

2000

## The Dissemination of Rumor among the Cherokees and their Neighbors in the Eighteenth Century

Marion A. Cail

*College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd>



Part of the [Indigenous Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Cail, Marion A., "The Dissemination of Rumor among the Cherokees and their Neighbors in the Eighteenth Century" (2000). *Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects*. Paper 1539626270.

<https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-3cpd-yq10>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@wm.edu](mailto:scholarworks@wm.edu).

**THE DISSEMINATION OF RUMOR AMONG THE  
CHEROKEES AND THEIR NEIGHBORS IN THE  
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

By

Marion A. Cail

2000

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Maurice A. O'Neil  
Author

Approved, August 2000

James Axtell  
James Axtell

Dale Hoak  
Dale Hoak

James Whittenburg  
James Whittenburg

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iv
Abstract	v
Introduction	2
Chapter I: The Agents of Rumor	8
Chapter II: The Resolutions of Rumor	32
Conclusion	59
Bibliography	63

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Axtell, my thesis supervisor, for his support and inspiration during this research project. I am very grateful to Professor Hoak and Professor Whittenburg for their careful reading of the manuscript and for their helpful suggestions. My friends both here and in England have given me endless encouragement and patiently listened to my ideas as they developed through the course of this work. I am also very grateful to the benefactors of the St Andrews' Scholarship fund who have, along with the generous support of my parents, financed this year. Finally, my greatest debt of gratitude is to my parents, I dedicate this work to them, because through sunshine and rain they have kept me buoyant; without their untold love and support, none of this would have been possible.

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to redress a major aspect that has been overlooked in studies made of Early America: the significance that Rumor played in the everyday lives of Indians. Rumor, which has been defined throughout this thesis as current unsubstantiated information, played a fundamental role in Cherokee communities. Essentially rumor gets right to the heart of Indian culture. In exploring how Indians viewed rumor, historians gain insight into how Indians perceived themselves and those around them. One of the challenges of this thesis has been to move beyond the literate universe and instead imagine what it was like living in a community where enunciated words were the primary means of communication. The study of rumor reveals the importance of memory and goes some way to explain why the elderly were revered.

One of the major problems that have been tackled within the following chapters is how to trace rumor and to distinguish fact from fiction. Indians managed to sift through rumors, deciphering between those that held some element of truth and others that were purely gossip-driven. Establishing the truth could be a time-consuming process, particularly in the event of uneven terrain and dense woodlands. Rumors ran rife during times of uncertainty and even amongst groups who had established trust. It is clear that the forces driving rumors were often as diverse as the rumors themselves. Often rumor sped through the settlements, whipping up anxiety and uneasiness as it hurtled past.

**THE DISSEMINATION OF RUMOR AMONG THE CHEROKEES AND  
THEIR NEIGHBORS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

## Introduction

“My tongue is my pen and my mouth my paper.”<sup>1</sup>

Although rumor is a fascinating area of study for historians of early America, it is one that has been largely overlooked. One of the aims of this thesis to redress this neglect by analyzing the responses of Cherokee communities to unsubstantiated news, which they received on a frequent basis. Perhaps part of the reason that rumor has not been the stuff of history books is because historians are wary of using general talk or hearsay in their analysis of the past. But all evidence is slippery to a degree and rumor, which relies upon indirect testimony, is no different in this respect.

Rumor has been defined throughout this thesis as general talk or hearsay of doubtful accuracy. The study of rumor is central to our understanding of early America and thus is pertinent to study for a number of reasons. In the first instance the information that is transmitted through rumors touches the core of the human experience. The stuff of rumor indicates the types of underlying issues, which were

---

<sup>1</sup>Skiagunsta, an elderly tribal chief, uttered these words. Talk of the Cherokee Indians to Governor Glen, 15 November 1751, in William L. McDowell, Jr., ed., *Colonial Records of South Carolina: Documents Relating to Indian Affairs, May 21 1750 - August 7 1754*, 2 vols. (Columbia, S.C., 1958), 1:80, 164, 453. (hereafter *DRIA*)



pertinent to Indians and their British counterparts. The number of rumors and the speed with which they traveled through Cherokee communities suggests that unsubstantiated information was often convincing and thus picked up by individuals and spread by them over communication networks. It will become clear throughout this thesis that one of the main characteristics of persistent rumors were those that gripped individuals and threatened their security and well-being. British threats of the suspension of trade or the fear of impending war from hostile tribes often provoked anxiety and alarm. By carefully tracing a rumor from its origin, one can see the social repercussions that were sparked by the transmission of scurrilous information.

One of the most challenging and fascinating aspects in the analysis of rumor has been attempting to span the gaping divide that exists between literacy and orality. Although Indians were well aware of the literate world in which the white man corresponded, the Cherokee world was one that relied upon orality as its primary means of communication. The analysis of rumors circulating in borderland communities requires a leap of imagination for historians who are preconditioned by a literate world. If one is to successfully gain a deep understanding of Cherokee communities, it is essential to leave all that is familiar and step onto unknown territory. It is only by casting off our literacy that we can successfully enter the mind of the Cherokee Indian and see what he saw and attempt to understand how he perceived his changing world.

The work of anthropologists, psychologists and sociologists has proved very beneficial in this respect. Gordon Allport and Leo Postman set up a framework

around which they developed theories concerning the psychology of rumor. They emphasized the purposive nature of rumor and how rumors served specific emotional ends. Their research indicates that in times of crisis false reports grew virulent.<sup>2</sup> Ralph Rosnow and Gary Fine further developed these ideas in their work and also focused upon gossip as a medium of social interaction.<sup>3</sup> The stuff of rumor tends to concern groups of people rather than individuals or social incidents, which is the substance of gossip. Although rumor and gossip share the quality of being unconfirmed, gossip tends to have more malicious effects on specific individuals than rumor, which is more neutral in substance. An unspecified number of individuals tend to spread rumors, whereas the unconstrained chatter of a select few usually leads to the promulgation of gossip.<sup>4</sup> Raymond Firth, in his anthropological case study of the Polynesian island of Tikopia in the Western Pacific, studied the effects of rumor in a primitive society. His analysis of this community indicated ways in which to study the formation, incidence and social repercussions of rumor.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Walter Ong in his studies on 'primary oral cultures' crucially pinpointed the need to move beyond the notion that orality is a deficient variant of a literate world.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to consulting a number of the theoretical studies that have been carried out on rumor, it is important to understand the dynamics of Cherokee society and therefore a number of historical works concerning the Cherokee Indians were closely studied. David Cockran, in his meticulous research, has illustrated the

---

<sup>2</sup>Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman, *The Psychology of Rumor* (New York, 1947).

<sup>3</sup>Ralph L. Rosnow and Gary A. Fine, *Rumor and Gossip: The Social Psychology of Hearsay* (New York, 1976).

<sup>4</sup>Patricia M. Spacks, *Gossip* (New York, 1985), 3.

<sup>5</sup>Raymond Firth, "Rumor in a Primitive Society," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 53 (1956), 122-32.

<sup>6</sup>Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York, 1982).

importance of community life on the Cherokee-Carolina frontier and has greatly benefited one's understanding of the complexities of these diverse cultures.<sup>7</sup> Thomas Hatley, for his part, has charted the demise in the relationship between the Cherokees and their European neighbors using the metaphor of "dividing paths."<sup>8</sup> James Merrell's work on the role of interpreters as cultural brokers has also proven to be enlightening. His evidence suggests that interpreters held a dominant position in frontier life; they were embraced and also spurned by the communities in which they operated.<sup>9</sup>

One of the most detailed primary sources that remain of the Cherokee Indians are what have come to be known as the "Indian Books."<sup>10</sup> Before 1756 all matters relating to Indian affairs were referred to South Carolina's Executive Council. The current affairs of the kingdom were reported to the governor of the colony in the form of letters and affidavits taken by a select group of British officers who were responsible for collecting intelligence. These books are peppered throughout with references to rumor. The historian Gregory Evans Dowd was the first to seriously consider rumor as a legitimate and valuable line of enquiry and used the Indian Books as his focus of analysis.<sup>11</sup> His work, which concentrates on the panic of 1751, illustrates that rumors were the catalyst for the panic, which ensued between the Cherokees and South Carolinians. In studying the relationship between the

---

<sup>7</sup>David H. Corkran, *The Carolina Indian Frontier* (Columbia, 1970), *The Cherokee Frontier: Conflict and Survival 1740-1762* (Norman, 1962).

<sup>8</sup>M. Thomas Hatley, *The Dividing Paths: Cherokees and South Carolinians Through the Era of the Revolution* (New York, 1993).

<sup>9</sup>James H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York, 1999).

<sup>10</sup>These have been collected and published in *DRIA*.

<sup>11</sup>Gregory Evans Dowd, "The Panic of 1751: The Significance of Rumors on the South Carolina-Cherokee Frontier," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser. 53:3 (July 1996), 527-560.

Cherokees and South Carolinians, Dowd suggests that each side used rumor to further their own needs. The second part of my thesis, which focuses upon this panic complements Dowd's work but goes one stage further. I have taken a number of rumors, which gained momentum in the early 1750s and traced them from their origins to their demise. I have been particularly keen, unlike Dowd, to analyze the motivations behind those who were responsible for the birth and promulgation of rumors and how these rumors mutated as they spread through the settlements. I found Theda Perdue's work on Cherokee women to be particularly enlightening as she proved, and my own thesis further illustrates, that women did play an important part in Cherokee society.<sup>12</sup> Whilst they remain anonymous in the sources, nonetheless they were responsible for warning British traders of impending dangers which they had got wind of. This thesis indicates that rumor did not always polarize both sides, in the case of the Carolinians and Cherokees, there were, as the examples of women illustrate, times when both sides directly interacted with one another, even though it appeared dangerous to help those who were considered the common enemy.

Communication was clearly the key to establishing good diplomatic relations between the British and their Indian neighbors. The first half of my thesis indicates that interpreters held a distinguished place in the Indian-English worlds they inhabited. Essentially they were cultural brokers who not only interpreted and translated talks between each side but also straddled the immense cultural divide that existed. They ensured for instance that English officials understood and adhered to Indian customs and ceremonies. Officials of the British crown had been used to

---

<sup>12</sup>Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Cultural Change, 1700-1835* (Lincoln, 1998).

carrying out business transactions swiftly, but the Cherokee insisted on deeply pondering on what had been said to them. Often talks would be discussed with tribesmen and repeated time and again before any agreement was reached. Officials found themselves waiting for days to settle misunderstandings that on occasion were the result of scurrilous rumors.

Interpreters were able, unlike their Indian countrymen, to engage in the literate world of the English officials with whom they came in contact. The Indians relied upon interpreters realizing that they were at a distinct disadvantage, how could they be sure that what the settlers enunciated was also the same as what they wrote on parchment? Skiagunsta, an elderly head warrior noted, “my tongue is my pen and my mouth my paper...I cannot write as you and your beloved men do. When I look upon writing I am as if I were blind and in the dark...We have but one path to the English and that is straight and clear, but on[e] each side it is darkness.”<sup>13</sup>

The transition and various guises of rumor are worthy of analysis because they are an indication of the uncertainties that wracked frontier life. As it will become clear, the types of rumors that were most prevalent among the Cherokee community in the 1720s and 1750s were those that directly threatened the safety and stability of tribal life. The substance of scurrilous rumors reflected underlying anxieties and fears in community life.

---

<sup>13</sup>Talk of the Cherokee Indians to Governor Glen, in *DRIA*, 1:80, 164, 453.

## Chapter I: The Agents of Rumor

“Rumor! What evil can surpass her speed?  
In movement she grows mighty, and achieves  
Strength and dominion as she swifter flies.  
Small at first, because afraid, she soon exalts  
Her stature skyward, stalking through the lands  
And mantling in the clouds, her baleful brow...  
Feet swift to run and pinions like the wind  
The dreadful monster wears; her carcass huge  
Is feathered, and at the root of every plume  
A peering eye abides; and, strange to tell,  
An equal number of vociferous tongues,  
Foul, whispering lips, and ears, that catch at all...  
...She can cling  
To vile invention and malignant wrong,  
Or mingle with her word some tidings true.”<sup>1</sup>

The vivid personification that Virgil creates of Rumor, a female bird-like monster, clearly reveals how insignificant tidbits of gossip, discussed by a few select individuals, have the potential to gather speed and importance as they are transmitted, by word of mouth, from one person to groups of people. Undoubtedly, the successful transmission of unsubstantiated information depended largely upon the atmosphere in which the seeds of rumor were planted. In portraying Rumor as female, Virgil succumbed to the idea that women have a greater tendency to gossip than do their

---

<sup>1</sup>Virgil, *Aeneid Book IV*, as cited in Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman, *The Psychology of Rumor* (New York, 1947), ii.

male counterparts. Perhaps this supposition was based upon the belief that women spent a greater part of the day interacting with one another due to the nature of their work. However, unsubstantiated information was spread by and among men as well as women, white traders and slaves as well as Indian tribal allies and enemies. In fact, it appears from the surviving records that men more frequently and often unwittingly spread rumor, although it is significant that all of the evidence is recorded from a male perspective and therefore may be biased. Indian communities attached a great deal of importance to rumor, thereby elevating it to lofty heights, and, like Virgil, attributed lifelike qualities to what could at best be imagined rather than observed. In some native groups, rumors were referred to as “bad birds” of ill omen.<sup>2</sup>

Rumor was pivotal in Indian societies because they were “primary oral cultures.”<sup>3</sup> The majority of Indian tribes were not in *any* sense literate, even though by the eighteenth century, tribal chiefs were well aware of the white man’s writing habits. The historian’s formidable task is to imagine what it would have been like living within a frontier community that functioned primarily by oral communication, and that survived successfully in the decades before the advent of letters and other forms of literary communication. This requires a leap of imagination because humankind in the twenty-first century is preconditioned by literacy, albeit augmented by a new type of “secondary orality” sustained by the telephone, radio and television.<sup>4</sup> It is far easier to regard oral cultures as variants of a deficient literate

---

<sup>2</sup>For instance Pontiac, an Ottawa chief, traveled to Illinois in the late 1760s and was confronted by ‘bad birds’ flying among a band of Potawatomes. Howard H. Peckham, *Pontiac and the Indian Uprising* (Princeton, 1947), 306-7.

