbook, so the dates have mostly been removed. Here and all places after, they are cited by the title of the article and the location of the scrapbook.

then hired to her to direct, stage, write, and costume all of the festival's events.<sup>23</sup> Her associate, H.R. Harrington, designed and built the props for the event.<sup>24</sup>

Russell founded The Workshop Theater around 1926. A North Carolina native, her interest in theater dated back to her involvement in productions at Raleigh High School and the North Carolina College for Women. Russell started her career as a teacher at Raleigh High School, where she formed North Carolina's first high school drama club and advised students on writing and producing their own plays. After teaching, she studied at Inter-Theater Arts in New York before working for a large photographic studio doing costuming and staging. After working on a short-term project in Asheville, Russell decided to stay and found The Workshop Theater, which successfully produced costumes, props, plays, pageants, and festivals both in Asheville and around the South, gaining national attention for Russell's talent. One journalist praised her work, saying, "The Workshop theater is now recognized as one of the south's most efficient, and at the same time most artistic centers of theatrical work." Russell's associate at The Workshop Theater was H.R. Harrington, who managed prop and set design and construction. The two married in 1935 before founding Harrington-Russell Festivals. They ran Harrington-Russell in Asheville until the 1940s, when they moved to Atlanta.<sup>25</sup>

The pageantry of the Rhododendron Festival, completely written and designed by Russell, was detailed and elaborate. While Russell made some of the costumes and props herself, she also contracted with Philadelphia costuming company Van Horn & Sons to rent

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<sup>23</sup> Virginia Terrell Lathrop, "Miss Russell Has Earned National Recognition for Artistic Stage Pageantry," *The Charlotte Observer*, Aug. 4, 1929, Pack Library Newspaper File Collection: Biographies, Vol. 59, North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library, Asheville, NC.

<sup>24</sup> "Big Fellow Arrives for Part in Festival." Van Horn & Sons to Edith Russell, letter, May 26, 1933, Folder 2, Series 1, Edith Russell Papers.

<sup>25</sup> Lathrop, "Miss Russell Has Earned National Recognition for Artistic Stage Pageantry." "Mrs. Harrington Dies; Author and Director," *Asheville Citizen*, Nov 16, 1967, Pack Library Newspaper File Collection: Biographies, North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library, Asheville, NC.

costumes for the festival. For the 1934 Rhododendron Festival, for example, Van Horn & Sons supplied Russell with mid-seventeenth century costumes. The company kept the men's costumes in stock, and made the women's costumes specifically for the festival. The company rented to Russell robes for the king and queen along with royal jewels, separate outfits for the Lord Chamberlain, Archbishop, and Master of the Revel (Jester), as well as twenty outfits for the ladies and gentlemen of the court, 10 for each gender.<sup>26</sup> In addition, Russell also rented uniforms and swords for the Brigade of Guards and had Van Horn & Sons design and make special dresses for each sponsor.<sup>27</sup>

Just as Asheville's real estate boom paralleled Miami's boom, the two cities' celebrations of their respective economic successes also ran in parallel, with Asheville's Chamber of Commerce following Miami's example for staging a proper celebration of the city's successes. The two festivals had similar parades, pageants, and symbolic figureheads. However, the Fiesta of the American Tropics did not last, while the Rhododendron Festival became a popular part of Asheville culture throughout the 1930s and into the early 1940s. Weede's contributions to publicizing the festival and Russell's expertise designing the costumes, pageantry, and events contributed to the festival's popularity and attracted tourists from around North Carolina and from other southern states. In 1930, the festival attracted 50,000 people.<sup>28</sup> By 1935, the total attendance at all the festival's events rose to several hundred thousand attendees, many of them tourists.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Van Horn & Sons to Edith Russell, letter, May 3, 1934, Folder 3, Series 1, Edith Russell Papers.

<sup>27</sup> Edith Russell to Van Horn & Sons, letter, May 9, 1934, Folder 3, Series 1, Edith Russell Papers.

<sup>28</sup> "Beautiful Southern Girls Enhance Flower Festival."

<sup>29</sup> "Asheville Festival: Western North Carolina Prepares for Its Ninth Rhododendron Celebration in June."

## Appealing to White Tourists

Relative to other cities after the Reconstruction, Asheville had a reputation for more moderate race relations. For instance, from the 1880s to the early 1920s, blacks and whites shared water fountains in and around the city. However, segregation laws regarding water fountains were introduced in Asheville shortly after the Ku Klux Klan held their national convention in the city in 1924. Once the laws were changed, some whites beat blacks who, unaware that the law had changed, used the white water fountains. The KKK national convention, the beatings, and a series of rapes in 1925 blamed on black men challenged the city's mostly peaceful race relations as well as the city's broader reputation for having such.

Some Asheville whites were concerned that media articles about the tensions and tourists who would go home and tell stories of the racially-motivated incidents would hurt Asheville's tourist industry. In reaction to these incidents, whites worked to highlight examples of blacks contributing positively to Asheville's development, such as one newspaper article that showed pictures of a cleanly kept black neighborhood and its local church. As one historian writes: "Because of the large southern tourist clientele, tourism boosters had a vested interest in portraying black residents in a positive light." By the 1920s, Asheville was a popular tourist destination not only for southern tourists, but for tourists from the North as well.<sup>30</sup>

Black leaders in Asheville saw tourism-related growth as a threat. Regarding the series of rapes allegedly committed by black men, black leaders urged white city leaders against blaming all blacks in the city for the crimes of just a few people. Further, black leaders placed the blame on black workers who had recently moved to Asheville from rural

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<sup>30</sup> Robert D. Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2005), 83-84, 64. Chase, 147-148.



areas. The workers came to Asheville because they had been hired by developers and businessmen to be laborers building the infrastructure of or otherwise working in the growing tourism industry, or what the black leaders termed the “white man’s residential paradise,” referring to the housing developments that sprung up as a result of tourists deciding to move permanently to the city.<sup>31</sup>

Despite these instances, the city was relatively peaceful. This was not the result of well-established integration or of blacks and whites working together, but rather of separation and almost total disenfranchisement of the black community in Asheville. For instance, in 1941, whites owned 49,753 pieces of property compared to the 1,799 owned by blacks. Further, poll tax figures from the same year show 11,636 whites registered to vote compared to the 319 blacks registered. If the numbers showed such marginalization in the 1940s, the 1920s and 1930s were almost certainly similar.<sup>32</sup>

The separation between the white and black communities, in addition to the felt need by white municipal leaders to protect Asheville’s reputation in order to attract white southern tourists, is manifest in the Rhododendron Festival. Aspects of the festival were cultural expressions of the tourist industry’s catering to whites and of the marginalization of the black community in Asheville more broadly. While it is not clear that any part of the festival was a purposeful exclusion of people of non-white races or that the festival developed out of an intentional desire to attract only white tourists, many aspects of the festival’s events lend themselves to such an interpretation.

There are numerous examples of involvement in the festival by non-white people, without evidence of their participation as tourists or spectators. In 1931, members of the

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 84-85.

<sup>32</sup> Chase, 144.

Eastern Band of Cherokees from Big Cove performed the “Eagle dance” at the festival. One newspaper advertised the event, referring to the “crude drums and gourd rattles” used to perform the dance, which “according to older members of the tribe, has never been performed in the presence of white people.”<sup>33</sup> The way the dance is described indicates that the Cherokee presence at the festival was merely a spectacle. The Cherokee were not participating in the festival like the white guests and spectators were, but rather were part of festival’s show to be advertised and sold to citizens and tourists. In other years, the Rhododendron Pageant had scenes such as an “Indian episode” or “Chinese episode,” in the pageant, a focus on what was “exotic” to white southern culture. Finally, the black community did not have their own place in the festival until 1940, when a Negro parade was added, but even this was not part of the main parade.<sup>34</sup>

Outside of particular events like the parade and the pageant, the overall pageantry of the festival is a peculiar mix of white southern and European culture. While the inclusion of Indian and Chinese elements to the festival was exotic to white tourists, the presentation of white southern culture in the way it was mixed with appeals to medieval European heritage also was an exotic cultural expression. As to white southern culture, two particular instances stand out. Every year of the festival, governors or state leaders from other southern states sent a young woman to represent the state as a “sponsor” at the festival. These women were highly publicized in the Asheville newspapers with pictures and biographical information about each one.<sup>35</sup> To be eligible to be a sponsor, a woman had to be currently attending

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<sup>33</sup> “Cherokee Indians to Present Dance at Flower Festival,” *Statesville Record and Landmark*, June 11, 1931, 7.

<sup>34</sup> Whisant, *Finding the Way*, 137.

<sup>35</sup> “Miss Buncombe,” “Will Attend Fete As Florida Sponsor,” “Louisiana Names Her As Fete Sponsor,” “Kentucky Sponsor,” “South Carolina Sponsor,” “Miss Asheville,” Newspaper articles in scrapbook, Series 2, Box 2, Folder 28, in the Edith Russell Papers. I take these articles to be a representative, not exhaustive sample of newspaper articles featuring photos and biographical information about the sponsors. These articles all regard sponsors sent to the 1934 Festival.

college and to have received an honor while in college such as May Day Queen or Miss Asheville.<sup>36</sup> The sponsors were sent so that the “rare beauty of the rhododendron and the charm of Southern young womanhood [would] be mingled in celebration.”<sup>37</sup> The sponsors, all white, were lauded in the newspaper as the epitome of southern womanhood.

The “sponsor” label was not unique to the Rhododendron Festival, but rather was a term also used in many other white southern celebrations. For instance, at Lost Cause events in the post-Civil War South, young members of the United Daughters of the Confederacy acted as “sponsors.” At these events, the sponsors’ roles were to symbolize white southern womanhood and to embody “the values of a white community wistful for the culture of the Old South” that the Confederate soldiers had ostensibly fought to defend.<sup>38</sup> Women were also chosen as the symbolic royalty for May Day celebrations, ring tournaments, and civic festivals, with a similar function to the sponsors. At the Rhododendron Festival, a sponsor had to have already been chosen as queen of such an event in order to be considered as a sponsor for the festival. As one historian has described the position of women chosen as sponsors or other “beauty royalty,” “These women reflected the values of white southerners taken with notions of romance and chivalry.”<sup>39</sup> Like other white southern celebrations, the sponsors at the Rhododendron Festival were meant not only to symbolize the epitome of white southern womanhood, but to also symbolically represent Old South culture.

A second instance of white southern culture in the Rhododendron Festival happened during the 1934 Rhododendron Ball. The ball opened with the entrance of the King and Queen, followed by the Lord High Chamberlain and the Cardinal. One journalist described

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<sup>36</sup> Chase, 124.

