

Interviewee: Joyce Conseen Dugan

Interviewer: Jim Farris

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Location:

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Jim Farris: I'm Jim Farris, doing an interview with the principal chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Joyce Conseen Dugan, April 18, 1997. Chief, when did tourism begin on the Qualla Boundary?

Joyce Dugan: I think commercial, commercial tourism as we know it today probably began in the '20's. From what I've been able to determine, 1926 is the first time that we know of that someone wore a Plains headdress in town and, that was attractive to tourists. I think when Great Smoky Mountain National Park was built brought on the greatest advent of tourism. Prior to that, we were what you might say dizzling in it. But we had some visionaries who saw the great potential for tourism when the park was built because of the people coming, we were at the gateway to the park to the Great Smoky Mountain Park, plus the Blue Ridge Parkway. And that opened it up for greater development because people would come, and they realized how many people were interested in visiting a reservation. But I think the greatest, the biggest impact came when the park was built.

JF: Okay. What have been the effects of tourism on the Qualla Boundary?

JD: Well, in regards to our infrastructure, I think it's been a benefit, because it's provided tribal levy to the government to provide infrastructure needs such as water and sewer, sanitation, lease protection, emergency medical services. Now those are the things that you, you would generally say that tourism has impacted on us. But I think it's caused us, as I've stated before to many groups, it caused us to compromise our traditional values, because we had to appeal to that tourism population, for the tourist population. When they came to a reservation, they wanted to see the headdresses, and the tipis, and by and large, we gave them what they wanted to see. Because it was a means to keep them coming. And we allowed the real meaning of who are to be compromised, rather than give them truly what we stood for and the true history of Cherokee, although that was in, the you know, some of our attractions, the big feathered headdresses and the fancy dancing in Cherokee, downtown Cherokee, those things were not Cherokee. So, and we also even allowed craft shops and motels to give, what we considered today derogatory names or those stereotypical Indian names, to their shops. And no one argued about that because it was I think for years we had lived in such poverty and no one, no employment, now people were able to work, even if it was just in the summer. So, there was very little argument about it. I think traditionally Cherokee people have been more of an accepting tribe, and it has not been until recent years when we began to see what was happening and we said, we can't allow this to continue to erode our culture. So, I think that the tourism had a tremendous effect on how we even viewed ourselves. And we had to compromise those traditional values with the need to survive. And we felt at that time that the need to survive was

greater than those traditional values.

JF: How has tourism helped or harmed the Cherokee people?

JD: Well, again, I think that's just what I've answered to that question is the same. It's helped us economically, we can't deny that. While on one hand we may resent the heavy traffic flows, and people looking at us like we're something very unique, while we may resent that, on the other hand we recognize that again those tourists are what pay for some of the services we enjoy. For instance, the water and sewer, and the trash pickups, and governmental services that we're able to provide due to the levies. But I think what I just answered would answer that same question that, again, we've compromised our culture.

JF: Do the Cherokees encourage any particular kind of tourism?

JD: In the past I think that we've encouraged the, we were appealing to those drop-in visitors, and though, and to a moderate to a lower income visitor, because the shops were filled with a lot of trinkets and things, not Cherokee-made, but those kinds of things that the lower income could afford. And I think that brought on, and probably this may be an answer to the previous question, it brought on a decline of our own native crafts being sold. Because we, when we make native crafts, we have to charge a good price for them. And I think we're seeing fewer, or for a while we saw fewer and fewer of those crafts being made, because people were buying the junky trinkets. What was the question?

JF: Do the Cherokees encourage any particular kind?

