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Tradition: Intermittent and Persistent, with Particular Reference to the Cherokees¹

Raymond D. Fogelson

There seems to be little disagreement on the definition of tradition. Disputes only arise with respect to the value of tradition, its significance and authenticity. As a starting point, a definition of tradition found in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* will suffice: “an aggregate of custom, beliefs and practices that give continuity to a culture, civilization and social group and thus shape its views.”

Etymologically, the word “tradition” derives from the Latin *tradere* —“to hand over, deliver.” A related secondary meaning refers to “giving up,” “surrender,” and “betrayed”—and surprisingly is the root of the term “treason.”

Tradition implies an oral transmission from generation to generation of opinions, doctrines, practices, rites, and customs. The Ten Commandments of Moses were passed on orally before being inscribed in stone; core Christian doctrines were kept alive through oral transmission before being written down long after Christ’s crucifixion. For Muslims, the printed Koran is surrounded by and dependent upon a large body of oral tradition.

For some thinkers, tradition is less a continuous connection to a glorified past and more an impediment to progress and social improvement. Henry Ford is famous for his judgment that “history is bunk.” (Parenthetically, the word “bunk” originates from the perorations of an infamous member of the House of Representatives

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from nearby Buncombe County, North Carolina.) However, it is worth returning to Ford's fuller exclamation. He said:

History is more or less bunk. It's tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present and the only history that is worth a tinker's damn is the history that we make today.

For Ford, tradition can be dismissed as an irritant, a cuticle hanging precariously on the dead hand of history. Tradition thus is antiquarian, anti-modern, backward-looking and highly romantic. There is a strong irony here: the same Ford whose assembly lines² accelerated the American Industrial miracle that transformed our cultural landscape also was a prime mover behind the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, as well as the founding of Michigan's Greenfield Village, a romanticized version of pre-Industrial America. Indeed, tradition be damned.

The idea of tradition has drawn its share of ambivalent skepticism. In his justly forgotten film *Deconstructing Harry*, Woody Allen remarks, "Tradition is the illusion of permanence." The reality and authenticity of tradition has been challenged by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, with their notion of invented traditions. Invented traditions possess shallow time depth and dubious origins. Invented traditions often lend themselves to commodification in their capacity for objectification. So-called "real traditions" have more blurred boundaries and indeterminate, drifting timelines. Yet all traditions, whether real, invented, or re-invented, require social recognition. Today's event may become tomorrow's tradition.

A more positive approach views traditions as akin to notions of collective identity. This refers not only to a unifying collective self-image, projected both outward and inward, but also to a process of temporal continuity and sameness. My friend Robert McKinley

insightfully refers to this process as cultural self-awareness. Cultural self-awareness implies a critical and semi-objective sense of one's own culture. Long ago, Paul Radin argued that every society contained a small number of thinkers who questioned the everyday assumptions of its general populace and constructed new philosophical systems. It was also Radin who showed that Native skepticism was evident in the mythic behavior of trickster figures. Tricksters violated social convention and pushed cultural understanding to its limits, thereby making manifest cultural self-awareness.

The tension between Native philosophers and true believers in every society provides the spark that gives vitality to tradition. However, the life careers of traditions can take some tricky turns. Traditions may often cease to be protected, but their memories may persist in a latent state of abeyance.

At the right moment the tradition may re-emerge either full-blown or in a revised form. The Kwakwa'wakw resumed potlatching fifty years after its legal prohibition. Descendants remembered who owed what to whom. In 1958, I witnessed Big Cove ballplayers form two parallel lines for war cries of the *talala*, or pileated woodpecker. They repeated the ritual four times, each time advancing a few feet. This was a condensed version of the ancient war path ritual. After the performance, the ballplayers departed by pickup truck for an exhibition game in Cherokee.

Our contemporary political scene has witnessed the emergence of the Tea Party. This conservative group of anti-big government, super-patriots takes its cue from the tax revolt by a mob of protesters unconvincingly disguised from head to toe as Mohawks. They riotously dumped a large shipment of English tea into Boston Harbor on December 16, 1773. This, of course, was seen as a prelude to the American Revolution—or Rebellion, depending on which side of the Atlantic you came from. Interestingly, as historian Alfred

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Young documents in his fascinating book *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party*, the event didn't become known as the Boston Tea Party until almost 50 years later. Young makes an important distinction between private memory (what an individual remembers about an event he or she has experienced or observed) and public memory ("what a society remembers collectively, or after most private memories have faded or disappeared, the way it constructs the part from many sources").

