

WHEN EAST MET WEST

By Frances Rosser Brown

On a mid-May afternoon in 1951, a caravan of cars stopped at the home of Dr. and Mrs. Grant Foreman, in Muskogee, Oklahoma. Four fullblood Cherokee Indian men dressed in early day Cherokee Indian costumes, four fullblood white men, and a white woman got out of the cars and went up the stone walk to the Foreman home. Dr. and Mrs. Foreman were at the door to greet their visitors, for guests were expected. Only by accident were they expected, however.

A few weeks previously Mrs. J. Bartley Milam of Claremore, Oklahoma, widow of the late chief of the Oklahoma Cherokees, had called upon Dr. and Mrs. Foreman when passing through Muskogee enroute to Tahlequah. During the visit Mrs. Foreman said that she had read in the newspapers about a group of North Carolina Cherokees who were going to travel west soon, over the historic "Trail of Tears" to Oklahoma. The party was coming in the interest of the dramatic pageant, "Unto These Hills", which depicted the removal of the 17,000 Cherokee Indians from their homes in the Great Smoky Mountains in 1838 to land which is now in Northeastern Oklahoma.

The North Carolina Indians who were coming to Oklahoma were descendants of the Cherokees who had secreted themselves in mountain hideouts one hundred-thirteen years ago during the enforced removal of their tribesmen from their ancient homelands to the west. These descendants were retracing the trail their kinsmen had taken in that troubled time a century ago.

"You know they're coming to see you and Dr. Foreman while they're in Oklahoma," Mrs. Milam had said.

"Why, no," Mrs. Foreman answered. "I didn't know it."

The Cherokees were coming. Mrs. Milam had seen a copy of their itinerary. They were to arrive at the Foreman home at 3 o'clock on Wednesday afternoon, May 16. That day they would attend the annual Strawberry Festival in Tahlequah and then come on to Muskogee after luncheon.

When the travelers arrived in Muskogee that mellow May day, they were wearing festival badges, boutonnieres of large fresh strawberries and maidenhair fern. One of the white men led the group up the walk. He introduced himself as John Parris, director of public relations for the presentation of "Unto These Hills" which was to open in June in Cherokee, North Carolina, for its third season. Mr. Parris explained that in the writing and staging of the drama, Dr. Foreman's book, *Indian Removal*, had been diligently

consulted and followed. He, and those with him, had wished for some time to meet the author of this book which meant very much to all of them.

McKinley Ross, vice-chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, was the first of the visitors to be introduced to Mrs. Foreman and Dr. Foreman. Then Joseph Washington, grandson of Tsali, the Cherokee martyr; Arsene Thompson, a Cherokee minister; and Leroy Wahneta, a former Cherokee athlete and now representative of the Eastern Cherokee Historical Society, were presented. The other visitors were Mrs. John Parris, Wayne Parris, and Frank Jones of the Winston-Salem, *Journal-Sentinel*, all of Cherokee, North Carolina, and Colonel A. L. Smith, retired, Tryon, North Carolina, Masonic Service worker.

On entering the Foreman home the guests were greeted with sounds of soft drum beating and muted chanting. Dr. and Mrs. Foreman had asked Peter McDonald, Navajo Indian student at Bacone College, Muskogee, to sing and play his raw-hide drum on the guests' arrival as a special gesture of welcome.

When the music ceased the visitors from the East were introduced to other guests who had been invited there to meet them. Several of these were descendants of the Cherokees who had traveled the "Trail of Tears" in the 1830's. One of these was the late Judge O. H. P. Brewer, of Muskogee, District Judge of the Fifteenth Judicial District of Oklahoma, who had been a member of the Oklahoma Constitutional Convention and Superintendent of education of the Cherokee Nation before statehood. Another was Mrs. J. W. McSpadden of Tahlequah, granddaughter of the Rev. Jesse Bushyhead who had led one of Cherokee groups over the trail to Indian Territory more than a century ago. Two others were descendants of William Shorey Coodey who wrote the constitution of the Cherokee Nation when it was founded in the west. These were Miss Ella Robinson, a granddaughter, and Dan Coodey, a great-nephew, both of Muskogee.

Following the introductions, the Eastern Cherokees presented Dr. Foreman with a clay pipe of peace as a token of their respect and friendship. After expressing his appreciation for the gift, Dr. Foreman took the four into his study and showed them a photostatic copy of the Treaty of 1828 made between the Western Cherokees and the United States, which he kept in a cabinet in the room. Dr. Foreman told them that Sequoyah's signature to this document is the only signature of the famous inventor of the Cherokee alphabet that he has ever found in his historical research. The Cherokees were interested in document. They were interested too in learning that the book, *Indian Removal*, had been largely written in this study.

Soon Dr. Foreman and his guests rejoined the group in the living room where there was a lively conversation on Cherokee lore.

Someone gave a bit about the native language: At the time of the Cherokee removal in 1838, the Cherokee language was more or less standardized. After that time, the two divisions of the people created different terms for innovations that they experienced in their widely separated lands. Too, with little communication between the two tribal groups, normal language changes in each were unknown to each other down the years. The Easterners and the Westerners there agreed that the language was undoubtedly less standardized than it was when Sequoyah caught all of its sounds in about eighty written characters.

After half an hour of conversation and picture making, the guests were invited into the dining room for refreshments. Cake and ice cream topped with strawberries were served. Some of the guests sat in the dining room to eat. Others gathered in groups on the screened porch off the dining room.

When the visitors began to say their goodbys, Dr. Foreman gave the Easterners a copy of his book, *Muskogee: The Biography of an Oklahoma Town*. Mrs. Foreman, too, had a remembrance for them, a copy of one of her books, *Park Hill*, the history of a Cherokee town West.¹ Accepting the gifts one of the guests said that they had hoped to get copies of *Indian Removal* in Oklahoma, but they had learned it was out of print.² Anyway, on this trip they had accomplished one of the things they had set out to do: They had met the man who had preserved much of the history of their people, the Cherokees, and they were grateful.

¹ Carolyn Thomas Foreman, *Park Hill (Muskogee, 1948)*. This book covers the history of the town of Park Hill, an early cultural center in the Cherokee Nation, West.

² Grant Foreman's *Indian Removal* will appear in reprint from the University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, early in 1953.