JD: Okay. So, in the past, we, I think we were not very selective. However, we had some, again, those visionaries who came in and saw the need, when they recognized the popularity of the Cherokees, I think they saw the need for something that would portray the history and give the true picture. And I think that brought on the drama *Unto These Hills*, and that brought, opened, brought along the opening of the Oconaluftee Indian Village. And the Museum, so that we could portray as close as we could, the true story of the Cherokees. But at the same time, we were allowing those various shops to open up. I think in present times, that it is critical that we do everything we can to preserve the culture, cultural flavor of who we are, through whatever means. Through gift shops, through new developments. We'd like to see more attractions that would appeal to the family, but that have a cultural emphasis. We'd like to see more opportunities for people to come in and learn the true story and it be more hands-on, interactive experiences. I think that's what they need at this point. We have many people throughout this country who claim Cherokee lineage. We don't deny that, you know, but we hear it so often that we sometimes smile when we hear it, but because the Cherokees were so widespread throughout the area of 6 states, naturally we have to assume that there's Cherokee influence coming from all those states. So, I think people out there are really craving to know more about the true history. I know that from my role as principal chief, we get calls and letters daily from people who are just interested in knowing, knowing things like

traditional medicines, what kind of medicines do we use. Just anything that we would give them. They're not so much interested in the shops, what kind of shops do you have, do you have, what kind of motels do you have. The questions we get are those pertaining to our history, our traditions, our arts and crafts. The culture in general. So, I think that the time is right, right now for us to capitalize on that interest. And at the same time, we feel that we also need to attract that high, that middle to higher income family. They don't want to come here and see junk. They want an enrichment, an enriching experience. Many of them are more educated, and certainly have more means, economic means. And they, they're not interested in going and buying the trinkets so much as they're interested in experiences. So, what we're looking at, and have been talking about is how, what do we need to do to provide them with that enriching experience that is interactive and that will keep them here longer than one day, just passing through on the way somewhere, that would cause them to want to come here and spend 3 or 4 days. We need to capitalize on our natural resources. We have a beautiful river, we have clean air right now, and somehow, we need to bring people here to not only enjoy the attractions, but to make that the natural environment an attraction too. So, with all the development that's going on we have a formidable task to try to balance those two, because as a tribe we have to ensure that what we offer is culturally relevant, not simply because it's what the tourist, we think the tourist want, but because what we want to give to them, so that when they leave here, they're richer for it.

JF: Okay. In what ways, do you think the opening of the casino will change the impact of tourism on the Cherokee reservation?

JD: Well certainly I think through all the studies that have been conducted, we know there's going to be a tremendous growth in the numbers of people that come. We will probably see a different kind of people coming in. We're gonna see I think fewer, or more retirees I'm hoping that choose to come. I hope we don't see fewer families. Because again I think our task is to make sure that we still appeal to the family, not just to the gambler. Time will tell I think, how well we accomplish this. And again, we want those people to stay for more than one day. We want them to stay and enjoy, what I hope is that the casino is another attraction for daddy or mom or whatever grandpa that comes with a family through our area. I hope it's another attraction and it's not the attraction. And that I think is what, for instance the Cherokee Historical Association, is concerned about. The Museum is concerned about that. But I think if we meshed them all together and we worked together, we would still be able to attract people because of being Cherokee, not because of [them]. I know that's, I may be naive at this point in thinking it can be done, but I still truly believe that it can. We had people coming here before we really even put effort into it. When we were just throwing up junk shops, you know, just throwing up a building and selling something, people were coming here. So, I'm hoping they will continue to, and we just have to monitor, monitor it closely. We have people already monitoring it, and preparing for it, and I think as soon as the casino opens, we're gonna have to be watching it, and keeping some data, to make sure that everything is balanced. And so, that we can begin to develop plans when it becomes unbalanced.

JF: What do you see happening to the individual Cherokees as more and more people come in? I mean do you see a cultural loss?

