

ROSS, ELIZABETH · INDIAN CORN

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Elizabeth Ross, Interviewer
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Indian Corn

A variety of corn long raised by the native Cherokees is that which is called "teotla corn," the ears of which are rather small and slender, with red, yellow, blue and white grains.

In early times when the wooden mortars and pestles were widely in use, practically all of the Cherokees of the hill regions cultivated this corn. It was a favorite roasting ear variety, and proved excellent in the making of hominy. It could also be pounded into meal. Most cultivators of the teotla corn raised a sufficient quantity to last from season to season, and enough ears with which to plant the patches were carefully preserved through the fall and winter seasons.

The corn patches of which much has been said and written by those referring to the raising of corn by Indians, were in the Cherokee Nation, fenced with rails or poles, and were of small extent in most instances, from less than one acre to several acres. Cultivation was largely with hoes in the earlier periods. e es the teotla corn, beans, pumpkins and other

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products were cultivated and raised. In course of time, horses were utilized in cultivating the ground, and other varieties of corn were raised and meal was realized from the white and yellow corn which was ground at the grist mills which had been built along streams at various places in the districts of the nation; but there were, nevertheless, many of the native people who continued to raise some of the teotla corn every year.

Some of the older people clung to the "old-time" corn year after year, considering it superior to new and larger varieties which came into use from time to time. Besides being used in the making of grits for hominy, the teotla corn was also utilized in the making of parched meal.

In making parched meal the corn was carefully roasted until well done, placed in the mortar and pounded into fine meal. This meal possessed highly sustaining and nutritive properties. A small quantity in a cupful of water, sweetened or plain, was equivalent to a meal, it has been asserted.

The parched meal was carried by travelers when making long journeys, and in long past years constituted the principal article of food used by the warriors when they made incursions into distant regions. Sometimes pounded dried plums or peaches were added to the meal, but more often it was carried without addition of any other substance. In Indian Territory days some of the native women sometimes carried parched meal for sale or trade when visiting prairie localities or the small towns. Other varieties of corn were used at times in the making of parched meal, but the old-time men and women preferred that which had been made from the teotla corn.

Within comparatively recent times the quantity of teotla corn raised has become very small. Those living at some distance from the hill country, who cultivated small tracts planted to the corn, have practically altogether desisted, having found the procuring of seed corn of the variety impossible. However, there are yet some of the natives in remote sections who continue to cultivate and raise small quantities.

Authority: Numerous Cherokee citizens; J. M. Sanders, Coney locality, and almost any other person of the hills.