Cherokee Village

Arkansas est. 1954

Cherokee Village: What’s in a Name?

Cherokee (Tsala-gi) Tribe Lifeways
There were no Cherokee in Cherokee Village: Native Americans and Popular Culture
Celebrated Cherokee figures in the modern era

Ozark Pioneer and Folk

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Midcentury Recreational and Retirement Communities

The Multigenerational Retirement Community

John A. Cooper, Sr. Founding Architect of America’s Retirement Community Industry
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Fay Jones, Modern Architecture

Regional Modernism in Architecture and Planning: Topography, Context, Climate, and Tectonic Form

Eunice Fay Jones: One of America’s Most Significant Architects
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Urbanization: the urban-rural cross-section of living in Cherokee Village

Seasonal and permanent camps dotting the spring river watershed around hand and now Cherokee Village inspired the design of Cherokee Village, especially in the role of water as an organizing force. Village design adopted the settlement vocabulary of the modern camp and its use of the smaller "unit plan" in modulating large camp populations. In Cherokee Village's case, nine reservoirs with extensive cove sub-groupings along the riverbanks were constructed to provide waterfront homesites, an indispensable camp feature.
“every 12 seconds a man would be retiring”
del webb is credited with having created the retirement community industry based on his development of sun city, arizona—an age-restricted retirement community opened in 1960. webb used innovative market segmentation techniques including subsidized mini-vacation packages and direct-mail marketing in convincing seniors nationwide to relocate to his sunbelt leisure community. seniors over 55 left their families to live in the “active lifestyle” subdivision structured around recreation centers with pools, shuffleboard, lawn bowling, crafts, and golf on short courses.

but john a. cooper, sr. already accomplished all of this in 1954 when he opened cherokee village, arkansas, a planned retirement-based recreational community. while cooper mostly targeted seniors, he did not employ age restrictions and even donated land for the construction of schools. cooper had been a real estate developer since the late 1940s, and by the early 1950s recognized an emergent market opportunity in the new generation of retirees. post-war retirees were the first to enjoy full social security benefits, pensions and other savings, unprecedented mobility, and extended life expectancy; all shaping new conceptions of retirement structured around “active lifestyles”. cooper fully grasped the scope through his own research, observing that “every 12 seconds a man would be retiring; every 12 seconds a man would be receiving a gold watch”. the cherokee village sales force—over 130 at its peak in the 1970s—was the first to deploy new marketing techniques including free vacation packages to four home sites and direct-mail advertising. cherokee village eventually attracted thousands of property owners from all 50 states and 20 countries to this ozark foothills community.

ironically, del webb and his management consultants reacted with skepticism to demographic and market segmentation development when they first learned of the retirement community concept through a 1957 nbc show featuring youngtown, arizona; youngtown, the first age-segregated retirement community was developed in 1954, the same year as cherokee village. however, cherokee village differed from sun city and youngtown in that john cooper triangulated influences from the nineteen hundred century american camp meeting movement, the new land sales industry, and regional modernism in creating a sense of place integral to the ozark foothills landscape. cooper was drawn to the summer camp and resort tradition long established in sharp county with its emphasis on social pluralism and family, while all three progenitor planned communities were marketed around the trope of the “vacation” only cherokee village embraced complexity, aspiring toward intergenerational living and association with local settler pioneer, scouting, and native american heritages.
"playing indian"

John and Mildred Cooper venerated Native American culture. Indeed, Cherokee village was named to acknowledge an undocumented Cherokee settlement nearby while its street names adopted proper Indian names, both were involved in the scouting movement, which drew heavily upon native American tropes in a return to primitivism. Postwar era appropriation of Indian names and imagery accentuated a long troubled relationship between Indians and white settler culture that displaced indigenous peoples from their homelands, as author Philip Deloria argues in *Playing Indian*, Americans have used Native American imagery and enacted Indian roles throughout the nation’s history to shape white national identity, from colonial insurrectionists dressing up as Indians to carry out the 1773 Boston tea party and other carnivals and misrule rituals (e.g., the whiskey rebellion of 1791-1794, and the post-revolutionary war tammany societies), to the formation of 19th century ethnographic studies around the ideology of the vanishing Indian (they are still here), conceptions of Indianness changes over time, revolutionary era Indianness celebrated freedom, Americanness, and the potential in open landscapes, what is clear according to deloria is that America “desired Indianness, not Indians.”

In the 20th century invoking Indianness helped Americans confront anxieties over the environment, authenticity, cold war, and the various dislocating effects of modernity, the scouting youth movements originating in the early 20th century, including the woodcraft Indians and camp fire girls, were at the forefront of enacting Indianness to reestablish links to nature missing among urban youth in industrial society. Interwar period summer camps codified Indianness through practices including dressing up as Indians, performing indigenous dance rituals, and casting votes of honor around council rings among nearby tips, totem poles, and wigwams, taking their cues from a naturalized and ahistorical Indian figure (“the noble savage”), education in woodcraft—the art of living in the woods—was a primary concern of the interwar summer camp. Teachings in woodcraft were accompanied by a focus on the development of handicraft, agriculture, and social skills. Camps generally became incubators of the middle class.

Indeed, spring river residential camps and resorts—the area’s frontline institutions in pioneering larger settlement processes—thoroughly Indianized the summer camp landscape after world war one. The idealization of a seemingly primitive, timeless, and purifying native American ethnography provided a counter to modernization processes that were felt to be more alienating than liberating. Playing Indian was mixed with the era’s progressivist tendencies, especially mass tourism. In the social construction of modern childhood and ultimately national identity, the veneer of Indian lore and motifs deployed in camp life migrated to permanent settlements constructed in the mid-twentieth century, citing Edward said, a founder of postcolonial studies, Deloria thus observes a hardened truth: that the social construction of whiteness—in all its dissonance, imperialism, and subjugation of Indian culture—is intertwined with the construction of Indianness.

Deloria tells us that the search for the authentic is a distinctly modern condition: a quest for this other that “can be coded in terms of time (nostalgia or archaism), place (the small town), or culture (Indianness),” like most economic and social relationships in America, even for non-Indians, these relationships oscillated between destruction and creativity, similarly, Cherokee village is an unfinished project on several fronts, socially, culturally, and physically.
cherokee (tsalagi) tribe lifeways

the cherokee institutionalized hospitality and reciprocity in both their commons and family structure, a riparian culture settling along rivers, cherokees were excellent farmers and ecosystem architects, notably, three-fifths of the world’s crops now in cultivation originated from amerindians.

“anthropogenic forests” or the humanization of the forest

“antropogenic” forests (shown above) are the riparian forests of the eastern tribes, interspersed with fields. early colonists described forest mosaics of meadows, woods, savannah, etc. these forests included herbaceous understories, game, and food resources, and provided fish runs. the riparian forests served as windbreaks, air filters, and soil structurers.

“three sisters” agriculture

indigenous americans integrated the planting of storage crops: corn (maize), beans, and squash. beans fix nitrogen, while squash provides the structure for beans to climb, complementing squash vines. squash retains soil moisture and prevents weeds, together, they contain complex carbohydrates, essential fatty acids, and all nine essential amino acids.

egalitarianism and constitutional governance

cherokee governance was based on hospitality, flexibility, and decentralization. each community was made up of a hunter-gatherer-farming-trade economies. the cherokee tribal council balanced by tribal laws, hunting rights, and local government. the cherokee tribal council, the “tsalagia,” held the second greatest continuously existing representative government in the united states.

justice

cherokees equated justice with the restoration of social harmony: offenders were treated with dignity under a kinship-based civic ethic—the “white path” or path of peace.

extended and blended family structure

cherokee family structure was extended and blended. family was the unit of production, and marriage was not viewed as permanent. women did not view land as property to be owned or occupied. land was stewardship, communally, natural resources were managed and harvested collectively. men and women worked together for as long as they cultivated it.

matrilineal and care structures

familial ties and kinship networks maintained through mothers and grandmothers, highlighting the centrality of intergenerational caregiving and education for both boys and girls. women decided on the “right path” for the cherokee way of life, the “black path,” the “red path.”
socialization of middle-class youth in industrialized urban society incorporated authentic experiences as a counter to traditional education. American summer camps were total mythic spaces incorporating native American imagery, majesty, and dignity, especially among scouting and other outdoor movements. The perceived exoticism and primitivism of native American cultures were used to establish identity in the modern world. The perceived exoticism and primitivism in native American cultures were used to establish identity in the modern world.

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Despite the co-opts' generation for Native American cultures, their understanding of Indigenous heritages was deeply formed through the popular culture. The film industry of the 20th century developed the "Hollywood Indian," which appeared in frontier settings despite most having moved to cities. In the popular mind, Indians were portrayed as noble savages, either as warm-hearted heroes or as savagely primitive with whom the white man could have a proper relationship. In television, "Gunslinger" was the longest running western series with a total of 655 episodes and 94 Native American characters.