<sup>3</sup>Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York, 1982), 1.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 11.

universe rather than in their own right. Nonetheless, by freeing ourselves from our inherently literate culture and focusing upon orality, one will get closer to the Indian mentality and simultaneously gain a deeper understanding of a culture that was distinctly at odds with that of Europe's colonizers.

To understand how rumor was transmitted and interpreted, it is important to understand how Indians were educated. The education of Indians was poles apart from the methods used in the Western world; native children did not 'study' in the strict sense of the word, since there were no books or texts to read. Instead, education, like so much else in Indian society, was conducted by means of informal apprenticeship. Parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents, played a central role in a child's life, teaching them by example. Children learnt from a young age the importance of the five senses. They were taught to be observant by interpreting gestures made by those around them, to listen, and to carefully repeat what was being uttered, since language was their only form of communication and memory their primary mode of information storage.

Sustaining thought in an oral culture is clearly tied to communication. Indian leaders realized the difficulty of retelling a story in exactly the same manner because verbal sounds vanished as soon as they were enunciated. Thus, there was no way of capturing them and distilling information as chirographic cultures did, passing down in written form to posterity important information relating to laws and moral codes. However, the Indians overcame this problem in part by thinking in heavily fixed formulaic patterns, by using rhythms and repetition along with other rhetorical devices such as alliteration or assonance. Indian communities continually listened to



proverbs and legends and this was one method employed to ensure that important stories were passed from one generation to the next. The process of learning often occurred by participation in the community rather than by solitary study. Without writing techniques, Indian communities did not have the same means to record and analyze their thoughts. The words that were enunciated could not be traced back to their original sources because of the evanescence of sound. Without a written record, speeches were events or occurrences, they could never be repeated in precisely the original manner in which they had been enunciated.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, their methods of recalling information worked quite effectively. Tribespeople also placed great emphasis upon respect for their elders, believing that old age was synonymous with wisdom. Since knowledge was precious and simultaneously hard to retain, elders were the walking encyclopedias of the tribe.<sup>6</sup>

Because of these oral traditions, historians of native America are forced to work on a daily basis with indirect testimony and hearsay. Many of the surviving documents that historians refer to in order to glean an understanding of colonial society were written by Europeans. Even the surviving minutes of treaty councils, which are considered to be some of the best records of Indians, were recorded from a European perspective. Thus there is danger that either the Indian voice is submerged, inaccurately transcribed by interpreters, or perhaps lost altogether.<sup>7</sup> The historian's task is made all the more difficult by the uncertainty that the evidence available may

---

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 31-32.

<sup>6</sup>James H. Merrell, *The Indian's New World: Catawbas and their Neighbors from European Contact Through the Era of Removal* (Chapel Hill, 1989), 262-66; James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Context of Culture in Colonial North America* (New York, 1985), 14-15.

<sup>7</sup>Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization* (Chapel Hill, 1992), 5-6.

be plagued with bias or deliberately distorted to further colonizers' ambitions.<sup>8</sup> Many of the practices and rituals that Indians engaged in were inconceivable to the European mind, and therefore those sources that do remain need to be particularly well scrutinized for cultural bias.

If historians of the colonial period readily admit the limited nature of their evidence and their reliance on hearsay, why is it that rumor has been largely overlooked in studies of early America? Part of the answer lies in the way in which historians approach their craft. Rather than seeking to strip "away the fictive elements of our documents so we can get to the facts," as Natalie Zemon Davis suggests, colonial historians should "let the 'fictional' aspects...be the center of analysis."<sup>9</sup> Those who are reluctant to alter their approach only need note the success of Davis's work on sixteenth century France. By placing rumor at the center of analysis, historians are truly engaging the world of the trader and the Indian and are simultaneously illustrating, as Marc Bloch suggested over half a century ago, that rumor can provide both a window and a mirror into a group's "collective consciousness."<sup>10</sup> Essentially, the historian and Indian share the same problem, the only difference being that the Indians faced it with far greater urgency, which was on occasion life threatening.

The success of a rumor, whether it spread and was believed by only a few tribespeople --a few were all that were needed to cause disruption--depended on a

---

<sup>8</sup>James Axtell, "Ethnohistory: An Historian's Viewpoint," in Axtell, *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York, 1981), 8; "Through Another Glass Darkly: Early Indian Views of Europeans," in Axtell, *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York, 1988), 28.

<sup>9</sup>Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford, 1987), 3.

<sup>10</sup>Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam (New York, 1953), 106-107.

number of factors. Social tension or the threat of war between tribes was often a breeding ground for rumor. Colonel George Chicken's journal of his travels amongst the Cherokee nation in 1725, along with Captain Fitch's journal among the Creeks a year later, clearly illustrate the problems these communities faced; an off-the-cuff comment that began as insignificant could suddenly mutate into a rumor and grow to huge proportions, motivating individuals to react in diverse ways.<sup>11</sup> There was no foolproof way of verifying oral "Accots" except by direct confrontation with the enemy or news gathered from trusted allies, and even then allies could within a short space of time become enemies.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, Chicken relied upon several sources for reliable information: the correspondence of Arthur Middleton, president of the Trade Council, documents that intermittently arrived from England, and interpreters for verification or dismissal of local rumor. Yet even reliable local news was often slow in coming due to the locations of Indian settlements. Chicken was frequently forced to think on his feet and to employ common sense when it came to accepting or dismissing rumors.

For instance, whilst he was visiting Keowee, two Chickasaws arrived from the town of Savannah with the news that a band of Cowetas had set out against the Yamasees and that the Upper Creeks intended to rise up against the peoples of the Upper Settlement.<sup>13</sup> After establishing that this rumor had come from a Creek,

---

<sup>11</sup>Allport and Postman, *Psychology of Rumor*, 1-33.

<sup>12</sup>Colonel Chicken makes references to 'Accots' (accounts) throughout his journal. "Journal of Colonel George Chicken's Mission from Charleston, South Carolina to the Cherokees, 1726," in Newton D. Mereness ed., *Travels in the American Colonies* (New York, 1916) (Hereafter cited as "Chicken's Journal.")

<sup>13</sup>Keowee was the principal town of the Lower Cherokees, situated on the Keowee River in what is present-day Oconee County, South Carolina. The Chickasaws maintained friendly relations with the

Chicken dismissed it because, as he told the Chickasaws, “if it had been true I should have heard of it before now from the commander of the Savannah garrison or some of our white men.”<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear from a letter sent to Middleton that Chicken was still uncertain about the authenticity of the rumor even after dismissing it.<sup>15</sup> He was in a difficult position because he had to make decisions without sending runners out to ascertain the true situation.

The Cherokees were distributed over three areas: the Lower Settlement, in what is now western South Carolina and northeastern Georgia; the Middle Settlement, in western North Carolina and northern Georgia; and the Upper Settlement, in western Tennessee and northern Alabama. The Upper Creeks lived in the region surrounded by the Coosa and Tallapoosa Rivers whilst the Lower Creeks lived by the Chattahoochee River.<sup>16</sup> The long distances that had to be traveled to reach each settlement made Chicken’s expeditions more difficult. Early in his journal he noted several occasions when he was forced to leave the trail to retrieve a lost horse and or to wait out bad weather.<sup>17</sup> These unavoidable delays could cause anxiety for those tribes who had heard of his presence in their territories. Had he been attacked, did he turn back, or was his expected arrival a mere rumor? On one occasion Chicken, who was surprised that his arrival had been expected, questioned the headmen of the towns surrounding Tugaloo, asking them where they had heard this information because he

---

English but were habitually at war with some of their neighboring tribes. The Cowetas were Lower Creeks who resided in what is now Russell County, Alabama.

<sup>14</sup>“Chicken’s Journal,” 133, 26 August 1725.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 137, 30 August 1725.

<sup>16</sup>David Corkran, *The Carolina Indian Frontier* (Columbia, 1970), 13.

<sup>17</sup>“Chicken’s Journal,” 99, 26 June 1725.

had not sent runners ahead to prepare them.<sup>18</sup> The Indians replied that although white men had not passed on the news, the arrival of a government official was expected because their king had been sent a commission suggesting that the English might lend assistance against Cherokee enemies.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the Creeks had been expecting the arrival of an Englishman for some time, as Captain Fitch found out on meeting sixty headmen at the town of Okchayi.<sup>20</sup> One of the headmen informed Fitch, “we have bin a long time ‘threatened’ with a talk to be sent among us but its not coming after so many promises we had now given over expecting any, but we are heartily glad to see you on our land.”<sup>21</sup> Such expectations may have unsettled the English officials who had hopes of quietly observing the Indians’ latest trading activities. At any rate, they did not want the Indians to feel threatened by their presence.

The primary purpose of Colonel Chicken’s year-long expedition among the Cherokees and Captain Fitch’s among the Creeks was to assess which branches of each tribe were true friends of the English and which were feigning friendship and intriguing with the French and Spanish. By 1725, the English had developed good trading relations with the Cherokees and to a lesser degree with the Creeks. However, these relations were threatened by rumors of warfare, by avaricious traders who cheated and thereby agitated the Indians, and by French emissaries from Louisiana who attempted to disrupt British trade by inciting the Cherokees to war

---

<sup>18</sup>Tugaloo was a Cherokee town situated at the confluence of the Tugaloo River and Toccoa Creek in Habersham County, Georgia.

<sup>19</sup>“Chicken’s Journal,” 105, 16 July 1725.

<sup>20</sup>Okchayi was an upper Creek town on Oktchayi (now Kialaga) Creek, in the southeastern part of the Coosa County, Alabama.

<sup>21</sup>“Journal of Captain Tobias Fitch’s Mission from Charleston to the Creeks, 1726,” in Newton D. Mereness ed., *Travels in the American Colonies* (New York, 1916), 178, 20 July 1726. (Hereafter “Fitch’s Journal.”)

against the Creeks. Chicken and Fitch were also sent among the Indians to convince them of English friendship, to assure them that the 'Talks' they carried from the king of England were truthful and that any local news they relayed to them was accurate. Chicken's account of his presence on Indian soil appears to have impressed many of the tribal headmen, who "had long expected a beloved man of the English among them and that now they had sent me and they were as glad to see me as if I had come from above."<sup>22</sup> The Creeks welcomed Fitch, declaring that he was the first white man they had seen since peace with the Cherokees was announced. However, unlike their newfound allies, they did not hold elaborate ceremonies to receive him or lavish gifts upon him.

Fitch was satisfied with the reception he received at the hands of the Creeks; he was not interested in giving or receiving gifts because he did not believe that gifts were necessarily a sign of true friendship. Fitch's opinion regarding gift-giving was further enunciated by the king of the Okchayi, who suggested that although he did not have the wherewithal to bestow bountiful gifts like those he had seen his people return with after visiting the English king, he was nonetheless as "straight hearted as the best of them that has been down."<sup>23</sup> Fitch's response indicates that the English had found that gift-giving was not in the long term a successful way of securing friendship or wiping out rumors: "As you say your people mind my king's talk no longer than the presents last, for when your people are with my king, they tell him

---

<sup>22</sup>"Chicken's Journal," 101, 5 July 1725.

