



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Won't You Be My (Allotment) Neighbor?: Mapping Cherokee Homelands in Diaspora

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US-412 E, traveling east

Driving from Tulsa airport in my rental car, I thought about the shape of the terrain. It was flat. As I moved east, the land gradually changed; it got hillier, more wooded. I began to see wild onions growing alongside the highway. The redbud and dogwood were in bloom, bursts of bright pink and white against a woody backdrop of trees erupting into their spring foliage. Driving alone, I thought about what it means to return "home" to a place I've never been. I thought about the feeling of a homecoming without ever having been home. I tried it on for size: "these are the lands I'm meant to move



through, and I belong here." This sentimental mantra and feeling made me ache. I felt like I was willing a relation into being - a sign without a referent. I felt more overwhelmed than comforted. It felt good to finally be "home," but I was still driving alone through these hills, bound for Tahlequah.

This is the first entry in a journal I kept when I visited Cherokee Nation for a two week research trip in 2022.¹ Incidentally, this trip would also be my first visit to our reservation in what was once known as Indian Territory, now northeastern Oklahoma.² As the entry suggests, this trip was an anxious homecoming for me. Although I was there primarily to visit archives containing materials related to allotment and late-nineteenth, early twentieth-century Indian Territory print cultures, I found myself confronting the context of my own family's relationship to our homelands in Cherokee Nation, a relationship profoundly impacted by allotment policy and the aftermath of its regime of colonial privatization. I belong to a family of proud Cherokee Nation citizens to be sure, but I grew up in the diaspora in California and have spent all my life away from our reservation. This is not to say I was isolated from community. I grew up surrounded by several generations of extended Cherokee family. When I was young, my auntie Pamela Gentry often dragged me to community events hosted by Cherokee Nation in California. I continue to be an active community member in our diaspora organizations up and down the West Coast.³ And yet, as I was driving from Tulsa, I found myself



preoccupied with experiencing my “homelands” for the first time and what that experience was supposed to mean to me.

Alongside my archival and historical research into Indigenous engagements with allotment was this persistent and parallel question of Cherokee diaspora and homeland that inevitably drew on the personal, familial, and community contexts of my own relationship to allotment. In between days spent in the archives, I took the opportunity to visit places that remain important to my family, including allotment lands we once held, cemeteries that hold ancestors, and other former homeplaces. I also spent time with Cherokee communities and relations in Sequoyah County to whom I am connected.

At the beginning of the research trip, I conceived of these two activities—archival research and first-time encounters with allotment homeplaces—as separate. One day I would be pouring over newspaper editorials debating allotment policy and combing through deeds of transfer and lien notices. The next I would be walking across and in between individual allotments that used to belong to family or former neighbors. Yet another day I would be exchanging stories with friends about what happened to their family allotments and their own enduring relationships to those lands. In one sense, time spent in the archive often—but not always—confirmed an understanding of allotment’s legacy as one of loss, fragmentation, and diminishment. This follows from

what I mostly found in the archive: after the passage of the Curtis Act in 1898, newspapers in Indian Territory carefully tracked the development of the policy's implementation.⁴ As these home papers told it, allotment and the catastrophe that followed appeared increasingly inevitable. In other sources—chasing an allotment's chain of title, for instance—I would find another story of an allotment's escalating indebtedness or tax delinquency, which often ended up with the land in foreclosure and its eventual transfer into non-Native hands. Indeed, many scholars writing about the history and legacy of allotment in Indian Country often focus on this narrative of loss to emphasize the frenzy of settler colonial exploitation and injustice that followed the policy.⁵

Time spent away from the archive, however, offered a different understanding of allotment, a different *experience*. Walking or driving through former allotment lands, often in conversation with friends and with the felt presence of ancestors, revealed complicated forms of belonging and attachment—not just separation and detachment. It seemed to me that these encounters and conversations were confirmation that allotment's logic of privatized alienation from the land had not just failed; it had been turned on its head by the descendants and heirs of these original allottees.⁶ My experience on the land during that trip also exceeded a simple framework of connection and loss that many scholars reach for when writing about Indigenous experiences with settler colonial structures like allotment—our own experiences or otherwise. Through my family's experience and from listening to stories of other



community members who grew up in diaspora, I came to realize that contemporary Cherokee people have taken up the very structure designed to sever connection to our homelands in the early twentieth-century to articulate forms of persistent belonging—however attenuated or compromised these forms may ultimately be. These are forms of allotment survivance that nevertheless grapple with the enduring legacy of allotment’s forms of severance.⁷

As I alternated days in the archive with days out on the land, separating my archival research and encounters with actual allotments became increasingly difficult. I realized that these encounters have much to offer for moving beyond the archive’s dominant narrative of loss. They represent alternative forms of critical and imaginative engagement with the legacy of allotment, which include personal and embodied encounters with allotment land, family histories, and stories from community members. In many ways, the incredible work collected in *Allotment Stories*, edited by Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee Nation) and Jean M. O’Brien (White Earth Ojibwe) demonstrates how Indigenous authors turn to these alternative forms to (re)negotiate land privatization and to reframe allotment’s impact. The collection and its individual contributions bring together critical analysis, artistic expression, family and community stories, personal testimony, and other forms of Indigenous engagement with allotment and similar regimes of colonial privatization. These allotment stories complicate—if not



refuse—narratives of loss and privatized logics of division. As the collection makes abundantly clear, these diverse forms imagine and enact post-allotment Indigenous futures rooted in grounded normativity, a term coined by Glen Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene) to describe Indigenous values and knowledge systems where land plays a foundational role, including and especially in ethical decision-making.⁸ In their stories of allotment survivance and in their critiques of settler colonial privatization, these forms engage with longstanding Indigenous traditions.

As I pursued my research over the following two weeks, I soon realized that the journaling with which I open this article had become an important research practice, generating a new allotment story reflecting on family allotment land and conversations I had with friends.⁹ Instead of being an exercise in parsing "legitimate" archival research from community and family history, my journal increasingly became both a space of critical reflection and a method for thinking about the legacies of allotment across personal, community, and archival contexts. Through the practice, I found myself considering the densities of Indigenous experience to be found on allotment land itself. Drawing on Black Studies scholar Robin Kelley's conception of the density of American Blackness, Chris Anderson (Michif [Métis]) theorizes a framework of density—rather than essentialized difference—to acknowledge the complexities, multiple subject positions, and different places that shape the contours of Indigenous life. A concept of density helps us avoid framing Indigenous experiences in terms of essentialized, often racialized difference, "fixed in time and space through apparently objective, logical



markers used to bear the discursive weight of our authenticity and legitimacy” (92). The transformation of Indigenous land within a set of privatized relations does not follow a fixed, linear conversion of collective land into private, Native landownership to non-Native. Cherokee and other Native people occupied several and often contradictory positions as allotment unfolded. Some benefitted from and advocated for the privatization of the Cherokee Nation, while others suffered greatly. A simple narrative of loss or victimhood is often predicated on a notion of essentialized difference and flattens the complexity of Indigenous experiences related to allotment.

I realized stories on and about allotment land reveal a density of experience. Cherokee communities continue to refuse both reductive narratives of Indigenous deficiency and a narrow politics of belonging based on American citizenship and private landownership.¹⁰ The turn toward these place-based, storied conversations among Cherokee people reorients the post-allotment geography of Cherokee lands I encountered on my trip. These conversations reveal the enduring strength of our communities across time and place—not a geography of atomized allottees and non-Native landowners but a kinscape of allotment “neighbors” with multiple lived experiences. Neighbors and their descendants continue to work together and embody our values and traditions even as we navigate the densities of our communities and as our diaspora(s) continue to grow away from Cherokee Nation and United Keetowah

Band of Cherokee Indians in northeastern Oklahoma and from the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in our traditional homelands in what is currently known as the southeastern United States.