There were no Cherokee in Cherokee village: Native Americans and popular culture

"There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism."
Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History"

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Sports teams and mascots

Kevin Boyarski observes the first use of Native Indian mascots arose with the federal allotment process in the 19th century. As Native American communities were settled and land parcels were assigned to land parcels in Western Indian territories, Native American mascots were used to promote the use of Native mascots despite dispossession of their land and homes. Some of the better known Native American mascots include the Cleveland Indians, the Cleveland Indians' Chief Wahoo, and Chief Wahoo.

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celebrated cherokee figures in the modern era

having survived broken treaties, wars, removal, and reallocation, cherokee culture consistently demonstrates its resiliency. cherokee figures continue to advance socio-cultural and political legacies within both the cherokee nation and the united states. this counters the myths that native americans had disappeared and that indian peoples’ cultures are static.

on september 26, 1838, cherokee leader john benge escorted 1,000 cherokee towards present-day stillwater, oklahoma. the benge route entered oklahoma at pittsburg ferry on the current river in southeastern randolph county. the group traveled through old jackson road and headed the springwater just south of miami on a spot called mingo fork. after crossing the spring river into lawrence county, the trail continued onto smithville and crossed sharp county north of batesville. from there, the group continued across the ozark mountains to near fayetteville before ending their journey in indian territory, present day tahlequah, oklahoma.

the trail of tears by robert lindneux

sequoyah 1822-1843
educator

renos j. smith 1837-1893
cherokee principal chief

major ridge 1771-1839
cherokee leader

john robb 1790-1866
cherokee chief

stand waite 1806-1871
first native american brigadier general

will rogers 1879-1935
american film actor

joseph clark 1893-1971
u.s. navy admiral

varner rogers 1899-1911
cherokee senator and judge

john martin 1809-1907
native american civic leader

lynn ogg 1899-1954
author and poet

william pinn 1830-1880
cherokee assistant chief

willa cather 1873-1947
novelist, journalist

quentin tarantino 1963
director, producer

robert carley 1940-2014
cherokee author

tom three persons 1809-1849
cherokee lawman

willa m. mullikin 1949
first female cherokee chief

keith harper 1945
attorney

royce corriell 1974
businessman
trains, rivers, and float trips
tourism and real estate
development in the ozarks
were primarily a midwestern
phenomenon. by the end of
the 19th century,
middle- and upper-class
tourists and investors from
kansas city, st. louis, and other
cities north were attracted by
the pastoral imagery
depicting the ozarks. arcadian
imagery promoting classical,
genteel visions of agrarian
life—solidified by harold bell
wright’s 1907 best-seller
shepherd in the
hills—established the basis of
the region’s commercial
tourism. railroads overcame
the geographical and cultural
barriers stymieing urbanization
of the ozark frontier, through
cave parties, river float trips,
game parks, and fish camps,
regional boosters including
railroad companies advertised
the ozarks as a continuous
“pastoral playground”. the
ozark float trip staged by
outfitters became
memorialized in the region’s
journalism and folklore as
discussed by morrow and
myers-phinney in their history
of tourism in the ozarks, shepherd
in the hills country.
tourist-sportsman excursions
led to resort cities as rivers were
dammed, which in turn
brought a rush of
homesteaders from across the
nation to real estate
developments after the 1940s.

likewise, the towns of hardy
and mammoth spring on the
spring river, each hosting a rail
station on the “frisco” line, had
their origins in entertaining
urban tourists on guided float
and fishing trips. mammoth
spring is the headwaters of the
spring river, issuing nine million
gallons of cool water per hour,
making it the world’s
nineth-largest natural spring, the
spring river became a famous
ozark trout and float stream,
where a federal fish hatchery
maintains the world’s only
captive spawning population
of gulf coast striped bass.
camps and resorts populated
the spring river and the south
fork of the spring river,
eventually attracting summer
vacationers like memphian
businessman john cooper who
stayed, cooper, and real
estate developers after him,
constructed
recreational-based
communities throughout north
central arkansas, particularly
appealing to midwestern
retirees.

the interests of urban
tourist-sportsmen, mostly
businessmen, influenced a
strong conservation
movement in the ozarks, often
in battle with their fellow
investor class who developed
extractive industries in timber
and minerals. later, real estate
developers like cooper drew
upon a place-based and
folk-oriented conservation
ethic in the planning of
cherokee village—dubbed
“the parent of the original
vacation-retirement
community” and based on
sportsmen activities.
the six development stages of the frontier in shaping the ozarks

from frederick jackson turner, “the significance of the frontier in american history” (1893)
Arkansas Ozark Settler Folkways

19th century settlers of Highland landscapes often experienced arrested economic development due to the lack of urbanization, skilled specialization, and access to trade. A distinct frontier humanism persisted in the postbellum Ozark forests to the 20th century; their expressions of self-sufficiency later proved attractive to subsequent generations of outsiders seeking nostalgia, escape from the city, or back-to-the-land lifestyles.

Subsistence Homesteads

Subsistence homesteads often one and a half story structures of heavy logs were built near springs for access to water and to keep animals out of vegetable gardens. An open range economy where homesteaders shared a wooded commons for hunting, foraging, and animal grazing until railroad consolidation after 1920. Fences were used only to keep animals out of vegetable gardens. As an alternative to tanning in poor soil, stokers drove small herds of cattle to markets and saved less manageable hogs for family consumption. Fences were a source of livelihood for foraging plants, trapping, tree felling, timbering, fishing, and moonshining before the commodification and enclosure of land.

Cabin-based Crafts

Cabin-based crafts included basketry, fanning, woodworking, spinning, weaving, and candle making. Homesteaders typically had a patch for tanning animal hides, particularly to make shoes, hats, and harnesses from cowhides, deerhide, and beaver and bear pelts. Thread from cotton or wool was carded and spun at home to make clothes, curtains, gussets, and towels. Yarn bowls were made mostly from oaks or hickories, incorporating natural dyes and herbs for aromatic effect. Household articles could be obtained from traveling cooper, cedar wash tubs, woodworkers, and blacksmiths.

Hunting and Fishing

Hunting and fishing were important sources of food and products. In the open range economy, deer were an important protein source. Indian corn was a staple crop, but it was also used for making bread, cakes, and pies. Beans and squash were also grown. Tobacco was grown for smoking and was used as a currency. Animals that were not eaten were often used for clothing and other household items.

The Pie Supper

The pie supper is a ritual where family wrapped pies are auctioned to raise funds for charitable causes like subscription schools. The needy, or troops during a war, associated with the rural Ozarks, pie suppers were a community event where people gathered, performed, played sports, conducted business, and engaged in general fellowship. Some were held weekly, and pie makers—women—were expected to eat their pies with male purchasers (“married” and “unmarried” pies were separated). Pies disappeared as rural school districts consolidated.

Music and Distinct Ozark Mountain Sounds

Music and distinct Ozark mountain sounds, most folk dances tunes, are played through the fiddle, banjo, guitar, mandolin, dulcimer, and autoharp. Scottish influences, religious settlement of the Ozarks mixed ancestral ballads with local frontier ballads. Novelty items, such as the harmonica, with its origins in 16th century Scotland, served as the foundation for subsequent development of Highland music traditions including gospel, country, and bluegrass. As John Quincy Newell wrote in the leatherwood, “The country fiddler was an important personage, looked upon with almost as much respect and reverence as the country parson.” The fiddler went hand-in-hand with square dancing (“stepping”) or (g) dancing native to Ozark events held weekly in many communities.

Education and “Subscription Schools”

Education and “subscription schools” occurred before 20th century education reform in Arkansas that led to compulsory free school education. Teachers traveled from to fund a building, a school’s salary, and supplies. Schools continued to exist for several years. In some cases, students were taught from two to three months per year. In some communities, schools were dedicated to self-improvement, used their schoolhouses to host local history societies, and convene debates, spelling bees, and kangaroo courts.

Herbal Traditions in Ozark Folk Healing

Hyphenated medieval magic recipes from Europe and Native American botanical knowledge were combined to create the Ozarks’ unique folk herbal healers. Herbal healers used plants in alcohol to create extracts, like wild cherry wine to make expectorants. The Ozarks’ were an especially important source of information transfer on botanical-based medicines—e.g., bloodroot for skin ailments, sassafras as a tonic and laxative, goldenrod as an antiseptic and digestive aid, and poke root for arthritis. Indeed, the Ozarks’ high biodiversity in plant life attracts root diggers for pharmaceutical companies near the Ozarks. The Ozarks’ extinction due to over-extraction, folk healing, combined scientific burns, and ritual involving herbs, prayer, singing, and counseling by wise, healers, and seers.
journal accounts
Travel accounts constitute the earliest literary image of territorial Arkansas. Despite Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's particular establishment of the Arkansaw stereotype associated with immorality and ignorance in his 1819 journal, “A tour in the interior of Missouri and Arkansas,” several journals would follow in his footsteps.

humorist books
On a later train through Arkansas, humorist Samuel L. Clemens (Mark Twain) turned an otherwise dull trip into a journey of self-discovery, elevating its status to manifest destiny.

h.l. mencken and boosterism
H.L. Mencken, a magazine writer and editor, wrote articles such as “The South Becomes a Nation” that encouraged boosterism. His defense of southern culture was understood in the context of a larger national debate.

comic strips
The rise of comic strips, particularly “Beverly Hillbillies” and “Dennis the Menace,” illustrated the stereotype of rural Americans, blending urban and rural settings.