<sup>23</sup>"Fitch's Journal," 177, 16 July 1726.

that they are his good friends; but when they come here they never mind what they promise to my king.”<sup>24</sup>

Both Chicken and Fitch were representatives of a country that had attempted through gift-giving to control, amongst other things, how news was passed between and among tribes. It was apparent by 1725 that gift-giving was an expensive and ineffective method of obtaining long-term friendship with the Indians. Chicken and Fitch looked for other ways to influence Indian culture and to obtain trust and assurances from them. They were quick to remind Indian tribesmen, by sharp rebukes, how good the English had been to them, furnishing them with weapons and ammunition. Fitch chided the people of Okchayi upon realizing that their young people digested and reacted to rumors more hastily than the older members of the tribe:

“I must tell your young men that if it had not been for us, you would not know how to war, nor yet have anything to war with. You have had nothing but bows and arrow’s to kill deer...now you have learnt the use of firearms as well to kill deer and other provisions as to war against your enemies. Yet you set no greater value on us who have been such good friends unto you, then on your greatest enemies, this all you that are old men knows to be true. And I would have you make your young men sensible of it.”<sup>25</sup>

There was constant tension between the young warriors and council elders of the eastern tribes of North America. Waging war and maintaining peace were possibly the most important activities in the lives of Indian men and women. War created chaos and ripped kinship relationships apart, often shattering the inner sanctum of family life irrevocably. Women were particularly vulnerable because of the relatively isolated tasks they performed, which included fetching water, gathering

---

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 178.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 181, 20 July 1726.

nuts, and firewood.<sup>26</sup> On one of many instances, a Cherokee woman set out with a male protector to gather some wild herbs to make salt. In the short time that her protector left her side to kill a turkey, he returned and to his dismay “espied some enemies who he found had taken away the woman he left behind him.”<sup>27</sup> The Cherokees were unsuccessful in their efforts to recover the woman. They informed Chicken of their intentions to make peace with tribes to the south of them (Creeks), so that they could venture out to hunt and confidently “leave their women and children at home.”<sup>28</sup>

The waging of war was not taken lightly; insecurity and humiliation were considerably less appealing than peace and prosperity. Nonetheless, young Indian men were eager to prove their worth by brave feats in war. This is not surprising given the rituals and strenuous tests of endurance that they had encountered during the rite of passage from childhood to manhood.<sup>29</sup> It is little wonder, then, that young men were more susceptible to rumor. King Brim commented to Fitch with reference to the young men of the Lower Towns:

“There are a great many stories that come into this nation but from whence they come I cannot tell. Sometimes I hear your king is joined the [Te?] and coming to cut us off. We that are head men give no credit to these stories but the young men may believe them for what I know and likewise add to them.”<sup>30</sup>

In their desire to reach the lofty status of ‘hero’ within their communities, the young men of the Tallapoops and Abecas attacked and seriously injured an English

---

<sup>26</sup>Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Cultural Change, 1700-1835* (Lincoln, 1988), 87.

<sup>27</sup>“Chicken’s Journal,” 113, 28 July 1725.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>29</sup>James Axtell ed., *The Indian Peoples of Eastern America: A Documentary History of The Sexes* (New York, 1981), 141-70.

<sup>30</sup>“Fitch’s Journal,” 182, 20 July 1726.



trader named Sharp, stealing his hides while he was with the Cherokees.<sup>31</sup> This action infuriated Fitch because it further delayed a peace treaty that the Creeks were supposedly making with the Cherokees. Hobyhawchey, who was responsible for bringing news of the peace to the English, said, “The news came in of what was done to the white man at the Cherokees. I then thought [it] needless to send down to your king for I expected nothing less than a war.”<sup>32</sup> Fitch admonished Gogell Ey, a mature man of years, saying, “You ought to have known better and since you were the head of those people you should have prevented their roguish proceedings.”<sup>33</sup> Moreover, in the event of Sharp’s death, “I do assure you that my king would require no less satisfaction than your life and the lives of all the head men that were with you; and if your people should have denied to deliver you up then my king would have taken satisfaction with the muzzles of their guns.”<sup>34</sup>

Whilst Fitch did not lay the blame entirely on the younger tribesmen, he wanted to know what actions the elders of the tribes involved intended to take. The reply he received to his questions was encouraging: “We believe that our young people have and will suffer so severely for this that they will take care how they bring themselves and friends into trouble again.”<sup>35</sup> Whilst these words were reassuring, how could Fitch rely on the Indians to subjugate their young inhabitants? One of the headmen went on, “if any of our young men will be so head strong as not to follow orders and will commit any hostilities on your people at the Cherokees or else where,

---

<sup>31</sup>The Tallapoops were Creeks who inhabited the region of the Upper Tallapoosa River. The Abecas were Upper Creeks who inhabited a town on or near to the Upper Coosa River.

<sup>32</sup>“Fitch’s Journal,” 180-1, 16 July 1726.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 178, 20 July 1726.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 179.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 191; 14 September 1726.

we will then deliver the offenders to your king and he may do with them as he thinks fit.”<sup>36</sup> In addition to this, the tribal leaders agreed that they would not permit any of their people to go to war without sending leading men with them, since they were the only ones who could be trusted.<sup>37</sup>

Rumors gathered strength in the absence of trust. How could these British men have confidence in what the Indian tribal leaders said, especially when they had let them down in the past? Perhaps it was the tone of their words or the gestures they used in enunciating these messages of reliance and friendship that convinced Chicken and Fitch of their true intentions. But, then as now, actions spoke louder than words. King Brim, an elder, readily admitted that he had not obeyed British orders in the past. Nonetheless, he desired to prove that he was serious about his task of warring with the Yamasees and offered the services of his son Sepey Coffee to lead his tribe because he was too old. Still, could Sepey Coffee be relied upon? After all, he was young and had recently been allied to the French and Spanish. Brim confirmed his son’s speech which declared his allegiance to the English and persuaded Fitch that “he has had so much said to him that he will now prove as true to you as ever he did to them.”<sup>38</sup> Fitch must have realized the dangerous implications of placing his trust in the hands of this youngster; his disloyalty would have proven disastrous, given the contacts he had with the French and Spanish. On reaching the town of Apalachicola, Fitch uneasily noted the display of friendship that Coffee showed towards a

---

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 190.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 183, 2 August 1726.

Spaniard.<sup>39</sup> However, he seemed to be reassured by Coffee's actions; he noted that friendly gestures were employed to prevent the Spaniard doubting his real intentions and discovering his plans against the Yamasees.<sup>40</sup>

The presence of Spaniards among the Indians was troublesome for a number of reasons. They were responsible for planting rumors among the Indians and then plied the natives with brandy that "soon put the town into confusion."<sup>41</sup> On questioning the Spaniards about the purpose of their trip among the Creeks, Fitch discovered that Brim had allegedly sent one of his men to St Augustine requesting the Spaniards to "bring a talk" to his men and, on receiving it, he would send one back to the Spanish. The Spaniard had brought a slave, stolen from the English, to speak with and interpret the words of the Indians. Fitch received the slave and therefore successfully managed to prevent the Spanish from relaying their false talks to the Indians. Dismissing the excuses given for being on Creek soil, he said "I do not doubt that you have some lying stories to tell the Indians which is customary for you to do, and I should do you justice, seize you and send you where the Negro is going."<sup>42</sup> But this was unnecessary; the Spanish 'mouthpiece' had been successfully apprehended. Fitch's presence proved to be very fortunate; as one of the local headmen told him, "if you had not been here we should have had their talk for two or

---

<sup>39</sup> Apalachicola is a town in Hitchiti; the Indians here were closely associated with the Creeks.

<sup>40</sup> "Fitch's Journal," 184, 7 August 1726.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.,

three days. They are often coming here with talk and we never find any of their talks to be true and I know of no one here that wants any of their talk.”<sup>43</sup>

In a similar vein, Chicken was forced to deal with the French and their rumor-mongering tactics. He did not get the opportunity to confront them face-to-face but was forced to interpret rumors as he heard them. These rumors were potentially of a more threatening kind; they alluded to the strength of the enemy and therefore stirred up more uncertainty among the Cherokees. Before leaving the town of Tellico, Chicken interpreted an account from three Chickasaws. They claimed that the Weeo-tee-noes had killed the Chickasaw king along with several other men, even though the Chickasaws were at peace with them.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, they indicated that the Broad River was full of canoes containing French Indians and they were surrounding nearby towns.<sup>45</sup> Whilst Chicken was perturbed to hear such news, he did not react immediately; in fact, he waited two weeks to report the news to Middleton, writing “how true this information is I cannot assure you because they [the Chickasaws] are always known to be a people that run from one nation to another inventing what stories they can to ‘amuse’ the people with...I am very jealous of them overpowering them [the Cherokees] at one time or another.”<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 187, 8 August 1726. Chicken was aware that slaves were spreading rumors among the Cherokees. He reported in a letter to Middleton, “The slaves that are now coming up talk good English as well as the Cherokee language and I am afraid too often tell fallacies to the Indians which they are very apt to believe.” “Chicken’s Journal,” 139, 30 August 1725.

<sup>44</sup>The Weeo-tee-noes were French Indians.

<sup>45</sup>“Chicken’s Journal,” 120-2, 12 August 1725.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 136, 30 August 1725.

On the second of September, Chickasaw men and women came to Keowee to report that the Cowetas were engaged in a battle against the Yamasees and that the Upper Creeks had plans to attack the Upper Cherokees. Ibid., 140.

This was not the only time when the Cherokees were adversely affected by rumor. Chicken was surprised to learn that a Creek man from Coosa and an African slave woman, who were enemies of the Cherokees, had been received into the town of Tellico where they remained for four days.<sup>47</sup> After this time, the Coosa man fled in fear leaving his companion but “particularly gave her in charge to talk about a peace” for six Creek towns.<sup>48</sup> The presence of a woman of low standing in these negotiations indicates that the Creeks intermittently relied upon the diplomatic services of women.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, in a letter to Middleton, Chicken argued that the main reason they were allowed into the town was due to the presence of the slave woman, who was one of the headman’s relations.<sup>50</sup> The Coosa man had used the slave woman as a pawn and told the headman that once he negotiated peace all the Cherokee slaves that the Creeks had among them would be safely returned. Chicken admonished the headman, telling him that this was an evil rumor, that the Coosa man had no intention of making peace but sought to establish the strength of the town and lull them into a false sense of safety, so that they would be unsuspecting and unprepared for forthcoming attacks.

Clearly the dissemination of rumors was a serious problem that wracked diplomatic relations, and both Chicken and Fitch attempted to overcome their problems with varying success. In his role as Indian commissioner for South Carolina, Chicken sought to decrease the number of Indian communication channels

---

<sup>47</sup>Coosa was an Upper Creek town situated on the Coosa River in the Talladega County, Alabama.

<sup>48</sup>“Chicken’s Journal,” 134-35, 30 August 1725.

<sup>49</sup>Perdue discusses the diverse roles of Cherokee women in wartime. Perdue, *Cherokee Women*, 86-108.

<sup>50</sup>“Chicken’s Journal,” 142, 9 September 1725.

by nominating warriors to officially relay business matters. At a general meeting with the Cherokees he indicated to Middleton that he had stipulated “When ever they [Cherokees] sent any of their people about business to the English that they might be head warriors, that we might know how to use them, and those were the people among them that we must take the most notice of.”<sup>51</sup> This instruction had repercussions for Indian women because it directly affected their political status. Women usually participated in politics at the clan level, but Chicken’s instruction represented a shift from ‘kin’ to ‘warrior’ and effectively excluded them from the military arena.<sup>52</sup> In theory at least, their roles as diplomatic negotiators among and between the Cherokees and the English ended. Nonetheless, those women who were as convincing as the African slave woman at Coosa may still have caught the attention of and swayed local listeners by their news. In addition, Chicken’s appeal for exclusive negotiation with warriors undermined Cherokee political practices. In matters of diplomacy it was customary for the Cherokees to send a group of individuals, including a warrior along with other men whom the tribe held in high esteem. The fact that Chicken’s successor, John Herbert, was troubled by the same problems suggests that Chicken’s instructions fell largely on deaf ears. At a meeting held at Nequisey in 1727 representatives from seven towns gathered. Only three of the towns sent only warriors to represent them; the other towns continued their traditions of sending a select group of warriors and other distinguished tribesmen.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 138, 30 August 1725.

<sup>52</sup>Perdue, *Cherokee Women*, 92.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.,

Nevertheless, from the 1730s onwards, consensual politics gave way to an assertive decision-making process dominated by warriors.<sup>54</sup>

The issuance of instructions to the Indians was not always the most effective way to slow down or halt the dissemination of rumors. The presence of interpreters who acted as cultural brokers between English and Cherokee peoples often helped to prevent misunderstandings because they straddled the divide between European and Indian cultures; thus their presence often impeded the diffusion of false rumors.<sup>55</sup> Essentially, interpreters were “go-betweens” who often had a command of English and at least one Indian language.<sup>56</sup> They ultimately determined what was relayed from Chicken and Fitch’s speeches to the Indian tribes and vice versa; their attendance at meetings and more informal occasions made possible the exchange of words and promises between groups who were foreign to one another. A small number of those who traveled among the tribes of the Eastern Woodlands were persons of mixed European and Indian parentage.<sup>57</sup> Two of the best-known mixed-race interpreters of the Eastern Woodlands were Andrew Montour and Arent Stevens

---

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 94.

<sup>55</sup>James Axtell, “Babel of Tongues: Communicating with the Indians in Eastern North America,” in Gray, Edward G. and Fieiring, Norman. eds., *The Language Encounter in the Americas, 1492 to 1800*. Providence and New York: Berghahn Books, 2000, 15-60; Nancy L. Hagedorn, “‘A Friend To Go Between Them:’ The Interpreter as Cultural Broker During Anglo-Iroquois Councils, 1740-70,” *Ethnohistory*, 1988, 35 (1): 60-80 at 60.

<sup>56</sup>Andrew Montour spoke English and French fluently along with a number of Indian languages. Hagedorn, “‘Faithful, Knowing, and Prudent’: Andrew Montour as Interpreter and Cultural Broker, 1740-1772,” in *Between Indian and White Worlds: The Cultural Broker*, ed. Margaret Connell Szasz (Norman, 1994), 44-60 at 45.

