



Cherokee Crafts

Curtis Lees is a Cherokee who resided in Jena, Louisiana, where he made traditional Cherokee bows from native locust trees. He made arrows and blowguns from native cane. Lees also made ceremonial turkey feather fans and headdresses.

Lees used tools that he made himself to continue the craft that his ancestors perfected so they could catch ducks and geese along Catahoula Lake in Central Louisiana. Curtis explained how important his work is to him in an earlier interview: "When I make a bow, part of me goes with it." He is also passing on the traditions of his people. Curtis continues, "I'm keeping alive something my people did."

Despite his interest in preserving his heritage, Lees's grandchildren are interested in other things, which worries the Louisiana Cherokee. Although Lees's bows and arrows could be used for hunting, most of them are bought by collectors. The same materials used by Cherokees and Choctaws go into his bows, arrows, and blowguns.

Using native Louisiana switch cane, Lees makes blowguns. He makes his darts from pine splinters and feathers them with cotton. Lees demonstrates his crafts at festivals across Louisiana and has appeared frequently at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, the Louisiana Folklife Festival, and the Natchitoches NSU Folk Festival. People from as far away as New York and Oregon have interviewed him for books and articles. Many of his crafts are in public and private collections and museums.

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