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LANDSCAPE OF HOPE AND DISPOSSESSION: VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE IN THE COOKSON HILLS, 1934–1949

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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Abstract

This thesis examines a little-studied moment in Oklahoma's environmental and Indigenous history: the era of the New Deal, Second World War, and early days of the Cold War. From the 1930s to the late 1940s, as Oklahoma reeled from twin economic and environmental catastrophes, local people, Native and non-Native, attempted to harness the revolutionary possibilities of the New Deal to improve their economic and ecological condition. Rising from the study of one specific area, the Cookson Hills in eastern Muskogee and western Cherokee County, this thesis examines how everyone in Oklahoma tied their future to the transformation of the land. Tying these developments to broader national trends during the New Deal, including rural land use adjustment and increasing urban federal investment, as well as the rise of an incipient national security state, this thesis argues principally for the continuity of two key themes in Oklahoma's Native American history. First, the ongoing efforts by local, state, and federal actors to transform the state's land through the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, and second, the incredible resilience and political activism of Indigenous peoples within the state, who have fought off decades of efforts by the state to eradicate their political autonomy, to emerge by the late twentieth century as some of Oklahoma's most significant political and economic actors. Nonetheless, threats to Indigenous land remain constant, even as Native nations continue to rebuild in the early twenty-first century.

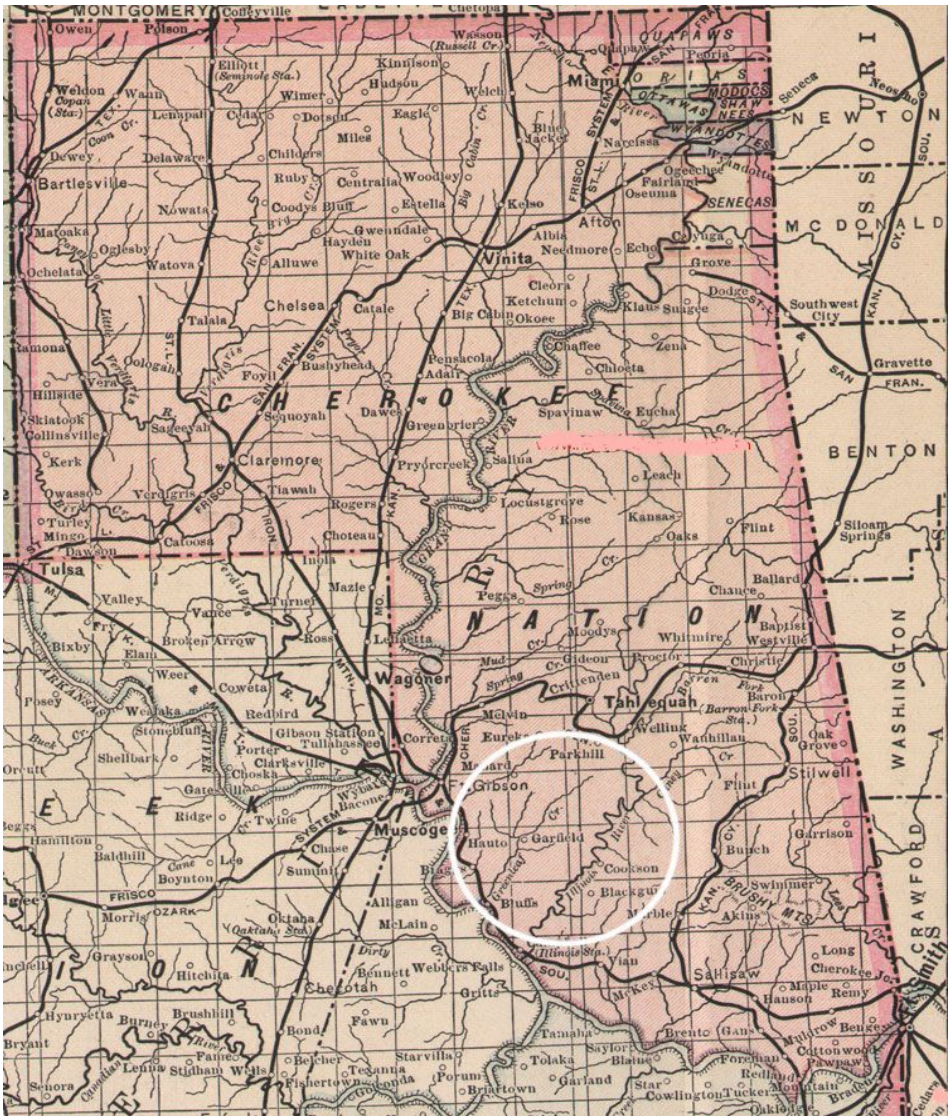

Figure 1: Map of Cherokee Nation, c. 1903. Cookson Hills area marked out by white circle. Courtesy Library of Congress.

Introduction: Hopes and Dreams in the Cookson Hills

From 1967 to 1972, researchers affiliated with the Doris Duke American Indian Oral History Program fanned out across Oklahoma's Indigenous communities. Their mission, funded by billionaire philanthropist Doris Duke, was to record history "from the Indian's point of view."[1] Duke had initiated the program in 1966 at several universities across the American South and West, including the University of Oklahoma, spurred to charity by the concerns of scholars that "invaluable knowledge was being lost as the older generation of Native Americans died, taking their knowledge with them."[2] Program researchers thus sought to save a valuable fragment of what traditional knowledge and memory remained in Indigenous communities before the modern urban world consigned this intangible cultural heritage to be forgotten.

One of the researchers affiliated with the program was a Cherokee man by the name of J.W. Tyner, and across the late 1960s and early 1970s, he would conduct dozens of interviews with Cherokee old-timers across the rocky hills of the Cherokee Nation, often while driving in his car. His travels would take him to some pretty remote corners of the Cherokee Ozarks, a landscape defined by its steep ridges and narrow river and creek valleys. In February 1969, he traveled to visit Katie Sam, a Cherokee woman born in 1907 and raised along the banks of Greenleaf Creek, an Ozark watercourse that ran through an area known as the Cookson Hills, and which Tyner would characterize as "a clear sparkling stream, having some rich farm land…[and] protected by the beautiful hills."[3] Katie had grown up in this arcadian landscape, enjoying the "untold wealth" of the hill country where her father, Watt Sam, "worked hard to

[1] Quoted in Dianna Repp, "The Doris Duke American Indian Oral History Program: Gathering the 'Raw Material of History,'" *Journal of the Southwest* 47, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 11.
[2] Ibid., 18.
[3] J.W. Tyner, "Katie Sam, Some Life History Materials and Related Subjects," 28 February 1969, Doris Duke Oral History Collection (hereafter DDOHC), Western History Collections (hereafter WHC), University of Oklahoma, Norman (hereafter OU).

provide a comfortable home, and farmed his acres well to make a living for the family."[4] Although in her early life Katie had witnessed the forced suppression of the Cherokee Nation politically, and the rapid of much of the Cherokee land base through the federal policy of allotment, these memories existed alongside what, by all accounts, appeared to be a happy and well-off childhood.

But, in the 1930s, Katie and her family had been forced from their peaceful home along Greenleaf Creek, as the federal government condemned their land and flooded the verdant valley to create Greenleaf Lake. Forced off their land, with only a "meager pittance" in exchange for their home, the Sams relocated to a "little piece of flint rock land" several miles east along the Illinois River in 1936.[5] The family never recovered, and Katie's parents, Watt and Mary Sam, died soon after "with sad and heavy hearts believing that the future held little for the unification and way of life so hoped for by the Cherokees."[6]

The dispossession of the Sams at Greenleaf was echoed in another story Tyner would uncover, this time involving Cherokee families who had made their home just north and east of the Sams, also in the Cookson Hills. In the fall of 1969, he drove down dusty dirt roads to the community of Qualls, an old farming village deep in the Cookson Hills, the highest and most rugged section of the western Ozark uplift. Qualls must have seemed to Tyner and his employers as a vital site of study, a community on the verge of disappearing. Speaking with 60-year-old John Raincrow, whose family had lived there "as long as anyone can remember," Tyner learned that Qualls had once been a bustling little crossroads town, boasting two general stores, a post office, school, and even a church. Qualls had never been a wealthy place, but most people, according to Raincrow, had never minded that, enjoying the peace and quiet the community

[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.

provided. But in 1942, as the United States went to war across the globe, the federal government carried out a set of evictions to make way for the creation of Camp Gruber, a military installation that would eventually house 35-40,000 soldiers. By the early 1960s, the town's last store had been shuttered, with Tyner remarking that Camp Gruber "was probably the choke that strangled to death a community."[7] Across the 1930s and 1940s, then, a region old-timers had known as "Greenleaf Creek country," named for the lush tributary of the Arkansas that ran through the hill country here and provided rich bottomland for Cherokee farmers, had been emptied, and, Tyner wrote bitterly, "never again will...know human habitation."[8]

Learning these stories seemed to have quite an effect on Tyner, and he wrote of the dispossessions with clear-eyed anger, laying the finger of blame squarely on the shoulders of the federal government. Describing Katie Sam's experiences, Tyner argued that the Sams and their neighbors on Greenleaf Creek were victims of the "heartless greedy...onslaught of the whiteman," simply another step in the sad story of "invasion and contamination that started three or four hundred years ago."[9] This greed had resulted in the ruination of rural Cherokees like the Sams, who, Tyner wrote "does not want to be crowded, or have his homeland torn up, or his way of life disturbed."[10]

The stories John Raincrow and Katie Sam related to Tyner in 1969 are familiar ones in the annals of American history. Indeed the entire foundation of the United States rests on the violent conquest--often neutrally described as "expropriation"--of Indigenous lands, and the subsequent replacement of Indigenous peoples, places, and histories with non-Native settlers, places, and histories. This process, which remains ongoing, has been termed by many scholars as

[7] J.W. Tyner, "Some History of Qualls Community," 3 October 1969, Doris Duke Oral History Collections (hereafter DDOHC), Western History Collections (hereafter WHC), University of Oklahoma, Norman (hereafter OU).
[8] Ibid.
[9] Tyner, "Katie Sam."
[10] Ibid.

settler colonialism.[11] Achieving statehood in 1907, the state of Oklahoma from its very inception profited off this project immensely. Across the early twentieth century, the federal government in concert with "grafters" had facilitated massive land grabs across the Indian Territory and later Oklahoma, parlaying their success into prestige and power within the state and nation.[12] Through transforming the Cookson Hills, various groups of people—whom we might collectively call agents of the state—transformed a rural Cherokee landscape into one that would generate profit for themselves and their allies, erasing the Indigenous presence on the land in the meantime. It was a depressing, but all-too-predictable punctuation mark of the success of this project.

But the story of these dispossessions is more complex than that. In analyzing the story of how the federal government came to take ownership of about 60,000 acres of land in the Cookson Hills between 1935 and 1942, one finds that the process by which the White man's greed won out in those years was far more contingent than it appeared to Tyner in 1969. First, my analysis shows that Cherokee people were not passive victims of this moment. They had their own ideas about what to do with the Cookson Hills area, ideas they argued for loudly and publicly across the 1930s and 1940s. They sought, as best they could, to assert their sovereignty over their land and future. Further, although the White man's greed eventually won out, this greed was motivated primarily by the deep economic and environmental crises that swept Oklahoma across the 1920s and 1930s. As the Dust Bowl and Depression ravaged the region, agents of the state saw salvation in the Cookson Hills, and a means to generate permanent economic uplift. Living in an uncertain present, both Cherokees and these agents of the settler state--local municipal leaders, congressmen, federal officials--staked their hopes of a better

[11] I remain indebted to the foundation work on settler colonialism carried out by Patrick Wolfe. See Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Studies* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–405.
[12] Angie Debo, *And Still the Waters Run: The Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940).

future in the Cookson Hills, and the eventual outcome that Tyner would describe in 1969 was always a contingent one, never preordained.

Through exploring this story, I aim to focus on characters who are otherwise paid too little attention in this period of Oklahoma history. David Chang argues that Oklahoma's history in popular imagination is defined by two images: the first, of hopeful White settlers lining up for the Land Run of 1889, with their dreams of creating a successful and productive life for themselves in what would become Oklahoma; and the second of their children and grandchildren, only about 40 years later, packing up and heading west in search of a new life, leaving behind a land that was dried up and wasted.[13] These images, as Chang points out, obfuscate a great deal. "Where are the Indians? The Blacks? The oil? The Oklahomans who stayed in the state in the 1930s?"[14] This thesis does not explore or provide answers to all these questions, but does seek principally to complicate that second picture, so evocative of Oklahoma in the 1930s, and examine how those who remained in Oklahoma during the 1930s and 1940s--Native and non-Native--reacted to changing circumstances, and charted new possibilities for the state's political, economic, and environmental future.

First and foremost, this is a story of Indigenous dispossession, the foundational theme of Oklahoma's founding and early history, but one that receives relatively scant attention after the 1920s, as the "allotment era" wound down nationally and was replaced with the Indian New Deal and policies of self-determination. Studies of Indigenous dispossession in Oklahoma have focused largely on the policy of allotment, by which the federal government forced Native nations to divide up their communally owned land bases, weakening Native political collectivity

[13] David Chang, *The Color of the Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma, 1832–1929* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 2.
[14] Ibid., 2.

and allowing an "orgy of grafters" to move in and defraud many Native people of their land.[15] Allotment reduced Native self-sufficiency and autonomy, and eventually the United States all-but destroyed tribal governments with the creation of the state of Oklahoma in 1907.[16] By the 1930s, Native land holdings in Oklahoma had decreased from a pre-allotment total of around 23,000,000 acres to approximately 3,000,000 acres, almost all of which was allotted land, and only half of it protected from sale due to federal restrictions on the sale of land owned "full-blood" or "incompetent" Indians.[17]

Starting with Angie Debo's work in the 1940s, several scholars have examined the destructive effects of allotment on Indigenous nations, particularly among the Five Tribes.[18] Bonnie Lynn-Sherow has shown how Anglo settlers wrought massive environmental change that also reshaped conceptions of race in Oklahoma Territory.[19] David Chang, similarly, has shown how allotment reshaped politics, race relations, and even the landscape in irrevocable ways in the Creek Nation, just south and west of the Cherokee Nation.[20] Rose Stremlau's work on allotment in the Cherokee Nation, meanwhile, highlights how allotment agents sought to sever Cherokee familial patterns, and Cherokee ties to the land, with a great deal of success, despite the creative and adaptive ways in which Cherokee families responded to allotment.[21]

None of these works, however, examine the era under study here, even though, as the stories of Katie Sam and John Raincrow suggest, Native people continued to lose land even after

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[15] Angie Debo, *And Still the Waters Run: The Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), 92.
[16] Ibid., 150–80.
[17] "Five Civilized Tribes Conference Regarding the Wheeler-Howard Indian Bill," Muskogee Oklahoma, 22 March 1934, p. 10, Five Civilized Tribes Series, Major Council Meetings of American Indian Tribes, Part 1, Section 1: Navajo, Five Civilized Tribes, Pueblo, Cheyenne, and Arapaho, and Ute, 1914–1956, Bureau of Indian Affairs Records, RG 75, National Archives and Records Management, Washington, D.C.
[18] Debo, *And Still the Waters Run*.
[19] Bonnie Lynn-Sherow, *Red Earth: Race and Agriculture in Oklahoma Territory* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004).
[20] Chang, *The Color of the Land*.
[21] Rose Stremlau, *Sustaining the Cherokee Family: Kinship and the Allotment of an Indigenous Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

political winds shifted in Washington, D.C.. Indeed few texts examine in-depth Native history in Oklahoma in the 1930s and 1940s at all. Histories that do tend to underemphasize ongoing patterns of dispossession in favor of the optimistic possibilities that the Indian New Deal offered to Native nations across the country. Angie Debo, whose book carried her story all the way up to the time she wrote it in the late 1930s, wrote hopefully of a "new spirit in Indian administration" that would bring an end to the land losses of the early twentieth century, and allow Native nations to assert themselves politically again.[22] In a more recent work on the period in Oklahoma, John Blackman takes a similarly optimistic view. Although the signature legislation of the Indian New Deal, the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) failed in the state, the passage of an Oklahoma-specific version of the bill--which, critically, removed many of the safeguards the act's designer, John Collier, had put in to prevent yet more Native land loss--called the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act (OIWA) "brought the benefits of the IRA..to Oklahoma Indians along with other significant gains."[23] This despite the fact, as Blackman himself shows, that the OIWA did little to help Native nations organize themselves politically or regain land lost in previous years.[24] Further, again as Blackman's text shows, rural and lower class Native people continued to suffer in the years following the passage of the OIWA. Indeed, Native land loss would continue, and by 1990 the total area of Native-owned land had shrunk by around 1.5 million acres since the 1930s.[25] Dispossession has thus remained an important piece of Oklahoma's Indigenous and settler colonial history.

The dispossessions in the Cookson Hills, of course, took place within a very different political, economic, and environmental context from the era of allotment; that is to say they took

[22] Debo, *And Still the Waters Run*, 378.
[23] Jon S. Blackman, *Oklahoma's Indian New Deal* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 4.
[24] Ibid., 117–29.
[25] Joe Mitchell, "Forest Service National Resource Guide to American Indian and Alaska Native Relations," April 1997, US Forest Service, https://www.fs.fed.us/people/tribal/.

place in an era when a great deal in Oklahoma was falling apart. An agricultural depression struck eastern Oklahoma in the 1920s, as farm prices fell in the wake of the end of World War I, exacerbated in 1929 by the stock market crash that would launch the Great Depression. Starting in 1930, a series of intense droughts would sweep the middle of the United States, igniting the Dust Bowl, which Donald Worster describes as "the most severe environmental catastrophe in the entire history of the white man on this continent."[26] These twin crises spurred a massive outmigration from Oklahoma, and eastern Oklahoma in particular, across the decade, with Worster estimating the state as `a whole lost around 450,000 people from 1930 to 1940.[27] Local leaders in eastern Oklahoma observed these trends with alarm, and, like many others across the nation in the 1930s and 1940s, sought reprieve through federal investment. Specifically they sought to restore the region's economy, environment, and population through the transformation of the land in the Cookson Hills. These transformations entailed a continuation of Indigenous dispossession that had helped bring the state into existence and brought wealth and prestige to its leaders.

Cherokee people and Cherokee leaders resisted these dispossessions however, suggesting another underexplored but continuous theme in Oklahoma's history: that of Indigenous resistance and resilience in the face of colonial violence. Stremlau has shown how Indigenous people reacted strategically to the policy of allotment, and attempted to avoid its most brutal effects to sustain their community ties and Native identity.[28] Stremlau shows how Cherokee groups, such as the Nighthawks and Keetoowahs, sought to resist allotment, moving deeper into the high Ozark hills in order to maintain traditional Cherokee cultural and political structures.[29]

[26] Worster, *Dust Bowl*, 24.
[27] Ibid., 48.
[28] Stremlau, *Sustaining the Cherokee Family*, 150–77.
[29] Ibid., 170–4.

As for the political and economic elites of the tribes, there is an emergent scholarship on the Sequoyah movement, during which various Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders in Indian Territory argued for the creation of a separate, Native state in what became eastern Oklahoma.[30]

This plan, of course, failed, and by the 1910s the federal and state government had begun a long tradition of suppressing and belittling the governments of the Five Tribes. This was particularly true among the Cherokees, where the federal government refused to recognize any Cherokee leaders as legitimate besides the few "chiefs-for-a-day" that various administrations appointed across the 1920s and 1930s, and even then these "chiefs" functioned simply to sign off on land sales.[31] Indeed the federal government would not recognize a more permanent principal chief until 1941. Echoing this gap, recent scholarship on Cherokee politics tends to emphasize the revival of the Cherokee Nation as a political entity from the 1950s to the 1970s, and paying comparatively little attention to the period from roughly 1920 to 1950, the period in question here.[32]

This paucity of scholarship is not reflective of a paucity of material from this period, however. On the contrary, Native people, despite the devastation of allotment, were vocal political actors across the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. This activity was particularly true of the Cherokees. Cherokee councils met, elected leadership, and lobbied those in positions of power in Oklahoma and the United States as a whole. The records of politicians like Senator Elmer Thomas and Congressman W.G. Stigler are full of correspondence between these Oklahoma leaders and tribal representatives such as principal chief J.B. Milam, and even rural Cherokee

[30] Most of this work lies in as-of-yet unpublished dissertations. See Cori Simon, "Shadowland: Indian Territory's Contested Past and Uncertain Future, 1800–1910," (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2020); Alexandra E. Stern, "Reconstructing Indian Territory: Federal vs. Native Power and the Expansion of American Sovereignty, 1861–1907" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2020).
[31] Robert J. Conley, *The Cherokee Nation: A History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003).
[32] Clint Carroll, *Roots of Our Renewal: Ethnobotany and Cherokee Environmental Governance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 86; Margaret Huettl, "Product of Chaos: W.W. Keeler, Community Organization, Identity, and Cherokee Revitalization, 1961–1976," (Masters thesis, University of Oklahoma, 2010).

subsistence farmers, people like Carrie Collier or Cherokee Washington. Famous Cherokee and Native leaders were also prominent figures in the struggle against Indigenous sovereignty in this period, including former Cherokee national attorney—turned U.S. Congressman W.W. Hastings, who staunchly opposed the revival of tribal self-government, and the restoration of the tribal land base.

Cherokee people, like Native people across Oklahoma, thus were not invisible during this period. In fact, they elicited a great deal of attention and concern from Oklahoma's non-Native population, particularly surrounding the political future of Native nations, who were far less dead and buried than the state of Oklahoma, and the United States government, may have wished to admit. Across the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, Oklahoma newspapers reported fervently on the political goings-on in Oklahoma's Indian Country, recounting tribal councils, elections, and the various campaigns that tribal leaders launched in efforts to protect their land and restore their sovereignty. Local journalists wrote feverishly, and perhaps a bit worriedly, about the possibilities of this activism, suggesting that for many in Oklahoma, the potential for Native political revival was never far away. Although these articles often trafficked in racist tropes and imagery of the mythical "vanishing Indian," underneath the colonial sheen we might see the very real, and very public voice of Native people, many of whom refused to bow to the eliminationist zeal of the state that had subsumed them.

The "logic of elimination," as Patrick Wolfe would call it, was and remains a powerful rhetorical tool, however, and this has colored many of the academic studies of Oklahoma Indians, and Cherokees in particular, during this period.[33] Under the aegis of the New Deal, ethnographers, historians, and geographers fanned out across the Cherokee Ozarks to study the region's Native population, resulting in a wealth of vital archival information, upon which this

[33] Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 387–409.

study has drawn heavily. Interviewers working with the Works' Progress Administration's (WPA) Indian-Pioneer Histories project interviewed hundreds of Cherokee old-timers, asking them about their life histories and traditional Cherokee practices. Geographer Leslie Hewes, a student of Carl Sauer, drove up and down the Cherokee Ozarks in 1935 and 1936, speaking with Cherokee residents and writing down what he could see of the Cherokee presence there from the side of the region's bumpy back roads. Both of these intellectual ventures into the region shared an overwhelming assumption that Cherokee people, and Cherokee culture, were, to some extent, primitive and degraded, and destined to disappear.[34]

Nonetheless these researchers found everywhere signs of Cherokee persistence and resistance to colonization and erasure, which often bewildered them. Hewes in particular struggled to reconcile what he saw with the prevailing scholarly notions of the day around race and Native people. Claiming in 1943 that the Cherokee Ozarks was a "culturally retarded" place, full of "very conservative and very poor" Indians who were particularly resistant to "culture-modifying stimuli"—i.e. the hallmarks of modernity: mechanization, urbanization, and the emergence of capitalist trade networks—he noted these Cherokee ways of being nonetheless, and remarked on Cherokee views of their own land and its recent history, views which tended to lay the blame for degradation squarely at the feet of "the destruction of game, the allotment of land, and the presence of the white man."[35] Once again digging beneath the racialized binaries between civilization and savagery, and modernity and Native peple, that blinded Hewes, and that

[34] Hewes made this racialized understanding clear in his many early studies of the Cherokee Ozarks. See Leslie Hewes, "Cultural Fault Line in the Cherokee Country," *Economic Geography* 19, no. 2 (April 1943): 136–42.
[35] Ibid., 138.

Paige Raibmon has so eloquently uncovered, we can see a story of continued Cherokee resistance and refusal to be submerged by those would narrate them out of existence.[36]

I argue, then, that this period is crucial in understanding the connections between the destructive moment of allotment and Oklahoma statehood at the turn of the century, and the decades-long revitalization of the Cherokee Nation as a political entity since the late 1940s. Despite the long-standing limits of the scholarship on this place and period, if we venture into the Cookson Hills, just as we can see ongoing patterns of dispossession in the 1930s and 1940s, we can also see evidence of a vibrant Cherokee politics. Although the federal government ceased to recognize any but their anodyne appointees as chief, this did not stop Cherokee leaders from seeking to unite and represent themselves. Cherokee councils would meet across the 1920s and 1930s to elect a principal chief. At one of these councils, in 1938, Cherokee leaders would elect Jesse Bartley Milam as principal chief, who in 1941 would be recognized by the federal government as the first meaningful principal chief since the 1910s, and make the protection of Cherokee lands in the Cookson Hills one of his central aims as principal chief. Cherokee groups such as the Kee-Too-Wah Society, and the Nighthawk Kee-Too-Wahs, would regularly petition the federal government across the 1930s and 1940s, as well, to create a Cherokee land cooperative there, a self-sufficient reservation of sorts, centered around Cherokee understandings of land use and environmental management.

These efforts, which several Cherokee leaders, alongside many of the rural smallholders who found themselves dispossessed at the same time would spearhead, reflected traditional Cherokee ways of relating to the land. Indeed although in the 1930s New Deal land use planners would come to understand the rocky hills of the Cherokee Ozarks and landscapes like it as

[36] Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 1–5.