<sup>57</sup>The official name of those of mixed parentage is métis. Métis usually applies to those persons who have one French and one Indian parent. However, like Hagedorn I have extended this to include all individuals of mixed ancestry. This is less offensive than the terms “mixed bloods” or “half breeds.” Ibid., 76.

who operated among the Iroquois.<sup>58</sup> The Iroquois held Montour in high esteem; they often employed him as a speaker and regarded him as a war chief.<sup>59</sup> Mixed race interpreters were particularly fortunate because they grew up and mingled between two cultures and thus tended to be more sensitive to cultural differences because of their upbringings.<sup>60</sup> Nonetheless, the continual forays back and forth between cultures could trap interpreters in a permanent no-man's land. The confusion regarding their identity, which sprang from their mixed parentage, affected their sense of belonging. Montour, for instance, answered to several names, including 'French Andrew' and 'Andrew Sattelihu' and his countenance and style of dress did not help to establish his identity; while some thought that he was European, others described him as an Indian.<sup>61</sup>

Many of the interpreters that the British crown used were English and they were paid for their loyalty and services. Often they were required to swear an oath of fidelity, promising to uphold and promote the province in Indian affairs.<sup>62</sup> Their wages varied according to their ability, Joseph Cooper, for example, received twenty-five pounds in 1725 for his efforts as a "linguister" in the Cherokee nation, whereas in the early 1750s, Montour received one hundred pounds when he transferred to the Northern Department of Indian Affairs.<sup>63</sup> Chicken used incentives to encourage

---

<sup>58</sup>Andrew Montour (ca. 1715-1772) was the son of interpreter Madame Montour and Carondawana, an Oneida war chief. During his childhood he lived among the Oneidas in New York and later among the Delawares and Shawnees of Pennsylvania. Hagedorn, "'Andrew Montour,' 40.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>60</sup>Hagedorn, "Brokers of Understanding: Interpreters as Agents of Cultural Exchange in Colonial New York," *New York History* 1995, 76 (4): 379-408 at 381.

<sup>61</sup>James H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York, 1999), 75-76.

<sup>62</sup>Axtell, "Babel of Tongues," 51.

<sup>63</sup>"Chicken's Journal," 165, 19 October 1725; Hagedorn, "Andrews Montour," 53.



interpreters to be hardworking and honest translators. In one instance, he indicated to Eleazer Wigan that providing he remained loyal to the crown, Chicken would convey his aptitude as a linguist to the British government: "I cannot but believe you have been and may be of service so you need not doubt but on a true representation of your care and fidelity to them that they'll readily requite you."<sup>64</sup>

The journals of these men suggest that the interpreters were not always by their sides but lived among the Indians. By living among Cherokee tribes, English interpreters familiarized themselves with the Cherokee language; each settlement spoke a slight variant of the mother tongue. Moreover, settling among Indian families gave them an intimate knowledge of not only native tongues but also of the numerous rituals and religious beliefs that existed; they immersed themselves in Indian traditions which afforded them an awareness of their hopes and fears; they became "repositories" of Indian culture because they realized that their success depended upon their intimate understanding of a diverse culture.<sup>65</sup> Interpreters who were blest with both linguistic and diplomatic skills often moved effortlessly back and forth across the cultural divide. They gained prestige and influence by virtue of their specialized skills, providing that they performed satisfactorily.<sup>66</sup> Chicken and Fitch sent letters to the interpreters to bring important matters to their attention and often asked them to be their scouts, fishing out information and reporting it to them. In one such letter, Chicken wrote to Wigan: "The reason of me sending you this is to desire you to encourage the people in your parts to go out in one body. I suppose

---

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., "Chicken's Journal."

<sup>65</sup>Hagedorn, "A Friend," 61, Szasz "Introduction," 3-20 at 6; Axtell, "Babel of Tongues," 41.

<sup>66</sup>Hagedorn, "Brokers of Understanding," 381.

they'll have a meeting which I desire you to be at and let me know what steps they intend to take to prevent their enemies from doing them damage."<sup>67</sup> The sharp tone of another letter sent to Wigan illustrates the extent to which Chicken relied on him. "I cannot too much caution you of letting me know the truth of *all* affairs among these people [you being on oath] the nature of which I hope you are not unacquainted with."<sup>68</sup>

These interpreters occupied a rather delicate position because, although they lived among the Indians and consequently had a much deeper understanding of this unstable environment than either Chicken or Fitch, in order to be successful they needed to earn the respect and friendship of the tribes, which would not happen if they scurried off to report every event to the British government. On the other hand, it was imperative that they carefully scrutinize information before relaying it to ensure that it did not contain rumor; otherwise there was danger that the rumor would find its way onto the President of Trade's desk. On both accounts it was of primary importance to represent both the Indians and the English fairly and accurately to each other in order to prevent misunderstandings, which often led to the outbreak of hostilities. Perhaps in their role as translators, they may have used their power and authority to tone down points that were potentially contentious.<sup>69</sup> In one letter to Wigan, Chicken said, "take great care that you do not acquaint me with anything but what you are first assured is truth, you very well knowing how we have heretofore

---

<sup>67</sup>"Chicken's Journal," 148-49, 16 September 1725.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 165, 19 October 1725.

<sup>69</sup>Hagedorn, "A Friend," 71.

been amused with fallacies and what charge the country has been at to set those stories in a true light.”<sup>70</sup>

Together with being a power broker and scout, the interpreter was also a diplomatic agent, ensuring, for example, that the tribesmen of the Upper Settlements made their brethren in the Middle and Lower Settlements aware of any resolutions by sending messages to them. These types of diplomatic relations, whether successful or not, were at least one way of attempting to quash rumor. Nonetheless, whilst interpreters could advance negotiations by ensuring that reliable information was passed between parties, they could and did on occasion hinder discussions to suit their own purposes; such actions seriously undermined the trust that had been invested in them by both the English and the Indians.<sup>71</sup> Fitch encountered this problem when he decided to change his interpreter. He believed that William Hodge was better equipped to speak with the people of the Lower Towns than was John Molton. Furious at this decision, an intoxicated Molton followed Fitch to the Lower Towns and accused him in the presence of the Indians that (as Fitch wrote) “I was a thief, had stole his servant (William Hodge) and not to mind what I had said to them as my talk was not good.”<sup>72</sup> These allegations proved to be quite harmful because, although Fitch charged Molton to behave with more respect, Hodge was not able to engage in any discourse with the Indians. Furthermore, Fitch encountered the same problem when he returned to speak with the Cowetas on the following day. Molton, now

---

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>71</sup>The trustworthiness of mixed-race interpreters was also questioned. Montour’s character was considered to be “unfathomable,” because it was never clear with which group he truly sympathized. Merrell, *Into the American Woods*, 77.

<sup>72</sup>“Fitch’s Journal,” 207, 28 December 1726.

sober, again persuaded the headmen not to engage in any discussion with Fitch whilst Hodges acted as interpreter. Motivated by self-interest and concerned that Hodge would undermine his position as an interpreter, Molton deliberately stirred up unrest amongst a number of the Indians who sympathized with him. In turn, they implored Fitch to use Molton as an interpreter because they claimed that they could not understand Hodge. Sepe Coffee came to the rescue and made Fitch aware of the dissembling tactics that the Indians were using. He informed him that “Hodge could speak their tongue nearly as well as themselves” and shamed the Indians who objected to Hodge by asking them which part of the talk they did not understand.”<sup>73</sup> Whilst Coffee proved his loyalty to Fitch through these actions and prevented further misunderstandings and bad feeling, Molton’s actions indicated that he could neither be trusted nor relied upon.<sup>74</sup>

As with the interpreters, Chicken and Fitch could not always rely on English traders for accurate information or good behavior. Rumors circulated among nations regarding the avarice of the traders. Chicken investigated such rumors because they were potentially damaging to the maintenance of favorable diplomatic and trading relations.<sup>75</sup> In one instance, Captain Charles Russell informed Colonel Chicken that David Doway, an Indian trader, had sworn under oath that John Sharp had stolen a number of hides from the Cherokees.<sup>76</sup> However, Chicken found on questioning the headmen of the Upper Settlements and assuring them that he would right any wrongs

---

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 208.

<sup>74</sup>Inebriation was a problem among both interpreters and Indians. Those who provided liquor to Indians were not good role models for responsible drinking. Montour was reported to have been quite abusive during his drunken bouts. Hagedorn, “Andrew Montour,” 58, Merrell, *Into the American Woods*, 99-100.

<sup>75</sup>Hagedorn, “Brokers of Understanding,” 386.

<sup>76</sup>“Chicken’s Journal,” 97-8, 22 June 1725. John Sharp was also an Indian trader.

done; the head warrior of the Tugelo said that he was aware of the whole matter and Sharp had not stolen skins from the Indians but was merely collecting his debts from them.<sup>77</sup>

Chicken appears from his journal entries to have had little regard for the traders, believing they were troublemakers and rumor-mongers. He suggested in a letter to Middleton that the Indian trading law ought to be changed so that traders would be permitted to trade only in just two towns of their choice. It was Chicken's opinion that as the traders moved from town to town they carried rumors with them, which was "a great detriment to trade."<sup>78</sup> In addition, Chicken generally disapproved of the servants whom the traders brought with them; he described them as "a loose vagabond sort of people who will not stick out to say or do anything among the Indians for the lucre of a few skins, so that I think the fewer of them there is the better."<sup>79</sup>

In contrast, Fitch's relationship with the traders appears to have been quite amicable. On one occasion, in particular, William Wood, an English trader, warned Fitch that the Indians who had assembled to speak with him were agitated about the amount of time that he devoted to speaking of war. Wood informed Fitch, "We that are white men have been very much slighted by them...it is my opinion that if you rehearse the same talk that you gave them last that we shall all be murdered."<sup>80</sup> To his credit, Fitch, confronted the Indians, saying "I can assure you my king will make a war with you which I have in words from his own mouth, and like it how you will I

---

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 130, 21 August 1725.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 106-7, 17 July 1725, letter to Middleton.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 107.

<sup>80</sup>"Fitch's Journal," 195, 1 November 1726.

cannot help it, for I came here to tell you the truth and that I shall do.”<sup>81</sup> To this the King of the Oasfuskee replied, “Tis true we were speaking pretty angry but it was about the Chickasaws and not about you. I do assure you that we desire to have no difference with you.” Determined to establish the truth of the matter, Fitch called forward the trader who repeated the words he had heard; the Indians seemed to be concerned that they had been caught out but still denied the claims that had been made against them.<sup>82</sup>

Whilst rumors intermittedly rumbled around the countryside, rumor flourished in areas and among people who were ill at ease, distrusting the true motives of the other. In a world where accounts and messages were almost always impossible to verify immediately, the unknown was an uncertain and frightening prospect. Those who had something to gain on occasion added to these doubts, including the French and Spanish, traders and interpreters. There were instances where others unwittingly added to these uncertainties by innocently relaying news they had heard as they passed from town to town. Each side sought to protect themselves and their own interests, which, unsurprisingly, created serious tensions amongst tribal communities and foreign powers.

---

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 196, 2 November 1726.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 197.

## Chapter II: The Resolutions of Rumor

Rumor, like a breeze, murmured through the Cherokee countryside. At times it passed gently over Indian communities, leaving the inhabitants undisturbed by the hearsay it deposited. On other occasions, it dropped pregnant words into the air, which like viruses were contracted by one person and shortly afterwards passed among many. The power of enunciated words, displayed both by the speed with which they were spread and the various reactions they spawned, is astonishing. Rumor can be used as a gauge to measure the degree of anxiety experienced by borderland communities in the eighteenth century. The diverse forces attributing to the dissemination of rumor reveals a number of fears deeply embedded in society and simultaneously exemplifies the conflicting hopes and aspirations of competing groups.

The success of rumor depended upon the extent to which communities responded to unsubstantiated information. On first inspection, it is surprising that rumor managed to appear and cause dissension in relatively stable communities, even those unconvulsed by the terrors of war, plague, or starvation. Rumor was divisive; it tore communities apart by falsely creating convincing anecdotes that were considered to be either partially or wholly true. Distinguishing between fact and fiction was

extraordinarily difficult in oral communities. The conflict that developed between the Cherokees and South Carolinians in 1751 clearly illustrates the difficulties caused by the lack of reliable information. Both groups experienced extreme anxiety because they relied heavily upon one another for the maintenance of peace.

During the eighteenth century the Cherokees became one of the most powerful Indian tribes on the frontiers of English America.<sup>1</sup> In 1751 the thirty-five years of relative peace that the South Carolinians and Cherokees had enjoyed was suddenly disrupted. This long-term alliance had not been without its problems. The War of Jenkin's Ear and King George's War undoubtedly created anxieties, but persistent negotiations smoothed over these concerns. Both groups valued the pact between them because it was mutually beneficial. The Cherokees, for their part, relied upon manufactured goods from their white allies. These included clothing, guns, powder, and iron. Skiagunsta, the elderly head warrior of the Lower Towns, was aware of their dependence on the settlers, "I have always told my people to be well with the English for they cannot expect any supply from any where else. The cloaths we wear, we cannot make ourselves, they are made for us. We use their ammunition with which we kill deer. We cannot make our guns. Every necessary thing in life we must have from the white people."<sup>2</sup> In return for these vital supplies, the Cherokees traded deerskins with the British.<sup>3</sup> Hunting deer had become the tribes' chief industry by 1750. Thus, the relationship that had been cultivated

---

<sup>1</sup>David H. Corkran, *The Cherokee Frontier: Conflict and Survival 1740-1762* (Norman, 1962), 3.

