**Culture in Transition: The Cherokee in Middle Tennessee**

**Tues. March 29 through Tuesday May 3,**

**11.00 AM – 12.15 Tuesdays**

**The Temple**

**5015 Harding Pike**

**Nashville, TN**

**Pat Cummins, Cherokee Historian**

**(615) 926-2406**

**E-mail:** [**pat@nativehistoryassociation.org**](mailto:pat@nativehistoryassociation.org)

**Handout # 1 Supplement**

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**Introduction**

Cherokee Indians once occupied an area encompassing approximately 140,000 square miles that became parts of North Carolina, Tennessee, South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama. The Cherokee thrived in North Carolina well into the late eighteenth century, but as Euro-American settlers steadily moved into and near Cherokee lands, sharp conflicts arose between Cherokees and whites and between Cherokees themselves, as leaders with competing claims to speak for the tribe secured treaties and formed other agreements with white settlers that were not acknowledged by all Cherokee people. In 1838-39, the U.S. government forcibly removed the Cherokee from their lands in North Carolina, leading them on the infamous Trail of Tears to the Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma). A small number of Cherokee people successfully resisted removal, however, by claiming North Carolina citizenship and by maintaining the right to remain on lands they owned. These people and their descendants were recognized in 1868 by the federal government as the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. In the early 2000s these Cherokee, living on the Qualla Boundary in the western part of the state, were the only Indian tribe in North Carolina fully recognized by the federal government. The tribe has more than 13,000 enrolled members but less than 500 of those persons are considered to be full bloods or 4/4 Cherokee by tribal enrollment standards. A minimum documented 1/16 Cherokee blood quantum is required for enrollment in the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, while a documented 1/32 degree blood quantum is required for enrollment in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma.

**1.**

**Cherokee Origins and First European Contact**

The Cherokee, members of the Iroquoian language group, are descended from the native peoples who occupied the southern Appalachian Mountains beginning in approximately 8000 B.C. By 1500 B.C., a distinct Cherokee language had developed, and by 1000 A.D. the Cherokee were living a Woodland lifestyle with unique cultural characteristics influenced by Mississippian religious traditions. The growing and harvesting of corn, or selu, beans, and squash—the Cherokee "three sisters"—were ascribed deep spiritual significance, as were other occupations, including hunting, the care and cleaning of homes, the gathering of other essential foods, games, dances, and religious ceremonies. The central philosophy of duyuktv, meaning "the right way," prescribed that the Cherokee attempt to obtain harmony and balance in every aspect of their lives, particularly with respect to the natural world. Communal responsibility and sacrifice were essential to the Cherokee vision of life, as symbolized by the central plaza—used for public ceremonies—and the council house, or town house, which held the "sacred fire," embodying the spiritual essence of the town. Besides food, the environment provided all that the people needed, including medicine, clothing, weapons, shelter, musical instruments, and personal adornments. The governing of Cherokee towns was through democratic consensus as well as the leadership of priests, war chiefs, and peace chiefs. Familial ties and clan affiliations came through Cherokee women, who owned the houses and fields and passed them on to their daughters.

Although initial contact took place during Hernando De Soto's expedition in 1540, sustained relations between Europeans and the Cherokee were not established until the late seventeenth century by traders from Virginia and South Carolina. During the seventeenth century, Cherokees living in what became North Carolina were distributed among the "Middle Towns" along the Little Tennessee River, the "Valley Towns" along the Hiwassee and Valley Rivers, and the "Out Towns" on the Tuckasegee and Oconaluftee Rivers. As British and French colonial aspirations began to clash, the Cherokee became increasingly important as a buffer and continued to alternate alliances between the two nations. In 1730 Alexander Cuming took seven Cherokees to England, reinforcing Cherokee alliances with the English that had been established through a treaty signed at the Town of Neguassee. The increasing pressure of European expansion, and the subsequent loss of much of their territory, led the Cherokee to initiate hostilities as the French and Indian War (1754-63) progressed. Virginian hostility toward the Cherokee led to the Cherokee War of 1760-61, a war in which the tribe suffered extensive losses.

**2.**

**Disease, Destruction, and the Loss of Cherokee Land**

Smallpox and other diseases brought by Europeans and enslaved Africans were more devastating to the Cherokee and other southeastern Indians than war. Since the Indians did not have the immune system the Europeans had built up after centuries of contact with these diseases, simple contact could set off an epidemic. Cherokee people were exposed to smallpox for a period spanning over three centuries. Probably their first exposure was in 1698, when a smallpox epidemic decreased their population measurably. In 1738-39 the tribe experienced its worst epidemic from smallpox, when the disease was brought by traders or was brought back from an expedition in which the Cherokee aided the British against the Spanish in Florida. Between 7,000 and 10,000 Cherokees died, representing about one-half of the tribe's population. Since medicine men were unable to provide a cure, the Cherokee tried a traditional method of purification—sweat houses followed by plunging into icy streams. This practice only added to the number who died. Others who survived the disease were horror stricken by their disfigurement and killed themselves rather than live in disgrace.

In addition to population losses, the 1738-39 epidemic had other consequences for the Cherokee. Towns were relocated, Cherokee distrust of the English increased, and the French gained a foothold among the tribe. The epidemic also brought a deterioration of Cherokee culture by challenging religious beliefs, almost destroying the medicine man's perceived power. Smallpox struck the Cherokee people again in 1759-60 during the French and Indian War.

Although the Cherokee first made land cessions to Europeans in 1721 and 1755, British victory in the French and Indian War in 1763 ended the need for the tribe as a buffer and brought increasing pressure of colonial expansion. Although the Proclamation Line of 1763 officially prohibited white settlers from entering Indian Territory. White encroachment on Cherokee lands continued after the establishment of the line. The years 1768, 1770, 1773, and 1775 saw a series of "voluntary" land cessions made by the Cherokee. The 1775 cession, led by land speculator Judge Richard Henderson,involved most of the upper half of Cherokee hunting grounds and included most of what is modern-day Kentucky. In all during this period, the Cherokee people ceded almost 50,000 square miles of land.

**3.**