



(Above) 1924/1925 USGS Topographic Maps of Cherokee, Gravelly Springs and Barton, Alabama Quadrangles

by the Indian Agency. Once the Chickasaw land was annexed, the population of Cherokee grew into a substantial community – the post office was moved from the Chickasaw Indian Agency to Cherokee in late 1856. The U.S. Postal Service gave the post the name of Cherokee – presumably after the Native Tribe although the land was actually Chickasaw territory. About the same time, the booming cotton industry prompted the Memphis and Charleston Railroad to be built through the town. The following year, a depot was constructed and the town was laid out around it. According to the historical marker for Cherokee, Dr. William C. Cross and John W. Rutland drew the town plat out of their plantation lands. Main Street was formed from the boundary line between their plantations.

Having a railroad in the mid-1800s made the town a target for the Union Army during the Civil War.

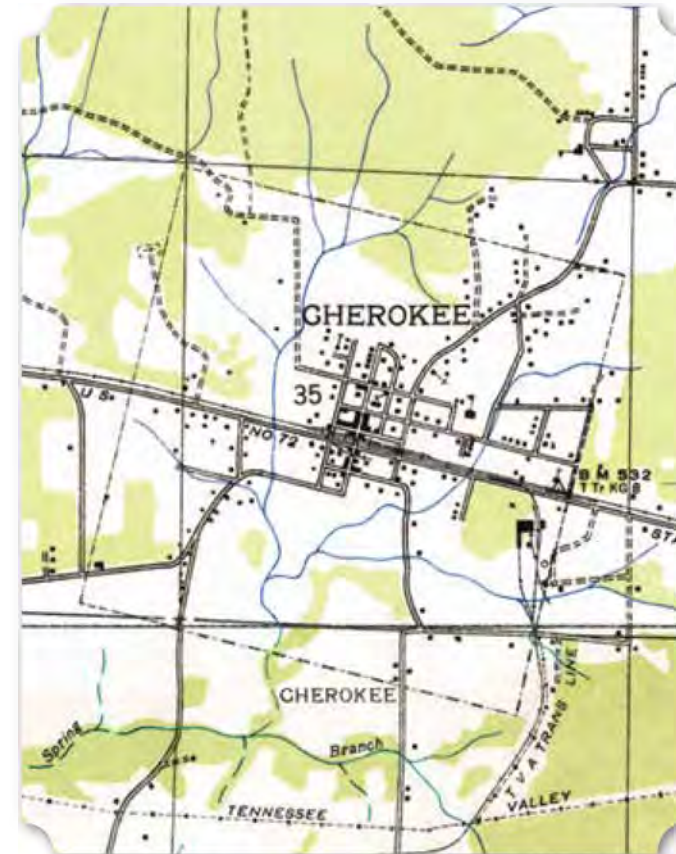
Cherokee was occupied by the Union no less than three times. While the area did not do well in the years that followed the War, the town survived Reconstruction and continued to develop into the turn-of-the-twentieth-century. By 1914, Cherokee had a telephone line and by 1920, it had electricity. Unfortunately, as the nearby Quad City area grew, business was drawn away from Cherokee.

Today (as of 2010), Cherokee has a population of 1,048 people with 18.3% of those people identifying as African American. That’s about 191 people. While the town began as mostly agricultural, now only about 1.1% of the population works in agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mineral extraction combined. Most people (23.9%) work in the manufacturing industry.

Cherokee is also a census district used to enumerate the households within the town of Cherokee and its surrounding area. From 1900 to 1940 the population of Cherokee grew from 357 households to 601 households. As the population grew, the percentage of African American households declined from 32% in 1900 to 20% in 1940. Although a third to a fifth of the total households in Cherokee were African American, the number of those households that owned and operated a farm were fewer. As of 1900, there were only seven African American landowning farmers in the area of Cherokee. This represented only 6% of the African American households. The number of African American-owned farms peaked in 1920 when 26 households were farms owned by African American families – one-fourth of all African American households. The number of African American farms declined again in 1930 and 1940. In those years, only 17 and 16 African American landowning farmers lived in the Cherokee area, respectively.

Many of the surnames of African American landowning farmers in the Cherokee area are familiar

(Top Right) 1935/1936 USGS/TVA Topographic Maps of Cherokee, Cherokee and Barton, Alabama Quadrangles (Right) 1954/1968 USGS/TVA Topographic Maps of Cherokee, Cherokee and Barton, Alabama Quadrangles



KEY

- COMMUNITIES
- CEMETERIES
- CHURCHES
- PLANTATIONS
- SCHOOLS
- OTHER

to large families in North Alabama and many of the plantation owners in Colbert County. The Rutland family owned multiple farms from 1900 to 1920. William D. Rutland (born circa 1862) owned a farm from at least 1900 to 1920. Sam Hayes (born circa 1968) owned a farm on Tuscumbia Pike from at least 1910 to 1940. Ed Fant owned a farm on Cove Road, south of Cherokee, from at least 1920 and 1940. In fact, when the census divided the enumeration district into north and south sections in 1920, the majority of African American-owned farms were south of U.S. 72 and the town of Cherokee.

Cherokee High School began as Cherokee School, one of the seven Rosenwald schools in the county. It was a two-teacher schoolhouse budgeted for the 1921-1922 fiscal year. The school was deeded five acres instead of the required two acres of land for the Rosenwald fund. Cherokee School cost a total of \$2,900 - \$1,200 was provided by the local African American community, \$900 from public donations “raised through nickel and dime donations, individual church gifts, picnic sales, and ball-game admissions” and \$800 from the Rosenwald Fund. After the building was complete, the county school board agreed to operate the school.

The school grew and with time added more teachers and classrooms. According to the historical marker associated with the school, students from smaller, primary schools such as Lane Springs (north of Cherokee), Barton, Pride (east of Cherokee and Barton), and even Carter Branch, Mississippi were able to continue their education at Cherokee for the higher grade levels. The first class to graduate from Cherokee School was in 1938. Integration brought about changes in the school system, the school was closed and the students were routed to Cherokee Vocational High School. The last class graduated in 1968. Cherokee School graduated more than 500 students in its 30 years of service to the African American community. The school was later reopened as a middle school. It closed permanently in 2007 when classes were consolidated into Cherokee Elementary School and Cherokee High School.

* Indicates a Historical - Non-Extant Resource