<sup>2</sup>Proceedings of the Council concerning Indian Affairs, 7 July 1753, in William L. McDowell, Jr., ed., *Colonial Records of South Carolina: Documents Relating to Indian Affairs, May 21 1750 - August 7 1754*, 2 vols. (Columbia, S.C., 1958), 1: 453 (hereafter *DRIA*)

<sup>3</sup>The colonial authorities set prices in terms of deerskins; they became "the currency of the Carolina trade." Perdue, Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Cultural Change, 1700-1835* (Lincoln, 1988), 77.



between the Cherokees and South Carolinians was based upon reciprocity. Diplomatic and trading relations were fundamental to the social well-being of both groups and it was therefore in everyone's interest to remain on good terms.

Furthermore, the geographical location of the Cherokees was important from a British perspective. Although the Cherokees were mountain dwellers, they were not isolated. Their territories were divided into three main settlements, which stretched across South Carolina to the Ohio Valley and spanned the headwaters of the Tennessee, Kanawha and Savannah rivers.<sup>4</sup> The location of these settlements were important because they acted as buffers for the British in South Carolina against possible attacks from the French and Spanish who possessed lands along the Gulf of Mexico. At the same time, the Cherokees possessed a powerful geographical weapon; the "key of Carolina" provided another route into the colony.<sup>5</sup> If they so desired, they were well positioned to send warriors eastward into Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. During May 1751 when relations were seriously deteriorating, Governor James Glen of South Carolina, realized the importance of restoring harmony: "It is absolutely necessary for us to be in friendship with the Cherokees in particular...They are reckoned to be about three thousand gunmen, the greatest nation we know of in America except the Choctaws and while we call them friends we may consider them a bulwark at our backs; for such numbers will always secure us in that quarter from the attempts of the French."<sup>6</sup> Even as late as 1755,

---

<sup>4</sup>M. Thomas Hatley, *The Dividing Paths: Cherokees and South Carolinians Through the Era of the Revolution* (New York, 1993), 13.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 71-72.

<sup>6</sup>Corkran, *Cherokee Frontier*, 15.

trader Ludovic Grant reaffirmed the importance of the Cherokees when he informed Glen that “Carolina hath no greater barrier against the French.”<sup>7</sup>

Given the benefits that both parties enjoyed from this relationship, its deterioration was an acute blow. For eight months the Cherokees and Carolinians were wracked by uncertainties; their long-term friendship was seriously in jeopardy and each side feared the prospect of war. This leads one to question the content and scale of the rumors, which circulated between both groups to provoke such hostility, and such antagonism is all the more astounding considering the strength of their friendship. Deep-seated fears unleashed alarm, which engulfed Cherokee and South Carolinian communities and led to outbreaks of violence. The agitation that resulted illustrates that on occasion the resolution of rumor was far from peaceful.

The volume of evidence that historians have at their disposal of these eight troublesome months is substantial. Before the British establishment of Indian superintendencies in 1756, all matters pertaining to Indian affairs were dealt with by South Carolina’s Executive Council. The governor of the colony, who was ultimately held accountable by the British government for its proper administration, relied upon a select group of trusted militia officers to keep him abreast of the current affairs of the kingdom. One of their main responsibilities was to gather intelligence and then report on the findings. This information was assembled mainly from letters and affidavits that came from traders and backcountry merchants. On occasion these emissaries directly reported on events or ‘talks’ that took place while they were on

---

<sup>7</sup>Ludovic Grant to Governor Glen, 20 August 1755, in *DRIA*, 2:74.

their travels.<sup>8</sup> It was believed that this material was significant enough to warrant separation from the proceedings of the elective branch of the legislature recorded in the *Journal of the Commons House of Assembly*.<sup>9</sup> Consequently the materials that were gathered from these intelligence expeditions were copied into “Indian Books,” so “that all those matters may be seen in one view.”<sup>10</sup>

The “Indian Books” are peppered throughout with references to rumor, and the crisis of 1751 is an excellent example of the decisive role that rumors played in the panic that ensued. On occasion, the “Indian Books” provide an opportunity to analyze the motivation behind those who were responsible for starting rumors and how these rumors mutated as they spread through the settlements. Broadly speaking, the rumors that developed between the two groups were diverse in terms of their content. For instance, the rumors that circulated among the Cherokees for the most part pertained to whole-scale invasion of their territories by the Carolinians. For their part the Carolinians believed that the Cherokees were conspiring with the French and intended to carry out raids against them. However, the sources indicate that the Carolinians were particularly alarmed to hear that a number of unprovoked acts of violence had been carried out against British traders and other settlers. The important difference in the nature of these rumors is that the fears of the Cherokees were centered on their lands; theirs was a collective fear. Carolinians feared for the violation of the individual; fear for one’s life created a deep-rooted anxiety, which

---

<sup>8</sup>During Glen’s administration information was collected from a broad range of sources, whereas his successor William Lyttelton did not have an extensive network of informants but mainly relied upon a number of military officers under his command. Hatley, *Dividing Paths*, 109.

<sup>9</sup>*Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, April 1750-August 1751* (Columbia, 1974)

<sup>10</sup>Clerk to the Council (1746), quoted in McDowell, “Series Preface,” in *DRIA*, 1:v

was both intensely personal and collective. The investigations sent out from Charleston suggest that the first rumors, which created the crisis, spread among the Cherokees.

An affidavit taken from a backcountry storekeeper, Herman Geiger, of events that happened “some time ago” indicates the difficulties the Charleston officials faced.<sup>11</sup> Geiger’s official statement was given in the third person, which distanced him from the events and indicated that for the most part he was not actually present; thus what he related was largely hearsay. He claimed, for instance, that he had heard from “several” individuals that William Broadway, a deerskin trader, had entered the Cherokee towns and on being asked by the Indians the common question, “What news below[?] He replied that the white men were raising an army to cut the Indians all to pieces.”<sup>12</sup>

How veritable is Geiger’s statement? On the one hand, it provided plausible answers to the agitation of the Indian Piedmont settlers. Yet “several” people had informed Geiger of the imminent attack: who were they and could they be trusted? Sadly, there is no way to establish answers to these questions. To further complicate the picture, Broadway was an employee of James Francis, one of Geiger’s competitors.<sup>13</sup> It is possible that Geiger bore Francis some type of grudge and hoped to undermine Francis’s trading ability in the Indian community by creating the impression that Francis’s employees could not be trusted. However, if this was the case, Geiger stood to undermine his own reputation if his account was disproved; he

---

<sup>11</sup>Affidavit of Herman Geiger, 11 May 1751, in *DRIA*, 1:113-14.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>13</sup>Hatley, *Dividing Paths*, 85.

had after all made a damning declaration under oath. It is not clear what motivated Broadway to respond the way he allegedly did. Perhaps after a few glasses of rum it was his idea of a private joke, which was inadvertently heard by others and spread out of control. Or he may have been motivated by personal gain. Indians fearful of war would have greater needs for guns and powder, which he could offer them at inflated prices and generate profits from such transactions. In any case, the alarm that this outrageous rumor created illustrates the degree to which the Cherokees regarded the news of traders. The traders were in a powerful position; they were relied on to exchange vital goods and as representatives of the British crown. Broadway had abused this power and jeopardized the harmony of Cherokee-Carolinian relations.<sup>14</sup>

The same rumor of impending invasion by the Carolinians undoubtedly spread swiftly to other towns, growing in magnitude as it traveled. The affidavit of James Beamer who traded in the town of Tugaloo illustrates the general confusion in that community. Several “gangs” of Cherokees from the Lower Towns had been out warring. One of these groups returned and announced that William Broadway had told one of their tribesmen, “There was an army of white people, about six hundred, coming up to take the Norward Indians for the mischief they had done to the white people.”<sup>15</sup> This news was reiterated in another account that had been sent through the nation by an Indian messenger named Jepto.<sup>16</sup> The mutation of this invasion rumor illustrates the verbal distortion that took place. The exact size of the phantom army

---

<sup>14</sup>David Dowey in his affidavit reported that William Broadway said, “I hear I am to be hanged,” Dowey replied, “Indeed William if what the Indians say of you to be true, you deserve to be severely chastised for you have bred great disturbances.” Affidavit of David Dowey, 25 May 1751, in *DRIA*, 1:57-58.

<sup>15</sup>Affidavit of James Beamer, 12 July 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 26-29.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 1: 28.

had suddenly gained importance; it had grown to six hundred. The original rumor as it traveled had grown more specific. The attack was a response to the actions of 'Norward Indians,' who sporadically attacked White and Indian Piedmont villages, including those of the Catawba and Chickasaw Indians who were allies of the South Carolinians. A number of 'Norward Indians' came from New York and Pennsylvania and spoke Iroquoian tongues, cognate to the Cherokee language, while others scattered across Pennsylvania to the Upper Great Lakes spoke Algonquian.<sup>17</sup> It is little wonder that the Indians were alarmed by the thought of six hundred Carolinians storming their communities. Beamer's affidavit is likely to be more reliable than Geiger's declaration because he understood and conversed in the native dialect, whereas Geiger depended upon the translations of interpreters for much of his news. Concerned for the welfare of their families, the Cherokees took the rumor seriously and hastily made preparations to defend themselves against the enemy.

The deep fear that was generated among these people is reflected in the "disturbances" that followed.<sup>18</sup> Beamer reported that the Indians, driven by the imminent arrival of a large army and propelled by the urgent need to procure supplies of guns and powder for protection, broke into the storehouse of trader Bernard Hughes and stole what they could. Now prepared for war they waited in anticipation, but shortly afterwards they received news that the report of invasion had been false. So they returned the goods they had taken from Hughes. Beamer does not indicate.

---

<sup>17</sup>Gregory Evans Dowd, "The Panic of 1751: The Significance of Rumors on the South Carolina-Cherokee Frontier," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser. 53:3 (July 1996), 527-560 at 532. For Catawba diplomacy see James H. Merrell, *The Indian's New World: Catawbas and their Neighbors from European Contact Through the Era of Removal* (Chapel Hill, 1989) 134-66. For Iroquois diplomacy see Richard Aquila, *The Iroquois Restoration: Iroquois Diplomacy on the Colonial Frontier, 1701-1754* (Detroit, 1983).

<sup>18</sup>Affidavit of James Beamer, 12 July 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 26-29.

‘who’ or ‘what’ persuaded these frightened Indians that their fears were redundant. The rumor was resolved peacefully. Nonetheless, he was anxious to prevent “these continual alarms from the Indians” and suggested to Governor Glen that it was “absolutely necessary” to build a fort a mile from Keowee.<sup>19</sup> The construction of a fort would offer many benefits, including personal ones for the English settlers and traders. “It will not only be of service to keep the Cherokee Indians in awe, but it would [stop?] the warlike incursions of the Northward Indians, would be of great service to the traders, in securing their interest, and prevent some profligate people from taking to[o] much liberty in transgressing the laws.”<sup>20</sup>

One other notable invasion rumor was circulated among the Cherokees in late April 1751. This may have been a further mutation of those described by both Geiger and Beamer. Robert Bunning, a Cherokee interpreter acting in his role as diplomatic agent, sent word to Governor Glen of the ‘talk’ that the Raven of Hiwassee had given in the presence of his people. The Raven explained to Bunning that the people from Keowee and Esternorie heard from William Carr that the governor intended to send an army to kill any Norward Indians that were found in their towns. The townspeople panicked on hearing this news, “got it into their heads, they could not believe it was the Norwards you intended to kill, but they themselves.”<sup>21</sup> Alarmed, they called a meeting with the neighboring townspeople of Echoe and relayed the rumor. In turn, the people of Echoe sent runners to the town of Kittawa acquainting them with the

---

<sup>19</sup>Keowee was the principal town of the Lower Cherokees, situated on the Keowee River in what is present-day Oconee County, South Carolina.

<sup>20</sup>Affidavit of James Beamer, 12 July 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 29. The terms “northward” and “norward” Indians are used interchangeably in the sources. I use the term norward unless I am directly quoting from the sources.

<sup>21</sup>Talk of the Raven, 14 May 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 74-77 at 74.

disturbing news that an army had been raised to kill them. The people of Kittawa “believed it.”<sup>22</sup> All three resolved to ally together and prepared for the ‘impending’ attack. The snowball effect is clear; uncertainty fuelled this rumor, which quickly spread to neighboring towns.

In each case South Carolina had no plans to attack, but the deep fear of conspiracy generated by these “bad talks” was serious enough to provoke what at the time were considered to be rational responses.<sup>23</sup> Other unsettling incidences occurred amidst this uncertainty, which created hostility among the Cherokees and made them more suspicious of Carolinian intentions. About the same time that these invasion rumors were circulating, Cherokee tribesmen from Tugaloo made public a crime that had been committed against them. They estimated that 331 deerskins had been stolen by white men from one of their camps on the Savannah River.<sup>24</sup> Understandably they sought recompense for the theft of such valuable property. The Cherokees were unconvinced by attempts that had been made by the thieves to throw them off their trail. The robbers were well acquainted with Indian habits; they had covered the ground with “small skins cutt and their dryed meat thrown on the fire” in the hopes that the Cherokees would think that one of their native enemies was responsible for the robbery.<sup>25</sup>

The Cherokees carried out a thorough search for their missing skins and tracked the thieves into South Carolina. The deposition of James Francis indicates that the Cherokees suspected two white men whom they had seen in the woods, “one

---

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>23</sup>Governor Glen to the Cherokee Emperor, 8 June 1751, in *DRIA*, 1:173-174 at 173.