"submarginal" or not worth cultivating, the truth was that Cherokee people had thrived in the southern uplands for centuries. In their homelands in the Southern Appalachian Mountains, for instance, Cherokees lived in small villages along rivers and creeks, farmed communally in the lush river bottoms, and used the surrounding uplands for hunting and gathering activities that supplemented their agricultural output.[37] Even as settler colonial pressures forced Cherokees to shift their subsistence patterns in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, recentering the Cherokee home around individual homesteads and animal husbandry, Carroll argues that "communal ownership of the land" remained a fundamental projection of the Cherokee Nation's "traditional values."[38]

When the Cherokees were forced to move westward, they carried their subsistence patterns, and their understanding of communal land tenure with them. They found, in the Ozark Mountains, a landscape much alike to the one they had known in the Appalachians: a landscape defined by its sharp topography and many rivers and creeks. Despite these similarities, the Ozarks, as both Leslie Hewes and Carroll have pointed out, are overall much drier and less lush than the Cherokees' Appalachian homeland, creating an environment somewhat less suited to intensive agriculture.[39] Nonetheless, Cherokee people re-established their farmsteads in the river bottoms and ranged their livestock in the woodlands. Critically, they continued their practice of controlled burning in the upland forests, thus managing the forest ecosystem to maximize its usefulness as a game habitat, space for gathering wild plants, and as a rangeland for cattle and pigs.[40] Through these practices, Carroll argues, the removed Cherokees "made the hills of the

[37] Carroll, *Roots of Our Renewal*, 39–40.
[38] Ibid., 55.
[39] Carroll, *Roots of Our Renewal*, 58–9; Leslie Hewes, *Occupying the Cherokee Country of Oklahoma* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 15.
[40] Michael C. Stambaugh, Richard P. Guyette, and Joseph Marschall, "Fire History in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma," *Human Ecology* 41, no. 5 (2013).

western Ozarks *home*," transforming the Cherokee Ozarks into "a Cherokee cultural landscape."[41]

The hill country would remain a Cherokee cultural landscape, even as allotment ravaged the Cherokee Nation in the early twentieth century. Certainly the coming of allotment and the suppression of the Nation as a political entity caused severe ecological damage in the hill country.[42] Indeed, as I show in the opening pages of Chapter 1, the allotment of the land divided the Cherokee commons, and resulted in the loss of the open rangeland for livestock, as well as the suppression of Cherokee fire ecology. The coming of the timber industry to the Ozarks, further, would clear-cut the woods and drastically reduce game habitat and wild plants. Nevertheless, Cherokees continued to make their homes in the hills, and many continued to practice farming the creek bottoms and keeping alive Cherokee familial ties and traditions.[43] Stomp grounds crisscrossed the hill country, and lively little crossroads towns, like the Qualls of John Raincrow's youth, dotted the countryside. Anthropologist Al Wahrhaftig, writing in the 1970s, went so far as to describe this period in the Cherokee Ozarks as a "second golden age."[44]

[41] Carroll, *Roots of Our Renewal*, 63.
[42] Here I aim to expand on Stremlau's brief discussion of the environmental impact of allotment in the Cherokee Ozarks. Stremlau, *Sustaining the Cherokee Family*, 210–4.
[43] Stremlau, *Sustaining the Cherokee Family*, 233–7.
[44] Albert Wahrhaftig, "In the Aftermath of Civilization: The Persistence of Cherokee Indians," (PhD Diss., University of Chicago, 1975), 106–8.

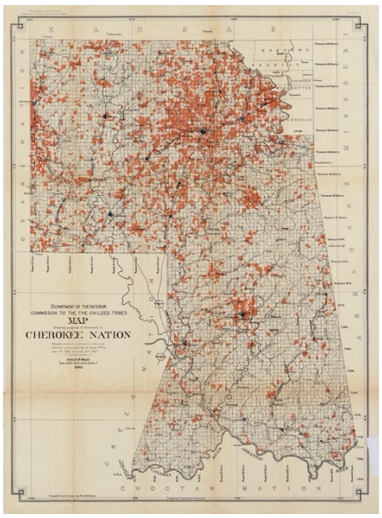

Figure 2: Map of allotment in Cherokee Nation, c. 1903. While allotment proceeded fairly quickly in the oil-rich northern reaches of the Nation, it took longer to advance in the Cherokee Ozarks. Courtesy Library of Congress

Wahrhaftig's characterization is certainly overstated, but does suggest that, for many Cherokees, the high hills of the Ozarks offered a degree of protection from the worst effects of the arrival of settlers en masse in eastern Oklahoma. Indeed, the Cookson Hills as a space proved important as the center of Cherokee political efforts, and Cherokee dreams for the future, across this period, largely because the Cookson Hills--unlike, say, the oil-rich prairie country east of Tulsa, or the fertile agricultural land of the Arkansas River Valley--remained illegible to outsiders and to the state, protected by its high hills and narrow valleys.[45] Few good roads traversed the hills, meaning that non-Cherokees had difficulty navigating the rough terrain. Further, the region contained few mineral prospects, insulating it from the kind of intensive resource extraction that took place to the north around Tulsa, and to the west around Muskogee. Although the Cherokees of the hills experienced the ravages of clear-cutting, overhunting, and finally drought and economic collapse in the 1920s and 1930s--just like many farmers across the Ozarks--they still held out hope that they might fully restore the landscape in which they had once thrived, a landscape that survived, albeit in diminished form, across the inaccessible hills.

[45] On illegibility see James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 9–51.

The very inaccessibility that helped protect the hills as a fractured Cherokee landscape, however, created a very different view of the hills for outsiders across the early twentieth century. Indeed, across the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s, as rural Cherokee farmers and traditionalists came to see the Cookson Hills as a site of Cherokee restoration and regeneration, many outside of the hill country came to understand the hill country as epitomizing an alluring but threatening quality of being a place out of time, a trackless wilderness harboring an at-times dangerously anti-modern streak.[46] When a string of bank robberies struck the towns of eastern Oklahoma in the 1920s, many traced the robbers to the Cookson Hills. One newspaper in Muskogee characterized the hill country in 1922 as "rugged as the Rockies...admirably fitted for the purpose the outlaws have...applied them for," remarking that few police officers were able to "penetrate the wilds" there.[47] In 1933, a report from the Associated Press, reprinted in the *Miami News-Record* in northeastern Oklahoma, described the hills as "rugged, little inhabited, and difficult of access," and went on to claim that "a person familiar with the region could vanish into its heart and elude capture indefinitely."[48] These characterizations spread across the nation, and newspapers from Miami, to New York, to Los Angeles would spread this understanding of the Cookson Hills as a landscape that was essentially opposed to modernity.[49]

In this context, many in Oklahoma came to see it as a site in need of transformation, a place that needed to be modernized to reduce lawlessness and generate profit. Ed MacDonald, chair of the Oklahoma State Highway Commission, summed up this view in 1934 while

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[46] This mirrored similar characterizations made by outsiders about the Ozarks as a whole in the early decades of the twentieth century, characterizations that drew in tourism and created an image of the region as a place that history, and therefore modernity, had essentially bypassed. See Brooks Blevins, *Hill Folks: A History of Arkansas Ozarkers and Their Image* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).
[47] "Cookson Hills Mourn Bandits," *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, 7 October 1922.
[48] "'Bad Lands' Back to Fame," *Miami News-Record*, 2 June 1933.
[49] "The King is Dead But His Band," *New York Daily News*, 18 March 1934; "Notorious Bandit Believed Hiding in Old Haunts," *Fresno Bee*, 11 October 1934; "The Law Brought a Pretty Schoolmarm into the Bandit's Den," *Miami (FL) News*, 9 June 1935.

advocating for the construction of a new highway through the hills, claiming that the road would "be a definite aid to law enforcement agencies," and would help transform a region that "has great possibilities as a play-ground or recreational center."[50] As conditions in eastern Oklahoma became increasingly dire across the 1930s, many people like MacDonald would come to see the Cherokee Ozarks, and the Cookson Hills in particular, as a place that could restore their respective city, congressional district, and state to economic prosperity.

Across the 1930s and 1940s, as the economic, environmental, and geopolitical crises of the Dust Bowl, Depression, and the Second World War hit the region, Cherokees and settlers alike imagined a brighter future, one intimately tied to the landscape. They projected these visions of the future onto this 60,000-acre tract in the Cookson Hills, transforming it from a quiet corner of the Ozark Mountains of Oklahoma into a landscape of hope--for the Cherokee Nation, as a people and a political entity, hope of maintaining and restoring Cherokee political and economic autonomy, and the Cherokee land base. For agents of the state, meanwhile--city leaders from nearby towns, congressmen from Oklahoma, and federal officials--the Cookson Hills tract came to embody their hopes of generating economic and political uplift for their constituents.[51]

Across the two chapters that follow, I examine these conflicting hopes for the land, within the rapidly evolving contexts of the Great Depression and Dust Bowl, New Deal, Second World War, and the early days of the Cold War. In Chapter 1, I turn to the 1930s and coming of the New Deal, as the twin crises of the Great Depression and Dust Bowl exacerbated pre-existing economic and environmental issues in eastern Oklahoma. I argue that the New Deal presented

[50] "State Plans for Hi-Way in Hideout," *Alva (OK) Weekly Record*, 20 February 1934.
[51] I borrow here from scholar Brian McCammack, whose work on the Black community in Chicago in the early twentieth century explores the various outdoor landscapes--parks, beach towns, and campgrounds--that Black migrants created in and around Chicago that came to embody their hopes of racial equity and prosperity that motivated much of the Great Migration. Brian McCammack, *Landscapes of Hope: Nature and the Great Migration in Chicago* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 2.

opportunities to both rural Cherokees and non-Cherokees in eastern Oklahoma. The desire for economic uplift led the citizens of the region's towns and cities, led by their energetic young Congressman, Jack Nichols, to lobby the federal government intensely for increased investment into the region through federally funded projects, including a vast national park. Cherokee people, meanwhile, saw in the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) and the policies of John Collier a chance to generate economic, environmental, and political uplift in their communities, and they, too, lobbied for federal support in transforming the hill country, in their case to create a self-sufficient Cherokee community there.

In this clash of visions, Nichols and his supporters would win out, while Oklahoma's congressional delegation succeeded in preventing the application of the IRA in the state. Where Cherokee leaders had hoped to create a new reservation populated by rural farmers, the federal Resettlement Administration (RA) instead created a 30,000 acre land use project--including a new recreation area created through the flooding of Greenleaf Creek to create Greenleaf Lake--that involved the eviction of the area's residents, including many Cherokees by 1938. Borrowing from Ira Katznelson's concept of the "southern cage," I argue that a similar "settler colonial cage" in the Cookson Hills circumvented the revolutionary promise of the Indian New Deal and reinforced state suppression of Indigenous political alterities.

The New Deal and the changes it brought to the Cookson Hills, however, were not enough for the powerful people of eastern Oklahoma, and by late 1940, as the possibility of US involvement in World War Two became ever more likely, the leading citizens of the city of Muskogee began advocating for a new future for the Cookson Hills tract, as a military installation, in an effort to boost their city's flagging metropolitan dreams. Muskogee lay about twenty miles west of the Cookson Hills project area, and had, in the early twentieth century, been

Indian Territory and later eastern Oklahoma's premier urban center, but by the 1930s was in the midst of a long, slow decline. Citing the massive economic and population boost the installation would bring to eastern Oklahoma, Muskogee's leaders, including city manager Roger Tucker and banker Harry Ogden, would embark on a remarkable lobbying campaign to bring military investment to the Cookson Hills, enlisting the support of Congressman Nichols and Oklahoma senator Elmer Thomas, chair of the Senate subcommittee on military appropriations. In the campaign for the "Cookson Hills cantonment," Muskogee's leaders hoped to supercharge their city's urban development dreams.In January 1942, this lobbying would pay off, as the military announced the establishment of the cantonment, named Camp Gruber, on the site of the old RA project. The installation, designed to house around 40,000 soldiers and civilians, expanded beyond the bounds of the 30,000 acre tract quite quickly, and by the spring of 1942 the Army announced plans to condemn an additional 30,000 acres of surrounding land, including at least 9,000 acres of Cherokee-owned land.

Here the camp's backers, including the Army and the city of Muskogee, would run head-on into a recently-revived Cherokee Nation, led by recently elected principal chief J.B. Milam, whose vision for the Nation's future involved the protection and restoration of the Cherokee lands in the Cookson Hills. As the second world war transitioned into the early days of the Cold War, Cherokees and Muskogeeans would fight over the future of Camp Gruber, although neither side would, in the end, get what they wanted, as the camp languished in a state of abandonment across the 1950s and 1960s.

The story of the Cookson Hills between 1935 and 1949, then, echoes the story of the settler colonial project in Oklahoma and across the globe, a project rooted in the conquest of Indigenous land, and the transformation of that land into something unrecognizable to its

Indigenous peoples, and profitable to the settler state. While these efforts were not always necessarily conscious, the end result has been the same. The creation and propagation of the state of Oklahoma has resulted in a near-continual loss of land for Indigenous peoples, dwindling their holdings to a fraction of what they once were, and reducing many Native people to poverty, even after the era of allotment came to an end. John Raincrow and Katie Sam's stories as told to J.W. Tyner in 1969 were yet another confirmation of this bitter reality.

Yet this story was never predetermined. Cherokee people fought for their land, and fought for a very different future, across the 1930s and 1940s, even as many powerful people in Oklahoma did their best to pretend Native people weren't there. Even in the darkest moments of post-statehood Oklahoma, when Native people have often appeared all-but invisible in the historical record, Cherokee people fought for their own vision of the future, a future rooted in the land. Indeed, I suggest in the closing pages of this study that the last 60 years of Oklahoma Indian history are suggestive of an incredible resurgence of the state's native nations, politically and economically. In the Cookson Hills in the 1930s and 1940s, we can see evidence of this resurgence, even as Cherokee people endured yet more traumatic dispossession.

Chapter 1

The New Deal Comes to the Cherokee Ozarks: Competing Visions in the Cookson Hills, 1934–1938

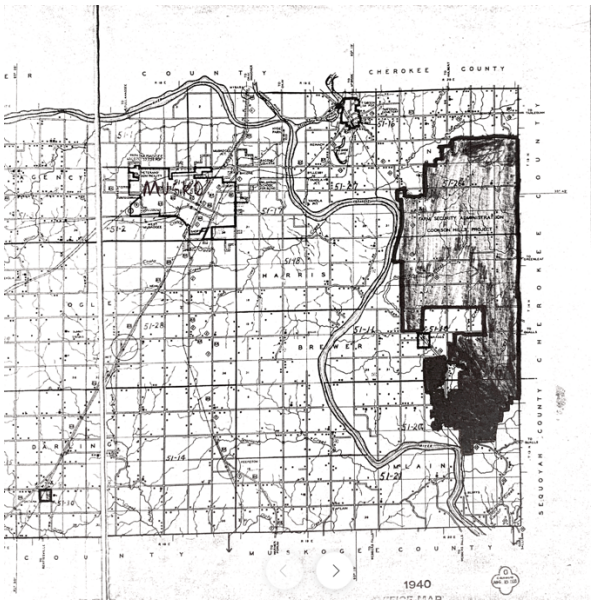

Figure 3: Muskogee County c. 1938, with Cookson Hills Project Area shaded in black. Image Courtesy U.S. Bureau of the Census. Shading by author.

In February of 1935 a jarring headline appeared in the *Miami News-Record*, a local paper in northeastern Oklahoma. The federal government was going to "depopulate" the Cookson Hills, a rugged and notorious mountainous area of the Oklahoma Ozarks, about 80 miles south of Miami. The reason for the depopulation had to do with the land's unsuitability for agriculture, its barren-ness. "In a forced migration, paralleling the Arcadian trek," the article's author wrote, "the 400 families of the unfertile hills area will be moved to a resettlement region in Muskogee county."

[1] The next day, a similar article appeared in the paper in Tahlequah, former capital of the Cherokee Nation nestled on the north end of the Cookson Hills. Noting a meeting between federal and state land use planners with representatives from the local chamber of commerce, the

[1] "Government to Depopulate Cookson Hills," *Miami (OK) News-Record*, 10 February 1935.

article's author described rapturously that the "gullied and depleted soil no longer fertile" would soon be emptied of its human inhabitants, and allowed to "blossom forth as a national forest with fish and game preserves, grass ranges, and playgrounds for eastern Oklahomans."[2] The tired, infertile soil would become fertile once again, not for farming, but for timbering, hunting, and recreation.

This was a remarkably revolutionary plan, a project of one of the New Deal's most ambitious--and controversial--rural land policy agencies, the Resettlement Administration; it was also, however, not the only possible future for the hills that people in eastern Oklahoma saw in the 1930s. The previous year, representatives of several Cherokee groups, including most prominently the Kee-Too-Wah Society and the Kee-Too-Wah Nighthawks, had publicly advocated for the creation of a vast, self-sufficient, communally owned Cherokee community in the Cookson Hills. Seeking, "only a chance to become self-supporting," in the words of respected elder Sam Smith, Cherokee leaders made their case publicly at a congress with Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier in Muskogee in April 1934.[3]

All the groups who would find themselves lobbying for these remarkably distinct futures--Cherokee activists, federal and state land use planners, local boosters from towns like Muskogee and Tahlequah, and members of Oklahoma's congressional delegation--did so through an embrace of the transformative possibilities of the New Deal. Newly elected president Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his New Deal promised radical changes to the American economy and society. A new set of idealists found themselves in government positions, and they sought to create a new, equitable society. Central to this project, as historians Sarah Phillips and Sarah

[2] "Cookson Hills May Be Sight [sic] of AAA Land Reclamation Project," *Tahlequah (OK) Citizen*, 21 February 1935.
[3] "Cherokee Indians Near Gore Plan First Project," *Tulsa World*, 19 April 1934.

Gregg have shown, was rural uplift through reforms in land use.[4] Central also to the New Deal was a radical shift in the federal government's relationship to Native nations, epitomized through Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier's Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) which promised an end to the policy of allotment and the recognition of tribes' right to self-government.[5]

In the Cookson Hills in the 1930s, these two imperatives of the New Deal met on the landscape, and were revealed to be at odds with each other. These two visions imagined radically distinct futures for the hills. The conservationists and federal land use planners who advocated for and eventually carried out the RA project in the Cookson Hills imagined an outdoor recreation paradise, devoid of permanent human habitation, a place where the land could recover from the abuses of ecological exploitation. Meanwhile many Cherokee activists, including the residents of the hill country, promoted the return of a distinct form of Cherokee habitation in the hills, one centered around agriculture, careful management of the hill country's forested ecosystem, and communal land tenure. These competing visions thus pitted emergent concepts of Indigenous sovereignty and conservation against each other, revealing the lofty aims of the New Deal to create an equitable society and the limitations of those aims in a state and nation built on processes of Indigenous dispossession.[6]

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[4] Sarah Phillips, *This Land, This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Sara Gregg, *Managing the Mountains: Land Use Planning, the New Deal, and the Creation of a Federal Landscape in Appalachia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), ch. 6. See also Neil Maher, *Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Jess Gilbert, *Planning Democracy: Agrarian Intellectuals and the Intended New Deal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

[5] On the Indian New Deal, see Lawrence Kelly, *The Assault on Assimilation: John Collier and the Origins of Indian Policy Reform* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983); Kenneth R. Philp, *John Collier's Crusade for Indian Reform, 1920–1954* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977); Marsha Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010).

[6] I am particularly influenced by the scholarship of Marsha Weisiger, whose work on sheep reduction in the Navajo Nation during the New Deal is particularly revelatory of the tension between conservation and Indigenous sovereignty. Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country*, 181–200. Other scholars have drawn out this tension through examination of the histories of various national parks across the West. See Mark Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 25–

Because only one vision, in the zero-sum game of Oklahoma land politics, could win out, and to tell the truth, the deck was always stacked against the Cherokees who advocated for the IRA and its promise of a return to communal land tenure. The wealthy and powerful elites of eastern Oklahoma, Native and non-Native alike, opposed the IRA and John Collier, and would help bring about its demise. Members of the Oklahoma congressional delegation such as W.W. Hastings, Jack Nichols, and Elmer Thomas opposed the IRA even as they lobbied passionately for other New Deal programs in the region, particularly the RA project in the Cookson Hills. Blake Perkins, writing of the New Deal in the Arkansas Ozarks, argues that it was a process mediated intensely by local elites, and in the Oklahoma Ozarks the story was no different.[7] Local elites, representing the interests of towns such as Muskogee and Tahlequah, sought to transform the Cookson Hills, not simply to restore the environment, but to generate vital economic benefits for those towns and the region as a whole. By transforming the Cookson Hills into "Green Country," leaders such as Nichols hoped to rake in money from outdoor recreation and provide a path forward for towns such as Muskogee and Tahlequah, going through their own severe decline in the wake of the economic and environmental disaster of the 1930s. When men like Nichols and his contemporaries looked at the Cookson Hills, they did not see the Cherokee homeland that Keetoowah leaders saw; rather, they saw worthless land in need of drastic transformation in order to turn a profit.

The Cherokees who advocated for the IRA and for the formal recognition of the Cookson Hills as a Cherokee homeland, then, were trapped in a "settler colonial cage," that consciously

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37; Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 149–70.

[7] Blake Perkins, *Hillbilly Hellraisers: Federal Power and Populist Defiance in the Arkansas Ozarks* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 127–57.

delimited the revolutionary possibilities of the New Deal in the Cherokee Ozarks.[8] By 1939, the RA--and later its successor the Farm Security Administration (FSA)--had bought up approximately 33,000 acres of land in the Cookson Hills, and gone about transforming it into a conservation and recreation area, part of which is today known as Greenleaf State Park. Meanwhile the IRA had failed in Oklahoma, due in large part to the lobbying of influential congressmen like W.W. Hastings and Elmer Thomas, and its replacement, the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act (OIWA) had been stripped of much of its reformatory teeth, largely due to the efforts of Congressman Jack Nichols.

Nevertheless, the failure of the IRA and the Keetoowah vision for the hills in the 1930s should not blind us to the very real and concerted efforts made by Cherokee people to advance their own interests under the auspices of the New Deal. Although the Cookson Hills were never transformed into a vast Indian reservation, that future appeared very possible for many in eastern Oklahoma in the early 1930s, and the ideal would not die with the failure of the IRA in 1935. Indeed, although it was not visible to most at the time, Cherokee efforts to support the IRA presaged a decades-long resurgence that has continued to the present day, and Cherokee leaders were not done trying to reclaim the Cookson Hills.

This future, however, was not quite visible in the 1930s. Deep in the throes of economic and environmental crisis, Cherokees, White homesteaders, politicians, and local New Deal planners all saw opportunity in the New Deal, and they tied that opportunity to a reimagining of the landscape. They saw in the Cookson Hills a site of potential reimagination. Local people,

[8] Here I borrow from New Deal scholar Ira Katznelson's concept of the "southern cage" that prevented the advancement of racial equity in the American South during the New Deal, a cage that was constructed and maintained by southern congressmen, whom FDR relied on for support of his policies. Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liveright, 2013),

desperate for relief, attempted to use the promise of the New Deal to generate economic, social, and cultural uplift.[9]

Few places needed the revolutionary changes promised by the New Deal as much as Oklahoma, a state ravaged by agricultural depression and Dust Bowl. An agricultural depression brought on by the collapse of farm prices in the early 1920s had sparked an economic decline in the state, particularly in its verdant eastern section.[10] This decline was exacerbated by two catastrophes that struck the state in the late 1920s and early 1930s: the first was the stock market crash of 1929, which marked the beginning of the Great Depression; the second was a series of severe droughts that struck the middle of the continent from 1930 to 1936.[11] Drought hit the largely agricultural region of the Cherokee Ozarks and Arkansas River Valley particularly hard. In October 1931, a journalist from the *Boynton Index*, the paper for a small town in Muskogee County, proclaimed the last twelve months as "the year of the great drought," and remarked on the extraordinary aridity of the past year, which had "wrought great damage to millions" and deprived "several million persons of food."[12] In 1934, another drought swept across the region, sparking financial losses that Donald Worster argues amounted to half the total money the US had poured into the war effort during World War 1.[13] In 1936, director of the recently created

[9] The frenzy with which people lobbied for New Deal programs belies the notion, advanced most prominently by Oklahoma historian Keith L. Bryant, Jr., that the New Deal left little or no lasting impact on the state. Keith L. Bryant, Jr., "New Deal," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=NE007.
[10] Much scholarship on the Dust Bowl era in Oklahoma has focused on the state's western region, on the Southern Plains, but, as Donald Worster points out, farmers in eastern Oklahoma suffered intensely in the 1920s and 1930s too, and indeed made up the majority of "Okies" who migrated to California in that period. The Joads, protagonists of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, hailed from Sallisaw, a small farming town on the Arkansas River just a few miles away from the base of the Cookson Hills. Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (1979; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 48–60.
[11] Worster, *Dust Bowl*, 8–12.
[12] "Huge Task in Drought Aid Met by Red Cross," *Boynton Index*, 23 October 1931.
[13] Worster, *Dust Bowl*, 9.

RA Rex Tugwell would tour the Great Plains and find what he termed a "picture of complete destruction."[14]

Farmers in eastern Oklahoma, Native and non-Native, had long lived on tight margins, and economic and environmental crises made things even tougher across the 1920s and 1930s. As David Chang has pointed out, most farmers in the region in the early twentieth century were not landowners, but rather made their money through tenant farming.[15] In the Cookson Hills, an investigation carried out by the RA in 1935 would find that 69% of farm families were on some sort of government relief, and that the average yearly income for farm families sat at around $49 for landowners and $39 for tenant farmers, with families on average numbering between six and twelve members.[16]

As times got increasingly tough, many farmers opted to simply up stakes and leave. One newspaper estimated in 1935 that 30 percent of farms in the Cookson Hills had been abandoned in the previous five years.[17] This trend constituted a piece of a larger pattern of outmigration across Oklahoma in the 1930s. Across the 1930s, 440,000 people moved out of Oklahoma, many of them heading west to become migrant farm laborers in California and Arizona. Most of these migrants came from the state's eastern portions. Worster argues that, in that section of the state in the 1930s, 28% of farmers moved every year, contributing to what Worster called a "rootless countryside."[18]

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[14] Ibid., 12.
[15] David Chang, *The Color of the Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma, 1832–1929* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011) 131. In Cherokee County, 57% of farmers were tenants; in Sequoyah, 70%; in Muskogee County, 72%. Leslie Hewes, "Tenure," 1936, Folder 13, Box 5, Leslie Hewes Collection (hereafter LHC), Western History Collections (hereafter WHC), University of Oklahoma, Norman (hereafter OU).
[16] "Resettlement Program Being Launched in Two States May Establish Sound Land Policy," *Miami News-Record*, 5 August 1935.
[17] "Cookson Hills Tract is Sold," *Miami News-Record*, 13 October 1935.
[18] Worster, *Dust Bowl*, 48.

Indeed, rootlessness seemed to characterize the experiences of White farmers in the hill country in the early twentieth century, a rootlessness exacerbated by the economic and environmental ravages of the 1920s and 1930s. George Hess, the son of German immigrants, had been born in Indian Territory in 1895, as the Cherokee Nation fought tooth and nail to resist allotment. By 1920 Hess was renting a farm in Sequoyah County and living with his wife.[19] By 1930, however, he and his wife had moved, with their now-enlarged family of six children, to a new farm in Nash Township, Muskogee County, right in the heart of the Cookson Hills, which they rented for three dollars a month.[20] John M. Reynolds, who went by Jack, meanwhile, had been born in Cookson in 1890 to White squatters who had come over the line into Indian Territory from Arkansas sometime in the 1880s. Sometime before 1920 Reynolds took out a mortgage from a local bank to purchase a farm in Cookson, but by 1930 Reynolds had lost his farm and was renting property nearby.[21]

It should be unsurprising then that by 1935 men like Jack Reynolds and George Hess had had enough eking out a living on someone else's land in the hill country. In 1935, Reynolds would write angrily to Senator Elmer Thomas, denigrating the region's agricultural potential and claiming the hills were "just a refuge for outlaws and moonshiners." He went on to describe the region's forests as "cut away" and "practically gone," before exhorting Thomas to urge the government to buy the hill country and transform it into a forest reserve.[22]

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[19] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1920, Population, Sequoyah, Oklahoma* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1923), 1C.
[20] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1930, Population, Nash, Muskogee, Oklahoma* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1933), 5C.
[21] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1920, Population, Cookson, Cherokee, Oklahoma*, 1A; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1930, Population, Cookson, Cherokee, Oklahoma,* 8B.
[22] Jack Reynolds to Elmer Thomas, 18 March 1935, F 58, B PJ 10, Elmer Thomas Collection (hereafter ETC), Carl Albert Center for Congressional Research (hereafter CACCR), OU.