In the 1830s, the Boston Tea Party became fixed in public memory as a celebratory symbol of American nationalism. At that time, political battles raged between the backcountry Jacksonian populists and the more establishment Whigs, whose party more derived from a close identification with the Founding Fathers and a desire to preserve a conservative revolutionary tradition.

But this was more than a hairdresser's version of history.

Issues of slavery and conflicts between Federalism and States' Rights came to the fore. Another central issue during those tumultuous times was the removal of Eastern tribes to the trans-Mississippi West. Greed, corruption, and mismanagement had a catastrophic effect on Indian Removal. The Jacksonians' triumph led to national disgrace. The Cherokees, in particular, suffered extreme trauma, which was preserved in private memory and family traditions. The expression "Trail of Tears," a journalistic invention, was only seared into public memory years after the tragedy.³ For conservative Cherokees, the event was referred to in their language as "the driveaway," with connotations of animals being led to slaughter. The large death toll combined with the inability to carry out proper burial rites gave the situation a sense of unreality, disbelief, or denial, as well as unmitigated sorrow. Such conditions might in other times have motivated active resistance or given rise to a Ghost Dance, but absolute deprivation made resistance inconceivable. Theologian Jaroslav

Pelikan's idea that "tradition is the living faith of the dead" seems relevant here.

Big Cove, 1957-1960

At this juncture I'd like to take a detour and reconstruct private memories of the Big Cove that I encountered as a young graduate student. I already had completed two years of graduate study at the University of Pennsylvania, where I was immersed in the four-field approach. Exposure to such professors as A. Irving Hallowell, Anthony F. C. Wallace, and Alfred Kidder II afforded me some background on Native North America.

The decision to engage in fieldwork with the Eastern Cherokees was quite fortuitous. I knew a little bit about the Southern Appalachians from visiting my sister while she attended Black Mountain College, that great experiment in America's higher education. Paul Kutsche, one of my classmates at Penn, had also briefly attended Black Mountain, and he had just spent the summer of 1956 doing Cherokee research under the auspices of a three-year project out of the University of North Carolina. Over coffee, I asked him about the prospects of my joining the project. I applied and was conditionally accepted without funding. Fortunately, Penn had a small amount of money for summer fieldwork. I was awarded all of \$300 and was on my way.

John Gulick headed the project, but my closest colleagues on the field team were Paul Kutsche and Charles Holzinger and his family. Later, near the close of the project, Bob Thomas was recruited to help shape the final report, *Cherokees at the Crossroads* (1960). We resided in Big Cove in an abandoned Quaker schoolhouse, next to the Pentecostal Holiness Church.

Big Cove was created after the Removal in 1839 as one of the five contiguous kin-based communities that constituted the core of

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what would become the Qualla Boundary (reservation) of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. While there may be archaeological remains of individual households in Big Cove that predate Removal, there is no clear evidence of a discernable village site. Owing to its topography, Big Cove historically has been considered the most isolated of the five original post-Removal Cherokee townships.

Big Cove has also been regarded as the most culturally conservative segment of the reservation. While other towns had their medicine people and traditionalists, generations of anthropologists flocked to Big Cove. If you laid down all the anthropologists end to end . . . that might be considered a good thing from a Cherokee perspective! Leading the charge was the brilliant and genial James Mooney, to whom all subsequent Cherokee anthropology could be considered a footnote. His successor, Frans Olbrechts, was less well received by his Cherokee hosts and hostesses. Frank Speck, whose knowledge of Eastern Woodland Indians was unsurpassed, was well liked and always referred to respectfully as Dr. Speck. In one brief summer, William H. Gilbert collected much ethnographic material, including valuable data on kinship and social organizations. He also did good service by collating much of the scattered literature on the Eastern Cherokee.

Leonard Broom and one of my mentors, John Witthoft, conducted significant fieldwork prior to the University of North Carolina's project of 1955–1959. I always considered John Witthoft to be a model candidate for what would become the McArthur Genius Award. However, the efforts of these and later anthropologists were only made possible by an impressive lineage of Cherokee intellectual collaborators. Mooney relied heavily on Swimmer (Ayunaii) for myths and medical knowledge; Mooney was also assisted by the venerable John Ax, by Suyeta, Tagwadihi, and Ayusta. James Wofford was his key informant in the Indian Territory. Mooney

trained and encouraged a bright young man named Will West Long (Wili Westi). Will developed an encyclopedic knowledge of Cherokee traditions and assisted several later generations of anthropologists. He was eulogized by Witthoft with a three-page obituary in the *American Anthropologist* in 1948. Mollie Sequoyah and two of her sons, Lloyd and Amoneta, continued the dialogue with outside researchers. I will be forever indebted to Lloyd Sequoyah for most of what I know about Cherokees. He was my patient mentor, my colleague, and travel companion on two trips to Oklahoma.