<sup>24</sup>Affidavit of Charles Banks, 1 June 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 23-24.

<sup>25</sup>Affidavit of James Beamer, 12 July 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 26.



an old man with gray hair, and the other a man with humpback.” He told Broadway, who was acting as their interpreter, the “Indians varied much in their conjectures.”<sup>26</sup> Francis claimed that he maintained good relations with the Indians by assisting them in their quest to find the criminals and providing a search warrant so that all suspecting places could be scrutinized.<sup>27</sup> Geiger disputed this and argued that Francis did *not* assist the Indians in their inquiries because he was aware that they owed James Beamer leather and claimed that their hides had been stolen so that they could avoid repaying their debts.<sup>28</sup> As usual, Geiger’s information was second - or third - hand and thus questionable. Charles Banks confirmed that he had seen the warrant that Francis issued and duly allowed the Indians to look at his skins; “They acknowledged none to be theirs.”<sup>29</sup>

This injustice against the Cherokees took months to resolve. It is little wonder that in such circumstances tensions mounted and rumors flourished. The Cherokees had incurred a substantial loss and the Carolinians appeared to be stalling for time. The Carolinians’ tardy response did not enhance diplomatic relations but was another reason for the Cherokees to suspect their motives and question whether they could be trusted. The evidence suggested that Carolinians were responsible for the theft. The Indians found pipes among the English traders, which they had packed into their missing skins. Naturally, this discovery heightened their suspicions. Trader James Adair had given a pipe to one of Francis’s servants.<sup>30</sup> For his part Francis could not

---

<sup>26</sup>Deposition of James Francis, (June 1751?), in *DRIA*, 1:24-26, 25.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>28</sup>Affidavit of Herman Geiger, 11 May 1751, in *DRIA*, 1:113.

<sup>29</sup>Affidavit of Charles Banks, 1 June 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 23-24.

<sup>30</sup>Affidavit of James Beamer, 12 July 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 26.

be sure who was responsible for the injustice and offered a five-pound bill to anyone who could give him “certain information” concerning the theft.<sup>31</sup> Rumors floated from one person to another. One suggested that trader James Burgess had admitted to stealing the skins and would do the same again if he had the opportunity.<sup>32</sup> Another testified that Edward Turner (occupation unknown) knew who was responsible for taking the skins and would release the information if summoned to do so.<sup>33</sup> In late November, after thorough investigations, Governor Glen finally agreed to resolve the matter and pay the Cherokees in full for their missing skins on the proviso that they would first compensate Bernard Hughes for the losses he had incurred during Indian raids at his store.<sup>34</sup>

Before Glen’s acknowledgement of English culpability, the Cherokee-Carolinian alliance was close to the breaking point. Relationships with British traders had deteriorated because the Cherokees strongly suspected that a number of them were responsible for the missing skins, the Cherokee trading debt had mounted, and it was likely that the traders cheated them with false weights and measures. To make matters worse, the Lower Creeks and Lower Cherokees were at war, which proved financially draining on the Cherokee economy. The British had not intervened, much to the Cherokees’ annoyance, nor punished the Creeks for the hostility shown towards their Cherokee ‘allies.’ Many native hunters who usually procured both food and deerskins were now preoccupied with war. Cherokee agitation was symbolized in the changing attitudes towards traders, who ultimately represented the British crown.

---

<sup>31</sup>Deposition of James Francis, (June 1751?), in *DRIA*, 1: 25.

<sup>32</sup>Affidavit of James Beamer, 12 July 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 27.

<sup>33</sup>Deposition of James Francis, (June 1751?), in *DRIA*, 1:25.

<sup>34</sup>Captain Glen to the Indians, 20 November 1751, in *DRIA*, 1:184-87.

The detailed affidavit of James Maxwell, a Carolina agent, illustrates that after the 'missing skins' incident there appeared to be a noticeable difference in the way the Cherokee Indians behaved towards the traders. Ronald and Abraham Smith, licensed traders, reported that the Cherokees were "very impudent and unusually insolent." Indians declared in a threatening manner that the traders should not leave until they brought supplies of ammunition; at one point the traders thought they would lose their lives.<sup>35</sup> While traversing the Lower Settlements, Maxwell was again told that the Indians were "grievously insolent, and rude, and that their (the traders') lives were in danger."<sup>36</sup>

As Maxwell traveled from one settlement to another and spoke with groups of traders, he received similar types of disturbing information. For instance, in the town of Jortice, located in the Middle Settlement, the white inhabitants informed him that "bad talks" had been sent from the Lower Settlements since the winter months. Even Maxwell noticed a difference in their temperament; Indians who had formerly shown kindness to him would not now look at him.<sup>37</sup> Although he tried to assuage the fears of the traders, it became increasingly obvious that the Cherokees harbored grievances against them. However, these negative reactions were not evident throughout the whole nation. Maxwell was heartened to meet Cornelius Dougherty, a principal trader in the town of Hiwassee. Dougherty informed him that the Raven of Hiwassee and his tribesmen took no notice of "bad talks," although they were frequently sent them from the Lower Towns. Samuel Benn and Robert Goudy, traders at Toquo,

---

<sup>35</sup>Affidavit of James Maxwell, 12 June 1751, in *DRIA*, 1, 68-71 at 68.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*,

Tellico, and Ninety-Six, did not feel threatened, perhaps because the Overhill Cherokees sent a “strong guard” to protect them when they engaged in trade.<sup>38</sup>

Breaking his journey at Joree for the night, Maxwell met a messenger who informed him of an unsettling rumor: there were plans afoot to kill him and all the other white settlers in the town. Maxwell’s deposition reveals that he carefully scrutinized this rumor. “I only laughed at [it],” he said, “as I really thought if they had such a design they would never make it publick.”<sup>39</sup> By calmly analyzing and dismissing this falsehood, he prevented uproar in the town and rested that evening “without fear.”<sup>40</sup>

The following day he was confronted with additional rumors, more specific in origin and detrimental in content. James May, a trader at Joree, came “very fast on foot” and informed him of a Cherokee plot to kill British traders. An Indian woman from Stecoe, a Cherokee “Out Town” on Tucosigia River, informed May that Norward Indians had murdered Daniel Murphy, a Virginia trader.<sup>41</sup> Further, she notified her local Stecoe trader, Bernard Hughes, of the impending danger. “Initially reluctant,” he abandoned his store once his attackers were in sight and fled to Tuckaseegee, where he found refuge in Robert Bunning’s trading house.<sup>42</sup> The assailants broke into his store and divided up the booty. Skeptical about the

---

<sup>38</sup>Deposition of James Maxwell, 4 May 1751, in *DRIA*, 1:116-18 at 117.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>40</sup>Affidavit of James Maxwell, 12 June 1751, in *DRIA*, 1, 68-71.

<sup>41</sup>Hatley, *Dividing Paths*, 82.

<sup>42</sup>Corkran, *Cherokee Frontier*, 26.

authenticity of these rumors, Maxwell was nonetheless fearful that Hughes's attackers had caught up with him and killed him too.<sup>43</sup>

In an attempt to separate fact from fiction, Maxwell questioned the headmen of Joree and found that they, too, had heard this news from "several messengers" and believed it.<sup>44</sup> Maxwell obtained assurances that the Indians of Joree would protect him and other British settlers if they were attacked. Yet Indian manpower was limited and both the traders and the inhabitants of Joree feared they would not be able to defend themselves against one hundred northern Indians.<sup>45</sup> In the meantime, May, seized by the rumors of death and destruction and fearing that he might suffer the same fate as Hughes, took precautions and moved his goods and skins into the house of the Raven of Cowee. The Raven was also swayed by the rumors and was surprised to hear that Maxwell was so reluctant to believe them. He asked May, "Is he deaf, won't he hear, tell him, from me to be gone, and if he will be deaf and won't hear, do you go for the Talks are very bad, and tell him further not to go by the way of Keowee, for they will kill him, nor by the way of Ninety-Six, for they will waylay him."<sup>46</sup> Convinced finally by the admonitions of those he trusted together with others who said that the reports had been confirmed by Indian women, Maxwell hastily left and headed for Augusta with seventeen white and two black men, some of whom were armed. On his arrival there, he met two traders, William Veal and James Tortooshells, who had fled from Keowee, distressed because they believed "all or the

---

<sup>43</sup>Deposition of James Maxwell, 4 May 1751, in *DRIA*, 1:116-118.

<sup>44</sup>Affidavit of James Maxwell, 12 June 1751, in *DRIA*, 1, 68-71.

<sup>45</sup>Deposition of James Maxwell, 4 May 1751, in *DRIA*, 1:116-118.

<sup>46</sup>Affidavit of James Maxwell, 12 June 1751, in *DRIA*, 1, 68-71.

most part of the white men had been killed the same night.”<sup>47</sup> On their travels they had met John Vann, a trader on the Georgia border, who fled with his family from Ninety-Six because he feared for their well-being. Vann had heard that Hugh Murphey had been “shot at through the arm” as he traveled to Coronico, “but he had gott clear of the villains that shot him.”<sup>48</sup> The affidavit of trader Robert Gandey suggested that the culprit was a Cherokee from one of the Lower Towns.<sup>49</sup>

The resolution of these rumors, spread by one Indian woman and later by a number of “wenches,” was that they ravaged the settlements, causing deep panic and alarm. The reactions of the traders and Indian headmen illustrate that women were powerful agents of rumor, even though they remain anonymous in the sources.<sup>50</sup> This rumor plot is particularly interesting because it throws a glimmer of light onto the lives of Cherokee women, who usually remain confined to the edges of the remaining paper record. The woman who warned May had been as loyal as his friend the Raven, though she was not given a name.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the lowly social status of the “wenches” who continued to spread the rumor appears to have raised few questions regarding its reliability. Perhaps this was because sexual freedom was accepted in Cherokee society. The European notion of sexual freedom was that it degraded women and jeopardized civic order.<sup>52</sup> However, Cherokee women controlled their own sexuality. Unmarried women were permitted to engage in sexual

---

<sup>47</sup>Deposition of James Maxwell, 4 May 1751, in *DRIA*, 1:116-118

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>49</sup>Affidavit of Robert Gandey, 5 June 1751, in *DRIA*, 1:71.

<sup>50</sup>A number of Cherokee women became wives of traders; intermarriage illustrates that the British trusted them. It is probable that the trader James Adair married a Cherokee woman and had children by her. Perdue, *Cherokee Women*, 81-82, 198.

<sup>51</sup>Hatley, *Dividing Paths*, 53

<sup>52</sup>Perdue, *Cherokee Women*, 191.

relations with any man, providing they did not violate incest taboos with members of their own clans or the clans of their fathers.<sup>53</sup> James Adair astutely noted that even married women were granted “Full liberty to plant their (men’s) brows with horns as oft as they please, without fear of punishment.”<sup>54</sup> These “wenches” were loyal to the British cause and informed the traders that they were in danger; their personal friendships and possible sexual liaisons with local traders may have been a motivating factor.<sup>55</sup> The women may also have felt a sense of responsibility for the well-being of the community. They relied upon European goods particularly, cloth, kettles, hoes, and blades. If the traders escaped unharmed, it was likely that they would return once the unrest subsided, whereas the death of the traders would seriously disrupt the local economy and discourage other traders from settling in the same place.

With the benefit of hindsight it is possible to detach some fantasies from the facts and establish how these rumors were resolved. In the first instance, the numerous reports that “Poor Daniel Murphey’s being unfortunately killed” was “false;” Anthony Dean verified that he was alive.<sup>56</sup> However, Beamer’s letter to Glen, along with council reports, indicate that northern Indians killed Murphey the following spring.<sup>57</sup> Second, northern Indians did plunder Hughes’s storehouse, but he escaped unharmed, contrary to the reports made by John Bryant and William

---

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 56.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>55</sup>Friendship was also a reason for warning settlers of impending attacks. Ann Matthews, a colonist in Carolina, recalled in her memoir that an unnamed Cherokee woman warned backcountry settlers of an enemy attack because she “disliked very much to think that the white women who had been so good to her in giving her clothes and bread and butter in trading parties would be killed.” Anne Matthews, “Memoir,” 2, typescript in the South Carolina Library, Columbia, quoted in Hatley, *Dividing Paths*, 89-90.

<sup>56</sup>Letter from Anthony Dean to Cornelius Doherty, 1 May 1751, in *DRIA*, 1:72.

<sup>57</sup>Hatley, *Dividing Paths*, 53.

Thomson, who suggested that he was one of four traders to lose their lives.<sup>58</sup> It was later reported that “not one white man was killed.”<sup>59</sup> The Stocoes admitted to looting Hughes’s storehouse; they had been provoked by “a lying talk from Keowee” and “their dogs, and their hoggs, and themselves run mad.”<sup>60</sup> Finally, Hugh Murphey was shot and “very much disabled.” Skiagunta reported to Glen that Norward Indians, “the Twightwees, Taghwas, and Nanteyas” were responsible for this action.<sup>61</sup> This contradicted the earlier rumor suggesting that a Lower Cherokee was culpable.<sup>62</sup> There was an element of truth in each of these rumors, but as they circulated they became intertwined with one another and it appeared to the traders that each of these isolated events formed an integral part of a larger plot to kill them. In their attempts to make sense of the confusing events around them, they looked to one another for support and leadership, but rumor like an infection had tainted their sense of well-being. The actions of the Cherokees spoke louder than any words of consolation and the traders fled.

