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Disparate Cultures in Contact

ROWENA McCLINTON

The Brainerd Journal: A Mission to the Cherokees, 1817–1823, ed. Joyce B. Phillips, Paul Gary Phillips, and Philip Viles. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998. xx + 586 pp. \$55.00, ISBN 0-8032-3718-9.

An important primary source for Cherokee culture, *The Brainerd Journal: A Mission to the Cherokees, 1817–1823*, is composed of notes written almost daily by two New England missionaries, Cyrus Kingsbury and Ard Hoyt. Their contribution to Cherokee history is valuable because, other than government accounts that parallel this same era, little literature survives about these crucial years preceding forced removal in 1838–39.

As Anglo encroachment on Cherokee land and resources intensified in the early 1800s, Cherokee chiefs increasingly turned to missionaries to teach their young people English, not Christianity. They believed that missionaries could provide ways, the “arts of civilization,” to deal with the invading frontier settlers. The first missionaries to enter the Cherokee nation to establish mission schools were the Moravians, followed by the Presbyterians.¹ In 1817, Cherokee leaders invited New England Congregational missionaries, sponsored by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions based in Boston, to open a mission school near present-day Chattanooga. The Brainerd Mission, or Chickamauga, was named for the well-known New England missionary David Brainerd and lasted from 1817 to 1838, when the U.S. government forced Cherokees from their ancestral domain.²

Throughout the early 1800s, land tenure was the most difficult problem the Cherokees faced, and thus the *Journal* discloses just how critical the years preceding removal actually were. It was kept from 1817 to 1823, after which the missionaries wrote of their experiences in letters to their benefactors, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. These *Journal* entries are a mother lode for ethnographic material and for descriptions of

the dailiness of community life at Brainerd.

Because the Mission housed hundreds of Cherokee boys and girls, visitors abounded, and naturally they told the missionaries about encountering various Anglo pressures to abandon the southeast for land over the Arkansas River. The records reveal that whites harassed Cherokees constantly by stealing their cattle, horses, and hogs. Other missionary observations divulge early nineteenth-century Cherokee insights into U.S. policymakers’ expulsion intents in the Federal City: The Father (the president) sent plows and hoes for the Cherokees to learn the “arts of civilization” and told the Cherokees to plant, not hunt.³ “Now the Father⁴ hands out rifles and says to us there is plenty of hunting ground around the Arkansas River.”⁵ So critical was the topic of land retention that Second Principal Chief Charles Hicks told the missionaries that “many of the people are very anxious to receive instruction and their anxiety is increased from the conviction that their very existence as a people depends upon it” (p. 73). Yet many other parents thought it futile for their children to receive an education because “white people were determined to have the country” (p. 95). But the *Journal* relates that Cherokee leadership remained firm in its conviction to retain its historic terrain: “Cherokee chiefs appear determined not to part with their land on any conditions” (pp. 9, 386).

The *Journal* also mentions that the Cherokee National Council along with Principal Chief Pathkiller demanded that Cherokee children stay in the Mission until their schooling met missionaries’ satisfaction. Concerned about getting Cherokee youth educated, the Cherokee National Council forbade any child to leave school without the permission of the missionaries or else be fined. Schooling was free to the Cherokees so long as they obeyed Cherokee law. One Cherokee mother, desperate to stay within Cherokee legalities, used a rod to punish her child, who did not want to stay at the Mission any longer. Corporal punishment, a European innovation, was rare among Indian peoples.

Exacerbating additional tensions was missionary presence in general. Their living in the Cherokee nation led to factionalism, because Cherokees relayed misleading infor-

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mation and hearsay that added the needed fuel to cause dissension in Cherokee ranks. The missionaries reported that a few Cherokees claimed that they would not send their children to Brainerd Mission because Second Principal Chief Charles Hicks benefited financially according to the number of children enrolled.