This article departs from the archival research I had originally set out to pursue and instead invites other forms of research practice and knowledge production often marginalized or excluded from traditional forms of scholarship. Rather than proceed from research notes I had written recording time spent in the archive, I begin with the journal that reflects on my walks across allotment land, conversations I had with friends and family, and other interactions with community. These entries often ground the critical inquiry that follows in particular allotments and homeplaces or what I am calling Cherokee allotment "neighborhoods." At the same time, entries sometimes depart from allotment lands, reflecting the cycles of travels abroad and returns home that have always been a part of Cherokee history and are a significant part of allotment's legacy for diaspora communities in California and elsewhere.

In this article, my journal functions as a method for thinking about the legacy of allotment in Cherokee life as taking place across multiple sites—or neighborhoods—both on and off the reservation in Oklahoma. An entry about a conversation I had with a friend that took place on Sparrow Hawk Mountain (northeast of Tahlequah) serves simultaneously as a point of entry and departure for considering another conversation about a mountain in the allotment neighborhood of England Hollow. This conversation takes the form of an interview in 1969 between two Cherokee men, Richard Manus and



Boyce Timmons, found in the Doris Duke Indian Oral History Program archives. Rather than serve only as an ethnographic narrative documenting a fixed and “vanishing” Cherokee place, I take this conversation found in the archive as a map for present-day experiences with my own family allotment neighborhood in the township of Long in Sequoyah County. This composite map of past and present Cherokee landscapes leads me to another conversation between myself and Michael Delano Webb, a member of the diaspora community in the Sacramento Valley of California.

This meandering direction—from one storied conversation to another, across time and place—is intentional. I lean into the anxious feelings, tenuous family connections, and community conversations that surrounded the “homecoming” of my original research trip. I think about what being on and centering Indigenous relationships to allotment land has to offer for articulating a sense of “homelands” and belonging across these multiple sites of Cherokee life. I cite and create what Mishuana Goeman (Tonawanda Band of Seneca) has called a “dialectic of stories” from the past and present that subvert allotment’s narrative of inevitable privatization (74). I demonstrate that conversations on and about allotment land cite but also literally “site” allotment neighborhoods as “nodes” (to use Goeman’s term) within a broader Cherokee space. These conversations are not simply snapshots within a linear sequence of private landownership, moving inexorably from Native to non-Native.

These past and present articulations of allotment neighborhoods—as Cherokee spaces—resist settler colonial geographies of privatization that order Indigenous lands and histories according to hierarchies of private ownership, including the temporal order of an allotment’s chain of title or the spatial order of the survey plat map. I demonstrate that allotment land is not simply a fixed space of privatization but rather a part of a storied Cherokee landscape that routes through multiple generations and territories.

To that end, this article challenges the myth of a singular Native “home” that positions Indigenous communities as unified and geographically stable, with consistent and uncomplicated relationships to a territorially defined homeland or homelands, especially lands profoundly impacted by colonial privatization. In many ways, this article is in dialogue with the 2009 special issue of *American Indian Quarterly*, “Working from Home in American Indian History,” edited by Susan M. Hill (Haudenosaunee citizen/Wolf Clan, Mohawk Nation) and Mary Jane Logan McCallum (Munsee-Delaware First Nation). This collection of essays highlights the circuitous routes that Indigenous researchers must often take when working from (or towards) home—however unstable that notion may be. Like *Allotment Stories*, these essays invite us to embrace the vexed and complicated relationships that Native researchers may have with archives and archival research. Citing Heather Ponchetti Daly’s (Iipay Nation of Santa Ysabel) essay on the impact of the 1953 Termination Act on Indigenous scholarship and community systems, Hill and McCallum point out that, on the one



hand, Indigenous researchers must often navigate archival materials, such as government documents and oral histories collected by settler academic institutions, that seek to define us as products of the very archives we examine. On the other hand, these materials often also serve as an important documentary record for our own family and communities' stories, a repository for our own histories (xii).

Thinking with the land and other allotment homeplaces, together with archival research, opens up new questions concerning the relationship between the diaspora and our homelands on the Cherokee reservation. While this diasporic relationship has often been discussed in terms of our forced Removal in the 1830s or in terms of the impact of relocation and Termination era policies from the 1950s through the 1980s, I suggest allotment stories are a neglected but nonetheless important form for articulating enduring relationships to land and community in the diaspora, which is comprised of Cherokee citizens who have come to their diaspora communities at different points in time. The impacts of allotment on Cherokee communities are typically framed in terms of local and fixed transformations on reservation lands. This article expands this local frame in and through diasporic experiences with allotment.

In this way, I contribute to ongoing efforts by Cherokee scholars to call attention to the dynamics of tribal specificity and Indigenous transnationalism in Cherokee literatures, literary traditions and stories. These efforts include Kirby Brown's (Cherokee

Nation) work on Cherokee literary expressions written in the aftermath of allotment. His study of writing during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries recovers and articulates a Cherokee transnational imaginary that traverses tribally specific, local contexts to national and global Indigenous diaspora communities. Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee Nation) presents a Cherokee literary history that paves the way for thinking about diaspora and the Cherokee literary tradition. According to Justice, a full understanding of this tradition, within which I situate the storied conversations I discuss in this article, requires attending to "homeward relationships of rootedness and movement, the geographic bonds of those who live in the lands of the ancestors as well as those of outland Cherokees, whose relationships to home are figured in different ways" (*Our Fire* 49).

By inviting archival materials reflecting on transformations of allotment lands, such as those found in the Doris Duke Indian Oral History Program archive, into contemporary personal, family, and community allotment stories, this article situates "home" and "homeland" within tribally specific and transnational relationships in which I implicate my own position(s) as a Cherokee researcher to the multiple communities that I inhabit. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou) and her work in *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999) is also a methodological guide here. Following her example, I analyze allotment's colonial forms of knowledge found in the archive to craft an allotment counter story. This story recovers Cherokee voices that span several conversations and that draw on Indigenous values, practices, and ways of knowing. It



is my hope that this counter story repurposes materials found in settler archives into allotment stories of survivance.

Allotment Neighborhood: Sparrow Hawk/England Hollow

A couple of days after arriving in Cherokee Nation, I met up with my friend Angela Spencer and her sister Rhonda Spencer (both Cherokee Nation citizens) for a hike through the Sparrow Hawk Primitive Area, a short distance northeast of Tahlequah where I was staying. The trail leads up to Sparrow Hawk Mountain, and we were huffing and puffing uphill. Angela and Rhonda, whose family home is near Tahlequah, were familiar with the area, but this would be my first time walking the land.



Figure 1: Photograph of the Illinois River near Sparrow Hawk Mountain, Cherokee County. Photo taken by the author.

April 15, 2022

Near Sparrow Hawk Mountain, Cherokee County

We stopped at a rocky outcrop over the Illinois River and sat down for a while. Turkey buzzards rode the morning thermals up into the air above us and then dipped back down, gliding and swooping near us as we talked. The river down below bent southwest. We looked out over a bowl in the hills.



We talked Cherokee Nation politics and identity, and what the future might hold. We shared what we thought about blood quantum nationalists, Cherokee constitutionalists, and the progressives who are now in office. We discussed the future of our Nation, on the land. Here we were debating our government, its policies, our People. Oklahoma receded from view, and I could only see Cherokee lands. I was in political relation to the land and the river—not a visitor but a citizen. I felt that our talk of Cherokee histories, experiences, politics was an act of stewardship, creating obligations and commitments that need continual political renewal—returns home from abroad.