From the frontiersman to subsistence farmer to hillbilly
The bear state
Arkansas was established as the first European settlement in Arkansas in 1802. From neighboring territories, mostly settled by French and Spanish forts in Louisiana, the frontiersmen spread out, taking advantage of the economic opportunities and the natural resources.

satirical press
Satirical newspapers, known for their尖锐批评 and often critical of the government and local authorities, played a significant role in shaping public opinion.

movies
Building on the popularity of the hillbilly genre, movies such as “Oklahoma!” and “Little House on the Prairie” further cemented the hillbilly stereotype in American culture.

Television
The first few years of television brought the hillbilly to the nation, with programs such as “The Beverly Hillbillies” and “Dennis the Menace” becoming household names.

Media images of the ozarks: the people, the land
Wellness spas and resorts
A belief in the health-giving properties of spring waters led to the establishment of wellness resorts. These resorts capitalized on the natural resources and offered a way for people to escape the urban lifestyle.

Amusement parks
Amusement parks, such as Eureka Springs and Silver Dollar City, offered a way for people to escape the urban hustle and bustle, providing a space for people to relax and enjoy the Ozarks.

From pastoralism to wellness, back-to-the-land, and cultural tourism
Pastoralist literature
Harold Bell Wright's novel, set in the Ozarks as a backdrop, sets the stage for the pastoralist movement. Several other pastoral novels romanticized an escape to a simpler, more natural life.

Subsistence farming
The agricultural practices of the Ozarks were characterized by subsistence farming, where crops were raised to meet the needs of the family. This combination of food and cash crop production allowed for self-sufficiency.

Back-to-the-landers
The 1960s and 1970s brought about a cultural movement that created a desire for a simpler life, away from the consumerist trend of the city. This trend was reflected in the Ozarks, where the community sought to create a more self-sufficient lifestyle.
The story and tune originate with Sanford Faulkner, an Arkansan pioneer and politician, and his entertaining telling of his encounter with a squatter while traveling in the Ozark mountains, establishing a reputation of hard-won hospitality for the Ozarks.

1847
The Arkansas Traveler, having been performed regularly across the Midwest for years, is arranged and published by William Cumming, marking the first of many literary appearances of the traveler.

1856
Edward Payson Washburne completes a painting illustrating the meeting between the traveler and the squatter, symbolizing the stereotypes of the hillybilly squatter (nativist, independent).

1868
Frank Chantaué begins telling "The Arkansas Traveler" at many stage appearances of the Traveler; Chantaué would become one of the most performed of the century.

1870
New York print makers cut it, and it's brought off on popular prints of the Arkansas Traveler, nationalizing the reputation of the Ozark hillybilly.

1882
A novel begins publishing the Arkansas Traveler, a nationally distributed humor journal parodying all the hillbilly stereotypes culturally embedded in the name.

1901
The Little Rock Travelers (now the Arkansas Traveler) travel across the country to institutionalize the traveler as their namesake, embracing the image.

1916-1938
With the influence of the great depression, continued institutionalization of the traveler as a symbol of the perception of the hillybilly squatter and his Ozark home, winning over one of the loudest voices in the land.

1938
On the success of his radio revival of the Traveler on Bing Crosby's Kraft Music Hall, Bob Burns starts a national radio show of the same name that runs until 1949.

1941
The state of Arkansas creates an award called the Arkansas Traveler, bestowed upon "outstanding citizens who have contributed to the growth, enjoyment or welfare of the state of Arkansas or to her people." It was first awarded in 1941 to Franklin D. Roosevelt and has since been awarded to several honored guests, recalling the hospitality of the squatter's home.

1949
"The Arkansas Traveler" tune is given a new life by the 1949 reunion of the Squatters and the state song of Arkansas until 1963. In 1966, it is named the state historical song.

1968
Leo Reynolds opens the Arkansas Traveler Folk Theatre as a tourist attraction in Hot Springs, Arkansas. The theatre reenacts the original tale in song and story to thousands of tourists four nights a week.

The Arkansas Traveler: from a pioneer ethos to media iconography

Frontier ethos  Hospitality custom  Literary genre  State icon

Song • Painting-play • Journal • Baseball team • Newspaper • Movie • Radio show • State song • State award
the arkansaw traveller theater in hardy: a “thick description”

for twenty-four years hardy, arkansas was home to the arkansaw traveller folk theater east of highway 167 on an old parking road to preserve the culture of the ozarks. the theater was founded in 1968 by leo rainey, the area development agent for the university of arkansas cooperative extension service, and organizer of the ozark foothills craft guild. the summer-season dinner theater played nightly to the taste of the traveler and the audience from the "147" folk song, the "arkansaw traveler and raccoon, watt!" published by w.c. peters. it has been arkansas' state historic song since 1949. crowd size averaged five hundred people at every performance.

built by t. e. davis of hardy, the theater with 60 part-time employees sought to holistically preserve the folk and humor traditions of the ozarks using period music, hill folk, costumes, and sets throughout the complex. female employees wore flower dresses and bonnets while men wore suspenders. georges and bennets, the theater's construction employed traditional pioneer methods and materials. means represented regional staples including soft pork, corn bread, spring river greens, hill potatoes, beans and ham hocks, and chicken and dumplings. the gift shop showcased jams, jellies, brittles, and candy made on-site. locally made products like hodgen mill stone ground cornmeal and hill's valley cheese were also sold. spinning demonstrations accompanied a total entertainment environment, which utilized a reclaimed pioneer era cabin as a stage, surrounded by real livestock and the performers' children playing in the stage's foreground.
vectors of change: steamboating and railroading in north central Arkansas

nobody associated steamboats with remote mountains, dubbed “floating palaces” by ozarkers, well over 100 boats regularly traveled the white river at the peak of steamboating in the 1870s.

ever since the wavert first steamed up the white river in 1831, the white and black river became highways of commerce through these ozark wilderness valleys that lacked good roads. in their track, steamboats and ferries on the white river, along with small steamers, hauled small cargos of goods, like animal hides, rendered bear oil, and cotton downriver while transporting new settlers, food products, and Pioneer staples. steamboats also brought a level of cosmopolitan refinement to the ozark frontier.

the kansas city, springfield, and memphis railroad (once the st. louis and san francisco railway company, now the kansas city southern railroad) developed along the spring river in the 1880s, and gave rise to the town of hardy. in 1883, hardy began as a railroad town providing passenger service and water service for steam locomotives but grew to become a significant tourist destination for summer resorting and camping. tourists traveling by fast train from memphis to the colorado mountains to escape the mississippi delta heat and humidity became attracted to hardy and the scenic spring river environment—a closer vacation destination. memphis area entrepreneurs including george gillette bufford and john cooper a generation later built area resorts and year-round residential developments. until buses and automobiles displaced the popularity of train travel after 1930, the railroad was the catalyst of economic development in sharp and fulton counties.

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American Camps: The City in the Woods

Camp Meeting Movement

The American camp meeting movement popularizing community experiences in the woods from religious revivals to cultural exchanges, became source material for a uniquely American form of settlement—the special interest community. This included recreational and retirement communities, resort villages, bungalow courts, pocket neighborhoods, trailer parks, and various utopian communities. Contemporary examples include seasonal festivals like Burning Man, a nine-day event focused on community, art, and self-reliance held in the temporary desert city of Black Rock, NV.

The camp meeting has its origins in 18th-century religious revivals where families built permanent cabins around a shared lawn landmarked by a tabernacle for preaching and assembly. Camp families independently sustained themselves often over an entire summer. Some early camps were the size of neighborhoods serviced by planned circulation networks, urban blocks, stables for livestock (pre-railroad), and porches for socializing. Late 19th-century camps, like Westleyan Grove in Oak Bluffs on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, and Pilgrim, Mount Tabor, and Ocean Grove in New Jersey grew into incorporated towns.

Modern Camp Variations

Favored civic, education, and leisure interests, these included the chautauquas (beginning in 1874 as a summer camp for Sunday school teachers on Lake Chautauqua, New York), health resorts popularized in the 1880s, the early 20th-century resort hotel, and summer youth camps. The Chautauqua movement became an American institution, a center for new ideas in the arts and public affairs with concerts and theatrical performances attended by tens of thousands. Summer residents seeking self-improvement, cottages were the primary housing form in campgrounds, though sites later accommodated hotels and multifamily dwellings compatible with the pedestrian scale of camps. Regardless of meeting purposes, all shared a common objective to renew individuals through communal-based retreats to nature.