The grim portrait Reynolds painted, of a deforested region made up of worthless soil and morally tainted individuals, reflected the dire straits of the time, but also belied the long history of successful Cherokee habitation in the Cookson Hills. By the time Reynolds' parents had moved to Cookson in the 1880s, Cherokee people had lived and farmed in the hill country for two generations, thriving in an environment that echoed in many ways their original homeland in the southern Appalachians. For the residents of the hills, the years since the coming en masse of white settlers and the destruction of the Cherokee Nation as a political entity had been one marked by severe ecological degradation through land use practices that threatened to annihilate the delicate forested commons of the hill country. For these Cherokees, the Cookson Hills were not a landscape of criminality and barren soil, but a homeland, and for them the New Deal presented a chance to secure that homeland, regenerating the environment and the Cherokee people.

Prior to allotment, the Cherokees had lived on land owned in common. Among rural Cherokees living in the Ozark Mountains, the forest had operated as a common. Such subsistence strategies were common among people living in marginal mountain environments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hillside farmers in southern Appalachia, for instance, as Sara Gregg argues, operated the forest "as an open-access commons...families maintained themselves in part through the natural bounty of landscape."[23] Among Cherokee farmers living in the Ozarks, a similar system prevailed, rooted in the Cherokee custom of communal land ownership. Baxter Choate, a Cherokee old-timer living near Stilwell, remembered this system well, as he relayed his memories to geographer Leslie Hewes in June 1935. Speaking of the "full bloods" who lived in the Ozark hills, Choate remembered that, prior to allotment, "many were

[23] Sarah Gregg, *Managing the Mountains: Land Use Planning, the New Deal, and the Creation of a Federal Landscape in Appalachia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 16.

hard working, independent. A good many had 20-50 acres in cultivation. Had cattle and hogs." Indeed, Choate remembered that "some full bloods sold several hundred dollars worth of cattle per year." Using the open range of the forested commons, Cherokees had grazed their cattle in the mountains in the summer, and wintered them in the lush bottomland of the creek and river valleys.[24] Ned Alberty, another Cherokee interviewed by Hewes, remembered that "restricted Indians"--another term for "full-bloods," Native people judged by the federal government to be "incompetent" and therefore restricted from selling their allotment--"had lived better before statehood," as they had carried out "cultivation" and had "plenty of game and open range in the woods."[25]

Indeed, many of the White squatters who came into the Cherokee Ozarks in the 1880s and 1890s--at the same time as Jack Reynolds' parents--remembered a landscape overwhelmingly defined by abundance. Mary E. Clark, who came to the Cherokee Nation in the late nineteenth century after marrying a Cherokee man from Cookson, remembered that, when she first arrived in the hill country, "it was a beautiful place. I could see deer jumping around anytime—lots of wild turkeys and all kinds of game."[26] Mrs. Bryson (no first name given), a settler who's family had begun squatting in the hills in 1886, when she was just 4 years old, told an interviewer that she had been scared of the Indians then, who regarded her and her family with rightful suspicion. She also noted, however, that her family had never had any difficulty in procuring food, as "rabbits were plentiful," the "rivers were full of fish," and she and her siblings could pick wild berries when they were in season.[27] White men who had come in with the timber industry in the early days also remembered the Cookson Hills as having been "good timber

[24] Baxter Choate, Interview by Leslie Hewes, 23 June 1935, Folder 48, Box 4, Leslie Hewes Collection, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman (hereafter LHC.)
[25] Ned Alberty, Interview by Leslie Hewes, 5 July 1935, F 48, B 4, LHC.
[26] Mary E. Clark, Interview by Frank Still, 1937, IPP.
[27] Mrs. Bryson, Interview by Jerome M. Emmons, 1 June 1937, Indian Pioneer Papers (hereafter IPP), WHC, OU.

country."[28] H.C. Bone, a mill operator in Stilwell, told Hewes in 1935 that, 20 years earlier, the small region had supported "perhaps a hundred sawmills." The region had once been full of good, old-growth pine and hardwood, lumber that had proved profitable for the mill operators.[29]

Allotment brought down the forest commons. The Dawes Commission sought to "civilize" Cherokee people by, as Rose Stremlau has demonstrated, separating them from their relationships with their extended families and the land.[30] Through the process of allotment, commissioners divided up the previously-held-in-common Cherokee Nation into individual tracts, owned by the heads of individual families. Cherokee farmers who had once been able to move across the land relatively freely, grazing their cattle in the old-growth trees and gathering edible plants from the forest floor, now found the land divided into 160-acre increments, and lands once held in common increasingly privatized and fenced off.[31] Cherokee people reacted creatively and strategically to allotment, and many of the Keetoowahs refused to take their allotments, or to put their names on the Dawes Rolls at all. Many retreated into the Cookson Hills and other remote corners of the Cherokee Ozarks to escape the surveillance of the settler state. There, they sought to revitalize distinctly Cherokee relations to the land, as when Keetoowah leader Redbird Smith led a group of around one hundred Cherokees into the mountains of southeastern Cherokee County to form a self-sufficient, communally owned agricultural community there in 1921, following the federal government's rejection of a Keetoowah proposal for a Cherokee reservation in the region.[32]

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[28] Boyd Mcgee, Interview by Leslie Hewes, 20 June 1935, LHC.
[29] H.C. Bone, Interview by Leslie Hewes, 20 June 1935, LHC.
[30] Rose Stremlau, *Sustaining the Cherokee Family: Kinship and the Allotment of an Indigenous Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 4–10.
[31] Clint Carroll, *Roots of Our Renewal: Ethnobotany and Cherokee Environmental Governance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 84.
[32] Stremlau, *Sustaining the Cherokee Family*, 200; Robert Conley, *The Cherokee Nation: A History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 203.

As the Dawes Commission finished its work in the first decades of the twentieth century, "an orgy of grafters" moved in, defrauding many Cherokees of their land and creating a huge "landless Indian" problem across the Cherokee Nation.[33] In the Ozarks, timber interests would move into the region quickly following allotment, and disrupt previous Cherokee subsistence patterns. This story echoed with others across Indian Country in the midst of the allotment era. On the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota, Melissa Meyer has shown how timber companies--aided by sympathetic federal surveyors--manipulated the allotment process to buy up highly valuable timber lands on the cheap, reaping massive profits. They were further aided by changing federal laws, such 1902 Morris Act, which allowed timber to be sold separately from the land, meaning that, by the early twentieth century, lumber companies "acquired unlimited access to timber" on Anishinaabe land.[34]

One of the tycoons who moved into the Ozarks was one Jay Fulbright, a timber baron from Fayetteville, Arkansas, and father of one of the most famous American statesmen of the twentieth century, Senator J. William Fulbright.[35] By the late 1910s, timber companies had clear-cut all but the most inaccessible recesses of the Arkansas Ozarks, and, just as the timber craze there was dying down, it seems that Fulbright chose to expand into the relatively untouched Cherokee Ozarks. It's unclear how the Fulbrights acquired as much land as they did, but according to one of their former employees, H.C. Bone of Stilwell, from 1916, the Fulbrights owned thousands of acres in Cherokee, Adair, and Sequoyah counties. They clear-cut the woods they owned, and eventually Cherokee smallholders, living on increasingly thin soil, clear-cut

[33] Angie Debo, *And Still the Waters Run: The Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), 92–125.
[34] Melissa L. Meyer, *The White Earth Tragedy: Ethnicity and Dispossession at a Minnesota Anishinaabe Reservation, 1889–1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 140.
[35] Randall Woods, "Fulbright, Bill," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, 18 October 2017, https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/bill-fulbright-1652/.

their own properties and sold the wood to local stave mills operated by the Fulbrights in order to survive.[36]

The coming of the timber industry and the clear-cutting of the forest had many effects on the landscape of the Cherokee Ozarks, but all of them served to further marginalize Cherokee and non-Cherokee subsistence farmers. First, cutting the forest drastically reduced game habitat, resulting in drastically reduced game populations.[37] By 1926, the state game and fish commission estimated there were only 30 deer left in Adair County, 40 in Cherokee County, 5 in Muskogee County, and 12 in all of Sequoyah County, together the four counties that make up most of the Cookson Hills region.[38] The loss of game cut out a major part of the rural Cherokee diet, and, as Cherokees like Ned Alberty saw it, contributed to the decline of Cherokee fortunes.[39]

Further, the timber industry discouraged pre-existing Cherokee fire ecology, which had ensured a healthy game habitat and created open woodlands, ideal for grazing cattle. Just about everyone Leslie Hewes spoke to in 1935 who could remember the pre-allotment era spoke glowingly of the open forest. Arthur Sanders, a Cherokee old-timer remembered "big trees with but little underbrush formerly." He remembered riding through the woods on horseback, but no longer. "Now, however, it is very difficult to get through."[40] Historian Stephen Pyne has shown how Ozark communities, and particularly the Cherokees, sought to use fire as a "catalyst" to

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[36] H.C. Bone, Interview by Leslie Hewes, 23 June 1935, F 48, B4, LHC. Other interviews conducted by Hewes corroborate this narrative, but I was unable to find much else on the Fulbright's business dealings and land owning in Oklahoma. Bone claimed that Fulbright acquired much of the timber land "off taxes," the meaning of which is not clear to me at this moment. W. Oaks, Interview by Leslie Hewes, 26 June 1935, F 48, B 4, LHC; Boyd McGee, Interview by Leslie Hewes, 26 June 1935, F 48, B 4, LHC.
[37] Carroll, *Roots of Our Renewal*, 82.
[38] A.R. Reeves, *Report of the State Fish and Game Commission, for Biennial Beginning July 1, 1924, Ending June 30, 1926* (Oklahoma City: Walker-Wilson-Tyler Co., 1926), 30–1.
[39] Alberty Interview.
[40] Arthur Sanders, Interview by Leslie Hewes, 20 June 1935, F 48, B4, LHC. Other Cherokee interviews corroborate this image of the woods. See Choate Interview; Alberty Interview.

transform the landscape and make it more suitable for hunting, forest farming, and grazing cattle.[41] Boyd McGee, a settler, timber worker, and former cattleman in Stilwell, described the landscape he had first encountered as a young man at the turn of the century. Back then "the woods were composed of big trees and were open. The grass grew up 3 to 4 feet high…[the Ozarks] was one of the best grazing lands."[42] Fire, however, was an annoyance to the timber industry. Timber barons and the newly created US Forest Service set out to suppress fire as much as possible in the early twentieth century, and the Cherokee Ozarks were no exception.[43] Fire suppression, combined with clear-cutting, destroyed the good grazing land that had previously existed, and by 1935 the livestock population of the mountains was half of what it had been in 1880.[44]

Central to all of this degradation was the policy of allotment, which had privatized land and thus fundamentally disrupted the Cherokee forest commons. Cherokees lost access to the open range as settlers bought up and fenced land, restricting access for grazing animals in particular.[45] With land increasingly restricted, Cherokee farmers often found themselves on poorer soil, and they were unable to move fields easily when the soil became worn out, as they had in the past. Coupled with the loss of game, the decline of the Cherokee "public domain," as Clint Carroll refers to it, forced many Cherokees into a state of extreme poverty.[46] Describing the experience of the White Earth Reservation at around the same time, Meyer argues that while

[41] Stephen J. Pyne, *To the Last Smoke: An Anthology* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2020), 338–9. See also Michael C. Stambaugh et. al., "Fire History in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma," *Human Ecology* 41, no. 5 (2013).
[42] McGee Interview.
[43] Carroll, *Roots of Our Renewal,* 86.
[44] Leslie Hewes, "The Oklahoma Ozarks as the Land of the Cherokees," *The Geographical Review* 32, no. 2 (April 1942): 275.
[45] Carroll, *Roots of Our Renewal*, 86.
[46] Ibid., 69–71; 83–9.

"Lumber companies' destructive practices...worked to erode the seasonal round…the greatest disaster stemmed from land alienation" caused by the policy of allotment.[47]

When the crises of the 1920s and 1930s hit, then, the Cherokee Ozarks suffered intensely, something observers of the time noted and tried to explain. In 1942, drawing on field research conducted in the early 1930s, Leslie Hewes would describe a "cultural fault line" in the Ozarks, at the boundary between the Cherokee Nation and Arkansas, characterizing the Cherokee Ozarks in this way: "Farm buildings are poorer, and towns are less well developed...the region is less intensively and carefully utilized, than the country immediately to the east." At the core of this cultural fault line, Hewes argued, was the cultural backwardness of the Cherokees, locked in the "pioneer period."[48] Hewes was wrong, however. It was allotment, and distinctly non-Cherokee understandings of land use, that had brought the Cherokee Ozarks to its knees.

The Cherokee Nation, meanwhile, had little institutional recourse to resist the ecological destruction occurring within its boundaries, principally because the federal government and the state of Oklahoma had decided that, for all intents and purposes, the Cherokee Nation no longer existed as a meaningful entity. Indeed, starting with the federal government's controversial reinstatement of William C. Rogers as principal chief in 1905 (Rogers had been elected principal chief in 1903, then impeached by the National Council in 1904 due to his efforts to assist in allotting Cherokee land and dismantling the Cherokee government), Cherokee principal chiefs functioned largely to sign off on land transfers.[49] The federally recognized political entity that had once comprised the Cherokee Nation became--until the appointment of J.B. Milam as

[47] Meyer, *The White Earth Tragedy*, 219.
[48] Hewes, "The Oklahoma Ozarks," 281.
[49] Conley, *The Cherokee Nation*, 199.

principal chief in 1941--essentially a rubber stamp for federal and state policy, particularly with regard to land use.[50]

Just because the US government had rendered their formal political institutions impotent, however, Cherokee people did not cease being politically active. Some, including former Cherokee National Attorney W.W. Hastings, entered state politics. In 1914, Hastings won election to Congress, serving as representative for Oklahoma's Second District, which covered most of the state's mountainous eastern region, and which he would continue to serve until 1935.[51] Hastings, however, was no proponent of tribal sovereignty or land management. Indeed, he was in many ways an ardent assimilationist. When he announced his first congressional campaign in Tahlequah in 1914, Hastings declared that if elected he would do what he could to loosen restrictions on land owned by "restricted" Indians--those deemed by the federal government to be "incompetent" in managing their affairs (typically "full-bloods) and who thus held their allotted lands in trust with the federal government until such time as they were deemed "competent" and could do whatever they wished with it, including sell it--and work to assimilate Native people into modern society.[52]

Other Cherokee leaders, however, formed new organizations and councils to advocate for Cherokee sovereignty at the same time. In doing so they drew on long-standing Cherokee systems of governance, which long preceded the establishment of constitutional government in the 1820s under John Ross. Dating to time immemorial, Cherokees had organized themselves into distinct and autonomous towns, whose representatives came together in councils to discuss pressing issues and the best ways to maintain "the principle of balance and harmony" that

[50] Ibid., 201–2.
[51] Todd J. Kosmerick, "Hastings, William Wirt," The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, Accessed 23 March 2021, https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=HA051.
[52] "W.W. Hastings Announces for Congress at a Wild, Enthusiastic Meeting at the Opera House, where for 3 Hours Standing Room was at Premium," *Cherokee County Democrat*, 9 April 1914.

Gregory Smithers argues made up "one of the cornerstones" of the Cherokee worldview. As Cherokees increasingly found themselves pulled into global networks of trade and colonialism, these councils also served as places to choose diplomatic representatives, leaders whose job it was to travel to far-flung centers of empire such as Williamsburg, Virginia, and London, and represent Cherokee interests and sovereignty.[53] It was only in response to the pressures of colonization that Cherokees adopted centralized forms of government that relied on recognizable-to-Euro-Americans institutions and bureaucracies, including a constitution and a bicameral legislature that echoed in many ways the United States' system of government. It was under this system that the Cherokee Nation governed itself from the 1820s to the early 1900s, and it was this system that the United States government had (mostly successfully) destroyed in the early days of Oklahoma statehood.[54] Following the loss of the institutional framework of the Cherokee Nation, it seems that many Cherokee nationalist leaders embraced a return to the older style of governance, forming autonomous Cherokee groups and coming together in council to discuss a unified national strategy for survival.

Different Cherokee groups met in a series of councils in the 1920s and 1930s, coalescing into an "Executive Council" made up of leaders from four distinct groups: the Eastern Cherokee Council, Western Cherokee Council, Tulsa Cherokees, and the Kee-Too-Wah Society.[55] In 1921, in a national council at Tahlequah, this coalition elected Levi Gritts of Muskogee as principal

[53] Gregory Smithers, *Native Southerners: Indigenous History from Origins to Removal* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019), 102–3.
[54] Ibid., 137–8.
[55] The Eastern Cherokee Council claimed to represent the interests of the "immigrant Cherokees" who came to Indian Territory with John Ross in the 1830s. The Western Cherokee Council, meanwhile, claimed to stand for the Old Settler Cherokees who had moved to Indian Territory prior to the Trail of Tears. The Kee-Too-Wah Society largely represented the interests of conservative Cherokees who had proved most ardently opposed to allotment, including the Keetoowahs and Nighthawks, while the Tulsa Cherokees represented a group of Cherokee businessmen from in and around Tulsa, including perhaps most notably banker and oilman J.B. Milam, who made his home in Chelsea, a small town about 50 miles northeast of downtown Tulsa. Howard Meredith, *Bartley Milam: Principal Chief of the Cherokees* (Muskogee: Indian University Press, 1985), 19–34.

chief, Levi Cookson of Cookson as assistant chief, and confirming Frank J. Boudinot as the tribe's attorney and representative in Washington, D.C.[56] By electing Gritts as principal chief, Cherokee leaders hoped to show a unified front in pursuing land claims against the federal government, and following the national council of 1921 Gritts and Boudinot urged President Warren G. Harding to recognize Gritts as principal chief, and attempted to drum up support for a bill Boudinot had drafted that would grant the Cherokee Nation jurisdiction to pursue land claims against the federal government.[57]

Federal and state leaders, however, ignored the Cherokees' elected leadership, and W.W. Hastings in particular proved remarkably hostile to Cherokee efforts to maintain their government-to-government relationship with the United States. Indeed, Hastings would play a key role in killing several "jurisdictional bills" put forward by representatives of the Five Tribes in the 1920s, prompting one critic to declare the Cherokee congressman "an Indian only when it is politically convenient."[58] Throughout the 1920s and much of the 1930s, the federal and state governments, aided by politicians like Hastings, would stymy Cherokee efforts to revive their national government and fight for Cherokee land.

When FDR named John Collier as Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1933, the relation of the federal government to Indigenous nations promised to change. Collier and his employees at the Office of Indian Affairs quickly set to work on what would become the landmark legislation of his time in office, the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), or as it has come to be known, the "Indian New Deal." Central to the IRA was a repeal of the policy of allotment, and the creation of constitutional tribal self-government. One of its more ambitious aims was to allow a means for Native nations to regain land lost due to allotment, and thus rebuild their land

[56] "Plan Merger of Cherokee Societies," *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, 5 April 1921.
[57] Ibid.
[58] William Madison, "W.W. Hastings Indian Record," *Sallisaw Democrat-American*, 31 October 1924.

base. Collier was a flawed man--paternalistic, authoritarian even--but for Cherokee leaders who had found their efforts to combat land loss stonewalled for decades, he was a potential ally.[59]

To promote the IRA, Collier held a number of meetings with Native communities across Indian Country in 1933 and 1934. In March 1934, Collier held one such meeting with members of the Five Tribes at Muskogee, just west of the Cookson Hills. At that meeting, Collier received a largely tepid reception, and some representatives of the tribes were openly hostile--chief among them Creek leader Joseph Bruner, a man who had profited immensely from land sales in the early twentieth century, and who denounced the IRA as communism, claiming it would "make reservation Indians out of Oklahoma citizens."[60] Indeed Bruner spent much of the two-day congress repeatedly motioning to adjourn the meeting.[61]

The Cherokee leaders who attended the meeting, however, were largely receptive to the IRA and Collier's ambitious plans. Houston B. Teehee, a prominent Cherokee citizen who chaired the meeting, applauded the "principle of self-determination" that undergirded the bill.[62] Several Cherokee groups authored resolutions in support of the bill that were read aloud at the congress in Muskogee, including the Kee-Too-Wah Society and a separate group known as the Kee-Too-Wah Nighthawk Society, who held a meeting of over 6,000 Cherokees in the hills north of Gore to decide to their support for the bill.[63]

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[59] Collier made lasting enemies of the Navajo, for instance, over his brutal stock reduction program there in the 1930s. See Marsha Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010); Traci Brynne Voyles, *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 28-53.
[60] Quoted in "New Deal for Indian Explained," *Sapulpa (OK) Herald*, 22 March 1934.
[61] "Five Civilized Tribes Conference Regarding the Wheeler-Howard Indian Bill," Muskogee, Oklahoma, 22 March 1934, Five Civilized Tribes Series, Major Council Meetings of American Indian Tribes, Part 1, Section 1: Navajo, Five Civilized Tribes, Pueblo, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Ute, 1914–1956, Bureau of Indian Affairs Records, RG 75, National Archives and Records Management, Washington, D.C.
[62] Ibid., 4.
[63] Ibid., 60.

Much Cherokee support for the bill rested on the promise of the restoration of tribal self-government and the restoration of a Cherokee land base. The Nighthawks made this clear in their resolution, rooting their support for the IRA in its sections that would allow for "local self government" and enable tribes to "conserve and develop Indian lands."[64] Indeed Collier spent much of the meeting explaining his plan to establish Native-owned land cooperatives in areas of high Native population.[65] Collier's principal aim with these cooperatives, as he made clear, was to reduce the "landless Indian" population in the Five Tribes, which he estimated to be around 12,000 by 1934.[66]

Collier sought to ease this problem enabling tribes to purchase land that, under the aegis of the New Deal, the federal government was already busy buying up, taking out of cultivation, and restoring to the public domain: submarginal land. The bill would include about $2,000,000 for tribes in Oklahoma to buy land, and Collier explained to the tribes that they could likely buy a great deal of land for relatively little money if they focused on purchasing "submarginal" lands. These lands, although by definition considered ill-suited to agriculture, Collier proclaimed were actually "a great deal better than any but the best which you Indians have now," and were "perfectly good for grazing and for subsistence farming."[67] And nowhere was more submarginal than the Cookson Hills. It is no wonder, then, that Nighthawk leaders like Sam Smith, son of Redbird Smith who had first proposed the creation of a Cherokee reservation in the Cookson Hills in the 1910s and 1920s, threw their support behind the bill. It promised the regeneration of Cherokee land and community in the hill country.

After the congress at Muskogee, newspapers across eastern Oklahoma reported on the

[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid., 18.
[66] Ibid., 12.
[67] Ibid., 31.

very real possibility of the Cookson Hills becoming a large Cherokee reservation. A newspaper in Sapulpa, a suburb of Tulsa in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains, reported on the meeting, noting that "Oklahoma's Cookson Hills...might become an Indian hunting ground if Indians approve President Roosevelt's 'new deal' for them." The article went on to describe Collier's goal of reversing allotment and promoting self-determination for Native nations, and claimed that the Keetoowahs planned to "set up cooperative communities for a return to primitive life in the Cookson country, if the bill passes congress."[68]

Another newspaper account of the meeting, published in the *Tulsa World* in April, included a quote from Keetoowah elder Sam Smith. Smith argued that the Cherokees he represented sought "not a return to barbarism." Their vision was straightforward, he argued. They wanted "only a chance to become self-supporting."[69] Smith, along with fellow elder E.M. Frye, went on to note that the Keetoowahs would police their own reservation boundaries, and could thus be counted on to drive out any outlaws seeking to hide out in the hill country, something "all the state's officers have not been able to do."[70]

The IRA would fail in Oklahoma, however, and its failure was largely due to the efforts of men such as Joseph Bruner and W.W. Hastings.[71] Eastern Oklahoma was a major center of anti-IRA activism among Native people. Jon Blackman explains this sentiment, arguing that "many Oklahoma Indians already felt assimilated into white society and resented the attempt to reinstitute tribal control over their property and lives." Others, with good reason, distrusted any kind of government intervention.[72]

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[68] "New Deal for Indian Explained."
[69] "Cherokee Indians Near Gore Plan First Project," *Tulsa World*, 19 April 1934.
[70] Ibid; "New Deal for Indian Explained."
[71] Jon S. Blackman, *Oklahoma's Indian New Deal* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 75.
[72] Ibid., 61.

Joseph Bruner and W.W. Hastings, powerful men themselves, shared common ground in opposing the IRA also with many of the moneyed interests in eastern Oklahoma. These people constituted the "despoilers" and "grafters" whom Angie Debo would later eviscerate in her 1940 classic, *And Still the Waters Run*, wealthy settlers who had made great profit off the policy of allotment. John Collier's plan threatened those gains, and threatened to undo decades of diligent work to suppress Native sovereignty in Oklahoma.

In the end, Oklahoma's entire congressional delegation would oppose the IRA, using their power to block the passage of the bill until Collier agreed to exempt Oklahoma's tribes from most of its reforms.[73] Collier would later work with Oklahoma senator Elmer Thomas to pass the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act (OIWA), often called "Oklahoma's Indian New Deal," in 1936, but the act had little teeth, especially as it related to the restoration of tribal land bases.[74] Indeed the man who succeeded W.W. Hastings as congressman for the Second District in 1935, John Conover "Jack" Nichols, would play a key role in watering down the OIWA, blocking its passage in May 1935.[75] Nichols' opposition to the bill in its initial form seems to have centered on its plan to increase safeguards on restricted Native lands, something that would have made the taking of Native-owned land much harder.[76] When the bill did eventually pass in 1936--with these increased safeguards stricken--it included little money for economic relief and land purchases by tribal governments.[77] The dream of a vast self-sufficient Cherokee community in the Cookson Hills was put on hold.