According to a survey map published in 1909, after allotment had been administered and the state of Oklahoma carved out of Indian Territory in 1907, we were walking on allotment lands located in sections 6 and 7 of Township 17 North, Range 23 East. At the time, these lands were selected by or assigned to the Walker, Thompson, and Lawrence families. From our stopping place at the rocky outcrop, we were peering across the edge of survey map T17N R23E to sections 1 and 12 of T17N R22E, to lands selected predominantly by Whaler family members.¹¹

These survey maps draw out property lines for titles owned by new Indian landowners (called allottees) and came to produce and represent a new colonial regime of privatized land ownership. This allotment territoriality attempted to restrict

tribal sovereignty and fracture Indigenous land relations into a fragmented geography of lands "in severalty," a privatized landscape of individually owned parcels subject to the machinations of a settler-dominated market economy.¹² A primary goal of this process was to divide and privatize Cherokee Nation's collective land tenure, enshrined as a core feature of sovereignty and Cherokee land relations in Article 1, Section 2 of the Cherokee Nation Constitution ratified in 1827 (before Removal) and in 1839 (after Removal). The 1839 Constitution of the Cherokee Nation mandates that lands "shall remain common property" (1839 Constitution).

Political belonging to the modern Cherokee Nation is now rooted in census rolls created during allotment. These rolls were produced in collaboration between the tribal government and the Dawes Commission, the US federal body responsible for administering allotment in Indian Territory. These rolls were required before families could select or were forcibly assigned allotment lands. The "modern" basis for citizenship in the Cherokee Nation is outlined in Article III of our 1975 Constitution, which establishes that "[A]ll members of the Cherokee Nation must be citizens as proven by reference to the Dawes Commission Rolls" (Sturm 239).

Growing up in diaspora, I understood my political citizenship in Cherokee Nation in the context of allotment, within its particular politics of belonging and recognition derived as it is from the Dawes Rolls and the selection of allotments. My mother Valerie Radocaj and auntie Pamela (the same auntie who brought me to community events) documented our belonging through a small family archive of



allotment land certificates, survey plat maps, and other Dawes Commission documentation relating to our family. It was through these maps and documents that I came to experience my own connection to Cherokee lands and to the allotment neighborhoods of Sequoyah County where my family had selected their allotments. Although not entirely the same, I realize that this experience was not unlike that of a researcher in the archive, a connection mediated through these materials, often abstract and disembodied. Although an important part of our family's documentary record and the way we articulate belonging to Cherokee people, this connection by itself feels static, unconnected to our culture, traditions, and language. To me, it does not need renewal and does not come with a sense of obligation.

Two days after that lonely drive from the airport, however, I was out here in conversation with Angela and Rhonda, and the land began to take a different shape for me. Through sharing our family stories and our thoughts on Cherokee politics, I felt this political connection exceed the allotment context in which it had originally taken root. Perhaps our conversation politically and imaginatively rolled back an allotment territoriality that laid the groundwork for the state of Oklahoma. Our exchange invited us to think about an expansive sense of sovereignty and political culture in terms of Cherokee grounded normativity, in the collective land tenure, place-worlds,¹³ and knowledges that allotment attempted to undermine. With this conversation in mind, I

now turn to other Cherokee voices, another conversation that took place in a nearby allotment neighborhood about 14 miles east following the valley of the Illinois River's Baron Fork. Like our conversation on Sparrow Hawk mountain, this interview reflects on the Cherokee routes, transformations, and future of another mountain near England Hollow in the decades that followed allotment.

On February 8, 1969, Boyce Timmons, a Cherokee educator and director of the Doris Duke Indian Oral History Program at the University of Oklahoma, interviewed his friend and countryman, Richard Manus. Manus was born in England Hollow, northwest of Stilwell in Adair County, in 1910, shortly after allotment, when Cherokee Nation was illegally disestablished and the state of Oklahoma was born in 1907. Timmons and Manus discuss changes in the geography of the land, travel routes, and relationships to non-human relations in the area. The interview was conducted outside Manus's home at the base of a mountain near England Hollow, not far east of Sparrow Hawk mountain. In discussing the kinds of game that had once been found in the area, Manus gestures to the mountain and mentions that there is "a lot of [Cherokee syllabary] Indian writing [inscribed on rocks up there]. And when I was a kid, there was some big walnut trees right here" (Manus T-417-3). Manus continues by tracing the road that travels up the mountain and mentions that the road "wound all around. Here. It wouldn't no straight road. They just pick out the best places to travel. They didn't have no way to work the road" (T-417-3). Transformations in travel—how roads were



constructed, especially after section lines were laid down—are significant topics in discussing allotment and post-allotment landscapes. Then, as now, storying a Cherokee landscape involves thinking about how people move through Cherokee space. Throughout the interview, the mountain and its vectors of travel serve as geographic reference points of travel across land, and writing inscribed in stone signifies the mountain’s important place in Cherokee land narratives of the region.¹⁴

The writing on the mountain cites/sites Cherokee geographies—physical, political, and spiritual—in which it is expressed. The mountain, inscribed with syllabary, is co-extensive with the signification of the writing itself. The writing exists not just in a symbolic realm that represents, records, or signifies but is a material and storied layer in a significant place-world. In fact, this kind of writing belongs to a much longer tradition that stretches back to before Removal. For as long as Cherokee people have used our syllabary, we have made inscriptions onto and out of the land to record our activities and carry out ceremony. Cherokee and other scholars recently translated syllabary inscriptions in Manitou Cave, near the old settlement of Willstown in what is now called Alabama (Carroll et al). The inscriptions refer to a stickball game played on April 30, 1828. More than simply recording a specific event, the cave writing was an integral part of the game, which is itself a part of ceremony that takes place over several days. The translation and presence of the inscriptions indicate that the caves are

spiritually significant places and an important junction in Cherokee spiritual geography, between the Middle World where humans dwell and the Under World.¹⁵ As explained by Cherokee Nation National Treasure Loretta Shade, the Cherokee cosmos contains three worlds which are interconnected and in dynamic relation: ᏍᏰᏍᏗ *Galvladi* (the Sky World), which stretches from the earth to the heavens above; ᏲᏊᏗ *Elohi* (the Middle World); and ᏲᏊᏗ ᏁᏐᏐᏗᏊᏍᏗ *Elohi Hawinadidla* (the Under World), which exists underneath the land and water (Teuton, *Cherokee Earth Dwellers* 34-35).

These inscriptions also register intersecting political and historical conflicts at the time of their creation. Carroll et al. write that the appearance of the inscriptions in a deep and remote part of the cave "may reflect the significance of the religious practices carried out there; it might also reflect the need for greater security and privacy due to communal conflicts between Cherokee traditionalists and more acculturated Cherokees associated with missionaries and other influences from the encroaching white culture" (533-534).

Within these intersecting physical, political, and spiritual contexts, the syllabary writing on the mountain near Manus's house is significant to the story that Manus and Timmons are telling. In the story, the writing is not simply a passing curiosity about the mountain. It is situated in a Cherokee relational world, what Christopher Teuton (Cherokee Nation) has called a "web of relationships" that span physical, political, and spiritual realms and that pattern Cherokee values and land relations (*Cherokee Earth Dwellers* 32). After discussing Manus's grandmother's medicine practices, Manus and



Timmons return to the big walnut trees next to the syllabary inscriptions mentioned earlier, and their reference prompts the story of the Wickliff boys, who were opposed to allotment (known by US federal authorities as “outlaws”) and also related to Manus’s grandmother. According to Manus, these anti-allotment Cherokees used to tie their horses to those trees as they moved through Chewey Ford and on to Kenwood in Delaware County to escape federal marshals (T-417-9–417-10). Manus claims that the difficulty of traversing the landscape up the mountain was the reason they could not be caught. He asserts knowledge of “every inch of it [the mountain]” (T-417-10). Manus returns to the topic of Cherokee stone writing next to the walnut trees and asks Timmons to help him find somebody who can translate it. Timmons offers to return at a later date and take photographs of the writing to have translated (T-417-10).