Summer Camp, a "Manufactured Wilderness"

The rise of the summer youth camp in the 1890s was directed at building capacity and character in urban youth without subjecting them to the adult influences of the resort hotel, led by American scouting, youth improvement stemmed from emulation of frontier soldiers and pioneers to mid-twentieth-century enactment of Indian roles in recovering authenticity threatened by modernity. Native American motifs like the council ring and tipi became permanent imagery in the camp landscape. After the new deal in the 1930s, summer camps were thoroughly modernized but planned to look natural, more akin to suburbs than the urban neighborhoods distinguishing the camp meeting movement. While camps are not exclusively American, they uniquely served as training grounds for prototyping new conceptions of social life in a democracy.
changing concepts of tourism in the ozarks

healing
Belief in the healing power of mineral spring water, coupled with the yellow-fever epidemic in the Mississippi valley that killed hundreds in the 1880s, led to the development of health resorts around Ozarks springs, post-civil war resorts and camps introduced new populations and urbanists different from the region's prevailing subsistence agricultural economy.

resorting
After 1900, the Kansas City, Springfield, and Memphis railroad passing through Hardy introduced another set of entrepreneurs that transformed the spring river watershed. Resorts were built for summer residents, many from Memphis, earning Hardy the moniker “playground of the Ozarks.” One of those vacationers was John Cooper, who later developed Cherokee Village.

camping and scouling
The enhanced financial ability of a growing middle class and the proliferation of automobiles allowed vacationers greater access to the same remote country destinations as the rich. The depression era back-to-the-land movement and scouting favored water-oriented vacation activities in rustic settings.
Spring River Camps and Resorts

Camps, whether fish, hunting, religious meeting, healing resort, vacation, or scouting, were important institutions in settling the Ozarks. Some became towns; the construction of the "fisco" railroad through Hardy and mammoth spring after 1900 brought summer camps and with them an investor class that later reshaped the area through real estate development.

Whapleton Inn
"Home Among the Leaves"
1912

Built by memphian dr. george gillespie butford, this summer resort camp perched on a bluff overlooking the town of Hardy inaugurated the moniker "playground of the ozarks," Hardy was the first upland train stop in the Ozarks for mountain-going urbanites seeking to escape the summer heat, humidity, and disease outbreaks plaguing the central Mississippi River Valley. Around a shared lawn butted built 10 Waywom cottages, an inn, tennis courts, and a lawn pavilion with a coffee shop, bowling alley, shuffleboard court, and dance floor, the formal arrangement resembles the popular 19th century religious camp meeting with their central lawn and assembly tabernacle surrounded by cabins, later turned vacation camps.

Camp Kla Kima
"Home of the Eagles"
1916

Founded on land donated by memphian bolton smith—a vice president of the national boy scouts of America—this boy scout camp was started by the memphis Chickasaw Council to serve its chapters, boy scout camps aimed to capture the frontiersman spirit lost to the urbanization of youth by modeling pioneer, scout, soldier, and Indian figures. By the time Kla Kima was founded, World War One instilled a desire to prepare young men with military discipline, this is reflected in the parade ground formation formed from military camp topologies that influenced the first generation of scouting summer camps for boys.

Camp Miramichee
"Quiet Morning Place"
1916

Founded by memphian sophie kraus as a vacation camp for working women, Camp Miramichee was given to the women of Memphis in 1920. Attendees continued to be working women until the Great Depression when enrollment was opened to girls of all ages. Over the next 20 years enrollment populations oscillated between women and girls ages 10 to 18. Campground layout reflected the "unit plan" layout, a typology popularized in new deal planning (1930s) that subdivided camps into age-based units. According to author abigail van slyck in a manufactured wilderness: summer camps and the shaping of American youth, 1890-1960, unit plans were accompanied by the use of "landscape naturalization" techniques common in the picturesque, reinforcing a sense of isolation among units. Van slyck likens these camp layouts to hamlets in their creation of separate visual and auditory environments. In the case of Miramichee, differences were created by clustering units on top of the hill, overlooking the river, or fronting the creek flowing through the site at its low elevation. Overall camp planning uses informality as an antidote to the disciplinary aspects of work and school settings. Upon commercialization of the area, the camp was sold in 1975.

Camp Kiwani
"Spirit of Joy and Youth"
1920

The Girl Scout Council of the Mid-South founded Camp Kiwan for Memphis area campers, who initially hiked the five miles separating the camp from the Hardy train depot. Adjacent to Camp Miramichee, both camps shared the Evergreen as canoeing was a big part of the camp experience with older campers having taken the 100-mile trip from Mammoth to black rock. Like all early scouting camps after World War One, Kiwan was rich in Indian symbology appropriating council rings, Indian dancing, and native American names for camp structures. Singing was an important ritual at Kiwan throughout the day, a "singing tree" enclosed by a stone bench stood outside the waltz or dining hall. This reflected the emphasis on civilizing processes for girls during the 1920s and 1930s. As "girls were encouraged to discipline their bodies in order to enhance the natural beauty of the site," according to van slyck, the camp layout is formal, with sleeping pavilions divided by age levels fronting a shared lawn akin to the central lawns of the camp meeting grounds.
old kia kima in sharp county: one of america's earliest footholds in scouting

Throughout the first world war, preparation for military service was the main focus behind scouting principles. In 1918, the original camp, consisting of stones and wooden sleeping cabins and a trail, was improved in the image of a military encampment, and was given a superior rating upon inspection by the war department. Training to develop qualities of leadership, discipline, and resourcefulness, camp activities also reflected those of military training. Scout groups still train in the now defunct camp for similar training today.

26 of the original merit badges of the boy scouts of america

- archery
- architecture
- art
- astronomy
- athletics
- bugling
- camping
- chemistry
- cooking
- cycling
- electricity
- first-aid
- forestry
- gardening
- horsemanship
- lifesaving
- music
- painting
- photography
- pioneering
- plumbing
- public health
- scholarship
- sculpture
- surveying
- swimming
scouting in cherokee village: native american heritage in the boy and girl scouts

scouting was a progressive-era organization that mixed pioneering ethics and native american heritage with new notions of modern commerce. it was spurred by the fear that skills of survivial and communal traditions were being lost to industrialization, especially among city-dwelling youths.

while some of the native american traditions employed by scouts were misappropriated, they were most interested in their shared reverence for nature. with three camps on the spring river, hardy became ground zero for memphis scouts to learn the naturalist skills of native people. this area had particular significance to the cherokee, who hosted inter-tribal games at the foot of waterfall hill along the spring river. both boy scouts and girl scouts would participate in activities that encouraged a closer relationship with nature and native heritage, such as archery, canoeing, dancing, crafts, and games.

kia kima and miramichee were founded in 1916, among the first scout retreats established for both boy scouts and girl scouts of america. the hardy area was chosen not only for its native american heritage, but also for its access to the railroad, cooler summer climate, proximity to the spring river, and popularity as a natural healing resort town.

camp kia kima
kia kima camp activities often revolved around imitation of native american rituals, dances, and song. they sought to foster a deeper understanding and reverence for the natural world and the native american cultures of the region.

camp miramichee
ywca camp miramichee was founded by sophie krouse of memphis in 1916. here, young women would learn many of the same survival skills as their male counterparts. the highlight of the camp was the "boat trip," where eight- to ten-year-old girls would embark on a canoe journey.

kamp kiwani
kamp kiwani was founded by the girl scouts of united states in 1920. kamp kiwani embraced the native american tradition of council. the "singing ring" was deployed as a circle of stone benches around the campfire. the "singing tree" - a large campfire pole where camp songs were sung stood just outside of the dining hall. these circles extended to the other two local camps, where all three would come together at kiwani for celebration and song around the campfire.
Camp Cedar Valley: Second Generation Scouting Camp

camp cedar valley was constructed in 1942 when mr. d.o. orton purchased 95 acres of land on the south fork of the string river near hardy, arkansas. this was the first camp owned by the eastern arkansas area council (seac) of the boy scouts of america. the council was initially formed by fourteen counties in 1915 with the goal of establishing a summer camp. the council hosted several temporary camps at local state parks before purchasing the old camp cedar valley site.

in 1942, the first year the camp opened, one week cost $7.50. that year, 618 scouts attended one of six week-long terms. cedar valley hosted activities including swimming, canoeing, and rowing from a natural beach on the south fork river. the area was also known as one of the best fishing spots in arkansas due to the extremely cold water. scouts were trained in archery and knot tying. camp activities were regulated by a church bell originally obtained from the old twinn plantation near eureka, arkansas. (tribute to cherokee village developer john cooper).

when camp cedar valley relocated the bell was moved to the new site. the bell was reinstalled in 1976, and rang for the first time at its new location during the us bicentennial celebration.

a log administration building and five stone cabins were located on the site at the time of purchase. initially, the majority of scouts stayed in tents because the existing cabins were too small. as scouts were added and expanded, they continued to be made of local stone, with screened covered sides, and filled with bunked army cots. the site of the camp also included a natural bluff named council bluff — the location of campfires and homes to a native american teepee. a natural chapel sat down the hill in a wooded area.

over time the city of cherokee village developed much of the land surrounding the camp. in 1966, camp cedar valley fought more space for their growing numbers and relocated just southwest of viola, arkansas. the seac sold the land to the cherokee village corporation. portions became part of the first cherokee village golf course, while the care of the property became cedar valley park. the cabins were torn down, but the community buildings were repurposed and renovated by the city for other uses like clubhouses and storage buildings.

