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PORTRAITURE, MATERIAL CULTURE, AND PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE  
CHEROKEE NATION'S "FIRST FAMILY", 1843-1907

A thesis submitted by  
Emma Doubt

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Art History

DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY  
UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX  
OCTOBER 2017

STATEMENT

I hereby declare that this thesis has not and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature: ... ..

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines expressions of affluence and modernity in the context of nineteenth-century Indian Territory, with a particular focus on the Oklahoma Cherokee Nation. It does so through a consideration of the portraiture, material culture and photography of one of the most influential political families in Cherokee history; namely, the Ross family, who were considered to be the dynasty of the Cherokee Nation in the nineteenth century. The thesis examines the art and objects that were commissioned and circulated within the family between 1843-1907, a period in which the categories of 'modernity' and 'Indigeneity' were presented as antagonistic in troubling anthropological ventures and visual forays into salvage ethnography. The thesis seeks to challenge this narrative with the Ross family as a primary case study, and to explore the ways in which modernity was produced and encouraged within Indigenous contexts.

The project brings together previously unexamined materials from important archives in the Cherokee Nation, including the Jennie Ross Cobb and Anne Ross Piburn collections, the archives of the Cherokee Female Seminary, and the object and archive collections of the historic George M. Murrell Home where generations of Rosses lived throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To this end, the objects under consideration include painted portraiture, the domestic objects that have been preserved in the Ross family home, and photography. Though the family's most famous member, Chief John Ross, has been featured in a number of important historical studies, current scholarship has yet to pay serious attention to the collections generated and preserved within the family. As such, this thesis contributes original art historical research, and explores the fascinating ways in which the Ross family's active participation in visual culture establishes an alternative narrative within nineteenth-century Indian Territory.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for their generous support of this research. Without their doctoral award programme, this project would not have been possible. In addition, thank you to the School of History, Art History, and Philosophy, and to the Doctoral School at Sussex, for supporting the undertaking and dissemination of this research through numerous research and travel grants.

I am humbled to acknowledge those who have supported me throughout the course of this research. First and foremost I thank my brilliant doctoral supervisor, Dr. Meaghan Clarke, whose engagement, expertise, and guidance have been integral to this project's development. It has been my great privilege to learn and grow under her tutelage. This support has been echoed in the uniquely compassionate Art History department at Sussex, with thanks due especially to Dr. Francesco Ventrella and Professor Geoff Quilley for their insights into this work. In my research cohort, thank you to fellow Canadian art historian Michele Robinson, an indispensable friend and colleague. Thanks, too, to Cait Dowd, Cathrin Yarnell, Hannah Jordan, and Elizabeth Heath for sharing their eyes, ears, and ideas. Lastly, a special thank you to Professor Charmaine Nelson at McGill University, whose long-term mentorship and support I am forever indebted to.

I am grateful to the community of Tahlequah in the Cherokee Nation for the warmth and generosity that facilitated this work. Thanks especially to local historian Shirley Pettengill for an initial correspondence that grew into numerous research trips, archival treasures, and invaluable stories that are woven into every corner of this thesis. I also thank the wonderful historians and curators of the George M. Murrell Home in Park Hill, including Jennifer Frazee, whose scholarship on the home was integral to my own, and David Fowler whose insights helped to grow this research (and whose corn seeds are currently breaking new ground in my backyard). Thanks, too, to Amanda Pritchett for her support over my trips to the community's beloved Murrell Home. Without the welcoming generosity of this community, who opened their homes and histories to me, this project would not have been possible.

I was fortunate to consult numerous archives in Tahlequah, Norman, Oklahoma City, and Washington, D.C. over the course of this research. For her time and expertise, thank you to Vickie Sheffler at the John Vaughan Special Collections Library, Northeastern State University; to Tom Mooney at the Cherokee Heritage Centre; to Jackie D. Reese at the Western History Collections at Norman University; and to Rachel Mosman at the Oklahoma Historical Society. In Washington, thank you to Heather Shannon at the cultural resources centre of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian; to Paula Richardson Fleming and Gina Rappaport at the National Anthropological Archives; and to Barbara Orbach Natanson in the prints and photographs division at the Library of Congress. Thank you especially to Mary Lou Reker and Travis Hensley at the John W. Kluge Center (Library of Congress), and to my fellow 2014-15 research cohort there.

This work would not have been possible without the tireless love and support of my family, with my parents Maggie and Bryan at the helm. Thanks to them for championing my art education since the very beginning. To Jenny, Simon, Ivo, Jacki, and to the two tiny new branches currently growing on our family tree, Emmett and Eleni, thank you for seeing me through. Thank you, too, to cherished friends Lauren Aché, Samantha Glennon-Bond, and Lina Carlini for being in my corner throughout this process. Last but not least, thank you to my partner David Jones, whose patience, compassion, and belief in me preside over every page.



## Introduction

In 1910, the celebrated frontier photographer Edward S. Curtis produced a photograph of a father and son sitting next to each other in a Piegan lodge in Montana. Members of the Blackfoot Confederacy, Little Plume and his son Yellow Kidney appear in seated poses, unsmiling, looking out at Curtis's camera. Traditional accoutrements hang in the lodge's interior, including a tobacco pipe that rests in the significant space between the father and son. Just next to the pipe rests a small box with a clock inside of it. Early editions of Curtis's tour de force *The North American Indian*, a 20-volume work that he produced between 1907 and 1930, would include this version of *In a Piegan Lodge* (fig. 1.1).

Later, Curtis would retouch the copper plate from which editions of the photograph were made, removing the clock altogether (fig. 1.2). Working at the intersection of nineteenth-century salvage ethnography and photographic pictorialism, gestures like these exacerbated the constructed visual gulf between Indigenous subjects and the modern world. Using posing and props, exclusions and embellishments, Curtis's resulting portrayals fed the popular "vanishing race" mythology circulating in American visual culture throughout much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Contemporary scholarship by Christopher Lyman, James Faris, and Gerald Vizenor, among others, has advanced our understanding of Curtis's motivations for such exclusions.<sup>1</sup> As Vizenor articulates, the exclusion of the clock – a mundane visual symbol of modernity and technological advancement – was a way for Curtis to preserve a "simulation of traditional authority."<sup>2</sup> Both Vizenor and Lyman interpret the exclusion as a method of fakery and disanalogy.<sup>3</sup> In this way, the deliberate removal of the clock also removed the possibility of associating the two figures with inevitable everyday signs of the modernization that had been present in Indigenous communities much earlier than 1910.

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<sup>1</sup> See Christopher Lyman, *The Vanishing Race and Other Illusions: Photographs of Indians by Edward S. Curtis* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1982); James Faris, *Navajo and Photography: A Critical History of the Representation of an American People* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000); and Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Post-Indian Warriors of Survivance* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Gerald Vizenor, 2000. "Edward Curtis: Pictorialist and Ethnographic Adventurist." Paper presented at Claremont Graduate University, California, 6-7 October 2000. Transcript accessible on the American Memory Website of the Library of Congress, accessed 27 April 2017, [http://www.e-scoala.ro/american/us\\_cultures/c4d.html](http://www.e-scoala.ro/american/us_cultures/c4d.html).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Vizenor also references Lyman, *The Vanishing Race and Other Illusions*, 86.

Does a countervailing visual record exist? This is the key research question that guided the early stages of this project, broadly defined. I initially set out to discover if the early production of photographic images by Indigenous<sup>4</sup> subjects, from within Indigenous communities, would yield different visual results from those inundating the nineteenth-century photographic record. I was inspired by a small cache of early photographs produced by the Cherokee photographer Jennie Ross Cobb, featuring a group of young Cherokee women in Victorian dress skipping along a railroad track in Tahlequah, the capital of the Oklahoma Cherokee Nation (fig. 1.3 / Appendix 2-A2.16). A century after they were taken, these photographs would be hung on the walls of national and international art galleries, would be printed and written about in exhibition catalogues and scholarly texts, discussed by artists, art historians, and curators – would even appear in University classrooms and curricula. The touristic gaze that Curtis had cultivated would eventually be replaced by a twenty-first century audience whose curiosity had now looped back on itself: here were stylish, smiling, and affluent young Cherokee women wielding the camera in their own hands. Was this not unusual in early photography? Was it easy for Indigenous women to get hold of cameras in the nineteenth century? Was this typical? Were there others?

Curtis's photographs would have us think otherwise. But if photographs like Cobb's existed, perhaps there was further evidence of the misrepresentation or 'fakery' that was at play in so much of the visual narrative. As the research developed, I began to see with more clarity that the presence of modernity within certain Indigenous communities was an important component of how identity was constructed, transformed, and visualized in the nineteenth century. Using visual tactics of allegiance and disavowal, the portraiture and material culture generated within so-called Indian

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<sup>4</sup> Within the historical and geographical context of this thesis, I use the term "Indigenous" to refer to First Peoples in the United States specifically. I follow the United Nations adoption of the term "Indigenous" in acknowledging the following: The diversity of distinct self-identification processes at the personal and community levels; historical continuity with pre-colonial and pre-settler societies; strong links to territories and natural resources; distinct social, economic and political systems; distinct languages and cultural practices; forms of non-dominant groups of society; and strong links to ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities. See the United Nations Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, "The Concept of Indigenous Peoples", Workshop on Data Collection and Disaggregation for Indigenous Peoples, New York, 19-21 January 2004. For a discussion of the term at the international level, see Andy Gargett, *The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (Switzerland: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2013), 1-139.

Territory confronts the dominant visual narratives being produced by outsiders like Curtis during the heyday of salvage ethnography on the American frontier.<sup>5</sup>

To this end, this thesis examines the visualization of affluence and modernity in Indian Territory through a close analysis of the portraiture and material culture belonging to one of its most influential nineteenth-century families – namely, the Ross family. The research situates the material objects commissioned, produced, and circulated within the family within the complex social, political, and cultural context of the Cherokee Nation’s capital, Tahlequah. In doing so, it establishes an alternative visual record running parallel to popular nineteenth-century images that articulated a growing anxiety about the “fate” of Indigenous populations on the American frontier. An analysis of Ross family objects within this context seeks to uncover a more substantial challenge to the visual stereotypes of Indigenous peoples being proliferated in the period, and reveals an intrinsic relationship to emerging ideas about the modern world. In simple terms, as the mainstream American popular imagination ran wild with the inundation of images and articles produced about its “vanishing race”, the images being produced in Indian Territory itself tell a different story entirely.

#### Contextual Parameters: The Ross family in nineteenth-century Indian Territory

The Ross family was one of the most prominent political families in the Cherokee Nation’s history, described by the Oklahoma Historical Society as the “dynasty of the Cherokee Nation” in the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> This was largely due to the legacy of John Ross, who was Principal Chief of the nation for a staggering 39 years from 1828 until his death in 1866. This tenureship saw the Cherokee Nation through such tumultuous historical events as the forced removal from Georgia westward on the Trail of Tears in 1838-39, and the American Civil War from 1861-65. Aside from the political careers of multiple generations of Ross family members, the family also enjoyed a great amount of economic prosperity through their multiple business ventures, including the substantial wealth they garnered through their participation in plantation slavery. The Rosses were

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<sup>5</sup> Salvage ethnography refers to the body of work developed by anthropologist Franz Boas in the late nineteenth century, and into the twentieth. It promoted an ideology that centered on the assumed extinction of traditionalist cultural practices due to the increasing encroachment of modernity within Indigenous communities. For his main treatise, referred to as the cornerstone of Boasian anthropology, see the revised edition of Franz Boas, *Race, Language, and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> See “Ross Family History”, The Oklahoma Historical Society, accessed 23 September 2016, <http://www.okhistory.org/sites/mhrossfamily>.

descendants of mixed Cherokee and Scottish ancestry, and this bi-cultural status facilitated John Ross's ease with moving between two worlds with trips back and forth from the Cherokee Nation's capital in Tahlequah, to the United States capital in Washington, D.C. Subsequent generations of Rosses continued to have a strong presence in the Cherokee Nation's capital throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with young Ross women attending the renowned Cherokee Female Seminary, and family members upholding the important influence the Ross dynasty wielded in the worlds of business, politics, and education. As this thesis explores, the legacy of the Ross family was visualized and upheld in public and private spheres, from the early portraiture of frontier artists, to the wealth on display in their private homes, and the formal photography produced through their schools.

### *Indian Territory*

The geographical parameters the thesis keeps to are informed by the Ross family's presence in Indian Territory in the immediate aftermath of the 1838-39 removal. Until 1907, the present-day state of Oklahoma was split into two separate spaces commonly referred to as the Twin Territories of Indian Territory and Oklahoma. Following President Andrew Jackson's signature on the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the American government negotiated with five of the country's Indigenous groups to displace them from the southeast to territory west of the Mississippi river. The five groups who fell prey to this ruling included the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Seminole, and Creek, later referred to as the "Five Civilized Tribes" for their adherence to the settler practices of Christianity, centralized government, the development of a written language, and plantation slavery. The Ross family was directly implicated in the removal, with John Ross in constant negotiations throughout the process.

The Cherokee were the last group to be forcibly removed to Indian Territory, a march that reached its peak between 1838-39, when Chief John Ross was working hard to oppose the Treaty of New Echota. Following the treaty, southeastern Cherokee land was ceded to the American government in exchange for compensation and federally-designated land in Indian Territory.<sup>7</sup> The removal occurred in stages, with Cherokees first invited to voluntarily move themselves and their families west in the two years following the signing of the treaty. Forced removal then began in the autumn of 1838.

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<sup>7</sup> The homelands of the Cherokees included the states of Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, North and South Carolina, and Virginia.

The title “Trail of Tears” refers to the suffering and deaths of close to 4,000 Cherokees due to starvation and the harsh conditions of the journey. As contemporary artist Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie explains, government policies like the Indian Removal Act were created to “destroy the very fabric of Native culture”, and the marches her ancestors were forced to take were “in violation of every basic human right imaginable.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed the legacy of the Trail of Tears continues to resonate with the descendants of its survivors, and commemorative sites exist across the territory covered on the marches.

The years following the Trail of Tears moved towards a period of prosperity for the newly arrived members of the Cherokee political elite in Indian Territory, headed by Ross himself. Tahlequah became the capital of the Cherokee Nation, and the surrounding Park Hill area just 5 miles outside of the capital was developed by Ross and other members of prominent political and merchant families. Referred to as the Cherokee Golden Age for its prosperous economic infrastructure, stable political climate, and successful educational system, Park Hill became synonymous with the wealthy and cultured families who populated its environs, with the Rosses at the helm. This thesis explores the evolving context of Indian Territory as both a geographical place and ideological space in each chapter: Chapter One analyzes the visualization of John Ross as its primary leader; Chapter Two explores its prosperous development in the Cherokee Golden Age through the plantation ventures and homes of the Cherokee elite; Chapter Three discusses the renowned educational system that it became known for; and lastly Chapter Four focuses on the emergence of one of the first Indigenous female photographers it produced.

### *Time Frame*

The major time frame informing this thesis spans the mid-nineteenth century to the early years of the twentieth (1843-1907), with the arrival of statehood in 1907 demarcating the end of Indian Territory as a designated ideological space when it was absorbed into the state of Oklahoma. Chapter Two moves forward in order to incorporate comparative analyses of the Ross family home in its shifting status as a residence (1840s), a restoration project (1950s), and a contemporary historic home

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<sup>8</sup> Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie, “When is a photograph worth a thousand words?” in *Native Nations: Journeys in American Photography*, ed. Jane Alison (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 1998), 42. This essay was re-published in *Photography's Other Histories*, eds. Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson (Duke University Press, 2003), 40-52.

(present-day). Chapter four similarly adjusts the primary time frame in order to consider the ideological re-framing of Ross family photography in contemporary exhibitions from 1998 and 2006.

The historical time frame accommodates some of the earliest documented images of Ross family members, made for both public and private use, as described in Chapter One. These images enter such remarkable outlets as the famous ‘Indian galleries’ of Charles Bird King (1836), George Catlin (c. 1840), and John Mix Stanley (1844); and, later, the first ever national photography collection to be developed and exhibited at an American museum with the founding of the Smithsonian Institution (1858). These instances highlight the documentary impulse that informed the visualization of Indigenous people through portraiture in the 1840s and 1850s, and the resulting transition from painted to photographic portraiture in government-sanctioned (and funded) efforts.

Aside from the history of painted and photographic portraiture in Indigenous communities, the thesis time frame also accounts for developments in domestic display in the antebellum south, as explored in Chapter Two. In the 1840s, various branches of the Ross family tree were renowned and recognized for the elaborate mansions they built on the grounds of their plantations in the newly settled Cherokee Nation. The commissioning of portraiture used for display in the home, as well as the importing of expensive furniture, keepsakes, upholstery, china, and silverware aligned the Ross family with the southern gentry whose homes were a primary vehicle for identity projections and self-fashioning during this period.

Continued educational reform in the Cherokee Nation is another important cultural context that is accounted for through the identified time frame of this thesis. As Chapter Three analyzes, the Cherokee Male and Female Seminaries were established as beacons of educational progress in Indian Territory, and were one of the Ross family’s long-standing legacies in the area. John Ross and William Potter Ross were instrumental in establishing the schools, which were run as sovereign institutions without any interference from federal or governmental agencies until the beginning of the twentieth century when statehood arrived. They were unique in this way, and therefore provide substantial insight into the vision John Ross had for the education of generations of Cherokees in the otherwise hostile educational reform imposed on Indigenous populations through enforced assimilationist policies.

Finally, the time frame accounts for one of the major technological developments that had major implications in the visualization of Indian Territory when photography eventually reached the frontier. With the arrival of photography, the colonial project directly coincided with the modernization of portraiture and increased colonial encroachment in picturing Indigenous subjects. As Martha Sandweiss emphasizes in her seminal text *Print the Legend*, photography and the American West were quite literally developing alongside each other in the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Reaching back into the history of Ross family portraiture materializes this relationship. In 1843, for instance, the Ross family were involved in one of the first photographic commissions to occur in Indian Territory when John Mix Stanley introduced the family to his daguerreotype camera. Moving deeper into the nineteenth century, photography became more of a reality and less of a novelty in Indian Territory, with droves of traveling commercial photographers serving the bustling towns of Tahlequah and nearby Muskogee. Chapter Four charts the proliferation of photography in the Ross family and community in the 1880s-90s through the figure of Jennie Ross Cobb, in order to present a photographic record that counters the mounting anxiety about *how* to represent Indigenous populations in the nineteenth century.

### Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

#### *Race and Modernity*

The time frame provides an important basis from which to discuss the emergence and transformation of ideas about ‘modernity’ throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – a crucial interpretive component informing my analysis of the objects under review here. More specifically, the relationship between Indigeneity and modernity has been scrutinized in contemporary scholarship to more adequately address the construction of a racially charged binary informing both terms. For some insight into how mid nineteenth-century audiences understood conceptions of this relationship, and most importantly how Indigenous people viewed it, the thesis consults primary source literature including articles from popular periodicals and newspapers whose circulation extended into Indian Territory.

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<sup>9</sup> See Martha A. Sandweiss, *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002).

I invoke the nineteenth-century usage of the terms “modern” and “modernity”, particularly as they circulated in rhetoric pertaining to the “fate” of Indigenous populations in the United States. This term circulated in various avenues of public dialogue, including political discourse, popular newspapers and periodicals, and public addresses that were concerned with the American colonial project. As Curtis’s 1910 photograph *In a Piegan Lodge* visualized, the American cultural imagination was inundated with homogenized narratives of Indigenous populations whose traditional practices and ways of life were placed in opposition to the “progress” and advancements of the modern world. This is illustrated in the countless titles that had a wide reach across American readerships. The scrapbook of one nineteenth-century visitor to Indian Territory, for instance, includes titles such as “Making Good Indians,” published in *The Quaker*; “The Indian Congress: The Last Days of a Dying Regime,” published in *Ainslee’s Magazine*; “Making the Warrior a Worker,” published in *Munsey’s Magazine*; “The Passing of the Indian Chiefs,” published in *Metropolitan Magazine*; and “The Last Indian Campaign,” published in *The Pacific Monthly*.<sup>10</sup> These disturbing titles attest to the pervasiveness of the erroneous “vanishing race” ideology that was being proliferated in the public sphere.

As numerous contemporary scholars have insisted, this scheme necessarily situated Indigenous subjects and cultures on the outside of modern culture, creating a binary that persisted well into the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup> This was hardly a contemporary observation, however; numerous public figures and editorials challenged the construction of this relationship as it was happening. A 1905 editorial in the *Cherokee*

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<sup>10</sup> These articles are pasted in the scrapbook of Clara Churchill, wife of Inspector of Indian Schools Frank Churchill, who was posted to numerous schools across the United States from 1889-1909, including visits to the Cherokee Nation in the 1890s. Clara Churchill’s numerous journals and scrapbooks detail a keen interest in the rhetoric described above. For these articles in particular, see Grant Hamilton, “Making Good Indians,” *The Quaker*, September 1899; Wade Mountfortt, “The Indian Congress: The Last Days of a Dying Regime,” *Ainslee’s Magazine*, April 1900; A. Decker, “Making the Warrior a Worker,” *Munsey’s Magazine*, October 1901; R.D. Williams, “The Passing of the Indian Chiefs,” *Metropolitan Magazine*, February 1902; and Millard F. Hudson, “The Last Indian Campaign in the Southwest,” *The Pacific Monthly*, February 1907. For an edited anthology of *New York Times* coverage, see Robert G. Hayes, ed., *A race at bay: New York Times editorials on “The Indian Problem”* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> In the context of art production, see for instance Ruth B. Phillips’s substantial body of work dealing with numerous iterations of the relationship between Indigeneity and modernity, including “Native American Art and the New Art history,” *Museum Anthropology* 13, no. 4 (November 1989): 5-13; *Trading Identities: The souvenir in Native North American art from the Northeast, 1700-1900* (Seattle: University of Washington Press and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998); “Taking the Local Seriously,” *World Art* 4, no. 1 (January 2014): 17-25; and recently “Aesthetic primitivism revisited: The global diaspora of ‘primitive art’ and the emergence of Indigenous modernisms,” *Journal of Art Historiography* 12 (June 2015): 1-25.



*Advocate* newspaper, for instance, denounces the paternalism of this ideology, detailing a strong bias against its presence in Indian Territory:

Much useless, unnecessary and uncalled for worry is being indulged in by the philanthropists of the East over the future of the Indian of the Five Civilized Tribes, and to those who know the tribes as they really are this solicitude is amusing. It would be interesting to the effete East to know conditions here as they exist. To know that in mercantile lines, in banking circles, as agriculturists, stock raisers, professional men, and politicians, the front ranks are filled with Indians by blood. [...] In the larger towns Indians are on the boards of directors of almost all the national banks, and it is more than an even bet that the handsomest houses in the various communities belong to Indians.<sup>12</sup>

As this editorial attests, the Cherokee Nation made concerted efforts to set the story straight in terms of their active participation in categories of modernity.

In the contexts that this thesis engages with, the “modern” reaches into nineteenth-century portraiture and exhibition practices; practices of domestic display and self-fashioning; educational structures and reform; and photography – one of the most iconic modern advances of the nineteenth century. Within these contexts, traditionalist Indigenous socio-cultural practices were seen as incongruent with imported European portraiture conventions, antebellum architecture, rigorous classical education, and active participation in amateur photography. This thesis hopes to challenge the straightforward binary that was established between the Indigenous and the modern in the nineteenth century in order to demonstrate the substantial overlap between these two categories in the Ross family especially.

The relationship between acculturation and modernity is another important factor in situating the ways in which the Cherokees were conceived of as being exemplars of both in nineteenth-century rhetoric. The thesis time frame takes up with Cherokee history almost three centuries after first contact, so that intermarriage and acculturation were normative practices by the time the nineteenth century emerged. Because of this, conceptions of modernity in historical Indigenous contexts have been complicated by conceptions about race. Structures of racial hierarchy introduced in the seventeenth century continued to inform social practices throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the proliferation of European colonization and imperialism – and continue to disrupt the basic civil rights of Indigenous peoples living in North America today. For Indigenous populations who were forcibly acculturated to European

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<sup>12</sup> “The Future of the Indian,” *Cherokee Advocate Newspaper*, 7 January 1905.

settler practices, proximity to “modernity” – arguably a variant of “whiteness” in the nineteenth century – would eventually inform the descriptive language applied to Indigenous cultural practices. Within this scheme, the Cherokees were deemed a highly modern group because of a number of specific developments that were generated from within the tribe, and that aligned them closely with white settler practices: a written language, a printing press, a sophisticated educational system modeled on elite east coast colleges, success in modern agriculture and plantation slavery, and the leadership of John Ross, who circulated easily amongst the political elite in Washington. Ross’s extensive archive of correspondence is consulted as a primary source in this thesis, providing invaluable insight about his evolving conception of modernity in relation to the Cherokees throughout his tenure as their Principal Chief.<sup>13</sup>

The visual materials explored in this thesis uncover a complex relationship between Cherokee sitters within the Ross family (and their immediate milieu), and categories of whiteness and Indigeneity. Because this thesis is concerned with the performance of European social codes and cultural practices associated with whiteness, I use the term “bi-cultural” to refer to the dual heritage of members of the Cherokee elite under review here. This term encompasses the performance of race as an integral component of socio-cultural codes, but prioritizes the cultural practices themselves (for instance, portraiture conventions, domestic self-fashioning, and participation in photography). In formal portraiture, Ross family members adopted the conventions of European portraiture, emulating the poses, gestures, accoutrements, and dress of traditional portraiture practices. They also appeared with visibly pale complexions, begging the question of whether or not this was an accurate depiction of their appearances, or a manipulation of skin tone for purposes of “passing” for white. The visualization of white skin in formal portraits thus presents a conflict between the public rhetoric in which members of the elite expressed pride in their status as Cherokee, and their deliberate self-fashioning in line with European cultural conventions – and, in much of the portraiture, white complexions. In the case of John Ross especially, the Principal Chief’s appearance reinforced the learned practices that afforded him access to categories of privilege. Ironically, this became an imperative component of his ability to circulate within predominantly white circles in Washington’s political elite as a representative leader of the Cherokee Nation.

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<sup>13</sup> See Gary Moulton, ed., *The Papers of Chief John Ross* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985).

In the nineteenth-century editorials, letters, and travel journals connected with Indian Territory and referenced in this thesis, the appearance of white Indigeneity was inherently connected to conceptions of modernity and modern practices. This is further complicated in that much of the pride Cherokee elites expressed was located in their purported distinction from other Native American tribes, as evidenced in the public addresses and letters of John Ross, and archival materials documenting the pedagogical approaches of the Cherokee Female Seminary for instance. As the portraits explored in this thesis attest, the performance of whiteness was a way for elite Cherokees to disassociate from categories of visible Indigeneity that would have conjured traditionalist, primitivist, or pre-modern connotations in the nineteenth century context. Thus the Cherokee elite's purported adherence to whiteness as a visible racial category *and* as a culturally-rooted practice led to their identification as a highly cultured and "civilized" tribe. As the *Cherokee Advocate* editorial attests, the performance of whiteness was an effective (if deeply problematic) strategy to address and overturn the rampant negative stereotypes associated with Indigenous populations and the enforced disenfranchisement that followed suit.

Much of John Ross's advocacy on behalf of the Cherokee Nation appeals to this disenfranchisement, enforced through such racist government policies as the forcible removal of the tribe to Indian Territory in 1838. These acts of political aggression were economically motivated, and were enacted through the racial hierarchies that positioned white political elites in positions of ultimate authority. The immorality of this approach is invoked in numerous letters and public addresses delivered by John Ross. However, the Ross family's participation in plantation slavery and the economic prosperity garnered through their numerous associated enterprises indicates a complicity in the exploitation of categories of racial superiority and inferiority for financial gain that were in place throughout the nineteenth century. Discussions of bi-culturality, transcultural spaces, and race in this thesis thus extend into the context of plantation slavery, in which the Cherokees – and the Ross family in particular – were participants. The financial successes of John Ross, his brother Lewis Ross, and his nephew by marriage George M. Murrell can be attributed to the successful plantations they owned in Indian Territory and parts of the southeastern United States, including a lucrative sugar plantation in Louisiana. Their exploitation of African-American labour through the institution of slavery was in fact one of the biggest components in their characterization as a "modern" Nation. This little-known history contributes to an understanding of the

reasons why the Cherokee elite was portrayed as modern. It also complicates any straightforward understanding of their victimization through the racial hierarchy that supplanted them from their native homelands. That slave-owning populations were complicit in the proliferation of such a hierarchy is clearly indicated through the success of their plantations, and John Ross's initial alliance with the Confederacy in the years leading up to the Civil War – albeit something he later withdrew from.<sup>14</sup>

### *Objects and Transculturation*

The intercultural expression embodied by the objects under review in this thesis merits a discussion of the key term “transculturation” as it has emerged in more recent scholarship addressing art and material culture. The term was first introduced into humanities scholarship with the publication of anthropologist Fernando Ortiz's work *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* in 1940.<sup>15</sup> Ortiz's study focuses on the development of tobacco and sugar as the primary goods driving the Cuban economy, and the subsequent impact of this on Cuban culture, society, and national identity. He developed the term “transculturation” to explore the transformative process undergone when cultures are brought together because of colonial power structures. The term has been used and adapted in various humanities disciplines, and more recently has been used in art history as a productive way of analyzing objects produced as a result of this kind of cultural contact.

The term is a particularly useful theoretical tool in this thesis because of Ortiz's emphasis on transculturation's difference from “acculturation.” That is, whereas processes of acculturation focus on the stage at which one culture acquires or adopts the practices of another's, transculturation stresses the presence and partial uprooting of the

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<sup>14</sup> A substantial body of scholarship exists delineating Cherokee involvement in the history of plantation slavery. See William McLoughlin, “Red Indians, Black Slavery and White Racism: America's Slaveholding Indians,” *American Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (1974): 367-385, and McLoughlin, *Cherokee renaissance in the New Republic* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986); Linda K. Kerber, “The Abolitionist Perception of the Indian,” *The Journal of American History* 62, no. 2 (1975): 271-295; R. Halliburton, *Red over Black: Black slavery among the Cherokee Indians* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977); Theda Perdue, *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society, 1540-1866* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1979); Annie Heloise Abel, *The American Indian as slaveholder and secessionist* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992); Claudio Saunt, “The Paradox of Freedom: Tribal Sovereignty and Emancipation during the Reconstruction of Indian Territory,” *The Journal of Southern History* 70, no. 1 (February 2014): 63-94; and Celia E. Naylor, *African Cherokees in Indian Territory: From chattel to citizens* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet de Onis (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

preceding culture – and the creation of a new one altogether as a result of contact. He explains this distinction as follows:

The term transculturation better expresses the different phases in the transitive process from one culture to another, because this process does not only imply the acquisition of culture, as connoted by the Anglo-American term acculturation, but also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of one's preceding culture, what one could call a partial disculturation. Moreover, it signifies the subsequent creation of new cultural phenomena [...].<sup>16</sup>

This process of cultural uprooting, exchange, and re-articulation more adequately describes the objects under review here than does the more direct process of cultural acquisition. The time period the thesis engages with takes up with objects produced within the Cherokee Nation three centuries after first contact with Europeans, where a period of acculturation was in many cases a necessary component of survival in the so-called “new world.” Cultural violence continued well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through government policies and, most substantially, in the federal boarding school system's institutionalization of cultural genocide. However, the cultural practices and societal structures in place in the Cherokee Nation's capital were well beyond a period of mere cultural acquisition in the time period considered here. Instead, they express a deep-set and long-standing negotiation between Indigenous and settler societies that migrated with them to their own new world after the Trail of Tears.

Ortiz's original definition is also useful in its emphasis on the “partial disculturation” or disavowal that processes of transculturation necessarily involve. That is, in negotiating the influence of an imposing dominant culture and selecting which components of said culture to integrate, aspects of the culture of origin are left behind. This process of disavowal is productive in acknowledging both the very presence of a culture of origin – often not evidenced in classical portraiture – as well as the encroaching representational regime slowly incorporated into Indigenous contexts. This process of disavowal is evidenced in multiple ways throughout the materials analyzed in this thesis.

As Julie F. Codell reinforces in her introduction to the anthology *Transculturation in British Art*, the concept is also distinct from Mary Louise Pratt's work on the “contact zone.”<sup>17</sup> In *Imperial Eyes: Travel writing and transculturation*,

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<sup>16</sup> Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 32-3.

<sup>17</sup> Julie F. Codell, *Transculturation in British Art, 1770-1930* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

Pratt contextualizes European travel writing within processes of imperialism – namely European economic and political expansion from the eighteenth century onwards.<sup>18</sup> The contact zone describes a space of imperial encounter, one in which “subjects previously separated by geography and history come into contact with each other and form ongoing relations” – often tainted by inequality and colonial coercion.<sup>19</sup> Here, transculturation emphasizes the agency of subjugated peoples within dominant modes of representation. In Pratt’s study, the concept is used to explore the ways in which dominant European modes of representation are absorbed, subverted, and sorted through on the receiving end of empire.<sup>20</sup>

Pratt’s work is a foundational text in studying the integral impact of imperialism on cultural production in colonized spaces; however, interpreting the Cherokee Nation’s capital as a “contact zone” does not adequately address the mid nineteenth-century context in which cultural expression was largely contained within the Park Hill and Tahlequah community itself. That is, while European *influence* is certainly visible in the art and material culture of the Ross family, the presence of invading Europeans in the Park Hill community was not. In fact, the Cherokee Nation’s new capital west of the Mississippi was a designated space *for* Indigenous groups – reinforced in the title of Indian Territory assigned to the area.

Codell’s edited anthology attests to the paradoxical formation of British identity as “exclusive, unified and homogenous”<sup>21</sup> in the face of imperialism’s increased cultural contact, access, and exposure to the wider world. The art objects produced in such a framework belie this exclusivity, however, revealing more of the cultural encounter than perhaps was initially intended. Here Codell suggests that transcultural art is interstitial: “between cultures, experience and imagination, memory and loss, desire and anxiety, and dream and reality.”<sup>22</sup> This is a welcome exploration of the term in an exclusively art historical context, whereby a range of material objects – often obscure, unknown, undetermined – are given serious attention for the complex web of cultural interactions they represent. This is particularly relevant in my own selection of objects, whose primary significance points to inter-cultural expressions in the Cherokee Nation. Codell’s framework accommodates the uncertainty at the heart of many of the

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<sup>18</sup> See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel writing and transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 6

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Codell, *Transculturation in British Art*, 2.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

Ross materials, “beset with conflicts, imperfections, overdetermined choices and endless varieties, not only of accommodation and facilitation, but also of agency.”<sup>23</sup>

However, the thesis departs from Codell’s primary focus on the artist, and instead shifts the interpretive agency onto the Ross family as sitters, commissioners, and consumers of the art objects under review. Here I follow Ruth Phillips’s contention that “The dialogic and transformative nature of the processes of production and consumption [...] has been far less widely acknowledged or rigorously analyzed.”<sup>24</sup> Phillips discusses these processes in relation to the souvenir function of Indigenous art from the Canadian Northeast. This work charts an important interpretive framework in which souvenir objects function as “object record[s] of historical processes” that contribute to the construction of cultural difference. Here the traditional role of the artist is subsidiary to the complexities of cultural output and reception. Similarly, I locate agency in Ross family members’ roles as sitters, commissioners, and consumers – rather than exclusively in the role of the artist or producer behind the objects analyzed. This allows for an expanded consideration of how the objects functioned in their various contexts – both on the local Cherokee level, as well as on a national American one.

Elizabeth Hutchinson’s work moves away from European imperialism and the contact period to turn her attention more substantially towards its aftermath in the context of late nineteenth-century cultural production. More specifically, she explores the period’s fascination with Native American handicrafts and art objects – the “Indian craze” – as a particular type of modern consumption. In doing so, she seeks to expand our definition of modernity to include the relationships between groups and the modern world, and thus to understand modern visual culture as “a field in which multiple participants have a stake as makers, critics, and consumers.”<sup>25</sup> Here the use of the term transculturation opens up the opportunity to interpret “both sides of the artistic exchanges”<sup>26</sup> involved in the Indian craze as being mutually constitutive, and as contributing equally to the development of nineteenth-century conceptions of primitivism and modernism.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>24</sup> Phillips, *Trading Identities*, xi.

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Hutchinson, *The Indian Craze: Primitivism, modernism, and transculturation in American Art, 1890-1915* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 10.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>27</sup> For an exploration of the ‘modern’ as a construct applied to culture, art, and artists in the British context, see the anthology *English Art, 1860-1914: Modern artists and Identity*, ed. David Peters Corbett and Lara Perry (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

Hutchinson's text is particularly useful for its emphasis on a broader understanding of who participated in nineteenth-century ideas about the "modern." As she explains, the notion of primitivism was used as modernism's antagonist in the fine arts especially – a binary that situated the Indigenous cultural production that it supposedly characterized "*outside of and in opposition to modern culture.*"<sup>28</sup>

Transculturation offers an opportunity to debunk this binary, and to better understand the modern project as a process involving diverse participants and interactions. This speaks to my focus on Ross family participation in visual expressions of modernity, and the identity-building project evidenced in many of the objects under review here.

Further links to transculturation in the materials I analyze merit an acknowledgement of the European ancestry of various branches of the elaborate Ross family tree. This is an integral component of projections of affluence and modernity that can, in many ways, be read as expressions of "Europeanness" in some of the earlier portraiture. John Ross's mixed Scottish and Cherokee ancestry, and generations of inter-marriage with white Americans of European descent throughout the Ross family's nineteenth-century familial configuration, certainly played an important role in how family members chose to identify and visualize themselves. This becomes especially relevant when thinking about the mid nineteenth-century Rosses as members of a "first family" in the traditional sense, with John Ross in the leadership position of Principal Chief. The visualization of this hybrid identity, involving "Cherokee-ness", "European-ness" and "American-ness" is a necessarily transcultural pursuit – especially within the context of its relationship to power and politics within the American colonial project.

### *Home*

The complexities of transculturation, a process that in its very fabric implies a dislocation of cultural roots through travel, migration, and contact with the outside world, is further complicated when mitigated through the context of "home." As a theoretical concept, home is fraught with a number of complicating factors, including most substantially the enforced displacement from the Cherokees' native homeland of Georgia on the Trail of Tears, and later, necessary evacuation from the adopted homeland of Indian Territory at the onset of the Civil War. Repeated references to an abstract notion of home and its theoretical counterpart, "belonging", are found

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<sup>28</sup> Hutchinson, *The Indian Craze*, 4.



throughout John Ross's papers. These references often grapple with the term on the level of national belonging and dislocation, as in his famous 1836 plea against the Treaty of New Echota, in which he stresses a process of de-nationalization: "We have neither land, nor home, nor resting place that can be called our own."<sup>29</sup> This upheaval is also powerfully conveyed on the local level. An additional letter written by Ross's second wife Mary Brian Stapler expresses her grief over the loss of their beloved Rose Cottage home during a Civil War attack: "*Home*, my dear husband we have no home there now, one we cherished so long and took so much trouble to make beautiful is now in ashes, and all is ruin around."<sup>30</sup>

This exploration of home as an abstract concept extends into an analysis of home as a tangible, localized place in my analysis of the historic Murrell property that was home to generations of Ross family members in one way or another from its construction in 1844 to its historicization under Jennie Ross Cobb in the 1950s. A number of scholars have provided tangible frameworks through which to interpret home as a site of identity formation, and the material objects present in the home as evidence of the same. Katherine Grier's extensive study of the function and design of the parlour in Victorian America has been a useful tool in situating two of the most public rooms in the Murrell home, for instance. Her text *Culture and Comfort: People, Parlors, and Upholstery, 1850-1930* has been particularly useful in articulating the ways in which Murrell home objects contributed to the function of the rooms in which they were located, and how domestic objects are useful in delineating the projection of identity within those spaces.<sup>31</sup> Interpreting the Murrell home as a mixed-heritage plantation home and historical site has been a complex undertaking, and work by Jennifer

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<sup>29</sup> John Ross, "To the Senate and House of Representatives," Red Clay Council Ground, Cherokee Nation, 28 September 1836. Published in Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, vol. 1, 458.

<sup>30</sup> "Letter from Mary Bryan Stapler to John Ross," Washington Place, Philadelphia, 4 December 1863. Published in *Voices of Cherokee Women*, ed. Carolyn Johnston (Winston-Salem, N.C.: John F. Blair, 2013), 144.

<sup>31</sup> Katherine Grier, *Culture and Comfort: People, parlors, and upholstery, 1850-1930* (Rochester, N.Y.: Strong Museum and University of Massachusetts Press, 1988). For a later edition, see also Grier, *Culture and comfort: Parlor making and middle-class Identity, 1850-1930* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2010). Other useful texts include Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth ed., *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A social history of spaces and services* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992); Jane E. Simonsen, "'Object Lessons': Domesticity and Display in Native American Assimilation," *American Studies* 43, no. 1 (April 2002): 75-99; and Simonsen, *Making Home Work: Domesticity and Native American Assimilation in the American West, 1860-1919* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

Eichstedt and Stephen Small, and Tiya Miles in particular, have been helpful comparative models in organizing my own interpretive framework.<sup>32</sup>

### Methodology and Materials

My methodological approach in this thesis is predominantly object-driven. I interrogate three categories of objects: Portraits, made for both public and private use; domestic objects, imported by the Ross family from the east coast of the United States for their homes in Indian Territory, and later preserved for public exhibition; and photographs, produced by professional photographers and Ross family members alike, and portraying family and community members from the early days of photography to the turn of the twentieth century. In each chapter, I situate these objects within the socio-cultural contexts in which they were commissioned, produced, and / or circulated, and derive my interpretations of their use, function, and importance through detailed considerations of these contexts. The objects and their associated contexts are used to interrogate the ways in which the Ross family visualized and projected their composite identities in support of their desired affiliation with the categories of modernity being established in the nineteenth century. In this way, each chapter is intended to contribute a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which the dominant visual culture in nineteenth-century explorations of Indigenous life were acknowledged, subverted, and left behind altogether amongst the Ross family and their circle in the Cherokee Nation's elite.

I turn to three primary archival collections with close connections to the Ross family, as well as numerous subsidiary collections that have provided invaluable contextual insight into the visualization of Indigenous groups from the 1840s to the beginning of the twentieth century. In the Cherokee Nation, these include the object and archive collection at the George M. Murrell Home in Park Hill, which is documented here for the first time in academic scholarship through an extended appendix (see Appendix 1); the photography archives of the Cherokee Female Seminary at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, which has received no extended scholarly

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<sup>32</sup> Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small, eds., *Representations of slavery: Race and ideology in southern plantation museums* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002); Tiya Miles, *The House on Diamond Hill: A Cherokee Plantation Story* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). See also Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and white women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); and Catherine Clinton, *The plantation mistress: Woman's world in the old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).

consideration in the context of art history; and the Jennie Ross Cobb photography collection, which is divided between the Oklahoma Historical Society in Oklahoma City, the private collection of Karen Harrington in Tahlequah, and the George M. Murrell home, and is also documented in full here through an extended Appendix (see Appendix 2). My analysis in Chapter Four is based on reproductions of Cobb's photographs that I consulted first hand at the above-mentioned archives, as well as digital copies that were made and sent to me by Karen Harrington in 2015.<sup>33</sup> Subsidiary archives in Oklahoma and the Cherokee Nation that I have also consulted, and that appear in this thesis, include the Anne Ross Piburn photograph and manuscript collection held in the Western History Collections at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, OK, and the photography archives of the Cherokee Heritage Center in Park Hill, which holds additional records related to Jennie Ross Cobb's output.

In Washington, D.C. I consulted a number of important archival collections over the course of a 6-month fellowship at the John W. Kluge Center, Library of Congress. There, I had access to invaluable materials, including such objects as a rare 1850 daguerreotype of Chief John Ross, and the statue of Sequoyah that Anne Ross Piburn modeled for (currently in the Capitol building), discussed in Chapter Three. In addition, I conducted research with the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art, where I consulted the George Catlin papers and the John Mix Stanley papers and scrapbooks for Chapter One of this thesis. Lastly, I worked with the photography archive at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian's cultural resources center in Maryland, where I was able to consult the scrapbooks, travel records, and journals of nineteenth-century school inspectors who spent considerable time in the Cherokee Nation's capital in Tahlequah while the Ross family were flourishing. Inhabiting the spaces in Washington that John Ross frequented regularly in his capacity as a political leader, as well as making the journey numerous times to his other home in the Cherokee Nation, provided access to two disparate political systems and communities, and insight into the complexities that would have gone into mitigating both.

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<sup>33</sup> Reproductions of a family album were shared with me in 2014, however to respect the private function of the album, which is a treasured keepsake that was in the possession of Cobb's great-granddaughter, I have deliberately excluded these images from my analysis here.