The inscriptions on the mountain collate and layer the seemingly divergent story threads in the interview: Manus’s grandmother’s medicine practices, the land narrative of travel routes, and the fugitive, anti-allotment Wickliff boys who are kin to Manus himself. Cherokee land directly manifests in and shapes the aesthetic and formal qualities of the storytelling between Manus and Timmons. The dialogic interview between these two Cherokee men is on the surface directed at drawing out an ethnographic narrative of England Hollow from Manus but transforms into a storytelling collaboration that exceeds the interviewer/interviewee dynamic of the

Doris Duke Indian Oral History Program. Foregrounding the land narratives of England Hollow both reveals the Cherokee grounded normativity of these stories and offers a way to think beyond traditional ethnographic frameworks, including those motivating the Doris Duke program, which position the Indigenous voices in settler oral history archives as mere informants or subjects of a salvage ethnography project.

From 1967 to 1972, tobacco billionaire Doris Duke sponsored the Indian Oral History Project at several state universities across the country, including the University of Oklahoma.¹⁶ Its goals were to gather the "raw material of history from the Indian point of view" and to provide participating Native Nations with copies of the tapes as part of a reciprocal agreement (Bruner 3). The program collected oral narratives primarily from Indigenous Elders about their histories, practices, and communities during and after allotment.¹⁷

The program at the University of Oklahoma was administered by the American Indian Institute and directed by Timmons, also a university administrator who had a long history working with OU's University Indian Education programs and with many Native Nations in Oklahoma (Repp 168). Timmons regarded the Duke funding as an opportunity to further the development of American Indian Studies that began almost immediately after allotment had been administered, tribal governments severely constrained, and the state of Oklahoma born. The predecessor of the institute that Timmons chaired and that administered the Indian Oral History Project was the Institute



of Indian Affairs, established at OU in 1914 after the heads of several Native Nations pressured US Senator Robert Owen, who was Cherokee himself (169).

The Indian Oral History Project belongs to a settler tradition of Indian oral history that stretches back to the founding of the US settler state and continues into the present. The creation of an Indian oral history archive like the Duke collection often follows a preservationist approach, motivated by the settler trope of the vanishing Indian, which insists that Indigenous peoples are on the verge of extinction in the face of an encroaching settler modernity. Regna Darnell argues that this sort of approach belongs to a type of salvage anthropology in which researchers see themselves taking on the duty (from Native Nations) to document and preserve knowledges and cultures before they vanish (11-19). In *Playing Indian*, Philip J. Deloria (Dakota) traces the genealogy of salvage ethnographic practice in Indigenous communities from the founding of the US settler state to the present. He argues that this practice belongs to a performative tradition of reviving and repurposing the figure of the American Indian in order to resolve inherent contradictions within US political, economic, and cultural realms at different points in its history as a settler colony.

The relationship between interviewer and interviewee in Indian oral history programs like Doris Duke emerges from and contributes to this ethnographic dynamic and is inseparable from the logic of the colonial archive itself. It emerges from a power

dynamic in which the interviewer often acts as an agent of institutional gatekeepers (such as public universities) that process and collate oral narrative data into an archive then housed at universities. The Doris Duke program often neglected to adequately train its researchers in oral narrative methodology. Its researchers frequently failed to receive consent forms from interviewees. Dianna Repp notes that the goals and administration of the program were inconsistent across different designated cultural groups and were often influenced by the field researchers and their relationships to the communities to which they were dispatched (171).

Although this lack of consistency and academic rigor has earned the Duke collection a poor reputation among scholars and academics interested in accurate and "authentic" oral narrative data from Indigenous communities, it provided opportunities for Native Nations and Native field researchers to prioritize recording their own stories, and to use the largesse of Duke funds toward Indigenous ends. More than half of the interviews collected in the Cherokee Cultural Group at OU were conducted by J.W. Tyner and Boyce Timmons, both Cherokees who belonged to and had longstanding commitments with the Indigenous communities and Elders they interviewed.

Rather than read stories like those told by Timmons and Manus as ethnographic "oral histories" that simply document or reflect a (supposedly vanishing, more authentic) Indigenous past, I read them as collaborative, polyvocal stories about a transforming, post-allotment landscape. Teuton argues that notions of "orality" and "oral literature" have roots in European and colonial traditions of ethnographic study



that privilege a linear progression of time and that reinforce the idea that Native Nations would survive modernity only as archival materials documenting a US national legacy (“Indigenous Orality” 169). Teuton calls for reclaiming Indigenous oral expression by examining how concepts like “oral history” and “orality” have come to be defined and then “re-storying” these oral histories within “terms, concepts, and stories that express culturally specific models of Indigenous textuality” (172). Looking at oral histories in the Duke archive as culturally specific Cherokee allotment stories grounded in the allotment neighborhood of England Hollow allows us to reframe these histories within Cherokee grounded normativity. These grounded allotment stories are continuous with enduring storytelling traditions and narratives of land and place-making that remain vital to our values, forms of community, and sovereignty.

These traditions continue into the present in stories that my relatives and community tell in diaspora, and in those told in communities on our reservation. Although the lived experiences of allotment for people who grew up in diaspora may differ significantly from those of people like Manus and Timmons, rewriting oral history narratives as Cherokee allotment stories prioritizes building contemporary relationships across home and diaspora communities, aligned with the contemporary needs, connections, and desires that Cherokee people have with our lands. Linda

Tuhiwai Smith argues that Indigenous peoples *rewrite and re-right* what is found in the archive to suit our ends. She writes:

Indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes. It is not simply about giving an oral account or a genealogical naming of the land and the events which raged over it, but a very powerful need to give testimony to and restore a spirit, to bring back into existence a world fragmented and dying (28).

This rewriting and re-righting of the archive contributes to efforts to recover a Cherokee world fragmented by allotment. Such a project is very different from the imperatives of salvage anthropology and preservationism that the Duke project originally followed.

Allotment Neighborhood: Long Township

Reading over hundreds of interview transcripts in the Duke project, I also came across many interviews conducted by Boyce Timmons' Cherokee colleague J.W. Tyner. In his work with Elders, Tyner would often prioritize stories about local cemeteries, which remain important places to Cherokee communities. Tyner used information he obtained from his work with the Duke program to publish *Our People And Where They Rest* (1969-1985) with his sister, Alyce Tyner Timmons, who happens to have married Boyce Timmons. This twelve-volume compendium maps hundreds of Cherokee, Mvskoke (Creek), Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole cemeteries and the ancestors who rest there (viii). As our lands increasingly passed out of Native hands during and after allotment, stewardship of these spaces surely became increasingly difficult. Tyner and Alyce Tyner Timmons's compendium attempts to re-map cemeteries as important



nodes within sovereign Native landscapes connected through family and community despite the profound impact of allotment. Their work, although now long out of print, continues to serve as a significant reference for Cherokee communities, including my own in California. I was never able to find a copy of the compendium to consult in California, but I had long known of its importance as a documentary record for many Cherokee family homeplaces.