the new site of the camp was called pine trail reservation. a master plan was developed for three separate camps on the 1,250 acre property; however, only camp “a” was actually completed. which they called camp cedar valley in honor of the first camp, a large portion of land where camp “a” was planned to be built was sold to cover debt leaving the remaining property, at 771 acres. today, the property is a privately owned camp that is available for group use.

in the summer of 1967, when the seac was transitioning from the old camp cedar valley to the new site outside of viola the scouts jointly attended camp at new kinsco.
order of the arrow and lodge 413

The OA recognizes three distinctions of membership: officer, brotherhood, and vigil honor. In order to be inducted each scout must complete a series of ceremonies and activities that reflect the honor society’s respect of Native American self-sufficiency and connection to nature. This attitude of service and selflessness became a model for young boys, in 1948 the order of the arrow (OA) was fully integrated into the Boy Scout program. Jack Roy, an inducted member of the OA in El Dorado, Arkansas moved to Jonesboro, Arkansas to help Cedar Valley establish the order of the arrow and build lodge 413, to ensure success he recruited young scouts with leadership potential to help in the process. The first induction occurred in 1949 with the “ordain tapout” ceremony. For the ceremony the selected Chief would appear on a small island mid-river while a runner would carry a torch from the council bluff down to the candidates. Lodge 413 was named “Hi Lo Ha Chy” a-la, “Thunder in the Cedars” and there are several rumored stories of its origin. In 1952, growing interest in “Indian lore” lead Jack Roy to hire two Native American teenagers from Tahlequah, Oklahoma for the summer to teach the scouts proper dancing technique and costume construction. Around this time the first official dance team was established, when camp Cedar Valley relocated to Vicksburg, the site of the old ceremonial circle was protected. Great care was taken to move the ceremonial elements to the new camp Cedar Valley site.

“Old white” flap was the first issued by lodge 413

“The shield” patch was the first lodge insignia

“Vigil blanket patch” was never sold, only one was given per scout
the multigenerational retirement community

cooper’s cherokee village concept
while special interest communities were not new to the american landscape, communities organized around the ethos of aging first arose in the 1950s, not coincidentally, this kind of market segmentation paralleled the rise of the nuclear family; ironic, given the cherokee practice of living in blended multigenerational households formed along matrilineal descent.

interestingly, cherokee village did not employ age restrictions as had del webb and the retirement planning industry after sun city in the 1960s, nor did cooper market primarily to seniors, but generally to young families, among his marketing innovations in land sales other than direct mail and free vacations to tour home sites, cooper deployed "graduated land sales", a theory articulated by joes basore, his marketing executive (and son-in-law), "what we’re doing is just like graduating… first from grade school, then high school, then college, we’re selling land for people to play and pay for while they are young, then they are graduating to the next phase—retirement, and then later to apartment or townhouse living, it’s graduated living."

as the earliest planned recreational community, cooper pioneered other planning concepts which became standard bearers in the industry, cooper was the first to use golf fairway frontage for middle-class housing, the july 1971 issue of golf usa recognized john cooper as "the architect of america’s land development industry, and originator of the planned retirement concept which has swept the nation," likewise, instead of using highway strip malls prevalent at the time, cooper developed a mixed-use neighborhood town center, reenacting a village orientation, perhaps most notably, cherokee village originated as an unincorporated community (i.e., not a city), and thus functioned as an early example of the common-interest community, this entails shared ownership and governance of public amenities among residents through a property owners association and/or suburban improvement district.

unlike the standardized landscapes signaling retirement communities everywhere, cooper emphasized the village’s integration with a rugged ozark riparian landscape. drawing upon the tropes of pioneers and native americans (indiansness is represented as a ghost in the brochure) prevalent in the scouting movement, marketing material clearly referenced back-to-the-land imagery central to ozarks tourism since the 1880s, this included hunting, swimming, archery (bowfishing still popular), and horseback riding through mountain streams, alongside golf courses, equestrian facilities, a marina, and an airstrip. unfortunately, cooper’s unique sense of placemaking was not replicated by the industry.

cherokee village’s remoteness forced another innovation in cooper’s business model—vertical integration of real estate development. in addition to sales and financing managed by his real estate company, cooper owned an engineering and construction company for construction of village infrastructure and, homebuilding, cooper’s operations produced their own drain tile and included a complete cement plant and concrete block factory. cooper also provided furnishings packages for new homeowners, cherokee village even had its own disaster fall-out shelter stocked with a two-week supply of food and water—an example of civil infrastructure rare in speculative community development.
John A. Cooper, Sr. Founding Architect of America's Retirement Community Industry

John A. Cooper, Sr. (1906-1998) was inducted into the Arkansas Business Hall of Fame in 2004, joining the likes of Sam Walton, John Tyson, J.B. Hunt, William Allard, and Winthrop Rockefeller. John Cooper opened the nation's first planned retirement-based recreation community in 1954, and by 1967 his Cherokee Village Development Company was the nation's fourth largest land developer.

"The man who most changed the face of Arkansas." Witt Stephens, founder of Stephens, Inc. (largest brokerage firm off Wall Street.)

Upon Cherokee Village's 60th anniversary in 2014, Cooper's namesake company employed approximately 600 people and its developments have attracted more than 125,000 property owner households.

1906
Born in Earle, Arkansas.

1927
Received a law degree from Cumberland School of Law in Lebanon, Tennessee.

1946
Purchased 400 acres along the south fork of the Spring River for a summer retreat, christening the property Otter Creek Ranch.

1949
Developed Avondale Gardens in West Memphis, Arkansas.

1953
After purchase of additional land around his summer retreat, Cooper formed the Cherokee Village Development Company to develop a planned community.

1953
Rydwan, Washington, a logging camp founded in 1923 was purchased and converted to a retirement community considered to be America's first exclusive retirement community.

1954
Cooper's Cherokee Village Development Company began work on Cherokee Village in the Arkansas Ozarks, the nation's first planned retirement-based recreational community.

1955
June 11 marked the official grand opening of Cherokee Village.

1960
Dale Webb opened the massive Sun City in Arizona, an age-restricted community offering modest homes, tennis courts, and golf courses. Sun City is considered the prototype retirement community. The "sun city concept," even though Cherokee Village (and age-restricted) predated Sun City by six years.

1965
Cooper begins work on Bella Vista in northwest Arkansas. His second retirement-based recreational community built around a camping resort encompassing 36,000 acres.

1966
Cooper co-founded and elected president of the National Association of Community and Land Developers to formulate and maintain ethical standards in the land development industry.

1968
The Cherokee Village Development Company changes its name to the John A. Cooper Company with Cooper as president and chairman of the board.

1970
Cooper opens his third planned community, Hot Springs Village, eventually encompassing 50.7 square miles.

1971
The company renames itself as Cooper Communities, Inc., and relocates to Bella Vista Village, Arkansas.

1982
Howard Schwartz opens the villages in Florida, the nation's largest age-restricted retirement community with a population now over 128,000 people and the nation's 18th fastest growing metropolitan area.

1983
John Cooper dies at the age of 77. The Mildred A. Cooper Memorial Chapel designed by Frank Lloyd Wright was opened in 1991 in Bella Vista.

1986
Cooper Communities, Inc. builds Tellico Village near Knoxville, its first planned community outside Arkansas, encompassing 4,600 acres.

1989
Retired from Cooper Communities, Inc.

1998
John Cooper Sr. dies at the age of 91 in Dallas.

1987
Cooper opens his fourth planned community, Bella Vista Village, Arkansas.
John Cooper and the Interstate Land Sales Industry

Cooper was prescient 70 years ago in formulating a community prototype that acknowledged a retiree every 12 seconds (now an American turns 65 every 7.2 seconds). Cooper was the first to convert raw land into marketable home sites, originating the mass merchandizing of real estate.

The three Copper community developments in Arkansas, collectively, are greater in land area than the state's largest city, Little Rock.

From U.S. Census 2018 estimates of 2021 population count:

- Cherokee Village-1954: 21.3 square miles, 7,739 population
- Bella Vista Village-1956: 45.9 square miles, 12,516 population
- Hot Springs Village-1970: 56.9 square miles, 20,901 population

Mass merchandizing real estate involves the sale of lots, properties, and land for development, often for retirement or second homes.

Subdivisions were sold long before people got around to developing and occupying their properties, a persistent problem. These "pre-construction subdivisions" resulted in extensive vacancies and gaps in infrastructure development, often stranded those who had bought homes in an uninhabited rural setting for long periods of time. Cooper avoided some of the shortcomings (through 90 percent of community villages) by providing complete road, water, sewer, and utility service, and infrastructure capacity. 

Cooper also had a golf course and restaurant at the outset; Cooper left a robust infrastructure base for Cherokee village's development over time.

Developer Business model: Land sales were a departure from the business model of traditional planned community developers who financed projects through complex debt and equity capital stacks, distinct from planned community developers who earned revenue from commissioning neighborhood builds and other developers. Land sales companies drew profits from the sale of lots to individuals, who then built on development contracts.