## Chapter Breakdown

Chapter One of this thesis takes up with Ross family portraiture from 1843-1907, focusing most substantially on the portraiture of Chief John Ross. As the primary figure in the establishment of the Ross family as the dynasty of the Cherokee Nation, considerations of the ways in which John Ross was portrayed, and the contexts in which his portraits circulated, are of primary importance in establishing how the Ross family was presented as an exemplar of progress and advancement in the nineteenth century. The contexts in which his public portraits were circulated point to the ways in which the family was included in visual frameworks carved out for the visualization of Indigenous “otherness” – travelling Indian galleries, government-sanctioned documentary efforts, War Department commissions – and the ways in which John Ross’s portrait was incoherent within these spaces. The chapter also explores a substantial suite of Ross family portraits that were commissioned by the celebrated frontier artist John Mix Stanley for private use within their homes, in order to explore the ways in which the Ross family exercised considerable agency as sitters and commissioners in the proliferation of “Indigenous scenes” in nineteenth-century frontier painting.

Chapter Two explores the Ross family residences, with particular emphasis on the art and domestic object collections of the George M. Murrell Home, which was used by generations of Ross family members from 1844-1907. This chapter looks to the portraiture and material culture within the home to better understand how it supported (and continues to support) projections of affluence and modernity within the family. I interpret the residence in its multiple functions: its historical status as a working plantation and residence to George Murrell and Minerva and Amanda Ross; its restoration in 1948 under the curatorship of Jennie Ross Cobb, who continued to act as its primary curator until her death in 1959; and its contemporary iteration as a state-owned historic home kept and run under the administration of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Chapter Three moves further into the nineteenth century in order to examine the ways that Indigenous “otherness” was subverted in the photographic portraiture of young girls and women attending the Cherokee Female Seminary – a celebrated institution that the Ross family was instrumental in establishing, and that generations of Ross family women attended. The photography collections of the seminary archives, housed at the John Vaughan Special Collections Library at

Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, form the core archival collection examined in this chapter. Jennie Ross Cobb's most celebrated images of young seminary women are then discussed within the expanded visual framework generated through the school in the late nineteenth century.

The final chapter is dedicated to a comprehensive analysis of Jennie Ross Cobb's photography collection in an exploration of how the Ross family moved from subjects of artistic expression, to practitioners of one of the most modern trends to sweep the country in the late nineteenth century. It first delineates the emerging cultural trend of amateur women's photography in the United States, with a particular focus on women's participation in photographing Indigenous communities as an expression of their own self-fashioning towards the turn of the twentieth century. Next, it situates Jennie Ross Cobb within this important contextual framework, as a consumer and practitioner of the new camera technology. Lastly, it provides the first critical analysis of the contemporary context in which Cobb's photographs enjoyed a resurgence, and challenges the critical framework that asks her photographs to circulate as examples of Indigenous visual sovereignty. In doing so, it seeks to demonstrate the ways in which her photographs have been recruited to the contemporary project of establishing a historical trajectory for Indigenous participation in photography – without substantial consideration paid to the complexities and complications of the narrative.

## Chapter One: Family Lines: Ross Family Portraiture, 1836-1858

*“John Ross, whose name I have before mentioned; with this excellent man, who has been for many years devotedly opposed to the Treaty stipulations for moving [the Cherokees] from their country, I have been familiarly acquainted; [...] I feel authorized and bound, to testify to the unassuming and gentlemanly urbanity of his manners, as well as to the rigid temperance of his habits, and the purity of his language, in which I never knew him to transgress for a moment, in public or private interviews.”*  
 -George Catlin on John Ross, in *Letters and Notes on the manners, customs, and conditions of the North American Indians, 1842*<sup>34</sup>

This chapter analyses the public emergence of the Rosses as the Cherokee Nation’s “first family” through the early portraiture of Chief John Ross. At a time when adventurer-artists such as Charles Bird King, George Catlin, and John Mix Stanley were producing overtly exoticized images of “pre-modern” Indigenous populations in the American west, John Ross was simultaneously urging the federal government to see the ways in which the Cherokees “[had] succeeded the rudeness of the savage state.”<sup>35</sup> Ross’s visualization spans some of the most important nineteenth-century outlets and developments in portraiture, including the famous travelling Indian galleries of Charles Bird King, George Catlin, and John Mix Stanley, and their corresponding catalogues; the staggering encyclopedic project of Thomas McKenney and James Hall, entitled *The Indian Tribes of North America: with biographical sketches and anecdotes of the principal chiefs*; and the Smithsonian Institution’s first ever national exhibition of Native American portraits in 1852 – the first museum exhibition of photography in the United States – accompanied by A. Zeno Shindler’s 1872 catalogue entitled *Photographic portraits of North American Indians in the Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution*. Ross’s portrait was visually incongruous with the bulk of the images being produced for these galleries, though he was included in every major survey of the time.

Section 1.1 introduces the Principal Chief with a particular focus on the ways in which he carried and projected a composite identity as both European and Cherokee in order to maintain political ties in Washington and the Cherokee Nation. Next, section 1.2 examines the contexts in which Ross’s earliest political portraits appeared, as detailed above. Section 1.3 focuses specifically on the work of artist John Mix Stanley in order to examine the first major private commission that the Ross family participated

<sup>34</sup> George Catlin, *Letters and notes on the manners, customs, and condition of the North American Indian*, volume 2 (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1841), 119.

<sup>35</sup> Ross, “To the Senate and House of Representatives,” 458.

in, when they hired the artist to paint a suite of seven portraits made for their private residences. The Ross family also commissioned Stanley to take a series of daguerreotype portraits – some of the first ever commissioned in the Cherokee Nation. To this end, section 1.4 concludes the chapter with an analysis of the photographic portraiture of Chief John Ross, taken in the final years of his tenure as Principal Chief.

### 1.1 Introducing Chief John Ross

John Ross was Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation from 1828 until his death in 1866. During that time, he led the Cherokee people through a number of tumultuous historical events, including most notably their removal from Georgia westward on the Trail of Tears in 1838-39. Almost all existing contemporary scholarship on Ross centralizes his mixed-race heritage and the defining role this identification played in his rise to prominence. Born to the Scottish trader Daniel Ross and his mixed-heritage wife Mollie McDonald on 3 October 1790, Ross grew up along the Coosa River in one of the largest Cherokee towns in present-day Alabama.<sup>36</sup> As was customary, he received his Cherokee name at adulthood, Kooweskoowe or Guwisguwi, meaning “Little White Bird”, and maintained this part of his identity throughout his lifetime. In his recent 2015 study of the parallel careers of John Ross and Andrew Jackson, Steven Inskeep points out that the structures that came to define racial identification in the United States (and that would therefore classify Ross as one-eighth Cherokee) would not make much sense in the matrilineal Cherokee context where belonging was traced through the mother’s bloodline.<sup>37</sup> Thus becoming Kooweskoowe and wearing traditional dress to the annual Green Corn Festival were integral components of Ross’s identity. However, coming from a bi-cultural family, the formal education his father secured for him first with a private tutor and later at school, as well as the English that was spoken at home and the finest collection of maps, books, and English-language newspapers that his father procured prepared Ross for the white world into which he was to be immersed.

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<sup>36</sup> Daniel Ross was the descendant of Scots who moved to Cherokee County on the east coast of the United States in order to trade with the Cherokees. Mary Mollie McDonald, his future wife, was the daughter of John McDonald (also of Scottish descent) and McDonald’s wife Ann Shorey. Ann Shorey is the Cherokee connection in this branch of the Ross family; her mother was Cherokee on both sides of the family. Because belonging to the tribe is matrilineal, Ann Shorey’s status is crucial in the Ross family’s early affiliation with the tribe. Later, generations of Rosses would intermarry with other Cherokees, including John Ross, whose first wife Quatie was also Cherokee on both sides.

<sup>37</sup> Steven Inskeep, *Jacksonland: President Andrew Jackson, Cherokee Chief John Ross, and a great American land grab* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015).

Ross maintained a careful balance between these two components of his identity for strategic reasons both pre- and post-removal. During the first years of his chieftaincy and especially in the years leading up to 1838, Ross was preoccupied with insisting that the Cherokees be permitted to stay in their native homeland in Georgia amidst pressure from the federal government to cede lands and move west. These negotiations required him to circulate in the white world of the political elite while maintaining his loyalty to the Cherokee population he represented. His approach included appeals to the Cherokees' advancement and their adherence to "the principles of white men", stipulating: "I will own that it has been my pride, as Principal Chief of the Cherokees, to implant in the bosoms of the people, and to cherish in my own, *the principles* of white men! [...] those mighty principles to which the United States owes her greatness and her liberty."<sup>38</sup> This created a lasting impression on the white men and women with whom he interacted, who described him in much the same way as they did the Cherokee Nation at large: educated, prosperous, and in the opinion of president John Quincy Adams, holding "manners and deportment" no different from "those of well-bred country gentlemen."<sup>39</sup> His rhetoric was thus reflected in the public image he carefully constructed and projected, so that his allegiance with "well-bred country gentlemen" was vocalized, visualized, and noticed by those he hoped to impress.

When Ross arrived in Park Hill post-removal, he was one of the five wealthiest men in the Cherokee Nation, and lived accordingly. At this time, accounts of Ross by visitors to Park Hill, and from records of his own correspondence, confirm that his identity as a wealthy southern planter was on display front and centre. He lived in Rose Cottage, a large mansion that could accommodate upwards of forty guests at any given time and was adorned with the finest furnishings, including mahogany, rosewood, silver, imported china, and other luxuries which were brought in from across the country.<sup>40</sup> In this way, Ross relied on his ability to integrate and emulate high society – what Inskeep refers to as passing for white<sup>41</sup> – in order to negotiate on behalf of the Cherokees in Washington.

The relationship between Ross's Cherokee identity and his skill at circulating in the political elite played out in his portraiture. In each case, he is pictured as a powerful

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<sup>38</sup> "Letter from John Ross...In answer to Inquiries from a friend," Washington City, 2 July 1836, in Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 456.

<sup>39</sup> John Quincy Adams quoted in Inskeep, *Jacksonland*, 118.

<sup>40</sup> R. Halliburton Jr. claims the furniture in Rose Cottage alone was valued at \$10,000. See Halliburton, Jr., *Red over Black*, 70.

<sup>41</sup> Inskeep, *Jacksonland*, 56.



figure-head, though the contexts in which he appeared contradict this in some ways, and implicate Ross in the paternalistic nineteenth-century narratives surrounding Indigenous populations that were circulating through the catalogues and travelling Indian galleries so popular at the time. Nevertheless, from pre-removal to the throes of the Civil War, Ross was pictured as a progressive and affluent leader, extending the traits invoked by his personal likeness to the much larger social context embodied in the Cherokee Nation itself.

### 1.2 Exhibiting In the Capital: The Indian Galleries of Charles Bird King and George Catlin, 1836-1841

*“But for this gallery, our posterity would ask in vain – ‘what sort of a looking being was the red man of this country?’ In vain would the inquirers be told to read descriptions of him – these never could satisfy. He must be **seen** to be known. Here then is a gift to posterity.”*  
*–Jonathan Elliot on Charles Bird King’s Indian Gallery, Guide to Washington, 1830.<sup>42</sup>*

#### *Charles Bird King*

The most famous portrait of Ross was done by Charles Bird King, likely between 1836-37 when both were in Washington. The original was destroyed in the monumental 1865 fire at the Smithsonian that wiped out the bulk of both King’s and John Mix Stanley’s Indian Galleries, which were hanging in the museum’s west wing between 1852 and 1865. Curiously, the portrait is not listed in the corresponding documentation, which includes most substantially the 1859 catalogue of works that were moved from the War Department where they originally hung, to the Smithsonian in 1858. Neither is there any mention of the Ross portrait in the list of works bequeathed to the Redwood Library at Newport, the Museum of Science and Art of the University of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia, or at the U.S. National Museum at Washington. This much points to the uncontested conclusion that, like most of the originals painted for the War Department, Ross’s portrait went up in flames on 24 January 1865.

Luckily, the War Department commission described in this section grew into a parallel project that would preserve Ross’s likeness for generations of viewers to consider. Over the course of eight years, Superintendent of Indian Affairs Thomas McKenney, who was a close acquaintance of Ross’s, undertook an ambitious project to reproduce King’s original portraits for a descriptive catalogue of the country’s Indigenous tribes annotated with biographical sketches of the principal chiefs. In

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<sup>42</sup> John Mix Stanley Scrapbook, 1843-1868, Collection Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

collaboration with James Hall, who was responsible for producing the written biographies and anecdotes for the catalogue, McKenney and Hall's *The Indian Tribes of North America* was published for the first time in February of 1837. The reproductions are near identical to King's originals, and provide an accurate guideline to the compositions he painted from life. The resulting images allegedly astonished McKenney, who upon seeing one of the lithographs exclaimed "I consider the above copy, perfect; a perfect likeness of the man, who is known to me – and an exact copy of the original drawing by King, now in the office of Indian affairs."<sup>43</sup>

Charles Bird King's relationship with the United States War Department spanned twenty years, from the spring of 1822 until 1842. He was first approached by Thomas McKenney to paint delegates from the Pawnee, Kansa, Oto, and Omaha nations in the 1821 Upper Missouri delegation who were visiting Washington for an audience with president James Monroe. At this time, McKenney had an idea to commission portraits of all of the prominent visiting delegations in the hopes of developing a government collection. From then until 1842, King was commissioned to paint from life over one hundred portraits, including important members of at least twenty tribes from across the country. These portraits thus functioned on a number of levels: They were seen as capturing what McKenney perceived to be a "vanishing" way of life; they satisfied his impulse to collect and document, and therefore contributed to the early formation of a national archive "for the inspections of the curious", providing "information of future generations"<sup>44</sup>; and they continued the European tradition of delegation portraiture in an American context. King's portraits thus served a documentary function that played an important role in the development of a national collection. Further, unlike his contemporaries George Catlin and John Mix Stanley who traveled west to paint Indigenous populations, King's portraits were done in Washington, and thus take on an additional layer of meaning as records of diplomatic relations between the country's Indigenous tribes and its federal government.

It was on one such trip to Washington that Ross made his way to King's studio and sat for his portrait. Aside from his status as Principal Chief and the controversial negotiations with the federal government that he was in the midst of pre-removal, Ross was also a friend of Thomas McKenney, and thus it comes as no surprise that he would

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas McKenney quoted in Herman J. Viola, *The Indian Legacy of Charles Bird King* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press and Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976), 71.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 18-20.

be selected for a portrait.<sup>45</sup> King was likely paid \$20 for the bust – a steady fee that the War Department issued, as opposed to the slightly more expensive \$27 he brought in for full figures. Historians assume that it was up on McKenney’s wall at some point, and later moved to the Smithsonian.<sup>46</sup>

The strongest evidence that we have of King’s original commission is its copy for McKenney and Hall’s *The Indian Tribes of North America*, where Ross’s portrait appears in volume three (fig. 1.4)<sup>47</sup>. The bust pictures him adorned in European dress, sitting in a red velvet chair at a desk with his hand over a piece of paper – one of two that provide insight into the portrait’s date, the circumstances under which it was taken, and the aspects of Ross’s character that were intended with its production. Just underneath Ross’s right elbow a folded sheet of paper identifies him, reading “John Ross Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation.” This suggests that the portrait would not have been taken before his appointment in 1828. The piece of paper that rests under his right hand provides more specific insight as to when it was done, reading “Protest and Memorial of the Cherokee Nation Sept. 1836”, invoking Ross’s momentous protest to the removal of the Cherokee under the Treaty of New Echota, for which his reputation was made.

The letter in question refers to one written by Ross on Red Clay Council Ground in Tennessee on 28 September 1836 and signed by him and his brother Lewis Ross along with over two thousand supporters. Ross opens the letter by seeking permission to solicit the attention of the Senate and House of Representatives “under circumstances [...] of distress and anxiety beyond our power to express”<sup>48</sup> and continues in a passionate protest against the Treaty of New Echota that would see the Cherokee Nation pushed out of their native Georgia. “By the stipulations of [the treaty],” Ross urges, “we are denationalized; we are disenfranchised.” He continues, “We are deprived of membership in the human family! We have neither land nor home, nor resting place that can be called our own” – and this much based on the “acts of a few unauthorized

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<sup>45</sup> The exact date of King’s original portrait of Ross is unknown. He painted other prominent Cherokees who visited Washington including Sequoyah in 1828; however, in the McKenney and Hall lithographic reproduction, Ross is pictured with his hand over a letter dated 1836, suggesting the portrait was taken around this time. Steven Inskeep dated the portrait in the 1820s during his lecture at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., however this date is impossible given the 1836 date on the letter in Ross’s portrait. See Steven Inskeep, “Jacksonland,” United States National Archives, 14 September 2015, <https://youtu.be/JR9AssuDGIU> (accessed 15 November 2015).

<sup>46</sup> As per Viola, *The Indian Legacy of Charles Bird King*.

<sup>47</sup> Visual analysis for this work is guided by the lithograph in the collections of the Library of Congress prints and photographs division, Washington, D.C.

<sup>48</sup> Ross, “To the Senate and House of Representatives”, in Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, 458.

individuals.”<sup>49</sup> The basis of Ross’s plea thus rests on the tension between individual and collective agency: the few delegates who negotiated the Treaty of New Echota without the knowledge or support of the Cherokee Nation are described as committing an act of individual dissent against which Ross stipulates “we have had no agency.”<sup>50</sup> This represents a further injustice when he describes the adoption of the government’s civilizing program as an integral component of collective Cherokee identity:

In truth, our cause is your own [...] it is based upon your own principles, which we have learned from yourselves [...] and the result is manifest. The wildness of the forest has given place to comfortable dwellings and cultivated fields [...] mental culture, industrious habits, and domestic enjoyments, have succeeded the rudeness of the savage state.<sup>51</sup>

In a final appeal, Ross throws the fate of his nation into the hands of the senate with the incentive that their advancement – indeed their very existence, should the treaty be reversed – would be “perpetuated as a living monument, to testify to posterity the honor, the magnanimity, the generosity of the United States.”<sup>52</sup>

Ross’s portrait memorializes this plea and the “living monument” it embodies – not the events leading up to its production, nor its outcome, but the plea itself. This becomes an integral part of how we read his character through the King portrait. While the Euro-American clothing he is portrayed in is a striking symbol of Cherokee advancement in white society, especially in the context of other chiefs who were painted by King and clad in more traditional garb, the letter offers a subtler and more conflicted insight into Ross’s relationship to both worlds. Though it was written in Red Clay, in the portrait Ross is in Washington with the letter in hand, thus adjusting to McKenney’s original priority of documenting the presence of distinguished delegates in the capital. Its circulation also reflects Ross’s own movement back and forth between the Cherokee Nation and Washington, right up until his death in 1866 and subsequent burial back in the Park Hill Ross family cemetery. Lastly, it identifies Ross as an educated man of letters, something that facilitated his role as a voice for his people throughout his chieftaincy. This is highlighted in his biographical entry, which identifies him as having a mind “enlarged by education and travel”, and having

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 460.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 461.

“laboured assiduously with the pen [...] to enlist the sympathies of the American Government and people.”<sup>53</sup> Indeed, we know Ross today through his letters.

Most of the text for *The Indian Tribes of North America* was produced by James Hall, who diligently collected biographical details from each of the sitters portrayed. Ross’s entry is unusual, however, in that it admits to be incomplete as far as personal details go:

We regret that the want of materials for a separate memoir of this chief has prevented us from giving him the place in the biographical portrait of our work, to which his eminent services, and conspicuous position, entitle him. But this has been prevented by the difficulty of procuring authentic information, and by our reluctance to enter in detail upon a life so eventful and important, without such full and accurate materials, as would enable us to do justice as well to him, as to the numerous friends and enemies, who have acted with and against him.<sup>54</sup>

Given Ross’s friendship with Hall’s collaborator, his admission that he was unable to procure “authentic information” is unusual. It is unlikely that Ross would not be forthcoming with this information given his willingness to sit for his portrait, and to be included in the McKenney and Hall anthology. Further, in a later letter to the American writer John Howard Payne dated 1848, Ross expresses his willingness to contribute to Payne’s project of publishing a history of the Cherokees, writing, “If agreeable to yourself, I should be happy, to see you here at any time, to talk over the subject of the History of the Cherokees, you design publishing.”<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, Ross’s entry in McKenney and Hall is pursued “in general terms”<sup>56</sup>, and focuses almost exclusively on his role as a leader during the Treaty of New Echota and the Trail of Tears, supporting the centrality of the letter in his portrait. His role in Washington is also described, further reinforcing the movement and circulation of Ross’s leadership in both the Cherokee Nation and the United States as symbolized by the letter. “[He] has spent many of his winters at Washington,” Hall writes, “where he was well known to all the leading statesmen [...] while the remainder of his time has been actively employed among his own people.”<sup>57</sup> Throughout the section, Hall seems intent on Ross’s

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<sup>53</sup> Thomas Lorraine McKenney and James Hall, *The Indian Tribes of North America, with biographical sketches and anecdotes of the principle chiefs*, vol. 3, ed. Frederick Webb Hodge (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1933), 309.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> John Ross, “Letter to John Howard Payne”, New York, 26 November 1848, in Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, vol. 2, 330.

<sup>56</sup> McKenney and Hall, *The Indian Tribes of North America*, 310.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

influence, even sharing the narrative with him: “We have considered it due to the Cherokees in this afflicting crisis of their affairs, to let their chief be heard.”<sup>58</sup>

Thomas McKenney’s War Department Gallery presented an individuated visual account of the country’s Indigenous leaders. Commissioning King’s European-influenced abilities to visualize the character and gravitas of each sitter thus functioned as a sign of respect to the visiting delegates, and inscribed their presence within the space of the nation’s capital. Some delegates even commissioned King to make copies for them to take home, suggesting their approval of the process. As Rowena Houghton Dasch points out, the delegates’ presence in Washington, and the War Department gallery’s commemoration of it, allowed the local population an opportunity to get past “the abstract and distant ‘American Indian’ type” and move towards an understanding of each sitter on an individual basis.<sup>59</sup> The subsequent publication of *The Indian Tribes of North America* presents Ross in the context of a biographical encyclopedia, forging a direct correlation between outward appearance and inner character that was made possible through the juxtaposition of portraiture and textual biography. This emerging encyclopedic approach speaks to Marcia Pointon’s observations about the synchronicity of written biography and painted portraiture in the nineteenth century.<sup>60</sup> McKenney and Hall were not alone in their project of producing a catalogue of prominent Indigenous sitters, however; one of the country’s most influential painters of Indigenous life was close on their heels.

### *George Catlin*

*“No man can appreciate better than myself the admirable fidelity of your drawings and book which I have lately received. They are equally spirited and accurate – they are true to nature. Things that **are** are not sacrificed, as they too often are by the painter, to things as in his judgment they should be. [...] Your collection will preserve them, as far as human art can do, and will form the most perfect monument of an extinguished race that the world has ever seen.”*  
– Letter from Lewis Clark to George Catlin, Paris, 1841.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 323.

<sup>59</sup> Rowena Houghton Dasch, “‘Now Exhibiting’: Charles Bird King’s picture gallery, fashioning American taste and nation 1824-1861,” (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2013), 138.

<sup>60</sup> See Marcia Pointon, *Portrayal and the Search for Identity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013). For portraiture in the context of eighteenth-century Britain, from which many American portraiture conventions were adopted, see her book *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>61</sup> “Letter from Lewis Clark to George Catlin,” Légation des États-Unis, Paris, December 1841. George Catlin Papers, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

On 27 January 1838, John Ross sent a letter to his friend John Howard Payne from Washington enquiring after a written transcript of his speech to the Seminoles. “Did Mr. Catlin hand you a copy of my talk [...]?” Ross inquired, “and is he gone to Charleston with the view of painting the exiled chiefs of that nation? I should be gratified to be informed upon these points – and at *all* times be happy in hearing from you.”<sup>62</sup> When reunited in Washington in the spring, Ross and Payne would go together to hear the celebrated artist George Catlin speak. On 10 April, Ross wrote a short note to Elizabeth Milligan, the woman he was courting at the time, informing her that the two men would be calling on the Milligan sisters that evening, “to attend Mr. Catlin’s lecture” in Washington.<sup>63</sup> George Catlin was back from his extensive travels across the western frontier, where he was compiling portraits for his own eventual catalogue, entitled *Letters and notes on the manners, customs, and condition of the Native American Indians* published for the first time in 1837 and subsequently thereafter. It was probably on this visit to Washington that Catlin and Ross discussed the possibility of a portrait. Indeed, a hand-coloured chromolithograph of Ross appears in the 1840 edition of Catlin’s anthology, as plate number 215 in his section on the Cherokee.<sup>64</sup>

Catlin hoped that the U.S. government would purchase his gallery to fulfill the same documentary and commemorative impulses that saw McKenney commissioning King; however, he was unsuccessful to this end. Like King, Catlin first attempted the artist circuit in Philadelphia, trying to establish himself as a portraitist there before giving up and heading west. His initial petition to the government happened the same year that Ross went to hear him speak during his lecture circuit in the capital. With the American government passing on the acquisition of the gallery, Catlin took it to Europe, settling with his family in London and exhibiting on the continent. The gallery was broken up in 1852, and his original portrait of Ross remains un-located. Reproductions of an 1848 edition included in the collections of the Archives of American Art have a handwritten entry that reads “missing” next to Ross’s name, indicating that researchers have yet to locate it.<sup>65</sup> However, certificates of authenticity were included as part of his catalogues, including one that advertised his portrait of Ross as an example of the

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<sup>62</sup> “Letter to John Howard Payne,” Washington City, 27 January 1838, in Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, vol. 1, 586-89.

<sup>63</sup> “Letter to Elizabeth Milligan,” in Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, vol. 1, 626.

<sup>64</sup> For this edition see George Catlin, *Letters and notes on the manners, customs, and condition of the North American Indians* (London: Egyptian Hall, 1840). Collection Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley.

“distinguished Men and Women of the different Tribes”, indicating that an original before the illustrated version did indeed exist and was exhibited in Washington, and possibly abroad (fig. 1.5). Thus, like the original King portrait, our only insight into Catlin’s rendering is the lithograph reproduced for *Letters and Notes*. Interestingly, Hall approached Catlin during the production stages of *The Indian Tribes of North America* for a potential collaboration. Hall appealed to Catlin’s extensive portrait collection and his experience travelling across the frontier to try and persuade him to contribute to the project. Catlin refused, and continued his pursuit with *Letters and Notes*, ultimately creating a rival publication to McKenney and Hall’s.

The image of Ross for the 1841 edition is a chromolithograph bust that pictures him in European clothing similar to the garb he chose for his portrait painted by King (fig. 1.6). He is adorned in a yellow vest, white high collared shirt, and overcoat, and sits with one arm over the back of a red chair. Catlin’s cartoon busts of various members of the Cherokee Nation include a written component, much in the same vein as the McKenney and Hall catalogue; however, his editions from the 1840s present a later version of post-removal Cherokee history. Rather than focusing on the Treaty of New Echota, as Hall’s biography does, Catlin’s account takes place west of the Mississippi. Nevertheless, he too highlights Ross’s resistance to the removal, and describes him as “a civilized and highly educated and accomplished gentleman.”<sup>66</sup> He adds an addendum, highlighting their familiar acquaintance and stating “I feel authorized, and bound, to testify to the unassuming and gentlemanly urbanity of his manners, as well as to the rigid temperance of his habits, and the purity of his language, in which I never knew him to transgress for a moment, in public or private interviews.”<sup>67</sup> Catlin’s description of Ross as possessing a “gentlemanly urbanity” is an excellent summation of how he was perceived in the public eye, and how he was depicted in his portraiture.

Catlin was aware of the visual distinction between modernity and Indigeneity that was being produced by other practitioners in the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed the very pursuit of producing a travelling Indian gallery that would attract a gallery-going public relied on such a distinction. He was also susceptible to the various mythologies surrounding Indigenous “progress” that were circulating in the nineteenth century – narratives of the “noble savage” and the “vanishing race” that painted Indigenous

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<sup>66</sup> Catlin, *Letters and notes*, 119.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.



figures as tragic heroes whose relationships to modernity were at the mercy of the painter's brush. This much is captured in Lewis Clark's letter to Catlin, in which he nostalgically muses that Catlin's portraits were in place to "preserve", and to produce a "most perfect monument of an extinguished race that the world has ever seen."<sup>68</sup> Catlin's fixation with the emergence of modernity in Indigenous contexts is crassly misrepresented in a portrait of the Assiniboin leader Wi-jún-jon, for instance, in which he anticipates the "before and after" trope later picked up in documentary photography (fig. 1.7). The posing of the figure here highlights the visual gulf between his "before" likeness, in which he is roughly sketched in unspecific Plains clothing, including full headdress, buckskin shirt, blanket, and moccasins, with tattoos painted sloppily on his legs; and the "after" portrait, in which the dandy figure swaggers under the influence of the liquor bottles tucked into his back pocket, with two gloved hands clutching an umbrella in one, and a fan in the other.<sup>69</sup> Given this precedent, Catlin's inclusion of John Ross's portrait in one of his galleries is an interesting break from the crassly delineated visual gulf between Indigenous and modern traditions that were pursued elsewhere in his work.

### 1.3 Going West: John Mix Stanley and Ross Family Portraiture, 1843-44

*"Walk into the Gallery; there they stand before you – not mere imitations, like Catlin's', but bold, life-like, full size pictures of as noble a race of men as the light of day ever shone upon. [...] all are there before you, looking like life so exact that one almost fancies he has been suddenly transferred from the busy, bustling cities of the east to the wild woods and broad prairies of the west."*

– Review of Stanley's Indian Gallery, Troy, 23 September 1850.<sup>70</sup>

By 1843 Ross had returned to Park Hill, and it was there that he would come into contact with the celebrated frontier artist John Mix Stanley. Six years after Catlin toured his Indian gallery in Washington, Stanley arrived in Tahlequah to collect portraits for a gallery of his own – and would be described as Catlin's rival, and in some cases his superior, when his own gallery made it to Washington. Stanley arrived in the Cherokee Nation in June of 1843 with his assistant Caleb Sumner Dickerman to paint one of his most ambitious works (and incidentally one of the few that would survive the Smithsonian fire). The painting is entitled *International Indian Council*, and pictures the

<sup>68</sup> Letter from Lewis Clark to George Catlin, 1841

<sup>69</sup> This visual exaggeration is exacerbated through Catlin's mis-translation of the sitter's name, Wi-jún-jon (meaning 'The Light') to the erroneous 'Pigeon's Egg Head', which chose for the title of his painting.

<sup>70</sup> John Mix Stanley Scrapbook.

inter-tribal council convened by John Ross to establish alliances and laws amongst the newly arrived tribes on the frontier (fig. 1.8). It was one of three peace councils that Stanley attended that year, estimating attendance at ten thousand people, including tribal leaders and government officials. While only the figures of Zachary Taylor and his aid William W.S. Bliss have been explicitly identified in the painting, it is likely that Ross is pictured presiding over the council as well.

Stanley also painted John Ross, though the portrait unfortunately became another casualty of the Smithsonian fire. When exhibited back on the east coast, his gallery was received with great acclaim, and the Ross portrait often singled out in exhibition reviews. In St. Louis, one reviewer notes “among the portraits we noticed a splendid likeness of John Ross,”<sup>71</sup> while a Cincinnati reporter muses that “the portrait of John Ross, [and those of] many of the warriors that took a part in the Sanguine Florida war, are executed in a masterly manner, far superior in our opinion to any Indian portraits that have been exhibited in the United States.”<sup>72</sup> A number of reporters were taken with Stanley’s portrayal of character in the Indian Gallery portraits, again pointing to the individuation of each sitter that King was working towards with his War Department commission. One reporter commends Stanley’s ability with the brush, stating “There was [...] the character of the actors more strongly drawn than any pen or writer could do it. [...] the movers in the Cherokee feuds, Ross, Stan Watie, &c. [...] in the delineation of strong character few can equal Stanley.”<sup>73</sup> A later reviewer for an Albany, N.Y. newspaper echoes this sentiment, stating, “It is a matter of no little curiosity to be able to look upon the precise features of [...] Ross, and an hundred other distinguished Chiefs and to mark the peculiarities, the native strength and power which their countenances exhibit.”<sup>74</sup> Louisville also gave it a warm reception, and Ross’s portrait was celebrated as a true likeness of the Principal Chief. “We are personally acquainted with the originals of many of his portraits, and have never seen more faithful likenesses,” one reviewer confirms. “The portraits of John Ross, George Lowry [etc.]

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<sup>71</sup> “Indian Portraits”, *St. Louis N. Era*, 15 May 1845, in John Mix Stanley Scrapbook.

<sup>72</sup> “Stanley and Dickerman’s Gallery of Indian Portraits”, newspaper unknown, 2 February 1846, John Mix Stanley Scrapbook.

<sup>73</sup> “Patronage of Artists and Authors, &c.”, *The Cincinnati Evening Journal*, 17 February 1846. John Mix Stanley Scrapbook.

<sup>74</sup> “Stanley and Dickerman’s Indian Portrait Gallery”, unknown Albany newspaper, 9 November 1850, John Mix Stanley Scrapbook.

are unsurpassed, and he had not a single painting while here, that was not immediately recognized by every citizen and Indian who visited his rooms.”<sup>75</sup>

Like Catlin, Stanley petitioned the U.S. government to purchase his gallery as the core of a national collection. This was endorsed by McKenney himself, who wrote a glowing letter on Stanley’s behalf. “Stanley has immortalized himself by the reflex he has given of this down trodden race”, he writes.<sup>76</sup> Like most of the reviews Stanley’s gallery attracted, McKenney emphasized the “life-like” character of the portraits, which, given the special eye-witness status Stanley held due to his time on the frontier, was the primary basis of their value. “Nothing can be more life-like than are these portraits,” McKenney urges. “The costume, also, is perfect. It is all a reality – truth is at the foundation of all.”<sup>77</sup> McKenney was not alone in his praise for Stanley’s gallery. In fact, many of the reviews Stanley collected for his scrapbook describe it as superior to Catlin’s, and express an anxiety for it to stay in the United States given Catlin’s displacement of his own gallery to Europe.<sup>78</sup> One reviewer rates Stanley’s gallery superior to both Catlin’s and King’s:

We are well acquainted with the celebrated Catlin Gallery, which attracted so much attention here and in Europe, and which the French Government is now said to be about to purchase. We are familiar, also, with the United States Gallery of Indian Portraits, by Charles Bird King, at Washington, which has been gradually augmenting for many years and is very valuable. But the present collection is superior to them both, not in extent or variety, but in the high finish of the paintings, their depth of expression, and the bold and striking air of life and reality with which these wild and singular figures stand out from the canvass [sic].<sup>79</sup>

While an official purchase was never made in Stanley’s lifetime, his gallery made it to the Smithsonian in 1852, where it was joined by King’s War Department Gallery when it was moved six years later in 1858. There the two galleries formed the most comprehensive collection of Native American portraiture in the country. This satisfied the growing public demand for a gallery of the sort, and is anticipated in one reviewer’s express desire that Stanley’s gallery become “the property of the public, and be placed, together with other paintings of a similar character [...] in some capacious

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<sup>75</sup> “Mr. Stanley, and his Indian portraits”, newspaper unknown, date unknown, John Mix Stanley Scrapbook.

<sup>76</sup> “Extract of a letter from Col. Thos. McKenney, formerly Commissioner of Indian Affairs, to a friend of his in this city”, newspaper unknown, New York, 20 March 1851, John Mix Stanley Scrapbook.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> For a comparative analysis of Catlin’s and Stanley’s galleries see Brian W. Dippie, “Government Patronage: Catlin, Stanley, and Eastman,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 44, no. 4 (Autumn 1994): 40-53.

<sup>79</sup> “The Indian Gallery”, unknown Cincinnati newspaper, c. 1846, John Mix Stanley Scrapbook.

and well-lighted room, where they could be viewed and enjoyed by the people.”<sup>80</sup> When the two galleries co-mingled at the Smithsonian, the local viewing public was exposed to the individual likenesses of the country’s pre-eminent Indigenous leaders. A sculpture entitled *Dying Gaul* by British artist John Gott was loaned to the exhibition by a local Washington collector and installed in front of the Indian galleries. In a gesture of extreme interpretive manipulation, viewers were thus encouraged to associate the prominent men adorning the walls of the newly opened Smithsonian with the stoic gladiator standing defeated in Gott’s sculpture. This curatorial decision worked to reinforce the ‘vanishing race’ ideology that became so popular amongst the Indian Gallery going public.

The only existing visual evidence we have as to the layout of these galleries is found in two stereographs that picture them hanging in the west wing of the Smithsonian (figs. 1.9 and 1.10). Both were published by Langenheim, Lloyd, and co. around 1851 and one may very well have been taken by Stanley himself.<sup>81</sup> The clearest stereograph pictures his gallery hanging behind the Gott sculpture (fig. 1.11). Though a clear identification of the figures based on the Langenheim view is not possible, it is tempting to think that John Ross might be hanging in the left corner of the main wall, in a cluster of portraits picturing sitters in European dress. Scholar and former senior Smithsonian curator Paula Richardson Fleming notes that the Langenheim glass stereo is the best existing view we have of the gallery due to problems with lighting.<sup>82</sup> We do know that Ross’s portrait was on the wall, however. Like Catlin, Stanley produced a catalogue of his portraits that was available to gallery viewers entitled *Portraits of North American Indians, with sketches of scenery, etc.* published by the Smithsonian in 1852. Ross’s entry appears at number 19, under his Cherokee name Coo-Wis-Coo-Ee. Stanley writes a glowing profile of Ross – a man of “high estimation” and “a man of education” – with an emphasis on his hospitality, which Stanley himself experienced when visiting Park Hill: “His hospitality is unbounded [...] his guests are at once made to feel at home, and forget that they are far from the busy scenes of civilization.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> “Stanley’s Indian Gallery of Portraits”, *The National Intelligencer*, c. 1851, John Mix Stanley Scrapbook.

<sup>81</sup> One of the stereographs in the collections of the Smithsonian National Anthropological Archives is tentatively attributed to Stanley (not pictured here).

<sup>82</sup> Paula Richardson Fleming, personal correspondence with author, 30 November 2015.

<sup>83</sup> John Mix Stanley, *Portraits of North American Indians, with sketches of scenery, etc. painted by J.M. Stanley* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 1852), 15.

The same year that John Ross's portrait materialized, in 1844, Stanley received an additional, substantial Ross family commission. This commission was separate from his Indian Gallery portraits and thus presumably made for private use and exhibition in the domestic sphere. Stanley's presence at the Intertribal council provided an opportunity to become acquainted with the elite political families active in Indian Territory during his time there. This would have been an important place for him to gain commissions, and is likely where he first encountered numerous members of the Ross family. His presence in the Territory was also advertised in the local *Arkansas Intelligencer*, where the paper reported that "many of our citizens would like to avail themselves of an opportunity of having their 'images and likenesses' transferred to canvas by Mr. Stanley's magic pencil."<sup>84</sup> As such, Stanley received two major commissions to paint Chief John Ross's extended family: the chief's sister Elizabeth, her husband John Golden Ross,<sup>85</sup> and their three children William Potter Ross, Eleanora C. Ross, and Lewis Anderson Ross (figs. 1.12-1.16); and the chief's daughter Jane Ross Meigs with her baby Elizabeth, along with her two sons John and Henry Clay Meigs (figs. 1.17-1.18).

The first commission features a series of portraits that follow an adherence to formal portraiture conventions, while including subtle references to particular traits of the Ross family. John Golden Ross, who is likely the primary commissioner of the series, appears in a position of authority, adorned in a black suit, crisp white shirt and black cravat seated in a red upholstered chair. He was a close confidante of the Principal Chief, and served as a liaison with the rest of the tribe during John Ross's frequent trips to Washington. He holds a copy of the *Cherokee Advocate* newspaper in his hand – a private reference to his son, who was its first editor. The portrait of his wife Elizabeth, a teacher, has her in a mirror position to her husband's, suggesting that the pair were conceived of as a diptych. William Potter Ross, in a suit identical to his father's, is pictured in a classic three-quarter bust pose. As the catalogue accompanying the portrait's recent exhibition states, "If he looks a bit self-satisfied in the Stanley portrait, he should have been. In 1842, just two years before he sat for Stanley, he had graduated

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<sup>84</sup> Quoted in *Painted Journeys: The Art of John Mix Stanley*, ed. Peter H. Hassrick and Mindy N. Besaw (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 140.

<sup>85</sup> No blood relation to the Ross family under review here; related by marriage.

from Princeton, the first in his class of forty-four men.”<sup>86</sup> He would later become the first editor of the *Cherokee Advocate*, later going on to serve in the Cherokee senate.

The portrait of John Golden and Elizabeth Ross’s daughter Eleanora C. Ross is especially interesting. In it, she wears a formal pale pink dress, with her hair falling across her shoulders but for two braids that stretch across her collarbone. She holds a copy of Stanley’s sketchbook open to a pastoral landscape scene in her lap, with his name appearing below the sketch. The other hand holds a pencil pointed to the adjacent blank page. Stanley may have been offering drawing lessons to the young woman during his time in Indian Territory; this would align with the Victorian educational expectations for girls and young women being promoted through the seminaries they attended. That the young girl, under different circumstances, might be found in the pages of Stanley’s scrapbook rather than holding it poised for her own portrait commission, is impossible to ignore given the fate of Stanley’s Indian Gallery sitters. It may also point to the journey of Stanley’s subjects from the frontier landscape scenes that he was so fascinated in capturing in his sketchbook to the high society “urbanity” that Catlin describes Ross as possessing, and that becomes memorialized in this portrait series in particular.

In addition, Stanley painted John Ross’s daughter Jane Ross Meigs in a demure portrait with her baby Elizabeth Grace, as well as her two young children John Ross and Henry Clay Meigs pictured with their dog Carlo (figs. 1.17 and 1.18). Jane, a daughter from Ross’s first marriage to a Cherokee woman named Quatie, married U.S. agent Return J. Meigs, who valued material prosperity and encouraged the Cherokee to do the same. As Alexandra Harmon notes, Meigs “urged Cherokee leaders to take pride in having ‘more money, more cattle, more horses, more and better cloathing [sic] than any other nation of Red men of equal numbers in America.’”<sup>87</sup> In marrying into the Ross family, Meigs would find an abundance of this prosperity, and the portrait commission reflects as much in the clothing selected for Meigs’s children.

Stanley’s final portrait is of Eleanora Ross’s young brother Lewis Anderson Ross, who is pictured sitting on a barrel of hay holding a bow and arrow in his left hand, and a small hare in his right. The young Ross here carries on the hunting tradition keenly pursued in the family. He is dressed in colours that compliment Eleanora Ross’s

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>87</sup> Alexandra Harmon, *Rich Indians: Native people and the problem of wealth in American history* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 105.

portrait, with both children painted against an illusionistic outdoor backdrop that includes hints of sky, hay, and in Lewis Anderson Ross's case, the trunk of a tree. In expressions reminiscent of their parents, the children appear serious and unmoving, each intently clutching the paraphernalia attached to their gendered activities while gazing out at Stanley.

As a group, the paintings use formal portrait conventions to deliberately associate this branch of the Ross family with politics (John Golden Ross), education (Elizabeth Ross), journalism and public life (William Potter Ross), culture/refinement (Eleanora Ross), and aristocratic traditions, as in the hunting trope included in Lewis Anderson Ross's portrait. Overall, the Ross family commission thus recreates the affluence and refinement that John Ross was known and respected for, and is unique first in the distinctness of the portraits from those Stanley took for his travelling Indian Gallery, and next for their very commission – that of an affluent Native American family for display in their own homes and not through a government agent or curio-seeking artist.

An additional Ross family commission was completed by Stanley during his time in Indian Territory. In 1843, a letter written by his assistant Caleb Sumner Dickerman on 4 August in Bayou Menard, Cherokee Nation described what was probably one of the first – if not the first – photographic commission made by the Ross family: “After the adjournment of the Council we were requested by Mr. Lewis Ross (a brother of the principal Chief of the nation,) to visit his house and take some Daguerreotype [sic] miniatures for him. Accordingly we repaired to his house, remained four days, and took ten miniatures.”<sup>88</sup> Dickerman's letter goes on to describe Lewis Ross's family, character, and home, creating a portrait in words of Stanley's commissioner. He emphasizes race (“Mr. R. has but very little of the Indian blood in his veins. He has a white lady for a wife”); his “beautiful and accomplished” daughters; his son, the Princeton College graduate; his hospitality and worthiness; his house, “beautifully situated, and furnished in modern style”; and the labour that kept the plantation and estate running, “100 negroes [...] all of whom appear happy and perfectly contented.”<sup>89</sup> Thus, like his brother John, Lewis Ross played an active role in

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<sup>88</sup> “Letter written by Mr. Sumner Dickerman,” Bayou Menard, Cherokee Nation, 4 August 1843. John Mix Stanley Scrapbook.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

commissioning cutting-edge portraiture for himself and his family, keeping up the modern and affluent appearance for which the family was known.