<sup>37</sup> “Beautiful Southern Girls Enhance Flower Festival.”

<sup>38</sup> Blain Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, & Pretty Women: Race and Beauty in the Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 109.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

the entrance of the court ladies, saying, “As the ladies of the court approach[ed] the throne to make their obeisance to the King and Queen, they [were] expected to kneel and have pinned upon their bosoms pins of royal crest before they bow[ed] and kiss[ed] the hands of their royal majesties.”<sup>40</sup> Following the reception of the court ladies, the Lord High Chamberlain Frank Coxe summoned the Royal Brigade of Guards, who marched in military formation with sabers drawn to present the flags of the ten represented southern states. The sponsors came immediately following the flags and took their places on either side of the king and queen. After the sponsors, a gentlemen of the court summoned slaves bearing gifts from each of the represented states to be presented to the King and Queen.<sup>41</sup> The representation of slaves bearing the agricultural produce of southern states, and this during a city celebration meant in part to attract southern tourists, evinces a particular image of slavery in in the context of white southern history.

The expression of white southern culture was mixed with an expression of medieval European culture. Just as the Fiesta of the American Tropics appealed to Florida’s connection with European explorers in the New World—Ponce de Leon and his followers—the Rhododendron Festival appealed to North Carolina’s European heritage by choosing medieval European fashion as the theme for the pageantry. Such a theme would have been attractive to both northern and southern white tourists because at the turn of the twentieth century, both northern and southern whites alike were turning towards the southern Appalachian region as a bulwark of “pure” whiteness. As one scholar argues, “In the geographic imagination . . . of white Americans at the close of the nineteenth century,

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<sup>40</sup> “New Plans Originated For Rhododendron Festival Ball,” Newspaper article in scrapbook, Series 2, Box 2, Folder 28, in the Edith Russell Papers.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

Appalachia represented a bounded, isolated reservoir of racially ‘pure’ white Americans.”<sup>42</sup>

Although this attitude was certainly prevalent at the turn of the century, it also continued well into the 1930s. The use of white culture in the Rhododendron festival meshed with the wider public’s interpretation of Appalachia as a bastion of whiteness, thus creating appeal for the festival.

Asheville’s Mountain Dance and Folk Festival (MDFF), which began as a program in the Rhododendron Festival in 1928 before becoming its own festival in 1930, received the most press in this regard. One *Washington Post* article about the MDFF stated, “In the Southern Appalachians, so it has been said, live the contemporary ancestors of present-day Americans. Elizabethan English and dances in vogue during the days of King George have lingered on in many of the mountain pockets. The plaintive white spirituals grew up there and stayed on to greet the radio.”<sup>43</sup> Similarly, *The Baltimore Sun*, republishing an article from Asheville, wrote, “The annual festival [MDFF] here is a big occasion for those who love the melodies that were old in the time of Shakespeare and the songs that men in buckskin sang as they fought to build an empire in a mountain wilderness.”<sup>44</sup> Regardless of whether or not mountain folk actually were speaking vernacular Elizabethan English or that each ballad sung was sung exactly as it was in Shakespearean times, white public opinion held that the ballads, dances, and ways of speaking were connected to the historical European roots of white American ancestry.<sup>45</sup> As such, many “Anglo elites understood true ‘Americanness’ as linked to whiteness and British ancestry.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Emily Satterwhite, “Romancing Whiteness: Popular Appalachian Fiction and the Imperialist Imagination at the Turns of Two Centuries,” *At home and Abroad: Historicizing Twentieth-Century Whiteness in Literature and Performance*, La Vinia Delois Jennings, ed. (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 93.

<sup>43</sup> “Appalachian Folklore,” *The Washington Post*, Apr. 10, 1938, B6.

<sup>44</sup> “Folk Festival at Asheville,” *The Baltimore Sun*, Jul. 26, 1942, CS16.

<sup>45</sup> For more information on the culture and preservation of early twentieth century Appalachian music and culture, see Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill:

Although the Rhododendron Festival did not get the same press as the MDFF, which connected the cultural expressions of the MDFF with British ancestry and white views of “pure Americanness,” the Rhododendron Festival originally spawned the MDFF. Further, the pageantry of the Rhododendron Festival supported the broader trend among whites to associate the Appalachian region with a “pure” whiteness representing America’s European heritage. Although Asheville was a city and as such was not as representative of isolated rural mountain areas, Asheville was still much smaller, and since it is nestled away in the Appalachian Mountain range, may still have represented to white tourists the imagined Appalachian ideals of a pure, preserved link to white America’s European heritage.

The objection here is that many white elites, while imagining Appalachia as a reservoir of “pure” whiteness, also saw mountain folk as crude and ignorant people. Writers of popular fiction, such as William Goodell Frost, painted mountain whites as backward, barbaric people, generally considered not much better than people in non-white races. In order to reconcile the contradiction between using Appalachia as a romanticized image of “pure” whiteness and embracing the view that mountain whites were inferior, white elites held that the mountain folk simply needed enlightenment. One scholar, writing from Frost’s perspective, argues, “mountaineers were surely one of ‘us’ in their raw hereditary and racial ‘potential’ for uplift.”<sup>47</sup>

Elements in the Rhododendron Festival did not explicitly espouse this view. Rather, the Rhododendron Festival connected the whiteness of Appalachia with the gentility of European heritage. For example, the sponsors, meant to encapsulate southern whiteness,

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University of North Carolina Press, 2000). and David Whisnant, *All that is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

<sup>46</sup> Satterwhite, “Romancing Whiteness,” 93.

<sup>47</sup> Satterwhite, “Romancing Whiteness,” 94-95. Note that although Satterwhite was writing from Frost’s perspective in this quote, she herself does not maintain that view, but was using it as an example in her article.

were college educated and thus totally the opposite of the ignorant mountain folk. Because the festival was located in a city in Appalachia, festival planners were able, even if unwittingly, to thread a needle between two views. The festival simultaneously harnessed the appeal of perceived Appalachian whiteness through the expression of white culture while at the same time maintaining an aura of sophistication—the use of European-themed pageantry and college-educated sponsors—appropriate for the festival’s urban setting.

In addition to the festival’s connections to romanticized images of Appalachia, the festival’s medieval themes also came from early twentieth century anti-modern and reformist ideologies. Dissatisfied with many of the popular forms of leisure at the time, these movements used folklore to look back in time in order to formulate models for leisure that would have a therapeutic role in promoting self-fulfillment and promoting civic spirit and national identity. For example, Sarah Gertrude Knott, Allen H. Eaton, Constance Rourke, and others, who founded the National Folk Festival, all held to these anti-modern, reformist beliefs. Although this was not the case for the National Folk Festival, much of the folklore used by anti-modernists expressed, as one folklorist described it, an “Anglophilic conflation of images of the Middle Ages and the Elizabethan period.”<sup>48</sup> In looking back to Appalachian folklore, the Rhododendron Festival centered on the same folklore used by reformers in the early twentieth century.

The European heritage presented in the Rhododendron Festival was manifest thematically and in the costuming more than the contents of the pageantry. While the Rhododendron Festival did not have a historical figure such as Ponce de Leon in the Fiesta of the American Tropics, the Rhododendron Festival did have a King and Queen of

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<sup>48</sup> Timothy Lloyd, “Whole Work, Whole Play, Whole People: Folklore and Social Therapeutics in 1920s and 1930s America,” *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 110, No. 437 (Summer, 1997), 243.

Rhododendron, a jester, courtiers, a brigade of guards, trumpeters, and a whole host of characters to make up the royal court. The characters in the festival's pageantry were the Ponce de Leon, *per se*, of the festival. The royal court, coronation, and pageantry linked the Rhododendron Festival back to region's perceived European heritage, and linked the festival symbolically with the broader trend of associating Appalachia with "pure" whiteness.<sup>49</sup>

The medieval theme to the costuming and pageantry throughout the Rhododendron Festival is similar to pre-World War I pageantry. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, several hundred pageants were performed that included "fairy tales, classical themes, the Bible, medieval and Renaissance legends."<sup>50</sup> Although the Rhododendron Festival started after the pageant movement ended in the United States, the fairy tale and medieval themes of the Rhododendron Festival hearken back to the pageant movement.

For example, consider the 1934 Rhododendron coronation and pageant. During the ceremonies, Otis Green, Sr., the current cardinal of the Kingdom of Rhododendron (and president of the Asheville Chamber of Commerce), anointed the head of the king, Asheville-native Grove Seely, and conferred upon him the royal crown, ring, glove, scepter, and golden rod. King Seely, having been so crowned and vested with the instruments of power, turned to crown Myra Lynch queen and to vest to her a royal crown, ring, and scepter. The new king and queen then assumed the throne, from which they granted the "master of the revel" to

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<sup>49</sup> "Royalty for Annual Fete Here Chosen;" "Miss Stephens Is Named First Lady In Court;" "Long Parade For Fete Is Assured;" "New Plans Originated For Rhododendron Festival Ball," Newspaper articles in scrapbook, Series 2, Box 2, Folder 28, in the Edith Russell Papers. These are newspaper articles that give a flavoring of the European-oriented pageantry. Similar newspaper articles can be found in Scrapbook, Series 2, Box 2, Folder 28, in the Edith Russell Papers.

<sup>50</sup> Alessandra Lorini, "The Theater of Democracy in Progressive America: Ethnic, Racial, Class and Gender Identities in American Pageantry," *Federalism, Citizenship, and Collective Identities in U.S. History*, Cornelis A. van Minnen and Sylvia L. Hilton, eds. (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: VU University Press, 2000), 89.



“present an entertainment which his loyal subjects have prepared in honor of the coronation.”<sup>51</sup>

With this granting of permission, a strange pageant commenced on McCormick Field where the coronation had just finished. The show incorporated some 500 people from the region, and depicted devil dances, sacrifices to the fire-god, prehistoric monsters and other scenes of fantasy.<sup>52</sup> The entertainment opened with a scene in the Stone Age featuring Diny, a fifty-foot long “greenish-brown monster,” as one journalist described.<sup>53</sup> Just following, Millicent Livingston and Charles Harbeson performed a tango. A wild ozarda dance followed, performed by forty-nine trained dancers, then a scene in which sleepy giants captured a fairy sprite.<sup>54</sup> These fantastic portrayals preceded the appearance of the bard of the Appalachian, Bascom Lamar Lunsford, who performed a Scottish ballad. But even this brief respite from fantasy could not last, as the popular minstrel was followed by a rendition of Cinderella, a demon orgy put on by the Boy Scouts, and finally an epilogue of the mystical Rhodora and the Rhododendron Blossoms in a “display of mystic beauty.”<sup>55</sup>

Such pageants and wider festival pageantry were meant to promote community solidarity through mass participation. The participation in the Rhododendron Festival was not limited to contributing to the pageantry itself or in acting in the Rhododendron Pageant, but also included engagement in the festival by spectating and attending. In the case of the

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<sup>51</sup> “Royalty For Annual Fete Here Chosen,” “Miss Stephens Is Named First Lady in Court,” “New Plans Originated For Rhododendron Festival Ball,” and “500 Persons To Take Part in Spectacular Rhododendron Pageant,” Newspaper articles in scrapbook, Series 2, Box 2, Folder 28, in the Edith Russell Papers, #3821, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>52</sup> Nan K. Chase, *Asheville: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2007), 126.