The growth in the second home market hit a fever pitch in the 1980s based on land sales speculation. In the peak season of the 1970s, more than 300 couples visited Cherokee Village daily to look at property. Typically, buyers did not receive deeds for their properties until they were fully paid off, many purchasers walked away, foreclosing their equity payment toward ownership and contributing to low tax delinquencies. This has been an issue in Cherokee villages with the glut in property supply throughout subdivisions.

The resale value of properties was practically worthless, often found their properties undevelopable due to lack of road development, location on steep hillsides, or in swamps, and lack of utility services (water, sewer management, and sewer the big issues). The elimination of the consumer credit and financial industries from land sales removed the oversight it provided to curb consumer fraud and abuses that eventually plagued the industry, now essentially unregulated and dominated by small actors.

Federal regulation of land sales. Unlike traditional community or new town development characterized by concerns for social and environmental experimentation, land sales involved a more speculative venture for profit. Cooper offered a positive role in helping the U.S. Congress legislate the land sales industry. Beginning in the 1960s, Cherokee Village was widely celebrated in the media, as a model development merging the land sales model with community development, profit reports that more than 10,000 subdivisions were operating in the U.S. and most preferred "simply to sell lots without waiting around to build." In 1964, Cooper assumed the presidency of the national association of community and land developers, which he co-founded to formulate and maintain ethical standards in the land development industry. Cooper testified before Congress, assisting in the successful passage of federal consumer protection measures that transformed the land sales industry, the interstate land sales full disclosure act of 1968 changed the way subdivisions were marketed, and developed. John Cooper was a force in both codifying as well as redefining the contemporary community development industry.

In its early years, Cherokee Village was seen by locals as an elitist community of outsiders with considerable wealth, despite that most residents were middle-class. Cooper's unique community design and marketing likely led to the perception held by locals.
How were mid-twentieth-century recreational communities developed?

It is more complicated than a city, requiring both private and public decision-making structures.

1. Acquire property
   - Remote amenity-based subdivisions are supply-side developments where the developer assembles a packaged community to create demand for home sites. Midcentury developers employed sophisticated mass marketing processes to convert rural land into marketable home sites.

2. Develop infrastructure
   - Midcentury developers financed and constructed infrastructure for entire communities, rather than phase project implementation to short-term demand. To keep costs low, developers specified septic systems (instead of sewer), unimproved roads, and water supply through individual wells or purchase from neighboring governments, in addition to electricity (telephone party lines were initially shared among Cherokee Village residents).

3. Develop amenities
   - Amenities generated around recreation and natural geographic features were central to merchandising home sites and lifestyle in midcentury communities, usually to vacationers, investors, and retirees.

4. Charter governance bodies
   - Property owners' associations, suburban improvement districts, and incorporation as cities are structures to which developers shift the burdens of providing and maintaining public services—fire, police, streets, trails, water, sewer, electricity, communications, and recreation—to property owners.

John Cooper purchases land to establish Cherokee Village in 1954.

- 130-person sales force
- Advertising and vacation visits
- Marketing and sales
# Cherokee Village: Evolving Governance Structure

|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Administrative Services | • owned and managed by John Cooper  
• managed marketing and sales of residential property | • managed by appointed board and president  
• managed marketing and sales of residential property  
• hired contractors to maintain common property and infrastructure | • headed by three commissioners appointed by the circuit court  
• sells bonds  
• levies assessments and user fees | • formed municipal court  
• formed multi-department government headed by elected mayor  
• formed planning department and code  
• tax split: 35% city/65% SID |
| Municipal Services     | • informal post office opened in the sitting bull restaurant | • volunteer EMT service established | • fire department built  
• elementary, middle, and high school built  
• hospital built  
• post office formalized and moved to town center | • took over management of fire, police, and school services  
• police force established  
• renovated town center to house city hall |
| Utility Services       | • established quapaw water company built initial 17-mile water supply network  
• built initial 21-mile electrical power network  
• built 8-15 phone party-line |                              | • purchased water company and made improvements to water network  
• expanded electrical network  
• expanded communication network | • took over management of utility services  
• built sewer system serving town center and other centrally located properties |
| Transit Services       | • built 26-mile street network  
• built half-mile airstrip |                              | • took over management of street network construction and maintenance | • took over management of street network construction and maintenance |
| Amenity Services       | • built reservoirs  
• built golf courses  
• built recreation center  
• built marina  
• built parks | • managed upkeep for reservoirs, golf courses, recreation centers, marinas, parks | • took over management of reservoirs, golf courses, recreation centers, marinas, and parks after donation from co-op communities  
• second golf course built  
• second recreation center built | • contracted the SID to continue the management of all recreation services  
• grocery store was closed and displaced by city hall  
• grocery store opened in town center |
Cherokee Village and Hardy: A Comparison of Street Networks

In land area, Cherokee Village is Arkansas’ 19th largest city though 75th in population size. Hardy ranks 93rd in land area and 215th in population size.
subdividing the universe: the house lot as the unit of commerce

while john cooper’s cherokee village development corporation (john a. cooper company) in 1958, then cooper communities, inc. in 1971 was an early example of the interstate land sales company popular from the 1950s to the 1970s, his company proved to be a successful community builder, according to author morton poulton in the great land hustle, land companies generally followed one of four business models: acreage peddlers who simply sold land for investment purposes without ever having built projects; land merchandisers that simply subdivided projects with few improvements; vacation or second home developers who built minimal improvements; and community builders characterized by their high levels of investment in placemaking amenities and civic programming. cooper was a community builder having financed and built public facilities on land which he donated including parks, homes, and schools. cooper commissioned noted design professionals like william coloreflo, an award-winning planner from memphis who laid out cherokee village.
Placemaking amenities: the promise of community

Placemaking is a human-centered planning approach which emphasizes a sense of belonging to a bioregion, connection to people, and other non-market investments that enhance social capital and ecological stewardship.

New Kila Kila Boy Scout Camp
John Cooper built the New Kila Kila Boy Scout Camp in 1963 as a companion of John Cooper Lake to replace the old Kila Kila camp. The camp provided a wilderness experience expected in Boy Scouting.

Cherokee Elementary School (above)
Located outside of Cherokee Village in Highland, Cooper donated the land for construction of the school. Cooper’s land and monetary donations were credited with the early school system’s performance.

Cherokee Village Town Center (right)
Designed by E. Jay Jones and built from 1954-1955, the town center serves as a commercial and institutional anchor for Cherokee Village. It housed the town’s first grocery store and the post office, and now houses the city hall.

St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church (above)
Designed by and built in 1864 as a church, member and architect from Texas, St. Andrews was built in 1864 and was donated by John Cooper. It was the first church built in Cherokee Village.

Thunderbird Recreation Center (right)
Sitting along the northern shoreline of Lake Thunderbird, the Thunderbird Recreation Center was built in 1955 at the site of the three recreation centers.

Eastern Azurk Hospital
Built in 1910 and expanded in 1933, the Eastern Azurk Hospital served as the primary health center for Cherokee Village until its abandonment in 2004.

Omaha Recreation Center (above)
In 1976, the Omaha Recreation Center was built on the shores of Lake Omaha to strengthen investor interest in the town and in the western portion of Cherokee Village.

South Golf Course (left)
Described by golf digest as a “hidden gem,” the course is considered one of the state’s top courses.

North Golf Course (right)
The first of two 18-hole courses, the north golf course was built in two parts. The first nine holes were completed in 1962 and the second in 1963. The course crosses the north fork of Spring Creek and houses one of the village’s three recreation centers.

Sitting Bull Restaurant
Dedicated in 2007, the Sitting Bull Restaurant opened its doors in 1989. It provided space for the restaurant and opened the first post office in the town. Water pumped from Lake Cherokee was used as a cooling medium for air conditioning.

Thunderbird Marina
Lake Thunderbird Dam was completed in 1959. The marina has served as the primary boating site with slips and access to the largest lake in the village and the connecting lake Sequoyah.

Papoose Park
The first park built in Cherokee Village, Papoose Park now offers approximately 17 acres of elevated views from Lake Cherokee. It has served as an outdoor social space adjacent to the town center since the village’s early days.

Gitchie Gumee Beach
Gitchie Gumee Beach sits on the shores of Lake Sequoyah, the second lake to be built in Cherokee Village. Since its installation in 1937, the beach has been featured on postcards and advertisements for Cherokee Village.
sitting bull restaurant: dining for recreation rather than utility

The restaurant, which also housed Mildred Cooper's wigwam gift shop—and later a post office and expanded fine dining, entertainment, and meeting facilities—served as an important social center in the community.

