
Reviewed by Aubrey Lauersdorf (Auburn University)
Published on H-AmIndian (August, 2023)
Commissioned by F. Evan Nooe (University of South Carolina Lancaster)

Scholarship on Cherokee resistance to removal often focuses on the Cherokee Nation instead of the smaller and more fragmented communities that would organize as the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in the 1860s. In Their Determination to Remain, historical archaeologist Lance Greene bridges the archival and archaeological records to examine the experiences of some Cherokees who avoided removal, including the slaveholding, cross-cultural Welch family and more than one hundred Cherokee people who formed Welch's Town on their land between 1839 and 1852. Greene's book is most successful at offering a rich portrait of the Welch family's experiences and decisions during and after the removal, including their development of a household with many of the outward trappings of a typical Southern plantation that was nonetheless a “hybrid space” (p. 133) incorporating long-standing Cherokee values and material culture.

Greene's first chapter provides an overview of Cherokee lives and politics in the early republic, which is enriched by his description of the material culture of several Cherokee households. Ranging from Chewkeeaskee's modest cabin to the sprawling Vann plantation, these differing lifestyles reveal the wide array of adaptations that Cherokee families made to the threat of US expansion and settler colonialism in the early nineteenth century. Greene primarily focuses on those Cherokees who accepted allotments from the United States in 1819, thus severing their ties to the Cherokee Nation. While scholars often consider these Cherokees to be more “traditional,” Greene argues that the most significant traditional value embraced by this group was localism—a belief in “town and community autonomy” (p. 5) and an “adherence to the role of the clan system” (p. 10). This localism, Greene explains, was threatened when leaders quickly began “converting the Cherokee Nation into a capitalist, patriarchal society” that “limited the powers of autonomous Cherokee towns and outlawed practices that had been Cherokee tradition for centuries” (p. 8). While the formation of the Cherokee Nation certainly included profound changes that were met with resistance by some Cherokee people, Greene might have nuanced this discussion with inclusion of recent scholarship that reveals how the Cherokee Nation also preserved long-standing values, such as Cherokee historian Julie Reed’s 2016 Serving the Nation: Cherokee Sovereignty and Social Welfare, 1800-1907.

According to Greene, the value of localism helps explain why the Welch family allowed displaced Cherokee people to live on their land fol-
ollowing the US government’s efforts to remove them between 1836 and 1838. In chapter 2, Greene traces the resistance of those Cherokees who concealed themselves in the mountains to avoid removal. Approximately four hundred Cherokees were successful, although their families faced immense suffering and many deaths. The Welch family were not exempt from this suffering. Although Betty Welch’s whiteness allowed her to avoid incarceration, her Cherokee husband John Welch and her son were captured and held alongside other Cherokee men. The nine Black people enslaved by the Welch family were also incarcerated, and three died. After John’s release, the Welch family were forced to repurchase their land at a state auction and transfer it to Betty’s name to protect it from further threats by the US government and land-hungry white settlers. With their land secure, the Welch family allowed thirty Cherokee families to build Welch’s Town there in 1839. Drawing on archival and archaeological sources, Greene reconstructs the formation of this town in chapter 3.

Greene’s discussion of Betty Welch’s role in this process will be of especial interest to scholars of nineteenth-century women’s history. Greene shows how Betty Welch’s whiteness and cross-cultural marriage put her in a unique position. Her whiteness provided certain “unassailable rights” that shielded her from the violence faced by her Cherokee husband and neighbors and allowed her to obtain power of attorney and legal ownership of Welch family property (p. 5). While Betty’s cross-cultural relationships and defense of the Cherokees drew the ire of white settlers and officials, Greene argues that she likely earned respect from her Cherokee neighbors, who traditionally held women in high esteem. Although Betty herself was illiterate and left no records of her own, in chapter 5, Greene adeptly uses archival sources to show how the Welch family continued to leverage Betty’s status as a white woman to subvert further attempts to undermine their landownership and remove the Cherokees from Welch’s Town through the 1840s.

In the absence of documents that reveal Betty’s perspective, Greene’s material culture analysis demonstrates the complexities of her and the Welch family’s relationship to both white planter and Cherokee culture. In chapter 4, Greene examines the cultural hybridity of the Welch plantation, using archaeology to “see how they conceived of their place in the social environment” in which they lived (p. 16). This included the excavation of “three subsurface cellar pits” in a structure first built as the Welch home in 1822 and then used as a kitchen until 1850 (p. 17). Greene’s excavations reveal that the Welch family “outwardly presented themselves as westernized plantation owners” while continuing to use some long-standing Cherokee objects. Betty might have rejected the pottery made by Cherokee women, which was affordable and widely available, in favor of a smattering of mismatched Western-style ceramics, but she still served her husband and children traditional Cherokee foods. Throughout his life, John Welch smoked from traditional carved pipes despite easy access to Western alternatives. One is left to wonder the extent to which John Welch guided the family’s hybrid diet and material culture as well as the risks they undertook to protect Cherokee families on their lands. Indeed, soon after John Welch died in 1852, the Cherokee community living on the Welch plantation dispersed, a decision Greene attributes more to the diminished threat of removal than to the death of John.

Throughout A Determination to Remain, Greene also uses archival and archaeological records to reconstruct the lives and decisions of the “ordinary” Cherokees of Welch’s town as well as the Black people enslaved by the Welch family. However, Greene’s sources make this a difficult task. While Greene notes that the archival record privileges white and elite Cherokee perspectives, he perhaps overstates the extent to which the archaeological record he draws on “challenges
archival silences” and can “escape the political biases that guide the creation of historic documents” (p. 4). Like the archival record, this archaeological record privileges those who had more things to leave behind and who lived in more permanent structures—in this case, the Welch family. Consequently, Greene is not always able to offer the rich portrait of Welch’s Town or the enslaved people living on the Welch plantation as he is Betty, John, and the Welch children. Still, his attempts to integrate their experiences into the narrative are commendable. Perhaps most compelling is a fictional account informed by the work of scholars like Marissa Fuentes and Tiya Miles, which uses both archaeological and archival sources to imagine how these three groups (the Welch family, enslaved people, and Welch’s Town) came together in 1850 to dismantle the kitchen building that was the focus of Greene’s excavations.

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