<sup>53</sup> “Big Fellow Arrives For Part in Festival,” *Asheville Citizen*, June 1, 1934, Newspaper Article in Scrapbook, Series 2, Box 2, Folder 28, in the Edith Russell Papers, #3821, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>54</sup> “Royalty For Annual Fete Here Chosen,” Newspaper article in scrapbook, Series 2, Box 2, Folder 28, in the Edith Russell Papers.

<sup>55</sup> “500 Persons to Take Part in Spectacular Rhododendron Pageant,” Newspaper articles in scrapbook, Series 2, Box 2, Folder 28, in the Edith Russell Papers.

Rhododendron Festival, the promotion of solidarity through appeals to European and medieval culture extended beyond the Asheville community itself but also to the white tourists in attendance.<sup>56</sup>

Intentionally or not, the festival was aimed primarily at attracting white tourists. The lack of participation by non-white people as spectators and guests was not necessarily a purposeful exclusion, but rather is indicative of Asheville's race relations in the 1920s and 30s. The building tensions as a result of new segregation laws in the mid-1920s and the marginalization of the black community within Asheville is represented in the festival by the lack of inclusion of the black community in the Rhododendron Festival until the Negro Parade was introduced in 1940. The festival planners' incorporation of white southern culture and the symbolic ties between the festival and white European heritage helped to attract the hundreds of thousands of tourists each year. The popularity of the festival was due in some part to the white southern and European culture represented, which in being infused together, presented an exotic form of white culture that played to broader trends that romanticized white Southern Appalachia.

### **Escapism in the Rhododendron Festival**

In attempting to explain the Rhododendron Festival, some have labeled the festival a form of escapism during the Great Depression. For instance, Nan Chase calls the festival a "communal escapist fantasy."<sup>57</sup> While there is some merit to this interpretation, such a label is too simplistic to be an overarching analysis of the festival. As has already been shown, the

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<sup>56</sup> Lorini, "The Theater of Democracy in Progressive America: Ethnic, Racial, Class and Gender Identities in American Pageantry." For more on historical pageantry, see: David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

<sup>57</sup> Chase, 121.

Rhododendron Festival was a copy of celebrations in Miami. Further, Weede wanted to use the festival to publicize Asheville and to attract tourists. By incorporating a fused white southern and European culture into the festival, those goals were accomplished. Because of the focus on tourism, the Rhododendron Festival cannot simply be labeled an escapist fantasy. However, the two interpretations are not mutually exclusive. Part of the allure of the festival to tourists was its entertainment value. The pageants, balls, parades, etc. all provided entertainment and distraction, indeed forms of escapism. Moreover, the escapism interpretation has further validity in the ways that the Rhododendron Festival symbolized Asheville's wealth in the 1920s.

Escapism as a label for forms of entertainment during the Great Depression refers to one side of a cultural split during the 1930s. One side of the split focused on explaining and interpreting the economic crisis as a way to grapple with it. The other side, labeled escapism, refers to a need to get away from the hardship of the Great Depression and to be distracted from life's difficulties, which in its own sense was also a way to grapple with the Depression.<sup>58</sup> By remembering Asheville's growth in the 1920s, the Rhododendron Festival was a distraction from Asheville's economic woes in the 1930s.

Asheville's growth in the 1920s was fast and highly visible to the general public. The fastest growth occurred in the real estate market, leading to massive speculation, resulting, in part, in a number of public building projects including a high school, recreational sports fields, and a new major road heading eastward out of town. Asheville's progress was visible because it was marked by new building projects in public spaces. Such visible growth also meant a visible decline when the Depression hit. In 1930, the first bank closure unleashed a

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<sup>58</sup> Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark: A Cultural History of the Great Depression* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 4.

domino effect in the region that quickly shut down a number of financial institutions, the city's debt was exposed, and the crash was obvious.<sup>59</sup>

In the wake of the crisis, the Rhododendron Festival, called by one journalist the "mountain mardi gras," followed the same pattern as the city, almost as if the festival itself was a public building project.<sup>60</sup> The festival gained instant popularity in its first few years, making it an important cultural feature of 1930s Asheville that was quite visible to Asheville's citizens and tourists. The festival grew quickly, attracting thousands of people each year from its very beginning.

As a public building project, the festival functioned as a form of escapism during the Great Depression by the way that symbols of wealth in the festival were reminiscent of Asheville's wealth and growth during the 1920s. The daily parades, evening balls, and annual pageant all centered on an ornately costumed royalty that filled the scene with opulence. Take, for example, the much-anticipated 1934 Rhododendron Ball held in the Carolina Tobacco Warehouse, which had been converted into the Laurel Pavilion for the occasion. A 5,000 square foot dance floor had been constructed. To build it, "ten men drove protruding nails down deep into the flooring; a sand machine operator spent 100 hours going over the floor's surface three times; a special crevice filler was applied," and then the floor was shellacked, waxed, and ready for the festivities. Seats for 1,000 spectators and 1,000 dancers lined the hall. Pine trees reminiscent of a medieval forest stood along the walls. At the south end, Tommy Tucker and his Californians, a noted radio and hotel band, played in an amplification shell. At the north end sat the rustic throne of the king and queen along with 70

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<sup>59</sup> Harshaw, 191. Chase, 111-112.

<sup>60</sup> "Pageantry Tonight's Big Event," Newspaper articles in scrapbook, Series 2, Box 2, Folder 28, in the Edith Russell Papers.

seats for the members of the royal court.<sup>61</sup> As described earlier, the pageantry of the ball included the stately entrance of the royal court followed by the marching of the brigade of guards, the entrance of the sponsors, and the presentation of gifts by the slaves of the realm.

The ballroom lined with trees, the famous band, and the soft entrance of the sponsors contrasted by the stately procession of the guards all made up a scene calculated to exhibit beauty and power. The presentation of gifts represented the abundance of the mythical realm and functioned as symbols of wealth. The display of wealth was reminiscent of 1920s Asheville where money, progress, and growth seemed to abound. The beauty, power, and wealth in the pageantry of the Rhododendron Ball were public demonstrations of wealth in the festival just as the revamping of Asheville through building projects were public demonstrations of Asheville's wealth. Having lost actual public demonstrations of wealth in city growth to hold onto, the festival represented a way to remember Asheville in a previous time, unhampered by the difficulties of the Great Depression. Participation in such remembrance and expression was a form of communal escapism.

One historian argues that “not money and success, not even elegance and sophistication, were the real dream of the expressive culture of the 1930s, but this dream of mobility, with its thrust toward the future.”<sup>62</sup> The Rhododendron Festival certainly exuded images of money, success, elegance, and sophistication in its décor and pageantry. But it also offered a certain mobility, or escapist freedom, within the “pinched, anxious, graceless” atmosphere of the Depression.<sup>63</sup> The movement of parades through the city streets, the gracefulness of the royalty and sponsors, and the strangeness of the pageants all provided

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<sup>61</sup> “New Plans Originated For Rhododendron Festival Ball,” “Elaborate Balls Will Be Festival Features,” Newspaper articles in scrapbook, Series 2, Box 2, Folder 28, in the Edith Russell Papers.

<sup>62</sup> Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark*, 361.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 360.

participants and spectators with the mobility to escape, even if temporarily, from the confines of normal life during the Depression. Parties such as the Jester's Revel, a Mardi Gras-like series of events towards the end of the festival, offered a "night parade of grotesque and comic figures and floats which will move through the streets . . . the stage show at the Grove Arcade and the Carnival Night Ball, Bazaar, and floor show on the roof of the Grove Arcade."<sup>64</sup> The night-long revelry provided an outlet for excitement and entertainment far different from any other time of the year. In short, the mobility offered by the Rhododendron Festival was the freedom to leave Asheville for a short time and to enter the fantastic and mythical Kingdom of Rhododendron.

Escapism in the Rhododendron Festival, built in part on a remembrance of Asheville's former wealth, required a particular collective memory of Asheville in the 1920s. However, the collective memory expressed in the escapism of the Rhododendron Festival was based more on an illusory memory of the 1920s, rather than a perception grounded in historical accuracy. The festival, a four-day event, was transient. It came and went each year. Similarly, Asheville's wealth in the 1920s was transient as it came and went over the course of the decade. The rampant speculation and economic investment was based on credit that had no meaningful financial backing. The irony of the escapism in the Rhododendron Festival is that the wealth and prosperity of the 1920s that it sought to remember was just as transient as the coming and going of the festival each year. The symbols of wealth in the festival—the costumed royalty, the fancy balls, and nightly parties—only lasted for the week of the festival. They were public expressions of wealth, stateliness, and dignity. Such expressions remembered the wealth of the 1920s, reminiscent of Asheville's major public

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<sup>64</sup> "Rhododendron Festival Will Open Tonight," Newspaper articles in scrapbook, Series 2, Box 2, Folder 28, in the Edith Russell Papers.

building projects that had served as visible signs of Asheville's growth into a respectable and booming city.

The label escapism can only be applied to the Rhododendron Festival problematically, since the festival was primarily a means to publicize the city and to attract tourists. However, the extent to which the festival was a form of escapism is the extent to which the festival, reminiscent of Asheville's wealth in the 1920s, was an expression of collective memory contrasting perceptions of Asheville's wealth and stability in the 1920s with the realities of the Great Depression in 1930s, during which the festival was celebrated. Symbols of wealth, such as the entertainment value of the parades, pageants, and balls, provided an outlet to temporarily escape from the Great Depression.