Dividing the nation even further were the malevolent rumors floating throughout the Cherokee community about the Congregational missionaries. Some Cherokees believed that missionaries would kidnap their children. The *Journal* also reveals how Cherokees circulated other deceptions about Brainerd through the following story: A few Cherokees spread lies about the school and reported that many of the Mission's children remained sick most of the time. Attributing the stories to Satan, the missionaries attempted to frustrate the effects of misinformation since they were always concerned with their reputation in the Cherokee nation. Often the *Journal* recounts that the missionaries reiterated Cherokee leaders' confirmations: They are "thoroughly convinced of the truth and excellency of our most holy religion" (p. 198). In reality, strain and stress in Cherokee society persisted and thus complicated and impeded the "civilizing" process. While the entries reveal missionary empathy for the Cherokees and observations of Cherokee culture, many of the accounts actually deal with missionary health problems. They contracted numerous ailments; details about methods used to cure them are abundant throughout the *Journal*.

Additionally, the missionaries were ethnocentric and aired their feelings of superiority toward the Cherokees. As a polygamist society, the Cherokees naturally had marital values and practices different from those of the missionaries. Frequently, the missionaries viewed Cherokees as "whore mongers and adulterers God will judge" (p. 47). The "civilizers" disclosed their dismay and intolerance for Cherokee customs such as Cherokee Ball Play, "heathen" events that have no place in "civilized" society. As agents of change, they were intractable against students who were absent due to Ball Play. One Tilman Rose, who had the longest tenure of all students and spoke good English, merited expulsion because not only had he attended Ball Play but he had led others to do likewise. Inadvertently, the *Journal* unveils the perseverance of Cherokee traditions even when Cherokee leaders and missionaries alike were attempting to rid Cherokees of time-honored customs in order to attain Anglo respect.

Such prejudice on the part of the New England missionaries, however, went a long way toward preventing more Cherokees from being baptized. The *Journal* dis-

closes that out of more than three hundred students who attended the school off and on during the five years from 1817 to 1823, only eleven joined the Mission church. The diaries report that the most notable Cherokee student converts were John Arch and Catharine Brown,⁶ both of whom served the Mission as interpreters. Additionally, since they found the Mission's "civilization" program friendly substitutes for Cherokee customs, these two pupils embraced Christianity and the "arts of civilization" and urged others to follow the same paths.

Furthermore, "civilizing" Cherokees meant making them into whites by ridding them of traditional ways—changing males from hunters into farmers and girls from agriculturalists into weavers and spinners. In order to execute the "civilization" process, the Mission contained more than one hundred American people by 1823, and consisted of forty buildings: a storeroom (dry goods store), gristmill, sawmill, looms, and blacksmith shop in addition to a church and houses for missionaries and students. The *Journal's* numerous diary entries reveal generous gifts to promote the Mission's "civilizing" aim, mainly from New England patrons, who often sent money and supplies. The latter consisted of various items such as books and tracts, combs, stocking yarn, needles, silk, and ink stands. Money was used to buy horses, hire blacksmiths, and build cabins. Frequently the missionaries recorded how Cherokee chiefs, Charles Hicks and Pathkiller, continually praised the Mission because of its "civilizing" influence in the Cherokee nation.

This carefully edited edition of *The Brainerd Journal* is an enlightening aperture into early nineteenth-century Cherokee culture. The *Journal* itself is complemented by introductory chapters, endnotes, a geographical index, and student biographical sketches. The editors chose to edit according to prevailing standards for documentary editors: intrude as little as possible into the original manuscript. They recorded crossed-out text, permitting the missionaries' original thoughts to be read and thereby imparting finer detail. For instance, the reader can discern how a sickness, scrofula, particularly rampant among Cherokees, affects the body: one of his legs was "afflicted with lameness . . . occasioned by white swelling" (p. 230).

Available to researchers until recently only in microfilm or in the original manuscript at the Houghton Library at Harvard, this thoroughly annotated transcription of the *Journal* will appeal to ethnohistorians, historians of the Early Republic, religious scholars, and a general audience. Since parts of the *Journal* pinpoint disparate cultures in contact, a subject of national concern, case studies can be extrapolated for college or secondary classroom use.

What makes this work particularly significant is that co-editors Gary Phillips and Philip Viles are direct descendants of the Mission's first superintendent, the Reverend Ard Hoyt, and Assistant Principal Chief George Lowery. Along with Joyce Phillips, they have contributed greatly to our understanding of a bygone era. This *Journal* sheds remarkable insight into a time when Anglo opportunism went unbridled, and Americans backed by an aggressive government looked upon indigenous people as obstacles to progress and "civilization."