The aims of the University of North Carolina Cherokee Project were to train some students and to produce a contemporary account of Eastern Cherokee society that would document current issues and prospects and be accessible and, hopefully, useful to Band members. Cherokees had long been critical about the uselessness and potential danger of previous anthropological inquiry. Nevertheless, members of the field team were allowed a great deal of latitude in research topics. The general project design considered culture change and focused on Big Cove as a conservative baseline and Painttown as a more acculturated community. I was originally scheduled to do Rorschach testing in Painttown that could complement data collected by Kutsche, both in Big Cove and in a White Mountain community in Kentucky. However, after collecting about ten protocols I became discouraged and abandoned the psychological testing. I rationalized my decision by telling myself that I was not interested in individual pathology and social anomie, which I didn't have to go to an Indian reservation to study. I refocused my attention on surviving traditions. I became interested in studying those institutions and beliefs that the Cherokees themselves considered to be traditional.

I was influenced by William Fenton's ideas of cultural persistence as opposed to culture change and by his notion of "up-streaming" that involved looking at current beliefs and practices to discover

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clues to the past. I labeled my variant of this approach “iceberging,” meaning that by studying surface features of recognized traditions a deeper and more complex underlying structure might be revealed.

One of the first things I noticed in Big Cove was the persistence of traditional gender roles. There was still a fair amount of farming being practiced, and, except for clearing the fields and helping in the harvest, this was primarily a female domain. Women’s work was continuous, regularly paced, whether in working the fields collectively, harvesting fish, managing the household, attending to child rearing, or making crafts. The world of men extended beyond the household and featured hunting, lumbering, trading, and other activities involving high energy expenditure interspersed with slack periods of inactivity. My first paper at the American Anthropological Association meetings in 1957 was on this topic; a much more elaborated version was published years later as “The Petticoat Government of the Cherokees.”

I also began working more exclusively with Lloyd on medicine and related matters. At this time, I was less interested in ethnobotany and more concerned with the change, persistence, and accommodation in Cherokee medicine. This became the subject of my 1958 master’s thesis and was later published in Bulletin 180 of the Bureau of American Ethnology.

I also had an opportunity to build on the pioneering description of the *gadugi* or free labor companies by Frank Speck and Claude Schaeffer. It became clear to me that these groups were vestiges of the red or military branch of this older hierarchy or dual political organization of Cherokee towns. At least three *gadugi* groups operated in Big Cove in the recent past. They provided an economic and communal safety net for local group members.

A fourth interest ultimately became the basis of my doctoral dissertation on the ballgame, also known as *danahwah usdi* (“little

war”). This topic opened up aspects of traditional war ritual and warriorhood. The ballgame was still played as an exhibition for tourists. I was surprised at the amount of ritual still associated with the game. My first intention was to write a short article that would update Mooney’s classic account. However, I soon realized that a comprehensive description and analysis would require monograph-length treatment. I entertained thoughts of publishing the dissertation and even prepared several revised drafts. However, I put off completion of this manuscript and never got back to it. I am happy that other scholars (namely the late Marcia Herndon, Tom Vennum, and Michael Zogry) found the dissertation useful in their accounts of the ballgame.

While working on these topics I seemed to be running against the traffic of *Cherokees at the Crossroads*. Acculturation, progress, modernity, community, value orientations, and modal personality structure were the hot topics of the day. My research into the past reeked of old-fashioned, moldy-fig, salvage ethnology. I know I roused the suspicion of many Cherokees as well. Who was this young white guy who was spending so much time with Lloyd Sequoyah and other elders? Was something conspiratorial afoot?

Although Big Cove remained a pocket of conservatism, “the times, they were a’changin’.” A few years earlier, community effort, organized along *gadugi* lines, cleared the way for power lines so that electricity reached the farthest corners of Big Cove. This failed to precipitate an immediate revolution. People feared electric bills, and they preferred their old, reliable Roman Eagle wood-burning stoves for cooking and heating. Telephones and televisions awaited the future—let alone computers, cell phones, and tape recorders. Several Big Cove families embraced the challenge and promise of progress. Seaborn and Sally Bradley ran an award-winning model farm. It was Sally who first introduced me to the delights of sourwood honey.

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Wilbur Sequoyah, the school bus driver, lived with his wife in a modern ranch house. But the epitome of the progressive lifestyle was achieved in the large stone-front residence where Georgia and Roy Blankenship raised their remarkable family. I was privileged to rent a room here in 1960 during the final phases of my doctoral research. Later the impressive building was purchased by the tribe for a senior residence. The house has since been razed.

