

HUGH CARDON'S HISTORY OF CHEROKEE COUNTY

Mr. Hugh Cardon wrote the following history of Cherokee County on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the county in 1936. This history was published in the COOSA RIVER NEWS on Friday, August 7, 1936 - 36 years ago. Mr. Cardon was a much respected historian of the county and a collector of antiques and Indian artifacts. He died February 11, 1953. The Society has collected a number of his articles written for the public press and will publish them from time to time. The following article was preserved by Mr. J. Robert Embry of the Blanche, Lookout Mountain Valley, Little River Area and loaned it to the Society. Other histories of the county will be published from time to time giving the views of other historians. The Society receives dozens of requests yearly for a brief history of this part of the state.

CARDON'S CHEROKEE HISTORY

A great thinker once aptly said, "A land without memories is a land without hope." In this year of the celebration of our century of existence as an organized body politic, it, too, is fitting that we reflect on the "rock whence we were hewn."

The State of Alabama as a whole owes quite a great deal to our county for it was on this soil that Alabama was discovered by DeSoto, the Spanish Governor of Florida, in 1540. After having traveled through Florida and Ga. with an entourage of soldiers and slaves, DeSoto, in 1540, stood on the banks of the Coosa before the great Indian city of Chiaha. From the natives of the seacoast and the 'Golden isles of Georgia,' the Spainards had heard of the richness and beauty of the land and people whose territory they were now about to occupy. There has been some discussion among historians as to the exact location of Chiaha, some claiming that it was located on the site of Rome, Georgia, others that it stood on the land near where Chattooga River flows into the Coosa, and yet others maintain that it was located on what we now call McCoy's Island, near Poole's Ferry. Scientifically and patriotically, we maintain that it was located on McCoy's Island. DeSoto was accompanied by several secretaries, who kept daily records of travel and progress of the expedition. Posterity is greatly indebted to these gallant scholars for their diaries, and it is fitting that we pay tribute to them for first publicizing the value of our country to the civilized world. Two of the scribes we know by name, Biedma and Garcellasso, and the other is anonomously known as "The Gentleman of Elvas," a citizen of Portugal. From all of their narratives we learn that Chiaha was located on an island of large size and it is agreed by all that it was located on the Coosa. There is today but one island in the Coosa that would in any way compare in size to that mentioned by the Spanish and Portugese narrators, and that is McCoy's Island.

Several years ago, D. M. Andrews, a highly scientific gentleman, who had thoroughly mastered the narratives of the DeSoto expedition, traversed by foot the route of the exploration. In addition to possessing a thorough understanding of the narratives, Mr. Andrews was assisted by maps and topographical sheets of the U.S. Geodetic Survey. After this type of survey, he came to the very definite conclusion that Chiaha was situated on IicCoy's Island in Cherokee County, Alabama. The report of his findings has been published by the Alabama Department of Archives and History, and included by Dr. Thomas M. Owen, in his invaluable HISTORY OF ALABAMA. No other commentator on the question has approached the subject with as much precision and as scientifically as Dr. Andrews, consequently we believe his opinion free from successful challenge.

DeSoto and his men spent some thirty days at Chiaha, feasting themselves and their mounts on the products of a soil more fertile than any of their eyes had yet beheld. It was here for the first time that they saw wild honey, black walnut oil, and crystal clear grease, held in gourds. Pearls in enormous quantities were given the Spaniards. These pearls were gathered from the mussels of the Coosa. In turn, DeSoto gave the Indians the first horses and pigs ever seen by them. After having fully recovered from a long and fatiguing march, the Spaniards decided to move on in search of more unconquered kingdoms, but before leaving demanded, women and slaves to accompany them, their entourage of five hundred women and slaves, shackled together in irons, having been depleted by the toilsome travel. At this suggestion our first Cherokees naturally rebelled, and under cover of darkness fled to the forests. Whereupon DeSoto and sixty of his soldiers scoured the country, ravaging and laying waste to homes and crops. In order to stop this waste, the Indians agreed to allow their men to go with DeSoto to carry the baggage.

From 1540 to 1816 we know very little of what happened within the bounds of this county, but suppose that it was occupied by the Cherokee and Creek Indians. Pickett tells us that the word 'Cherokee' means "men of divine fire", while others interpret it to mean "cave people." At any rate, it is the consensus of opinion that the Cherokee men were larger and more robust than any of the other Indians, and their women more graceful, erect, and symmetrical. Their hands and feet were small and beautifully shaped, and on account of their outdoor life, cleanliness, and type of country in which they resided, they enjoyed better health and longer life than any of our other aborigines. Pickett says specifically, "Many of them had genius, and spoke well, which paved the way to power in council. Their language was pleasant. It was very aspirited, and the accents so many and various that one would often imagine them singing in their common discourse." The truth of Pickett's statement will not be doubted when we speak aloud some of their words, such as 'Coosa', 'Oostanaula', 'Chattooga', and 'Junaluska.'