Stanley's relationship to the Rosses through the commissioned paintings of John Ross and his family, and the daguerreotype miniatures of Lewis Ross and his, is a remarkable example of the modernization of portraiture among Indigenous elites. These commissions served a different purpose to the portraits and scenes Stanley intended for his Indian Gallery. This was especially true of the daguerreotype miniatures – a commission that implicated the Ross family in an important moment in the transformation of portraiture on the frontier with the arrival of the camera. Scholar Julia Ann Schimmel describes the advent of Stanley's arrival with a daguerreotype camera as “astonishing”, suggesting that he may very well have been the first artist to photograph in the Southwest, and was one of few who brought a camera onto the western frontier as early as he did.<sup>90</sup> Martha Sandweiss contextualizes Stanley's 1843 daguerreotypes within the timeline of Native American portraiture, taking as her starting point the first documented photograph of an Indigenous person in the portrait of Hawaiian chief Timoteo Ha'ahlio in 1843.<sup>91</sup> Stanley's daguerreotypes in June of that year took place just two weeks after the historic Ha'ahlio portrait, marking the Ross miniatures as some of the first photographic portraits of Native American sitters in the history of daguerreotype photography in the United States. Understanding the Ross commission in this light offers the opportunity for an interpretive shift, in that they were commissioned as personal keepsakes to be kept within the family – much like the oil portraits Stanley was commissioned to paint – and not as exploitative visual objects to be taken back east and exhibited as part of a travelling gallery. As Sandweiss reinforces, the Ross commission indicates that “native subjects were [...] participating as full partners in the collaborative process of making a picture, and in understanding how photographic portraits could serve personal needs.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Julia Ann Schimmel, “John Mix Stanley and Imagery of the West in Nineteenth-Century American Art,” (PhD diss., New York University, 1983), 44-45.

<sup>91</sup> Herman J. Viola, however, dates the first portrait of a Native American sitter between 1844-1846. The portrait in question is of Peter Jones, a minister of Ojibwa-white ancestry who visited Great Britain from 1844-46 and posed for his photograph in full regalia for David Hill and Robert Adamson of Edinburgh. See Herman J. Viola, *Diplomats in Buckskins: A History of Indian Delegations in Washington City* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981), 179.

<sup>92</sup> Sandweiss, *Print the Legend*, 210.



#### 1.4 The Photographic Portraiture of John Ross, 1844-1858

With the introduction of photography on the American frontier, professional and amateur photographers alike undertook the visualization of Indigenous populations for tourist and documentary purposes. “Adventurer artists” like King, Catlin, and Stanley were eventually replaced by similar figures in the photographers who perpetuated similarly misinformed stereotypes about the relationship of Indigenous subjects to photography. Here again, John Ross’s image started to appear, only now in photographs, indicating a final context in which his private and public persona was visualized and circulated.

Ross started to appear in photographs as early as 1844, when he sat for a wedding portrait with his second wife Mary Brian Stapler. This first photographic image of Ross, then fifty-four years of age, marks a more personal portrayal of the public figure who, before this, appears predominantly in the context of his public persona as Principal Chief. Further, the personal nature of the image deflects the highly charged context of Native American portraiture that characterized the Indian Galleries and corresponding catalogues that Ross appeared in previously, as well as the attention to his racial makeup and degree of acculturation that formed the dialogic context for each portrait. In his wedding portrait, Ross appears smiling – for the first time – affectionately seated next to his smiling wife Mary Brian Stapler (fig. 1.19). The two were married in September of 1844 (coincidentally the same month that Ross sat for his portrait with Stanley), in the President’s parlour at Hartwell’s Washington House Hotel, a popular location for visiting statesmen at 223 Chestnut Street in Philadelphia’s bustling city centre. As was to be expected, the Ross Stapler wedding was a society affair, and written up in the local newspapers.

In the 2015 publication *Illicit Love: Interracial sex and marriage in the United States and Australia*, scholar Ann McGrath includes a chapter on Ross and Stapler, scrutinizing Ross’s mixed heritage and how it came to bear on his second marriage. Analyzing his letters, McGrath points out that Ross used language playing into the racial stereotypes circulating at the time as a form of jest in his letters to Thomas McKenney especially. In one such letter Ross describes his intention “to take from the banner state, Delaware [Stapler’s home], a captive quaker lassie, to preside over his

wigwam” and boasts of taking a “trophy” of “civilization” back to Park Hill with him.<sup>93</sup> This language marks a complex expression of Ross’s identification with both his white and Cherokee ancestry. Invoking the captivity scenes popularized in paintings like Stanley’s *Osage Scalp Dance* (fig. 1.20), which pictures a white woman kneeling at the mercy of a group of Osage warriors, Ross paints himself into the scene, acknowledging the popular stereotyping of Native American masculinity that, were it not for his affluence, education, and appearance, might catch Ross himself in the crossfires. But his Rose Cottage home was hardly a wigwam, and Ross’s wedding portrait sees him in a black vest, overcoat, and necktie – clothing he consulted Stapler about prior to their wedding. She requested that he wear a black satin vest, rather than a silk one, and Ross likely obliged and is pictured wearing the very thing in their wedding portrait.<sup>94</sup>

The pair also sat for individual oil portraits in Philadelphia a few years into their marriage. The famous Philadelphia portrait painter Samuel B. Waugh painted a lavish portrait of Mary Stapler Ross (fig. 1.21), as well as a portrait of their two children entitled *Children of John and Mary Ross* (fig. 1.22). Another celebrated Philadelphia portraitist, John Neagle, painted Ross in 1848 (fig. 1.23); the portraits may have been commissioned to hang in their home in Rose Cottage.<sup>95</sup> While Neagle did paint a number of Native American sitters and was not exempt from the “Indian craze” that captured the imaginations of his contemporaries (his lithograph of Big Elk served as the frontispiece for Samuel George Mortin’s 1839 *Crania Americana*, for example), his portrait of Ross is closer in style and execution to the portraits of distinguished Americans he painted over his time in Philadelphia.<sup>96</sup> Following suit from King’s portrait that pictures him with one of his famous letters, Neagle paints him holding a letter that reads “Treaty with the Cherokee Nation and the United States, 1846.” That

<sup>93</sup> Quoted in Ann McGrath, *Illicit Love: Interracial sex and marriage in the United States and Australia* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 23.

<sup>94</sup> “Letter From Mary B. Stapler”, Wilmington, 28 August 1844, in Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, vol. 2, 242.

<sup>95</sup> Emma Fundaburk’s 1969 work dates the Waugh portrait of Ross and Stapler’s two children at 1843, which is impossible given the two were married in 1844 and had their children subsequently. The portrait could be mis-identified as an additional Stanley portrait of Ross’s children with Quatie, or could indeed be of the Stapler-Ross children but taken later, perhaps closer to 1848 when Stapler herself was painted. In addition to Waugh’s portrait of Mary Brian Stapler and Neagle’s portrait of John Ross, Fundaburk lists two additional and identical paintings attributed to Neagle; these were probably copies. Mantle Fielding’s essay on Neagle in note 99 does indicate that he made copies of a number of his portraits, so this would not be unusual. See Emma Fundaburk, *Southeastern Indians: Life portraits. A catalogue of pictures, 1564-1860* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Reprint Corp., 1969).

<sup>96</sup> See John C. Ewers, *Artists of the Old West* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965) for a brief discussion of Neagle; see also Mantle Fielding, “John Neagle: Artist (1796-1865)”, in *Catalogue of an Exhibition of Portraits by John Neagle* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1925), 5-15.

the pair sat for their portraits with leading east coast portraitists as commissioners and members of the political elite inscribes this status into the family's visual legacy.<sup>97</sup>

Like the oil portraits, another early daguerreotype of Ross may have been taken on the occasion of his engagement or marriage to Mary Brian Stapler (fig. 1.24). This daguerreotype is in the prints and photographs collection of the Library of Congress, where photo historians have attempted a date based exclusively on analyses of Ross's attire. While some elements of his dress – the bowler hat, bow-tied cravat, cropped hair, and the pebbled elliptical mat that he stands on – point to the mid-1840s, other elements including the high point collar and wide coat lapels suggest it was taken as late as 1850. With Ross's frequent visits to Washington and Philadelphia, it would not be unusual for him to have a formal daguerreotype portrait taken at one of the competing studios – especially for an occasion as important as his engagement. Either way, the portrait pictures Ross once again as a beacon of modern America with the inclusion of his signature top hat and the fashionable attire he chose for his portrait.<sup>98</sup> Though the portrait was produced for private use and remained in Ross family hands until very recently, it eventually made its way via private sale to the world's largest public photography collection.

In 1858, Ross would once again sit for his portrait in his public capacity as Principal Chief (fig. 1.25). This photograph is Ross's most famous and marks another instance in which he appears in a pivotal moment in the history of Native American portraiture – and photography, as it happens. The following year, in 1859, Smithsonian secretary Joseph Henry made an appeal of his own to the commissioner of Indian affairs to have all delegations to Washington photographed as a formal part of their tour. With the arrival of photography, the same impulse that saw McKenney commission King to take portraits of visiting delegates for the War Department would find a simpler solution. The delegation photographs as Henry conceived of them would “form a valuable addition to the interesting collection of portraits already possessed by the

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<sup>97</sup> McGrath's study uncovers evidence that Stapler and the presidential first lady Dolley Madison were in correspondence around the Ross Stapler wedding. Stapler kept the dried flowers that Madison sent to her in congratulations. This act of intimacy extended by the first lady of the United States to the Cherokee Nation's equivalent first lady is a further indication that the Rosses were considered to be part of the political elite's inner circle.

<sup>98</sup> Based on personal correspondence with Library of Congress photography curator Beverly Brannan, 20 November 2015. Brannan was involved in acquiring the daguerreotype for the Library's collection from a dealer who purchased it from a Ross family relative in Oklahoma. Her initial research reached out to photo historians whose analysis and dating strategies were based on Ross's attire.

Government and deposited in the Smithsonian Institution.”<sup>99</sup> The practice would also memorialize the important journey that delegates made to the east coast to have an audience with the president, and the albeit imbalanced intercultural exchange that took place. Arguably this journey east was a parallel experience to the journey west that so-called “adventurer artists”<sup>100</sup> like Stanley and Catlin took during the same period.

At this time there was a close correlation between painting and photographic portraiture, with artists and studio portraitists frequently sharing commissions. Stanley himself participated in this practice when he brought a visitor to the studio of Julian Vannerson – the Civil War photographer who would eventually be involved with Ross’s portrait – after a visit to the Smithsonian. His guest recounts the visit as follows: “From the Smithsonian Institute, Mr. Stanley accompanied me to the Photographic Rooms of Mr. Vannerson, a skillful and tasteful Photographer, who executed a photograph of Legare, from the portrait by Mr. Stanley, and kindly presented me with a copy just before I last left.”<sup>101</sup> Aside from the close association that artists and photographers held when it came to portraiture, this anecdote reveals that Vannerson’s studio was a popular stop on the Washington tour. The same year that Stanley brought his guest to visit, John Ross would sit for his photograph at the McClees studio where Vannerson would eventually be employed.<sup>102</sup>

In his study of the history of delegation visits entitled *Diplomats in Buckskins*, Herman J. Viola notes that, in its early stages, the primary impetus for inviting delegates to the east coast was an exercise in control for those who were perceived as a military threat, as well as an attempt to convince visiting delegates about the supposed benefits of civilizing practices.<sup>103</sup> Despite an elaborate gift exchange that almost always included fine clothing – which, subsequently, delegates were photographed wearing, adding an additional layer of meaning to the eventual images – the visiting men and women were often exploited for their curiosity value, a point that the first Native American head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Ely S. Parker drove home when he

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<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Viola, *Diplomats in Buckskins*, 181-2.

<sup>100</sup> Francis Flavin uses this term in his work “The Adventurer-Artists of the Nineteenth Century and the Image of the American Indian”, *Indiana Magazine of History* 98, no.1 (March 2002): 1-29.

<sup>101</sup> “Correspondence of the Courier,” *Charleston Courier*, 1 October 1858. John Mix Stanley Scrapbook.

<sup>102</sup> Paula Richardson Fleming notes that Vannerson does not include Ross in his portrait list; however, because the original negative was in the Addis studio (previously McLees studio), it was probably made by the McLees studio staff, which included Vannerson as agent and photographic artist. See Paula Richardson Fleming, *Native Photography at the Smithsonian: The Shindler Catalogue* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 74.

<sup>103</sup> Viola, *Diplomats in Buckskins*, 28.

abolished the delegation visits altogether in 1869. Ross himself was horrified when, in 1836, a local *Playbill* reported that he had performed a war dance with his “merrie men” at the National Theatre in Washington. He wrote to the newspaper that had reported the false information and sternly insisted “Neither I nor any of my associates of the Cherokee delegation have appeared on the stage [...] We have been occupied with matters of graver import than to become allies of the white men forming the dramatis personae.”<sup>104</sup> However, the formal delegation photographs that appear in Shindler’s work commemorate a more serious exchange – one that Ross participated in constantly throughout his tenure, as his 1858 delegation portrait would indicate.

This eventual collection of photographs would form the core of the Smithsonian’s first photography collection, and would appear in the institution’s first ever photography exhibit in 1869 – the first exhibition of photography to be held in an American museum. It thus also marked the introduction of making public the documentary function of photography as it related to Native American portraiture. The formation of the delegation collection was a collaborative effort spear-headed by Henry and the collector William Blackmore in England, who commissioned a number of Washington photographers to take portraits of visiting delegates, and loaned items from his own collection to the Smithsonian so that copies could be made for theirs. In 1867, the artist and new proprietor of the Addis studio (previously the James McClees photography studio on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington) was commissioned by Blackmore to begin work on the exhibition and corresponding catalogue, entitled *Photographic Portraits of North American Indians in the Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution*. The catalogue was printed in July of 1872 and is today known as the Shindler catalogue. Coincidentally in a similar vein to the galleries of King and Stanley, it is the only existing evidence that the exhibition took place.<sup>105</sup>

In 1858, Ross sat for his delegation portrait at the McClees studio on Pennsylvania Avenue. He was in Washington with a number of other visiting Cherokee delegates who also appear in the Shindler catalogue. The bust photograph pictures him as a mature man of sixty-eight, seated at a slight angle and wearing his usual formal attire. When Shindler took over the Addis studio some ten years later, the negatives

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>105</sup> Fleming is the preeminent scholar on the Shindler catalogue and exhibition, and reproduced an annotated version of it in her seminal work *Native American Photography at the Smithsonian: The Shindler Catalogue*. See note 102 for full citation.

from McClees's studio came with the property, and thus Ross's portrait was included in the final catalogue.<sup>106</sup>

With this photograph, Ross's likeness appears once again at a seminal art historical moment in the United States. It was part of the Smithsonian's first public attempt to exhibit photographs with the same reverence that was reserved for other mediums adorning its halls. Further, as part of Henry's appeal to commission the delegation photos, he emphasized the value the photographs would have to the delegates themselves when they visited Washington, indicating that, from its beginnings, Native American photographic portraiture was conceived of as having a multitude of functions within the space of the capital and within Indigenous communities.

### Conclusion

Over the course of his time as Principal Chief, the portraiture of John Ross appeared in each of the first major catalogues of Native American portraiture – represented in painting, lithography, and, with the Shindler catalogue in 1872, photography; and was commissioned at a seminal moment when the Washington political elite was configuring the potential, function, and purpose of Native American portraiture in the establishment of a visual legacy for the supposed benefit of the country. His appearance on the walls of Thomas McKenney's War Department office, in the Indian Galleries of King, Catlin, and Stanley, each of whom exhibited at the Smithsonian in its first years; and in the nation's first ever photography collection and exhibition is a remarkable indication of the ways in which Native American portraiture prioritized the public man in Ross – and, in turn, the ways in which Ross used portraiture to advance his own mission for the public perception of the Cherokee. The public function of Ross's portraits was thus governed by the perceived role of the genre in the mid-nineteenth century. He stood out in the context of Native American portraiture, however, because he did not represent the romanticized figure capturing the collective imagination of the young country. Rather, his portraits were exemplary of the "civilizing" efforts undertaken by the American government earlier in the century – ones that Ross himself endorsed time and again in his appeal to stop removal and to gain the respect of the political elite. As such, many of his portraitists leaned on their European training to

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<sup>106</sup> See Fleming's annotated entry on John Ross (no. 47) in Fleming, *Native American Photography at the Smithsonian*, 321.

bring the full gravitas of the Cherokee aristocracy embodied in Ross's "gentlemanly urbanity" to their resulting portrayals. His portraiture was strategic in this way because, as Inskeep argues in his analysis of Ross, "A significant part of the civilization program was the promotion of Ross himself."<sup>107</sup> Without exception then, his portraits and corresponding descriptions represented him as an educated, modern, and affluent leader, with a particular fixation on his mixed heritage and the privilege this afforded him.

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<sup>107</sup> Inskeep, *Jacksonland*, p. 64.

## Chapter Two: Inside the George M. Murrell Historic Home, 1844-2016

*"I then and there beheld the finest sights I ever saw; Oh! Had I only the power to sketch well; I am sure I could had one of the finest scenes that the world affords and been worthy the most prominent place in the finest picture gallery."*  
 – *Journal of Emily Murrell, 1850.*<sup>108</sup>

*"I am well, fat and enjoying myself nicely at the chief's. We live in luxury and splendor and refinement."* – *Letter from Oswald Woodford, 1851.*<sup>109</sup>

This chapter moves from the visualization of the Ross family through portraiture to consider an important site in Ross family history in which portraiture, domestic objects, and photography were actively commissioned and displayed. The George M. Murrell historic home, initially named "Hunter's Home" in 1844, was home to generations of Ross family members from its construction in the antebellum era through the Civil War and into the early twentieth century. In 1948, a restoration project was undertaken with John Ross's great-granddaughter Jennie Ross Cobb at the helm, and thanks to her decade-long tenureship as its first official curator, the home was restored and opened to the public as a state-owned historic site in 1950. Because of her initial work, it is today the most comprehensive public site dedicated to Ross family history, and maintains an elaborate collection of Ross family art and material culture.

Located in the Cherokee Nation's Park Hill community, the Murrell home is the last-standing antebellum plantation mansion in the state of Oklahoma (fig. 2.1). The property's owner, George M. Murrell, was a merchant from Lynchburg, Virginia, who married into the Ross family in 1834.<sup>110</sup> With the removal pending, Murrell travelled to Indian Territory with Chief John Ross and his new father-in-law Lewis Ross to choose land for himself and his new bride, Lewis Ross's young daughter Minerva Ross. When he arrived in Park Hill, Murrell immediately secured the "improvements" that were to become his home from an old Cherokee settler for a sum of \$2,000.<sup>111</sup> The new couple

<sup>108</sup> Unpublished journal of Emily Murrell, niece of George M. Murrell and Minerva Ross. Original copy is in the private collection of Frank W. Jarnagin; transcript held in the Murrell Home archives.

<sup>109</sup> "Letter from Oswald Woodford," Indian Territory, January 1851, in Brad Agnew, *Northeastern: Centennial History* (Tahlequah: John Vaughan Library, Northeastern State University, 2009), 5.

<sup>110</sup> Lewis Ross was the brother of Principal Chief John Ross. George Murrell worked for one of his mercantile stores on the border between Tennessee and the Cherokee Nation in the early 1830s. He married Lewis Ross's daughter Minerva Ross in 1834; she was 15 years old, and Murrell was 26. When Minerva Ross died, Murrell married her younger sister Amanda Ross, to keep the familial and business alliances between the Murrells and Rosses alive.

<sup>111</sup> In Indian Territory, Cherokees owned the land in common and therefore it could not be purchased, but 'improvements' on the land could be. This was the way in which Murrell secured the right to farm and build at Park Hill.



arrived in Park Hill in 1839, but by 1855, Minerva Ross had sustained a long illness and died in one of the bedrooms of the home. Murrell went on to marry her younger sister Amanda in order to keep alive the economic, political, and familial ties that had been forged through the first marriage. The intermarriage of the Murrell and Ross families represented a powerful alliance – one that has been preserved and maintained through the art and material culture that has appeared in the home from its original construction to its contemporary upkeep as a historic site.

Section 2.1 will start by situating the home within its original socio-cultural milieu, by providing an overview of the affluent Park Hill community that was monopolized by members of the Ross family in the pre-Civil War era. Section 2.2 includes a substantial discussion of the home's status as a working plantation, and the implications of this for the family's outward projections of affluence. Section 2.3 considers the layout of the home in its initial iteration as "Hunter's Home", as well as a discussion of selected portraits and domestic objects found in its interior from 1844 when it was built to the first years of the Civil War when the family fled to Georgia. Next, section 2.4 explores its restoration as the "George M. Murrell Historic Home" in the 1950s when it was transformed into a museum of Ross family history under the curatorship of Jennie Ross Cobb. Lastly, section 2.5 critically assesses the site's interpretation in the present day within the context of related southern plantation museums that engage with legacies of slavery and Cherokee history.

## 2.1 "The Athens of Indian Territory": Park Hill, 1845-1861

The Park Hill community is located five miles outside of the Cherokee Nation's capital Tahlequah. In the immediate aftermath of the removal in 1838-9, the Ross and Murrell families monopolized the Park Hill area, with homes built for John Ross, Lewis Ross, and George Murrell within a close radius. Soon after the arrival of these families, the area was considered the cultural centre of the Cherokee Nation and was often referred to as the "Athens of Indian Territory"<sup>112</sup> – a nod to the characteristics being projected through the Greek revival architecture on display in the area, and a common naming practice for plantations across the American south.<sup>113</sup> Aside from this, the import of

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<sup>112</sup> Agnew, *Northeastern*, 12.

<sup>113</sup> Eichstedt and Small note that classical and neoclassical European styles and traditions were imported and put on display in southern plantation architecture, including the names of towns such as Athens, Paris, Rome, and Geneva. See Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 31.

European furniture, upholstery, and goods that were present in Rose Cottage (home to John Ross and Mary Brian Stapler), Hunter's Home (home to George Murrell and Minerva Ross), and Prairie Lea (home to Lewis Ross and Fanny Holt) suggest that the identity projections being fostered in each home were in line with the "gentlemanly urbanity" that George Catlin attributed to John Ross upon meeting him for the first time. Historian Carolyn Foreman reinforces the status of Park Hill as a social and cultural epicenter of the Cherokee Nation, emphasizing that the Rosses in Park Hill lived in "great style", and were constantly entertaining and welcoming visitors for extended periods of time.<sup>114</sup>

John Ross was one of the five wealthiest men in the Cherokee Nation, and lived accordingly. The grounds of his Rose Cottage home stretched for 1,000 acres and held an apple orchard, stables that could accommodate fifty horses, a kiln, smokehouse, dairy, blacksmith shop, laundry, and slave cabins. This was a remarkable estate for newly-settled Indian Territory, and attracted a great deal of attention. As Alexandra Harmon notes, "An estate of that size [...] made Ross richer than most White southerners;"<sup>115</sup> in this way, Rose Cottage became a central feature of Park Hill, and an outward manifestation of the Cherokee Nation's prosperity and participation in "the great family" of the United States through its Principal Chief. A description published in August of 1854 in the school newspaper of the Cherokee Female Seminary attests to this, reading:

[...] instead of the rudely constructed wigwams of our forefathers which stood there not more than half a century ago, elegant white buildings are seen. Every thing around denotes taste, refinement and the progress of civilization among our people: well may they vie with the long enlightened inhabitants of the *east*. One of the most handsome and beautifully situated of these dwellings is the residence of our Chief and his white bride, who left her native land and friends a few years since, to come and dwell with him in his wild prairie home among his own tribe, the Cherokees.<sup>116</sup>

The language used here provides some insight into the importance of projected affluence amongst future generations of Cherokees. Terms such as "elegance", "taste", "refinement" and "progress" are contrasted with the "rudeness" of traditional Cherokee dwellings. As the extract attests, the appearance of affluence provided a means through which members of the Cherokee Nation could align themselves with the social,

<sup>114</sup> The most extensive descriptions of Rose Cottage are compiled in Carolyn Thomas Foreman, *Park Hill* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1948).

<sup>115</sup> Alexandra Harmon, *Rich Indians*, 100.

<sup>116</sup> "View from our Seminary", *The Cherokee Rosebuds*, 2 August 1854.

political, and cultural engine being generated on the country's east coast. Ironically, while so-called "adventurer artists" such as George Catlin and John Mix Stanley looked to the western frontier for the development of a uniquely American (read: non-European) painting tradition that they located in the assumed pre-modern traditions of Indigenous cultures, members of the Cherokee Nation's elite looked to the east coast's European influences for the latest in fashionable dress, portrait traditions, and domestic design. Metropolitan centres like New York, Washington, and Philadelphia – spaces in which members of the Ross family spent considerable time in their roles as merchants and politicians – provided access to social and cultural cues that were imported to the Cherokee Nation and implemented amongst its elites. The architecture of Park Hill homes and the objects on display in their interiors were a primary way in which this alignment with the "effete east"<sup>117</sup> could thus be enacted in Park Hill.

Aside from John Ross himself, the Park Hill community was made up of some of the wealthiest traders and plantation owners in the south, contributing to the formation of a southern gentry within the Cherokee Nation – what Ross's rival John Ridge would bitterly refer to as an "unholy aristocracy"<sup>118</sup> during their extended political rivalry. As William McLoughlin describes,

Park Hill was the social and intellectual centre of the nation. [...] [It] was noted for its sophisticated social life, stately residences, well-stocked shops, ornamental shrubs, fine carriages, and well-kept farms and plantations. Every traveler to the nation paid a visit to this centre of Cherokee society, and those who described the Cherokees as "progressive" and "well-informed" based such opinions on their observations during visits to this community.<sup>119</sup>

Indeed the perceived affluence of Cherokee populations in Tahlequah, Park Hill, and the neighbouring town of Muskogee was identified as "progress" by visitors to the area who were impressed by the living quarters, manners, and hospitality of the Ross and Murrell families.

This is documented in the journal of U.S. Secretary of the interior Ethan Allen Hitchcock, who visited Lewis Ross's opulent Victorian mansion at Prairie Lea plantation in the 1840s, for instance. His description of the furniture and upholstery found at the residence suggests that he was duly impressed:

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<sup>117</sup> As per "The Future of the Indian," *Cherokee Advocate* (see note 12).

<sup>118</sup> John Ridge quoted in Harmon, *Rich Indians*, 129.

<sup>119</sup> William McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears: The Cherokees' Struggle for Sovereignty, 1839-1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

Lewis Ross the merchant is wealthy and lives in considerable style. His house is of the cottage character, clapboarded and painted, his floor carpeted, his furniture elegant, cane bottomed chairs, of high finish, mahogany sofa, two superior mahogany Boston rocking chairs, mahogany ladies work table with drawers, a very superior Chickering piano on which his unmarried daughter, a young lady of about 17 or 18, just from school at Rawway in New Jersey, plays some waltzes, and sings some songs.<sup>120</sup>

Hitchcock follows up his description of Lewis Ross's material goods with an overview of the women he encountered at Prairie Lea. The tremendous detail of his descriptions reveals the impact that the material wealth of the Ross family had on his estimation of their character – arguably one of the primary motivations for the Ross family's attention to material wealth in their homes. Thus the "very superior Chickering piano" is played by Ross's very superior young daughter, who is described admiringly by Hitchcock as "lively and pretty with rich flowing curls, very fine eyes and beautiful regular ivory teeth."<sup>121</sup> His entries on the Ross and Murrell women further indicate that the two families were close-knit and received important guests together at all three of the residences.

As a visitor from the east coast, Hitchcock's descriptions suggest that he was battling against the biases he was accustomed to as an outsider to Indian Territory. On his first approach, he notes the appearance of community members he passes, writing "These people, said I, don't look very wild."<sup>122</sup> This sentiment holds true throughout Hitchcock's narratives about the various people he met, and political and social gatherings he was privy to during his time there. With a strong tone of paternalism typical of the nineteenth-century diarist, he notes the disappearance of "savage customs", the "dispensing [of] moccasins" in favour of shoes, and uses phrases such as "industrious" and "orderly" to describe the "influential people in this Cherokee nation."<sup>123</sup> This is significant in confirming the negative biases that members of the Cherokee elite were working to counteract. Hitchcock's reliance on first appearance – duly taking note of the shoes, customs, and general appearance of those he came to briefly interact with – as an indicator of character provides some insight into why the Ross family and other members of the Cherokee elite invested painstaking efforts into

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<sup>120</sup> Grant Foreman, ed., *A traveler in Indian Territory: The journal of Ethan Allen Hitchcock* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 44-45.

<sup>121</sup> Foreman, *A traveler in Indian Territory*, 45.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 49.

constructing an appearance that was favourably recognizable to east coast visitors like Hitchcock.

Tellingly, the initial bias that Hitchcock was anticipating had not shifted much by the time the turn of the twentieth century arrived. In later years, the New Englander Clara Churchill wrote about the complexity of the modern condition in Indian Territory when she visited Tahlequah. She writes, “If one comes here to see wigwams, feathers, and bows and arrows he must go further on, they are not here; instead you will find keen lawyers, merchants, and business men as can be found anywhere.”<sup>124</sup> She is especially adamant on this point when it comes to the Cherokee people she met in Tahlequah, Park Hill, and Muskogee, who she celebrates as being “a wonderful race”<sup>125</sup>, “a brainy people”<sup>126</sup>, and “entitled to the name they bear, officially, of civilized Indians.”<sup>127</sup>

Thus the homes of John Ross, Lewis Ross, and George Murrell were some of the primary ways in which the Park Hill community became synonymous with the Cherokee Nation’s reputation for being a “modern” and “civilized” society. As the following section explores, one of the primary ways in which the wealth of the family was produced and recognized was through their participation in plantation slavery. Indeed the abundance and luxury of Rose Cottage, Prairie Lea, and Hunter’s Home was facilitated and maintained through the labour of the enslaved men, women and children who were owned by the Ross and Murrell families. The following section will demonstrate the importance of this history in establishing and maintaining the family’s reputation within the context of the illustrious Park Hill community.

## 2.2 Affluence and Enslavement in Park Hill

Despite existing research and scholarship on Cherokee participation in plantation slavery, it remains a little-known fact that members of the elite in Native America owned slaves. Lewis Ross played an especially powerful hand in the proliferation of plantation slavery in the Cherokee Nation, using the Trail of Tears to turn a profit

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<sup>124</sup> Clara Churchill, “From Indian Territory, Muskogee, I.T.,” *Lebanon Free Press*, 3 July 1899. Clara Churchill Scrapbook, Churchill Collection, Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian Cultural Resources Centre, Suitland, MD.

<sup>125</sup> Clara Churchill, “From Indian Territory, Tahlequah [sic], I.T.,” *Lebanon Free Press*, 17 July 1899. Clara Churchill Scrapbook.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Clara Churchill, “More about Indians and their country,” *Lebanon Free Press*, date unknown. Clara Churchill Scrapbook.

through the slave trade. In anticipation of a demand for slave labour when plantations were being established in Indian Territory on the heels of the removal, Ross shipped five hundred enslaved men and women from Georgia to Indian Territory on a chartered boat. Upon arrival, the men and women were sold to other Cherokees.<sup>128</sup> This event alone implicates the Ross family directly in the proliferation of the slave trade on the western frontier, and represents an additional, internal displacement that was carried out within the tribe itself around removal.

In the context of Hunter's Home, George Murrell used slave labour to maintain the numerous components that kept the home and the general store up and running, though likely on a smaller scale than John Ross and certainly on a smaller scale than Lewis Ross. When John Mix Stanley and his assistant Sumner Dickerman visited Lewis Ross's home to take daguerreotype miniatures of his family, Dickerman notes the presence of 100 slaves, confirming that within the Ross family, Lewis Ross played the strongest role in the exploitation and proliferation of slave labour.<sup>129</sup> Though information about those who labored for the Murrells is scarce, a number of historical documents do exist. The most notable of these records are a fugitive slave advertisement published in the *Cherokee Advocate* newspaper in 1845 detailing the characteristics of Murrell's coachman; a journal kept by George and Minerva Murrell's niece Emily Murrell, written in 1850, which contains frequent references to a slave woman named Margaret who accompanied her on her journey from Tennessee to Indian Territory to visit the home, and to the slave children who she interacted with therein; and most substantially an 1860 census, which notes that there were nine slave cabins on the property. In 2014 during a fieldwork trip to the Anne Ross Piburn collection at the University of Oklahoma, I uncovered an additional document to add to these records; namely, a hand-written list of 29 names with the title 'Admitted Freedmen' written across the top. The list includes the names, ages, and sex of 29 former slaves who, after the Civil War, enrolled as members of the Cherokee tribe. Given Anne Ross's involvement in the Murrell Home's restoration in the 1940s and 1950s, this list could indicate that she was doing preliminary research into the Murrell family's former slaves.

Post-removal, there were eighteen Cherokee citizens recorded as owning more than twenty slaves; John Ross, Lewis Ross, and George Murrell were three of those citizens. The distinction between a plantation and a farm – both reliant on slave labour –

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<sup>128</sup> See Perdue, *Slavery and the evolution of Cherokee society*, 72.

<sup>129</sup> As per Sumner Dickerman's letter, see note 88.

lay in the numbers: the presence of over twenty slaves provided access to the designation of ‘plantation’ on the official census.<sup>130</sup> Only 12% of the slave-owning southern population participated in this category; that multiple Ross family members were participants in the institution on the scale that this percentage represents indicates how essential slave labour was to their enterprises. Pre-removal, John Ross was reported as having close to twenty slaves who belonged to him and his first wife Quatie, in Georgia. By 1852, this number had doubled. One visitor reported seeing as many as forty slaves on the grounds of his Rose Cottage home that year.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, George Murrell reportedly owned forty-two slaves. This was a great many more than the four he owned in 1834 when he married Minerva Ross,<sup>132</sup> but more importantly, this number placed him amongst the already extremely limited number of Cherokee citizens who owned and ran successful plantations.

Aside from the homes themselves, the labour forces that were owned by John Ross, Lewis Ross, and George Murrell for their individual and collective enterprises were perhaps the most predominant indicators of their wealth and the supposed modernization efforts that were being disseminated in the Cherokee Nation. As Alexandra Harmon notes, the enslaved were only one aspect of a family’s outward signs of affluence. Perversely, those who worked the land existed as one signifier amongst many, including “marketable crops, expensive clothing, large houses with glass windows, fine furniture, and servants who set the dinner table with porcelain, silver, and imported delicacies.”<sup>133</sup> This is poignantly illustrated in the testimony of Lucinda Vann, who laboured for the other most prominent Cherokee plantation owner in the nineteenth century, James Vann. Her testimony offers first-hand insight into the ways in which slave labour was exploited to showcase the wealth of the Cherokee elite. She recounts,

Marster Jim and Missus Jennie wouldn’t let his house slaves go with no common dress out. They never sent us anywhere with a cotton dress. They wanted everybody to know we was Marster Vann’s slaves. He wanted people to know he was able to dress his slaves in fine clothes. We had fine

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<sup>130</sup> As per John Michael Vlach, “The plantation Landscape,” in *American Architectural History: A Contemporary Reader*, ed. Keith Eggener (London and New York: Routledge, 2004): 95-111; and McLoughlin, 1986; Eichstedt and Small, 2002; and Harmon, 2010.

<sup>131</sup> Halliburton Jr., *Red over Black*, 70. Former Murrell home curator Shirley Pettengill adjusts this figure to 46, based on primary research she carried out in the Nave Collection at Northeastern State University’s John Vaughan Library in 2002.

<sup>132</sup> As per Jennifer Frazee, *A Mansion at the Athens of Indian Territory: Hunter’s Home, 1845-1991* (MA thesis, Northeastern State University, 2014).

<sup>133</sup> Harmon, *Rich Indians*, 99.

satin dresses, great big combs for our hair, great big gold locket, double earrings, we never wore cotton except when we worked. We had bonnets that had long silk tassels for ties. When we wanted to go anywhere we always got a horse, we never walked.<sup>134</sup>

In the Ross and Murrell families, the association made between labouring bodies and wealth was further illustrated in numerous visitor accounts that make reference to the labourers seen on the grounds of their homes. In John Ross's case, these public appearances bolstered his wealthy status and contributed to his outward projection of power and prosperity. One of the most noted features of his projected identity as a wealthy southern planter was the coachman who took him from place to place, for instance. An account from a Mrs. Tyner Swift describes a childhood memory of seeing Ross pass by her uncle's house in a horse-drawn carriage. She remembers the coachman in uniform "who sat up on the back"<sup>135</sup>, and recounts walking outside to the fence to watch him pass. A similar thing occurred when Ross and his wife pulled up to the Female Seminary for Sunday service, and were met by the faces of young students crowding the windows of the school to see the Chief and his elegant wife arrive "with a flourish" in their carriage.<sup>136</sup> Eliza Whitmire's narrative includes a mention of John Ross's coachman as well: "I have seen a dashing young slave boy acting as coachman for Chief John Ross, drive him in from his home near Park Hill and let him out at the Capitol Square [...]."<sup>137</sup> Such anecdotes reveal the disturbing subconscious aspects of the planter-class psychology, whereby the public appearance of an enslaved person was admired as a symbol of wealth.

George Murrell's own coachman was also cause for public discussion, drawing further attention to Murrell's wealthy status in the community. A fugitive slave advertisement in a very early issue of the *Cherokee Advocate* newspaper provides some insight into Murrell's coachman, Spencer (fig. 2.2). Written in both English and Cherokee, the entry includes predictions about where the coachman was likely to have gone, and offers a \$50 reward for anyone who returned him to Murrell.

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<sup>134</sup> See testimony of Lucinda Vann in the *WPA Oklahoma Slave Narratives*, eds. T. Lindsay Baker and Julie P. Baker (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 437. The interviewers employed through the Work Projects Administration retained the vernacular speech in their published interviews with their subjects. For an extended compilation of slave narratives from the Cherokee Nation specifically, see *Black Indian Slave Narratives*, ed. Patrick Mingos (Winston-Salem, N.C.: John F. Blair, 2004).

<sup>135</sup> Baker and Baker, *WPA Oklahoma Slave Narratives*, 437.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>137</sup> See testimony of Eliza Whitmire in *Voices of Cherokee Women*, ed. Carolyn Ross Johnston (Winston-Salem, N.C.: John F. Blair Publishing, 2014), 116-117.



Art Historian Charmaine Nelson's most current research focuses on the rhetoric and function of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fugitive slave advertisements in the Canadian and Caribbean contexts, with a special focus on their subliminal function. Nelson's innovation lies in her interpretation of the ads "as portraits, although dubious, of the enslaved which functioned primarily through vision."<sup>138</sup> Thus without meaning to, many slave advertisements like Murrell's in the *Cherokee Advocate* unwittingly described the unique attributes of the enslaved person it was attempting to track. Nelson argues that, in this way, the ads illuminated the characteristics that made the enslaved unique, and provided a window into the lives of the individuals who fled. In sum, then, the advertisements act as "repositories of data" on slave populations, and in many cases work to humanize and individualize the enslaved people being pursued.<sup>139</sup> In the case of Murrell's *Cherokee Advocate* text, then, the advertisement unwittingly plays a dual function, both in announcing Murrell's wealth, and in providing some insight into the coachman himself.

The advertisement Murrell took out adheres to the categories of information identified by Nelson as being consistent in fugitive ads of the Americas. These include personal identity, geographical origins, race, complexion, and cross-racial mixing, mannerisms, voice / speech and language, bodily marks of branding or other signs of torture, dress, bodily presentation, skills, the details and possible motives of escape, and lastly the proposed reward.<sup>140</sup> In Murrell's advertisement, information about Spencer is included for each of these categories: His name, his racial identity ("A *Dark Mulatto*"), his age ("between 35 and 40 years of age"), and his height, weight, build, and facial hair ("usually wears half whiskers – when he left, however, they were shorn off"<sup>141</sup>). His skillset is also described, as are characteristics of his personality: "[...] prides himself much on his abilities as a Coachman and Barber." Further descriptions of his physical appearance reveal that he was well dressed. In this case, Spencer is described as having no scars, and as being "very tidy in dress." A description of exactly what he was wearing when he disappeared – "a pair of Janes pants, a brown Janes dress coat, three-fourths worn, a silk hat, brim lined with Bombazine" – and the clothing he took with

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<sup>138</sup> Charmaine Nelson, "From African to Creole: Examining Creolization through the Art and Fugitive Slave Advertisements of Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Canada and Jamaica," McCready Lecture on Canadian Art, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 20 January 2016, <http://www.ago.net/mccready-lecture-on-canadian-art-charmaine-nelson> (accessed November 2016).

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> For an extended discussion of this advertisement, see Naylor, *African Cherokees in Indian Territory*, 39.

him when he fled, follows. The advertisement therefore points to Murrell's wealth in a number of ways, from the detailed description of Spencer to the generous \$50 reward that he offers for his return.

Participation in plantation slavery was a sign of status and affluence among the wealthy Cherokee elite in Park Hill. The wealthiest families in the Cherokee Nation, including the Murrells, Rosses and Vanns, were intimately connected through generations of intermarriage, and were allied in their commercial enterprises. These alliances were facilitated and enacted through the institution of slavery, not to mention the numerous ways in which familial lines and ties in slave populations were determined based on trades and sales between the families. Thus not only was the presence of substantial labour forces on the grounds of their homes a disturbing public announcement of their wealth, the very source of their success was tied up in the lucrative plantation enterprises they invested in together. Slavery was also perversely one of the ways in which the Cherokee elite could claim allegiance to modernity and the perceived modernization of agriculture and industry in their own milieu. This allegiance to modernity was further articulated within the domestic space of the home, wherein European objects, furnishings, and portraiture styles were displayed to showcase the family's wealth and affluence as participants in the dynasty of the Cherokee Nation.

### 2.3 Inside Hunter's Home, 1844-1861

Standing at approximately 5,000 square feet, Hunter's Home was one of the crowning jewels of Park Hill in the pre-Civil War years. Like Rose Cottage and Prairie Lea plantation, its exterior and impressive grounds were awe-inspiring to visitors unfamiliar with the Park Hill community. George Murrell and Minerva Ross's niece Emily Murrell writes an impassioned entry in her journal upon first glimpse of the home, recounting "I then and there beheld the finest sights I ever saw; Oh! Had I only the power to sketch well; I am sure I could had one of the finest scenes that the world affords and been worthy the most prominent place in the finest picture gallery."<sup>142</sup> This description suggests that the Murrell home had achieved its desired effect, so much so that it was reproducible for posterity, worthy of "the most prominent place in the finest picture gallery", and thus deserving of commemoration and admiration for its impressive

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<sup>142</sup> Journal of Emily Murrell, 51-52.

appearance. Thus while John Ross's likeness was circulating as an example of the modern progress and influence of the Cherokees in the picture galleries of Washington, D.C., the home of his niece was working to similar ends back home in Indian Territory.

While the exterior grounds and labour forces of the Murrell home and the surrounding Park Hill area announced the affluence of the Cherokee Nation's wealthiest families to visitors and community members alike, the home's interior reinforced the public image that the family pursued within the private space of their domestic milieu. With its imported European furnishings, formal portraiture, and expensive oak and mahogany furniture that was shipped in from the east coast, the private space of the home was thus treated as an opportunity to make long-lasting impressions on society figures from both inside and outside of the Park Hill community. This section begins with a brief overview of the home's original layout, followed by an analysis of a selection of portraiture and material culture that was present in the original Murrell home setting in order to explore the ways in which the family mobilized their composite identities through visual means.

The early layout of the Murrell home interior, including the chosen function of each room, indicates that the family was apprised of nineteenth-century norms in designing domestic space. The ground floor consisted of public rooms that were designated for receiving both distinguished guests and members of the family. These included the parlour, which was the most important social space in the nineteenth-century home, as well as a sitting room, dining room, and library. The kitchen was also found on the ground floor, though at the back of the house as, like other plantation homes, this was a space designated for labour and would rarely have been used by the family. The kitchen included a separate entrance leading out onto the grounds of the home – another common feature for many plantations, which sometimes had kitchens that were in separate quarters from the main house altogether. The kitchen includes a narrow set of stairs leading up to a loft space, which may have been inhabited by the Murrell's cook, Eliza, and her six children.

The upstairs quarters consisted of three spacious bedrooms where family members and guests stayed together in various configurations throughout the nineteenth century. These include the adjoining east and south bedrooms, and a detached west bedroom across the hallway, as well as a clerestory to relieve the intense heat of Oklahoma summers. Designating an upper floor for private bedrooms, and thus shifting sleep from the ground floor to a separate sphere, was a growing trend amongst well-to-

do households from 1850 onwards. The Murrells were at the cutting edge of this practice, it would seem, as the construction of the two-story house commenced in 1844. As Elizabeth Cromley summarizes in her work on the American bedroom, 1850 marked a shift in the layout of residences, from a design where sleeping spaces for children and servants were incorporated on the ground floor or in outbuildings (like slave cabins, for instance), to separate sleeping quarters on an upper floor. She writes,

[...] by 1850 this relation marks a difference in class. At the high-cost end of published house designs, the preferred location of all chambers was on a separate “chamber floor” clearly segregated from the social zone of the house; the urban middle-class and well-to-do households in both country and city had grown away from the ground-floor sleeping room.<sup>143</sup>

Beyond the journal of Emily Murrell where only Minerva Ross’s quarters and her own upstairs guest room are mentioned, there is no official room assignment documented; however, historical interpreters at the home stress that the ground floor sitting room served a split function and was designed under exceptional circumstances for Minerva Ross when she became too ill to climb the stairs. Aside from this detail, the inclusion of three separate upstairs bedrooms in the Murrell home’s plans provides yet further understanding as to the class status they were hoping to project.