Indeed, other plans for the hills were in the pipeline, plans that were connected to the emergent category of submarginal land that Collier had spoken of in 1934.. These visions,

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[73] Ibid., 71–7.
[74] Ibid., 92-103.
[75] "Indian Bill is Dead as House Tables It," *The Indian Journal*, 30 May 1935.
[76] "Revised Indian Welfare Bill Submitted to Oklahoma Tribes for Approval," *Miami News-Record*, 26 June 1935.
[77] Blackman, *Oklahoma's Indian New Deal*, 120–2.

however, looked radically different from that of the Keetoowahs. In February 1935, eight months after an amended IRA had passed Congress, damning the Keetoowah dream for a reservation in the Cookson Hills, a headline appeared in the local newspaper in Miami. "GOVERNMENT TO DEPOPULATE COOKSON HILLS" blurted the front-page headline. The author elaborated, explaining that E.G. Jeffrey, director of the Oklahoma Rural Rehabilitation Corporation (ORRC), had announced recently that the hills were to be "depopulated by the federal government and transformed into a game refuge… In a forced migration, paralleling the Arcadian trek of an early day, the 400 families of the unfertile hills area will be moved" to a resettlement area near Muskogee.[78]

In Tahlequah, a few days later, another article appeared, this time with much less certainty on whether or not this depopulation would actually take place. The article's author noted a meeting of Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) officials C.F. Clayton, Dan T. Gray, and Charles Kilpatrick, with local chamber of commerce officials in Tahlequah to discuss the removal of the farming population of the Cookson Hills, and the creation of a vast recreation area where they had once lived. The article's author wrote that the federal officials "envisioned a complete reclamation for the wooded slopes which have defied cultivation and for the gullied and depleted soil no longer fertile enough to grow a living for the farm families now living in the area."[79] On this barren soil, however, AAA bureaucrats saw potential:

> The new dealers see an opportunity of growing useful timber on the rugged slopes, now thickly covered with scrubby blackjacks. They see a chance to sow grass seed on the prairie land. When settlers first came to Oklahoma it was the tall and luxuriant grazing

[78] "Government to Depopulate Cookson Hills," *Miami News-Record*, 10 February 1935.
[79] "Cookson Hills May be Sight [sic] of AAA Land Reclamation Project," *Tahlequah Citizen*, 21 February 1935.

that attracted them to the new frontier. There is no reason, they believe, why Oklahoma soil can't once more produce grass taller than an average man's height.[80]

The article's author, in describing this vision for the future, drew on a similar memory of the Cookson Hills as the Cherokees, as a formerly abundant natural landscape. However, this vision of the future of the hills didn't have any people in it, whereas the Keetoowah proposal had envisioned a lived-in landscape. The New Dealers aimed to regenerate the land through rational, scientific, Euro-American management, and this system found itself fundamentally at odds with Cherokee understandings of the land use.

The New Dealers' plan reflected prevailing conservationist understandings of the Cookson Hills, and Ozarks more broadly, in the early twentieth century. In 1936, the Oklahoma state game warden would write in his biennial report to the governor that the mountains of eastern Oklahoma constituted a true "wilderness" whose soil was "unsuited for agricultural use other than timber production, [and] a companion crop of big game, elk, deer, and turkey" for recreational hunting.[81] Indeed, as far back as 1896, US surveyors, sent out to survey the land for the coming of allotment, had characterized the Cherokee Ozarks, of which the Cookson Hills were the most rugged and inaccessible region, as "rough and mountainous," with most of the soil categorized as "4th rate," unsuited for agriculture, and only the rich bottomland soil of the narrow river valleys useful for any sort of cultivation.[82]

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[80] Ibid.
[81] State Game and Fish Commission, *Biennial Report, July 1, 1934 to June 30, 1936* (Oklahoma City: State Game and Fish Commission, 1936), 15.
[82] M.P. McCoy, J.C. Wilkinson, and J.M. Johnson, Surveyor's Notes, 1897 (transcribed by Leslie Hewes, 1935), Folder 31, Box 4, Leslie Hewes Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman (hereafter LHC).

In the eyes of federal and state planners, the Cookson Hills constituted something of a wasteland, unsuited for agriculture, and therefore, implicitly, people.[83] Sam Smith and his fellow Cherokees saw the land differently. Indeed, as scholar Clint Carroll argues, Cherokee people have traditionally understood landscape management through "relationship-based practices" that emphasize humans' interconnectedness with the natural landscape. [84] Settlers perceived environmental governance, as evidenced by the statements of surveyors and game wardens above, as over the "natural world," a place Carroll argues is "devoid of humans." Cherokee people, meanwhile, "believe that they have a responsibility to maintain certain relationships with nonhuman beings in ways that acknowledge the separate agency of those beings."[85] These relationships manifest themselves not through the removal of people from the landscape, but rather through the maintenance of the landscape through human habitation and intervention. A place like the Cookson Hills, which federal officials deemed unfit for human settlement, was rather a landscape that required careful management by the Cherokees who lived there.

For the New Dealers, however, the Cookson Hills constituted a sub-marginal landscape, one on which farming--indeed any human habitation--was complete folly. Never mind the fact that Cherokees had been farming in the narrow valleys and hillsides of the region since the 1830s, to the New Dealers, this was a land on which humans should be only visitors.[86]

Further, these officials saw a chance to generate rural uplift, a key component of FDR's New Deal land policy.[87] C.P. Blackwell, who came to run the resettlement project in the

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[83] For more on the concept of "wastelanding," as well as the "wasteland discourse, see Voyles, *Wastelanding*, 28; Valerie Kuletz, *The Tainted Desert: Environmental Ruin in the American West* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 13-4.
[84] Carroll, *Roots of Our Renewal*, 8.
[85] Ibid., 8.
[86] This logic was of a piece with dominant ecological thinking of the era. For more on the development of the national park idea, and how wilderness advocates and conservationists came to see Indian removal as an essential precursor to landscape preservation, see Mark Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
[87] Phillips, *This Land, This Nation*, 1–12.

Cookson Hills in 1935, clearly saw himself as a friend to these downtrodden rural farmers. "The nation and the state cannot afford to let conditions stay as they are," he claimed in an interview in August 1935.[88] Indeed, according to Blackwell, the average annual income for the 400 families in the project area ran to just $39, with families averaging between six and twelve members. "The fertility has been washed out of the soil," he claimed, and what the farmers there needed was to be moved somewhere better suited to farming, and "to be given supervision and helped to farm better...then in a few generations we will have raised a generation of good citizens and good farmers."[89] Doing so, Blackwell went on to claim, was the only way to save rural America, otherwise "when we turn these [farm] boys and girls loose they go to the cities because there is no hope of ever making homes for themselves in the country."[90]

The New Dealers were imbued with a passion and idealism matched only by their paternalism. In Blackwell's vision, the farmers of the Cookson Hills needed to be remediated into society. They were bad farmers attempting to farm bad land, and needed to be taught to be good farmers on good land. Such a characterization was common in New Deal rural land use projects. In Shenandoah National Park, FDR's Resettlement Administration (RA) sought to conduct a similar land use project to the one they were undertaking in the Cookson Hills at the same time.[91] From 1935 to 1937, federal officials resettled the hollow farmers of the Shenandoah onto better land, relying on what Gregg calls a "simple narrative of ignorance, poverty, and maladjusted land use," to justify the removal.[92] New Dealers, and many members of the public,

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[88] "Resettlement Program Being Launched in Two States May Establish Sound Land Policy," *Miami News-Record*, 5 August 1935.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] The Resettlement Administration was created by the Roosevelt administration in 1935, through a merging of the AAA and Federal Emergency Relief Agency (FERA) in an effort to consolidate federal resources. Sarah Gregg argues that the RA saw it as a "moral imperative" to remove farmers from sub-marginal land. Gregg, *Managing the Mountains*, 175-211.
[92] Gregg, *Managing the Mountains*, 12.

saw "submarginal land" as a result of poor agricultural practices as well as poor soil.[93] A similar, much more racialized dynamic played out on the Navajo Reservation in the 1930s, as Collier and Soil Conservation Service officials embarked on a brutal program of stock reduction, blaming Navajo herders for depleting the soil through overuse.[94] The New Dealers wanted to help, but in every case "helping" was predicated on a notion that local people, and especially Native people, were culturally backward.[95]

In the spring of 1935, newly appointed project manager for the Cookson Hills, Charlie Kilpatrick, set about notifying local landowners of the government's interest in their land, and he enjoyed the broad support of many in eastern Oklahoma.[96] Local municipalities like Tahlequah and Muskogee, and local politicians like first-term congressman Jack Nichols--who had succeeded W.W. Hastings following the 1934 elections--and Senator Elmer Thomas, supported the land use project from the outset. This support was not borne out of compassion for the poor farmers of the hills, however, but rather by the recreation area the government promised to build on the reappropriated land. A recreation area had been a key component of the government plan from the beginning, and local newspapers quickly embraced the idea. In the same interview with Blackwell described earlier, the reporter wrote glowingly of the future development of the area, claiming that "the land in this area...will make a park which should attract hundreds of thousands of visitors annually."[97] The *Daily Oklahoman*, one of the largest newspapers in the state, ran an ad for the region in July of that year, only a few months after the project had been announced. Filled with pictures of the region's idyllic beauty, the advertisement asked the reader to "get it

[93] Ibid.
[94] Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country*, 32–59.
[95] It's unclear how many of the farmers who were moved out of the Cookson Hills project area were Cherokee, but it's likely that a plurality or majority of them were, given the prevailing demographic data compiled by Leslie Hewes in 1935. Hewes, "Oklahoma Ozarks," 274.
[96] Charlie Kilpatrick to Miss Mary C. Boudinot, 22 April 1935, Folder 16, Box PJ 18, Elmer Thomas Collection, Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center, University of Oklahoma, Norman (hereafter ETC).
[97] "Resettlement Program Being Launched in Two States."

out of your mind that the area around Cookson is a bandit country." The government was transforming the hills, and the ad predicted that "the hills will become a favorite vacation and week-end picnic section of the state."[98]

Jack Nichols, who so ardently opposed much of the Indian New Deal, embraced New Deal programs more broadly, and lobbied heavily for the establishment of a national park in the region. In April 1935, in a telegram to his constituents relayed in the *Tahlequah Citizen*, Nichols reported that "NATIONAL PARK SERVICE TODAY RECOMMENDED CREATION 55,000 [acre] NATIONAL PARK SOUTH OF TAHLEQUAH ALONG ILLINOIS RIVER AND EXTENDING EASTWARD. MEANS TAHLEQUAH TO BE ENTRANCE TO NATIONAL PARK WITH THOUSANDS OF VISITORS."[99] The exact location of the park was as yet unclear, but Nichols hoped to make Tahlequah reap the economic benefits of the tourism the park could produce.[100] Throughout the summer and fall of 1935, Nichols campaigned in Washington for the creation of a national park, sending regular updates back to his constituents in Tahlequah and Muskogee.[101] Nichols did not just campaign for the national park either. One of his other efforts to secure federal funding for his district was to lobby for the establishment of a federal prison in the Cookson Hills.[102]

In October, two important pieces of news arrived in northeastern Oklahoma. The first was that the federal government had finally approved the Cookson Hills Submarginal Land

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[98] "In the Cookson Hills," *Daily Oklahoman,* 28 July 1935. This sort of boosterism was common in the Ozarks during this period, as local elites sought to take advantage of the natural beauty of the region and relative lack of development. This sort of boosterism also played a key role in generating the archetypal Ozark character of the hillbilly. Brooks Blevins, *Hill Folks: A History of Arkansas Ozarkers and Their Image* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).
[99] "National Park Seen for Cookson Hills," *Tahlequah Citizen*, 11 April 1935.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Jack Nichols, "News from Washington," *Tahlequah Citizen*, 23 May 1935; "Predict Approval of Cookson Project," *Tahlequah Citizen*, 18 July 1935; "Nichols Makes Protest for National Park," *Tahlequah Citizen*, 19 September 1935; "Jack Nichols Shakes Hands in Tahlequah," *Cherokee County-Democrat Star*, 20 September 1935.
[102] "New Federal Prison Proposed in Cookson Hills of State," *Blackwell Journal-Tribune*, 12 July 1935. Nichols' plan for a federal prison would eventually fail in 1938, as the government chose to build in Texas instead.

Project, and the purchase of private land by the government could begin. W.S. Key, Oklahoma's Works Progress Administrator, made the announcement, and stated that work on the project would begin shortly after federal funds were allocated.[103] The second piece of news, at least to the denizens of Tahlequah, was more disappointing. The National Park Service announced it was abandoning plans to construct a vast national park in the Cookson Hills, due to lack of funds.[104] Instead, only the 30,000 acre tract, much closer to Muskogee than Tahlequah, under the purview of the RA would be transformed. An article in the *Cherokee County-Democrat Star* lamented the loss of the project, claiming that Muskogee would now get the honor of becoming "the gateway to the park project area." The article's author took issue with this, claiming that "the real heart of the Cookson Hills Park Project lies in Cherokee county" near Tahlequah.[105]

Tahlequah's dreams of national park fame may have fizzled, but the government had now officially committed to the resettlement and recreation project near Muskogee. Excited eyes from around the state watched on. The first step, of course, was getting the 400 or so families off the land in question. This process took a while. In fact, it was not until February 1936 that the RA, now headed up in Oklahoma by D.P. Trent, announced a formal plan to purchase the farmers' land. The plan was ambitious, and would involve, according to Trent, the purchase of hundreds of new farms on more fertile land, that would be leased back to the farmers who would then enter a rent-to-own program with the federal government. Ideally, the farmers would come to own their land within 5-20 years.[106]

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[103] "Roosevelt's O.K. on Cookson Hills Work," *Miami News-Record*, 17 October 1935; "Cookson Hills Tract is Sold," *Miami News-Record*, 13 October 1935.
[104] "Cookson Hills Project Dropped," *Blackwell Journal-Tribune,* 20 October 1935; "Vast Cookson Hills Project Abandoned," *Miami News-Record*, 20 October 1935; "Cookson Park Project Abandoned," *Daily Oklahoman*, 20 October 1935.
[105] "Cherokee County Loses Cookson Hills Project," *Cherokee County Democrat-Star*, 25 October 1935.
[106] "Resettlement Administration to Buy 200 Farms for Cookson Hills Residents," *Miami News-Record*, 27 February 1936.

The plan was ambitious, and clearly contained many logistical hurdles. The need to negotiate with, purchase land from, and then move hundreds of families off their land would take a while. Patience among some began to wear. An Associated Press article, which appeared in countless newspapers across the state in March 1936 reported on growing impatience among area farmers who had already sold their land, and were now wondering whether they would be "moved soon to new homes."[107] Many farmers had signed options on their land with the government as early as the spring of 1935, before the project had even gained full federal approval, and as a result had been waiting for almost a year to be moved onto new land.[108] There was also likely growing impatience among people in Muskogee and Tahlequah eager for the former "hideout for outlaws" to be transformed into a "playground."[109]

There was some political opposition to the project, and to the New Deal more broadly in the mountains of eastern Oklahoma. In the spring of 1936, Newal Ellis--a rural printer--announced his plans to run against Jack Nichols for the Democratic nomination for the Second District. His stance was resolutely anti-New Deal. In an interview with the *Oklahoma News*, Ellis panned the federal government's relief efforts, calling them a "'termite to the Constitution.'"[110] Ellis announced also that he would campaign by driving his small horse and buggy across the rural Cookson Hills, rallying what he believed constituted a large majority of locals who opposed FDR's programs.[111] Further, in June 1936, a circuit court found the Cookson Hills

[107] "Question Arises in Hills Country," *El Reno Daily Tribune*, 27 March 1936.
[108] See Kilpatrick to Boudinot, ETC.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Quoted in "Roosevelt's Horse and Buggy Remark Takes Life as Newal Ellis Runs for Congress in Cookson Hills," *The Oklahoma News*, 25 March 1936.
[111] Ellis' stunt was also in response to FDR's criticism of an obstructionist Supreme Court in 1935, whom the president accused of adopting a "'Horse-and-buggy definition of interstate commerce.'" Ibid; William E. Leuchtenberg, "When Franklin Roosevelt Clashed With the Supreme Court--And Lost," *Smithsonian Magazine*, May 2005, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/when-franklin-roosevelt-clashed-with-the-supreme-court-and-lost-78497994/.

Project unconstitutional. Charles Kilpatrick, appointed by Trent to head up the project in early 1936, chose to ignore the court however, and the project was allowed to continue.[112]

Overall support for the project--and the New Deal--remained high throughout the region however. In July, Nichols handily won the Democratic nomination for his seat in Congress with 26,000 votes. Ellis ran far behind, winning just 316 votes in the entire district. In Wagoner County, just west of the Cookson Hills, and where Ellis won only 16 votes, one reporter noted dryly that the anti-New Dealer was "keeping pace with his horse-and-buggy campaign [and] running far behind."[113] Nichols would handily win reelection in a solidly Democratic district, suggesting his efforts to bring federal projects to the Cookson Hills were paying off.

Excitement for the project built in the Cherokee Ozarks as it moved further along. An announcement came in the summer of 1936 that the new recreation area would be a CCC Project, and consist of a sparkling new reservoir--what would eventually become Greenleaf Lake--as well as cabins, lodges, and hiking trails available for visitors.[114] In January 1937, as the first families were being moved out of the hills and onto new land, an editorial appeared in the *Cherokee County Democrat-Star*, lauding the coming recreation area, and the possibilities for wildlife conservation in the region. Arguing that "the entire Cookson Hills utilization project is the natural haunts of Oklahoma's natice [sic] game animals," the author predicted that the new recreation area would rival the popularity of the Wichita Mountains preserve in western Oklahoma.[115] Journalist Noel Houston, who in 1934 had "exploded" the outlaw myth of the

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[112] "Cookson Hills Park Project Gets Start," *Miami News-Record*, 1 June 1936; "Court Ruling Doesn't Check Cookson Hills Land Project," *Daily Oklahoman*, 7 June 1936.
[113] "Candidates in Runoff Race Start Fence Repair," 14 July 1936, *Wagoner Tribune*; "Senate Derby," *Cushing Daily Citizen*, 12 July 1936.
[114] "Cookson Hills Park Project Gets Start."
[115] Then called the Wichita National Forest, the area of the Wichita Mountains in southwestern Oklahoma had been set up through the lobbying of various conservationist groups in Oklahoma in the early twentieth century. By the 1930s, the Wichitas hosted a wealth of animal populations, including bison, elk, and longhorn cattle, as well as recreational reservoirs, lodges, and other amenities for tourists. See S. Matthew DeSpain, "For Society's Sake: The

Cookson Hills, summarized the broad support the project held, through the "endorsement of newspapers, chambers of commerce, all kinds of civic organizations in eastern Oklahoma, particularly in Muskogee." Muskogeeans, Houston argued, supported the project so eagerly because of "the recreation area which should bring thousands of vacationists and holiday seekers through Muskogee annually."[116]

The only major opposition to the project, it seemed, would come from those who stood to be moved off their land. The archive leaves little record of this dissent, as the media was eager to present an overwhelmingly positive picture of the removals. Newspapers started to report on families arriving at their new farms in December 1936, almost a year and a half since many had first been approached by federal agents. In Wagoner County, the local paper reported that George Hess and his family of ten had been moved from the "barren Cookson Hills" to "Wagoner County's rich Choska Bottoms."[117] Similar accounts followed in newspapers into the spring and summer.[118] In July 1937, *The Daily Oklahoman* ran a photograph of a young, smiling Cherokee woman, with the caption "Happy Now!" Underneath the photo, the author described the story of the Glory family, who a year before had lived "in destitution on a rocky Cookson Hills farm." Now, however, the Glorys had "been given a $3,000 farm of rich bottom-land along the North Canadian River in McIntosh County. No wonder...lucky, formerly impoverished farmers are happy."[119]

Wichita Mountains, Wildlife, and Identity in Oklahoma's Early Environmental History," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 78 (Winter 2000); Jack Haley, "A History of the Establishment of the Wichita National Forest and Game Preserve, 1901–1908," (MA Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1973).

[116] Noel Houston, "Muskogee Sees Only Bright Side, Not Taxes, of New Deal Experiment," *Daily Oklahoman*, 28 July 1937.

[117] "Out of Barren Hills to Rich Choska Farm Moves Family of 11," *Wagoner Tribune*, 15 December 1936

[118] "Wagoner County Gets 22 Families Given RA Farms," *Wagoner Record Democrat*, 24 June 1937; "RA Office is Flooded with Tenant Queries," *Wagoner Tribune*, 10 August 1937; "Cookson Hills Folk Move to Good Land," *Coweta Times-Star*, 21 January 1937;

[119] "Happy Now!," *Daily Oklahoman*, 26 July 1937.

This picture and others like it, of down-on-their-luck farmers turning their fortunes around with the help of the federal government, obfuscates more complicated stories of the project. As early as 1935, before the project had even achieved federal funding, land-owners in the predominantly Cherokee-populated tract had registered complaints about the process by which Kilpatrick and the RA sought to buy land. Mary Boudinot--niece of Frank J. Boudinot, last elected Principal Chief of the Cherokees and a member of the Keetoowah Society--was serving in the US Foreign Service in Cuba in 1935, when she received a letter from Charlie Kilpatrick describing what the federal government intended to do with her family's allotment near Braggs, Oklahoma.[120] Alarmed, she went to see Kilpatrick at the project office in Muskogee the next time she was home. In a letter to senator Elmer Thomas, she described her encounter with the RA official in less-than glowing terms. Boudinot reportedly told Kilpatrick she had no interest in selling her land, to which he "actually became angry, saying the land would be condemned, etc., etc., and that I would be forced to sell in the end anyway."[121] Following this meeting, Boudinot recounted being stopped on the street by federal officials, attempting to intimidate her. She further recounted that other land-owners were being "troubled and threatened by the project managers" with condemnation if they did not sell.[122] She concluded her letter by demanding Thomas open an investigation into the RA, and further claiming that "much of the land which the Government is desirous of buying (including my property), is good land."[123]

When Senator Thomas sent his reply, a few days later, he downplayed Miss Boudinot's concerns. He claimed, confidently, "there is no way the land can be taken from you without your consent, save through condemnation." If such condemnation were to occur, Boudinot would be

[120] Winnifred Clark, "Mary Caroline Boudinot," Indian Pioneer Papers, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma; Kilpatrick to Boudinot, ETC.
[121] Mary Boudinot to Elmer Thomas, 29 July 1935, F 16, B PJ 18, ETC.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.

more than entitled to contest the government's valuation of her land in court.[124] A White settler who had made a fortune as a booster in southwestern Oklahoma, Thomas was perhaps unaware of the irony of telling a Cherokee woman that the government couldn't take her land away. Nevertheless he seemed sure that law and fairness would win the day.

Boudinot considered the valuation put on her land by the federal government to be an insult, and a poor reflection of the land's actual worth. Indeed, in Kilpatrick's initial letter to her, he had informed her the land had been appraised at around $5 an acre, with her allotment covering 70 acres.[125] Thomas characterized this amount as "practically nothing."[126] Many Cherokees no doubt faced a similar dilemma. They could sell their land to the government, land they had been promised in perpetuity, for pennies on the dollar, with the promise of new, better land somewhere else. Such an outcome would generate little income for the landowners, and force them away from their homes, which Mary Boudinot and others did not see as worthless at all.[127]

This was a tale then, of two visions of the landscape coming into conflict. The government, and proponents of the project generally, seemed to see the land in dollars and cents. The land was unprofitable. Worse, it was in a state of near-complete environmental decline. The only solution, to regenerate the land and its inhabitants, was to move the people off it so the land could be restored to its prior status and become profitable again as a recreation area, game refuge, and forest preserve. This solution fit well with the New Dealers ideals around rural uplift

[124] Elmer Thomas to Mary Boudinot, 8 August 1935, F 16, B PJ 18, ETC.
[125] "Offer to Sell Lands to the United States," F 16, B PJ 18, ETC.
[126] Thomas to Boudinot, ETC.
[127] In interviews conducted in the 1960s as part of the Doris Duke Oral History Project, Cherokee researcher JW Tyner interviewed several Cherokees who had lived in the area before the condemnation, and many of them described a region of small, but productive farms. See John Raincrow, 3 October 1969, Interview by JW Tyner, Doris Duke Oral History Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman (hereafter DDOHC); Floyd Colvert, Interview by JW Tyner, 15 July 1969, DDOHC; Katie Sam, Interview by JW Tyner, 28 February 1969, DDOHC.

and land management as well. But for many of the Cherokees who lived on the tract, the land was something different entirely. As Carroll argues, for the Cherokees, "traditional teachings seek to uphold and promote the responsibilities that Cherokees have to one another and to the land." More than that, Carroll argues the land is essential to Cherokee identity, which is "founded in a connection to place."[128] Tiya Miles has argued that "land, specifically homeland, sustains Native identities and values," and that removal from homeland disrupts those values and connections.[129] Writing on the Trail of Tears in the nineteenth century, Miles argues that "the tearing of the flesh of the people from the same flesh of the land" constituted "a rupture of soul and spirit."[130] It was in this context, then, that Cherokee landowners pondered the government's offer to buy their land, not helped by aggressive and coercive tactics on the part of Kilpatrick and his employees.

Miss Boudinot held on to her land as long as she could, fighting in court over the valuation until finally the federal government condemned it in 1942. Even then she continued to write her congressional representatives, from various exotic locales across the globe, demanding the return of her land, for years.[131] Other landowners resisted the government as well, although for not quite as long. The project dragged on, and in January 1938, a federal judge was forced to condemn one thousand acres of land in what would become Greenleaf Lake, so the dam could be built and the valley of Greenleaf Creek flooded. In an article on the condemnation order, the author claimed that Judge Eugene Rice's hand had been forced by landowners who "have hitherto refused to sell."[132] Katie Sam, a Cherokee woman whose father had owned land on

[128] Carroll, *Roots of Our Renewal*, 141.
[129] Ibid; Stremlau, *Sustaining the Cherokee Family*; Tiya Miles, *Ties that Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2003), 158.
[130] Ibid., 157.
[131] Mary Boudinot to W.G. Stigler, 18 March 1948, Folder 67, Box 4, W.G. Stigler Collection, Carl Albert Congressional Research Center, University of Oklahoma, Norman (hereafter WGSC).
[132] "Cookson Hills Area Is Ordered Vacated," *Miami News-Record*, 27 January 1938.

Greenleaf Creek, recalled to an interviewer in 1969 that "His land was condemned, my dad's. So he sold it and course they had to sell it."[133] Her father had been able to buy some new land northeast of their old home, near the small community of Cookson, but "It wasn't much acres as it was back home, but that's what he got."[134]

As the condemnations continued, the project ground on to completion. Finally, in the last week of July, 1938, papers announced the recreation area would open on the first Friday in August.[135] One article highlighted the great changes that had taken place in the Cookson Hills in the last few years, the author claiming that "The Cookson Hills, long a hangout for bandits, have had their face lifted."[136] In the *Indian Journal*, the newspaper in the small town of Eufaula, south of the Cookson Hills, one writer wrote hopefully that although "the ultimate success of this venture will not be evident for several years...indications are now that the results will justify the huge federal expense."[137] Charlie Kilpatrick, in an interview published in the Tahlequah paper on the day of the park's opening, was bullish in his assessment, claiming the recreation area "will be a great boon, we believe to our people."[138]

Recreation, however, was not all Kilpatrick had on his mind. He hoped also that visitors would appreciate the thousands of acres of land in the project not taken up by the lake, lodges, and hiking trails. He lauded reforestation efforts, as well as the conversion of old farmland into pasture, which he hoped would "permit the native grasses to come back," allowing for cattle to graze on the land once again. He further described efforts to encourage wildlife restoration and

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[133] Katie Sam, Interview by JW Tyner, Doris Duke Oral History Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma.
[134] Ibid. In a cruel twist to the story, the Sam family was forced to move from this land too, in 1950 when the Army Corps of Engineers built Tenkiller Dam, flooding the land.
[135] "Cookson Hills Project to be Opened August 5, *Cherokee County Democrat-Star*, 22 July 1938.
[136] "Cookson Hills Now Recreation Center," *Oklahoma News*, 29 July 1938.
[137] "Cookson Hills to be Dedicated Friday," *Indian Journal*, 4 August 1938.
[138] "Dedication of Cookson Hills will be Friday," *Cherokee County Democrat-Star*, 5 August 1938.

the stocking of Greenleaf lake with fish. Concluding the interview, Kilpatrick asked only that "many of our visitors will view examples of all this work."[139]

The Cookson Hills had been restored, it seemed, to the arcadian paradise it had once been. The forest was coming back, the grassland once again suitable for cattle, wild game would soon fill the woods, and fish would fill the waters. But without any people. The New Deal had arrived in the Cherokee Ozarks, but it could have looked a great deal different. The Keetoowahs had tried to restore the prior bounty of the landscape, and had seen in the New Deal a chance to regain some of what had been lost during allotment and its ensuing ecological catastrophe. Their dream had been lost, however, as Oklahoma's political elite combined to defeat the IRA and prevent much meaningful reform in Oklahoma's Indian policy.

