

## A Tribute & A Dedication...

# Addie George

November 30, 1911 - June 23, 2006

Ms. Addie George was not only the oldest living Yuchi at 94 when she passed, but she was among the most influential of the Yuchi -- tirelessly giving herself as a cultural emissary. Addie was an energetic dynamo who had the gift of gab, and told you just what she thought. At her passing, she had 14 children, 28 grandchildren, 46 great grandchildren, and 20 great, great grandchildren. As a matriarch this would be a sufficient accomplishment unto itself, but Addie was a tireless diplomat and emissary for the Yuchi culture as well.

In the 1950s as he pondered what appeared to be a dimming future of the Yuchis, Chief Sam Brown, Jr. ignited a cultural revitalization effort. He pressed for tribal recognition and also returned to the Yuchi's roots in the Chattahoochee Valley between Georgia and Alabama. He remembered what he had been told about this Yuchi homeland by his ancestors. Spotting a taxidermied white raccoon \*, he remembered the prophesy that a white raccoon would herald the return of the Yuchi to the area. Soon his diplomacy brought the donation of 100 acres of land and sparked a Yuchi revival in the Chattahoochee Valley. While Chief Brown passed before the Tribe returned, among the tribal delegates that formed a strong bond between the Columbus area residents and the Yuchi was Addie George. Following Chief Brown's lead Addie took up the cause and for decades she returned each year to the Chattahoochee Valley to share the Yuchi culture with the area residents. Thousands of kids in the schools and their parents at museum programs learned of the Yuchi culture from Addie. From the language and cooking, to the cultural worldviews, Addie opened up their hearts and minds to the world before European settlement. Several scholars came to learn of the language and culture from Addie. She was a one person embassy for the Yuchi that may have just turned the tide on the impending cultural extinction.

Like many of Indians of her generation she went to boarding school. The Eufaula Boarding School (Eufaula, OK), like most Indian schools run by the Federal Government punished students for speaking Indian languages. Addie spoke no English when she arrived, and suffered under the negative reinforcement in order to learn it. Fortunately, at holiday breaks her sternly traditional grandmother insisted she speak Yuchean, but used more positive reinforcement in that requirement than the Boarding School did. This left Addie in the unique position of being a highly fluent bilingual -- but Addie also learned the Cherokee and Muscogee languages. This gave Addie the necessary skills to be a Indigenous linguist.

Addie was one of the last and most fluent speakers of the Yuchi Language. It was her first language, and she had the added advantage of being married to a Yuchi who spoke the language. She also missed few opportunities to speak it with the few remaining speakers, as well as to teach it to anyone willing to learn. She shared her understanding of the language with Lew Ballard, James Crawford, Joseph Mahan, Richard Grounds, this writer and many others, ensuring that it would not be totally lost as the last links of direct generational parental enculturation of Uchean are extinguished in the clash of cultures. Future generations will know much more about the legacy of the Yuchi from the dedicated efforts of Addie George. She is arguably the best cultural emissary a people could have -- and will live on through her efforts here.

The language is the heart of any culture. The Yuchi culture and language are far more tightly interwoven than most. If the language were to be lost, the best window on the culture would be closed. Addie was known for speaking her mind. And oft did so on such issues as the importance of language. Once when she was doing a radio show with Will Rogers, Jr. She spoke to him in Cherokee, to which he replied that he did not understand the old language. She scolded him, " You are the son of a famous Cherokee -- You ought to speak your own language." His embarrassment was a lesson for us all in the importance of a language to a culture.

While the language and the culture has been documented by the several ethnologist over more than three centuries, no one provided more of the material than Addie George. As an emissary for the Yuchi culture and heritage, Addie provided a depth of understanding to her kinfolk and interested academics that will ensure that the Yuchi Culture survives through the Twenty-first Century and beyond, even though it looked doomed to die in the last century. The [www.yuchi.org](http://www.yuchi.org) pages could not have existed without her tireless efforts, and so they are herein dedicated to this remarkable woman -- teacher, linguist and inspiration.



Ms. Addie George sitting on the base of the Sacred Fire sculpture at the Chattahoochee Indian Heritage Center at October 5, 2002 Dedication. photo: DKH

### **Chattahoochee Indian Heritage Center**

The center celebrates the culture and accomplishments of the Native Americans who inhabited the Chattahoochee River Valley until their removal west in the 1830s. The center's memorial is a symbolic representation of a Creek central plaza, consisting of four arbors surrounding the Sacred Fire, a 25-foot flame sculpture made of stainless steel and bronze. Around the symbolic square ground are plaques listing the names of Indian heads of households who were shown on the Creek Census of 1832, just prior to their removal to Oklahoma. A large playing field south of the memorial honors stickball, a game that was a major part of South-eastern Native American culture. An annual Southern Indian Homecoming is held at the center. Call for dates and times.

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Tribal matriarch Addie George (left) stands with two of her daughters and a great-granddaughter at the 1995 Yuchi Green Corn Ceremonial near Kelleysville, Oklahoma. Mrs. George will represent the Yuchi



Addie and her Husband, Rufus George Ca. 1960 at the Columbus Museum



Rufus George & Sam Brown III

“Yuchi Delegation of Oklahoma to Columbus Museum of Arts & Crafts, Georgia, 1830-1958.”



**Yuchi Chief Sam W. Brown, April 13, 1958.**