The visual and material culture that was chosen for the more public ground floor spaces in the home reveals something of the family’s desired identity projections, and provides some insight into the role that visual and material culture played in creating lasting and favourable impressions. As the home’s most publically visited room, the objects chosen for the parlour are of particular importance. Katherine Grier’s research into the culture and function of nineteenth-century parlours draws some interesting conclusions about expressions of class and identity that resonate with the Murrell home. More particularly, she draws a parallel between the refinement of the domestic interior and the refinement of character in the nineteenth-century home. In demonstrating taste in their aesthetic decisions, the Murrell-Ross family was therefore participating in the social codes and etiquette that denoted a certain character. In this way, objects and identity were very closely connected. Grier stresses that “properly selected and arranged interiors were analogs or material equivalents of the moral state of the household.”<sup>144</sup> The parlour in Hunter’s Home adhered to this, with expensive and carefully selected

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<sup>143</sup> Elizabeth Collins Cromley, “A History of American Beds and Bedrooms, 1890-1930,” in Foy and Schlereth, *American home life*, 121.

<sup>144</sup> Grier, *Culture & Comfort*, 6.

imports shipped across an extensive trade route from Georgia to Indian Territory to ensure that their home was finely furnished.

Existing objects from the original home provide some insight into the culture and taste that the family imported from the east coast to their parlour in the Cherokee Nation. One of the room's centerpieces was a pianoforte dated to the 1840s, for instance (fig. 2.3 / Appendix 1-A1.5). Pianos appeared frequently in the parlours of elite homes before the 1880s when they were replaced by less expensive organs. Beyond the impression they would have made as beautifully crafted instruments, the presence of a piano in the parlour had symbolic value as well, signaling to visitors that the family was educated and cultured. It also set the room apart as a place of entertainment, as hosts – usually young ladies – would be asked to play for the merriment of their guests. Grier notes that pianos in this period held particularly feminine associations, and became synonymous with feminine accomplishment and refinement in families of a certain class. An existing copy of Amanda Ross's music book, resting on an Elizabethan-style music rack that dates back as early as the 1830s before the family even arrived in Indian Territory, indicates that she was the musician in the home. The ornately carved wood of the rack or "whatnot" and its veneer surface contribute to the elegance of the piece, which was passed down through the Ross family and donated back to the home in 1985.

Grier's discussion of parlour refinement also includes an analysis of the use of elaborate upholstery for the windows and, later, for doorways between bedrooms. This detail was especially important, as upholstery could be seen from outside by visitors approaching the house. While Emily Murrell's journal reveals that some of the upholstery in the home was indeed hand-made, numerous sets of curtains from the Murrells' original parlour and dining room suggest that they were well aware of the impression that such fine items could make on visitors approaching the home. Two sets of curtains from the original house confirm this. The first of these is a set of green silk damask curtains with a floral design and rose gimp ties (fig. 2.4 / Appendix 1-A1.11). The rich green that this set was made with was a rare and expensive colour, suggesting that they were almost certainly hung in the parlour where visitors would notice them. A second set made out of red damask with a similar design was likely used in the dining room – the other space in the house that was used for entertaining guests.

Visitor accounts and historical records such as Emily Murrell's journal indicate that the family frequently received guests, and that the home was a popular stop on early tours to the newly developed seat of the Cherokee Nation. The parlour would have

been the first space in the house that guests were received, and the objects and material culture on display therein revealed a great deal about the home's inhabitants. The following sections examine the visual culture selected by the family for various uses, including the portraits that were on display in the parlour, a suite of lithographs that were commissioned for the dining room, and a selection of keepsakes that were commissioned for private use.

### *Painted Portraits*

There is ample evidence that the Murrell and Ross family actively commissioned portraits of themselves for display in their residences. While John Ross's portrait commissions were largely intended for circulation and display in the public sphere, the portraits produced for the Murrell household bridged the public / private divide. Thus while formal painted portraits hung in the parlour where visiting guests would admire them, miniatures and keepsakes were also produced for private consumption by members of the household themselves.

Portraits of the master and lady of the house, George Murrell and Minerva Ross, are perhaps two of the strongest examples of the ways in which the family manipulated portraiture traditions to identify and align themselves with the southern gentry. These are two of the most notable pieces that have survived from the original home, and have been central to the parlour from the home's original layout to its restoration and preservation in the contemporary era.

The portraits were painted between in c. 1844 and, given the orientation of the figures in each, were conceived of as a diptych (figs. 2.5-2.6 / Appendix 1-A1.6 and A1.7). George Murrell's portrait pictures him seated in a black suit, crisp white shirt and cravat against a generic landscape scene reminiscent of something that might be used as a backdrop in a commercial photographer's studio. One hand rests by his side; the other – curiously unfinished – is held up gallantly to his chest as he looks out, his gaze oriented slightly to the right. Minerva Ross's portrait complements this composition, showing her seated in an off-the-shoulder black dress with full skirt. A bracelet adorns her right wrist, which rests delicately just above her knee, and her left hand curves into her shoulder along the neckline of her dress. She, too, looks out, with a gaze that veers left to complement her husband's. Together, the lyrical hand gestures, fixed and confident gazes, and formal black attire – as well as the overall harmony and coherence of the portraits as a pair – exude the air of refinement and gentility that the couple strove

to communicate to their guests. Thus just as objects within the home held symbolic value as extensions of their owners, the portraits are especially symbolic in their literal portrayal of the family.

The artist of these two portraits is a contested unknown.<sup>145</sup> It is unclear whether they were done in Park Hill, or whether they were done on the east coast during one of Murrell's many visits there. Due to their dates, it is tempting to attribute them to John Mix Stanley, who took portraits and daguerreotypes of the Ross family in Indian Territory between 1843 and 1844. His assistant Sumner Dickerman's letter revealing their stay with Lewis Ross, whereupon they "repaired to his house, remained four days, and took ten miniatures"<sup>146</sup>, suggests that the pair may have come into contact with George Murrell and Minerva Ross, whom he mentions in his letter. "One of his daughters is married to a white man by the name of Merrill, who is a merchant in this country"<sup>147</sup>, Dickerman specifies. During his time in Indian Territory, Stanley enjoyed prolonged stays with both John Ross at Rose Cottage and Lewis Ross at Prairie Lea, and obtained a substantial commission of half a dozen portraits by John Ross's brother-in-law, as explored in Chapter One. These commissions provide ample evidence that the extended Ross family were keen to have their portraits done by Stanley, and were happy with the outcome. Julia Schimmel's unpublished research into Stanley's oeuvre was the first to make the connection, though curators of the home are skeptical due to perceived discrepancies in style.<sup>148</sup> Interestingly, the latest major traveling retrospective of Stanley's work and its accompanying scholarly publication, though dedicated to Schimmel, does not include the Murrell portraits.<sup>149</sup>

Despite skepticism about the artist behind these portraits, they do speak to some of the formal elements of Stanley's other Ross commissions. The careful ringlets of hair hanging from Minerva's head, for instance, appear in Stanley's portraits of Eleanora C.

<sup>145</sup> A typo in a 1954 newspaper article covering the restoration of the Murrell Home contributes to the confusion by stating that "The portraits of Major George Michael Murrell and Amanda (Ross) Murrell, painted by 'Charles Charles', of Philadelphia, have been restored to the parlor. They were brought from Lynchburg, Virginia, where the Murrells stored them during the war." Cobb was curator in 1954, and was likely consulted for the article; whether she had more substantial insight as to who painted the portraits is unknown. Charles Bird King was working in Philadelphia intermittently throughout his career, though no existing research into his extensive journals, letters, and writings ties him to the Murrell family portraits. For the original newspaper article, see Lorena L. Travis, "Restoration of Murrell Home Progresses", *The Star-Citizen*, 6 May 1954.

<sup>146</sup> Sumner Dickerman's letter, see note 91.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> In her doctoral thesis, Schimmel attributes the paintings to Stanley, though does not provide substantial evidence for her claim. She too looks to the important letter written by Dickerman that places Stanley at the centre of yet another Ross family commission with the daguerreotypes.

<sup>149</sup> See Hassrick and Besaw, *Painted Journeys: The art of John Mix Stanley*.

Ross and Jane Ross Meigs (see back to figs. 1.15 and 1.17). While Minerva's hairstyle was a fashionable one for Victorian sitters, a remarkable early daguerreotype of her (discussed below) pictures her with an entirely different style. Further, a number of the hands painted into the Ross portraits appear clunky and unfinished, with thick contour around each finger in some cases – just as they appear in George Murrell's portrait. Lastly, the portraits that Stanley painted of John Golden Ross and his wife Elizabeth Ross also appear to have been conceived of as a diptych (see back to figs. 1.12 and 1.13). In this pair of portraits, the couple sits in an identical red velvet side chair with one arm resting on a centre table covered in red upholstery, and the other resting in their laps. As with the Murrells, they both wear black; however, the background evokes an interior domestic setting whereas the Murrells are painted against an exterior landscape scene.

We can only speculate as to whether or not the portraits that hung in the parlour were done by Stanley's celebrated hand. He was certainly favored for a substantial number of portraits by the rest of the extended Ross family. Whoever the artist was, they were very obviously painting the couple as subjects of European portrait conventions, rather than those governing the Indian Galleries travelling around the country at the time. The seated poses, hand gestures, and elaborate European attire speak to the formal portrait conventions that conveyed a sitter's status and standing in the nineteenth century. This set of rhetorical choices announces the couple's allegiance to "Europeanness" and modernity on a grand scale, in keeping with John Ross's lifelong dedication to perceived conceptions of the advancement and progress of the Cherokee Nation beyond the "rudeness of the savage state."<sup>150</sup>

### *Private Keepsakes*

Early photographic images of sitters that have been identified by Murrell home interpreters as Minerva and Amanda Ross further confirm the family's interest in the importance of appearances, and their participation in the modernization of portraiture with the arrival of photographic technology in Indian Territory. A daguerreotype of Minerva offers an interesting point of comparison to her painted portrait (fig. 2.7 /

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<sup>150</sup> Ross, "To the Senate and House of Representatives," in Moulton, *The Papers of Chief John Ross*, vol. 1, 458.



Appendix 1-A1.44).<sup>151</sup> Taken in the 1840s, the daguerreotype is the only photograph of Minerva known to exist, and as with the formal portraits, it is inviting to attribute this object to Stanley based on its date and his close connection to the Rosses. Here she is pictured seated wearing a black dress with white fur draped across her shoulders. Her necklace, earrings, and belt have been painted in gold. Aside from her hairstyle, which noticeably adjusts the curled ringlets in the painted portrait, her small frame is especially striking when compared to the voluptuous frame of the figure in the painted likeness. Minerva would have undoubtedly experienced weight loss at the peak of her illness – something that is reported in Emily Murrell’s journal – suggesting that, if the figure in both likenesses is indeed Minerva Ross, the daguerreotype may have been taken later than the portrait. Another explanation points to the difference in approach to painted and daguerreotype portraiture in the mid-nineteenth century. Where early daguerreotypes were seen as a novelty for their “magical verisimilitude”<sup>152</sup>, the painted portrait of the same period was open to manipulations of character.

A tintype of Minerva’s sister and George’s second wife Amanda Ross also appears in the Murrell Home collection (fig. 2.8 / Appendix 1-A1.45). Though the tintype was taken at a later date in the 1850s, the casing is near identical to Minerva’s, with a chalice cup engraved into the leather. The tintype of Amanda pictures her seated in an elaborate white dress with patterned black trim, and her hair parted and tied back on either side of her head. The oval metal matte and the tintype technique give the image a mirror-like quality that was cause for fascination in photography’s early years. The two remarkable photographic portraits were donated to the Murrell home in 2010 after a great-granddaughter of George Murrell and Amanda Ross found them in her home in Connecticut. Like the oil portraits, the tintype and daguerreotype announce the Ross sisters’ allegiance to the status that the Ross family pursued throughout their reign in the Cherokee Nation.

An additional example of the ways in which the family explored the full gamut of portraiture traditions appears in a painted miniature of George Murrell, embedded inside of a gold, oval-shaped locket (fig. 2.9 / Appendix 1-A1.46). The locket has a

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<sup>151</sup> The striking difference in appearance between the figure in the daguerreotype and the figure in the painting is cause for concern in terms of identifying both figures as Minerva Ross. Attribution is based on the provenance of the daguerreotype, which belonged to George Murrell, and was passed down to family members before his great-granddaughter returned it to the Murrell home in 2010.

<sup>152</sup> See Alan Trachtenberg, “Photography: The emergence of a key word,” in *Photography in nineteenth-century America*, ed. Martha A. Sandweiss (Fort Worth and New York: Amon Carter Museum and Harry N. Abrams, 1991), 20.

small gold ring attached to the top, suggesting that it was meant to be worn around the neck or attached to clothing and thus was kept close to the body in some way. A lock of hair is secured to the back of the locket behind a piece of oval-shaped glass, and an inscription that reads “Murrell 1842” appears just above the lock of hair. In the portrait, Murrell appears wearing the same black overcoat, cravat, and white shirt as he does in the larger painted portrait that hangs in the parlour. Given the date and Stanley’s arrival only the following year, Murrell likely had the miniature done in one of the bustling art metropolises on the east coast during one of his many trips there.

Commissioning a miniature was a unique way of claiming allegiance to new sectors of bourgeois society. On the east coast, where miniature consumption flourished before the 1860s when photographs took over, merchants indulged in miniature consumption as a form of participation in the bourgeoisie. Anne Verplanck’s work on the medium’s proliferation in nineteenth-century Philadelphia notes that, because it was available at the same time as the much cheaper and less time-consuming daguerreotype, those who chose to have their miniatures painted opted into the symbolic patina that it invoked. Because of its long-established connections to Europe and associations with royalty, Verplanck points out that its later American iteration “imbued miniatures and their users with centuries-old associations of wealth, taste, and power.”<sup>153</sup> She writes,

The high cost and time commitment further added to miniatures’ preciousness; they were intended to survive and to be treasured for future generations, creating or extending the history of a family line. Through the longevity of the form and its associations with taste, refinement, and sensibility, miniatures, even when new, had the patina of age.<sup>154</sup>

Murrell’s commissioning of a miniature portrait also situates him within a larger network of commissioning patrons. As Verplanck notes, often patrons who were happy with their miniatures would refer the artist out to other members of their social circles. These networks spanned broad geographic areas and were not necessarily limited to the patron’s milieu. In fact, Verplanck’s case study of antebellum Philadelphia miniaturists suggests that patrons were drawn from farther afield, with southern locales a particularly thriving market. This could very well be the context for Murrell’s own miniature.

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<sup>153</sup> Anne Verplanck, “Patina and Persistence: Miniature Patronage and Production in Antebellum Philadelphia,” in *The American Bourgeoisie: Distinction and Identity in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Sven Beckert and Julia B. Rosenbaum (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 65.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

The lock of hair secured to the back of the gold locket transforms the object into a personal keepsake. This detail brought with it sentimental associations that came to bear on both the sitter and his relationship with whomever the object was intended for. Because of their small size, miniatures were often intended to be worn close to the body – something that Verplanck suggests is indicative of the “physical and emotional closeness among the sitter, the wearer, and the viewer.”<sup>155</sup> The inclusion of a lock of hair would heighten this closeness, marking the object as a gesture of affection that had an additional air of exclusivity due to the expense of having it made.

### *Quorn Hunt lithographs*

Another existing piece of insight into the Murrell family’s use of visual culture within the home lies in a suite of eight lithographs that was originally commissioned by George Murrell. These were hung in the dining room, which, aside from the parlour, was the other ground floor room that bridged the public / private divide in the home. In lieu of the formal portraits that adorn the parlour, the dining room featured *The Quorn Hunt*, a suite of lithographs depicting Britain’s oldest and most famous fox hunt. The Ross and Murrell families were enthusiasts of the hunt, and named their estates according to its traditions as is evidenced in Murrell’s “Hunter’s Home” and Lewis Ross’s “Tally-Ho” plantation.<sup>156</sup> Murrell had an original set of prints made in London, and imported them to Indian Territory for the home. As with the rest of the material culture on display, this worked to project a favourable class status and social standing in the family. *The Quorn Hunt* progresses through eight stages, represented in individualized scenes that are hung around the dining room (fig. 2.10, 1-8 / Appendix 1-A1.29). *The Meet*, *Drawing Cover*, *Tally Ho! And Away!*, *The pace begins to tell!*, *Snob is Beat*, *Full-cry Second Horses*, *The Whissendine appears in view*, and finally, *The Death* complete the narrative of the hunt, characterized through the equestrian scenes accented with red hunting jackets, racing dogs and galloping horses. The lithographs would have been hung in their narrative order, with the first appearing towards the

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>156</sup> For an extended study of Lewis Ross’s plantation ventures see William D. Reeves, *From Tally-Ho to Forest home: The history of two Louisiana Plantations* (Bayou Goula, Louisiana: D. Denis Murrell and David R. Denis, 2006).

bottom of the staircase that connects the dining room with the upstairs quarters, and the final two scenes hanging just outside the entrance to the sitting room.<sup>157</sup>

As Grier notes, in the dining rooms of the middle and upper classes, the functionality of the space was supplemented with objects that held historical and metaphorical value. In the nineteenth century, this included the “masculine iconography of the hunt” within the space of the dining room – “even though few of the men who headed dinner tables in these settings ever brought dinner home to their families in such a direct manner.”<sup>158</sup> Murrell may have been an exception to this rule, however; Emily Murrell’s journal includes three entries detailing occasions on which her Uncle Murrell indulged in the hunt. “Rain; It is quite gloomy indeed”, she writes in an entry dated 18 April 1850; “Uncle George started a fox but soon lost the track on account of the rain. Wm Ross Jr kill’d a Rabbit & squirrel.”<sup>159</sup> The entry indicates that hunting was a shared love between the Murrell and Ross families – a point reinforced in Stanley’s portrait of the young Lewis Anderson Ross, with his bow, arrow and small hare (see back to figure 1.16). On another occasion, she writes, “Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> They went fox hunting caught none”<sup>160</sup>; and finally, the following day, “Tim Walker came out again tonight for another hunt in the morning.”<sup>161</sup> Grier continues,

Employing images of the violence of the hunt, its conquests, and the abundance resulting from skill at hunting reflected the sense of self as well as the economic competence that good masculine providers were supposed to have. Placed inside a family’s house, such images were also a metaphorical statement of the difference between the harsh world outside the home and the softer one within its walls.<sup>162</sup>

Beyond the “statement of difference” that Grier points to, purchasing a suite of lithographs depicting the British Quorn hunt was a way for Murrell to outwardly portray his love of this beloved ritual – a fact that resonates in the very name of his estate. On a metaphorical level, the lithographs were a way of inscribing the historical elitism associated with the British fox hunt within the home, and claiming an allegiance to

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<sup>157</sup> As per the Murrell Home’s current hang of the suite, based on Murrell’s 1850 renovation of the dining room.

<sup>158</sup> Grier, *Culture & Comfort*, 12.

<sup>159</sup> Journal of Emily Murrell, 35.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>162</sup> Grier, *Culture & Comfort*, 12.

Europeanness. Much like the portraits then, the lithographs functioned as an associative claim to the social elite invoked by the hunt.<sup>163</sup>

The artist for these plates is Henry Alken, the engraver is F.C. Lewis, and the publisher is Rudolph Ackerman.<sup>164</sup> In the nineteenth century, Alken illustrated the work of the Welsh sporting writer Charles James Apperley, whose writings on the fox hunt were admired by the readership of *The Sporting Magazine* and the *Quarterly Review* where he was published. Alken made a name for himself through these prints, including most notably the 34 plates he did for Apperley's celebrated *The Life of a Sportsman*.<sup>165</sup> The publisher, Richard Ackerman, ran a successful print shop in London, moving from the Strand to Regent Street where he established the Eclipse Sporting Gallery in 1831.

Apperley's writing on the British fox hunt is particularly shrouded in imperial history, including its age-old rivalry between the British and the French. In *Nimrod Abroad*, Apperley paints a particularly nationalist picture of the British fox hunt, farcically illustrated in an exchange he recounts between an English sportsman and Napoleon himself: "When Mr. Thomas Assheton Smith, of great Leicestershire renown, was presented to Napoleon, he exclaimed on hearing his name, 'Ah! Voilà le grand chasseur d'Angleterre!'"<sup>166</sup> This humorous anecdote, rife with imperial references, situates the hunt within the realm of the European social elite. The proliferation of the quintessentially British hunt is explored by Apperley when he writes,

A few years back it would have been next to an impossibility to convince an Englishman that a Frenchman could ride to hounds; [...] But matters are strangely altered in these respects. It is true the postilion, and the farmer, and the tradesman, adhere to the jack-boot and jolting seat, which their forefathers considered both necessary and correct; but a very great portion of the upper orders are now seen in saddles and with bridles of the simple English form, and rising in their stirrups, in the trot, as Englishmen have always done.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> For additional research on the iconography of the hunt see Kenneth L. Ames, "Murderous Propensities: Notes on Dining Iconography of the Mid-Nineteenth Century," in *Three Centuries Two Continents*, ed. Nancy H. Schless and Kenneth L. Ames (Watkins, Glen, NY: American Life Foundation), 1983; and Kenneth L. Ames, *Death in the dining room and other tales of Victorian culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 1992.

<sup>164</sup> An additional suite of the *Quorn Hunt* done by Alken, engraved by Lewis and published by Ackerman was in the October 2012 sale at Christie's South Kensington. It came in just above the low estimate at £3,500. An additional suite is in the collections of the Yale Centre for British Art.

<sup>165</sup> See Charles James Apperley, *The Life of a Sportsman* (London: Rudolph Ackermann, 1842). The first edition of this text was sold at Christie's New York in 2009, fetching \$4,375 USD.

<sup>166</sup> C.J. Apperley, Esq., *Nimrod Abroad*, vol. 1 (London: Henry Coburn, Publisher, Great Marlborough Street, 1842), 159.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 159-160.

Apperley's highlighting of imperial rivalries between the British and the French is especially poignant in light of the colonial context in which his prints would later find themselves: much further afield, in the dining room of a prominent Cherokee family at the height of the colonial project. Like the portraiture and material culture on display elsewhere in the home, the remarkable presence of the *Quorn Hunt* suite in the dining room of Hunter's Home – a home named for the very hunt the suite represents – reinforces the ties to Europeanness that were sought after in the Ross family in the transcultural space of the “Athens of Indian Territory.”

#### 2.4 Restoring the Home, 1948-1960

On 6 April 1951, the District Judge in Muskogee, Oklahoma wrote a letter to the Chairman of the Planning and Resources Board in Oklahoma City recommending Jennie Ross Cobb for the first curatorial post at the George M. Murrell historic home. Emphasizing the patriotism for which the Ross family was known in the Cherokee Golden Age, Cobb is described as a reputable and outstanding citizen in the Park Hill community.<sup>168</sup> The letter stresses her connection to the Ross family in a detailed description at its introduction:

Mrs. Jennie Ross Cobb is a descendant of Chief John Ross and her father Robert B. Ross was for a number of years Treasurer of the Cherokee Nation. Mrs. Cobb grew up in the vicinity of the Murrell property, is an old Female Seminary student, was a teacher in the Cherokee schools and is quite familiar with the history of the Murrell property [...] and is deeply interested in seeing the property cared for as the years go by.<sup>169</sup>

The judge concludes with perhaps the most important trait Cobb brought to the eventual restoration of the site, namely her “deep interest in the community wherein the home is located as well as [...] her interest in seeing matters of historical and educational value perpetuated in the state of Oklahoma.”<sup>170</sup> His heartfelt appeal resonated with the planning board in Oklahoma City. In 1948, the state of Oklahoma successfully purchased the property, and in 1952, Cobb returned to the family home she inhabited from 1894-1906 and became its first official curator. Her tenure there lasted until her death in 1959.

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<sup>168</sup> “Letter from the District Judge to the Chairman of the Planning and Resources Board,” Muskogee, Indian Territory, 6 April 1951. Anne Ross Piburn Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

Interestingly, this emphasis on the Ross family's long history in Park Hill became the main focus under Cobb's curatorship. Whereas the "improvements" were purchased and placed under George Murrell's name in 1844, Cobb's contribution to the home's restoration meant that its contemporary iteration as a museum grounded Ross family history more substantially at the site. The objects she obtained through loans and acquisitions firmly reinforce this agenda, with special emphasis on securing originals from the home's pre-Civil War interior, as well as additional Ross family pieces belonging to ancestors including John Ross and Lewis Ross.

One of the primary erasures that took place at the home under Cobb was its status as a working plantation site when it was first constructed. Thus the nineteenth-century context that prized the visibility of the Murrell and Ross family's slave labour became hidden in the home's re-articulation on the brink of post-Jim Crow America. A newspaper headline from a 1950 issue of the *Oklahoman* newspaper illustrates this erasure in describing the restored home as "an historical shrine and Indian art centre" – indicating that Cobb paid particular attention to securing art objects for the home's permanent collection and temporary displays.<sup>171</sup> She was especially keen to repatriate the painted portraits of George Murrell and Minerva Ross, and was successful in securing an additional oil portrait of Lewis Ross<sup>172</sup>, as well as a rare early drawing of Rose Cottage, and a copy of one of the last-known photographic portraits of John Ross completed by the Philadelphia portraitist Frederick Gutekunst in 1863. This emphasis on the early visual culture of the family allowed Cobb to re-create an early version of what the interior would have looked like, but was also an expression of her close familial associations with the home from the years she lived there herself in the 1890s. Though racial tensions and inequalities continued to prevail in the post-Civil War years, Cobb's experience of the house in the 1890s saw a shift in its function from a plantation to a family home – an important detail that contributed to the curatorial decisions she made in the 1950s.

The Murrell home was not the only historic Cherokee site to undergo significant state-funded efforts at restoration in the early 1950s. In a remarkable comparison, the

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<sup>171</sup> "Old House Becomes Shrine," *The Oklahoman*, 9 July, 1950.

<sup>172</sup> This portrait is thought to have been painted in the 1830s by Ralph Earle II (1788-1837), who was the son of American portraitist Ralph Earle I. Earle II followed in his father's footsteps, travelled to London, and trained under John Trumbull with some input from Benjamin West. Upon his return to the United States, Earle II became a good friend of President Andrew Jackson, and produced a number of portraits of the president and his family when Jackson got to the White House. This association, passed down through the Ross family with the portrait itself, is precarious given the drastically different style of Lewis Ross's portrait, and further research is needed to establish the connection more substantially.

plantation mansion and grounds belonging to the prominent Cherokee political figure and planter, James Vann, and later his son Joseph Vann, also underwent a significant restoration process. The Vann plantation “Diamond Hill” was in many ways the Murrell home’s equivalent in the Cherokees’ original homeland of Georgia earlier in the nineteenth century – though on a much larger scale. James Vann was a planter who owned upwards of 70 slaves<sup>173</sup> and ran a successful enterprise trading in corn, wheat, fruit, and cotton in the early 1800s before the removal. His son, the notorious Joseph Vann, built a grandiose brick mansion on the Diamond Hill plantation site when he inherited it in the early 1820s. Like the Murrell home, the Vann mansion was the “crown jewel” of the area, and was passed down through various configurations of the family until 1835, when the Vanns were forced west. It also fell into a state of disrepair in the post-Civil War years, just as the Murrell home did in 1907 when it was eventually sold out of the Ross family for the first time. In the 1950s, a group of impassioned local residents petitioned for the Vann house to be restored and re-opened as a historical site. The founding of the Joseph Vann Historical Association happened in 1951, and by 1952, the group had raised the money to purchase the house and six acres of the original land that the plantation rested on. It was then legally acquired by the Georgia Historical Commission the same year.

The story of the Murrell home thus, in many ways, picks up where the Vann House left off. When the Vanns were forced out of the prosperity of the Diamond Hill plantation in 1835, the Ross and Murrell families were establishing their own mansions as the “crown jewels” of Indian Territory in the post-removal years. The importance and legacy of this prosperity was similarly valued in the context of the Murrell home. Thus, just as a group of community members worked hard to establish the Vann House as an official Georgia Historic Site on the National Register of Historic Places, Jennie Ross Cobb and the community members who formed the eventual Friends of the Murrell Home were instrumental in petitioning the Oklahoma Historical Society to purchase the home in 1948. The complex chapter of Cherokee history surrounding the decades leading up to and following the removal has therefore been commemorated through two historic restorations of the homes that existed and prospered in each of the Cherokees’ homelands in Georgia and Indian Territory – sites that are now connected through the

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<sup>173</sup> According to Tiya Miles, this was one of the largest populations of enslaved African-descent laborers in the Cherokee Nation (pre-removal). For more on the prominence of the Vann family in the history of plantation slavery, see Harmon, *Rich Indians*.



historic trail that visitors can undertake. It has also, crucially, mobilized that history through the prosperous plantation-owning Cherokee families in the Vanns, Rosses, and Murrells, who were intimately connected through a number of different allegiances – familial, political, and economic.

Photographs from the 1950s restoration of the Vann house indicate that there were further parallels between the material culture that was emphasized in both the Murrell and Vann homes. A 1950 photograph of one of the primary figures in the restoration of the Vann home pictures her sitting underneath Joseph Vann’s portrait in the home’s interior, for instance, indicating that portraits played a similarly important role in both the original home and its restoration. Three small additional lithographs appear on the wall next to Joseph Vann’s portrait, and are identifiable as copies of Charles Bird King’s originals for the McKenney and Hall anthology. The Vanns were the subjects of portraiture in much the same way that the Rosses were, and members of the family were painted by leading portraitists of the day, including Charles Bird King. One of the copies on the wall in the 1950 photograph, though cut off, could certainly be a copy of John Ross’s portrait for McKenney and Hall. An additional photograph pictures one of the designers choosing drapery for the parlour of the Vann House, indicating that this room was prioritized in the same way as Cobb’s version of the Murrell home parlour was.

Cobb’s selection of furnishings from the 1840s and 1850s makes clear that she prioritized Ross family relics for her room displays and building of the collection, but also that she wanted to stay as true as possible to the time period in which the original iteration of the Ross family inhabited the home. Because many of the items that she secured were originals from the 1840s-50s, this restaging is a persuasive interpretation of how the original space may have appeared. A rare early series of photographs of the Murrell home parlour taken around 1895 (likely by Cobb herself) provide a partial inventory of some of these original pieces that stayed in the home when her branch of the family moved in. The images suggest that many of these originals were being kept and photographed in the parlour for inventory purposes as the family was settling in (figs. 2.11-2.13 / Appendix 2-A2.22-A2.24). Cobb worked to repatriate a number of the original parlour pieces based on these photographs,<sup>174</sup> supplementing these pieces with

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<sup>174</sup> See Appendix 1 under “parlour” for full details of the objects secured for this room under Cobb’s curatorship.

additional Ross family heirlooms including most notably an extensive loan of original furniture from one of John Ross's residences in Philadelphia.

Photographs of her parlour display from the late 1950s indicate that she centralized the heads of household in this room particularly.<sup>175</sup> Importantly, Cobb paid particular attention to securing the original portraits of George Murrell and Minerva Ross while she was there. She then hung the portrait of George Murrell above the fireplace, where it likely would have hung in the original home (and where there may have been an additional family portrait when she lived in the home in the 1890s), and hung the accompanying portrait of Minerva Murrell above the pianoforte that later belonged to her sister (figs. 2.14-2.15). Repatriating the portraits to their original setting was a way for Cobb to reinscribe the presence of the home's owners in its most public space, and reinforce the significant influence enacted through the powerful alliance of the Ross and Murrell families, initiated with the marriage of George Murrell and Minerva Ross. The portraits were some of the most significant items that she procured for the home.

Approaches to repatriation were similar in the 1950s refurbishment of both the Vann and Murrell homes. Indeed, both sites relied on family donations of original pieces. Interestingly, while family heirlooms from Oklahoma were making their way back to the Vann house in Georgia, Murrell and Ross family heirlooms were making their way to Oklahoma from descendants in the southeast. However, the Vann house "revitalization project" was a six-year ordeal, and involved architects, interior decorators, landscapers, and designers before its eventual dedication in 1958. By contrast, the Murrell home restoration was largely a family-oriented affair, and Cobb was the primary point of contact for acquisitions and refurbishment. In this way, the largest disconnect between the restoration of the Vann house and the Murrell home lies in the family line, in that the Murrell home had the unique advantage of a family member who had lived there guiding the home's restoration.

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<sup>175</sup> The parlour had special significance to Jennie Ross Cobb, who held her wedding celebrations there in 1905. After a ceremony held at the Presbyterian Church in Tahlequah, she and her new husband Jesse Clifton Cobb hosted a gathering at the home. Described as a celebration solemnizing "two of the city's most popular young people" in the *Tahlequah Arrow*, the event was attended by a "large concourse of friends and relatives" who gathered in the Murrell home to commend the newlyweds. The "spacious parlors" are explicitly mentioned, suggesting that the adjacent sitting room and dining room were open to accommodate the large number of guests. The article emphasizes Cobb's role in the community at the time, stating, "The bride is one of the most popular and best-known young ladies of the city who has grown to maturity among us. She is one of those young women of sterling qualities, of whose graces, charms and talents Tahlequah is justly proud. She goes from us amid the best wishes for her future joy." See Waddie Hudson, "Cobb-Ross," *The Tahlequah Arrow*, 30 September 1905.

One of the unique memory guides that contributed directly to the Murrell home's restoration was Cobb's photography. She was the first to photograph it in the 1890s, and thus her original photographs provide the earliest guide to its interior. Interestingly, the earliest known photograph of the Vann house is dated 1898, and thus visual records detailing the home's interior would not be representative of its earliest configuration – a time period that pre-dates photography by nearly a decade.<sup>176</sup> Similarly, the earliest photographs of the Murrell home and its interior begin with Cobb in the late 1890s, when she was living there with her branch of the Ross family as a young girl. While unfortunately her original glass plates for a series of images of the home's interior have been damaged, contact prints were made for a number of her photographs, and are still readable as a basic visual guide to some of the rooms.<sup>177</sup> After Cobb's death in 1959, care and upkeep of the Murrell home stayed in the family, with Cobb's sister-in-law Marguerite Ross taking over the role of curator in 1959. It is notable that Marguerite Ross stepped into the role the same year that Cobb passed away, ensuring that its continued restoration and preservation stayed in family hands (fig. 2.16).

The transformation of the Ross family home into a state-owned museum and heritage site occurred under the dedicated efforts of Ross family women, with Jennie Ross Cobb at the helm in the late 1940s.<sup>178</sup> Though her role as one of the first documented Indigenous women to explore with camera technology in the 1890s has been celebrated in contemporary scholarship (as Chapter Four of this thesis explores),

<sup>176</sup> Tiya Miles includes a photograph of the Vann house's exterior with the caption "The oldest known photograph of the Vann House," dated 1898.

<sup>177</sup> The contact prints were secured thanks to journalist Mary Elizabeth Good, who was the last person to interview Cobb before she died. Good herself took extensive photographic documentation of the home in the 1960s, and these photographs are now in the Murrell Home archives.

<sup>178</sup> Exploring Cobb's role as a curator within the nineteenth-century context of women professionalizing would be an interesting parallel research project, especially given the popularity of collecting and display amongst nineteenth-century women. For more on the professionalization of women artists and collectors in the nineteenth century, see Meaghan Clarke, "'The greatest living critic': Christiana Herringham and the practice of connoisseurship," *Visual Resources* 33, no. 1/2 (2017): 94-116; Clarke, "The art press at the fin de siècle: Women, collecting, and connoisseurship," *Visual Resources* 31, no. 1/2 (2015): 15-30; Clarke, "'The triumph of perception and taste': Women, Exhibition Culture, and Henry James," *Henry James Review* 31, no. 3 (2010): 246-253; Ellen McLeod, *In Good Hands: The women of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014); Kristina Huneault and Janice Anderson, *Rethinking Professionalism: Women and art in Canada, 1850-1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012); Deborah Cherry and Janice Helland, *Local / Global: Women artists in the nineteenth century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); and Laura R. Prieto, *At home in the studio: The Professionalization of women artists in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). For feminist scholarship on the contemporary context, see Lara Perry and Angela Dimitrakaki, *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures, and Curatorial Transgressions* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013).

her role as the first curator of the Murrell home – arguably a much more involved professional pursuit – has not been adequately explored. The decisions that she made with regards to layout and acquisitions reveal the extent to which she relied on her photographs and her memory of the home in its late nineteenth-century iteration to guide her interpretation of the space. It also tells a version of history that emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between the Ross family in the Cherokee Golden Age and the development of Indian Territory itself – albeit with little attention paid to the home’s original status as a working plantation. As the following section will explore, preliminary attempts to address this erasure have been undertaken, but the home in its current state continues to prioritize the importance of the Ross family in keeping with Cobb’s legacy.

## 2.5 The Contemporary Home, 2016

Tiya Miles’s important research on the Vann house emphasizes the transculturality that was built into the very fabric of the home. She notes, “On Diamond Hill, one of the first and most prosperous Cherokee plantations, American Indians, enslaved people of African descent, and Euro-American missionaries, craftsmen, and laborers lived [...] intersecting lives.”<sup>179</sup> Imagining how this mix of cultures would have manifested itself in the everyday life of the house, she further muses,

On any given Diamond Hill day in the early 1800s, a blend of cooking smells would have mingled in the air: Cherokee hominy and bean soups, African-inspired sweet potato or boiled peanut dishes, and fresh slaw prepared from the bounty of the Moravians’ garden. A symphony of sounds, too, rode the gentling breeze, as residents conversed in Cherokee, African, English, and German languages. On Christmas holidays and Saturdays, the steady beat of African drums emanated from the slave quarters, resounding through the night.<sup>180</sup>

Passages like this are included throughout Miles’s study, and allude to the significant gaps in the current Vann house’s display and program. The narrative picture Miles paints of the house foreground its transcultural character, and while it is based on extensive archival research, her historical imagination has been tasked with filling in the

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<sup>179</sup> Miles, *The House on Diamond Hill*, 3.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

significant blanks on what the experience of the house was like beyond the confines of the Vann family itself.

The current Murrell home display faces similar challenges. Though its dedicated staff of historians and curators speak openly about the history of slavery at the site, and continue to produce valuable research, exhibits, and educational tools on the subject, there are still major gaps in our knowledge about the individuals who laboured for the Murrell and Ross families, and their individual and collective roles in shaping the home. This information would be especially welcome given the home's newly focused programme dedicated to the development of agriculture in the Cherokee Nation, with a new antique agricultural festival now held each October on its extensive grounds.<sup>181</sup> As the primary work force in plantation agriculture, the role of slave labour is thus important to integrate into the site's history as a working plantation, and could be centralized in a more substantial way.

Given the inherent transculturality of the Vann house, with the mixed European-Cherokee ancestry of the family and the slave population of upwards of one hundred African-descent and Afro-Cherokee people living on its grounds, it is ironic that this diversity is at once erased from the home's interpretive displays, while also acting as one of its primary appeals. Miles describes the troubling reality of the home in its 2002 state, noting that its preservation and displays "had fully excluded blacks and substantively discounted Cherokee women."<sup>182</sup> As such, the house "was playing a role in solidifying and carrying forward interpretive narratives of the past that idealized Cherokee history, highlighted Cherokee likeness to whites, undermined black history, and sidelined Cherokee women's lives."<sup>183</sup> In upholding the nineteenth-century idealization of Cherokee affluence and prosperity through a comparison to the white southern gentry, the Vann house thus misses out on an opportunity to substantially explore the implications of such a diversity of cultures on the grounds of one residence.

By contrast, though the slave population who lived at the Murrell home site is grossly under-represented, the home does incorporate a number of displays in its current interpretation that speak to the transcultural status of the family itself. One instance of this is in the parlour, where curators have secured and displayed an early 1860 copy of the Cherokee bible. The pervasiveness of Christianity in newly-settled Indian Territory

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<sup>181</sup> The festival focuses on the modernization of agriculture in nineteenth-century Indian Territory, with workshops dedicated to the growing season, food-ways, animal husbandry, farming, and domestic skills.

<sup>182</sup> Miles, *The House on Diamond Hill*, 190.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 190-191.

cannot be overstated, and in most nineteenth-century texts focused on settling Indigenous land, conversion to Christianity is identified as the primary assimilation tactic.<sup>184</sup> By the time Minerva Ross was moving into her new home the family was fully adherent to Christian practices and belief systems, and kept at least one copy of the Bible out to indicate that theirs was a Christian home. The curator's inclusion of an 1860 copy of the Bible translated into Cherokee – one of two from the home's collections – thus represents a fascinating transcultural moment when Sequoyah's syllabary was used by the Reverend Samuel Worcester to translate the scriptures into Cherokee. By 1850, Worcester's translation was in its fifth edition and was continuing to be printed right out of Park Hill.

The Vann house arguably does not attempt to highlight transculturality in the same way as the Murrell home does; however, Miles argues that the diversity is ironically one of its primary appeals. She addresses the “unexpected” novelty of the plantation as a home “built for and owned by American Indians” – and unsettlingly, she describes visitors as being “able to fold the unexpected aspect of Native American history into their enjoyment of the site.”<sup>185</sup> She compellingly reminds us, too, that Indigenous history has long been romanticized in the American popular imagination in a similar vein to the ways in which “southern ladies in hoopskirts and lace” have been romanticized in the plantation scenes of the antebellum south. In this way, the thing that sets the Vann house apart from other sites is the fact that the home owners were Cherokees. She writes,

This unexpected aspect of the home's origins is one that fascinates many visitors, many of whom associate Native Americans with plains-style teepees and simplistic, static lifestyles. [...] For both [locals and outsiders], the movement from discomfort with Indians found in the “unexpected” setting of the southern plantation to pleasure in an “exotic” Indian presence in this same setting hinges on the specific Indians in question – Cherokee Indians – who have often been categorized as uniquely “civilized” in American historical and popular representations.<sup>186</sup>

In this way, a major part of the appeal to visitors of the contemporary Vann historic site

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<sup>184</sup> A remarkable primary source detailing the inescapable nature of Christianity with new missionary presence amongst the Cherokee is the diary of Catherine Brown, penned in 1825 by one of the first Cherokee women to be converted to Christianity. See Reverend Rufus Anderson the younger, ed., *The Memoir of Catharine Brown, a Christian Indian, of the Cherokee Nation* (London: B.J. Holdsworth, 1825).

<sup>185</sup> Miles, *The House on Diamond Hill*, 12.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

is its very transculturality – though this is something that is usurped in favour of displays that cohere with other popular plantation sites across the American south.

In their study of southern plantation museums and the erasures that take place therein, Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small stress that placing a sole emphasis on the families or “master-enslavers” of the home works to humanize them to an extent that directly de-humanizes the labouring populations who were also living on-site. Understandably the complexities of Indigenous-owned plantation sites were not included within the remit of their study, and thus their use of the term “white-centric” to describe the plantation sites they analyze has another meaning entirely within the context of homes like the Murrell, Ross, and Vann examples. However, the use of this phraseology emphasizes the imbalanced narratives told through the special attention paid to the detailed idiosyncrasies of who they refer to as the “master-enslavers.”<sup>187</sup> At the Murrell home, the emphasis is certainly placed on the family members who inhabited the home – an emphasis that was carried over from Cobb’s initial displays as the home’s first curator. An example of the erasures that this emphasis enacts is found in the dining room, for instance, where a large gash has been preserved on the dining room door. Visitors are told that the gash was created by John Ross’s famed nemesis, Stand Watie, during a Civil War raid of the house where Ross and Murrell family members stood cowering in the corner while Watie’s troops raided the home for goods. The vulnerability of the women who remained in the home during the raid is referred to and often quoted to conjure sympathy for the fear that they would have felt in the presence of Watie’s aggressors. However, very little of the historical implications of the Civil War are mentioned. Given that slavery was the primary impetus for the war itself, a stronger programme highlighting the home’s (and family’s) implications in the conflict would be a welcome addition in incorporating the institution of slavery more substantially into contemporary interpretations of the site.

Perhaps the most obvious way in which the Murrell home is aligned with the curatorial devices employed in other plantation sites across the south, is in its emphasis on Europeanness within the art, furnishings, and material culture on display within the home. Ties to the south are of course reinforced in the objects themselves, as many of them were imported from Louisiana and New Orleans. As Eichstedt and Small point out,

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<sup>187</sup> See Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 4-5.