The Indian New Deal may have failed in Oklahoma, but the New Dealers had succeeded in remaking at least one small section of the rural Ozark landscape. Indeed it seems that for at least some of the farm families who were taken out of the Cookson Hills, the RA project helped turn things around. George Hess--who had spent much of his life as a transient tenant farmer in the hill country before being moved to a new farm in Wagoner County in 1936--by 1940 owned his farm outright.[140] Hess would even win an award in 1942 from the Soil Conservation Service for doing "an outstanding job in the establishment of conservation practices" on his farm.[141] George Glory and his family, touted as true success stories of the project, who had been resettled in 1936 on a farm in the flatlands of western Muskogee County, seem not to have stayed there particularly long. By 1940, Glory and his family were living in Rogers County, where the head of the family had found work on a WPA project--likely the ongoing construction of Pensacola

[139] "Dedication of Cookson Hills Will be Friday."
[140] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States*, Oklahoma, Wagoner County, Enumeration District 73–10, p. 2A, roll m-t0627-03338, T627, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).
[141] "Porter Farmers Given Certificate at Friday Meeting," *Wagoner Record-Democrat*, 8 October 1942.

Dam, which would create Grand Lake O' The Cherokees. The Glories were renters, but George made, according to the census, about $218 for the year 1940, likely far more than what he had earned farming in the Cookson Hills.[142]

The Hesses and the Glorys had certainly been helped by the New Deal. But we have to weigh that success against the failure of other possibilities offered up by the New Deal, particularly to Native people. The New Dealers' success in transforming the landscape resulted in even less Native land in the Cookson Hills than there had been before. For the Cherokees of the Cookson Hills who embraced the dream of restoring the Cherokee commons, the New Deal had initially offered revolutionary opportunities before settling on variations on the same old theme of dispossession.

The New Deal was, however, coming to an end in Oklahoma. In 1938, ardent anti-New Dealer Leon Phillips won the governorship of Oklahoma, and immediately set about slashing as many government programs as he could. Over the opposition of men such as Jack Nichols and Elmer Thomas, Phillips obstructed new federal programs in the state.[143] In March 1939, Phillips publicly announced in hearings at the state capitol that he saw the Cookson Hills project as "a white elephant in my books," a money sink he was only too eager to cut away.[144] The recreation area was only saved by the fact that as a federal project funded by federal money, Phillips had no authority to cut its funding.[145]

The New Deal may have been effectively over in Oklahoma, but the transformation of the Cookson Hills was not. In the coming years, Oklahoma's leading politicians--men like Elmer Thomas and Jack Nichols--this time spurred on by the citizens of the nearby town of Muskogee,

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[142] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States--1940, Population Schedule*, Verdigris, Rogers County, Oklahoma, Enumeration District 66-21.
[143] "Oklahoma Congressmen Go on Record in Denison Dam Fight," *Oklahoma News*, 21 January 1939.
[144] "A&M Head Dumps Cut Problems on Solons and Slows Money Bill," *Blackwell Daily Journal*, 21 March 1939.
[145] Ibid.

would seek again to reimagine the hill country, this time not as a space of outdoor recreation, but rather as a militarized landscape, an extension of the incipient national security state in eastern Oklahoma. This transformation, like that of the 1930s, would entail a great deal of Native dispossession, as another 30,000 acres of land were cleared for the creation of the military installation that would come to be known as Camp Gruber, including 9,000 acres of Cherokee-owned land.

The dream of a Cherokee landscape in the Cookson Hills was not dead, however; simply delayed. In the 1940s, as the leaders of Muskogee, aided by Thomas, Nichols, and the Department of War sought to transform the hills in the name of national security, they ran up against a resurgent Cherokee Nation, determined to protect and restore its land base. Seizing on national changes in federal Indian policy that the Indian New Deal had ushered in, the Cherokees, led by a newly empowered principal chief, J.B. Milam, would fight for the Cherokee vision of the landscape in the Cookson Hills. In doing so, Milam would help spur a national resurgence that has continued to the present day. To that story we now turn.

Chapter 2:

The City v. The Nation: Army Camps, Cherokee Nationhood, and Muskogee's Metropolitan Dreams, 1941–1949

12-year-old Harold Summerlin lived a life not unlike that of many other rural Ozarkers in the 1940s. His family owned a 160-acre allotment in the Cookson Hills, which his father had grown up on, and although, as he would later concede, their living conditions were somewhat "primitive," Harold didn't remember his life in the Cookson Hills that way. Sure, their property lacked electricity, and he and his siblings pulled water from a well, but the land, Harold felt, provided more than enough to live comfortably. The soil of the Summerlin's property wasn't the most productive in the world, but, Harold remembered, Cherokees living in the area supplemented their agricultural production with hunting and gathering activities. Deer, as many conservationists in eastern Oklahoma noted at the time, were scarce, but Harold and his brothers could still hunt "rabbits and squirrels" in the woods. Nearby at the Cookson Hills project, now under the auspices of the Farm Security Administration (FSA), federal employees introduced a handful of white-tailed deer to the woods, meaning that soon enough Harold and his family might be able to hunt the animal again.[1] When times were lean, Harold's father would travel into the nearby city of Muskogee, the "Indian Capital of the World" to earn extra wages working temporary jobs to support his large family and property.[2]

[1] "Six Full-Grown Deer Put in Cookson Hills Project by Game Department," *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, 2 March 1941.
[2] Will Chavez, "Camp Gruber Forced 2nd Removal for Cherokees," *Cherokee Phoenix*, 22 October 2012.

In the summer of 1942, however, Harold's family would be forced to evacuate their peaceful allotment in the Cherokee hills to make way for an expanding Army cantonment.[3] The way in which Summerlin and his family recalled their eviction recalled the imagery of the forced removals from the Cherokee homelands in the southeast in the early nineteenth century. Harold remembered that he and his family were forced to leave quickly, in the middle of the corn growing season. Unable to stay to harvest the crop, the family lost not only their home but their livelihood, and food source, in quick succession, as they fled across county lines to a relative's home. Harold's younger brother, Gerald, recalled bitterly that he had been forced to leave many of his belongings in the family home, destined to be destroyed during field artillery practice in the coming years. Describing what he clearly thought of as an invasion, Gerald remembered that "By the time we got out of there, the Army was already moving in with heavy artillery, so it wasn't even safe to be close."[4]

Who was behind this new invasion of the Cookson country, that all told, would drive at least 45 Cherokee families from their allotments, land that, according to federal law, remained "restricted" from sale? Immediately, it was the United States Army, a force that was in the midst of a rapid and unprecedented expansion in the wake of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and the commencement of American involvement in the Second World War. Oklahoma's senator Elmer Thomas, chair of the military appropriations subcommittee, had recently found the country's domestic military infrastructure to be in "critical condition" and signaled that he would liberally support budget increases and development.[5] The Cookson Hills area, much of which

[3] "Camp Gruber and the Displacement of Cherokee Families," *Osiyo.tv*, 21 April 2019, https://osiyo.tv/cherokee-almanac-camp-gruber-and-the-displacement-of-cherokee-families/.
[4] Chavez, "Camp Gruber Forced 2nd Removal."
[5] Quoted in David D. Webb, "Thomas, John William Elmer," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=TH008.

already lay in federal hands due to the land use projects of the 1930s, represented an attractive, and relatively inexpensive, place to put a new camp.

But more than a matter of convenience, the arrival of soldiers at the Summerlin home in July 1942 was the product of almost two years of intense lobbying by a group of powerful citizens in the nearby town of Muskogee. These lobbyists saw the camp as a means to rebuild their city's wealth, prestige, and population, all of which had taken major hits in the Depression and Dust Bowl years. These Muskogeeans, many of them prominent businessmen, saw in Camp Gruber what so many other boosters across the South and West in the 1940s and onwards would see in federal projects: the chance to generate massive urban development through massive federal investment.

The Cherokee Nation, in its first major political action since Oklahoma statehood, would rise to challenge the vision of the hills that the citizens of Muskogee enacted in the Cookson Hills in 1942. They would challenge the government's condemnation of Cherokee land in court, and seek to staunch the bleeding of Cherokee land loss. They were led in this endeavour by Jesse Bartley Milam, a wealthy banker and oilman and proud Cherokee citizen, who in 1938 was elected principal chief of the united Cherokee Nation, and formally recognized by the United States in 1941. Milam had his own vision for the development of eastern Oklahoma, one that would combine Cherokee economic self-sufficiency with a rebuilding of the Cherokee land base, and an emphasis on Cherokee traditions and ways of life. In Camp Gruber, he saw a threat to that vision, and a threat to Cherokee sovereignty.

So it was that across the 1940s, the Cherokee Nation, led by Milam, and the city of Muskogee, led by a band of wealthy boosters, would argue for these contrasting visions of the future in the Cookson Hills, a future that both understood to be deeply tied to the land. By the

1940s, Muskogeeans were desperate to revitalize their city's sagging fortunes, and saw Camp Gruber as their best, and perhaps last, chance to transform the city and the region. While Muskogee declined however, the Cherokee Nation was rising again, 30-odd years since its almost-total destruction. Led by Milam, a united and recognized Cherokee Nation would mount a very public and ardent fight for its lands, something Cherokee leaders in the 1930s had been unable to do, and that would portend momentous changes in the power and visibility of Oklahoma's Native nations across the latter half of the twentieth century.

The re-emergence of Native nations in Oklahoma as recognized and powerful political entities was not clear to most Oklahomans, or Americans, in the late 1930s and early 1940s. After all, the Indian Reorganization Act had failed in Oklahoma, and its replacement, the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act (OIWA) had little teeth to generate the kinds of radical improvement in Native material conditions that John Collier and his allies had sought in Oklahoma.[6]

Cherokees, many of whom had been supporters of Collier's proposed program, sought to take advantage of the limited political organization that the OIWA allowed for. Historian and Milam biographer Howard Meredith estimates that two dozen Cherokee organizations applied for corporate status under the OIWA's provision allowing for any Indian tribe to "organize for its common welfare and adopt a constitution with by-laws."[7] This organizing fervor did not result in much success, and thus many Cherokee leaders sought to unite their disparate bands, to present a singular face to the federal government in the Cherokee's ongoing efforts to secure their land. At a meeting north of Stilwell in 1938, representatives of various Cherokee organizations selected

[6] For more on the IRA in Oklahoma, see Jon S. Blackmon, *Oklahoma's Indian New Deal* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013).
[7] Howard Meredith, *Bartley Milam: Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation* (Muskogee: Indian University Press, 1985), 37; Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act, 74 U.S.C., Ch. 831, 28 June 1936.

Jesse Bartley (J.B.) Milam as principal chief, although he would not be recognized by the federal government as such until 1941.[8]

According to Meredith, Milam's recognition as chief came almost by accident, a matter of convenience as developers sought to liquidate more Cherokee land title in the 1930s and 1940s. In this case it was the recently formed Grand River Dam Authority (GRDA), formed in the 1930s by the state of Oklahoma as a TVA-adjacent public utility, whose main priorities were to dam the Grand and Verdigris Rivers. In the late 1930s, the main project undertaken by the GRDA was the creation of Grand Lake O' The Cherokees, a massive reservoir project that would flood thousands of acres of land in the Cherokee Nation. A federal judge, according to Meredith, had ruled in 1938 that the river itself was property of the Cherokee Nation, and so, in order to legally acquire title to the river, the GRDA needed to negotiate with the Nation's leadership. They turned to Elmer Thomas, who lobbied the president to appoint Milam as chief. President Roosevelt did so, and Milam was recognized by the US government in 1941.[9] An inauspicious start.

J.B. Milam was a man prepared to face the difficulties of being a Cherokee leader in twentieth-century Oklahoma. Born to a Cherokee mother and White father in 1884, Milam grew up in Chelsea, a small railroad town in the northern part of the Cherokee Nation along the valley of the Verdigris River, northeast of the then-small village of Tulsa and around 100 miles north of Muskogee and the Cookson Hills. A member of a wealthy family, Milam had attended the Cherokee National Seminary in Tahlequah, and as a young man witnessed the trauma and upheaval of allotment, and the disintegration of the Cherokee Nation as a political institution.[10] Returning to Chelsea following his education, Milam found himself right in the middle of

[8] Meredith, *Bartley Milam*, 35–51.
[9] Meredith, *Bartley Milam*, 51–7.
[10] Ibid., 2–18.

northeastern Oklahoma's oil boom, and became a wealthy banker and oil man in the first two decades of the twentieth century.[11] By the 1930s he was a prominent and well-known member of northeastern Oklahoma's petroleum and gas industry.[12]

Milam also took an interest in learning as much as he could about his Cherokee heritage, and by the 1930s had become a recognized leader in the preservation of Cherokee history and culture. He would help found and lead the Cherokee Seminaries Association, an organization for alumni of the Cherokee National Male and Female seminaries.[13] He became a member of the Oklahoma History Society in 1937, and helped locate and commemorate the legendary Cherokee educator Sequoyah's home in the Cherokee Ozarks, just a few miles east of the Cookson Hills tract, in the late 1930s and early 1940s.[14] He was thus a well known figure in the state and among Cherokee people when he was recognized as principal chief in 1941.

Milam, however, was no chief-for-a-day, a rubber stamp for federal and state land acquisition schemes. He had his own goals for the future of the Cherokee Nation, and they centered around the protection and reclamation of Cherokee land and culture, and the economic development of the Cherokee Nation. One of the central issues that Cherokee leaders who had supported the Indian Reorganization Act in the 1930s had identified, and whom John Collier had echoed in his efforts to bring reform to Oklahoma, had been the problem of "landless Indians."[15] Milam set out to solve this problem, first by pursuing financial restitution for land claims made against the US government to alleviate Cherokee poverty, and second by acquiring lands where

[11] Ibid., 19–34.
[12] For instance, Milam would serve as a director of the International Petroleum Association of America and play an important role in its annual meeting in Tulsa in 1938. "Chelsea Oil Man Takes Prominent Part in I.P.A.A Meet," *Chelsea Reporter*, 20 October 1938.
[13] "Seminary Alumni to Hold Eleventh Annual Meeting," *Cherokee County Democrat-Star*, 30 April 1937.
[14] Ibid., 30–4.
[15] I talk about this more in the first two chapters of the thesis.

he could to provide a land base for the many Cherokees who found themselves without land.[16] It may not have been evident at the time, but Milam's tenure would mark the beginning of a new day for the Cherokee Nation as a political entity, and as a force to be reckoned with in eastern Oklahoma.

Meanwhile, in the city of Muskogee, times were increasingly tough. The city had once been the largest in Indian Territory, and had boomed following the discovery of oil south of the city in 1905, with a population increase of nearly 500% between 1900 and 1910.[17] This population rise accompanied and stimulated a massive economic boom in the town, and in these early years the oil and gas industry that was thriving across Oklahoma seemed destined to put the city on the path to long-term prosperity. Muskogee's anointed status only seemed to grow when the Pure Oil Company established a refinery on the city's outskirts in 1907.[18] The city's streetcar system opened in 1905, the third such public transit system in the state, after Oklahoma City and McAlester.[19] Between 1910 and 1912, the city saw five new "skyscrapers" constructed downtown, including two luxury hotels.[20] By 1913, a local paper confidently reported that the city had transcended the boom days of previous years, and "is now on its steady stride towards commercial supremacy in the southwest."[21]

In addition to oil, Muskogee achieved early prominence due to its status as a regional transportation hub. The city sat at the forks of three rivers, the Grand, Verdigris, and the

[16] Meredith, *Bartley Milam*, 57–65; Robert J. Conley, *The Cherokee Nation: A History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 204–8.
[17] Grant Foreman, *Muskogee: Biography of an Oklahoma Town* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943), 141.
[18] Ibid., 136-8.
[19] Roger Bell, "Muskogee's Trolley Years," 3 Rivers Museum, accessed 26 February 2021, http://www.3riversmuseum.com/muskogees-trolley-years.html.
[20] Claudia Craig, "National Register of Historic Places, Nomination Form: Muskogee's Pre-Depression Skyscrapers," (Washington D.C.: National Park Service, 1983).
[21] "Happy New Year," *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, 1 January 1913.

Arkansas and as such had long served as a center of trading, since at least the 1830s.[22] By 1913, it also sat at the intersection of five major railroad lines, prompting one local journalist to boast that the city had become "the headquarters for some of the heaviest and most powerful railway motive power in the country," with "some of the most modern locomotives" in the nation.[23] These lines connected Muskogee to Kansas City, St. Louis, and south to Texas as well. In 1915, representatives from Muskogee would attend a grand convention that resulted in the establishment of the Jefferson Highway, an international thoroughfare that would connect Winnipeg to New Orleans.[24] The highway ran right through Muskogee--which was the largest municipality on the route between Kansas City and Dallas--and by 1921 the local Kiwanis Club would establish an "auto tourist camp" to accommodate the increasing numbers of tourists who traveled through the city.[25] As oil built Muskogee, railroads and highways seemed to promise continued growth in population and stature.

Throughout the city's early existence, its relationship to Native people had been complicated. As allotment proceeded in the early years of the twentieth century, a small group of wealthy businessmen, Native and non-Native, collaborated to "purchase" the city's townsite from the Creek Nation at a drastically reduced price, furthering processes of Indigenous disposession and the despoliation that Angie Debo would describe in 1940.[26] At the same time, in the chaotic days of allotment and the run-up to Oklahoma statehood, Muskogee had been the focal point of the Sequoyah movement, an effort by local leaders, Native and non-Native, to transform the Indian Territory into a largely Native-run state, with Muskogee as its capital.[27] Although this vision of Muskogee as an Indian capital did not come to fruition, Muskogee in the

[22] Foreman, *Muskogee*, 11.
[23] "Powerful Engines Haul Freight Over Local Line," *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, 14 June 1913.
[24] "Will Muskogee Be On or Off Jefferson Highway?," *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, 6 November 1915.
[25] "Tourist's Camp Ready on May 1," *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, 25 March 1921.
[26] Debo, *And Still the Waters Run*, 333.
[27] Stern, "Reconstructing Indian Territory."

early twentieth century did boast a sizable the Native population. Indeed in the 1910 census, Muskogee boasted the largest urban Indian population in the United States.[28] Muskogee's boosters seized on this information, with one newspaper article proclaiming Muskogee the "capital of the Indian country," and an advertisement for the city in 1926 to proclaim it "the town of consistent prosperity, the Indian capital of the world."[29] The presence of a large Indigenous population, to Muskogee's boosters, seemed only to further its annointed status within Oklahoma, and the West, as a modernizing, growing metropolis.

But growth slowed across the next three decades, while other cities, namely Tulsa, surged. In 1920, the city's population sat at about 30,000, having risen from around 2,500 before statehood. Tulsa, meanwhile, the city most Muskogeeans saw as their rival, by 1920 was the 97th largest city in the United States, having swelled to a population of 72,000, even though only twenty years before it too had been a quite small hamlet.[30] Unsurprisingly, many Muskogeeans saw this growth as threatening to Muskogee's dream of becoming eastern Oklahoma's premier city. Oil had been discovered in Tulsa in 1905, the same year as Muskogee, and yet Tulsa's population continued to grow exponentially, even as Muskogee's slowed. As early as 1922, local businessman B. Frank Wood would complain that Tulsa had "become the great oil capital of the southwest..traveling full steam ahead," while Muskogee "seemed to slip over on dead-center and just stay there." He exhorted his fellow Muskogeeans in the local paper to redouble their efforts

[28] Patricia Rubertone, *Native Providence: Memory, Community, and Survivance in the Northeast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020), 13.
[29] "Fullblood Indian on the Program," *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, 12 May 1916; "Carload Shipment as Muskogee Advertising," *Muskogee Daily News*, 20 March 1926.
[30] Campbell Gibson, "Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990," U.S. Bureau of the Census: Population Division, Working Paper No. 27 (June 1998), https://web.archive.org/web/20070314031958/http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027.html.

at growth, attract new industries, and try to reach a population of 100,000 by 1930, which he claimed, "would mean an average yearly increase of only 8,000."[31]

Wood's proposal, however, never came to fruition, and by 1940 the city's population stood at around 32,000. Tulsa's, by contrast, had doubled to around 140,000, while Muskogeeans looked on with jealousy.[32] Grant Foreman--who had first come to Muskogee in 1889 as an employee of the Dawes Commission, and whose experiences there would spark a long career researching and writing about Native American history--would lament on Muskogee's diminishing status in 1943, remarking that the discovery of oil fields near Tulsa had caused an exodus of the many wealthy inhabitants of Muskogee. "So many went there from Muskogee," he wrote, "as to contribute measurably to Tulsa's advantage over her less fortunate neighbor."[33] Foreman would note rather glumly that in the contest between the two cities' populations, Tulsa "ran away from Muskogee" for good.[34]

Slowed population growth matched declining productivity in the Muskogee oil field. Oil production fell generally across the 1920s, from 270,000 barrels per year in 1920, to around 80,000 barrels per year in 1928, before plateauing across the 1930s.[35] Meanwhile, in Tulsa, In the 1930s, following the discovery of more lucrative oil fields in Illinois, the Pure Oil company pulled out of the region, and the refinery closed, "to the great financial loss of Muskogee."[36] The company had employed a great deal of people, and in the 1970s a resident of Boynton, a few miles west of Muskogee, recalled that when he had moved to the area in the late 1920s, the towns of Muskogee County were thriving places, "but then we lost the refinery and the Pure Oil

[31] B. Frank Wood, "Muskogee's Why-Nots and Whys," *Muskogee Times-Democrat*, 21 January 1922.
[32] Gibson, "Population of the 100 Largest Cities."
[33] Ibid., 150.
[34] Ibid., 142-3.
[35] Calvin Harold Riggs, J.L. Eakin, and Kenneth H. Johnston, "Petroleum-Engineering Study of Muskogee Oilfield, Muskogee County, Oklahoma," (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, 1959), 14.
[36] Ibid., 138.

Company," and things never recovered.[37] Downtown Muskogee suffered as well, and in 1932 the lessee of the Severs Hotel, one of Muskogee's pre-Depression "skyscrapers" went bankrupt, prompting a foreclosure on the building and a fire sale of the furniture from the hotel's 250 bedrooms.[38] By 1933, the city's trolley system, once a symbol of its incipient cosmopolitanism, had closed, with the city citing budgetary issues.[39]

Prominent Muskogeeans held out hope for salvation, however, and saw it in the Cookson Hills, the site of the New Deal land use project that many in the city had lobbied so aggressively for in the 1930s. By 1941, the Cookson Hills project had opened to the public, and federal and state officials were making headway on the conservation efforts they had touted in years prior. In March of that year, game rangers reintroduced a small number of white-tailed deer and partridges to the project area, and game department employee Joe Lambert told the *Muskogee Daily Phoenix* that in time, the area "should make a good range for deer."[40] Rangers were also busy at work introducing protective grasses and planting thousands of trees, and renting out sections of the project area for cattle grazing. The project had even managed to turn a profit in 1940, netting around $8000 from grazing fees and money spent at the recreation area along Greenleaf Lake.[41]

Leading Muskogee businessmen, however, such as Harry Ogden, a prominent banker and president of the city's chamber of commerce, who had moved to the city in Territory days and married into a prominent Cherokee family, saw more lucrative federal opportunities on the horizon. Franklin Roosevelt's victory in the 1940 elections, along with gains across the country

[37] Quoted in Molly Wins, "Boynton, Okla., Is Relieved to Quit the National Spotlight," *New York Times*, 21 November 1977.
[38] *Harris V. Cook*, 12 May 1936, Oklahoma Supreme Court, 177. Okla. 58; "Notice of Sheriff's Sale," *Muskogee Legal Record*, 15 February 1933.
[39] Bell, "Muskogee's Trolley Years."
[40] "Six Full-Grown Deer."
[41] L.C. Gentry, "Cookson Hills Grass, Tree Plantings Heavy," *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, 30 March 1941.

for Democrats, promised the expansion of military spending, something FDR had prioritized since 1939.[42] Leading the charge in the expansion of domestic military infrastructure was none other than Oklahoma Senator Elmer Thomas, an ally of FDR who, in the 1930s, had championed New Deal programs like the Cookson Hills resettlement and recreation area, all while quashing reforms such as the Indian Reorganization Act.[43] By 1941, Thomas was the chair of the Senate military appropriations sub-committee, where he pledged a "liberal" approach to the military budget, and granted wide latitude to the War Department in terms of spending.[44]

Harry Ogden and his associates watched these developments closely, and sometime in the winter and spring of 1941, began a concerted campaign to bring a military cantonment to eastern Oklahoma. Word of this initially secretive campaign got out in early March 1941, when the *Daily Oklahoman* ran a story reporting that congressman Jack Nichols--who in years prior had lobbied for federal investment in the Cookson Hills, ranging from a national park to a federal prison--was now asking that the War Department locate a $10,000,000 cantonment in the Cookson Hills. Nichols, according to the article's author, believed "that use of the Cookson hills would save the cost of the land as the area already is government-owned," and that "'there is practically a complete system of roads in the area.'"[45] In other words, the Cookson Hills project area, once seen by many Muskogeeans as an impenetrable wilderness, was now so accessible it could support a population of thousands of soldiers.

