

My Summer In Cherokee BY BEN ETHERIDGE

(Ben Etheridge, who was this summer a member of the cast of "Unto These Hills" relates in this article his experiences of the summer. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. T. J. Etheridge.)

A three-month's vacation with pay, flavored with show business, fireside get-togethers, and long mountain hikes, made this past summer in Cherokee my most exciting in years. Immediately one would ask, "How was it possible to arrange such a wonderful vacation with pay?" And I would answer that actually my trip to Cherokee was to work with the famous outdoor drama, "Unto These Hills," but that I do not consider any job in the theatre as work if one is an ardent lover of drama. Perhaps the interogator would not agree, but I am certain that this is true.

I received the job with the drama last winter when the technical director of the Carolina Playmakers asked me if I would like to go to Cherokee and work with "Unto These Hills" as a scenery technician and actor. I accepted gratefully and in a few days signed a contract as technician and actor. I was enrolled in his course in technical laboratory at the time. I studied the complete functions of the theatre and spent twenty hours a week constructing scenery for forthcoming plays.

As early as grammar school days I have always been interested in dramatics. Eagerly, I used every opportunity to participate in community and school dramatics, though opportunities were few. When I reached the twelfth grade, I played the small part of an English professor in our senior play. After this performance I became entranced by the power of drama and decided to make dramatics my life's profession.

Two days after my third college year had ended, I left for Cherokee. During the month of June I assisted in assembling the heavy outdoor scenery. Rehearsals were also held during this period, and I was called to tryout for the leading role in scene five, the storekeeper, and John Ross, the Principal Chief of the Cherokee. A few days later I was informed that I had received both parts--the storekeeper, assigned as my principal role and John Ross, as second role. When opening night came on June 28th, I had also been appointed to play in scene one the part of a Spanish soldier in De Soto's army; in scene nine I became a square dancer, and in scene ten and twelve I received orders from Major Davis as a sergeant in the United States Army. When I was not on stage as an actor, I was shifting scenery as a technician, changing into a different costume, singing in the choir, heard five times during the performance.

These various jobs at the theatre occupied my time from seven until ten forty-five every evening except Mondays. Every night after the show the actors' canteen was open. Here was provided our own music for dancing and a concession counter for those who enjoy a late snack. On Saturday night the members of the cast gave floor shows, consisting of scenery designed by the actors, take-offs on outstanding people, musical skits, one act plays, and Cherokees and whites alike flock from all parts of the reservation to see them. On Monday nights (our night off) I usually went to Asheville for a movie or a visit to a night-club.

To keep the actors and crew members content in afternoons, the Cherokee Historical Association, sponsor of "Unto These Hills," provided free classes for the cast. Such classes as weaving, pottery, drawing, and painting, ballet and modern dance, film study, wrought iron, woodwork, jewelry, speech, acting, and playwriting were usually filled not only by the members of the cast but also by the Cherokees. These interesting classes were taught by older members of the cast who had attained MA degrees in dramatic art. Cherokees and white residents of Cherokee also were instructors.

Trips to Asheville and long hikes, through the mountains were only a few of the many things I did for entertainment. To Clingmorn's Dome, the second highest peak east of the Mississippi River, I once visited with a small group of the cast to see