## **Conclusion**

Although the Rhododendron Festival was not the first of its kind, it definitely was not the last festival to focus on white heritage and culture with the use of medieval themes in order to attract tourists. The Natchez Garden Club's Spring Pilgrimage, which started in Natchez, Mississippi, in 1932, included a ball, crowned a Japonia King and Azalea Queen (similar floral themes as the Rhododendron Festival), and included a "historical pageant." The Spring Pilgrimage was later renamed the Confederate Pageant and became a vision of refined white society. The Azalea Festival in Charleston, South Carolina, began in 1934 and over time included a medieval-themed lancing tournament, black singers performing spirituals, and a reenactment of a pirate hanging.<sup>65</sup> Though there may not be a way to know if

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<sup>65</sup> Charles Reagan Wilson, "Tourism, Cultural," *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 16: Sports and Recreation*, Harvey H. Jackson III, volume ed. (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 227-230.

the Rhododendron Festival had any direct impact on these other two, the festival was certainly in the earlier part of a prevalent cultural trend during the 1930s.

The Rhododendron Festival, as well as the Spring Pilgrimage and Azalea Festival, used the expression of white culture, specifically the exotic feel of medieval themes mixed with Old South culture, in order to attract tourists to the city. Consequently, the festival functioned as an economic booster for Asheville during the Great Depression as well as a form of entertainment and escapism for the spectators and tourists involved. Looking long-term, the Rhododendron Festival, under Weede's guidance and influence, became an advertisement for Asheville's tourist industry, showing off the city to the thousands of tourists who came each year to the festival. Publicizing Asheville through use of the Rhododendron Festival, ostensibly leading to a wider awareness of Asheville as a viable tourist destination, is the long-term legacy of the festival in terms of the growth of the tourist industry in western North Carolina. Ultimately, the Rhododendron Festival was canceled in 1942, ostensibly because of World War II, but was later resurrected after the war in a different form and to a much lesser degree of popularity.



## Chapter 3:

### **Attracting Tourists with Kilts and Cabers: The Cultural and Economic Impact of the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games**

#### **Introduction**

After World War II, changes in leisure practices affected tourism nationally and in western North Carolina. The United States' post-war affluence provided financial means for leisure and tourism that were unavailable to most people during the Great Depression and World War II. The nation's Gross National Product, \$211 billion at the end of World War II, grew to more than \$1 trillion by the early 1970s, a testament to the United State's affluence and economic growth during the post-war years. In the 1940s and 50s, visits to national parks and national forests exploded, as did attendance at sporting and cultural events. Sales in sports equipment also increased drastically. Further, recreation and leisure-oriented companies offered amusements in theme parks, cruise ships, sporting events, and new television programs.<sup>1</sup>

During the 1950s, recreation and environmental movements became connected. Although the National Park movement had successfully advocated over the last several decades for the creation of national parks across the United States, Americans began to realize that many natural areas of the country had been destroyed by logging, mining, oil drilling, and other forms of commercial exploitation. In 1958, Congress created and authorized the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission to develop recommendations to solve the problem. From that commission's recommendations, the

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Kraus, *Leisure in a Changing America: Trends and Issues for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2000), 27.

federal Land and Water Conservation Fund was created to help acquire, develop and rehabilitate land for outdoor recreation purposes.<sup>2</sup>

Federal initiatives affected North Carolina tourism. For instance, during the 1950s, as tourist fishing in western North Carolina increased, federal and state funds were used to stock mountain streams with trout and other fish. During the 1960s, North Carolina benefitted from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), which was created by the federal Appalachian Regional Development Act of 1965. The ARC helped fund and implement road-building projects in western North Carolina, notably the I-40 and I-26 connection. In the same decade, demand for mountain real estate, mostly to be used as second homes, increased. Infrastructure development and an increase in tourist attractions followed the real estate industry's expansion. Consequently, the beginnings of urban sprawl, lack of proper zoning, and population growth sparked state government intervention. While the 1973 Mountain Area Management Act failed in the legislature, the 1983 Mountain Ridge Protection Act limited the size of buildings built on mountain and ridge-tops and opened the opportunity for counties to adopt even more stringent laws.<sup>3</sup>

As such, North Carolina was a microcosm of the larger struggle in the United States between tourism, leisure, and environmental protection. In 1952, North Carolina businessman and civic promoter Hugh Morton provided a combination of the three in his private, for-profit tourist attraction at Grandfather Mountain. Morton used environmental conservation as the fundamental draw for tourists to come to the mountain. To advertise the mountain, Morton hosted a number of events on the mountain unrelated to his own attractions, including the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>3</sup> Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 140-145.

The Grandfather Mountain Highland Games (GMHG) represents a revival in Scottish heritage celebrations in the United States in the mid-twentieth century. In the early part of the century, the number of Scottish organizations had declined throughout the 1920s, Great Depression, and World War II. Given the long history of Scots living in North Carolina, it is not surprising that the first highland games in the United States after World War II were held in the state. Indeed, the GMHG has over its development and growth become the best-attended highland games in the United States.<sup>4</sup> While the purpose of the GMHG, first and foremost, was to serve as a coming together of Scots in order to celebrate Scottish heritage, the games attracted popularity as a form of cultural tourism, attracting tourists nationally and internationally as competitors and spectators at the event. The games' popularity promoted western North Carolina's tourist industry by advertising Grandfather Mountain as a tourist attraction.

This chapter will begin by giving a brief history of Scots in North Carolina and of highland games in America before looking more closely at the GMHG's founding and development. Though connected with Scottish ancestry, the event was a mixture of authentic games and invented pageantry that together fostered a sense of "Scottishness" for the people involved, which contributed to the games' popularity. The sense of "Scottishness" promoted cultural tourism at the event, drawing thousands of visitors annually. Tourism at the games served as a promotion for Grandfather Mountain, which has hosted the GMHG since their inception. As such, the games have had a positive economic impact on the region not only because of the tourism the games themselves attracted each year, but because the games advertised Grandfather Mountain and the surrounding region as a tourist destination for

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<sup>4</sup> Arnow, "Gathering of the Clans on Grandfather Mountain," 5.

visitors to return to at other times during the year. This in turn boosted western North Carolina's tourism industry in the mid to late-twentieth century.

### **Scots in North Carolina**

Scots have been immigrating to the United States for centuries, beginning in the 1600s. They left Scotland for several reasons. First, some left for economic or political reasons. For example, landowners forcibly removed many poorer Scots from their homes during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in what have become known as the Highland Clearances. Further, political conflicts including the Covenanters in the seventeenth century and the Jacobite Risings in the eighteenth century also contributed to Scottish emigration. Finally, some left voluntarily because they feared being forced out or hoped that by leaving they could seek better economic opportunities elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>

Once in the United States, Scottish immigrants founded community organizations as a way of sharing common heritage. The Scots Charitable Society in Boston, MA, which was founded in 1657 to help Cromwellian prisoners, is one of the earliest Scottish organizations. In the 1700s and 1800s, a number of St. Andrew's societies were established, mainly in cities in the eastern part of the United States such as Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore, Albany, and Charleston. The first Burns societies and highland games events were founded in the mid-nineteenth century. Scottish organizations, one sociologist notes, may not "encourage a view of Scotland itself which is accurate or realistic, but that is not their purpose. They have an important social function in gathering together people with a Scottish heritage . . . enabling them to participate in a wide range of events." Such organizations continued to

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<sup>5</sup> Duncan Sim, *American Scots: The Scottish Diaspora and the USA* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Dunedin Academic Press Ltd, 2011), xv-xvi.

flourish through the end of the nineteenth century, but experienced some decline in the early twentieth century. Scottish immigration declined in the 1920s, and the children of earlier Scottish immigrants assimilated into American culture and did not continue the societies started by their parents.<sup>6</sup>

The first Scots in North Carolina date back to the Cape Fear settlement started by Highlanders in 1732. During the 1730s and 40s, Scots came from Argyllshire, Ross, Sutherland, and the Isle of Skye. In the years leading up to the American Revolution, as many as 20,000 Scots came to North Carolina. Scottish-native and governor of North Carolina Gabriel Johnston and his successor, Josiah Martin, ensured land grants and ten-year tax exemptions to Scots who came to the state, a generous offer that many Scots took advantage of. After the Revolutionary War, such enticements were no longer offered to Scots immigrating to North Carolina, and though some still came to the state, many instead migrated from Scotland to Canada.<sup>7</sup>

Scottish immigrants to North Carolina generally came from three distinct groups: Lowland, Highland, and Scots-Irish. The Lowland Scots tended to settle along the coast in English settlements. The Highlanders mainly settled in Cape Fear, and the Scots-Irish lived primarily in western North Carolina and the Piedmont. Although the three groups settled in different geographic areas of the state, they did not remain culturally distinct. The Highlander image of the kilt-wearing Scot emerged in the twentieth century as the dominant cultural symbol of all three groups. Other traditions and customs among Scottish Americans blended

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<sup>6</sup> Sim, *American Scots*, 49-52.

<sup>7</sup> Celeste Ray, *Highland Heritage: Scottish Americans in the American South* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 3-5.

together to simply become “Scottish” as opposed to being distinctly Lowland, Highland, or Scotch-Irish.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Highland Games in the United States**

Though some older Scottish highland games date back to the second century CE—including the Ceres Games of Fife and the Braemar Gathering, for example—Scottish highland games only developed in size and frequency in Scotland during the 1820s, and so are not as old as many imagine. The North American incarnation of the games emerged not long thereafter. For example, the Boston Caledonia Club first organized their games in 1853, just over a century before the GMHG were started. During its more than a century-long history in the United States, the highland games’ popularity has experienced a parabolic trajectory, with a period of great expansion followed by decline and then a later revival and explosion of the games that has propelled the games to the present.<sup>9</sup>

Following the Civil War, there was a rapid increase in the number of highland games events that lasted until roughly 1885. The increase began with the Caledonian Club of San Francisco’s inaugural games on Thanksgiving Day, 1866. While the first year of the games was a relatively small affair, the second year attracted over 4,000 people and sparked the creation of highland games events elsewhere in the United States. At its height, the expansion of highland games in post-Civil War America led to as many as 125 events held in a given year. In the 1880s, highland games events in the United States began to decline. The rise of the modern sports industry and the increasing popularity of baseball and boxing as professional sports, and football as an amateur sport, contributed to the decline by drawing

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 46-49.

<sup>9</sup> Emily Ann Donaldson, *The Scottish Highland Games in America* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1986), 10-11, 23-33.

attention away from highland games events. In addition, the rise of amateur sporting clubs provided more regular opportunities for competition without the need for Scottish ceremony. During the Great Depression, many highland games were cancelled due to the high cost of staging the events. By the end of the 1930s, only two of the highland games events from the post-Civil War era remained.<sup>10</sup>

Despite this decline, new highland games events began to emerge in the 1920s and 30s. Highland games events were few in the early twentieth century, but included the Round Hill Games, started in Connecticut in 1924, and the The Games of the United Scottish Societies in southern California, which began in 1927. There were few games events held in the 1930s and 40s, presumably due first to the difficulty of funding the events during the Great Depression and then due to the challenges of war time during the 1940s. However, the Central New York Scottish Games began in 1934, the Pacific Northwest Games began in 1945, and a Scottish group in Portland, Oregon, held its first games in 1952.<sup>11</sup> In 1956, the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games were born.