JD: Well we've been, you know we have suffered a cultural loss for many years, and I think it was largely due to tourism, and because of having to accommodate to a different world around us in order to survive economically. I have seen a deterioration of our culture, you know, in my own lifetime, so I know that it's inevitable. I don't see the casino impacting that. I don't see more people impacting that, any greater than it's been impacted already. I hope it's impacted less because I think we're at a day and time when we realize how serious it is if we don't make an effort to maintain what we have and to restore what we've lost as much as possible. In recent years, I've seen a resurgence of that cultural awareness that I didn't see, I didn't have when I was growing up, I, in school as a child. There was nothing about our culture, and nothing about our history ever taught to us. And that happened all the time. Now we're seeing it integrated in the, into the curriculum. So, the Cherokee history and culture is being given the importance it needs to be given. So, I don't see, if we continue that, I don't see that we're going to be impacted any greater, you know with greater numbers coming in. Because of this renewal of effort to preserve and protect what we have that was not there say even 10, even 5 years ago, or 10 years ago.

JF: What do you want the tourist to learn about Cherokee during their visit?

JD: I'd like for them to learn about our history and again I'd like for more of that to be interactive. We have, for instance, the Indian village, we have the Museum, we have the drama, but there's very little opportunity for them to interact with people in learning who we are today. Learning about us, you know, to learn our desires, and our needs and our dreams are the same as theirs. We would like to see more done, for instance, at the ceremonial grounds. That's used very little, and it could be used more effectively for learning camps, craft camps so that you know, tourists could come in, bring their children, let them learn the basics of basketmaking, the basics of pottery, the basics of beadwork. There are many opportunities there that if we can put our minds and our resources together and put some money into it, to, even that place, the ceremonial grounds would be a drawing card. So, I want them to learn about us, and what a rich history we have. The drama is good, but it's embellished for drama purpose, for dramatical reasons. They need to learn the true story of it, and they need to learn the impact we had in this whole area. There are many wonderful stories in our history of people. They need to learn more about Sequoyah. Some of our leaders of the past. And of the future. I think many of our people have sat back and thought well, it's tourist season, it's time to head for the hills and you know, tend to the gardens and then we'll come back out in October. But I think it's time that we became more interactive. If tourists are gonna learn who we really are, they're gonna have to hear it from the real people. And not through videos and not through any kinds of attractions that we have, but it's gotta come from the real people. The principal people.

JF: What images do you want the tourist to take back with them when they leave

Cherokee?

JD: I think I've alluded to most of that throughout this. I want them to leave here with a positive image. There are some things that I have concerns about. I don't like to see the bears in captivity. That's one of the areas that I think we need to look at in the near future. That is not a Cherokee traditional way, and it bothers me that for tourism purposes, we're still promoting those practices. But I want them to leave with a positive experience that this is a good place to visit, the water is good, the air is pure, the people are friendly and giving, and I want them to think that this is a good place to come back to, and they can tell their friends, yes, this is a good place to visit. I think most people would like to have the serenity of a quiet neighborhood year-round. But realistically, we're in a business that doesn't allow that. And no matter how much we may complain about traffic and people invading our territory and our space throughout the summer, we nonetheless I think, by and large, most of us realize that we couldn't survive without it. It has helped us survive for many years and it's not anything we can overlook.

JF: Okay. Thank you very much.

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Recorded Interview Written
Consent Form Mountain
Heritage Center Western
Carolina University

This recorded interview is part of the Mountain Heritage Center's ongoing oral history research project to recover and preserve the history of Southern Appalachia. An ever-increasing number of people are being asked to record their knowledge and memories. The resulting tapes and transcriptions are archived at the Mountain Heritage Center for future use and become resources which are used for a variety of educational purposes (e.g., quotation in writings, as parts of sound tracks for audiovisual presentations, or in instruction). The tapes and transcriptions are not kept confidential and are available to qualified researchers. Your participation in this interview is voluntary, and you may stop at any time.

The Principal investigator is Dr. Tyler Blethen. If you have any questions, please call him at 704-227-7129. You may contact the WCU Institutional Review Board at any time should you feel that your rights have been violated:

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Date: 4/18/97

Witness: Paula J. (Last name unclear)

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Interview Date: 4-18-97
Interview Place: Chris' Office
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