The lifestyles of master-enslavers and their families in the [southern] states were dominated by paternalist morality, gendered ideology, and aristocratic codes of honor borrowed from Europe and transformed in the context of local conditions. Aspects of civil society, such as the architecture of public and private buildings, music, theater, art, and extravagant consumption patterns, referenced and often imitated European patterns.<sup>188</sup>

Previous sections of this chapter have explored the connotations of Europeanness in the Murrell and Ross family's portraits and material culture in the context of its original nineteenth-century usage; however, its re-introduction into display practice in the contemporary period arguably serves a dual function. Not only do the objects remind us of the European-inspired honor codes, consumption patterns, and aristocratic tendencies that were deliberately invoked through the objects in their nineteenth-century context, but they also align the Murrell home within the contemporary context of plantation museums, and the nostalgic romanticization of the lives of the home's inhabitants within the context of the southern gentry. The portraiture in the home is an example of this. While in most cases the portraits themselves adhere to aristocratic traditions through the clothing and posing of the figures (in the portraits of George Murrell, Minerva Ross, and Lewis Ross in particular) and thus reveal something of their nineteenth-century function, bringing them together and supplementing them with additional portrait acquisitions re-centralizes the family within the space of the home. As Eichstedt and Small observe, the photographs, painted portraits and drawings of the heads of the family on display in other southern plantation museums are often of the original owners, but when supplemented with additional family portraiture, "provide the opportunity to discuss the web of kinship that tied together elite families of the South", and to create a sense of historical familiarity in positioning the family within circles of affluence and high society.<sup>189</sup>

Additional displays in the Murrell home further highlight the family's ties to Europe, and thus position it within the aesthetics and display of southern plantation museums. The repatriation of original furniture, and the subsequent acquisition of period furniture in the same style as the original pieces is an additional commonality between the Murrell home and plantation museums across the south. Presented "as a sign of taste and of wealth"<sup>190</sup>, particular pieces that were owned by the family are highlighted and imbued with particular importance. The presence of the fleur-de-lys

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 77-78.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 80.



pattern on originals from John Ross's home and Lewis Ross's home works to strengthen and reinscribe the European ties represented through the period pieces, for instance. Similarly, the re-hang of the *Quorn Hunt* suite displaying the European fox hunt as the primary artistic detail in the dining room is a further example of this.<sup>191</sup>

Additional ties to Europe are highlighted in the curated display cases on the upper floor of the home that include configurations of ornate personal objects. Feathered and embroidered fans, leather and pearl gloves, lace dress mitts, and white dress pumps attest that household members were at the height of fashionability (see fig. 2.17). This was even extended into the realm of imported European children's toys. A second display case exhibits a porcelain doll and numerous handmade outfits from 1860 that John Ross purchased for his young daughter Annie Brian Stapler during a visit to France (fig. 2.18 / Appendix 1-A1.50) – further reinforcing the importing of European taste and culture to Indian Territory. As a visual reminder of the transculturality of the home, curators have interestingly juxtaposed this unique find with contemporary-made traditional beaded moccasins, highlighting the mingling of cultures that can now be tangibly assessed through the material culture of the Ross and Murrell families (fig. 2.19).

The major exclusion in the ornate displays of family wealth – from elaborate tea caddies, original china, mahogany furnishings, silk and lace accessories and elaborately carved room dividers with ivory inlay – is of course the very source of the wealth itself, and the labour that facilitated the family's elaborate lifestyle being interpreted and displayed. This much is reinforced across the sites that Eichstedt and Small detail in their study. As an example, they note that “at several sites visitors are told that the cook would have slept in the loft above the kitchen, though in all but one case the upstairs was closed to visitors.”<sup>192</sup> The Murrell home kitchen's loft and likely sleeping quarters for the cook, Eliza, and her family is no exception. Though interpreters have put considerable effort into curating the kitchen as a space of labour, with original spinning wheels and cooking accouterments centralized, access to the loft above the kitchen is

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<sup>191</sup> In 2001, a generous patron of the Murrell home did research on the lithographs, and arranged to have them re-printed and hand-coloured from the original plates in London. With an additional donation from Jennie Ross Cobb's great-granddaughter in 2004, former curator of the home Shirley Pettengill had frames re-made in the style of the original bird's-eye maple frames used for the original lithographs that hung in the 1840s dining room. The set of eight that currently hang in the dining room are prints from this commission.

<sup>192</sup> Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 97.

closed to viewers (fig. 2.20).<sup>193</sup> Further, numerous references to both Murrell's and John Ross's favourable treatment of their slaves works to perpetuate romanticized notions of the institution of slavery and the family's participation in it – another tactic Eichstedt and Small discuss in their survey.<sup>194</sup> Together, the display and interpretive tactics that the Murrell home adheres to centralize the family in a way that positions the home within a network of plantation museums across the south, in the same way that the Murrell and Ross families themselves strove to participate in such a network in the original nineteenth-century context of the home within newly developing Indian Territory.

### Conclusion

Similarities between the Murrell Home and Eichstedt and Small's detailing of plantation museums across the south are extensive. From ideological parallels such as the centralization of the family, to smaller traditions such as the popular ghost story night, the culture and approach that the Murrell home participates in aligns it with other plantations in the American south. Given the wealth and status that was afforded the Ross and Murrell families, not to mention Lewis Ross's considerable hand in the slave trade, histories of the Afro-Cherokee families in Park Hill require urgent attention. Eichstedt and Small's research into plantation museums shows that these sites overwhelmingly downplay – or neglect altogether – the histories that lie beyond the family represented in the big house. And in the Cherokee context, Tiya Miles's invaluable work recovering the history of slavery at the Vann estate, today enshrined as a historic site in Georgia, poses pressing questions concerning the historicization of the Cherokee Nation's most affluent and influential families.

A short drive up the hill from the Murrell home takes you to the Ross family cemetery, where members of one of the Cherokee Nation's most celebrated families are buried (fig. 2.21). Beyond this family cemetery where generations of family members

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<sup>193</sup> I was granted access to view the living space above the kitchen, which is today used as archival storage and thus is difficult to imagine in its historical nineteenth-century layout and usage.

<sup>194</sup> Information about Murrell's and John Ross's favourable treatment of slaves is based on an entry in the unpublished memoir of James Latta, who was Murrell's overseer. According to the entry, Latta was told to always make sure that the slaves were being treated "well." The memoir is in the collections of the Murrell Home, entitled "The Lord's Vineyard," and written in 1859. See Frazee's discussion of the memoir in *A Mansion at the Athens of Indian Territory*, 23. For critical analysis of the trope of "favourable treatment" in the context of Cherokee plantations, see Perdue, *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society, 1540-1866*.

would reunite, signposted with historical plaques and tombstones, lies a vast and empty field of unmarked slave burials.<sup>195</sup> Archaeological work undertaken in 2000 through the Oklahoma Archeological Survey uncovered over 500 burials in the Ross cemetery and surrounding area – a staggering figure given the much smaller number of headstones scattered around the grounds. The difference between the family cemetery and the slave cemetery is palpable, and emblematic of the symbolic erasure of the stories and histories of African-descent and Afro-Indigenous populations who laboured for the eminent families peopling the Cherokee Nation. Together with the archeological surveys of 2013 and 2014 dedicated to more accurately locating where the slave cabins were on the Murrell property, we can only hope that a more dedicated understanding and representation of the individuals who laboured for the Cherokee Nation’s celebrated historical families is to come.

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<sup>195</sup> Additional slave testimony attests to the fact that other slave-owning Cherokee families would have their own private cemeteries. The Perryman cemetery in Tulsa is one example of this.

### Chapter Three: Portraiture and Identity at the Cherokee Female Seminary, 1840-1915

*“The Seminary our garden fair  
And we, the flowers planted there...  
Like roses bright we hope to grow,  
And o’er our home such beauty throw  
In future years – that all may see  
Loveliest of lands, - the Cherokee”  
-Poem printed in the Cherokee Rosebuds Newspaper, 1855*<sup>196</sup>

This chapter moves from the residences that announced the Ross family’s status in Indian Territory, to one of the long-standing legacies the family was remembered for there. The foundation of the Cherokee Female Seminary in 1851 was one of the most important moments in the establishment of a sovereign educational system in the Cherokee Nation, amongst the rampant educational reform for Indigenous children being systematically enforced by the federal government in the mid-nineteenth century. Taking the elite east coast college Mount Holyoke as a primary influence, the Ross family were directly involved in the foundation of a similar institution for Cherokee women in Indian Territory, with John Ross and William Potter Ross leading the project. The seminary was attended by generations of Ross women, including Jennie Ross Cobb<sup>197</sup> and her sister Anne Ross Piburn, and the institution had a profound influence on the education of generations of young Cherokee women.

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, photography was common practice at the school. In contrast to widespread images of young African-American and Indigenous school children being produced at federally-run normal schools across the United States, the images produced at the seminary – by professional photographers and amateur photographers alike – picture elegant young Cherokee women actively participating in their own self-fashioning. Jennie Ross Cobb herself took images of young seminary students smiling in front of their school, strolling together into

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<sup>196</sup> “Our Wreath of Rose Buds,” *The Cherokee Rose Buds newspaper*, 2 August 1854.

<sup>197</sup> 1894 was the first year that Cobb enrolled for the spring semester at the Cherokee Female Seminary. She was a student there for ten semesters in total, including the spring of 1894, spring and fall 1896-99, and the spring semester of 1900 when she graduated. Cobb’s grades are somewhat erratic, at times indicating a near-perfect score in the categories of attendance, deportment, and scholarship, as in the third month of spring semester 1894, while at others a drop in grades and absence for months is evident, as in her spring semester of 1897 - perhaps indicating sustained illness or bereavement in the family. Overall her scores for attendance and deportment outweigh the scholarship score over the ten months. Cherokee Female Seminary Grade Book, 1894-1900, Special Collections, John Vaughan Library, Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, OK.

Tahlequah, and skipping along the new Ozark and Cherokee railway tracks, presenting a remarkable alternative to controlled, unspontaneous visual narratives of American educational reform at the turn of the century. Together with the portraiture produced through the school itself, the resulting body of photographs visualize a population of young Cherokee women embracing and participating in modern life.

This late nineteenth-century visual narrative conflicts with the school pictures of Indigenous school children and young adults being produced elsewhere in the country. J.N. Choate's infamous "before and after" photographs of children enrolled at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania come to mind, as does Frances Benjamin Johnston's extensive documentation of students at the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama and the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Virginia.<sup>198</sup> These photographs were produced for advertising purposes and to validate America's acculturation program for minority populations in the post-Civil War era, with Johnston's photographs travelling all the way to Paris to showcase America's progress at the 1900 *Exposition Universelle*. There, her famous photograph of Louis Firetail posed next to a stuffed eagle showed the world that the young schoolchildren gazing up at him were learning to "progress" beyond the cultures that were now relegated to the history classroom (fig. 3.1).

While earlier photographs produced of the Cherokee Female Seminary show close adherence to the visualization of coherence and control promoted in school photos like Choate's and Johnston's, later nineteenth-century photography produced at the seminary itself and by its students evidences a different set of identity projections altogether. Capitalizing on the country's fixation with typecasting the female body in visual culture, portraiture and photographic images of the Cherokee Female Seminary's teachers, students, and alumna evidence a hybridization of familiar feminine "types" as the century came to a close. These projections worked to visualize distinctive versions

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<sup>198</sup> For scholarship on these two major commissions, see Laura Wexler, "Black and White and Color: American Photographs at the Turn of the Century," *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 12 (1988): 341-390; Jeanne Przyblyski, "American Visions at the Paris Exposition, 1900: Another Look at Frances Benjamin Johnston's Hampton Photographs," *Art Journal* 57, no. 3 (1998): 61-68; Shawn Michelle Smith's chapter "Photographing the 'American Negro': Nation, Race, and Photography at the Paris Exposition of 1900," in Smith, *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999); Tova Cooper, "The Scenes of Seeing: Frances Benjamin Johnston and Visualizations of the 'Indian' in Black, White, and Native Educational Contexts," *American Literature* 83, no. 3 (September 2011): 509-545; and for the critical re-framing of the photographs by contemporary artist Carrie Mae Weems, see Vivian Patterson, ed., *Carrie Mae Weems: The Hampton Project* (Williamstown, MA: Aperture, in association with Williams College Museum of Art, 2000).

of what it meant to be Cherokee. As such, this chapter will analyze various categories of photographic output attached to the seminary's visualization of this. First, section 3.1 will briefly introduce the foundation of the school under the influence of John Ross and William Potter Ross. Section 3.2 will then explore the militaristic approach to visualizing Indigenous school children elsewhere in the United States, including an analysis of early photographic renditions of the seminary itself. Next, section 3.3 will present a selection of images that re-configure this visualization of Indigenous students – an agenda that was pursued actively by seminary graduates like Narcissa Owen beyond the iron gates of the school. Lastly, section 3.4 introduces the cultural practice of 'playing Indian' for the camera, including an extensive case study of one seminary student in particular who made a career out of the practice.

### 3.1 The Cherokee Female Seminary – Early Years

The Cherokee Female and Male Seminaries were unique institutions in the turn of the century educational climate that produced images like *Class in American History*, and the Ross family played a vital role in their establishment. John Ross's vision of establishing sovereign schools for its young people and governing them within the tribe without federal interference became a reality on 6-7 May 1851, when both seminaries were dedicated in Tahlequah followed by Park Hill.<sup>199</sup> This event would continue to be a celebrated landmark in the Cherokee Nation, with commemorative events held each May. In contrast to schools set up by missionaries earlier in the nineteenth century, the seminaries were conceived of and established by the Cherokee Nation itself based on inspiration from prominent east coast colleges.

In 1846, John Ross's nephew William Potter Ross (of the 1844 Stanley portrait) travelled to Philadelphia to meet two newly-appointed teachers and accompany them to Park Hill where they were to take up their new posts. He played a central role in establishing the seminaries, and was an advocate for the educational practices the school would eventually implement. He was also directly involved in selecting teachers from prestigious east coast colleges, as his 1846 recruitment trip attests. The Mount Holyoke

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<sup>199</sup> The 1851 dedication marked the first time that the seminary was open for enrollment. Between 1856-1870 it was closed due to economic deprivation in the Cherokee Nation following the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. It re-opened for a long stretch between 1870-1887, but was destroyed in a devastating fire on Easter Sunday in 1887. The seminary was re-built and re-opened in its new building and location just north of Tahlequah in 1889.

Female Seminary in Massachusetts was selected as a fitting institution from which to hire the Cherokee Female Seminary's first teachers, Sarah Worcester and Ellen Whitmore, and on which to model the new school's curriculum and governance. "I cannot express my gratitude to Mr. Ross for his kindness to me", Whitmore writes in a diary entry of November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1846; "'regard me as your brother, Miss Whitmore,' he said, 'and never hesitate for one moment to let me know anything that I can do for you.'"<sup>200</sup> The prestige of colleges like Mount Holyoke was a desirable outcome for the establishment of the seminaries, and provides a strong indication that Ross and his associates were seeking out a similar system through which to produce elite and accomplished young women within the Cherokee Nation.

This hospitality continued upon the young women's arrival, where "the great chief of the Cherokee Nation, the renowned John Ross"<sup>201</sup> invited Whitmore to Rose Cottage. "I confess I trembled a little when told that he was waiting to see me in the parlour, but I assumed composure however agitated I felt."<sup>202</sup> In all, Whitmore's accounts of her arrival in Indian Territory were positive: "I am delighted with the warm welcome which I received. It is peculiarly gratifying to my heart in this land of strangers to be received as one whom they had looked for with interest."<sup>203</sup> John Ross extended the same hospitality to Oswald Woodford of Yale University, appointed to teach at the newly opened Male Seminary. Woodford stayed at Rose Cottage where his expectations of Indian Territory were reportedly overturned. The tension between his pre-conceptions of Indigenous life on the frontier and his new, palatial accommodation in the home of John Ross were happily reported in a letter home to parents back east: "I am well, fat and enjoying myself nicely at the chief's. We live in luxury and splendor and refinement."<sup>204</sup>

The seminaries remained open for an initial five-year period, during which time the Female Seminary in particular contributed significantly to Park Hill's reputation as the "Athens of Indian Territory." Using Mount Holyoke as a model meant that the seminary was at the cutting edge of reforms in women's education that were carried out through the increasing popularity of the seminary model in the United States. Rather than creating a finishing school geared solely towards the domestic arts that would

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<sup>200</sup> Lola Garrett Bowers and Kathleen Garret, ed., *The Journal of Ellen Whitmore* (Tahlequah: Northeastern State College, 1953), 15.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> Oswald Woodford quoted in Agnew, *Northeastern*, 5.

prepare young women for marriage and motherhood, the Cherokee Female Seminary introduced a rigorous academic program into its curriculum. Thus young women were tested on their skills in reading, spelling, grammar, arithmetic, and geography before being granted free entry by the tribe.<sup>205</sup> This worked against the “normal” school model promoted through the federal boarding school system that emphasized vocational training as well as social and moral reform for Indigenous students. Further, it worked in contrast to the “domestic skills, social polish, and parlor savvy”<sup>206</sup> that were central to women’s education more broadly across the country.<sup>207</sup>

Under the jurisdiction of the celebrated principal teacher Ann Florence Wilson, the demanding academic curriculum the newly-enrolled girls were exposed to was underpinned with strong tones of Victorian morality that Wilson enforced in every aspect of school life. Though perhaps the gendered ideals upon which this sense of morality rested would suggest a paradox in terms of the girls’ classical academic curriculum, which integrated the more traditionally “masculine” subjects of science and mathematics, for instance, in fact the rigour of academic training in seminary education was devised to contribute to the sphere of family and home rather than detract from it. Far from being an unanticipated result of the curriculum developed and introduced at the seminaries, academic rigour was in fact a *desired* outcome for women who were educated in this context. In his study of the emergence of female seminaries in antebellum America, Leonard I. Sweet notes that Mount Holyoke was at the fore in terms of being one of the few women’s seminaries to achieve equality of status with men’s colleges (in this case, Amherst College, with which Mount Holyoke shared texts and course work). That Ross would select this prestigious institution as a model indicates that the transformation of women’s education away from the functional goal of making its students “marriageable, ladylike, and established in the domestic skills”<sup>208</sup> and towards a well-rounded liberal education was sought out by the Cherokee Nation

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, “The Female Seminary Movement and Woman’s Mission in Antebellum America,” *Church History* 54, no. 1 (March 1985): 41.

<sup>207</sup> It was this seeming opposition to labour and vocational training, along with the higher than usual salaries paid to teachers, that saw the seminary criticized and closed by the start of the 1856 fall semester. A number of historical events halted its permanent re-opening; however, the new school built just north of Tahlequah was dedicated and open for business in 1889.

<sup>208</sup> Sweet, “The Female Seminary Movement and Woman’s Mission in Antebellum America,” 48.



for its girls. Further, this placed them on par with what its male students were being taught a few short miles away at the Cherokee Male Seminary.<sup>209</sup>

### 3.2 School Pictures: Visualizing “progress” in documentary and tourist photography

Aside from the reverence bestowed upon the seminaries from their very inception from leading figures like John Ross and Elias Boudinot, they were met with intrigue from outsiders to Indian Territory. Documentary photographs and postcards produced at both seminaries attests to this. The first Female Seminary building was photographed in the 1870s for the collection of United States Indian agent Major George W. Ingalls, for example, and shows an adherence to the controlled aesthetics of documentary photography subsequently produced at schools for Native American children across the country. The glass negatives of the seminary in the Huntington Library’s George W. Ingalls photography collection pre-date J.N. Choate’s appointment as Carlisle’s official photographer in 1879, though he did start photographing before this inauguration. Choate’s Carlisle images are widely considered to be precedents in the visualization of control exercised over incoming pupils who were then exposed to rigorous “civilizing” programs.<sup>210</sup> The use of similar compositional tactics in the glass negatives by Powell expedition photographer John K. Hillers for Ingalls is thus a revealing instance of visual mis-categorization, as the seminary was a sovereign, tribally-run institution that predated the first federal boarding school for Native American pupils (Carlisle). The similarity between these and school photos produced in federally-run boarding schools in the same period thus evidences the fallacy of the documentary gaze when imposed on a pedagogical context that was exempt from federal control.

The military approach to education and training at the Carlisle Indian School was influenced by the military career of its founder Richard Henry Pratt (including eight years spent as a field soldier in Indian Territory and Texas), and especially the time he

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<sup>209</sup> Scholar Emily Legg argues that the balance and equality in terms of the curricula offered at both male and female seminaries in the Cherokee Nation was deliberate, and traces this decision back to attitudes towards gender roles in the Cherokee Nation before they were disrupted by acculturation processes. See Emily Legg, “Daughters of the Seminaries: Re-landscaping History through the Composition Courses at the Cherokee National Female Seminary,” *CCC-National Council of Teachers of English* 66, no. 1 (2014): 67-90. For scholarship on the Male Seminary, see Devon A. Mihesuah, “Out of the ‘Graves of the Polluted Debauches’: The Boys of the Cherokee Male Seminary,” *American Indian Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (October 1991): 503-521.

<sup>210</sup> For an extended study of Choate’s Carlisle images within the context of the school’s “Americanization” programs, see Hayes Peter Mauro, *The Art of Americanization at the Carlisle Indian School* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2011).

spent working with Native American prisoners at Fort Marion, Florida. There he experimented with introducing an educational curriculum to the prisoners delivered largely by women who possessed “social distinction in the town”<sup>211</sup> and applauded by reformers like Harriet Beecher Stowe. By the time Carlisle opened its doors to its first two hundred pupils in the school year 1879-80, Pratt’s mandate to run an institution dedicated to “civilizing” the country’s Indigenous populations was clearly delineated. This agenda was reinforced through the photography he commissioned, including Choate’s photograph of the very first group of arriving Lakota Sioux pupils at the school. This first image would form the backbone of Pratt’s use of photography to publicize the success of the school in pairings of before-and-after images of Carlisle students – that is, images taken upon their arrival, and those taken once their hair had been cut, clothing changed, and the illusory mechanics of the photographic imagination set loose on the pupils. “I send you today a few photographs of the Indian youth here”, Pratt wrote of these images to the Hon. T.C. Pound in the U.S. House of Representatives; “You will note that they came mostly as blanket Indians. [...] I am gratified to report that they have yielded gracefully to discipline and [...] are, to our minds, quite up to the average of those of our own race.”<sup>212</sup> And thus photography’s use as a tool of control entered an educational – and racialized – sphere. In imposing disciplinary order to the picturing of Carlisle students pre-indoctrination, Pratt was producing documentary evidence of what his militaristic approach would render. As such, the visual discipline instilled in generic documentary photographs of groups of Indigenous students would eventually give way to portraits of individuals transformed, much in the same way that Catlin’s “before and after” rendering of Wi-jún-jon attempted.

Given this loaded contextual framework in which photography was used to deliberately invoke the constraints imposed on Indigenous bodies, Hillers’s documentary images of an entirely different educational context in the Cherokee seminaries is an interesting example of the visual propaganda being disseminated irrespective of tribal context. Two such images from c. 1874 picture students of the Female Seminary in two different compositional layouts. The first Ingalls entitled *Young Ladies Seminary Before Improvement*, and shows a group of young girls and

<sup>211</sup> Robert M. Utley, ed., *Battlefield and Classroom: Four Decades with the American Indian, 1867-1904* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964), 188.

<sup>212</sup> “Letter from Pratt to Hon. T.C. Pound,” U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C., dated 28 January 1880. Quoted in Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, 248.

women standing in a tightly-packed cluster at a distance from their school (fig. 3.2). The presence of young children wearing matching uniform dresses and standing in the front row is especially jarring, given that much of the photography in the seminary's photographic archives pictures older girls and women who arguably have a more pronounced sense of autonomy in the photographic process. The second image Ingalls entitled *Young Ladies Seminary and Graduating Class of 1875*, and shows a different approach to the arrangement of figures (fig. 3.3). Here a row of seven young women, presumably the graduates, stand spaced out at the forefront of the image and quite away from the school. Smaller groups of women and girls are huddled in the background, on the grounds, front steps, and landing leading up to the school's front door.

Hayes Peter Mauro's analysis of Choate's photograph of incoming students at Carlisle, in many cases arranged in a similar composition to Hillers's negatives here, argues that the imposition of visual order on the incoming students intercepted the otherwise negative stereotypes of Indigenous figures being circulated in popular photographs. He writes, "In [...] early photographs of the arriving boys, the issue of a latent criminality needing surveillance, discipline, and order is suggested in compositional terms."<sup>213</sup> In the girls' case, "[Pratt] eventually attempted to convert young Indigenous women from unhygienic squaws into Victorian matrons by countering the former image with an improved image showing the effects of life at Carlisle."<sup>214</sup> Given their compositional similarity, it is tempting to see Hillers's images as attempting a similar function within the context of documentary expedition photography. His mechanical placement of bodies on the grounds of the seminary, emphasizing the school's architectural authority through the architecture of the image, echoes Pratt's militaristic approach to the institutionalization of Indigenous bodies for purported educational gain. Just as Pratt worked to "proffer specific notions of 'race' and 'Indianness' as categories through their visualization"<sup>215</sup>, Hillers's images work to project the educational reform being developed in one of the so-called Five Civilized Tribes and attracting attention on the country's frontier.

This attention was fostered not only in the production of images like Choate's and Hillers's, but also in their dissemination to a wider viewing public. Mauro describes the troubling contextual layer added to one of Choate's early images of incoming

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<sup>213</sup> Mauro, *The Art of Americanization at the Carlisle Indian School*, 66.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

female students when the photograph was turned into a commodity and stereograph circulated for the curious consumption of the touristic gaze. Similarly, at least one of Hillers's photographs of the Female Seminary turned up in a postcard version focused once again on the architecture of the school, with the caption "Old Cherokee Female Seminary at Park Hill, which was burned April 10, 1887", today in the seminary's photographic archives (fig. 3.4). A number of additional postcards of the new seminary building produced by the local photographer J.F. Standiford further allude to public interest in the school, although these later postcards move away from Hillers's controlled and documentary approach into more informal and picturesque images with figures standing, sitting, and interacting with each other (fig. 3.5). A continued interest in disseminating positive images of the town into the early years of the twentieth century is further evidenced in the production of a "book of pictures" called "Illustrated Tahlequah." Here the seminaries were visualized with an intended audience in mind – one that extended beyond the confines of Indian Territory. "Send a few copies to your friends in the States", an ad in *The Tahlequah Arrow* reads; "'Illustrated Tahlequah' [...] is a big advertisement for the town. It shows fine pictures of the Male and Female Seminaries [...]."<sup>216</sup>

Beyond the controlled documentary gaze imposed on the Female Seminary by the complex collaboration of Ingalls, Powell, and Hillers in its early iteration, the newly-opened seminary was a proud cornerstone of the Cherokee Nation, and continued to attract the attention of locals and visitors alike. Snapshots of the school appear in the scrapbook and photo albums of Clara Churchill, wife of the 1899-1909 Inspector of Indian Schools Frank Churchill – albeit with a very different underlying tone. Using the snapshot aesthetics afforded a new generation of women photography enthusiasts, Churchill's images of the Cherokee Female Seminary lack the controlled composition of those found in Ingalls's collection, and instead picture a rustic outdoor scene (see fig. 3.6). Contrary to Hillers's compositional adherence to the tactics laid out in school photos like Carlisle's, and thus his neglect to visualize how the seminaries were in a different category altogether, Churchill remarks on the sovereignty of the institution in one of her numerous letters published for the *Granite State Free Press* newspaper of Lebanon, New Hampshire. She notes, "The seminaries referred to are entirely supported

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<sup>216</sup> "Illustrated Tahlequah," *The Tahlequah Arrow*, 28 June 1902, 3.

by the Cherokee government, and Cherokees only are eligible.”<sup>217</sup> Both seminaries were an attraction on the Churchills’ visit to Tahlequah, and the presence of snapshots of the institution in the pages of Churchill’s scrapbook, as well as mentions in her private journal and her public letters points to the seminary’s curiosity value in its very status as a tribally-run institution for young Cherokee women.

By the time Oklahoma was approaching statehood in 1907, the seminary was in its last decade. An historian of the school, Brad Agnew, equates statehood with the demise of the seminaries precisely because of the inevitable interference of the federal government with the structure of education in the Cherokee Nation. The eventual restructuring of the tribal government in 1907 thus meant the end of the Female Seminary itself. With the introduction of the Curtis Act in 1898, the tribal schools in Indian Territory began a process of losing their sovereign status to the Interior Department, and were assigned government-appointed supervisors to oversee how they were run in the lead-up to statehood. Another of Clara Churchill’s letters written from Indian Territory in 1901 is exemplary of the ironic frustration white school agents expressed at the exclusionary success of the tribally-run schools: “the public schools in this country are for *Indians only*. [...] What about the poor *white children*?”<sup>218</sup> The seminary’s focus on education for Cherokee girls and women thus shifted as new mandates emerged to include provisions for the education of all children in Indian Territory, not only those who held tribal status. In March of 1909, the seminary that had up until that point functioned as a beacon of the Cherokee enlightenment for young women was replaced by the co-educational Northeastern State Normal School.

### 3.3 Formal portraiture at the Cherokee Female Seminary

In 1904, one of the seminary’s most famous and outspoken teachers, Narcissa Owen, overturned public expectations when she was invited to exhibit some of her prize-winning paintings as part of the Indian Territory display at the Louisiana Exposition. “Wishing to do my part [...] to show the world that the Cherokees were a cultured and civilized people”, she writes in her memoirs, “I painted as an Indian Territory exhibit

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<sup>217</sup> Clara Churchill, “A Letter from Mrs. Churchill, Concluded from last week. Muskogee, I.T., May 1, 1901,” *Granite State Free Press Newspaper*, Lebanon, N.H. Clara Churchill Scrapbook.

<sup>218</sup> Clara Churchill, “Little Journeys in the Indian Territory, Muskogee, I.T.,” *Lebanon Free Press*, 17 June 1901. Clara Churchill Scrapbook.

the portraits of six generations of [the Jefferson] family.”<sup>219</sup> This exhibit grabbed the attention of one visiting reporter, who noted, “Among the pictures painted by Indians is one of Jefferson [...] by Mrs. Owen, a Cherokee 82 years old. It is a perfect likeness of Jefferson, and it will surprise any artist to be told that it was the work of an old Indian woman.”<sup>220</sup> Owen responded to this account in a chapter of her memoirs she entitled “Modern Misrepresentation of the Indians”, writing indignantly,

The facts are the Indians of Indian Territory are civilized, educated Christian people. [...] my painting was not done in a tepee, but on Pennsylvania Avenue, in the Corcoran Building, opposite the Treasury, at Washington City. There are seven portraits and one miniature in the lot, and the seven were painted in about two and one-half months. Among my studio friends I was known as the “lightning artist,” because of my rapid work.<sup>221</sup>

This response not only sets the ignorant journalist straight, but positions Owen within the Washington elite as a professional practitioner. Her boast that the ambitious seven-figure portrait was undertaken “on Pennsylvania Avenue, in the Corcoran Building, opposite the Treasury, at Washington City”, places her as an active participant in the capitol’s artistic hub, with the studios and galleries of artists including King, Catlin, and Stanley present alongside her own. Elsewhere, she boasts a reputation of being “a kind of queen bee of the women’s department”<sup>222</sup> at the Muskogee fairs, indicating a dedication to her status as a woman painter.<sup>223</sup>

Ironically, however, given Owen’s determination to counter outdated and negative stereotypes of Indigenous people as existing outside of modern life, her very status as being both an elite Washington figure and the descendent of a Cherokee chief was itself perceived to be something of a novelty. “Mother of U.S. Senator an Indian Queen”, a *New York Times* headline announces; “Mrs. Narcissa Owen, Daughter of the Last Chief of the Seven Great Cherokee Clans, Is a Charming Old Lady of Distinction Whose Talent in Art Has Won Recognition.”<sup>224 225</sup> Throughout, the article uses obsequious language to highlight Owen’s identity, including, for instance, referring to

<sup>219</sup> Karen L. Kilcup, *A Cherokee Woman’s America: Memoirs of Narcissa Owen, 1831-1907* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), 82.

<sup>220</sup> Quoted in Kilcup, *A Cherokee Woman’s America*, 133-4.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>223</sup> For a discussion of identity projections fostered at the Muskogee fairs, see Andrew Denson, “Muskogee’s Indian International Fairs: Tribal Autonomy and the Indian Image in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (October 2003): 325-345.

<sup>224</sup> “Mother of U.S. Senator an Indian Queen”, *The New York Times*, 22 January 1911, 48.

<sup>225</sup> For further analysis see Stephen J. Brandon, “‘Mother of U.S. Senator An Indian Queen’: Cultural Challenge and Appropriation in *The Memoirs of Narcissa Owen, 1831-1907*,” *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 13, no. 2/3 (2001): 5-22.

her as a “Princess of pure American nobility” and an “admixture of the best of the white and red races.”<sup>226</sup> Referring to her as “Quatsis” (her Cherokee name) on the one hand and “gentlewoman” on the other, the editorial points to the perceived novelty of modernity and Indigeneity coming together in an elite figure such as Owen. In this way, the article attempts to draw out the opposition she was perceived as embodying for non-Indigenous audiences and readerships. “As she sits amid all the luxuries of this twentieth-century civilization and recounts the tales that were told by her ancestors over the camp fire far back in the days when Pocahontas defied the grouchy Powhatan”, the article continues, “she seems the last link between aboriginal America and the present day, the link connecting the wild past of her forefathers with the electric light and the telephone and all other manner of modernisms.”<sup>227</sup>

The selection of images accompanying the article further points to the uneasy slippage that Owen occupied for *Times* reader intellectuals on the east coast of the country. A reproduction of the Jefferson Peace Medal that once belonged to her father, including the iconic symbol of the handshake that categorized nineteenth-century diplomatic relations between Indigenous tribes and the U.S. government appears sandwiched between a formal photographic portrait of Owen in a high-collared black dress on one side, and her own painting of the Jeffersons on the other.<sup>228</sup> Below, she is pictured outdoors with a group of socialites at a reception that was thrown in her honour at her home in Oklahoma, named “Monticello” after the Jeffersons’ own country home; and to the left of this scene, a series of Cherokee symbols with the caption, “Name of Mrs. Owen’s Father, Chief of the Cherokee Nation, Written in Cherokee Tongue.”<sup>229</sup>

The elite status Owen was dedicated to projecting is exemplified in her 1896 self-portrait (see fig. 3.7). Completed when the artist was approximately sixty-five years of age, the portrait pictures her seated at an angle in a wicker chair with her face shown in profile. She wears a black dress with teardrop diamond earrings and necklace, and holds a delicate pair of eyeglasses in her left hand perched authoritatively over the arm of the chair. As scholar Joni L. Kinsey remarks, “Owen’s determined efforts at

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> For further research on the symbol of the handshake in the context of diplomatic gift-giving see Viola, *Diplomats in Buckskins*, 1981.

<sup>229</sup> “Mother of U.S. Senator an Indian Queen”, *The New York Times*.

composing a sophisticated demeanor that would challenge stereotypes”<sup>230</sup> shines through in details such as this. Further, Kinsey notes that Owen portrays herself “in the height of fashion”<sup>231</sup> with her high-collared black bombazine dress, tasteful jewelry and delicate eyeglasses. These details contribute to the air of “polished self-possession” Owen conveys in the portrait. In sum, Kinsey reinforces that “this self-conscious formation of identity is at odds with our preconceptions of both women and Native Americans in the 1890s.”<sup>232</sup>

To this end, the portrait can be read as a deliberate act of self-identification incorporating complex acts of deflection and association. In deflecting the visual stereotypes that others were so keen to affix to Owen’s image, she instead aligns herself with the fashionable social elites whose networks she circulated comfortably in. This process of deflection and association can be interpreted as an extension of transculturality, in that Owen is both acknowledging the existence of a “preceding culture” (as per Ortiz), while also inhabiting a new associative space. Rather than seeing the portrait as a hidden denial of her Cherokee identity through the performance of Europeanness, she rather urges her audience to see that the visual associations of affluence, modernity, and fashionability are integral components of her identity as Cherokee. Kinsey interprets the portrait as an outward projection of how Owen hoped to be seen, “not as the haughty daughter of a chief, but rather as [...] an example of the *melding of two worlds*, a model of her aspiration, not only for herself but for any who associated her with the Cherokee people.”<sup>233</sup>

The self-portrait thus ignores the categorization of Owen as the “Indian Queen” that the *New York Times* article sought out, and instead presents her as the alter-ego gentlewoman that it included for dramatic effect:

[...] not a rugged warrior in the heart of the forests, bedecked with war paint and feathers; not a war-lord of the wilderness inured to strife and chase, ready for any desperate enterprise, like the Cherokees of old, but a genial old lady of 79 years of age, the mother of a distinguished United States Senator, seated comfortably in a generous lounging seat in a luxurious apartment house of Washington City – a gentlewoman whose [...] chiefest pleasure today, beyond the soft tones of her piano and guitar, is to sit ensconced in her Morris chair and look upon the works of art that deck the walls of her sitting room: paintings that are the work of her own hand, done

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<sup>230</sup> Joni L. Kinsey, “Cultivating the Grasslands: Women Painters in the Great Plains,” in *Independent Spirits: Women Artists of the American West, 1890-1945*, ed. Patricia Trenton (Berkeley and LA: University of California Press and The Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 1995), 264-65.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 265. Author’s emphasis.



by her within the last half dozen years, and which in this last half dozen years have won diplomas and medals of honor at international expositions.<sup>234</sup>

Owen's self-portrait and her extensive write-up in the *New York Times* evidence a multifaceted process of self-fashioning in the public eye. In her narrative framing, the supposed tension between her Cherokee heritage and her socialite status in Washington's elite is highlighted, in large part, for the perceived novelty value of these two identity projections co-mingling in one figure. The early twentieth-century preference for easily consumable female types thus presided over an editorial portrait of Owen. However, her painted self-portrait challenges the need for such a distinction between her Cherokee identity and her elite social status. However, her painted self-portrait challenges the need for such a distinction between her Cherokee identity and her elite social status, which are both expressed through the portrait. This self-fashioning was a powerful overturning of the popular stereotypes presiding over the visualization of the Indigenous female body throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and categorized the hybrid typecasting that the Cherokee Female Seminary would adopt in its own formal photographic portraiture.

By the time the new Female Seminary opened its doors at the dedication ceremony of 7 May 1889, photographs of its students had largely shed the tainted documentary gaze imposed by an earlier generation, and emulated the identity projections so adamantly pursued by Narcissa Owen. However, as Owen's portrait attests, what it meant to identify as Cherokee continued to work itself out in front of the camera. Images from this period picture the students dressed in their finest and posed for formal group portraits in the parlour, dressed up for plays and performances, and actively participating in school life. Where Hillers's documentary photographs worked to homogenize the Cherokee Nation's student population in order to create the illusion of order, photography produced through the seminary itself worked to project the affluence and refinement that bolstered its reputation towards the end of the nineteenth century. Clusters of young girls and women scattered on the grounds of the school and staring blankly out at the camera were replaced by elegantly dressed young debutantes posed carefully in the parlour's lush interior.

Under the tenure of Ann Florence Wilson, the school was governed according to a strict adherence to Victorian gender roles. Indeed school historian Brad Agnew quips,

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<sup>234</sup> "Mother of U.S. Senator an Indian Queen", *The New York Times*.

“It is doubtful that the English queen herself could have imbued Victorian morality more effectively than Miss Wilson did.”<sup>235</sup> Following the 1847 decision that the seminary would only employ female teachers, women like Owen and Wilson were hired not only as educators but as role models for the students. Between 1876-1887, many of these teachers were white.<sup>236</sup> The cult of ideal womanhood that characterized white middle and upper class womanhood in the southern United States was thus central to how the seminary approached the education of its girls. They were chaperoned when they left school grounds, their interactions with members of the opposite sex were strictly overseen, the use of lipstick and rouge was banned, and their dress and appearance was monitored closely.

The version of ideal womanhood that was being fostered at the seminary was thus, overwhelmingly, a white one. No aspects of traditional Cherokee culture – language, belief systems, tribal practices – were taught at the school. As such, the identity projections promoted involved a complex combination of pride in the distinctness of the Cherokee Nation, and mainstream societal norms. Devon Abbott Mihesuah’s extensive research into the construction of identity at the seminary explores the divide between traditionalists and progressives that was exacerbated by notions of race and racial hierarchy in the nineteenth century. For traditionalists (often referred to as “full-bloods” in nineteenth-century rhetoric), school life would have been an alienating experience. “They missed the tribal stories, religion, and dances, and the ties with the elders of the tribe who taught its myths and legends”, Mihesuah writes; “Whereas the federal boarding schools were controlled by white Americans, the Female Seminary was controlled by Cherokees who subscribed to the values of white Americans.”<sup>237</sup> This isolation was aggravated by the experience of “looking Indian” and therefore being relegated to an inferior class status in the eyes of their peers.

In stark contrast to this, students from progressive and elite families – those who “looked white” and in many cases came from bicultural or “mixed-blood” families – had an easier time integrating into school life. Mihesuah attributes the school’s impetus to emulate white Victorian gender norms within a “desire for enlightenment and equality with whites”<sup>238</sup>, and its students motivated by the fact that they “certainly did

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<sup>235</sup> Agnew, *Northeastern*, 2.

<sup>236</sup> As per Chapter Four in Devon A. Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds: The Education of Women at the Cherokee Female Seminary 1851-1909* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

<sup>237</sup> Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds*, 82.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

not believe themselves “primitive” and were determined to prove it by making their tribe a model of white society.”<sup>239</sup> The young women who fit this category were from the Nation’s elite political families like the Rosses, and their experience of identifying as Cherokee was tied in with the progressivist agenda of the school. Mihesuah points out that reading materials available at the seminary reinforced the class division and racial hierarchy being fostered between traditionalist and progressive students, with publications in the library including the racial treatises of Charles Caldwell, Samuel George Morton, and Josiah C. Nott.<sup>240</sup> The images present in such publications would be visceral reminders of the racial hierarchies being established in Indian Territory – though, ironically, the artist commissioned to produce the frontispiece for Morton’s text *Crania America*, John Neagle, was also the artist behind a formal portrait of John Ross in his signature black suit and bowtie (see back to fig. 1.23).<sup>241</sup>

By the 1890s, photography was not an uncommon event in school practice. Professional photographers were invited to take group portraits of the girls in the school’s parlour for special events including plays, performances, and graduation photos. True to form, Wilson insisted on formal attire when a photograph was taking place. Mihesuah notes that she allowed the students to wear evening gowns so long as they avoided “attention-getting corsets and hoop skirts”<sup>242</sup>, indicating an adherence to popular attitudes about the moral implications of women’s attire. Here class divisions continued to crop up in the clothing chosen for the photographic event: “Affluent parents bought or made party dresses for their daughters, but some girls preferred to create their own ‘dream dresses’ in sewing class with materials they bought. The poorer girls and orphans had to settle for wearing their regular school uniforms.”<sup>243</sup> Carefully posed group portraits in the school’s parlour thus image seminary students dressed exquisitely in evening gowns with lace trim and floral satin sashes, and posed in neat configurations in more subtle uniformed dress – though always with a fashionable embellishment in the form of plumed hats, sashes, or fans (fig. 3.8).

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>240</sup> Charles Caldwell’s ideas about polygenism were published in his treatise *Thoughts of the Original unity of the Human Race* (New York: E. Bliss, 1830); Samuel George Morton’s treatises on race were published in three volumes, including *Crania Americana: A comparative view of the skulls of various aboriginal nations* (Philadelphia: J. Dobson, 1818); he later collaborated with Josiah C. Nott et al on the treatise *Types of Mankind* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1854). Together, these treatises laid the foundations for scientific racism and centuries of racial oppression.

<sup>241</sup> This portrait was painted by John Neagle in c. 1848, and is in the collections of the Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, OK.

<sup>242</sup> Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds*, 79.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

The careful selection of what to wear for the camera was paramount to constructing a façade in nineteenth-century America; that is, in conjuring a desired class status, and a cultured standing. Joan L. Severa identifies a principled component to the edifice of façade in her study of dress and photographic portraiture, arguing that a “proper” façade was indicative of the “tremendous, almost *moral*, significance during the nineteenth century that one appear cultured.”<sup>244</sup> The selection of a sitter’s best dress worked to invoke this desirable image, and reached back into earlier seventeenth-and eighteenth-century conventions in painted portraiture, in which finery and dress contributed to the representation of character. Professional photographers were aware of the appropriate visual systems at play in establishing the sitter’s aspired reputation, and recreated them accordingly in the space of the studio.

In the case of the parlour portraits, the selection of evening dresses indicates an observance of these practices and is key to interpreting the intended outcome of the photo sessions. In one such photograph, the girls are pictured wearing evening dresses that were in line with the latest European fashions of the 1890s, and more particularly the period’s craze for English tailoring (fig. 3.9). Particular details of the young Cherokee women’s dresses point to this fashionability, including most prominently their sleeves, necklines, and fabric. The “thick gathers or pleats in an always-enlarged upper sleeve”<sup>245</sup> was typical of 1890s evening-wear, evidenced in the abundance of fabric around the upper sleeves of each sitter – including, in the case of the figure on the left, a tight, fitted lower sleeve that Severa indicates is characteristic of special-occasion dresses. Another detail that points to the special occasion status of the photograph are the necklines of each dress which, though high-collared, nevertheless reveal something of the sitters’ necks. This was a convention that was acceptable for evening wear, “when it was permissible to bare the neck”<sup>246</sup>, and thus demonstrates a close attention to showcasing the finest and most fashionable attire for the advent of the photograph.