I first consulted *Our People* in the special collections of Northeastern State University in Tahlequah after visiting a cemetery that holds my own family ancestors in the allotment neighborhood of Long, Muldrow, and Remy, located in Sequoyah County about thirty miles south of England Hollow. I now turn back to a journal entry reflecting on this cemetery visit and to the township of Long, where much of my family selected allotments. In this reflection, I think about the problems and complexities of my own position as a Cherokee citizen who grew up in diaspora, and I reflect on what it means to “come home” after generations in California. To that end, I prioritize my experience of family allotment land and cemeteries against what I have come to understand through the archive, even as I draw on archival sources in new and imaginative ways to navigate these spaces.

On the first Sunday of my trip—Easter Sunday—I drove out to these family allotments. Before the trip, I had combed through documentation related to my

family's enrollment with the Dawes Commission and allotment selection, including testimony they gave before the commissioners, land certificates, and enrollment cards. I had found the township-and-range coordinates to my great-great-grandmother Rebecca's allotments and located them on a plat map that the Commission had created. On the plat, I also found allotments belonging to many of her Moton relatives on whose allotments the township of Long had been largely established. In addition to the individual allotments of Rebecca's Cherokee kin and neighbors, these maps charted the township's boundaries and cemetery. Angela, with whom I had hiked up Sparrow Hawk Mountain a couple of days earlier, offered me a way of putting that plat map on my phone so that I could more easily track my movements across allotment land (see Figure 3). Driving out to Long, I wanted to find an embodied connection to these family places that had been an abstraction for my entire life, existing only on the surface of a Dawes Commission plat map and in my family's small archive of Dawes documentation.



Figure 2: Photograph of an allotment once held by the author's great-great grandmother Rebecca Moton Shamblin. Photo taken by the author.

April 17, 2022

Long, Sequoyah County

The drive through the Ozark foothills followed the shape and contours of the land until Highway 64B and 1050 Road joined up with the lines of the section road. This sudden

change in geography, from winding roads through forests of elm, cedar, and coffee tree to the straights and 90 degree turns of the township-and-range survey, told me I had arrived onto allotted land and that now I had to navigate the area in squares and rectangles, geometric hallmarks of checkerboarding and of privatized Indian land.¹⁸

*But it also meant that I was driving onto family lands—possibly the first homecoming since Rebecca left with her non-Cherokee husband Francis more than a hundred years ago. As I got closer, I opened up the Google Earth map on my phone and turned on the .kml file of the allotment plat map that Angela had given me. Angela's spouse, Peder Nelson, had created this file, which overlaid the plat onto Google Earth's modern Global Positioning System (GPS) map. It allowed the user to track whose allotment they were on in real time. Angela and Peder first began creating these .kml files in collaboration with Angela's mother Betty Sanders Spencer, *hrR* jigesv, who had spent decades locating, mapping, and documenting her family allotments.¹⁹*

I now looked down and saw myself—a pulsing blue dot indicating my GPS location—moving across the old allotment plat. I turned right onto S 4750 Road from E 1050 Road, passing James Redden's allotment on the right, Sarah Ada Redden's to the left, then Hugh's, Lou's—Rebecca's allotment was surrounded by Redden family members. Today, there were houses, trailers, and cars all around. I was concerned that I'd attract attention to myself, because why else would anybody be driving down this road if not to visit a neighbor or family member—or to cause trouble, an intruder. I was concerned that there weren't a lot of places to pull over onto the side of the road.



I settled by turning onto E 1057 Road and parking there in the middle of the road. I got out and stood between Rebecca and Moses Redden's allotments. On the plat, a thin line indicating a creek runs through my grandmother's allotment. I had spent a long time studying these plats for my own research and out of a strong desire to find connection to my homelands, and that thin, squiggly line had been disruptive, exceeding the tidy lines of the survey grid. The creek running through my grandmother's allotment seemed so significant, and there it was before me: It ran down to and under the road through a culvert, flowing from Moses' allotment to my grandmother's. Alongside its banks grew what appeared to be old elm trees. It seemed as though no one had ever lived there. The land was not under cultivation; it was short grassland except for the trees along the creek banks. I could not trespass onto her allotment because of a barbed wire fence. I don't believe my grandmother had ever lived here. I don't know if this allotment could be a homeplace. I was a little disappointed, but I had noticed Long Cemetery on the plat, a little way back along 1050 Road. I decided to see if I could find my uncle Clem, Rebecca's uncle, buried in that cemetery. The map indicated that his and the allotments of many Moton relatives were located near the cemetery.

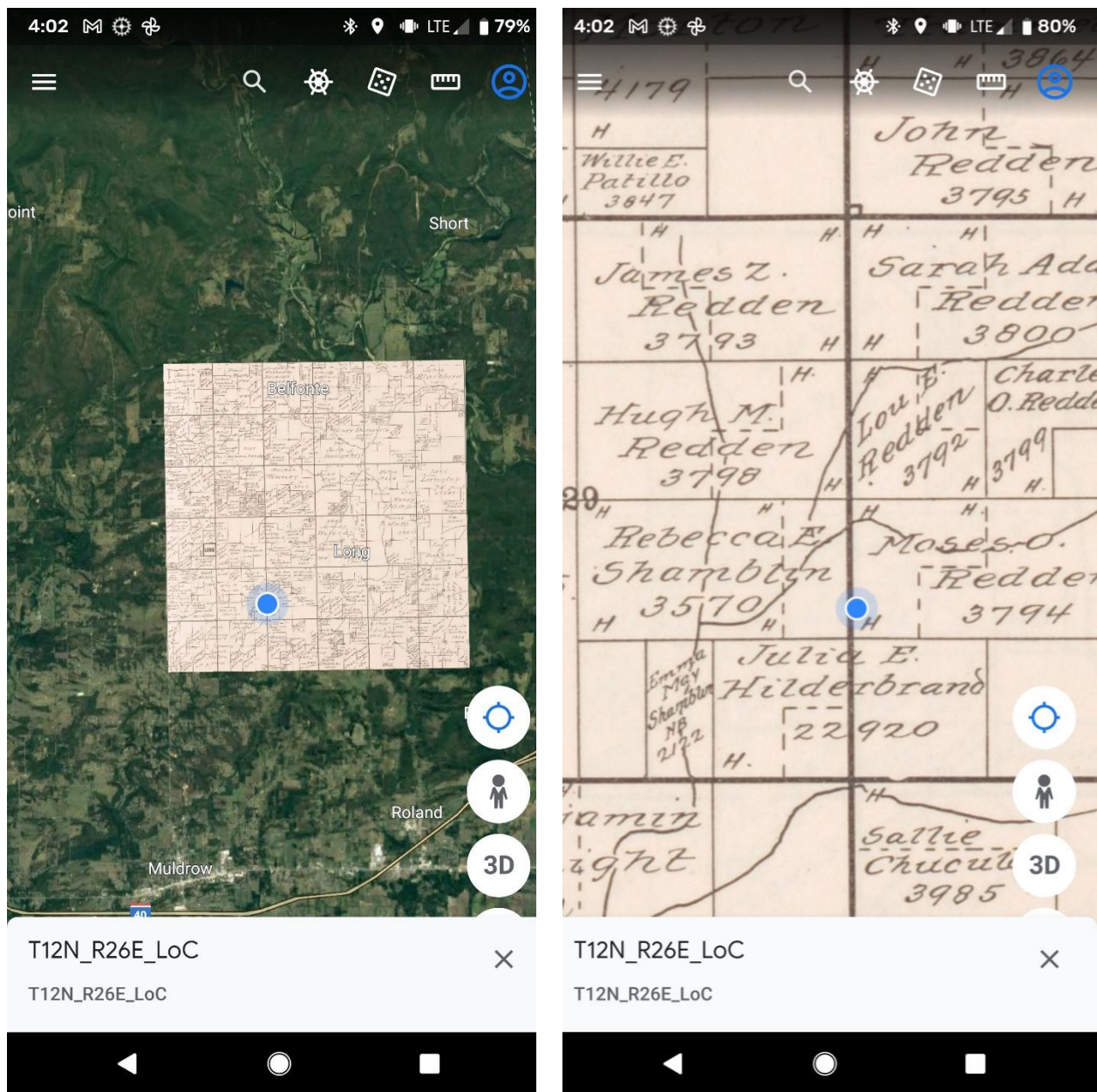


Figure 3: Screenshots of author's phone showing plat map overlaid on GPS map from Google Maps.