he did not relish the sports commonly engaged in by Indian boys, but found more pleasure in strolling through the woods, studying nature, building houses with sticks, and carving in stone. His father having abandoned his mother while Sequoyah was young, it fell his lot to be 'the man of the house', which position he occupied with dignity and credit. We are not positive as to the exact place of Sequoyah's birth, but it is definitely known that he lived for a while near Wills Town in DeKalb County, and he is also listed as being a resident of the Alpine district in the north end of Cherokee County, Alabama, and Chattooga County, Georgia. As Sequoyah grew older, he not only tilled the soil, raised and broke colts, and kept a herd of dairy cows, but also became an expert in the making of silver ornaments, such as bracelets, armbands, and brooches. One day while working in his shop, he was visited by Charles Hicks, who had had the benefit of schooling, to write his name on a piece of paper. Sequoyah, who could neither read nor write, then copied his name as it had been written by Hicks, on a piece of silver and thereafter stamped his name on articles which he made. A short time later he visited the mission school at Wills Town and was astonished that a white man could write on a piece of paper and this piece of paper could be carried miles away to another white man who could read the same and understand what the white man had thought who had written the note. Most of the Indians thought that this power of conveying thought and information on paper by means of writing was a supernatural gift, possessed only by the whites, and not intended by the Great Spirit to belong to the red man. Sequoyah, however, was not charged with this superstition, and determined that the faculty of conveying information in writing should be shared by the Indians. Returning to his home in the forests, he reflected on the subject of inventing a language which could be understood by his people and within a short time devalved the Cherokee alphabet. This alphabet is said by linguists to be one of the easiest to learn and use of any yet invented.

The Cherokee people soon became accustomed to the Sequoyah alphabet, and in 1829 the Rev. Samuel Worchester, missionary, had cast in Connecticut several fonts of Cherokee type, establishing at New Echota, Georgia, THE CHEROKEE PHENIX. This newspaper was published weekly and printed half in the Cherokee language and half in English, being edited by Elias Boudinot, a Cherokee Indian. It continued operations until about 1835 when it was suspended on account of the attitude of the people of Georgia toward the Cherokee nation.

Native Cherokees were not only converted to the Christian faith, but became preachers and exhorters. Notable among the Christian preachers were John Arch and Thomas J. Meigs, the first being affiliated with the Moravian church and the latter with the Methodist church. As a matter of fact, when the whites started settling Cherokee County in the 1830's, they found that most of

by John Marshall, in the case of the Cherokee Indians vs. Georgia, ruled with the Indians in practically all their contentions. However, Ross' efforts were of no avail as the Indians were removed by force, west of the Mississippi in 1837 and 1838.

Prior to their removal, they had perfected a well-organized system of democratic government, they were seekers after knowledge, they were economical and prosperous, and as a result their lands, slaves, and looms were not only coveted, but actually seized by some of our white forebearers. The Treaty by which the Indian lands were seized constitutes one of the darkest page of our whole existence, and we cannot well condemn other people, or other nations for wrongs for which we have been equally as guilty;

Prior to 1835, when the Treaty was made by which the Cherokees were to be removed to the West, few white people had settled in what is now Cherokee County. In the autumn of 1835 Rev. Whitfield Anthony, a Methodist preacher, brought with him to this county his family and several other families from Georgia and South Carolina, numbering in all about forty. These people settled some four miles north of Cedar Bluff, in the Lay, or McCoy, Bend, or three miles west of the mouth of Mud Creek. As stated previously in this hurriedly written sketch, Rev. J. D. Anthony, a son of Whitfield Anthony, wrote for the GADSDEN TIMES in 1875 his recollections of childhood days in Cherokee, he having been ten years old when his family moved here in 1835. He states that their nearest neighbors Ambrose Vandiver who was the father of several girls; Hezekiah Day, the first Justice of the Peace in the county; John Lay, father of Capt. Pat Lay of Gadsden; Mrs. McCoy, who was the mother-in-law of John Lay; and her sons William, John and her daughter Nancy.

Times were indeed hard for these pioneers for the first few years. Only a small acreage of land had been cleared and was tillable, homes and barns had to be constructed without benefit of saws or shingle mills, there were no churches or schools, wild bands of Creek Indians roamed the woods, having slipped into the Cherokee Nation. For the first year there was no hog meat or grease with which to season vegetables, beef and deer tallow being used as a substitute. When corn was to be ground, a trip was made to the nearest grist mill which was 'back in Georgia.' However, many of the settlers made improvised mills by burning a hollow in a fat pine log to the desired size, and then poured the corn in and pounded it with pestle until it was in an edible condition.

A more serious hardship which the pioneers had to endure was the lack of any organized system of government. A gang of ruffians, known as the 'Slicks', had taken the administration of justice into their own hands. The chief of this gang of buccaneers lived on the south bank of the Coosa, one mile below the