Big Cove in 1957 was still quite impoverished. Yet its residents found ways to survive through self-reliance, communal sharing of resources, small tribal and governmental relief efforts, and through various forms of temporary employment—mostly in the summer. Education was a source of hope for the future. Problems of public health prevailed: high rates of alcoholism, some incidence of tuberculosis, obesity, and the chronic scourge of diabetes. The missing limbs of people like Nanny Driver and Lawyer Calhoun remain fixed in my mind. Conservatives continued to consult native practitioners, while at the same time availing themselves of the services of the agency hospital.

Crime existed at a more or less constant rate but usually occurred under the influence of alcohol. Alcohol entered Big Cove from the stills of local moonshiners and from surreptitious expeditions across its mountains to Cosby, Tennessee. Stories were told about men consuming some of the illegal liquor on the way home, getting drunk, falling asleep, and being mauled by Russian boars. I recently found out that these fearsome creatures with their razor-sharp tusks had been imported around 1900 by a lumber baron who had clear-cut a mountaintop near Murphy for a private menagerie of exotic animals. The boars easily escaped and proliferated in their new environment. Drunken men were frequently “lawed” by their wives for self-protection. A few murders and burglaries occurred each year. I vividly recall one instance when I went to visit Lloyd, who was staying with

the Wolf sisters and their 50-year-old mentally-impaired brother, Walker Wolf. As a boy, Walker was said to have been lured into the woods by the Little People and was frightened out of his wits to such an extent that he lost the power of speech. Anyway, I crossed the suspension bridge near the grammar school and Huskey's grocery store and followed the trail northward on the opposite side of the Raven's Fork River. Suddenly, a man jumped out of the weeds and pointed a pistol at my head. I can still see the glint of its shining silver barrel. It was Wade Wolf, who spent most of his adult life in and out of jail. He had just robbed a tourist shop in downtown Cherokee. We were casual acquaintances. He said "Oh, it's just you, Ray" and lowered the gun. "You won't tell anyone where I am, will you?" I lowered my head and replied "No, Wade" and continued on my way to see Lloyd. During my fieldwork I never heard of any drug trade, unlike the situation now.

In the late 1950s I learned the truth of Gregory Bateson's maxim, "the map is not the territory." Big Cove was a large, bounded area intersected by the Raven's Fork River and its tributaries. It contained impressive mountainsides and a limited amount of fertile bottomland. The Big Cove Road entered from the east, off Highway 441 and a short stretch of National Park land. The road followed the course of the river from a roughly north-south direction. In my time, the Big Cove Road was a graveled, tire-flattening passageway that connected the lower Stoney area with upper Big Cove. The road operated as a moccasin telegraph controlling the flow of information back and forth throughout the community. Automobiles were less common in 1957, and people did a lot of walking.

At some levels Big Cove acted as a single community; at other levels it was an amalgam of separate settlements. Big Cove was politically represented by two elected members on the Tribal Council. The community also came together for various competitions at the

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annual Fall Fair. An early member of our field team, Hester Davis, identified five named sections within Big Cove's boundaries: Upper Big Cove proper; Straight Forks; Bunches Creek; Galimore Creek; and Stoney. Many of these sections had their own Cherokee names.

Four Baptist churches and one Pentecostal church were located in Big Cove. Membership could be quite fluid. Many culturally conservative Cherokees felt no contradiction in following traditional beliefs and practices while still attending church regularly. Often Christianity was espoused only in life crises, like impending death. I went to the funeral of Adam Welch at the head of Galimore Creek. Adam was a staunch traditionalist who spoke little or no English. It was claimed that he chose to join the church on his deathbed, but he expired before he could be properly baptized. At his funeral, the preacher proclaimed that Adam had died a Christian and used as precedent the conversions of the two thieves who confessed their sins while being crucified with Jesus on Calvary Hill.

The separate sections of Big Cove were closely connected by clusters of kin. These sections were spatially linked together by an intricate network of paths. While the Big Witch section of Wofltown was twenty miles away by car, the distance was significantly shorter by foot. Big Cove's borders were more porous than generally assumed. Another mistaken assumption is that Big Cove was a relatively pristine, untouched area. Its solitary splendor, however, was penetrated by a single-gauge railroad spur for logging in the 1920s. Its roadbed along the ridgeline can still be traced today. A lot of lumber was hauled out of Big Cove. The present landscape comprises secondary or tertiary regrowth forest and is maintained on a sustained yield basis.