Excitement built in Muskogee, and by the end of March, Ogden had decided to go public with his campaign. In an extraordinary meeting that month, representatives from 50 towns across

[42] Price Fishback and Joseph A. Cullen, "Second World War Spending and Local Economic Activity in US Counties, 1939–58," *Economic History Review* 66, no. 4 (2013): 977.
[43] Carolyn G. Hanneman, "Senator from Oklahoma: The Legislative Career of Hoosier Elmer Thomas," *Indiana Magazine of History* 103, no. 4 (December 2007): 379-80.On Thomas' notable opposition to the IRA, see Blackmon, *Oklahoma's Indian New Deal*, 56–77.
[44] Hanneman, "Senator from Oklahoma," 381.
[45] "Army Camp for East Side Asked," *Daily Oklahoman*, 4 March 1941.

the Arkansas River Valley and Cherokee Ozarks came together at the Hotel Severs in Muskogee to discuss the cantonment campaign. Ogden, who presided over the meeting, argued that the proposed cantonment would "bring a veritable new city to eastern Oklahoma since the camp would quarter between 30,000 and 40,000 enlisted men and officers, making a city as large or larger than Muskogee." Further he explained to those gathered there that the Cookson Hills cantonment "cannot fail to help every community represented here." Finally, he called on the citizens of eastern Oklahoma to "telegraph or write the Oklahoma congressional delegation urging that they lead every effort" to obtain the cantonment. Ogden's call to arms was met with rapturous approval, and the representatives at the meeting immediately agreed form an organization known as the Eastern Oklahoma Defense Committee to lobby for the camp in Washington.[46]

Sure enough, immediately after the meeting in late March, letters and telegrams flooded the offices of Oklahoma's congressional delegation, with hundreds landing on Elmer Thomas' desk in the first weeks of April. The missives came from all over northeastern Oklahoma. 45 citizens of Braggs, a town that in its best years had supported a population of around 400, and located just west of the proposed cantonment site, wrote to Thomas on 31 March petitioning him "to use your influence and prestige in securing a Cantonment for the Cookson Hill Area."[47] The mayors of Tahlequah, Webbers Falls, Council Hill, and Vian all sent letters, declaring their towns to be fully in support of the city of Muskogee.[48] Chambers of commerce from across the

[46] "Active Campaign for Cookson Cantonment Opens," *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, 29 March 1941.
[47] Citizens of Braggs, OK, to Elmer Thomas, 31 March 1941, Folder 12, Box PJ 3, Elmer Thomas Collection (hereafter ETC), Carl Albert Center for Congressional Research (hereafter CACCR), University of Oklahoma, Norman (hereafter OU).
[48] R.G. Wiggins to Elmer Thomas, 1 April 1941, F 12, PJ 3, ETC; Jim R. Doss to Elmer Thomas, 1 April 1941, F 46, B PJ 12, ETC, CACCR, OU; W.H. Gaulding to Elmer Thomas, 31 March 1941, F 46, PJ 12, ETC.

region lended their voices, too, as well as other prominent civic groups, like the Lions Club of Eufaula, Oklahoma.[49]

Private citizens, many of them business owners, voiced their support as well, and they hastened to remind Thomas of the economic benefits the cantonment would bring. One such letter came from L.H. Jones, the manager of a business in Westville, on the Arkansas line in Adair County. Jones begged Thomas to push for the camp by advocating for the economic benefit that it stood to present to the region, explaining that "there would be created a market for the produce, canned goods, and fruit for which the Arkansas River is noted."[50]

Thomas, in general, was a supporter of the cantonment, although, as he noted in many of his responses to constituents, "the War Department advises that no new cantonments will be constructed unless the United States becomes involved in actual war."[51] Immediately after the commencement of the letter-writing campaign, Thomas welcomed a delegation from Muskogee, who had come to help advocate for the cantonment. The senator would work closely with this and other delegations across the spring, summer, and fall of 1941.[52]

By July 1941, it seemed that the proposal for the cantonment had reached an impasse, and many in Muskogee and surrounding areas grew worried that some other town in Oklahoma--some said McAlester, site of the Stringtown penitentiary, while others worried about erstwhile rival Tulsa--would receive the prized cantonment instead. Accordingly, in late July, the city council of Muskogee elected a new delegation of heavy hitters to head to Washington to plead the city's case. This new group consisted of Ogden, an old friend of Thomas, as well as the city

[49] Charles Cobb to Elmer Thomas, 1 April 1941, F 12, PJ 3, ETC; Eufala Lions Club, Chamber of Commerce, American Legion, to Elmer Thomas, 1 April 1941, F 12, PJ 3, ETC.
[50] L.H. Jones to Elmer Thomas, 1 April 1941, F 12, B PJ 3, ETC, CACCR, OU.
[51] Elmer Thomas to W.T. Thorne, 2 April 1941, F 12, B PJ 3, ETC.
[52] Ibid.

manager Roger Tucker and another member of the chamber of commerce, Carl Bates.[53] This delegation enjoyed little initial success, and by September Ogden and Thomas commiserated that the cantonment's authorization continued to be held up.[54] By October, Carl Bates wrote to Thomas that "it now appears that the Cookson Hills cantonment is a matter of the indefinite future."[55] Despite the ramp-up in domestic military expenditure, as Thomas had pointed out back in April, the United States was as of yet in peacetime, and therefore it seems the Army couldn't justify the cost of building a new military installation.

This calculus abruptly changed on December 7, 1941, with the attacks at Pearl Harbor, and hopes in Muskogee immediately rose. On December 8, Thomas sent Ogden an urgent telegram, informing him that a new appropriations bill would carry funds for "thirty new bomber bases and seven new air fields," and that while the bill did not yet authorize construction of any army camps, plans were rapidly changing in the wake of the Japanese attack, and it was "entirely possible for [the] expansion of [the] army and immediate construction of [the] Cookson Hills camp."[56]

Events now proceeded quickly. By 10 December, Thomas wired Ogden informing him that Muskogee had been approved as a Defense Housing Area, opening it up to federal funding for defense projects including the proposed cantonment.[57] Ogden responded, again highlighting the economic benefits of the authorization, writing that "We are very happy that this application has been approved...this will give us relief."[58] By December 15, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9282, establishing the cantonment that would come to be called Camp Gruber,

[53] R.M. Mountcastle to Elmer Thomas, 30 July 1941, F 61, PJ 9, ETC.
[54] Thomas to Harry Ogden, 15 September 1941, F 61, PJ 9, ETC.
[55] Carl K. Bates to Elmer Thomas, 21 October 1941, F 61, PJ 9, ETC.
[56] Elmer Thomas to Harry Ogden, 8 December 1941, F 61, PJ 9, ETC.
[57] Elmer Thomas to H.H. Ogden, 10 December 1941, F 61, PJ 9, ETC.
[58] Harry Ogden to Elmer Thomas, 10 December 1941, F 61, PJ 9, ETC.

named after a long-time artillery officer at Fort Sill, in western Oklahoma.[59] The order became public news on 7 January 1942, when the Muskogee paper celebrated the announcement on its front page, declaring that "Spurred by the demands of an all-out war," the United States government "ordered that construction of the big project get started at the earliest possible moment."[60] Harry Ogden and his fellow lobbyists celebrated, and the cantonment that would become Camp Gruber promised to solve the twin crises of population and economic stagnation that Muskogee was facing.

Construction of the cantonment proceeded apace across the early months of 1942, as the United States went to war in the Pacific and began planning for the eventual invasion of North Africa. A Muskogee construction company, Manhattan-Long, was hired to construct the camp, and set to work building the 1,700 buildings the new camp would require. The contractors would also transform Greenleaf Lake into a reservoir for the camp, and reroute a highway to go around, rather than through, the site of the camp.[61]

The War Department did more, however, than simply transform the pre-existing Cookson Hills Project area. At some point--it's not entirely clear when--the demands of the camp construction exceeded the 32,000 acre project area, and Army officials deemed an additional 30,000 acres necessary to complete the cantonment. It was at this time, in May of 1942, that young Harold Summerlin and hundreds of his neighbors received notice that the land they lived on, that many of them had been born and raised on, was no longer theirs.

The evacuation was rapid, too rapid for people who had spent their entire lives intimately tied to these particular tracts of land. In June 1942, families were given 45 days to move out. As Frela

[59] Mary Jane Warde and Diana Everett, "Oklahoma's Legacy of Defense: National Guard Armories, Davis Air Field (Muskogee), Whitaker Education and Training Center (Pryor), and Camp Gruber, Oklahoma," (Oklahoma Historical Society: State Historic Preservation Office, September 1993), 30-1.
[60] "Army Camp 'Go' Signal Given," *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, 7 January 1942.
[61] Warde and Everett, "Oklahoma's Legacy of Defense," 31-2.

Summerlin, Gerald and Harold's sister, would later remember: "We left everything. We left an organ in the house, and a big trunk full of pictures....I don't know what else we left, but I know we didn't get it all."[62] What's more many of the Cherokee inhabitants of the area had spent many years improving their lots, and stould not just to lose their property but the often multiple homes they had built there. Johnson Silk and his family, like everyone else in the region, found themselves forced to move with crops still in the ground, leaving their livelihood to be destroyed by the Army.[63] The Summerlins' had at least three generations living on their property, in multiple houses.[64] Cornelius Raincrow's property, at 156 acres, included at least three sets of improvements, including a second house that his son-in-law inhabited. Raincrow also had 30 acres in cultivation.[65]

This eviction recalled in some ways the RA's removal of hundreds of families from the area only a few years earlier, but it differed in one key way. That removal had been brought on by the New Dealers' idealism, however paternalistic and misguided it may have been, and had been undertaken in a sincere effort to improve the lives of what federal officials had seen as backward, poverty-stricken folks. Notably the Resettlement Administration had sought to remove farmers from land they judged as sub-marginal, and sought to move farmers onto better land in other places.

The dispossessions of 1942 would be made under a very different aegis of federal power: that of national security and military necessity. As a result, the officials were not at all concerned with removing struggling farmers from exhausted soil, and generating rural uplift through resettlement and agricultural education. Rather they were most interested in an efficient clearing

[62] Quoted in "Cherokee Almanac."
[63] R.P. Matthews, "Invasion Brings Ruin to Cookson Families," *Tulsa Daily World*, 12 July 1942.
[64] "Cherokee Almanac."
[65] "Tract No. C-431 and C-447," Appraisal, Folder 13, Box 1, Series 1, J.B. Milam Papers (hereafter JBMP), McFarlin Library Special Collections (hereafter MLSC), University of Tulsa, Tulsa, OK (hereafter TU).

of the land to make way for a division of infantry that needed training in advance of entering a global conflict. All told 45 Cherokee families would find themselves dispossessed in that summer, all of them on land that was "restricted," and thus, as the federal government had told them, could not be taken away from them.

There was another difference to the New Deal-era removals, however, which was that the dispossessed Cherokees had a federally recognized leader to lobby on their behalf. Shortly after the condemnation notices were sent out, J.B. Milam caught word of it, and immediately set about doing what he could to ensure housing for the removed Cherokee families. The military, it seems, had provided little in the way of advance payment for the lands they were acquiring, and allotted, as Milam would discover, only a paltry sum to provide for the families' moving expenses, including housing and food.[66] Little infrastructure lay in place for this mass exodus from the Cookson Hills, so Milam, alongside Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) employees from the Five Tribes Agency in Muskogee, cobbled together what they could, sending some families to hastily erected housing, or to stay with relatives across the region. Somehow, by July 14, the day before the final deadline to evacuate the area, all 45 families had been found somewhere to stay.[67]

Meanwhile, Milam set about raising the alarm on what was happening in the Cookson Hills. He got in touch with R.P. Matthews, the farm editor at the *Tulsa Daily World*, who, in the early days of July traveled down to Muskogee and Cherokee Counties and conducted an investigation. In a stunning exposé published on 12 July, Matthews wrote in stark terms that "tragedy and heartache are stalking again across the rugged Cookson hills, and brewing now is a second 'Trail of Tears.'" He went on to describe the ways in which the "mass evacuation is

[66] Milam's research revealed that, on average, the War Department provided between $12–17 per month to the evacuated families between July and December 1942.
[67] Meredith, *Jesse Bartley Milam*, 70–3.

bringing hardship and actual ruin to many of the hill people" whose rustic way of life was increasingly threatened.[68]

Matthews argued that the central issue of the removal was that the Cookson families were not being offered nearly enough money for their land. He examined Johnson Silk's property, where the War Department's appraisers had offered the family $1200 for 120 acres, including 60 in cultivation. Matthews claimed that similar tracts of land which had been condemned by the government to create Grand Lake O' The Cherokees had sold for twenty times that number, a startling difference.[69] Cornelius Raincrow, meanwhile, wasn't even sure what the appraisers felt his land was worth, and was due to move off the land with no guarantee of when he would be paid. Others Matthews interviewed were similarly unclear on when, exactly, they would be paid, and how much.[70]Milam would seize on the discrepancies that Matthews reported on, and, in conjunction with A.M. Landsman, superintendent of the Five Tribes Agency in Muskogee, would conduct his own investigation into the perceived undervaluing of Cherokee lands, and the heavy-handedness of the military in pushing his people off their lands.[71]

Down in Muskogee, meanwhile, advocates for Camp Gruber were deeply angered by Matthews' reporting, something they saw as yet another example of Tulsa attempting to thwart the city's ambitions. In an editorial published two weeks after Matthews' first report came out in the *World*, the editors of the *Muskogee Phoenix* admitted that, while no doubt the appraisers had made some errors, those could be excused as the Army was "grooming itself at breakneck speed to fight a war of survival." Further, the *Phoenix* questioned why, exactly, the *Tulsa World* "should suddenly evince such great concern over 45 Indian families so far removed from its

[68] Matthews, "Invasion Brings Ruin to Cookson Families."
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] "R.P. Matthews, "Tribal Head Moves to Prevent Hardships, Loss Due to Alleged Low Land Appraisals," *Tulsa Daily World*, 19 July 1942.

immediate sphere of activity." The Cookson Hills, the paper's editors seemed to be arguing, belonged to Muskogee's sphere of influence, not Tulsa's. The editors then turned conspiratorial, asking "Would [the *Tulsa World*] be carrying on such a frothing crusade if the big army cantonment had been located in Osage County, adjacent to Tulsa and where Tulsa wanted it, instead of where it is in Muskogee and Cherokee counties?"[72]

As ridiculous as this accusation may have seemed--and indeed Matthews would offer a stinging rebuke a few days later in the *World*, describing the editorial's final question as "too asinine to merit an answer"--it reveals the very real fragility of the city of Muskogee in this moment.[73] Muskogeeans had watched as Tulsa had outstripped their town to become eastern Oklahoma's premier city--and the oil capital of the world--while Muskogee's population, and oil fields faltered.[74] Muskogee's decline was evident, and the Muskogee paper's vitriol revealed, in some ways, the meaning Muskogeeans had attached to Camp Gruber.

Milam meanwhile, had his own visions for the region's future, and it started with the defense of--and regaining of--Cherokee lands. There was no time, he must have realized, to contest the legality of the dispossessions themselves, particularly in the height of war, but he still hoped for a measure of justice through the courts. While conducting his investigation into the Camp Gruber removals, Milam had come across the story of the Nesqually Nation in western Washington, whose lands had been taken by the Army during World War 1, and how "compensation was so inadequate" that the Nesqually had secured a formal investigation from

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[72] "Altruism or Something Else," *Muskogee Phoenix*, 26 July 1942.
[73] R.P. Matthews, "Muskogee Paper Protests World Disclosures on Indian Evictions," *Tulsa Daily World*, 30 July 1942.
[74] For more on Tulsa's history during this period, see Angie Debo, *Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capital* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943). By 1928, the Muskogee oil field, which at its height had produced nearly 1,000 barrels a day, was only producing around 225 per day. Charles W. Wilson, Jr., "Geology of the Muskogee-Porum District, Muskogee and McIntosh Counties, Oklahoma," *Oklahoma Geological Survey* 57 (1937): 107–9.

Congress that "resulted in an appropriation from Congress to recompense the Indians."[75] Empowered by this information, Milam resolved to seek a similar resolution for the Cookson Cherokees.

Across the summer and fall of 1942, as an army of soldiers moved into the Cookson Hills to train for war, Milam worked with the Cookson Hills Cherokees to seek greater compensation for their lands. Following a new set of appraisals conducted by F.E. Perkins, the Indian Office in Muskogee arrived at vastly different valuations on the Camp Gruber lands than War Department appraisers had. Perkins found that Johnson Silk's land, which had been appraised at $1200 by the War Department, was worth $2175, including almost $300 in crops.[76] This undervaluation reflected a broader trend, and as Milam would later note, "the appraisals of the War Department were only about two-thirds of the Indian Department."[77]

Most of the families who sued the federal government in 1942 settled out of court, but a few demanded a jury trial. Ten landowners ended up going to trial in federal court in Muskogee across late 1943 and early 1944. In court, the lawyers representing the Cherokees sought to War Department appraisers as systemically undervaluing the lands due to pressure from the government to condemn the tracts quickly, as well as a lack of intimate knowledge of the agricultural potential of the Cookson Hills specifically. This tactic revealed itself in the cross-examination of R.S. Sears, a local appraiser the War Department had employed to appraise Charles and Mary Glass' properties in the Summer of 1942. Noting that Sears had only been on the Glass' land "for the one day on or about July 15," the family's lawyer asked whether Sears had ever approached the landowners while calculating their land's value, to inquire about the farm's typical yield. Sears confessed that he had not, but instead had "examined the soil" and

[75] J.B. Milam, note, undated, F 13, B 1, S 1, JBMC.
[76] F.E. Perkins, Description of Tract C-444, n.d., F 13, B1, S 1, JBMC.
[77] J.B. Milam to Ed Moore, 27 April 1948, F 58, B 4, W.G. Stigler Collection (hereafter WGSC), CACCR, OU.

figured out "in my opinion what that land will yield in the various crops adaptable" to the farm.[78] He also admitted that he had valued the Glass' wells as having "no other value than...in its unit value."[79] In total, Sears had valued the land at $2000, while Perkins had found that the Glass' tracts were worth close to $4500, taking into account the value of crops growing, and the value of the many improvements the Glass family had made to the land, including digging wells and building multiple houses and outbuildings.[80]

Milam and the Cherokees' hopes for a repudiation of what they saw as a deep underappreciation lay in the hands of federal judge Bower Broaddus, a man whose own history suggested the litigants faced long odds. Broaddus had made a name for himself as a lawyer in Muskogee, and later as a prominent member of the Oklahoma state legislature. In 1940, he was appointed by president Franklin D. Roosevelt as judge for the Eastern, Western, and Northern districts of Oklahoma, succeeding the eminent Alfred P. Murrah.[81] He was also a good friend of Elmer Thomas, an ardent New Dealer, and an enthusiastic supporter of Camp Gruber. He made these opinions clear in a letter sent to Thomas in the late spring of 1942, just as work on the cantonment was concluding. Describing to Thomas his view of the economic impact the camp would have on the area, he wrote "I think it is the best thing I have seen yet and I have heard others comment to the same effect."[82]

Broaddus' eventual rulings seem to have sought a middle ground between the War Department and Indian Office appraisals. For Johnson Silk's property, valued at $1200 by the

[78] Witness Examination, R.S. Sears and John Ralls, Civil Case 829, 17 December 1943, Folder 11, Box 6, Bower Broaddus Collection (Hereafter BBC), Western History Collections (hereafter WHC), OU.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Bower Broaddus, Case Notes, 17 December 1943, F 11, B 6, BBC.
[81] "Broaddus, Bower Slack," *Biographical Directory of Federal Judges*, Federal Judicial Center, accessed 26 February 2021, https://www.fjc.gov/node/1378296.
[82] Bower Broaddus to Elmer Thomas, 29 April 1942, F 61, PJ 9, ETC.

War Department and almost $2200 by the Indian Office, Broaddus arrived at a sum of $1600.[83] For Cornelius Raincrow and his son-in-law's property, which the Indian Office had valued at $1950, including a sizable gravel pit that Raincrow claimed the War Department appraisers had overlooked, the court gave a final appraisal of $885.[84] In total, Meredith concludes that all the claimants who went to jury trial late in 1943 and 1944 gained increased valuations "in varying amounts."[85]

The true value of this increase in payment is debatable however. After all, by the time most of the litigants received a ruling on their properties, they had been evicted from their homes for over a year and a half, with practically no assistance from the government.[86] Further, it's possible that few of the litigants made any significant money at all, due to legal fees incurred during the trial. Harold Summerlin remembered that "they offered us $1,200 for the farm...My dad hired a lawyer and got $400 more, but the lawyer got half that.'"[87] Some Cherokees claimed never to have received a significant payment at all. Carrie Collier, one of the dispossessed, wrote to Milam in 1947, claiming to have only ever received a partial payment of $300, a fee she claimed was basically worthless as "people have never bought no homes yet with three hundred dollars." She went on to state that many litigants had not yet been paid anything, complaining that "There are some that can't read still waiting for more money."[88]

Further, the modest sums that the litigants may have received did little to staunch the trauma that they experienced upon being removed from their homeplaces. Robert Clark, who

[83] Description of Tract C-444, F 13, B 1, JBMC.
[84] Description of Tract C-431 and C-447, F 13, B 1, JBMC.
[85] Meredith, *Bartley Milam*, 74–6.
[86] The War Department did give out $25 to each family for immediate assistance back in the summer of 1942, but an investigation by Milam uncovered that this money--beyond being completely inadequate-- had to be spent within three days of the move. A further $6000 was made available to the displaced through the Indian Office in Muskogee, but it is likely that this was eaten up rather quickly as well. R.P. Matthews, "Tribal Head Moves to Prevent Hardships, Loss Due to Alleged Low Land Appraisals," *Tulsa Daily World*, 19 July 1942.
[87] Chavez, "Camp Gruber Forced 2nd Removal for Cherokees."
[88] Carrie Collier to J.B. Milam, 10 October 1947, F 13, B 1, JBMC.

owned 110 acres, made it clear in court that "people did not want to sell" their land, even at increased prices.[89] This land was important to its inhabitants, and, Meredith argues, was sacred ground. Stomp grounds--vital ceremonial spaces to the Cherokee--were and are the center of many Cherokee communities, including the one at what became Camp Gruber.[90] Cherokee Washington would write to congressman W.G. Stigler in 1947, and explain the significance of the land, that "we lived all our life there...of cours it rough land, up land but we were used to. We have a home, when we were there." He went on to inform Stigler the Cherokee inhabitants wished to go back, writing that they were "interested to go back old home, down at old Stomp Ground where we used to live."[91]

It was not just land that the War Department sought to transform into a militarized landscape in the early 1940s, but Cherokee homeland. The Cookson Hills were a place that the inhabitants of the region, as Clint Carroll has argued, had spent over a century diligently transforming into homeland in the wake of the trauma of the Trail of Tears.[92] They had farmed the bottomlands there, built homes there, and carefully managed the hill country's forest ecosystem for generations. No wonder the removals of 1942 would be remembered so bitterly by those who survived it. J.W. Tyner, a Cherokee scholar who interviewed Cherokee old-timers as part of the Doris Duke Oral History Project in the 1960s, traveled to the community of Qualls, which had been bisected by the establishment of Camp Gruber in the 1940s. After speaking with John Raincrow, whose family had been forced to leave their land in 1942, Tyner recorded,

[89] Case Notes, Tract No. C-483, 17 December 1943, F 9 B 6, BBC.
[90] Meredith, *Bartley Milam*, 74–6; Al Warhaftig, "The Tribal Cherokee Population of Eastern Oklahoma," *Current Anthropology* 9, no. 5 (December 1968): 511.
[91] Petition of Cherokee Indians to W.G. Stigler, 21 February 1947, F 58, B 4, WGSC.
[92] Clint Carroll, *Roots of Our Renewal: Ethnobotany and Cherokee Environmental Governance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 57–82.

angrily, that "That creation by the government in the days of World War Two was probably the choke that strangled a community."[93]

Milam's goal of protecting and rebuilding the Cherokee Nation's lands had taken a hit, as around 8,000 acres of restricted land had been lost to the War Department, and 45 Cherokee families found themselves in the position of so many other Cherokees at this time of being landless. The Cherokee experience mirrored that of Native nations across the country during the second world war. Paul Rosier estimates that, all told, during the war Native Americans lost around 1 million acres of land, as the federal government requisitioned Native lands for military installations and internment camps for Japanese Americans. Such massive land loss reversed many of the gains that the Indian New Deal had promised, even as Native Americans enlisted to fight for the United States in record numbers.[94]

Milam likely knew that further action during the war would be fruitless, and thus put off any attempts to relitigate the issue of the removals, or to regain the land, until after the war. In the meantime, he attempted to make sure that the land's new occupants were reminded of whose land they were training on. In the summer of 1943, Milam wrote to Col. R.J. McBride, Chief of Staff for the 88th Infantry Division currently stationed at Camp Gruber, and informed him that "Camp Gruber is on the land formerly owned by the Cherokee Nation." Milam reminded him that the Cherokees were a large and prestigious tribe, and the only tribe to have furnished "the statues of two Indians..for Statuary Hall in Washington...Sequoyah...and of course our own late

[93] J.W. Tyner, "Some History of Qualls Community," Doris Duke Oral History Collection (hereafter DDOHC), WHC, OU.
[94] Paul Rosier, *Serving Their Country: American Indian Politics and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 97–9.

Will Rogers." Milam concluded his letter with an invocation to McBride, writing that "I trust that while you are with us that you may learn more of our people."[95]

McBride's reply was revelatory of the attitude of the War Department to the Native people of the Camp Gruber area, as well as to the transformations that the military made to the landscape of the Cookson Hills. McBride thanked Milam for his letter, and wrote that actually the soldiers were well aware "that the camp was built in an area formerly owned by the various Indian tribes." The 88th Division had tried to honor these tribes, McBride wrote, "by naming the various ranges where we conduct our firing after the well-known tribes." A singular honor had been bestowed on the Cherokees, whose name blessed the largest such range at the camp.[96]

Even as they lost their land to help the war effort, several of the dispossessed Cherokees joined the United States Army during the war years, although it's unclear if any served at Camp Gruber itself. Earnest and Kenneth Silk, sons of Johnson and Rachel Silk, would both enlist in 1942 in the Army in Tulsa.[97] Indeed both were serving when their parents had their land condemned that summer.[98] Harold and Gerald Summerlin's father, George Washington Summerlin, also served, enlisting on March 8, 1944, and was stationed at Fort Sill, near Lawton in southwestern Oklahoma.[99]

The Army was transforming the Cherokee landscape into a militarized one, turning what had once been Cherokee farmsteads into firing ranges, sacrifice zones for the greater good of

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[95] J.B. Milam to R.J. McBride, 1 June 1943, F 13, B 1, S 1, JBMC.
[96] R.J. McBride to J.B. Milam, 11 June 1943, F 13, B 1, S 1, JBMC.
[97] Earnest E. Silk, U.S., World War II Army Enlistment Records, 1938–46, Ancestry.com, accessed 24 March 2021, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=8939&h=1193563&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=2442; Kenneth Silk, U.S., World War II Army Enlistment Records, 1938–1946, Ancestry.com, accessed 24 March 2021, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=8939&h=1193864&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=2442
[98] Matthews, "Invasion Brings Ruin to Cookson Families."
[99] George Washington Summerlin, U.S., World War II Army Enlistment Records, Ancestry.com, accessed 24 March 2021, https://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?dbid=8939&h=1632079&indiv=try&o_vc=Record:OtherRecord&rhSource=2238.

national security. In the process, the Army erased the Cherokee presence on the landscape, literally vanishing the transformations and improvements they had made, burning the houses and outbuildings. Milam would later write to W.G. Stigler of the destruction, telling him that "I understand the buildings were used as targets and all destroyed, so there is nothing left but the land."[100]

While the soldiers training at Camp Gruber scattered a Cherokee community, they seem to have revitalized one in Muskogee, where the arrival of a "new city" of 30 to 40 thousand, most of them young men. Indeed, according to Mary Jane Warde and Diana Everett, during the war, the camp housed a total population of 44,836 soldiers, around 4,000 civilian employees, and eventually 3,000 German POWs. This total population of around 52,000 exceeded Muskogee's own totals by a large margin, and was good enough to make Camp Gruber Oklahoma's third largest urban area, after Oklahoma City and Tulsa.[101]

The sheer number of new people offered to revitalize the town. Earlene Salyers, a child during the war years, remembered that "The city...was alive with constant activity. Soldiers were everywhere. Little boys saluted the soldiers, and the soldiers were always giving candy to the kids."[102] Indeed, downtown seemed thoroughly revitalized during the war years. Following lobbying by Ogden and his allies in the spring of 1942, the United Services Organization (USO) agreed to locate a USO club in a vacant building on West Okmulgee, just a few blocks from downtown.[103] The USO club would become a center of social life in Muskogee during the war

[100] J.B. Milam to W.G. Stigler, 7 October 1947, F 58, B 4, WGSC.
[101] Warde and Everett, "Oklahoma's Legacy of Defense," 32. Urban population data taken from US Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1940, Oklahoma* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1941), 861.
[102] Quoted in Janet Allen, "Camp Gruber: The War Years," 3 Rivers Museum, Accessed 26 February 2021, http://www.3riversmuseum.com/camp-gruber-the-war-years.html.
[103] Harry Ogden to Elmer Thomas, 24 April 1942; Elmer Thomas to Harry Ogden, 27 April 1942; both F 62, PJ 9, ETC. See also "Plans for City USO Center Discussed at Capital City," *Muskogee Phoenix*, 21 March 1942; "The USO Hut Draws Nearer," *Muskogee Phoenix*, 25 March 1942.

years, just as similar clubs would for towns across the country. Meghan Winchell writes that USO clubs helped provide recreational spots for soldiers who "flooded local communities that were unprepared to deal with their numbers."[104] Muskogee's leaders, in seeking a USO club for their town, despite its distance from the camp (almost 20 miles), sought to capitalize on the recreational possibilities of thousands of soldiers coming into town on their weekends off.