Even though the GMHG were not the first in the twentieth century, they have become certainly the largest and most important. Their popularity has ignited a revival of the highland games in North Carolina, if not nationally, in the latter part of the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> Over time, the GMHG gained national and international attention, drawing tens of thousands of competitors and visitors each year, sparking a general increase in the number of games around the United States in the second half of the twentieth century. This dramatic increase in the popularity and frequency of the highland games in the United States has continued to the present.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 23-24, 40, 42-43.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>12</sup> Ray, *Highland Heritage*, 59.

## Creating The Grandfather Mountain Highland Games

If there was a place in the United States best suited to spark a revival in Scottish heritage celebration, North Carolina was the place for it. The long history of Scots in North Carolina and the numerous Scottish heritage celebrations (though not yet highland games events) meant a significant group of Scottish enthusiasts who might be eager to attend and participate in a highland games event. As such, the meeting of two Scottish heritage enthusiasts, Agnes MacRae Morton and Donald MacDonald, led to the founding of the GMHG. Agnes MacRae was the daughter of Hugh MacRae, a MIT-graduate and North Carolina businessman in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries who promoted the development of Wrightsville and Carolina Beaches, and created the Linville resort village. He also bought Grandfather Mountain with financial support from his father, bringing the land into the MacRae family's ownership. Hugh MacRae had also contributed to *The History of the Clan MacRae, With Genealogies* that was published in 1899 with his financial support and included the American MacRae family history. Passionate about his family's Scottish history, he instilled in his daughter Agnes a love for Scotland and their family heritage by taking her to visit Scotland and reading English translations of Gaelic poetry with her. With a love for Scottish heritage inherited from her father, Agnes MacRae desired to organize a MacRae clan gathering.<sup>13</sup>

Donald MacDonald, a writer for *The Charlotte News*, also had a keen love for his heritage. He participated in clan gatherings in North and South Carolina for years before creating the GMHG. In 1954, MacDonald traveled to Scotland to observe the Highland Games at Braemar, the games on which he would eventually model the GMHG. So taken

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<sup>13</sup> Donald MacDonald, *America's Braemar: Grandfather Mountain and the Re-birth of Scottish Identity Across America* (Madison, GA: Southern Lion Books, 2007), 59-61, 66.



was he with the games that he vowed to start his own upon returning to the United States. Back in the United States, MacDonald hosted several Scottish heritage celebrations, including a Burns dinner in honor of Robert Burns' birthday. He also co-founded America's Clan Donald and organized the clan's first ever meeting, which was held at Flora MacDonald College in honor of the college's namesake. Flora MacDonald was a Scottish woman who helped Bonnie Prince Charlie escape from the British after his defeat at the battle of Culloden before she herself immigrated to North Carolina. MacDonald used his media influence at *The Charlotte News* to have his Scottish events covered in the newspaper and on the radio.<sup>14</sup>

Through the media coverage of MacDonald's clan events, Agnes MacRae (who by that time was married and had become Agnes MacRae Morton) learned about MacDonald and set up a meeting with him. The two first met at Grandfather Mountain. Morton explained to MacDonald her desire to host a MacRae clan gathering, while MacDonald spoke of his desire to host a Highland Games in America, to be, as he termed it, "America's Braemar," hoping to create an event modeled after the famous Highland Games in Braemar, Scotland. Morton and MacDonald settled on the highland games, deciding together on the name Grandfather Mountain Highland Games and Gathering of the Scottish Clans. Morton created a festival committee in Linville to plan the games, and MacDonald became the first president of the committee.<sup>15</sup>

The two founders decided on August 19 as the date of the first games in order to commemorate that date in 1745 when Bonnie Prince Charlie (known then as the "Young Pretender") hoisted the Jacobite flag in Glenfinnan, Scotland, entreating highland Scots to help fight the British and reclaim the Scottish throne. The clansmen answered the call of the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 60-61.

<sup>15</sup> MacDonald, *America's Braemar*, 60, 66.

Stuart prince, but were defeated at the Battle of Culloden. Upon their defeat, thousands of highland Scots were forced out of Scotland, some migrating to North Carolina.<sup>16</sup> The date symbolically connected the games in North Carolina with the long history of Scots living in the state. Modeled after the schedule of events listed in MacDonald's copy of the 1954 Braemar Games souvenir brochure, the GMHG were meant to bring Scots together to dance, compete, and celebrate Scottish heritage and culture.<sup>17</sup>

### **Fostering "Scotishness"**

From its early years in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the GMHG built a reputation as being the most authentic version of highland games in the United States due to both their setting and contests. GMHG participants and spectators would drive to rural Linville, North Carolina, before leaving the main highway and traveling up to the top of Grandfather Mountain to attend the games. MacDonald and Hugh Morton, the son of Agnes MacRae Morton who had inherited Grandfather Mountain, focused heavily on the authenticity of the events as a way to attract tourists. MacDonald praised Grandfather Mountain's landscape for its similarities to Scotland. While in actuality Grandfather Mountain is not very similar to the Scottish Highlands, traveling to the Blue Ridge Mountains and winding up the road to the top of Grandfather Mountain for the games created a physical setting that fostered a sense of

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<sup>16</sup> "They Plan Telephone Pole Toss!", *Raleigh News and Observer*, Aug. 5, 1956, WN-Festivals/Conventions/Public Entertainment-Grandfather Mountain (File 0408), North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library, Asheville, North Carolina. Frank McLynn, *Bonnie Prince Charlie* (London, UK: Pimlico, 2003), 135-136.

<sup>17</sup> MacDonald, *America's Braemar*, 67.

authenticity and Scottish heritage among participants and spectators, Scottish and non-Scottish alike.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to a geographical setting that symbolically approximated the Scottish Highlands, the contests held at the games also fostered a sense of Scottish authenticity. The caber toss, while not new to highland games in the United States, is an event that has become an icon of highland games. Part of the “heavy events” that also included shot put and hammer throw, the caber toss involves throwing a 16 to 18-foot-long tapered wooden pole weighing around 200 pounds. Though the contest’s exact origins are unclear, the caber toss supposedly dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the contest was first used as part of Scottish military event. Other stories, though, ascribe the caber toss contest to lumberjacks who would throw logs into a stream to float the logs downriver as part of the logging operations.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to iconic events like the caber toss, games planners added the sheaf toss in 1963. The contest requires competitors to throw a 14 to 25 pound “sheaf,” a bag stuffed with hay, twigs, or heather, over a bar. The contest functions like a high jump in track, in which the bar is raised each round and competitors must continue to toss the sheaf over the bar in order to advance. The sport developed in Scotland out of common farming practices. The GMHG were the first games in the United States to adopt the sport as a contest.<sup>20</sup>

Outside of the athletic contests, dancing and piping competitions also fostered a sense of Scottish authenticity. For instance, the 1958 games featured contests for the Highland

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 43. Drew A. Swanson, “Marketing a Mountain: Changing Views of Environment and Landscape on Grandfather Mountain, North Carolina”, *Appalachian Journal*, Vol 36, No 1 (Fall 2008/Winter 2009), 42. Arnow, “Gathering of the Clans on Grandfather Mountain,” 6.

<sup>19</sup> “Heavyweight Athletic Competition,” *Round Hill Highland Games*, accessed Jan 27 2016 via <<http://www.roundhill.org/heavysports.html>>. David Webster, *The World History of Highland Games* (Barcelona, Spain: Graficas 94, 2011), 25.

<sup>20</sup> “Old Chore Is New Sport,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 18, 1963, WN-Festivals/Conventions/Public Entertainment-Grandfather Mountain (File 0408), North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library, Asheville, North Carolina.

Fling, Sword Dance, Seann Triubbas, and the Scottish Lilt, all traditional Scottish dances. The Sword Dance, for example, is based on a particular moment in the Battle of Dunsinane in 1054, in which MacBeth's chieftan killed one of Malcolm Canmore's soldiers and danced around the dead body while he held his sword over his vanquished foe.<sup>21</sup> Piping bands were also common. In the inaugural 1956 games, the Washington Scottish Pipe Band directed by Pipe Major Gene Castleberry and several pipers from the Citadel's Pipe Band came to perform and compete against each other in a contest directed by Pipe Major Jack H. Smith from Winston-Salem, North Carolina who had performed a number of times at the State Fair in Raleigh, North Carolina. In addition to the pipers, the "Fighting Scots," a brass band from Laurinburg, North Carolina, also performed.<sup>22</sup>

Authenticity was important for attracting participants and spectators alike since the purpose of the games was to celebrate Scottish heritage, culture, and tradition. However, over time, the historical accuracy of the ceremonies and pageantry gave way to the perceived authenticity of such events. Planners tried to foster a sense of Scottishness, that is the sense of connection to Scottish heritage and tradition, even if doing so undermined the historical accuracy of the event. Several additions to the games in the 1980s illustrate the promotion of Scottishness over and against preservation of cultural authenticity.

In the 1980s, the GMHG introduced several new ceremonies. During opening night of the games, participants invoke the Spirit of the Clans in a torchlight ceremony. During the ceremony, which is loosely based on a tradition used to call Highland Scots to arms, representatives of each clan emerge out of four corners of the field holding torches and move towards each other until they form a blazing Saint Andrew's cross. As the four processions

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<sup>21</sup> Webster, *The World History of Highland Games*, 21.

<sup>22</sup> "They Plan Telephone Pole Toss!"

continue to move, each clan representative throws his torch into a blazing pit. The chaplain and president of the games both address the crowd, and pipers close the ceremonies. This ceremony, though meant to foster a sense of Scottish unity, is problematic for some Scots and onlookers, who see the blazing cross as reminiscent of a blazing cross of the Ku Klux Klan, which southern Scots played a role in forming. Another ceremony added in the 1980s, the Parade of Tartans, is a simpler event where men, young and old, march in a parade, each wearing their clan tartans. (In the present-day parades, women are allowed to march as well.)<sup>23</sup>

In the first years of the games, only men (more specifically, only Scottish men wearing kilts) were allowed to compete in the athletic competitions. Further, the most iconic athletic events in the games—tossing the caber, stone putting, tossing the sheaf, and hammer throwing—are all heavy weight events attached to military traditions (which would have been all male at the time of their founding) or male-dominated industries like logging. Although many games events around the country began to include separate divisions for women to compete in the heavy weight athletic events, the GMHG continued to allow only men to compete in heavy weight contests until 2015.<sup>24</sup> Until recently, women were also excluded from participating in the Parade of Tartans and the opening ceremony.<sup>25</sup>

The exclusion of women from the games hearkens back to historical highland games in Scotland. According to Celeste Ray, even though the participants' home lives were not necessarily male dominated, the heritage lore of the highland games constructed a male

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<sup>23</sup> Arnow, "Gathering of the Clans on Grandfather Mountain," 9. Duncan Sim, *American Scots*, 27, 56. For more on Scots and the founding of the Ku Klux Klan, see: Sim, *American Scots*, 27-28.

