



LEES CREEK: A CHEROKEE DISTRICT

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(*Abstract*)

The Lees Creek* district is a representative Indian district, although in a number of respects it is not typical. It is more rugged, less accessible and larger, its inhabitants are more conservative, and the cutting of cross ties is a more important industry than in most Cherokee districts. A district of poor, rocky, and hilly land, Lees Creek is still largely Indian country. About half of the population (estimated at over 1,100) is composed of Indians, the majority of whom are full bloods.

The Indians now find themselves in straitened circumstances. Lowered morale and reduced resources, accentuated by recent crop failures, are

*Properly Little Lees Creek. A neighboring Indian district, Greasy Creek, is included. The area under consideration is found in southeastern Adair County, bordering on the state of Arkansas, and includes the following tracts of land: T. 14N., R. 25E.; T. 14N., R. 26E.; fractional T. 14N., R. 27E.; and the southern third of T. 15N., R. 25E., and T. 15N., R. 26E. The areas listed form the Adair County portion of the proposed Indian Purchase Project 1-31-B, Adair Co., Oklahoma, in which both the Office of Indian Affairs and the Land Utilization Division, Resettlement Administration, are interested. "Lees Creek" is the first of a series of studies on the geography of the Cherokee country.

held responsible. Small as the area of crop land of the Indians is, it has kept pace roughly with the increase of population. Other resources, however, have decreased. The formerly luxuriant grasslands of the oak-hickory woodland remains only in remnants. The resident Indians now have few animals, and the cattle of the outsiders make free use of the unfenced land. Since the coming of the railroad, in 1895, the game has been destroyed. The Indians have thus lost what were formerly two of their most important sources of support.

Large sawmills and stave mills have not worked in the area for a number of years. However, in recent years the Indians have turned to the cutting of cross ties in an effort to replace the wasted resources of the area. During the recent period of poor crops the cutting has been especially active. Information given by buyers in Stilwell forms the basis for estimates showing an annual income from tie-cutting of about \$150 per Indian family. Most of the cash income, in fact, most of the total income of the Indians of the area, at least in the more rugged southern and eastern portions, is derived from tie-cutting. Since the beginning of road building on the project in 1935, which provided work for many Indians, the cutting of ties has declined sharply.

The "project" is designed to protect and restore the most largely destroyed resources—pasture, game, and forest, and to provide for their proper utilization by the Indians. In regard to this and other areas, C. F. Blackwell, Regional Director of the Land Utilization Division, Resettlement Administration, writes:* "Lands are being purchased as Indian projects where it is proposed to resettle stranded Indian families who have an agricultural background and wish to engage in farming." It is hoped to rehabilitate both the land and the Indians. Otherwise, the tie-cutting industry may, like the hunting and grazing industries, come to an end, thus leaving the Indians even more largely dependent on government aid than they are now.