Traders were not alone in seeking refuge from real and imagined dangers. Farmers and other frontier inhabitants and their families decided, albeit reluctantly, that leaving their settlements was the best way to resolve the difficulties they faced. James Francis reported from Saluda that Norward Indians were particularly menacing: they “openly threaten white as well as red people.”<sup>63</sup> The townspeople there took steps to fortify themselves in the event of invasion, which they believed a

---

<sup>58</sup>Deposition of John Bryant, 4 May 1751, in *DRIA*, 1:41, Affidavit of William Thomson, (date unknown), in *DRIA*, 1:51.

<sup>59</sup>John Gray to Governor Glen, 22 May 1751, in *DRIA*, 1:59.

<sup>60</sup>Talk of the Raven, 14 May 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 74.

<sup>61</sup>Talk of the Cherokee Indians to Governor Glen, 15 November 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 178-184 at 180.

<sup>62</sup>Affidavit of Robert Gandey, 5 June 1751, in *DRIA*, 1:71

<sup>63</sup>James Francis to Governor Glen, 14 May 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 63.



serious possibility. The number of violent rumors that circulated throughout the nation undoubtedly encouraged individuals to flee from their familiar surroundings. Particularly disturbing was the affidavit given by Mary Gould, a German immigrant, to a justice of the peace in Saxagotha. Her family's kindness towards the Shawnee Indians was repaid with extreme violence and terrible suffering. The Indians had been welcomed as houseguests, given food and tobacco, and permitted to stay overnight. The next morning they "shot my husband through the head, [they] struck me with a tamhook under my right arm...and killed both my children...then they plundered the house of all that was valuable."<sup>64</sup> Later in June, trader John Hamilton reported, "The talk of the Indians has put us to great confusion and has been the cause of the building of three forts. One of the three is very defensive, and will be when finished perhaps one of the best in the country."<sup>65</sup>

Captain Alexander Rattray reported similar resolutions amongst settlers who lived along the Wateree River. Many left their homes and sought refuge in forts while others fled from the area. "Nothing was expected but an open war." Fearing attacks from hostile Indians, parties of men rotated reaping and guarding their corn crops.<sup>66</sup> The Nottoway Indians who had allied with the Iroquois also proved to be menacing.<sup>67</sup> They were warring against the Catawbans and passed through white settlements to reach their rivals' territory. Asahquah, the headman of the Nottoways, said that his men came "after our own colour and not after white people." However, they were annoyed by the settlers' attempts to "intermeddle" in their military tactics.

---

<sup>64</sup>Affidavit of Mary Gould, 8 May 1751, in *DRIA*, 1:126-127.

<sup>65</sup>Letter from James Hamelton to George Hunter, 4 June 1751, in *DRIA*, 1:83.

<sup>66</sup>James Beamer to Richard Lambton, 10 May 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 65.

<sup>67</sup>Merrell, *The Indians' New World*, 97.

The Nottoways accused the settlers of alerting the Catawbas of their approach. In retaliation they killed cattle as they passed through English settlements, while others in their group deliberately destroyed crops.<sup>68</sup>

The extreme defensive measures of the settlers indicate the degree to which rumor had gripped Carolinian communities. Fearing that there would be no other resolution to these isolated Indian attacks except war, the settlers planned accordingly. They had good reason, since the rumors regarding violence were interspersed with others concerning Cherokee intrigues with the French and ‘Negro’ slaves. Trader Robert Gandey declared that the Little Carpenter, a Cherokee Indian who had been captured by the French and lived among them for a number of years, was responsible for ‘bad talks’ and for rounding up a French commission.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, the Raven of Hiwassee admitted that “I have heard that the French encourage their Indians to kill white people, and also those of our nation.”<sup>70</sup> Glen blamed the Cherokees for permitting the French to enter their territories and “destroying our good friends.” He also declared that a number of Cherokees had “aided and assisted” the French on their expeditions by providing them with ammunition which they had used to kill settlers’ cattle.<sup>71</sup> By cleverly releasing these rumors of a possible Cherokee-French alliance, the Cherokees played on one of Carolina’s greatest fears and reminded the South Carolinians of the strategic importance of the Cherokees in defending the colony.

---

<sup>68</sup>Talk of the Notowaga Indians, (no date) in *DRIA*, 1:47.

<sup>69</sup>Affidavit of Robert Gandey, 5 June 1751, in *DRIA*, 1:71.

<sup>70</sup>The Little Carpenter was known by Cherokee Indians as Attakullakulla. Talk of the Cherokee Indians to Governor Glen, 14 November 1751, in *DRIA*, 1:175-178 at 177.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 1: 178.

Rumors of Cherokees corrupting ‘Negro’ slaves who belonged to English settlers by inciting them to run away were also disturbing. Trader Edmund Grey reported that “a half-breed fellow did seduce six of my Negroes to run away from me to the Cherokees, from whence he promised to conduct them to some place where they might depend for their freedom...(the fellow) ought to be proceeded against, as an incendiary and disturber of the publick safety.”<sup>72</sup> Only three of his slaves returned.<sup>73</sup> The old warrior of Keowee told Indian trader Richard Smith that he had been approached by a number of Negroes who told him “that there was in all plantations many Negroes more than white people, and that for the sake of liberty they would join them.”<sup>74</sup> These rumors indicated that the Cherokees sought to diminish the strength of English settlers by encouraging the French to join Cherokee raiding parties and by causing internal division and distrust by inciting the slaves to leave their masters.

Naturally, Glen was perturbed by these rumors and the response of the settlers who left their homes; ultimately he feared that fleeing Carolinians would lose the strongholds they had made because Indians might reclaim the land in their absence. Moreover, the disorder and panic did not bode well for the success of his Indian policy. He was under pressure from the committeemen in the Upper and Lower Assembly houses to restore order; thus he urgently needed to find solutions to these escalating problems. In the first instance, the houses raised troops to protect the colony. Glen appointed John Fairchild, who was responsible for raising a group of

---

<sup>72</sup>Edmund Gray to John Fallowfield, 15 May 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 83.

<sup>73</sup>The other runaways spread invasion rumors among the Cherokees. Deposition of Richard Smith, 12 July 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 101-103 at 103.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, 103.

rangers, to patrol the borderlands. Glen urged his officers to “assure the settlers that nothing shall be admitted by this government, that may tend to their safety.”<sup>75</sup> By carefully scrutinizing the areas from which settlers had fled, Glen realized that if the Catawba and Norward tribes were reconciled, many of the threats to the settlers would dissipate. Using his diplomatic skills, Glen not only convinced the representatives of the Upper and Lower assemblies to plough money into this project but also persuaded the Catawbas to meet for peace talks with the Six Nations in New York.<sup>76</sup> Glen’s role as mediator was made easier due to the damaging consequences of Norward raids that were inflicted upon Catawba property.<sup>77</sup>

These initial actions taken by Glen did reduce the numbers of Norward Indians traveling through the Carolina backcountry, but more was needed to restore order to the troubled, rumor-laden colony. The two houses of assembly demanded that Glen impose a trade embargo on the Indians. The committeemen believed that this would bring the Indians to their senses and peace would once more be restored. Glen was reluctant to carry out this proposal; he argued that it required “the most serious consideration” and feared that such action would ignite further hostility.<sup>78</sup> Such an embargo would have serious effects on *all* Cherokees, even those who had played no part in disturbances of the peace and who had remained loyal to the British cause, such as The Raven of Hiwassee. Glen also feared that such actions would provoke an alliance with the French, “who have been long counting their

---

<sup>75</sup>Governor Glen to John Fairchild, (date unknown) in *DRIA*, 1, 49.

<sup>76</sup>Merrell, *The Indians’ New World*, 155-60, see also Affidavit of William Thomson, in *DRIA*, 1: 51.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>78</sup>Governor Glen to the Committee on Indian Affairs, (Date unknown), in *DRIA*, 1: 52.

friendship.”<sup>79</sup> By June, however, Glen’s reluctance had dissipated. The increasing number of affidavits and letters he received suggested that the panic had worsened.<sup>80</sup> Glen wrote to the President and Council of Georgia informing them that he was “sending a sufficient force against (the Cherokees) to puni[sh] the guilty” and requested that Georgia comply with the trade embargo.<sup>81</sup>

Glen resolved in his mission to “demand satisfaction for the insolent and audacious behavior” of the Indians, communicated with the traders, and insisted they withdraw from the nation.<sup>82</sup> Unfortunately for the Indians, the departure of the traders coincided with the beginning of the hunting season, when local traders usually provided items on credit.<sup>83</sup> They were sorely missed. Robert Bunning, interpreting a talk given by the headsmen of Tacite, Tellico, and Cheoah, reported that “It is of great trouble to them now to see the white people’s houses empty in this nation, they used to be full of goods...We long and mourn to see our traders among us.”<sup>84</sup> The towns of Keowee and Estanarie responded by abandoning their villages and retreating into the hills. Captain John Fairchild noted that they were “destroying their own corn fields by way of fat’ning their horses as if for some journey.”<sup>85</sup> It came to Glen’s attention that in the early summer a number of headmen made attempts to carry out negotiations with him. However, on setting out they met a messenger who informed them that the Creeks had declared war on them and were joined by a thousand white

---

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>80</sup>This can be seen from the evidence used in this chapter.

<sup>81</sup>Governor Glen to the President and Council of Georgia, 15 June 1751, in *DRIA*, 1:170-72 at 171.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>83</sup>Perdue, *Cherokee Women*, 78.

<sup>84</sup>Talk of Tasitte of Euphassee and others, 30 July 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 107-108 at 108.

<sup>85</sup>Captain Fairchild to Governor Glen, August 24, 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 121-22.

men who intended to intercept them on their way down to Charleston.<sup>86</sup> Naturally, the Cherokees turned back and rushed to their villages for protection. The breakdown in friendly trade relations, symbolized by the trade embargo and the departure of many traders from Cherokee communities, left Indians uncertain of the intentions of those at Charleston. The rumor of attack was plausible and therefore taken seriously.

As the summer months wore on, a number of leaders including Ammouiscositte of Tellico and the Tacite of Hiawassee were reluctant to visit Charleston because of the fear of disease and consequent death. Bunning reported that “The air from the Congarees down is very unhealthy, and the sickness in town proved very fatal to many of their people.”<sup>87</sup> After a discussion with a number of traders, he commented in November that “The nation in our time has been greater than at present. We remember since there were six thousand stout men in it. They are now not half.”<sup>88</sup>

It became clear that the only satisfactory way to bring an end to the disorder and hostility that engulfed the Cherokee-Carolina border was to control the dissemination of rumor. Establishing the source of a rumor made it possible to understand the motivational aspects that had driven an individual to spread hearsay. However, this was an exceptionally complex task not least because it was so difficult to confirm who had started a rumor. In chirographic cultures rumors can sometimes be traced back to one source; at least there might be a paper trail to follow. In oral societies verbal words vanished as soon as they were enunciated. Obviously the

---

<sup>86</sup>Talk of the Head Men of Chotee and Tanacy, in *DRIA*, 1: 100.

<sup>87</sup>Talk of Tasitte of Euphassee and others, 30 July 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 107-108.

<sup>88</sup>Bunning had spoken with Doherty, Beamer and Grant. Memorial of Robert Bunning and Others, 22 November 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 148.

transmission of rumor relied upon the repetition of a particular idea, but the author of that idea was more easily distanced from it. Then as now, there was no single foolproof way of verifying which individuals created rumors. Even the affidavits and depositions taken under oath contradicted one another.

Nonetheless, Glen had his suspicions. At the top of his list of suspects were the traders, for a number of reasons. In their attempts to making a living, they might have sacrificed honesty and integrity and spread rumors along their “trader grapevine” to increase profits.<sup>89</sup> This may have been what motivated William Broadway to spread outrageous invasion rumors. The life of a trader was difficult. Some traders, including Cornelius Doherty, were plagued by debt.<sup>90</sup> Traders had close reciprocal ties to the Indian communities they supplied; they spoke their languages and were the only British subjects able to converse freely with them. Their role as diplomatic agents was very important; they spoke and traded with Indians on a regular basis. Sometimes traders relied upon Indians for advice and protection, as James May did with the Raven of Cowee. Glen was unable to prosecute any of the traders because of his and their reliance on hearsay combined with his lack of concrete evidence. His frustration can be seen from a declaration to the Cherokees in November 1751: “Sometimes traders write letters which we do not know how to believe.”<sup>91</sup>

Nonetheless, he did take steps to regulate the dissemination of information. The scheme for regulating the Indian trade was an attempt to confine traders to

---

<sup>89</sup>Merrell, *The Indians' New World*, 138.

<sup>90</sup>Corkran, *Cherokee Frontier*, 139.

<sup>91</sup>Talk of the Cherokee Indians to Governor Glen, 15 November 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 178-184 at 181.

operate in designated areas, with the idea that rumors would not be disseminated so easily because traders ‘in theory’ would not transgress the boundaries of their licenses.<sup>92</sup> The rules set out in this scheme were quite strict. The traders were not permitted to sell alcohol to Indians because of its harmful effects, nor were they permitted to take “Negroes” with them as companions as colonial officials feared that they would spread unsubstantiated information.<sup>93</sup> In December 1751, an ordinance for regulating the Cherokee trade specifically stated that no trader should “presume to talk to any Indian, of matters relating to the state or government without leave.”<sup>94</sup>

These regulations struck at the core of some of the worst abuses, yet it is questionable how successful the government was in monitoring the actions of the traders and how willing the traders were to obey such regulations. Traders lived and worked among the Indians; conversation was their passport to carry out bartering which helped them to live on a day-to-day basis. A number of clauses in the ordinance were suitably vague: what did ‘all matters of state and government’ refer to? Ultimately, individual interpretation depended upon how much information the traders relayed to the Indians. The ordinance served as a warning from the colonial governor.