These portraits appear to present a fascinating hybrid visualization of the “types” of womanhood constructed in late nineteenth-century visual culture in the United States. Martha Banta describes the emergence of gendered visual types as one of the era’s

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<sup>244</sup> Joan L. Severa, *Dressed for the photographer: Ordinary Americans and fashion, 1840-1900* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1995), xv.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 457.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*

“dominant cultural tics” during the period 1876-1918.<sup>247</sup> Whether it be the stoic and goddess-like Columbia, the coy and charming American Girl, the wealthy Heiress of All the Ages, or the able and dynamic New Woman, American culture was fixated on the visualization of idealized feminine types in the production of a coherent American identity.<sup>248</sup> Resonating throughout Banta’s analysis of the variant ways that female types were organized into visual categories is an anxiety over the very real implications of those types coming to life. Here, the “power of the type as an aesthetic convention capable of promoting the creation of the ‘real thing’”<sup>249</sup> underlines the aesthetic decisions made in picturing the American self. Further, the availability of The American Girl meant that she was adaptable and easily-appropriated to a multiplicity of genres and motivations. Take Charles Dana Gibson’s illustration for a September 1902 issue of *Life* magazine, for instance (fig. 3.10). Entitled *Design for Wall Paper. Suitable for a Bachelor Apartment*, Gibson’s illustration pictures a cluster of white female heads with elaborate hair styles creating an all-encompassing “wall paper” in his take on the American Girl. Similarly, a photograph produced at the seminary pictures the class of 1905 in a series of vignette busts with meticulous hairstyles reminiscent of Gibson’s series of heads (fig. 3.11). Reproduced in Mihesuah’s book alongside further photographic evidence that students “spent hours on their hairstyles”, the seminarians’ appearances and dress for the camera point to a visual iteration of the American Girl as she appears in popular culture.

The lavish dress and elaborate hairstyles that appear in the parlour photographs work to project the ideals of refinement, fashionability, and social grace through the figures of these young Cherokee women. This is supported by their careful pyramidal posing at the centre of the composition. Here, another aspect of painting technique is evident, and works towards the visual portrayal attempted through the photographs. Severa argues that, with the emergence of an early photographic portraiture that was following close at the heels of painting, the individuality of each sitter was at risk of being compromised in the “conventionality of the pose.”<sup>250</sup> In following popular poses adopted in painted portraiture – “how to lean gracefully against chairs, cut-off pillars,

<sup>247</sup> Martha Banta, *Imaging American Women: Ideas and Ideals in Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), xxviii.

<sup>248</sup> “Columbia”, “The American Girl”, “The Heiress of All the Ages”, and “The New Woman” are Banta’s titles. See *Imaging American Women*, 1.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxii.

<sup>250</sup> Severa, *Dressed for the Photographer*, xiii

trees, and fences”<sup>251</sup> – photographs continued to attempt the careful self-fashioning available through such orchestrations. Banta describes women’s poses as effective components in projecting the social, as opposed to the private, self, when she writes: “Poses could be identifying acts by which persons announced the kind of social self they might like to become.”<sup>252</sup> In the context of the seminarians’ poses, this statement presents a potentially troubling way of thinking through the social selves being performed in the space of the photograph. In interpreting the poses as highlighting their *potential*, documentary photography’s trope of picturing the Indigenous body as *tabula rasa* once again rears its ugly head. With hints of the southern belle, the virtuous Victorian lady, the fashionable young debutante, and indeed the American Girl, these formal portraits highlight the seminary’s philosophy “white is best” as articulated by Mihesuah.<sup>253</sup>

Scholar Linda Williams Reese further notes that, under Wilson’s tenure especially, the students “combined the high aspirations of a New England schoolgirl and the social graces of a southern lady with a fidelity to their Cherokee inheritance”<sup>254</sup>, consolidating the myriad identities that were encouraged at the school. In picturing the girls as comfortably recognizable and knowable “types”, photographs of the young seminarians could be used to bolster a public image of the Cherokee Nation’s dedication to being leaders in the settler project of progress and civilization among the Indigenous tribes in Indian Territory.

Graduation photographs worked to similar ends. Jennie Ross Cobb’s own graduation photo from 1900 pictures her perched on the end of a semi-circle comprised of eight young women posed on the front steps of the seminary (fig. 3.12). The group appears in near-identical high-collared white dresses with elaborate trimming, with two of the central figures holding paper fans open at their waists. Cobb and two of her classmates, Josephine Barker and Eugenia Eubanks, appear to have corsages fixed to their collars. These corsages swap places in an additional photograph that appears in the collection of Cobb’s younger sister Anne Ross Piburn (fig. 3.13).<sup>255</sup> This configuration

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 610.

<sup>253</sup> Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds*, 44.

<sup>254</sup> Linda Williams Reese, *Women of Oklahoma, 1890-1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 90

<sup>255</sup> Though unidentified in the Piburn collection, Cobb is likely the third figure from the left. This photograph is likely an additional photo of Cobb’s graduation day that was kept and collected by her younger sister.

was typical for the seminary, and both earlier and subsequent photographs picture its graduates posed in a semi-circle on the steps, matching in white.

Compared with photographs of the young women at Mount Holyoke, which the seminary looked to from its inception, dress and hairstyles are nearly identical. Take, for instance, a photograph of the Sigma Theta Chi sorority taken at Mount Holyoke in 1900 (fig. 3.14). Here, twenty-six young women stand in a cluster on and around a bridge that stretches over a brook of running water. The majority of them are wearing white dresses in the same style as those found in Cobb's graduation photograph. Students were also exposed to the photographic experience in the studio, as a group scene from the same year shows (fig. 3.15). Much like the Cherokee Female Seminary's parlour photographs, the young women are here pictured in a group composition, interacting with each other against a studio backdrop. Though the Cherokee Female Seminary students are shown in hats that rival those seen here, the styles are nevertheless similar. The white high-collared dresses continue to appear throughout early twentieth-century portraits of Mount Holyoke students, as evidenced in a later group scene of their 1912 editorial board (fig. 3.16). Here, in both hairstyles and dress, it is difficult to overlook the striking comparison between Cobb's graduation photograph and the Mount Holyoke students peering curiously at one of the school's publications. Were the team behind the *Cherokee Rosebuds* school newspaper to be photographed, a similar configuration would likely occur.

Given the deliberate selection of Mount Holyoke as the east coast model for the Cherokee Female Seminary, the similarities between the formal portraiture of white women and Cherokee women at each institution are not in vain. This is especially true given the presence of Mount Holyoke teachers themselves making the journey west to teach in Indian Territory – importing their knowledge of how the New England seminary for women was governed, and the appropriate identity projections to exude and foster.

This visualization was drastically different from other “types” of Indigenous womanhood being pursued elsewhere in Indian Territory. Rayna Green's often-cited work “The Pocahontas Perplex” observes two overriding categories for representations of Indigenous women, describing the “princess” and “squaw” as alter-egos in the predominant stereotypes that came to define Indigenous women's roles and identities in popular visual culture. According to this scheme, the idealized “Indian Princess” is submissive and accommodating, helpful and willing to make sacrifices. She can be

found in popular Indian folklore rescuing white hostages from captivity – hence Green’s invocation of Pocahontas as the exemplary embodiment of this “type.” The pervasiveness of this stereotype can be deduced from Narcissa Owen’s characterization as an “Indian Queen” and “Princess of pure American nobility” for the *Times* article, for instance. By contrast, the “Indian squaw” occupies the flip side of the coin, presented as overtly sexualized. This relationship to sexuality is a defining feature for what follows: “drunkenness, stupidity, thievery, venality of every kind.”<sup>256</sup> Whereas Green’s conception of the princess figure is presented as a noble – and necessary – figure in parables of colonial interaction, the squaw does not share the same space. Rather, “in the traditional songs, stories, obscene jokes, contemporary literary works and popular pictorializations of the Squaw, no heroines are allowed.”<sup>257</sup>

The seminary portraits introduce a different “type” altogether into the visualization of young Indigenous women. As is the case in Owen’s self-portrait, we can interpret the resulting photographs as transcultural expressions. In looking to an idealized feminine type, in all of her social graces, fashionability, and moral rigour, the seminary portraits deliberately deflect the derogatory associations that the rest of the country was projecting onto Indigenous female bodies. This disavowal facilitated a productive resistance towards the visual stereotypes inundating the world around the seminary. These associations did not go unnoticed by its young students, however. As the following section will demonstrate, an additional cache of photographs picturing the seminary students “playing Indian” further complicates the straightforwardness of popular stereotyping practices as they existed in the visual culture of the time. The following section builds on this disavowal of visual stereotyping in the school’s formal parlour portraiture to explore what happens when, by contrast, those stereotypes are indulged.

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<sup>256</sup> Rayna Green, “The Pocahontas Perplex: The Image of Indian Women in American Culture,” in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women’s History*, ed. Ellen Carole DuBois and Vicki L. Ruiz (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 19.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.



### 3.4 “Playing Indian”

*“It is precisely this contradiction which both hates and loves Indians, and enjoys them in their primitive role, that plants the notion that it is the role, not the real, which is to be enjoyed.” -Rayna Green, “The Tribe Called Wannabee”, 1988*<sup>258</sup>

In 1916, *The Washington Post* published an article entitled “Don’t Talk So Much – Advice of Indian Girl to the Eastern Women”: “‘Turn Your Home Into a Wigwam,’ Says Talented Daughter of Oklahoma Redman to Her Pale Face Sisters.”<sup>259</sup> The earnestness of the title and caption seems to entirely miss the point of this editorial. Here was a young Cherokee woman pulling the leg of her earnest east coast readership. “You Eastern women can be as strong and happy as any Indian squaw, even if you are so unfortunate as to live in a steam-heated apartment instead of a wigwam”, the young auteur quips;

And here’s a bit of advice I may give right here: Even if the white woman does live in an apartment house she can burst forth into an occasional war whoop. By letting off the pent-up vim even the most happy woman would feel relieved. If the cranky neighbor threatens to summon the police, why put on your hat and coat and make for the woods. The walk as well as the whoop will do you good.<sup>260</sup>

Moving on to mock the vanity of feminine beauty rituals she continues, “Take your after luncheon beauty nap on the floor. [...] In addition to feeling more comfortable you will find yourself losing your little affected mannerisms. No woman could twitter and gush when sitting on the floor.” Warning against powder, paint, corsets and shoes, the author jests, “I must say that powder and paint sound the death knell of clear, healthy skin. The white women should omit cosmetics, and in their stead take a cold plunge every morning. If she lives near a river, so much the better.” A final observation that she had “never seen an Indian wearing glasses”<sup>261</sup> is a humorous note to end on – especially when placed in juxtaposition with Owen’s elegant portrait and its inclusion of her eyeglasses to highlight her status as a learned woman.

A text box to the right of the article makes an early twentieth-century attempt at an advice column:

Indian Maid’s Advice To Her White Sisters:  
Don’t talk so much.  
Burst forth into a warwhoop once in a while.

<sup>258</sup> Rayna Green, “The Tribe Called Wannabee: Playing Indian in America and Europe,” *Folklore* 99, no. 1 (1988): 33-4.

<sup>259</sup> “Don’t Talk So Much”, *The Washington Post*, 2 July 1916, 3.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

Carry a load on your back if you haven't a "papoose."  
 Sit on the floor.  
 Take your after-luncheon beauty nap on the floor.  
 Don't wear corsets.  
 Wear your hair down your back.  
 Wear moccasins instead of shoes  
 Keep "the pipe of peace" lighted.  
 Pray often.<sup>262</sup>

In sum, the article boasts, "facts are facts, and should be heeded, and the fact is that while the white woman and her home are but slightly removed from being a decided failure, the squaw and her wigwam remain a decided success."<sup>263</sup>

The young author of this piece, Kathryn Fite, was an alumna of the Cherokee Female Seminary who toured the country as a performer in the popular Circuit Chautauqua movement at the beginning of the twentieth century. Circuit Chautauqua was developed initially in the Midwest as a commercial enterprise that sought to educate and uplift America's rural populations. It later developed into a major touring commercial pursuit, reaching millions of Americans between 1904-1932. The performance of a consistent American identity was a central pursuit of the Chautauqua, and the programming reflected this. Line-ups included lectures, dramatic recitations, and musical performances that addressed relevant concerns of the time. Charlotte Canning argues that it functioned as an ideological apparatus, stressing that, "By performing the America they wanted to exist, Chautauqua and its communities helped to make that America exist, even if only for the duration of the performance."<sup>264</sup> Further, the process of Chautauqua in real time, as a cultural practice and not only an ideological pursuit, meant that some of the objectives pursued through performance eked into life on the ground. Speaking to performance's transformative abilities, Canning argues that while Chautauqua represented the ideals sought out by its viewership, those same notions of what it meant to be American were guiding the circuit line-ups themselves.

While a highly amusing take on the frivolity of women's advice columns, Fite's *Washington Post* article is also a telling example of the ways in which young women from the Cherokee Female Seminary were aware of and responded to the dichotomous

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Charlotte Canning, "The Platform versus the Stage: The Circuit Chautauqua's Anti-theatrical Theatre," *Theatre Journal* 50 (1998): 317. For an extended study, see Canning's book *The Most American Thing in America: Circuit Chautauqua as Performance* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005).

stereotyping that white and Indigenous women were subjected to as they entered the twentieth century. Her trickster-esque tone became an integral part of her public persona as she, like Owen, professionalized (though in Fite's case on the stage rather than behind the easel) and found herself in the public eye. Her eventual professional role on the Circuit Chautauqua stage facilitated travel around the country and abroad, and even led to an invitation from the notorious explorer Dr. Frederick A. Cook to appear in a motion picture being made about his expedition to Mount Everest in 1915.<sup>265</sup>

In an interesting juxtaposition to Owen, however, Fite's public self-fashioning revolved around her performance of all of the things Owen's portrait stood against: when Fite stepped onto the stage, she transformed from Ms. Kathryn Fite into "Kamamah", meaning "butterfly" in Cherokee, and became a performer of Indian folklore who captured the imaginations of audiences from coast to coast. This is evidenced in the numerous program line-ups that described Fite as the "Cherokee Indian entertainer", "dramatic Indian entertainer", "Native Cherokee Indian in Costume", and simply the "Cherokee Indian."<sup>266</sup> Just as the *New York Times* article on Narcissa Owen emphasized her Cherokee identity by referring to her as an "Indian Queen", these descriptions of Fite very obviously commercialized on her identity as an Indigenous performer – as did the performances themselves. Fite's act included dramatic readings of stories and legends, lectures on Cherokee religion, and performances of the character Minnehaha from Longfellow's popular epic poem *The Song of Hiawatha*. "She is a delightful type of the western girl"<sup>267</sup>, one article touts, explaining further that she is "a veritable composite of Pocahontas, Minnehaha and Laughing-Water."<sup>268</sup> Karen Kilcup similarly discusses Owen's role in terms of cultural composites, but in service of a very different "type", and evoked in terms of a very different cast of characters. Kilcup points out that Owen "combats strongly the stereotype of the half-breed [...] by invoking some of white culture's most cherished female images, becoming an amalgamation of Pocahontas, Annie Oakley, and [...] Queen Victoria."<sup>269</sup> Though performing seemingly opposing "types", the transcultural projections pursued by Owen

<sup>265</sup> As per an article entitled "Miss Kathryn Fite highly Honored," *Cherokee County Democrat*, Tahlequah, OK, 20 May 20 1915.

<sup>266</sup> "Official Program, I.C. Chautauqua, July 15-19," *Daily Iowan*, 13 July 1920, 4; "An Open Letter," *Iowa City Press-Citizen*, 1 July 1920, 6; "Chautauqua Program August 5-11, 1914, Inclusive At T.H.A.T. Park," *Huntington Press*, 19 July 1914, 2; "Carbondale Chautauqua July 2-6, 1914," *Daily Free Press*, 2 July 1914, 2; and "Vitale's Band Comes Monday," *Huntington Herald*, 8 August 1914, 8.

<sup>267</sup> "Kate Fite," *Muskogee Times Democrat*, 29 April 1916, 1.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>269</sup> Karen L. Kilcup and Stephen Brandon, "Preface" in *A Cherokee Woman's America*, 33.

and Fite are arguably different sides of the same coin, and point to the nation's fixation with female typecasting at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The willingness of audiences across the United States to believe in the myth of Indigeneity as a romanticized, pre-modern state contributed significantly to the popularization of performing such composites. Audiences were culpable in building the fantasy. Performances of *The Song of Hiawatha* were especially widespread and, not coincidentally, the protagonist's female lover Minnehaha was a popular favourite.<sup>270</sup> Clara Churchill's recounting of her experience watching a performance of *Hiawatha* delivered by school children during her visit to the Winnebago school agency evidences such an indulgence in the illusion. After descriptions of the setting of the performance – "A genuine Indian tepee had been erected [...] a fire was burning brightly [...] it was a full moon. Could the environments have been more appropriate for the recital?" – as well as the costumes "loaned by Indians, [...] the handiwork of Winnebago squaws", Churchill's use of language changes as she starts to describe the performance itself.<sup>271</sup> "After Hiawatha brought his bride, Minnehaha, to old Nakomis' wigwam there was a great feast, and the braves danced around the campfire in wild fashion, the actors walking and chanting, and as each one passed the fire he threw in a little powder for colored light, which burned up into a brilliant red"<sup>272</sup>, she recounts. Here her description of the unfolding of the story evidences a complete immersion. The fictional narrative – Hiawatha bringing his bride to old Nakomis' wigwam – and the reality of the performance – the actors walking and chanting – become intertwined. The assumed authenticity of the performance, and its perceived closeness to Longfellow's fictional tale, thus lends itself to Churchill's immersion in the fantasy. She confides as much in her letter, writing,

I never fully appreciated the beauty of this poem until I saw what I have attempted briefly to describe – its presentation on a moonlight night, in an Indian country, with real Indians, and real Indian costumes, all in front of a real Indian wigwam, under the trees, in the open air. It is but a short distance from this spot to the pipestone quarries, and to the country of many of the Indians Mr. Longfellow describes.<sup>273</sup>

Rayna Green's analysis of "playing Indian" reveals an underlying set of anxieties and cultural expectations about the role of Native American culture in the

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<sup>270</sup> For more on this see Alan Trachtenberg's study, *Shades of Hiawatha: Staging Indians, Making Americans: 1880-1930* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004).

<sup>271</sup> Clara Churchill, "The Omahas and Winnebagos", *Granite State Free Press*, 1901. Clara Churchill Scrapbook.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

formulation of a national identity.<sup>274</sup> Putting these formulaic fantasies on the stage opens up a space in which the characterization of Indigenous culture as a performance could be enjoyed, as Churchill's description attests. Further, it presented an inherent contradiction in colonial attitudes towards Indigenous populations, promulgating a nation-wide appreciation, even affection, for the mythical Indian figure as exemplified through performance, while at the same time implementing violent processes of acculturation and assimilation to the white mainstream. Disturbingly, Green explains the contradiction in terms of love and hate, pointedly stating that "it is precisely this contradiction which both hates and loves Indians, and enjoys them in their primitive role, that plants the notion that it is the role, not the real, which is to be enjoyed."<sup>275</sup>

Fite's role, Kamamah, was consumed by audiences whose ready assumptions that her "Indianness" needed no further extrapolation carried her performative illusions. On the Chautauqua stage, her daily experience as a Cherokee from the capital of the nation, educated at the female seminary and not usually adorned in costumed regalia did not take precedence over her stage presence as a folkloric Indian performer. This is made painstakingly clear in a letter of admiration Fite received from an adoring audience member after one of her performances as Kamamah:

My dearest Kathryn: I call you by your English name, because I cannot speak Indian and call you Kamamah, although I like it much better. I loved you from the moment I saw your picture, and read that you were an Indian princess. [...] I do not see how anyone could help loving you, and I fear you will not have me, but I just had to write you and tell you that I have always longed for an Indian maid for a wife. Longfellow must have had you in mind when he was writing his poems.<sup>276</sup>

With this absurdist colonial fantasy that her stage presence conjured for east coast audiences, it is no wonder Fite was inspired to write her *Washington Post* editorial whereby the tables – and fables – could, for once, be turned.

Fite's stage presence played directly into some of the racialized and gendered stereotypes circulated in popular culture, exploiting the familiarity of these tropes in Chautauqua's viewership – especially outside of the context of the western states. This much is noted in an article dedicated to Fite's stage performance and tour of the east coast written for the *Muskogee Times Democrat*: "There her Indian appearance, the

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<sup>274</sup> There is a substantial body of scholarship on the cultural practice of "playing Indian" that exceeds the scope of this chapter. See most notably Phillip Joseph Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). See also Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha*, 2004. For a more recent study of Indigenous appropriations of the practice, see Monika Siebert, *Indians Playing Indian: Multiculturalism and contemporary Indigenous art in North America* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2015).

<sup>275</sup> Rayna Green, "The Tribe Called Wannabee", 33-4.

<sup>276</sup> "Kate Fite", *Muskogee Times Democrat*, 8

costume she has adopted, and the readings of legends, folklore and stories concerning the Indian, appeal in oddity and unique design to the people of the east.”<sup>277</sup> The same article presents two photographs of Fite in support of its exploration of her stage presence, and split identity as Kamamah for the stage and “Just Kate” to her friends and family back home in Tahlequah (fig. 3.17). The first is likely a promotional image taken on the occasion of her tour and more specifically her performance in Boston (fig. 3.18). In the newspaper article where the two photos were printed, the second shows her in European dress, with her hair tied back, and an image caption that reads: “Just Kate.” The juxtaposition of these photographs offers a fascinating visual portrayal of Fite’s two identities, and further reinforces the performativity of her stage presence and the accouterments of theatre she consciously employed.

The introduction to the article explores how Fite’s different personas are developed and received according to whose context she presented herself in:

To the great white man’s world, which is so fast absorbing the race to which she belongs, she is known as Miss “Kathryn” Fite. To her Anglo-Saxon grandparents she would have been “Katherine.” To her Irish-German ancestors she would have been “Katie,” and to her own most intimate friends she is “just Kate,” but in Boston and upon the Chautauqua platform she is “Kamamah.”<sup>278</sup>

In the context of Muskogee, just beside Tahlequah where Fite was raised, it is telling that the transparency of “Kamamah” as a characterization or conglomeration of gendered stereotypes, was obvious. The article even points this out, stating:

[...] to those who know her, so well, it is really funny to contemplate how cleverly she “gets by” with her inimitable characterization of the Indian before the highbrow audiences of the east. As a matter of fact, Miss Fite is simply an American girl of Indian ancestry, who has seen and appropriated an opportunity to create, for the Chautauqua course and lecture platform, a unique feature. And everyone admits she is doing it well.<sup>279</sup>

Here, the author’s reference to the “American girl” evidences the pervasiveness of female typecasting in the public eye. In this instance, Fite’s Indianness is relegated to her past or “ancestry”, and her ability to fit into the modern, mainstream ideal becomes the predominant criteria by which she is assessed.

Fite’s adoption of the persona and her agency in creating it is further emphasized in her ability to step out of it when the audience is no longer there: “Three months in the year, she discards the blanket, headdress and moccasin, gives up the title, Kamamah,

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 8.

and becomes ‘just Kate’ again.”<sup>280</sup> In this highly charged environment, the adoption and performance of these stereotypes indicate a nuanced awareness of the visual culture that Fite herself was being coopted into, despite her status as an educated member of the Cherokee elite. In mimicking these stereotypes back in her performances, her cultural output is a remarkable overturning of the fixity inherent in colonial discourses that position the Indigenous female subject as either “princess” or “squaw.”

An additional series of photographs in the archives of the Cherokee Female Seminary pictures Kate Fite engaged in further practices of playing Indian alongside a number of her peers, including Beulah Benson Edmonson, Cora Benge, Minnie Benge, and Cobb’s younger sister Anne Ross (figs. 3.19-3.22). The presence of these photographs in the archives suggests that playing Indian was a popular practice at the school – as, indeed, a much earlier group photograph of a row of young seminary students holding bows and arrows indicates (fig. 3.23). Additional photographs of Fite’s peers are also held in the Murrell home collections (figs. 3.24-3.25). Anne Ross herself was no stranger to photography, appearing in these photographs (with Fite) in promotion of her role in a play performed at the Hinton Theatre in the neighbouring town of Muskogee (fig. 3.26). There she performed the legends of “The Making of the Earth,” “The Origin of the Beaver,” “The Ground-Hog,” and “The Corn Dance.” Beyond Muskogee, Ross was also booked to perform on the Chautauqua Circuit along with Fite. In Muskogee, they faced a packed house:

It was not only something new and decidedly novel to Muskogee, but it portrayed parts of real Indian life and customs to the many out-of-town guests who thronged the theater, filling it to its capacity, many of whom had never before seen people of Indian blood dressed in their native costumes.<sup>281</sup>

Once again, Fite herself performed the death of the beloved Minnehaha, and additional piano pieces were performed by seminarians Cora Benge and Anna Mae Thorne, one of which was a musical selection entitled “Indian Phantom.”

In another albeit unconventional iteration of playing Indian, Anne Ross would eventually pose for the sculptor George Julian Zolnay’s statue of Sequoyah, commissioned to stand in the Statuary Hall of the capitol building in Washington. The statue was originally meant to be sculpted by a woman artist, Vinnie Ream; when she fell ill, the commission went to Zolnay. Fite was a great-grandniece of the iconic

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> “Party of Cherokee Men and Maids Interpret Tribal Legends and Songs,” *The Muskogee Times-Democrat*, 30 April 1915, 1.

Cherokee figure Sequoyah, who is celebrated as the inventor of the Cherokee alphabet; that her classmate Anne Ross would be the model for his commemoration in the nation's capital is a telling example of the interconnectedness of the Cherokee Nation's elite. The seminary was indeed an institution in which future generations of young women formed social and professional networks. The relationship between two seminary families, the Rosses and the Carters, provided the infrastructure for Anne Ross's commission, for instance. She was introduced to the sculptor Zolnay through the Carter family in 1916 during a trip to Washington to visit her girlhood friend Julia Carter. There, she met Zolnay and was asked to pose (fig. 3.27). Carter's father was in congress, and her mother thought Ross an ideal candidate to pose for the statue of Sequoyah that was to be unveiled in statuary hall the following year. She accompanied Ross to Zolnay's studio, and the artist agreed.

Ross's selection as a model for the statue was based in large part on her bicultural status. She recounts, "As everyone knows, Sequoyah was of mixed Cherokee and white blood. Mrs. Carter knew I was of these two bloods, so she suggested me as a model."<sup>282</sup> Sequoyah's was to be the first freestanding statue of a Native American figure to appear in statuary hall, so issues of race and appearance were undoubtedly at the forefront of its design.<sup>283</sup> Zolnay's search for a model stemmed from his desire to break with the painting tradition that had coopted Sequoyah's representation up to that point; namely, the portrait made by Charles Bird King, which hung in the same Indian Gallery that housed his portrait of John Ross (fig. 3.28). Bird's was the only known portrait that Sequoyah sat for. "This portrait has been copied and distorted until it is hard to say what is a true likeness of him", Anne Ross explained; "Anyway, Zolnay did not want to copy any picture. He wanted to model from life."<sup>284</sup> Despite this fact, Zolnay did maintain something of Bird's original portrait: The turban that had previously appeared in Sequoyah's painted likeness had now been cast in bronze.

Over the course of one week and numerous sittings, Mrs. Carter worked with Zolnay to decide on a configuration for the statue, whose preliminary designs had been undertaken by Ream before she fell ill. Mrs. Carter's contribution is an interesting component of Ross's narrative of the sittings, indicating that she had a vested interest in

<sup>282</sup> Anne Ross, quoted in "She is 'Face' of Sequoyah's Famed Statue," *The Daily Oklahoman Newspaper*, 6 October 1957, 12.

<sup>283</sup> Interestingly, the other statue representing Oklahoma in statuary hall is of Will Rogers, and thus the two historical figures chosen to represent the state in the capitol building are both Cherokee. The statue of Will Rogers was undertaken by artist Jo Davidson and gifted by the state of Oklahoma in 1939.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.



the commission in her capacity as a congressman's wife. The resulting statue pictures Sequoyah with "graceful and dignifying" drapery based on Mrs. Carter's arrangement of a sheet she draped over Ross's dress, and a face whose forehead, eyes, nose, cheeks, and upper lip were based on Ross's, but whose chin was modeled on another Cherokee figure, Houston B. Teehee from Oklahoma<sup>285</sup> (fig. 3.29).

The unveiling ceremony saw a number of Washington socialites and members of the political and Cherokee elites gather to witness Sequoyah's statue take its rightful place among the country's celebrated historical figures in statuary hall – including Narcissa Owen's son, Senator Robert L. Owen, and very likely Narcissa Owen herself. Anne Ross recited the 1899 poem "Ode to Sequoyah"<sup>286</sup> to this illustrious audience, cementing his contribution to Cherokee culture and history and her own to his commemoration. The importance of this unveiling resonated in the Cherokee Nation for years to come. In a later recording for the Oklahoma Historical Society's Oral History Collection, Kathryn Fite was asked to talk about the Cherokee alphabet and its inventor – Sequoyah being an ancestor of hers. On the recording, her immediate response was the following: "The unveiling of the statue of Sequoyah in Statuary Hall Washington D.C., took place June the 6<sup>th</sup>, 1917. Three members of congress from our state, giving addresses, were of Indian blood."<sup>287</sup> The ceremonious event of the statue's unveiling amongst the Washington elite in the space of the capitol building was Fite's first point of reference here, indicating its continued importance in narratives and oral histories of Sequoyah's legacy. It also suggests that she may very well have been there herself.

### Conclusion

The photography produced through the Cherokee Female Seminary from its inception in the 1850s to its closure in 1907 evidences a period of diverse and engaging relationships to modernity. Given the images that were eventually produced at the seminary, Hillers's initial renderings of clusters of unsmiling children posed unnaturally in front of the school are rendered all the more dubious. As Narcissa Owen pursued in her self-portrait, visualizations of Cherokee women within the context of educational reform did not

<sup>285</sup> As per Anne Ross's descriptions.

<sup>286</sup> Alexander Lawrence Posey, "Ode to Sequoyah", in *Changing is Not Vanishing: A Collection of American Indian Poetry to 1930*, ed. Robert Dale Parker (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 168.

<sup>287</sup> Kathryn Fite Smullin Interview, Living Legends Oral History Collection. Recording courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

necessarily follow the visual constrictions pursued across the country in projects like those of Hillers, Choate, or Frances Benjamin Johnston. These conventions were even explored and exploited within Indigenous populations themselves, as Kathryn Fite's photographs and performances "playing Indian" attest. This approach takes a more varied description of Indigenous women at the turn of the century, so that "playing Indian" and the "American Girl" are no longer necessary opposites but, rather, intersectional components of modern Indigenous subjectivity. As the following chapter pursues, Jennie Ross Cobb's eventual photographs of her peers leave behind the constraints of the "type" altogether as photographic practices and guidelines for young amateurs started to emerge towards the turn of the century.

#### Chapter Four: “A Humanizing Eye”: Jennie Ross Cobb, Then and Now

*“The 19<sup>th</sup> century photographer who I believe truly imaged Native women with love, and a humanizing eye is Jennie Ross Cobb (Aniyunwiya). Photographs of Native women at the Aniyunwiya [Cherokee] women’s seminary, images of Native women living in the contemporary, relaxed poses, smiling to a friend. Photographs by a Native woman photographing Native women at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, images Curtis, Vroman, Hillers and the many others could not even begin to emulate, when the eye of the beholder possesses love for the beheld.” – Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie, 1998.<sup>288</sup>*

This chapter introduces a final modern context in which the Ross family were active participants; namely, photography. More particularly, the chapter analyzes the photography of Jennie Ross Cobb, whose presence in the Cherokee Nation with a camera shifts the Ross family’s agency as commissioners and consumers of visual culture in nineteenth-century Indian Territory, to actual producers of images themselves. Prints and reproductions from her original glass plates have ensured that the content of her images lives on in historical archives scattered around Oklahoma and the Cherokee Nation. This small collection of Cobb’s pre-statehood photographs indicate that she was active in photography between c. 1895-1907, and photographed a diversity of scenes from family members, peers at the Cherokee Female Seminary, community events, and images of the Murrell home’s interior and grounds. Despite the fact that her photographs were produced for private use and enjoyment, however, contemporary scholarship surrounding Indigenous participation in the medium of photography has imbued her images with new importance. As one of the only pre-twentieth century Indigenous female photographers on record, Cobb has been celebrated as an exceptional case in the history of photography – especially as it relates to the extensive and invasive documentation of Indigenous cultures on the frontier. But does this critical attention adequately reflect the idiomatic historical context in which these images were produced? As an educated member of the affluent Ross family, not to mention a descendant of the Cherokee Nation’s longest-standing Principal Chief, Cobb’s background positioned her particularly well to participate in the modern trend that was sweeping the nation at the turn of the twentieth century. In presenting this research within the context of previous chapters, which establish the Ross family as long-standing producers and consumers of modern practices, this chapter seeks to challenge

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<sup>288</sup> Tsinhnahjinnie, “When is a photograph worth a thousand words?”, 53.

the narrative of exceptionalism that has guided contemporary re-framings of Cobb's output and contributions to the history of photography.

To this end, section 4.1 delineates the small body of scholarship that has included fleeting mentions of Cobb's work in order to establish the narrative her images have been recruited to participate in. Section 4.2 then provides a critical analysis of Cobb's output, identifying the ways in which her photographs adhered to the modern photography trends that were being encouraged in the work of young female amateurs. It looks closely at her images of children, peers, and her celebrated photograph *When the train came to Tahlequah* in particular, though documentation of all known images that have been attributed to Cobb between 1895-1907 are included in a full appendix (see appendix 2). Lastly, sections 4.3 and 4.4 explore two contemporary curatorial contexts in which Cobb's photographs have appeared and have been ideologically tasked: the exhibitions *Native Nations: Journeys in American Photography*, held at the Barbican Art Gallery in London in 1998; and the exhibition *Our People, Our Land, Our Images: International Indigenous Photography*, held at the CN Gorman Museum in California in 2006.

#### 4.1 Art History and Jennie Ross Cobb

The literature on Cobb is limited, and confined to two categories: critical and academic scholarship, and exhibition materials. Between 2000-2003, Cobb's work appeared in four critical works, including Mick Gidley's essay "Modern Indian American Photography" for the anthology *Mirror Writing: (re)-constructions of Native American Identity*;<sup>289</sup> Steven D. Hoelscher's influential and often-cited *Picturing Indians: Photographic Encounters and Tourist Fantasies in H.H. Bennett's Wisconsin Dells*;<sup>290</sup> and finally, contemporary artist and scholar Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie's essay "When is a photograph worth a thousand words?" re-published from its original 2000 version in Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson's critical anthology on postcolonial photography, *Photography's Other Histories*.<sup>291</sup> Her name started to appear in additional critical anthologies between 2009-2013. Paula E. Calvin and Deborah A.

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<sup>289</sup> Mick Gidley, "Modern Indian American Photography," in *Mirror Writings: (re)-constructions of Native American Identity*, ed. Thomas Claviez and Maria Moss (Berlin: Galda & Wilch Verlag, 2000), 257-282

<sup>290</sup> Steven D. Hoelscher, *Picturing Indians: Photographic Encounters and Tourist Fantasies in H.H. Bennett's Wisconsin Dells* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008).

<sup>291</sup> See note 7 for full citation.

Deacon's *American Women Artists in Wartime, 1776-2010*, published in 2011, includes a brief mention of Cobb's photographs.<sup>292</sup> Contemporary scholar and curator Veronica Passalacqua's essay "Finding Sovereignty through Relocation: Considering Photographic Consumption" includes two reproductions of Cobb's group portraits, and a mention of her work in the 2011 anthology *Visual Currencies: Reflections on Native Photography*.<sup>293</sup>

An additional area in which Cobb's name appears includes historical research into the Cherokee Nation, mostly before Oklahoma achieved statehood in 1907. Scholar Devon Abbott Mihesuah's *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism* from 2003 includes a mention of Cobb as the only Cherokee Female Seminary advocate for Indigenous rights.<sup>294</sup> Further to this, a very brief biographical sketch is also included in her important 1993 work dedicated to the history of the Seminary, entitled *Cultivating the Rosebuds: The Education of Women at the Cherokee Female Seminary, 1851-1909*.<sup>295</sup> James McCullagh's extensive research into the teachers of the Cherokee Nation pre-statehood includes some useful data on Cobb's time as a teacher before she married and moved to Texas, published in his 2010 *The Teachers of the Cherokee Nation Public Schools: 1870s-1907*.<sup>296</sup> Cobb's photograph of her students at a small rural schoolhouse in Christy also adorns the book's cover. A similar historical survey completed by Deborah L. Duvall, entitled *An Oral History of Tahlequah and the Cherokee Nation* published in 2000, also includes reproductions of Cobb's photographs.<sup>297</sup> In a photographic context, Kristina Southwell and John Lovett's 2010 study of Annette Ross Hume's photos, *Life at the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita Agency*, includes a brief mention of Cobb and some very useful background on another woman photographer from Oklahoma.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> Deborah A. and Paula E. Calvin, *Women Artists in Wartime, 1776-2010* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2011).

<sup>293</sup> Veronica Passalacqua, "Finding Sovereignty through Relocation: Considering Photographic Consumption," in *Visual Currencies: Reflections on Native Photography*, ed. Henrietta Lidchi and Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie (Edinburgh: National Museums Scotland, 2009), 19-37.

<sup>294</sup> Devon A. Mihesuah, *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, empowerment, activism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003).

<sup>295</sup> Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds*, 1993.

<sup>296</sup> James D. McCullagh, *The teachers of the Cherokee Nation public schools, 1870s-1907* (Tahlequah: Cherokee Heritage Press, 2010).

<sup>297</sup> Deborah L. Duvall, *An Oral History of Tahlequah and the Cherokee Nation* (Tahlequah: Arcadia Publishing, 2000).

<sup>298</sup> Kristina Southwell and John R. Lovett, *Life at the Kiowa, Comanche, and Wichita Agency: The photographs of Annette Ross Hume* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010).

The most recent scholarly examination of Cobb's output appears in a chapter of Nicole Dawn Strathman's PhD dissertation entitled *Through Native Lenses: American Indian Vernacular Photographies and Performances of Memories, 1890-1940*.<sup>299</sup> Strathman's chapter on Cobb presents a broad, uncritical chronological overview of her most productive period, touching on the general themes that shape her work and situating them in their historical milieu. Her case study on Cobb is used in support of her argument that the photographs under scrutiny "stand as counter-images to the hegemonic visual histories of their peoples," and thereby "undermine dominant narratives while simultaneously endorsing their own tribal histories."<sup>300</sup> She urges, "My goal is to prove that 'Native American photography' as practiced by and for Native Americans is profoundly different than photography practiced by contemporary non-Natives."<sup>301</sup> My own research into Cobb's photographs and their substantial visual context finds that photography practiced "by and for Native Americans" (i.e., Cobb) was in fact distinctly not different from the photography practiced "by contemporary non-Natives" – in fact much of it was *deliberately* identical. The impetus behind the photographic act was driven by different sets of motivations, and circulated for different audiences, but the photographs themselves show a close adherence to popular photography conventions being disseminated for young female amateurs during the time period Cobb was experimenting with her camera.

Further, Strathman's analysis of Cobb's images of seminary students as examples of the "new woman", and of her domestic scenes as participating in more "general trends in bourgeois American photography," does little to support her claim that photographs like these were produced in order to further the objectives and narratives of tribal communities.<sup>302</sup> Problematically, there is very little evidence of what Cobb's purported objectives actually were for taking photographs, beyond her obvious enjoyment of the practice. As such, typecasting the images as adhering to a tribal agenda is surely counterproductive to overturning the impetus of visual stereotyping altogether.

This chapter contributes to the literatures above in connecting Cobb to a larger context of women photographers in late nineteenth-century America, and in

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<sup>299</sup> Nicole Dawn Strathman, "Through Native Lenses: American Indian Vernacular Photographies and Performances of Memories, 1890-1940," (PhD diss., UCLA, 2013).

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, ii-iii.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 208

detailing the contemporary contexts in which her photographs have been appropriated and re-circulated. It stresses that, given the preeminence of the Ross family in Indian Territory and their participation in the latest in visual and cultural trends detailed in previous chapters of this thesis, it comes as no surprise that Cobb was keenly involved in the emergence of women's photography practices at the turn of the twentieth century.

#### 4.2 Photography and Jennie Ross Cobb

There is an overall lack of clarity as to when Cobb received her first camera, and thus when she began her journey with photography. One of her cameras was likely purchased from the popular Poco line produced by the Rochester Camera Company (hereafter RCC), with a Bausch & Lomb Optical Co. lens patent date of January 6, 1891 (fig. 4.1). Todd Gustavson, curator of the technology collection at the George Eastman House and specialist on early photographic equipment, confirms that this camera looks like it belongs to the RCC Cycle Poco series.<sup>303</sup> Further, the Poco cameras from this time came in two sizes, 5x7" and 4x5", which corresponds to the two sizes of glass plates that Cobb ordered through the Eastman Kodak Company in Rochester, NY and the Hammer Dry Plate Company of St. Louis, MO.<sup>304</sup> Unfortunately, whether or not it was acquired at a later date or handed down from a family member remains unclear. At the time indicated on the lens patent, Cobb would have been ten years old. Joan Jensen suggests that Cobb's father gave her a box camera at the early age of 6 or 7 years old, in 1887-8.<sup>305</sup> With the release of the illustrious Kodak No. 1 in 1888, cameras were indeed becoming more easily accessible devices, and this may have been the very gift that Cobb was given that same year. Nicole Dawn Strathman suggests that she received a Kodak bellows unit between the ages of twelve and sixteen (1893-1897) – however the later years of this timeframe do not account for her dating of an important series of photographs, which appear as being produced c. 1895.<sup>306</sup> Veronica Passalacqua's brief biographical sketch of Cobb suggests that she was given a camera by her father as a young child<sup>307</sup>, while a much earlier account from a local newspaper, *The Star-Citizen*,

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<sup>303</sup> Todd Gustavson, Personal correspondence with author, 15 October 2014.

<sup>304</sup> Mary Elizabeth Good, "It was Indian Country," *Your World Newspaper*, 29 January 1961, 6.

<sup>305</sup> See Joan Jensen, "Jennie Ross Cobb," in *Our People, Our Land, Our Images: International Indigenous Photographers*, ed. Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie and Veronica Passalacqua (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2006), 4-6.

<sup>306</sup> See Strathman, "Through Native Lenses," 194-237.

<sup>307</sup> See Veronica Passalacqua's note in Alison, *Native Nations*, 314.

notes that Cobb “graduated from the Female Seminary in 1900; taught school the next year and with her first pay check, bought a Kodak.”<sup>308</sup> Inconclusive and scattered reports of her early practice make an exact practical starting-point very difficult, as they do an accurate date for each of her images. However, Cobb’s role as a consumer of the new camera technology peddled by Kodak and the RCC offers an opportunity to interpret her output as a product of this new and exciting environment for young women amateurs, connecting her to a larger network of female photography hobbyists and enthusiasts.

From her surviving glass plates and contact prints, Cobb’s most productive early years can be identified as spanning 1896-1906. This is of particular historical importance for its contribution to a visual record before Indian Territory was absorbed into the state of Oklahoma – not to mention a time period that accounts for the proliferation of photographic images of Indigenous populations being produced and disseminated across the country for documentary and tourist purposes. Despite the development of this booming genre right on her doorstep with the presence of visiting photographers, surveyors, aspiring artists, and outsider amateurs, Cobb developed her own photographic practice right at home, made for private enjoyment rather than the public consumption that defined the majority of Indigenous portraiture towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Outside of the family, a corpus of close to one hundred images exists and is divided between public and private collections.<sup>309</sup> She was primarily self-taught, an undertaking that would have been accessible to her through the popular mail-order catalogues produced by Kodak and the Rochester Camera Company from whom she would eventually acquire a folding Poco. Using the dry-plate process, she used the closet on the ground floor of the Murrell home as a darkroom in which to develop her photographs – an indication that she was picking up tips from popular photography advice columns printed for women amateurs in titles like the *Photo-American* and the *Ladies’ Home Journal*.<sup>310</sup> Using domestic space to develop photographs was encouraged amongst women amateurs, who were assumed to be primarily situated in the space of the home. While Cobb’s exact reading material is unknown, given the huge

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<sup>308</sup> Travis, “Restoration of Murrell Home Progresses,” *The Star-Citizen*.

<sup>309</sup> See appendix B for full image details.

<sup>310</sup> *The Photo-American* in particular ran a column entitled “Our Women Friends” intermittently between 1892-94, for instance. The column was edited by Adelaide Skeel and was directed at an emerging demographic of female amateur photographers.



popularity of magazines and periodicals and their wide circulation throughout the United States, her rural location would not have excluded her from the demographic readership of popular magazine titles. As Strathman muses, “Jennie Ross was undoubtedly familiar with Kodak’s marketing campaign through the popular magazines and mail-order catalogues that circulated among her friends in Park Hill.”<sup>311</sup> While the impact of the Kodak Girl advertising campaign targeting white middle-class demographics of American women is obvious in the surge of women photographers and camera clubs emerging in major metropolises like New York, Washington, and Philadelphia, its impact on smaller rural towns and the women who lived there is a less documented history.

A strong case can be made for Cobb’s participation in this movement by looking at the facets of photography being advertised through Kodak and the RCC, whose catalogs and user guides she turned to while she was learning how to make and develop photos. In keeping with the nostalgic idealization of childhood, leisure time, and home that was put forth in Kodak’s influential advertising campaigns, Cobb’s output reveals an adherence to this agenda in the subject-driven nature of her photographs. The primary focus of her images document intimate scenes of family life, individual and group portraits of young women from the Cherokee Female Seminary, interior and exterior views of the Murrell home, and snapshots of local gatherings and events in the Cherokee Nation’s capital, and in this sense the photography trends being promoted amongst women amateurs accounts for the bulk of her output.