The secular hub of Big Cove was the grade school, where white Principal Ralph Hatcliffe held forth. Hatcliffe was a strict disciplinarian who was not averse to physical punishment. He was feared by

the students but admired by their parents. Students who welcomed spring by enjoying pungent ramps were forced to stand alone and have their mouths washed out with soap. Incidentally, ramps (*Allium tricoccum*) had a wide geographic distribution, even extending to my home base of Chicago. Chicago's name derives from an Algonquian term for ramps. We could have been called Ramptown. Ironically, our present Mayor, Rahm Emanuel, whom I renamed Ramp, is both scant in height and notorious for his foul mouth.

Getting back on course, the Straight Forks area is intermediate between Bunches Creek and Upper Big Cove. A large boulder sits where the river branches off in different directions. According to local tradition, James Mooney once decided that this confluence would be a good fishing spot. Supposedly he asked Will West Long for a ceremony to attract fish. Mooney then stood on the rock with outstretched hands and recited the incantation. When he finished, he leaned back and seven rattlesnakes suddenly appeared, and the panicked Mooney jumped into the river. Later he bawled out Will for giving him the wrong ceremony.

The farthest removed corner of Upper Big Cove was—and remains—a bastion of cultural conservation. Up upon the Raven Rock cliffs overlooking a vast vista, members of the Calhoun family reside. Lawrence and Lawyer Calhoun were repositories of much traditional knowledge, and the revered, recently deceased Walker Calhoun attempted to revive cultural self-awareness among his followers. He drew much of his inspiration from his uncle, Will West Long, who is buried just outside the household. Again we are reminded of Jaroslav Pelikan's view of tradition as "the living faith of its dead."

In retrospect, the Cherokee project of the late 1950s succeeded in fulfilling its goals. A number of students gained field experience, and the tribe was given access to the results of the research. But rather than producing a useful compass indicating where the Eastern

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Cherokee had been and where they might be headed, the collected data and interpretations have receded into history. Much interesting material from the project is entombed in the archives of the Wilson Library at the University of North Carolina: fieldnotes, genealogies, census materials, psychological tests, and five valuable project reports by Robert K. Thomas.

A reissue of *Cherokees at the Crossroads* appeared in 1973 with a thoughtful epilogue by Charlotte Neely (then Williams). Charlotte points to an improving economic situation, the growth of the tourist industry, decreasing isolation, new housing, improved educational facilities, increasing language loss, an aloofness to pan-Indianism and the Red Power Movement, a concerted attack on archaeologists and their disturbance of graves, a decline in farming, and the disappearance of the *gadugi* organization. Charlotte also presciently observes that, while the Cherokees have always been adaptive to changing situations, adaptation is not necessarily accompanied by the disappearance of traditional knowledge. As Susanne and Lloyd Rudolph also concluded from their research in India, there can be a modernity of tradition. Indeed, this crossroad choice between modernity and tradition is not a zero-sum game.

It's hard to realize that 40 years have elapsed since Charlotte's reassessment of *Cherokees at the Crossroads*. Many of the trends she spotted continue unabated, such as the steady growth of tourism and the baby boom. The biggest change, of course, has been the advent of casino gaming. The per capita payment to enrolled members of the Band has lifted many families above the poverty level. Additionally, about 17 percent of the approximately 3,000 full- and part-time casino employees are enrolled members of the Band. Casino profits have been reinvested in tribal infrastructure, in health and educational programs, and in the purchase and preservation of important

off-reservation archaeological sites. The most notable acquisition was the ancient mound site of Kituwah, a sacred mother town adjacent to the reservation. Remote sensory devices have revealed the structure and extent of the mound site, but direct excavations have been prohibited. More recently, the historic site of Cowee near Franklin, North Carolina, has also been purchased and is presently being studied for non-intrusive techniques by archaeologist Kathryn Sampeck and her team.

These tribal actions and other developments signal a positive valuation of tradition. The revitalized Museum of the Cherokee Indian, as well as the Sequoyah Birthplace Museum in Vonore, Tennessee; the reconstructed eighteenth-century village; the refocusing of the Outdoor Drama; the continued popularity of the Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual; the restoration of the historic Vann House; and the increased number of fairs and festivals—all these developments testify to the significance of tradition in maintaining Cherokee identity and strengthening the economy.

Traditional arts, in particular, are enjoying a renaissance: high quality works in carving and sculpture are being produced; traditional stamped pottery, which was once on the brink of extinction, has made a strong comeback; basketry has achieved new standards of excellence; outstanding forms of beadwork, finger weaving, and silversmithing are also enjoying a growing market. The performing arts, including music, dancing, and storytelling, are very much alive and have commercial appeal.

The artistic explosion has important economic consequences in not only invigorating tourism but also in slowing down the rate of mobility and out-migration. The Qualla Boundary, like other reservations, and rural communities more generally, faces a chronic problem in keeping its younger population at home in the absence of

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a suitable jobs base. Engagement with the gaming industry, employment in tourism, or the opportunity to make a living as artists and crafts people—all help to keep Band members at home.