In due course the crisis of 1751 was resolved through a combination of diplomatic tactics and peace negotiations. These efforts culminated in an exchange of

---

<sup>92</sup>Ordinance for Regulating the Cherokee Trade, 3 December 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 198-200 at 199.

<sup>93</sup>Scheme for regulating the Indian Trade, in *DRIA*, 1: 86-89 at 88.

<sup>94</sup>Ordinance for Regulating the Cherokee trade, 3 December 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 198-200 at 199.



gifts and a treaty signed on 29 November 1751.<sup>95</sup> For their part the Indians promised “that they will not listen or give any ear to bad talks, whether they are brought to them by Indians or white men, and least that they will not give credit to them but will seize and detain the person bringing them until they acquaint the governor and receive his directions...And the governor promises that he will not give absolute credit to the letters that he wrote to him or others concerning the behaviour of the Indians till such time as he has sent to them to enquire to the truth.”<sup>96</sup>

Slowly a fragile peace returned to the nation. But the foundations of peace were shaky because larger political, social, and economic issues that were transforming Cherokee society had not been addressed. The arrival of increasing numbers of settlers into the backcountry threatened to disrupt the fragile Indian economy and to dislocate the livelihoods of local Indians, which revolved around hunting.<sup>97</sup> The visual changes that the settlers made to the Indian landscape, which included log cabins, roads, and fenced fields of cows were like “a powerful acid that ate away the Indians’ world.”<sup>98</sup> The Indians found a number of these changes offensive and on occasion attempted to obliterate them.<sup>99</sup> It is little wonder, then, that settlers were not always greeted in the friendliest terms. During this period of European expansionism, “a choking cloud of contention settled over the piedmont as

---

<sup>95</sup>Corkran, *Cherokee Frontier*, 30-34. See also Governor Glen’s Talk to the Cherokee Indians, 22 November 1751, in *DRIA*, 1:148, 184; Talk of Governor Glen to Cherokees, 28 November 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 196.

<sup>96</sup>Talk of Governor Glen to the Cherokees concerning their Treaty, 26 November 1751, in *DRIA*, 1: 187-196 at 192.

<sup>97</sup>See James Axtell, *The Indians’ New South: Cultural Change in the Colonial Southeast* (Louisiana, 1997), Chapter 2.

<sup>98</sup>Merrell, *The Indians’ New World*, 182.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*, 183.

natives wrestled colonists for control of the land.”<sup>100</sup> Settlers and Indians began to compete for the same natural resources, which were in shorter supply due to the increase in the population. With each side claiming sovereignty of ‘their’ land, disputes were often protracted and compromise difficult to ascertain.

Ultimately, the crisis of 1751 was resolved. The rumors dissipated as quickly as they had circulated. But it would not be long before the blackbirds of rumor took wing again. This time, though, the magnitude of the rumors they unleashed would lead to the bitter and bloody War of 1760-61.

---

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 182.

## Conclusion

Rumor is a pipe  
Blown by surmises, jealousies, conjectures,  
And of so easy and so plain a stop  
That the blunt monster with uncounted heads,  
The still-discordant wavering multitude,  
Can play upon it.<sup>1</sup>

In a similar vein to Virgil with his female bird-like monster and her vociferous tongues, Shakespeare captured the diverse and ephemeral nature of rumor. The metaphorical use of a pipe blown by surmises, jealousies and conjectures clearly indicates that the instigators of rumor were motivated on numerous grounds to spread outright lies and half-truths. Some were provoked by self-gain, others tried through the promulgation of rumor to rouse their communities to rise up and stand united as one cohesive group, and perhaps a small number of rumors originated due to boredom. In any case, it is clear that rumors divided communities, both fellow kinsmen who under normal circumstances were on friendly terms and others who were perceived as the common enemy.

It is clear that within primary oral cultures information was a valued commodity. It is evident in the documents that there was a deep desire between

---

<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *King Henry IV*, as cited in Ralph L. Rosnow and Gary A. Fine, *Rumor and Gossip: The Social Psychology of Hearsay* (New York, 1976), 21.

individuals to exchange news which was an integral part of regular social intercourse and is all the more logical given the unwieldy terrain and long distances between Cherokee settlements. It was not uncommon for Indians to ask traders who entered their towns, 'What news?'<sup>2</sup> Driven by a mixture of curiosity and concern, individuals were anxious to hear about events that had been occurring in nearby towns, including the movements of tribesmen in their own community. William Broadway's revelation of an impending attack was taken seriously because there was no immediate way to clarify what turned out to be a scurrilous rumor. Whilst it may have seemed unlikely there was still a possibility that it could be true and therefore the Indians were forced to take necessary precautions. At the same time small groups of tribesmen might speculate what had been going on, in the absence of news from trusted channels, and this too could encourage rumormongering.

The wagging tongues of rumor appear to have affected all those who heard them; rumor did not discriminate against age, race or gender. Women were just as likely as men to convey to others what they had heard and interpreters and traders could sometimes play an unwitting role in the dissemination of half-truths and outright lies. It appears that each group was motivated to spread rumors for different reasons. Perhaps the Cherokee women who had heard of a plot to kill British traders were genuinely concerned about the well being of their communities and therefore passed it in the hope that disaster could be averted. Had the traders been killed, they would not only have lost their friendship but perhaps they thought it would be less likely that new traders would set up in their community because of the recent violence

---

<sup>2</sup>Raymond Firth indicates that he was asked on a daily basis the same type of question, "Rumor in a Primitive Society," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 53 (1956), 122-32 at 123.

against British subjects. Interpreters were driven by financial motives, it was in their interest to ensure that they did not deliberately misinterpret or distort what had been enunciated to them otherwise they would fall from their distinguished positions. On the other hand, the dissemination of scurrilous rumors could prove profitable; often it was essential to hold council meetings to resolve the misunderstandings, which had been created by unsubstantiated information. Similarly traders wielded a double-edged sword. The dissemination of false, aggressive rumors might boost the sale of guns and powder, but in the long term discovery could lead to loss of respect within Indian communities and ones livelihood.

Rumor traveled wherever conditions were propitious, as it journeyed over inhabitants who were anxious it became distorted by individual judgments and fears. Sometimes what had started out as a small tidbit of hearsay had the potential to grow out of control. The larger the rumor, the more difficult it was to eradicate. The crisis of 1751 took nine months to bring under control and that was after lengthy diplomatic negotiations on the part of both parties. Rumors became superfluous once the tensions that had given them life died out completely or at least had been temporarily smoothed over. Usually the demise of a rumor required an affirmation from the enemy declaring that there was no truth in the hearsay that had been spread. Although the rumor of impending invasion that Broadway appears to have started was rebuked, serious damage was done, not only had a trader's store been raided but the speed with which the rumor traveled and mutated as it reached other settlements caused great anxiety for those that heard it. Only occasionally rumors died a natural death, they evaporated out of earshot because those who had given them credence

grew weary of them or negotiated a compromise. For instance in the case of the missing deerskins, governor Glen agreed to dispel the bad feeling that the rumor had caused by reaching a financial settlement.

Perhaps the most essential ingredient required for the demise of rumors was group perseverance. The panic of 1751 subsided because each side accepted their misunderstandings and agreed to reconcile their differences. But the causes of these disagreements lay underneath the surface waiting for the opportune moment to erupt into life again. The distinctive motives of the Cherokees and the British settlers ensured that the malicious birds of rumor would rear their heads again and take to wing.

## Bibliography

### Primary Collections

McDowell, Jr., William L. ed., *Colonial Records of South Carolina: Documents Relating to Indian Affairs, May 21 1750 - August 7 1754*, 2 vols. Columbia: South Carolina Archives Department, 1958.

\_\_\_\_\_ ed., *Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade, September 20, 1710-August 29, 1718*. Columbia: South Carolina Archives Dept., 1955.

Mereness, Newton D. ed., *Travels in the American Colonies*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916.

*Journal of the Commons House of Assembly, April 1750-August 1751*. Columbia: Historical Commission of South Carolina, 1951.

### Secondary Sources

Allport, Gordon W. and Postman, Leo. *The Psychology of Rumor*. New York: H. Holt and Company, 1947.

Aquila, Richard. *The Iroquois Restoration: Iroquois Diplomacy on the Colonial Frontier, 1701-1754*. Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1983.

Axtell, James. *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.

\_\_\_\_\_ ed., *The Indian Peoples of Eastern America: A Documentary History of The Sexes*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Invasion Within: The Context of Culture in Colonial North America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

\_\_\_\_\_. *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

\_\_\_\_\_. *White Indians of Colonial America*. Fairfield, Wash. : Ye Galleon Press, 1991.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Indians' New South: Cultural Change in the Colonial Southeast*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Babel of Tongues: Communicating with the Indians in Eastern North America," in Gray, Edward G. and Fieiring, Norman. eds., *The Language Encounter in the Americas, 1492 to 1800*. Providence and New York: Berghahn Books, 2000, 15-60.

Bloch, Marc. *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam. New York: Vintage Books, 1953.

Burt, Jesse C. and Ferguson, Robert B. *Indians of the Southeast: Then and Now*. Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1973.

Chapman, J. Milling. *Red Carolinians*. Columbia: S.C., University of South Carolina Press, 1969.

Corkran, David H. *The Carolina Indian Frontier*. Columbia: S.C., University of South Carolina Press, 1970.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Cherokee Frontier: Conflict and Survival 1740-1762*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962.

Crane, Verner W. *The Southern Frontier 1670-1732*. New York; London: Norton, 1981.

Davis, Natalie Zemon. *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1987.

Dowd, Gregory Evans "The Panic of 1751: The Significance of Rumors on the South Carolina-Cherokee Frontier," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser. 53:3 (July 1996), 527-560.

Firth, Raymond. "Rumor in a Primitive Society," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 53 (1956), 122-32.

Goody, Jack. *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Hagedorn, Nancy L. "'A Friend To Go Between Them: The Interpreter as Cultural Broker During Anglo-Iroquois Councils, 1740-70,'" *Ethnohistory*, 1988, 35 (1): 60-80

\_\_\_\_\_. 'Faithful, Knowing, and Prudent': Andrew Montour as Interpreter and Cultural Broker, 1740-1772," in *Between Indian and White Worlds: The Cultural Broker*, Margaret Connell Szasz, ed., (Norman, 1994), 44-60.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Brokers of Understanding: Interpreters as Agents of Cultural Exchange in Colonial New York," *New York History* 1995, 76 (4): 379-408.



Hatley, M. Thomas. *The Dividing Paths: Cherokees and South Carolinians Through the Era of the Revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Johnson, Michael. *The Native Tribes of North America: A Concise Encyclopedia*. New York; Macmillan; Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1994.

King, Duane H. *The Cherokee Indian Nation: A Troubled History*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1979.

Merrell, James H. *The Indian's New World: Catawbas and their Neighbors from European Contact Through the Era of Removal*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier*. New York: Norton, 1999.

Ogden, C.K. and Richards, I.A., eds., *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1945.

Ong, Walter J. *The Presence of the Word; Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1967.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. New York, London: Methuen, 1982.

Patterson, Lotsee and Snodgrass, Mary Ellen. *Indian Terms of the Americas*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1994.

Peckham, Howard H. *Pontiac and the Indian Uprising*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947.

Perdue, Theda. *Cherokee Women: Gender and Cultural Change, 1700-1835*. Lincoln, (Nebraska): University of Nebraska Press, 1998.

Richter, Daniel K. *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.

\_\_\_\_\_.and Merrell, James eds., *Beyond the Covenant Chain: The Iroquois and their Neighbors in Indian North America, 1600-1800*. Syracuse, N.Y. : Syracuse University Press, 1987.

Rosnow, Ralph L. and Fine, Gary A. *Rumor and Gossip: The Social Psychology of Hearsay*. New York: Elsevier, 1976.

Shibutani, Tamotsu. *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor*. Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1966

Sirmans, Marion Eugene. *Colonial South Carolina: a Political History, 1663-1763*. Chapel Hill, the University of North Carolina Press, 1966.

Spacks, Patricia M. *Gossip*. New York: Knopf, 1985.

Waddell, Gene. *Indians in the South Carolinian Lowcountry, 1562-1751*. Spartanburg, South Carolina, University of South Carolina, 1975.

Wood, Peter H., Waselkov, Gregory A., Hatley, M. Thomas., eds., *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

## VITA

### Marion Allison Cail

Born in London, England, January 4, 1977. Secondary education successfully completed, in June 1995, at St. Augustine's Priory in Ealing, London, where she was Head Girl in her final year. Received a Master of Arts degree with honors in Modern History from the University of St. Andrews in June 1999. Awarded the St. Andrews' Scholarship to study at The College of William and Mary.

In August 1999, the author entered the one-year Master of Arts program in the History Department of the College of William and Mary and specialized in American History.