I let the allotment plat overlaid on my phone guide me. I followed the section lines as I would Google Map instructions. I followed the lines to the cemetery, a small rectangular plot next to the reserved township of Long.



I found the cemetery next to a couple of churches. There were many signs indicating rules and requirements for placing items by graves and for the upkeep of the cemetery. It seemed like the whole community had a hand in stewarding these ancestors, Cherokee and non-Cherokee alike. Towards the entrance were the graves of more recent ancestors who had passed in the last 20 years. I found Shamblins—the family Rebecca had married into, my grandfather Francis’s family. In amongst a stand of trees, further away from the entrance, were the oldest graves. I wandered among these graves—no one else was around. It was Easter Sunday, after all. I saw the gravestones of other allottees—Boyds and many Reddens, including Moses, Rebecca’s allotment neighbor. I saw Fleetwoods, Gordons, and Howells—all Cherokee families in the area.

I finally found Uncle Clem’s headstone. It stood apart from the rest of the gravestones, at the edge of the cemetery. There weren’t many other graves around except two other markers—not headstones—that presumably belonged to other Motons, other family. The distance between Clem’s grave to other Cherokee families buried in the cemetery seemed significant to me. Even though Long had been established on Moton allotments, few Moton relatives were buried here, and there weren’t subsequent generations clustered around Clem’s grave like with the Redden family or the Howells.

It's because many of us left.

Many Motons left this community. Clem's brother John Henry, my grandfather, is buried in the Upper Camp Creek cemetery nearer to Muldrow. Here I am, drawn to Long because of my grandmother Rebecca and her uncle Clem, who was a Cherokee Nation solicitor for Sequoyah District before allotment. They selected allotments here. It seems like allotment was the point when my Cherokee family was just beginning their journey away from these lands, which would eventually take them to California. Here I was, generations later, returned home, even if this place is simultaneously a place of departure, the origin of our family history in the Cherokee diaspora in California.

Looking west, I can't help but think of my grandmother Helen, her mother Edith, and her grandmother Rebecca, who are all buried in the Pierce Brothers Santa Paula Cemetery in Ventura County, California, not far from where I grew up in Thousand Oaks. I'm here at Uncle Clem's cemetery, 1,500 miles almost exactly due east from where they're all buried. In the Santa Paula cemetery I helped lay my grandmother Helen, Rebecca's granddaughter, to rest this past January.

In these encounters with homeplaces and allotment lands, I could see and feel my family's diaspora story. In the absence of family presence on Rebecca's allotment and especially in the placement of Uncle Clem's headstone amongst our other allotment neighbors, I felt diaspora inscribed in and on allotment land itself. To me, this experience complicates the apparent binary of diaspora and reservation experiences that separates the density of Native life into a spectrum of assimilated and authentic



experiences, usually mapped in a geography of “those who left” and “those who stayed.” I want nonetheless to highlight the manifest tensions of returning “home” for Cherokee families who have been living away from our lands and communities—sometimes for generations. In her study of Oneidas in New York and elsewhere, Kristina Ackley (Bad River Chippewa descent/Oneida Nation in Wisconsin [Turtle Clan]) suggests that the terms “diaspora” and “forced removal,” particularly in the context of the ongoing violence of settler colonialism, are often difficult to disentangle. Navigating this colonial entanglement, to use Jean Dennison’s (Osage Nation) term, Ackley follows Oneida travel routes, kinship networks, and intellectual traditions to chart out a Haudenosaunee genealogy of community mobility (465-466). In his commentary on the special issue in which Ackley’s work appears, Philip J. Deloria describes the genealogy Ackley traces as an Oneida “countertradition in which one might perceive a sense of home that is place-based but not place-bound and thus open to a community conceived in the terms of diaspora and national identity” (Deloria, “Commentary” 549).

Former Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation Chad Smith has described the decades that followed the allotment catastrophe as a second “economic Trail of Tears,” another iteration of our earlier, nineteenth-century forced removal from our ancestral homelands in what is also known as the southeastern United States (C. Smith 58). This

economic Trail of Tears compelled many people to migrate to California, including my own. Ackley demonstrates that community-based research can reframe the fraught relationship of diaspora beyond the terms of connection and disconnection by grounding the lived experience of Wisconsin Oneidas in terms of Haudenosaunee knowledges, traditions, and values. In this way, I suggest that by examining family and community experience of California Cherokees, we can avoid reinscribing and reifying allotment's privatized logics of division and instead reframe diasporic relationships to Cherokee lands in terms of our knowledges, traditions, and values that remain place-based but not place-bound.

Allotment Neighborhood: McLain, OK/Van Buren, AR

In conversations with my grandmother Helen, my mother Valerie, and my auntie Pamela Gentry, I learned that our family began our journey away from Cherokee lands and communities, soon after allotment and Oklahoma statehood. Sometime between 1910 and 1920, my great-great-grandmother Rebecca Moton Shamblin sold her allotments in Sequoyah County in the township of Long and moved to the township of McLain, about 40 miles west of the lands our family had occupied since Removal—though McLain is still on reservation lands, near Webbers Falls. In 1913, my great-grandmother Edith was born and grew up on the family farm in McLain. She married Harman Cook in 1928, and, soon afterwards, my grandmother Helen was born in 1929 (US Census). I was not able to confirm our family's residence with the 1940 US Census, but before she passed, Helen told me that her parents Edith and Harman moved the



family to Van Buren, Arkansas, about 50 miles east of McLain and less than 10 miles from our family in Long. She told me the family moved because of severe drought conditions that undermined the family's ability to farm. I suggested that she could be talking about the epic drought of 1934, which coincided with the Great Depression of 1929 and the infamous Dust Bowl conditions that Smith argues contributed to the economic Trail of Tears and that dislocated many farmers, Native and non-Native alike (Cook et al). Stremlau suggests allotment, along with the invasion of settlers it precipitated, led to the soil exhaustion and resource mismanagement that characterize these infamous conditions (6). Helen mentioned that her grandmother Rebecca was widowed young, when her husband Francis died from a vitamin deficiency in 1930, after which Rebecca lived amongst her Cherokee family, including with her daughter Edith and granddaughter Helen in Van Buren and with Edith's sister Eva who remained in McLain, OK.

Around Van Buren, AR, my family began farming along the Arkansas River, but Helen told me the family was again in crisis when the river flooded in 1943. I learned more about that flood and what challenges my family might have endured in a conversation I had with my cousin Bubba. He is the nephew of my grandfather John Gentry who is not Cherokee and whom Helen married in 1945. During my trip, I drove out to meet my grandfather's family, including Bubba, at a produce stand they own

near Westville, AR, about 5 miles southeast of Van Buren. They had gathered there for a potluck celebrating Easter.