<sup>24</sup> This information was found comparing the 2014 and 2015 athletic contest results. 2014 does not include any category for women in the heavy weight competitions, while the 2015 results do. The contest results can be founded at <<http://www.gmhg.org/results2007.htm>>.

<sup>25</sup> Celeste Ray, "Bravehearts and Patriarchs: Masculinity on the Pedestal in Southern Scottish Heritage Celebration," *Transatlantic Scots*, Celeste Ray, ed. (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2005), 237.

environment during the actual event. In support of the male environment of the games, women tended to play “masculinity-validating roles,” such as running the clan tents and participating in dance competitions.<sup>26</sup> Such an environment, built on tradition and heritage lore, contributed to the perceived Scottishness of the GMHG. Masculinity in the GMHG is derived in part from southern culture. The founders and original participants in the games mainly came from the South and grew up in a culture that emphasized the respective roles of the southern gentlemen and southern lady.<sup>27</sup>

Masculinity and southern culture in the GMHG extends past the male-dominated events to also include a type of militarism in the games. As Ray argues, the memory of the Lost Cause in the American South has been compared to the Scottish defeat at Culloden, when Bonnie Prince Charlie was defeated in trying to win independence for Scotland from the British. The memories of both events hold that the South and Scotland respectively were well-functioning societies until they were defeated over their respective causes. However, Scots in both Scotland and the South became known for their later military services to their victors. The Scottish Highlanders often fought for the British instead of emigrating and many southern Scots fought on behalf of the United States during the Spanish-American War. The similarities in the military histories of the two groups play out in attendees at the games. Military professionals make up a large part of the Scottish heritage community in the South, and some wear tartans signifying their military branch rather than their Scottish clan.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to traditional southern gender stereotypes and militarism in the GMHG, the masculinity inherent in the games was also fed by the broader Cold War culture of the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Celeste Ray, “‘Thigibh!’ Means ‘Y’all Come!’: Renegotiating Regional Memories through Scottish Heritage Celebration, *Southern Heritage On Display: Public Ritual and Ethnic Diversity Within Southern Regionalism*, Celeste Ray, ed. (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2003), 269).

<sup>28</sup> Ray, “‘Thigibh!’ Means ‘Y’all Come!’”, 261-267.

1950s and 60s. In an age marked by anxiety regarding the Cold War and the possibilities of nuclear war, social critics announced a “crisis of masculinity” in the 1950s. Further, the imagery of the Cold War between hard and soft power created as one historian argues, a “dualistic imagery . . . that put a new premium on hard masculine toughness and rendered anything less than that soft, timid, feminine, and as such a real or potential threat to the security of the nation.”<sup>29</sup> The male-dominated GMHG, with its emphasis on strength in the heavy weight athletic contests and a general militarism in the overall aura of the event, meshed well with the wider cultural focus on masculinity in the 1950s and 60s.

Highland games events at Grandfather Mountain and around the world, regardless of their historical accuracy or authenticity, serve as a symbolic link between Scots dispersed around the globe. Lord MacDonald of the Isle of Skye, the guest of honor at the 1987 GMHG, expressed this sentiment saying:

In the uncertain world in which we live today, people might be forgiven for thinking that gatherings such as these are anachronistic in present day life. They might be forgiven for closely questioning the validity of perpetuating ancient traditions which under close analysis could be blamed to some extent for the disintegration of the Highland system that existed up to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century.

However, as we know, the converse is true, and as the years go by these traditions grow in meaning and stature, and become more important as a unifying link crossing all known geographical and man-made boundaries.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Kyle A. Courdileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), viii.

<sup>30</sup> John Parris, “Bagpipes sound Salute to Tartan: Highland Games Get Under Way,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 12, 1987, WN-Festivals/Conventions/Public Entertainment-Grandfather Mountain (File 0408), North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library, Asheville, North Carolina.

The expression of Scottishness, whether real Scottish culture or an invented expression of such, aided in the celebration and preservation of Scottish heritage and culture in the United States. The Scottishness of the GMHG undoubtedly contributed to the popularity of the games among Scots and also appealed to non-Scots curious about experiencing Scottish cultural traditions. The development of Scottishness in the GMHG over time has been part of the inspiration igniting the revival of highland games and other events celebrating Scottish culture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

### **Hugh Morton and the GMHG: Advertising a Mountain**

Since their inception, the games have been held on MacRae Meadow at Grandfather Mountain, which at the time of the event's founding was owned and operated by Hugh Morton, the son of Agnes MacRae Morton, for whom the meadow was named, and grandson of Hugh MacRae who originally bought Grandfather Mountain. Born in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1921, Hugh Morton was a civic promoter, photo-journalist, and entrepreneur. During World War II, Morton earned a Purple Heart and Bronze Star making newsreels for the United States Army in the Pacific theater. He was also chairman of the U.S.S. North Carolina Battleship Commission during their fund-raising drive to save the ship. In the mid 1940s, Morton inherited Grandfather Mountain from his grandfather, Hugh MacRae, and took over its full operation in 1951. Morton's grandfather had constructed a small road to the top of the mountain, and charged tourists fifty cents to drive up.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ben Steelman, "Morton lives up to his new book's title," *Wilmington Star*, Nov 27, 1988, Hugh Morton, Biographical Clipping Files with Index, North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library, Asheville, North Carolina. Don Bedwell, "The Mountain Man: A developer takes the high road, treading the fine line between promotion and preservation," *Business North Carolina* (March 1991), 39-40.



After inheriting the mountain, Morton decided to make Grandfather Mountain into a private, for-profit tourist attraction modelled after National Parks. In order to appeal to tourists, Morton widened and improved the quality of the road and increased the admission charge to ninety cents. In addition, Morton built a mile-high swinging bridge designed by Greensboro, North Carolina, architect Charles Hartman, Jr., that spanned between the two peaks of the mountain. The bridge, made entirely of steel, was built in Greensboro by the Truitt Steel Company, then hauled by truck up Grandfather Mountain for assembly. Because of inclement weather, the bridge took three weeks to assemble.<sup>32</sup> With these new and improved attractions, Morton used the mountain's natural beauty in his promotional materials, allowing the mountain to advertise itself. The road improvements and the promotional materials paid off. From 1946 to 1956, the number of tourists visiting the mountain each year jumped from 12,000 to 250,000 people.<sup>33</sup>

Morton's marketing strategy—letting the beauty of the mountain itself attract visitors—relied on his careful preservation of Grandfather Mountain. Starting in 1954, Morton fought the Park Service on a proposed route for the Blue Ridge Parkway that would run the parkway across Grandfather Mountain. Morton saw the parkway proposal as destroying the mountain's beauty (and thus ostensibly its appeal to tourists) and refused to yield to the Park Service until a compromised route was agreed upon in 1966. For the tourists, Morton provided a close-up look at the mountain's flora, fauna, and animal wildlife

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<sup>32</sup> Interview of Hugh Morton by William Friday, *UNC-TV on Public Broadcasting Station (PBS)*, video 26:47, aired Aug 2, 2002, accessed Feb 3 2016, via <<http://video.uncctv.org/video/2306104550/>>. "Mile High Swinging Bridge," *Grandfather Mountain*, accessed Feb 3 2016, via <<http://www.grandfather.com/information/mountain-escapes/mile-high-swinging-bridge/swinging-bridge-facts/>>. The current bridge was built in 1999, replacing all the existing parts except the original towers with pieces made of galvanized steel, the advantage of which is that the new materials do not have to be repainted.

<sup>33</sup> Don Bedwell, "The Mountain Man: A developer takes the high road, treading the fine line between promotion and preservation," *Business North Carolina* (March 1991), 39-40. Johnny Corey, "The Morton Magic," *The Charlotte Observer*, Sept 2 1956, Hugh Morton, Biographical Clipping Files with Index, North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library, Asheville, North Carolina.

by building a habitat area where animals were kept for tourists to see. He also provided signage around the park similar to that at national parks documenting the various wildlife and vegetation.<sup>34</sup>

In the same way that the mountain was advertised on the basis of its authenticity—its preservation of wildlife and vegetation—the early GMHG were also publicized for being an authentic Scottish event. Morton’s mother, who co-founded the games with Donald MacDonald, convinced Morton to handle the publicity for the games. Morton applied his already successful marketing strategy of focusing on preservation and authenticity to the games. After all, the stated purpose of the games was to foster interest in traditional and authentic Scottish culture.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, the GMHG fit into Morton’s larger advertising scheme for Grandfather Mountain. The games were one of several events that Morton hosted at Grandfather Mountain, and these events served to promote the mountain as a tourist attraction. Morton hosted “Singing on the Mountain,” a popular hymn-singing festival that attracted as many as 30,000 people by 1956, a hill climb for sports car enthusiasts, and a kite flying contest.<sup>36</sup> Although Morton donated the use of MacRae Meadow for the GMHG, he stood to gain from the games’ presence on the mountain. Just like “Singing on the Mountain,” the sports car race, and the kite flying contest all brought tourists to Grandfather Mountain, the GMHG also brought tourists to the mountain and made tourists aware that the mountain existed as a destination for future visits.

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<sup>34</sup> H. Leslie Furr, Wayne E. Williams, “Grandfather Mountain: An Outdoor Tourism Experiment,” *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance*, Vol 59, No 8 (Oct 1998), 45-46.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 46. Arnow, “Gathering of the Clans on Grandfather Mountain,” 6.

<sup>36</sup> Johnny Corey, “Promoter Helps Self, N.C.,” *Raleigh News and Observer* Aug 5, 1956, Hugh Morton, Biographical Clipping Files with Index, North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library, Asheville, North Carolina.