But what of Big Cove? Its former isolation has been compromised. The Big Cove Road is now paved; camp grounds and public fishing areas abound; housing has been upgraded; up-to-date schools have been built near the entrance to the Stoney area; even the stray dogs are fat. Television, perhaps the main culprit in native language loss, is found in nearly every household. I wonder about the number of cell phones and computers. The cost of this forceful entry into the modern world is a loss of privacy. Except for some of its more remote locales, Big Cove is no longer sheltered from the din of downtown Cherokee.

When I was exposed to the four-field approach to anthropology as a graduate student, we were taught that ethnography—or, more precisely, ethnology—was based on comparison. As a result, students were required to take classes in World Ethnography and a variety of areal courses. Later at the University of Chicago, several faculty sensed that our students were forsaking the comparative approach for a mess of monocultural pottage. Marshall Sahlins and I led the fight to require all students to gain mastery of at least two different cultures or culture areas. Sadly, this requirement faded away in the mists of post-modernism.

Early on, I became interested in comparing what I was learning from North Carolina Cherokees with other groups. Cherokee-Iroquois comparisons had been pursued for a long time, based on known linguistic relations. However, Cherokee culture was deeply embedded in a larger Southeastern pattern that prompted comparisons with the Creeks and other Muskegon peoples. But the most obvious comparison was with the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma. Here, I was stimulated by conversations with Bob Thomas. I believed

the heart of “Cherokeeness” remained in the East. My impression from the literature was that very little authentic Cherokee tradition survived in the West. Bob tried to convince me otherwise and talked about the creative spirit of Cherokee culture and living traditions moving westward. He had written a classic account of the Redbird Smith movement of the so-called Nighthawk Keetoowah faction.

I became excited about venturing to Oklahoma and taking Lloyd Sequoyah along. He might help me gain access to some of the conservative leaders. It would be an educational experience for both of us. I was interested in how he would relate to Oklahoma Cherokees. But mostly I looked forward to Lloyd’s company.

I should mention that in the late 1950s, the Eastern and Western Cherokees seemed worlds apart. Few Cherokees had travelled west. In 1951 a delegation from the Cherokee Historical Society went to Oklahoma to bring back the sacred fire that now burns perpetually from a gas jet at the Mountainside Theater. (But more on this later.) Journeys from Oklahoma to North Carolina were both rare and awe-inspiring. These resembled a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Prophecies abounded in Oklahoma about a permanent return to the paradisiacal homeland. The only local Western Cherokee I knew about was Guy Bark, who had married a Big Cove woman and lived on a remote mountaintop. It wasn’t until 1984 that formal diplomatic relations between the Eastern Band and the Cherokee Nation were restored at Red Clay, Tennessee, where the last council meetings were held before Removal.

In August of 1958, Lloyd and I set forth at the crack of dawn on a clear summer day. I remember travelling west through the shimmering Cherokee National Forest. By dusk we reached the outskirts of Corinth in northern Mississippi. We rented a motel room and went for dinner at a nearby roadside cafe. The waiter eyed us suspiciously from a distance and then came over and declared, “We don’t serve

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Negras.” I wish Lloyd had replied, “I don’t eat Negras,” but I don’t want to add these unspoken words to his angry stare.

The next day we arrived in Tahlequah in late afternoon. We stood on a busy corner where Lloyd would stop passers-by and greet them by saying hello (*siyo*) and introduce himself by saying, “I’m a Cherokee from North Carolina, I belong to the *Ani gilo hi* clan.” Usually there was no response. One woman curtly answered, “I’m five-eights,” and hastened off. Someone suggested that we drive to Stillwell where there was a denser population of Indians.

In Stillwell we added to our plea the old standard line “Take us to your leader.” One kind soul took pity on our plight and gave us directions to the nearby residence of George Hummingbird, the then Vice Chief of the United Keetoowah Band. George welcomed us warmly and embraced Lloyd as a brother after learning that they both belonged to the same clan and also shared the same clan on their father’s side. We were invited to an impromptu gathering of elders, where over quiet conversation we were served bowls of homemade vegetable soup, bean bread, and scraps of deep-fried fatback.

The next day George and his activist brother Gus gave us a tour of the countryside. That night we were invited to Muskogee to have dinner with George’s son, Rabbit, who was a crane operator. After dinner Rabbit asked about some medicinal herbs that were unavailable in Oklahoma. Lloyd recognized the plants and promised to send him some when he returned home. Rabbit then went into the bedroom and returned with a pair of pants, which he handed to Lloyd to seal the deal. Cloth, and before that, animal skins, were recompense for the medicine man and considered instrumental in the efficacy of the treatment. I was duly impressed that this tradition was still alive and well in the heart of the city.