April 16, 2022

Westville, Arkansas

Bubba and I teamed up for the egg toss after the children's Easter Egg hunt, and we did pretty well until the hardboiled egg exploded in my hand from the velocity of flying for so long through the air. After, Bubba gave me a tour of the tractors and farm equipment there at the property. While we talked, his barn cats ate up the pieces of fallen egg at our feet. They were sweet cats, but Bubba insisted they had no names. We talked about the Arkansas River, which my family had farmed along for many generations. I mentioned that my grandmother's family had moved to California in 1943 because of a flood, and Bubba confirmed that there had been a terrible flood along the river in '43 and that many who had been farming in the bottomlands, including my grandmother's family, had lost everything. He told me that lately rainfall had been changing and that it was becoming heavier and less regular. More flooding like '43 in the future, he said. We had been facing the river during our conversation and he had been gesturing to different points on the land.

After two destabilizing climate events that left my family without crops to bring to market, my family joined tens of thousands of others and headed to California. Helen



told me that in 1943 three generations of our Cherokee family—my grandmother Helen, her mother Edith, and her grandmother Rebecca—moved to Santa Paula on Chumash lands in Ventura County, California. By 1945, my grandmother Helen had married my grandfather John, Bubba’s uncle, and moved to Sylmar in Los Angeles. Her mother Edith, her aunt Eva, and grandmother Rebecca remained in Santa Paula. Edith worked as a lemon tallier at a lemon packing house, while my great-grandfather Harman served as a ranch helper (US Census). Rebecca continued to live with her daughter, Eva, Edith’s sister, until her death in 1955. I grew up about 15 miles southeast of Santa Paula, in Thousand Oaks, and I had the good fortune of visiting my Santa Paula Cherokee family often. My great-grandmother Edith always had a packed house full of our relations.

Cherokee diaspora in California

My family’s story is typical of many Cherokees who belong to the diaspora in California. Through privatization, allotment introduced a new element of insecurity to Cherokee and other Native communities that made families more vulnerable to climate disasters like the ones my family endured. Privatization attempts to sever relationships to land and community by undermining community and tribal support networks that depend on collective land relations. It disrupts the continuity of agricultural and other food systems, among other communal efforts by which Indigenous people navigate crises. In a privatized world, many Indigenous people depended instead on more precarious

forms of support in a settler-dominated market, such as wage labor, usurious credit schemes, and mortgages (if they could even get them) that contributed to the transfer of lands out of Native hands.²⁰ Among a host of other settler colonial processes and federal Indian policies, the undermining and severing of collective relations to our lands contributed to the massive diaspora of Cherokee citizens now living in California. Despite moving away, communities in California continue to maintain relationships with each other and with communities on Cherokee lands.

The Cherokee women in my family, including my mother, my auntie, and my grandmother, always prioritized being in community with other Cherokees in California even though we lived 1500 miles from our reservation. In the early twentieth century these communities grew as informal associations organized primarily through kinship, regional ties, and where families could find wage jobs, especially in the seasonal fruit picking industry and in the agricultural sector of California's Central Valley. In the 2000s, the Cherokee Nation formally chartered these growing associations into "at-large" or "satellite" communities of Cherokee Nation citizens and other Cherokee peoples. In addition to growing up in an extended family of many Cherokee relatives, I experienced community through these at-large community organizations.

The first of these was the Cherokees of Orange County, which my auntie Pamela Gentry helped co-found, and then the Cherokees of Northern Central Valley (CNCV) when I moved up to the Sacramento Valley for graduate school. With roots going back to the 1990s, CNCV as an organization was officially chartered in 2008 and belongs to



this larger network of at-large community organizations. CNCV organizes membership meetings, hosts speakers and representatives from Cherokee Nation, and serves as an important point of contact for many Cherokee peoples living outside of the reservation and other Cherokee homelands and political territories. Organizations like CNCV can function as nodes within a broader Cherokee space that spans these homelands and political territories.

The last conversation I include cites/sites a place-based but not place-bound notion of Cherokee “home” and “homeland” in diaspora. Like other storied conversations I explore here, it draws on Cherokee grounded normativity and value systems situated within a web of relationships in Cherokee space. In 2021, I interviewed Michael Delano Webb, an Elder, founding member of CNCV, and a Cherokee Nation citizen who has lived in the California diaspora his entire life. This interview was part of a community-engaged research project I facilitated as a Mellon Public Scholar in partnership with CNCV.²¹ Similar to the conversation between Timmons and Manus, our conversation describes the history of our community, but it also articulates important place-based values that have their origin in Cherokee relationships to our homelands. These values continue to thrive and guide communities in diaspora.

In his interview with me, Mike describes the founding of the organization, which began as the Cherokees of Northern California Club before it became officially

chartered by the Cherokee Nation. He mentioned that the first meeting happened in the mid-2000s at a place on Auburn Boulevard that runs northeast from Old North Sacramento along Interstate 80.

And we went in there, and there was quite a gathering that came in. And they were asking people to step up. And so I volunteered. I thought, well, okay, this is gonna be a good time to get involved. We have the names of the people, too. We had Joe and Betty West, Rob Wood. Barbara and Ray Warren. We had Odell and Nancy Landers. We had Jim Crouch. We had me and Liz. And Bob Wizenhunt. Bob was a World War Two hero and wounded veteran, and a really nice man. And so, we became the first council.

I asked Mike why the organization was important to him and why he has remained active in the community for over 15 years. He emphasized the importance of commitment, of cooperative labor with other Cherokees, as a source of motivation:

I said, we [he and his wife Liz] would become the treasurer, only if people were serious about it, and committed to it. And all seven of us were, and have been right up until this day, even with the council changes. People commit and something happens when you get on the council. You become an owner, you become really protective. So everyone did and you know, I used to, you know, I admired everyone. They made long distances to our meetings, Barbara and Ray came down. Betty and Joe came down from snowing and raining and hailing and long drives, and never missed a council meeting. And we were having them



I think monthly at that time for quite a while. And so, you know, when you're committed you feel committed just from the commitment perspective.

This value of commitment, Mike said, is connected to the often-evoked Cherokee value of *SSY gadugi*. *SSY Gadugi* is often used simply to describe a Cherokee ethos of working together, but I have been told that it is not just about working to provide for one's community in need. This collective effort *anticipates* that need and meets it before the need arises. It is not reactionary like other models of charity or mutual aid. Anticipating and then being proactive to fill the needs of community involves a regularity of service and a persistence in providing support. It builds habits, expectations, and dependable structures of care. It strengthens our interdependency with each other. It is in this active, persistent sense that Mike describes the importance of commitment to other Cherokees on the community council and to those the organization serves.

As a value, *SSY gadugi* has always been central to our survival, especially during allotment. Rose Stremlau documents how Cherokee communities in Adair County—the community of Chewey in particular—geographically responded to the events leading up to, that enacted, and that followed from allotment. Since colonial encounter, Cherokee peoples have transformed the orientation of our communities, townships, and kinship systems to navigate settler colonial pressure. Stremlau argues that during

allotment many Cherokee farms, especially those in Adair, functioned as "hubs" of individual and collective work that brought together kin and community in order to survive. These farms in what one might call the Adair allotment neighborhood combined many food systems, including agriculture and livestock husbandry, hunting, fishing, and wild plant harvesting (Stremlau 61). These farms were typically smaller and practiced polycropping that resisted pests, disease, and the turbulence of the market economy (61).