All that remains of the Brainerd Mission today is the Brainerd cemetery, flanked by a shopping center and an asphalt parking lot, along Brainerd Road in present-day Chattanooga, near Chickamauga Creek, the northern border of the ancient Cherokee nation. Cherokee visitors frequent the cemetery, maintained by the Chickamauga Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, one of few structural reminders of their past.

Notes

1. In 1801, the Unity of the Brethren, or the Moravians, established Springplace Mission, a site in present-day northwest Georgia. Springplace Mission closed in 1833, when Georgia citizens took Moravian dwellings by force due to an 1832 Georgia land lottery. For information about the Springplace Mission, see Rowena

McClinton, "The Moravian Springplace Mission Among the Cherokees at Springplace, Georgia" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1996); William Gerald McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries: 1789-1839* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); and the Reverend Edmund Schwarze, *History of the Moravian Missions Among Southern Indian Tribes of the United States* (Bethlehem: Times Publishing Co, 1923; reprint, Grove, Oklahoma: Stauber Books, 1999).

In 1804, the Presbyterians started a mission school near present-day Maryville, Tennessee, and Cherokees closed it in 1810 because the headmaster, the Reverend Gideon Blackburn, traded whiskey with southeast Indian tribes, an illegal business. McLoughlin, "Parson Blackburn's Whiskey," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 57, no. 4 (Winter 1979): 427-45.

2. For a definitive study of the Brainerd Mission, see Robert Sparks Walker, *Torchlights to the Cherokees* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931; reprint, Johnson City, Tennessee: Overmountain Press, 1993).

3. President George Washington and Secretary of War Henry Knox established the first official U.S. Indian policies, whereby the government sponsored missionary efforts and sent Indian agents to various tribes with "civilization" tools such as hoes, plows, spinning wheels, and looms.

4. James Monroe.

5. *The Brainerd Journal*, 60, hereafter cited by page number in the text.

6. For a definitive study of Catharine Brown, see Rufus Anderson, *Memoir of Catharine Brown: A Christian Indian of the Cherokee Nation* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1825; reprint, Signal Mountain: Mountain Press, n.d.).

Institute for the Editing of Historical Documents March 2000

Contingent on funding, the twenty-ninth annual Institute for the Editing of Historical Documents will be held 19-24 June 2000 in Madison, Wisconsin. Jointly sponsored by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, and the University of Wisconsin, the Institute will provide detailed theoretical and practical instruction in documentary editing and publication.

The Institutes have been extraordinarily productive, providing training to more than 450 participants to date. Of these 68 are heading or have headed important documentary publication projects and many others have worked as full-time historical editors. Institute graduates also include college and university faculty, editors of state historical publications and staff editors of other publications, archivists, manuscript librarians, government historians, and graduate students from many universities. The 15-18 interns meet every morning and most afternoons for lectures and presentations by experienced editors. Three resident advisors will be available for consultation during the term of the Institute.

The 2000 faculty and their topics are Michael Stevens (State Historical Society of Wisconsin), introduction to documentary editing; Richard L. Leffler (Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution), transcription; Esther Katz (The Margaret Sanger Papers), document selection, promoting an edition, and fundraising; Robert Rosenberg (The Papers of Thomas A. Edison), annotation and electronic editions; John P. Kaminski (Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution), indexing; and Nancy C. Essig (University Press of Virginia), publishing an edition. Katz, Leffler, and Rosenberg will serve as resident advisors.

There will be no charge for tuition. Single accommodations for the interns are provided at no cost in the Wisconsin Center Guest House on the University of Wisconsin campus. The Guest House, which is run much like a hotel, is two blocks from the State Historical Society, where the daily meetings are held.

Application to the Institute is competitive, with numerous applicants every year from all over the country. Further information and application forms are available from the NHPRC, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. 20408; phone (202) 501-5610; e-mail: nhprc@arch1.nara.gov. The application deadline is March 15, 2000.