I kept pestering the Hummingbirds about whether it would be possible to visit the Nighthawk people. They weren’t very keen on

the idea, since as good Baptists they didn't appreciate what they regarded as a return to paganism. Moreover, in their activist efforts to maintain Cherokee treaty rights, the United Keetoowahs found little support from the Nighthawks, who wanted nothing to do with the government. Finally, as proper Cherokee hosts, they consented to take us to Stoke Smith's ceremonial ground outside of Vian. Stokes was Redbird Smith's youngest and only surviving son.

Stokes and the Hummingbirds put aside their differences and chatted amiably. Stokes was soon impressed with Lloyd's knowledge of Cherokee ways. Stokes told us about the dances and the significance of the central fire. He recalled that a few years back some white gentlemen from Cherokee, North Carolina, came and wanted to take some of the fire back to the East. Stokes didn't trust the visitors and thought the request was presumptuous. But to get rid of them he disappeared and returned with some coals that he had lit with his cigarette lighter. This is the fire that eternally burns from a gas jet at Mountainside Theater in Cherokee.

While fire, as the earthly incarnation of the sun, is certainly a central feature of Southeastern ceremonialism, the idea that the sacred fire was transported over the Trail of Tears and never extinguished doesn't fit with what we know about New Fire rituals. Comparative evidence shows that a new fire was kindled to mark a new annual cycle, often at Green Corn ceremonies. Special fires were also built for war parties, ball games, and curing ceremonies.

Among the Creeks at New Tulsa ceremonial ground, where I was an adopted member for over 25 years, in preparation for Green Corn the charred remains of the old fire are carefully removed and deposited on a mound at the edge of the square ceremonial grounds. Fresh, uncontaminated black earth is brought in and shaped into a new circular hearth. Later, four specially selected logs are placed on this hearth and at the appropriate time are ignited with the help of

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special herbs and kindling. The fire is kept burning and may be fed with deer or beef tongues during the duration of the ceremony, and then the fire is allowed to die out. Such ethnographic detail may be distracting but is necessary to demonstrate how traditions can be over-simplified and distorted in transmission.

Stokes Smith also honored us by bringing out the sacred wampum belts. He draped them over some outdoor metal chairs and allowed us to inspect them. The belts once belonged to the Cherokee Nation and commemorated various treaties. The belts had indeed survived “the trail where they cried.” They had become heirlooms of Chief John Ross’s family. When the Redbird Smith protest arose in the late 1890s in opposition to the Allotment Act and the dissolution of the Cherokee Nation, the leaders “borrowed” the belts. Through interpretation of the symbols woven into the belts, the belts became the basis for a reconstituted Cherokee religion. These belts have become more and more sacred over time. Today they are rarely displayed in public. Before we left, Stokes tape-recorded a message for the elders of Big Cove, explaining traditional beliefs and offering to bring back the Fire and the new religion, a dream that was only realized decades later through the combined efforts of Bob Thomas and Walker Calhoun.

Our trip was successful. We attended a stomp dance, and Lloyd was convinced that these were not Cherokee dances. While driving through the Cookson Hills early one evening, a deer bounded across the road. Lloyd’s eyes lit up. Though he was over sixty years old, he had never seen a deer before. The deer population in the Southern Highlands had been hunted to near extinction. Deerskins were once the major export commodity in the Colonial Period.⁴ And the deer was to the Cherokees much as the buffalo was to the nineteenth-century Plains Indians. Presently the deer population has rebounded

with a vengeance and poses a public danger as a nuisance and bearer of Lyme disease.

During the whole trip Lloyd was very careful with his money. Occasionally he'd buy a small tin of snuff, but that was about it. Before we left, we went to a craft store and Lloyd splurged on some eagle feathers that were illegally for sale. He later distributed these treasured items to his closest friends. Traditions about the special powers of eagles and memories of the ancient Eagle Dance are still viable.

Let me end with a final postscript on wampum. In the late 1990s, the Cherokee ethnomusicologist Charlotte Heth and I were invited to preview the exciting new cutting-edge laser light exhibits at the Museum of the Cherokee Indian. One exhibit baffled me. It concerned a Cherokee elder who, during pre-Removal days, hung a wampum belt in a Cherokee council house and predicted dire times ahead—but, if the People followed the Cherokee Way, symbolized by the white path of beads down the center of the belt, they would survive as a people. When he completed his talk, the wampum belt suddenly burst into flames. But the fire soon subsided and the wampum belt survived, indicating that the Cherokees, after some difficulty, would also survive if they continued on the White Path.

