

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **The Great Smokies**

At the edge of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park there is the village of Cherokee, the headquarters of the Cherokee Indian Reservation. From a delightful experience in house touring in Charleston we motored over the Blue Ridge mountains to arrive in Cherokee where we spent the night and toured the village and then proceeded on to Gatlinburg where we visited the Pi Beta Phi craft shop and viewed the handcraft of the mountain people.

Cherokee has a population of 500 persons, but when the summertime comes it is more than doubled with the visitors who arrive to occupy the popular hotels and motels nearby and at Gatlinburg. On the Indian reservation there are 3,000 Cherokees, remnants of the once powerful tribe which originally owned much of the land in Tennessee, South Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, and North Carolina. The reservation covers about 63,000 acres.

We visited the Museum of the Cherokees which is truly an educational experience for the whole family. Here has been collected the finest display of Cherokee Indian artifacts in existence. The curator informed us, with much pride, that the Indians themselves had provided most of the valuable and interesting material. Rescued from burial grounds and ancient camp sites dating back 10,000 years, these artifacts trace the Indians' history from the time of the Dawn Age to the present.

The National Park Service assisted the Cherokees Historical Association, a non-profit organization, in its ambitious program for the preservation of the history and traditions of the Cherokee Indians. The association also sponsors a living museum "The Oconaluftee Indian Village" and the Cherokee Indian drama "Unto These Hills," given each summer from late June until early September. Of course, we regretted that our visit was too early in the year to see this drama, which is declared to be most beautiful and entertaining.

In Gatlinburg, the principal Tennessee entrance to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, we drove for two miles along the banks of the Little Pigeon River at the foot of Mount Le Conte, all within the city limits of this once tiny community. It is now a popular mountain resort area. Young dogwood trees, now in full bloom,

line the city street, and the surrounding mountains are literally covered with the flowering tree and redbud also in full bloom at this season. It is a sight never to be forgotten.

Gatlinburg has also become an important handicraft center for the Southern Highlands area. Outstanding skill is shown in weaving, pottery and basket making. The Pi Beta Phi Settlement School is situated here, and we delighted in our visit to the craft shop which the fraternity sponsors.

Pi Beta Phi, the first national sorority for women, founded in 1867, started the school as a living memorial to its founders in 1912, and it now covers 80 acres. This school has done much to call national attention to the native handicrafts of the mountain people.

The Gatlinburg school began when a teacher arrived and took over a class of 13 pupils at the end of the three months term offered by the county. The women of the sorority selected the site for the school upon advice from the United States Commissioners of Education. A folder provided by the workshop informed us that the people of this community were descendants of the first pioneers, of pure Anglo-Saxon stock who had settled in this mountain area, isolated from the rest of the world because of poor roads. Their descendants are the weavers, and their children attend the school. The present enrollment is approximately 600 students. Last year a class of 30 seniors graduated from the four-year high school program.

The name for the Great Smoky Mountains comes from the blue haze, sometimes as dense as smoke, which almost always, it is said, hangs over the mountain peaks. The park includes the most massive mountain uplift in the East, and one of the oldest land areas on earth. It is the ninth park in size in the country and is 54 miles long and from nine to 19 miles wide. The motor drive through these mountains is one of the most enjoyable to be imagined and a visit to Cherokee and Gatlinburg is exciting and educational.