Although Morton worked for the benefit of the GMHG, his work also benefitted himself. As one journalist described, “True, Morton’s activities have been geared to help himself but in so doing he’s helped North Carolina a great deal. Take his Grandfather Mountain for instance.”<sup>37</sup> For example, the games’ planners were not shy about the games’ connection with the mountain. Morton, as head of publicity for the games, influenced the promotion of Grandfather Mountain in the games’ advertising and brochures. In the 1958 Grandfather Mountain Highland Games brochure, for example, the front cover welcomed tourists with the Gaelic phrase “Ciad Mile Failte,” or “100,000 Welcomes.” This greeting was followed in the inside cover with a full page advertisement for Grandfather Mountain topped by the phrase “Highlight of Your Visit.” The advertisement held that the mountain, rather than the games, was the highlight of the tourists’ trip.<sup>38</sup>

Although the GMHG advertised Grandfather Mountain as a tourist attraction, Grandfather Mountain’s growing popularity in the 1950s also contributed to the games’ success. After Morton renovated the road and built the mile-high swinging bridge in 1952, he conducted a whole range of advertising to promote Grandfather Mountain. As one journalist noted, Morton “focused attention to [Grandfather Mountain] by newspaper, magazine and radio advertising; spotted pretty bill-boards along tourist-traveled highways; shot a non-commercial, color movie of Grandfather area and made it available to schools and organizations through the University of North Carolina.”<sup>39</sup> Grandfather Mountain quickly grew into a popular tourist destination. The mountain’s easy accessibility from the highway and improved road to the top benefited the GMHG, which stood to gain from hosting the

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<sup>37</sup> “Promoter Helps Self, N.C.”

<sup>38</sup> “Souvenir Program,” *Grandfather Mountain Highland Games*, 1958, WN-Festivals/Conventions/Public Entertainment-Grandfather Mountain (File 0408), North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library, Asheville, North Carolina.

<sup>39</sup> “Promoter Helps Self, N.C.”

event on the mountain. In addition to the mountain's natural beauty that promoted a sense of Scottishness, connecting the games with an increasingly well-known tourist attraction provided an established venue for the event and helped the games' early advertising and publicity efforts. Newspaper articles talking about Grandfather Mountain or Morton often included information about events being hosted on the mountain, giving mention to the GMHG.<sup>40</sup>

While Grandfather Mountain helped the games, the games helped Grandfather Mountain, and Morton's connection to both was a strong common link. Although the GMHG only brought tourists to Grandfather Mountain once a year, the games served as an advertisement for Morton's growing tourist attraction on the mountain. By bringing tourists to the mountain, the GMHG gave attendees a first hand glimpse of Grandfather Mountain, possibly inciting some to return at other times during the year.

### **Visitors at the Games**

The games attracted visitors from across the United States and around the world. Three broad categories of visitors attended the games: celebrities, Scots, and non-Scots. The celebrities that came to the games were generally local North Carolina athletes, politicians, or other well-known people in the community. Further, the games attracted people from Scotland and Americans of Scottish heritage who came as spectators, performers, or competitors to enjoy the atmosphere, participate in the events, and get in touch with their Scottish roots. Finally, as the games increased in popularity and renown, the games also attracted many curious non-Scots interested in observing the games and Scottish culture.

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<sup>40</sup> "A New Season," *Statesville Record and Landmark*, May 2, 1959, 1. "Promoter Helps Self, N.C." "The Morton Magic." I have only listed three articles here as examples, though there are more supporting this point.

The participation of local celebrities in the games contributed positive publicity to the games. In 1957, for example, North Carolina Governor Luther Hodges was impressed by his visit to the games, telling reporters he expected “the gathering of the clans . . . to become another North Carolina ‘first’ as a tourist attraction.”<sup>41</sup> In 1958, Charlie “Choo Choo” Justice participated in the games. Justice, a running back for the University of North Carolina in the 1940s, was twice a runner-up for the Heisman Trophy and to many was a symbol of athleticism and good sportsmanship.<sup>42</sup> During the 1958 games, Justice served as the honorary chairman of athletics, working with Charlotte, North Carolina, track coach Ronald Patterson to run the track and field events. Floyd Simmons, a Charlotte native and University of North Carolina alumnus who competed in the Olympics decathlon and later became a Hollywood actor, competed in the 1958 games, fulfilling his dream of tossing the caber. Not only did he compete in the event, but he won with a toss of 38 feet 10 inches. The 1958 games also hosted United Nations President Sir Leslie Knox Munro as a speaker. Munro used his platform at the games to lay out a formula for the success of the United Nations and to advocate for a permanent international force and a permanent observer force to be maintained at the United Nations’ headquarters. In 1987, 1952 American Olympian Tommy Burleson ran the Olympic Torch through the games, where it stopped for a brief ceremony on its way to its final destination in Seoul, South Korea.<sup>43</sup> These early celebrities provided positive press and advertising for the games.

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<sup>41</sup> “Governor Sees New Attractions For Tourists,” *The Gastonia Gazette*, Aug 29, 1957, 10.

<sup>42</sup> “Charlie ‘Choo Choo’ Justice,” *The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*, website, accessed Feb 3 2016, via < <http://www.unc.edu/interactive-tour/charlie-choo-choo-justice/>>.

<sup>43</sup> “Justice, Simmons Set For Scot Games July 13,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 6 1958; “Formula is Cited for U.N. Success,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 14, 1958; John Parris, “Olympic Torch Arrives As Games End,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 13, 1987, WN-Festivals/Conventions/Public Entertainment-Grandfather Mountain (File 0408), North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library, Asheville, North Carolina.

The second category of visitors is the Scots. Many people from around the United States, Canada, and Scotland traveled to the games because of their Scottish heritage and their desire to participate in Scottish traditions and celebrations. Games planners also targeted people who *might* have Scottish ancestry. Planners wanted to draw people of possible Scottish ancestry to the games to help them discover their heritage and to participate in, or at least watch, the celebrations of Scottishness on Grandfather Mountain. Charles Gordon, a North Carolina businessman who served as Chairman, Chief Executive Officer, and Treasurer for the games and for many years was involved in the games planning, said his motivation was not, as one journalist paraphrased him, “to impress tourists,” but “to bring in people who might have Scottish background.” Indeed, the games were structured to pursue that goal. Each clan at the games had a clan tent at which visitors could see if their heritage traced back to a particular clan, and if so, could join their national clan society. However, different clans varied in the rigidity of their eligibility requirements, some requiring documentation proving one’s lineage in order to join.<sup>44</sup>

Although only Scots were allowed to compete in the games, many non-Scots still found the games a fascinating event at which to be a spectator. Journalists such as *Asheville Citizen-Times* writer John Parris, who wrote about the GMHG for many years, generally referred to the crowd of people at the games as the “Scots and non-Scots,” both differentiating between the two groups and acknowledging the substantial number of non-Scottish tourists who attended the games, even during the games’ early years.<sup>45</sup> By 1976, the

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<sup>44</sup> Arnow, “Gathering of the Clans on Grandfather Mountain,” 8.

<sup>45</sup> John Parris, “Highland Gathering was Bonny,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 12, 1965; “Let the Games Begin,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 14, 1985, WN-Festivals/Conventions/Public Entertainment-Grandfather Mountain (File 0408), North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library, Asheville, North Carolina.

games attracted enough attention by Scots and non-Scots alike that part of the games were aired on television channels around the United States.<sup>46</sup>

### **Legacy of the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games**

Evaluating the wider impact of the GMHG requires an approach from two angles: economic and cultural. The economic impact of the games is manifested in two ways. First, the games promoted Grandfather Mountain as a tourist attraction by making people who, in the 1950s, might not yet have been reached by Morton's advertising for the mountain, aware of the mountain and what attractions the mountain and surrounding region offered to tourists. However, the promotion of Grandfather Mountain by the games should not be overstated, since Grandfather Mountain's own advertising and popularity as an increasingly frequented tourist attraction promoted the games as well.

While publicity, which promotes tourism, is one way of examining economic impact, another is to look at tourist expenditures in the counties surrounding Grandfather Mountain during the period of time when the games were held each year. Such an analysis shows that expenditures by tourists—celebrity visitors, Scots, and non-Scots—during the games had a quantifiable economic impact in the wider community. Take the 1997 games as an example. Although the games were held in Avery County, the county did not have enough accommodations to host the large numbers of tourists at the games. In addition to Avery County, the ten surrounding counties hosted visitors, thus spreading the economic impact over ten counties, instead of just a few. Over the region, the total tourist expenditures during

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<sup>46</sup> 30,000 Gather For Highland Games," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 11, 1976, WN-Festivals/Conventions/Public Entertainment-Grandfather Mountain (File 0408), North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Public Library, Asheville, North Carolina.

the games were about \$2.4 million, or 0.01% of the total tourist expenditures in that region for the year. While this is a small percentage, it is a significant amount for a one weekend heritage tourism event. Further, 90% of the visitors had plans to return, and 50% were already repeat visitors. Thus, the revenue stream was not a one-off addition to the community, but rather was a revenue stream that promised continuity over time.<sup>47</sup>

While the GMHG has had a positive economic impact in the wider region around Grandfather Mountain, its strongest legacy is the promotion of Scottish heritage and culture and its role igniting a revival of highland games in the United States. The GMHG were followed by highland games in 1958 in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. During the 1960s, highland games appeared in Sacramento, California; Bellingham, Washington; Fair Hill, Maryland; Long Island, New York; Salado, Texas; and eight other cities. The list grew longer in the 1970s with an explosion of highland games events. Although some highland games events had begun in the early twentieth century following the 1880s decline in highland games, the GMHG sparked a revival unparalleled in the history of highland games in the United States. During the twenty-first century, the number of highland games or Scottish themed events held around the United States has risen to as many as 250 events in the American South alone, doubling the number of events held throughout the entire United States during the peak of the post-Civil War highland games expansion.<sup>48</sup>

The GMHG set the tone for the revival of highland games by introducing authentic events such as the sheaf toss that had not been used previously as an athletic contest in the United States. Further, the GMHG set the tone for inventing new cultural events and

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<sup>47</sup> Deepack Chhabra, Erin Sills, and Frederick W. Cabbage, "The Significance of Festivals to Rural Economies: Estimating the Economic Impacts of Scottish Highland Games in North Carolina," *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 41, May 2003, 424-426.

<sup>48</sup> Donaldson, *The Scottish Highland Games in America*, 47-48. Celeste Ray, "'Thigibh!' Means 'Y'all Come!'", 253.



traditions in order to foster a sense of Scottishness that drew celebrities, Scots, and non-Scots alike to participate in and watch the games. As such, the cultural impact of the GMHG far outweighs its economic impact on the region surrounding Grandfather Mountain, though both are noteworthy legacies of the event.