The transformation of the American working-class dream into the mass-market restaurant for socializing and reproducing a "middle-class family together" paralleled the rise of the affluent recreational community. Both embodied the ethos of nations formed to organize a novel postwar consumer landscape structured around the white middle-class family. Living in many decades, the sitting bull restaurant enforced dress codes, even requiring long dresses for women and pants for men in this vacation community. Despite this new age of affluence, where a middle-majority possessed discretionary income, cooks still had to subsidize the restaurant's operations from its beginning in 1955 to 1970 because it wanted to make good food available at inexpensive prices, overlooking opening a restaurant inside the hotel of the town center. The sitting bull restaurant eventually drew to become a community center complex with the addition of a library, playland, and a recreation room for teenagers, meeting rooms, and a private dining room and club (in a dry county) called the teepee room. Aside from the former wigwam, Andrew hulkey points out in his dress, bowling alley, and theater posts showing the new American dream in postwar consumer culture that these once working-class institutions were domesticated or family-oriented establishments through "family, respectability" imagery. Hulkey observes: "Silverware and scintilla symbolically appropriated the nation's founding myths of colonial settlement and theatrical expansion in the names they chose for their establishments, and they kept them employed in the dining experience, in eating "boy's" food that was not overly frightening, they adopted something more attractive, a bastardized national cuisine that would make items like hambone and "hot dog" as a staple."

Over its 45-year history, the sitting bull restaurant went through several ownership changes and rebranding until its demolition in 2007, according to resident and author John Parker. "They tore down the most historical, most charming and most loved building in the village. We lost documentation indicating why Cooper chose to expand the hotel, and after the famous 1958, a local Indian leader sitting bull became a popular venue for diners after he joined Buffalo to host, and his wild west show in 1955 eventually meeting president Grover Cleveland. Popular media likely shaped Cooper's American identity, though one most related toward western lore rather than the eastern Cherokee nation.

Despite this new age of affluence where a middle-majority possessed discretionary income, Cooper still had to subsidize the restaurant's operations from its beginning in 1955 to 1970 because he wanted to make good food available at inexpensive prices.
In addition to golf courses, early recreational communities were structured around the damming of streams to create reservoirs (lakes are natural reservoirs are manmade by way of dams). Reservoir building became a popular mid-century economic development tool in the area, attracting a post-war retirement population as well as families seeking outdoor-based activities. Water-based amenities offered a broad appeal to naturists, anglers, and recreationists of all ages and income groups. In Cherokee village, the reservoirs constructed from headwaters and second order streams are moderately scaled. Their fractal geometries provide an intimacy through the many caves natural to the watershed’s karst formations also harboring numerous caves, springs, and sinkholes, more than golf courses, water provides spatial and botanical landscapes shared among the many homeowners who are not boaters.

John Cooper modeled his retirement community concept around the area’s river-based summer and scouting camps that he and his wife, Mildred Cooper, generously supported.

Nine dams: the re-creation of camp lifestyles
the seven lakes of cherokee village

while village lakes express self-similar cove formations—a fractal geometry that is a function of its foothill topography—variations in scale, geography, drainage features, and elevation characterize each lake as a distinct neighborhood.

lake thunderbird 1950
294 acres
75' maximum depth 25' average depth
7.5 miles of shoreline
wake lake with fishing, boating, and skiing

lake erie mid-1970s
19.2 acres
unknown maximum depth
no wake lake with fishing

lake cherokee 1954
27 acres
40' maximum depth
6.6 miles of shoreline
no wake lake

lake sequoyah mid-1950s
73.5 acres
70' maximum depth
2.4 miles of shoreline
no wake lake with fishing, boating, and swimming
beach, boat slips and dry storage

lake navajo mid-1960s
54 acres
25' maximum depth
1.5 miles of shoreline
no wake lake with fishing

lake chanute mid-1970s
56 acres
unknown maximum depth
2.2 miles of shoreline
no wake lake with fishing
a cherokee village
pre-development watershed

the pre-development hydrological patterns of the south fork of the spring river watershed had already been civilized through campsites, river-based recreation, and cattle ranching.
Cherokee Village Patterns: Capture Land and Dam

The village's identity is shaped by the watershed's undulating topography and its fingered distribution of headwater streams, which were dammed in the 1950s and 1960s to create a chain of reservoirs for recreation and homesites.
**Cherokee Village Patterns: Roads and the "Polycentred Net"**

The village’s road network combines new arterial roads with existing highways in a mosaic of loops called a polycentred net. Urbanist Kevin Lynch coined the term to describe new midcentury settlement patterns where streets no longer generate urban form or recognizable spatial configurations (e.g., town squares, main streets, urban cores). Rather, the polycentred net is a neutral geometry or planning "fabric." Unlike traditional town streets where people shop and socialize, the road network here delivers only traffic and utility services.
Cherokee Village Patterns: Roads and Reservoirs as a "Capital Web"

The construction of a road network and reservoirs constitutes an infrastructure package implemented by the developer—known as a capital web—for attracting investment from the sale of lots, road infrastructure—not town centers—shapes low-density settlement patterns. The concept was coined by urban designer David Crane in the 1960s to capture this new singular vision of midcentury planning characterized by indeterminacy: i.e., we know things will change but we don’t know what the market will demand next. The polycentric net offers new possibilities in generating greater specialization and variation among future development in each loop.
cherokee village patterns: topography and buildings

There are more than 3,100 residential units in cherokee village. Most early property owners who constructed homes purchased homesites fronting a reservoir, river, or golf course.
f

Cherokee Village Patterns: Parcels and Buildings

80 percent of subdivision parcels, however, remain undeveloped despite having been sold more than 50 years ago. Without additional reservoir, river, or golf course frontage for homesites, what market models will attract the next stage of home building? How adaptable are the loops in sponsoring greater specialized development to answer various market demands?
Cherokee Village Patterns: Topography and Roads

Feeder roads with branching cul-de-sacs tend to follow the ridge-valley pattern of the topography as they infill the arterial loops. Cul-de-sacs result in low connectivity among land uses including the lack of walkability. Thus, reservoirs rather than streets assist in wayfinding and in creating a sense of place.
Cherokee Village Patterns: Traffic Intensity

Average daily traffic count of motor vehicle use for each road readily shows the hierarchy of travel intensity within the polycentric web among arterial, feeder, and local roads. Traffic counts interpolated from data supplied by the city of Cherokee Village.
over 80 miles of roads remain unpaved, which are informally used by residents as trails and biking paths. These unimproved road networks provide conservation services for the village, at least for now.
Cherokee village patterns: roads and buildings

Buildings tend to aggregate around a spatial feature: water or a golf course. Streets are no longer the means for expressing a shared landscape or in creating recognizable town form as in traditional settlement patterns like Hardy.
Cherokee Village Patterns: Topography, Roads, and Buildings

The polycentric net is driven by a homogeneous subdivisioning of homesites within each loop. However, the network lacks human-scaled articulation, like blocks, it also lacks a larger identifiable order, like a town grid or a linear fabric seen along rivers and beaches, older Arkansas hill towns like Fayetteville, Eureka Springs, and Hot Springs have iconic or "imageable" street networks supportive of wayfinding and non-traffic services related to recreation, socializing, commerce, and delivery of ecosystem services.
Cherokee Village Patterns; Topography, Roads, Buildings, and Watershed

The capital web of reservoirs and road loops stretching across the village's 21.3 square miles creates a distributed order of water, recreational assets, and a town center, as focal organizations in a polycentric net. Could future development capitalize upon these underutilized focal organizations by developing greater specialization and variation around these centers?
Cherokee Village Patterns: Full Buildout

What if Cherokee Village had been fully built out as planned? Would the natural environment of wooded hills and streams have disappeared or become severely fragmented?
Cherokee Village Patterns: Clearings

Tree canopy coverage in Cherokee Village is 94 percent. Clearings in the forest are some of the more unique spaces in the village, especially those at public facilities, golf courses, and reservoirs.
cherokee village patterns: income stratification

Information gleaned from the U.S. census bureau and the 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-year estimates shows significant variations in household income and home values across Cherokee Village's seven census blocks. Data sets for each census block include population, median age, median household income (MHI), and median home value (MHV, exhibited on next page). Among the 2,370 households in Cherokee Village, the highest median household income lies within the undeveloped Fulton County census tract, more than twice that of some census blocks in east Cherokee Village.
cherokee village patterns: median housing values

Unsurprisingly, lake thunderbird households enjoy the highest home values. Though, census blocks containing lakes do not necessarily guarantee overall high home values, of the 3,131 housing units in cherokee village, 24.31 percent are unoccupied, a high rate suggesting that many units are being deployed for rent to vacationers, migrant corporate staffs, and other short-term occupancies.
cherokee village civic clubs: scripting the “active adult” lifestyle

Cooper planned for the “active adult” lifestyle, a theory of retirement developed in the mid-1950s, the first generations of residents participated in over 100 civic associations. cherokee village continues to demonstrate high levels of social capital, including development of its own historical society and community development initiatives.

