

Qualla Boundary ^[1]

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Qualla Boundary

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<http://www.ncmarkers.com> ^[2]



A 2012 photograph of the survey marker for the Qualla Boundary. Image from Flickr user Jimmy Emerson.

^[3]The Qualla Boundary, the official name for the Cherokee Indian Reservation in western North Carolina, was officially surveyed and its present boundaries were established in 1876. The tract owed its creation to the alliance and efforts of the Cherokee ^[4]people and to William Holland Thomas ^[5], the white Cherokee chief. Thomas purchased lands for the Cherokee people under his name in the 1840s and 1850s, and in 1866 the United States recognized the right of the Cherokee to own and control the lands. Ten years later, the land was surveyed and demarcated as Cherokee land, outside of federal and state government jurisdiction.

Between October 1838 and March 1839 the federal government forcibly removed the Cherokee people from their lands in western North Carolina. About 11,000 Cherokee Indians were relocated in what became known as the Trail of Tears ^[6]. Some Cherokee remained in North Carolina, however, including many who hid in the Great Smoky Mountains ^[7]. In addition to those who eluded internment and forced migration, some Cherokee were free to stay because of earlier treaties, including the Oconaluftee ^[8]Cherokee under Yonaguska ^[9]. These individuals recruited Thomas to purchase land on their behalf, which he began doing in 1840.

William Holland Thomas owned three stores in Qualla Town and the surrounding areas by the late 1820s. Having worked and lived amongst the Cherokee people from earlier in his life, Thomas had a significant knowledge of their language, and was a close friend of Yonaguska. He was well respected and trusted by the Cherokee people, eventually serving as their only white chief. After the Trail of Tears, Thomas acted on behalf of the Cherokee and acquired lands focused around the Oconaluftee River and Soco Creek. A large tract of land, consisting of around 50,000 acres, was eventually collected around Oconaluftee Creek, and this constitutes the majority of the Qualla Boundary today.

Thomas also struggled to gain official permission for the Oconaluftee Cherokee to remain in North Carolina. In 1866, the Eastern Band of Cherokee ^[10] were formally granted freedom to live in North Carolina, and were recognized as a separate entity from the Cherokee living in Oklahoma in 1868. In 1874, a board of arbitrators appointed by the federal courts found that Thomas's land purchases had been on behalf of the Cherokee people, and the lands were placed in a trust for the Cherokee tribe.

Because the boundaries of the land were still vague, in 1876 a survey was completed by M. S. Temple, deputy U. S. Surveyor, and the boundaries of the Qualla Boundary were established. The surveying began in Soco Gap, an area that was the most important passageway through the Balsam Mountains for the Cherokee before the arrival of the white man.



A 1941 map of the Qualla Boundary, mostly in Swain and Jackson counties. Image from North Carolina Maps.

[11]

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Additional Resources:

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Image Credits:

Emerson, Jimmy. "Qualla Indian Boundary Marker At the Haywood-Jackson County line on US Hwy 19 @ the Blue Ridge Parkway." September 9, 2012. *Flickr*. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/61278305@N00/7983009860> [3] (accessed July 12, 2013).

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Origin - location:

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