## **Conclusion**

Unlike the Cherokee Indian Fair and the Rhododendron Festival, the GMHG were not founded by a government organization. Rather, two individuals with a common passion dreamed of bringing highland games to North Carolina and brought that dream to fruition. Their family backgrounds, financial ability to travel to Scotland, and Hugh Morton's ownership of Grandfather Mountain all contributed to Donald MacDonald and Agnes MacRae Morton's ability to start the games. Nevertheless, because neither of the co-founders stood to make a profit from the GMHG, the planners had the freedom to focus on the cultural authenticity and cultural performance of the highland games. This focus promoted their interest in drawing people of Scottish heritage together to celebrate common ancestry and culture without the pressure of catering to tourists' interests.

While the promotion of Scottish culture was the primary motive of the GMHG, the games still had a positive economic impact on the surrounding region. As tourists came from around the United States, Canada, Scotland, and elsewhere to watch and participate in the games, Grandfather Mountain and the tourist attractions of the surrounding area received an extra measure of publicity and support. This further aided the development of the western North Carolina tourist industry in the second half of the twentieth century. Indeed, Scottish

culture sold tourists on the highland games, which in turn sold them on Grandfather Mountain and western North Carolina as tourist destinations for future visits.

## **Conclusion:**

### **Festival Tourism and the Building of a Tourist Industry in Western North Carolina**

Throughout the twentieth century, festivals in western North Carolina have functioned as advertisements for the region, promoting the broader tourist economy by attracting thousands of visitors each year to the festivals and showing off what attractions western North Carolina has to offer. Indeed, the Cherokee Indian Fair, the Rhododendron Festival, and the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games each helped tourist boosters draw people to western North Carolina and promote the tourist economies in Asheville, Cherokee, and Grandfather Mountain. Each represented a form of festival tourism.

This thesis has identified the ways that cultural performance in these three festivals appealed and catered to tourists and promoted each location as a viable tourist destination. Further, it has identified how the festivals influenced the course of particular turning points in the history each location. The Cherokee Indian Fair began during the decline of the logging boom, when BIA and Cherokee leaders placed a renewed emphasis on subsistence agriculture, but also attempted the development of a new tourist industry to bring in revenue. The Rhododendron Festival began at the end of Asheville's real estate boom and functioned not only as a form of escapism, but more importantly was used by Fred Weede and others as an advertisement for Asheville's tourist industry during the Great Depression. Finally, the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games began during Hugh Morton's early efforts to advertise and promote Grandfather Mountain as a tourist attraction. Indeed, the games both benefited from Morton's advertising and helped Morton advertise by drawing thousands of tourists to the mountain and letting the mountain's beauty advertise for itself. These junctures

between the festivals and the history of each festival's location provide clear examples of the festivals' functions as advertisements for the region and their role in developing a durable tourist economy in western North Carolina.

The tourist industry in western North Carolina in the early twentieth century was dominated by health resorts catering to wealthy elites and was relatively isolated in western North Carolina. Although roads and railroads made the region more accessible for tourists, it is not clear that a tourist economy could or would have emerged as a major form of industry in the region. As western North Carolina's tourist economy began to expand and diversify in the twentieth century, tourism boosters used festivals as mechanisms by which to diversify the tourist industry. By using festivals as a form of entertainment and a way to promote the region's other tourist attractions, these boosters highlighted, through festivals, what western North Carolina could offer to tourists. The legacy of the Cherokee Indian Fair, the Rhododendron Festival, and the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games is shown in both how the festivals manifest themselves presently and in the ways that the influence of each can still be seen on the tourist industry in the location of each festival.

Presently, the Cherokee Indian Fair is still being used as a tool to promote different initiatives on the reservation. Although Cherokees can still win monetary prizes for the best food and handicrafts, the focus of using the contests as a promotion of certain industries like handicrafts and subsistence agriculture is no longer a major aspect of the fair.<sup>1</sup> 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 continue his health

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<sup>1</sup> Tonya Carroll, "Cherokee Indian Fair," *The Digital Heritage Project*, Western Carolina University, 2009, accessed Mar 25, 2016, via <<http://digitalheritage.org/2010/08/cherokee-indian-fair/>>.

education programs by inaugurating a running event in the fair to bring attention to diabetes and the benefits of living an active lifestyle.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to promoting specific initiatives within the Cherokee nation, the fair continues to attract tourists each year. On one of the Cherokee Nation's 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."<sup>3</sup> The same fair attractions advertised to tourists in newspaper articles during the fair's first decades are similar to attractions advertised today. The performance of "authentic Cherokee culture" back then is, in effect, the same performance being offered now. The difference now is that, in addition to the fair, the Eastern Band of Cherokees has a host of other tourist attractions that have been built up to further diversify the tourist industry on the reservation. Visitors can go to 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 artisans as members.<sup>4</sup> These facets of the Cherokee tourist industry today, as has been shown in this thesis, descend from programs in the Cherokee Indian Fair that have now for a century influenced the tourist industry on the reservation.

In Asheville, the Rhododendron Festival no longer exists. However, the Royal Brigade of Guards, created in the 1930s to be a part of the pageantry of the festival, still holds a Rhododendron Ball that functions as a debutante ball, selecting a Queen and King

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<sup>2</sup> Maria Scandale, "The 99<sup>th</sup> Annual Cherokee Fair Comes to the Cherokee Indian Fairgrounds," *Indian Country Today*, accessed Mar 25, 2016, via <<http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2011/10/02/99th-annual-choerokee-fair-comes-choerokee-indian-fairgrounds-54434>>.

<sup>3</sup> "104<sup>th</sup> Annual Cherokee Indian Fair," *Cherokee North Carolina Website*, accessed Mar 25, 2016, via <<http://visitcherokeenc.com/events/detail/choerokee-indian-fair/>>.

<sup>4</sup> "Attractions," *Cherokee North Carolina Website*, accessed Mar 25, 2016, via <<http://visitcherokeenc.com/play/attractions/>>.

each year.<sup>5</sup> In 2015, for instance, the Rhododendron Ball honored twenty-two young women at a June event held, as some Rhododendron Festival events were in the 1920s and 30s, in the Grove Park Inn. The ball featured, as one journalist described, “an evening of pageantry including dinner, presentation ceremony and dancing.” Like the sponsors who represented southern states during the Rhododendron Festival in the 1920s and 30s, all the debutantes were white women currently enrolled at a college or university.<sup>6</sup> Though the culture surrounding Rhododendron Ball and the debutantes may have changed, that is, the women may not still be held as standards of Old South white womanhood, the image of the event remains similar to aspects of the Rhododendron Festival in the 1930s.

Though the Rhododendron Festival is only survived by the Rhododendron Ball and is no longer a major feature of Asheville culture, the tourism it promoted continues to thrive. Fred Weede’s use of the Rhododendron Festival to advertise Asheville and draw people to the city worked. The strategy is at least one factor that brought people to Asheville and made them aware of the city’s attractions, and the tourists have kept coming, even if for different reasons, over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. According to a report published by the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority and research group Tourism Economics, tourists in Asheville spent \$1.7 billion in 2014, and approximately 14.8% of all jobs in Buncombe County were tourism related.<sup>7</sup> Overall, 9.8 million visitors

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<sup>5</sup> “Asheville’s Rhododendron Ball honors 15 young women,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, June 11, 2014, accessed Mar 25, 2016, via <<http://www.citizen-times.com/story/life/2014/06/11/ashevilles-rhododendron-ball-honors-young-women/10325115/>>.

<sup>6</sup> “Asheville’s Rhododendron Brigade honors 22 young women,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, June 12, 2015, accessed Mar 25, 2016, via <<http://www.citizen-times.com/story/life/2015/06/12/ashevilles-rhododendron-brigade-honors-young-women/71121214/>>.

<sup>7</sup> Note that the \$1.7 billion tourist spending figure does not include business transactions necessary to support the tourist industry. For example, it does not include a restaurant buying food in a grocery store to then prepare and sell to tourists. A figure including direct and indirect impacts of the tourist industry and all business sales therein would be \$2.6 billion.

came to the country that year.<sup>8</sup> The size of Asheville's tourist economy now can in some measure be linked to popularity of the Rhododendron Festival in the 1930s.

In Linville, North Carolina, Grandfather Mountain is no longer a for-profit attraction, but is run by the non-profit organization The Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation. The foundation follows Hugh Morton's tradition of combining environmental preservation with tourism, but instead of gaining a profit, the foundation uses the all proceeds from sales in order to care for and preserve Grandfather Mountain for tourists.<sup>9</sup> The Grandfather Mountain Highland Games, celebrating its sixty-first year in 2016, is still held on MacRae Meadow at Grandfather Mountain. The games have continued on much the same as they did in the first two decades, although women are now allowed to compete in the heavy weight athletic contests and participate in the GMHG's ceremonies. Further, when writing about Hugh Morton or Grandfather Mountain, the GMHG still gets a mention from journalists. For instance, in a 2015 article on Hugh Morton, *Asheville-Citizen Times* journalist Dale Neal recounted the story of Morton's mother instructing him to allow the GMHG to be held for free each year on MacRae Meadow. Thus, even sixty years later, the GMHG is still considered part of Morton's legacy in western North Carolina.<sup>10</sup> The games were part of Grandfather Mountain's growth as a tourist destination, and the mutually beneficial relationship between the two has made both into popular attractions even six decades after their founding.

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<sup>8</sup> "The Economic Impact of Tourism in Buncombe County, North Carolina: 2014 Analysis," *Tourism Economics: An Oxford Economics Company and Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority*, June 2015, accessed Mar 25, 2016, via <[http://bctda.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Buncombe-Tourism-Impacts-2014\\_06232015.pdf](http://bctda.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Buncombe-Tourism-Impacts-2014_06232015.pdf)>.

<sup>9</sup> "About Grandfather Mountain," *Grandfather Mountain Website*, accessed Mar 25, 2016, via <<http://www.grandfather.com/about-grandfather-mountain/what-is-grandfather-mountain/>>.

<sup>10</sup> Dale Neal, "Morton made Grandfather Mountain into top attraction," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, June 2015, accessed Mar 25, 2016, via <<http://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/local/2015/07/03/morton-made-grandfather-mountain-top-attraction/29669369/>>.

The legacy of the Cherokee Indian Fair, the Rhododendron Festival, and the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games is the robust tourist economies on the Cherokee reservation and in Asheville and Linville. The growth of these areas has contributed to the development of tourism in western North Carolina more broadly. Festival tourism in the early to mid-twentieth century functioned as an advertisement for an entire region, the legacy of which continues to the present.



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