Social conceptions of retirement were reconstructed in the mid-1950s, especially as average lifespan in America increased to 69.6 years from 47.3 years in 1900. In 1954, sociologist Robert Havighurst with Eugene Friedman published the meaning of work and retirement, arguing that in retirement workers substituted “organized leisure activities” for the structure and status once provided by holding jobs. This concept became known as the “activity theory,” retirement was no longer envisioned as a time of withdrawal, the theory led developers to reach different planning conclusions—some toward the construction of age-restricted communities while others like cooper emphasized intergenerational connection regardless, all developers of retirement communities were compelled to script a lifestyle concept in project planning beyond the simple sale of houses or lots, cooper sponsored publication of a seasonal (later monthly) newsletter, the cherokee village, to help build community association and facilitate to market the sale of lots. research shows that seniors fear loss of purpose and social isolation more than death, thus the centrality of civic association in retirement-based communities like cherokee village.
A genealogy of midcentury planned communities: the bauhaus in the woods

With the rise of postwar mass suburban housing, consumers purchased the lifestyle vision projected by a neighborhood as much as the attributes of an individual home. A large consumer market for modern design and planning set the stage for midcentury developments like Cooper’s Cherokee Village. New developments of widely different scales across the U.S. were premised almost exclusively on automobile use, and novel blends of nature, community, and city. High-profile midcentury developments contemporaneous with the planning of Cherokee Village show that Cooper was working within a zeitgeist—a spirit of the age shaped by the European Bauhaus—though, inflected by a regionalism specific to the Ozarks.

Sun City
Mesa County, Arizona
1960: 5,725 acres

Despite the name, Sun City is an unincorporated planned community with a population of 32,000. It is commonly acknowledged as the first planned retirement community built in the U.S. The real estate company, founded by Alva Strickham in 1959, offered live-in home makes built around golf courses and modern housing. Sun City’s development was a vision of a utopian community built around golf courses and modern housing. The development was initially marketed to older adults and retirees, but it quickly expanded to attract a diverse population of middle-aged and younger adults, becoming a model for planned communities across the country.

Levittown
Long Island, New York
1947: 4,000 acres

Levittown is often seen as the first suburban development in the U.S. It was developed by William Levitt and his brothers, who used mass production techniques to construct homes quickly and at a low cost. The development featured a grid-like street plan, with identical houses facing each other, and was intended to create a sense of community among its residents. Levittown’s success led to the development of other similar communities across the U.S., further shaping the suburban landscape.

Park Forest
Illinois
1945: 2,000 acres

Park Forest was developed by the Park Forest Corporation, which aimed to create a neighborhood that combined the best aspects of city and country living. The development featured a mix of single-family homes, apartments, and commercial spaces, along with parks and recreational areas. Park Forest was one of the first developments to emphasize environmental sustainability, with features such as stormwater management and energy-efficient construction.

Crestwood Hills
Los Angeles, California
1947: 635 acres

Crestwood Hills was designed by architects Paul Rudolph and John McCabe, who were influenced by the Modernist architecture of the Bauhaus. The development featured a series of low-rise, mid-century modern homes, with clean lines and a focus on simplicity. Crestwood Hills was known for its unique architectural style and became a notable example of mid-century modern design.

Hollin Hills
Alexandria, Virginia
1949: 356 acres

Hollin Hills was developed by the real estate firm bottle and bottle Development Company, based in Washington, D.C. The development was designed by architect Howard Frankauer, who aimed to create a cohesive neighborhood with modern and mid-century modern homes. Hollin Hills featured a variety of housing types, including single-family homes, apartments, and townhouses, and was designed to be visually appealing and environmentally sustainable.

Arapahoe Acres
Englewood, Colorado
1949: 30 acres

Arapahoe Acres was developed by the real estate company Arapahoe Acres, Inc., which aimed to create a neighborhood that combined urban and suburban living. The development featured a mix of single-family homes and small apartment complexes, along with a park and a community center. Arapahoe Acres was one of the first developments to feature a town center, creating a sense of community among its residents.

For more information on the history and development of these communities, see the following sources:


These developments were significant in shaping the suburban landscape of the mid-20th century and continue to influence modern planning and design.
placemaking in the ozarks

John Cooper Commissioned Two Arkansas Architecture Firms Who Balanced New Modernist Expressions of Space with the Concern for Local Topography, Context, Climate, Light, and Tectonic Form (Construction Systems) That Roots Buildings to Place. Fay Jones was Hired to Design the Town Center, Nearby Townhouses, and a House Near the River; a Jonesboro Firm Noted for Their Modernist Buildings, Stuck, Frier, Land & Scott, Inc., was Hired to Design the Lakeside Thunderbird Recreation Center, While Houses Were Left to Individual Builders, Many of the First Lake Homes Exhibiting a Regionalism Based in Contemporary Fenestration (Window) Patterns, Traditional Gable Roofs and Interior Cathedral Ceilings, Open Floor Plans, and Outdoor Decks. These Various Brands of Modernism Demonstrated that Buildings Could Celebrate a Sense of Place Without Resort to the Cartooning of Traditional Architectural Styles or Kitsch. Their “Critical Regionalism” Resisted Debased and Sentimentalized Consumer Trends. Cooper was the Only Developer in the First Generation of the Post-War Land Development Industry to Connect Design Thinking with Placemaking for Middle-Class Housing. He Skilfully Used Symmetry to Create Typologically Clear Building Organizations in Service to Expressing a Poetics of Construction Fitting of the Ozark Landscape. Paradoxically, Jones’ Buildings Create a Convincing Environmental Continuity (Known as “Organic Architecture”) Yet Stand as Powerful Landmarks.

Similarly, the Thunderbird Recreation Center by Stuck, Frier, Land & Scott, Inc., Terraces, Pools, Lawn and Game Courts, and Various Assembly Buildings Along Lake Thunderbird. The Elegant Composition of Low-Slope Roof Structures on Heavy Masonry Bases Frame Exterior Recreation Spaces with Lake Views, Countering the Heavily Wooded Landscape on the Arrival Side of the Buildings. Panelizing Stone with Wood-Frame Glass Curtain Walls, the Complex Balances Transparency and Enclosure in Connecting Lake with Woods, and Intimate Spaces with Assembly-Sized Spaces. Like Fay Jones’ Work, Simple but Well-Detailed Building Forms Create Community Landmarks Without an Overbearing Monumentality.
Eunice Fay Jones: One of America's Most Significant Architects

A native Arkansan, E. Fay Jones (1921-2004) was an internationally acclaimed architect who won the American Institute of Architects' highest honor—the AIA Gold Medal in 1990. Jones' Thornhill Chapel in Eureka Springs was voted the 20th century's fourth-best building by the AIA.
e. fay jones architecture in cherokee village
Application of the principles of organic architecture with words from Fay Jones

detail
As a vocabulary for building and site, details should manifest larger systems of thought while expressing "an intensity of caring." The detail fulfills the cognitive function of ornament to bind together various scales and environments, including inside and outside, earth and sky, and heavy and light.

form
Generative ideas are a seed that integrates the part to the whole; the nesting of patterns where "you should feel the relationship, to the parts and to the whole." Jones' approach balances overall symmetrical organizations with local asymmetries adapting to function and context. Light was also key force in Jones' thinking: "since architecture is space.

site
Establish a fit between building and site, blending exterior and interior space through extension of ground and ceiling surfaces from inside to outside. At final resolution, site and building should achieve a kind of singularity, or oneness, or harmonious and ideal relationship.

material
Use native materials according to their intrinsic properties: "materials should be used in a way that conveys their strength and best qualities, letting each material—whether it is wood, stone, or steel—express its basic nature.

shelter
Buildings should aim for dignity and simplicity, not grandeur. "Every man should have a place where he can have communion with himself and his surroundings, a personal environment free from dissonance and frustrations."
a legacy of midcentury modern architecture in cherokee village

midcentury modern design (1940s-1960s) was a movement that democratized access to high design in products, graphics, clothing, furniture, architecture, and landscapes through mass production. the midcentury aesthetic in architecture features open floor plans, light-filled interiors, spatial connection between inside and outside, and the expression of structure and natural materials.
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mildred b cooper memorial chapel
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drum house drawing
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photo of bela vista country club
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hot springs village desoto recreation center
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mildred b cooper memorial chapel
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what's next?

The construction of whiteness is intertwined with the construction of Indianess, dominated by the settler dissonance of "revering" Indigenous culture while simultaneously dismantling it. How might the relationship be decolonized with consideration for deeper cultural lessons like stewardship of resource commons, communal neighborhood forms, a disciplined ecological footprint, etc.?

native american heritage

ozark pioneer and folk

austerity characterized the ozark frontier resulting in resourceful but ruralized economies lacking the specialization and opportunity intrinsic in more complex urban economies. How might Cherokee village confront its perceived isolation to attract a greater range of services (e.g., healthcare), amenities, and lifestyles demanded by current markets?

camping and scouting

that camps arose to become pivotal institutions in advancing social improvement and a middle-class order among settler culture is uniquely American. How might the social coherence and the physical attributes of the camp environment inform the development of new neighborhood archetypes in Cherokee village?

midcentury recreational and retirement communities

the land sales industry was driven by lot subdivision for single-family homes: a mid-century market phenomenon now with limp market demand, what new settlement patterns and infrastructure improvements are available to create a sense of place throughout low-density development not tied to water or golf course frontage?

fay jones, modern architecture

good design leverages market value and place identity. the midcentury buildings constructed in Cherokee village's early years constitute a cultural gene pool that warrants extension of this legacy. Is there a set of architectural principles that can be codified in new nonresidential and residential construction that embody Cherokee village's unique sense of place while maintaining a range of lifestyle choice?