The family unit was an important component of Kodak’s campaign and part of their appeal to young women whose business they hoped to attract through advertisements picturing familial and domestic scenes within the home. These campaigns and the culture of amateur women’s photography that developed around them contributed to the aestheticization of the domestic sphere and the American family within it, visualizing the modernization of the American home through the “new woman” photographers newly behind the camera. In appealing to this realm, Kodak shifted the very function of photography from its ability to recreate the portraiture conventions of high art to a more spontaneous private expression. Nancy Martha West points out that Kodak introduced play into the experience of photography, “allowing consumers for the first time to [...] adopt informal poses and gestures in informal

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<sup>311</sup> Strathman, “Through Native Lenses,” 224.

settings – beaches, parks, city streets.” Further, Kodak created a “coherent representational universe for the commodity of the snapshot [...] supplying a new set of codes and images aimed at celebrating the nostalgic pursuit of beauty, pleasure, and innocence.”<sup>312</sup> Thus the private sphere and the photographer’s personal expression within it were prioritized through Kodak, and this spontaneity infiltrated the formalities of photographic portraiture – especially when it came to the family unit.

Cobb’s output demonstrates an engagement with this new set of priorities, and her intense focus on the people closest to her indicates that she was drawn to the individual and group portraiture made so familiar through Kodak’s lens. This becomes especially interesting to consider given the highly public and formal portraiture that the Ross family appeared in throughout the decades leading up to the turn of the century – portraits that Cobb would have been familiar with during her time living in the Murrell home where earlier oil paintings of Ross family members hung. Cobb re-inscribed this space with a modernized version of family portraiture that adhered to the play and private expression Kodak encouraged, capturing her family members in spontaneous moments of laughter, posing her young nephew on the steps leading up to the home, and developing the images within the home itself in the closet on the ground floor.

### *Children*

These tendencies are most visible in Cobb’s portraits of children. The sixth of nine children, she had three younger siblings as well as two nephews during the time she was living in the Murrell home. In 1901, she took a portrait of her young nephew Blake Ross, posed in front of the home (fig. 4.2 / Appendix 2-A2.4). The child is angled slightly towards the step on which his right foot rests, has his hands in his pockets, and looks out beyond the camera. The surrounding details that she includes within the frame – the window, the large ceramic vase, the vine creeping up the side of the house – integrate the home and its legacy, stretching back into the Cherokee golden age, into the portrait. Blake Ross was the first child of the next generation born to Cobb’s eldest brother, and thus the first boy of his generation to carry the weight of the Ross family name. Another less formal portrait of him is in the Murrell home collections, donated by the Bradshaw family (fig. 4.3 / Appendix 2-A2.21). It may have been taken on the same occasion, as the child is pictured in a jacket and cap, standing outside with a large dog.

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<sup>312</sup> Nancy Martha West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 5.

He stands at a distance from the camera, with one hand resting on the large animal, turning towards the sunlight, with his shadow stretching back behind him. Another portrait of a young boy carrying a turkey in the backyard of the Murrell home appears to have been taken in the same year (fig. 4.4 / Appendix 2-A2.11).<sup>313</sup> The child stands holding a dead turkey swung over his shoulder – the latter reaching almost the full length of his standing body. He wears clothing similar to that in Blake Ross’s portrait: black tights underneath cropped trousers, black leather ankle boots, and a short jacket to keep him warm in the late-November afternoon. His body is turned to face the camera, in which direction he smiles tentatively, perhaps keen to continue walking or to unburden himself of the weight of the large fowl draped along his back. Journalist Mary Elizabeth Good’s caption for the photograph in her 1961 article on Cobb for the local newspaper *Your World* reads, “The Robert Ross [Cobb’s father] family could usually count on plenty of company for Thanksgiving. Mrs. Cobb made this photograph in the back yard of the Murrell home where her family lived at that time.”<sup>314</sup> The Ross family’s observance of the Thanksgiving holiday indicates full adherence to the Christian holiday season in the United States, and to American family life where they were based.

Another series pictures much younger children, probably additional family members, visiting the Murrell home. Cobb repeats the motif of the steps in two portraits of a young girl from this series, taken in 1895.<sup>315</sup> In the first image, the young child is pictured facing the camera, with one foot standing out in front of her and the other elevated on the Murrell home steps, in a gesture identical to the Blake Ross portrait (fig. 4.5 / Appendix 2-A2.51). Her left arm rests on the elevated knee, and the other holds a bouquet of flowers upside down, covering part of her mouth. The child’s expression is inquisitive, focused, and her gaze fixed off to the side, again in a very similar instruction to the portrait of Cobb’s nephew. A more spontaneous image of the same child appears as part of the photo session in a joyful portrayal of her now sitting on the steps (fig. 4.6 / Appendix 2-A2.52). She holds the bouquet in her left hand, and the other is partially raised in a gesture of excited laughter. In both images, the child is adorned in a white lace sundress, with white stockings and bonnet, and black leather

<sup>313</sup> The Oklahoma Historical Society dates this photograph between 1896-1906, though this is a timeframe that they give to most of the photographs in the Jennie Ross Cobb collection. It is more likely that this photograph was taken around the same time as the Blake Ross photos, c. 1901.

<sup>314</sup> Good, “It was Indian Country”, 6.

<sup>315</sup> While the child in each image is not named, it is possible that the little girl is Cobb’s younger sister and the last of the Ross family children, Anne Ross (who would later pose for Sequoyah’s statue).

lace-up shoes. The lavish lace the child wears and bouquet she holds indicate that she is dressed for a special occasion. The presence of additional images of children wearing white in the Murrell yard further suggests that Cobb took this series of photographs on the same day.

Picturing children in the intimacy of her family home from the formal tradition of portrait photography to the more spontaneous realm of dynamic snapshot aesthetics attests to Cobb's interest in the larger project of visualizing childhood that was being explored in women's photography throughout the country. In an interesting comparison between turn-of-the-century snapshots of children and the formal features of mid nineteenth-century studio photography depicting children with "awkward gestures, buttoned-up costumes, and rigid expressions", Nancy Martha West points out that earlier nineteenth-century portraits were made in support of a portrayal of children as adults-in-the-making, whereas later snapshot photography was finally at ease to portray them in a more accurate way.<sup>316</sup> She stresses that "to no small extent, snapshot photography gained its cultural currency from the promise that children could demonstrate for the first time in photographic history all the characteristics – spontaneity, playfulness, innocence – recently discovered as uniquely their own."<sup>317</sup>

Looking closely at Cobb's images of children, the themes encouraged by Kodak – childhood, leisure, and middle-class home life – are directly engaged with in her output. The joyful, spontaneous image of the young girl laughing on the steps of her home and her images of the young Blake Ross playing with his dog and carrying a turkey home for Thanksgiving dinner follow the patterns of childhood photography promoted and popularized through Kodak. Aside from the children she photographed with obvious enjoyment, she also took advantage of the Murrell home's picturesque setting to stage a number of additional portraits in the landscape of the home. These images tend to picture women with younger girls and children, echoing West's observation about Kodak's strong push for amateurs to capture the fleeting innocence of childhood by photographing children alongside adults. Two particularly skilled images picture women from her family with their younger counterparts by their sides. In one such image, a young woman crouches on the porch next to a white vase while her counterpart is engaged to the left of the frame, resting her feeding bucket on the porch while chickens mill about her ankles (fig. 4.7 / Appendix 2-A2.58). Cobb was obviously

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<sup>316</sup> West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*, 76.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

intrigued by the aesthetic possibilities of the white vase and the woman in white crouched next to it. In another image taken in the garden of the Murrell home, a trio composed of a young woman, girl, and baby crouch front and centre, while an older woman smiles and watches over them just behind (fig. 4.8 / Appendix 2-A2.59). This scene of maternal affection of all ages – child, girl, and woman – as they smile and interact with the infant on the grounds of the home, is perhaps as close as one can get in picturing Kodak’s aesthetic categories.

Aside from the children in her family, whom Cobb photographed with great care and obvious enjoyment of the subject matter, she also photographed children who she encountered in her community, and in her future role as a teacher at local schools in the Cherokee Nation. These images are a more somber glimpse at some of the race and class divisions at work in the communities around Cobb’s own. Strathman draws our attention to the 1896 photograph of three young African-American children standing around a tree, holding tin buckets and looking in disparate directions (fig. 4.9 / Appendix 2-A2.53). Standing at a close distance to the young children are two women, dressed in white lace dresses and hats, one of them looking at the children and the other looking ahead towards the camera. Two of the children seem distracted by something to their left, outside of the frame of the picture. Strathman suggests that the two women in white were accompanying Cobb on a walk, when she stopped to take the photograph. She writes, “Taken outdoors near a water source (possibly behind her house), three black children hold buckets while two white women in Victorian dress appear to pause as they walk by. The outfits alone are a study in contrasts. Wearing hats and full-length, white-ruffled dresses, the women are paragons of Victorian summer fashion. The children, on the other hand, are shoeless and dressed in simple, drab cotton shirts and shorts.”<sup>318</sup>

The bucket re-appears in another portrait of a young African-American child sitting on the steps of the Murrell home after collecting water from the spring behind the house (fig. 4.10 / Appendix 2-A2.54). Here Cobb has posed him in one of her favourite settings, as we have seen from the images of her young family members pictured sitting and standing on the steps of the home. The intimacy of this technique is here extended to the young child, whose face is only partially visible in the waning late-afternoon sun. He sits patiently, and looks intently out, with an expression of interest at

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<sup>318</sup> Strathman, “Through Native Lenses,” 210-11.

the camera whose lens interrupted his afternoon chore. A man stands protectively in the doorway behind him with his hands in his pockets, and a woman to his left, leaning against the front of the house with one hand on her hip.

Another photograph of two young girls with a baby carriage, standing outside a tall brick building, appears in the Murrell home collections (fig. 4.11 / Appendix 2-A2.55). The two young women are wearing similar checkered dresses and hats, hinting at what might be a school uniform – though the worn material and shoes suggests that it was not the Cherokee Female Seminary attended by Cobb and her peers at Park Hill. A similar checkered dress appears in an image of Cobb's young Cherokee students at a rural schoolhouse just outside of Tahlequah, for instance.

Two additional images of Cobb's students standing in front of their schools point to her awareness of children from other communities, whose backgrounds were a far cry from the privileges afforded her through the Ross family name. Contact prints of one of the images appear in the Oklahoma Historical Society collection, as well as the Cherokee Heritage Center collections. Entitled *School Children at Christy Rural School*, the Cherokee Heritage Center's record for this image indicates that it was a gift of Lee and Mary Elizabeth Good of Tulsa, Oklahoma (fig. 4.12 / Appendix 2-A2.62). The verso inscription reads: "Following [Jennie Ross Cobb's] graduation from Cherokee Female Seminary in 1902, Jennie Ross (later Jennie Ross Cobb) great granddaughter of Chief John Ross, taught school near Christy. Her pupils were full-blood Cherokee and she lived with Mrs. Cooney Wolfe."<sup>319</sup>

Like many of the women who attended the Cherokee Female Seminary, Cobb went on to teach in local schools in the Cherokee Nation after her graduation in May of 1900. Just before she graduated, the school system in the Cherokee Nation drastically changed when, in 1898, the Curtis Act placed the control of tribal schools under the Secretary of the Interior of the United States, as explored in Chapter Three. In an attempt to improve the primary school system, new rules and regulations were introduced for teachers. This included the 1899 announcement that all teachers were required to pass examinations qualifying them to teach. These were administered through Summer Normals, which were held at the Cherokee Female Seminary. As this was the primary means by which teachers were qualified to start work, it is almost

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<sup>319</sup> Cherokee Heritage Center, Tahlequah, OK, Good Collection (accession number 73-150001-4).

certain that Cobb would have attended one of the summer Normals, and acquired her certification through the Seminary.<sup>320</sup>

Cobb then went on to teach in the public school system in the Tahlequah, Coowescoowee, Illinois, and Going Snake districts. There many of her students were so-called “full blood” Cherokee children, primarily denoting a lower class status, and in many cases, negotiating multiple cultural and language barriers that distanced them from access to a rigorously controlled Euro-American education like the one Cobb received at the Seminary. The two existing images of Cobb’s students offer some potential insight into this unease. In stark contrast to the images of her family members, and to the images of her own fellow classmates at the Female Seminary, the children depicted here pose tentatively for the camera. While the photograph of the school children she worked with at the rural Christy school is very carefully composed, with three figures standing in the doorway and five children standing on the ground in front of the school, accompanied by their teacher dressed in white, the image in Karen Harrington’s collection of a larger group of about eighteen children standing with a male teacher, proved a less successful venture (fig. 4.13 / Appendix 2-A2.56). One child props up a crying toddler in the far right of the frame, while the majority of the children look uneasily into the camera, restlessly holding their positions for Cobb’s configuration.

This diverse exploration of picturing children – from the intimacy of her family home to the wider cultural nets cast in her community and workplace, and from the formal tradition of portrait photography to the more spontaneous realm of dynamic snapshot aesthetics – attests to Cobb’s interest in children as photographic subjects, and in the larger project of visualizing childhood that was being explored in women’s photography practices throughout the country.

### *Seminary Students*

As Chapter Three explored, images produced of the Cherokee Female Seminary’s students evidenced a substantial shift in the visualization of young Indigenous women. Cobb herself took photographic portraits of her peers in Park Hill and Tahlequah, including students and graduates of the seminary. These images suggest a further adherence to images of the “new woman” that were being pursued and disseminated

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<sup>320</sup> For more on the public school system in the Cherokee Nation, see McCullagh, *The Teachers of the Cherokee Nation Public Schools*, 2010.

through the Kodak craze, and ultimately depict a community of young women who were actively participating in the modern world.

One of her best-known images pictures a group of seminary graduates positioned at the intersection between the path leading up to their school and the one leading them away, huddled together, and smiling for the camera (fig. 4.14 / Appendix 2-A2.14). Unlike the etiquette expected from formal graduation photos produced through the school, their dresses no longer matched, their uniformly pulled back hair was now tucked underneath a stylish selection of lavishly plumed hats, and they were no longer constrained to the front arches of the seminary now looming in the background.<sup>321</sup> Because of the informal ease communicated through the image, this photograph marks a departure from the formalities of group portraits commissioned by the seminary on the occasion of school graduations. Photographs of Cobb's own graduation demonstrate the staged formality of this type of photography (see back to fig. 3.12). While the formal graduation photographs of the young Cherokee women present them dressed in white, formally posed, and standing almost expressionless in a semi-circle on their school steps in keeping with the school's Victorian aesthetic, Cobb's group portrait taken just two years later sees the graduates smiling, and standing at ease.

Additional images taken by Cobb appear of the young students on the grounds of their school, shielding their eyes from the hot Oklahoma sun, and walking away from the school's iron gates (figs. 4.15-4.17 / Appendix 2-A2.90-A2.92). One group portrait pictures a group of young students walking along the boardwalk that led from the seminary into Tahlequah (fig. 4.18 / Appendix 2-A2.13). The image captures a favoured activity of the young women, whose strolls into Tahlequah were encouraged as part of their education. Mihesuah notes that,

Once every two weeks, teachers accompanied the high-school girls to Tahlequah to visit the ice cream "saloon," the opera house, or the art galleries. [...] In addition to shopping at the various stores and attending cultural events [...] they could roller skate at a rink for fifteen cents an hour or have their photographs taken in the town's portrait studio.<sup>322</sup>

This was a tradition adhered to from the seminary's beginnings, and enforced under Anne Florence Wilson's strict Victorian regime. Brad Agnew describes the "rigorous

<sup>321</sup> The photograph pictures seminary graduates Sally Parrish, Gazelle Lane, Mary Guleger, Pixie Mayes, a "Miss Falkner," and Elizabeth Van Ross. As per Good, "It was Indian Country," 6.

<sup>322</sup> Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds*, p. 72-3.



walks” overseen daily by Wilson as part of her disciplinary program of well being – one that combined regular doses of sulphur and molasses with a requisite long walk following the final class of the day. True to form, the students were expected to walk in a straight line upon leaving the campus, and whether they were headed into the countryside or into town, they were always chaperoned by teachers or the principal herself<sup>323</sup> (fig. 4.19).

In contrast to photographic images picturing the students militantly marching into town in uniform and accompanied by chaperones making sure their demeanour and appearance were always in check, Cobb’s photos picture the seminary students connected, at ease, and in motion. Here, the young women are engaged in the same activity, only now it is a product of their leisure time. The figure on the left may even be posturing for the camera, leaning back slightly and gathering her skirts with her hand at the hip. The figure standing next to her smiles.

Part of the striking quality of Cobb’s snapshots of the young seminary students, therefore, can be attributed to the spontaneity of the young women’s’ visualization prior to their self-fashioning. Within this configuration, they are liberated from the confines of the “type” that previously governed how they appeared in photographic portraiture, as explored in Chapter Three. Thus where the seminary’s formal portraiture used the pose in a deliberate attempt at self-fashioning in order to align its young women with the recognizable traits promoted in white Victorian gender ideals, Cobb pictures her subjects moving through the world and inscribing their presence beyond the confines of the school’s iron gates. Recognizing this is a significant step towards entering a new interpretive sphere in terms of Cobb’s role and the women who appear as subjects in her photographs.

#### *When the train came to Tahlequah*

One of Cobb’s most celebrated photographs resonates with the visual possibilities opened up with the modernization of photography, and continues the series that Cobb began with her images of the seminary students walking into Tahlequah. It pictures a group of young women walking along the newly inaugurated Ozark and Cherokee Central Railroad in 1902, the first year it ran through Tahlequah (fig. 4.20 / Appendix 2-A2.16). Cobb was present at the depot the day that the very first train pulled into

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<sup>323</sup> As per Agnew’s description in *Northeastern State University: A Centennial History*, p. 6.

Tahlequah in the spring, and thus her dynamic snapshot of seminary students also serves a commemorative function. The railroad ran through Fayetteville, Tahlequah, Park Hill, Muskogee, and Okmulgee, connecting the capital of the Cherokee Nation with the capital of the Creek Nation – and finally providing the seminary with a viable form of transportation for its students and faculty.

For Tahlequah, this arrival of the railroad was cause for celebration. The front page of the *Tahlequah Arrow* announced “Tahlequah Celebrates – Eight Thousand People Witness the Arrival of the First Passenger Train.”<sup>324</sup> Advertising space also acknowledged the momentous event: “...Too Much Railroad Celebration...” one local ad reads; “Watch for Our Ad Next Week.” This represented the culmination of years of bids and business maneuvers in an attempt to connect the Cherokee Nation’s capital with the rest of Indian Territory – a time the newspaper describes as an “epoch full of anxiety and bright promises.”<sup>325</sup> “The efforts of a pushing and energetic citizenship have been rewarded”, the article touts, “and today Tahlequah occupies her place on a pinnacle in the commercial world.”<sup>326</sup> Though the capital was envied by other towns in Indian Territory, the lack of any railroad connecting it with other major towns and developments meant that it remained isolated from the rest of Indian Territory. With the arrival of the Ozark and Cherokee Central, it would now quite literally be on the map (fig. 4.21).

The celebrations for this momentous occasion were to draw the largest crowds and entertainment that the town had ever hosted. Official jubilee celebrations began a few days later, on Tuesday, 5 August 1902, and were attended by over five thousand people from Tahlequah and surrounding towns. The day was tinted with strong tones of patriotism, with local businesses and stalls waving the American flag. “[...] The band stand in capital square was literally covered with flags and draped with flag bunting, and the band wagon was a moving mass of patriotic colors”, *The Tahlequah Arrow* reported.<sup>327</sup> In an interesting counterpart, this patriotism was tempered with Indigenous celebratory rituals including a stomp dance led by local Gee Dick, and an address delivered in the Cherokee language by Assistant Chief Wash Swimmer, who spoke after dinner. The intermingling of the quintessentially American celebrations – flag flying, cattle roping, baseball – with the Cherokee stomp dance thus welcomed the arrival of

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<sup>324</sup> “Tahlequah Celebrates,” *The Tahlequah Arrow*, 9 August 1902, 1.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 4.

the railway's industrial feat into the community in an inter-cultural space. Additional addresses were given by congressmen, clergymen, and local politicians.

The very first eight-coach passenger train pulled into the Tahlequah depot at 11:45 am on celebration day, containing around eight hundred passengers. The day's entertainment and activities included a sack race, three-legged race, wheel-barrow race, and foot race; an afternoon cattle roping contest between twenty-one young men competing for the \$50 first-place cash prize; a ball game between the Rogers (Arkansas) and Tahlequah baseball teams organized in the athletic grounds of the Cherokee Male Seminary; and a corn stalk shooting contest held between "four fullblood teams" for a \$10 cash prize. Music and dancing in capital square and the opera house rounded out the evening. The famed actor Will Rogers, who Cobb would later photograph, was absent for the occasion, though his nephew wrote to him to report the event:

Dear Uncle Willie:

Tahlequah has a railroad now. It was completed to Tahlequah on the third of August and the big celebration day was the fifth. I was down there and took in every thing there was to take in. [...] Every body was at the train. Whenever a train comes in every body sets out for the depot, foot and horse. They had speaking and other sports and in the evening they gave a big ball. I sure went to that. [...] There was a stomp dance led by old Gee Dick just before the ball, and we went to the opera house about 9 o'clock. Sure had a fine time there, and there were a lot of girls and boys said they wished you were there, as it did not seem right unless you were there with all of your fun.<sup>328</sup>

Completion of the track represented a triumph in engineering, with close to forty thousand feet of track being laid in just six days leading up to the workers' arrival at the Tahlequah depot. Track crew were rewarded with watermelons, lemonade and tobacco from locals when the last rail was set and the conductor Alf Reid pulled the first train into town. Images of the labour involved in the railroad's construction appear in the archival collection of photographer Alice Robertson, who ran a small portrait studio in Muskogee called the Robertson Studio (fig. 4.22-4.23). These images invoke a "before and after" structure, with one centralizing the mules and work-horses, as well as the bodies of male labourers scattered across the land, and the other picturing the Ozark and Cherokee Central itself, carrying freight, with the men now standing aboard the fruits of their labour.

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<sup>328</sup> "Letter from Clement Mayes McSpadden to Will Rogers," 31 August 1902, Indian Territory, in Arthur Frank Wetthei, and Barbara Bair, ed., *The Papers of Will Rogers: The Early Years, November 1879-April 1904*, vol. 1 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 343-4.

Beyond the practical benefits of the railroad reaching into Tahlequah, its symbolic significance is paramount. The building of the railroad in the United States is intimately linked with the very same rhetoric of expansionism and progress that determined the fate of the country's Indigenous populations in the years leading up to its construction. As Indigenous scholar Jolene Rickard stresses, "The symbol of progress in America in the nineteenth century was the train. Indian control of the great Plains impeded the necessary expansion of the railroad."<sup>329</sup> Introducing a third component to the histories of the railroad and the desired control of Indigenous populations, Rickard places photography at the centre of this history, noting "The photographers that photographed Indian communities in the nineteenth century knew that the Indian stood in the way of the goals of the government."<sup>330</sup> In the nineteenth-century context that positioned modernity and progress as being necessarily in opposition to overly-romanticized notions of pre-modern Indigeneity, the symbol of the train as a beacon of industrialization was thus necessarily outside of the representative sphere reserved for Indigenous subjects. Rickard's observation that the expansion of the railroad necessitated the relinquishment of Indigenous land rights therefore permeates the photographic record as far as imaging the Great American railroad goes. This marks a misrepresentation in the context of Tahlequah, whose participation in and contributions to the modern world date back to the very arrival of Cherokees in Indian Territory.

The arrival of the Ozark and Cherokee Central into the Tahlequah Depot on 5 August 1902 thus participates in an important trajectory of mechanization and modernization in the first years of the twentieth century. Far from being an isolated Indian Territory outpost somewhere on the country's frontier, Tahlequah could now function properly as the capital of the Cherokee Nation. Indeed, *The Tahlequah Arrow* equates the arrival of the train with a new positionality for the town on a "pinnacle of the commercial world." The arrival of the train thus functions as a symbolic arrival as well, in that the town could now be recognized as an active and connected participant in a larger modern network. The fact that this was celebrated on such a large and unprecedented scale indicates that the arrival of the train did, indeed, mark an arrival for

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<sup>329</sup> Jolene Rickard, "The Occupation of Indigenous Space as 'Photograph,'" in Alison, *Native Nations*, 59.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

the Cherokee Nation's capital – one that, “to describe it as it was would necessitate the use of all manner of metaphorical flights.”<sup>331</sup>

*When the Train Came to Tahlequah* evidences Cobb's own participation in this momentous arrival. In picturing young women from the seminary in motion, she visualizes them on the brink of a new moment in Tahlequah's relationship to modernization. Here, they have abandoned their poses and are instead unselfconsciously making their way across the newly laid tracks. The young women here appear in motion, anticipating the freedom of travel that they would be granted with the arrival of the train. Further, Cobb's interest in lifting her female subjects outside of the confines of the pose and instead picturing them moving positions her as a particularly modern viewer. Indeed, a number of Cobb's photographs evidence sustained attempts at capturing her female subjects in motion (fig. 4.24 / Appendix 2-A2.61). Characterizing the period 1895-1907 as one of extraordinary innovation – which as it happens, is the exact period that defines Cobb's early output in the Oklahoma Historical Society records (1896-1906) – Lynda Nead argues that “By 1900 it would have been easy to conclude that all images and the act of viewing itself involved some form of motion.”<sup>332</sup> This animation of the figure marked a significant transformation, one of “immense cultural and psychological potency”<sup>333</sup>, in which boundaries between the viewer and the image are obstructed.

Additional images of Cobb's peers similarly picture them out in public space, engaging with each other and their immediate surroundings in the bustling districts of Tahlequah and Park Hill. A number of images, for instance, picture her peers interacting with their counterparts at the Cherokee Male Seminary in contexts that range from the grounds of the school, to the fence of the Murrell home in Park Hill, to Tahlequah's bustling town center. Activities the young members of the Cherokee Nation are engaging in include the annual picnic organized for members of both Seminaries (fig. 4.25 / Appendix 2-A2.43), outings from Park Hill into Tahlequah (fig. 4.26 / Appendix 2-A2.12), a town festival in which Cobb's young peers dressed up to “play Indian” in the town square (fig. 4.27 / Appendix 2-A2.18), and indulging in the watermelon crop cultivated in Indian Territory (fig. 4.28 / Appendix 2-A2.20). Though Cobb's practice was still developing, there is nevertheless an overwhelming sense that

<sup>331</sup> “Tahlequah Celebrates”, *The Tahlequah Arrow*, 1.

<sup>332</sup> Lynda Nead, *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, photography, film, c. 1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 12.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

she brought her camera out into the community, and was keen to capture the everyday activities of her peers and surroundings.

This impetus places Cobb amongst numerous other women amateurs who were invited to take their cameras out into the world and photograph what was going on around them. Her participation in this trend is significant for a number of reasons. First, it positioned her as a modern consumer of the new camera technology that was otherwise used by outsiders to visualize Indigenous populations in order to bolster their own identities. Next, it provided a way for images of Indian Territory to emerge from within, situating the community that was so accustomed to being the subject of photographs, as producers. And lastly, Cobb's explorations with the camera have inadvertently diversified the visual record, leaving behind a vibrant chronicle of the transcultural community that comprised Indian Territory before it (forcibly) achieved statehood and became absorbed into the state of Oklahoma. This is evident in her unassuming snapshots that picture such momentous events as the arrival of the Dawes Commission in Indian Territory – a controversial historical event in which members of the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek / Muskogee, and Seminole tribes were asked to enroll their names on the Dawes Rolls to be eligible for membership in their own tribes. The infamous white tents are here captured by Cobb, whose name appears on the rolls, as a testament to her participation in the process (fig. 4.29 / Appendix 2-A2.82).

Cobb's presence with a camera at such events as the arrival of the Cherokee and Ozark railroad in Indian Territory and the Dawes Commission in the Cherokee Nation carries historical importance within the trajectory of Indigenous participation in photography. As the following section will analyze, her images have been re-situated in a recuperative effort that seeks to reclaim histories of the camera in Indigenous communities, and thus to establish a sovereign history of Indigenous photographic production. As curator and scholar Veronica Passalacqua explains, "key to establishing a sovereign, uniquely Indigenous, territory of Native photography is the documentation of a clearly defined history of Native peoples practising photography."<sup>334</sup> Cobb's name is one of very few from the nineteenth century that we have to reach for in working on a visual history such as this. As a woman photographer, she is in fairly good company, with over 100 nineteenth-century amateur and professional female practitioners of the

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<sup>334</sup> Passalacqua, "Finding Sovereignty through Relocation," 21.

medium listed in the Twin Territories alone.<sup>335</sup> However, add to this categorization her racial and cultural heritage, and she remains the earliest documented Native American woman photographer on record. It is this last point that has seen her contemporary launch into the public eye. While early Indigenous portraitists include the likes of Benjamin Haldane<sup>336</sup>, Horace Poolaw, Lee Marmon, and Richard Throssel, Cobb is the only woman whose name appears alongside these pioneering examples of early Indigenous involvement in the medium. As a result, scholars and curators have understandably been excited about the discovery of an early woman photographer to add to this expansive research.

#### 4.3: Curatorial Contexts: *Native Nations: Journeys in American Photography*

Within the realm of contemporary Indigenous photography, photographs that were intended for private use and later consulted as historical documents have since been lifted out of their idiomatic context to circulate as art objects, with new rhetorical meaning. Most notably, Cobb's photographs have been exhibited both in the United States and abroad in pursuit of a recuperative agenda that challenges perceived notions about the relationship between Indigenous peoples and photography. These exhibitions include the show *Native Nations: Journeys in American Photography* (Barbican, London, 1998), *New Territory: Women Behind the Camera in Oklahoma before 1907* (International Photography Hall of Fame and Museum, 2003), and *Our People, Our Land, Our Images: International Indigenous Photographers* (CN Gorman Museum and traveling, 2006). Unsurprisingly, Cobb's photographs of her peers at the Cherokee Female Seminary have been consistent favourites in each of these milieus.

Consulting Devon A. Mihesuah's dedicated research into the Cherokee Female Seminary has been productive in determining the ways in which Cobb's contemporary re-framing deviates from the world that produced her photographs in the first place. As Mihesuah's work shows, the culture and curricula developed at the seminary before, during, and after Cobb's time there was in place to support a so-called progressivist agenda. One of her key points centres on its exclusionary nature, designed as it was to

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<sup>335</sup> This figure was derived by photo-historian Chester Cowan of the Oklahoma Historical Society's photography archive department. See also Palmquist, *Women photographers in the collection of the Women in Photography International Archive*.

<sup>336</sup> For original work on Benjamin A. Haldane see Mique'l Icesis Askren, "Memories of Glass and Fire," in *Visual Currencies*, 91-109.

be “the ultimate expression of the progressive Cherokees’ desire for enlightenment and equality with whites.”<sup>337</sup> She makes a point to highlight that the young women’s time at the seminary was spent fostering a distinctly Cherokee identity (while acknowledging that “there were differences in opinion as to what a Cherokee really was”<sup>338</sup>).

Nevertheless, the character being fostered there was distinct from other federal boarding schools where a pan-Indigenous identity was encouraged among pupils from different tribal backgrounds and belongings. As Mihesuah points out, “children from many different tribes attended federal and mission schools at the same time, often resulting in pan-Indian identities.”<sup>339</sup> It is not difficult to imagine that the acculturation tactics enforced at institutions like Carlisle, where children had their hair cut and clothing replaced, would trigger a formation of the “pan-Indian” identity Mihesuah points to, for bonding and survival purposes if nothing else. By contrast, the progressivist mandate pushed at the seminary worked to set the young Cherokee student body apart from this shared identity altogether. As Chapter Two of this thesis explored, this exclusivity was made visual in the formal photography produced through the school – including Cobb’s images of her peers.

Contemporary exhibitions, however, have placed Cobb’s photographs in precisely the pan-Indigenous dialogue that Mihesuah argues was *avoided* in the Cherokee Female Seminary. In the exhibitions *Native Nations* and *Our People, Our Land, Our Images*, Cobb’s images appear alongside historical and contemporary photographs taken by Indigenous photographers from across the globe. These new expansive parameters have them interacting with expressions of identity and representation from a diversity of Indigenous cultural contexts.

From September 1998 to January 1999, the Barbican Art Gallery in London staged an exhibition entitled *Native Nations: Journeys in American Photography*. Curated by John Hoole in consultation with leading scholars and practitioners in the field, the exhibition explored the “representation of Native North Americans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the reclaiming of that medium by Native subjects in the 20<sup>th</sup> century”<sup>340</sup>, and presented “two inseparable parts of the same story; photographs of Native subjects, photographs by Native subjects.”<sup>341</sup> The exhibition attempted to visualize this position,

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<sup>337</sup> Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds*, 17.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>340</sup> Jane Alison and John Hoole, “Forward,” in *Native Nations*, 9.

<sup>341</sup> Jane Alison, “Introduction,” in *Native Nations*, 11.



and the accompanying catalogue extended the dialogue by inviting contemporary Indigenous scholars and artists to embark on interpretive journeys where hostile nineteenth-century visual contexts were reconfigured and twentieth-century “Native visions” were brought to the fore. From its inception, the images exhibited in *Native Nations* were staged as participants in a talking-back framework that, in many ways, pre-determined their contemporary function and eclipsed their unique and disparate historical contexts.

The exhibition’s whistle-stop tour through nineteenth-century photography of Indigenous subjects traced the ideological shifts in the production and reception of the images as the century came to a close. “Invaded Spaces”<sup>342</sup> began the journey, and included images from the government-sponsored photographic surveys that took place between 1850 and 1880. The selection highlights the topographical images of Andrew J. Russell, John K. Hillers, and Andrew Jackson with reluctant portraits taken by Alexander Gardner and various other government employees. “Theatre of Diplomacy” turned to a different kind of formal photography, focusing on the formal delegation portraiture taken in Washington, D.C. when Indigenous leaders and representatives made the journey east to negotiate with government officials. These included the delegation photographs taken by, most substantially, Julian Vannerson and Samuel Cohner of the James E. McClees Studio in Washington, D.C., as well as those of Charles Milton Bell and A. Zeno Shindler. “The American Dream” moved into the final two decades of the nineteenth century, when the distressing “vanishing race” ideology took hold of the American photographic imagination. “Desirable Objects” then explored the commodification of Indigenous portraiture, with particular attention on albumen prints, albums, and *carte-de-visites*. Focusing more substantially on the role of collectors, this section presented items in the collections of the French prince Roland Bonaparte, the British collectors Sir John Benjamin Stone and William Blackmore, and the ethnologist James Mooney. The exhibition’s first half culminated in Edward Curtis’s work *The North American Indian*, which was the sole focus of its final selection of settler photography. “Curious Curtis” presented a choice of portraits spanning 1904-1922 in Curtis’s signature high pictorial style and highlighted the problematic artistry and romanticism that photography was beginning to introduce into

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<sup>342</sup> The section titles are taken from the accompanying exhibition catalogue, and Claire Warrior’s citing of them in her review of the exhibition itself. See Claire Warrior, “Native Nations: Journeys in American photography,” *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, 12 (1999): 169-171.

Native American portraiture. Though the pictorial work of women photographers like Elizabeth Grinnell and Gertrude Käsebier pre-dates Curtis's ambitious project, *The North American Indian* nevertheless continues to be the most widely known corpus of portraits of Indigenous peoples compiled at the beginning of the twentieth century. Theresa Harlan, one of the scholars invited to write for the show's catalogue, indicates that the popularity of Curtis's romanticized portrayals contributed to a violent and erroneous myth. She argues, "allegorically picturesque photographs made the forced assimilation of Indigenous people palatable, righteous and even commemorative. Why else would the market demand annual Curtis wall calendars each year?"<sup>343</sup>

The second half of *Native Nations* attempted to respond to the diverse ways in which white photographers represented the Indigenous populations they met and interacted with throughout the nineteenth century. Influenced by Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie's seminal concept, this part of the exhibition was entitled "Photographic Sovereignty", and exhibited the work of ten Indigenous photographers whose work could paradoxically participate in this talking-back framework while also holding its own sovereign ground. This structure worked to respond to Gerald Vizenor's observation that mainstream society's fascination with the proverbial Indian led to the absence of actual Indigenous voices and visions as participants within the cultural sphere.<sup>344</sup> Here, the work of early Indigenous photographers came to stand in for a collective Indigenous presence in the context of photographic practices in the United States, while their contemporary counterparts responded to the camera's colonial history.

Early photography in this section ranged from Cobb's 1890s prints through Richard Throssell's from the early twentieth century, Horace Poolaw's from the late 1920s, and up to Lee Marmon whose images brought viewers into the 1960s. In their own ways, these photographers visualized the diversity of their communities with the intimacy of an insider's lens. Most of the photographs are deliberate, and some even appear staged; however, all of them escape the exacting genre classification that Curtis and his predecessors worked to establish for the better part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The representative selection of Cobb's photographs include the seminary portraits (see back to figs. 4.14, 4.19, and 4.21), as well as a print of her younger sister Anne standing with another family member around the back of the

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<sup>343</sup> Theresa Harlan, "Indigenous Photographies," in *Native Nations*, 235.

<sup>344</sup> Referenced in Alison, "Introduction," *Native Nations*, 13.

Murrell home (fig. 4.30 / Appendix 2-A2.6), and a group of peers sinking their teeth into slices of watermelon in Park Hill (see back to fig. 4.28). The inclusion of the picnic is an interesting selection from Cobb's (albeit limited) collection, and was chosen no doubt to include a light-hearted, fun, and relatable scene to contrast with the exhibition's troubling first half.

Given this contextual framework, Cobb's photographs are thus asked to function on multiple levels within the space of the exhibition's second half. Because of their positioning within the earlier timeframe, they were used as a symbol of Indigenous participation in early photographic output while also facilitating a later, contemporary movement that used them to break away from the canonical history of photography. Here, Cobb's snapshots appeared as some of the exhibition's earliest examples of an Indigenous perspective guiding the project of twentieth-century photographic sovereignty. They showed Sally Parish, Gazelle Scrap Lane, Mary Guleger, Pixie Mayes, and Elizabeth Vann Ross smiling out at what would, in the context of the Barbican exhibition, now be a predominantly British gallery-going public. They showed family members tentatively smiling behind the back gate of the Murrell home. They showed a watermelon picnic, that fraught symbol of the American South, with young Cherokee men and women perched on a fence in the hot sun biting into their slices and looking up at Cobb as she snapped her image.<sup>345</sup> In Tsinhnahjinnie's interpretive journey for the catalogue, a further selection shows her images of the railway and boardwalk and her peers strolling happily along each. When compared with Andrew J. Russell's bleak photograph of the long, empty Union Pacific railroad track east of Granite Canyon, included in the exhibition's first half, Cobb's image of a group of young women laughing and skipping along the Ozark and Cherokee Central, with the fabric of their skirts bunched into their hands and the abundance of their plumed hats shielding their faces from the sun, there does seem to be something to Jane Alison's claim that "the contrast between Native and non-Native images is [...] striking and moving"<sup>346</sup> (figs. 4.31-4.32).

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<sup>345</sup> PhD researcher at Rice University, William Black, has a forthcoming scholarly article exploring the emergence of the watermelon as a racist visual trope in the nineteenth century: William Black, "How Watermelons Became Black: Emancipation and the Origins of a Racist Trope," *Journal of the Civil War Era*, no. 8 (forthcoming June 2018). See his article for *The Atlantic* on this issue: "How Watermelons Became a Racist Trope," *The Atlantic*, 8 December 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/12/how-watermelons-became-a-racist-trope/383529/> (accessed 24 June 2017).

<sup>346</sup> Alison, "Introduction," 18.

What is the basis of this difference? For contributors to *Native Nations*, a recurring reference to the humanizing treatment of Indigenous sitters by photographers from within their own communities is a powerful starting-point in approaching this question. Harlan's discussion prioritizes the tenderness that can only be achieved with an insider's perspective when she describes the work of Richard Throssel, Horace Poolaw and Lee Marmon as presenting "humanizing and self-affirming representations of Native people."<sup>347</sup> Alison's introductory remarks refer to Poolaw and Marmon's work as "sensitive and affirmative" work that, because taken within their own communities, is able to access and communicate a discernable "degree to which intimacy and friendship exists between subject and photographer."<sup>348</sup> Tsinnahjinnie ascribes a similar reading to Cobb's much earlier snapshots when she writes,

The 19<sup>th</sup> century photographer who I believe truly imaged Native women with love, and a humanizing eye is Jennie Ross Cobb (Aniyunwiya). Photographs of Native women at the Aniyunwiya [Cherokee] women's seminary, images of Native women living in the contemporary, relaxed poses, smiling to a friend. Photographs by a Native woman photographing Native women at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, images Curtis, Vroman, Hillers and the many others could not even begin to emulate, when the eye of the beholder possesses love for the beheld.<sup>349</sup>

Thus the "humanizing eye" that emerges in comparative analyses of early photographs taken from within Indigenous communities with those taken from outside grounds the contemporary revival of Cobb's early snapshots.

The inclusion of Cobb alongside Throssel, Poolaw, and Marmon points to the contemporary push to redefine the parameters of Indigenous photography through the establishment of a historical trajectory. In this context, Cobb's unassuming snapshots of her friends and peers were used to very different ends than those intended, if at all, when they were taken. Joan Jensen uses them to stress that "Cobb's Cherokee women defied the stereotypical photographic views of Native women of the time. They were posed, self-assured, fashionable, confident carriers of two cultures and extremely proud of their Cherokee heritage."<sup>350</sup> Mick Gidley describes them as casual and intimate, "each evocative of leisurely movement and full of signs of their emergent middle class status."<sup>351</sup> Similarly, Paula E. Calvin and Deborah A. Deacon suggest that "she chose to

<sup>347</sup> Harlan, "Indigenous Photographies," 235.

<sup>348</sup> Alison, "Introduction," 18.

<sup>349</sup> Tsinnahjinnie, "When is a photograph worth a thousand words?," 53.

<sup>350</sup> Joan Jensen, "Native American Women Photographers as Storytellers," New Mexico State University, 1998, <http://www.cla.purdue.edu/waaw/jensen/NAW/html> (accessed 3 July 2014).

<sup>351</sup> Gidley, "Modern Indian American Photography," 265.

show them as modern young women, fashionable and seemingly self-assured. She understood the power of the photographer to create an impression, recording not defeated warriors but young women adapting to their new lives.”<sup>352</sup> This last reference to “defeated warriors” is an unnecessary embellishment and it is unlikely Cobb’s peers were going through a period of “adapting” in their turn-of-the century context, however the observation that Cobb’s images counteracted popular stereotypes aligns with the overall critical reception of her photographs.

#### 4.4 Curatorial Contexts: *Our People, Our Land, Our Images: International Indigenous Photography*

Cobb’s group portrait of seminary students appeared once again in the 2006 exhibition *Our People, Our Land, Our Images: International Indigenous Photography*, which was mounted first at the C.N. Gorman Museum in California and later toured around the United States. This image was again the earliest image in the exhibition – and she excitingly was presented as the first known Indigenous female photographer – and was thus a starting point for the construction of an Indigenous photographic history and trajectory. Like *Native Nations*, The Gorman Museum press release articulated some of the same interpretive conclusions in stating that Cobb’s works “raise critical distinctions between those photographing their own communities from the inside, with familiarity and respect; and other non-Natives photographing at this time on behalf of the government, expansionism, or academic research.”<sup>353</sup>

The exhibition was bookended with sections entitled “Our Past” where Cobb’s images appeared, and “Our Future”, where images from emerging Indigenous artists were shown. Within this framework, the exhibition presented work from twenty-six Indigenous photographers from North America, Iraq, Peru, and New Zealand in a globalized interpretive context in which pan-Indigenous modes of expression and self-representation were able to shine independently of the colonial histories put front and centre in *Native Nations*. Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie was a key figure in the exhibition and catalogue, and quipped that finally an Indigenous photographic presence could be

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<sup>352</sup> Calvin and Deacon, *American Women Artists in Wartime*, 74.

<sup>353</sup> C.N. Gorman Museum press release, “Our People, Our Land, Our Images: International Indigenous Photographers,” University of California Davis, 2006, <http://gormanmuseum.ucdavis.edu/Exhibitions/Previous/IPC/IPC2.thm> (accessed 1 November 2014).

established “without wasting precious time on countering Western philosophy.”<sup>354</sup> This comment articulates Tsinhnahjinnie’s long-term engagement with photographic sovereignty – a term she coined to refer to the process of recuperating photographic representation within diverse processes of Indigenous image-making. This foundational concept utilizes the term “sovereignty” – evocative of the struggle for self-governance and the right to ancestral land characteristic of early and ongoing Indigenous-settler relations – to politicize the history of photography, and insist on new interpretive tactics.<sup>355</sup> Photographic sovereignty as a theoretical concept circulating within a larger network of Indigenous photographers thus asks us to reconsider the relationship between Indigenous peoples and photography, and to liberate the medium’s contemporary use from its colonial beginnings.<sup>356</sup>

In her brief biographical essay on Cobb for the exhibition, Jensen presents the young photographer as independent, and intensely interested in photography from an unusually young age. As her practice developed, Jensen stresses that Cobb’s photographs, for their dynamic portrayal of young Cherokee women “as if in movement” were a departure from the formal poses usually expected in Indigenous photographic portraiture. “The technique here is precise and accomplished”, she writes; “They are lively, dynamic, and engaging photographs.”<sup>357</sup> Critical reception for the show echoed this sentiment. A review for the *American Indian Quarterly* presents the exhibition and catalogue as an “extraordinary, and very bittersweet” counter-narrative.<sup>358</sup> Scholar Mary K. Bowannie describes the experience of viewing the early photographs, including Cobb’s, as “exciting”, stating that “The images leapt off the page and were rich with the stories of what was going on with the people or the community. Rather than being frozen images in time, these photographs are still very

<sup>354</sup> Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie, “Preface”, in *Our People, Our Land, Our Images*, x.

