

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

The Cherokee People. By Thomas E. Mails.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3nq5593d>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 18(2)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Anderson, William L.

Publication Date

1994-03-01

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

people from land, people from each other, and self from its spiritual potential. Hogan says as much in "Sickness":

I saw disease.
It closed doors, turned on light.
It owned water and land.
It believed in its country and followed orders.
It went to work.
It tried to take my tongue.
But—these words,
these words are proof
there is healing (p. 63).

Paul Rice

The Cherokee People. By Thomas E. Mails. Tulsa, OK: Council Oak Books, 1992. 368 pages. \$49.95 cloth.

Thomas E. Mails, retired Lutheran minister and author of numerous works, especially *Warriors of the Plains*, has produced an eye-pleasing coffee table book, *The Cherokee People*. In great detail, he covers such topics as origin, settlement, physical appearance, material culture, life cycle, government, warfare, healing, causes of disease, ancient religious beliefs, religious festivals, the transformation of culture, as well as a history of the Eastern and Western Cherokee.

Much of the material in the early chapters of this work is based on Butrick-Payne manuscripts housed in the D'Arcy McNickle Center of the Newberry Library at Chicago. These manuscripts were collected and synthesized by John Howard Payne, drawing primarily on the preremoval writings of Reverend Samuel E. Butrick, a long-time missionary among the Cherokee. Students of Cherokee history will benefit from the extensive quoting of this previously unpublished material. Of further usefulness in understanding twentieth-century Cherokee people are the minutes of the 1913-14 Big Cove Farmers Organization, a contemporary description of life in Cherokee in 1931 by Superintendent L.W. Page, and interviews with Cherokee such as William and Rufus Smith and Archie Sam.

The book contains descriptions that may capture the reader's attention: the daily attire of the men, women, and children; the headdress for battle and ball play; ceremonies for naming,

marriage, death, mourning, and purification, and the religious festivals. The work is lavishly illustrated with almost four hundred color and black-and-white drawings by the author. (My only real concern in the illustrations is his depiction of the Little People—usually described as well proportioned—as dwarfs.)

Although this is a welcome book, the author never indicates that modern scholars have discovered materials that contradict or shade some of the views of his sources. Indeed, the bibliography suggests he did not look at any books published on the Cherokee since 1979. He neglects most of the works of Cherokee scholars such as John Finger, William McLoughlin, Gary Moulton, Theda Perdue, John Philip Reid, Rennard Strickland, and Russel Thornton.

In addition to these omissions, the historical narrative is marred by factual errors. Mails has Attacullaculla going with the Cherokee to London in 1735 instead of 1730; Attacullaculla as chief when he visited London, instead of two decades later; Fort Loudoun built in 1757 instead of 1756; Christian Priber as a Jesuit, long since proven to be a former Huguenot lawyer; and Junaluska with five hundred warriors in the Creek War of 1813, when actually there were 636.

The book also contains misspellings (Amonceta Seqoyah is spelled three different ways and never correctly) and contradictions (the geography for North Carolina and Tennessee in the appendices contradicts the material in the text). Mails suggests that his Cherokee friend knows where the ancient village of Kituwah is located but that its "whereabouts are not to be revealed" (p. 259). Yet most Cherokee historians, archaeologists, tribal members, and even tourist bus drivers can take you right to this "secret" spot. The author also incorrectly implies that the U.S. government "simply ignored them [the Eastern Band of Cherokee] and let them go their own way" (p. 225). In fact, the government made repeated attempts to remove them over the next two decades.

Although this work may be beneficial to some, it should be read with caution.

William L. Anderson
Western Carolina University