Indeed, the road between the city and its army camp became a well-traveled one across the war years, as soldiers came to town to eat, drink, and shop, and locals, often young women, traveled to Camp to attend concerts, boxing matches, and dances. Martha Thomas, a young African American woman who lived with her father in Muskogee in the early 1940s, would recall these connections to her daughter in 2015. During the war, Thomas worked as a waitress at Jim Youngs Barbecue, where she would often talk with young soldiers in town on their days off. She was also a member of a local club that paid to transport young women to the camp to "dance with the soldiers," although, she hastened to add "I didn't do too much dancing because I never was a real good dancer," although she did enjoy playing cards with the soldiers and seeing the occasional concert, like when Ernie Fields, a famous Black big band leader from Tulsa, came to perform for the troops.[105]

These connections between city and camp could become more enduring when soldiers from Camp Gruber married into the community at Muskogee, and, although marriages in general fell across the war years, those marriages that did occur frequently involved soldiers from Camp

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[104] Meghan K. Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun: The Story of USO Hostesses During World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 5.

[105] The camp did house both Black and White units during the war, although camp facilities remained completely segregated. It's likely that the soldiers Martha danced with were members of the 333rd Field Artillery Batallion, an all-Black unit mobilized at Camp Gruber in August 1942, and who shared the camp with White units such as the 88th and 42nd Infantry Divisions. Martha Thomas, interviewed by K. Davette See, 15 October 2015, *StoryCorps Archive*, https://archive.storycorps.org/interviews/mby014072/#transcript; Warde and Everett, "Oklahoma's Legacy of Defense," 32. For more on the history of racial violence and the Black community in Muskogee County, see Karla Slocum, *Black Towns, Black Futures: The Enduring Allure of a Black Place in the American West* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

Gruber. Grant Foreman would remark approvingly on the number of young soldiers who had decided to marry Muskogee women and settle in the town after the war in the final few pages of his 1943 history of the town. "Hundreds of married officers and enlisted men...have found homes in Muskogee," he wrote, "where they have entered into the social and economic life of the community, to which they have brought elements of culture and interest that have made them most welcome."[106] Indeed, on 3 May 1943, the *Muskogee Legal Record* reported 11 marriage licenses issued in the last week, and 5 of them involved soldiers stationed at Camp Gruber.[107] On 10 September, 7 out of 13 marriage licenses listed the groom's address at the cantonment.[108] Similar numbers can be seen across the year 1943.[109] Local historian Gordon Wallace, who combed through the war-years marriage records in the town's library in the early 2000s, remarked on this trend across the early 1940s, noting he was surprised at "the number of soldiers who married local girls."[110]

The war had to end eventually however, and, following the end of hostilities in the Pacific in August 1945, the city of Muskogee and the Cherokee Nation would again attempt to transform the landscape. In the wake of war, Milam and his fellow Cherokees saw a chance to regain the land they had lost in 1942, to reassert the Cherokee presence in the Cookson Hills, and to resolve the ongoing problem of "landless Indians" in the Cherokee Nation. The leading citizens of Muskogee, meanwhile, aided once again by powerful politicians such as Elmer Thomas, Robert S. Kerr, and Jack Nichols' successor as congressman for the Second District W.G. Stigler, would fight to make the camp's presence on the land permanent. In doing so, they

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[106] Foreman, *Muskogee*, 153.
[107] "Marriage Licenses," *Muskogee Legal Record*, 3 May 1943.
[108] "Marriage Licenses," *Muskogee Legal Record*, 10 September 1943.
[109] "Marriage Licenses," *Muskogee Legal Record*, 8 January 1943; "Marriage Licenses," *Muskogee Legal Records*, 1 December 1943.
[110] Nancy Calhoun, "There's A Lot of Love--And History--at the Muskogee Library," *Muskogee Phoenix*, 12 January 2009.

hoped to build on the gains in population and economic activity the war had brought to the city, and transform Muskogee into a center of military investment and infrastructure.

Following the end of the war in August 1945, the population of Camp Gruber dropped sharply, and by early 1946, camp officials had begun auctioning off surplus military equipment, including 200 Jeeps that were put up for sale in April 1946.[111] By the spring of 1947, it seemed that the Army would formally deactivate the camp at any moment, prompting a firesale of the camp's assets, including its many buildings.[112] Representatives of school districts from across Oklahoma, still clearly strapped for cash in the wake of the Depression, immediately wrote to new congressman W.G. Stigler, who had succeeded Jack Nichols as representative of the Second District in 1943, inquired as to purchasing the surplus buildings.[113]

Several groups had designs on the land of the camp itself, and saw in the wake of the war a chance to project their vision of the landscape at Camp Gruber. Some envisioned returning to the 1930s vision of the region as a grand state or national park, and W.J. Rea, president of the Muskogee chapter of the Izaak Walton League, took this position in his initial correspondence with Stigler throughout the winter and spring of 1947. In December 1946, as rumors of the camp's impending closure swirled around eastern Oklahoma, Rea wrote to Stigler, advocating that the camp's excess lands be leased to his organization so they could "make this one of the most desirable recreational spots in Eastern Oklahoma." The Izaak Walton League had long served as concessionaires at Greenleaf Lake, and Rea felt they merited consideration for control of a new, expanded recreation area.[114] Rea redoubled his efforts following announcement of the camp's deactivation in early 1947, and in late March of that year convinced the Muskogee

[111] "Camp Gruber Holds Sale of 211 Jeeps," *Miami News-Record*, 1 April 1946.
[112] "Gruber Released by US Air Force, Returned to W.A.A.," *Muskogee Phoenix*, 3 October 1947.
[113] Ibid.
[114] W.J. Rea to W.G. Stigler, 9 December 1946, F 52, B 4, WGSC.

Chamber of Commerce to pass a resolution supporting leasing the "inactive Camp Gruber lands" to the Izaak Walton League for use as a conservation and recreation area.[115]

Local cattle ranchers also quickly began to advocate for use of the camp as well, and they counted among their numbers several of the Cherokees who had been dispossessed back in 1942. In February 1947, over 350 signatories claiming to represent the "farmers and stockmen of Muskogee, Cherokee, and Sequoyah Counties" signed a petition sent to Stigler begging the congressman to "use your influence to keep [Camp Gruber] open for grazing purposes to the farmers and stockmen of this locality."[116] Claude Todd, from the Muskogee Chamber of Commerce, mailed the petition to Stigler along with a letter in support, arguing that the main goal of the petition was to keep Camp Gruber in public hands, rather than allow it to fall into the hands of a private company.[117] Both Johnson and Jennie Silk would sign their names to the petition, hoping to regain at least some access to their lands, perhaps to restore a semblance of the Cherokee commons that had once thrived there.

Most people in Muskogee and the surrounding towns, however, wanted to keep the camp open at all costs. In the Chamber of Commerce's resolution to support leasing the land to the IWL, they included a stipulation near the end cancelling their support "in the event of an emergency for training troups [sic] or otherwise determined by the governing agencies."[118] Todd elucidated this in his letter accompanying the petition, explaining to Stigler that the Chamber of Commerce was not really in favor of leasing the land for grazing but rather "to have Camp Gruber be given some permanent use of military nature." He went on to inform Stigler that the

[115] Sidney Ditmars to W.G. Stigler, 31 March 1947, F 59, B 4, WGSC.
[116] "Petition," n.d., F 59, B 4, WGSC.
[117] Claude Todd to W.G. Stigler, 28 February 1947, F 59, B 4, WGSC.
[118] "Resolution," 31 March 1947, F 59, B 4, WGSC.

"farmers assured me they were in accord with our views," and wanted to keep the camp open if possible.[119]

In response to the camp's deactivation, the Chamber of Commerce and the city government began a full-on campaign to keep the camp open in 1947 and 1948. In July, with Stigler's help, Congress would pass a resolution to order the WAA to refrain from declaring the deactivated camp "surplus" and therefore up for sale, until March 1948.[120] In the meantime, Muskogee's leaders worked urgently to determine how to save the camp, with a fervor that matched their initial efforts to attract the cantonment back in 1941. The City Council of Muskogee would pass a resolution in August 1947, which city manager John Oliver Hall would inform Stigler of in a letter later that month. Declaring that, in the past "organizations from this community have urged that Camp Gruber be utilized for peace-time Army training" and that sometimes "the local commercial benefit of Army activities at Camp Gruber was a factor in these recommendations," Hall argued that this time was different. Now, he wrote "there has sprung up a feeling in this community, inspired solely from interest in the national defense." It was only out of patriotic duty that the city hoped to save its army camp, and any action to dismantle the installation was "foolish in the light of recent international events."[121]

Hall was probably only half-telling the truth. Certainly, there were reasons to expect war on the horizon, as Harry Truman had spoken to a joint session of Congress in March, and declared that "the free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms."[122] Further, Truman and his Secretary of State, George C. Marshall, would seek to

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[119] Todd to Stigler, 28 February 1947.
[120] "Gruber Released By U.S. Air Force, Returned to WAA"; Senate Concurrent Resolution 31, 80th Cong., 1st Sess., 25 July 1947.
[121] John Oliver Hall to WG Stigler, F 62, B 4, 28 August 1947.
[122] Harry S. Truman, "Recommendation for Assistance to Greece and Turkey (Truman Doctrine)," 12 March 1947, Doc. 171, 80th Cong., 1st Sess., Records of the United States House of Representatives, Record Group (hereafter RG) 233, National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA).

swell the ranks of a shrinking peace-time military through Universal Military Training (UMT), a proposed policy that enjoyed a great deal of popularity in the United States at the time.[123] What would come to be known as the Cold War was beginning, and as Michael J. Hogan has argued, the federal government was laying the foundations for an incipient national security state.[124]

But growth politics mattered too, and they likely mattered quite a bit to the leaders of Muskogee. Muskogeeans were no different from the leaders of other cities and towns across the West in the postwar years, all of whom were desperate to hang onto the federal cash cows that military installations represented. One local made this clear in a letter to the editor of the *Muskogee Phoenix*, published in 1948. In a letter titled "Keep It in Oklahoma," the author complained that Texas companies were primed to lease Camp Gruber if it was declared surplus by the WAA, and that such a result would be damaging to Oklahoma's prospects. "It does not seem like good politics for Oklahoma," he wrote, "to let Texas move in on our government projects."[125] Kate Brown, examining the case of Richland, Washington--site of a wartime nuclear research facility--argues that, facing the reality that their town's "economy would roll off with the tumbleweed" if the government pulled out, local leaders in Richland and eastern Washington lobbied for increased federal investment, and an increasing national security state infrastructure, to create what Brown calls a "permanent war economy."[126] Scholars such as Andrew Needham and Andrew Busch have examined how city leaders in Phoenix and Austin, respectively, lobbied for increased federal funding and development in this period in order to

[123] John Sager, "Universal Military Training and the Struggle to Define American Identity During the Cold War," *Federal History* 5 (2013): 57–74.
[124] Michael J. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945–1954* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
[125] "Keep It In Oklahoma," *Muskogee Phoenix*, 12 July 1948.
[126] Kate Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 125; 124–32.

bolster their cities' populations, economies, and regional status.[127] In the postwar period, for the leaders of Muskogee, the retention of Camp Gruber remained the key to building their city. It was in this context that the Chamber of Commerce, to be joined soon enough by the City Council, and by many other leading politicians in the state, declared their unequivocal support for keeping Camp Gruber open.

Claude Todd's letter back in February 1947 may have overstated the total support for the retention of Camp Gruber as a military installation, particularly considering that several Cherokee ranchers signed it, who even at that moment were also trying to reclaim the land they had lost. While Todd claimed that the signatories were in "accord" with the Chamber of Commerce in wanting to keep the camp open as a military installation, the signatures of the Silks on another petition, sent to Stigler at almost the same time, suggest otherwise. That petition arrived on Stigler's desk in February 1947, right before that of the stockmen, and had been mailed by Cherokee Washington on behalf of 23 of his former neighbors. In the petition, from "the restricted full-blood Cherokee Indians" of Camp Gruber, the interested parties declared "we would be ready to received [sic] or repurchase the property, and wish to reacquire these same lands back for our use, when the area is no longer needed by the government."[128]

The dispossessed Cherokees had been watching the events of the last few years closely, waiting for the chance to return to their land. Milam had counselled patience during the war years, encouraging his citizens to accept their court settlements and bide their time. By 1947, many of the dispossessed were getting increasingly impatient. In addition to petitions like the one sent to Stigler, some wrote to their chief, Milam. Carrie Collier wrote J.B. Milam in October

[127] Andrew Needham, *Power Lines: Phoenix and the Making of the Modern Southwest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Andrew M. Busch *City in a Garden: Environmental Transformations and Racial Justice in Twentieth-Century Austin, Texas* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).
[128] Petition of Cherokee Indians to W.G. Stigler, 21 February 1947, F 58, B 4, WGSC.

1947, clearly frustrated. Writing to "see if I can't get a better answer from you," she asked Milam to "tell Bill Stigler to get busy and do something for the Indian...if we have another war please ask them to use the Government land so they won't disturb the Native Indians." Continuing, she explained that the Cherokees had moved off the land under the impression that they would be funded to find somewhere else and some way else to live, but that the government had failed in this promise. She also worried that unless Milam did something to improve the land situation, "what few Indians left on the Illinois river they will drive them out without no place to go."[129] Despite the end of the war years, the dispossessed Cherokees had not regained their land, or even--in their eyes--just compensation for the land they had lost; and, with the impending construction of Tenkiller Ferry Dam on the Illinois, hundreds more Cherokees stood to be evicted from the Cookson Hills, as Collier alluded to.

Milam, however, had not been sitting idly by as the years passed, but rather had been actively working to lay the foundations for his vision of the Cherokee Nation's future. This vision, as discussed earlier, had centered on economic development and the reclaiming of the land, and in the 1940s Milam had begun to make progress on the latter. By the time Carrie Collier wrote to him in the fall of 1947, Milam had returned approximately 30,000 acres of land to the Cherokee land base, through two land acquisition efforts, known as the Kenwood and Candy Mink Springs projects, respectively. These lands would be owned as trust lands of the Cherokee Nation, inhabited mainly by "full-bloods," and remain in tribal hands today.[130] He was also in the midst of an ultimately failed attempt to purchase the Oklahoma Ordnance Works, a

[129] Collier was probably talking about the impending construction of Tenkiller Ferry Dam, a project that would inundate much of the lower Illinois River valley, taking many Cherokee farmers from their homes. Carrie Collier to J.B. Milam, 10 October 1947, F 13, B 1, JBMC.
[130] Carroll, *Roots of Our Renewal*, 90–1. The Kenwood Project is often colloquially referred to as the "Kenwood Reservation," connoting its known status as an Indigenous space. See Karen Coody Cooper, *Oklahoma Cherokee Baskets* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2016), 57.

federally owned wartime production plant in Mayes County that had closed in 1946 following the war.[131]

Milam had not forgotten about the Camp Gruber Cherokees, either. He responded to Collier's letter in late October 1947, and quickly informed her that there were lands available in the Kenwood area. Commiserating over the fact that she and the other dispossessed had not been treated fairly in not only the Camp Gruber deal, but many others," Milam wrote that he was in the midst of writing to the Oklahoma Congressional delegation to push Congress to "reimburse our Indians who suffered so greatly in giving up their homes, when it is admitted they could not take the same money and secure a place to live." Milam was interested in more than righting the wrongs of wartime litigation, however, and he made this clear to Collier in his letter, stating that "I am pleased to say that I have written the War Assets Administration asking that they reassign this land to the party from whom they took it as part compensation for what is due them."[132]

Milam, like the dispossessed Cherokees, wanted the land back, and the principal chief would embark on a furious lobbying campaign to the Oklahoma Congressional delegation, matched in its persistence perhaps only by the simultaneous efforts brought forth by the city of Muskogee. Milam had the benefit of having the BIA on his side, as evidenced by a memorandum the bureau had drafted back in 1946, advocating the return of the 8500 acres of restricted land "to the Indian granters without the use of funds."[133]

With the support of a government agency in hand, Milam wrote to congressman W.G. Stigler and senators Ed Moore and Elmer Thomas in the fall of 1947 and the winter and spring of 1948. On 7 October he wrote to Stigler reminding the representative that "when this [land for

[131] J.B. Milam to E.H. Moore, 24 January 1948; E.H. Moore to J.B. Milam, 27 January 1948; both F 13, B 1, JBMC.
[132] J.B. Milam to Carrie Collier, F 13, B 1, JBMC.
[133] C. Girard Davidson, Memorandum for the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 30 September 1946, F 58, B 4, WGSC.

Camp Gruber] was being acquired our Government did a very unpopular and unfair thing. They dispossessed a lot of our Indians, and did not allow them a fair price for their lands. Milam went on to advocate for selling the land back to the Cherokees, at a much-reduced price "for the damages done to them," although, he did offer that "if the land could be given to the original owners it would be nothing but right."[134] Stigler would reply, but offered only the information Milam no doubt already was aware of, that "Muskogee is making a determined effort to have Camp Gruber put on a stand-by basis" and thus the camp had not been formally closed yet.[135] Stigler had sent a similarly non-commital response to the Cherokees who had petitioned him back in February, writing to Cherokee Washington that the land had not been deemed surplus by the War Department yet, and thus there was nothing to be done. Stigler did promise, however, that "when and if this property is offered for sale," he would ensure the dispossessed Cherokees were notified first.[136] Milam generally received the same responses in his other correspondence with senators Elmer Thomas and Ed Moore.[137]

Milam's dreams of returning Camp Gruber to the Cherokees would fail, in the end, in large part because the legislators Milam had pled his case to were, such as Bill Stigler, were among the most prominent voices for reactivating the camp. Stigler had come out as an unequivocal supporter of keeping Camp Gruber active as early as April of 1947.[138] Throughout the summer and fall of that year, he kept up his contacts with city leaders in Muskogee, and in September participated in a meeting of Muskogeeans at the Severs Hotel--one of Muskogee's landmark buildings and where Harry Ogden had launched the campaign for Camp Gruber back

[134] Milam to Stigler, 7 October 1947.
[135] W.G. Stigler to J.B. Milam, 10 October 1947.
[136] W.G. Stigler to Cherokee Washington, 7 March 1947, F 58, B 4, WGSC.
[137] J.B. Milam to Ed Moore, 27 April 1948; Ed Moore to J.B. Milam, 1 May 1948; both F 13, B 1, JBMC.
[138] "Future of Camp Hinges on Parley," *Daily Oklahoman*, 4 April 1947.

in 1941--to "discuss the importance of retaining Camp Gruber."[139] Following that meeting, Stigler quickly wrote to other prominent Oklahomans and government officials, including Elmer Thomas, former governor Robert S. Kerr, and General Wilton B. Persons of the War Department.[140]

In all of his letters, Stigler minimized the economic concerns of retaining the camp, and emphasized eastern Oklahomans' patriotism and concern for national defense. Describing the "vigorous protest and disapproval" of the citizens of Muskogee to the "dismantling of Camp Gruber," Stigler claimed that "In the light of our international situation, it is indeed extremely difficult to comprehend the reasoning...to dispose of this army installation."[141] Closing his letter to Persons, Stigler emphasized the existential threat the United States was facing in the brewing Cold War, writing that "I am sure you realize how terribly important this matter is from the standpoint of the Army as well as the security and welfare of our nation."[142] Keeping Camp Gruber open was a matter of vital national security.

Thomas and Kerr were quickly convinced, and began lobbying aggressively for Muskogee's cause. Thomas, still a prominent member of the Senate appropriations committee, met with a delegation from Muskogee in Washington in October 1947, and took a direct meeting with Secretary of War Kenneth C. Royall to request that Camp Gruber not be deactivated "so as to afford the Congress the opportunity of reconsidering our present status with respect to preparedness."[143] Thomas would then write to General Robert Littlejohn, head of the WAA, and aware that the officer was "not in a free position to withhold advertisement and sale" of the camp's properties, nevertheless suggested that Littlejohn would be "justified in not rushing

[139] W.G. Stigler to Elmer Thomas, 11 September 1947, F 62, B 9, WGSC.
[140] Stigler to Thomas, 11 September 1947; W.G. Stigler to Robert S. Kerr, 11 September 1947; W.G. Stigler to Wilton B. Persons, 11 September 1947; all F 62, B 9, WGSC.
[141] Stigler to Persons, 11 September 1947. Similar sentiments were expressed in his letters to Thomas and Kerr.
[142] Stigler to Persons, 11 September 1947.
[143] Elmer Thomas to Robert M. Littlejohn, 8 October 1947, F 62, B 4, WGSC.

advertisement and sales of these properties."[144] Meanwhile, Kerr, alongside Stigler and Harry Ogden met with President Truman on October 9, to urge him to "retain Camp Gruber...as an army stand-by installation, at least until congress can act on universal military training."[145] Kerr, Democratic Party chairman for Oklahoma, considered himself a friend of Truman and reportedly stayed after the meeting to speak with the president. Kerr claimed that he stayed only to offer Truman "best wishes of Oklahoma..in his present efforts to conserve food, promote peace, and, incidentally, to succeed himself in 1948."[146] An allusion to the votes that could be gained--or lost--depending on how the president handled Camp Gruber? Perhaps, but at the very least it suggests the power that the men who would fight for the camp's retention held both in Oklahoma and nationwide.

For the time being, however, these powerful men were unable to do much to render Camp Gruber a permanent fixture of the eastern Oklahoma landscape, and their initial failure was explicitly tied to the failure of the movement for Universal Military Training (UMT), advocated by President Truman and General George C. Marshall, who by 1947 was serving as Secretary of State. Marshall had been advocating for UMT for years, but starting in March 1947, had begun to press for legislation to that effect in Congress.[147] The possibility of a UMT bill, which would greatly swell the ranks of the peacetime military through establishing compulsory military service for all American men aged 18 or over, became more and more real in the summer and fall of 1947, and the Camp Gruber advocates had made it a key part of their lobbying efforts. Truman would formally propose UMT to Congress in March 1948, and it

[144] Ibid.
[145] "Truman Urged to Hold Gruber," *Daily Oklahoman*, 10 October 1947.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Sager, "Universal Military Training," 57.

seemed to have a clear route to passage.[148] With an enlarged military, the government could justify keeping secondary camps such as Camp Gruber open. Stigler, Ogden, and their allies would have their hopes dashed, however, when Congress tabled the bill in 1948 and never again acted on the proposal.[149]

With UMT defeated, hopes for a revitalized Camp Gruber appeared dead in the water. In the summer of 1948, the War Assets Administration assumed control over the camp, and began the lengthy process of selling off the camp's assets, leasing Greenleaf Lake back to the Izaak Walton League, and allowing cattle to graze on the camp lands.[150] By June, Stigler's secretary in Washington would wire the congressman's office in Muskogee, informing them that Camp Gruber would "definitely not be reactivated."[151] Muskogee's leaders were furious with the the apparent failure, and A.W. Hays, president of the Muskogee Chamber of Commerce, wrote to Kerr, Thomas, Ed Moore, and the rest of the Oklahoma delegation in Washington, as well as the Secretary of the Army, to inform them that the decision had aroused "considerable public resentment" in Oklahoma, and represented a "failure of officials to realize the present potentialities of Camp Gruber." Hays noted that the camp afforded a cheap and up-to-date location for military training, and begged the legislators to keep pushing, writing that the project needed to be "reconsidered to its fullest extent."[152]

For Muskogee's leaders, it was starting to feel like 1941 all over again, when dedicated lobbying had run up against government intransigence. As they had done in 1942, when Tulsa's newspaper had raised the alarm around the dispossessions taking place at Camp Gruber, some in

[148] Ibid., 67-8.
[149] Ibid., 69–70.
[150] Karl E. Wallace to W.G. Stigler, 30 March 1948; W.G. Stigler to Karl E. Wallace, 17 May 1948; both F 64, B 4, WGSC.
[151] Betty Field to Alice Morris, 15 June 1948, F 65, B 4, WGSC.
[152] A.W. Hays to Elmer Thomas, George Schwabe, Ross Rizley, Ed Moore, Carl Albert, Kenneth Royall, 29 June 1948, F 65, B 4, WGSC.

Muskogee turned to conspiracy. F.L. Inman from the Chamber of Commerce made this clear in September 1948, when he wrote to Robert Kerr to inform him of the city's continuing efforts to reactivate the camp. After remarking the Camp Gruber was "reported to be one of the finest army posts in the country," Inman suggested to Kerr that the government's failure to reactivate such a brilliant symbol of the American military was down, once again, to the scheming of one of Muskogee's rival towns, this time Forth Smith, Arkansas whose own Camp Chaffee rivaled Camp Gruber in size and accessibility, and crucially, still housed a sizable garrison in 1948. Inman never directly implicated the leaders of Fort Smith in a conspiracy in his letter to Kerr, but did note, tellingly that "due to circumstances beyond our control, a comparison divulged false information that Chaffee is larger than Gruber."[153] Determined to make the case for Camp Gruber as a better garrison than its neighbor on the Arkansas side, Inman detailed to Kerr that he and several others from Muskogee had gone to Washington to meet with the War Department, but that once there had been informed that "there would be no need for any further camps in the national security program....unless we actually get into war."[154]

Once again Muskogee had been passed over, this time for Fort Smith, a town of about the same size as Muskogee. Camp Chaffee, later rechristened with the more permanent moniker Fort Chaffee, would house the Fifth Armored Division until 1957, serve as the US Army's field artillery school until 1959, and later house the 100th Infantry Division, before being inactivated for the first time in 1961, to be reopened at times across the later 20th century and eventually serve as a refugee camp for people fleeing Vietnam and Cuba in the 1970s and 1980s.[155]

[153] F.L. Inman to Robert S. Kerr, F 4, B 65, WGSC.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Jana K. Lipman, "A Refugee Camp in America: Fort Chaffee and Vietnamese and Cuban Refugees, 1975–1982," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 33 (Winter 2014): 57–87.

