

Students Experience Cherokee Culture at Cherokee Homestead Exhibit

“I enjoyed making a necklace like the Cherokee and I also liked the farming area since I like to cook and we learned about the food they ate. We learned about Sequoyah and how he made the Cherokee alphabet. I definitely enjoyed going there,” declared Ciara Stophel, who was one of Hayesville’s sixth grade students who visited the Cherokee Homestead Exhibit on May 31st.

The purpose of the visit was to learn how the Cherokee people and their culture were impacted by European settlers. The students learned how Cherokee traditions and culture were passed down orally from the elders to the younger members of the family. After seeing the written language of the Europeans, Sequoyah developed the Cherokee alphabet, which was written in syllables. The students learned how to pronounce several Cherokee words thanks to volunteers Marsha Christy and Rachel Baughn.

The sixth graders learned how Cherokee women began making European-influenced baskets with wooden handles and materials other than river cane and oak, so they could be traded for fabric, pots and other household items. As demand for river cane for cattle feed increased, less was available to make the traditional Cherokee baskets, mats, instruments, and benches.

To the delight of the students, they got to grind corn kernels into meal with a corn pounder. Volunteer Eleanor Moyer helped students discover how farming practices of European settlers influenced Cherokee farmers to change from mound gardening to planting their crops in rows, which depleted the soil of nutrients and contributed to erosion.

Thanks to instruction from volunteers Joan Joppie and Jill Long, each sixth grader made a gorget from a piece of gourd. While the Cherokee originally wore gorgets around their necks made from shells, they later began wearing metal gorgets obtained from Europeans. These personally-designed gorgets will serve as a lasting reminder for the students of their experiences and knowledge acquired while visiting the Cherokee Homestead Exhibit.

Lead teacher Judy Bourne stated, “We look forward to visiting the Cherokee Homestead Exhibit each year where the students can learn about local history. The students enjoy the experience and the lessons support the 6th grade curriculum.”

This workshop was made possible by funding from the Clay County Communities Revitalization Association. Volunteers Rachel Baughn, Marsha Christy, Lisa Deas, Jill Long, Eleanor Moyer, and Sandy Nicolette representing CCCRA and the Clay County Master Gardener Volunteer Association were involved.

To date, over 7,000 people have participated in learning activities at the Cherokee Homestead Exhibit. To view photos of these workshops and other events held at the exhibit, visit our website at: cccra-nc.org.