SSY Gadugi is also related to the word ᎠᏚᏍᏔᏅ *sgadugi*, which can mean community or can mean a community's constituent parts like a district, county, or state. ᎠᏚᏍᏔᏅ *Sgadugi* can signify the components of Cherokee sovereignty, and *SSY gadugi* can signify an active ethic for building community institutions like CNCV and more broadly a nationhood predicated on collective effort and sustained cooperation. Through division and separation, allotment attempted to undermine this collective ethic of *SSY gadugi* to build and maintain our ᎠᏚᏍᏔᏅ *disgadugi* (communities) into the future, to anticipate the needs of our (allotment) neighbors. Privatization and allotment hampered our ability to depend on each other, especially in the context of growing diaspora communities away from Cherokee lands. But at the same time, this active sense of building community—this Cherokee value rooted in cooperative labor on and with the land—also enabled us to survive and even thrive through allotment and through shifting relationships to our homelands. In many ways, *SSY gadugi* exemplifies how Cherokee values rooted in grounded normativity can be place-based but not



place-bound; our language and the values it expresses contain the blueprints for living in diaspora, in a circuit of going abroad and coming home. These blueprints, however, serve not only diaspora communities, but also make room for imagining Cherokee relations on Osage and other Indigenous lands, which are now home to Cherokee Nation and United Keetoowah Band. The blueprints do not collapse the place-based nature of Cherokee values into place-bound terms of political territory. The settler colonial violence of our forced removal from our homelands in the southeast redounded especially upon Osage communities living in the region that our reservation now occupies. In his play *The Cherokee Night* (1932), Cherokee dramatist Lynn Riggs evokes this compounding violence through the figure of Claremore Mound, a mountain that we might add to the geography covered thus far.²² In this article, I employ a dialectic of allotment stories spanning time and place within a multi-sited Cherokee world to avoid possibly reproducing the violence of Osage displacement. These storied conversations refuse to conflate place-based values like *SSY gadugi* with a notion of a fixed, place-bound set of Cherokee land relations that disavow other layered Indigenous land relations and sovereignties, including the Osage.²³

Community Elders like Mike Webb have continually renewed and sustained the role that at-large community organizations like CNCV have had in connecting

Cherokee people across the many sites of Cherokee life—in our original homelands in the southeast, on our reservation in northeastern Oklahoma, and in diaspora. This sustained collective effort, this *SSY gadugi*, has been a significant means by which Cherokee people living in diaspora have anticipated the changing needs of our future, as we increasingly live away from—and across!—our homelands. To those living in diaspora, "homeland" is both an imagined place of belonging (e.g., our ancestral lands in what is also known as the southeastern US) and sometimes a political homeland in northeastern Oklahoma.²⁴ Family stories like the ones my grandmother Helen has told me and community histories like those told by Mike Webb are cherished allotment diaspora stories that teach us how to be Cherokee across our homelands.

The conversations and stories between Cherokee people that I bring together in this article all engage with the changes that allotment introduced to Cherokee relationships to our lands and communities both on our reservation and in diaspora. Although these conversations take place across time and space, when brought together they reveal the interwoven strands of Cherokee storytelling, history, language, and community-building that maintain these relationships. By forging connections among oral history narratives, critical reflection on personal encounters with my family's allotment homeplaces, and community stories, I trace an enduring Cherokee grounded normativity in Cherokee values of *SSY gadugi* and land relations to our mountains, waterways, and cemetery places. Bringing together these different allotment stories, this article cites and sites our communities beyond allotment's



regime of division and alienation from Cherokee homelands. In the face of allotment's forms of severance, these storied conversations illustrate Cherokee allotment survivance—the multiple ways in which Cherokee people maintain and sustain our communities in the aftermath of a colonial privatization scheme that relied on our disintegration.

Notes

¹ The trip was generously supported by a grant from the American Philosophical Society's Philips Fund for Native American Research, which I received during the 2020-2021 round of funding.

² Using the term, "reservation," to describe Cherokee lands in what is now Oklahoma is a relatively recent development. For many Cherokee people, reclaiming the term is an affirmation of enduring sovereignty in the face of ongoing settler colonialism rather than an expression that idealizes or romanticizes our land base. In 2020, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *McGirt v. Oklahoma* that the reservations of the so-called Five Civilized Tribes, including the Muscogee (Creek), Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole Nations, were never disestablished by Congress after allotment through the Oklahoma Enabling Act of 1906, which laid the groundwork for the creation of the state of Oklahoma in 1907. The use of "reservation" is an assertion that allotment and Oklahoma statehood never extinguished the Native Nations of Indian Territory.

³ This same auntie was a founding member of the Cherokees of Orange County in California. Although she's no longer active in that group, she was the first to teach me what Cherokee community organizing could look like. Since then, I've been honored to be a part of the Cherokees of Northern Central Valley, based in the Sacramento Valley in California, and now the Cherokee Community of Puget Sound serving Western Washington.

⁴ These newspapers include the *Cherokee Advocate*, *Muscogee Phoenix*, *Tahlequah Arrow*, and others. See Littlefield and Paris for a compendium of American Indian and Alaska Native newspapers and periodicals, which includes information, history, and locations of Indian Territory newspapers.

⁵ See especially Debo, Otis, Prucha, and McDonnell.

⁶ See Radocay for work on how Cherokee people repurpose the colonial cartographies of allotment. See also Justice, *Indigenous Literatures* pp. 192-204.

⁷ See Vizenor for a discussion of his concept of "survance," which denotes narratives that carve out active Indigenous presence within and against settler colonial erasures, including those enacted by allotment and colonial privatization.

⁸ See also L. Simpson for an elaboration of grounded normativity in Indigenous political resurgence and the everyday activity of Indigenous theorizing and organizing.

⁹ My mentor at UC Davis, Beth Rose Middleton Manning, insisted that I keep a journal. I am incredibly grateful for that suggestion and for all her mentorship over the years.

¹⁰ For more on stories of Indigenous deficiency see Justice, *Indigenous Literatures* pp. 2-6. Also see A. Simpson for her discussion of an Indigenous politics of refusal that contests forms of tribal and settler national belonging delimited by a settler-dominated politics of recognition.

¹¹ Maps retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2011585467/>

¹² See Radocay for work on allotment geographies and survey maps. Also see Palmer and Ruppel.

¹³ See Basso.

¹⁴ See Fitzgerald for a discussion on the importance of "land narratives" to Indigenous place-making and the production of sovereign landscapes.

¹⁵ For an overview of Cherokee stickball and its spiritual and historical significance, see Mooney and Zogry.

¹⁶ See Ambler for a discussion of Duke-funded oral history projects at other universities.

¹⁷ For a retrospective of the Doris Duke Program, see Penfield. And for a description of the scope and sequence of the program, see Jasper.

¹⁸ Checkerboarding describes an important consequence of allotment: as allotments passed from Native to non-Native ownership, the continuity of the land took the form of a checkerboard pattern with some parcels still belonging to Native families and others to non-Native enterprises.

¹⁹ Angela's mother, Betty, passed away a couple of weeks after our Sparrow Hawk hike.

²⁰ See Debo for an overview of the fraud, financial insecurity, and other hardships that Native people faced during the allotment of Indian Territory.

²¹ The project titled "Cherokee Diaspora Stories" is a multimedia collection of personal, family, and community stories about the diverse experiences of the Cherokee diaspora that now resides on Nisenan, Miwok, Patwin, and other California Indian lands.

²² In Scene One, we learn that the Mound was the site of a battle in 1817 between Osage and Cherokee "Old Settlers" who had moved west as pressure from US settler colonialism intensified.

²³ For work that richly explores Osage land relations, histories, and experiences, see Dennison, Mathews, and Warrior *Tribal Secrets and The People*.

²⁴ See Smithers.



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