Meanwhile, in Muskogee, city leaders watched Fort Smith with jealousy, and, perhaps, hoped for war.

Meanwhile, Milam, ailing from a heart condition that would soon kill him, saw a chance in the failure of UMT and the subsequent deactivation of the camp to regain the lands. That July, he organized a Cherokee national convention at Tahlequah, the first such convention held since the pre-allotment era, and a meeting that numerous scholars and writers have argued was an essential turning point in the renewal of Cherokee popular sovereignty.[156] At the meeting, Milam centered the issue of landless Indians--something that Cherokee leaders had been attempting to address for decades by this point--and addressed the assembly on his hope that the Cherokees could yet regain Camp Gruber.[157] The convention would be the culminating act of Milam's career of public service, and set the stage for the next 70 years of Cherokee political history. But, as Wilma Mankiller writes, "it was also one of Milam's last significant acts as principal chief."[158] A few months after his convention speech, Milam would be hospitalized in Kansas City after suffering several strokes. He would die there on 8 May 1949, leaving a significant and deeply underappreciated legacy of service to his people, although he never had gotten to see Camp Gruber returned to the Nation.

The leaders of Muskogee wouldn't really get what they wanted, either. Stigler would write to Harry Ogden in February 1949, and tell him plainly that although he was "just as interested in seeing Camp Gruber reactivated as you and the people of Muskogee," it was time to face facts, to "cease to do wishful thinking and be realistic."[159] Despite this exhortation, many Muskogeeans would continue to hold out hope for the camp's reopening throughout the late

[156] Wilma Mankiller and Michael Wallis, *Mankiller: A Chief and Her People* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1993), 179; Meredith, *Bartley Milam*, 111–6; Carroll, *Roots of Our Renewal*, 90.
[157] Meredith, *Bartley Milam*, 116–23.
[158] Mankiller and Wallis, *Mankiller*, 179.
[159] W.G. Stigler to Harry Ogden, 1 February 1949, F 69, B 4, WGSC.

1940s and early 1950s, including Paul Bruner, a Creek citizen and former pronounced opponent to the IRA in the 1930s. Bruner enjoyed some minor success in 1951, when the Army announced plans to revoke leases on the Camp Gruber land and freeze all sale of assets, teasing the potential reactivation of the camp at the height of the Korean War.[160] But this success was fleeting, and by 1952 the Army had ended the freeze, and begun opening up the land for grazing leases again.[161] Most of the camp's buildings were gotten rid of during this period, and around 30,000 acres of the land were eventually transferred to the State Game and Fish Department for use as a game refuge, what is today the Gruber State Game Management Area in 1953.[162] Nevertheless the federal government would hang onto the remaining 30,000 acres of land, leasing it to cattle ranchers, until 1967, when it was finally turned over to the Oklahoma National Guard as a training center.[163]

After Milam's death in 1949, the federal government never again seriously entertained the possibility of giving the land back to the Cherokee Nation. Why they never thought of it is unclear from the archive, but it likely has to do with the small profit the government was able to glean from cattle leases across the 1950s and 1960s. Further, it's possible the Army held on to the lands, as the Cold War escalated and the national security state continued to expand, with one eye to eventually reactivating the camp should the possibility of global war with the Soviet Union be realized.

Moreover, the continued federal ownership of the Gruber lands allowed Muskogeeans to continue to project their metropolitan dreams onto the site for decades. In 1957, in the wake of the Sputnik launch, James Leake, president of the Chamber of Commerce, was reported to be

[160] "Bruner Gives Detailed Report On Trip to Washington at Civic Club Meeting," *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, 5 June 1951; "Gruber Expansion Called for in Bill for Appropriations," *Muskogee Phoenix*, 5 June 1951.
[161] W.G. Stigler to Floyd Garrett, 17 April 1952, F 77, B 4, WGSC.
[162] "Outdoor Oklahoma," *Okemah News Leader*, 22 October 1954.
[163] Francis Thetford, "Mike, Ed See Gruber Site," *Daily Oklahoman*, 30 March 1967.

"urging military and industrial use of Camp Gruber...as a rocket launching base."[164] By the 1960s, as the Army sold off the floors and foundations of the old buildings at the camp, some still held out hope.[165] In October 1961, crews of contractors from Muskogee were seen mowing the parade grounds at the abandoned camp, prompting excitement that the camp might be reactivated. Congressman Ed Edmondson, who had succeeded Stigler after the latter's untimely death in 1952, promised to get to the bottom of it, and the Muskogee papers reported on the possibilities, although they noted that "no definite plans were drawn."[166]

Muskogeeans continued to hold out hope for the camp, even as their city's dreams of becoming eastern Oklahoma's metropolis continued to grow dimmer and dimmer. The city's population flatlined across the 1950s and 1960s, following a brief bump between 1940 and 1950.[167] In the 1950s, despite the concerted efforts of Muskogee's leading citizens, President Eisenhower's Interstate Highway 40 would bypass the town, passing instead some thirty miles south of it.[168] New highways running north and south would supplant the old Jefferson Highway, and once again, Muskogeeans turned the blame for this to their larger neighbor to the north. Journalist John L. Stone would write in 1957 that the city was destined to be "by-passed...with the help of our Tulsa friends and a couple of misguided local so-called civil leaders who have considerable business interests in Tulsa."[169] Once the transportation hub of Indian Territory and later eastern Oklahoma, Muskogee by the 1960s found itself in the novel position of being out-of-the-way, for virtually the first time in its existence no longer a stopping point along one of the United States' major thoroughfares.

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[164] "Camp Gruber Use Urged by City C of C," *Muskogee Phoenix*, 8 October 1957.
[165] "Bids on Sale, Removal of Four Items of Property Are Invited," *Muskogee Phoenix*, 19 February 1961.
[166] "Gruber Readied for Air Drops," *Muskogee Phoenix*, 14 October 1961.
[167] Wallace F. Waits, Jr., "Muskogee," *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, accessed 26 February 2021.
[168] "Seven Citians Plan to Be at Road Meet," *Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat*, 10 April 1958; "C. of C. Told of Plan to Change Highway 40," *Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat*, 7 April 1958;
[169] John L. Stone, "Highway 69 Is Important," *Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat*, 17 March 1957.

The Cherokee Nation, meanwhile, has undergone a remarkable transformation in the years since J.B. Milam first became principal chief. Under Milam's successor, W.W. Keeler, the Nation continued to develop its economic base and revitalize Cherokee political institutions.[170] Keeler presided over the restoration of democratic elections to the Cherokee in 1971, and early forays into business development that would prove profitable to the Nation across the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Keeler and his successors Ross Swimmer and Wilma Mankiller would also continue Milam's legacy of reacquiring land, continuing to restore pieces of the tribal land base that had been lost in previous decades.[171]

In many ways, then, the stories of the Cherokee Nation and the city of Muskogee, which collided in the 1940s, have since diverged. Where Muskogee and towns like it was supposed to be the future of Oklahoma in 1907, with Native nations on the brink of vanishing, and consigned firmly to the past, instead it is Native nations who have proved resilient, and the boom-and-bust towns of Oklahoma that have found themselves in increasingly precarious positions, towns that settlers thought would thrive in the footprint of a vanished Indian landscape.

The great tragedy of the story of Camp Gruber, however, remains the loss of 60,000 acres of Native land, well after the policy of allotment and the "orgy of despoliation" that Angie Debo would describe in 1940, had come to an end. The Cherokee Nation's challenge to this dispossession should not be understated, but in the end, the Cherokees were playing a rigged game with the state of Oklahoma and an increasingly powerful military apparatus. When Milam sought help from his representatives, Elmer Thomas, Jack Nichols, Ed Moore, and Bill Stigler, he sought help from men who were deeply invested in the very narratives that Muskogeeans found themselves trying to fulfil in the 1940s. These men believed in Muskogee's metropolitan

[170] Margaret Huettl, "Product of Chaos: W.W. Keeler, Community Organization, Identity, and Cherokee Revitalization, 1961–1976," (MA Thesis: University of Oklahoma, 2010), 6-8.
[171] Carroll, *Roots of Our Renewal*, 92–3.

dreams just as much as Harry Ogden, and the possibility of Cherokee sovereignty over the land threatened those dreams, revealing how fragile they really were. Yet while the Cherokee Nation has demonstrated its fortitude, and built itself up in the decades since Milam challenged the hegemony of "Queen City of the Southwest" the lands at what is now Camp Gruber remain out of reach, hidden behind fences and guardhouses.

Conclusion: Imperial Decline and the Limits of Resurgence

Oklahoma is a place filled with failed dreams. Historian David Chang claims that "The history of Oklahoma is a history of movement, possession, and dispossession. It is American history told in fast-forward."[1] It is a place forever defined, Chang argues, by the remarkable rapidity with which it rose, carried with the hopes and dreams of hundreds of thousands of White settlers hoping to build a glorious future on the ashes of the Indian Territory, and its almost equally quick collapse and failure, as by the 1930s thousands of those settlers' children and grandchildren left for California, leaving behind a landscape that was ecologically depleted, and a state in the throes of the Great Depression. Oklahoma, then, is where empire stalled, where visions of America's metropolitan, modern future, were ground down by the dust and wind. It is a place that, in the American imagination, seem empty or emptying, forever in decline.

Nowhere are the failed dreams of Oklahoma more visible, perhaps, than in the stories of its cities and towns. Writing of the state's capital, Oklahoma City, but expressing a sentiment that could easily apply to many of the state's towns, journalist Sam Anderson writes of a place that "from its very first moment...has always wanted to hurry up--to exist, somehow, in its own glorious future."[2] Muskogee, whose boosters had once dreamed of making it the "Queen City of the Southwest," or the "Queen City of the Arkansas," has, in the last 60 years, been forced to accept that it is neither. Surpassed first by Tulsa, and now even by the town of Tahlequah—a place Muskogee had once usurped as the center of political power in the region—the city has stagnated. The future its leaders envisioned in the 1910s, and fought for so ferociously across the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, has not come to fruition.

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[1] Chang, *The Color of the Land*, 2.

[2] Sam Anderson, *Boomtown: The Fantastical Saga of Oklahoma City, Its Chaotic Founding, Its Apocalyptic Weather, Its Purloined Basketball Team, and the Dream of Becoming a World-Class Metropolis* (New York: Broadway Books, 2018), xviii.

The transformations that many of eastern Oklahoma's elites sought for the Cookson Hills in the 1930s remain on the land, but their permanence there is increasingly tenuous. Greenleaf State Park, the diminished result of Jack Nichols' campaign for a vast national park that would transform Muskogee and Tahlequah into prosperous gateway towns, has, in recent years, come under threat of sale or closure. In 2015, then-governer Mary Fallin cut nearly $16,000,000 from the Oklahoma Department of Tourism and Recreation's budget, prompting fears that many state parks, including Greenleaf, might be forced to close or transfer to private ownership. Opposition to her budget arose principally from lawmakers from the state's eastern side, the "Green Country" of which Greenleaf and so many other state parks are emblematic.[3] The threat of closure increased across Fallin's tenure, and by 2017 worried citizens drafted a petition to save 16 state parks—including Greenleaf and nearby parks such as Cherokee Landing, Lake Eufaula, and Talimena—from closure or sale. Dale Spoonemore, who authored the petition, described the parks as "some of the most beautiful places in Oklahoma," places to "get out into nature and disconnect for a few days." Closing these parks would "take that opportunity away from many people and future generations."[4] Greenleaf State Park remains open today, but, like all state parks in Oklahoma, operates on a shoe-string budget compared to previous years, as successive Republican governors have cut the state's tourism budget.[5]

Camp Gruber, once the key to transforming Muskogee's fortunes, sits now as a much-diminished National Guard training center, a potent symbol for the ongoing story of imperial decline in twenty-first century Oklahoma. Re-established on a tract half the size of the original in

[3] Logan Layden, "State Parks in Danger After Tourism Department's $16 Million Budget Cut," *State Impact Oklahoma*, 11 June 2015, https://stateimpact.npr.org/oklahoma/2015/06/11/state-parks-in-danger-after-tourism-departments-16-million-budget-cut/.
[4] "Don't Close 16 Popular and Beautiful Oklahoma State Parks," Change.Org, 2017, https://www.change.org/p/oklahoma-state-house-don-t-close-16-popular-and-beautiful-oklahoma-state-parks.
[5] Lindsay Cuomo, "Oklahoma Debuts New Parking Pass Prgoram at State Parks," *Metro Family Magazine*, accessed 30 March 2021, https://www.metrofamilymagazine.com/parking-passes-state-parks/.

1967—the remaining 30,000 acres make up the Gruber and Cherokee Game Management Areas, operated by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation—for use by the Oklahoma Nation Guard, the camp's reopening was touted in Oklahoma papers as an economic boon, promising to pump $350,000 into the local economy each year.[6]

But Gruber, like Greenleaf, has faced the specter of closure in recent years. In 2005, Department of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld threatened to close or severely curtail 25% of domestic military installations, as part of the latest round of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC), a program established in the late 1980s to streamline the US' domestic military infrastructure amidst the winding down of the Cold War.[7] Camp Gruber, along with two other national guard installations in Oklahoma, appeared set to be closed, prompting Oklahoma governor Brad Henry challenge the Pentagon's authority to do so without his consent. Rumsfeld relented, and Camp Gruber remained open, surviving—for now—the scythe of federal budget cuts.[8]

While places like Greenleaf and Gruber have become increasingly fragile in recent years, Native nations in Oklahoma, and particularly the Cherokees, have resurged across the latter half of the twentieth century. The Cherokee Nation, for instance, which the state of Oklahoma, in concert with the US Congress essentially destroyed as a political entity in the first decade of the twentieth century, rebuilt itself across the twentieth century. Today, the Cherokee Nation boasts

[6] Bob Ruggles, "Camp Gruber Rebuilding Project Could Aid State Economy," *Daily Oklahoman*, 29 July 1969.
[7] "Feds Looking at Closing Several Oklahoma National Guard Facilities," *News On 6*, 25 February 2005, https://www.newson6.com/story/5e3686882f69d76f6209c3c7/feds-looking-at-closing-several-oklahoma-national-guard-facilities; "Rumsfeld Scales Back His Plans to Shut Down Military Bases," *Baltimore Sun*, 30 March 2005, https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-2005-03-30-0503300276-story.html.
[8] "Governor Henry May Block Base Closures," *Daily Oklahoman*, 31 March 2005, https://www.oklahoman.com/article/2890476/gov-henry-may-block-base-closures?.

a population of around 380,000 citizens, and claims to inject over $2,000,000,000 into the state's economy annually.[9]

This remarkable resurgence, however, has had its limits, and there remains a disconnect between the Cherokee Nation as an institution, and many rural Cherokee citizens, the same rural Cherokees who found themselves dispossessed across the 1930s and 1940s. Cherokee people in the Cookson Hills continued to lose land across the 1950s, as the Army Corps of Engineers condemned much of the fertile bottomland of the lower Illinois River Valley to build Tenkiller Ferry Dam, forcing hundreds of landowners to leave. Among the evicted residents of the valley were Katie Sam and her family, who had been forced off their home along Greenleaf Creek for the same reason only fifteen years earlier.[10]

Material conditions among rural Cherokees continued to deteriorate as well. In 1952, Angie Debo, surveying the Cherokee Ozarks, would characterize the entire region as "one vast slum."[11] Writing of rural Cherokee communities in the 1960s and 1970s, anthropologist Al Wahrhaftig would lament that "the Cherokees…scramble for simple survival as a community for mere subsistence as individuals," a "minority population enclaved and exploited within its own homeland in the Ozark hills of eastern Oklahoma."[12] This poverty continued even as Cherokee principal chief W.W. Keeler—Milam's successor, and like his predecessor a wealthy oil man—invested millions of dollars into anti-poverty and relief programs.[13]

Unsurprisingly, this gap between the Cherokee Nation's institutional and economic rebound and the continuation of rural Cherokee poverty has bred a certain degree of mistrust. In

[9] "Cherokee Nation's Economic Impact on Oklahoma," Cherokee Nation, accessed 30 March 2021, https://www.cherokeenationimpact.com/.
[10] Tyner, "Katie Sam."
[11] Angie Debo, *The Five Civilized Tribes of Oklahoma: Report on Social and Economic Conditions* (Philadelphia: Indian Rights Association, 1951), 4.
[12] Albert L. Wahrhaftig, "In the Aftermath of Civilization: The Persistence of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma," (PhD Diss., University of Chicago, 1975), 20.
[13] Huettl, "Product of Chaos," 9.

the 1960s, the Original Cherokee Community Organization (OCCO), a group of Cherokee traditionalists, publicly opposed Keeler's reign as chief, demanding he be removed from office. One of their main contentions was that Keeler and other political elites had shown too little regard for rural poverty in the Cherokee Nation. The OCCO also fought for state recognition of Cherokee hunting rights, rights they believed were infringed upon by state regulation of hunting in Ozark game management areas, such as the lands adjacent to Camp Gruber.[14] This mistrust of the tribal government has continued among rural Cherokee traditionalists, as ethnobotanist Clint Carroll discovered in the 2000s while working with the tribe's Office of Environmental Quality. When Carroll would conduct research interviews on traditional plant knowledge, for instance, he noted that his "association with the tribal government…added a level of skepticism—there was always the possibility that the knowledge could be…used in ways that were not intended by my informants."[15]

Perhaps some of this mistrust reflects the continued reality that many rural Cherokees, especially those Cherokees who were forced off the land that became Camp Gruber and the Gruber State Game Management Area in the 1930s and 1940s, displaced from their homelands. The dream of a self-sufficient land cooperative in the Cookson Hills remains deferred (see Figure 5.). The Summerlins, Sams, Silks, and other families who lived so many lives in the Cookson Hills, are unable to return to land that was theirs' for over a century. All because of a New Deal submarginal lands project and military installation that saw active federal use for around ten years at most. Those ten years proved pivotal, however, in transforming this corner of the Cookson Hills from a landscape of largely Cherokee farms and woodlands, to a patchwork of national guard training lands, a dilapidated state park, and a game refuge, all united by their lack

[14] Daniel Cobb, *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 160.
[15] Carroll, *Roots of Our Renewal*, 3.

of permanent human residents. The landscape has changed into something markedly different from what anyone dreamed of in the 1930s and 1940s, but remains in limbo, caught in a holding pattern as the agents of empire figure out their next move.

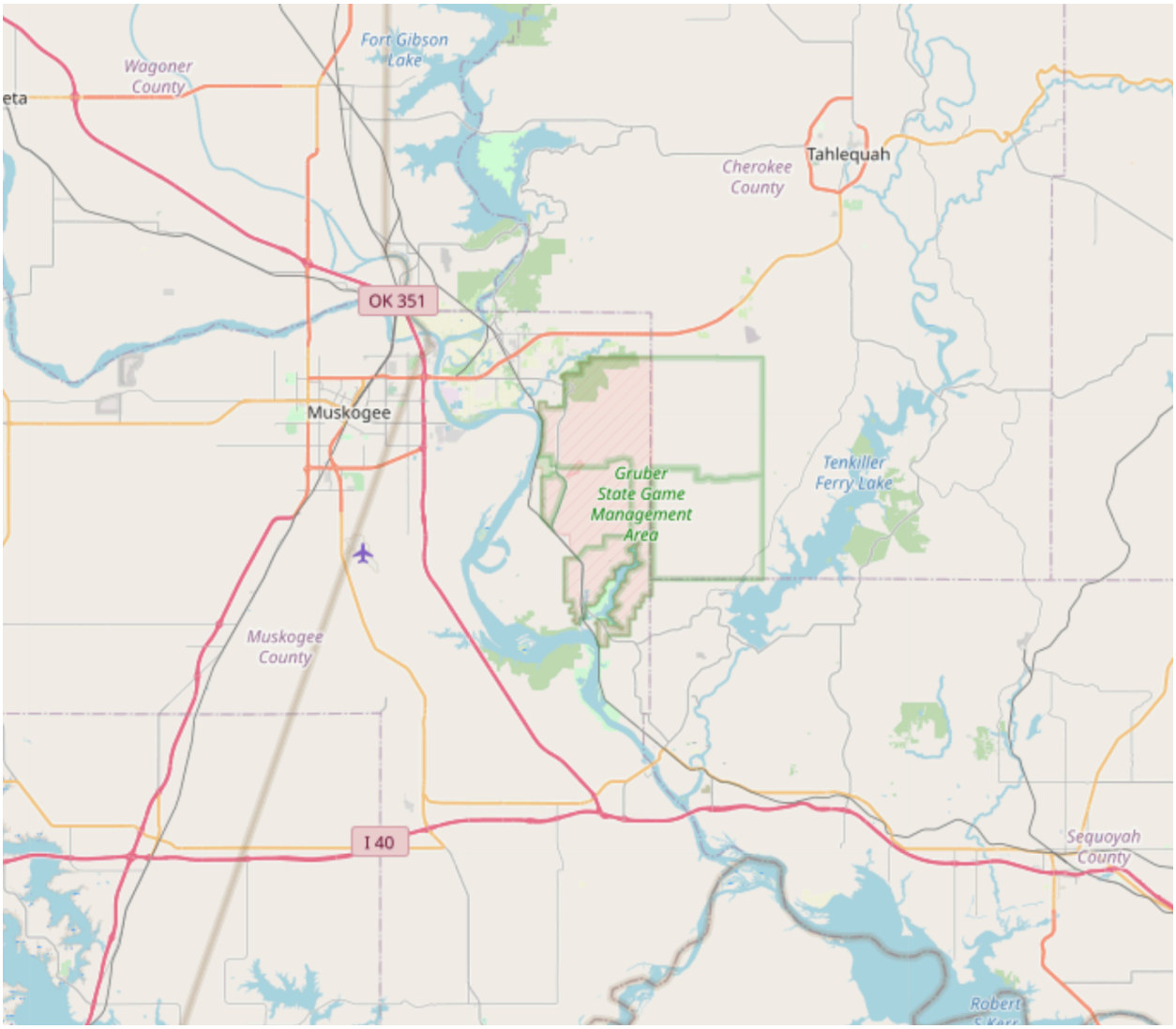

Figure 4: Cookson Hills area as it looks today. Camp Gruber and Game Management Area are outlined in green, corresponding roughly to the installations World War II-era boundaries. Image Courtesy Open Street Map.

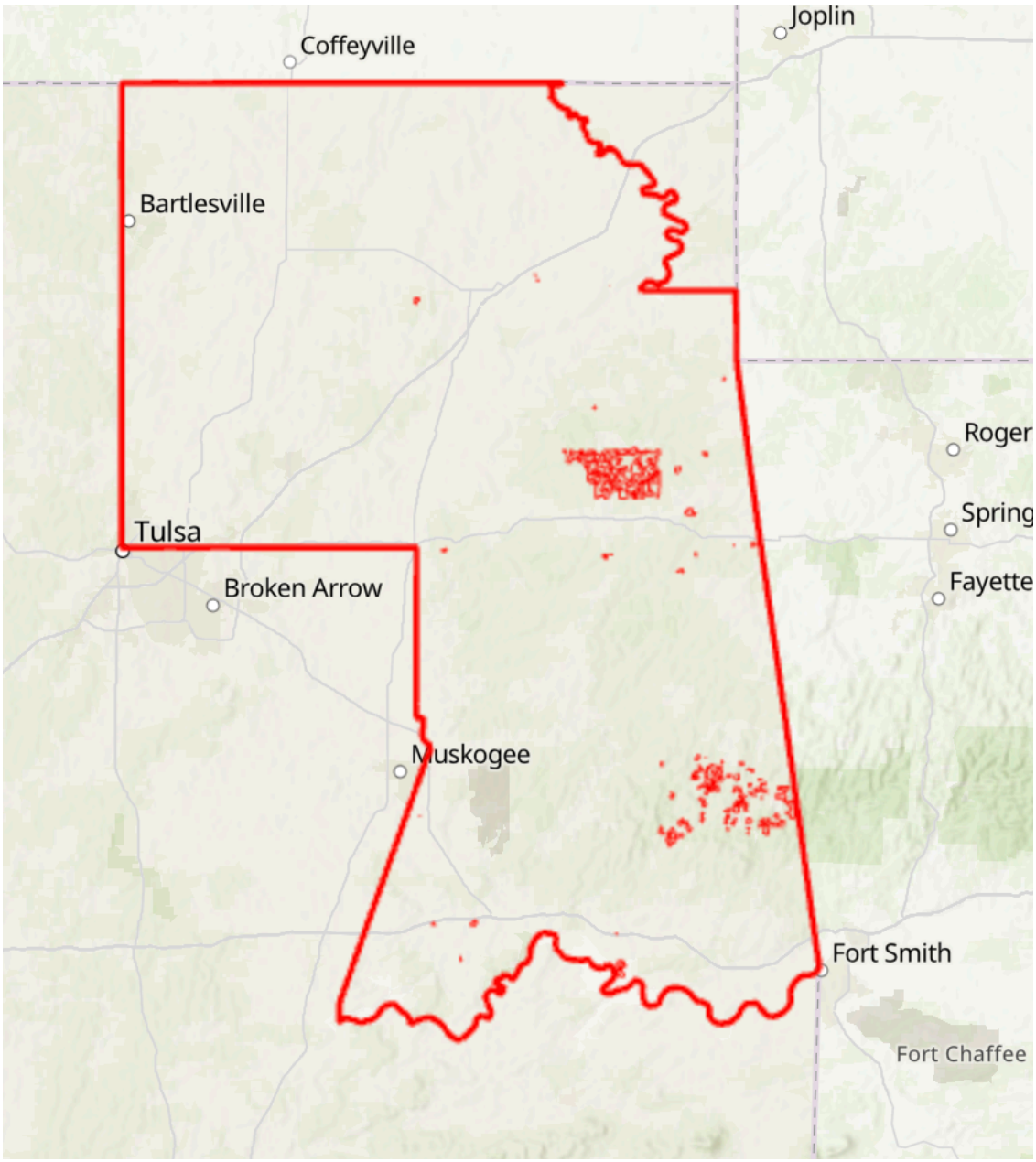

Figure 5: Cherokee Nation trust land as of 2021. Where a little more than a hundred years ago, all of the land in the Cherokee Nation was publicly owned, today only a fragment lies in the hands of the tribal government. Camp Gruber is marked out in gray, just east of Muskogee. Image Courtesy Cherokee Nation Geodata Center.

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DDOHC—Doris Duke Oral History Collections, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

ETC—Elmer Thomas Collections, Carl Albert Center for Congressional Research, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

IPP—Indian Pioneer Papers, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Normann, Oklahoma.

JBMP—J.B. Milam Papers, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

LHC—Leslie Hewes Collection, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

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