While the idea of the White Path was familiar to me, I never heard anything about flaming wampum belts. I asked Museum Director Kenny Blankenship about it, and he assured me that the story was well known on the reservation and also in Oklahoma. I told him I had spent a lot of time in Oklahoma and never heard of it.

A few years later, I read an excerpt from a medicine man's expert testimony on the Tellico Dam project, also known as the snail darter case, in which the Little Tennessee River would be dammed and many early historic Cherokee settlement sites and graveyards

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would be inundated. It was pretty much the same narrative displayed in the museum. However, I was shocked to learn that the testimony was offered by none other than my consultant and fellow traveler, Lloyd Sequoyah. I later found a full version of the text in my dear friend Barbara Duncan's wonderful collection *Living Stories of the Cherokee*. The pieces of the puzzle began to come together. I'm pretty sure Lloyd knew little or nothing about wampum belts before our visit to Stokes's grounds. But where in the world did the inflammable wampum come from? Then I remembered that Lloyd had been an off-and-on member of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, in which a central symbol was a flaming cross. Suddenly it all came together! I learned that living traditions can take some circuitous twists and turns, but this does not make them any less meaningful.

NOTES

1. This paper was originally presented as the Keynote Lecture of the 49th Annual Meeting of the Southern Anthropological Society in 2014. I wish to thank Robbie Ethridge, President of the Society; Lisa Lefler, who performed yeoperson service in organizing the Program and editing these papers; Tom Belt for his kind introduction and help in translations; members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians for their past and present generous hospitality; and finally my loving wife Karen, for making all things possible.
2. According to some accounts, the inspiration for the assembly line came from Ford's tour of a Chicago Stockyard meat-packing plant that he took during a visit to the 1893 World Columbian Exposition. He viewed with interest the disassembly line that involved the use of the Hereford Wheel, a solid wooden wheel about six feet in diameter. Freshly slaughtered steers or pigs were attached to the face of the wheel and rolled through a series of successive stations where skilled workmen systematically dismembered and butchered different parts of the body. In reaction to this cutting-edge technology, Ford supposedly had an "ah ha" experience and envisioned a reverse process whereby the disassembly line became an assembly line.
3. The first use of the phrase "Trail of Tears" seems to have come from a Choctaw chief upon his arrival in Little Rock after the ordeal of Removal. In an 1832 interview with a reporter from the *Arkansas Gazette*, he described the journey as a "trail of tears and death" (Langguth 2010, 164–65). The phrase circulated rapidly in Northern newspapers. The Cherokee *nu no du na tlo hi la* (Rozema 2003, 40) or *nunna dual tsyny* (Perdue and Green 2007, xiv), roughly translated as "the trail where they cried," seems like a secondary, later transcription into Cherokee of an already widely disseminated expression. It is, perhaps, significant that James Mooney never uses the expression "trail of tears" in his monumental *Myths of the Cherokee*. Tom Belt said Cherokees never called it "trail of tears"; instead the Cherokees in Oklahoma used a word for when you drive or push livestock (like a cattle drive or herding)—so it would be translated "when they drove them here" or "when they pushed or herded them here," *tsi du ni hi lo tlv (hlv) i*. Sometimes

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a term was used that translated “when they ousted them here.” In other words, they didn’t come here on their own. Occasionally North Carolina Cherokees used the term that means “when they put them over the top to the other side,” meaning put them over the mountains, *tsi du ni wo hi la tv nv i*.

4. The Southeastern deerskin trade of the first half of the eighteenth century is ripe for reanalysis. From the Native side, we need to know more about the ethno-ecology of the deer population; more about the nuanced hunting techniques, including spiritual beliefs and practices; more details about the dressing and tanning of deerskins by women would be welcomed; and more about the transportation of deerskins to the trading post by water and by human porters, many of whom were probably captives or slaves. The interaction with traders whereby exchange value was determined and quantifiable currency established demands closer study. The conflicts between Native ideas of barter as ritualized exchange and market capitalism calls for further exploration. From a Native perspective, manufactured cloth became, in many ways, a symbolic surrogate for deerskins. For a brief period, the deerskin trade became a temporary deterrence to settler colonialism. These dynamics deserve deeper explication and analysis.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the strong demand for deerskins has never been clear to me. Deerskins were valuable (and fashionable) for items of clothing as apparel, as material for furniture upholstery, for bookbinding, and for belts and braided twine. This juncture of Western history witnessed the beginning of the industrial revolution. Perhaps the early machinery was driven by leather belts of Native American origin, soon to be replaced by stronger material (?).

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