<sup>355</sup> Articles Tsinhnahjinnie produced between 2003 and 2009 reveal an evolving definition of the concept. In her article “When is a photograph worth a thousand words?” she describes the term as experiential, taking responsibility to reinterpret historical images of Indigenous peoples and establishing roots for the concept within the historical archive. Her preface for the catalogue of the exhibition *Our People, Our Land, Our Images* (2006) turns more substantially towards an act of doing, and thus turning toward the sovereign act of photographing itself. In 2007, her article for the catalogue of the Eiteljorg Fellowship for Native American Fine Art incorporated her personal narratives into a broader discussion of global Indigenous consciousness, stressing a responsibility to community through the activation of visual sovereignty. Finally, her 2009 text for *Visual Currencies* combines both personal and community connections to the term, pointing to its fluidity, its development, and its endless potential for innovation.

<sup>356</sup> For an extended study of photographic sovereignty in the context of Tsinhnahjinnie’s work, see Emma Doubt, “Portraits Against Amnesia: Archival Recuperation in the work of Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie,” *World Art* 6, no. 1 (2015): 19-44.

<sup>357</sup> Jensen, “Jennie Ross Cobb,” 4.

<sup>358</sup> Mary K. Bowannie, “Our People, Our Land, Our Images: International Indigenous Photographers (review),” *The American Indian Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 566.

much alive. [...] The people and images are as alive as the day the photographs were taken.”<sup>359</sup> Another review for the show’s more recent appearance at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum in Norman, Oklahoma, published interviews with Veronica Passalacqua, artist Shan Goshorn (represented in the exhibit), and Heather Ahtone, the museum’s assistant curator of Native American and non-Western art. For Ahtone, Cobb’s image was one of the most striking. She describes the young women as fashionable, and thus challenging the impulse to assume that “in the 1900s, Indians looked a certain way.”<sup>360</sup> She muses,

She was a Cherokee woman using a fairly new medium at that time in Indian Territory [...] documenting her classmates going to school at an institution of higher learning that was established by her tribal community [...] at a time when for many other women in the country that wouldn’t have been an opportunity. [...] That’s a perspective that in history sometimes gets lost, yet this photography allows us to re-engage that historical factor.<sup>361</sup>

“Our Future” explored where the field of Indigenous photography might be headed, after reviewing where it came from and how it emerged. The work of one artist in particular is especially provocative when exploring the historical trajectory whose beginnings Cobb has been recruited to represent. Erica Lord is an Athabaskan/Inupiaq artist who uses her own body in much of her work to explore issues of identity and belonging. Her work *The Tanning Project* was represented in the exhibition’s final act. In this series, Lord tanned four provocative phrases onto her skin and posed her body for the camera (fig. 4.33). “Indian Looking”, “Half Breed”, “Colonize Me” and “I Tan To Look More Native” participate in Lord’s ongoing commitment to exploring her personal relationship to her own transcultural background, and the ways in which photography has participated in the exoticization of Indigenous female bodies.

An analysis of Cobb’s image alongside Lord’s provides a clear example of the dialogue that Cobb’s images have been asked to participate in. Cobb’s photographs of her peers wearing lavish European hats in front of their school was the earliest photograph included in the show, introducing a starting point for the concept of photographic sovereignty in the section entitled “Our Past”; and Erica Lord’s *Tanning Project* was included in “Our Future” – an example of the kind of paces contemporary Indigenous photography has taken (figs. 4.34-4.35). Though the two photographers are worlds apart, considering their photographs side by side is useful in understanding the

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> Interview quoted in Brandy McDonnell, “Our People, Our Land, Our Images opens at Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art in Norman,” *NewsOK*, 11 April 2014.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid.

continued complexities that disavowal and association continue to play in visualizing identity within Indigenous milieus. Whereas Cobb's photographs have been celebrated because of the narrative of alternative identity projections they tell, Lord's self-portrait is a powerful comment on the relationship between identifying and being-identified-as – a legacy that continues to haunt Indigenous contexts.

The blunt statement tanned into Lord's skin in *I Tan To Look More Native* calls attention to a state of un-belonging thrust on any subject defined only by their racial or cultural visibility. It materializes the cultural violence that nineteenth-century ethnographic photography enacted on Indigenous bodies when it assigned a stringent set of visual rules onto a huge diversity of cultures and belongings. It also directly addresses that recurring comment and question about the projection of identity through visual means – what is particularly “Cherokee” about Cobb's photographs? – that has come up time and again in pursuing this research. Crucial to the empowerment of Lord's photographic subject playing out in front of the camera is her place behind it, so that the image is at once a self-portrait, an embodied statement about race and belonging, and a reclaiming of the camera back from colonial hands.

The dialogic re-framing of Cobb's photographs in this space was thus intended as an example of photographic sovereignty at work. It placed Cobb's images within a new trajectory that could seek her out as a possible point of origin that could facilitate eventual conversations about Indigenous photographic sovereignty pursued in images like Lord's. Here, Cobb's images of her peers invoke a powerful reaction beyond what she herself could have anticipated when she took them. For Tsinhnahjinnie, the assumed relationship between subject and photographer – the beholder and the beheld – in Cobb's images is what humanizes her “eye” beyond what any outsider was capable of. Though few, if any, substantial details have been circulated about the visual and cultural context through which Cobb's snapshots emerged, her very presence with a camera in late nineteenth-century Indian Territory is taken to be an example of the “photographic sovereignty” that artists and scholars like Tsinhnahjinnie have striven to make room for in an otherwise stubborn photographic canon.

However utopian this framework may be, it does not account for the “western philosophy” that was actively and intentionally produced in generations of Ross family portraiture. Given the idiomatic historical context that produced Cobb's photographs in the first place – the rise of amateur women's photography in the United States, and the modern contexts and frameworks that Cobb pursued in her images – re-contextualizing



her as the embodiment of an “Indigenous perspective” does little to address the complexities of transculturation that were pervasive in Indian Territory before statehood, and within the Ross family itself. Further, this re-framing has not considered Cobb’s other major professional pursuit in her involvement as a curator of the Murrell home in any substantial way, or the complex histories that the site invokes in its multiple personalities as a historic site, Ross family history depository, and pre-Civil War plantation, focusing instead on her contribution as a photographer. Engaging in the complexities of this history, especially given the Ross family’s insistence on visualizations of affluence and modernity, opens up greater possibilities in understanding the diversity of identities and visual allegiances that proliferated in Indigenous communities when photography started to appear.

### Conclusion

Jennie Ross Cobb continued to be a keen photography enthusiast late into her life (fig. 4.36). Before she died in the 1950s, a local journalist was working on an extended study of the Murrell home, including the important role that Cobb’s photographs played in its restoration and re-imagining. While Mary Elizabeth Good left behind extensive photographic documentation of the Murrell home’s interior in its late 1950s iteration, an extended study on Cobb never transpired. Renewed interest in Cobb’s photographs started to appear as part of the 1980s surge in scholarship dedicated to Indigenous photography, and developing a critical framework for a long and fraught legacy of invasive photography practices within Indigenous communities. As this chapter explored, part of this recuperative effort involved documenting Indigenous participation in the medium of photography itself. While the symbolic significance of the camera is on par with that of the train in terms of its paramount importance to the modernization of the frontier in the nineteenth century, its reclamation within Indigenous philosophies and representative systems continues to be concerned with the damaging representative practices established in its early days on the frontier. Given this history, the excitement of a young Indigenous photographer using the technology to her own ends and within her own community amongst the droves of documentary lenses that were encroaching at the time, is immediately understandable.

Nevertheless, much of the contemporary attention Cobb’s photographs have received have done little to extend beyond this excitement and situate her photographic

pursuits within the long-standing participation of the Ross family in modern visual practices. Just as the Ozark and Cherokee Central Railroad extended into Indian Territory, placing it “on a pinnacle with the modern world”, so too did the burgeoning world of amateur women’s photography. Neglecting this, and neglecting the long legacy of Ross family participation in the commissioning of visual works that portrayed them as active and affluent modern figures, does little to redress the historical imbalance that contemporary contexts seek to undermine. Further, the transcultural context that the Ross family inhabited from its arrival in Indian Territory in the 1830s complicates any attempt to position Cobb as representative of a sovereign Indigenous voice.

## Conclusion

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Edward Curtis turned his camera outwards to mythologize the perceived degradation of a homogenous “traditional” Indigeneity in the United States. The visual language he developed within the parameters of photographic pictorialism was perpetuated in previous and subsequent documentary photography, and was echoed in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century editorials that worried about the future of Indigenous populations – a conceit described in Renato Rosaldo’s term “imperialist nostalgia”, in which “agents of colonialism [...] mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed.”<sup>362</sup> Gerald Vizenor’s powerful articulation of the concept of Indigenous survivance denounces this legacy. A deliberate distortion of the word “survival” into an active narrative stance, Vizenor describes the term as “an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name.”<sup>363</sup> Though Vizenor is preoccupied with the world of literary story telling, his proposal holds true within the visual arts, and the stories relayed therein. Tragic heroes were painted into Stanley’s canvases and Curtis’s prints just as they were spun into words.

Indeed, part of the “fakery” of Curtis’s images was his deliberate neglect of one important, necessary component of the transformation; namely, modernity. Modernity in its complex variants was something to be survived and resisted, but also integrated and reformulated. This much is declared in Narcissa Owen’s indignation at a 1904 write-up about her Jefferson portraits, in which she points out that the public of her time was regularly “misled” about the communities that populated Indian Territory.<sup>364</sup> Similarly, the public persona projected by Chief John Ross through his portraiture worked to promote an image of his tribe that was coherent with his own portrayal: educated, urbane, industrious, modern. As Chapter One of this thesis explored, the portraiture commissioned within the Ross family during a moment of heightened colonial sensibilities in the realm of the visual arts, pictures a family whose public priorities were visualized through private portraiture. This extensive suite of family portraits is demonstrative of the control and agency that they exercised as sitters and

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<sup>362</sup> Renato Rosaldo, “Imperialist Nostalgia,” *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 108.

<sup>363</sup> Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives of Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1999), vii.

<sup>364</sup> Owen, *A Cherokee Woman’s America*, 133.

commissioners, despite a visual record that would have us thinking otherwise. In this way, the portraiture and material culture analyzed throughout this thesis conveys an important message about self-identification amidst the restrictive visual language being circulated by outsiders at the time.

As with any cultural context, concurrent accounts exist and co-mingle. A short drive from the Murrell home will bring you to Park Hill's Cherokee Heritage Centre where a very different historical site – telling a very different side of Cherokee history to the one examined here – is located. Diligwa is an outdoor living history site that recreates life at an eighteenth-century Cherokee village (fig. 5.1). Visitors can tour the grounds and participate in traditional activities including basket making and stickball, and historical interpreters living in one of the site's eight residential structures guide them through numerous recreational and learning stations. The village is comprised of nineteen interpretive spaces set up across the four acres of land attached to the Cherokee Heritage Centre museum. It also includes communal cornfields where the village would have been supplied with corn, bean, and squash. At the unveiling of the newly restored site in 2013, Principal Chief Bill John Baker stressed the site's emphasis on Cherokee culture in an early-contact era. "I look forward to hundreds of thousands of Cherokees and non-Cherokees being able to come to this village and see what it was really like", he stated in an interview at the opening ceremony for the site; "I think it will be an opportunity for a learning lesson for a lot of folks to realize that we had a pretty fabulous culture, even before contact."<sup>365</sup>

The site was first conceived of in 1967, nearly two decades after Jennie Ross Cobb began her own work reviving the Murrell home. In this earlier iteration, Diligwa's emphasis was on reconstructing a principal village in the Cherokee's original homeland in the southeast, before European contact. Emphasis on the pre-contact era thus provided a dramatically different perspective on Cherokee culture than did the Murrell home mansion just a short drive away. Diligwa's re-opening in 2013 adjusted the site to reflect a more historically accurate version of 1710 – a date chosen specifically for the bustling trade activity that was occurring at this point in the eighteenth century.

Nevertheless, the series of wattle and daub structures that comprise the site still feel a world away from the two-story Murrell mansion with its oil portraits, mahogany furniture and silk damask curtains. As Chapter Two of this thesis explored, the historic

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<sup>365</sup> Principal Chief Bill John Baker, interview for the Cherokee Nation News on the event of Diligwa's reopening, 4 June 2013.

antebellum home functioned on many levels as it moved through time and as various branches of the Ross family lived there. To name only a few, it served as the home of a wealthy merchant and the Ross sisters who he shared the home with; as a site of labour and production; as a symbolic beacon of progress in the “Athens of Indian Territory”; and, later, as a commemorative site in which Ross family relics told the story of the Cherokee Nation in its post-removal revival. Further, the countless distinguished guests, among them military and political figures, aristocrats, government representatives, artists and writers, and the many dinners, weddings, births, and deaths that occurred at the home imbue the space with a profound sense of history. If Diligwa commemorates a way of life for many Cherokee traditionalists in the eighteenth century, the Murrell home is a dramatic awakening to generations of transculturation and intermarriage amongst the Cherokee. And, while Diligwa’s principal architect stressed that the site was “for the Cherokee, about the Cherokee, and it *is* Cherokee”<sup>366</sup>, the Murrell home’s transcultural history stakes a far more complicated claim.

Poignantly, Diligwa has been built on the land where the first Cherokee Female Seminary stood, and three original columns from the school’s Greek Revival palladian colonnade façade stand tall just outside the gate leading into the village (fig. 5.2). In Chapter Three, the thesis turned to the composite versions of photographic identity expressed through the young women in attendance at the school. Whether dressed in silk, lace, and plumed hats, “playing Indian” for the Chautauqua stage, or posing for a statuary hall sculpture of the nation’s beloved Sequoyah, the visual record produced and influenced by the seminary evidences a complex reckoning with historical accounts. As another Ross descendant, historian Carolyn Ross Johnston writes,

Cherokee women who were in the upper class increasingly viewed education as a vehicle of success. They adopted many of white society’s Victorian values of morality, culture, and progress. They also cultivated the domestic arts and adopted outward symbols of gentility and respectability, from their style of dress to the ways in which they furnished their houses.<sup>367</sup>

The school was instrumental in constructing the necessary “outward symbols of gentility and respectability”, as its photographic record evidences. The juxtaposition of one of the nation’s proudest symbols of advancement and progress in the school’s original columns and Diligwa’s re-creation of life before colonial encroachment is thus

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<sup>366</sup> Diligwa chief architect, Charles ‘Chief’ Boyd, speaking at the Diligwa opening ceremony, Cherokee Nation News, 4 June 2013.

<sup>367</sup> Johnston, *Voices of Cherokee Women*, 215.

a fitting metaphor for the complex and competing influences at work across Cherokee history.

The final chapter of this thesis focused on the photography of Jennie Ross Cobb, positioning her first within the idiomatic historical context that produced her photographs in the first place, and comparing that context with contemporary exhibition frameworks that have reclaimed her photographs to entirely different ends. Equipped with the theoretical tools of survivance and sovereignty, contemporary practices have found new use and new meaning in Cobb's intimate snapshots of daily life in the Cherokee Nation's capital. Placed in curatorial contact zones and consulted for their historic testament to Indigenous photographic production that intervenes in overtly biased colonial narratives, Cobb's unassuming portrayals have been tasked with reconfiguring the visual record.

Both Diligwa and the Murrell home are cherished historical sites in the Cherokee Nation today. Just as their sites are maintained concurrently, and share the same five-mile radius, their respective versions of history and modernity – though visually disparate – are closely intertwined. Their status as living history sites is an especially concrete conjuring of Vizenor's conception of Indigenous survivance as it is enacted through storytelling and "active presence." In September of 2016, Murrell home community members were invited into the home's gift shop – once George Murrell's library, with a reproduction of Sequoyah's portrait later adorning its walls – to learn about the history of corn in the nation ("before Christopher Columbus decided to get lost", the speaker duly noted).<sup>368</sup> "Selu", or the Corn Mother, was the first woman in Cherokee mythology, and the spiritual significance of corn is therefore an integral part of its cultivation. It was also a crop that continued to be cultivated with the introduction of modern agriculture, as images shown by the historian running the meeting attest. As agriculture modernized, and as colonial presence continued to encroach, corn was joined by other crops. As Theda Purdue writes of the eighteenth-century Cherokee context, "Metal hoes made the job easier, but the work remained the same. Agricultural production had expanded to include a number of crops introduced by Europeans and Africans. These included watermelons, onions, collards, fruit trees, and even a little cotton."<sup>369</sup> Over a century later, Jennie Ross Cobb would photograph her friends and family members sinking their teeth into watermelon slices on the fence surrounding the

<sup>368</sup> Friends of the Murrell Home meeting, Park Hill, Oklahoma, 8 September 2016, author notes.

<sup>369</sup> Theda Purdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change*, 116.

Murrell home – a fitting image of the deep roots of transcultural processes at work, quite literally from the ground up.

As the Friends of the Murrell Home meeting attests, the home continues to be used as a dynamic site dedicated to the celebration of Cherokee culture and history in its complex and variant forms. While it once represented a beacon of progress in a rapidly modernizing world, rituals like this one, held amidst the portraiture and finery that attest to that status but centred on the sacredness of Selu, also create links to the world explored at Diligwa. There is a poem about how to plant corn seeds that was recounted as the evening came to a close. In many ways, its four short verses resonate with the seeds of history that continue to be cultivated there:

One for the black bird,

One for the crow,

One to let rot...

...And one to let grow.

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## APPENDIX 1

Edited and abridged selection of major historical furnishings, art objects, and portraits in the Murrell Home's current display, by room. Descriptions and data for these objects are based on the Murrell Home's collection software, and consultations with current and former curators conducted in 2014 and 2016.

This appendix is abridged and edited, and includes a selection of art, furnishings, and domestic objects that were in the original Murrell residence, as well as objects that belonged to John Ross and Lewis Ross, and objects that were secured under the curatorship of Jennie Ross Cobb.

**Parlour****A1.1 Sofa**

**Date:** c. 1835

**Description:** Rosewood and fabric, veneer, winged Griffin foot, upholstered with design of pomegranate and acanthus leaves.

**Acquisition:** 1961

**A1.2 Oval Occasional Table**

**Date:** c. 1850s

**Description:** Oval occasional table made of walnut wood and marble.

**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, mid-1950s

**A1.3 Music Rack / "Whatnot"**

**Date:** 1830s

**Description:** Elizabethan style. Four-square tiered shelves spaced by spindles at back and front legs. Two-knob drawer with handmade dovetails and veneer front.

**Acquisition:** 1985

**A1.4 Corner cabinet**

**Date:** c. 1850

**Description:** Rococo style with Gothic elements. Cabinet doors with glass Gothic style windows, two in each door, one shelf in bottom, two in top. Pediment is with acanthus leaves at sides and fruit in center. Undecorated except for molding around windows ending with onion dome at top. Bottom glass cabinet doors are covered in walnut veneer.

**Acquisition:** 1985

**A1.5 Piano**

**Date:** 1840s

**Description:** Rosewood or mahogany veneer; ivory. Made by John Pethick. Restoration style with Gothic elements. Square grand is actually rectangular and has 43 ivory keys,

31 black keys. Large octagon feet with grooved rings at base and top. Insert gothic onion dome design at each end of front. Music rack and hanged front fold up to close. Lyre pedestal design for foot pedals.

**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, mid-1950s

#### A1.6 Portrait – George M. Murrell

**Date:** c. 1844

**Description:** Oil on canvas; frame gold leaf gilded, 46 x 39 ins. (with frame). Portrait (bust) of George M. Murrell, seated, in a black coat, white shirt, and black cravat, facing left. Gold painted frame with gold leaf underneath.

**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, c. 1959

#### A1.7 Portrait – Minerva Ross Murrell

**Date:** c. 1844

**Description:** Oil on canvas; frame gold leaf gilded, 46 x 39 ins. (with frame). Portrait of Minerva Ross Murrell, seated, wearing an off-the-shoulder V-neck black dress, facing right. Gold painted frame with gold leaf underneath.

**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, c. 1959

#### A1.8 Sofa – John Ross

**Date:** 1860s

**Description:** Camelback sofa upholstered in brown cloth with a fleur-de-lys pattern.

**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, mid-1950s

#### A1.9 Table – John Ross

**Date:** 1860s

**Description:** Rococo revival. Wood (mahogany), marble top, brass casters. Matches étagère.

**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, mid-1950s

#### A1.10 Étagère – John Ross

**Date:** 1860s

**Description:** Wood étagère with mirror and marble top.

**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, 1957

#### A1.11 Silk Damask Curtains

**Date:** c. 1850s

**Description:** Green and red silk damask curtains with floral design, with pink silk gimp ties.

**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, 1950s

## **Sitting Room**

### **A1.12 Bed / Canopy**

**Date:** c. 1840

**Description:** Mahogany, veneer, brass.

**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, 1954

### **A1.13 Wardrobe**

**Date:** c. 1840

**Description:** Restoration Style with gothic design and arch incising on doors. Brass escutcheon on each side.

**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, 1954

### **A1.14 Chest of Drawers**

**Date:** c. 1840

**Description:** Handmade in the Restoration Style. Burl veneer on the drawers, brass keyhole on each, and ogee feet.

**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, 1954

### **A1.15 Washstand**

**Date:** c. 1840

**Description:** Handmade in the Restoration Style. Mahogany veneer, brass, marble.

**Acquisition:** before 1977

### **A1.16 Sofa**

**Date:** c. 1840s

**Description:** Mahogany wood, cotton batting, webbing, damask cover, with fabric-covered arms and wooden serpentine scrolling. Was originally upholstered in deep rose damask with a bird's eye design.

**Acquisition:** 1985

### **A1.17 Portrait – Fannie Holt Ross**

**Date:** c. 1840

**Description:** A bust pose of Minerva and Amanda's mother, Fannie Holt Ross. Frame is gilded or gold-painted wood.

**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, mid-1950s.

### **A1.18 Portrait – Lewis Ross**

**Date:** mid-1830s

**Description:** Painting of Lewis Ross dressed in black coat, white shirt, black vest and black cravat. Gold leaf frame. Donor believes artist to be Ralph Earle II (1788-1837), done on the east coast before the Trail of Tears.

**Acquisition:** 2009

#### A1.19 Photograph – John Ross and Mary B. Stapler

**Date:** c. 1840s

**Description:** Bust photograph of John and Mary B. Stapler Ross. Wooden frame with pressed mold design on gesso, five decorative surfaces with silver and gold gilt overlay. Print of 1844 daguerreotype of Ross's wedding picture.

**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, 1957

#### A1.20 Photograph – John Ross

**Date:** 1880s

**Description:** Photograph of John Ross taken by Frederick Gutekunst. Oval, wood frame with gesso overlay gilded with raised decoration on three surfaces. Tinted photograph on matte board. Wooden back cover has label with origin in Philadelphia and "1862" penciled at top. Print of the original photograph by Gutekunst.

**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, 1957

### Dining Room

#### A1.21 Dining Room Table

**Date:** 1880s

**Description:** Mahogany dining table, oval in shape, with three inserted leaves.

**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, mid-1950s

#### A1.22 Sofa

**Date:** unknown

**Description:** Tapestry, cotton, webbing, mahogany veneer, steel springs. Design of upholstery is diamond pattern with red flowers, green leaves and brown stems, with small diamond at each corner connecting with red and green in center. Inset of fleur-de-lys design.

**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, mid-1950s

#### A1.23 Sideboard

**Date:** 1830s

**Description:** Sideboard base is mahogany veneer over walnut with marble top. Three drawers at the top, each with keyholes, three cupboards below. Walnut cupboard above has three doors with glass windows, round at top.

**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, 1952-54

#### A1.24 Cabinet

**Date:** c. 1860s

**Description:** Rococo Revival. Marble top server cabin (white and gray). Wood (walnut) has two drawers, two doors in front, one shelf inside. Hand carved drawer pulls and elongated oval design is applied on drawer fronts, machine-made round dowels. Each



door has one inset oval panel, round escutcheons; rounded corners on frame with square inset panel on each side.

**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, 1957

A1.25 Sugar bowl and Creamer (Part of silver tea set)

**Date:** c. 1830-1833

**Description:** Part of a silver tea and coffee set created by Taunton Britannia Co. Rococo Design. On one side, ivy vines and berries are etched, on the other side strawberry vines and berries. Legs have lion heads at the top and curve in to form paws at the bottom.

**Acquisition:** 1985

A1.26 Dinner Set – John Ross

**Date:** 1850s

**Description:** Ceramic dinner set from the John Ross Household (Rose Cottage). Includes bowls, dinner plates, and platters, white base colour with blue glaze; small pink and green floral pattern.

**Acquisition:** 2004

A1.27 Crystal sugar bowl – John Ross

**Date:** 1850s

**Description:** A crystal sugar bowl and detachable lid. The crystal is highlighted with ruby coloring. Part of a set with a matching creamer, teapot, and coffee pot.

**Acquisition:** 2004

A1.28 Atomizer

**Date:** date unknown

**Description:** Perfume bottle, cut glass or clear crystal. Base of neck has hexagon shape cut into base, glass cut along base, running up sides. Stopper has silver top with rounded beading around edge and glass bottom to slide into bottle. “Sterling 804” is stamped in silver.

**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, mid-1950s

A1.29 Quorn Hunt Lithographs

**Date:** c. 1835

**Description:** Heavy rag paper, imprint, watercolor. Lithographs depicting the Quorn Hunt, including *The Meet*; *Drawing Cover*; *Tally Ho! And Away!*; *The pace begins to tell*; *Snob is beat*; *Full-cry second horses*; *The Whissendine appears in view*; and *The Death*. Artist: Henry Atkin, engraver: F.C. Lewis, publisher: Rudolph Ackerman.

**Acquisition:** 2001

## **East Bedroom**

### **A1.30 Bed**

**Date:** c. 1880

**Description:** Bed is handmade, inset paneled headboard with outward curving scroll at top. True side rails with spacing on inside for light seats, which complete the set.

**Acquisition:** 1996

### **A1.31 Dresser – John Ross**

**Date:** date unknown

**Description:** Walnut dresser with marble top, four drawers below, top drawer serpentine with applied decoration and round escutcheon. Dovetails in drawers are hand-made. Incised serpentine corners at front. Oval mirror at top has decorated motifs at top and bottom of frame; mirror held in place by elaborately hand-carved scrollwork and leaf brackets above marble top.

**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, 1957

### **A1.32 Sewing Machine**

**Date:** date unknown

**Description:** Sewing machine and stand. Oak cabinet, iron legs and head, curved oak veneer cover for head. Four drawers with ring pulls. Treadle machine with wood extension to lift into place on the left. The drawers contain the instruction book, needle case, bobbin and case and several attachments. Swing out door in center front.

**Acquisition:** 2014

### **A1.33 Pastel painting – John Ross**

**Date:** c. 1870

**Description:** Pastel portrait in wood frame, rectangular. Bust of Chief John Ross. Frame is gold painted and wood inlay. Identical to Vannerson / Shindler catalogue photograph 1858.

**Acquisition:** 2004

## **West Bedroom**

### **A1.34 Wardrobe**

**Date:** c. 1853

**Description:** Rococo style. Rosewood lined with maple or painted wood runners. Large double doors have inset mirror opening on veneer interior of amber color. Decorated with Della robin swag or print, flowers, 4 nuts. Two finials at top centered with elaborate picture of fruit and leaves.

**Acquisition:** 1950s

### **A1.35 Chest of Drawers**

**Date:** c. 1850

**Description:** Rococo style. High with mirror and beveled edges. Dresser has marble top 1 ½” thick. Below top of dresser and bottom just before apron is heavy, carving on both. Apron on sides have rounded legs in front and square in back. Sides have serpentine on wide apron. Mirror frame is ornately carved.

**Acquisition:** 1950s

#### A1.36 Table

**Date:** c. 1850

**Description:** Rococo style. Slate topped table with four set-in legs extending into stretchers meeting in the middle, Slate is deep gray colour.

**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, 1950s

#### A1.37 Desk – John Ross

**Date:** c. 1860s

**Description:** Wood (walnut) has lid on left side which raises from use position, inset of black oilcloth. Spindle gallery at back on left; right top is solid with drawer above slotted compartments. Lid locks to desk compartment, pull drawer on right has machine-made round dowels. Three inset panels at front. Four decorative turned legs.

**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, 1957

#### A1.38 Lincoln Chair

**Date:** c. 1850-1860

**Description:** Wood, thread, metal. For squib backing, cotton, thread, springs, netting. “Lincoln Chair”. Transfer information states: “This small upholstered chair was given to Mrs. Martha H Flick by Mrs. U.S. Grant, wife of President Grant.” It is said to have been President Lincoln’s favorite chair while he was in the White House.

**Acquisition:** 1950s

#### A1.39 Portrait – Mary Jane Ross

**Date:** c. 1844

**Description:** Portrait of Mary Jane Ross, sister of Minerva and Amanda Ross Murrell. Believed to have been painted on the east coast while Mary Jane Ross was attending school. She was 17 or 18 (born in 1827). Hung in the Lewis Ross home in Salina, Indian Territory.

**Acquisition:** 1993

### South Bedroom

#### A1.40 Bed

**Date:** unknown

**Description:** Walnut four-poster bed. Solid wood frame, dark color. Each post is an octagonal column with round hand-carved balls on top. Bottom of the legs have been cut down from their original height.

**Acquisition:** 2004

A1.41 Roll top desk**Date:** unknown**Description:** Oak wood and brass. Other wood painted or stained and varnished.**Acquisition:** Jennie Ross Cobb, 1950sA1.42 Trunk**Date:** c. 1850s**Description:** Wood traveling trunk with a copper / brass lock on the lid. Wood interior covered in cotton. Two lift-out compartments, wood covered in cloth, and has a metal turn latch on each end. Creator Cor. G Banes maker Philadelphia Lock pat. 1854**Acquisition:** 1950sA1.43 Screen**Date:** c. 1890s**Description:** One of a set. Both screens are “oriental” in design but differ slightly in pattern. Made of dark mahogany. Four legs, 12” in height. Elaborately carved wooden design of flowers and leaves surround the entire screen. The top 7 ins. also has an elaborately carved wooden design depicting a dragon. The interior design depicts bird and flowers made from ivory inlay. The back of the screen has a faint painted design.**Acquisition:** 2009**Miscellaneous Objects**A1.44 Daguerreotype of Minerva Ross**Date:** 1840s**Description:** Daguerreotype of Minerva Ross Murrell. Leather case with rose design and gold-hinged latch. This is the only known photograph of Minerva Ross in existence.**Acquisition:** 2010A1.45 Tintype of Amanda Ross**Date:** 1850s**Description:** Tintype of Amanda Murrell. Matted in an oval metal matte under glass and enclosed in a wooden leather-covered case. Inside of the case lined in painted gold braid pattern. Inside front cover purple velvet**Acquisition:** 2010A1.46 George M. Murrell Miniature Locket**Date:** 1842**Description:** Gold locket with painted portrait of George M. Murrell under glass. Lock of hair secured to verso under glass with inscription above that reads “Murrell 1842.” Small gold ring attached to the top for hanging**Acquisition:** 2009

A1.47 Engraved silver table spoons**Date:** c. 1837**Description:** Three silver table spoons monogrammed with the initials "GMM" (George Michael Murrell). Made by Jehu & W.L. Ward in Philadelphia**Acquisition:** 2010A1.48 Lorgnette / Opera glasses**Date:** c.1895**Description:** Folding opera glasses. Ornate gold handle with hinge and latch. Handle inscribed with "FMH" (Fannie Murrell Hughes). Five purple rhinestones in cross shape on either side, and small ring attached for hanging.**Acquisition:** 2010A1.49 Watch fob**Date:** mid-1800s**Description:** Gold charm hanging on black ribbon with gold hanger at top. Charm is gold filigree design holding a yellow topaz stone. Used to hang a pocket watch from a vest pocket.**Acquisition:** 2009A1.50 Child's Doll**Date:** c. 1860**Description:** Porcelain doll with painted face and hair and blue ribbon. Dressed in long-sleeved blue dress with two inch satin edge at bottom of skirt, and six pearl buttons.**Acquisition:** 1950s

## APPENDIX 2

Complete collection of photographs attributed to Jennie Ross Cobb. Descriptions and data for these photographs are based on records compiled from the Oklahoma Historical Society, the George M. Murrell Home, the Karen Harrington Collection, the Cherokee Heritage Centre, and the Anne Ross Piburn Collection (University of Oklahoma).

Oklahoma Historical Society – Jennie Ross Cobb Collection

These are reproductions of the contact prints Mary Elizabeth Good made from Cobb's original glass plates, in connection with an extended interview she conducted with Cobb for the local newspaper *Your World*. Many of these were published in that article, and for this reason, their attribution to Cobb is verifiable.

A2.1 Jennie Ross Cobb, George M. Murrell house, winter view of house front, c. 1896-1906. (Acc. No. 20661.1)

A2.2 Jennie Ross Cobb, George M. Murrell House, front walk during summer, c. 1896-1906. (Acc. No. 20661.2)

A2.3 Jennie Ross Cobb, George M. Murrell House, east porch, c. 1896-1906. (Acc. No. 20661.3)

A2.4 Jennie Ross Cobb, Blake Ross as a young boy, c. 1901. (Acc. No. 20661.4)

A2.5 Jennie Ross Cobb, Robert Bruce Ross and Anne Ross Piburn, c. 1900. (Acc. No. 20661.5)

A2.6 Jennie Ross Cobb, George M. Murrell House, Back of the house, c. 1896-1906. (Acc. No. 20661.6)

A2.7 Jennie Ross Cobb, Robert Bruce Ross Jr. on horseback in the back yard, c. 1896-1906. (Acc. No. 20661.7)

A2.8 Jennie Ross Cobb, George M. Murrell House, interior view, c. 1896-1906. (Acc. No. 20661.8)

A2.9 Jennie Ross Cobb, George M. Murrell House, exterior view, c. 1896-1906. (Acc. No. 20661.9)

A2.10 Jennie Ross Cobb, George M. Murrell House – Pigs and cattle feeding next to barn, c. 1896-1906. (Acc. No. 20661.10)

A2.11 Jennie Ross Cobb, Young child carrying a dead turkey, c. 1896-1906. (Acc. No. 20661.11)

A2.12 Jennie Ross Cobb, Two women in Tahlequah, c. 1896-1902. (Acc. No. 20661.12)

A2.13 Jennie Ross Cobb, Students stroll along boardwalk that led from school into Tahlequah, c. 1896-1906. (Acc. No. 20661.13)

A2.14 Jennie Ross Cobb, Cherokee Female Seminary Graduating Class, 1902. (Acc. No. 20661.14)

A2.15 Jennie Ross Cobb, Cherokee Advocate Office, c. 1896-1906. (Acc. No. 20661.15)

A2.16 Jennie Ross Cobb, When the Train Came to Tahlequah, 1902. (Acc. No. 20661.17)

A2.17 Jennie Ross Cobb, Carnival. Williams Hardware Co. Harness Department's Float in an Indian Territory Parade, c. 1896-1906. (Acc. No. 20661.18)

A2.18 Jennie Ross Cobb, Carnival day, c. 1896-1902. (Acc. No. 20661.19)

A2.19 Jennie Ross Cobb, School near Christy, c. 1896-1906. (Acc. No. 20661.20)

A2.20 Jennie Ross Cobb, Watermelons, c. 1896-1906. (Acc. No. 20661.21)

#### George M. Murrell Home

A2.21 Jennie Ross Cobb, Blake Ross, c.1901-2, Bradshaw donation

A2.22 Jennie Ross Cobb, Murrell Home Parlour (1), c. 1895, Bradshaw donation

A2.23 Jennie Ross Cobb, Murrell Home Parlour (2), c. 1895, Bradshaw donation

A2.24 Jennie Ross Cobb, Birdcage in downstairs hallway just outside Murrell Home parlour, c. 1895, Bradshaw donation

#### Karen Harrington Collection

Karen Harrington holds the most comprehensive group of original glass plates attributed to Cobb. These plates were purchased by Harrington from Cobb's sister, and thus have been attributed to Cobb. There is no evidence beyond the sale tying Cobb to the glass plates, but the subject matter of the photographs (especially in connection with the Murrell home) strongly points to Cobb as the photographer. The size of the glass plates also adheres to the size of plates she purchased, and her camera, which is in the Murrell home collection.

A2.25 Jennie Ross Cobb, Men on horseback, c. 1896-1906

A2.26 Jennie Ross Cobb, Dawes Commission tents, c. 1907

A2.27 Jennie Ross Cobb, Garden of the Murrell home, c. 1896-1906

A2.28 Jennie Ross Cobb, Back of the Murrell home, c. 1896-1906

- A2.29 Jennie Ross Cobb, Gathering at the Murrell home, c. 1896-1906
- A2.30 Jennie Ross Cobb, Oswego Seed & Grain Company (1), c. 1896-1906
- A2.31 Jennie Ross Cobb, Oswego Seed & Grain Company (2), c. 1896-1906
- A2.32 Jennie Ross Cobb, Two figures on grounds of the Murrell Home, c. 1896-1906
- A2.33 Jennie Ross Cobb, Celebration in Indian Territory, c. 1896-1906
- A2.34 Jennie Ross Cobb, Women at the Murrell Home, c. 1896-1906
- A2.35 Jennie Ross Cobb, Figures posed outside the Murrell Home, c. 1896-1906
- A2.36 Jennie Ross Cobb, Group of young men posed outside the Murrell home gate, c. 1896-1906
- A2.37 Jennie Ross Cobb, Snow on the grounds of the Murrell Home, c. 1896-1906
- A2.38 Jennie Ross Cobb, General store (1), c. 1896-1906
- A2.39 Jennie Ross Cobb, General store (2), c. 1896-1906
- A2.40 Jennie Ross Cobb, General store (3), c. 1896-1906
- A2.41 Jennie Ross Cobb, Carriage ride, c. 1896-1906
- A2.42 Jennie Ross Cobb, Wedding celebration, c. 1896-1906
- A2.43 Jennie Ross Cobb, Picnic scene, c. 1896-1906
- A2.44 Jennie Ross Cobb, Young women posed outdoors, c. 1896-1906
- A2.45 Jennie Ross Cobb, Tahlequah Court House, c. 1896-1906
- A2.46 Jennie Ross Cobb, Child in the garden of the Murrell Home (1), c. 1896-1906
- A2.47 Jennie Ross Cobb, Child in the garden of the Murrell Home (2), c. 1896-1906
- A2.48 Jennie Ross Cobb, Young men outside the Cherokee Male Seminary, c. 1896-1906
- A2.49 Jennie Ross Cobb, Family members outside the Murrell Home, c. 1896-1906
- A2.50 Jennie Ross Cobb, Town gathering, c. 1896-1906
- A2.51 Jennie Ross Cobb, Child on steps of the Murrell home, c. 1895-1906
- A2.52 Jennie Ross Cobb, Child with bouquet on steps of the Murrell home, c. 1896-1906



A2.53 Jennie Ross Cobb, The Meeting, c. 1896-1906

A2.54 Jennie Ross Cobb, Child on the steps of the Murrell home, c. 1896-1906

A2.55 Jennie Ross Cobb, Two young girls with baby carriage, c. 1896-1906

A2.56 Jennie Ross Cobb, School children, c. 1902-1906

A2.57 Jennie Ross Cobb, Cherokee students returning to school, c. 1897

A2.58 Jennie Ross Cobb, Woman and girl on the porch of the Murrell home, c. 1896-1906

A2.59 Jennie Ross Cobb, Group of women with baby in garden of the Murrell home, c. 1896-1906

A2.60 Jennie Ross Cobb, Mrs. Robert Bruce Ross on the steps of the Murrell home porch, c. 1896-1906

A2.61 Jennie Ross Cobb, Three women in motion, c. 1896-1906

#### Cherokee Heritage Centre

Many of the photographic prints in the Cherokee Heritage Centre connected to Cobb are duplicates from the Oklahoma Historical Society's collection. The Centre also holds a collection of glass plates donated by Marguerite Ross (Cobb's cousin, and curator of the Murrell Home when Cobb passed away), and have tentatively been attributed to Cobb.

A2.62 Jennie Ross Cobb, School children at Christy rural school, c. 1902. Gift of Mary Elizabeth Good

A2.63 Jennie Ross Cobb, The board walk from the Cherokee Female Seminary at Tahlequah, c. 1902. Gift of Mary Elizabeth Good

A2.64 Jennie Ross Cobb, When the Train came to Tahlequah, 1902. Gift of Mary Elizabeth Good

A2.65 Jennie Ross Cobb, Anne Ross Piburn and Robert Bruce Ross at Park Hill Creek – Murrell House, c. 1895-1906. Gift of Mary Elizabeth Good

A2.66 Jennie Ross Cobb, Exterior view of walnut barn north of the Murrell House, c. 1895-1906. Gift of Mary Elizabeth Good

A2.67 Jennie Ross Cobb, Cherokee Capital Building, c. 1895-1906. Gift of Lulah Ross Henderson, 1979

A2.68 Jennie Ross Cobb, View of Illinois River from railroad trestle near Park Hill, c. 1900. Glass plate negative. Gift of Marguerite Ross

A2.69 Jennie Ross Cobb, Man on horseback, c. 1901. Glass plate negative. Gift of Marguerite Ross

A2.70 Jennie Ross Cobb, Four men outside Murrell House, c. 1900. Glass plate negative. Gift of Marguerite Ross

A2.71 Jennie Ross Cobb, Two girls in front of house, c. 1900. Glass plate negative. Gift of Marguerite Ross

A2.72 Jennie Ross Cobb, Man carrying two boxes, c. 1900. Glass plate negative. Gift of Marguerite Ross

A2.73 Jennie Ross Cobb, Downtown Tahlequah, Arrow Book Store visible in background, c. 1900. Glass plate negative. Gift of Marguerite Ross

A2.74 Jennie Ross Cobb, Man standing behind horse, c. 1900. Glass plate negative. Gift of Marguerite Ross

A2.75 Jennie Ross Cobb, Man in Tahlequah, c. 1900. Glass plate negative. Gift of Marguerite Ross

A2.76 Jennie Ross Cobb, Woman eating watermelon at Murrell Home, c. 1900. Glass plate negative. Gift of Marguerite Ross

A2.77 Jennie Ross Cobb, Woman standing in stream, probably Illinois River, c. 1900. Glass plate negative. Gift of Marguerite Ross

A2.78 Jennie Ross Cobb, Woman in buggy, c. 1900. Glass plate negative. Gift of Marguerite Ross

A2.79 Jennie Ross Cobb, Looking north from the front porch of the Murrell home, c. 1900. Glass plate negative. Gift of Marguerite Ross

A2.80 Jennie Ross Cobb, Baby on porch of the Murrell Home, c. 1900. Glass plate negative. Gift of Marguerite Ross

A2.81 Jennie Ross Cobb, North front of Murrell home, c. 1900. Glass plate negative. Gift of Marguerite Ross

A2.82 Jennie Ross Cobb, Dawes Commission field team, c. 1900. Glass plate negative. Gift of Marguerite Ross

A2.83 Jennie Ross Cobb, Goo Goo Eyes and Watermelon [as per plate inscription], c. 1900. Glass plate negative. Gift of Marguerite Ross

A2.84 Jennie Ross Cobb, Creek behind the Murrell Home, c. 1900. Glass plate negative. Gift of Marguerite Ross

A2.85 Jennie Ross Cobb, Vegetation, c. 1900. Glass plate negative. Gift of Marguerite Ross

A2.86 Jennie Ross Cobb, Two men and a woman holding fishing rod, c. 1900. Glass plate negative. Gift of Marguerite Ross

A2.87 Jennie Ross Cobb, Working on the range, c. 1900. Glass plate negative. Gift of Marguerite Ross

A2.88 Jennie Ross Cobb, Horse drawn wagon, north Muskogee Avenue, Tahlequah, c. 1900. Glass plate negative. Gift of Marguerite Ross

A2.89 Jennie Ross Cobb, Winter at the Murrell Home, c. 1900. Glass plate negative. Gift of Marguerite Ross

Anne Ross Piburn Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma

A2.90 Jennie Ross Cobb, Girls on the grounds of the Cherokee Female Seminary, c. 1895.

A2.91 Jennie Ross Cobb, Cherokee Students Returning to School, c. 1897.

A2.92 Jennie Ross Cobb, Young women walking away from the Cherokee Female Seminary, c. 1898.

