

Chapter 1

The Cherokee Indians Lose Their Homelands



About five hundred years ago the original home of the Native American Cherokee Indian tribes was located in the Great Smoky Mountain areas of the present states of North and South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, Alabama and Georgia. The Cherokees' first encounter with European settlers happened in 1540 when Hernando Desoto, a Spanish explorer, traveled from Florida to the Appalachian Mountains in search of gold. At that time the Cherokees were introduced to knives of steel and iron axes that made cutting trees and digging out canoes easier and faster. Natives began to sew cloth,

adding glass beading by using metal needles. The soft cloth garments worn beneath the soldiers' metal armor fascinated the tribes.

When Europeans arrived along the Atlantic seacoast, the way of life for the tribes began to change. By the 1600s friendly French explorers met the Cherokees and bargained for furs. The fur trade had an increasingly adverse impact on the tribes of the Eastern woodland areas of the southeast because it changed their agricultural way of life. Consequently, natives found the fur trade more lucrative than hunting and farming.

Women were expert farmers who raised corn, beans, squash, pumpkins, sunflowers, and tobacco. Children gathered berries, nuts, fruit and roots. Farming was considered women's work. Men spent their time hunting deer and other wild game, fishing streams and rivers, chopping trees for dugout canoes, preparing blowguns, spears, snares and traps and fashioning bows and arrows.

The female tribe members were the heads of the family. All children belonged to the mother's clan, even if the mother married a European, the children were considered Cherokee. The tribes and clans lived in village communities built around a large square. Each family had its own plot to farm and every village had a communal field to provide food for the poor and for travelers passing through the village.

Each town had a large, 400 seat council long house used for ceremonies. The Cherokees were not nomadic. They lived in permanent towns and villages. Homes were built of tree bark, reeds and grasses, clustered around large mounds, which served as platforms for the houses of the chief or sachem. Roofs were made of overlapped bark strips and thatch.

Trade became more lucrative than agriculture. As cutthroat competition of the fur trade continued to destroy the native way of life, tribes stopped planting crops, causing their fields to be overrun with weeds. Feuds over the best hunting and trapping territory increased as the demand for furs accelerated. As the tribes slaughtered thousands of animals to gain individual wealth, family discipline and village cohesiveness dissolved. Young men left their tribes for new jobs as scouts, traders and soldiers in the white men's world. Within decades, species of animals were wiped out in entire areas. Guns, metal traps and intensive hunting caused the depletion of wildlife, which in turn, caused the starvation of the tribes.

The demand for more European-made products caused the tribes to ally with the French and Spanish against the English. As the Scot-Irish-English traders and settlers began migrating over the Appalachians, the Cherokee women married European men. The offspring of those marriages began to adopt the European mannerism and culture.

Old bark houses were replaced by log cabins. Leather clothing was replaced by cloth. Along with new goods and products, came diseases, smallpox, and tuberculosis, which was the final blow for the tribal structure. Poverty and alcoholism collapsed stability of village communities, causing a chain reaction of displacements and the seeking of new homes away from war parties and traders' guns.

Finding themselves on the losing side of European conflicts, Joseph and Rebecca Richardson lost their homelands in the Cherokee territory of Georgia and migrated north on the Appalachian Trail with their twelve children to join relatives in New Jersey. The youngest son, Isaac Revey Richardson, was born April 10, 1818 in Eatontown village at

the family home on South Street and Richardson Avenue. Isaac Revey Richardson was the grandfather of Ryers Crummal, Adeline Richardson Thomas, Robert GibsonRichardson, Jonathan Richardson, Julian Russell Richardson, Charlotte Richardson, Theodora Richardson Bell and James and Robert Revey.